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Disciplining an Unruly Field: Terrorism Experts and Theories of Scientific/Intellectual Production

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Abstract "Terrorism" has proved to be a highly problematic object of expertise. Terrorism studies fails to conform to the most common sociological notions of what a field of intellectual production ought to look like, and has been described by participants and observers alike as a failure. Yet the study of terrorism is a booming field, whether measured in terms of funding, publications, or numbers of aspiring experts. This paper aims to explain, first, the disjuncture between terrorism studies in practice and the sociological literature on fields of intellectual production, and, second, the reasons for experts' "rhetoric of failure" about their field. I suggest that terrorism studies, rather than conforming to the notion of an ideal-typical profession, discipline, or bounded "intellectual field," instead represents an interstitial space of knowledge production. I further argue that the "rhetoric of failure" can be understood as a strategy through which terrorism researchers mobilize sociological theories of scientific/cultural fields as both an interpretive resource in their attempts to make sense of the apparent oddness of their field and their situation, and as schemas, or models, in their attempts to reshape the field. I conclude that sociologists ought to expand our vision to incorporate the many arenas of expertise that occupy interstitial spaces, moving and travelling between multiple fields.

Keywords Terrorism · Experts · Knowledge · Boundary work

> "I asked these two [advisers to a government counterterrorism expert], 'how did you get your jobs?' and they say, 'oh, we had the only qualification this person wanted... we knew nothing about terrorism.'" (from an interview with a terrorism expert, 2006).

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Introduction

"Terrorism" has proved to be a highly problematic object of expertise. In 1992, Bruce Hoffman, one of the most prominent experts in the field[1] wrote that:

> Fifteen years ago, the study of terrorism was described by perhaps the world's preeminent authority on modern warfare as a 'huge and ill-defined subject [that] has probably been responsible for more incompetent and unnecessary books than any other outside the field of sociology. It attracts phonies and amateurs…as a candle attracts moths'… [T]terrorism research arguably has failed miserably. (Hoffman 1992, pp. 25-28)

More than 15 years after this assessment, descriptions of the field are rife with similar claims. The field[2] of terrorism expertise has been characterized by disagreements ranging from the question of what counts as legitimate knowledge, to how to define its main concept. From an analytical point of view, terrorism studies fails to conform to the most common sociological notions of what a field of intellectual production ought to look like. From the participants' point of view, the field has oft been described as a failure.

One possible conclusion to the problem I have described might be that this is a field in decline: an imminent failure. But this is manifestly not the case: the study of terrorism is a booming field, whether measured in terms of funding, publications, or numbers of aspiring experts. Terrorism expertise has been an area of significant demand since the 1970s, and funding and demand for expertise have further skyrocketed since 2001. We are thus left with a puzzle: how to reconcile these perceptions of failure with the persistent demand for knowledge and growth of the field? This paper aims to explain, first, the disjuncture between terrorism studies in practice and the sociological literature on fields of intellectual production, and, second, the reasons for the experts' "rhetoric of failure" about their field.

The project of terrorism expertise has been a magnet for critiques from all directions. Experts[3] have routinely been criticized on political grounds, with critiques from the left focusing on the exclusion of state violence from conceptualizations of terrorism (Chomsky 2001; Herman 1982; Herman and O'Sullivan 1989), while critiques from the right have accused experts of "sympathizing" with their research subjects (e.g. Jones and Smith 2006; Kramer 2001).[4] Terrorism research has also been marginalized within academia, with some arguing that studies have been insufficiently rigorous, failing to meet academic standards,

[1] Bruce Hoffman, author of *Inside Terrorism,* has worked at RAND and the Center for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence at the University of St. Andrews, and is now on the faculty at Georgetown University.

[2] My use of "field" here is obviously influenced by Bourdieu, although, as will become apparent, I do not see terrorism expertise as a "field" in precisely in the same sense (Bourdieu 2005).

[3] As I worked on this project, two questions have been posed to me repeatedly: *What is terrorism? And who is a terrorism expert?* One set of askers takes these questions as the presumed conclusion to my study: what *is* terrorism, really? And who are (really) terrorism experts? The second set of interlocutors, meanwhile, takes these questions as necessary preliminaries to the study: how do I assign values to these concepts, so that they might be measured and analyzed? The goal of this project is indeed to investigate terrorism, but not in either of the ways presumed above. Rather, the study takes as its object these very questions, asking how and why they have become meaningful. To clarify, I do not seek to determine who is "really" an expert; the processes through which this question is contested are, rather, the core of what I observe and try to explain. When I speak of "experts," I refer to the pool of those treated as experts and those hoping/trying to be treated as experts; with "expertise" being the products, findings, knowledge, statements of these populations.

[4] See Ilardi (2004) for one response to such critiques, and Zulaika and Douglass (1996) for an earlier analysis of this phenomenon.

while others have argued that terrorism is a fundamentally biased concept, essentially unsuited for academic analysis (e.g. Beinin 2003).

It may not seem surprising that the production of knowledge about such a contentious subject would attract external critiques. What is more deeply puzzling, however, is that some of the harshest and most frequent laments have come from the practitioners of terrorism studies themselves. Terrorism researchers have characterized their field as stagnant, poorly conceptualized, lacking in rigor, and devoid of adequate theory, data, and methods. One of the most oft-noted difficulties has been the inability of researchers to establish a suitable definition of the concept of "terrorism" itself, with the result that practically every book, essay, and article on the topic has been compelled to take on this so-called "problem of definition." Nor has this aggressively critical stance weakened over time, but rather, it has been a constant feature of the field from the 1970s, when the first specialized works on modern terrorism began to appear,[5] to the present day. This paper thus asks, how can we make sense of such a peculiar field? How can we understand the problematic nature of "terrorism" as an object of knowledge, as manifested in the field's social structure and in experts' claims of failure?

