# Terrorism: emerging critiques

**Basia Spalek** introduces the themed section on terrorism and encourages us to take a multi-dimensional approach to understanding violent extremism and how to respond to it.

In June the Home Office published '*The Prevent Strategy: a guide for local partners in England; Stopping people becoming or supporting terrorists and violent extremists*'. The publication illustrates the seriousness with which the British government views the risk of terrorism facing the UK, identifying Al-Qaida as consituting the most significant threat. This government document is part of an emerging set of discourses, practices and institutions in the UK that are directly trying to reduce the risk of homegrown terrorism, whereby initiatives aimed at countering terrorism are increasingly being mainstreamed into the policies and practices of a wide range of statutory and non-statutory organisations, including agencies of the criminal justice system. Whilst the government's Prevent strategy views local authorities and the police as taking the lead in any strategies developed to counter terrorism, other partners are also viewed as being integral to preventing violent extremism, including representatives from the education sector, children's and youth services, probation and prison services, including members of Local Strategic Partnerships and Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (HM Government, 2008). Importantly, Muslim communities are seen as key partners in helping to prevent violent extremism, with 'communities defeating terrorism' becoming an accepted counter-terrorism maxim (Briggs et al., 2006). Therefore, Muslims' responsibilities as active citizens increasingly include them working with the authorities to help reduce the risk of terrorism.

Clearly, countering terrorism features highly on social policy agendas influencing the policies and practices of a wide range of organisations, particularly agencies of the criminal justice system, and impacting especially on Muslim communities. However, in the haste to respond to the events of 9/11 and July 7th 2005 London bombings and subsequent terror plots in the UK, there has been little thought given to some critical issues that countering terrorism raises for government. Responses to terrorism by state authorities have produced a considerable, and growing, critique from academics, criminal justice practitioners, think tanks, civil liberties organizations, as well as from community members, particularly those communities who have experienced the majority of counter-terror initiatives. One theme emerging from, and underpinning, struggles that individuals are engaged in with state authorities in trying to articulate truth to power, is in relation to how government responses to violent extremism themselves can increase, rather than reduce, the terror threat. As recently argued in the UK by the former chief inspector of constabulary, Lord Dear, 'the best course for a terrorist is to provoke a government into over-reacting to a security threat by eroding civil liberties, increasing executive powers and diminishing due process by the denial of justice' (Travis, 2008: 1). According to **Pantazis** and **Pemberton**, whose article features in this CJM edition, recent experience of the political violence in connection with Northern Ireland suggests that the perceived and lived injustices of

'suspect' communities targeted by draconian counter-terrorism legislation does little to ensure greater public safety and may even serve to escalate conflict. Nonetheless, they argue that these concerns have been cast aside by New Labour's attempts to remould an allegedly outdated criminal justice system by exploiting a longstanding decline in the popularity of civil liberties. For **Longstaff** and **Graham**, although the 9/11 and 7/7 bombings prompted a number of changes and extensions to police powers, it is important to note that the murder of Jamie Bulger in 1993 and public reaction to this that provided the political climate to new counter-terrorism legislation and associated increases in police powers. Longstaff and Graham argue that care must be taken to ensure that legislation introduced in response to the very real threat of terrorism does not lead, over time, to largely imperceptible but potentially irreversible changes in the freedoms taken for granted in advanced democracies. Nonetheless, **Bonner** argues that if one takes a historical perspective to the issue of the danger to civil liberties from unduly repressive powers, then 'the rules of the game have not changed'. For Bonner, the only 'rule of the game' that clearly has changed is that United Kingdom courts have started to apply an enhanced level of scrutiny in relation to state powers and their impacts on the rights and freedoms of individuals due largely to the Human Rights Act 1998, leading to a more empowered and less deferential judiciary. **Zedner** explores the "Ticking Bomb", a hypothetical scenario much loved by policy makers as a lever to introduce emergency powers against terrorist threat. She argues that instead of allowing a future hypothetical to become a ground for legislating today, the ticking bomb might better be invoked to oblige us to identify the precise grounds upon which exceptional measures can be justified. A second critique that can be discerned from within academic and activist circles is in relation to the militarism of the Bush Administration and its allies, and the

