Expertise and (in)security: Lessons from prison and probation contexts on counter-terrorism, trust, and citizenship

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Introduction

With the revelations that many ISIS recruits are ex-offenders (Cottee 2016), prison and probation settings are on the frontline of counter-terrorism practice. The latest policy developments in Europe on managing radicalization and convicted terrorist-offenders in prison and post-release settings show some perhaps surprising recommendations: those built on a foundation of seeking to build trust, to recognize human dignity and equality, and a broader vision to reform offenders *as citizens* (Council of Europe 2016, United Nations October 2016, Williams 2017).

Counter-terrorism practice, however, has often taken a strikingly different tone—one where the management of risk involves anticipating threat and intervening against citizens in a "pre-crime" space of prevention (McCulloch and Pickering 2009). Distrust, rather than trust-building, is emphasized. As a growing body of critical literature at the intersection of sociology, criminology and international relations has examined, counter-terrorism policies and practices have sought to achieve security through prevention and in a way that is harmful to Muslim and ethnic minority groups (McCulloch and Wilson 2016, Mythen and Walklate 2016, Sentas 2014). Counter-radicalization efforts, these authors argue, and as I develop in this article, have eroded trust, dignity, and equality by marginalizing Muslim, ethnic minority and immigrant groups and creating "suspect communities".

What accounts for these contrasting means to achieving security? In this article, I examine the roots of social scientific expertise that underpin these contrasting perspectives. Following Kundnani (2012), I argue that the social science underpinning the concept of radicalization is driven by a risk-detection and pre-emptive logic of a psychological science that has severe policy and practice implications for particular communities. I argue instead for an expanded, sociologically-informed conceptual framework for thinking about security and insecurity. As demonstrated by emerging best practices among European prison and probation practitioners, such a framework for security would be built on trust-building, equality, and goals oriented to contributing to the well-being of individuals as citizens.

I begin with a summary of dominant counter-radicalization logic around prevention. Then I explore its psychological underpinnings and the consequences for Muslim and ethnic minority groups. I conclude by reflecting on recent research that I conducted in two English high security prisons with colleagues (Liebling et al. 2015) and emerging European counter-radicalization practices in order to prompt a rethinking of security and sources of expertise.

Expertise and the "Pre-emptive creep" of Counter-terrorism

The current counter-terrorism climate is characterized by a pre-emptive risk logic (Mythen and Walklate 2016). Since 9/11, measures to pre-empt terrorist attacks have grown. Arrests and prosecution for foreign travel have joined a number of legislative measures aimed at pre-empting terrorism, including Control Orders in the UK and extended detention practices. Mythen and Walklate argue that these measures are underpinned not by the principle of prevention, but by the practice of pre-emption. Pre-emption reflects an anticipatory logic that is based not on the interpretation of the past but an anticipation of the future. It is a response to the question of "what if" and justifies actions "just in case" (2016).

Critics have suggested that this anticipatory logic arises "from ill-thought through and hastily applied security-seeking practices" (Mythen and Walklate 2016, 1120) or from a secular

security *habitus* that reflects unconscious and unconsidered practice (Gutkowski 2014). Contrary to these views, and in line with Kundnani (2012), I propose that pre-emptive counter-terrorism is framed and authorized by predominantly psychologically-informed social scientific models of radicalization which are estranged from thinking about the broader, sociological significance of their models when put into policy and practice.

Models of radicalization are characterized by a predominantly psychologically and social-psychologically-informed approach common within the field of terrorism studies that responds to the question: "What leads a person to turn to political violence?" (Koomen and Van der Pligt 2016, 259). This approach takes cases of the "spectacular few" (Hamm 2013) and works through the privilege of hindsight to piece together the causes of an individuals' behaviour after violence has occurred. Generalizations are then made from small numbers of individuals who committed acts of terrorism, and a social scientific research programme is borne out of a "systematic synthesis that incorporates as many as possible of the likely determinants and contextual factors relating to radicalization" (Koomen and Van der Pligt 2016, 6).