I suggest that terrorism studies, rather than conforming to the notion of an ideal-typical profession, discipline, or bounded "intellectual field," instead represents an interstitial space of knowledge production, oriented between and towards multiple arenas of knowledge production, consumption, and legitimation, including academia, the media, and the state. This presents a challenge to the sociological literature on intellectual fields, which has tended to focus upon strictly bounded sites, and supports the need, as some others have already suggested, to expand sociological studies of expertise beyond such bounded arenas. Further, while sociological studies of expertise have tended to focus upon arenas in which the object of expertise is already "formed," so to speak, terrorism studies presents an example of a case in which the object of knowledge is not only not yet stabilized, but in which it is not clear that it will ever completely take settled form. Terrorism expertise is thus not described by usual description of fields, but instead should be understood as an interstitial space, characterized by a constant dialectic between attempts to institutionalize it as a "science" and forces that pull it back into relation with other fields (largely the state). This paper analyses the relation of sociological theories of scientific/intellectual fields to the case of terrorism expertise along two dimensions. First, it analyzes how the case of terrorism studies presents a challenge to this literature, insofar as it does not fit the expectations of most of the writing in this area. Second, I analyze the way in which this disjunction is itself a self-identified problem for a number of actors in the field, which they make sense of through what I label this "rhetoric of failure," a recurrent claim of failure in evaluations of terrorism studies as a field.[6]

I argue that this rhetoric of failure arises precisely because actors perceive their field as having failed, in the language of sociology, to become a bounded field of cultural production, a mature profession, or a fully institutionalized discipline. Although

[5] See Stampnitzky (2008).

[6] This "rhetoric of failure" appears especially puzzling in light of the sociological literature on professions and expertise, which tends to predict that experts, in both settled fields and fields in formation, will engage in "boundary work" to defend and differentiate their work. This notion of boundary work, conceptualized as the (rhetorical) methods through which scientists legitimate and differentiate themselves and their work from non-scientists (Gieryn 1983, 1999), is predicated upon the construction and maintenance of distinct demarcated spheres of knowledge-production, a framework which has tended to dominate sociological studies of expertise, despite the existence of many arenas of expertise, including terrorism studies, which fail to adhere to this characterization.

sociological theories of scientific fields do not adequately describe the world of terrorism experts, such theories are influential, I suggest, insofar as they are mobilized as cultural schemas by actors hoping to "discipline" their field. The discourse of failure can thus be understood as both a self-critique, and a form of strategic action, performed by those terrorism experts who are most invested in the production of terrorism studies as a rational/quasi-academic project, whose self-conception and legitimacy is based upon their ties to the academic arena. (And, conversely, I will suggest, those whose legitimacy is less bound to the academic arena are less likely to judge the field as a "failure," even when they observe some of the same characteristics in it that lead the academics to perceive it as failing, because they are less likely to hold up the model of a normal scientific field as the ideal.) In other words, I argue that these theories have been mobilized as models in strategic efforts to reform the field, arguing that the experts' rhetoric draws upon theories of scientific production to develop both an auto-critique, and a call for reform. Thus, while sociological theories of scientific/intellectual production do not themselves adequately describe or explain the case of terrorism expertise, they are nonetheless important for understanding the field, insofar as experts mobilize these very theories in an attempt to influence its development.

Data and Methods

This paper is based upon findings from a larger study of terrorism expertise as an intellectual arena. I begin with a description of the structural conditions shaping the production of terrorism expertise, drawing upon secondary literature on terrorism and terrorism studies, and an original data set on presenters at 150 conferences on terrorism held between 1972 and 2001, and then analyze experts' own understandings of their project, drawing upon qualitative data consisting of experts' own statements and claims about the field in both interviews and written sources.

Textual sources included review essays and evaluations of the field published in journals, edited volumes, and collections of conference papers, published from the mid-1970s to the present day, which were chosen to represent the evolution of experts' assessments of the field over time. There are three core journals in the area of terrorism research (Gordon 2004a; Reid 1992): *Terrorism: An International Journal/Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (published 1978-present)*; TVI (Terrorism Violence Insurgency) Journal* (published 1979-1999); and *Terrorism and Political Violence* (published 1989-present). I looked at every issue of these publications, from their founding through at least 2002, paying particular attention within these to commentary pieces and review articles in which active researchers present their views of the current state of the field, editors' introductions, evaluations of the current state of research, and literature reviews. I also collected all available reports from conferences on terrorism held between 1972 and 2001, scanning these for similar commentary and prescriptions about the direction of the field.

In addition to these written sources, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 26 current and former researchers in the field. These interviews focused upon individual career histories and views of the field, including interviewees' judgments of what constitutes useful and legitimate knowledge. In selecting interviewees, I aimed to recruit those who were prominent in the field, as based upon conference presentations, journal articles and book publications, and the results of an earlier survey of experts (Schmid and Jongman 1988), and worked to include a mix of experts based at universities, think tanks, in government, and in the media, as well as representatives of those who had been active in

the field since its inception and more recent entrants.[7] Interviews were open-ended, with most lasting between 45 minute and 1 hour, and respondents were given the option of speaking anonymously or for attribution, with most choosing the latter. I also obtained transcripts from a series of 11 interviews conducted in the early 1980s by a student at the Claremont Graduate School (Hoffman 1984), which provide a dimension of historical depth and support my claims that certain rhetorical themes were persistent over time.[8] Finally, I engaged in a number of more informal or off-the-record conversations with academics, think tank researchers, current/former military personnel, and consultants, and attended several conferences on terrorism as an observer.

Literature Review

Previous Work on Terrorism and Terrorism Experts

The extant literature on terrorism experts may be grouped into several approaches. The first consists of literature that largely takes a debunking tone, in which the most common argument is that terrorism expertise is essentially propaganda produced by governments seeking to demonize their enemies and draw attention away from their own use of violence (Bartosiewicz 2008; Burnett and Whyte 2005; Chomsky 2001; Halkides 1995; Herman 1982). One of the best known books on terrorism experts (Herman and O'Sullivan 1989), argues that terrorism experts constitute an "industry," funded and organized by the state and other elite interests. While this certainly accounts for some aspects of terrorism expertise, it is inadequate as an overall explanation of the phenomenon. This explanation tends to neglect the agency and interests of the experts themselves, and the ways in which these interests may either harmonize or clash with those of the state, the media, and the "terrorists" themselves. Further, while these debunking works tend to focus on the most polemical of the experts, terrorism experts have never unanimously endorsed the state's goals and practices, and have been both more independent and more divided than a simple reflection theory can explain.

