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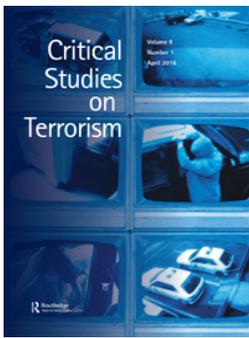
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## Critical terrorism studies, victimisation, and policy relevance: compromising politics or challenging hegemony?

Will McGowan

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ARTICLE

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## Critical terrorism studies, victimisation, and policy relevance: compromising politics or challenging hegemony?

Will McGowan

Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology, University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK

### ABSTRACT

This article considers the key contributions Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) has made to our understanding of victimisation, contending that while CTS has greatly expanded our knowledge in certain areas, it has hitherto failed to adequately engage with victims and survivors of terrorist attacks. It argues that CTS has the capacity to afford greater space to marginalised survivor narratives and representations of victimhood which are often used to justify prevailing responses to terrorist violence. Finally, it suggests that this represents an important juncture for CTS to reflect upon the issue of vulnerability in its pursuit of more progressive policy agendas.

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Critical terrorism studies; terrorism; victimisation; victims; survivors; policy relevance

## Introduction

Speaking on 7th July 2015 in a speech reminiscent of President Bush's Address to the Nation on the evening of 11th September 2001, David Cameron insisted that "ten years on this is one of those days where everybody remembers exactly where they were when they heard the news" (2015). The Prime Minister spoke of the "resolve and resolution" of Londoners and the UK in the aftermath of the London bombings, reminding us of "the threat that we still face." Linking the tragic reality of the past with the imminent and inevitable threat of the present and future, he went on to speak of the "grace and the dignity of the victim's families for all they've been through," emphasising the need to "honour the memory of those victims and all those that were lost ten years ago today." Despite the focus on victims of the 7th July 2005 attacks and their families, there seemed to be a lot "going on" in addition to paying tribute; a multiplicity of political agendas seemed to be at play. In another speech during the day, Cameron said:

Ten years on from the 7/7 London attacks, the threat from terrorism continues to be as real as it is deadly – the murder of 30 innocent Britons while holidaying in Tunisia is a brutal reminder of that fact. But we will never be cowed by terrorism. We will keep on doing all that we can to keep the British public safe, protecting vulnerable young minds from others' extremist beliefs and promoting the shared values of tolerance, love and respect that make Britain so great. (Davies and Addley 2015)

**CONTACT** Will McGowan  [W.Mcgowan@liverpool.ac.uk](mailto:W.Mcgowan@liverpool.ac.uk)

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In this excerpt alone, the Prime Minister speaks of “7/7”, the tragic attack in Tunisia, Britain’s refusal to be intimidated by terrorism, the government’s “anti-extremism” strategy, and gives an indirect nod to the Conservative party’s contested promotion of “fundamental British values” (see Department for Education 2014).

The discursive significance of speeches such as this for the representation of terrorism and counterterrorism more broadly has been a staple analytical focus for critical terrorism studies (CTS) and constructivist approaches more broadly (Jenkins 2003; Jackson 2005; Croft 2006), with recent work emphasising the important temporal and commemorative function such constructions serve (Holland and Jarvis 2014). While speeches such as these ostensibly position victims of specific terrorist attacks at the centre of political discussion, we are unlikely to hear much about them for much of the time. In this regard, victims of terrorist attacks assume a doubly intriguing position for CTS. They rarely occupy CTS scholars’ primary focus, despite featuring strategically in elite discourse, and when they have been discussed, it is often in isolated relation to political rhetoric or acts of speech making such as the one presented above. These are undoubtedly important and often provide us with the first threads of an issue to pull at before we can unravel the bigger picture. However, in considering the multifaceted relationship between CTS, victimisation, and policy relevance this article wishes to delve deeper into some of the broader questions victimisation poses for CTS.

Given the significance of exploring and encouraging alternative framings of terrorism within CTS, it is both necessary and important that much work in this field has focused on the perpetual threats to democracy, disregard for human rights, harmful security practices, and illegitimate military activities that we have seen mobilised in the name of the war on terror. From the outset, CTS has been committed to shedding greater light on these issues and many others by providing a space for scholars who may otherwise have been reluctant to publish in “‘terrorism industry’ journals” (Breen Smyth et al. 2008, 2). Such contributions to our understanding of inequality, suffering, and extrajudicial deployments of state power – all of which point to instances or patterns of victimisation – widely reflect CTS’ commitment to maintaining an ethical-normative orientation (Jackson 2007, 249). According to Jackson (2007, 249), CTS is an emancipatory project with an ethical responsibility to stand up for the oft-targeted “terrorist other” who may legitimately be killed, tortured, or incarcerated for counterterrorism purposes.

By adopting an “openly normative” stance CTS seeks to identify who that “terrorist other” may be at any given point in time and subject these processes of “othering” to closer critical scrutiny. CTS critique has thus rendered state centric assumptions around terrorism, terrorists, and power inherently problematic and unstable which has in turn enabled us to view “the terrorist” as human and varying forms of “terrorism” as human and political struggle. Despite this immense contribution CTS has only partially turned its critical gaze towards victims and survivors of terrorist attacks which, reversing the above logic for heuristic purposes, we might understand to presently denote those who have been killed, injured, or who have lost loved ones as a result of violence perpetrated by individuals or groups deemed to be terrorists by the state.<sup>1</sup>

Among the foundational aims of CTS, stated in the very first issue of this journal, was the need “to engage in conversations with *actors who have important and interesting points of view on terrorism-related issues, but who might otherwise be marginalized in public debate*, including policy-makers and those designated as ‘terrorists’” (Breen Smyth

et al. 2008: 3; emphasis added). This article contends that victims and survivors of terrorist attacks represent such a group of actors. More specifically, it suggests that victims and survivors of terrorist attacks are rendered hyper-visible in certain respects, and yet remain experientially marginalised from public debate and policymaking in others.

