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Abstract

In this paper, we make a case for situating the school as a geopolitical site. The geopolitical functions of schools and schooling have long been investigated by geographers: forming national citizens, promoting geostrategic discourses, and disciplining populations, to name a few. However, we advocate an approach that is “outward looking,” examining the school not just as a space where these functions are carried out by the state, but as a site where institutional structure, educators, and students exercise agency in complicating the actual implementation of state geopolitical aims. We do this by examining two cases where public schooling has been leveraged by Western states in the service of the post-9/11 securitization of Muslim students in the United Kingdom and France. We argue that these two cases illustrate that schools can be examined not just as containers for state policy, but as explanatory moments in their own right in understanding state geopolitical strategy.

Keywords

Geopolitics, school, education, national security

Introduction

In September 2016, children in the southwest French town of Béziers participating in the typical bustle of the *rentrée*—the post-vacation transition to work and school—found

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themselves in the midst of an attempt to politicize the country's demographic profile. Béziers mayor Robert Ménard tweeted “#backtoschool (#reentrée): the most shocking proof of the #GreatReplacement in progress. You only have to look at old class photos . . .” Ménard's reference was to a common far-right refrain in France and beyond, the *grand remplacement*, that claims that the “native” French population is being gradually displaced by a non-European, largely North African, population. Despite eventually being fined €2000 for “incitement of hatred” under France's stringent anti-hate speech laws, Ménard produced a flurry of additional tweets, culminating with “Compare a class photo from the 1970s with one from today. Unquestionable #GreatReplacement!”.

Ménard's tweets illustrate that schools are especially visible spaces where the optics of students' skin color, clothing, and even family names are instrumentalized in the service of making political and territorial claims in a time of heightened reactionary nationalism. Crucially, however, the French “school of the Republic”—the *école républicaine*—is not just a space where contemporary struggles over identity, belonging, and security play out; given its unique institutional structure and place within French society and history, the *école républicaine* also speaks back to and modifies the discourses and practices that animate these struggles. In this sense, we argue that French public schools, along with other state-sponsored compulsory education systems, are *geopolitical* spaces in two senses. First, states mobilize their public education systems and individual schools in the service of their territorial security interests. Second, the characteristics of schooling as an institution impact how teachers and their students rework, contest, and/or acquiesce to these geopolitical maneuvers.

The notion of the school as a geopolitical space is not one that is wholly new to political geography and critical geopolitics. In this article, however, we argue that we must shift our geographic perspectives about the relationship between schools and the societies in which they are embedded. Rather than undertake the typical convention of approaching phenomena occurring in education systems and individual schools as derivative of larger sociopolitical issues, we follow an “outward-looking” perspective on the geographies of education. This analysis thus extends the innovative scholarship of Claudia Hanson Thiem (2009), which advocates for an approach in which geographies of education “are not so much objects to be explained as explanatory moments in their own right” (157; see also Cohen and Lizotte, 2015; Mitchell, 2018). To advance this scholarship, this article examines how schools are relationally constructed as sites where states attempt to carry out their foreign policy and security objectives, particularly in the context of the global war on terror and rising nationalist movements. In doing so, we recognize that there are other important areas in which schooling can be usefully and powerfully situated in other geopolitical spaces of state restructuring, particularly in the formation of global “knowledge economies” (Moisio, 2018).

To illustrate the geopolitical role played by state schooling, we draw on two case studies from related yet distinct places where the state has attempted to leverage schooling to meet its territorial security objectives related to the perceived problem of “homegrown terrorism”: the Prevent duty in Britain and the “great mobilization of the school for the Republic's values” in France. The two cases share many points in common: they both were established in response to specific acts of domestic terrorist violence yet remain embedded in a larger overall atmosphere of mistrust of Muslim identity and religiosity in contemporary majority non-Muslim societies. They both are being undertaken in Western European democracies in which nativism and nationalism are experiencing waves of electoral success. Yet these two cases differ precisely because of the specific nature of the respective school systems in which they are being instituted. In Britain, the Prevent program has been characterized by a much more active set of state interventions in individual schools enacted and enforced across the nation, while in France a sort of “normative confusion” (Lorcerie, 2010) reigns as school

staff attempt to make sense of national guidelines on the basis of their local knowledge and experience. These differences help elucidate the variable ways states have mobilized schools in the service of their geopolitical agendas. Despite both programs ostensibly taking the form of imposed mandates instituted across the education sector, they differ in the translation of high-level discourses to on-the-ground, day-to-day, practice.

Although many Western states have implemented antiterrorism initiatives that depend on schools—such as the United States’ Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program, Belgium’s Action Plan Against Radicalization (Plan R), and Canada’s National Strategy on Countering Radicalization to Violence—we chose the cases of France and Britain as they both clearly illustrate how schools function as key geopolitical sites to achieve the state’s territorial and security goals. In the case of France, the *école républicaine* has long been a state instrument for assimilating domestic and colonial populations to the cultural and political standards of the Parisian elite. In this sense, recent attempts to discipline certain expressions of Muslim identity fit into a well-established tradition. Britain also has relied on schools to manage cultural tensions wrought by rising immigration in the 1960s. Unlike France, however, British schools developed multicultural education programs that both assimilated immigrant children and recognized their cultures, languages, and values. Despite this multicultural veneer, Britain also facilitated more pernicious policies that treated immigrants as threats to the social order, such as limiting the number of immigrant students in any one school (Male, 1980). The Prevent duty continues this legacy of managing immigrants and the perceived threats they pose through the British school system. The inclusion of these two cases therefore is not to develop a comparative or comprehensive analysis of antiterrorism initiatives and the school systems that carry them out; instead, we seek to use these two cases to demonstrate how schools have been affected by and contributed to prevailing geopolitical agendas while maintaining internal logics irreducible to the external forces exerted on them.