Since 2001, several books taking a somewhat more nuanced view of terrorism experts have appeared. Mueller (2006) focuses on the interests of experts and politicians to account for the persistence of a "terrorism industry," while Lustick (2006) suggests that the "war on terror" may have become a self-perpetuating phenomenon, generating incentives for its own continuation. More recently a "critical terrorism studies" movement has emerged, seeking to critique existing research on terrorism and develop a new framework for research on terrorism from a critical perspective (e.g. Jackson 2005; Jackson et al. 2009; Kassimeris 2008; Ranstorp 2007).[9] While this critical terrorism studies literature often empirically highlights the connections between experts and the state, it generally lacks a developed

[7] The interview sample thus resulted in an over-focus on the "legitimate" sector of the "field," but there were both pragmatic reasons for this, given my research strategy, and an analytical/theoretical logic to having done things this way. Prior literature (in the sociology of science and knowledge) tends to over-emphasize this sector, so it makes sense that I would focus my investigation there; second, as I show, this sector is a particularly important site for studying the production and legitimation of terrorism expertise, as it illuminates processes of attempts at legitimation and institutionalization. See Table 1, below, for more information on the interviewees.

[8] These included several of the same individuals interviewed by the author of this paper.

[9] See particularly, the new journal *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, founded in 2008 by Richard Jackson of Aberystwyth University (UK).

theory of how it is that these structural connections affect the discursive content of terrorism expertise. This paper aims to present a model for a more grounded analysis of the production of terrorism expertise, one which illustrates the necessity of jointly analyzing expert terrorism discourses and the production of experts and expertise.

For more in-depth empirical studies of terrorism experts, I often found the best sources to be the body of work produced by those affiliated with terrorism research. While many of the accounts found in such "first order" histories of the field (e.g. Laqueur 1999) tend to assume that the rise of a specialty in terrorism expertise was a direct response to events, and thus do not see the question of expertise itself as in need of explanation, some fairly sophisticated histories of have been produced by those working in, or alongside the field (Crelinsten 1989a, b, 1993, 1998; Gordon 1998, 2001, 2004a, b, 2005; Reid 1983, 1993, 1997; Reid et al. 2004; Sproat 1996). Schmid's work, including his surveys of experts, is of particular note (Schmid 1993; Schmid and Jongman 1988), as are qualitative reflections on the field and its history including Ranstorp (2007), Silke (2004), and Zulaika and Douglass (1996). I draw on these works as primary data, providing first-order accounts of the field.

Literature on the Sociology of Scientific/Intellectual Fields

The existing sociological literature on expertise, science, and the professions tends to assume that expert arenas will take the form of relatively independent, sharply bounded "fields." Consequently, studies of expert knowledge production tend to be focused on bounded, relatively institutionalized settings. The sociological literature on expertise tends to highlight the importance of institutionalization, suggesting that as areas of expertise develop, they will coalesce into recognizable forms such as academic departments and professional organizations in order to establish control over both the definition of their particular problem and the production and certification of legitimate experts (Abbott 1988; Bourdieu 1996, 2005; Gieryn 1983, 1999; Larson 1977). The archetypal case here is medicine, with its highly structured training and certification processes, collective ethical self-regulation, and monopolistic control over who may practice, backed by the power of the state (Starr 1982). Much of this work draws on a Bourdieuian conception of the field of cultural production, in which mature cultural fields are characterized by highly regulated boundaries (similar to the notion of "closure" in the study of professions), and sufficient relative autonomy such that they have a distinct logic shaping relations of production and among producers (Bourdieu 2005, p. 33). This approach to intellectual production is illustrated perhaps most starkly by Frickel and Gross (2005), who argue that "intellectual movements" are driven to institutionalize by carving out a settled space within the structure of disciplines, and predict that intellectual movements that fail to do so will fade away and die.

Yet terrorism studies fails to fulfill the expectations built into such sociological theories of scientific/intellectual fields. Terrorism experts have rarely succeeded in consolidating control over the production of either experts or knowledge on their subject, and lack the disciplining and certifying practices normally associated with mature disciplines and professions. Vastly different sorts of individuals, with varying training and differing institutional bases, emerge as terrorism experts in different settings. In sociological terms, the field has been characterized by a low degree of autonomy, and weak, permeable boundaries. There are few barriers to entry, with a high degree of movement into and out of the space of production from surrounding areas. A high proportion of those writing on the topic have no significant background in the topic. Emblematically, experts have themselves complained that the field is filled with "self-proclaimed experts." There is little regulation

of who may become an expert, and the key audience for terrorism expertise is not an ideal-typical scientific community, but rather the public and the state.

If sociological work on intellectuals and professions has tended to conceptualize the world in terms of separate, bounded spheres, where might we turn for an understanding of intellectual production as a more intersectional arena? While sociological work on social and symbolic boundaries has begun to conceptualize boundary spaces as potential sites of hybridization, creolization, and creativity, sociological studies of science and the professions have mostly persisted in focusing on processes of boundary construction and defense, rather than viewing the boundary itself as a potentially productive site (Lamont and Molnar 2002). However, a few recent studies of expertise have begun to focus upon irregular or interstitial fields (Bliss 2009; Eyal 2002, 2006a, b; Frickel 2004; Medvetz 2007; Mitchell 1991; Panofsky 2006), and I situate my conceptualization of terrorism studies in relation to this line of thinking.

