

## Logics of care and control

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DOI:

[10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092](https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092)

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*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Citation for published version (Harvard):*

Brown, KE & Mohamed, FN 2022, 'Logics of care and control: governing European "returnees" from Iraq and Syria', *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp. 632-658. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092>

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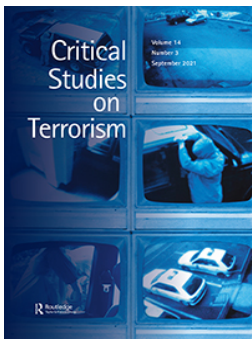
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To cite this article: Katherine E. Brown & F. Nubla Mohamed (2021): Logics of care and control: governing European “returnees” from Iraq and Syria, Critical Studies on Terrorism, DOI: [10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092](https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2021.2016092>



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Published online: 21 Dec 2021.



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## Logics of care and control: governing European “returnees” from Iraq and Syria

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines how European “returnees” from the conflict in Iraq and Syria are managed by European governance and screening, prosecution, reintegration and rehabilitation (SPRR) processes. It explores the contestations and dynamics among professionals and practitioners involved in SPRR, and how they attempt to manage competing narratives of villain/victim. The article finds that underlying their efforts are different notions of “care” that allow for benevolent control and risk mitigation. The integration of care into governance has unevenly distributed political effects, allowing for the ongoing resilience and adaptability of the war on terror.

### KEYWORDS

Care; governance; returnees; SPRR; ISIS; counterterrorism; gender

### Introduction: European women and children Daesh returnees

In 2019, the so-called Islamic State (Daesh) lost territorial control of its self-declared caliphate in Iraq and Syria. Since then, the international community has struggled to respond to the challenges posed by the 41,000 foreign persons who were recorded to have travelled to join the Caliphate – either as fighters or performing *hijra*<sup>1</sup> to start a new life under Daesh control. Less than one-third have been repatriated, with a global return rate of 9% for women (Cook and Vale 2019). There are approximately 10,500 foreign women and children remaining in Iraq and Syria, detained in a network of prisons and camps run by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) under the political leadership of the Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) (International Crisis Group 2020). The Egmont Institute suggests there are 200 women from 11 European countries remaining in these camps (Renard and Coolsaet 2020). In addition, there are approximately 650 children with links to Europe, of whom approximately 120 are under the age of 12 and who are unaccompanied or separated from their families and living in an interim care centre in the camp (International Observatory of Human Rights 2021). The largest group is French, followed by German, Belgium, Dutch, Swedish and British citizens. European governments and local authorities in Iraq and Syria also admit that they do not know the whereabouts of many other European women once affiliated to Daesh who are not in the camps. This transnational group of women (and the children with them) do not fit neatly into pre-existing categories of international law or politics, resulting in an apparently contradictory array of responses and narratives where as a class of people they are positioned as both victims and perpetrators of atrocities.

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The increasing instability in West Asia and North Africa, the lack of provisions and security in the displacement camps, and the pressures of the Covid-19 pandemic mean there is urgency to facilitate the return of foreign nationals, with a particular focus on both women and children. The UN reminded member states in April 2019 that the situation for many women and children with links to terrorist groups was untenable (UN 2019; CTED 2019a). In 2020, the European Council concluded that all children in the camps were in “acute humanitarian distress” (Schennach 2020; see also Council of Europe, 2021).

Despite this, there remains considerable official and public reluctance on the part of states to repatriate their citizens. Thomas Renard argues that it would be “political suicide” for politicians to repatriate “terrorists” costing them votes (Hassan 2021). A poll carried out in conjunction with *La Figaro* in France found 89% of respondents opposed the return of adult fighters (Odoxa-Backbone 2019;). In the UK, the official rhetoric affirms this hostility: Britain’s Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab stated in Parliament “We certainly want to see those responsible for atrocities and crimes given justice in the region, so far as that is practical”, and went on to say that “In relation to the question of returns, we do not want to see foreign fighters returning to this country” (Hansard 2019). As early as 2014, Europol highlighted that returnees<sup>2</sup> may play a role in “logistical, financial or recruitment cells, and may act as role models to individuals within extremist communities” (Europol, 2014, 9). This positions returnees as a threat to national security, regardless of actual participation or experiences of violence, as an enabling factor of extremism. In some cases, such as that of Shamima Begum, their presumed potential threat to national security has resulted in the revocation of their citizenship (Masters and Regilme 2020).

