The Study of Terrorism 10 Years After 9/11: Successes, Issues, Challenges

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The Study of Terrorism 10 Years After 9/11: Successes, Issues, Challenges

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ABSTRACT

This article surveys the field of terrorism studies since 9/11 and attempts to assess some of its main successes, perennial issues and future challenges. It suggests that terrorism studies has grown and matured in the decade since the attacks, in part through its rising popularity and institutionalization in new university teaching programs, a growing number of think tanks and research institutes, and scholarly activity in new networks and journals. While some of its successes include new dedicated scholars and researchers, improving standards of scholarship, and diversification of research and methodological approaches (including the rise of critical terrorism studies), a number of perennial issues continue to haunt the field. These include, among others: tendencies towards decontextualisation, de-historicisation and knowledge subjugation within the field; skewed research priorities; normative-political issues surrounding policy engagement and problem-solving; the lack of reflexivity and engagement with critical terrorism studies and other critical movements; and the low entry barriers to terrorism expertise and the rise of pseudo-experts. The article concludes with a discussion of some of the main challenges facing the field, such as avoiding a bifurcation into critical and orthodox intellectual ghettos, bridging the trans-Atlantic divide between scholars, negotiating the complex legal environment posed by domestic counter-terrorism legislation, developing standards and safeguards for primary research and integrating the relevant knowledge of cognate fields such as peace studies into the research and teaching of terrorism studies. Overall, the article concludes that it is an opportune time to be involved in terrorism studies and there reasons for being cautiously optimistic about the next decade of terrorism research.

Keywords: Terrorism Studies, 9/11, War on Terror, Counter-terrorism, Problem-solving, Critical Terrorism Studies

11 Eylül'den 10 Yıl Sonra Terörizm Çalışmaları: Başarılar, Konular ve Sorunlar

ÖZET

Bu makale 11 Eylül sonrası dönem terör çalışmalarını kat edilen gelişme, öne çıkan konu başlıkları ve gelecekte karşılaşılabilecek sorunlar merkezinde incelemektedir. Makalede terör çalışmalarının 11 Eylül sonrasındaki on yıllık dönemde gelişerek olguluğa ulaştığı iddia edilmektedir. Bunda konunun üniveritelerde kurulan yeni eğitim programalarında, düşünce kuruluşlarında ve araştırma merkezlerinde akademik bir faaliyet alanı olarak görülerek popülerleştirlmesinin etken olduğu belirtilmelidir. Çalışmalar, konuya kenidisini adayan araştırmacılar sayesinde metodoloji ve konu çeşitliliği anlamında zenginleştiyse de çok sayıda sorun varlığını devam ettirmektedir. Makale alanda karşılaşılan çeşitli sorunların değerlendirmesiyle sonuçlanmaktadır. Kısacası çalışma, terör çalışmaları açısından günümüzün fırsatları barındıran bir zaman dilimi olduğu ve terörizm araştırmalarının gelecek on yılından da umutlu olunması gerektiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Keywords: Terörizm Çalışmaları, 11 Eylül, Teörle Savaş, Terörizmle Mücadele, Sorun çözümü, Eleştirel Terörizm Çalışmalarıı

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Introduction

It is by now something of a cliché to note that terrorism studies today is not only a very large field of research, but that in the ten years following 9/11, more works on terrorism have been published than in all the years prior to the terrorist attacks. A study from 2006 for example, found that 14,006 articles about terrorism had been published between 1971 and 2002, with 54% of the articles published in 2001 and 2002.[1] Another study found that 2,281 non-fiction books with the term terrorism in the title had been published between September 2001 and June 2008; in comparison, only 1,310 such books had been published in the entire period prior to 2001.[2] Fueling this veritable explosion of terrorism literature is a vast network of both new and old terrorism research centers, think tanks, postgraduate and doctoral programs in universities, private and government-funded research programs, terrorism research consortiums and associations, regular seminars and conferences, new data bases, and a great many other scholarly activities.

While it is clearly not possible to provide a comprehensive or systematic analysis of such a large and diverse set of literature and activities, there are two broad perspectives which can, in combination, allow for some tentative observations to be made about the state of the field – its successes, weaknesses and future challenges – ten years after 9/11. In the first place, there is a growing literature, including analyses from a sociological perspective as well as reflective reviews by scholars within the field, which has attempted to give an overview and assessment of the broad evolution, practices, failures and achievements of the field.[3] This literature provides a number of important insights into the broad trends and tendencies within the field. Second, the use of a broadly auto-ethnographic approach in which the author reflects on his personal involvement in the development of critical terrorism studies since 2006 can also provide useful insights[4]. Auto-ethnography assumes that knowledge is inherently relational, and argues that "if examinations of an author's personal experience can provide explanations of political features or behavior that would not have been possible through other, more conventional accounts, then they have made a contribution to knowledge".[5]

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[1] Cynthia Lum, Leslie Kennedy and Alison Sherley, "Are Counter-terrorism Strategies Effective? The Results of the Campbell Systematic Review on Counter-terrorism Evaluation Research", *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, Vol.2, 2006, p.491-92.