I suggest that the case of terrorism expertise may, in fact, be only one of many examples of the organized production of expertise in liminal spaces, a set of cases that have, puzzlingly, largely been neglected in the sociology of expertise in favor of a focus on more strictly institutionalized sites of knowledge production. Rather than a bounded field itself, I suggest that terrorism expertise is best understood as a site of knowledge production that exists on the boundaries where academia, the media, and the state meet. Further, I suggest that such sites may be useful in illustrating a number of flaws in the theories of scientific fields as conceptualized so far overall, and which might actually be more broadly applicable to intellectual production as a whole. Terrorism studies may be seen as a boundary object, existing in a tenuous relation with several other fields (most significantly, the academic world and the state) rather than a bounded field itself. This paper thus functions as an analysis of an exemplary case of knowledge production in such boundary spaces.

Terrorism Studies: A Strange "Field"

I thus argue that terrorism expertise has emerged from an interstitial space between the realms of politics and science. Both participants and observers have noted the financial, and, even more significantly, intellectual dependence of terrorism studies/experts upon government (Silke 2004, p. 15). Terrorism expertise has its origins as an adjunct to the developing counterterrorism apparatus of the state,[10] with the earliest organized efforts at terrorism studies largely sponsored by the state, and often explicitly oriented toward developing practical techniques of control. Perhaps even more significantly, the state has been not just the primary *sponsor* of knowledge-production, but also the primary *consumer* of research.

From the academic perspective, rather than developing into an independent discipline or subfield, terrorism studies has tended to occupy the fringes of more established academic fields, and has persisted in this state for some time. In 1984, Richard Norton, then an instructor in sociology at the US Military Academy at West Point, New York, and author of one of the first annotated bibliographies on the terrorism literature, suggested that the study of terrorism was populated in part by people who were "failed scholars in other areas" who yet "publish books by the dozen and make very little substantive contribution to the field" (Norton, quoted in Hoffman 1984, p. 142). Psychologist Ariel Merari, writing for a 1987 conference, commented that: "terrorism falls between the chairs" (Merari 1991, pp. 88-92),

[10] See Stampnitzky (2008).

and the author of a recent overview of the field concluded that, "the science of terror has been conducted in the cracks and crevices which lie between the large academic disciplines" (Silke 2004, pp. 1-2).

At the individual level, the marginality of terrorism studies within academia has meant that it has been perceived as a risky career move. According to one researcher, "For many years, terrorism was an 'untouchable' issue, a topic that despite its practical impact was isolated from the field of scholarly research" (Wieviorka 1995, p. 597). A number of interviewees also stressed the marginality of terrorism studies within academia and the effects this has had upon the field. For example, Timothy Naftali, author of *Blind Spot: The Secret History of American Counterterrorism*, told me that "you still can't get a job in history in this country if you're studying counter-terrorism."[11] According to another interviewee, "[one of the most prominent terrorism researchers in academia] was tenured despite the fact that he studies terrorism."[12] Similarly, Jessica Stern, author of *The Ultimate Terrorists* and a lecturer in public policy at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard, told me that (studying terrorism) "was a very weird thing to do at the time…My dissertation adviser…admits to me that he thought that it was just bizarre."[13]

There is no set career path to becoming a terrorism expert, nor is there any recognized credentialing body. As one expert noted, "My becoming a so-called expert on terrorism simply evolved from the fact that I spent such a lot of time talking about it" (Richard Clutterbuck, quoted in Kahn 1978, p. 55). Even specialized research journals and conferences, which represent the most professionalized and internally regulated areas of the terrorism studies world, have been populated by a high proportion of one-time authors, those who enter with no significant background in the field, and then disappear. Of 1,796 individuals presenting at conferences on terrorism between 1972 and 2001, 1,505 (84%) made only one appearance.[14] Similarly, a study of journal articles published on terrorism during the 1990s found more than 80% to be by one-time authors (Silke 2004, p. 69), while another study found that core journals in terrorism studies had significantly higher rates of contributions from non-academic authors than journals in political science or communications studies (Gordon 2001).

There is little regulation of who may become an expert, and the key audience for terrorism expertise has not been an ideal-typical scientific community, but rather the public and the state. The production of terrorism expertise has been particularly vulnerable to interlopers from other fields, including the political and military arenas, various academic disciplines, and the journalistic field. This produces an especially complex situation, since these fields of politics and the media are also sites for the legitimation and dissemination of terrorism expertise.

This helps to explain why the case of terrorism expertise does not fit the literature on scientific/intellectual fields, and suggests that we need to revise and extend our empirical and theoretical analyses of science and expertise. This also helps us to develop an explanation for why we see the discourse of failure. I argue that certain actors within the field, who I term the "professionalizers,"[15] are trying to discipline the field and make it look more like the ideal-typical field/discipline described in the literature, which they take as a

[11] Interview with Timothy Naftali, 7/5/2006. Naftali also observed that, before 9/11, terrorism was seen as a "backwater" not only within academia, but also among the elite analytical intelligence community.
[12] Interview with Marc Sageman, 11/14/2006.
[13] Interview with Jessica Stern, 8/19/2007.
[14] Source: author's data set on presenters at conferences on terrorism, 1972-2001 (see Stampnitzky 2008 for more details).
[15] Drawing upon Magali Sarfatti Larson's concept of "professionalization" (Larson 1977).

model. The rhetoric of failure can be seen as a manifestation of the status of the field, and experts' subject/subjective attempt to make sense of it, based upon their position in this "field." As I will show below, it is those whose primary affiliation is within the academic arena, who are most likely to judge terrorism studies as a failure against the model of an ideal-typical scientific field, while those who are located farther from the academic arena are less likely to hold up the disciplinary model as an ideal, even if they observe some of the same "failings" in terrorism studies as do experts situated within academia.

A "Rhetoric of Failure"?