To stage this analysis, we first review literature that has focused on the nature of schooling as a geopolitical state institution and schools as geopolitical sites. We then develop our central claim that schools themselves function as geopolitical sites through an exploration of geographic studies focused on the unique nature of the state-sponsored compulsory school as an institution. To do so, this analysis draws from a three-year interpretative qualitative research study on CVE programs in the United States, a two-year collaboration with an international coalition of community organizations working to understand and challenge antiterrorism initiatives in the United States and United Kingdom, a review of qualitative research studies on the Prevent duty’s impact on British schools and students (e.g. Farrell, 2016; Maylor, 2016), and an extended case study of a series of educational reforms France enacted to reinforce national pride and police social difference in the face of a perceived crisis of student loyalty to republican values, which included semi-structured interviews with teachers, principals, and street-level bureaucrats. Chris arrived at studying the *Grande mobilisation* after initial investigations into reforms to attendance zone policies that have had marked effects on student enrollment in schools perceived to be good or bad based on tacit understandings of their ethnocultural profiles. He is a US-born native English speaker who, as a result of living and teaching primary school English in France, achieved a high level of proficiency in the French language as well as a knowledge of common stereotypes and cultural tropes used in France to describe marginalized populations. His national outsider status often encouraged French educators to perhaps speak more candidly than they might with French researchers. Nicole arrived at studying CVE and Prevent through her initial ethnography of a U.S. public school that developed a specialized homeland security studies program to prepare poor and working-class youth for low-level work in the security industry (see Nguyen, 2016). As a US-born, non-Muslim woman of color, she was a racial

outsider, a positioning that offered different intellectual interpretations of her research data, facilitated particular relationships with Muslim research participants who sometimes provided insight into their life histories to contextualize their perspectives and practices, and required undertaking reflexive practices such as member checking.

Through an analysis of these data and anchored by our own social locations, we argue that schooling is not just any state institution: it is one that, within democratic societies, is imbued with a particular set of aspirational values and strategic aims by the state and civil society, and that nevertheless develops a certain level of autonomy from those very institutions that define its place within society. Subsequently, we examine the Prevent duty and the *Grande mobilisation de l'Ecole* to demonstrate how education systems, and their schools, function as key geopolitical sites primed for state interventions related to territorial security. We conclude with final remarks on how our work can contribute to the growing field of work on “outward-looking” geographies of education, and how reconceptualizing schools as geopolitical sites makes a more specific intervention in contemporary geopolitical issues.

Schools as geopolitical sites

Political geographers have explored the intersections of education and geopolitics through examinations of school textbooks, policies, discourses, disciplinary practices, funding regimes, and daily rituals. These studies primarily have focused on the role of schools in statecraft, nation-building, and citizenship formation; the deployment of geopolitical discourses in and through schools; the production and dissemination of knowledge that advances war; and the making of securitized subjects as future national security workers, imminent terrorist threats, and/or disposable populations. This conceptual work follows Sunčana Laketa's (2016) call to situate schools as “geopolitical arenas” and as “educational institutions that have historically enacted state power” (159).

To consider schools as sites leveraged by the state toward geopolitical ends, we must briefly consider the state itself, and particularly the kind of state in which our cases are located. Building on Jessop's (2016) concept of the state not as a pre-determined entity but as the material expression of social relations, we can likewise expect schools' geopolitical functions to reflect at least some of the relations held together by their respective states. Our cases in Britain and France represent Western European, post-industrial states that have crafted a particular relationship between government, economy, and society. In very general terms, this relationship has been characterized during the last 50 years by a decentering of nation-state power and its rescaling and reconsolidation alongside emerging urban agglomeration economies (e.g. Brenner, 2004). This shift has been accompanied by increasingly entrepreneurial forms of intra- and inter-state competition that have affected both governance and the profile of the economically and socially productive citizen to be inculcated through schooling. In Western democracies such as Britain and France, this profile includes qualities such as technological savviness, cosmopolitanism, and self-motivation, often at the expense of alternative subjectivities.

Against this context, the school is called upon to manage the tensions brought about by the rescaling of the state and of citizenship. In this area, geographer Katharyne Mitchell (2003) troubles dominant theorizations of schools as incubators of national citizenship. Recognizing the rescaling of citizenship consonant with state deterritorialization, Mitchell (2003) asks:

What happens then to the concept of democratic, *national* citizens when the nation no longer contains those citizens, when the citizens are increasingly ‘trans’-national, and the nation itself is tightly networked with others in a global system of social, political, and interdependency? (388)

As the interdependent processes of neoliberalism and globalization, and their associated spatial patterns, march forward, Western states have reorganized their schools to cultivate “strategic cosmopolitans” driven not by national unity in diversity but by global competitiveness (Mitchell, 2003). At the same time, the very same spatially uneven processes of globalization create discontinuities between the national-level ambitions of education systems and the ability of individual districts and schools to carry out these goals. As numerous national-level education initiatives have shown, anxieties about “failing schools” reflect wider fears about social cohesion, even as they are disproportionately visited upon schools whose populations are devalued for their racial or cultural qualities.