As we know, the scale of victimisation as a result of state led counterterrorism policies at home and abroad since “9/11” far exceeds that of officially recognised terrorist violence. However, this does not wholly explain the relative paucity of research focusing on victims of such violence within the CTS subfield which, despite providing an ideal forum for such discussions to flourish, rarely engages with such actors. In thinking through whether or not CTS can influence policy, whether it wants to, and, perhaps most importantly, why it wants to, there are at least four things to consider in relation to victims of terrorism which this article will address respectively. First, what contribution has CTS made to our overall understanding of terrorism-related victimisation? Second, why might CTS have been hitherto reluctant to engage with victims of terrorist attacks? Third, why might it be pertinent for CTS scholars interested in effecting policy change to pay closer attention to such victims? Finally, what are the potential benefits and dangers of attempting to influence policy through engaging with victims and victimisation?

In developing these questions, the central aim of this article is to draw attention to “moments of bias, selectivity, exclusion, aporia or inaccuracy within terrorism discourse” (Holland and Jarvis 2014, 190), policy, and socio-economic arrangements in relation to victims of terrorist attacks. In doing so, this article hopes to contribute to the present debate within CTS by suggesting that victims of terrorist attacks are key actors (both active and passive) in the (re)production of hegemonic framings of terrorism and counterterrorism, and therefore constitute an important “group” for CTS to consider in relation to policy. It does so in the firm belief that while victims of non-state violence should not necessarily occupy the central purview of CTS, they represent an important point of critique for scholars intrigued, perplexed, and exasperated by the West’s ongoing aggression justified in the name of the war on terror.

### Exploring “victimhood”: contributions of CTS

It would be wholly inaccurate to suggest that CTS has failed to engage with questions of victimisation. Indeed, the critical research agenda employed within this subfield of terrorism studies has provided a wealth of insights into the human costs of the war on terror from a range of previously obscured perspectives. This is an important and significant achievement of CTS, informed heavily from the outset by the traditions of the Frankfurt and latterly Welsh Schools of Critical Theory as a fundamentally emancipatory project (Gunning 2007a, 2007b; Jackson 2007; McDonald 2009; Breen Smyth et al. 2008).<sup>2</sup> Such an approach has led to scholars in this field prioritising questions such as “whose voices are marginalised or silenced and whose are empowered in defining ‘terrorism’ and responses to it in particular contexts” (McDonald 2009, 114), over and above depoliticised and “expert” problem-solving.

While commitments to CTS have led, in many instances, to the “cross-fertilisation” of ideas and approaches described by Gunning (2007a, 391), there remain areas of analyses which have surprisingly failed to synthesise. The study of victimisation is such a case in

point, despite long-standing commitments within cognate disciplines such as criminology, sociology, and critical victimology to challenge dominant conceptions of who the victim is, who is most at risk of victimisation, who holds the power to define victimhood, and to what ends such definitions are put (Quinney 1972; Rock 2002; Spalek 2006; Walklate 2012; Walklate and McGarry 2015). Nevertheless, the capacity for CTS and critical terrorism scholarship more broadly to contest status quo thinking around victimisation, particularly by “refusing to accept the hierarchy of credibility” (Becker 1967, 242) peddled within official discourse, make it ideally positioned to critically inform the terrorism policy landscape.

In thinking about the inroads that have been made as a result of CTS research and related literatures, we can identify at least three distinct contributions pertaining to various forms of victimisation. The first is the disproportionate surveillance of “suspect communities” (Hillyard 1993; Pantazis and Pemberton 2009; Mythen 2012). Of the three contributions, this area of research has captured the routine, day-to-day manifestations of state power which have impacted particularly negatively upon the citizenship of ethnic minority groups (Mythen, Walklate, and Khan 2009, 2012; Jarvis and Lister 2013; Lister and Jarvis 2013). The discrimination faced by these groups is multifaceted and may relate to increased stigmatisation, surveillance/self-surveillance, longer histories of social and economic exclusion, and a lack of political representation.

It is important to note, however, that while discrimination as a result of counterterrorism measures was widely recognised by participants in these studies, many resisted being passively labelled with a “victim identity” (Rock 2002). For example, describing the heterogeneity found within one of their focus groups, Lister and Jarvis (2013) recall how an Asian male participating in their research downplayed the impact of counterterrorism measures, ultimately as an act of self-control, self-preservation, and active choice making: “Pointing to the disempowering, and depoliticising, implications of a ‘victim’ subject position, however, this individual maintained the need for, and his own experience of, an agency unencumbered by social constraints such as racism” (Lister and Jarvis 2013, 764). Regardless of whether we agree with this stance politically, or indeed believe that the inevitable corollary of identifying with victimhood is disempowerment and depoliticisation, it forms part of an important heterogeneity to recognise and document.

Equally important is the need to recognise the disparity between the cases of discrimination that we actually hear about and those deemed un-newsworthy. Consider recent high-profile cases such as Ahmed Mohamed, a fourteen year old pupil from Irving, Texas who was arrested for bringing a homemade clock into school because it “looked like a bomb”; or Mohammed Umar Farooq, the masters student at Staffordshire University who was falsely accused of being a terrorist after a member of library staff noticed him reading a copy of John Horgan and Kurt Braddock’s *Terrorism Studies: A Reader*. While these cases are highly disconcerting, especially for the individuals involved, they represent particularly visible examples which risk overshadowing the kinds of daily, “low key” discrimination many ethnic minority groups face. Recent autoethnographic work by Fitzgerald (2015), who was also detained for possessing academic books about terrorism, explores counterterrorism interactions first hand in an attempt to unpack their experiential and affective consequences. He not only illustrates the personal and political usefulness of engaging in this kind of research within CTS, but reflexively questions the lack of “space that is actively afforded to “ordinary citizens” to relate their experiences to wider audiences” beyond the designated expertise of academia (Fitzgerald 2015, 174).

