Prison radicalisation – the devil is in the detail

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Abstract

This paper highlights the lack of rigour involved in research into prison radicalisation. Examining two high-profile cases of alleged prison radicalisation, Richard Reid and Jose Padilla, it argues that research into this phenomenon must be driven by an appreciation of its complexities and a need to avoid drawing conclusions on the basis of scant and unreliable information. Ultimately, our capacity to properly understand prison radicalisation, along with its causes and effects, will depend on how well we're able to answer very specific questions about a prisoner's experiences. While it may be tempting to draw conclusions from vague and incomplete information, it needs to be understood that when it comes to prison radicalisation, the devil really is in the detail.

With the emergence in recent years of home-grown terrorism as an issue of significant concern to the West, it was almost inevitable that the role of prisons in the radicalisation process would become research and policy priorities. This seemed like a fairly natural response given the nature of conditions within prisons and their apparent ability to fuel radicalisation, not to mention the historic importance of prisons in terrorist movements more generally (Hamm 2007, pp. 28-36). The depth and pervasiveness of concern is reflected in the following small sample. In 2006, one U.S. Senator chairing a committee examining prison radicalisation described American prisons as "a deep pool of potential homegrown operatives" that "provide fertile grounds for radicalization and recruitment efforts" (Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs 2007, p. 1). Similar fears were echoed by a U.S. report on prison radicalisation, which observed that "With the world's largest prison population … and highest incarceration rate … America faces what could be an enormous challenge – every radicalized prisoner becomes a potential terrorist recruit" (Homeland Security Policy Institute and Critical Analysis Group Prisoner Radicalization Task Force n.d., p. i). Other countries too have warned of the seriousness of the threat, with the UK-based Quilliam Foundation observing in 2009 that "In light of the role that prisons have historically played in incubating modern Islamist extremism, it should be a matter of urgent concern for the British government that there are currently record numbers of Muslims

in British prisons at a time when the UK is under sustained threat from Islamist terrorism both at home and abroad" (Brandon 2009b, p. 7). These comments are representative of a much larger body of opinion that portrays prison radicalisation as one of the most serious security threats and challenges to emerge post 9/11.

This article will examine two high-profile cases of alleged prison radicalisation frequently cited in these and other reports. Richard Reid in the U.K. and Jose Padilla in the U.S. continue to be presented as important examples of prison radicalisation, having become so high-profile that they are frequently offered as irrefutable evidence of the dangers of prisons and their capacity to breed terrorists (Brandon 2009a, p. 1; Cuthbertson 2004, pp. 18-19; US Department of Justice 2004, p. 6). They have, in other words, become part of the lexicon of prison radicalisation. The unquestioning and repeated acceptance of these cases by governments and analysts alike, however, has concealed just how poor the available evidence of their prison radicalisation actually is. In many ways, the Reid and Padilla cases are symptomatic of the deficiencies that have characterised the study of prison radicalisation generally. These limitations are characterised by a common failure to provide adequate explanation around three key areas.

Firstly, *the* n*ature and bearing of the individual's prison experience itself*. Too often, we are asked to rely upon very limited information, and therefore equally questionable analysis, about what the individual did in prison, who they interacted with, and the nature and development of their beliefs, spiritual or otherwise. In the end, we are presented with vague and unhelpful comments which typically sound like "[he] converted to Islam following a stint [in prison]" (Hamm 2007, p. 29); or, "[his] path toward terrorism began in … prison" (Brandon 2009a, p. 1); and, "[he] became a radical Islamist while in prison" (Ballas 2010, p. 4). In many cases, this represents the sum of evidence on the individual's prison experience and we are expected to accept this at face value. In addition to the absence of evidence capable of supporting many of these observations, the imprecision of these statements is equally worrying. Take for instance, the oft-repeated statement, "his path toward terrorism began in prison." Yet what precisely is being said here? Does it mean that the individual converted to Islam whilst in prison? Or that he was exposed to radical ideologies, or maybe even accepted the legitimacy of the need to engage in violence? Or does it mean that the individual formed associations, without necessarily sharing the beliefs of these individuals at the time, but whose acquaintance would subsequently lead to their involvement in terrorist activity? It seems obvious to suggest that gaining an authentic understanding of prison

radicalisation requires a thorough insight into these individuals' prison experience. Yet it is precisely this exactness that has eluded the vast majority of studies thus far.

