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Experiencing the War on Terror:
Bringing experiential knowledge
into Critical Terrorism Studies

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Abstract

Critical Terrorism Studies has produced an important volume of work in assessing and critiquing epistemological understandings of the War on Terror. Largely missing from this body of work, however, is the experience of those who are directly impacted by the policies of this global conflict. By rethinking the War on Terror as an experience of war, I posit a wider understanding of this war, by reassessing its temporal and spatial boundaries. Further, I seek to understand war through the experiences of those impacted by it. By providing a wider understanding of war and expanding our knowledge of its boundaries, I am able to show that those impacted by the policies of the War on Terror, can claim to have been subject to an experience of war, even when that experience takes place outside of the war zone.

My work for the last fifteen years has predominantly been based in the field, meeting with those who have survived the impact of global counter-terrorism policies. It is based on the work I have produced out of their stories that this thesis provides an ontological reframing of how war is experienced. By relying on this work, I first show how epistemological constructions of the terrorism 'threat' can become a site of war itself. I then move on to extending our understanding of where the War on Terror might be experienced, beyond traditional notions of a warzone. Third, I present evidence that shifts our knowledge of the starting date of the War on Terror's response to the attacks of 11 September 2001. The point is further made that an individual may be unaware of the existence of a war until they are impacted by its far-reaching policies, even in a country that is not at war. My penultimate contribution in this thesis is to argue that the War on Terror represents a continuum in terms of its language, epistemology and ontology. Finally, I consider my own positionality to the subject of my fieldwork, as a Muslim who has worked for and on the cases of those who are Muslim, within an environment of suspicion.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this, or any other, University. All sources are acknowledged as References.

I declare that the published papers that provide the evidence base for this thesis are based on my own sole-authored published works. All of these published works have been referenced within my thesis.

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Introduction

The War on Terror is largely seen as starting with the response to the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States through the US intervention in Afghanistan (Bush, 2001 and Duffy, 2015: 393). Some of the hallmarks of this conflict include: the invasion of countries, such as Afghanistan and Iraq, the deployment of troops in the Horn of Africa, military and commercial flights involved in rendition, torture, arbitrary detention, sprawling surveillance legislation and a seemingly irreversible change of culture to the way in which we travel.

Critical scholarship, such as that of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) has tackled various aspects of the War on Terror, whether it is in its discourses (Jackson, 2015 and Gunning and Jackson, 2011), domestic counter-terrorism policy (Breen-Smyth, 2014), or prosecution through war (Nazir, 2010) – but these analyses have predominantly been focused on epistemological understandings rather than ontological ones. Perhaps due to, or even to counter this trend, since 2009 I have been invited to participate, present and write for the CTS community due to my fieldwork experience specifically. As recently as April 2018, I was invited by one convener, with the following emphasis: *“it'd be nice to have somebody with more experience in the field and to open up spaces for non-strictly academic views.”*

The contribution I have made so far has been to provide actual lived experiences of many of my clients and research subjects globally to the understanding of how war, counterinsurgency and counterterrorism policies impact on their lives directly. Through this research, I have been able to help provide a more complex understanding of what an experience of war within the War on Terror might look like.

Based on the body of work I have produced, the central question addressed by this thesis is: Does the War on Terror, in the way it is prosecuted by states and experienced by humans, constitute a war experience even outside war zones? Can we understand domestic counterterrorism policy, that is not strictly inside a field of war, as creating an experience of war itself? Based on a key question asked by Christine Sylvester: *“What if we think of war as experience, as something ordinary people*

observe and suffer physically and emotionally depending on their locations?”
(Sylvester, 2012: 483)

How does this increase our understanding of the War on Terror and how does this impact on conceptualizations of war? By addressing these questions, my work makes the following key original contributions to knowledge:

1. I consider how Critical Terrorism Studies can be moved beyond epistemological analyses. My review of Marc Sageman’s work is used as a platform to explain that a problematic epistemological understanding, becomes a site of ‘war’ and can lead to abuses of entire communities, but still, that the ontological experience of those communities is missing. By relying on Sageman, I extend the idea of ‘what’ war is, and how its impacts are wider than often considered. The review further highlights my familiarity with the wider literature and how my work is grounded in this knowledge.
2. I argue that the War on Terror incorporates the entire world into a warzone that is contested through military interventions and through domestic counterterrorism policy – widening our understanding of the ‘where’ of its location. My research demonstrates that the impact of counterterrorism policy is felt, as an experience of war, outside of and beyond the arena of war – traditionally understood as a contention between two or more states through armed forces (Dinstein, 2001: 4). Whether it is the War on Terror’s language, such as ‘enemy combatant’ that makes its way from Guantanamo Bay to the Horn of Africa, or family members seeking justice for their detained loved ones being abused, these all constitute a spatial extension of where war is located, furthering our understanding of ‘war’.
3. My work challenges the established narrative of ‘when’ the response to the attacks of 11 September 2001 actually began, through my investigation of the case of Nihad Karsic and Almin Hardaus (Qureshi, 2009a). Traditionally it is assumed within the Critical Terrorism Studies literature that the War on Terror began with the invasion of Afghanistan. Through primary source investigation work, however, I have contributed evidence that two weeks after the Twin Tower attacks, the US military were detaining and torturing individuals as part of their global prosecution of counter-terrorism policy. I extend this idea of the

War on Terror taking place in peacetime jurisdiction by arguing that at the level of the ontological experience, an actor may not conceive of being in a 'war' until they are subjected to its sharp-end through counterterrorism policy. An analysis of lived experience thus offers a new temporal dimension to the War on Terror.

4. Drawing on the wider range of fieldwork and experience accumulated in the course of my work, I have developed a matrix that connects the experiences of the War on Terror both domestically and abroad, to show that the system of suspicion and policy is self-reinforcing – presenting the 'how' of the War on Terror. This matrix demonstrates that drone strikes and rendition flights abroad do not exist in a vacuum but rather are connected to what is happening domestically within the United Kingdom. This matrix contributes to knowledge by showing how the War on Terror replicates and self-reinforces its paradigm at both international and domestic levels. Using the cases of Mahdi Hashi, and later Umm Ahmed, I argue that there is no independent policy that exists outside of the logic of the War on Terror, but rather that policies are grounded in its language, its epistemology and its ontology.
5. The final contribution to Critical Terrorism Studies, rests in my positionality with respect to the suspect community that I seek to assist in mitigating the impacts of the global War on Terror. Alongside the organisation CAGE, I hold the state to account for its excesses in counterterrorism policy, while being subject to the full spectrum of the state's tools of repression. An analysis of this positionality extends the idea about 'how' war as an experience manifests itself, as communities enter into a dialectical relationship with the state. Drawing on the work of Khalili (2013), Sabir (2017), and Boykoff (2007), I show how the logic of counterinsurgency policy as used within conflicts abroad is replicated in the tactics of repression at home, furthering our understanding of how the War on Terror is deployed to create an experience of war in peacetime UK.