The second (intimately related) contribution relates to miscarriages of justice which have occurred in the pursuit of capturing and punishing alleged terrorists. The sense of urgency and desire to apprehend, charge, and detain suspected terrorists in order to illustrate decisive political action famously led to the wrongful convictions of the Birmingham Six, the Guildford Four, the Maguire Seven, and Judith Ward among others (see Roach and Trotter 2005 for a legal discussion of these cases). Evincing clear overlaps with the issue of everyday surveillance, Rizwaan Sabir and Hicham Yezza's arrest and detention without charge in 2008 and subsequent legal battles to establish their innocence remind us that (in)justice is not merely adjudicated over strictly legal terrain, but is also implicated in the way people are made to think and feel in more "everyday" settings such as universities (see Thornton's 2011 account of the case).

As Roach and Trotter (2005, 1) point out, the metaphor of war invoked in the "war on terror" suggests the inevitability of some "collateral damage," including a curtailment of freedoms and civil liberties, and a certain willingness to accept this as a small price to pay for greater security. Given the seriousness of these curtailments and the severe impact they have had for individuals and communities in both legal and extra-legal settings, Roach and Trotter (2005) also urge us to think beyond traditionally narrow definitions of what miscarriages of justice entail. The use of military and immigration laws to prosecute alleged terrorists, they argue, has meant that many people targeted in antiterror operations may never even have the opportunity to be found innocent because they will never be given a criminal trial. The indeterminate detentions and torturous interrogation tactics at Guantánamo Bay, and the abandonment of the Geneva Conventions by the USA represent the most widely condemned example (see Sands 2009). Again, however, it is imperative that the starkest examples do not overshadow the more routinised forms of detention in operation, such as immigration detention, or the insidious narrative gaining some traction in the most recent refugee crisis that security concerns about letting terrorists into the country should come before humanitarian morality.

The third way that CTS has contributed to our understanding of victimisation is by making global suffering more visible. Exploring the hegemony of the West and the impact of the war on terror for countries in the Global South has already been a commitment of CTS (Göl 2010), and is set to continue as the subfield grows and interdisciplinary analyses of everyday violence globally destabilise "traditional interpretations of what counts as terrorism" (Sjoberg and Gentry 2015, 358).<sup>3</sup> The year of 2015 alone provided innumerable instances where non-Western lives simply did not appear as valuable as Western ones, even where the identification of violence as terrorism was uncontentious.

The massacre of up to two thousand Nigerians in Baga began on 3rd January 2015 at the hands of Boko Haram militants and continued until 7th January, the day when Chérif and Saïd Kouachi entered the Paris offices of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and shot dead twelve people. Following the shootings in France, Amedy Coulibaly killed a police officer and a further four people in a kosher supermarket in a linked attack in Paris. Despite grave threats to journalists reporting in northern Nigeria and disruptions to internet access, reports of the Baga attacks soon appeared via social media, Amnesty International, and some Western newspapers (Shearlaw 2015). However, with events in Paris unfolding and live hostage sieges being broadcast on 24-hour live news channels around the world, the Nigeria attacks occupied Western media coverage only fleetingly. The lack of coverage was all the more surprising because of the geopolitical significance

of the attacks, with Boko Haram effectively taking control of Borno State as a result. World leaders joined millions of people in France and took to the streets in a march of solidarity for the victims of Paris, yet any publicly sustained compassionate regard for the African lives lost was palpably absent.

Similarly, there were several widely reported attacks between the Tunisia shootings and the London “7/7” commemoration, including two attacks on 7th July by Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab in Nigeria and Kenya, and yet they appeared similarly sidelined during a week when terrorism was being relentlessly discussed by politicians. Unfortunately, there are untold numbers of cases such as this which receive scant comparable coverage<sup>4</sup>; when they do make headlines it is often presented briefly and with little contextualising information, which makes such violence seem “even more irrational,” “even more savage,” demarcating non-Western conflict as always culturally and ideologically “over there” (Said 1978).

Despite these important developments, CTS has appeared somewhat reluctant to study and document the narratives of terrorist attack survivors who may, at first glance, appear to interrupt the general political consensus of the subfield as a whole. To be sure, this reluctance has almost certainly been a consciously reasoned decision for many CTS scholars. Calls for more inclusive, thoroughgoing accounts of victimhood which prioritise victims of the global North and its allies have figured in CTS scholarship from an early stage in the subfield’s development. Herring (2008, 201) rightly calls for terrorism research to move beyond “worthy–unworthy victim categories” which are often explicitly evident in Western political discourse and implicitly evident in the preferred focus of Western academic research. He makes an important contribution by reminding us that the political left is just as susceptible to adopting such reductionist standpoints by simply reversing the “worthy–unworthy” hierarchy. Herring also provides valid reasons for why CTS should focus on victims of the Global North’s aggression in order to fill a gap in mainstream terrorism studies, but does not discount any form of victimisation as falling within the remit of CTS, even suggesting the political feasibility of “simultaneously researching the terrorism of official enemies” (2008, 202). From the outset, CTS has explicitly adhered to the values and promotion of a “common humanity” (Herring 2008, 201), of prioritising “universal human and societal security” (Jackson 2007, 249). With this commitment in mind, while acknowledging CTS’ chief orientation to investigating violence perpetrated by the global North, this article now turns to why else it may be that this subfield rarely considers officially recognised victimisation by exploring the link between victim rights and neoliberalism.

### **Reluctance to engage with a chequered history: victim rights and neoliberalism**

As this article has already alluded to, CTS has greatly expanded our understanding of terrorism vis-à-vis harm and victimisation, yet consciously reserves most of its analytical energies for violence perpetrated by states and their responses to terrorism committed by non-state actors. Further explanation for the relative paucity of CTS research around victims of terrorism, beyond the commitments articulated above, may lie in the historical link between victims of crime (including terrorism) and neoliberalism. In considering what this link might look like in the USA, Ginsberg (2014) identifies three areas in which

victim rights and neoliberalism have gone hand in hand over the last three decades: culture, law, and economics. Although distinct, these three areas are unified by their overarching influence from neoliberalism, leading Ginsberg (2014, 914) to suggest that the denial of society evident in “capitalism’s methodological individualism” and rejection of collective welfare, characterises the contemporary conjuncture.