Secondly, *the mapping of individuals' post-release experiences*. The importance in examining post-release experiences is vital, particularly because years often separate an individual's release from prison and their engagement in terrorist activity. However, analyses of individual cases of alleged prison radicalisation, by definition, tend to present prison as being a defining, life changing moment, "the beginning of the journey", that set an individual irreversibly down the path of radicalisation and terrorism. The problem with attempts to identify defining moments is that they fail to understand that radicalisation is a complex process that occurs over time. Retrospective analyses of alleged and convicted terrorists that uncover any prison history are drawn to this experience like moths to the flame, particularly if there is any hint that the subject may have dabbled in Islam during their imprisonment. Events post-release are often examined not to assess their role in the development of an individual's beliefs over time, but rather to prove that the prison experience initiated an uninterrupted sequence of events that led ultimately to the individual's engagement in terrorist activity.

Thirdly, *the relationship between individuals' pre* and *post-release experiences*. In order to gauge the full effects of prison on the formation of an individual's beliefs and behaviour, the interplay between their pre and post-release experiences needs to be examined. For instance, does one's prison experience make one more receptive to extremist and violent ideologies post-release by strengthening the resonance and validity of anti-State and anti-Western rhetoric? Or, how do organisations with which an individual associates following their release exploit their prison experience to heighten their receptivity to radical ideas? And in these cases, is it even accurate to talk about the radicalising effects of prison?

Admittedly, achieving this level of precision in these three areas is particularly challenging, but the vast majority of work conducted in this field does not even come close to approximating this, in almost all instances even failing to acknowledge and treat these as distinct areas. In many ways, these deficiencies reflect the problems afflicting the study of radicalisation more generally – a failure, but perhaps more accurately, an inability, to consult those radicalised; gaps in our understanding of the radicalisation process, including the role of radical ideologies; and, the difficulty involved in accessing government records and intelligence.

The above notwithstanding, it should be noted that it is not being suggested that prison radicalisation in its various forms is not an issue of considerable importance or that recruitment attempts, successful or otherwise, do not occur. We know they do. For instance, the case of Kevin James, and his activities in California's New Folsom State Prison, unambiguously demonstrates that prisons are indeed places where radicalisation, recruitment and terrorist planning occur. Evidence abounds that James successfully recruited other prisoners to Jam'iyyat Ul-Islam Is-Saheeh (JIS), or Assembly of Authentic Islam, a group he founded whilst in prison. It is also clear that he was propagating a radical interpretation of Islam, one that called for violence against its enemies, including the U.S. government. James' reach also extended beyond prison walls, as his followers, under his direction, scouted targets, recruited others, and raised funds, primarily through armed robberies, for the purpose of launching its attacks, possibly on 11 September 2005 (Hamm 2007, pp. 39-53).

The need to take prison radicalisation seriously is reinforced by the recruitment potential of imprisoned charismatic figures such as Abu Hamza and Abu Qatada in the UK, not to mention the increasing number of individuals being held in Western prisons for terrorism-related offences. For instance, as of 2009, 143 persons were in UK prisons for terrorist-related offences (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 2009), while in Australia, the figure currently stands at fewer than twenty.

However, adopting a more critical eye to the processes of prison radicalisation is important for a number of obvious reasons, not the least of which is to help ensure that the positive and rehabilitative potential of religious conversion by prisoners (Spalek and El-Hassan 2007) is not encumbered by notions of some sinister and inevitable connection between conversion and radicalisation (Post and Sheffer 2007, p. 110; HM Chief Inspector of Prisons 2010).