Kundnani observes that prior to 2001, the term radicalization was used informally to describe a shift towards more radical politics. After 2004, its use in academic journals surged and the term acquired a "new meaning of a psychological or theological process by which Muslims move towards extremist views" (Kundnani 2012, 7). The term is now widely recognized to refer to the processes that "could lead to acts of terrorism" (Alonso, Bjørgo, and Porta 2008, 5). As Peter Neumann has observed, the term refers to "what goes on before the bomb goes off" (Neumann, 4). This shift in meaning is highlighted in an early but influential research report conducted for the New York Police Department:

> Where once we would have defined the initial indicator of the threat at the point where a terrorist or group of terrorists would actually plan an attack, we have now shifted our focus to a much earlier point—a point where we believe the potential terrorist or group of terrorists begin and progress through a process of radicalization. The culmination of this process is a terrorist attack. (Silber and Bhatt 2007, 14)

Writing in 2007, the report highlights a new counter-terrorism mandate that seeks to prevent terrorism at a "much earlier point". Knowledge of these earlier points follow from an ongoing curation of case studies of terrorists and a mobilization of social scientific theories and findings that supplies a knowledge base into the antecedents, or process, leading up to a terrorist attack. This knowledge base is produced by experts and consumed by practitioners and policy-makers. A complex "relationship between terrorism experts' and the actions of states" exists (Burnett and Whyte 2003), and this expertise is informed in significant ways by the social sciences.

> If a set of religious [and social and psychological] factors can be identified that terrorists share with a wider group of radicals, but which "moderate" Muslims reject, then a model can be developed in which such beliefs are seen as "indicators" of radicalization, a point along a pathway to becoming a terrorist. (Kundnani 2012, 9)

The pre-emptive creep is most dramatically illustrated in counter-terrorism practices directed towards Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) initiatives and "prevention" practices. In the English context, the Prevent strategy is directed across a range of institutions and to individuals considered "vulnerable" to violent extremism. The Prevent strategy was

inaugurated after the 7 July 2005 attacks on the London Transport System with a broad mandate "to stop people becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism" (Home Office 2011). Prevention activities cover a broad remit. I recall attending a Prevent annual meeting in 2009 in Birmingham, where delegates passed out magazines promoting Islamic fashion and hip hop, citizenship training was on offer, and Islamic cultural activities were promoted alongside various policing divisions. The securitization of Muslims and Islam was vividly on display.

The now statutory duty to spot signs of "non-violent extremism" in the UK, known ominously as the "Prevent duty", is the latest in this trajectory. Under section 26 of the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, local authorities, childcare providers, schools, further and higher education institutions, the NHS, the police, prison and young offender institution governors, and providers of probation services, must have "due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism" (Department of Education June 2015). The controversy around this duty is well-documented in the media, and includes examples of unassuming Muslim students being questioned about reading materials when those materials are for university courses (Ramesh and Halliday 2015).

In what follows, I review the way that social scientific expertise around radicalization has contributed to the construction of insecurity and a pre-emptive creep through the category of radicalization, and review its consequences in the making of radical Islam and authorizing and legitimizing practices against Muslims.

Radicalization: The Making of Insecurity and Radical Islam

The category of "brainwashing" provides one historical parallel that highlights the subtle and often indirect consequences of social scientific categories in generating insecurity around religion in wider society. The term "brainwashing" originated in the study of American prisoners of war in the 1950s during the Korean War and sought to explain why prisoners adopted communist views. The empirical basis for the category was limited, as only 25 of the 3000 prisoners of war refused repatriation, but it was later used to explain why people joined New Religious Movements (NRMs) or "cults" in the 1970s and 80s (Arweck 2006, 45). The term brainwashing was "the most characteristic feature of coverage of cults in the 1970s" and often reported as fact in news media and it came to signify deception, victimization and threat (McCloud 2004, 136). Organizations devoted to counteracting the dangers of cults were formed, experts in deprogramming specialized in "aftercare" for those who left an NRM, and governments formed policies to limit the size and power of NRMs.

