Embodying the Inquiry: Disaster, Affectivity, and the Localized Politics of Security

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Abstract

The responsibilizing of civil society for security has been well analysed in recent years, but the place of the public inquiry as an important site of negotiations over affectivity has been largely under-acknowledged. This article investigates the scope, recommendations, and forensic investigation of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, an inquiry established in the wake of the 2017 bombing and which prefigures the gaze of the UK's forthcoming 'Protect Duty'. Once formalized, this Duty will situate venue workers as crucial embodiments of national counter-terrorism priorities. The discussion shows how contestations over affective productivity are navigated across the Inquiry, with national security articulated as being generated exclusively through local spaces, and through a body divorced from its experience via sophisticated management techniques. We find how security is imagined through local workers becoming 'watchfully-anxious', with routinized procedures deployed to generate this necessary destabilization. Bodies of venue staff must be displaced and moved around, opening space for racialized encounters rendered necessarily productive of security. Workers are required to confess, defending their role in security failure and situating them within national priorities. Through close analysis of the Inquiry's reports, and drawing from interviews with UK disaster management experts, the discussion reveals how the Manchester Arena Inquiry positions national security as produced through low-paid workers defending the minutiae of their jobs in the context of the local venue. Through its forensic and detail-oriented analysis, the public inquiry is revealed as an important

technology in the (re)production of localized forms of security knowledge, which in turn delegitimizes knowledge of disaster as structural or political.

Keywords

Public Inquiry, counter-terrorism, affect, politics of space, embodiment

Introduction

The bombing of the Ariana Grande concert at the Manchester Arena in 2017, where 22 people were killed and more than 1,000 injured (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2020), was responded to through an array of commemorative events from concerts, vigils, and a memorial garden. As with certain other security failures or instances of public concern, notably Bloody Sunday, the Iraq War, and the Covid pandemic, a public inquiry was also established in the aftermath of the Arena attack to investigate how the disaster occurred. The *Manchester Arena Inquiry* began in 2019, and has seen emergency responders, private security operatives, and other workers present witness statements in forensic style in response to the Inquiry's interrogation. These minute-by-minute accounts of the events around the bombing have been probed by the Inquiry in order to determine where prevention might more effectively have taken place (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021). The scope and detail of the proceedings inform the statutory framework of the forthcoming Protect Duty, legislation which is set to require "improv[ements in] protective security and preparedness [as instituted by]… venues and organizations owning, operating or responsible for publicly accessible locations" (Home Office 2021, 5,14).

In other words, the UK Government response to the Manchester Arena attack will make individual venues and event organizers statutorily responsible for counter-terrorism, with the Manchester Arena Inquiry exploring the terrain for such responsibility. Whilst the principles behind this Duty have been central to the 'Protect' strand of the UK's broader counter-terrorism strategy since its inception (Coaffee 2010, 953), the Duty moves away from previous approaches of encouraging the owners of crowded locations to install proportionate protective security. The enforcement of the Protect Duty is likely to take place through civil rather than criminal sanctions where failures occur (Home Office 2021, 28), with the oversight and enforcement of the Duty operationalizing many of the themes investigated during the public inquiry. Could more vigilant venue managers and security operatives, and more robust processes, have prevented the attack or mitigated the damage caused? The Manchester Arena Inquiry therefore plays an important role in making visible the construction of knowledge about security – and about the way responsibility for the aversion of disaster is imagined.

In excavating the moments and minutiae of the days and hours before the bombing, the Manchester Arena Inquiry has been substantially more detailed – and concerned with reproducing security – than previous public inquiries into security breaches. The 2005 London bombings, for which no public inquiry has yet taken place, was investigated by the London Assembly. This investigation centred the bureaucratic failings of the response to the bombings in London, instead of "becom[ing] involved in 'what if?' scenarios" (quoted by Committee Chairman Richard Barnes in Greater London Authority 2006, 1; also see Edkins 2008). Where the response to the 2005 bombings was concerned with making more effective the response to an attack that had already taken place, the Manchester Arena Inquiry expended substantial effort in thinking through how security might be produced, staving off in particular forms of violence rendered terrorism. In other words, a much more security-oriented approach structured the Manchester Arena Inquiry in comparison to previous inquiries, and in particular to the investigation into the 2005 London bombings. We find how striking articulations of security are evident across the Manchester Arena Inquiry, where these had been absent in previous investigations. Security risk is purported Across the Manchester Arena Inquiry to be manageable, including through the pursuit of racialized and gendered bodies for its own sake. The Inquiry opens up novel and sophisticated routines through which the security operative might better disengage from their own experience, in order that security is produced. In effect, the paper illuminates the candid nature of negotiations over security knowledge-praxis, as manifested in the Manchester Arena Inquiry – and about the complex formulations of (white) anxiety through which security is made. Moreover, these complex formulations performatively erase violence as existing structurally. Instead, through the embodied, forensic interrogation of local spaces as crucial sites of the production of non-violence (evident across the Inquiry), the structural and the international are written out of negotiations over violence and security. Local spaces emerge as the locus of the production of national security, with policy formulations effectively placing expectation for terrorism-prevention on minimum wage venue workers.

This article analyses how those with responsibility for local spaces – and how local space itself – are reconstituted by the forensic interrogation of the Inquiry. With little existing critical work into how public inquiries operate as important sites of contestation over security knowledge-praxis,[1] this article utilizes literature which treats security as a performative exercise (Massey 2005; Butler 2006; Massumi 2015), applying it to the functions of inquiries, thereby developing insights into the way investigation reveals how security is known, produced, and contested. In effect, the contribution of the paper speaks to what is sayable and imaginable through security, thinking through the affective