As a geopolitical institution, Western state schools cultivate “political subjects with the skills and the sense of solidarity required to form an effective citizenry at a given moment” (Staeheli and Hammett, 2010: 672). To create governable subjects in diverse societies, Western states have used schools to inculcate a

national story of peoplehood that minimizes, or even overlooks, division and conflict in order to promote a form of association in which the claims of ‘the people’ or nation take primacy over the claims of groups or over histories that might divide the people. (Staeheli and Hammett, 2010: 673)

Through formal and informal curricula, culture, rules and regimentation, and embodied habits of everyday life, schools nurture students as governable subjects filled with patriotic pride, a sense of civic duty, and a willingness to subordinate racial, cultural, and other differences to a singular identification with the nation (Bartlett and Lutz, 1998). These features continue to define compulsory schools today, which the state still uses to manage class antagonisms, foster a patriotic citizenry, prepare youth for the workforce, and reproduce social hierarchies.

Curriculum in mandatory schooling is a particularly common area where states pursue geopolitical goals. Political geographers increasingly have studied how “school textbooks are generally some of the most efficient institutions of either nation-building or the indoctrination of state ideology” (Takeuchi, 2000: 83). State-sponsored school textbooks transmit and reproduce geographical imaginations and popular geopolitical discourses (Ide, 2016; Loewen, 2009). In the United States, for example, standards in the state of Massachusetts have required teachers to frame terrorism and the September 11 attacks around Islamic fundamentalism and the Middle East. More specifically, the teaching of world events standards asks students to “Explain the rise and funding of Islamic Fundamentalism in the last half of the 20th century” and the “increase in terrorist attacks against Israel and the United States” (Stoddard and Hess, 2011: 10). This educational mandate promotes a particular interpretation of world events that shores up nationalism and reaffirms the US commitment to the global war on terror, its alliance with Israel, and its demonization of Muslims as “Islamic fundamentalists.”

Political geographers also have reframed the internationalization or globalization of higher education in terms of a “geopolitics of higher education.” Natalie Koch’s (2014) research, for example, explores how “Western universities’ internationalization agendas have coincided with extensive nationalization agendas in other parts of the world,” evidence of a “broader geopolitics to these parallel developments” (47). The creation of international “branch campuses” of elite US universities like New York University extensions in Abu Dhabi and Shanghai articulates with local efforts to “domesticate elite higher education” by “bring[ing] Western education to their students rather than sending them abroad” (Koch, 2014: 47). Political leaders have justified these new institutional arrangements through a

language of nationalism, pointing to the reinvestment of education spending at home and to promote national futures (e.g. the Saudization of Saudi Arabia). Projects to develop globally competitive yet local universities are “intimately bound up with nation-building agendas, whereby citizens are to be made proud of their homeland, through promoting international prestige” (Koch, 2014: 48). State leaders initiate these educational arrangements to achieve their broader geopolitical agendas, making institutions of higher education critical tools of statecraft.

As these examples illustrate, state schools support, enact, and extend geopolitical strategies, especially related to territorial security. Yet, we broaden these critical explorations by reframing schools as geopolitical spaces primed for state interventions. We take seriously schools as a geopolitical site itself, thereby contributing to broader geopolitical maneuvering.

Institutional frameworks in schooling: From the state to the classroom

Having discussed some of the many ways in which states attempt to instrumentalize schools and schooling to achieve their geopolitical aims, we now explore more widely the institution of public schooling on its own terms. We demonstrate that while state interventions into education have been consequential in shaping schools as geopolitical sites, the compulsory schooling sector contains its own internal logics and agency that makes it an active participant in forming these sites. The people who inhabit schools and negotiate institutional norms can acquiesce to or resist the state’s goals. Far from forming a binary spectrum of passive acceptance or active revolt, such acquiescence or resistance can take more subtle forms that complicate the path from national ideological or strategic priority to on-the-ground practice.

Education scholars have long acknowledged the ideological aims of compulsory national schooling, especially those that are implicit to curricula and evaluation systems (Apple, 2004; Bowles and Gintis, 1976). Empirically, this is amply demonstrated in the multiple ways that the state attempts to leverage schooling to geopolitical ends. However, the driving forces behind such aims can be multiple and contradictory, reflecting larger societal disputes about the core purpose of public education (Labaree, 1997). Rather than situate the school as an institution overdetermined by these disputes, Blacker (2000) proposes a relational view of schooling in which its internal autonomy and therefore unique character is defined and preserved by the connections it has to other spheres of social and political life. By maintaining numerous, overlapping, and often conflicting social purposes, schooling gains a degree of indispensability so that its purposes cannot fully be dominated by any given external set of motivations.