Sociologists concerned with this period recognized that the term served little social scientific utility as it deprived individuals of a sense of personal agency, over-inflated the sense of risk associated with these movements, and neglected to situate the phenomenon within a broader social context (Beckford 1985, Barker 1984). The term is instead most remarkable for its wider effects in society and moral panics it reflected. Brainwashing served as a scientific category and explanation that fed into the perceived risks associated with these movements. There were, of course, some dangers associated with NRMs like the 1977 Jonestown massacre, but these were grossly overblown by the sensationalism around brainwashing and cult recruitment. Brainwashing instead served to demarcate boundaries around fringe, deviant and dangerous religion. This example of brainwashing has tenuous links to the contemporary concept of radicalization, but it illustrates how risk, religion, and social scientific concepts come to have profound impact on the construction of insecurities and in guiding security policies and practices.

Kundnani argues that radicalization is informed by predominantly psychological social scientific expertise that is mobilized about and against Muslims and Islam (2012). I summarize and expand upon his description of three ways that psychologically and social-psychologically informed social scientific expertise contributes to a pre-emptive logic against Muslims.

Cultural-Psychological frameworks continue the interest in terrorism research prior to 9/11 by identifying generic psychological factors related to group dynamics and struggles with identity (Laqueur 2004). This framework identifies the psychological and sociological antecedents to terrorism, including deprivation (real or perceived), grievances, perceptions of injustice, feelings of frustration and threats to identity. These furnish part of a model that is applicable to a range of terrorisms, including Left and Right wing kinds. However, as Kundnani observes, marginalization and inequality are seen as precipitating factors, and are woven into the story of Muslims about lack of European integration, uncertainties related to modernity, and the erosion of traditional structures of authority. This places Muslims at a default level of risk for radicalization. Moghaddam's staircase to terrorism model places these considerations on the "ground floor" (2005), seeding the imagination of a future where marginalization leads to the possibility of terrorism. As a more recent model for radicalization states: "deprived and stigmatized minority groups in Western society, in particular Muslims" may "engender radicalization and even terrorism" (Koomen and Van der Pligt 2016, 31).

Theological definitions of radicalization rely on the specific tenets of beliefs and are inseparable from Islam and radicalization. Reports from the New York Police Departments and the Danish Ministry of Justice reflect definitions of radicalization that are dependent upon particular Islamic contents (Precht 2007, Silber and Bhatt 2007), where the fourth stage is "Jihadization." Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman identify six behavioural manifestations of the radicalization process:

> the adoption of a legalistic interpretation of Islam, coming to trust only a select and ideologically rigid group of religious authorities, viewing the West and Islam as irreconcilably opposed, manifesting a low tolerance for perceived religious deviance, attempting to impose religious beliefs on others, and the expression of radical political views. (Gartenstein-Ross and Grossman April 2009, 18)

Similarly, Jones and Smith argue that ideology alone is the driving force of violence, with a root in "spiritual sickness" (2014). Other considerations around "root causes", including marginalization, group processes, or psychological processes, are red-herrings, they argue. These definitions of radicalization are inseparable from Islam in content.

Theological-psychological approaches propose that specific theological thinking intersects with psychological or social psychological dispositions that contributes to violent extremism. These definitions are independent of particular contents, as different ideological systems could be injected into these models and a violent outcome may ensue. However, specific theological thinking is essential to the process. This lends these models, as in the work of Sageman and Wiktorowicz, to rely on the particular forms of Islamic theology. Kundnani underscores an important connection between psycho-social models and religious beliefs where the embedding of theological radicalism with particular psychological alignments or

group dynamics serve as the root causes of radicalization (2012, 15). The questions of violence can ultimately only be answered theologically.