Richard Reid

Richard Reid, also known as the "shoe-bomber", is perhaps the most frequently cited example of how prison can facilitate an individual's journey into terrorism. One is hard pressed to examine any report on prison radicalisation without being presented with the example of Reid. He has become the quintessential example of how prison can produce radicals and terrorists, a view that is as strong today as it was shortly after Reid's arrest in 2001 (Seper 2004; Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs 2007, p. 7; Homeland Security Policy Institute and Critical Analysis Group Prisoner Radicalization Task Force n.d., p. iii). For instance, one recent Australian report observed that "Richard Reid …

turned to extreme Islamism as a direct result of his experience in British prisons" (Bergin 2010), while another made the observation that "Reid … took his first steps to becoming the notorious "shoe bomber" in a British jail" (Masters 2010).

Yet precisely what evidence exists capable of showing that Reid was in fact radicalised in prison? Is it possible to establish a direct connection, or even an indirect one for that matter, between Reid's prison experience, radicalised or not, and his subsequent terrorist activity?

The problems that can arise in not examining individual cases in a detailed and methodical manner is revealed in a 2010 report on prison radicalisation by the Quilliam Foundation, entitled, *Unlocking Al-Qaeda: Islamist Extremism in British Prisons*. In its examination of Reid, it describes his prison experiences in imprecise, frivolous, and frequently contradictory terms. Take the following four comments made by the report, which are presented here in the sequence in which they appear in the original.

Comment 1 **-** "[Reid] adopted extreme Islamist beliefs as a direct result of [his] time in prison" (Brandon 2009b, p. 7). This comment is made without further explanation or supporting evidence. Yet what does it mean? Does it mean that Reid acquired these extremist beliefs while in prison? Or does it mean that he was not radicalised in prison, but that his prison experience somehow made him more susceptible to radicalisation following his release? Regardless, we are left with little doubt that prison was fundamental to Reid's radicalisation.

Comment 2 - "It is not known which individuals in prison inspired [Reid] to convert, however during this period there was considerable radical presence at FYOI [Feltham Young Offenders' Institution] (Brandon 2009b, p. 14)". This comment represents the sum of the report's description of Reid's prison experience. Unable to shed any light whatsoever on Reid's time in prison, it makes an attempt to establish a connection between Reid and radicalising influences in prison at the time of his incarceration. Again, no further evidence is offered, including the nature of this so-called "radical presence" and whether, or how, Reid may have interacted with, or been influenced by it.

Comment 3 - "[Reid] became consistently involved in [a radical group] only after [his] release. This however strongly suggests that [he] had adopted radical ideologies while in prison or that [his] prison experiences made [him] susceptible to extremists' messages" (Brandon 2009b, p. 19). In other words, we are being asked to accept that just because he

joined a radical group some time after his release, then prison must somehow be responsible for this decision. Again, there is no attempt to explain how one led to the other.

Comment 4 – "The case of Muslim converts like Richard Reid … suggest that converts are significantly over-represented among those who adopted extremist or jihadist ideologies as a result of their prison time" (Brandon 2009b, p. 19). In addition to reverting to its original, although unsubstantiated, claim that prison contributed directly to Reid's radicalisation, this comment also reflects the report's tendency to draw a strong connection between Reid's conversion in prison and his subsequent courting of radical ideology, as if though one naturally led to the other. Indeed, this propensity to explain Reid's radicalisation within the context of his conversion to Islam is evident within the broader literature (Warnes and Hannah 2008, p. 409; Hamm 2009, p. 668). In these instances, Reid's conversion is presented as proof of the perils of prison and its capacity to breed radicals,[1] despite a growing body of evidence that suggests the opposite is true (Spalek and El-Hassan 2007; Hamm 2009).

These observations about the Quilliam Foundation's report are made not because they are extraordinary, but because they are typical. Many descriptions of individual cases of the radicalising effects of prison are not only vague and unsupported by the evidence, but rely upon oft-repeated, so-called established cases to make their argument. In this way, many analysts and commentators who examine prison radicalisation seem to have abandoned the need to demonstrate the veracity of these individual cases. When it comes to research into prison radicalisation, there is a danger that repetition is becoming a substitute for evidence.