As a state institution, schooling is both bureaucratically centralized to greater or lesser degrees and dispersed in the form of individual school locations, creating important implications for how it spatializes state power. This is particularly true given the intersubjective nature of education and the roles of individual educators and students in constituting schooling. Feminist geographers have provided important insights into how the state and its institutions are “embodied” (Garmany, 2009; Mountz, 2004; Secor, 2007). Such a perspective shows how state restructuring and rescaling often devolve responsibility and decision-making authority onto intermediary bureaucrats and enroll individuals into their own self-governance. Moreover, this perspective reveals the uneven application of state power across space and the incompleteness of spatial sovereignty (Painter, 2006). By shifting the frame of analysis away from a notion of the state as a monolithic entity with internally consistent ideological aims, alternative sites where state policy is carried out emerge: the

workplace, the service provider, and the client all play important roles in negotiating the implementation of policy. Even in areas where sovereign state power is most clearly on display, such as in policing, the role of the individual in producing “street-level bureaucracy” (Lipsky, 1980) is of vital importance (Herbert, 1997).

Contextually examining how different elements of the education system interact to produce on-the-ground policy is especially important when it comes to contentious topics such as surveilling children for signs of violent extremism. Bowen et al. (2014) propose that, in their day-to-day functioning, national institutions operate in “relative autonomy” to national ideologies regarding citizenship, values, and immigration. This means that while such ideologies certainly intersect with the daily practices of ground-level state employees, these civil servants ultimately draw on their own framings of issues to address problems in the most immediate and practical manner possible. In addition, while schools are located in a hierarchy of power and accountability due to their status as state institutions, they are not defined solely in terms of their role in distributing this power or in adhering to this accountability.

Applying the practical schema framework to educational initiatives for combatting violent extremism reveals the intersecting scales in which Muslim students are situated as targets of policy intervention. Although discourses within schooling around integration and extremism in the West converge in some respects, they also partially reproduce national narratives (Lettinga and Saharso, 2012; Sunier, 2014). Competing practical schemata also can expose ideological fault lines within a single national context regarding the securitization of education. For instance, Mattsson and Säljö (2018) trace two different institutional discourses that discuss a single proposed anti-radicalization strategy, Sweden’s “Conversation Compass” (*Samtalskompassen*). They demonstrate that while the main government agency tasked with CVE attempts to fuse interventionist pedagogy with empirically unverified assumptions about the radicalization process, legal scholarship from another Swedish government institution exposes many problematic elements of the proposed policy that do not hold up to constitutional scrutiny.

Rhetoric circulated at the national level often is more or less detached from everyday education activities. At the ground level, schooling often finds itself caught between opposing normative attitudes about securitized issues, including the integration of Muslim children. In the meantime, educators are left “improvising alone” (Lorcerie, 2010) on the basis of their professional and personal frames of reference. This can reinforce, contest, or simply sidestep state geopolitical agendas. For instance, teachers’ biases—conscious or otherwise—can stigmatize non-dominant students as low-performing academically or behaviorally, reproducing the very effects they expect to encounter (Lorcerie, 2009; Van den Bergh et al., 2010). Likewise, teachers have the capacity to disrupt state monitoring projects such as curricular constraints (Teague, 2018) by drawing on their subjective experience in the classroom (Ball and Olmedo, 2013). Finally, teachers can try to find practical solutions to contentious issues (Vivarelli, 2014) or add plural meanings to dominant discursive frameworks surrounding specific school-based initiatives (Parker, 2011). These potential responses are instrumental in determining how policy reflecting high-level geopolitical aims is realized—or not—on the ground. Conversely, the degree to which school-level employees pursue, resist, or circumvent initiatives that monitor intensely securitized issues can have repercussions for how these same issues are understood in society more broadly.

Educator agency, however, is not exercised solely in the abstract; it is thoroughly embedded in the local educational geographies where teachers and other school staff live and work. These geographies both shape and are shaped by the institutionally and locally embedded knowledge that educators bring to their work. As with socioeconomic characteristics,

sociospatial categories can also have a stigmatizing effect that impacts teacher attitudes and by extension student learning outcomes (Popkewitz, 1998). Such categories can also be embedded within imagined geographies that circulate among educators, as Buendía et al. (2004) demonstrate. In their study, informal labels used to discuss urban space such as “South Side” mask how underlying understandings about those spaces are classed and raced, and structure educators’ implementation of reform efforts to align with their localized knowledge of racial and class differences.

Although it is leveraged in instrumental ways toward strategic state geopolitical goals, schooling by its very nature contains considerable capacity for redirecting these goals. As we discuss below, state mandates, institutional structures, local circumstances, and individual agency produce a variety of outcomes that situate the school as a geopolitical site in both of these capacities.

Suspects not students: The Prevent duty and the imposition of school surveillance

As a tool of statecraft, schools have played a central role in cultivating national identities and national pride. Textbooks, for example, can encourage geopolitical imaginations that produce particular notions of internal and external enemies and that justify particular security measures to guard against such threats (Ide, 2016). States also task social service providers with identifying and reporting potential security threats to law enforcement, practices that can reinforce prevailing notions of the Muslim child as an internal threat to national security. As we will see, the Prevent duty in Britain requires teachers to promote fundamental British values, challenge extremist ideas, and report children perceived to be “at risk of being drawn into terrorism” (Her Majesty’s Government, 2015: 15). In this section, we investigate how this new antiterrorism initiative has positioned British schools as geopolitical sites that both foster geopolitical imaginations that criminalize Muslim children and contribute to a broader geopolitical agenda beyond the education sector. We argue that, as geopolitical sites, British schools are affected by and contribute to the state’s domestic war on terror. To stage this argument, we begin with a narrative that illustrates this security agenda and then discuss the policy framework and its implementation in British schools.