As I have already noted, whereas sociological literature on science and the professions tends to predict that experts, in both settled fields and fields-in-formation, will engage in "boundary work" to defend and differentiate their work, terrorism experts' rhetoric has tended to cast their own field as a failure. This failure rhetoric is composed of four major complaints: the lack of credentialing qualifications and a consequent plethora of "self-appointed experts," critiques of insufficient research methodology, assessments of a lack of intellectual progress, and the inability of experts to establish a unified, stable definition of the concept of "terrorism." Note, further, that these statements, which persist over the course of several decades, come not from external critics or from individuals marginal to the project of terrorism research, but from some of the foremost individuals in the field.

The prevalence of "self-appointed experts" has been a long-standing complaint. In a 1984 interview, law professor and author of a number of books and articles on terrorism Robert Friedlander, commented that: "people…have wandered into terrorism [research]… because there were not enough other professionals to judge the worth of that particular contribution….[O]one-half to two-thirds of the work that they are doing in the terrorism field is repetitive, non-theoretical, and non-analytical" (Robert Friedlander, quoted in Hoffman 1984, pp. 96-98). Similarly, the introduction to a collection of papers presented at a 1985 conference sponsored by the US Department of Defense proposes that "terrorism is a popular area in which to publish and has attracted countless scholars who have seized upon the subject as a good "one-time' opportunity" (Slater et al. 1988, p. 2). Similar complaints arose frequently in interviews. One researcher interviewed commented that, "you have a whole industry, cottage industry of self-appointed…and they're making their life at it and actually even sell the product to the government,"[16] while a journalist who has written several books on terrorism observed that, whereas other fields had credentialing requirements, he was accepted as an expert on terrorism with no formal training.

A second common complaint is that work in terrorism studies has been insufficiently methodologically rigorous. Some focus on the relative lack of statistical work, while other bemoan the absence of field studies. One researcher told me: "St. Andrews,[17] which was created to teach about terrorism…up to this past year has not tried to teach its students, you know, Social Science 101, namely statistics,"[18] while another observed that, "there was a whole generation of terrorism scholars that never got out in the field that did all of their research from the faculty lounges or university libraries."[19] Andrew Silke, in his recent

[16] Interview with Marc Sageman, 11/14/2006.

[17] The Center for the Study of Political Violence at the University of St. Andrews (Scotland), one of the primary training centers for terrorism researchers in the world.

[18] Interview with Marc Sageman, 11/14/2006.

[19] Interview with Bruce Hoffman, 11/7/2006.

review of the field, writes that "Brian Jenkins, a doyen of the field, if not one of its 'founding fathers,' once compared terrorism analysts to Africa's Victorian-era cartographers. Just as the cartographers a century ago mapped from a distance a vast and impenetrable continent few of them had ever seen, most contemporary terrorism research is conducted far removed from, and therefore with little direct knowledge of, the actual terrorists themselves" (Silke 2004, p. xviii), finding that the "terrorism literature is composed mainly of studies which rely on relatively weak research methods….There is a heavy reliance on qualitative and journalistic approaches which lack the validity and reliability generally expected within mainstream social science research….[R]esearchers and writers in the area have developed an enormous tolerance for poor research methods" (Silke 2004, pp. 11-12).

A third category of critique is that the field has failed to make intellectual progress. Such complaints have dogged the field from its earliest days, and continue to the present. In 1983, Brian Jenkins, head of terrorism research at RAND, and one of the most prominent and prolific authors on terrorism, wrote, "Up to now the area of terrorism has been a sort of small hopper into which many things have been tossed by a lot of people. Frivolous and nonsensical things have been mixed with some good work" (Jenkins 1983, pp. 156-157). Similarly, political scientist Martha Crenshaw wrote in 1981 that: "As it often true of a new field of study, most work on terrorism is uneven in quality, and noncumulative"(Crenshaw 1981, p. 473), while Israeli political scientist Yehezkiel Dror wrote in 1983 that, "The literature on terrorism is booming with a mixture of serious studies and fictional treatments, sometimes with hard-to-discern borders between them" (Dror 1983, p. 66). The introduction to a collection of papers from a 1985 conference noted that although there is a "voluminous literature" on terrorism, this has "contributed only marginally to an overall systematic understanding of the major factors involved in international terrorism," (Slater et al. 1988, p. 2), and in 1988, political scientist Ted Gurr wrote that:

> The paucity of good systematic research on most aspects of terrorism contrasts sharply with the abundant literature on international conflict, political protest, revolution, and *coups*. Most of the literature consists of naive description, speculative commentary, and prescriptions for 'dealing with terrorism' which could not meet minimum research standards in the more established branches of conflict and policy. (Gurr 1988, pp. 142-143)

In his overview of the field, *Political Terrorism: A Research Guide to Concepts, Theories, Data Bases and Literature*, Alex Schmid wrote, damningly, "There are probably few areas in the social science literature in which so much is written on the basis of so little research" (Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 179), while the editor of a more recent guide, *Research on Terrorism: Trends, Achievements, and Failures*, asserts that: "it is possible for a research community to remain active indefinitely without ever producing meaningful exploratory results….It seems relatively clear that terrorism research exists in such a state" (Silke 2004, p. 58).

Similar critiques emerged in recent interviews with researchers. According to Martha Crenshaw,

> There's a problem of cumulativeness of knowledge….[P]eople just leap to the assumption that nothing has been done, because they've not researched to see if anything has been done. This is not true of people who've been working deeply in the field. I think it's just those people who come to it from another field and think, oh,

> now I'm going to devote my expertise to this. They think they've discovered a new phenomenon.[20]

This observation was borne out by the comments of another researcher, who told me, when asked if he had read much previous literature on terrorism: "I did read some…but it turns out that it just isn't very much literature…none of the studies are real scientific…there really was no discipline of terrorism."[21] While Bruce Hoffman noted that "the field remains very narrow. People keep going back to the same issues"[22]

Finally, one of the most serious recurring problems for the field is what has generally been referred to as the "problem of definition." As Brian Jenkins told me, "definitional debates are the great Bermuda Triangle of terrorism research. I've seen entire conferences go off into definitional debates, never to be heard from again."[23] A 1988 survey of the literature found over 100 different definitions in use among terrorism researchers (Schmid and Jongman 1988), an observer at a mid-1980s DOD symposium reported that there were "almost as many definitions as there were speakers" (Slater et al. 1988, p. 3), and a 2001 article described a "perverse situation where a great number of scholars are studying a phenomenon, the essence of which they have (by now) simply agreed to disagree upon" (Brannan et al. 2001, p. 11).