[2] Silke, Andrew, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies: Issues in Research", Richard Jackson, Jeroen Gunning and Marie Breen Smyth (Eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009, p.34.

[3] See, among others Lisa Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror: How Experts and Others Invented Terrorism*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, forthcoming 2012; Magnus Ranstorp (Ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research: State of the Art, Gaps and Future Direction*, London, Routledge, 2006; Andrew Silke (Ed.), *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements and Failures*, London, Frank Cass, 2004.

[4] See for example, Richard Jackson, "On how to be a Collective Intellectual – CTS and the Countering of Hegemonic Discourse", at *Capturing Security Expertise: Concepts, Typologies, Practices, Power*, 1st Copenhagen International Forum on Security Expertise, organized by the Centre for Advanced Security Theory (CAST), 16-17 June 2011, University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

[5] Roland Bleiker and Morgan Brigg, "Autoethnographic International Relations", *Review of International Studies*, Vol.36, No.3, 2010, p.792; see also Elizabeth Dauphinee, "The Ethics of Auto-ethnography", *Review of International Studies*, Vol.36, No.3, 2010, p.799-818.

This article draws broadly upon these two perspectives in a necessarily brief reflection on the field of terrorism studies since 9/11, and attempts to assess some of its main successes, perennial issues and future challenges. Critical reflection and taking intellectual stock in this way is a crucial part of moving any field of research forward, but especially one as young and rapidly expanding as terrorism studies. The necessarily tentative assessment which follows concludes that while there have been a number of positive and encouraging developments in the field in recent years, a number of critical challenges and perennial weaknesses remain. Nonetheless, on balance, it can be argued that it is an opportune time to be involved in the field and there are reasons for being cautiously optimistic about the next decade of terrorism research.

Terrorism Studies before and after 9/11

As Lisa Stampnitsky has ably demonstrated[6], the field of terrorism studies emerged out of counter-insurgency studies in the early 1970s[7], during which time deliberate efforts by its leading scholars succeeded in establishing "terrorism" as its own separate, bounded research field. It consolidated itself in the following two decades as a small but not unimportant field on the fringes of security studies and international relations. The new terrorism field had its own core journals (*Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* and *Terrorism and Political Violence*), a small number of dedicated research centers and think tanks (the two most important being the Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St Andrews, and the RAND Corporation), a small group of between 30 and 100 recognized "experts"[8], regular scholarly meetings, and a small but steadily increasing body of core publications that were widely cited by scholars within the field. Some studies have suggested that the core terrorism studies scholars at this time functioned in a sociological sense as a tight-knit "epistemic community" or "invisible college".[9] Others argue that it was during this period that a "terrorism industry" emerged[10] in which networks of scholars, state officials, counterterrorism practitioners, journalists and media-based "terror experts" developed a number of material and political interests related to terrorism and counter-terrorism.

Notwithstanding the Reagan administration's first "war on terrorism" in the 1980s and the rise of so-called "new terrorism" in the 1990s, it is reasonable to conclude that without the events of 9/11, terrorism studies would most likely have remained a relatively small and marginal, although not unimportant, field of study within academia.

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[6] Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror.*

[7]   See also Jonny Burnett and Dave Whyte, "Embedded Expertise and the New Terrorism", *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media*, Vol.1, No.4, 2005, p.1–18.

[8] Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.34; Sam Raphael, "In the Service of Power: Terrorism Studies and US Intervention in the Global South", Jackson *et.al.* (Eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies*, 2009, p.51-52.

[9]   Raphael, "In the Service of Power", p.49; Magnus Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11: An Academic Field of Old Problems and New Prospects", Jackson *et.al.* (Eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies*, p.20; Edna Reid and H.Chen, "Mapping the Contemporary Research Domain", *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, Vol.65, 2007, p.42-56.

[10]   See E. Herman and G.O'Sullivan, *The 'Terrorism' Industry: The Experts and Institutions that Shape our View of Terror*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1989.

The terrorist attacks were the impetus to a period of unprecedented growth in the field leading to what some have called "a golden age" of terrorism studies.[11] In terms of publications, the social science index recorded more than 100 articles on terrorism in 2001, a figure which almost trebled the following year and which has continued to rise every year after that, until by 2007, more than 2,300 citations were recorded.[12] Accompanying this explosion of publications, a number of new terrorism-related scholarly and online journals have been established in the years since 2001, including, among others: *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *Journal of Counterterrorism and Homeland Security International*, and *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*.