Although Critical Terrorism Studies is the field in which the majority of contributions are being made, this thesis also contributes to Critical Military Studies, and in particular to its investigation of war as experience. I will show how both disciplines can benefit from extending their frame of reference to understand counterterrorism as

creating actual experiences of war. Sylvester explains that the traditional definition in international relations understanding of war, is ‘collective violence used to achieve a political agenda’, but then goes on to suggest that we should consider the nature of that collective violence, rather than taking its existence as the defining fact (2013: 3). In considering this nature of war, Barkawi and Brighton refer to it as a “social activity related to the whole complex of social life and organization” (2011, 132). Through the course of this thesis, I am particularly interested in what constitutes a warzone beyond a specific location. Nordstrom argues that an ethnography of war cannot be understood in the same way as a location specific ethnography of the effect of war (Nordstrom, 1997: 78). For her, the ethnography of the warzone required shifting focus from:

“...relying on traditional ethnography rooted in a single locale to looking for understanding of the area of conflict itself. I grounded my ethnography in a topic and a process, not a place.” (Nordstrom, 1997: 78)

The warzone, as I understand it to be in the course of this thesis, is not limited to a specific location, but rather is understood as experience. With this in mind, the five contributions to knowledge presented above will form the structure of this introduction, referencing the published works that form this thesis. By following each section through, my aim is to provide a more complete understanding of the ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’ and ‘how’ of the War on Terror by demonstrating the key contribution that experiential knowledge makes here. As a final section, I consider some of the limitations of my work, especially with regard to my positionality to the suspect community I seek to assist. This is all based on the submissions I will be including in this thesis:

1. An Epistemic Break from Expertise
2. Researching Rendition and Torture in the War on Terror
3. Rules of the Game: Detention, Deportation, Disappearance
4. Prevent: Creating radical to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives
5. The UK Counter-Terrorism Matrix: Structural Racism and the case of Mahdi Hashi
6. Fight the Power: How CAGE resists from within a “suspect community”

Moving Critical Studies beyond epistemology

“Can the ontics of violence (the lived experience of violence) and the epistemology of violence (the ways of knowing and reflecting about violence) ever be realistically separated? Should an attempt even be made to situate violence in any of these domains? While recognizing that violence may be expressed as actions, emotions, responses, drives, or states of being, is it not dangerous to essentialize the definition of violence? To do so stereotypes core dimensions of human existence and leads to a tendency to fix violence as a "natural" category with "universal" expressions.” (Nordstrom, 1997: 116)

Carloyn Nordstrom correctly identifies that violence, when studied, must be understood from both the ontological and epistemological levels – the two cannot exist without one another. Within the world of Critical Terrorism Studies, the impact of counter-terrorism policy has largely focused at the level of epistemology.

To better understand how epistemology plays a role within the nexus of policy and experience, the first contribution to the thesis is a review of Professor Marc Sageman’s 2016 book ‘Misunderstanding Terrorism’, which seeks to address the actual ‘threat’ of terrorism posed by Muslims in the West. Although the review is largely dedicated to Sageman’s book, the first part discusses more generally the state of terrorism expertise and literature, in particular looking at the works of experts who defend counter-terrorism policies Raffaello Pantucci and Shiraz Maher. I argue that the work of such writers self-reinforces the threat of terrorism by creating knowledge that presents a higher risk of its occurrence based on problematic empirical understandings, that are then used to promote the need for further counterterrorism policy (Qureshi, 2017: 4). The review also demonstrates in depth knowledge of the terrorism and critical terrorism studies literature, and how my published works are grounded in an understanding the complexity of opposing arguments.

My main contention is that many narratives from the perspective of terrorism studies refuse to see the human impact of policies within communities. Sageman’s book perfectly summarises the impact that a false epistemology can have at a community

level – as he explains the disproportionate ways in which Muslim communities are targeted by profiling exercises in the West. His Bayesian probability analysis of terrorism statistics over a ten-year period, lead him to the conclusion that the response to the alleged threat is grossly disproportional:

“If all the various police departments in the West collaborate and carry out a gigantic sweep by applying this profile to their respective Muslim populations in order to catch terrorists hiding in their respective societies, they would arrest all 22 terrorists that emerge in a given year. However, they would make a mistake 1 percent of the time for 25 million people, which comes to 250,000 people. Therefore, in order to catch all new 22 global neo-jihadi terrorists, they would put 250,000 Muslims in jail by mistake. This rate of error of 99.99 percent is simply not acceptable in a liberal democracy.” (Sageman, 2016: 63)

The review contributes to Critical Terrorism Studies in placing the significance of knowledge and its construction of the threat of terrorism. As Sageman identifies, the current approach has resulted in widespread scrutiny of Muslims that would be considered discrimination by any standard (Kiai, 2017: 3). This is important, as it creates an environment where a polarisation is necessitated as the idea of ‘what if’ takes root, placing the vast majority of those who present no threat within a threat matrix.

Part of this discussion is the way in which ‘the problem’ is constructed – it is a matter of epistemology. In understanding the violence of counterterrorism policies can we reduce the violence simply to the level of its physical presence, or does it also operate at the epistemic level? Based on the review of Marc Sageman’s book ‘Misunderstanding Terrorism’ it can be argued that epistemology is itself a site of ‘war’, creating its own experiences. Part of the issue is the way in which ‘terrorism’ itself, and what counts as terrorism, is politically contested. While Critical Terrorism Studies scholars have examined this contestation, they have not examined how the epistemology of counterterrorism translates to the experience of those on the ground. As Sageman informs us:

“Honest scholars in the field self-categorize on the side of the state and, like any other in-group member in a conflict, are blind to their own in-group’s contribution to the process and completely blame the out-group for any violence. The state contribution to the process leading to political violence may be the most important still unexplored topic in the field. Acknowledgment of this contribution will help us understand this process and may even start a counter process that can defuse this type of political violence before it erupts.” (Sageman, 2016: 131)

The War on Terror exceeds the boundaries of the traditional conflict, in terms of space and experience, but also in terms of its meaning. Sageman, Jackson, Breen-Smyth and others within the critical world identify that the way we understand the War on Terror requires rethinking, and my work pushes further their contribution by including actual human experience in the study of the War on Terror.

In the nascent field of Critical War or Critical Military Studies, Tarak Barkawi and Shane Brighton have sought to ask these very questions of the way in which war is constructed, as they reject the idea that current studies of war have been adequate in describing it (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 130). For them, analysing the ‘uncertainty’ of what war is needs to be understood through the characteristics that are part of the ontology of war (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 138). They see studies of war as being wholly inadequate in dealing with the complex myriad phenomena that it constitutes:

“Underlying the decentering of war and its apprehension through, and reduction to, other social domains is the more fundamental problem of the conceptual black hole surrounding the notion of war itself. What is it? How ought we to think about it, inquire into it, and situate it in relation to other political and social phenomena? Questions of this sort require collective and sustained scholarly endeavor and debate. What is missing, then, is a scholarly project that takes war as its central object of analysis and is adequate to it.” (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 129)

As the authors correctly note, there is a paucity in material that centres the ontology of war, which they also claim aids in determining the epistemology of war – that latter requires the former – as they support one another in making war ‘knowable’ (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 134). This paucity is also evident in terrorism or counterterrorism studies: addressing this gap is one of the key contributions that my own published works make.

Where is ‘war’ located?

Fieldwork blurs the existence of legal distinctions and categories within zones of conflict; they have been found to be inadequate in the context of the ‘War on Terror’. The second paper presented in this thesis: ‘Researching rendition and torture in the War on Terror: lessons from a human rights organisation’ (Qureshi, 2009) highlights some of the ways in which CAGE¹ has worked with survivor communities around the world, and how the experience of those communities have contributed to alternative understandings of conflict.