Yet a number of experts persist in trying to stabilize the definition of terrorism. Political scientist Martha Crenshaw argues for the importance of a neutral (non-partisan, non-polemical) definition: "(t)he task of definition…necessarily involves transforming 'terrorism' into a useful analytical term *rather* than a polemical tool" (Crenshaw 1995, p. 7). Schmid and Jongman argue for a definition that is universally applicable, based on transparent guidelines:

> The search for a universalist definition of terrorism is one which scientists cannot give up. Without some solution to the definitional problem, without isolating terrorism from other forms of (political) violence, there can be no uniform data collection and no responsible theory building. (Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 3)

And they argue, further, for the need for a stable definition for scientific progress and legitimacy:

> The search for an adequate definition of terrorism is still on….[M]any authors seem fatigued about the need to still consider basic conceptual questions. This is a dangerous attitude as it plays in to the hands of those experts from the operational antiterrorist camp who have a 'we-know-it-when-we-see-it' attitude that easily leads to double standards which produce bad science and also, arguably, bad policies (Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. xxi).

These three imperatives: neutrality, universality, and stability, are seen as interconnected, each necessary for the other to proceed.

Definitional disputes are a central example of how terrorism experts talk about their field, and an arena which exemplifies the difficulties of the field. The "problem of definition" is a site where we can see struggles over the nature of terrorism expertise as a project in action, including attempts to reform the field to more closely approximate a more normative academic discipline. It illuminates a split in the field, between those who would

[20] Interview with Martha Crenshaw, 5/5/2006.
[21] Interview with Marc Sageman, 11/14/2006.
[22] Interview with Bruce Hoffman, 11/7/2006.
[23] Interview with Brian Jenkins, June 26, 2007.

aim to stabilize the concept, so as to make it more amenable to normal scientific analysis, and those who resist such definitional standardization. The rhetoric of failure and the "problem of definition" can thus, I argue, provide a window into struggles for authority within and over the social space of production of terrorism expertise, and illustrate the critical linkage between forming the object of "terrorism" and the production of "terrorism studies."

Positions and Perceptions: Who Participates in the Rhetoric of Failure?

Not all terrorism experts participate in this rhetoric of failure. Rather, it is a particular subgroup, those who are most oriented towards the academic field, and who are most invested in the creation of an autonomous, professionalized, disciplinary project of terrorism studies, who are most likely to perceive the field as a "failure" in need of reform. This desire to normalize the field is stated explicitly in the work of Avishag Gordon, of the University of Haifa, who writes that, "A growing proportion of academic research on terrorism emphasizes the need for an answer to the question: why has this research field not become an academic discipline, with its own core of researchers and its own department and curriculum?" (Gordon 2001, p. 120). As I will show below, terrorism experts who are less identified with the academic sphere are also less likely to participate in this rhetoric of failure. Tables 1 and 2 summarize the results of 33 interviews with terrorism experts located in a variety of institutional locations. These tables suggest that experts located in the academic sphere are more likely to partake of the rhetoric of failure, while experts located further from the academic sphere are less likely to perceive the project of terrorism studies as a failure.

Let me first explain how I grouped the interviews. Those who described the project of terrorism studies as having failed in any of several significant respects (failure to agree upon a workable definition, failure to institute boundaries and exclude "self-appointed experts," failure to develop appropriate methodologies, and failure to make intellectual progress), *and* who expressed a desire to "fix" one or more of these things, I consider participants in the discourse of failure. A second group consists of those who, like those who speak in the rhetoric of failure, identify one or more of these difficulties in the field, but who explicitly stated that reform of the field would be unlikely, undesirable, or unnecessary. A third group, the "no" category, tended not to engage in this sort of critique at all. I will next explain which sorts of experts tended to fall into which grouping, and why.

As I stated above, not all experts participate in this rhetoric of failure. Whereas many of the experts I interviewed spontaneously focused on weaknesses of the field, a number of experts did not. If asked about difficulties that others perceived, such as the lack of a stable definition of "terrorism," they tended not to perceive these as serious problems. These included experts who dismiss the development of scientific theories of terrorism as impractical, or even those who find such conceptual disputes academic, in the most pejorative sense of the term, and thus not useful for the (in their view) more important goal of producing knowledge that will directly serve the practical purposes of the fight against terrorism. These "pragmatists" may even argue that achieving an objective or consensus definition is not possible, but that this should not impede either theoretical or practical work on the subject. For example, Walter Laqueur has written: "Ten years of debates on typologies and definitions have not enhanced our knowledge of the subject to a significant degree…the study of terrorism can manage with a

Table 1 Who partakes in the "rhetoric of failure"?