In addition, courses and modules on terrorism have been instituted and taught at virtually every major university in the world, and terrorism studies degree programs have been established at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in an increasing number of universities.[13] Although still not institutionalized in the academy in terms of autonomous departments, there are also growing numbers of students undertaking doctoral research on terrorism-related subjects.[14] The growth in terrorism-related teaching has generated an increasing number of publications devoted specifically to the unique challenges of teaching terrorism[15] and terrorism-related subjects, and growing numbers of student textbooks on terrorism.[16]

Other indications of the massive growth, increasing institutionalization and growing influence of terrorism studies since 9/11 includes: a growing number of think tanks and research institutions around the world[17], such as, among many others, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC), the International Center for Political Violence and Terrorism Research (ICPVTR), and the International Centre for the Study

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[11] Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11", p.17.

[12] Ibid, p.17.

[13] The American Political Science Association website provides links to more than 30 university course syllabi on terrorism and political violence. See: http://www.apsanet.org/imgtest/APSA_syllabi.pdf. Avishag Gordon recounts how the University of California at Los Angeles introduced 50 new courses on terrorism soon after 9/11. Avishag Gordon, "Can Terrorism Become a Scientific Discipline? A Diagnostic Study", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.3, No.3, 2010, p.437-58.

[14] Combining a recent listing and my personal knowledge, more than 120 doctoral theses on terrorism-related subjects have been written or were in progress between 2001 and 2010. See Eric Price, "Dissertations and Theses on (Counter-) Terrorism and Political Violence (1980-2010)", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.3, 2010, p.58-63.

[15] See, among others: Gregory Miller, "Teaching about Terrorism: Lessons learned at SWOTT", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol.42, No.4, 2009, p.773-79; David Miller and Tom Mills, "Special Section: Introduction: Teaching and Research Terrorism: Pressures and Practice", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.3, p.389-392.

[16] See, among others: James Lutz and Brenda Lutz, *Terrorism: Origins and Evolution*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2005; Gus Martin, *Understanding Terrorism: Challenges, Perspectives and Issues*, 2nd edition, Sage, 2006; Richard Jackson *et.al.*, *Terrorism: A Critical Introduction*, Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011.

[17] A recent compilation lists 100 institutes, programs and organizations focused on terrorism. See Benjamin Freedman, "Terrorism Research Centres: 100 Institutes, Programs and Organisations in the Field of Terrorism, Counter-Terrorism, Radicalisation and Asymmetric Warfare Studies", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.5, p.48-56.

of Radicalisation (ICSR); new networks and associations of terrorism scholars, such as the Terrorism Research Initiative (TRI), the Society for Terrorism Research (STR), and the BISA Critical Studies on Terrorism Working Group (CSTWG); massive investment in terrorism research by state[18] and private funders; a growing number of highly visible terrorism experts who appear regularly in the media and criminal trials of terrorist suspects[19]; and the increasingly visible role of terrorism experts in public policy advice. Interestingly, the rise of the terrorism studies field since 9/11 has been accompanied by a massi ve growth in cultural products which have terrorism as a focus, such as Hollywood films[20], but also documentaries, popular novels and literature, television dramas, journalism, music, comedy and websites.

It is unquestionable that the growth and increasing institutionalization of terrorism studies over this period has had a number of positive outcomes and benefits for the field. In the first place, as Magnus Ranstorp puts it, the "veritable avalanche of studies has usefully energized the terrorism studies field with new intellectual talents offering fresh analytical angles and contextual and cultural depth".[21] In addition, it has generated a new generation of dedicated scholars and researchers, many of whom have graduated from studying the canon of terrorism studies from the undergraduate through to the doctoral level. These scholars have gone on to have successful academic careers in terrorism studies, publishing multiple studies that build upon earlier research. This is a major improvement from the pre-9/11 period when there were few dedicated terrorism scholars[22] and promising students were actively discouraged from pursuing a career in such a marginal field.

The growth of dedicated terrorism scholars, combined with increased funding opportunities for terrorism research, has also improved the level of collaborative[23] and empirically-based research which attempts to test theories and propositions, rather than simply recycle accepted claims in a circular manner.[24] Whereas a great deal of the terrorism literature before 9/11 was by one time authors, based on secondary research and consisting of review-type articles[25], increasing numbers of post-9/11 terrorism

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[18] For example, US Federal funding for research to improve understanding and prediction of terrorism for FY2003 was increased to $3 billion. Reid and Chen, "Mapping the Contemporary Research Domain", p.42.

[19] David Miller and Tom Mills, "The Terror Experts and the Mainstream Media: The Expert Nexus and its Dominance in the News Media", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.2, No.3, 2009, p.414-37.

[20] Thomas Riegler, "Through the Lenses of Hollywood: Depictions of Terrorism in American Movies", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.2, 2010, p.35-45; available online at: http://www.terrorismanalysts.com/pt/index.php?option=com_rokzine&view=article&id=112&Itemid=54.