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[1] Although work has been conducted on the ambivalent, supportive, and productive role of investigations into security breaches. See for instance: Edkins 2008; de Goede 2014

implications of such conjugations of security. The paper takes issues of affect and affectivity to be concerned with "prioritiz[ing] the body as a means for making sense of the world [and is concerned with how the body] experience[s], encounter[s], and perform[s] life among other bodies within material space" (O'Grady 2018). In so doing, the paper at hand analyses how bodies are negotiated in their engagement with local venue spaces across the Inquiry. The public inquiry is not analysed as causally-productive of security embodiments, but as a site at which contestations over security knowledge-praxis are particularly evident, given their close connection to specific breaches of security and the forensic nature of post-breach investigation. Importantly, articulations of security emerge across the paper as meaningfully divorced from notions of probability or likeliness: a central focus of the paper therefore concerns the very erasure of local experience through formal processes of a public inquiry as productive of security, even whilst local experience is written as the crux of security politics. Of note, 'terrorism' is taken across the paper to be racially formulated: in other words, the figure of the terrorist is – and the act of terror are perpetrated by – a racialized, gendered, classed other (Said 1987; Puar & Rai 2002; Boukalas 2016; Ali 2020). The suffering produced by violence labelled 'terrorism' is obviously substantial for those affected and their relatives. The focus of this paper at hand is not to think through such suffering, but instead to illuminate the sophisticated and racialized imaginaries of security that write such violence as governable and manageable. Given the remarkable policy attention directed towards the *prevention of terrorism* (Stewart & Mueller 2014), the article focuses on how security is conjugated through economies of space and affect, in this policy context.

Through a discourse analysis of the Manchester Arena Inquiry report and interviews with two disaster experts involved in the response to the bombing, the discussion illuminates three areas of localized conduct where the scope and recommendations of the reconstitute security responsibilities. The paper first analyses how the Inquiry situates a transition from watchfulness to anxiousness in the practice of local security operatives, framing this as constitutive of greater security. Secondly, the paper examines how the Inquiry criticizes and reconstitutes the embodied, performative movement of staff around the venue, configuring bodily displacement of local workers as crucial to counter-terrorism success. Finally, it explores how the Inquiry requires local staff to explain and justify their conduct under oath, rendering the performative power of their confession as necessarily constitutive of security (Mills 1995). In this final section I draw from two interviews I conducted with senior UK disaster experts closely connected to the response to the 2017 attack, in order that the implications of the local positioning of security across the Inquiry might be made more visible.

Ultimately, the paper traces the investigative trajectory and recommendations of the first report of the Manchester Arena public inquiry, as an inquiry which has been much more active in offering specific and extensive recommendations for the production of security than other inquiries,

notably the Iraq Inquiry (The Iraq Inquiry 2016). As it makes explicit "recommendations as to what the key elements of a Protect Duty should be" (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 61), this inquiry goes beyond other inquiries in its wide-ranging assertions to inform policy about how local (security) knowledge and practice should be differently enacted. Analysing the productive inclination of the Manchester Arena Inquiry can help make sense of the (evolving) place of inquiries in the making of security knowledge-praxis, and in their place in writing what is known about security failure and its aversion. The discussion illuminates the politics of security knowledge articulated across the Manchester Arena Inquiry report, showing how the process of its investigation and recommendations localizes the site of risk and risk-management by mobilizing workers' anxious engagement with/in space (Massey 2005; Purnell 2021). This article connects the production of security knowledge in the wake of disaster, to the implications for bodily and spatial security enactments.

The Productive Power of Investigation

With attacks of terror from the past increasingly being reconfigured productively in terms of the missed *opportunities* they presented (BBC 2021; Smith 2021), the proposed Protect Duty – prefigured by the Manchester Arena Inquiry investigation – constitutes a continuation of security logics that illuminate the manageability of terrorism threat, where the investigation into the 2005 London bombings asserted the attacks could *not* have been prevented (de Goede 2014). What can analysing the Inquiry's scope and recommendations tell us about how security logics are written into public space: how is the conduct of event staff imagined through its recommendations, and how are these staff expected to enact national security priorities, particularly in the perpetual absence of terrorism danger almost all staff face? This article connects local embodiments and spatialities of security, with implications for the role of inquiries within a governmental framework as a response to terror (Closs Stephens et al. 2021).

Much existing literature on inquiries asserts that 'truth' might be determined by formal investigation, and that more transparency and accountability might aid this process (Beer 2011; Roach 2014; Thomas 2015,2020; Robinson 2017). This scholarship often scrutinizes the technical functionalities and histories of inquiries and how they might better restore public trust (Burton & Carlen 1979; Beer 2011; Hills 2015; Robinson 2017), often assessing the balance of public interest with regard to secrecy, or the processes by which inquiries occur – focusing for instance on openness (Thomas 2015,2020). In his seminal work *Public Inquiries*, Jason Beer QC outlines a number of functions that a public inquiry fulfils, writing that "the first function of an inquiry is often said to be

establishing the facts" (2011, 2). Indeed, inquiries are often framed in public discourse around establishing 'truth' through a "full and fair account of what happened" (PASC 2005, 9), with literature equally centring on the processes through which these 'facts' emerge (Scraton 2004; Beer 2011; Thomas 2015,2020). Yet, what constitutes 'the facts' or 'truth' is situated, as post-colonial, feminist and other scholarship makes evident (see: Spivak 1988). Indeed, as Thomas (2017) illuminates, inquiries are often structured through juridical individualism. In other words, blame and responsibility for security failure is often attributed to individuals *rather than the conditions that make particular decisions possible*. This paper builds on Thomas' critique of the actor-centric gaze of inquiries (2017) by assessing the active imperative of the Manchester Arena Inquiry to provide extensive recommendations, and argues that post-disaster investigation itself contributes to the contingent production of truth (for more work on the productive nature of post-disaster investigation, see: Edkins 2008; de Goede 2014). Moreover, such scholarship on the public inquiry only peripherally captures the performative capacity of a public inquiry.

