

Here be Dragons: Navigating the Problems of Researching “Terrorism” and Critical Terrorism Studies

Abstract

This chapter will explore the methodological limitations of contemporary study of “terrorism”, particularly focussing on answering how and why the researcher – and academia as a whole – has been unable or unwilling to adequately address long-standing issues surrounding research ethics. It will suggest that the researcher has become both an accomplice and a hostage to mechanisms of governmental power within the long “War on Terror”, becoming thus implicated in, and acting to perpetuate, processes of societal securitisation. Whilst a critical terrorism approach, rooted in post-Frankfurt School analyses of power and Gramscian traditions of emancipation, offers means for mapping the mechanisms that compromise the researcher, this chapter finds that critical terrorism approaches are limited by their theoretical entanglements, methodological paucity and their ultimate inability to adequately dislodge the current security paradigm. Such problems ultimately risk entrenching the current impasse and impoverishing contemporary research of “terrorist” groups. However, the battle has moved on, and whilst critical terrorism studies may be fading in achieving its stated aims of breaking the securitising dynamic, it has created new means of viewing the field of “terrorism” research, with its effects to be felt long into the future.

Introduction

Research in the field of “terrorism studies” has long been criticised as theoretically and methodologically lacking (Schmid and Jongman 1988). Limitations in both academic rigour and self-reflexivity is demonstrated in “little self-conscious sophistication engagement with theoretical developments elsewhere and even less rigorous application of explicitly visible methodologies by the terrorism research community as a whole” (Ranstorp 2009: 24). The limitations within the contemporary field come in a number of different guises: a canonical dearth of empirically grounded research; limits of methodological rigour leading to speculative conclusions; dubious and unethical practices carried out by researchers; and a representative generalisation of the field as comprised of researchers either on short-term projects (and therefore unlikely to stay in the field) or embedded within – and answerable to – governmental (counterterror) power structures (Schulze 2004: 161, 67; Ranstorp 2009: 22, 28-30).

These are not new accusations. In 1997, Reid highlighted this lack of rigour, stating that the means by which terrorism studies were conducted constituted a “feedback loop” as the result of poor methodological practice; a static environment in which “the same hypotheses, definition and theories continue to be analysed, assimilated, published, cited and eventually retrieved” (Reid 1997). In the period since this indictment, the processes behind this recycling of deficient research material of questionable quality not been fully addressed and additional problems have become entrenched. As a result, publications within the field have become “an almost impenetrable mountain of contributions that could be generously characterised as highly speculative in

nature and without a high degree of rigorous scientific standard” (Ranstorp 2009: 22). This canon of poor quality works forms a characterisation of a field that is not only deficient in method and theory but lacking in appropriate reflexivity; as Dolnik pertinently stated in 2011, “while a new book on terrorism comes out roughly every six hours, only three evaluating the state of the field and its future directions have been published in the last ten years” (Dolnik 2011: 3).

This is particularly problematic because of the political context within which this criticism sits. “Terrorism studies” lies within the growth of a paradigmatic securitisation which has gained traction in Western policy circles following the New York attacks of 11th September 2001 and the Madrid and London bombings of 2004 and 2005, respectively.¹ Since conceptualisations of a “terrorist threat” entered mainstream governmental and social discourse, it has become one of the main focuses of modern statecraft, re-framed as a unique, unpredictable, irrational and existential threat – a “different” or “new” form of violence, “particularly savage and relentless” in its articulation (Ilardi 2004: 223; Enders and Sandler 2005; Hoffman 1999; Juergensmeyer 2000). Manichaeian underpinnings create the conditions for another key feature: that of terrorism as constituting an existential harm to “every free society” (Brachman 2009: 11; Trent 1980: 12). It is upon this conceptualisation that the paradigm of the long “War on Terror” rests, actualised in the implementation of sweeping counterterror legislation throughout Western states that have often ensured “the norms of prosecution and punishment no longer apply” (Buzan 2006; Wintour 2004).

This securitisation process has not gone uncontested and has been accompanied by the far more modest – although increasingly confident – “critical turn” in terrorism studies, which seeks to illuminate, problematise and destabilise the power dynamics upon which it is founded (Smyth 2009: 210). This school of critical thought has developed amongst scholars from a broad range of academic fields who have begun deconstructing the impact of counterterrorism on society. Such critical theorists posit the construction of “terrorism” as “a political tool of immense power, capable of providing a rationale for a range of actions, including war” (Ilardi 2004: 218); it has led to the circumscribing of civil liberties, the stifling of dissent and the diversion of attention away from more entrenched, long-term political problems (Jackson et al. 2011: 105). Such securitisation has not only benefitted established political powers but a host of other organisations, including national and international media, which often act to perpetuate alarmist discourse to their own benefit (Jackson et al. 2011: 53). Academia has been left neither unaffected nor untarnished by this securitisation process; in fact, in many cases it has acted as accomplice, in which “a triumvirate composed of the media, government and academia has to a great extent proscribed the course of terrorism studies” (Schulze 2004: 163).

¹¹ “The main argument of securitisation theory is that security is a (illocutionary) speech act, that alone uttering “security” something is being done... A securitising actor, by stating that particular *referent object* is threatened in its existence, claims a right to extraordinary measures to ensure the reference object’s survival. The issue is then moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal (democratic) rules and regulations of policymaking... [Thus] Security is understood to be a social and intersubjective constriction.” (Floyd 2007: 329); The Copenhagen School refers to a small group of scholars formally based at the Copenhagen Peace Research Institute (COPRI) in Copenhagen, most notably Old Wæver and Barry Buzan, whilst the Welsh School is centred around a group of security studies scholars linked to the University of Aberystwyth.

In a field dogged by accusations of intellectual poverty, a lack of adequate primary research and methodological shortcomings, (Silke 2004: 5-7). contemporary researchers face the dual charges of not only conducting research of dubious quality but of deliberately failing to address these shortcomings through interest-driven adherence to paradigmatic, securitised norms.

This chapter is designed to explore why it is that the contemporary study of terrorism, despite noisy criticism from critical scholars, is either unwilling or unable to address central shortcomings in its approach. It will seek to understand why this reticence to address methodological shortcomings seems not to be diminishing, as well as explore the extent that this can be considered a cycle of complicity so as to determine whether the problem lies in the securitised fortresses of orthodox academia or the ivory towers of critical theorists. This will be carried out by illuminating the power structures within which the social scientist interacts to come to such intentional or unintentional complicity. It will explore the researcher's interactions with structures on the level of the government and media; the level of interaction with academic organisations, peers and ethics; before delving into the researcher's own perceived understanding of risk and good practice on an individual level. This will build a comprehensive relief of how the researcher arrives at the confirmation of their complicity, before considering ways navigate responses to this.