More sophisticated models of radicalization have involved an interactive process between theological and social-psychological processes. Rather than "beliefs by themselves driving individuals to violence, the picture is one in which ideology becomes more extreme in response to a "cognitive opening", and "identity crisis" or a group bonding process" (Kundnani 2012, 14). There is an "interdependence of theology with emotions, identity and group dynamics" (Kundnani 2012, 14). This is evident in Sageman's work, where a "natural and intense loyalty to the group, inspired by a violent Salafi script, transformed alienated young Muslims into fanatic terrorists" (2011, 88).

Identity processes, however, are subject to a spectrum of trajectories. Olivier Roy, for example, highlighted this in his "neo-fundamentalist" matrix and description of processes of re-Islamisation that underpin a range of contemporary Islamic identities, ranging from Richard Reid (a failed self-detonating Muslim convert), Mecca2Medina (a group of rap musicians), and Tariq Ramadan (a Muslim academic articulating a congenial "European Islam") (Roy 2004). Even the theological foundations of a "Salafi outlook" fails to deliver the clarity needed for understanding violent radicalization (Hegghammer 2009).

Moreover, the processes underscored in the psychological-theological models are similar to those undergone by religious converts, to Islam and other religions, including NRMs. In this context, the religious convert to Islam is disproportionately viewed with suspicion as there is overlap in the process (e.g. identity crisis, "cognitive opening", distancing from family relations, and change of appearance and social affiliations). The systematization of knowledge into a model of radicalization, makes very ordinary psychological and social processes seem extraordinarily dangerous (at its most extreme, a "conveyor belt" to terrorism (Razzaque 2008)).

To summarize, the category of radicalization, informed by psychological and often combined with theological expertise, suffers from a problem of *specificity*; it captures too much and therefore identifies nothing specific in the pre-emptive space along the pathway to radicalization. Instead, these overly expansive frameworks catch a host of "false positives" and justify sweeping measures that target Muslim communities. Governing through pre-emption has severe consequences for those who are governed (Walklate and Mythen 2015, 1116). As I explore next, these social scientific models authorize and legitimize this form of governance.

The Problem with "Moderate" Religion

The dualism between universal security (for all) and sectoral security (for "us"), with counter-terrorism practices favouring the latter, has "eroded the rights of members of Muslim communities to equal citizenship" (Mythen and Walklate 2016, 1115). Mythen and Walklate have described the deleterious consequences that young British Muslims feel as they navigate and negotiate experiences of stereotypes and the frustrations they feel as they consider themselves to be law-abiding citizens who are routinely treated as suspicious and whose beliefs are subject to scrutiny (2015). They describe how Muslims often undergo a process of securitized reflexivity, where patterns of action and behaviour are routinely restructured in view of security processes, for example, changing dress so as to not be seen as an extremist.

"Moderate" Islam has come to be defined against this backdrop of insecurity. To qualify as a "good" or "moderate" Muslim, Muslims must assert "Western" or "British" values. Speaking out against terrorist violence is incumbent upon all Muslims as a rite of passage to fully qualifying for citizenship and to allay suspicion. Silence or a failure to be perceived as fully integrating into Western societies leads to suspicion. Recent controversy around the necessity of "British values" furthers this trajectory.

At stake here is entitlement to the full privileges of citizenship in Western democratic societies that includes the "citizenship of dissent" or expressing criticism. As Maira Sunaina has persuasively captured in the American context, Muslims are required to affirm Islam as a religion of peace and disavow violence as a prerequisite for Muslims to enter the public sphere: "The desire to perform good Muslim citizenship has altered identities and social relations within Muslim American communities after 9/11, and created divisiveness, mistrust, and suspicion related to questions of dissent and complicity" (Sunaina 2010, 50). The terminology of the "moderate" Muslim often inscribes boundaries around acceptable forms of identity and religion based on often narrow conceptions of national identity and marking otherness along racial and religious lines.