To date, analysis of the Iraq War dominates most of the literature around inquiries (Hills 2015; Thomas 2015,2017,2020; Robinson 2017) – yet the recommendations of the Iraq Inquiry were sparse and discrete. The Chilcot Report simply laid out its findings of fault and failure, which left "Partners Across Government [to] develop a… 'Chilcot Checklist'" of their own in response to these findings (MOD 2017). The Manchester Arena Inquiry report, however, offers extensive and specific recommendations designed to be integrated into the forthcoming Protect Duty, articulating new forms of being and movement within/through space of local security practitioners and event security teams (Massey 2005; Purnell 2021). The paper builds upon and advances existing scholarship about public inquiries, and argues that 'the official inquiry' – through its scope and emphasis on making recommendations – operates as a tool of governmental power (Thomas 2017; Closs Stephens et al. 2021). Assessing the politics of a post-terror response, the main contribution of this paper is therefore to analyse how the public inquiry plays an important and contested role in reproducing particular discourses about national security, and how they contribute to the affective "trigger[ing]" of workers' bodies and the space within which they operate (Aradau & van Munster 2012, 235; also see: Massey 2005; Butler 2006; Massumi 2015; Purnell 2021).

1. Watching and Alertness

This first substantive section explores how visual security is navigated by the Manchester Arena Inquiry, by examining how local security operatives are critiqued as watchful observers during the proceedings, and how their role – and security – is rearticulated and reconstituted by the Inquiry's recommendations. Security measures, from airport bag checks to the reporting of suspicious activity

in a crowded venue, are concerned with categorizing unfamiliar and unknown entities, so that they can be known and acted upon (Aradau & van Munster 2007). Importantly, what counts as *unfamiliar* and *unknown* is conjugated through racialized borders, borders which are also gendered and classed (Sian 2017; Ali 2020). In other words, the process of identifying possible security risk is constitutive of the safe, good, knowable 'us' – positioned as distinct from unknown, unfamiliar, racialized 'Others' (Noble 2015), as becomes clearer later in the paper. But for the purposes of this section, *seeing* is a practice central to this practice of identification and recognition, and was crucial to how the Inquiry investigated the failure to stop the bombing in 2017. Claims of recognition are made by inscribing threat onto Others, which often take place through visual interventions – such as people racialized as Muslims being situated outside of whiteness and safety, for the physical attributes like having a beard or wearing a hijab (see Sian 2017; Younis & Jadhav 2020). The centrality of *sight* and *seeing* in the production of threat narratives has been recognized in the recent turn towards examining the visual politics of security (Amoore 2007; Sian 2017; Bleiker 2018; Martin 2018; Ali 2020; Krahmann 2020). Adjustments to staff practices situated as necessary by the Inquiry highlight how visuality is far more than just a cognitive exercise: instead, watching and observation necessarily incorporate systems of embodied routines and rituals. These 'visual' rituals are then castigated for being insufficient, in light of narratives about ubiquitous threat – despite the continual absence of bombings almost every member of staff will ever face. The public inquiry is shown to provoke new forms of embodied exercises to motivate forms of alertness that can be defended as sufficient under the interrogative questioning of authorities, as this response to terrorism remakes what is known about the aversion of disaster.

Issues of visual vigilance and watchfulness are centred around the use of CCTV in the Manchester Arena Inquiry report. Staff were criticized for not having identified Salman Abedi (SA) during his hostile reconnaissance of the building, with CCTV articulated as a primary means by which prevention could have occurred. Three main areas of concern were raised by the Inquiry with regard to CCTV use: the existence of a Blind Spot without camera coverage; inconsistent observation of the CCTV screens; and an insufficiently-suspicious gaze from those monitoring the screens. The Inquiry highlighted that had these practices been sufficiently rigorous, the likelihood of the attack being as devastating as it was would have been diminished. These three factors are then articulated as points of failure, and as spaces for learning in the production of security, reconstituting what 'national security' means for security and the body at the local level.

Despite the near-constant CCTV observation around the time of the concert, the Inquiry report argued that this approach was inadequate, both on technical (near-constant) and conceptual grounds (mere observation). Several minutes were spent away from the CCTV screens by the security

team in the operation room on the night. The team was not criticized primarily for this absence in the report, not least because they were doing other tasks they had been instructed to perform. Instead the report highlighted the lack of restless, active engagement with the screen by staff as comprising a security failure, and a necessary point of future learning:

> There was a general problem with SMG's CCTV system and its approach to it. During show mode, those... who assumed responsibility for control of the CCTV system did not monitor it constantly. What I mean by monitor in this context is a person constantly reviewing images in real time, proactively, with a view to identifying suspicious activity (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 129).

Here we see that the constant watching of screens is articulated as necessary, but more notably that the *watching* of CCTV screens alone is insufficient. Instead, security staff should have produced, and should in future produce, security in every moment by being "proactively" alert to potential threats. The notion of "vigilant visuality" (Amoore 2007) does not sufficiently capture the forms of subjectivity being produced here. What is rendered necessary of staff by the Inquiry, as it foreshadows the forthcoming Protect Duty, is not mere watchful vigilance: they must instead pioneer, and enter new ground, in order to open up space for more security negotiations. Rather than *vigilant or anxious watchfulness*, the desirable subjectivity here is an *embodied, watchful anxiousness*. This anxiety, diffused through an engaged drive "to identify suspicious activity", must be constantly mobilized – particularly in the absence of danger (Massumi 2015). This hyper-vigilance, or state of anxiety, is produced by a range of more fully embodied practices, as we will see later in this section.

Rearticulating *anxious vigilance or watchfulness* to *vigilant or watchful anxiousness* is necessary to illuminate how the visual gaze is displaced as a tool of security by an altogether more affected – or emotionally-charged – body. We can observe this displacement of visuality by analysing how the Inquiry report describes the performance of alternative, desirable modes of staff conduct. Remembering that new imposed duties under a Protect Duty will affect venues where danger from terrorism is almost always perpetually absent, the report maintains that:

> In order for necessary security procedures to be maintained, each person needs to be reminded of the counter-terrorism aspect of their activities. The message that counter-terrorism measures are vital needs to be *constantly reinforced*... Those giving the warning need to be aware of [staff members becoming]... "*desensitized*"... and must try to refresh the message so that it is sufficiently updated and relevant *to attract the attention* of the listener (emphasis added: Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 151,152).