On this basis we can dissect why academia is so heavily implicated in the complicity of the securitisation process and why researchers have acted to perpetuate and advance a paradigm which has ramifications not only in the research community but in government policy, the media, international diplomacy, warfare, civil society and beyond. It will contend that one of the most significant problems with contemporary research is the process by which researchers are encouraged to conceptualise the "risk of harm" and that by facilitating a shift in this process, we may be able to transcend a proportion of the problems facing the field.

To achieve this, firstly, the chapter will explore current limitations of contemporary social science research on "terrorism". Secondly, it will explore how the research generally responds to problems of conducting such research by exploring how the notion of "harm" is conceptualised by the researcher through a multi-level analysis. Finally, it will begin the priming of an emancipatory process, exploring whether, by altering the researcher's means to evaluate the "risk of harm" through critical approaches, contemporary scholars studying "terrorism" can facilitate a reorientation of research barriers and enablers. Finally, this work will conduct a secondary critique of the question, bringing down the edifices of both orthodox and critical scholars, to consider how researchers can best navigate the field in the future.

Methodology

To explore the securitisation mechanisms that have impacted on and been reproduced by academia in the contemporary study of terrorism, focus is placed on analysing how the concepts of threat and harm are articulated on the levels of the legal/governmental, the ethical/review board and the research/researcher

(Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 11). The notion of harm is particularly relevant to terrorism studies, as the contemporary researcher – even with critical aims which look to overcome the suspect legacy of former research heavyweights – faces significant challenges in conducting methodologically rigorous research whilst navigating the ethical maxim of the “avoidance of harm” (Bresler 1995: 29). This work will draw on work by researchers and “terrorism” scholars, combining it with elements from the Frankfurt and Copenhagen schools of thought. These will be subjected to a broadly Gramscian process to discern the roots of the hegemonic paradigm of security, before looking for the means of an emancipatory process for both the researcher and wider academia.

As it stands, researchers are caught in a no-man’s land, in which the strict adherence to ethical, legal or normative proscriptions can cause the accuracy, legitimacy and credibility of their research to be compromised. It is this work’s purpose to destabilise these processes of assessing harm through a multi-level analysis, to gauge whether its present guise leaves the researcher in a position that both favours securitising mechanisms whilst simultaneously causing harm to researchers themselves and the subject of research. For now, “harm” is a suitable nexus to do this – by unravelling the limitations of concepts of harm, we chart a small area of territory in our understanding of terrorism and contentious politics, offering a guide for future researchers and an alternative to the scrawl of “here be dragons” that otherwise obscures our view.²

Macro-level power structures

The first task of this analysis is to explore how securitisation is developed and reproduced through the macro-level of Western societies, placing the researcher within the maelstrom of activity between the structures of the state and the “tentacles of terrorism” (Wintour 2004). Since 2001 and the start of the long “War on Terror”, media and governmental mechanisms have acted to create a dichotomy between contentious political actors such as designated “terrorist” groups – seen as inherently harmful and malign – and the benign rest. In the context of the researcher, this can lead to a set of processes by which researchers themselves can become re-conceptualised as harmful to the liberal-democratic state and its normative values.

Numerous securitising mechanisms can be observed throughout Western media in the years post-2001, with alarmist headlines, reductionist analysis and incendiary reportage ubiquitously evident (Munson 2008: 78). Studies conducted by Grusin highlight some of the dubious practices which media bodies have engaged in, concluding that most outlets are deliberately perpetuating a sense of fear through alarmist discourse as part of a process of “premediation” – the perpetuation of “an almost constant, low level of fear or anxiety about another terrorist attack” to support a beleaguered media (Grusin 2010: 2). This alarmist discourse is perhaps unsurprising when seen through a critical lens: the media benefits in numerous ways from dramatic pictures and analysis of terrorist incidents in the form of larger audiences, increased sales, associated revenues – particularly

² “When early cartographers mapped their universe they started with the settlements, connected these with travellers’ routes and then, left with vast unknown spaces on their parchment, carefully quilled in the words, ‘Here be dragons’. For these were the places where no-one ventured, or, if they did, never came back, or, if they returned, were never the same again...” (Best 1988: 239)

following the growth of online content. This alarmism is particularly clear in the aftermath of the events of 2001 – an attack which “brought together three sets of circumstances under which journalists can freely abandon their objectivity: tragedy, public danger and threats to national security” (Vultee 2011: 81).

Vultee conceptualises this a dual process, whereby securitisation is both “an effect *in* media” and “an effect *of* media” –driving and responding to securitising mechanisms – with terrorism becoming a “routine aspect of news framing” (Vultee 2011; Lee 1995: 7). How terrorism is perceived is certainly a product of how the media and the state choose to represent the threat (Wolfendale 2007: 86) and the growth of alarmist frames of extremism, terrorism and radicalisation since 2001 has enabled the conditions for the spread of securitisation rhetoric which conflates security with civil issues of migration and travel, political dissent and democratic engagement (McNeil-Willson 2017). This process has supported, and been supported by, the rise of discourses of terrorism at a governmental level which operate as “a rather successful macro-securitisation”, enforcing the hegemony of state power (Buzan 2006: 1103). This enables the development of premeditative responses to a “nexus of new threats: rogue states, terrorism, international crime, drug trafficking and the spread of weapons of mass destruction” (Buzan 2006). The raft of subsequent counterterrorism legislation post-2001 has been framed as protecting civil liberties against the threat of international terrorism, yet critical theorists and activists have raised concerns about the potential and actual impact that such policy has in curtailing human and civil rights to political engagements.

