From Deprogramming to Deradicalization

From Deprogramming to Deradicalization: How Cultic Studies Offers Insights for Subject-Diversion Programs and Suggests Pathways for Complaint About Religious and Ideologically Motivated Abuse in Australia

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1.Abstract

Based on a United Kingdom precedent, terrorism law in Australia defines terrorist acts as certain actions and threats against the government or a section of the community with the intention of advancing a political, religious, or ideological cause (Security Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Act, 2002). In addition, Australia has proscribed mainly Islamic-styled groups deemed to be terrorist, authorized preventative detention and control orders, and legislated for the cancellation of Australian passports for dual citizens fighting abroad; it also can extend prison sentences beyond term for those deemed a continuing risk to the community. Australia has also pursued policies aimed at both community engagement and education, with some minimally funded support for a few embryonic programs aimed at diverting individuals from extremist Islamist ideologies that promote violence.

Acknowledging that Islamist extremism poses the greatest contemporary problem in the sector of religion and belief, targeting programs toward the violent extreme of one faith group can lead to some resentment and resistance. Although pushback to any government regulatory program can be anticipated, there is scope for government to more effectively regulate (in a nondiscriminatory manner) the broader sector that encompasses religion and belief. The major obstacle to effective regulation of this sector seems to be the general reluctance of liberal democracies to regulate religion as a sector

at all, unless it is for the purpose of conferring benefits. I argue that this laissez faire diffidence to regulatory control is no longer tenable.

Drawing on insights gleaned from the study of cults, sects, and new religious movements, and from policy responses in other countries, I propose the establishment of a central repository specifically tasked to receive and competently assess complaints arising from the practice of religion and belief, with a particular focus on apostate research. A properly supported agency that accesses multidisciplinary advice and serves as a central repository for complaints, with powers to obtain information yet one step removed from law enforcement, would research best practice and make ongoing recommendations on sector policy. The remit of the agency (essentially a complaints commission for religious and ideological abuse) would include examination of behavior that potentially leads to violence, but would also examine other harmful conduct identified from complaints received.

2. Religious Motive in Antiterrorism Laws

A large proportion of contemporary terrorist incidents and plots involve actors sincerely (albeit misguidedly) motivated by religious ideology and acting under the direction of religious authority.[1] Many of these religiously motivated attacks and plots emerge from organizations and individuals who find theological justification for public acts of violence from extremist interpretations of Wahhabist and Salafist Sunni ideology, theological streams that emanate from Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which have a longstanding pedigree in Islamic thought.

In Australia, where the government has legislated to enable the Commonwealth Attorney-General to proscribe terrorist organizations, it is noticeable that most groups thus far listed as banned terrorist organizations are underpinned by extremist religious ideology commonly or popularly described as Islamic fundamentalism, radical Islam, Islamism, or Islamic extremism. Robert Manne has argued that a better term to employ, particularly for those who have pledged adherence to the Islamic State, but also to groups such as Al Quaeda (which does not share the same sectarian animosity to Shi'a Islam),[2] is Salafi jihadism, "believers in the revolutionary transformation of the world through violent means" (Manne, 2016, p. 159). This movement is "by no means an exclusively or even principally Saudi or Wahhabist phenomenon" (Manne, 2016, p. 19) as

Qutbists (followers of Sayyid Qutb whose prison writings formed the basis of the Islamic State ideology; see Manne, 2016, p. 8) in political exile from the Egyptian regime and Wahhabis first rubbed shoulders in Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s and the 1970s. From the mid-1980s they fought and talked and argued together in Afghanistan. The Salafi jihadist movement, which originated in Egypt during the late 1960s and the 1970s and expanded during the 1980s in the war against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan, represents the fusion of Salafi-inflected Egyptian revolutionary jihadism and politically awakened Saudi Wahhabism. (Manne, 2016, pp. 19–20)

Manne cites Wiktorowicz (2005), who divides Salafis into three basic types: the purists who don't engage in the political sphere, the politicos who engage in politics from the sidelines but avoid violence, and the jihadis. All are textual literalists, but it is only the third group "who believe there is an inescapable religious obligation to commit one's life to violent struggle for the creation of a truly Islamic world" (Manne, 2016, pp. 17–18). Indeed, for those religious apologists who like to profess the idea that terrorism is inspired by economics, or politics, and that religion is merely used as a cloak for these underlying motivations, it should be noted that Manne observes that "for the entire Salafi jihadist school, the only ideas that ultimately matter in the struggle for mastery of the world are those connected to religion" (Manne, 2016, p. 43; italics added).[3]