Persistently reminding staff of the threat of a terrorist attack – and the role of staff in its prevention – is situated by the Inquiry as a necessary exercise, due to the perpetual absence of such danger in the

embodied experience of nearly every worker. The necessity that attention is redirected towards this hypothetical threat through creative means highlights the disconnect between experience and the imaginable. Because of the constant safety from forms of violence labelled terrorism at essentially all public venues across the country, the message that remakes watchfulness into anxiousness requires more than just the eyes. The whole body is integrated to ensure the potential threat can be remembered in ways that affect how security operatives perform their duties (Purnell 2021, 46-47).

Across the Inquiry report we see how this shift, from watchful eyes to a triggered whole-of-body, is cultivated also by an array of rituals and practices that situate local operatives within the national – rather than local or experienced – threat imaginary. Attentive anxiety about an abstract (*but always possible*) danger is obtained not just with more engaging messages from managers and trainers, but through physical, embodied immersion of routines and paperwork. A number of suggestions are made in the Inquiry report about new practices that might be undertaken by staff to reinforce this anxious positionality. For example, the Inquiry recommends that formal risk-assessments are made statutory in each venue, to encourage behavioural change:

> It was suggested during the evidence that [conducting terrorism risk-assessments] was unnecessary, as everyone knew the threat level of a terrorist attack and would have regard to it in the way they behaved. I do not agree. While in theory that may be true, *the discipline of undertaking a risk-assessment* will assist in keeping the threat of terrorism at the forefront of the minds of those who prepare for the event (emphasis added; Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 150).

The italicized phrase in the extract highlights the recognition in the report of how risk-assessment and a multitude of other embodied practices might produce a more watchfully-anxious staff (including those in the CCTV room). The mere discipline of performing tasks themselves generates not only new awareness of possible risks but a more enhanced and embodied experience of alertness. Amoore writes that "the flat surface of the [CCTV] screen… is given depth by the layers and leaves of data" (2009, 134). In other words, the meaning extracted from the screen's flat surface is generated by watching-officials. It is important to note that the embodied practices and conduct of staff situate this watching (Purnell 2021): the observation does not just begin when staff judge the images on the screen. Instead, the depth and meaning of the CCTV screen exists amidst broader societal conceptions of risk and security (Younis & Jadhav 2020), and is (re)produced through drills and training of venue staff. As Crary writes, attentiveness is not "primarily concerned with [simply] looking… but rather with the construction of conditions that individuate, immobilize, and separate subjects" (1999, 74). The Inquiry, in mapping the forthcoming Protect Duty, therefore advises more training of staff, for example in hostile reconnaissance spotting (more on this in the following section). Such drills and

training situate those tasked with *watching* further into ongoing embodiments of (racialized) security. In other words, the direction of the (in)security operative's attention does not just concern visualities, but also concerns social norms, cultural practices, and other embodied modes of conduct. This makes rehearsal an important part of processes of disaster-management (Anderson & Adey 2011), not only in the form of response and recovery drills, but also in other embodied rituals, like the filling out of risk-assessment forms and the undertaking of training. As we can see from the quote above, the performance of these routines are articulated as important components of more rigorous security procedures (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 77). It is, according to the report, only through far more rigorously-embodied procedures that any meaningful security (via the watching of CCTV through a watchful anxiousness, in this instance) might occur – precisely because this monitoring is now characterized by more engaged nervousness, alertness, and *in*security. The filling in of paperwork, and the linking of risk-assessments to performed practice, and other rituals are all purposed – in the terms laid out by the Inquiry – to remake the body as an entity fuelled by anxiety and insecurity that can be watchful, and which can remain vigilant and alert, in the continuing absence of danger.

It should be noted that messaging from managers, and these embodied practices of filling in paperwork, are not primarily centred around the material production of security. Instead, they are processes through which legally-defensible security procedures can be generated. This topic – the production of defensible working practices rather than material reductions in violence – is covered more extensively later in the paper. For now, it is important to note that the idea of embedding routines appears more crucial to the Inquiry's purposes than interrupting material violence itself. In the following extract, no connection is made to how these practices might produce security. Instead, the overwhelming emphasis on *meticulous routines* reveals a certain disinterest in the materialities of security. The extract is taken from a section within the Inquiry report about how security procedures between the British Transport Police, and SMG and Showsec (two companies responsible for providing security at the Arena), might be better integrated. It tells of how routine itself will generate new, creative ways of knowing 'risk' through even more entangled security networks:

> The discipline of creating, updating and working to a written plan is likely to have uncovered further deficiencies in BTP's approach to policing events at the Arena. It would have provided an opportunity to reflect upon and develop arrangements for collaborative working with SMG and Showsec before, during and after events. This would have strengthened the relationship between the three organisations and ensured that there was effective communication, coordination and co-operation (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 141).

The banality and bureaucracy of counter-terrorism is patent here (also see: Heath-Kelly & Strausz 2019). The routinized practices of security workers evident in the extract is emphasized consistently

across the report, in place of how workers might engage with potential 'threat objects' like a bag of wires. The reframing of *watchfulness to anxiousness* outlined above is necessary to highlight how the process of being made constantly suspicious – through the performance of security exercises like the ones in this quote – is a central theme of the Manchester Arena Inquiry report. The disinterest in material security relative to embodied anxiousness was manifested particularly where the report considers how venues' risk-assessment processes might be reconstituted:

> One option is to remove consideration of likelihood from the process altogether. This will result in a focus on what can be done without providing for an opportunity for the thought, 'It will not happen to me', entering the process (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 163).

