

<b>Institution:</b> University of Nottingham		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 20 Social Work and Social Policy		
<b>Title of case study:</b> The Birmingham Trojan Horse affair		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2012 - present		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  John Holmwood	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Professor of Sociology	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  September 2009 - 31 <sup>st</sup> July 2020
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> From 2015 to 31 <sup>st</sup> December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No		
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Professor John Holmwood was an expert witness for the defence in professional misconduct cases involving senior teachers accused in the 'Birmingham Trojan Horse' affair of religious conservatism and a plot to take over and Islamicise schools in Birmingham, Bradford and Oldham, widely reported in the national and international media in 2014. His report was at the core of the defence case which progressed from August 2015 until May 2017 when the cases collapsed. Holmwood's research informed a major theatre play based on the affair. The play was seen by 7,933 (81.5% of capacity) attendees across the UK in October/ November 2019 and February 2020. Holmwood's work also influenced the approach of Muslim charities, such as Muslim Engagement and Development and Index on Censorship, to the government's Counter Terrorism Strategy, Prevent.</p>		
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Holmwood has researched issues of ethnic and religious difference through the lens of political (and religious) friendship (R1; R2) to understand the nature of multi-culturalism in a post-colonial and post-secular society. He has also written extensively about the displacement of democratic institutions by markets, especially in the context of education, arguing that this increases centralisation and the possibility of authoritarian action against schools by government as a consequence of the removal of intermediary bodies such as local education authorities. It also creates conditions for populism and scapegoating in political discourse. These themes came together in blogs written at the time the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair first broke (R3). On this basis, in 2015 Holmwood was approached by lawyers representing senior teachers at Park View Educational Trust (PVET) (accused in the Trojan Horse affair), to act as an expert witness in defence in professional misconduct cases brought against them. His report for the court (R4) set out how the official reports on which the charges were based had misrepresented the process by which schools were incorporated into academy trusts, had failed to apply official guidelines with regard to religious education and collective worship, and had failed to utilise research commissioned by the DfE on compliance with Prevent (then understood as part of a duty to promote community cohesion, which government had seen as a particular issue in areas of the country with significant ethnic minority populations). These would have shown that the PVET schools were more compliant than was typical.</p> <p>For example, R4 outlined that:</p> <p>(a) There was a high compliance with the requirement to promote community cohesion on the part of urban schools with large ethnic minority pupil intakes.</p>		

(b) Community cohesion was an approach to multiculturalism that recognised difference alongside a commitment to shared values. This facilitated the identification with being British on the part of citizens with different cultural and religious traditions.

(c) The issue of community cohesion appeared to be less the unwillingness to integrate, and more a failure by others to include, reinforced by policies on school choice and self-segregation by white communities.

(d) The Clarke Report (to parliament) into allegations concerning Birmingham schools, (which had recommended the prosecution of teachers), failed to establish benchmarks for the investigations of the schools - e.g., with regard to existing guidelines on religious education and collective worship, how the duty to promote community cohesion functioned in schools and its relation to issues associated with extremism, and the circumstances in which schools could take over other schools (it required a successful academy, endorsed by Ofsted inspections, and the active involvement of school improvement officers at the DfE).

Following the collapse of the case, without resolution of the guilt, or otherwise, of the teachers, Holmwood wrote a book on the case, co-authored with Therese O'Toole, University of Bristol (whose expertise lies in the area of counter-extremism and Prevent) (R5). The book was written as an expression of 'public sociology', on which Holmwood is a significant authority. This research (R5) showed the significance of the administrative arrangements associated with the academy schools programme and the centralisation of responsibilities within the DfE which facilitated an authoritarian response by government. R5 outlines a major injustice in the conduct of inspections and inquiries under the aegis of the DfE and its agencies (Ofsted, Education Funding Agency, National College of Teaching and Leadership) and Birmingham City Council. This injustice involved in the conduct of public inquiries is argued to be similar to that associated with the Hillsborough affair. Since 2017, Holmwood has been working together with LUNG theatre group on the development of a play, *Trojan Horse*, to publicise the injustice. Together with the writers of the play, he has written about the role of social research and verbatim theatre in the righting of injustices (R6).