In deconstructing the “threat” as represented in media and government discourse, Wolfendale states that “terrorism does not pose a threat sufficient to justify the kinds of counterterrorism legislation currently being enacted” (Wolfendale 2007: 75). What is more, the current counterterrorism practices often pose more of a threat to individual physical security and well-being of the state’s own citizens than the supposed harm emanating from terrorism; as such, she suggests “we should fear counterterrorism more than we should fear terrorism” (Wolfendale 2007). Anti-terrorism measures have become increasingly normalised within the daily lives of Western citizens as government spending on fighting terrorism – and, increasingly, the “gateway drug” of extremism – has spiralled (Jackson et al. 2011: 68). As well as a high financial cost, costs to civil liberties have come with the exploitation of fear by politicians as a way of “ensuring re-election, silencing their critics, controlling dissent, creating a more docile public, distracting the public from more entrenched and difficult social problems”, as well as ensuring the creation of a number of other projects not necessarily related to terrorism, such as “the introduction of identity cards, restriction on immigration, increasing financial regulation and limiting civil liberties” (Jackson et al. 2011: 141). These governmental legislative changes are generally framed as a temporary measure, yet laws made in the name of countering terrorism are rarely, if ever, revoked – as was the case with the anti-terror laws in Northern Ireland and Germany during the 1970s (Wolfendale 2007: 84).

What is particularly problematic about the long “War on Terror” – in contrast to previous conflict scenarios – is that it is no longer conceptualised as state-against-state but as state-against-“state of mind”, in which a “radical mindset” – rooted in an expansionist and absolutist “Islamist” doctrine – has become an enemy, in the place of

any national or intranational power structures (Hennessy 2008: 15)³ This is reflected in swathes of governmental discourse warning against an “aggressive Islamist ethos” constituting a threat that is “more diffuse, more complicated, more unpredictable” (BBC 2014; Gardner 2013). The nature of this “ideological threat” has meant that responding legislation has largely been designed as vague in its wording and broad in its scope, leading to its enactment in inappropriate scenarios. These mechanisms of securitisation not only contribute to a sense of anxiety about the threat from terrorism, it also leads to potentially problematic binary in favour of the current power structures – a form of “hyper-patriotism”, under which “political dissent is seen by society as unpatriotic and/or treasonous”, leading to the sidelining of academics who publicly challenge contemporary practice (Vultee 2011: 81).

Many self-professed “terrorism experts” in the West are linked to high-profile, well-funded counterterrorism and security institutions and a constellation of other organisations funded and supported through government or government implicated bodies. In the UK, these include (amongst others) Quilliam, the Centre on Religion and Geopolitics (Tony Blair Faith Foundation) and the Henry Jackson Society, which – despite often openly competing with each other – tend to operate as “front groups” for governments, part of the strategic communication component of counter-terror policies (Miller and Sabir 2012: 27). By developing recommendations and reports deliberately positioned as in line with government policy, such organisations have been accused of targeting Muslim communities (Dodd 2009, 2010) and aiding the de-politicisation of counter-terrorism (Miller and Sabir 2012). By constructing hegemonic discourse about terrorism in a way which removes not only any counter-narratives to an ideological approach terrorism but overtly supports “necessary” coercive counterterrorism and counter-extremism tactics, such organisations ultimately act to curtail dissent, reproducing structures of repression. They enable a system which attempts to intimidate sections of the population under the guise of a necessary response to “terrorism”, and become “essential to the efficacy of coercion and the generation of fear” (Miller and Sabir 2012: 27-8).

Within the context of contemporary academia, a significant issue is their entanglement with university bodies, often engaging with, funding or employing researchers, labs or departments. With a strong alignment and interaction between “anti-extremism” thinktanks and scholars, orthodox researchers are given “respectability, and their views are quoted in the popular press and other mainstream outlets” (Smyth 2009: 209). Meanwhile, those who take a more anti-establishment position can face professional penalties, barred from accessing high-profile institutions and national media exposure, governmental positions and funding opportunities. As Breen Smyth states, whilst the orthodox “terrorism” researcher can more readily access professional opportunities, “the critical scholar, in comparison, ploughs a rather more difficult and lonely furrow” (Smyth 2009). As such, the researcher is strongly incentivised to carry out research that fits with securitised state narratives and

³ “Compromise is not what many terrorists usually have in mind except as part of a “salami” tactic to inch closer towards achieving all their professed goals. These “dangerous dreamers of the absolute” (as Karl Marx once called them) are often totalitarian in their mindset. Their ideology must therefore be targeted” (Schmid 2005: 229)

discouraged from taking on the more problematic tasks of conducting critical, primary research that counters the orthodox canon.

Meso-level power structures

Researchers are not only disadvantaged in terms of power balance as due to media and government barriers and incentives, but face an as problematic power dynamic from current academic ethics procedures (Sleat 2013). The role of the ethics committee began its development in the years following World War II, as revelations about the medical experiments in Nazi concentration camps came to light through the Nuremberg trials which eroded the paradigmatic image of science as “intrinsically neutral, beneficial and value free” (Bresler 1995: 29). The subsequent Nuremberg Code formed the basis for international biomedical codes of ethics. The development of contemporary ethical research procedures was advanced in the wake of numerous ethnically dubious projects in the second half of the 20th Century – Tuskegee (1932 to 1972), Milgram (1961 and 1963), Zombardo (1973) and Laud Humphrey (Aagaard-Hansen and Johansen 2008; Haggerty 2004). Now, much international ethics is drawn from the Helsinki Declaration, notably the stringent avoidance of harm and the requirement that all research must be conducted to benefit the study group.⁴

Within terrorism studies, ethics has begun to play a more central role as a means of attempting to shore up failing methodological standards. In a field described as one which “attracts phoneys and amateurs as a candle attracts moths”, ethics procedures offer a means of tackling core shortcomings, such as the collection of data through means that are transparent and assessable (Ranstorp 2009: 26). This is particularly important given that researchers have often worked alongside governmental power structures, using closed or classified sources that are impossible to replicate, place within time or location, and may have been obtained under false pretences or duress, such as imprisonment or torture. Such closed source material “casts a dark cloud over the entire terrorism studies community” as to the general perception of their ethical codes of conduct, and the requirement for researchers to adhere to certain standardised ethics has improved the standard of research and challenged some closed source analysis (Ranstorp 2009: 28-30).

Current ethics procedures are founded on two central tenets: an overriding moral duty not to do harm throughout the course of the research programme – “an obligation which ‘trumps’ any other possible concerns” – and; that the risks area research study poses towards individuals who participate are prioritised “over and above the rights and interests of other individuals including the researcher and society more generally” (Sleat 2013: 15); a process broadly referred to as the *Participant Protection Model* (PPM). In favouring the subject, PPM opposes more consequential and utilitarian approaches in which benefit is measured against harm, holding respect for the participant sacrosanct. It reflects the roots of contemporary ethics procedures as heavily embedded in biomedical research practices, rebalancing the traditional asymmetry in power between

⁴ First developed in 1964, the Helsinki Declaration has – as of the time of writing – since been subject to six revisions: 1975, 1983, 1989, 1996, 2000 and 2008.

researcher and participant due to their knowledge differentials. As such, contemporary ethics procedures are framed within a context where the researcher has more power to harm than the subject.

