Good morning, everyone. Thank you, Claire, for that very generous welcome.

When I tell people I have spent the better part of two decades thinking about radicalisation, social exclusion, and the relationships between them, I sometimes get the sense they wish I had taken up a hobby with a faster route to a feeling of progress. Pottery.DJ-ing. Pretty much anything else.

But the questions have a way of refusing to settle. They have been with me a long time, and they show no sign of going away.

I am, as it happens, a Birmingham man. I was born here. My family has been in this city since the late 1940s, when my great uncle settled here after serving in the Second World War. My father joined him in 1957, at the age of seventeen. I went to school here. My first full-time job was here too — at what was then the University of Central England Business School. Then I disappeared off to Whitehall, in the belief that I could make a difference from inside government, and learned a great deal about why that is harder than it sounds. So I came back. My second academic post was at the University of Birmingham. Aston, now, is the third Birmingham university I have called home. The city, it seems, has a way of pulling me back. And I have long since stopped resisting.

None of this travel, I should say, has been tourism. All of it has been work, and most of that work has been on a fairly narrow set of questions. The places change. The questions do not. Why do societies that look, on the surface, very different, keep producing strikingly similar patterns of grievance, exclusion, and violence? Why does the script feel so familiar from one country to the next? And what does it mean to study these things from inside a community, rather than from above it? Those are the questions that have followed me from Birmingham to Istanbul, from Istanbul to The Hague, and from The Hague back to Birmingham.

Indeed, I have spent most of my working life trying to understand why people come to embrace political violence, why states respond to

that violence in the ways they do, and what gets lost in the gap between those two stories. I am very glad, at this stage of my career, to be doing that work in Birmingham again. There is no city in the country, and perhaps no city in Europe, where these questions have higher stakes or more interesting answers.

So, thank you. Thank you for being here on a Tuesday morning, when the diary always has something else to offer. The mix of people in this room — academic colleagues, council officers, civil society leaders, faith representatives, community practitioners, students — is not an accident. It is the deliberate composition of the day. And it tells you most of what you need to know about what the Centre on Radicalisation, Inclusion and Social Equity is for.

Let me try to explain that more directly.

We have been studying radicalisation, in something like its current form, for about twenty-five years. The wave of policy and research that followed 9/11 produced a vast literature, sizeable budgets, and an entire industry of programmes designed to identify, prevent, and rehabilitate what we have come to call the radicalising subject. A great deal of that work has been thoughtful. A great deal of it has been well-intentioned, and committed, and serious.

But the dominant paradigm has, I think, taken us only so far.

It locates the problem in the individual — usually in their psychology, occasionally in their family, sometimes in their religion. It treats radicalisation as a kind of pathology, a deviation from a baseline of normality, that can be detected, measured, and intervened upon. It produces what is sometimes called a pre-crime space, where the state acts on people for what they might one day do. And it concentrates almost all of its attention on what I have come to think of as the periphery — on the supposedly vulnerable subject — while paying very little attention to the centre, to the conditions that produce vulnerability in the first place.

In the work my colleagues and I did on the European DRIVE project, we tried to look across the whole picture: the individual, the social network, the structural environment. One finding came through more clearly than any other. The single most consistent predictor across both far-right and Islamist trajectories was not religious belief, or family background, or psychological profile. It was perceived loss of standing. Humiliation. The sense of having been written out of the story.

That is not a story about pathology. It is a story about politics. It is a story about how societies treat people.

I argued in *Islamophobia and Radicalisation*, a book I wrote in 2019, that we have to understand Islamophobia and Islamist radicalisation as mirror images of one another. They are not separate problems. They are two faces of the same one. They feed each other. They make each other louder. And they are both fuelled by the same long-running conditions: deindustrialisation, racialised inequality, the erosion of public provision, the politicisation of belonging. In my more recent work I have tried to push the analysis further. To ask how the structure of our economies and our politics produces the very extremism we then spend so much money trying to manage.

I want to be careful here.

I am not saying that nobody is responsible for the violence they commit. I am not saying that the security services, the police, the people who run Prevent, the colleagues who teach safeguarding, are doing the wrong thing, or acting in bad faith. Many of them are doing very difficult work, very well, in conditions that are not of their making. And there are violent actors out there — on the far right and within Islamist movements — who require serious and considered response.