### 3. References to the research

- R1. **Holmwood, J.** (2013). Rethinking Moderation in a Pragmatist Frame. *The Sociological Review*, 61(2),180-195. <http://doi.org/10.1111/1467-954X.12106>
- R2. **Holmwood, J.** (2020). A postcolonial conservative defence of multicultural equality. *Reset Dialogues*, Available open access: <http://www.resetdoc.org/story/postcolonial-conservative-defence-multicultural-equality/>
- R3. **Holmwood, J.** (2014). Markets, Publics and Education: A Tale of Trojan Horses. *Discover Society*, July 01, 2014. Available open access: <http://discoversociety.org/2014/07/01/markets-publics-and-education-a-tale-of-trojan-horses/>
- R4. **Holmwood, J.** (2015). 'Expert witness report'. In the matter of the National College for Teaching and Leadership and Monzoor Hussain (and others). *A copy of this document is stored at UoN and is available on request.*
- R5. **Holmwood, J.** and O'Toole, T. (2017). *Countering Extremism in British Schools? The Truth About the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair*, Policy Press. [DOI:10.1332/policypress/9781447344131.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447344131.001.0001)
- R6. **Holmwood, J.**, Monks, H., & Woodhead, M. (2020). Writing Justice/Performing Injustice: Reflections on Research, Publicity, and the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair. *Civic Sociology*, <http://doi.org/10.1525/001c.12089>

### 4. Details of the impact

The Trojan Horse affair gave rise to changes in the Government's Prevent strategy, including a duty on schools to promote 'fundamental British values'. These values were the same as the 'shared' values which schools previously had a duty to promote as part of community cohesion but designating them 'British' had the effect of distancing British Muslims from them. Holmwood

has been actively involved in questioning this policy, through work with an independent journalist on the role of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (among other topics; see B).

### **The Court Case: Changing Discourse**

In July 2015, Holmwood advised the defence team that the official reports into the affair and the media had failed to take account of the regulatory frameworks applying to schools, including that on their requirements to teach religion and conduct daily acts of worship (R3). The schools were, in fact, operating properly within the law, but the media attention had also encouraged some of the teachers and administrators that their own misgivings about the Islamic ethos of the schools was legitimate, and, thereby skewing the evidence that was presented (but not tested) in the reports. Holmwood subsequently acted as an expert witness for the defence in the case involving senior leaders at PVET accused of the Islamification of schools in Birmingham. He wrote a detailed evidence report (R4), described by the lead barrister of the defence team as “*a substantial and meticulously prepared document*” (A), for the court in 2015.

R4 highlighted the deficiencies of one of the prosecution’s key evidence documents - the Clarke Report. Initially, the Clarke report was intended by the prosecution to be background rather than primary evidence, but it was forced into disclosure in the course of the case. This was precipitated by failure to disclose evidence from expert witnesses in the senior leaders’ case, including that of Holmwood, in a case against junior teachers at PVET that went to the High Court and was quashed (A). This led to the identification of other evidence submitted to Clarke but not reported by him, which was judged to indicate serious impropriety on the part of prosecuting lawyers, leading to the **collapse of the case** in May 2017, and, subsequently, **related cases being discontinued**. In the words of the lead defence barrister: “*Professor Holmwood’s report enabled us to counter the established narrative of the Trojan Horse affair and also to argue that the action of the teachers was fully compliant with existing guidelines. Further he identified serious errors in the Clarke Report...It was in our view essential to discredit the Clarke Report. Professor Holmwood’s report was an important part of our efforts in that regard*” (A).

Holmwood’s involvement with the court case, culminating in the case’s collapse, has had a **profound effect on both defendants and defence**: “*...the teachers were greatly buoyed by Professor Holmwood’s sophisticated and objective account of the circumstances of the case that he provided both in his report and his testimony.... His integrity and commitment to rectify the injustice visited upon both the teachers and their local community has been solitary and greatly appreciated by them ... notwithstanding the fact that the teachers have not had the means to pursue further legal remedies...*” (A).