[21] Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11", p.22.

[22] Andrew Silke suggests that there were probably only about 100 scholars across the world researching and writing regularly on terrorism in the 1990s. See Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.34.

[23] Andrew Silke's research shows that before 9/11, only 9.4 percent of terrorism research was collaborative. This has increased to more than 25 percent in the post-9/11 period. Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.39.

[24] See Edna Reid, "Evolution of a Body of Knowledge: An Analysis of Terrorism Research", *Information Processing and Management*, Vol.33, No.1, 1997, p.91-106.

[25] See Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.38-39; Lum *et.al.*, "Are Counter-terrorism Strategies Effective", p.491-92.

scholars are publishing evidence-based studies[26], including studies based on field research and primary source interviews.[27] In effect, the previously noted "taboo" on "talking to terrorists"[28] appears to be a little less common in terrorism research since 9/11. Its decline is a welcome development, which can only improve the overall quality of research and knowledge.

The rapid growth in terrorism studies after 9/11 has also resulted in a welcome diversification in the field in both disciplinary and epistemological terms.[29] Once arguably dominated by political science and international relations, the field is now far more genuinely multi-disciplinary, with important research being contributed by, among others, historians[30], psychologists[31], anthropologists[32], economists[33], philosophers[34], and many others. Perhaps more importantly, and partly as a result of increasing multi-disciplinarity, the field has also witnessed a growing epistemological pluralization since 9/11. In addition to existing positivist approaches within terrorism studies, there are increasing numbers of studies, which take reflectivist, post-positivist[35], and historical-materialist[36] approaches.

There is little doubt that this development has been encouraged in part by the growth of critical terrorism studies (CTS) and its commitment to encouraging epistemological and methodological diversity[37], resulting in growing debates within certain sections of the field on ontological, epistemological and praxiological issues.[38] These kinds

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[26] See, for example: Robert Pape, *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*, Random House, New York, 2005; James Piazza, "Rooted in Poverty?: Terrorism, Poor Economic Development, and Social Cleavages", *Terrorism and Political Violence*, Vol.18, No.1, 2006, p.159-177; Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terror Networks*, Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.

[27] Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, New York, NY, Columbia University Press, 2005; John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism*, London, Frank Cass, 2005.

[28] Joseba Zulaika and William Douglass, *Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism*, London, Routledge, 1996.

[29] For an argument that the proliferation of voices may be impeding disciplinary consolidation in terrorism, see Gordon, "Can Terrorism Become a Scientific Discipline?", p.453.

[30] Richard English, *Terrorism: How to Respond*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

[31] Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism.*

[32] Joseba Zulaika, *Terrorism: The Self-Fulfilling Prophesy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009.

[33] A. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist: Economics and the Roots of Terrorism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007.

[34] Robert Goodin, *What's Wrong with Terrorism?*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2006.

[35] See Alexander Spencer, *The Tabloid Terrorist: The Predicative Construction of New Terrorism in the Media*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

[36] See Ruth Blakeley, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism: The North in the South*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2009.

[37] Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth and Jeroen Gunning, "Critical Terrorism Studies: Framing a New Research Agenda", Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smyth and Jeroen Gunning (Eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, London, Routledge, 2009, p.216-236.

[38] See, for example: Richard Jackson, "In Defence of 'Terrorism': Finding a Way through a Forest of Misconceptions", *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, Vol.3, No.2, 2011, p.116-130; Charlotte Heath-Kelly, "Critical Terrorism Studies, Critical theory and the "Naturalistic Fallacy'", *Security Dialogue*, Vol.41, No.3, 2010, p.235-54; Douglas Porpora, "Critical Terrorism Studies: A Political Economic Approach Grounded in Critical Realism", *Critical*

of debates on the nature and purposes of social theory have long been present in IR and other social science disciplines, but had until recently, largely passed terrorism studies by. Again, partly as a consequence of this epistemological pluralization, the post-9/11 terrorism studies field now includes a number of important debates[39] on issues which were rarely discussed within the field before 9/11, including: questions of gender and terrorism; the nature and causes of state terrorism; and the validity and utility of categories like "new terrorism"[40] and "religious terrorism".[41] The presence and increasing prominence of these kinds of debates are indications of the growing maturity of the field.

Finally, I would argue that the increasing number of publications (including this one) which attempt to assess and reflect upon the direction, priorities and achievements of the field to date[42] is evidence of a growing acceptance of the need for continuous reflexivity among terrorism scholars. This self-consciousness and recognition of the need for regular and critical self-reflection is also an indication of the intellectual maturing of the field.[43] It bodes well for its future development, as new scholars can be forewarned about the dangers and pitfalls of terrorism research, and consequently try to work around the problems and weaknesses which have been identified.