Destabilizing notions of likelihood from risk-assessment processes reveals the contested place of the body and its local experience (Purnell 2021), in the remaking of security knowledge-praxis. "Terrorist" violence, being almost a statistical impossibility at each venue, must be remembered by each worker made responsible for security in the forthcoming Protect Duty. The notion of diffuse responsibility for counter-terrorism has somewhat broad support, as we can see by looking at the Protect Duty's consultation report. In line with claims made across the paper, it shows a significant perception amongst those potentially affected by the Duty that *terrorism can occur anywhere*, to a point nearly one third (28%) of respondents recommended the Duty should be implemented at every public venue regardless of size (Home Office 2023). The Inquiry, in proffering potential policy options along these lines, makes evident the extent to which workers must resist succumbing to their experience, and instead embody anxiety and insecurity – so that even more integrated security procedures can occur (Mythen & Walklate 2008). Massumi (2015) writes that the space within which conflict takes place is less about physical materialities, and much more about the perceptive and temporal. The Manchester Arena Inquiry report illuminates how new sites of security (are made to) emerge, and how these spaces are negotiated through remaking the body and its relation to its environment. Importantly, work like *Ontopower* (Massumi 2015), as with much other existing scholarship on security, writes out the reproduction of racial orders (for a comprehensive discussion on this issue see: Ali 2020). As we will see in the following section – where the pursuit of a person rendered *Asian* and *male* was pursued by security operatives was commended in the Inquiry for its own sake – what is able to count as risk functions though racialized and gendered parameters.

By analysing the scope and recommendations of the Inquiry, therefore, we find how the post-disaster investigation situates proactive, engaged anxiety as constitutive of security. *Watching* for the purposes of security is therefore not just (or even primarily) a visual experience, but is situated within routinized and embodied rituals. *Listening* to messages reminding staff of terrorism risk amidst its

perpetual absence, *undertaking training* and *writing risk-assessment forms* to trigger the body's anxiousness, are all central to how the Manchester Arena Inquiry report narrates enhanced terrorism-prevention. The security operative is rendered a compromised agent: at once deployed to enact security yet simultaneously productive of perennial (and white) insecurity (Pallister-Wilkins 2021). That security operatives must become a sort of infiltrator, and that bodies must become detached from its local knowledge, reveals the place of the Inquiry in the (re)production of anxious structures and rationalities that in turn require soothing (Pallister-Wilkins 2021).

2. Walking and Moving

The Manchester Arena Inquiry also consistently asserted that processes should in the future be followed more stringently regarding the movement of staff around the venue, especially through the use of patrols. This second section analyses how movement of the body through (local) space, is situated as a key mechanism through which security might be advanced. We will see how the patrolling/patrolled body in turn destabilizes local space, leaving a trail of insecurity in its wake, in turn rendering future patrol over that space essential. The physical movement of staff, according to the Inquiry report, constitutes an "important measure" in the prevention of terrorism (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 92). Staff walking around a venue generates opportunities for more security encounters, through their greater exposure to the space through which they traverse. In effect, whilst the Inquiry acknowledges that technological options exist to enhance counter-terrorism, such as improving communications devices, it stipulates the importance of the body's proactive engagement through space in the production of security. What does this articulation of counter-terrorism responsibility do to the body – and what becomes of the space in which this more mobile and (in)security-engaged body exists (Purnell 2021)? With (in)security generated through patrols and movement of staff within venue spaces, the body is subsequently reconstituted as a critical – and always insecure – site where national terrorism prevention in the future must always be enacted.

With over 100 references to the word "patrol", we can easily see the centrality of the body and its relation to space across the Manchester Arena Inquiry report. The report identifies, along with more engaged (or *embodied-anxious*) use of CCTV, how "regular and thorough patrols might have prevented, or reduced, the impact of an explosion in the City Room" (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 75). The report also outlines how the bomber conducted hostile reconnaissance in the days preceding the attack, in a Blind Spot not covered by CCTV. The report claims that greater visibility of the spot through increased patrols would have meant the bomber's "activity would have been identified" (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 19). Rather than hypothesize about the validity of such claims, this

paper reveals the place of an inquiry in legitimating the body's mobilization, displacement, and destabilization, in order that more opportunities for (in)security encounters might be produced. Walking – and movement itself – is a highly political act, having many associations with issues of security. The (in)ability to walk and move is implicated by the presence of borders, prison walls, and guards (Purnell 2021, 54-55). Jonathan Skinner (2016) reminds us of the embodied implications of walking, and writes that social and protest movements walk on the streets as an act of resistance. Marching has also been an integral feature of armies engaging in war, including to disperse protests on the streets. In other words, walking within a venue's perimeter to enact security is therefore far more than just a routine to collect, interpret, and act on data – it performatively situates the worker within ongoing relations of security, as a "habituating spatio-temporal practice" (Skinner 2016, 26). With the Inquiry recommending that staff in effect walk miles during a shift *around and between possible terrorists* to enact counter-terrorism security (Mgbeoji 2018), requires the committed engagement of a worker's whole body.

Local venue security workers walking around a venue therefore become – and are always in the process of becoming (Massey 2005; Butler 2006) – engaged counter-terrorism officials. By making embodied judgments on the threat-potential of others inhabiting local venues (through the walking towards, questioning of, and confronting of possible terrorists), their role becomes more meaningfully rearticulated around this responsibility. As the Protect Duty moves towards becoming enshrined in law, workers walking with a statutory responsibility to enact counter-terrorism, along with the concomitant requirement to approach suspects and search bags for bombs, co-constitutes duty-and-body. Put simply, the very act of patrolling as a counter-terrorism officer functions "to retain interest at the end of a long day and make real the seriousness of the imagined crisis by creating a pressurised situation" (Anderson & Adey 2011, 1092). Through the patrol, workers operate on the borders of peace and conflict. The performance of counter-terrorism officers patrolling, detached from material likelihood of experiencing violence, reconfigures not only themselves but the space within which they move (Massey 2005, 10; also see: Butler 2006), as we will now see.