Person	Primary affiliation	Failure-Yes	Failure-Modified[d]	Failure-No
[a]A social scientist who works for the military	Military			X
[a]A former RAND analyst, now an independent consultant specializing in terrorism	Independent			X
[a]A social scientist working for the state department and the military	Government/military			X
[a]A former government counterterrorism analyst, now an independent consultant	Independent consultant			X
[a]Author of many books on terrorism	Think tank/Independent			X
[a]A former intelligence analyst, and independent consultant, author of a terrorism database	Independent			X
[a]Psychiatrist, working at a university, has done much consulting work for government and media	Academia			X
[b]Currently at a think tank; formerly head of a terrorism studies center and editor of a journal	Think tank			X
[b]Author of many books and articles on terrorism	Independent			X
[b]Independent consultant	Independent			X
[b]Psychiatrist	Independent			X
[a]RAND analyst	RAND		X[e]	
[a]Academic political scientist who works on terrorism	Academia		X[f]	
[a]Historian, has written on terrorism, consulted with 9/11 commission, now in a non-academic position	Independent		X[g]	
[a]Former government advisor, now at a think tank. Author of books and articles on terrorism.	Government/think tank		X[h]	
[a]Journalist, author of several books on terrorism	Media		X[i]	
[a]Academic, works at university terrorism studies center	Academia		X	
[a]Academic at a policy school, also affiliated with a think tank; has worked for RAND and the U.S. government. Author of books and articles on terrorism	Government/Academia		X[j]	
[a]Academic at a policy school, has written books and articles on terrorism	Academia	X		
[a]Academic, head of a terrorism research center	Academia	X		
[a]Academic, has written books and articles on terrorism	Academia	X		
[a]Academic, psychologist, affiliated with a terrorism studies center	Academia	X		
[c]Academic, political scientist, has authored many books and articles on terrorism	Academia	X		
[a]Author of books and articles on terrorism, employed at a policy school, formerly a terrorism analyst at RAND and head of a university terrorism studies center	RAND/Academia	X		
[c]Former head of terrorism research at RAND. Author of books and articles on terrorism.	RAND	X		
[a]Academic, criminologist, head of a terrorism s tudies center	Academia	X		
[a]Academic, political scientist, has published books and articles on terrorism	Academia	X		
[c]Academic, political scientist, editor of a terrorism journal	Academia	X		
[a]Author of books and article on terrorism, affiliated with a university and does much consulting for government.	Academia/Independent	X		
[a]Academic, political scientist.	Academia	X		
[b]Editor of a terrorism journal	Independent	X		

Table 1 (continued)

Person	Primary affiliation	Failure-Yes	Failure-Modified[d]	Failure-No
[b]Faculty member at a military college, has published books/articles on terrorism.	Academia	X		
[b]Law professor, has written extensively on terrorism.	Academia	X		

(Key: [a] interviews conducted by the author, 2006-2009; [b] interviews conducted by Robert Hoffman (Hoffman 1984); [c] interviewed by both)

[d] "Failure-modified" generally means that the person observes some of the 'characteristics' some label as failure, but doesn't necessarily see a discipline/field as the goal (and often explicitly stated this fact)

[e] Identifies some of the characteristics of "failure" but not invested in disciplinization

[f] Identifies strongly with discipline of political science rather than terrorism studies. Echoes some of the "failure" critiques, but different positioning

[g] Echoes some of the failure discourse, but not so invested in building a discipline; is outside of that project

[h] Some similarities with "failure discourse," but explicitly doesn't see terrorism studies as becoming a discipline or field of its own

[i] Identifies similar weaknesses in the field, but does not see it becoming a discipline

[j] Affirms most of the empirical claims that the failure discourses puts forth, but does not see the academic realm as central

minimum of theory" (Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 3).[24] Similarly, Paul Pillar, a former counterterrorist official at the CIA, has written that:

> Good policy on terrorism does not, however, require hand-wringing about how exactly to define it. For the great majority of counterterrorist activities, the late Justice Potter Stewart's approach toward pornography will suffice: that it is unnecessary to go to great lengths to define it, because one knows it when one sees it. (Pillar 2001, p. 16-17).

And, rather emblematically, a military general at a mid-1980s conference on counterterrorism policy and research sponsored by the US government concluded that,

> It's all well and good, all this intellectual philosophizing about the origins and psychology of terrorism, but in the final analysis, remember, we've got to get the bastards before they get us. (Post and Ezekiel 1988, p. 505).

Rather than viewing "terrorism" as a problem to be made coherent by or for academic analysis, these experts tended to see it as a practical problem to be combated and eradicated. Thus, a shifting, practice-oriented sense of definition was seen to be less of a problem. And, because these experts were less likely to have their primary affiliation within the academic world, making terrorism into a respectable academic object of study was less important for them. Among those interviewed whose primary affiliation was at a university, only one individual did not engage at all with the rhetoric of failure, a psychiatrist whose primary audiences were the media and the government. On the other hand, both of those experts whose primary affiliation was with the US government, and six of the eight independent experts, who often directed their work at the

[24] This comment was received by Schmid and Jongman in response to a survey of terrorism researchers. In response, they write that, "While there is an uncomfortable degree of truth in Laqueur's observation, one can also argue that even a 'minimum of theory' requires some consensus about what to theorize about. Laqueur's own, much-quoted, work on terrorism has been criticized by one of the respondents to our first questionnaire for being 'a book on an unidentifiable subject, so that the author can include whatever he sees fit'" (Schmid and Jongman 1988, p. 3).

Table 2 Who adopts the rhetoric of failure, by primary affiliation

(Total $n=33$)	Academia ($n=16$)	RAND ($n=3$)	Media ($n=1$)	Other think tank ($n=3$)	Independent ($n=8$)	Government/ military ($n=2$)
Rhetoric of failure-yes ($n=15$)	12	2	0	0	1	0
Rhetoric of failure-moderated ($n=7$)	3	1	1	1	1	0
Rhetoric of failure- no ($n=11$)	1	0	0	2	6	2

government, did not describe terrorism studies as a failure. Note that these individuals did not necessarily see terrorism studies as a *success,* they simply tended to be less overtly concerned with the success or failure of "terrorism studies" as a coherent project at all.

Which experts did engage in the rhetoric of failure? Among those interviewed, those working on terrorism studies within academic (12 of the 16 interviewees employed in academic positions) were mostly likely to view their project within the framework of academic disciplines, or as a proto-science.[25] One researcher, when questioned about his choice of methods, explicitly situated his work in reference to "science," replying that, "That's pretty much common sense. Any scientist would do that…I mean that's, that's science…to make statements or refute them, you need some kind of data," placing himself clearly within the project of "science," as opposed to others in the field.[26] Others who participated in the rhetoric of failure included two of three experts affiliated with RAND, and one independent expert. The case of RAND may appear at first glance more puzzling, but is less so when we consider that RAND looks toward the academic realm for legitimation more so than many other think tanks and contract research organizations. RAND is highly invested in the non-partisan nature of its research, a high percentage of its analysts have the PhD, and it even has its own graduate school where doctorates are awarded.