It was with the intrinsic understanding that contemporary terrorism is, in the main, inspired by sincerely held religious or other ideological beliefs that antiterrorism law in Australia, based on United Kingdom (UK) precedent, essentially defines terrorism as threats against the government or a section of the community "with the intention of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause" [Security Legislation Amendment (terrorism) Act, Section 100 (1) (Cth), 2002]. The Australian legislation includes the offences of

engaging in a terrorist act, providing or receiving training connected with a terrorist act, possessing things connected with terrorist acts, collecting or making documents likely to facilitate terrorist acts and performing other acts in preparation for, or planning, terrorist acts." These offences attract penalties up to life imprisonment. (Ruddock, 2004, p. 255)

The UK precedent, upon which terrorism laws in other Commonwealth nations are based (including New Zealand, Canada and South Africa), is the Terrorism Act 2000 (UK), in which the phrase "political, religious or

ideological cause" is first used [Section 101.1 (1) (b)]. This wording is particularly pertinent to our discussion about cults and terrorism because the UK legislative clause introduced into terrorism legislation preceded the events of 9/11 and was designed to counter the type of violence perpetrated by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in Japan in 1995. In fact, that was its "principal justification" (see Keiran Hardy, 2011, p. 341).[4] This concern about religious cults seems timely and prescient.

3. The Nexus Between Cults, Religion, and Terrorism

The sarin gas attacks perpetrated by Aum Shinrikyo in 1995 were not the only cultic attacks that UK legislators might have noted leading up to the turn of the century, although they are an obvious example of a group that can fit into the multiple definitions of a terrorist group, a cult, and a religion. Some other cult-related violence that would have concerned policymakers include the 1978 events in Jonestown, Guyana, where US congressman Leo Ryan and four other investigators were murdered, and where followers of the Reverend Jim Jones of the People's Temple were murdered and committed suicide in a mass atrocity. Legislators might have been aware of the 1984 attack by Swami Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and his "Orange People" followers, who attempted to take over the town council in Dalles, Oregon by contaminating salad bars in restaurants with salmonella typhimurium; the contamination caused several hundred local voters to become ill (a pioneering use of biological terrorism in the United States).

Legislators would have noted the confrontation near Waco, Texas in 1993, where David Koresh and his Branch Davidian sect of the Seventh Day Adventists murdered law enforcement officers and were involved in a standoff with authorities that resulted in a conflagration and scores of deaths.[5] Authorities in Europe were acutely aware of the group suicides of followers of Luc Jouret and his Solar Temple movement in Switzerland, Canada, and France between 1994 and 1997, and they also would have noted the collective suicides of followers of Marshall Applewhite and his Heaven's Gate movement in California in 1997. Policymakers also would have been horrified by the mass murders and suicides of scores of followers of Joseph Kibwetere and his Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments, in Uganda in the year 2000.

These events, occurring in different countries and involving different ethnic groups, or a mixture of people from varied cultural backgrounds, exhibit a number of similarities and share one particular point of difference from the groups that are the current focus of most antiterrorist policies. The difference in common is that none of these earlier groups are connected with Islamic theology. They derive their theological roots from Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and a hodgepodge of other assorted faith traditions. All of the groups noted above do, however, have much in common. All have been popularly described as cults. All were guided by charismatic individuals whom psychologists might well diagnose with narcissistic personality disorder. All involved strongly held, syncretic, spiritual belief systems, and all of the belief systems underpinning the atrocities (even the space cults can be described as spiritual) can be characterized as religious groups (or slide easily into the category) under prevailing legislative provisions.

In Australia, the accepted definition of religion is evidence of this, with even more support in definitions provided in other jurisdictions. In 1983 in the Scientology case, the Australian High Court offered a definition of religion that has been widely accepted for administrative purposes. The Court noted that the definition entails "first, belief in a supernatural Being, Thing or Principle; and second, the acceptance of canons of conduct in order to give effect to that belief" (Church of the New Faith v. Commissioner of Pay-Roll Tax, 1983, p. 136; italics added).[6] An even more expansive definition was earlier provided by the Indian Supreme Court in which it noted that "religion is not necessarily theistic, but undoubtedly has as its basis a system of beliefs or doctrines which are regarded by those who profess that religion as conducive to their spiritual well-being" (The Commissioner Hindu Religious Endowments Madras V Sri Lakshmindra Thirtha Swamiar of Sri Shirur Mutt, 1954, p. 1005; italics added).