The paper focuses on the research methodology implemented in gathering primary evidence, often at the sites where the abuses are taking place, whether that is in the jungles of Likoni in Mombasa, the tribal regions of Pakistan, or the outskirts of London. Being present and on the ground to gather evidence and conduct interviews became crucial to understanding how a global conflict at least experientially emerged.

Nordstrom’s experiences in Mozambique highlight the importance of being present, and using the ontic lens to widen our understanding of war. Crucially, Nordstrom allows the voices of those who are affected to guide her thinking, rather than applying her own assumptions to their experience:

¹ CAGE is an independent grassroots organisation striving for a world free of injustice and oppression. The organisation campaigns against discriminatory state policies and advocate for due process and the rule of law. My role in the NGO is currently as the Research Director, and have been involved in conducting fieldwork, researching and writing reports based on interviews conducted around the world.

“...War is when your loved ones die, when you lose your mother and father, when you see your friends lost and die. War is running, leaving your home and trying to find safe places [most of the children had fled their birthplaces due to the war]. War is always being scared and hungry.” Here the children began to tell me about their war experiences in general, tying that day's episode into a larger portrait of "living war" as a reality of life. Then, expanding into the impact of war on their lives: “We can't go to school, we can't go visit our grandparents and cousins, we can't grow up like we want to.” (Nordstrom, 1997: 21)

Nordstrom's study places impact within a wider frame of thinking, showing us how, in Brighton's first proposition on the phenomenology of war, “war presents a surfeit of being over knowing.” (Brighton, 2011: 102) It is contended in this introduction and in my published works that the War on Terror globalises these very experiences, it disorders by in effect making the entire world a warzone. As proven with early work about those detained at Guantanamo Bay, perhaps nothing speaks of the global nature of the War on Terror and the experiences of war it produced than this one phenomenon (Sands, 2006: 18 and Stafford-Smith, 2008: 122).

As signposted at the beginning of this introduction, the spatial widening of the War on Terror, to make the experience of war one that can take place in non-war zones, makes an important original contribution to terrorism studies. The ‘Researching rendition’ article presents how a single phone call on the morning of 30 January 2007 resulted in months of investigation, travel across Europe and Africa and ultimately the release of many of the individuals CAGE ended up working for. The human experience of war, as a matter of geography, was not spatially limited to the site of conflict in Somalia, but rather, could be found traversing across the world.

On day one, we assumed we would be representing four British men, who had fled Somalia at the start of Ethiopia's invasion between 2006 to 2007. They fled across the border into Kenya at the start of the fighting, only to be detained by the Kenyan Anti-Terrorism Police Unit, and further questioned by Mi5 during their detention. Due to the environment of the ‘War on Terror’, raising the prospect of someone being detained abroad illegally did not always result in assistance from the authorities,

rather the conflict abroad could find itself manifested in violent police raids in the United Kingdom (Qureshi, 2009: 370).

The United Kingdom is ostensibly outside of the warzone, but it is contented that a unique feature of the global 'War on Terror' is that it draws victims, their families and indeed bystanders, into the logic of a global war. After having been involved in helping to secure the release of the British men and have them safely returned to the UK, we were able to procure the flight manifests of the rendition flights they had been placed on. Here we found the names of over eighty individuals, men, women and children, from a range of nationalities who had been placed on illegal flights from Kenya to Somalia (from the war they had fled) and then on to Ethiopia. On reaching Ethiopia, it appeared that the global War on Terror had produced a kind of 'best practice' of national security policy in a conflict environment, by using questionable legal terms and housing detainees in cages:

“One of the worrying aspects of the detention of the African rendition detainees was their status on arrival in Ethiopia. Benaouda explained that the first time they were brought before a court in Addis Ababa, the judge explained to all of them that they were investigating whether or not these detainees were ‘enemy combatants’.” (Qureshi, 2009: 373)

Just as men had been detained in chicken wire cages at Camp X-Ray at Guantanamo Bay, these eighty detainees were detained in similar cages in Ethiopia. Regardless of the status of some of the men and women as potential combatants, there is no possible cause for the children having been processed as potential 'enemy combatants' – a term that is legally vague and not based in any international law precedent within the Geneva Conventions. This fieldwork we conducted makes an important contribution to understanding not only where 'war' is located within the War on Terror but also the different ways in which it manifests itself.

If one of the contributions this thesis makes is that the physical geography of the 'War on Terror' is expanded beyond what we consider to be the 'warzone', the third submission, 'Rules of the Game: Detention, Deportation, Disappearance', extends that notion even further by redefining political geography. As Brighton's second

proposition informs us, social and political meanings are unmade and remade in war in a way that it is difficult for us to predict (Brighton, 2011: 104).

‘Rules of the Game’ references the May 2002 declaration by the then US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, when he declared Syria as part of what he called the ‘Axis of Evil’. The presentation, for the view of the public, was that there was a cold-conflict taking place between the US and Syria, one of which President George W Bush said, “States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” (Bush in Qureshi, 2009a: 150) Only four months after John Bolton made his speech, a Canadian man of Syrian origin, Maher Arar, was forcibly placed on a rendition flight from JFK International Airport in New York and handed over to the Syrian intelligence services to be questioned and tortured. Publicly, the two countries were in a ‘cold’ conflict with each other, but privately, the War on Terror had redefined understandings of alliances and state relations to accommodate a secret relationship in the outsourcing of torture (Qureshi, 2009a: 151).

Arar’s case is just one example of how a very public political distance between two countries was bridged by their cooperation within the confines of the War on Terror. Among those declared as part of the ‘Axis of Evil’ was the Libyan government, and similarly they were involved in the rendition, interrogation and detention programme after having received Abdul Hakim Belhaj from the CIA during a similar period (Norton-Taylor, 2018). I argue that although there is a history of states acting in opposition to their public positions, the apparent binary nature of the War on Terror redefines our understanding of what the relationship between states are in ‘combatting terrorism’, through hidden cooperation between states seemingly in conflict with one another.

It is worth thinking about Barkawi and Brighton again, as they understand that, “war consumes, reworks, and produces truths,” (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 139) and so the War on Terror due to its amorphous nature, is perhaps the epitome of this truth production – you can be at conflict with, and at the same time cooperate with another country.

Missing within the larger political narratives, however, there is the human impact that the larger 'War on Terror' policies bring. The physical location does not minimise or maximise the impact as the experience can manifest itself in many different ways – drone strikes in Yemen or Waziristan can very much find their repercussions within family members in Western Europe. Similarly, the decision to remove an individual's citizenship in the UK can result in their extrajudicial killing abroad. Christine Sylvester informs us of the multiple ways in which these experiences can manifest, and how researchers play a role in 'accessing' those experiences.