The maxim that the research should, “at the very least, of course, do no harm” to research subjects is the cornerstone of contemporary ethics (Barrett and Cason 1997: 122). To show the ubiquity of this approach, a short study was conducted in which open-source ethics guidelines relevant to social science practice were taken from all major British research ethics institutions and UK Russell Group universities.⁵ The language used within these guidelines was examined to assess at which direction harm was conceptualised as occurring. In a study of 26 ethics guidelines, specific discussion on harm occurred in 131 separate occasions or ideas.⁶ These ideas were examined and given one of the following designations, depending on how harm was conceptualised:

- *Strong harm to subject*: The idea conceptualised harm as explicitly likely to occur through research to the subject
- *Weak harm to subject*: The idea conceptualised harm as implicitly or possibly likely to occur through research to the subject or the wider subject community (third-party risks)
- *Neutral*: The idea was either neutral or ambiguous on the direction of harm through research
- *Weak harm to researcher*: The idea conceptualised harm as implicitly or possibly likely to occur through research to the researcher or the wider academic community (third-party risks)
- *Strong harm to researcher*: The idea conceptualised harm as explicitly likely to occur through research to the researcher

In examination of this sample, 59 of the 131 total references (45%) of all ideas specifically referenced harm as likely to occur to the subject, rising to 72 of the total 131 if we include ideas implying harm to the subject (13). This means that 55% of ideas conceptualise harm as something that occurs from researcher to subject. References which were either neutral or ambiguous in their discursive conceptualisation of the direction of harm numbered 41 (31.3%), leaving only 18 ideas in which harm was referenced as potentially directed, at any point during the research process, towards the researcher, both implicitly (11) and explicitly (7), making up only 13.7% of ideas present in the sample.

These findings suggest that, within core British, Anglophone academic ethics, harm is conceptualised as far more likely to occur to the subject than to the researcher. Whilst this supposedly acts to protect the subject, it risks placing the researcher at a structural disadvantage: that the subject is more likely to experience harm often runs against actual power dynamics whereby the researcher is the more vulnerable party. By failing to account for

⁵ Where such sources are openly and externally available. Some universities listed as Russell Group institutions have not been included here because they do not have a separate set of guidelines outside of those produced by specific British research ethics institutions. For a list of Russell group institutions, see, www.russellgroup.ac.uk/our-universities/. The list of institutions from which ethics guidelines have been collected are as follows: Academy of Management; American Political Science Association; Association of Social Anthropologists; British Education Research Association; the British Psychology Society; the Economic and Social Research Council; the British Sociological Association; Cambridge University; Durham University; King’s College London; the London School of Economics; the Natural Environment Research Council; the Oral History Society; the Academy of Social Science’ Oxford University; Queen’s University Belfast; the RESPECT Project; the Social Research Association; University College London; the UK Research Integrity Office; the University of Birmingham; the University of Bristol; the University of Cardiff; the University of Exeter; the University of Liverpool; the University of Manchester; the University of Newcastle; the University of Nottingham; the University of Sheffield; the University of Southampton.

⁶ This did not include multiple instances of the same term within one sentence, paragraph or subsection.

potential power asymmetry that runs the other way, PPM cannot always offer an appropriate ethical foundation for the complex nature of contemporary social science research, particularly when researching armed “terrorist” groups.⁷

Instances in which the researcher is on the receiving end of power asymmetry include contexts whereby subjects “have the authority, prestige and capacity to harm the research, either physically (as in the case of more hazardous fieldwork projects) or through harming their interests (e.g. reputations, financial, cutting off future funding or access)” (Sleat 2013: 17). As much of social science research is specifically geared towards assessing and – in many cases – challenging those with significant positions of legitimate (state) or illegitimate (counter-state) power, such subjects are those more likely to be the focus of research, due to greater political capital and “elite”-level knowledge (Sleat 2013: 16). It would be difficult, furthermore, to assume that a lone researcher, conducting a series of interviews with armed groups, is in the position of power; or a researcher exploring claims of corruption within a state service. Obvious examples of such risks from the security apparatus of a potentially hostile state is that of Giulio Regeni, whose death in 2016 has been extensively linked to the Egyptian police, or arrests of democracy researchers in Russia.

These examples raise other problems of adherence to “do no harm”. If the power balance can be demonstrated as clearly weighted against the researcher, questions must be raised as to whether and to what extent deception is a legitimate approach to ensure the researcher’s safety.⁸ For instance, is it more dangerous for a researcher not to actively conceal the truth about their political, cultural and ethnic background or beliefs when conducting research with those that have overtly hostile agendas (such as far-right and National Socialist groups, or authoritarian states)? And is this deception, if carried to out to prevent harm to the researcher, as harmful to the subject as current ethics processes imply? Such situations show PPM as giving implicit preference to the potential harming of the researcher over the subject and may place the researcher in unacceptably dangerous situations.

Another issue is that of consent. In an examination of ethics, Van den Hoonaard concludes that, by requiring applicants to seek the permission of persons most likely to be in such direct positions of power over subjects, critical enquiry is being repressed. This places the ethical review board at odds with the critical aims of social scientists, limiting the accuracy of research and risking harm to participants (through the perpetuation of abuse) and the researcher’s career.⁹ Furthermore, the risk of potential hostility that researchers face when conducting

⁷ The PPM model is so inadequately divorced from social sciences that some social science ethics processes still require academics to report on whether they will be using stem cells or organic material in their research.

