



Book Review: *Muslims, Schooling and Security: Trojan Horse, Prevent and Racial Politics* by Shamim Miah

Author(s): Aislinn O'Donnell

Source: *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (December 2019), pp. 177-179

Published by: Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies

Stable URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/2451/60979>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33682/y2h9-hz14>

REFERENCES:

This is an open-source publication. Distribution is free of charge. All credit must be given to authors as follows:

O'Donnell, Aislinn. 2019. "Book Review: *Muslims, Schooling and Security: Trojan Horse, Prevent and Racial Politics* by Shamim Miah." *Journal on Education in Emergencies* 5 (1): 177-79. <https://doi.org/10.33682/y2h9-hz14>.

The *Journal on Education in Emergencies (JEiE)* publishes groundbreaking and outstanding scholarly and practitioner work on education in emergencies (EiE), defined broadly as quality learning opportunities for all ages in situations of crisis, including early childhood development, primary, secondary, non-formal, technical, vocation, higher and adult education.

Copyright © 2019, Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies.



The *Journal on Education in Emergencies*, published by the [Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies \(INEE\)](#), is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#), except where otherwise noted.

BOOK REVIEW

*MUSLIMS, SCHOOLING AND SECURITY:
TROJAN HORSE, PREVENT AND RACIAL POLITICS*
BY SHAMIM MIAH
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2017. XI + 127 PAGES
\$61.67 (HARDCOVER)
ISBN 978-3-319-52334-7

Muslims, Schooling and Security, by Shamim Miah, focuses on the risk of approaching education questions through the lens of a preventative counter-terrorist agenda. The Trojan Horse controversy in Birmingham, UK, illustrates this risk. A letter sent to the Birmingham City Council in 2014, now widely agreed to be a hoax, claimed there was an organized plot to “Islamize” state schools in Birmingham. This precipitated a series of emergency Ofsted (inspectorate) investigations in schools with a majority Muslim population, in Birmingham and beyond. In the wake of an initial media furor and moral panic, inspections that used the criterion of British values as a key factor in assessing (and failing) schools, the subsequent collapse of the case against teachers because of “serious procedural impropriety” by the National Council for Teaching and Leadership, and the conclusion that there was no evidence of widespread extremism in Birmingham schools—or indeed in schools elsewhere—it is important to reflect on the implications, as this book does, of the so-called Trojan Horse controversy.

The issues discussed in this book are complex, and they remain current. Miah’s book represents a wide-ranging survey and discourse analysis of legislation, policy documents, media reports, and speeches tracing the genesis of Prevent, the counter-radicalization element of CONTEST II and III (the British counter-terrorism strategy), as well as the Trojan Horse affair. The latter is symptomatic of the ways in which education and governance are ill-served when a counter-terrorist agenda intrudes into the domain of schooling, and it shows some of the dangers of misinterpreting religious conservatism or even displays of faith as indicators of extremism. The book covers a good deal of discursive territory in order to argue that the racialized representation of Muslims in recent policy initiatives presents Muslims as an existential threat to “ontological security.” The book addresses a range of contemporary issues relating to Prevent and the politics that surround it to show how they risk framing Muslims as a suspect community, or indeed as a fifth column. It explains how the discourse of values plays out

in the intersection of education and counter-terrorist policies. In this respect, *Muslims, Schooling and Security* maps a trajectory that has led, it is argued, to the increasing securitization of Muslims, in this case in the context of schooling. Miah claims that the racialized representation of Muslims in policy discourse and in the media has led to an “othering” of Muslims. He draws on colonial discourse and documentation to help reveal the shifts in discourse through which Muslims have historically been racialized, sexualized, and Orientalized. In addition, the role of the media in constructing the category of Muslims as a threat is described in detail, as are media failures to report with due care and impartiality on the facts of the Trojan Horse affair.

The detailed account offered of the Trojan Horse controversy helps to contextualize and understand some of the recent shifts in British counter-terrorist strategy, in particular the latest iteration of Prevent, with its focus on nonviolent extremism, and the responses to the controversy at the time. As Miah notes, it was disturbing to see that an unauthenticated document like the Trojan Horse letter could have such an impact on public discourse and the public imagination. These reactions are put into context through descriptions of then British prime minister David Cameron’s 2011 speech in Munich. This speech introduced the rationale for subsequent shifts in counter-terrorist strategy from a focus on violent extremism to a more expansive remit, including nonviolent extremism, values, and ideology. Cameron argued that we have witnessed a failure of state multiculturalism, suggesting that (Muslim) communities have isolated themselves through voluntary self-segregation. “Muscular liberalism” was invoked as the antidote to the breakdown in the social fabric. Miah challenges the claim that spatial segregation constitutes evidence that Muslims are unwilling to integrate, in particular when there is no reflection on the endemic social exclusion of communities. He also argues that monocultural neighborhoods are viewed (without evidence) as problematic in a policy context where integration (*qua* assimilation) is seen as the antidote to radicalization.

This book provides a good introduction to a number of the key debates that have emerged at the intersection of counter-terrorism and educational policies, and that are likely to be of interest to the readers of the *Journal on Education in Emergencies*. It also implicitly raises the question of how and whether schooling and education can be approached through an educational lens in the contemporary context. It can be difficult to see how educational questions, including questions of values and ethos in schooling, can be openly discussed in a context of increasing securitization of education through preventative counter-terrorist measures.

Muslims, Schooling and Security is ambitious and fast paced. Some of the arguments, in particular in the latter chapters, could have benefited from further elaboration, in particular in examining the relationship between the politics of racialization, ontological insecurity, and legacies of empire in the public imaginary. A less condensed conclusion would have been welcome, and, unfortunately, the typographical errors proved to be somewhat distracting. However, the book is an important contribution to both the literature in this field and to wider public debate, in particular with respect to the racialization of Muslims and the ways in which the current policy discourse of British values has been engendered in opposition to multiculturalism. Much has been written about uncritical claims to an Enlightenment legacy that posited only certain raced and sexed subjects as exemplifying universal values. That story failed to engage with what Enrique Dussel has called the “underside of modernity,” and it could be argued that this is also the case with this iteration of British values. Such a story also fails, as Miah points out, to acknowledge the role of minorities in the struggle against the prevailing forms of structural injustice that has led to the transformation of oppressive practices premised on subordination and exclusion.

AISLINN O'DONNELL

Maynooth University

*The views expressed here are the author's
and do not represent Maynooth University.*

For permission to reuse, please contact journal@inee.org.