Terror Risk: The Concept of Radicalization as a Discursive Device of Political Contention

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In today's "risk society" (Beck 1992), terrorism is certainly among the most prominent and discussed "global risk". Security is being constructed as *the* major political issue of our time and different risk management strategies are being put forward by government officials around the world in the form of counter-terrorism laws or de-radicalization programs. But most of these policies rest on a securitization logic and authoritarian-style regulations that threatens many of the basic freedoms at the heart of liberal democracies. Using empirical evidence from Canada, France, and the United States, I will argue that the general feeling of fear and insecurity regarding the risk of Islamist terrorism is used by political authorities in order to justify extensive measures of surveillance and control over civil society and dissident groups. As a risk management device, the notion of "radicalization" act to disqualify political opponents and justify repression, by turning their claims into either pathologies or crimes.

In this presentation, I will first address the question raised by the organizers of this stream, as of "**how transgressions shape the governance of urban vulnerability and risk**". Using theories of radicalization and political extremism (Amiraux et Araya-Moreno 2014, Sedgwick 2010, Sommier 2013), I will show that the global jihadist movement can be apprehended as a form transgression, a departure from accepted norms, practices and values of Western societies. Like other "radical" movements (environmentalists, natives, anarchists, fascists, etc.), they are labelled as such not only because they use violent means of contention, but also because they carry an "alternative" project for a new model of society, based on novel sets of values and political institutions. These "transgressive" views directly threaten the legitimacy of the established order and the ruling elites, thus calling for a strong response on the part of the State. Repressive measures such as mass surveillance, identity checks, and search without warrant are being put forward at the expense of some basic human rights, and in many cases, this is done with the general support of the population.

Second, I will turn to the question as to "**how risk management affect the vulnerable groups in the city**". Radicalization has become a central issue, mobilizing the attention of scholars, politicians and security agencies around the globe. However, current efforts to prevent violent radicalization are mainly concerned with identifying biographical and ideological factors leading to violent radicalization. On the basis of some specific characteristics (like religion or ethnicity), "preventive" actions are being undertaken without the individual ever having committed any actual crime. People are being put under observation, arrested and detained, based on a supposed allegiance to a given "radical" ideology. Like a self-fulfilling prophecy, this gives the impression that government's security agencies are being successful in their efforts to fight radicalization and it reinforces public support toward repressive measures (Mathelet 2015). But as Ragazzi (2016) and others have shown, the effect is that whole communities are labelled as

being "at risk" and must face stigmatization and social relegation. By manufacturing a discourse of risk and fear, State authorities manage to get more surveillance and control powers, but at the same time contribute to the vulnerability of Muslim populations. Even more so, policies and programs designed to minimize and prevent the risk of radicalization might, in fact, contribute to increase it.

Nevertheless, I argue that Muslim communities, although the primary victims of such measures, are not the only targets. Other social movements and civil society organizations, like environmentalists, worker unions or native groups, might fall under the guise of the new terrorism laws. I base my argument on the Canadian Anti-Terrorism Act (bill C-51), the French "*état d'urgence*", following the November 2015 attacks, and the American Patriot Act, all of which rely on an extended definition of terrorism. In this perspective, any social movement undertaking even legitimate and generally accepted forms of protest (like marches, demonstrations or occupations of public places) become vulnerable to arbitrary measures of repression. As many observers noted, the current trend points toward a "permanent state of exception" and this poses a real threat for democracy.

References

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