In 2016, nursery staff recommended that a four-year-old child participate in the UK’s deradicalization program, Channel. In describing a picture he drew of his father cutting a vegetable, the child mispronounced the word cucumber as “cucker bum.” Nursery staff interpreted the mispronunciation as “cooker bomb.” Fearing an incipient terrorist, the nursery manager completed a government “Early Help Assessment” form, writing that the child’s drawings “have previously had violent tendencies.” The child’s mother, however, explained that her son enjoyed watching *Power Rangers* and other popular media featuring superheroes, which informed his artwork (Prevent Watch, 2016).

The nursery staff’s response fulfills a mandate imposed by the UK’s *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act of 2015*, which requires “specified authorities” like teachers to “have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism.” This legislation supports the UK’s Prevent strategy, which seeks to “prevent people from becoming terrorists” through a variety of strategies, including the reporting of youth perceived to be at risk of or in the process of terrorist radicalization (Her Majesty’s Government, 2015: 14). Prevent serves as one strand of the UK’s multipronged antiterrorism program,

CONTEST, which has increased efforts to detect and prosecute terrorists, enhance border security, improve emergency preparedness, and challenge extremist ideology.

To guide local interpretations of the *Counter-Terrorism and Security Act*, the UK Home Office issued a “duty guidance” that details how such specified authorities are to comply with Prevent. Under this mandate, public school teachers and registered childcare providers must “make appropriate referrals” to the UK deradicalization program (Channel) to support individuals “at risk of being drawn into terrorism” and “promote fundamental British values”—democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance for those with different faiths and beliefs—as an antidote to terrorist radicalization and recruitment (Her Majesty’s Government, 2015: 13, 19). It is under this duty guidance that nursery staff filed a referral for the four-year-old child. Prevent therefore mobilizes schools as sites to enhance national security by deputizing teachers with identifying and reporting “at-risk” youth.

Given the highly centralized nature of the British school system, the state’s imposition of the Prevent duty is monitored and enforced by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), which reports directly to Parliament. Failure to comply with the Prevent duty empowers the Secretary of State to intervene, like cutting a noncompliant school’s funding. Given these Ofsted inspections and possible penalties, state schools across Britain typically have complied with this mandate, referring 2462 students to Channel in a single year (Home Office, 2018). Although schools and their staff differentially have interpreted and enacted such state policies, particularly the mandate to promote fundamental British values (Farrell, 2016; Maylor, 2016), the British school system remains “relentlessly centralized” (Richardson, 2010) and therefore significantly affected by the imposition of the Prevent duty (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017).

As with Prevent, the British government historically has engaged schools as geopolitical sites primed for security-related interventions. Earlier debates about the regulation of Muslim schools, for example, revealed struggles to maintain a cohesive British society through the management, oversight, and/or exclusion of faith-based schools in the state educational system. Since the 1990s, “which, if any, Muslim schools should be funded by the British taxpayer [has been] an issue which divides public opinion and generates strong feelings on both sides” (Tinker, 2009: 540). Unlike other faith schools, Muslim schools have been blamed for “creating the terrorists of the future” (Tinker, 2009: 540). In 1998, however, the British government incorporated two Muslim schools into the state sector after undergoing strict inspections (Meer, 2009: 381). Over the next decade, the British government encouraged the “establishment and subsequent expansion of state-funded Muslim schools,” which could increase state control while redressing the educational inequities experienced by British Muslims (Breen, 2018: 36). Although the British government sought to bring more Muslim schools under state management between 1998 and 2009, the 2010 election of conservative Prime Minister David Cameron generated fears that state multiculturalism failed and therefore reinvigorated public calls for assimilation (Breen, 2018: 36–37). These fraught social contexts facilitated the introduction of the Prevent duty in British schools.

Although the Prevent duty guidance aligns with public calls for assimilation and articulates a need to protect children from terrorist influences by “having robust safeguarding policies in place to identify children at risk, and intervening as appropriate,” the imposition of “fundamental British values” has led to the increased criminalization of Muslim children by defining Britishness in opposition to social difference (Her Majesty’s Government, 2015: 14). More specifically, this mandate has further narrowed how Britishness is conceptualized, promoted, and enforced such that teachers have come to view “students’ affiliation with

minority culture [as] divisive and contribut[ing] to social conflict” (Keddie, 2014: 539). The “conception of Britishness associated with social cohesion establishes a racialized polarization of who is and who is not British enough based on how well they have assimilated with reference to British symbols, history, and lifestyle” (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017: 33). Dominant interpretations of fundamental British values “assume a consensus with a political model of Britishness that is rooted in values that exclude and identify difference as problematic” (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017). As Maylor (2016) warns, “if British values are set up in opposition to minority cultures, this inevitably leads to a backlash against minority ethnic cultures,” evident in the disproportionate reporting of Muslim youth to Channel (317). Although research studies routinely demonstrate that “the meaning of British identity [is] contested from a variety of perspectives depending on the positioning of the participants,” the concept of “fundamental British values” has institutionalized a nativist understanding of Britishness rooted in whiteness (Farrell, 2016: 289). The Prevent duty calls on UK teachers both to surveil and be surveilled within the “truth game of Britishness” in the name of national security (Farrell, 2016: 293).