⁸ “prohibiting deception is akin to outlawing lying, something that at first blush might seem wonderful until it becomes apparent that lying and deceit lubricate daily life while serving large and small legitimate institutional purposes” (Haggerty 2004: 406)

⁹ “Early 20th-century sociology was part of a larger muckraking movement to reveal and critique the abuse of workers, the exploitation of immigrants, inhumane housing conditions, outrageous exercises of criminal justice power, corrupt politician-business relations, and so on” (Katz 2013: 1137); “REBS and IRBs require that the very people who abuse “vulnerable” populations consent to research that might reveal the abuse, such as the parents of runaway and intractable kids, police and judges who mistreat adults and juveniles, bathhouse managers who don’t post HIV health warnings, hospital administrators with authority over staff who would report rule violations that injure patients, teachers who have sexual relations with students, employers who cheat their workers by not paying overtime rates and by underfunding health plans, and ethics committee that may be shown to damage applicant’s careers.” (Katz 2013)

covert data gathering – particularly by those in more junior research positions – can lead to the quick dismissal of projects by academic bodies and funders, the abandonment of the project by researchers and the transformation of important research projects into innocuous enquiry (Katz 2013). The researcher therefore, by default of their research focus, is disadvantaged. The essential nature of research into “terrorism” means that “practically no field activity in this area will fall into the category of ‘low risk research’”, leading the researcher to go through the (“dreadful”) Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) process before fieldwork (Dolnik 2011: 226). The risk of harm thus becomes ubiquitous with research, in a field that already struggles with accessing primary data. By focussing almost exclusively on the potential for harm to subjects, current Anglophone ethics processes risk overstating the potential for harm, creating a cycle whereby it is impossible to know “whether fear creates the deviance or deviance the fear”.¹⁰

This power imbalance is even more obvious when compared to the journalist in their interaction with the research environment. Despite the shared publication interest, the journalist is permitted to carry out actions when gathering data that the social scientist would be condemned for; perhaps then, “what is sauce for the scientists should be sauce for the journalists and vice versa” (Horowitz and Garn 1979). The current ethics procedures mark the researcher out as a specific threat to the subject, whilst in some cases disenfranchising the subject from making informed decisions about participation in the project and discouraging those that are supportive of their potential involvement by necessitating demonstrable forms of consent.¹¹ The researcher therefore faces a series of constraints, from disciplining or fines for conducting certain research, to a creeping regulation which “institutionalises distrust, where researchers are presumed to require an additional level of oversight to ensure that they act ethically” (Haggerty 2004: 392). Whilst ethics procedures should be preventing researchers from using closed sources or unreplicable data sets, it seems to be forcing researchers to either reconsider primary data approaches or avoid certain research completely.

Micro-level power structures

The final level in which securitisation processes impact on the research is on the micro, in terms of day to day preparation, access and implementation of research procedures and localised government counterterrorism legislation, and here the researcher also faces significant disadvantages through the framing of primary research in the field as threatening. Researchers in contemporary terrorism studies can face a daunting lack of training, provision and care from their institutions when conducting research. Whilst “creep” from ethics committees mean that researchers are forced accept limitations on conducting research due to the potential harm subjects face, the field researcher themselves are often forced to rely on their own initiative to avoid exposure to danger.

¹⁰ Irving Louis Horowitz here invokes Kai Erikson’s famous statement in *Wayward Puritans (II)* when highlighting this process: “Men who fear witches soon find themselves surrounded by them; men who become jealous of private property soon encounter thieves. And it is not always easy to know whether fear creates the deviance or deviance the fear, the affinity of the two has been a continuing course of wonder in human affairs” (Horowitz and Garn 1979: 1022)

¹¹ “Are researchers really expected to attempt to talk willing interviewees out of speaking to them by presenting an exhaustive list of possible dangers of participation?” (Dolnik 2013b: 230-1)

In day to day research practice, the researcher is forced to confront legal barriers which problematise their research practice during field research in both Western Europe and in sites beyond. The expansion of far reaching and internationally-applicable counterterror legislation has greatly challenged the role of the researcher, regardless of their site of research. In British legislation, this includes sections 57, 58 and 58(A) of the UK Terrorism Act 2000, which relate specifically to the possession, collection and publication or eliciting of material likely to be used or to be useful to terrorism and are problematic in their broad conceptualisation of intent (Government 2000: 26-7).

Section 57 of the Terrorism Act 2000 makes it an offence to “possess an article in circumstances which give rise to a reasonable suspicion that its possession is for a purpose connected with the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terrorism” (Government 2000: 26). This is not confined to materials that can be used directly in acts of violence, such as arms, chemicals or explosives, but can include a potentially infinite number of more abstract objects. As in the case of Zafar [EWCA Crim 184 (2008) 2 W.L.R. 1013] – in which five individuals were charged for possession of documents, computer discs and drives containing material described as “radical”, “religious or philosophical” and “ideological propaganda” – prosecutions were sought based on materials that were “indirectly” connected to an act of terrorism. This is particularly problematic because of the degree of remoteness the item has to a potential act of terrorism is poorly defined: “a purpose connected with” an act of terrorism could include a plane ticket to Pakistan, a credit card which was used to book the flight, or even the defendant’s passport. Virgo concludes: “if the lawful possession of such items does fall within section 57, are we not getting perilously close to criminalising thought crimes?” (Virgo 2008: 237-8).

This case raises the issue that the researcher is often left vulnerable to being criminalised for possession of written and electronic materials that could be deemed useful for “terrorism” or “terrorists”. Irrespective of whether such prosecution is successful, simply the fact that such a case can be brought to trial should be of concern; even if the researcher is able to “prove that his possession of the articles was not for a purpose connected with the commission, preparation or instigation” of terrorism, the act of bringing the case to court can have serious ramifications for the anonymity of the researcher and the research subjects. With it possible for research material to be used against both researchers and subjects, scholars are handed a strong disincentive for conducting research into difficult areas of security.

Sections 58 and 58A are perhaps even more problematic, as they confer less importance on the intentionality of accruing information. In section 58, an offence is committed if the individual “collects or makes a record of information of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism” or “possesses a document or record containing information of that kind” (Government 2000). This specifically includes photographic or electronic records. It was these sections, for instance, that were referred to following the killing of US journalist James Foley when UK police states that “viewing, downloading or disseminating extremist material” such as this “may constitute offence under terrorism legislation” and “is a crime” (Halliday 2014). Other problematic sections for the researcher include section 19 of the Terrorism Act 2000, and 21A in the Anti-

Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001, which make it a criminal offence not to disclose information to a constable where a “person believes or suspects that another person has committed an offence... as soon as is reasonably practical” (Government 2000). The expansion of legislation that focusses on countering forms of extremism since 2015 has exacerbated the legal challenges facing researchers. The UK Counter Terrorism and Border Security Bill (2019), for instance, has widened the scope of Section 58 of the 2000 Terrorism Act, lowering the bar of prosecution for viewing extremist material from three clicks to just one, establishing conditions for prosecuting individuals who view online extremist material over another individual’s shoulder, broadening what is considered the “publication” of such material, and stating that UK citizens automatically commit an offence if they travel to certain designated areas (such as areas of Syria and Iraq), under Section 58B. Whilst there is a provision for providing a “reasonable excuse”, researchers still risk questioning or arrest, resulting in the forced relinquishing of sensitive data and the overriding of ethical considerations regarding participant anonymity.