What I am saying is this. If we keep focusing on the individual subject without asking why so many subjects are being produced, we are going to spend the next twenty-five years where we have spent the

last twenty-five. Putting out fires, while a great deal of effort goes into manufacturing the conditions in which fires start.

That is where RISE comes in.

The centre has been built around a fairly simple proposition. If the dominant approach treats radicalisation as an individual pathology, RISE treats it as a social phenomenon. If the dominant approach focuses on the periphery, RISE asks about the centre. If the dominant approach moves outward from the state, RISE moves inward from the neighbourhood, the city, the community — and asks what looks different from that vantage point.

This is not theory for the sake of being theoretical. It is an attempt to be useful in a different way.

We bring together — and you can see this in the day's programme — expertise from criminology, sociology, politics, forensic linguistics, and digital humanities. We are interested in how state policies are made, and how they land. We are interested in the digital architectures that increasingly mediate political belonging, including the algorithmic environments in which polarisation accelerates. We are interested in the forensic analysis of the language used by extremist actors. We are interested in how artificial intelligence is reshaping borders, surveillance, and migration. And we are particularly interested in what happens when you take the testimony of the people most directly affected by all of this seriously. Not as colour. Not as illustration. As evidence, with explanatory weight.

You will see this thinking in the architecture of the day.

We begin with theoretical critique, in panel one. We move into questions of policy and partnership, in panel two. We engage the digital frontier, in panel three. And we close — deliberately, at the end of the day, not the start — with community voices. That sequencing is not accidental. It expresses the centre's conviction that the analytical work and the community work belong together, and that one without the other gives you, at best, a half-answer.

I want to say a particular word about Birmingham, and about the West Midlands more broadly.

We have spent a long time, in this country, conducting our most important debates about security from London. London is, of course, an extraordinary policy and academic ecosystem, and I have great affection for the people who work in it. But it is not the only one. And many of the questions this centre exists to ask — about how a young, diverse, post-industrial city manages cohesion under pressure, about what happens when public services contract while social need expands, about how local government, faith communities, civil society, and universities can work together when none of them has quite enough on their own — are best asked here. Birmingham should not be an afterthought in the national conversation about security and belonging. It should be one of its key sites. And I think we have the building blocks, in this city, to make that case.

I have tried, in the construction of RISE, to put a substantial amount of weight on partnership.

About half of the speakers today are not from Aston. Several are not from universities at all. That is the model. We are a centre with intellectual ambition, but we are also a centre that knows it cannot answer the questions it is asking on its own. Birmingham City Council, the Equality Trust, the Dialogue Society, Together With Refugees, the Race Impact Group, the Archdiocese, the British Muslim Trust, colleagues from Exeter and Liverpool and Warwick and Lancaster and Edinburgh and Coventry — these are the kinds of partners we are building with. And I would like, this afternoon, to be building with more of you.

Which brings me to what I would like you to take from the day.

If you are a researcher: please put RISE on your radar. We have funding routes, doctoral training pathways, project partnerships, edited collections, conferences. We are particularly interested in collaborations that cross the academic-practitioner line. And we are

particularly interested in working with people who do not look or sound or think exactly like the people already working in this field.

If you are a policymaker or a practitioner: please come and find us. We are not going to be useful to you if we sit in a seminar room and write papers no one reads. We are useful when we are in the room with you. Asking the awkward questions. Helping you think through the problems you cannot quite name. Providing the evidence base that makes good practice defensible.

And if you are working in, or representing, a community: please consider us a partner you can hold accountable. We have written into the centre's terms of reference a commitment to inclusion and social equity that is not a brand exercise. We mean it. And if we drift from it, please tell us.

The argument I want to leave you with is this.

Inclusion and social justice are not soft additions to serious security thinking. They are the substance of serious security thinking. The societies that hold together — that absorb difference without producing violence, that respond to crisis without sliding into authoritarianism — are societies that have built inclusion into the way they govern themselves. The societies that come apart are the ones that have moved inclusion to the back of the building, while the front of the building is busy doing security.

RISE has been built on the proposition that those two parts of the building need to talk to one another. And, ideally, share a coffee machine.

Thank you. And I hope you enjoy the rest of the day.