“War experiences come in prosaic, profound, sickening, excruciating, and exhilarating ways, to all kinds of people living inside and outside actual war zones. Experiences of war provide information about what it is, how it operates, who takes part, how they are affected and affecting, and what the politics of war looks like beyond the war rooms of state. To access those experiences takes more than good intentions and interest. It requires that a researcher take a close look at herself/himself and a creative and acute look around at the mundanities and spectaculars, the tears and politics of life that accompany and that shape war.” (Sylvester, 2011: 129)

'Rules of the Game', is based on the experiences of those who were impacted by the policies of the 'War on Terror'. The book makes an original contribution to Terrorism Studies and in particular to understanding the War on Terror, specifically because it seeks to highlight the spread of this war across the globe, but also outside of the warzone. By presenting large sections of material taken directly from witnesses, I chose to retain the quality of their own words, over my own analysis, which I seek to intersperse between the testimony. What results is one of the widest demonstrations of the impact of the War on Terror, as other literature is limited by themes (such as torture), or geographical space (such as Abu Ghraib). With interviews with individuals from North America, through Guantanamo Bay, across the African continent and Western and Eastern Europe to the Middle East and South Asia, the book has a breadth of experience that captures the geography of global counterterrorism responses. The 'breadth' however is not limited to geography, but also policy, as the logic of profiling suspects on the streets of London is linked to the unlawful kidnapping and selling of detainees abroad. At a policy level, the

contribution presents empirical evidence of a wide range of policies and practices that are all interconnected through the War on Terror.

The book tells of fourteen-year-old Zahra Paracha in Pakistan, whose father Saifullah Paracha remains at Guantanamo to this day:

“My friends are all occupied in stuff like ‘does this shawl look good on me’ and they model in front of the mirror for like hours...and I’m looking at stuff like Lebanon and Israel war and I know if I ever mention it to them, they will have the dumbest look on this planet...and I wouldn’t blame them because they’re not really that old, they are only fourteen and when I realise that I am only fourteen then I realise there is something wrong with me.” (Qureshi, 2009a: 125)

Zahra is attuned to the disordering of her own life due to the detention of her father. Her experiences have placed her within a context where she has understood that the loss of access to her father, has placed her in a wider narrative that exists outside of ‘normal’ teenage life. Her life itself has become a repository of meaning. The impact is not always psychological, it can also be physical and therefore transport the conflict more directly to the subject. Campaigning for her Bosnian husband, Boudella Haji, who was detained at Guantanamo Bay, Nadja Dizderavic would conduct long vigils outside of the Bosnian parliamentary buildings after his unlawful kidnapping and rendition. In her view, her activities resulted in violence being directed against her by unknown foreign men:

“That man who was beating me, he was speaking English very quick and he was saying all bad words he was swearing...When I kick the guy, he raised his head, his eyes were bloody like an animal he took my head and hit me on the wall three times and kicked me in the stomach. Last thing I remember, because the stomach hit was so strong I was about to lose consciousness, he said that I have ‘salaam’ from Bush.” (Qureshi, 2009a: 169)

Temporal parameters of the War on Terror

The above examples all point to the space of the War on Terror having been expanded to encompass the whole world. Thus, as part of counterterrorism policies, any location can be brought within the logic of its global emphasis. This thesis however by focusing on the experience of the War on Terror also broadens its time beyond what has been traditionally understood.

Within the context of the War on Terror, it was in fact Bosnia that became ground zero for the US response to the attacks of 11 September 2001. The legal and academic community largely focus on the American invasion of Afghanistan as being the starting point of the War on Terror response. However, a key contribution that this thesis makes and within the book, is that Bosnia became the first site of the ‘war’ manifesting itself with the detentions of three Bosnian men. This changes how CTS understands the US response to 9/11, as no longer can it be claimed that Afghanistan, that is the invasion of a country and the toppling of its government, is ground zero of the War on Terror; rather it was the identification of suspects globally, as part of a programme of rendition, detention and torture. The practice of rendition, detention, and torture precedes the practice of invading “terrorist safe-havens.”

Indeed, On 24 September 2001 Abdel Hakim Khafagy, a 69-year-old Bosnian citizen was detained and taken to the US military base at Tuzla, Bosnia. The following day Nihad Karsic and Almin Hardaus were to share the same fate:

“They did not allow me to sleep as it was regulation...They were putting me through sleep deprivation. This went on for many days. In the first few days it was very intensive, soldiers were coming, they were shouting at me terrorist and so on.” (Qureshi, 2009a: 172)

For Karsic and Hardaus, their experience of detention and violence at the hands of US soldiers was not limited to wrongful allegations against them, but carried through to their release – the experience of war remained with them. Within the ‘Rules of the Game’, the idea of being in the “wrong place at the wrong time” pervades the War on

Terror's counterterrorism lens, as individuals all over the world are documented to have suffered due to national security concerns. As already highlighted above in the contribution on Sageman's work, a global policy has been developed to impact large populations placed under suspicion, with wide-ranging consequences for those who are innocent. This extends our understanding of the way in which an epistemology that is counter-productive, can have devastating consequences, particularly when the impact of those policies are not understood through the experience of survivor communities. Critical Terrorism Studies and Terrorism Studies, by placing the experience of the human at the centre of their understanding, will come away with a better-informed appreciation of how policy can potentially be counter-productive.

In questioning her own assumptions about the experience of war, Harmonie Toros engaged in an exercise with her students to try and understand how they conceived of the experience of war, outside of the warzone, "pushing against the widespread assumption in IR that they could not be bearers of war experience" (Toros et al, 2018). Although the range of student responses were fascinating to reflect on, for the purposes of this discussion one respondent stood out in particular. Yasmeen Omran described her experience of returning 'home' to the UK just after the Charlie Hebdo attacks with her partner from Amsterdam. After she is stopped under counterterrorism laws, Omran's reflections are interesting, as her life choices had convinced her that it was not possible for her to be profiled in the way she was under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 (Toros et al, 2018). For Omran, the 'War on Terror' subjected her to an experience of war, one that took root at a cultural level:

"What I was experiencing was so surreal after years of television and online newspapers fooling me to believe that it could never happen to someone like me... I found as a Muslim and Arab, I no longer needed to inhabit or have roots in states of war or dress in my religious garments to be placed in the box of potential terrorist. My identity and my appearance had condemned me to fight for my right to simply exist within this state without some sort of ulterior motive." (Omran in Toros et al, 2018: 5)

Omran is a British national, who was returning home from holiday, and despite that, was made to feel like a threat to the UK. There are layers to Omran's case, as it tells

us 'where' the War on Terror can be located, but also, as an experience of war, 'when'. Until that moment of detention, Omran was not aware of the relevance of the War on Terror's policies in her life, but it arrived and became part of her lived experience at the airport.

Similarly, in September 2002, Moloud Sihali was detained by the government and placed under harsh restrictions that controlled his movement outside of his home, despite not having any connection to terrorist activity. Sihali described himself as someone who was irreligious and so did not fit a profile, and yet was still targeted for being simply foreign (Qureshi, 2009a: 34).

The War on Terror has created layers of war experiences for those who are suspected within the prism of its logics. The violence that occurs, takes place at many different levels, as Galtung describes, from direct violence to structural violence to cultural violence (Galtung, 1990) – these are all forms of violence that reinforce and support the logic of one another in the context of the War on Terror. 'Rules of the Game: Detention, Deportation, Disappearance' presents the breadth of these experiences, as individuals find themselves fundamentally changed by the War on Terror.

This section and the one prior to it argue that my work has extended the War on Terror beyond previous understandings by investigating its lived experience. In particular, it has been extended spatially to include the entire globe as a potential site of war experience, but also temporally. In the context of the UK, for instance, daily life might not seem so much of a conflict, until you are stopped at an airport, an instance of a 'how' and 'when' of the War on Terror, for the individual, has arrived and located them.