Such laws create potentially impossible conflicts with research practices in this area of study, challenging the bond of confidentiality that is required between a researcher and subject, risking the use of confiscated research material as a meticulously organised and collated set of court evidence, as well as threatening prison for researcher and research subjects and calling into question the ethics of conducting primary research at all if subjects are unable to be shielded from harm.¹² Such laws are also highly racialised, placing minority researchers and interviewees in a more dangerous position because of their being part of a “suspect community”, and are more likely to effect junior or lower-level researchers rather than those who operate at the top of international departments with larger funds and greater reputations.

Beyond Western academic settings, the researcher and subjects face harm due to the legal sensitivity of potential research. Silke identifies two formations of harm facing the field researcher in “risky” global regions: the ambient and the situational (Silke 2004). Ambient risk is derived “simply from being in a dangerous setting in order to carry out research” (Silke 2004: 14). In such situations, the researcher’s presence has no impact on the level of risk that is faced. However, such risk is difficult to determine. The existence of terrorist and potentially violent actors is often dependent on severe political dissent or instability and, as such, political situations can quickly deteriorate (Barrett and Cason 1997: 98). Research on field anthropologists conducted by Howell found that 22 percent reported living through political turmoil, such as revolution, war or rioting, 15 percent being under suspicion of spying, 42 percent reported criminal interpersonal hazards such as robbery, assault, rape or murder and two percent reported hostage taking incidents during their time in the field (Smyth

¹² One example in which a researcher has fallen foul of legal challenges is that of Bradley Garnett who conducted deep participation research during a PhD project with a group of urban explorers. Spending prolonged periods of time with group on night-time excursions, Garnett also acted as the designated ‘scribe for the tribe’, detailing explorations and findings. Despite the research being approved by supervisors, a university ethics committee and successfully signing off his PhD after a defence with internal and external examiners, the British Transport Police took legal action against Garnett and a group of eight research participants. This centred around the collection of materials that were, according to the charge, ‘illegally obtained information’, and despite working through the doctoral process according to university regulations, the university refused to offer their support for him or the work. Even more concerning, the British Transport Police seized his doctoral research findings, including personal text messages, quotes from his thesis, field notes, photographs, video footage and even chat logs from social media, all of which were connected ‘off my person and from my house, which they raided while I was in custody after taking my door down with a battering ram’. (Garnett 2014: 38)

2009: 199). The researcher, interacting with potential dangerous subjects, is often required to place themselves within situations that are risky, in areas which operate outside of the law, such as unstable, post-conflict zones or regions of high criminal or military activity.

Situational danger, in contrast, arises “when the researcher’s presence explicitly provokes hostility and aggression from others in the setting” (Silke 2004: 14). This is a particularly significant risk for fieldworkers exploring terrorist groups, as they are required to garner potentially sensitive information from a variety of counter-hegemonic sources that already face a series of threats. This can provoke hostility towards the researcher from numerous actors in situations whereby “people can and do get killed because of the information they possess” (Barrett and Cason 1997: 98). Any naivety in discerning who to trust or entrust with information could prove fatal. Whilst both kinds of risks can be and are regularly negotiated by researchers, additional factors add greater pressure to the researcher. A lack of training available to researchers lead to an acute reliance on trial and error (Dolnik 2013a: 5). Such a process can yield important findings – teaching the researcher how they best engage in certain forms of research – yet in a field characterised as high-risk, risks immediate, dangerous repercussions. These risks are heightened in an academic environment in which over 90 percent of research studies are planned, conducted, analysed and written-up by just one person working alone, placing a heavy burden in managing potential harm on the researcher (Silke 2004: 69).

It is impossible to eliminate risk from the day to day activities of the field researcher when violence and instability are at the core the research subject (Dolnik 2013b: 227). But a lack of training provisions, limited support in developing proper fieldwork planning – owing largely to treating fieldwork as an academic “rite of passage” – and limited access to networks of those who have greater experience all side-line genuine concerns the researcher faces when entering the field. With no formal organisational or association of high-risk field researchers in existence and relatively scant training offered, newcomers to the field are often “left to their own devices, and this obviously increases the risks unnecessarily” (Taarnby 2013: 218). This risk has led to the researchers curtailing primary research, which becomes framed as either problematic or undesirable, or else suffused by a romanticism that expresses “the satisfaction of the Great White Hunter who has bravely risked the perils of the [urban] jungle to bring back an exotic specimen” (Lee 1995: 76).

Responding to Power Imbalances

The researcher is constrained by a tri-level process: on the macro level, the researcher faces a hostile context in which social scientists are coerced and incentivised through funding and research opportunities to adopt generally pro-governmental norms and approaches (Lee 1995). On the meso level, the researcher faces ever-growing barriers due to creeping problematic ethics procedures, poorly designed for such fieldwork and an increasingly formal set of ethics structures which encourages researchers to follow what they perceive to be the path of least resistance. And on the micro level, the researcher is unpracticed and untrained in a hostile security context, risking the welfare of themselves and a host of research subjects, gatekeepers and communities.

The impact of this has supported academic securitisation – the creation of a set of mechanisms which not only stifle primary research but acts to isolate and disable the researcher from drawing findings that are likely to challenge pre-existing assumptions about such groups. State structures are therefore able to mobilise a wide range of mechanisms to co-opt the researcher into supporting current articulations of power, which are bound together through a securitised palette of discourse.

Taking a critical reading, we can discern dominant actors (in this case, those with an interest in supporting the securitisation of political society) acting in ways that impact on academic culture (such as the ethics committee) and ultimately enforcing their interests on those in subordinate positions. The researcher themselves becomes complicit in this, taught to ignore the inequalities they are subject to and that they themselves exercise. This results in a *Pax Romana*, where the researcher is given the means to research through “the active consent of the subordinate” (Steans and Tepe 2008: 140). The researcher becomes implicated in this process, to reproduce the fundamental structure of the system of dominant opposition.