One of the effects of neoliberalism is that politicians and policy makers prioritise the individual, their interactions in and with markets, and their ability to elevate their own wealth and self-interests, “rather than addressing society as an interconnected whole in which each person’s welfare depends on the welfare of society as a whole” (Ginsberg 2014, 915). Intimately linked to this ideology has been a desire from some quarters within the victim rights movement (most notably the logic of “just desserts,” as championed by von Hirsch 1976, 1985) to align notions of (criminal) justice more closely with the moral reprehensibility of the offence in question. The harm and impact of criminal acts on individual victims are thus prioritised “as a measure of offence seriousness and therefore as the basis for determining the severity of the sanction” (Sebba 2000, 68). For Ginsberg (2014), this is manifest in the naming of criminal legislation after victims of crime, legal decision making increasingly influenced by victim’s wishes, and, in the case of America, granting victim’s families permission to view executions.

Other indicative measures of a greater participation of victims within the criminal justice system since the 1980s include an exponential rise in claims made to the UK Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority from 22,000 in 1979–1980, to over 70,000 by 2003–2004 (Mythen 2007, 465). The ascendancy of victim rights during this period affected offenders too, and was a matter of pivotal importance for policymaking associated with penal repression. The significance of crime as a widespread social concern was escalated under New Labour with Tony Blair’s “tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime” mantra. Although the prison population was generally rising before 1997, it increased sharply under New Labour and has continued to rise under successive governments (Bergman and Dar 2013).

Following Ginsberg (2014), these trends are not presented as solidly causal but rather cited simply to indicate a concomitant rise in the prioritisation of victim rights and services on the one hand and the use of incarceration on the other. For the time being, the UK represents a legal exception to the expansive entrenchment of crime victims’ rights described by Ginsberg (2014); while the Council of Europe, European Court of Human Rights, and the USA have all made moves to recognise enforceable rights for victims, the UK has not formally followed this international trend (Wolhuter, Olley, and Denham 2009, 119). This looks set to change, however. Prior to the 2015 general election, the Labour party put pressure on the then Justice Secretary Chris Grayling to enforce victim rights. While this was not done prior to the cabinet reshuffle, the Conservative party ran a consultation following their election victory into making some amendments to the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime. These amendments proposed to extend the services offered to victims of all criminal offences and bring the UK in line with the EU Victim’s Directive.

Increasingly, greater emphasis on the victim can be found in relation to terrorism policies. This includes recognition and compensation for victims of previous attacks, such as *The Victims of Overseas Terrorism Compensation Scheme* which came into force in

2012 under section 47 of the Crime and Security Act 2010 (Ministry of Justice 2012). There has also been a more general emphasis on resilience-based policies operating in a pre-emptive, future-facing capacity in anticipation of imminent attacks. Both the *Prevent* and *Prepare* strands of the CONTEST strategy draw on the concept of resilience, albeit in markedly different ways (Hardy 2015). *Prepare* aligns closely with ecological understandings of resilience and focuses on mitigating against the impact of terrorist attacks by improving emergency response procedures and educating communities (Hardy 2015, 84). In essence, it places greater responsibility on communities, businesses, and voluntary sector organisations to come up with contingency plans in the event of emergency. Rather than representing a compassionate response to victims and their families in the aftermath of a terrorist attack, it aims to mitigate against such shocks by ensuring “business as usual.”

Walker and Cooper’s (2011) widely cited genealogical study of resilience situates this facet of resilience-based policies within a broader political economy of crisis adaptation. Most interestingly, for the purpose of this article, are the parallels that they draw between Crawford Holling’s development of a “complex systems theory” approach to resilience in the 1970s, and the economic philosophy of Friedrich Hayek. Hayek saw the economic market as a complex ecological system and staunchly rejected the tenets of collectivism described by Ginsberg (2014). His work was highly influential, most famously for Milton Friedman and Thatcherism. Given these historical overlaps, it is perhaps unsurprising that “this search for resilience is generated at a particular moment in time and within the context of an age of ‘austere’ capitalism in which cutting costs and reducing deficits is paramount” (Walklate, McGarry, and Mythen 2014, 422). Thus, the attendant use of resilience rhetoric by policy makers advocating preparation for future victimisation, whether caused by social, political, or economic disaster, without interrupting the flow of austerity, suggests that there are disturbing parallels between the contemporary victim policy conjuncture in the UK and the cultural and political landscape in the USA described by Ginsberg (2014).

There is of course some overlap between those bodies of literature examining victim-based policies and those focusing on policing, counterterrorism, and surveillance. The link between counterterrorism policies and neoliberalism, while complex and diverse, is palpable and has been explored in detail by CTS scholars in various contexts. Boukalas (2015) recently emphasised the differential effects of counterterrorism along class lines, detailing the depoliticising function it has served in preventing economic crises “mutating” into political ones. Elshimi (2015) looks specifically at current policy drives towards the “de-radicalisation” of supposed “extremists” under the PREVENT and CHANNEL programmes (see also Qureshi 2015), drawing on Foucauldian theory to understand these forms of counterterrorism as “technologies of the self.” In a similar vein to Ginsberg (2014), Elshimi (2015, 121) points to the alternative “spheres of governance” brought into play through such policies which connect civil society more closely with discipline and self-regulation, making civil society an extension of state and political institutions.