What the work contributes, is the understanding of the subject of the War on Terror being far more diverse than otherwise might be imagined. As Shane Brighton's second proposition informs us, the political and social meanings of these subjects are permanently changed by their interaction with the War on Terror, even if the impact of the counterterrorism policy is not direct but felt through the trauma of being a family member of the one impacted. Zahra Paracha and Yasmeen Omran understand that things have changed for them, but with it comes the difficult acceptance that it

has not only unmade them, but remade them into someone different, someone separate.

The self-reinforcing war experience

The fourth contribution to this thesis focuses again on the ‘how’ of the War on Terror through a matrix I put forward in the book chapter, ‘The UK counter-terrorism matrix: Structural racism and the case of Mahdi Hashi’ (Qureshi, 2017b). This draws together 14 years of CAGE’s experience in the field and studying the UK’s policies of the War on Terror. The chapter offers the first complete map of how all aspects of British counter-terrorism policy intersect and reinforce one another. This is the first time that any organisation has sought to map policies from intelligence sharing exercises with foreign agencies to civil sanction policies such as citizenship deprivation to the ‘pre-crime’ policy of Prevent.

Although it would have been possible to present this chapter in more abstract terms, in designing the matrix, I was able to test its validity and logic by running fifty of my real-life cases through its flow system. By the time I arrived at the version I presented in this chapter, I had a 100% rate of accuracy across the cases I ran. In some instances, a suspect would be detained abroad, and so their case would be followed through the flow system until they arrived in the UK, and then chart their experience afterwards. In other circumstances, the individual might be suspected in the UK, only for them to travel abroad and be impacted by the domestic suspicion.

This matrix presents an original contribution to research on counterterrorism policy in the UK. When terrorism experts and indeed, even the formal government appointed position of the Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation assess counterterrorism policies, they separate them as disparate elements with no interconnectivity – so Prevent policy is seen as independent to deportation orders or citizenship deprivation orders. In reality, these are closely linked and it is a failure of the way in which they are assessed that allows abuses to take place across the spectrum. This chapter contributes to the understanding of Critical Terrorism Studies

by UK counterterrorism policy and practices by showing how these policies have an internal logic that reinforces the single parts of the system.

“Where foreign nationals have not committed any crimes, they can be deported (or subjected to other sanctions) under secret evidence based on arbitrary orders. Where UK nationals have not committed any crimes, they can have their citizenship removed (and other sanctions) over an arbitrary allegation of extremism. All of this works to provide the UK government with wide powers to be able remove perceived threats, even where those threats pose no imminent or long-term danger to the security of the UK.” (Qureshi, 2017b: 81)

Although his case does not touch every single part of the system, in the chapter I decided to focus on the case of Mahdi Hashi due to the volume of points of intersection his story had to the matrix both in the UK and abroad. The purpose of the chapter was to present an understanding of the intersection and violence of policy. Nevertheless, its significance could not be fully understood except through a human story with Hashi’s being particularly compelling.

At the age of sixteen, Mahdi Hashi was detained in Egypt being accused of numerous crimes including of being involved with Chechen *mujahideen* – unlikely considering his recent completion of GCSEs in the UK and only having recently arrived in Egypt in 2006. Instead of being assisted by the British consular authorities as a minor, Hashi felt he was being interrogated by the very people whose duty it was to assist him:

“...how I felt at the time, that they are trying to make me admit something, to make me say it first. I was speaking to the embassy they were trying to ask me why I was here, 'The Egyptian authorities are telling us something else.'” (Qureshi, 2017b: 83)

Mahdi Hashi had been brought by the Egyptian and British authorities into the War on Terror by using his vulnerable position in order to interrogate him. Even on Mahdi’s return to the UK, instead of providing him with medical or psychological services based on his experience in an Egyptian prison, he was held for hours at the

UK airport as a minor and interrogated about his beliefs with his DNA being forcibly taken (Qureshi, 2017b: 83). As with the experience of Yasmeen Omran, the entry or exit at any UK port has become a moment of tension for many who are identified as being Muslim, and on some occasions even those who are not. The powers as they are used under Schedule 7 of the Terrorism Act 2000 have been used well beyond the requirement that the border agents suspects that an individual has been involved in the commission, preparation or instigation of an act of terror. As I describe in the book chapter through direct interviews with those from Mahdi Hashi's community, the war experience of Yasmeen Omran and those I have interviewed was a common one, as the affected individuals found themselves in a state of conflict with the state. (Qureshi, 2017b: 84-86)

Despite the many attempts to coopt or coerce Mahdi Hashi into working for the security agencies, attempts that can only be described as a programme of harassment, eventually he felt compelled to leave the UK. The matrix uniquely is able to chart how Mahdi's experiences with stops at the airports and the programme of harassment all contributed to his designation as a threat. Once abroad, the matrix shows how Hashi was moved into a different section, where the untested allegation of 'Islamist extremism' was enough to deprive him of his citizenship, resulting in his torture and rendition at the hands of the US. (Qureshi, 2017b: 90)

Mahdi Hashi moved through different stages of his experiences of the War on Terror in the course of his travels since the age of sixteen. From his torture in Egypt, to the profiling and harassment in the UK, to the detention by al-Shabab in Somalia for allegedly being a spy, to the detention, torture and rendition by the United States – his case stands as a noteworthy example of how the logics of counterterrorism policy of the War on Terror creates a self-reinforcing war experience. The matrix makes an original contribution to knowledge in the field of Critical Terrorism Studies as it allows researchers and policymakers to see how the repercussions of policies can travel and have unintended consequences. While a specific policy on its own might appear to have some merit, when placed within the larger structure, it can instead reinforce areas which are already impacting on communities in negative ways. For example, in an environment where counterterrorism policing was already prevalent, the introduction of pre-crime, as will be seen below with the case of Umm Ahmed,

provides an extra layer of abuse that while seemingly separate, is completely connected to the larger system.

The chapter provides us with a view of how Hashi found himself being the subject of the structural violence of the state. However, Galtung allows us to extend structural violence, by helping us to understand that there is a third category of violence that is ‘cultural’ (Galtung, 1990: 291). As counterterrorism policy moves into the world of ideas through international programmes known as Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and in the UK context, Prevent, the notion of cultural violence (Galtung, 1990: 298) connects and reinforces existing systems of direct and structural violence.

As we have seen throughout this introduction, the War on Terror exceeds the boundaries of the traditional conflict, in terms of space and experience, but also in terms of its meaning. Barkawi and Brighton provide another layer to this understanding, by considering ‘liberal modernity’ as a ‘civilisational’ starting point in considering ‘war’, that it actually attempts to bracket and construct it in a ‘normative register’ (Barkawi and Brighton, 2011: 141). If liberal modernity is the constructing force, then where does this leave the experience of the victims or survivors, but more importantly, the experience of being the subjects of that construction?