Continuing Failures and Issues

In spite of the positive developments, which have taken place after 9/11, there remain a number of perennial problems and issues, which still need to be addressed in order to strengthen and improve the broader field.[44] In the first place, although some terrorism scholars have argued that it is not as serious a problem as is sometimes asserted[45], I would argue that questions surrounding the definition of terrorism[46] continue to pose a serious problem for the field. At the very least, the lack of an accepted definition used by most

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Studies on Terrorism, Vol.4, No.1, 2011, p.39-55; Jonathan Joseph, "Critical of What? Terrorism and its Study", *International Relations*, Vol.23, No.1, 2009, p.93-98; Rainer Hulsse and Alexander Spencer, "The Metaphor of Terror: Terrorism Studies and the Constructivist Turn", *Security Dialogue*, Vol.39, No.6, 2008, p.571-92.

[39] Many of the important debates in the field, some of which have become prominent in the post-9/11 period, can be viewed in Richard Jackson and Samuel Justin Sinclair (Eds.), *Contemporary Debates on Terrorism*, Abingdon, Routledge, 2012.

[40] Martha Crenshaw, "The Debate over 'New' vs. 'Old' Terrorism", I. Karawan, W.McCormack and S.Reynolds (Eds.), *Values and Violence: Intangible Aspects of Terrorism, Studies in Global Justice Vol. 4*, Dordrecht, The Netherlands, Springer, 2009, p.117-136.

[41] Jeroen Gunning and Richard Jackson, "What's so Religious about 'Religious Terrorism'?", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.3, 2011, p.369-388.

[42] See Ranstorp, *Mapping Terrorism Research*; Silke, *Research on Terrorism*; Jackson *et.al. Critical Terrorism Studies*.

[43] As Avishag Gordon puts it, an "encouraging fact about the future of terrorism as a research field is the growing attention being paid to its disciplinary difficulties". Gordon, "Can Terrorism Become a Scientific Discipline?", p.454.

[44] For an overview of the main problems facing the field, see Jackson *et.al.*, "Critical Terrorism Studies".

[45] See John Horgan and Michael Boyle, "A Case Against 'Critical Terrorism Studies'", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.1, No.1, 2008, p.51-64; Joseph Young and Michael Findlay, "Promise and Pitfalls of Terrorism Research", *International Studies Review*, Vol.13, No.3, 411-31.

[46] Jackson, "In Defence of 'Terrorism'".

researchers has troubling implications for the collection of comparable data[47], which in turn has implications for systematic empirical research and generalizations about terrorism.[48]

A critical question related to this fundamental issue is the debate over whether to include the study of state terrorism in the field.[49] While the majority of terrorism scholars do not include state terrorism in their research as a matter of course, others argue that important insights and knowledge is lost by refusing to study the originator and single biggest employer of the terrorism strategy.[50] On the other hand, some have argued that when commonly used definitions are examined, there does in fact, appear to be a broad consensus on how to define terrorism; the problem is that the definition is applied inconsistently and in a politically-motivated way by scholars to exclude certain groups or categories of actors like states.[51] Both arguments – that there is no common definition and that there is an unacknowledged consensus, which is inconsistently applied –have a degree of truth to them, and both clearly pose an ongoing problem for the field.

A second related problem is the prevailing tendency towards the de-contextualisation and de-historicisation of terrorism. For the most part, and notwithstanding the above-noted definitional problems, in data sets and research projects, terrorism tends to be extracted out from other forms of political violence and non-violent struggle and examined in isolation from the broader context in which it occurs. This broader de-contextualisation of terrorism is reflected in the ongoing neglect of research on historic terrorist campaigns. As Silke concludes, "Before 9/11, only one article in twenty-six looked at historical conflicts. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, interest in historical cases effectively collapsed and not even one article in fifty was focused away from current events".[52] Clearly, understanding any social phenomenon –whether it be forms of democracy and voting patterns, immigration, the functioning of the European Union, or indeed terrorism– requires deep historical and contextual knowledge. Trying to understand terrorism without detailed knowledge of the history and context in which it emerges, or the way in which terrorism as a strategy has evolved and developed over

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[47] For example, Michael Stohl argues that there has frequently been a failure to "distinguish terrorism from other forms of political violence in the actual data sets that have been compiled", in large part because once a group has been described as terrorist, all its actions are assumed ipso facto to be terrorism. Michael Stohl, "Knowledge Claims and the Study of Terrorism", Jeffrey Victoroff (Ed.), *Tangled Roots: Social and Psychological Factors in the Genesis of Terrorism*, IOS Press, 2006, p.29-30.

[48] Jeffrey Ross notes that the lack of definitional consensus means that "The various data sets are different (i.e., have different selection criteria, alternative formats, etc.), thus making comparison between data sets difficult". Jeffrey Ross, "Taking Stock of Research Methods and Analysis on Oppositional Political Terrorism", *The American Sociologist*, Summer 2004, p.26-37. See also Joshua Sinai, "New Trends in Terrorism Studies: Strengths and Weaknesses", Magnus Ranstorp (Ed.), *Mapping Terrorism Research*, London, Routledge, p.31-50.