What is known about Richard Reid is that he did convert to Islam during one of his two stints in Feltham Youth Offenders Institution during 1992/3 and 1995 on the advice of his father, himself a career criminal who spent many years in and out of British jails. His father, who also converted to Islam in prison during the 1980s, extolled the virtues of Islam to his son, informing him that Muslims "treat you like a human being" (Elliott 2002). Little information, however, is available about Reid's prison experience and what role it played in the formation of those views that ultimately led him to try and bring down American Airlines Flight 63 in

[1] For instance, one frequently-cited report makes the following observation. "There have been a number of incidents in the UK that demonstrate that radicalized or extremist Islamist prisoners may have the potential to cause disruption in prisons. These include: Richard Reid the failed transatlantic shoe-bomber is said to have embraced Islam while in prison and to have fallen under the influence of radicalizing influences upon his release from prison in 1996" (Hannah, Clutterbuck and Rubin 2008, p. 34). Beside the fact there is no evidence to indicate that Reid was an Islamist prisoner, let alone one who was disruptive, comments such as this demonstrate how a prisoner's conversion to Islam can readily lead to erroneous assumptions about the radicalising potential of prisons.

December 2001. Some attempts have been made to shed light on Reid's time in prison, including on those relationships that may have led him to acquire extremist views, but these too have not withstood scrutiny. For instance, it has been suggested that Reid was radicalised in Feltham by visiting Imam, Abdul Ghani Qureshi (Hamm 2007, p. 30), but the evidence indicates that Qureshi's contact with Reid was minimal, if not non-existent (Kelso 2001).

The true story behind Reid's radicalisation is more likely to be found in the 6 years between his release from prison in 1995 and his arrest in 2001. Following his release, he attended Brixton mosque for an unknown period of time, commencing, it would appear, in late 1995 according to the mosque chairman (Hoge 2001). Nor is it clear why he chose to attend this mosque, although it has been suggested that Brixton mosque had a reputation for attracting converts and assisting ex-prisoners to make the transition back into the community (BBC 2001). While at Brixton, he may have been influenced by one of its preachers, Sheikh Abdullah el-Faisal, who was jailed in 2003 for incitement to kill Jews (Herbert 2006), although el-Faisal claims that he has never met Reid (BBC News 2007). It is also while at Brixton mosque that Reid likely met with the so-called 9/11 "20th hijacker", Zacarias Moussaoui, who, along with others, may have enticed Reid into adopting radical beliefs (BBC 2001).

In any event, Reid eventually found himself at Finsbury Park mosque, where he was exposed to the teachings of other well-known extremist preachers, particularly Abu Qatada and Abu Hamza al-Masri (Elliott 2002; O'Neill & McGrory 2006). It was not until 1998, however, three years after his release from prison, that Reid showed any sign of holding extremist views, returning to his old mosque at Brixton where he harangued listeners for their passive views. It was while at Finsbury Park mosque that he travelled to Afghanistan to receive training in an al Qa'eda camp in either 1999 or 2000, a full 5 to 6 years after being released from prison.

At best, the available evidence suggests that prison may have served to contextualise and provide meaning to a number of experiences that pre-dated Reid's imprisonment, thereby initiating a political awakening of sorts, possibly precipitated or reinforced by his conversion to Islam. For instance, Reid did ambiguously observe in February 2002 during discussions with his solicitor that his conversion to Islam whilst in prison helped him to understand better the world around him (Herbert 2006). Reid also mentioned, possibly within the context of his conversion, that racism played a large part in his youth, citing a high-profile criminal case

that in his view exposed endemic discrimination in society. The manner in which these views and experiences merged, how they contributed to Reid's conversion and subsequent radicalisation, and the role played by prison in this process, remains a matter of pure conjecture. What appears clear is that Reid's path to terrorism was a long and complex one, involving the coalescing of a range of factors. This was revealed by Reid himself, who explained that attending the Brixton and Finsbury Park mosques did not make him a jihadi, but they helped him along the way. Reid revealed that these mosques and their preachers merged with his own reading, experience, and thinking about the world around him to produce a commitment to the use of violence in the defence of Islam (Herbert 2006). It may very well be the case that the true importance of prison, therefore, lay in Reid's retrospective evaluation of this experience, particularly through the lens of an ideology that presented Muslims and Islam as the victims of injustice. Yet to suggest that prison, in and of itself, created Richard Reid "the terrorist", is a gross misreading of the evidence, not to mention a failure to appreciate the complexities associated with a journey that takes one from religious convert to committed terrorist.