However, behind the scenes, across Europe, lawyers, civil servants, public officials, and security actors are setting the norms and standards, bureaucracies, and processes for the screening, prosecution, reintegration, and rehabilitation (SPRR) of women and children affiliated to Daesh (returnees). SPRR is the responsibility of individual EU member states, and in some countries, these responsibilities are further delegated to municipalities, with differing practices, budgets and priorities. Practitioner experiences, policy contexts, and legal frameworks therefore vary across the EU. However, these sit within a wider international and regional human rights context, and are supported by the EU regional security infrastructure. Building on the EU’s Counter-Terrorism Strategy first adopted in 2005, the Council of Europe, the EU DG Home Affairs, the EU counter-terrorism coordinator, and the EU Radicalisation Awareness organisation have been addressing their potential return since 2016 (Van Ginkel and Entenmann, 2016; 11-18).

More recently, in 2020, in part due to increased public and official hostility to repatriation, there was a leaked draft agreement between Kurdish authorities and the EU, which foresaw, among other things, the prosecution of foreign nationals by special Kurdish courts, schooling in displacement camps to minimise radicalisation by parents and the eventual repatriation of those women deemed not to have travelled to Syria or Iraq voluntarily (Vlierden 2020; Speckhard 2020). This was expected to reduce the pressure for mass repatriation and minimise public security concerns. Although this was welcomed at one level for improving the conditions at the two camps, NGOs, lawyers and research organisations continue to advocate for the return of those European nationals as a matter of international humanitarian obligation, human rights law, and welfare principles. Rights and Security International (2021) for example, highlight that these arrangements may represent the unlawful detention of children and call it “Europe’s Guantanamo”.

In this article, we ask how such competing and often contradictory logics of (in)security and human rights norms regarding foreign terrorist fighters, and those affiliated to proscribed groups, operate in practice, sometimes in contrast to official stated intent, and how this influences the gendered experiences of, and approaches to, returnees. Governance of counterterrorism – of which SPRR may be seen as a subset – can be considered a systemic feature of world politics post 9/11 which clearly needs mapping, but we also need to unpack how it operates, that is to understand “what actually happens at the interface of the fragments that compose the elemental institutions” (Kreuder-Sonnen and Zürn 2020). Unlike arguments that position all “returnees” as outside of law, we find that underpinning the SPRR practices regarding European women returnees is a deeper gendered logic that enables security governance to operate in the face of other normative principles: namely, that of care. The integration of care into security governance has unevenly distributed political effects.

To make this argument, the article first outlines existing research on returnees and security governance. We then describe our methodology to identify how European officials and practitioners respond to returnees in practice. Third, we offer our findings in two parts: the first addresses the short-term and immediate considerations of screening, repatriation and prosecution; and the second addresses the plans for longer term rehabilitation and reintegration. We follow this by unpacking the underlying logics of care that manifest, and offer a conclusion.

### Literature review: returnees, governance, and gender

Following terrorist attacks in Europe, where some of those who carried out the attacks had previously been to Iraq or Syria, researchers and policy makers became concerned with the impact of “veterans” on European security (Braithwaite and Chu 2018; Byman 2015; Cragin 2017; Hegghammer and Nesser 2015; Malet and Hayes 2020; Tammikko 2018; Davis 2020). This first strand of orthodox terrorism studies research focused almost exclusively on measuring the returnee threat, assessing their capability, motivation, rates of recidivism, and opportunities to carry out terrorist activity as a way of understanding what, if any, actions should be taken to mitigate the hypothetical security risks they pose. Even though the majority of returnees are women or children, in this strand of research, returnees are treated as recent examples of “foreign terrorist fighters” (FTF) who are absorbed into pre-existing gender-blind models of radicalisation and terrorism (Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown 2021). Although there is policy advice, aimed at security fields, rarely does this work consider practitioner level or front-line operations.