How space is engaged with by the body is not just momentary, nor does it stop with the body. Echoes of the activity in a space in turn rewrite the identity of that space/place, remaking it (Purnell 2021). Space is always being (re)produced through constant and dynamic negotiations within, through, and about that space (Massey 2005). Intangible components of an environment have significant implications for how particular places are perceived, experienced, and interacted with (Malpas 1999; Coaffee, O'Hare, & Hawkesworth 2009). The emotion of venue workers enacting counter-terrorism priorities is mobilized (Massumi 2015) by them walking around and, with their legs and eyes and hands investigating possible national security threats. Echoes of (in)security resound,

unsettling the space and others' interactions with it. As Purnell writes, "We enter and exit spaces filled with emotion as our very presence and activities simultaneously affect the atmosphere" (2021, 46). The compromised and anxious body, as articulated in the Inquiry's recommendations, in turn compromises the space through which it moves. Otherwise safe or secure-enough places are destabilized as perhaps-insecure and as filled with destructive potential, by the marching of the counter-terrorism officer hunting for possible insurgents amidst shoppers and mothers harried by their children. This space is made and remade by the embodied anxiety of counter-terrorism operatives patrolling through the venue – having been triggered by new training stipulations, the filling out of risk-assessment forms, and their movement across the venue floor looking for potential threats.

The Inquiry's recommendations about the renegotiation of space have significant temporal implications: as trails of insecurity are left in the counter-terrorism officer's wake, it becomes paramount to impose new (in)security processes in that space. As the anxious body moves through a space and into another one – from the main floorspace, up the stairs, behind the bins – it must always cycle back and return to the previously-occupied space, precisely because it has become always-insecure by the counter-terrorism officer having occupied it. Anderson and Adey's analysis of the function of disaster performance is compelling when they argue, "By making futures present at the level of affect, exercises function as techniques of equivalence that enable future disruptive events to be governed" (2011, 1092). However, the purpose of the exercise – patrolling, in this case – can perhaps be even more powerfully articulated aaround the production of certain forms of subjectivity than the governing of potential disaster. After all, the national disaster is statistically an impossibility at each local venue, and on the particular duty of each officer.

Discussing the implications of invisible security, Coaffee, O'Hare, and Hawkesworth remark that the effects of security are racialized (2009; also see: Rogers 2012). Possible insurgents identified by the counter-terrorism officer are not the harried, middle-class, white mother. Instead, threat is observed through racialized and gendered frames (Sian 2017; Ali 2020; Younis & Jadhav 2020). Indeed, the Inquiry report referenced how a potentially suspicious body entered the Arena a few days before the attack took place: this person was racialized and gendered as "an Asian male [who was] 'acting very suspiciously wearing all black with a large black bag'" (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 111). The person was then followed back to the train station and monitored until they departed on a train. Although identified as *not* being the bomber that attacked the venue days afterwards, and the encounter was therefore materially useless in intelligence terms, the pursuit of this possible threat object was lauded in the report for *simply providing opportunities to practice* "greater awareness [and] vigilan[ce]" (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 111-113). Younis & Jadhav write of the way in which

associations of Muslimness are made visible and quickly hidden as signifiers of terrorism risk, enables the performative "colour-blindness [of security to be] maint[ained]" (2020, 613). In the context of the Manchester Arena Inquiry, a person was inscribed with a racialized, gendered subjectivity in the context of threat management – a practice praised on its own merit irrespective of a bomb being detonated. Through this moment we can see that the inscription of (in)security onto local contexts is not (just) concerned with the preparation for a material disaster, but about the generation of racialized encounters in local spaces through bodily movement, and the production of even more (racialized) insecurity.

Just as the use of space is always being negotiated, ownership and responsibility over space dynamically emerges throughout the Inquiry's proceedings. Extensions of (in)security space are often inscribed by physical markers, such as walls, police tape, and the placement of baggage checks. The Inquiry report discusses how making physical extensions to the security perimeter might have averted the attack, given a number of hypotheticals:

> There existed the opportunity for SMG to make hostile reconnaissance more difficult for [the bomber] during events by pushing out the security perimeter of the security operation. This could have been a missed opportunity, depending on how the new security perimeter operated. It may have had the effect of deterring [the bomber] from attacking the Arena… Setting aside the issue of the perimeter, had things been done better by SMG and Showsec, and had BTP officers been more alert to the possibility of hostile reconnaissance, the prospect of detecting it would have been increased (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 14)

The reliance on counterfactuals in this extract highlights how borders are never secure, but are instead characterized by *in*security (Pallister-Wilkins 2021; Purnell 2021). The localized embodiment of the nation state manning borders in these local spaces is therefore, unsurprisingly, characterized by perennial anxiety and a need to calibrate and recalibrate possible risk-aversion measures. The movement of borders and perimeters is a tool through which security is configured. There is always more to do, and as Mythen and Walklate argue, it becomes "difficult… to identify safe spaces" (2008, 225). This performance – the calibration and recalibration of local details within a system characterized by insecurity – produces subjects that can less easily agitate for systemic, structural reform. They become consumed with whether the perimeter was extended far enough in that moment, what effects a week's extra training might have on CCTV operators, and how to capitalize on the identification of racialized and gendered bodies (remembering the pursuit of the person rendered "Asian male") in producing more security. The localizing of national security priorities provoked by the Inquiry in its pursuit to inform policy thereby short-circuits alternative ways of seeing and knowing from emerging, inscribing the present as good-enough. Writing about "post truth", Adébísí's analysis

is compelling in considering the extension of (in)security space, and how experience of insecurity is well-known around the world:

> Those who live in what is designated the Global South have always tasted the waters of [insecurity], we have bathed in it, been immersed in it. What is startling to us now is that the frontiers of [insecurity] are moving north, and those frontiers are moving very, very rapidly and being dispersed widely (Adébísí 2019).

Through its juridical individualism, its rejection of probability judgments, and its focus on local contexts, the Inquiry disperses these frontiers by mobilizing local workers' bodies and destabilizing workers' engagement with their environments.

This section has examined the forms of subjectivity produced by the way in which the Manchester Arena Inquiry encourages staff to move through space. We see how local venue workers, patrolling across venue floors tasked with counter-terrorism duties, are situated as crucial nodes of security. Complemented by physical bollards, security perimeters, and bag checks, the Inquiry provokes staff to embody a perennial insecurity amidst an ongoing absence of danger – reconstituting local space as the crux of security politics. This emphasis on localization privileges certain forms of knowing 'risk': other forms of violence excluded from the conversation around what constitutes 'terrorism' risk through the performance of these daily patrols (Thomas 2017). As forensic investigations of security failures take place on this local basis, the ability to consider structural causes of violence is foreclosed.