[49] See Ruth Blakeley, "Bringing the State Back into Terrorism Studies", *European Political Science*, Vol.6, No.3, 2007, p.228-253; Colin Wight, "Theorising Terrorism: The State, Structure and History", *International Relations*, Vol.23, No.1, 2009, p.99-106.

[50] See Jackson, "In Defence of 'Terrorism'".

[51] See Raphael, "In the Service of Power".

[52] Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.46.

previous centuries, can only result in surface-level forms of knowledge and highly dubious and ideological distortions (such as the notion of "new terrorism").

In part, this problem is related to the way terrorism is treated in Western society as a very immediate and highly unpredictable phenomenon. Certainly, the media tends to report terrorism in a highly de-contextualized manner, and politicians similarly tend to respond to it in a knee-jerk fashion.[53] Terrorism studies scholars have often followed a similar pattern: the sudden and massive explosion in research on al Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks[54] is illustrative of this tendency.

In part, this problem is also related to the way the early terrorism scholars attempted to construct terrorism as a separate and unique category of political violence, which required its own specialized approaches and dedicated scholars.[55] In this context, the exclusion of other approaches and cognate fields could be viewed as part of the process of attempting to maintain the boundaries of a core terrorism studies field, which is separate from other disciplines. As noted above, however, I believe that the pluralization and growing multi-disciplinarity of the field is making it more and more difficult to maintain the previous essential core to the field.

In any case, an unfortunate result of the essentializing and de-contextualizing of terrorism has been analytical and normative distortion in the sense of viewing terrorism as fundamentally and irrevocably different and more morally evil than other forms of political violence such as war and counter-terrorism. Importantly, it has resulted in a failure to absorb and build upon the research findings of cognate fields, which also study political violence, such as war and civil war research, genocide studies, and most obviously, peace and conflict studies. I have recently argued that it is something of a puzzle why conflict studies and terrorism studies have developed largely separate from each other, especially given that they study the same thing, namely, violent political conflict.[56] In addition to understanding how terrorism emerged as a separate field, looking at processes of "knowledge subjugation" can be a useful lens for understanding how relevant knowledge and approaches have been excluded from the field.[57]

Another ongoing problem in the field which is not unrelated to the first two problems is a skewed set of research priorities which results in an over-focus on certain issues and the perennial neglect of others. For example, there is a massive and ever-expanding literature on weapons of mass destruction terrorism, al Qaeda and Islamist terrorism, the tactic of suicide terrorism, so-called "new terrorism" and aspects of "religious terrorism", including the rapidly expanding "radicalization" literature.[58] At the same time,

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[53] See George Kassimeris (Ed.), *Playing Politics with Terrorism: A User's Guide*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2007.

[54] See Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.41-43.

[55] See Stampnitzky, *Disciplining Terror*.

[56] See Oliver Richmond, "Realizing Hegemony? Symbolic Terrorism and the Roots of Conflict", *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol.26, 2003, p.289-309; Jason Franks, "Re-thinking the Roots of Terrorism: Beyond Orthodox Terrorism Theory – A Critical Research Agenda", *Global Society*, Vol.23, No.2, 2009, p.153-76.

[57] Jackson, Richard, "Unknown Knowns: The Subjugated Knowledge of Terrorism Studies", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.5, No.1, 2012.

[58] See Silke, "Contemporary Terrorism Studies", p.41-45; Lum *et.al.*, "Are Counter-terrorism Strat-

subjects like the history of terrorism, state terrorism, terrorism in the Global South[59], the actual nature of the terrorist threat and most importantly, the empirical evaluation of counter-terrorism measures, remain under-researched. As already mentioned, the reasons for this distortion lies partly in the event-driven nature of terrorism (or more accurately, how 'terrorism' has been socially constructed as an unpredictable event), partly in the dominant narratives and myths which lie at the heart of the field[60], and partly in the current institutional structures of the field (see below).

The main point is that vast amounts of energy and resources are currently being invested in research questions of lesser or even dubious value, while far more pressing issues remain under-researched. The issue of the empirical evaluation of counter-terrorism policies is a particular case in point. As Lum *et.al.*'s study discovered, despite literally hundreds of billions of dollars spent on counter-terrorism measures over the past ten years, hundreds of thousands of deaths in counter-terrorism operations, a plethora of new laws and security measures, and a truly vast terrorism literature, there is an astounding lack of empirically-based research into the effectiveness of counter-terrorism measures. Only a tiny handful of studies have been conducted (Lum *et.al.*'s survey found seven rigorous empirical studies on counter-terrorism measures from 1975–2002), and these have discovered that many of the most commonly used counter-terrorism measures – offensive military operations, target hardening, and harsher laws, for example –"did not have a statistically discernible effect on reducing terrorism across time and, in some cases, led to increases in terrorism".[61] By itself, this shocking assessment raises extremely uncomfortable questions about the utility of current terrorism research for policy-makers, and its role in perpetuating the continued use of counter-productive or even harmful policies.