This leaves a small group, those I have categorized as using a "modified" failure discourse, those who observed some of the same characteristics associated with failure, but who didn't necessarily see a discipline/field as the goal (and often explicitly stated this fact). These include several academics who identified some of the same weaknesses in "terrorism studies" as did others, but were not invested in the emergence of terrorism studies as a discipline of its own.[27] This group also included a RAND analyst, a journalist, and a former government advisor now at a think tank.

Conclusions and Further Implications

Terrorism expertise has been characterized by an almost constant dialectic between struggles over (largely failed) attempts to institutionalize terrorism studies as a normal science, and countervailing forces which pull the space back into its orbit around other fields (primarily the state). The supply, and the demand, for terrorism expertise can be traced to multiple locations-

[25] A dramatic example of this phenomenon occurred when I presented a talk on my work to an audience that happened to include several terrorism researchers, one of whom posed as a question whether the field could be understood as failing to achieve the status of a mature scientific field, referencing Merton's sociology of science.
[26] Interview with Marc Sageman, 11/14/2006.
[27] Often, these were individuals more strongly attached to their own academic discipline as an intellectual and/or institutional home, who tended to be more recent PhDs, or more recent entrants to the world of terrorism studies, itself possibly an indicator of the relatively higher status of work on terrorism within disciplines such as political science, sociology, and economics in recent years.

most significantly, as I have noted in this paper, academia and the state. Although the ideal-typical model of a field of scientific/intellectual production—to which, as I have shown, even many terrorism experts themselves look as a guide—tends to assume that properly functioning arenas of expertise ought to establish a state of autonomy from "outside" influences, this may not be possible in the case of terrorism expertise. It is typical for terrorism experts to have hybrid careers, and many of the most prominent experts have moved among academic positions, government positions, and positions at hybrid institutions such as RAND. Indeed, it might even be argued that such hybrid careers provide the experts who inhabit them with a particular form of authority—as the prestige of advising the government, and the presumed access to privileged information that comes along with it, can in turn be "redeemed" for credit in the academic realm, and, conversely, the state seeks to consult with those in the academic sphere.

Terrorism expertise allows us to analyze how objects of knowledge and claims to expertise are constituted at the boundary—itself increasingly contested—between academic or scientific expertise and the state. Rather than a purely political or a purely analytical concept, expert discourse on terrorism exists in an interstitial space between the realms of politics and science. This has had significant implications for both public understandings of terrorism and the ways that "terrorism" has been constructed as an object of policy, and may even help to explain the success that various political actors have had in reformulating the problem to suit a variety of responses, including the various manifestations of the current "global war on terror." Experts have been unable to "stabilize" or control terrorism as a concept, or to successfully perform boundary work to defend terrorism as an arena of expertise.

I argue that the "rhetoric of failure" can be understood as a strategy through which (a subset of) terrorism researchers mobilize sociological theories of scientific/cultural fields as both an interpretive resource in their attempts to make sense of the apparent oddness of their field and their situation, and as schemas, or models, in their attempts to reshape the field. Those who participate in the discourse of failure make use of theories about scientific fields, and how such fields ought to develop, aiming to enact these as models in the world. The seeming discourse of failure can thus be understood as a means through which experts themselves understand their situation by making reference to social theories of "normal" scientific fields and are thus at a loss when their field behaves in an unruly way and fails to conform to these expectations. As I have shown, these perceptions of failure are not universal, but tend to reflect (and stem from) the experiences of a subset of experts who identify relatively more with the academic orientation, and who would like to "purify" (Latour 1993) this highly hybrid field of knowledge production into something approximating a more normal scientific field. They recognize that "terrorism" as a concept is, in practice, highly politicized, yet hope to purify its meaning by extracting from the definition that which they view as partisan, and settling upon a single, neutral definition.

However, these professionalizers face a constant onslaught of countervailing pressures. These come from both other experts, some of whom do not see developing a stable definition as necessary or important, and actors outside the scholarly arena who want to pull the definition of "terrorism" in various directions. They also tend to encounter difficulties when trying to establish definitions in practice in their own work, caught in a bind between trying to clarify "terrorism" as an analytical concept, and wanting to be of use and influence to the state. The current "war on terror" has posed a particularly problematic epistemological situation for these experts.[28] These purifying professionalizers have thus been relatively unsuccessful, and have

[28] As Martha Crenshaw told me, "There is a disconnect [between researchers and the state]….Imagine going to war on terrorism, not an actor, but terrorism, or terrorists of global reach, and sort of treating Al Qaeda as though it were a monolithic organization when everybody who's studied it understood that it was a merger of factions…the kind of complexity gets lost in translation." (Interview with Martha Crenshaw, 5/5/2006).

not even been able to agree upon a single definition amongst themselves. This has had significant consequences for the sorts of expert discourses that tend to be produced and disseminated about terrorism. Experts have been able to stabilize and control neither the definition of "terrorism," nor the production and legitimation of terrorism expertise itself.

I suggest that this has several significant implications for future work on scientific and intellectual expertise in society. First, terrorism expertise exemplifies an arena of intellectual production that does not fit the expectations of boundedness, expert control of authorization of knowledge, and stability of intellectual object that have tended to characterize most sociological work on expertise. Rather than assuming that such atypical fields are either failures, or on their way to becoming fully bounded "fields," I suggest that we ought to expand our vision to incorporate the many arenas of expertise that occupy interstitial spaces, moving and travelling between multiple fields. Finally, the case of terrorism expertise, and its seemingly peculiar "rhetoric of failure," suggests that we might pay more attention to processes of reflexivity, in which the models and discourses of social scientists travel among and influence those actors whom they are intended to describe (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992).

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