Jose Padilla

Like Reid, Jose Padilla, arrested in May 2002 in the U.S. initially on suspicion of plotting a "dirty bomb" attack, is presented as a terrorist whose extremist roots can be traced to his time in jail. Mark Hamm, in his very good study on terrorist recruitment in American prisons, presents Padilla as an example of someone who was recruited into terrorism whilst in jail, presenting as proof Padilla's conversion "to Islam following a stint in south Florida's Broward County jail where he had been influenced by a free-world imam", with the result, he observes, that Florida officials have been "interested in terrorism" ever since (Hamm 2007, pp. 29-30 & 101). Similarly, former Los Angeles Police Commissioner, William Bratton, while providing testimony before a U.S. House of Representatives Committee in 2007, placed Padilla in the same category as individuals such as Richard Reid and Abu Musab al Zarqawi, describing them as "street thugs radicalized while behind bars" (Bratton 2007). Finally, the *FBI's Law Enforcement Bulletin* recently observed in a feature article on prison radicalisation that Padilla "is just one more example of someone who became a radical Islamist while in prison" (Ballas 2010, p. 4). Indeed, the ubiquitous nature of these views concerning Padilla led to a revival of interest in the U.S. about the radicalising potential of prison on Muslim inmates (Sullivan 2002; Zoll 2005).

Yet, like Reid, there is little evidence to support these observations. In fact, evidence of Padilla's prison experiences, particularly as they relate to his religious or political views, is conspicuous by its absence. What is know is that Padilla was a troubled youth who found himself in a juvenile detention centre between the ages of 14 and 19, again finding himself in jail at 20. It was during this second stint in jail, his final one before being arrested on terrorism-related charges 10 years later, that he informed his then girlfriend that he intended to turn his life around (Sontag 2004). According to his girlfriend, Padilla "was upset at himself for getting in trouble again … He wanted to stop … all that and make a better place for himself in the world." Even if we accept that he may have commenced a process of religious awakening, the evidence that he was even flirting with Islam at this time is ambiguous, while the evidence of him courting radical ideas is non-existent. Moreover, there is no indication that prison introduced Padilla to an individual, or a network of individuals, whose association served to springboard him into a world of radical ideas and terrorism.

Following his release from prison in late 1992, Padilla and his girlfriend moved to Florida where they worked in a fast food store managed by Muhammed Javed, the co-founder of a local Islamic studies school. It was there that Padilla, for the first time, expressed an interest in Islam, in fact following his girlfriend's example, whose interest in Islam pre-dated his own. Indications are that Padilla's interest in, and active pursuit of Islam commenced in early 1993, at least 6 months *after* his release from prison. This was confirmed approximately one month after Padilla's arrest in 2002, when Javed informed the media that Padilla did not in fact convert to Islam in prison, but rather expressed an interest in the religion while working for him (Dahlburg 2002). It is also interesting to note that Padilla did not formally adopt his Islamic name, Ibrahim, until 1994, when he formally converted to Islam at al-Imam mosque in Sunrise, Florida (Ripley 2002). Padilla then began to attend a couple of local mosques, where he studied Arabic and scripture classes. The Imam at one of these mosques described Padilla as a student hungry for knowledge who was "neither quarrelsome nor radical but rather willing to listen and obey" (Sontag 2004).