Running alongside work such as this is a canon of literature exploring the epistemological and ontological shifts accompanying contemporary security practices which are premised upon futurity, catastrophe, uncertainty, and the unknowability of terrorism

and disaster (Aradau and van Munster 2007; Mythen and Walklate 2010; Aradau 2014; Jackson 2015). Resilience policies in particular, such as those described above, have prompted a growing mass of critical work commenting on the neoliberal logic underpinning them (Neocleous 2012, 2013; de Lint and Chazal 2013; Evans and Reid 2013; Joseph 2013; Diprose 2015) which CTS has been slower to engage with (Heath-Kelly, Baker-Beall, and Jarvis 2015, 10). It is under the economic conditions of neoliberalism that we have seen a concomitant expansion of victim rights and more pervasive, imaginative forms of counterterrorism and security. In exploring how we might understand neoliberalism itself as a form of terrorism by considering the harmful effects neoliberal policies have had on populations (Poynting and Whyte 2012; Heath-Kelly, Baker-Beall, and Jarvis 2015), critical research has opened up the field of terrorism studies to new lines of inquiry. However, this may have had the unintended consequence of leading some critical scholars to avoid victim politics altogether for fear of inevitable co-option by conservative agendas or of simply being ignored for not signalling more punitive responses.

### **Terrorism victims: political capital or emancipatory ontologies?**

As this article has sought to elucidate, the link between victims and crime, coupled with the casting of certain crimes as war (the “war on terror”, the “war on drugs”), has a well-established history and is by no means limited to terrorism. Commenting on the representation of crime victims more generally, Elias (1993) highlights some of the ways in which victims and their suffering have been co-opted into the emerging “get-tough” crime and security agendas of Western states in recent decades, reinforcing earlier links to neoliberalism. This has surely increased as crises within the criminal justice system identified by Garland (2001) have only deepened. According to Elias (1993, 24), we are repeatedly reminded “Let’s not forget the victim,” while victims continue to be treated with misguided paternalism, condescension, and even blame, as the crime policies ostensibly bolstered in their name do little to prevent further risks and often actually exacerbate them. This resonates strongly with counterterrorism policies since “9/11” and “7/7” which have intensified arbitrary surveillance measures in the name of national security and succeeded in alienating swathes of the population, most notably young Muslims – policies which themselves exhibit many of the characteristics of officially defined “terrorism” (Miller and Sabir 2012, 28).

While this approach may have produced a law of inverse consequences (Mythen 2010; see also Johnson 2000) which policymakers seem (knowingly or unknowingly) blind to, appeals to victimhood from international to individual levels continue unabated in an attempt to justify such policies. Counterterrorism rhetoric is necessarily imbued with appeals to an at least partially victimised identity (even where stoicism or defiance coexist), and the discursive construction of an inherently evil “other” is an important political strategy (familiar to CTS) for establishing and reinforcing self-identity at these levels (Jackson 2005, 59). Lawther (2015) has argued that the politicisation of perpetration and victimhood is particularly acute following political violence for both sides of conflict, whether they are seeking to evade responsibility, gain retribution, or lay claim to moral legitimacy. Victim rights movements thus become a “surrogate battleground” (2015, 29) for broader struggles over social and political change.

Victims and survivors of terrorist attacks, as well as relatives of deceased victims, become objects of intense media attention, televised remembrance services, and personalised speeches from politicians, sometimes elevating them to near “celebrity status” (Shichor 2007, 280). While such mediums offer an important public platform where narratives are both challenged and forged, projections of “ideal victims” (Christie 1986), struggles over “deserving” and “undeserving” victimhood (Knox 2001), and essentialist accounts of victim–perpetrator relationships often characterise mainstream political debate. As Rock (2002, 22) notes, “... the misleading polar oppositions of the politicians who cast victims as the invariably affronted ‘Us’ and criminals as the alien ‘Other’ who are locked into a state of warfare” are symptomatic of this. This has contributed to the professionalisation of victimhood by victim advocacy groups (Lawther 2015) who maintain such distinctions in order to attract funding, often from the same sources perpetuating this skewed commentary.

While contemporary analyses are far more likely to problematise such binaries, the ascendancy of victim rights throughout the late 1970s and 1980s described in this article was wholly compatible with a much less reflexive victimology in which academics often pitted simplistically rendered offenders against similarly monochrome victims (Elias 1986, 6). Approaching the issue of victimisation critically under current political conditions, and against this backdrop, it is understandable that scholars seeking progressive steps towards emancipatory goals may be reticent to engage with policy. There remain palpable historical links between victim rights, victim-based policies, and neoliberal governance. It is for precisely this reason that victimisation constitutes an important area of terrorism studies and policy making in desperate need of critical invigoration.

Following recent work which has considered the war on terror through the lens of exceptionalism (Agamben 2005; Aradau and van Munster 2009), we may argue that under these political circumstances, one group of victims’ suffering is also portrayed as exceptional. Evident power over who can commit violence also suggests the existence of a kind of sovereign legitimacy of one group’s suffering over and above other groups who may have experienced seemingly equivocal trauma. Disparities of suffering are not inherently unfounded but are only truly meaningful as far as they are historically situated. While this is admittedly a complex and shifting landscape to convey, terrorist attack victims ostensibly represent such “safe” political capital to politicians and security services that their suffering is frequently cited alongside familiar calls for retribution and one-dimensional conceptions of justice intimately tied to military reprisal.

Despite this, there exists a palpable absence of victim’s direct accounts at elite levels of counterterrorism discourse. As this article has already alluded to, victims of terrorism are often spoken about but rarely spoken *to*, and yet, their intangible ubiquity in times of conflict projects illusory political consensus. The reality is, of course, far more contested and in attempting to fathom out the boundaries of legal consensus at the European level, Argomaniz (2015, 137) asks how far we can assign distinctive “macro” status to victims of terrorism, demarcating them as exhibiting shared characteristics. To address terrorist attack victims at the macro level is to necessarily generalise across cases – to speak of collective patterns and rarely of individuals.