Another perennial question for terrorism studies lies in its obvious ideological bias, particularly its state-centrism. This can be seen most visibly in the way that the vast majority of terrorism studies scholars focus on groups which Western states and their allies currently oppose, and not on Western-supported terrorist groups, for example.[62] Unsurprisingly in terms of its origins in counter-insurgency studies, the number and prominence of former government officials and counter-terrorism practitioners within the ranks of "terrorism experts"[63], and the construction of terrorism as the most morally

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egies Effective?", p.492-93.

[59] It is illustrative of the field's myopia that a recent description of 50 un- and under-researched topics in terrorism fails to include topics related to the history of terrorism, state terrorism or terrorism in the Global South. See Alex Schmid, "50 Un- and Under-researched Topics in the Field of (Counter-) Terrorism Studies", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol.5, No.1, 2011, p.76-78.

[60] Richard Jackson, "Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Political Terrorism", Jackson *et.al.* (Eds.), *Critical Terrorism Studies*, p.66-83.

[61] Lum *et.al.*, "Are Counter-terrorism Strategies Effective?", p.508.

[62] See Raphael, "In the Service of Power". There are few prominent studies in the field on the Contras in Nicaragua, the Mujahaddin in Afghanistan, or UNITA in Angola, for example, which were all Western-supported groups that frequently employed terrorism; or on the fascist groups supported by the Italian state, the Protestant paramilitaries supported by the British government in Northern Ireland, or the Christian militias supported by the Israeli government in South Lebanon.

[63] See the examples described in Burnett and Whyte, "Embedded Expertise and the New Terrorism"; and Raphael, "In the Service of Power".

evil kind of political violence, it is nonetheless a problem that the field orients its research primarily towards the goal of state or national security. It is fair to say that the vast majority of terrorism research attempts to provide policy-makers with useful advice for controlling and eradicating terrorism as a threat to Western interests. As such, it takes a classic problem-solving perspective, which does not question whether the state itself might be implicated in causing or perpetuating the problem of terrorism and other forms of political violence. This can be a real problem when it distorts research priorities, co-opts the field and turns scholars into "an uncritical mouthpiece of state interests".[64] In other words, there is a real need for terrorism scholars to reflect on how they may be acting, perhaps unwittingly, as "organic intellectuals" in a hegemonic power structure. Certainly, there is a need for terrorism scholars to reflect more deeply on ethical-normative issues, such as whether their research ought to be oriented towards national security or towards human security[65], as the two are quite often not the same thing.

A related problem with the field today is the relative lack of debate and engagement with CTS and other critical approaches such as historical materialism, especially on the substantive ontological, epistemological and normative issues raised by these movements. Although there have been a few exceptions[66], for the most part, mainstream terrorism scholars have thus far refused to substantively engage with the serious and important questions and issues raised by critical scholars, most often characterizing such interventions instead as mere polemics. In part, this attitude is engendered by the need to protect the core interests and boundaries of the field, and by the roots of the field in positivist social science and a problem-solving approach. Nevertheless, it represents a missing opportunity to inject new perspectives, approaches and questions into the mainstream of the field, potentially leading to important new projects and insights.

Finally, as a number of reviews and studies have noted, terrorism studies has developed, and remains today, a field with very low entrance barriers: almost anyone can declare themselves to be a "terrorism expert", regardless of training or qualification, in ways that one cannot declare themselves to be a criminologist or a legal expert, for example.[67] This has resulted in high numbers of publications by one-off terrorism scholars who parachute in from other fields, publish a study on terrorism without spending the necessary years absorbing and building upon the existing terrorism research, and then return back to

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[64] Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11", p.25.

[65] See Jackson *et.al.*, "Critical Terrorism Studies".

[66] See James Lutz, "A Critical View of Critical Terrorism Studies", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.6, December, 2010, p.31-40; Richard English, "Review Article: The Future of Terrorism Studies", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.2, No.2, 2009, p.377-82; Horgan and Boyle, "A Case Against 'Critical Terrorism Studies'"; Leonard Weinberg and William Eubank, "Problems with the Critical Studies Approach to the Study of Terrorism", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.1, No.2, 2008, p.185-95.