Much effort has been made over the years to differentiate between cults and what is seen to be authentic religion; although this endeavor may be instructive from a sociological, psychological, or theological perspective, from a strictly legal perspective groups characterized as cults would generally be entitled to the same rights and privileges (or accommodations) provided to any other religious group. The International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA) has noted that a cult "is characterized by an ideology, strong demands issuing from that ideology, and powerful processes of social/psychological

influence to induce group members to meet those demands" (ICSA, 2006, p. 68). My comment on this is that

at the heart of groups most convincingly described as cults is an element of blind obedience by a group of followers to the instructions of a leader (reinforced by social/psychological manipulation) because of a belief that the leader has access to some supernatural power or knowledge beyond the ken of others, or is in communication with supernatural forces. (Mutch, 2012, p. 4)

4. Cult Deprogramming and Subject-Focused Deradicalization

The psychological and sociological processes involved in terrorist groups, from deceitful initial recruitment and conversion to the subjugation of the follower's thoughts and actions to the will of the leader (often under the close supervision of spiritual advisers), are not just similar to, but in many important respects identical to dynamics present in cults. In addition, the process of deconversion from cults, or what has now evolved into exit counselling, in an environment where the subject is somehow constrained (deprogramming) or where the subject voluntarily receives exit counselling, is identical to the process of deradicalization in those subject-focused programs in which the objective is deconversion from an ideological position that demands violent action. The difference between the two is that lessons available from the former have not been adequately assessed for assimilation into the latter.

Policymakers have made insufficient attempts to thoroughly analyze cult deprogramming and exit counselling in an effort to apply lessons learned to the few extant subject-targeted, ideological deconversion-centered, deradicalization programs they are pursuing. One easy lesson is that the most successful of the cult deprogrammers (now exit counsellors) are former cult members (apostates) who have both a detailed knowledge of the theological underpinnings of the cult, and also a knowledge (based on their own experience, often as perpetrators) of the sociological and psychological tricks or methods employed to indoctrinate members. While the involvement of clerics in deradicalization programs can sometimes be useful, it might also be counterproductive if the clerics are not thoroughly versed in the allegedly deviant strand of theology to which the subject adheres; in addition they must be knowledgeable about methods of psychological and sociological manipulation. Furthermore, such programs would likely never be as effective

as deconversion conducted by someone with the intimate understanding gained by having "walked the walk" in the shoes of the subject.

Another unresolved issue (quite apart from the fact that programs often seem to be oversighted by sociologists, and not psychologists or psychiatrists) is the efficacy of using trained psychologists in comparison to amateurs, such as knowledgeable apostates (a combination of both in the same individual is still rare). In this context, perhaps further research is called for to determine the potential effectiveness of using complementary teams that include both trained professionals and amateurs.

In addition, cult deprogramming or exit counselling most often involves the cooperation of the subject's actual family members (as opposed to the new "family" members of the cult). This practice suggests a similar need in subject-focused government deradicalization (or diversion) programs.

Further, deradicalization program researchers, educators, and trainers have paid insufficient attention to the lessons they might learn from cult deprogramming and exit counselling. In one paper that reviewed literature on both deprogramming and "deganging," the authors queried the focus on challenging group ideology in extant subject-deradicalization programs and argued that further research is required around affiliation motivations; they noted that, similarly, "deprogramming focuses virtually exclusively on challenging the ideology of the cult in question" (Morris, Eberhard, Rivera, & Watsula, 2010, p. 7).[7] But the authors relied on a particularly dated critique of deprogramming, and certainly more academic output on the work of contemporary exit counselling is necessary for access by psychologists seeking to play a constructive role in the many embryonic programs being commissioned by governments.[8]

From a layman's perspective, it seems that affiliation factors might lead some followers to self-sacrifice for a cause; but for them to deliberately attack innocent victims with knives at close quarters takes a particularly zealous mindset, one we might associate with the popular term brainwashing, reinforced by peer-group pressures. The ability for individuals to suppress any normal compassion and instinctive revulsion suggests a bloodlust inculcated by psychological indoctrination into a death cult.