Research with current and prospective teachers affirms that the imposition of fundamental British values on classrooms “has promoted a certain racially boundaried image of who is British,” leading teachers to “equate values with hidden, uncontested norms of whiteness and being middle-class, and unconsciously stigmatizing pupils who do not fit this position” (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017). A Muslim youth worker managing a local Prevent program, for example, reported that “the push for Britishness causes alienation. We become the ‘other.’ We need to be studied, managed, contained. Every conference we go to on Prevent frames things this way” (as quoted in Kundnani, 2014: 167). Professional forums enforce prevailing interpretations of Britishness that reify racial hierarchies.

Despite the imposition of this top-down mandate that has defined Britishness in opposition to social difference, schools, teachers, students, and labor unions have variably interpreted the imposed duty guidance, depending on their own institutional, professional, and/or personal goals. In Maylor’s (2016) qualitative research study of “multi-ethnic schools,” for example, students reported that rather than discuss what people in Britain share, their teachers emphasized “ethnic and cultural differences,” thereby equating Britishness with whiteness (324). Contrary to Maylor’s study, religious education students in Farrell’s (2016) research project continuously questioned the concept of Britishness. Student teachers suggested recasting fundamental British values as “fundamental school values” or “fundamental core values,” noting their role as “religious education teachers” and “not British values teachers” (291). Although student teachers differentially interpreted “fundamental British values” based on their own social locations, most expressed “unease” with the concept (291). Teachers’ own interpretations of Britishness organized their differential interpretations and enactments of the Prevent duty.

Despite these competing goals, understandings, and practices of the Prevent duty, the state has used this mandate to enhance territorial control by mobilizing teachers and schools as critical national security tools that enforce particular interpretations of “fundamental British values” and report youth who defy these values. State schools therefore have “become a conduit through which the intersection of counter-terrorism and the standards have resulted in the expectation that teachers will pursue and enforce a racialized security agenda” (Elton-Chalcraft et al., 2017: 33). Although the Home Office has imposed a top-down national security mandate on a highly centralized education system, teachers often have “improvised alone,” interpreting the duty guidance according to their own personal, political, and professional understandings of what constitutes the promotion of fundamental British values, ultimately creating disparate practices and outcomes. Schools thus serve

as contested geopolitical sites that differentially carry out, resist, and acquiesce to the demands of the state depending on their own internal logics, practices, and traditions.

La Grande mobilisation de l'École: Schools as sites of geopolitical incoherence

Due to France's colonial past, particularly in Algeria, French Muslims have long been an "imminent other" (Isin, 2002). Against the context of the more general post-9/11 securitization turn in Western democracies, claims to Muslim identity have been regarded with increasing suspicion, spilling over at times into open Islamophobia. This was particularly the case from 7 to 9 January 2015, when three self-proclaimed jihadists spread a wave of violence across sites in the Parisian metropolitan area. Two of the three, Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, targeted the offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, a publication long held as apostate by religious Muslims for its repeated provocative portrayals of Muhammad. The newspaper had its image quickly transformed in public opinion from a sophomoric outlet for disgruntled leftists into a martyr for free expression itself. The polarization of opinion led to condemnation of the shootings being transformed into a litmus test for one's adherence to modern standards of decency and civilization (Klug, 2016).

This litmus test was quickly applied to students within the public-school system: During an attempt to hold a nation-wide moment of silence following the attacks, about 200 cases of noncompliance in about 70 primary and secondary schools were recorded.¹ The French press published a sampling of these responses, many provided by teachers: In response to his teacher's insistence that he participate, one eighth-grade student in Lille casually replied, "I'll kill you with a Kalashnikov." Another reportedly told his teacher "they [the *Charlie Hebdo* staff] were asking for it. You reap what you sow when you provoke." Summoned before the French National Assembly to explain the incidents and her ministry's planned reaction, Minister of Education Najat Vallaud-Belkacem declared:

[After the attacks] teachers across France quickly understood that the school would be on the front line for reacting to these attacks, to explain to students the inexplicable, and to manage their emotions and reactions. In the wake [of the attacks] I had sent them a letter asking not only that they have students respect the minute of silence planned for the next day, but also that they create spaces of dialog and discussion. They did it, and for that I thank them. It did not always go well. There were incidents; numerous incidents, even. They are serious, and not a single one of them must be taken lightly. And not a single one of them will be taken lightly. (Assemblée nationale française, 2015)

The result of Vallaud-Belkacem's promise not to take the incidents lightly was realized in the *Grande mobilisation de l'École pour les valeurs de la République*, the "Great Mobilization of the [Public] School for the Republic's Values." Organized around 11 "principal measures," the initiative included curricular, administrative, and disciplinary reforms centered on an underlying assumption that student resistance to the moment of silence constituted a crisis of civic competence.

The *Grande mobilisation* illustrates two particularly French phenomena: the first is the place held by *laïcité* in the French public consciousness. This idiosyncratic version of secularism is held in equal esteem as the familiar trifecta of French Republican values, *liberté* (freedom), *égalité* (equality), and *fraternité* (solidarity). A 1905 law—often simply referred

to the *loi de 1905*—states the principles of *laïcité*² in its modern form and is the common reference for discussions on the topic:

Article 1. The Republic guarantees freedom of conscience and the free exercise of organized religions (*cultes*) under the sole restrictions hereafter enumerated in the interest of public order.

Article 2. The Republic neither recognizes, nor pays the salaries of, nor subsidizes any religion . . .