‘PREVENT: creating “radicals” to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives’ (Qureshi, 2015) places a case within a wider context and narrative about the UK government’s Prevent strategy. The piece argues that on 5 February 2011, former UK Prime Minister David Cameron gave a speech on security in Munich where, unlike Sageman, he places the blame of ‘Islamist terrorism’ on ideology over all else:

“At the furthest end are those who back terrorism to promote their ultimate goal: an entire Islamist realm, governed by an interpretation of sharia. Move along the spectrum, and you find people who may reject violence, but who accept various parts of the extremist world-view including real hostility towards western democracy and liberal values. It’s vital we make this distinction between the religion and the political ideology.” (Qureshi, 2015: 182-183)

By placing the idea of a ‘conflict’ outside of politics and into the realm of ideas, Cameron effectively contributes to the weaponisation of narratives and language, by establishing a counterterrorism epistemology – one that is not without consequence for the experience of those who will feel its effects.

At the centre of the piece is an interview conducted with Umm Ahmed (not her real name) that shows how an individual, who was never considered to be a threat to the UK, was not only convicted of a terrorism offence, but also placed through a mandatory ‘deradicalisation’ programme. Although the matrix was developed years after the publication of this piece, it extends the ideas of the matrix by showing how counterterrorism legislation prosecutes individuals for non-violent offences, and then internally reinforces the notion of a threat, despite no threat having existed.

This piece provides a unique contribution to narratives that surround the War on Terror and the way they are deployed, particularly in the space of ‘ideas’ – the ‘war’ moves from the space of violence to one of narratives, but ultimately back to violence. Nordstrom describes the breadth of how we understand violence:

“Violence is culturally constitutive. Its enactment forges, in fact forces, new constructs of identity, new socio-cultural relationships, new threats and injustices that reconfigure people's life-worlds, new patterns of survival and resistance.” (Nordstrom, 1997: 141)

In 2012, Umm Ahmed was charged with possession of a terrorism publication, what is known as a strict liability offence – requiring no intention – just mere possession of a magazine meant that she had committed an offence. Due to her relationship to others who had been convicted of terrorism, Umm Ahmed was advised to plead guilty to the offence by her solicitor, explaining that a jury would not be willing to see her as an individual. In his comments during her sentencing hearing, she was told by her judge:

“She is of good behaviour and a good Muslim. Against this background, I accept on the evidence before me that this defendant gathered together the contents of the SD card in order to explore and understand the charges which

her brothers faced. There is no evidence that she was motivated by their ideology or was preparing to follow them.” (Qureshi, 2015: 186)

Umm Ahmed describes how, despite this statement by the judge, he went on to describe his uncertainty as to whether or not she might have been a “fellow traveller” with her brothers, and so handed down a 12-month custodial sentence, in order that she be forced to go through a mandatory deradicalisation programme under Prevent. This case is an important example of how the perception of threats within counterterrorism are reinforced through cases such as a Umm Ahmed’s, where individuals who have no intention of causing harm, become terrorism conviction statistics, but also examples of ‘successful’ deradicalisation.

Where does this leave Umm Ahmed though? When we consider the human experience of ‘war’ and the way in which the global War on Terror has been constructed, it is informative to know how she conceives of her place within it:

“After all of this has finished for me, personally, I do believe that they have completely overestimated the threat that is posed, and their response is completely disproportional. I think that the security agencies have lost all control of the “war on terror” and have lost sight of what they were after in the first place. It is no longer about dangerous Muslims, but the ideology of Islam itself – and that is the one thing that they cannot contain, they don’t know how to contain it.” (Qureshi, 2015: 190)

Returning to the idea of the UK’s counterterrorism matrix that I presented in the book chapter discussed above, Umm Ahmed’s case presents the experience of the War on Terror at a level that is constituted outside of even notions of countering violence, to countering ideas. During the interview with Umm Ahmed in 2014, she spoke of the ‘deradicalisation’ tools that authorities used against her in prison. Among these tools was a psychological one called the Extremism Guidance 22+ (ERG), a tool that had not been publicly written about in terrorism policy literature. Umm Ahmed described her experience with the ERG in prison:

“I remember when they conducted my assessment, they explicitly stated that they did not consider me any kind of threat, or that I saw the UK public as a target or enemy, but during the ERG they were keen to know about my feelings on proscription of organisations...They asked about al-Muhajiroon, and I explained that under their categorisation, then yes they could potentially be proscribed, but then I said that the same standard should be applied to the EDL. The woman conducting the interview said she agreed with my viewpoint and that the EDL was a dangerous organisation – however – she still wrote into my record that I displayed having an “us versus them” mentality.” (Qureshi, 2015: 189)

Umm Ahmed’s reference to the ERG highlighted that psychological tools were being developed in order to ‘deradicalise’ Muslims, based on some form of peer-reviewed science – but hidden behind layers of national security secrecy. This is explored more fully in the final contribution to this thesis, the journal piece ‘Fight the Power: how CAGE resists from within a “suspect community”’.

‘Peace’ is ‘war’

The final contribution of my published works takes the investigation of ‘how’ the War on Terror manifests itself further, by showing that the theory and practice of counterinsurgency policies within conflicts abroad are brought to bear in a peacetime domestic situation at home – leading to an experience of war at community and organisational levels. Within the law, peace has been described largely through the absence of a conflict of hostilities, usually between two belligerent states (Schwarzenberger and Brown, 1976: 156) However, Brighton (2011) along with Barkawi (2011) help us to understand that our understanding of peace in war studies, has been limited by our understanding of both war and peace – in my mind this is particularly so in the context of the War on Terror. As Angela Davis captures, the wide-reaching impact of the War on Terror can be seen as part of militarisation globally:

“I’m trying to suggest that there are connections between the militarization of the police in the US, which provides a different context for us to analyze the continuing, ongoing proliferation of racist police violence, and the continuous assault on people in occupied Palestine, the West Bank, and especially in Gaza, given the military violence inflicted on people in Gaza this past summer.” (Davis, 2016: 140)

This militarisation cannot be seen in a vacuum that is restricted to the War on Terror, but rather must be seen as emerging out of a longer tradition of counterinsurgency. It is important to acknowledge the work of Laleh Khalili, whose book ‘Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies’ establishes an important baseline in our understanding of how the logic of counterinsurgency has come to embed itself within counterterrorism policies today (Khalili, 2013; see also Cochrane, 2013: 30). In the same vein as Davis, Khalili cites Israel’s occupation of Lebanon and Palestine, and the US role in the ‘War on Terror’ as contemporary examples of how warfare in the twentieth century has been defined by liberal asymmetric warfare (Khalili, 2013: 4). For Khalili, part of war is confinement (in its widest meaning) serving as a mechanism of control:

“The theoreticians of these mechanisms of containment, of confinement instead of slaughter, envisioned and advertised their tactics as more humane, as more liberal, and ultimately as techniques for socially engineering the people and places they conquered. The unmentioned axis around which much counterinsurgency revolves is that of “race” or its euphemism “culture” and “civilization”. Paradoxically, the very “humanization” of asymmetric warfare and the application of liberal precepts to its conduct have legitimated war making as political intervention.” (Khalili, 2013: 3)

The notion that liberal warfare is now humane and definable is part of the lie of the way that wars are fought. Michael Neu informs us that liberal justifications set ‘the very rules for how a moral discussion about war is to be conducted’ (Neu, 2018: 77). These justifications, however, mask the extent of the war experience, particularly in spaces outside of the warzone. If we turn to Shane Brighton’s third proposition on the phenomenology of war, we are presented with the notion that even in post-conflict, or

as I propose to extend Brighton, peacetime geographies outside of the ‘conflict-zone’, the logics of war continue to pervade. The War on Terror is, perhaps, the ultimate global manifestation of this. There are very few parts of the world that are not touched by its footprint, whether it is through the global trafficking of suspected terrorists on unlawful rendition flights, or narratives around ideologies of Islam, they all form a consistent narrative of a continued conflict.