[67] As Ranstorp puts it: "Unlike area studies or more professionally specialized social scientific disciplines where there is greater rigor in peer-review practices and professionalized barriers of entry, any retrained Soviet specialist or international relations generalist can in theory and practice become a specialized terrorism 'expert' overnight." Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11", p. 14.

their areas of specialism.[68] It has also resulted in the rise of "pseudo-academic" experts who are frequently prominent in the media or appear as government witnesses in terrorism trials, but who lack deep knowledge based on years of their own rigorous research.[69] This is slowly changing with greater institutionalization of teaching and research programs in universities, but the relationship between the academically trained "experts" and the often media-based "terror experts" remains tense and problematic, not least because the media pseudo-academic experts often perpetuate inaccurate and misleading notions of terrorism, and are often openly ideologically biased.

Conclusion: The Future of Terrorism Studies

Drawing upon auto-ethnographic observation in my own project of trying to promote critical terrorism studies since 2006, I would like to conclude the article with a discussion of some of the main challenges which I see facing the field over the next few years. An important future challenge will be to avoid bifurcation into critical and orthodox intellectual ghettos in which CTS scholars continue to meet in separate conferences, publish in their own journal and book series, and largely fail to engage with mainstream terrorism scholars – and vice-versa. In part, I view this challenge as resting largely on the shoulders of mainstream scholars who have with only a few exceptions failed to respond to calls for more sustained dialogue with critically-oriented scholars.[70] The danger is that the CTS scholars who are eager to enter into dialogue on crucial issues may eventually stop trying to engage with mainstream scholars and will instead direct their energies elsewhere. In part, this challenge is intimately related to the quite obvious trans-Atlantic divide in terrorism studies, which is in turn reflective of the different research cultures between Europe and North America, particularly in IR and security studies. In both cases, it is up to individual scholars on both sides to make genuine efforts to engage fruitfully with each other.

Another future challenge involves negotiating the complex legal environment posed by domestic counter-terrorism legislation, which can pose real dangers to scholars wishing to access primary sources.[71] It is unquestionable that the war on terror has had a chilling effect on certain kinds of terrorism research, most importantly primary research involving accessing terrorist materials or interviewing suspected terrorists and their supporters. Directly related to this, and cognizant of how counter-terrorist legislation can harm individuals suspected of involvement or support for terrorism, a challenge for the field involves the development of rigorous ethical standards and procedures for protecting both scholars and their sources[72], as other fields like anthropology do.

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[68] Silke's research found that 83 percent of articles in the core terrorism journals from 1990-1999 were by one-time authors. Andrew Silke, "The Devil you Know: Continuing Problems with Research on Terrorism", Silke, *Research on Terrorism*, p.57-71.

[69] See the notorious cases discussed in Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11", p.25-31; and Miller and Mills, "The Terror Experts and the Mainstream Media".

[70] Magnus Ranstorp agrees, arguing that it is "dependent on the willingness of 'traditional' terrorism researchers to examine the merits of, and to engage in a vigorous debate about, the core issues surrounding 'critical terrorism studies'". Ranstorp, "Mapping Terrorism Studies after 9/11", p.31.

[71] See Rod Thornton, "Counter-terrorism and the Neo-liberal University: Providing a Check and Balance?", *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, Vol.4, No.3, p.421-429.

[72] Marie Breen Smyth, "Subjectivities, 'Suspect Communities', Governments, and the Ethics of

Finally, there seems to me to be an urgent challenge to reintegrate –or to "de-subjugate"– relevant knowledge from cognate fields such as peace and conflict studies, and war studies, into the research and teaching of terrorism studies. It is a waste of effort and resources for terrorism scholars to continuously replicate studies on political violence that have already been undertaken in conflict studies, or to fail to build upon existing research into the resolution of political violence from peace studies, for example. In particular, the need to integrate peace and conflict studies and terrorism studies seems an obvious step, as they both study violent political conflict. It is encouraging that there is a small coterie of scholars, which is now attempting to do exactly this.[73]

In conclusion, despite the perennial problems and ongoing challenges facing the field, I believe that the present moment is an opportune time to be involved in terrorism studies, particularly for scholars and students willing to make a real effort to get to grips with both the cumulative knowledge gained so far, and the ongoing weaknesses of the field. In a real sense, the present growth of the field and the massive interest in the subject has created something of a critical juncture –an opportunity to shape the future direction and trajectory of the field. If scholars can take real note of these opportunities and make genuine efforts to avoid the well-noted pitfalls and correct some of the most obvious past mistakes, I believe that we can be cautiously optimistic that the next decade of terrorism studies will see a great many exciting new developments and genuine advances in knowledge. It may even be the case that in the next few years we will begin to see the emergence of professional associations, which can regulate standards, and stand-alone terrorism departments within university faculties.

Research on Terrorism", Jackson *et.al.*, *Critical Terrorism Studies*, p.194-215.

[73] See Richmond, "Realizing Hegemony?"; Franks, "Rethinking the Roots of Terrorism"; Harmonie Toros, *Terrorism, Talking and Transformation: A Critical Approach*, Basingstoke, Routledge, 2012.

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