However, the precise meaning of what kind of secularism *laïcité* prescribes is a political question, rather than a legal or constitutional one (Baubérot, 2012; Kheir, 2008; Roy, 2005). The second aspect represented by the *Grande mobilisation* is the recurrence of state educational responses to perceived crises of civic identity among French youth (Ribert, 2006).

At the intersection of these two phenomena, the school becomes highlighted as a site where *laïcité* is constructed and contested as a matter of national identity and security. Although this occurs in a range of public institutions in France (Bertossi and Bowen, 2014), the public school remains one of the most contentious. The image of the *école républicaine* that looms largest in the French cultural consciousness is that of the “republican stockpot” (*creuset républicain*), which crafts fledgling citizens loyal to the Republic’s universal values out of the country’s social and cultural differences. In some accounts, this citizen-making function takes on an almost-mystical quality. Vianès (2004), describes the school as

a sanctuary, that is to say, a space protected from strife. Society’s conflicts cannot penetrate it. It is unacceptable that the public, secular [*laïque*], and obligatory school should be polluted by the demands of “communities” that would try to impose their beliefs, their habits, their customs upon it. (22)

The sanctuary metaphor, repeated throughout French political discourse, illustrates that the *école républicaine* operates as a paradoxical geopolitical space: it attempts to produce a coherent state secularism policy across a uniform educational landscape, yet runs into institutional incoherence and contradiction as the policy is practiced in mundane school spaces. The ideal of the school as a “sanctuary” reflects a long-held desire to territorialize the French state by keeping competing identities and loyalties outside of the school’s walls. Yet, education’s very nature as an institution with some degree of autonomy and internal logic, as well as the locally embedded nature of individual schools, complicates the homogenizing aims of this project.

In the contemporary context of ascendant global political movements and the policing of Muslim identity by Western governments, the sanctuary metaphor takes on an additional layer of urgency. It is reinforced with reference to “communalism” (*communautarisme*), a term that, like *laïcité*, has a complex etymology and pedigree in French political culture. It stems from a deep distrust in French society of groups who claim authority from a power other than the state to impose cultural or religious restrictions on their members (Bowen, 2007). In common contemporary usage, it is used disparagingly to designate racial, ethnic, or religious groups of turning in on themselves and away from their fellow citizens, and to delegitimize their claims to the larger society (Taguieff, 2005). In effect, a meteoric rise in the use of the term over the past 15 years has discursively produced the very kind of cultural isolationism it presumes (Dhume-Sonzogni, 2016). This meaning also carries a significant spatial element: there is a widespread imagined geography of places where Muslim communalism has taken hold, a sense of places that have been “subtracted” from republican order

and are under the sway of Sharia law (Baubérot, 2012). These places generally are identified as the distressed urban peripheries of Paris and other large cities, *les banlieues*. Documentaries such as *Trappes à l'heure de la prière* (Trappes at Prayer Time) reinforce this mental mapping of communautarisme through depictions of entire municipalities being under the control of fundamentalist Muslims who disregard the principles of *laïcité* (Bowen, 2007).

The image of the *école républicaine* as a sanctuary of the Republic, combined with threatening geographies of communalism, situates individual schools within a particular geographic imagination as sites where racial and religious differences threaten the social cohesion of the French Republic. This imaginary is exemplified by the 2002 book *The Lost Territories of the Republic*, written by historian Georges Bensoussan under the pseudonym Emmanuel Brenner. Drawing on accounts from teachers in schools, the book presents a portrait of schools dominated by radicalized Muslim youth who terrorize their classmates. The book effectively shifted the national conversation on how religious identity encourages communalist behavior and therefore introduces a subversive element that undermines order in schools and broader society (Bowen, 2007). This marked a substantive shift in the public's broad understanding of the relationship between *laïcité* and public order from several years earlier, when the right to wear a *hijab* was seen largely as a matter of individual rights. In the context of a post-9/11 suspicion of Muslim identity and a spike in anti-Semitic violence in France, the presence of religious symbols in public spaces and especially schools were increasingly interpreted as an aggressive flouting of *laïcité* with possible ties to violent extremism.

Somewhat contrary to the Prevent project in UK schools, French attempts to pursue a racialized security agenda in national education have been halting, subject to changing political interest. As of early 2018, bureaucratic elements of the *Grande mobilisation* already had been reabsorbed into ministerial functions and reformulated as a result of shifting priorities on the part of the Philippe government (e-mail to the author, 30 January 2018). More importantly, however, research at the local level reveals an uneven geography of the application of such initiatives. Vivarelli (2014), for instance, finds a “pragmatic” enforcement of *laïcité* in secondary schools throughout the greater Strasbourg area, while Lorcerie (2012, 2010) contrasts the overblown media representation of Muslim students’ “challenges” to *laïcité* with the rather more mundane realities on the ground.

Reflecting such findings, certain school staff reject inflexible approaches to the enforcement of principles of *laïcité*. As one principal in the greater Paris area described her approach to enforcing the 2004 conspicuous symbols ban:

So I don't have issues, I don't have students who come either veiled [*voilées*] or anything else. Once everyone understands the rule... but a cross, my little thing, I don't go around with a cross, and I don't go around with a headdress [*coiffe*] – for the [school] personnel, it's clearly not allowed, that something be visible. But when it comes to children, and then you have something small, but something insignificant – if I'm dealing with a little scarf [*foulard*] on a [student's] head, I can say that it's to make her look pretty. It's not necessarily “visible.” (Author's interview, 24 June 2016a)

While instances of heavy-handed intervention exist, it would be reductive to conclude that the enforcement of *laïcité* in French schools is uniformly oppressive or targeted at Muslim students. Rather, it appears that the relative autonomy of the *école républicaine* and its agents complicates the path taken by surveillance and security policies as they flow from the central bureaucracy to individual schools.