The position of the NGO CAGE, and my position within the organisation, places us at the heart of resistance towards narratives, epistemologies and ontologies that make up the War on Terror in its entirety. My final contributing article in this thesis ‘Fight the Power: how CAGE resists from within a “suspect community”’ is key, as it demonstrates how the War on Terror takes on dimensions that could never have been predicted on 12 September 2001. It does so by outlining a very personal sense of feeling under siege that accompanies our attempt to hold the state to account. Whether it is political or media narratives, colleagues arrested or stopped at airports, or governmental institutions pressuring funders, there is a palpable sense of a full-spectrum response in which the entire machinery of the state is deployed.

As evidenced from Khalili above, much of counterterrorism in a domestic setting, has been constructed from the world of counterinsurgency. Rizwaan Sabir writes of the way in which coercive surveillance and propaganda is deployed by the state in order to neutralise those who might, in a pre-crime sense, become future threats or those who speak through “the language of Islam.” (Qureshi, 2017a: 4) Sabir specifically draws the analogy of domestic policy creating an environment of combatants and civilians, and how the logics of counterinsurgency manifest themselves broadly:

“...the surveilling of ‘all members of the community’ in order to determine which form of activity (or propaganda) needs to be targeted at them suggests that Prevent perceives law-abiding Muslims to be somehow susceptible to supporting or becoming involved in terrorism. Such a perception not only has a strong stench of Islamophobia but also shows how the counterinsurgency principle of treating the wider population as an enabler and supporter of insurgency and terrorism has been integrated into contemporary counter-

terrorism policy and practice. Such a practice erodes the distinction between civilians and combatants.” (Sabir, 2017: 12)

It must be acknowledged here, that the journal article is titled ‘Fight the Power’ by choice, bringing it within the frame of conflict, but it is a framing that comes from lived experience. For me, the War on Terror replicates the idea of a global war, one that finds itself at home domestically. The title was borrowed from Public Enemy, largely because as the article’s introduction notes:

“...the article argues that the violence and repression that has been targeted at CAGE is very much a continuation of historic policies targeted at people of colour/anti-racism activists in circumstances such as the Black Civil Rights movement in the United States or the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa. The article concludes by offering some thoughts on what the targeting of a group such as CAGE, which seeks to engage in counter-hegemonic resistance activities suggests as well as the repercussions of the state’s coercion and violence against such resistance.” (Qureshi, 2017a: 2)

The violence of the state is structural and cultural; in that way language and knowledge that is used can be part of the violence that is deployed against repressed communities (Galtung, 1990: 299). To quote Lina Mounzer’s essay on the way in which war is translated and how language itself can beat the drums of war: “We know how language itself can wage war against us, by mimicking the same casual dehumanization of a bomb.” (Mounzer, 2016) In the world of counterterrorism in the War on Terror, Sabir extends that thesis by writing on the way in which counterterrorism policy encroaches into the space of ideas themselves (Sabir, 2017). Further, not only engagement with the state, but potentially every single part of public life becomes a method of social control that serves to reinforce the War on Terror as a site of war:

“CAGE understood that calling for justice and accountability, would mean that we would be decried as somehow anti-British, or anti-Western, even while our critique was also levelled against authority in the “East”. This identity of resistance is forged out of a particular form of knowledge that the

modalities of oppression cannot be separated from one another easily. Political and media narratives are linked to policymaking, which is associated to public perceptions, and intertwined with jury trials, which are closely tied to public sector employees under a statutory duty to inform—all of this culminates to give form to the structural racism—through repression and coercion.” (Qureshi, 2017a: 5)

Our position in relation to the state and our communities is central to the ‘Fight the Power’ piece, as CAGE staff and volunteers are both actors and subjects within the War on Terror. CAGE simultaneously holds the state to account, while being subject to its institutions. The piece relies on Jules Boykoff’s ‘four mechanisms’ and ‘action modes’ of repression (Boykoff, 2007) within the context of the civil rights struggle in the US, and particularly within the context of the FBI’s Counter-Intelligence Programme (COINTELPRO). Going through Boykoff’s list, CAGE has been subjected to physical violence, public prosecutions, employment deprivation (funds being cut off), surveillance, infiltration, “black propaganda”, harassment arrests, extraordinary rules or laws, mass media manipulation and deprecation – so in other words, according to Boykoff’s categorisations, the full spectrum of repressive action modes he posits (Boykoff, 2007: 291-292).

In terms of building a contribution to knowledge in Critical Terrorism Studies, this extends the ideas of Khalili and Sabir that counterinsurgency tactics and policing are actually connected to all institutions of the state which are then deployed domestically within the context of the War on Terror – a fact that is both privileged and encumbered by CAGE’s positionality to the suspect community it seeks to protect. This positionality as both actor and subject is perhaps most clear after the arrest of my colleague, Moazzam Begg:

“CAGE received a letter from HM Treasury dated 14 March 2014, explaining that as Begg had been designated under Section 4(2) of the Terrorism Asset Freezing Act 2010, measures would need to be taken by the organisation to remove his name as a signatory to the account. The freezing, and ultimately closing of the CAGE account led to a loss of £3,000 per month in small standing order donations that had been set up by supporters of the

organisation. This was exacerbated by two significant donors, The Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the Roddick Foundation, not being able to provide us with funds that they had cleared to support the organisation. It also gave the perception that somehow, CAGE's activities were suspect and delegitimized." (Qureshi, 2017a: 7)

The experience of the organisation CAGE, and the fieldwork conducted around the world, exemplifies Shane Brighton's third proposition beyond the idea of a 'peace' time logic of war. The way that the 'War on Terror' has been deployed displays modalities of war that move beyond the idea of post-war, as we can experience the 'how' of the War on Terror, even when direct violence is not taking place. The 'peace' itself manifests in experiences of war through repression within a domestic setting, and so as discussed in the previous sections on the spatial extension of the War on Terror, we can see the way it manifests within the peace. Policing, with its operation based on strategies of counterinsurgency, can very much take on the form of the war, as Khalili describes that the links between counterinsurgency and counterterrorism can be seen all too clearly abroad and at home (Khalili, 2017: 246). My own positionality, and that of my organisation CAGE, highlights specifically our knowledge and understanding of the structural violence of the War on Terror, as the state seeks to repress our activities through the logic of counterinsurgency thinking being funnelled into counterterrorism.

Negative impact; positive outcomes: navigating research limitations

In the previous section, I explained the main ways in which CAGE has been subjected to attack by the state. I now want to outline what the impact of such attacks have been on the community as well as the organisation. Secondly, I want to describe how CAGE have resisted and navigated the attacks. The purpose of highlighting both is to show that even though CAGE has faced serious challenges and attacks, some may perceive this to have limited the impact of my research findings – in the UK and around the globe. Ultimately, however, I want to show how they have actually had the

opposite impact; that is to say, how they have encouraged people to actually seek us out from around the world in order to help them.