3. Explaining and Communicating

This final section interrogates the place of the Inquiry in localizing national security with regard to communicative processes. It outlines how the Inquiry demands that staff engage in rituals of explanation, being required to provide intricate defences for their every thought and movement. In examining the Inquiry's practice of *making local workers speak*, the section highlights how principles of legal defensibility – rather than accountability – are central to the production of security. Prioritizing the performance of these workers situates terrorism as a local problem, with security issues resolvable by making local counter-terrorism officials justify their every move under oath. Looking at how communication is portrayed by the Inquiry, and how a resilience expert responds to its articulations of responsibility, the section highlights contestations over this security knowledge.

As noted earlier, the productive capacity of operational procedures structures security, which can be identified in the Manchester Arena Inquiry report – whether that be through developing risk-assessment protocols, training, or walking around the venue. The role of communication is similarly

identified across the Inquiry report as critical in generating more integrated working practices, with the material production of security again rendered secondary. *More information* is articulated as necessary throughout the Inquiry's report, with communication and information-flow failures described across the document as contributing to the 2017 attack. However, these flows of knowledge are not just streams of data, but simultaneously produce more rigorous processes:

> Involvement of Showsec would have brought more benefits than just ensuring accurate information. It would have embedded Showsec into a process focused on counter-terrorism. It would have caused Showsec to think more about counter-terrorism. It would have led to more discussion about counter-terrorism between SMG and Showsec… The greater the communication, the better the coordination will be (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 67).

The report here is asserting that security might only be advanced through more entangled, interconnected networks which operate in dynamic and diffuse ways at the local level, ultimately where each operative performs a vital communicative role. The point being argued is not about whether these more integrated networks actually generate material security, but about the processes through which security is being articulated. The scale of communication, and the pace at which information flows upwards-and-downwards through a security system, is central in making "the machinery of war self-correcting, giving it a built-in capacity to evolve, [and where] the evolutionary feedback must operate in as close to real time as possible" (Massumi 2015, 96; also see: Lyon 2007). The Inquiry encourages the reporting of suspicious behaviour, recognizing that it might be frustrating that so many false alarms are created. However, it asserts that even these false alarms can be productive learning points for staff:

> Where hostile reconnaissance is suspected it needs to be properly recorded and reported to the police. The police should investigate it and report back. Briefings to security staff need to include details of the suspected hostile reconnaissance. This is so that staff know what has happened and know what to look out for (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 152).

Remembering the racialized formulation of the imaginary of threat (Sian 2017; Ali 2020; Younis & Jadhav 2020), the recording and reporting of possible hostile reconnaissance simply folds the structural nature of racialized imaginaries back onto local contexts (for a more comprehensive discussion on this issue see: Younis & Jadhav 2020). As the importance of in-the-moment and forensic flows of local information is prioritized, the local context becomes the pivotal site of security.

We see across the Inquiry that local workers must defend the logic of security and their responsibility for it, in their own words. In turn, we see how the public inquiry actively writes the local as the crux of security politics. Dozens of workers, all with some responsibility for enacting security

within and around the Manchester Arena, gave evidence at the Inquiry, testifying under oath and detailing minute-by-minute accounts of their actions. *What did they see in the seconds, minutes, and hours preceding the attack; what did they think about what they saw; why were they standing where they were standing; how else could they have moved; how else could they have perceived that might have contributed to the attack being less deadly?* The explanations of local operatives to the Inquiry, with their every move and perception confessed in full display, situates the frontlines of conflict as the perceptive and the local (Butler 1993, 13). This positioning of the locus of risk into the cognition and bodies of local venue workers makes absent any focus on foreign policy, relative deprivation, or state violence, in producing violence. The voices of senior security officials who attest that "terrorism" risk (also) emanates from Government policy (Manningham-Buller, quoted in Norton-Taylor 2010) are marginalized through the confessions of local workers. Interviewee 1, a disaster recovery expert who assisted the Government in responding to the Manchester Arena attack, noted there exists "very limited space" to question mainstream terrorism narratives in the aftermath of an attack (Interviewee 1; also see: Zulaika & Douglass 1996). This is particularly pertinent to remember considering the dynamics of power between the questioning of a public inquiry, and the workers being required to speak. What it means for local officials to embody national security through justifying their micro-decisions under oath, has significant bodily implications, as we will now see.

The sometimes-excoriating investigation by the Inquiry of local workers' performance prior to the Arena attack led the panel to make conclusions contrary to its own assertions that "the responsibility for the events of 22nd May 2017 lies with Salman and Hashem Abedi, his younger brother" (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 1). As the Inquiry explored how attacks might be less damaging in future, it intricately interrogated emergency workers who responded to the bombing in 2017. This approach provoked the ire of some resilience experts. Speaking with a civil protection and resilience expert, who was consulted for the parallel Kerslake Inquiry (which investigated the emergency service response to the attack), I asked him what he thought of the Manchester Arena Inquiry. He stopped for a moment, seemingly holding back tears, and said,

> I always fill up, because people did their best… *Now – four years* after the event – you've got people going through this Inquiry process. And Jesus Christ they're pulling out stuff we [in Kerslake] didn't know about. Some of this stuff we were told [during Kerslake]: untruths, or stretched truths, things that weren't right that people knew were wrong… And it's coming out in the Inquiry – because people are under oath in the Inquiry. They weren't under oath when they were talking to us. But *fucking hell, they were doing their best*! (Interviewee 2)

We can see in this excerpt the implications of making local workers explain themselves: the stress, humiliation, and embarrassment of such detailed interrogation produce tears of empathy from an

expert in disaster and disaster response. Reid and Chandler argue that the responsibilized subject is a "degraded" subject, whose agency and personhood is compromised (Reid & Chandler 2016). Processes of localization implicate the body, making it responsible for the anxiety of the global. Nowhere is it considered that attacks like the 2017 Manchester Arena bombing might be an inevitable consequence of British domestic or foreign policy – despite warnings to the same from key officials within the UK's intelligence services. Instead, this paradigm adopted by the Inquiry assumes the position that "the events of 22nd May 2017 demonstrate so devastatingly that [future attacks] *must* be prevented" (emphasis added: Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 79). As Interviewee 2 remarked, this poses a particular problem for venue workers largely in "minimum-paid jobs, [since] there's no empowerment [with that wage]."