So historical cult deprogramming, contemporary work by psychologists and former followers on voluntary exit counselling, or both (see Steven Hassan,

2012)[9] need to be thoroughly evaluated and adapted if appropriate to suit current realities within deradicalization programs, wherein authorities, through the use of compulsory-control orders, can require attendance, which, depending on the quality of the programs, might improve success rates.

In addition, even the critics of mind control or brainwashing seem to accept the idea that, whether the processes involved are psychological (including thought reform) or sociological, or a mixture of both (affiliation factors), there is a great deal of attrition (people leaving groups). Although no program will ever achieve the levels of deradicalization one might hope for, significant underutilized human intelligence potentially is available from both apostates and family and friends of converts. The need is to make this information more accessible and help professionals learn to make better use of it, whether to extricate individuals from destructive environments or to inform policy responses in order to suppress the harmful potential of deviant groups.

5. Countering Violent Extremism: Law-and-Order Legislation

In Australia, despite the similarities and overlap between cultic studies and studies of terrorism, government responses to problems identified in the two fields are very different. Considerable resources are expended on law-and-order responses to terrorism, yet governments are hesitant to embrace the broader regulation of cults, sects, and new religious movements. Governments seem reluctant to regulate the general sector that encompasses religion and belief, of which these sometimes-problematic groups are seen to form an intrinsic component, unless it is for the purpose of handing out financial and other privileges (accommodations) or protections (such as religious vilification laws).

Law-and-order legislative responses to terrorism include proscribing groups deemed to be terrorist organizations; authorizing preventative detention and control orders (now applied to individuals as young as 14), cancelling Australian passports for dual citizens, and extending prison sentences beyond term for those deemed a continuing risk to the community. These legislative responses are important to note because they provide a framework in which programs aimed at subject-focused deradicalization (or deconversion) programs can be facilitated.

Proscription

Originally, placing an organization on a list of banned organizations depended upon prior identification by the United Nations Security Council as a terrorist organization. This was deemed not to be sufficiently efficacious, so under the Criminal Code Amendment (Terrorism Organisations) Act 2004 (Cth), the federal government was enabled to "list terrorist organizations based on Australian national interest and security needs, as well as the advice of Australian intelligence organisations" (Ruddock, 2004, p. 257).

The procedure for listing is that the Attorney-General

must be satisfied that the relevant organisation is directly or indirectly engaged in preparing, planning, assisting in or fostering the doing of a terrorist act. The Act also provides that the leader of the opposition must be briefed about a proposed listing. Any regulation listing a terrorist organisation is subject to disallowance on the recommendation of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on ASIO, DSD and ASIS … the regulations are subject to a two-year sunset clause. (Ruddock, 2004, p. 257)

In addition, the Anti-terrorism Act 2004 (Cth) made it an "offence for a person to be a member of an organisation that a court finds to be a terrorist organisation, even though not listed by regulation" (Ruddock, 2004, pp. 257–258), and the Anti-terrorism Act (No 2) 2004 (Cth) established an association offense applying

to people who have links with a terrorist organisation or its members, but who themselves are not members of the organisation and who do not have an active involvement with the activities of the organisation. (Ruddock, 2004, pp. 257–258)

The proscription regime raises fundamental questions about the appropriateness, the legality, and the efficacy of banning organizations. In an era when the fundamental right of citizens to safety and personal security is being challenged, questions arise as to the extent the proscription regime might be expanded (or might exist at all) consistent with notions of democratic governance.

Preventative Detention

Preventative and control orders are designed to "permit the detention of terrorist suspects in order to prevent a terrorist attack from occurring or to protect evidence relating to a terrorist act, and to permit control of the movement and activity of persons threatening a terrorist risk" (Rose & Nestorovska, 2007, p. 41). The following acts reflect this approach.