The inconvenient truth for states and those in positions of power is that behind the rhetoric there *are* individuals. While dominant discourse often prevails, this relationship is far from determined solely by state agendas and is sometimes resisted by the very

groups and individuals the state assumes will support its polices. For example, Peaceful Tomorrows is a New York-based non-profit organisation comprising a small group of family members who lost relatives in the “9/11” terror attacks. They formed because they vehemently opposed the burgeoning war on terror and its harmful consequences, which were frequently “sold” to the public in their name, instead pleading for “nonviolent and reasoned responses to the terrorist attacks” (Peaceful Tomorrows 2015).

Similarly John Tulloch, a professor of media and communication studies who was seriously injured during the “7/7” terrorist attacks in London and whose bloodied image became an iconic representation of the bombing in British news media, later resisted the simplistic symbolism attributed to his suffering (McGarry and Walklate 2015, 91–92). He criticised the British government’s foreign policy, specifically its involvement in the Iraq war, as well as the curtailment of civil liberties and high-profile fatal shooting of Jean Charles de Menezes by British security forces (McGarry and Walklate 2015, 92). As Tulloch (2008, 34) later recalls, *The Sun* newspaper’s use of his injured body was accompanied by the headline “Tell Tony He’s Right” in support of Tony Blair’s counterterrorism Bill which proposed to extend detention without charge of terror suspects to 90 days.

While Tulloch did not support the Bill, nor the media’s manipulation of his suffering in this way, the event sparked an “intra-media argument” (Tulloch 2008, 34) which allowed him to progressively challenge the initial version of consensus over the coming months and years. Through radio and television interviews, personal and academic writing, and visits to “7/7” bomber Mohammad Sidique Khan’s former community in Leeds, Tulloch set about trying to broadcast the subjective motivations and multiple identities of both himself and Khan. More recently Tulloch, whose voicemail messages were intercepted by the *News of the World* newspaper, also accused David Cameron of “siding with the press barons” after Cameron refused to implement the Leveson Report in its entirety (Hill 2012).

Another dissenting voice is Dr Jim Swire whose daughter Flora was killed on 21st December 1988 when “Pan Am Flight 103” was brought down by a terrorist bomb over the Scottish town of Lockerbie. Despite the conviction of Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al-Megrahi in 2001 for the bombing, there persists widespread concerns that his conviction represented a miscarriage of justice on a considerable number of grounds. These mainly pertain to the quality of evidence presented at al-Megrahi’s trial. Jim Swire is a founding member of the single issue campaign group Justice for Megrahi which has consistently called for the Scottish Government to open an independent inquiry into the bombing and the conviction of al-Megrahi. Since the death of al-Megrahi in 2012 due to terminal illness, the group continues to campaign and has attracted a large number of high-profile signatories including Professor Noam Chomsky and Archbishop Desmond Tutu. Nelson Mandela was also a supporter of the campaign and encouraged that the case be reinvestigated. While the campaign for justice continues, the case of Justice for Megrahi is a powerful example of the potential that social movements spearheaded by victims have, showing their ability to reach politically prominent audiences and put pressure on state institutions.

In recent years, victims of terrorist attacks have also been cited in order to fuel domestic Islamophobic sentiment. In the UK, following the murder of Fusilier Lee Rigby in Woolwich on 22nd May 2013, right-wing groups including the English

Defence League and the British National Party cited Rigby's murder as justification for committing retaliatory violence (Rawlinson 2013). Right-wing political party, Britain First, actually used the evocative slogan "Remember Lee Rigby" on its ballot papers before the Electoral Commission had sufficient time to react and stop the phrase appearing on the first print run (Britton 2014). In both cases, Lee Rigby's family strongly and publicly denounced the anti-Muslim retaliation his murder provoked and rejected any associations that such groups wanted to make between his death and their political cause.

Although John Tulloch, Jim Swire, Lee Rigby's family, and the many families whose worlds were rocked by "9/11" and "7/7" have clearly had to try and make sense of events universally declared to be terrorism, the complexity of their cases remind us of some of the ways in which victims' testimony can be stripped of its wider political context and repackaged in far cruder ways. For this reason, it is imperative that in considering what the experiences of victims and survivors of terrorism look and feel like, we take into consideration the broadest range of incidents and not those prescribed to us by official reports and media foci. It also serves to emphasise the extent to which victims of non-state terrorism, in whose name the media, politicians, and policymakers often assume to be talking, can and do resist the political labels attached to them.

Incorporating victims of terrorist attacks more firmly into discussions of policy and critiques of state responses to security threats does not mean playing the state and media at its own game. It should not result in an equally reductive portrayal of victimhood, or view victims simply as a form of political capital to be exploited as they so often have been before. Rather, the experiences of victims should be recognised as an important symbolic and material source of knowledge and meaning-making – "as the privileged site of political agency and subjectivation" (Zulaika and Douglass 1996, 192). As Jackson (2007, 248) emphasises, we must understand "terrorism" as an instrumental use of political violence by actors operating within particular sets of circumstances, at particular times, in particular places, all of which point to the "ontological instability of the terrorist label" (2007, 248).

Set against this, the physical injury and loss of life caused by both terrorism and counterterrorism provide us with a starkly rooted, irrefutable trace to the lived experiences of those touched by terror. Of course, the importance of this situated knowledge applies to all forms of victimisation discussed in this article, and it is not the intention to prioritise certain victims over others. However, it does serve to remind us that while CTS should continue to apply immanent critique in its search for emancipatory processes, there are concrete realities from which we can make sense of our object of study and ethical issues from which we may usefully reconstruct future politics (Wyn Jones 2005).