The researcher is also co-opted by their place in class and status. The rise of the long “War on Terror” has securitised civil society by opening up space for military and security discourses to combine with and reinforce concern about fragmented wage labour, immigration, education, and a number of other civil sites, to create an environment conducive to what Hallsworth and Lea call the “securitisation of the life-world” (Lea and Hallsworth 2011). Elements of social life and civil liberties are traded for security, with citizens increasingly coming to accept the closing down and reconceptualisation of freedoms, such as pre-emptive arrests, or constraints of individuals suspected of “connection” with terrorism. Upper classes and majority communities are least impacted, whilst the closing of civil liberties impacts most severely on minority groups - particularly Muslim communities, who already face severe restrictions on their ability to access education, employment, and to engage with the public arena and shape mainstream discourse ((AI) 2012). Whilst minority groups and those with limited means of accessing societal debate face forms of repression, the beneficiaries of this “securitisation of the life world” can be broadly understood as the neoliberal and capitalist state (Lea and Hallsworth 2012). The researcher, largely embedded within generally more affluent, less working-class structures, and more likely to be from majority cultural backgrounds, is largely sheltered from the broader impacts of counterterrorism and more likely to reproduce it than find cause to systematically challenge it.

Whilst it is possible to establish a systemic form of complicity within academic research towards perpetuating securitisation processes, critical studies have, to date, only offered significantly limited means of emancipating the researcher from this environment. This has stifled attempts to break out from processes which prevent more primary research from taking root. The shortcomings of the critical turn are that, by apportioning too much blame on the bad practices of other researchers, it fails to set out a wider response to problematic power dynamics which keep the orthodox system dominant. What is needed is a more coherent and pragmatic response to the limiting of primary research in terrorism studies.

To break this cycle, a reconceptualisation of the risk of harm is proposed. Since much of the deficiencies in research stem from academia's complicity in securitised discourse, the transcending of such limitations is built here upon a discursive foundation. If we are to presuppose that "language, entwined with power, frames and positions the response", it is important to act to reposition the discourse around which research occurs in an attempt to liberate the researcher, the field and its subject from its methodological malaise and its compromisingly close relationship with state security power.

Emancipation

To challenge the barriers to research and the complicity of academia in securitisation mechanisms, the researcher must engage in challenge the current operations of social, economic and cultural hegemony within which it operates at the present time (Faubion 1994: 133). This can be attempted through exploring how we can adequately reposition "harm" and its role within such research.

At the micro level, a reorientation of harm is hampered by poor provision for training and support, with researchers having little protection from both the emotional stresses of research and little training for operating in hazardous environments. There exists a wealth of knowledge that is not being adequately utilised in academia, with skills being "rarely shared and discussed" and practical findings which "fail to be disseminated" (Lee 1995: 71). By creating greater opportunities for disseminating skillsets, as well as offering wider support networks for the researcher, scholars are better prepared and more likely to avoid difficulties in problematic regions. Initial guidance can come from the sharing of interdisciplinary methodologies, such as those used by contemporary anthropologists, archaeologists and geographers who often, in contrast to the orthodox terrorism scholar, "carry out fieldwork in areas that may be quite remote" (Lee 1995: 11). Researchers in such fields have carried out far more difficult research and an interdisciplinary approach will encourage researchers to view their subjects not as something likely to cause them harm but as "colleagues rather than subjects", as complex, "humanised" actors. This will support collaboration between fields, creating tangible benefits for researchers and strengthening challenges the (Barrett and Cason 1997: 123).

Further interdisciplinary approaches will support emancipation on the meso level. As Jones and Bhui declare, "a new ethics of research into terrorism is needed", one which offers a more open approach amongst researchers and encourages greater flexibility of the ethics process towards the subject matter (Jones and Bhui 2009: 54). The supporting of new procedures which depart from strict adherence to the PPM model of biomedical sciences to ones which offer greater awareness of the ebb and flow of power within social science field research is critical. By reconceptualising "harm" away from viewing the researcher solely as "a potential threat to the participant of his research", academic ethics boards will be able to assess projects from a viewpoint whereby the power relationship between researcher and subject is understood as open to continual contestation and change (Sleat 2013: 16). The challenge of the PPM model will not force a lapse into the removal of sound ethics regulation, as

Bauman suggests; rather, it offers the chance to diversify the nature of harm as more sensitive to the political scientist and challenge the current inherent structural disadvantage in managing power (Bauman 1993). There seems, at least anecdotally, a push for challenging the PPM forming amongst colleagues across Europe, who wish to emanate the more successful elements of Anglophone academic ethical processes whilst dispensing with those that stifle legitimate social science research in difficult areas.

On the macro level, social science needs to create a sustained challenge to current discourse. Through an active use of critical concepts, the researcher must join the critique of governmental and societal norms of “terrorism” and security, working to expose power relations that sit behind their development. The researcher is thus encouraged to cultivate a necessary iconoclasm to achieve this. Recast away from what Schmid and Jognman term a “firefighter” of political violence, in favour of a “student of combustion”, academics can remove statist norms for more egalitarian approaches (Silke 2004: 58). Meanwhile, a society increasingly challenged on its securitisation will be more likely to re-cast the researcher beyond the binary malign/benign categorisations. We must work against a system that encourages the idea that “an interest in terrorist material may be a marker for support and possible engagement in violent acts” and that researchers “should be treated as suspects” (Jones and Bhui 2009). Rather, to chase away the chimera of terrorism, researchers could use their platforms critically and actively “to engender crises of confidence in a society’s ideological and institutional framework” (Sementelli and Abel 2000: 459). In this, we must be encouraged to blur the division between academic and activist, to tackle the imposing security structures we face.

In reorienting the discourse of harm which the researcher faces when conducting research, the social scientist can partly create an actor-based response to securitising power structures. First order critiques of practice and practitioners challenge the contemporary research field which perpetuates power imbalances by mapping the relief of constraints and coercion, planning the beginning of a voyage to firmer methodological ground.

Limitations

There are limitations in such critical approaches to terrorism research. Firstly, by relying on an emancipatory set of critical theories we run the risk of creating a “confirmation bias” (Balzacq 2011). Such discursive emancipation, by developing “the possibility of resistance and alternative worlds”, tend to privilege speculation over empirical challenge (Grovgui and Leonard 2008: 170); by working to develop new processes free from current power paradigms, the researcher drifts into idealism and away from sincere rigour. In this case, such an approach becomes an exercise in post hoc storytelling that acts more as a methodological gloss than a solid theoretical foundation, the research “never actually tests the theory, as researchers simply find what they’re looking for” (Nyman 2013: 61). The approach simply swaps one hegemonic vision with a counter-hegemonic one, leaving academic enquiry, as Balzacq states, just as incomplete (Pasha 2008: 165).