Part of the complexity and uniqueness of the positionality of this piece in relation to the War on Terror is to be inside what Paddy Hillyard called the ‘suspect community’ (Hillyard, 1993 and Qureshi, 2017a: 2). When the narrative, epistemology and ontology of the War on Terror have constructed Muslims and Islam as a threat, it has meant that 1.8 billion people in the world become subject to its logics. While that has permitted us to operate relatively unhindered within Muslim communities (Qureshi, 2009: 374), belonging to the suspect community has also led to a series of challenges and problems, as I highlighted in the previous section (Qureshi, 2009: 374).

One of these problems has been that Muslim communities have often been afraid to publicly associate themselves with us. This was perhaps most present in the case that CAGE brought against the UK Charity Commission. Only the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust was willing to publicly back CAGE’s successful case against the Commission (CAGE, 2017a: 7) whereas Muslim charities expressed fear of being targeted if they sided with CAGE in their case against them. While this is one limited experience, largely our experience, based on the ever-increasing cases we receive, is that CAGE’s authenticity and independence trumps any fears communities may have. However, the fear of being subjected to state violence is not only restricted to communities but is something that has impacted the team at CAGE too, and has subsequently impacted the way we operate.

Although my positionality within CAGE and within communities occupies the space of a suspect in relation to the state, it is not my only position as I have both social capital (in my access to wider communities) and cultural capital (in my position within my own communities) (Bourdieu, 1989: 17). This positionality means that I have the privilege of respect. Part of the way I have sought to mitigate this is by never providing the subjects of my research or assistance solutions without giving them options and agency in the decisions that they take. Recognising the influence that I can have, it is important for clients or subjects to realise that the capital I have is in service to their needs as survivors.

Among the following reasons are why research participants and clients have been drawn towards me and towards CAGE more broadly. Firstly, the wealth of access that I have been given across the world to those who have experienced the violence of the policies of the War on Terror, primarily stems from my position within the community as a visibly observant Muslim, one who has studied law and so is in a potential position to help. My locus provides a degree of trust, particularly with an organisation such as CAGE in support.

Secondly, based on the length of time I have been working in the field, and the breadth of experience that I have been able to accumulate, I can only see my positionality to the community as being one of authenticity for the concerns of my clients and research subjects. Understanding not only their concerns, but also their cultural needs is key to being able to represent them, especially in an environment where there is a lack of understanding about who Muslims are within liberal NGOs. As I specifically highlight in my 'Fight the Power' article, there is a degree of liberal complicity that undermines the experience of those who are suffering the consequences of the War on Terror (Qureshi, 2017a: 8), and for this reason in particular, it is important to have representation of those voices and experiences from within communities, especially in avenues and spaces such as research where these voices have largely been on the margins.

In summary, while the attacks that CAGE have faced have been serious and sustained, one would think that they would have prevented our advocacy and research agenda, and ultimately limited the amount of impact we have had. However, these attacks have remarkably led to more people from around the world seeking us out for help and assistance in some of the most complex and politically charged circumstances. The status of being Muslim human rights activists thus is somewhat of a double edged sword: we have access and trust even among some of the most conservative communities around the world; however, by that same token, we become targets for those who despise such people (Qureshi, 2009: 373).

Conclusion

Fieldwork throughout the geographies of the War on Terror – whether spatial, temporal, or human – has informed the thinking in this introduction and my published works that follow, concluding that there is an experience of ‘war’ that takes place outside of our traditional notions and zones of war. Scholars such as Sylvester, Nordstrom and Brighton have assisted us in renegotiating those assumptions around ‘war’, but have been limited by their experiences and work. By presenting the experience of human beings affected in different contexts by the War on Terror, this piece has sought to extend our idea of counter-terrorism policy, and how it produces experiences of war.

My thesis builds on and but extends and challenges the literature that currently exists on Critical Terrorism Studies and on the human experiences of war. It first addresses counterterrorism from the epistemological level, situating itself in the literature and work of CTS to show that counterterrorism narratives are not devoid of meaning, but have an ultimate impact on the communities they target. My review of the work of Marc Sageman is key to helping this understanding, as I seek to show ‘what’ the War on Terror is beyond traditional epistemological understandings.

The ‘where’ of the War on Terror is also a key component to the furthering of our understanding, as I extend the spatial location of the War on Terror to include the whole world through war as experience. In that respect, the ‘when’ is equally important, as I not only move the timeline of the US response to 9/11 back from the war on Afghanistan to Bosnia, but further highlight how experientially, a person in a peacetime country can be drawn into the War on Terror through being impacted by its policies. They are until that moment oblivious that they may be impacted. Thus for them, in that moment, the War on Terror has begun. The book ‘Rules of the Game’ and article ‘Researching Rendition’ provide many important examples from the field at how individuals, often far away from the warzone, have been targeted and transformed by it.

The fourth section of this introduction uses a matrix of counterterrorism I developed to extend the idea of ‘how’ the War on Terror manifests itself, by providing evidence through the case of Mahdi Hashi and others. These cases show that there is a reinforcing system created by the War on Terror, that regardless of whether you start inside or outside of the warzone, can turn individuals into subject of its abuses. The human experience of war can take place in multiple ways and in multiple layers, providing breadth to our notions of war. What is particularly important about Hashi’s case is that the war followed him wherever he went once he was inside the system.

The War on Terror, while taking on physical forms through detention, rendition and torture, also operates at the level of narrative and epistemology. The article ‘PREVENT: creating “radicals” to strengthen anti-Muslim narratives’ shows the way in which threats are constructed, directly contributing to our understanding of ‘how’ counterterrorism policies reinforce themselves by constructing statistics through laws that criminalise non-violent behaviour. This extends our understanding of counterterrorism and how ‘terrorism’ is constructed, but also shows how those convictions help to reinforce the idea of a threat.

The final key contribution in this thesis, is based on the 2017 journal piece, ‘Fight the Power: how CAGE resists from within a “suspect community”’, which extends the argument of the experience of war by considering the extension of counterinsurgency policies to the domestic setting. Through focusing on my experiences within the organisation CAGE, I present details of how the state practically carries out a counterinsurgency policy in a domestic setting. It is posited that Shane Brighton’s ideas around a ‘war’ continuing into peacetime, can be further extended by rethinking the very idea of peace. Despite North America and Western Europe being outside of the war zone, their domestic counterterrorism policies and repressive policies further create an environment of war within the communities they place under suspicion.

Following on from thinking about the tactics of repression against CAGE, I consider the limitation of my research through my own positionality, as both an actor and subject of the ‘War on Terror’. While for some this may be considered a source of difficulty or contention for the subjects of my research, as the reach and access of my work has demonstrated, my positionality to communities has provided me an

authenticity that is unique among researchers looking into the impacts of counterterrorism.

Terrorism Studies and Critical Terrorism Studies have for a long time been focused on the structures and meanings of the War on Terror, but have largely failed to take into account the human experiences that underpin the harm that has been caused. By drawing on the work of Sylvester, Barkawi, Brighton and Nordstrom, understandings of counterterrorism policy can be improved by referencing the human experience of war. This thesis seeks to extend both these fields by bringing them closer together and contributing the following published works of the lived experience of the War on Terror, so that in the search for better ways of keeping societies safe, the cost to individuals and communities is never forgotten.

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