To reiterate, this principle has been exemplified in many instances within CTS which makes it particularly well placed to develop the critical study of terrorist attack victims and survivors. If we want to learn about terrorism and its realities then we must do precisely what advocates of the war on terror seem perpetually reticent to do – speak with the actors involved. Failure to do this only reproduces the "intellectually self-defeating" taboos surrounding terrorism (Zulaika 2009, 63) which have become so emblematic of much public and political debate on the subject. This has been attempted and achieved from various scholars working both within and beyond the CTS subfield, and indeed, outside of "critical" approaches more broadly in relation to terrorists and alleged terrorist groups (see *inter alia*, Wieviorka 1993; Bell 2000; Gunning 2008; Toros and Tellidis 2013; Powell 2014).

Similarly, critical studies have greatly expanded our understanding of the impact counterterrorism measures have had on citizenship by asking citizens directly about their experiences (Mythen, Walklate, and Khan 2009, 2012; Jarvis and Lister 2013, 2015; Lister and Jarvis 2013). Extending this reach to victims of terrorist attacks should be firmly on CTS' research agenda as it grapples with the issue of policy-relevance in order to better understand the relationship between the two and make a truly informed decision as to whether, and how, it wants to involve itself in mainstream debates.

## The powers (and dangers) of legitimacy

The fact that relatively little critical attention has been paid to victims of terrorist attacks make CTS ideally positioned to incorporate this area of study into discussions around how it might influence policy. There are many examples of double standards of morality outlined in this article which serve to illustrate a key point in relation to victims of terror globally: some victims we hear about, others we do not. As Butler (2004, 13) suggests, "terrorist" is a word within a hegemonic grammar reserved for acts of unjustified violence perpetrated against Western nations. For Butler, the West's responses to this violence display a clear lack of moral equivalence. The power of mourning in the wake of attacks perpetrated on Western soil and reactions to Western military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the deaths of so many Israelis and Palestinians, leave us in no doubt as to the inequitable moral and political value placed on Western lives. This arises partly, for Butler (2004, 15), due to our seeming inability to reconcile with a politics of "dual thinking" which both condemns terrorist violence when it occurs but also asks why it came about. As she noted following "9/11": "In a strong sense, the binarism that Bush proposes in which only two positions are possible – 'Either you're with us or you're with the terrorists' – makes it untenable to hold a position in which one opposes both and queries the terms in which the opposition is framed" (Butler 2004, 2).

This article has made clear that while CTS does adopt such a position, it can legitimately incorporate victims and survivors more thoroughly into its discussions in order to influence policy without sacrificing its predominant focus on victimisation caused by counterterrorism. By recognising the legitimacy placed upon normatively imagined victims by politicians and the media, CTS can assist in ensuring that dissenting voices from within this group, many of whom express a discomfort at being involuntarily cast as the justification for Western aggression, are more often heard.

While empirical sociological studies of terrorism victims are relatively sparse, they have illustrated that this group often enter into the sphere of dual politics described by Butler. For instance, in Webel's (2004) study, victims of both "9/11" and ETA attacks in Spain assigned joint responsibility to both their perpetrators and their own national governments for failing to prevent the attacks, failing to provide support following the attacks, and then for pursuing reactive policies in the event's aftermath which pay no attention to their experiences or desires as survivors; almost all of his participants expressed a desire for no more war and stressed the futility of further violence. They wanted to humanise their enemies. A majority of victims would like the chance to speak with their aggressors (Zulaika and Douglass 1996, 195), something Basque and Irish reconciliation work has successfully facilitated.

It should not shock us to realise that those who have been unfortunate enough to experience brutality and violence first hand do not want to see an escalation of it. This was echoed by the USA Army veteran Ted Goodnight, who is now a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War and Veterans for Peace, who simply states: "I don't think that war is a useful response to anything" (Breen-Smyth 2010, 460.) These voices are often lost in the clamour as those attempting to orchestrate public opinion do their best to cast perpetrators and victims as diametrically opposed. The fact that we can so easily recognise dominant narratives following events such as "9/11" and "7/7" largely underscores the success these narratives have had. They have been accepted as particular ways of understanding particular events. The power of speaking with actors at the heart of policies in question is something CTS can and should harness as an additional way of troubling such understandings.

Of course, there are dangers in attempting to incorporate victims of terrorist attacks into emancipatory objectives, although these dangers are now well rehearsed by CTS scholars (see McDonald 2009). CTS has also predicated its critical objectives on a desire to hear and learn from other disciplines, including postcolonial and feminist scholarship which are both increasingly informing contemporary debates and encouraging a more reflexive project. In addition to the dangers raised more broadly within CTS in relation to emancipation and global hegemony, the danger of focusing on victims of terrorism as "policy-relevant" is that it risks envisioning them as a perpetual problem, a growing concern, an ever-presence – that is, that they are cast as a priority group.

There are at least two related problems associated with this. One is that victimhood may be seen increasingly as the property of experts (Christie 1977) concerned with expert knowledge rather than organic and experiential "knowing otherwise" (Walklate and Mythen 2011), which is precisely what this article has argued victims of terrorist attacks can bring to debates. The other relates more fundamentally to the problem of adequately theorising vulnerability in a way which does not replicate the mistakes cognate disciplines have already worked through. This includes rejecting many of the speculative features associated with a "risk society" (Beck 1992; see Mythen 2004), and more closely mapping the danger faced and experienced by populations within and beyond the West in ways which do not render materiality and structure obsolete. The political instability and real threat of violence in parts of the Middle East and Africa make David Cameron's assertion that the next terrorist attack is just as likely to strike a European city as it is Tunisia seem all the more hyperbolic and Eurocentric. Risk of terrorism is not everywhere at once, it is contingent and contextual.

At the 2015 CTS annual conference at the University of Leeds, keynote speaker Professor Jeroen Gunning reiterated the need for CTS scholars to more thoroughly embed political economy and historical materialism within analyses of discourse in order to better account for issues of class and state power (see also Herring 2008; Herring and Stokes 2011). This is crucial if CTS is to make sense of terrorist attack victims in relation to policy, politics, and mainstream research. As this article has illustrated, policymakers are ever more reliant on the language of risk by making recourse to increasingly pre-emptive frameworks of resource management and resilience strategies which have little more than market interests in mind. If moving away from the language of risk and resilience in policy is an option for renegotiating our security arrangements then surely victims are an important group of actors to consider.