Indeed, certain educators feel at ease adapting messaging around *laïcité* to the needs of their students, rather than adhering to preconceived models for teaching the subject, as in the case of a teacher who described how she and her colleagues had invited the local chapter of a European anti-discrimination youth organization to talk to their students about *laïcité*:

There were certain students . . . in fact they personalize *laïcité* like something, like a straitjacket, and absolute prohibition, well . . . so that repels them a bit. So because of that I thought it was really interesting that they could have the point of view [a Ministry of Education representative], who brought them her view, and then, the whole [youth] association. Why the whole association? Because what I noticed during this discussion, was that exchanging among peers, among youth, that works really, really well . . . Whereas Mme. Fumet, that's really "the" *laïcité*. A certain, well, a representation of the institution, in fact. So there, they learned things, but it wasn't at all the same message – for them. Well, for me it was exactly the same. It's exactly the same message that the association gave. It's "living together." (Author's interview, 24 June 2016b)

The imagery of the *Grande mobilisation*, which hearkens back to French resistance and national struggle, has fallen flat on students who are simply trying to understand a historically ambiguous concept in its real-world dimensions. While there is no doubt that some educators have taken a harder line in enforcing the initiative's mandates, many have taken an approach such as the one outlined above. Somewhat in contrast to the British case of Prevent, the implementation of the *Grande mobilisation* has been informed a looser and more geographically variegated in the educational arena.

Rethinking schools as geopolitical sites

As this exploration demonstrates, Western schools serve as critical sites for state interventions to achieve strategic geopolitical goals, such as nation-building, enforcing territorial security, and managing global threats. Crucially, states do not merely leverage schools in their nation-building exercises; schools themselves become sites in which notions of risk, vulnerability, and security circulate from discursive to material realms and back again. Schools, for example, have promoted *laïcité* and "fundamental British values," enforced particular responses to terrorist attacks, and facilitated the reporting of youth perceived to be vulnerable to terrorist radicalization. Schools therefore are not only shaped by prevailing geopolitical contexts like the January 2015 attacks in France and the broader global war on terror; they are also the sites within which specific bodies are surveilled for signs of terror risk and disciplined. This process draws on understandings of geopolitical threats developed at multiple scales and recombined through the specific spatial context of the school building itself. As such, schools make unique contributions to the pursuit of dominant geopolitical goals such as the prevention of "homegrown terrorism" through the enforcement of fundamental British values and the policing of social differences through the enforcement of principles of *laïcité*.

Given these maneuvers, schools and their staff actively contribute to, negotiate, and resist the mandates, policies, and discourses imposed by state actors like French mayor Robert Ménard. These daily negotiations depend on teachers' own understandings of security, the social contexts in which they work, the internal logics that organize their schools, and the mandates that guide their engagements in the classroom. Although state education systems reorganize to meet geopolitical needs, individual schools contain their own processes of making ideal and pathological subjects according to prevailing

geopolitical narratives. School staff and students do not simply passively receive these narratives; they also reshape them in sometimes unpredictable ways. The result is geopolitical narratives and practices of risk and danger that resemble, but will likely not reflect exactly, those of the state.

Through this analysis, we argue that the geopolitical role of schools demands an “outward-looking” perspective attentive to the priming of schools for state interventions that carry out specific territorial and security objectives. This intervention builds on geographic research that examines how geopolitics affects schooling by fleshing out the double movement through which school systems are affected by and implicated in prevailing geopolitical agendas. Our intervention argues that, in addition to serving as containers of dominant geopolitical imaginations, schools actively function as key sites that carry out, remake, and contest the state’s geopolitical agenda. Antiterrorism initiatives like Prevent rely on schools to enact state strategies and contribute to broader geopolitical struggles, such as securing the nation from perceived internal and external threats. Through state policies and local practices, schools actively contribute to broader geopolitical goals beyond the sector by cultivating specific subjectivities, reaffirming the concept of the enemy within, and policing social difference. Drawing from studies on the embodied state, we also argue that these processes are not overdetermining as schools, teachers, and students negotiate, remake, and challenge these geopolitical maneuvers through their daily work. Lastly, as the distinct cases of Britain and France instruct, Western states differentially mobilize their schools as key geopolitical sites to achieve specific territorial and security goals.

As the subfield of critical geographies of education continues to cohere, geographers are well-positioned to study and respond to the mobilization of schools in the service of prevailing geopolitical agendas and the logics, discourses, and policies used to advance and/or refuse the state’s security objectives. Such work can attend to both the social forces like racialized surveillance organizing schools as well as the role schools play in maintaining, and disrupting, state power. As it does, it can likewise foreground the geopolitical nature of schools, as they generate, resist, and subvert understandings of who and what should be subject to state processes of surveillance and discipline.

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Notes

1. The Ministry of Education has not, to date, released data indicating in which schools these incidents took place.
2. Because of the untranslatable nature of the word, it is retained, in the original French and unitalicized, for the rest of the article.

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