Under the ASIO Legislation Amendment (Terrorism) Act 2003 (Cth), the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation may

obtain a warrant to question, and detain while questioning, people involved in, or who may have important information about, terrorist activity'. The Act enables a 'person to be questioned for up to 24 hours (or 48 hours where interpreters are used) and to be detained for up to seven consecutive days. (Ruddock, 2004, p. 258)

Under the Anti-terrorism Act (No 2) 2005 (Cth), an initial preventative detention order for up to 48 hours may be granted to a member of the Australian Federal Police by a senior AFP member and continuing orders by appointed judicial officers, with provision for repeated extensions of 48 hours. Prohibited contact orders may also be made to "prevent the detainee from contacting a family member, parent or lawyer" (to avoid the potential for alerting the perpetrators of plots) (Rose & Nesterovska, 2007, pp. 41–43).

Control Orders

Control orders allow people of concern to remain in the community; these orders may be granted upon application by a member of the Australian Federal Police if a court is satisfied on the balance of probabilities that "the order would substantially assist in preventing a terrorist act" (Rose & Nesterovska, 2007, p. 45). An order can

impose prohibitions, restrictions and other requirements upon a person's activities. The terms may include restrictions and prohibitions on movement, leaving Australia, associating with certain individuals, using certain forms of technology, and possessing or using certain articles. They may also include requirements to wear tracking devices, report to specified persons at specified times and places, be photographed and fingerprinted and participate in counselling or other services. (Rose & Nesterovska, 2007, p. 44)

Contravention can lead to 5 years' maximum imprisonment. Preventative and control orders were initially restricted to people aged 16 and over, but this age limitation has now been lowered to 14.

Extended Prison Sentences and Age Reduction for Continued Detention

Building upon the control-order framework and state precedents for the continuing detention of particularly dangerous sex and violence offenders, the Commonwealth has now passed legislation to provide for the continuing detention of prisoners who pose the risk of committing terrorist or treasonous offenses if they were to be released. Each prisoner must attend a preliminary hearing, where a report is to be provided by relevant experts on the prisoner's involvement in any rehabilitation programs (Criminal Code Amendment, 2016), although it is thought that there is "currently no reliable way to predict whether a terrorist still posed a threat" (Wroe, 2016, p. 7.86).

Additional legislation has also been introduced to reduce the age at which a person who is a security concern can have a control order placed upon them, from 16 to 14 years of age [Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment Act (No. 1), 2016]. It is reported that there are 14 jailed prisoners who pose a potential postsentence security risk, and a further 180 suspected terrorists are under investigation by the Australian Federal Police (Benson, 2016).

6. Education, Community Engagement, and Subject-Diversion Programs

In addition to these legislative responses, governments are actively pursuing counter violent-extremism programs that can be divided into two main streams: those focused on education and community outreach, and those focused on diverting individuals away from extreme ideologies that promote violence.

Education and community-engagement programs are an effort to co-opt the entire community, but (fairly obviously) members of the Islamic community in particular, to provide timely intelligence to law-enforcement agencies about potential terrorist activities by targeting what is termed violent extremism. This is defined as occurring when

a person or group decides that fear, terror and violence are justified to achieve ideological, political or social change, and acts accordingly." Violent extremism is an extension of radicalization from a relatively benign expression of a viewpoint to the use of violence to achieve a particular goal. (Angus, 2015, p. 2)[10]

At the state level, an example of the broader strategic measures undertaken include developing community-cohesion programs, including a Community Cohesion Ambassador's Program to enable community leaders to work with students in schools and the community "to provide advice on the risk of violent extremism and the importance of community cohesion" (Angus, 2016, p. 11). The New South Wales (NSW) Government has established a support and advice telephone line and a training program for NSW Government workers, together with capacity-building programs for community workers. In addition, the Premier has set up an expert panel (Countering Violent Extremism [CVE] Expert Panel) to provide advice and has appointed a Director for CVE Programs attached to the Department of Premier and Cabinet. On a more proactive level, an audit of prayer groups in the State school system has been established to ensure that extremists are not able to indoctrinate school kids in informal prayer groups, and presumably in scripture (or special religious education) classes (Angus, 2016).

At the Commonwealth level, under the Living Safe Together Grants Programme, $1.6 million was allocated in August 2014 "to 34 community-based organizations to help divert individuals away from extreme ideologies" (Angus, 2016, p. 10), while in 2015 an announcement was made for the investment of $22 million in "programs designed to monitor and counter extremist material online" (p. 10). The different level of financial resources allocated to these programs is interesting when one notes that in its own September 2015 Living Safe Together awareness kit, the Commonwealth states that "radicalisation is most often led by personal face-to-face relationships, but there are some examples of people becoming involved in radical groups through the internet" (Angus, 2016, pp. 4–5).