We may wish to question some of the suggestions made in this article around counterterrorism victimisation which have encouraged us to think of more, not less, people as being victimised by terrorism. Is this a fruitful line of enquiry? What are the dangers of suggesting that terrorism victimisation is so ubiquitous? These questions are posed to CTS as a subfield in the hope that it can envision a different way of incorporating victims of terrorism into the policy fold to those currently in practice. This can occur at all levels of policymaking, including state and non-state institutions, if there is a commitment to doing so. Unlike victim rights-based policies which tend to disaggregate society to the level of the individual victim, CTS has the capacity to bring victims into the fold of their critique and in doing so, both give voice to politically co-opted victims, and expound a social harms-based conception of vulnerability which neither denies nor privileges the victim over wider society.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that while CTS had made a significant and much needed contribution to our understanding of political violence and terrorism, including various forms of victimisation relating to these phenomena, it has hitherto failed to adequately engage with victims of terrorist attacks. In doing so, this article has made a number of related claims.

First, victim-centred policies have disproportionately occupied the purview of those in favour of neoliberal economics who have used them to champion more aggressive and reactionary policy responses to the war on terror. This is identified as just one implicit factor accounting for CTS' reluctance to engage more thoroughly with victims of non-state violence, among a series of more explicit ones. CTS has challenged the socio-economic and political logic underpinning many of these policies, but has not thus far endeavoured to explore the experiences of implicated victims directly. To do so would be an important contribution in attempting to shift the power of representation over to those actors in question. CTS work which has explored the direct accounts of alleged terrorists, as well as citizens' views on counterterrorism measures, should leave us in no doubt that such a task is well within the remit and capabilities of this subfield.

Second, it has been argued that victims and survivors of terrorist attacks represent a significant source of political capital for those in positions of power. This is often used to advance the kinds of policies mentioned above "in the name of the victims", yet silences or denies participation of dissenting victims whose vision of civil rights and social justice differs to that of prevailing political, economic, and military hegemony. CTS can do even more to question the legitimacy and authenticity of official discourse, particularly as it relates to unsupported claims around what victims may or may not want. Taking these claims seriously requires taking "the category of victim more seriously as a form of political and activist subjectivity" (Rentschler 2011, 24). It also requires more critical analyses of victimhood capable of exploring vulnerability through discussions of both "injurability" and agency (Schott 2013; see also Walklate 2011).

To be sure, the examples cited in this article are selectively indicative of instances whereby victims of terrorist attacks have campaigned against, and resisted representations of, their own "victimhood" *in ways politically amenable to CTS' ideological commitments*. Incorporating them into policy discussions will not dissolve existing controversies

between survivors, campaign groups, or policymakers with opposing political views. It can, however, endeavour to facilitate space for dissenting voices where they may otherwise be marginalised.

In addition, this article has suggested that while CTS can enrich policy discussions relating to terrorism both within and outside of government by engaging with victims, there are, of course, risks involved in doing so. These risks broadly relate to two problems: emancipation and vulnerability. While the former is already familiar to the CTS subfield, the latter poses questions less commonly grappled with by its scholars thus far in relation to terrorist attacks. How to manage the promise of emancipation, which means different things to different people and risks perpetuating the very kind of “expertise” being criticised, is a matter of ongoing and sustained reflexivity for us all. How to adequately theorise vulnerability within CTS is open to debate but as the subfield reconciles its relationship to policy it is a debate of pressing importance.

## Notes

1. While this denotation may be indicative of a “blind spot” in CTS research, there are several obvious issues with applying it more widely or un-problematically: “victim” and “survivor” are deeply politicised terms which carry varying resonance both within and beyond CTS; states involved in committing terrorist atrocities simultaneously arbitrate terrorist labels; non-state institutions can also be pivotal in making such demarcations, as well as differentially influencing what we might understand to be a terrorist attack; claims of terrorist attack victimisation are often not so confined and have included bystanders, distant witnesses, first responders, emergency service personnel, along with others. Equally, the fact that several CTS scholars have purposefully considered victims and survivors *who do not* fall into this denotation nonetheless indicates an engagement with who we might “normatively” imagine when we think of terrorist attack victims and survivors. This conscious selectivity lies at the heart of this overall enquiry. For an elongated and provocative discussion of normativity in contemporary social science, see Freitag (2001).
2. For a more detailed exposition of CTS’ academic lineage generally, including a critique of its emancipatory promise and use of predominantly Horkheimerian Critical Theory specifically, see Heath-Kelly (2010).
3. The most recent CTS developments to aid in our unpacking of everyday violence globally have combined feminist perspectives from International Relations and cognate disciplines and have emphasised the gendered nature of political violence and its representations. For an overview of this diverse and complex body of work, see Sjoberg and Gentry (2015).
4. Tragically, less than a month after submitting this article for review, a similar pattern emerged in the wake of the most recent terrorist attacks in Paris in which 130 people died on 13th November. These events, paradoxically, prompted widespread media commentary noting the lack of comparable coverage extended to terrorist attacks in Beirut, Baghdad, and the West Bank that same week which in turn generated considerable debate on the issue within mainstream media. Facebook was at the heart of many of these controversies for activating its Safety Check feature so that people in Paris could let their friends and family know that they were safe via their online profiles. It was the first time that Facebook mobilised this service during a terrorist attack, having previously limited its use to natural disasters. The website also enabled users to overlay their profile pictures with the French flag as a show of solidarity and mark of respect for the victims (many landmark buildings around the world were also illuminated in France’s tricolours).

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## Notes on contributor

*Will McGowan* is currently studying for a PhD in sociology at the University of Liverpool. His research focuses on the experiential narratives of survivors of political violence and terrorism.

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