Croft has similarly argued that the terms "moderate Muslim" and "radical Muslim" are part of broader social and cultural processes that have come to see Muslims as a threat (Croft 2012, see also, Mamdani 2005). The terms service the work of defining and redefining national identity and allegiances. A moderate Muslim is applauded when she or he speaks out against violence and aligns broadly with "Western values" and is "integrated" in society; A moderate Muslim is considered a problem when she or he fails to respond to problems within the Muslim "community". In both instances, boundaries are drawn around the Muslim community, which is presented as problematic and responsible for acts of violence.

The terms "radical" and "moderate" are normative constructs that define boundaries around what it means to be a citizen of a Western nation. In the most fervent of these views Islam is constructed as intrinsically other and incompatible with the Western (or British or American) views. It presents challenges to the scope and possibilities of multicultural societies, framing the limits of belonging. The terminology around the "moderate Muslim" defines allegiances.

At root in framing these allegiances lies the "slippery slope" of extremism and radicalization, a path or conveyor belt that defines, through social scientific models, risk and routes for pre-emption. An alternative view of security and insecurity, however, is emerging from the prison and probation contexts which places trust, citizenship and inclusion at the forefront of practice.

Trust-Building, Citizenship and Inclusion

In this concluding section, I draw on two examples to illustrate a shift in thinking about security and insecurity from pre-emptive risk logic towards a prioritization of trust, citizenship and inclusion. The first is based on my recent fieldwork (with Alison Liebling and colleagues) in two high security English prisons on "locating trust in a climate of fear" (Liebling et al. 2015). The study sought to understand how prisons could foster trust and the consequences of trust (and distrust) for thinking about security, safety, staff-prisoner relationships, and for individual prisoners' personhood, development and rehabilitation. Here I focus on the differing practices of two ways of practicing counter-terrorism in two prisons.

As a second example, I briefly examine emerging policy documents for managing extremist offenders and radicalization in prison and probation contexts. Together, these examples illustrate the need for and possibility of a new vocabulary for security and insecurity that requires a shift in the epicentre of expertise from the psychologically-laden focus of pre-empting risk to a sociologically-driven focus on trust, citizenship and inclusion.

Prisons and probation contexts have become important sites for developing policies and practices related to countering radicalization. This has followed from the links between people with criminal pasts and terrorist attacks (Basra, Neumann, and Brunner 2016, Hamm 2013). Saïd and Chérif Kouachi, responsible for the Charlie Hebdo shooting in Paris in January, 2015, for example, had criminal pasts, and their time in prison was fundamental to their radicalization process. The rapid increase of the number of individuals arrested for terrorism-related offences has added to concerns around prisons being sites where radicalization can occur as these individuals may join the mainstream prisoner population and have an adverse influence on others. The numbers of individuals arrested for jihadist terrorism in Europe has grown, with figures between 2013 – 2015 showing an increase from 216 to 687 (excluding UK figures; Europol 2016, 2014).

In my recent fieldwork in two English high security prisons, counter-terrorism practice varied widely. The two prisons presented a different model of practice. Broadly-speaking, one took a risk-based approach and the other took a trust-based approach. At the time of the research, offenders convicted for terrorism-related offences were imprisoned alongside the mainstream prisoner population and there were concerns over their influence over other prisoners. The risks of radicalization were layered onto the day to day risks that prison staff manage in a high security prison. Each prison, however, had a different approach to understanding radicalization.

In one prison, counter-terrorism practice was characterized by the effort to understand early warning "signs" or markers of radicalization, and this contributed to a narrow view of what radicalization involved. Staff were interested in determining the "signs" of radicalization, and these signs were marked in individual prisoners apart from an understanding of the features of the prison environment, the penal context, and a broader view of prisoners' experiences, life histories and narratives. Prisoners and staff described the types of activity that were considered suspicious, and this was often intimately tied with Islamic identity and practice. Inquiries about Islam ("Mr. Abu inquired about being a Muslim"), or aspects of religious practice ("He was witnessed praying in a cell with two other prisoners"), was viewed as behaviour related to the risk of radicalization.