This suggests to me that, in the crucial area of subject diversion through radicalization programs, the Commonwealth is flying by the seat of its pants and is sampling self-started programs in a desperate effort to find something that works. The paltry level of financial resources also indicates that there are very few of these programs available, and probably even fewer that could be

properly described as focusing on subject deconversion. In addition, the approach of community outreach and education of Government workers begs the question, "Are these efforts merely the blind leading the blind?" For example, among the numerous criticisms of extant CVE programs, Hussain Nadim notes, in relation to the training of school teachers to be on the lookout for extremism, that "It is almost impossible to identify at-risk students. How is the government or teachers going to identify who is at risk and who is not at risk at the age of 13, 14, 15 and 16?" (Angus, 2016, p. 13).

7. Human-Information and Apostate- Focused Research

With respect to both the broader approach of community engagement and education, and the more focused efforts to deradicalize at-risk individuals, the field of cultic studies offers insights into a far more effective approach. Streams of complaint about potentially dangerous religious or ideological actors can sometimes remain largely unexamined or overlooked because most Western democracies are reluctant to regulate the broader sector that encompasses religion and belief, of which the religious cults referred to previously comprise an intrinsic component, as do contemporary terrorist groups. Complaints come from disillusioned followers (apostates) who have left the groups, or their bewildered families and friends. Even when timely information is received by the relevant authorities, it is sometimes not acted upon because present arrangements do not sufficiently facilitate the type of ongoing, channeled, detailed information gathering required to facilitate multidisciplinary, research-based analysis about extremist groups and actors.

I have previously noted that the best way to gather "timely information most needed by public officials is that which can be provided by leavers [apostates] and families and friends of people in high-demand groups" (Mutch, 2006, p. 187). In addition to studies based on apostate testimonies and complaints made by group critics, I have suggested that in a triangulated approach other scholars might focus on group-access studies (difficult with respect to terrorist groups) and others from public-information sources in order to gather a so-called thick picture based on various approaches (Mutch, 2006).

Because of the fraught nature of the groups we are dealing with, and the need for timely action to protect the public, academics engaging in apostate research need to be working closely in partnership with governmental

authority to achieve the public-policy results required. Although many potential informants will not provide information on family members and friends if doing so might result in those individuals being drawn to the adverse attention of authorities, and particularly police, it is equally true that, because of the porous nature of many of these groups, there will always be informants. Even in the most tightly controlled groups or cells, there is sometimes attrition. In addition, if apostates with no record of attempted violence (although they may be implicated through association offenses— consorting with proscribed individuals or groups) are treated with a degree of sympathy (in contrast with the leaders and oligarchs who operate the groups), then over time trust can be built with potential informants to facilitate complaints from the public.

8. Pathways for Complaint

The absence of a dedicated agency tasked to receive and competently analyze streams of complaint about spiritual or ideological advisers has been a serious omission in our regulatory framework. Sometimes we see the convergence of real terrorism and dubiously qualified pastoral advisers, counsellors, and other individuals parading as spiritual therapists and healers. These individuals can proselytize within and outside religious groups, including cults, sects, and new religious movements. But even outside legislatively defined terrorism, there have been many instances in which the implosion or explosion of groups led by a fanatical preacher or spiritual leader have led to tragic, sometimes fatal consequences, with the process of ideological or religious conversion central to our understanding of how these individuals and groups operate.

In addition, a range of other unethical and predatory practices occur all too frequently in the religion-and-belief sector (the tsunami of child sexual abuse being a prime example) for governments to continue to ignore the need to effectively regulate the sector. Governments tend to treat the sector as a benign or beneficial grouping; and regulatory regimes generally facilitate access by the sector to privileges (accommodations), exemptions, or protections rather than enforce regulatory controls on behavior.

To be effective, the public face of a central repository for complaints about religious and ideological actors and groups is an important consideration. To be accessible such a repository must be known to the public so as to facilitate

pathways for complaint. It should be at least one step removed from law enforcement, to provide some reassurance that genuine victims of radicalization (in popular terms, brainwashing) will be treated with understanding. The public agency might be styled as a complaints commission for religious and ideological abuse.