Moreover, the Florida jail in which Padilla is alleged to have converted to Islam, the Broward County Jail, has no record of Padilla's conversion, let alone evidence of him holding radical Islamist views. According to the Broward County Sheriff, Padilla did not make any requests for special meals, religious classes or the Koran (Thomas and Canedy 2002). According to him,

> We do not have any documents that support that this conversion took place in the jail … We do not have any documents ... that shows that he requested to speak to an imam, that he asked to attend any Islamic classes or services, and we do not have any request that he changed his name while at the jail (Dahlburg 2002).

The closest evidence we have of Padilla's conversion to Islam whilst in prison is to be found in the form of accounts by anonymous law enforcement officials who claim that Padilla informed his interrogators that he *first became interested* in Islam while serving time in Broward County (Dahlburg 2002). In addition to the absence of any corroborating evidence, these accounts, even if accurate, hardly amount to evidence of Padilla's radicalisation in prison. The urge to conflate conversion and radicalisation would appear to be a strong one.

Common perceptions of an association between Padilla's prison experience and subsequent radicalisation may also be found in the comments made by then U.S. Attorney-General, John Ashcroft, who upon announcing to the world that Padilla had been arrested, stated that,

> Following serving in prison (sic) in the United States in the early 1990s, Jose Padilla referred to himself as Abdullah Al Mujahir. Subsequent to his release from prison, he travelled to Afghanistan and Pakistan (USA Today 2002).

This statement leaves the distinct impression that Padilla became actively involved with Islam, including its radical interpretations, very soon after his release from prison. However, Padilla in fact did not travel to Afghanistan and Pakistan until at least seven years after his release nor, as the previous discussion illustrates, did he become a Muslim until sometime after leaving jail.

Like Reid, it is during the ten years between Padilla's release from prison and his arrest on terrorism related charges that the real story behind his radicalisation is likely to be found. This period, however, is rarely examined to assess how Padilla was radicalised to violence. While little information is available on his political and religious views during this time, it is known that he went from mosque to mosque (Thomas and Canedy 2002), and that at some stage following his release from prison, was recruited by a North American cell to participate in jihad, and to travel overseas for that purpose (U.S. District Court 2005). It is unclear when Padilla began his association with members of this cell, although the indictment which

implicates him indicates that some relationship existed by mid-1996, at least three and a half years following his release from prison (U.S. District Court 2005, p. 8). There is no evidence, prior to this date, capable of demonstrating that Padilla may have harboured radical beliefs.

Scale of the problem

Given some of the shortcomings in our capacity to accurately describe individual cases of prison radicalisation, as demonstrated by the Reid and Padilla cases, perhaps it is also appropriate to briefly explore what is been said about the scale of the problem. Yet just as descriptions of individual cases of prison radicalisation can be flawed and misleading, so too can estimates of its prevalence. Take, for example, a recent report released by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), entitled *Terrorism. The New Wave* (Clarke and Soria 2010). Although the report discusses a range of issues, including the important observation that al Qaeda and related organisations seem more intent on dispatching lone operatives to the West, it is what the report said about prison radicalisation that received the vast bulk of media and government attention. The RUSI report observed, in a section tucked away in the last third of the document, that prison probation officers estimated that approximately one in ten of the 8,000 Muslim prisoners in high-security institutions in England and Wales have been *"successfully targeted"* by jihadist radicalisers. The report goes on to announce that there are "800 potentially violent radicals, not previously guilty of terrorism charges, [who] will be back in society over the coming five to ten years."

Predictably, there was widespread media coverage of this aspect of the report. The headline of *The Independent* dramatically announced 'Muslims being turned into terrorists in jail' (Milmo 2010), while the UK *Sun*, true to form, announced '800 fanatical Muslim lags 'waiting to hit UK'' (Wilson 2010). Even the Australian media jumped on the bandwagon, with *The Age* observing 'Radicals 'target' UK Muslim prisoners' (Johnson 2010).