### **The Play: Changing Attitudes through Public Engagement**

The key documents that came available during the case, as well as transcripts of cross-examinations, facilitated the writing of Holmwood’s and O’Toole’s book (R5), which has stimulated public debate and created awareness of the injustice experienced by the teachers, whose reputations were damaged and careers ruined on the basis of peremptory action by the authorities. The significance of this research (R5) was highlighted by an influential independent journalist (and nominee for the Orwell Prize 2020): “*There are very few academic books which have a profound importance in the real world. One of those is John Holmwood and Therese O’Toole’s study of the Trojan Horse affair, Countering Extremism in British Schools? The Truth about the Birmingham Trojan Horse Affair. It is one of the most important and courageous books I have ever read by academics. This is because Holmwood and O’Toole told what really happened in the so-called Trojan Horse affair in Birmingham in 2014...I cannot praise their work too highly for drawing attention to the injustice done to teachers, governors and the local community*” (B).

Holmwood’s research depicts a key moment in multicultural Britain, involving the scapegoating of Muslims and the disregard for due process and human rights (R5). It has helped shape the development of a successful play about the Trojan Horse case by community theatre group, LUNG (in conjunction with Leeds Playhouse). Holmwood played an instrumental role in the artistic development and production, providing academic expertise on early drafts and transcripts, checking the veracity of claims made in the play and contributed to the dramatization (C, D). The

Co-artistic Director of LUNG described Holmwood's contribution to the play as "...instrumental at every stage of the production - from creating the script, designing the impact of the tour to delivering the work on the ground when the play toured nationally" (C).

The play was performed at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe in August 2018, where it won the **Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award** (C). It has subsequently undertaken two national tours in October and November 2019, and February 2020. There have been 60 performances at 28 venues across the country, attended by over 7,933 people in total (filling 81.5% of the capacity of the theatre venues) from various ethnic, professional, religious backgrounds and age groups (C, E). Each performance was aligned with a Q&A session and/or a community-engagement event, at which the questions from the audience were answered by a panel involving teachers, policy-makers, Members of Parliament, Prevent professionals, governors, local councillors, and Holmwood; 71% of the audience members stayed for the post-show discussions (C); amongst those, there were representatives of 616 schools and community groups (E).

Feedback survey with 1158 viewers revealed that: i) 21.5% had **direct responsibility to the delivery of the Prevent strategy**; ii) 87.8% liked the play "a lot" and would recommend the show; iii) 33.9% felt that the Q&A session had **changed their thinking**, and iv) almost all reported **increased awareness** of the reality of the Trojan Horse affair (E). For example, viewers said:

*"Truths exposed; voices heard. Thank you for telling this story" (Gender N/A, aged 19 - 25 years, White British) (E).*

*"...very revealing experiences, facts of British societies and core British values." (Male, aged 65 years and over, Asian/British Asian) (E).*

*"It was awesome! I didn't know much about the Trojan Horse [affair] before coming into it, so I learned so much! It was like watching a NETFLIX documentary unravel!" (Male, aged 26 - 39 years, White British) (E).*

*"It was a valuable element in our 'UK-familiarisation programme'. We have moved to the UK and would like to better understand the culture here... I just feel super educated, but in a fun digestive way. And moved. And sad. But also inspired" (Female, aged 26 - 39 years, "Other" ethnicity) (E).*

*"The information given in both the show and the Q&A session was eye opening, shocking and needs to be spread. A responsibility for us all." (Female, aged 65 years and over, White British) (E).*

*"I want to go and spread the word and advocate." (Female, aged 26-39 years, White British) (E).*

Following the immediate success of the play at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Holmwood extended his commitment by ensuring that **wider access** was provided. For instance, he worked with LUNG to organise a special community performance in Birmingham. He was decisive in securing an Urdu translation of the show (funded by the University of Nottingham), which allowed another 274 people from 84 different community groups speaking Urdu to access the play (C). He was also committed to young people and schools (a potential interested audience group, captured through the feedback survey, see E) seeing the show. Thus, *"over 300 students, from schools who had not engaged with their local art venues for 3 years or more, accessed free matinee performances, and a post-show discussion afterwards with Professor Holmwood"* (C).