One approach might be a university-based unit (something such as INFORM[11] in the UK), but with a greater focus on apostate research and a wide, multidisciplinary approach that includes psychologists, psychiatrists, and theologians— and incorporates the expertise of nonacademic people, particularly apostates themselves with experience in programming (conversions), deprogramming, and exit counselling. However, although there is no doubt that an INFORM-styled university think tank, alongside other university units focused more directly on terrorist-related violence or Islamic-based research, would be a useful development in Australia, that option would not provide the sort of complaints-based, government-run agency with discrete investigative and reporting powers that is necessary to provide the type of evidence-based advice government ultimately requires.

Another model that incorporates a useful approach to dealing with problematic groups in the religion-and-belief sector is the French Miviludes (Interministerial Mission of Vigilance and Combat Against Sectarian Aberrations),[12] which involves a comprehensive government response to the phenomenon of what the French term sectarian deviation. Both INFORM, which is nongovernment but receives some government endorsement, and Miviludes, which is an arm of government attached to the Prime Minister's office, are attuned to nongovernment groups that focus on cults, sects, and new religious movements.[13],[14] Of the two, Miviludes exhibits a greater emphasis on formal connections with community groups, such as those operating under the umbrella of FECRIS (European Federation of Centres of Research and Information on Sectarianism),[15] which are most critical of sectés (cults).

The history of the mobilization of the anticult, countercult, and cult-watch groups that work in collaboration with parents and friends of individuals enticed into the clutches of destructive cults is a particularly relevant precedent for understanding what is needed to combat the influence of narcissistic predators parading as spiritual advisers, gurus, and other guises. A thorough examination of the movements' successes and failures, along with

the impediments imposed by academic cult apologists, cult harassment of critics (including defamation proceedings), the constraints imposed by human-rights regimes (Mutch, 2016), and legal and ethical impediments to deprogramming, provides essential background to understanding the crisis democratic societies now face to again combat the forces of totalitarianism that emanate in particular from religious and ideological groups rather than from the state.

In Australia we have taken some steps along the way to more effectively regulate the sector of religion and belief. The establishment of the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission in December 2012 (based somewhat on the Charity Commission for England and Wales) is potentially a positive step. But a generally benign oversight of not-for-profit groups (often referred to as the third sector) does not focus on the problems manifested in the sector of religion and belief, which may include both for-profit groups and dubiously qualified pastoral advisers, counsellors, and other individuals parading as spiritual healers or therapists who might not come under the radar of the regulator of the third sector.

That is why, in evidence to the Senate Economics Legislation Committee inquiry into the Tax Laws Amendment (Public Benefit Test) Bill 2010, I recommended that the government examine the Miviludes model. Despite unanimous support from the Senate committee members for this simple proposition, the then-government declined because of sensitivities toward religious freedom (for a critique of this reticence, see Mutch, 2011).[16] When the instigator of the Senate inquiry, Senator Nick Xenophon, suggested again in 2016 that an "agency mirrored on France's Miviludes is needed to crack down on groups using psychological pressure on members" (Gusmaroli, 2016), his suggestion was met with journalistic ridicule (Blair, 2016). The same sort of knee-jerk criticism can be levelled at any serious attempt to rehabilitate and utilize former jihadis (Maley, 2017), despite the common-sense insight, reinforced by cultic studies, that former adherents can be the most efficacious counsellors in deradicalization programs.

9. Conclusion: Recent Developments "Down Under"

To better target and deal with potential perpetrators as a result of continuing attacks from radicalized individuals, Australian governments are adopting

new approaches to focus on particular aspects of the terrorism problem. So a new unit in NSW (based on a Queensland precedent announced in anticipation of the release of the NSW Coroner's report on the Lindt Café siege; see State Coroner of NSW, 2017), called the Fixated Persons Investigations Unit, has been tasked to "focus on the detection, intervention and prevention of so-called 'lone actor' and 'fixated person' threats" (NSW Police Force, April 25, 2017, Facebook post). This unit is intended as a "resource for parents worried about their children being dangerously influenced" and targets "people so driven by religious, political, ideological or mental health issues that they threaten others" (NSW Police Force, 2017). In addition, the unit "includes a combination of experienced police officers and mental health workers, who will work collaboratively with established Counter Terrorism resources" (NSW Police Force, 2017).