What is interesting to note, however, is that the RUSI report's observation about the 800 Muslim prisoners who have been "successfully targeted" by jihadist radicalisers is based on a single source - namely a news story in the *Sunday Times*, which predates the RUSI report by a full two years (Leppard 2008). In addition to being somewhat dated, the RUSI report exaggerates a crucial aspect of the original *Sunday Times* story. While the RUSI report talks about the "successful targeting" of 800 prisoners, the original report talks merely of these individuals being "targeted" by al Qaeda, with no mention being made of how successful these efforts in fact were. An important distinction in anyone's language.

Moreover, it is evident that the authors of the report failed to verify even the most basic facts. For instance, the report arrived at its figure of 800 potentially violent radicals as a percentage of the *8,000 Muslim prisoners in high-security institutions in England and Wales*. Yet there are only 6,000 prisoners in high-security institutions in England and Wales, the majority of which are not Muslim (Travis 2010). After the Ministry for Justice challenged its figures, RUSI subsequently conceded that the figure of 8,000 Muslim prisoners was across the entire prison system, not just those in high security.

Inaccuracies and misreporting of this sort can only too easily spill over into other reports, very much like the Reid and Padilla cases, gaining currency each time they are presented as fact. Only several months after the release of the RUSI report, there are signs that this is already occurring (Wilner 2010, p. 12).

Lessons

There are several lessons that can be learnt from these examples. First, there appears to be a strong temptation to link prisoners' conversion to Islam with terrorist activities, as if though there is some inevitable path from prison conversion to terrorism. It is also often the case that a prison experience on the part of a suspected or convicted terrorist is assumed to have played a role in the development of that person's extremist beliefs and behaviour, even where there may be no compelling evidence to indicate that they even converted whilst in prison. This predisposition, one suspects, finds its roots in general theories of radicalisation based on notions of disaffection, isolation, identity seeking, and counter cultural urges, and the prison environment's capacity to feed, or exploit, these feelings (Silber and Bhatt 2007, p. 39; Neumann 2010, p. 2).

Second, the topic lends itself to vague and inaccurate reporting because of the difficulties involved in accessing information on activities taking place in institutions designed not only to keep people in, but also to keep people out. As a result, only snippets of information emerge from prisons, and it is on this basis that conclusions are reached, frequently through inference or sheer speculation. It is true that where criminal charges relate directly to an individual's prison activities (for instance, where this involves recruitment directly into a terrorist organisation), we are more likely to gain a fuller insight through trial transcripts, indictments, and other evidentiary material. Where this is not the case, assessing the nature of an individual's prison experience, including the role it may have played in that individual's subsequent terrorist behaviour, is likely to be shrouded in mystery. This is also true of

behaviour or the acquisition of beliefs whilst in prison that might be defined as radical, but which do not ultimately lead to involvement in terrorist activity. This difficulty merely underscores the importance of involving correctional institutions as research partners and engaging, where possible, the actual subjects of the research.

Finally, the devil is in the detail. Our ability to accurately gauge the nature and extent of prison radicalisation is dependent on our capacity to answer very specific questions. This includes a need to refine and re-define some of the questions to help us improve our understanding. In fact, the term "prison radicalisation" may partly account for some of the confusion, as it has, through common usage, become an all-encompassing term that includes a range of behaviours, much of it unrelated to actual radicalisation, let alone terrorist behaviour. From conversion to Islam and exposure to extremist ideologies on the one hand, to recruitment into terrorist organisations on the other, all have been presented as examples of prison radicalisation. Yet for others, the mere existence of Muslim prisoners is a problem that needs to be understood within the context of its radicalising potential (Cuthbertson 2004, pp. 16-18). We need, however, to properly understand these individual activities and circumstances, including their durability and influence on choices made by individuals post-release. Only then will we be in a position to understand the relationship between prison and terrorism, which afterall, lies at the heart of interest in this area.

To reiterate, none of what has been presented here is meant to diminish the actual and potential importance of prisons as places of radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism. However, the investigation of prison radicalisation as an area of terrorism research must move beyond its reliance on anecdotal evidence and assumption while simultaneously treating it as a complex process. Only then can we begin to identify genuine cases of prison radicalisation and speak with greater certainty and authority about its causes and effects.

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