In the second prison, staff operated through a different understanding of radicalization. Counter-terrorism practice involved building trust. Counter-terrorism staff, for example introduced themselves in a transparent manner to offenders convicted for terrorist-related offences, letting them know of their role and responsibilities. Trust was recognized as integral to security practices as it enabled closer relationships with prisoners and therefore a higher quality of information and intelligence gathering. Distrust undermined the practice of security and it meant that information could be unreliable. Staff also recognized that extremism and radicalization cuts across ideologies. Right wing extremists were a concern alongside Islamist extremism, reflecting the view that radicalization, and attempts to curb it, involve models of practice underpinned by a deep understanding of the social and relational climates of prisons.

There was recognition that the social context and prisoner dynamics could heighten polarization within the prison. The prison was seen as a micro-society, where tensions between communities could flare up and far right extremism and Islamic extremism were intimately tied. This reflected a broader, sociological and relational understanding of radicalization attuned to social dynamics and their complex interplay. It reflected a particular approach to counter-radicalization that was less focussed on clear-cut psychological or theological markers of individual risks related to pathways to radicalization. Part of the remedy to lessening the risks around radicalization that was expressed within this second prison, and is becoming widely acknowledged across Europe, is that attention to healthy prison environments, including those that reflect fairness and equality, safety and good relationships between staff and prisoners, are the primary means for preventing radicalization in prison (United Nations October 2016).

A focus on trust in prison and probation contexts is evident in a number of monitoring procedures and risk management practices found in recent European handbooks for policy-makers and practitioners, including ones by the Council of Europe (Council of Europe 2016), the United Nations (United Nations October 2016), and the European Commission (Williams 2017). The primary means to prevent radicalization, the reports highlight, includes attention to the conditions of the prison environment, upholding human rights and placing the end goal of rehabilitation and reintegration at the forefront of practice:

> The most powerful weapon in the fight against radicalization in prisons is without a doubt a humane detention *policy that respects the fundamental rights of the detainees and focuses indefatigably on rehabilitation and reintegration*. Therefore, a custodial sentence or measure has to executed under psychosocial, physical and material conditions that *respect the dignity of the human person*, has to render the preservation or growth of the self-respect of the detainee possible and has to appeal to their individual and social responsibility. (United Nations October 2016, 2; emphasis added).

In the management of offenders post-release, there are similar developments among probation officers throughout Europe that recognize that integration is the primary goal for extremist offenders and to decrease the risks of radicalization among offenders post-release. This offers only a brief glimpse of a changing outlook to security and insecurity, but in view of the perils of dominant approaches grounded in psychological and theological expertise identified above that contribute to the marginalization of Muslims and ethnic minority groups, it is a compelling and necessary one that demands attention.

What is remarkable about exploring counter-terrorism practice in prison and probation settings is that trust and a broader view of who offenders can become *as citizens* occupies a place on the forefront of priorities. In the contexts of greatest insecurity—work involving individuals convicted for offences that include terrorism crimes and those considered vulnerable to radicalization—security is sought *through* building trust, allowing for opportunities for individuals to demonstrate trustworthiness, recognizing human dignity and the possibilities for individuals to change and grow, with a wider view into reintegrating individuals into society as citizens. Insecurity arises from distrust, dehumanization, and marginalizing others and exclusion.

This shift in thinking about security, I suggest, requires a knowledge foundation different from that produced from case studies of terrorists, terrorist acts and process models arrived at through a psychologically-driven social science of radicalization. It requires a sociological turn that is attentive to the practices of institutions, the relationships between individuals in society and between communities, and an appeal to understand the functioning of more inclusive and cooperative societies.

For the foreseeable future, security and insecurity will be driven by questions around citizenship and the cruel dynamic of inclusion and exclusion. Counter-terrorism policy and practice will require a corresponding shift in knowledge expertise.

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