use of rendition and torture. For **Flynn**, the Bush Administration's decision to engage in a military campaign against terror has disastrous consequences to the nation's economic and civic health and to its security. **Scalia** looks at the prisons of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, where suspected terrorists are imprisoned to be interrogated by the US military forces, and the system of renditions, a network of abduction of suspected terrorists in European countries who are rendered to their countries of origin, where they are arrested and interrogated. For Scalia these developments might be considered as constituting a post-fordist model of penal production where in the political and judicial vacuum that is created, there is space for a 'flexible' treatment of inmates which means the denial of individuals' rights. A third emerging critique is in relation to the construction of the notion of the 'new terrorism', which conveys the sense of a heightened risk from terrorist activity faced by western liberal democratic states (Mythen & Walklate, 2006). Policies and practices associated with the notion of the 'new terrorism' have been criticised for their a-historicity, ignoring previous experiences of terrorism from which useful insights and lessons can be drawn. **Lambert** argues that Tony Blair's key role in promoting al-Qaida as a new and exceptional terrorist threat is all the more significant given his own contemporaneous experience of negotiating with an exponent of old terrorism, Sinn Fein, either the political representative of the Provisional IRA, or the IRA itself. For Lambert, it is appropriate to highlight the significance of Northern Ireland experience of 'suspect communities' over thirty years in a counter-terrorist context when addressing Muslim community groups post 7/7. Interestingly, some communities in the UK have long-standing experience in tackling extremism, however, it appears that government policy has tended to overlook this experience, instead propagating a 'war on terrorism' that has served to increase rather than reduce the terror

threat. **Haqq Baker** offers an insider's account of a British Muslim Convert community in London, which has been under much scrutiny. Haqq Baker's contribution alludes to a deeper problematic at play when considering terrorism and counter-terrorism. Traditional terrorism studies has been criticised for being analytically and methodologically weak, relying too heavily on secondary information and for failing to understand terrorism, and counter-terrorism, through the perspectives and experiences of those experiencing state repression (Breen Smyth, 2007; Jackson, 2007). As such Haqq Baker's account provides an alternative narrative to existing academic and political debates regarding adherents to Salafeeyah (or Salafism as it is more commonly known today). Similarly, **Githens-Mather** argues that when attempting to explore radicalisation it is important to examine and document the narratives of individuals who themselves have been radicalised, these narratives suggesting that it is a mistake to analyse individuals' experiences in a historical vacuum. The voices of those individuals whose lives have been directly impacted by terror attacks are also largely missing from the public arena, so that the construction of the social problem of terrorism post 9/11 has generally been dominated by state-centric perspectives. This edition of CJM features two articles written by direct and indirect victims of terrorism – **John Tulloch**, who was sitting in the same carriage as Mohammad Sidique Khan, the bomber of the Edgware Road underground train; and **Jo Berry**, whose father was killed when an IRA bomb blew up the Grand Hotel in Brighton during the 1984 Conservative Party Conference. Tulloch's account consists of a personal and critical reflection upon the political use of his 7/7 media image. As one of the 'walking wounded' to emerge from Edgware Road station about one hour after the explosion, Tulloch was photographed by free-lance photographers without being aware of this. Berry's account explores the emotional and

psychological journey that she made in trying to understand the conditions of injustice and oppression that led to the Brighton bombing. The focus on terrorism within this edition of CJM ends with a piece by **Fussey** and **Richards**, who look at how, and the ways in which, criminologists might go about researching and understanding terrorism. They highlight that ideology, symbolism, process and grievance are more pronounced in terror attacks than in ordinary crime, requiring criminological examination. As countering terrorism becomes mainstreamed into the policies and practices of agencies of the criminal justice system, it might be argued that the lens of criminological enquiry will increasingly be placed upon terrorism. As such, it is crucial for criminologists to reflect upon methodological and ethical issues in relation to researching terrorism and counter-terrorism. ■

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