Following the success of the play's national tour and the aligned Q&A sessions in October/November 2019, on 14 December 2019, LUNG won the **Islamophobia Awareness Month Best Partner Award** from MEND - a not-for-profit organisation, committed to empowering and encouraging British Muslims within local communities to be more actively involved in British media and politics. Holmwood developed relationships with MEND and the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims and, thus, was instrumental in organising a performance of the play at the Houses of Parliament. The performance was scheduled originally for March 2020 and temporarily postponed due to the on-going COVID-19 emergency situation (C).

### Shaping Political Expression and Guidelines

Holmwood's research and engagement work has been described as "educational" and has challenged political narratives: *"Thanks to his [Holmwood's] wisdom and understanding, I have been able to write much more deeply than would ever have been the case about Muslims in Britain. This includes articles on the Equalities and Human Rights Commission, the Prevent Strategy, Islamophobia in the Conservative Party and the wider narrative around Islam in government"* (B).

It has also **shaped the political and social campaigns** of activist groups, who are influencing public attitudes and values regarding the **Government's new Prevent strategy after 2015** - a new duty on schools to promote fundamental British values that followed from the Trojan Horse affair. The issues associated with the Prevent strategy and addressed in Holmwood's research and the play (R5, 6), have become the focus of his activities with MEND. Holmwood's contribution to *"...the impact of our [MEND] policy advocacy surrounding the infiltration of counter-terror apparatus into educational settings and the wider operation of structural Islamophobia across the UK policy framework"* was described as "pivotal" (F). Amongst other collaborative initiatives, Holmwood contributed to a MEND Report - 'More Than Words: Approaching a Definition of Islamophobia'. Consequently, the report *"...led to the production of **guidelines** outlining the manifestations of Islamophobia that have since been adopted by political parties and councils across the country"* (F).

Holmwood has also presented training sessions for MEND volunteers on the role of the Birmingham Trojan Horse affair and the use of the Equality Act 2010 in the definition of 'fundamental British values'. In addition, he has collaborated with Index on Censorship (and MEND) in addressing the impact of Prevent on the expression of Muslim issues in the arts, preparing a submission for the **Independent Review of Prevent** established by former Prime Minister (D, F). Following the removal of the designated Chair in December 2019, the Independent Review of Prevent was suspended by the new Government. Holmwood continues working with MEND (F).

Holmwood has been collaborating with *This American Life* and *Serial* - a major public broadcaster from the US which is developing a **podcast series on the Trojan Horse affair**, originally planned for broadcast in Autumn 2020 (G). He has already provided six hours of interviews, as well as recording a talk he gave at a London mosque. However, because of Covid-19 production of the series has been delayed until new year. Holmwood is also working with an independent journalist and leading commentator, on a series of media articles on the mistreatment of British Muslim communities. The first article on the failures of the Equalities and Human Rights Commission was published in Middle East Eye on 24 July 2020 (H).

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Stakeholder Statement from Barrister.
- B. Stakeholder Statement from Independent Journalist
- C. Stakeholder Statement from LUNG Theatre Group.
- D. Case study '[Bringing the Story Home - Trojan Horse in Birmingham](#)', Index on Censorship. Available online at: <https://www.indexoncensorship.org/2020/01/bringing-the-story-home-trojan-horse-in-birmingham/> (screenshot is also available).
- E. Trojan Horse play evaluation report (LUNG).
- F. Stakeholder Letter from MEND.
- G. Stakeholder Letter from This American Life/ Serial.
- H. 'Trojan Horse, Prevent, Islamophobia: How the EHRC failed British Muslims', *Middle East Eye*, 24<sup>th</sup> July, 2020. Available online at <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/uk-ehrc-prevent-equality-islamophobia-failed-muslims> (screenshot is also available).