The requirement to make local venue workers speak does not make them *democratically accountable* for their actions within the system, nor does this mechanism integrate accountability into the process of investigation. The Protect stream of the UK's counter-terrorism strategy has a sibling policy, Prevent, which was investigated by the Communities and Local Government Committee. The committee critiqued Prevent, recommending it should foster "greater empowerment and civic engagement with democratic institutions, to strengthen the interaction and engagement with society not only of Muslims, but of other excluded groups" (2010, 3-4). Rather than develop Protect around themes of inclusivity and engagement suggested by the Committee, the Manchester Arena Inquiry report (which again prefigures the forthcoming Protect Duty) valorizes the pursuit of people racialized and gendered as "Asian male[s]" *for the sake of pursuit*, as mentioned above. Despite the man demonstrating no patent threat, he was followed out of the venue and into Victoria Station, and observed on the platform until he departed on a train. This practice – pursuing citizens outside of the venue – was recommended as an approach *for how it encourages greater security-mindedness* (Manchester Arena Inquiry 2021, 111-113). Concerned that this conduct was situated by the Inquiry report as desirable, and that such norms might compromise local workers, I queried Interviewee 2 about whether conversations about *accountability and transparency* took place in forums organizing preparedness for and response to disaster. He replied,

> I think a useful word is defensibility. Because what you're dealing with emergency response particularly – which is coming out in both inquiries at the moment – is the *defensibility* of your actions. I think that's slightly different from accountability. Because defensibility allows you that space to position your actions within your own experience [against] a third person's expectations against what you should have known. It can be understandable why you did something. Which is very different from formal accountability which just sounds like a sentence written in a Standard Operating Procedure to me (Interviewee 2).

Although the interviewee here is technically talking about emergency response rather than security, the notion of accountability appears to be written out of contemporary disaster planning frameworks, superseded by the ability of an operative to *defend their position in relation only to security*. That a thoughtful and highly-experienced resilience expert considers "accountability" essentially useless jargon in the context of workers' explanations, shows how far security policy is from the recommendations of the Committee that examined Prevent (Giroux 2004). Centring the (degraded) security operative's own justification without processes to consider how particular, often racialized, groups might be affected (Coaffee, O'Hare, & Hawkesworth 2009), renders accountability a distraction. The radical focus on microscopic – not structural – causes of security failure evident in the Inquiry's forensic interrogation of workers' minute-by-minute movements, performatively situates the local space as responsible for preventing violence. Making it "understandable why [an operative] did something" (as the interviewee mentioned) therefore constitutes a mechanism through which localization is generated, upheld, and normalized. Yet these workers remain on a minimum wage: in other words, as implied by the interviewee above, local workers exist without proportional empowerment to the expectations placed on them *by* such articulations of security.

We have seen how the Inquiry compromises local workers by requiring their explanations for their every perception and movement to enact counter-terrorism security, amidst the perpetual absence of danger staff face. These workers must rewrite the local space as the only space worth examining – in their own words, under oath. These "confessional practices… guide the subjectivity" of venue staff, repositioning them in the midst of the production of security *as counter-terrorism officers*, as they reproduce risk narratives through their testimony under oath (Elshimi 2014, 116; also see Mills 1995).

Conclusion

The article has assessed how the Manchester Inquiry navigated knowledge about national security, through forensic analysis of the minutiae around the attack. By situating specific moments of inattention as missed opportunities, the Inquiry contributes to governmental consultation on a 'Protect Duty' by recommending the statutory diffusion of counter-terrorism responsibilities to local security practitioners and venue staff. The Inquiry conceived of security through the identification and eradication of procedural shortcomings – in a context where notions of likelihood and probability must be written out. These procedural shortcomings should be rectified, the Inquiry suggests, through affective and embodied demeanours of security where staff must be constantly reminded of, and destabilized in order to enact, their vital role in enacting counter-terrorism.

In the first section we saw how the local worker is rearticulated from an observer of CCTV screens to an always-anxious body that must actively identify risk. By training these workers through a myriad of embodied rituals, like creative training exercises and writing risk-assessment forms, the professional responsibility of the CCTV worker is constituted around a security trigger. Notions of likelihood and probability must be erased for ritualized counter-terrorism duties to make sense. Rather than broader contexts of (racialized) risk being opened up for interrogation, the local worker must simply respond through muscle memory to movements and behaviours depicted on the screen. Similarly, the Inquiry recommended that workers must move through the venue, patrolling space – performatively constituting that venue as (in)secure. As they move, they affect the space in turn (Purnell 2021), walking up to and around potential terrorists, their bodies on the borders of conflict. Patrolling becomes, in the Inquiry's recommendations, an embodied solution to the 'shortcoming' of static personnel not fully engaging with the need for always-more security. In the final section, the paper explored the contested, confessional dynamics of the Inquiry which contribute to the constitution of event space as a key site of the production of security. Low-paid workers were made to defend under oath their every perception within the local space, legitimizing the performative constitution of the venue as the locus of security.

Recommendations made across the Inquiry will soon be reified in the Protect Duty. The articulations of security across the Manchester Arena Inquiry report – and therefore the principles of the forthcoming Protect Duty – function to uphold structural continuity (Wall, Middleton, & Shah 2021). Situating threat as emerging only in local spaces and as a result of local inaction, forecloses space to consider violence as emanating as a result of political and systemic injustices. The role of states and companies, or broader structural violence, in producing economic and environmental suffering is more easily written out of public narratives, through the intricate fixation on local workers and spaces as the crucial node in the production of national security. The Manchester Arena Inquiry, in prefiguring the forthcoming Protect Duty, therefore reveals the public inquiry as an important – and contested – site in the (re)making of localized security knowledge and praxis.

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