The vision of the counter-hegemonic narrative can blind the researcher to the limitations of this approach; the “rainbow of resistance” to power structures in themselves offer “no real promise of transcendence and transformation” but rather a competing vision that can privilege the creation of new, repressive structures (Pasha 2008: 163). Critical scholars can miss the agency of other scholars whilst highlighting the many actors who benefit from counterterrorism, and there is limited appreciation that those who act to create a counter-narrative may be incentivised or seek aims that are less lofty than societal emancipation (Jackson, Smyth, and Gunning 2009: 44). As such, those who follow the critical approach of emancipation sometimes fail by their own standards in accepting that “theory is always for someone and for some purpose” (Cox 1981: 128), ignoring the duality of both the “potential and *limits* of resistance” to current power structures (Ayers 2008: 14).

Understanding the limits and diversity of state-centred power is a serious problem in critical terrorism approaches yet to be properly addressed. Whilst we should be aware of the huge scope of the power the state is co-opting and centralising under the auspices of counterterrorism, there will always exist limitations in the amount of power that can be accrued, just as there will be actors who are able to push back against the state from a lower position of privilege. Without accounting for activist response within securitisation theories, we risk creating a self-fulfilling process. Similar to al-'Azm's criticism of Said's *Orientalism*, (al-'Azm 1980), we create a system in which the only means of breaking the processes of repression comes from the oppressor itself, and the agency for change is removed from the subaltern.¹³

Critical theory approaches have also been accused of relying too much on European experiences of political contestation (Jones 2008) p.210. This is particularly problematic considering much emancipatory approaches are designed to lend “a voice to the voiceless” (Toros and Gunning 2009: 105). Seeing, in this case, that the majority of action by designated “terrorist” groups are built around challenging the contemporary paradigm of the Western-centric post-Westphalian international and economic system, critical theory, with its reliance on Western political traditions, risks inadvertently side-lining alternative traditions and perpetuating hegemonic paradigms.

The overtly structuralist and rigid limitations of securitisation theories also risk simplifying authorities as operating in a monolithic manner or depriving activists of the means of changing or re-appropriating certain security practices. As such, critical theorists imperil the dialectic that takes place between paradigmatic actors. Hegemony, henceforth, becomes largely conceptualised as a “one-direction power relationship... fashioned by the elite transnational class on its own terms and then forced or imposed on subaltern classes” (Germain and Kenny 1998: 17). These dominated groups are, in turn, given two options: either to resist assaults as best they can or capitulate in full and accept the status quo. Such an application of critical theory and the concept of hegemony misses the Gramscian act of contestation. By focussing solely on the power dynamics as a “top down”

¹³ “If reciprocity between subject and object is impossible then, by the same token, the object cannot challenge the subject by developing alternative models...” (Richardson 2000: 213)

phenomenon, what is missed is that, just as the structure bends the wills and actions of the individual, so “structures are transformed by agency” (Gill 1993: 23).

Conclusions

Where does the researcher stand, in this process of contestation between state counterterrorism and critical studies? Are we beached upon the sands of this dialectic, destined to continue to engage as both accomplice and hostage of this securitisation “terrorism studies”, contrary to our best efforts? Whilst critical efforts at countering the inequalities of counterterrorism are floundering, we should remember that such theories are tricky in their application. One of the strengths of critical theories are their diverse methodological facets and this is, in some senses, also a weakness, risking them becoming diluted, inconsistent or methodologically unworkable (Germain and Kenny 1998: 8). Furthermore, by working with concepts such as hegemony and power outside of their originally conceived environments, we risk totalising them in instances that misunderstand the role of resistance (Germain and Kenny 1998: 18). Terms such as hegemony become “reduced to a simple model of cultural control”, ossifying power structures that are rather “critically renewed, recreated and challenged, and in certain respects, modified” (Steans and Tepe 2008: 142). This runs counter to the aims of discursive analyses of historicising and contextualising paradigmatic norms.

Furthermore, utilising critical securitisation theory to understand such structural dynamics, in this context, reduces everything to a struggle over security, with the state-centric securitisation mechanisms cast as the key barriers to emancipation; desecuritisation, the enabler to achieving it. However, amongst key Copenhagen School scholars, securitisation sits within the context of “no clear normative agenda”; Copenhagen scholars “suggesting that desecuritisation is often preferable, never rules out securitisation as an option but rather suggests it is sometimes necessary” (Nyman 2013: 60). Critical terrorism scholars remove this potentially positive conceptualisation that security can have for change and, as such, limit the possibilities for researchers to use security or the state as a basis for positive change (Nyman 2013). For instance, whilst primary data offers a possibility to “expose the gaps in understanding, and the cultural and political biases and misinterpretations in government, intelligence and media accounts” (Smyth 2009: 196), it fails to adequately account for the variation in standard and interpretation of primary research, ignoring the practical limitations that will continue to face the researcher in the field and the inability of them to escape the liberal-counterterror state.

All is not lost. The battle standard for challenging the role of security in academia has been raised by critical scholars and, whilst it seems that the message from the ivory towers of critical theories has not succeeded in their emancipatory aim, unable to dislodge the discursive sway of the long “War on Terror”, they have continued to nurture a critical flame which now sits quietly burning at the heart of much of contemporary mainstream research on “terrorism”. Current critical and discursive theories offer only a limited framework to emancipate the researcher at present. Key shortcomings risk producing confirmation bias, problematic conceptualisations, dehistorical notions of power and limited means of matching theory with action in a workable practice. As such,

the tackling of the problems of current critical approaches is vital and its development will be achieved through the drawing together of praxis and experiences from across spheres of knowledge and of new ethical practices that release the researcher from their current constraints, particularly around notions of “harm”.

What this chapter does, therefore, is illuminate what is lacking. Critical terrorism studies are shown to be limited in their current guise, but they have driven the discussion in a new direction and a new generation of scholars will continue to challenge the securitised legacy of the long “War on Terror” in new ways. Yet, what has been shown is that underneath the blank spaces and snarling metaphorical dragons on the map lies something far less intimidating than the uncompromising and colourful depictions of “terrorism” and “terrorists”. Critical terrorism approaches show there is more to be gained by filling in these spaces by venturing to engage with violent actors on a more human and genuinely interactive level, something which offers far more complex and interesting findings. Critical terrorism approaches are not enough in themselves to enable the researcher to achieve this, but they have changed the map for contemporary researchers and illuminated the routes that we now must traverse.

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