This development indicates that the penny has finally dropped and policymakers are now attempting to develop discrete pathways for complaint that rely on the human intelligence that is best placed to identify a problem. The change incorporates the long-neglected involvement of mental health workers in the equation, although relevant experience and specialization will be a continuing challenge (Berkovic, 2015). However, whether parents and friends of indoctrinated children will have sufficient confidence in a law enforcement based unit to access any help it might be competent to provide remains to be seen (Davey, 2015).[17]

At the Commonwealth level, the government has recently issued a tender for a new Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Services Panel, "to provide a robust and agile panel of suppliers, available to the whole of government, that demonstrates an understanding of CVE policies and issues nationally and internationally" (AusTender, 2017).[18] Although the short timeframe on the tender suggests the Commonwealth might have possible suppliers in mind, it is interesting to note the comment that "no responses are being sought from Potential Suppliers at this time" on items that may include "policy," "program design," and most significantly, "intervention services" (AusTender, 2017). It seems that playing catch-up in this problematic policy area is still very much a work in progress.

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[1] Some of these acts are committed by so-called "lone-wolf" characters, who are arguably criminal psychopaths merely citing religious motivation and justification for effect; but the debate on these lone wolves can distract from the general proposition that terrorist acts are regularly perpetrated by small groups or cells inspired by religion and instructed by religious actors, even though the authenticity or legitimacy of the authority of these religious actors may be questioned.

[2] Indeed, it was the Islamic State "intention of killing all Shi'as and all members of other supposedly heretical or apostate Muslim sects that finalised the ideological breach between the Islamic State and al-Qaeda" (Robert Manne, 2016, p. 159).

[3] From a policy perspective, it is therefore essential that we understand the theological rationales upon which terrorist actions are based and justified, something that Manne has explained with respect to Salafi jihadism in his excellent book.

[4] The parliamentary speech to the bill, by UK Home Secretary Jack Straw (UK Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons, 14 December 1999, vol. 341, col. 159), is cited.

[5] Tactical mistakes made in that altercation can be attributable to a less-than-adequate understanding of cultic dynamics, inadequate regulatory control of firearms in the United States, and a failure to take earlier action to prevent harm to underage girls and others at the hands of the religious cult leader. The US Bill of Rights poses ongoing strategic challenges to rational and orderly policymaking in its vague protections for the right to bear arms and freedom of religion.

[6] Per Chief Justice Mason and Justice Brennan.

[7] The authors rely on some dated literature and focus on deprogramming, with all its pejorative connotations, rather than the contemporary usage of exit counselling.

[8] I acknowledge the excellent work being done by Rod Dubrow-Marshall (UK) in bringing the work of ICSA and the cultic-studies movement to the attention of the EU's Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), and in

particular to the RAN Exit Working Group cochaired by Judy Korn (Germany) and Robert Örell (Sweden).

[9] Hassan has developed the Strategic Interactive Approach (SIA), which "is non-coercive and empowers individuals by giving them the tools they need to detect and remove undue influence from their own minds" (Hassan, n.d., online at https://freedomofmind.com/strategic-interactive-approach/).

[10] The source of the citation in Angus is the Government of Australia, Living Safe Together: Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalisation in Australia, 2015, p. 10 (available online at https://www.livingsafetogether.gov.au/informationadvice/Documents/preventing-violent-extremism-and-radicalisation-in-australia.pdf).

[11] Information Network Focus on Religious Movements (London School of Economics).

[12] Mission interministérielle de vigilance et de lutte contre les dérives sectaires.

[13] See Mutch, 2004, pp. 376–383.

[14] See Fenech, 2011 (CIFS conference hosted by Senators Sue Boyce and Nick Xenophon, Cult Information & Family Support Inc.).

[15] Fédération Européennedes Centres de Recherche Fédération Européenne des Centres de Resherche et d'information sur le Sectarisme.

[16] CIFS conference hosted by Senators Sue Boyce and Nick Xenophon, Cult Information & Family Support Inc.

[17] Unfortunately, early indications are that the NSW initiative is struggling to win the hearts and minds of its target audience, precisely because of its close links to law enforcement. For further details, see McGowan (2017).

[18]"AusTender provides centralized publication of Australian Government business opportunities, annual procurement plans, multi-use lists and contracts awarded" (AusTender, https://www.tenders.gov.au).