Research by gender scholars and human rights activists and lawyers have highlighted how this “terrorist” framing is empirically inaccurate and misleading. Despite Daesh propaganda from 2018 onwards seemingly permitting women to participate in violent action, there is a lack of evidence for prosecuting women for their involvement in Daesh (International Crisis Group, 2019.). For the majority of foreign women, life was family orientated, and they only indirectly interacted with Daesh leadership through male citizenry (Vale 2019; Khelghat-Doost 2017, Khelghat-Doost 2021). The importance of motherhood to Daesh is established simply by the significant number of children born to foreign women in Iraq and Syria, their policies on contraception, and in interviews with women affiliated with Daesh: 97.4% said their role was as a mother or wife (Speckhard and

Ellenberg 2020). Duffy argues many have probably “been subject to egregious human rights abuses, including sexual violence, trafficking and forced marriage” (2018, 164). The UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate’s (CTED) summary of research responded to the diversity of women’s experiences by advocating for a broader awareness of “threat” and recognition of women’s complex agency (2019b). As CTED and terrorism researchers seek to recognise agencies of women returnees and their gendered vulnerabilities, this article seeks to identify how practitioners and professionals have navigated and responded to the women returnee’s apparent contradictory statuses and this increased awareness of their complex experiences.

While this first strand of terrorism research starts with better understanding terrorists, a second strand starts instead with the international system, highlighting the flaws and problems within the existing moral, ethical or legal frameworks (for example, Widagdo, Indrayanti, and Saraswati 2021). Such research is similarly problem-solving in orientation, and looks to set out either operational protocols or to identify underlying principles, normative frameworks and thresholds for SPRR. The majority of reports prioritise gaps in prosecution and security or human rights, and then proceed to set out a series of recommendations about what governments “should do” to rectify that gap (RUSI forthcoming; Holmer and Shtuni 2019; Van der Heide and Geenen 2017; White 2020).

In particular, human rights lawyers note the violations of women’s human rights within Iraq and Syria, especially regarding abuses of power by security officials; they highlight as well the gendered welfare of children, and question the sexist stereotypes regarding the risks of teenage boys. For example, a recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on protecting the rights of adolescents being detained in North-East Syria notes that even though it is clear that boys are victims, they are assumed to be extremists and are suffering harms through their detention in separate camps, as well as other human rights abuses and vulnerabilities (Ní Aoláin 2021). In accepting this gendered framing of teenagers in their repatriation efforts, it is argued that European governments are “creating tiers of children” (Tayler cited in Peltier and Méheut 2021). This article contributes to this literature by exploring how and to what extent such gender hierarchies continue post repatriation.

A third strand of research, critical terrorism studies, which locates debates on “returnees” as fitting within the overarching security narratives of the war on terror, is less well-developed than the problem-solving research. In this strand of research, there is considerable criticism of Islamophobia and sexism that is seemingly built into the counter-terrorism response. For example, Jiwani (2021) Andrews (2020) and Renton (2018) show how the development of an Islamophobic surveillance architecture and media tropes co-constitute the fear of the “foreign terrorist fighter”, and Jackson (2021) highlights “as far as women are concerned, we remain temporarily in the same, ever-repeating moment: politically violent women are either vulnerable damsels in distress or monstrous, unfeminine villains” (no page). In this article, we consider whether there are connections to such gendered and racialised narratives of threat and rescue in the European governance of returnees.

The first two strands of research reflect a broader shift in research and policy away from analysing terrorist groups towards a focus on the individual – their personal journeys and experiences in extremism become the object of concern. This shift is important for understanding how care can operate within security spaces. The third strand of research

shows how for returnees professionals and practitioners are operating in unequally gendered and racialised policy and institutional contexts. We use these strands of research to help us understand how practitioners and policy makers locate the management of returnees within wider security governance processes.

The treatment of returnees can be positioned as a continuation of existing anti-radicalisation and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts linked to the war on terror Brown, (2020a; Kundnani and Hayes 2018). Positioning returnee management within P/CVE spaces also reflects that the majority of those involved in returnee management are already engaged in P/CVE or deradicalisation work, and it is existing P/CVE structures and processes that are being repurposed or mobilised to manage returnees. In Europe, only in Germany do we find bespoke institutions (coordination offices) set up for SPRR. The link to P/CVE also allows us to consider the potential remit and scope of interventions in returnee's lives and the general public. This is sometimes referred to as a "spill-over expansion" of security logics (Alter and Meunier 2009). Globally, Kundnani and Hayes argue that "the War on Terror [has] a new vocabulary, new partners to interact with (from musicians and artists to educators and health workers, as well as the usual components of the security sector), and a wider range of methods for countering terrorism", (2018, p. 2).

In Europe, for example, Finch et al. (2019) found that there is widespread anti-Muslim discrimination within welfare and care professions in Sweden and the UK, such that colonial narratives and sensationalism of extremism prevent alternative interpretations of individual Muslim vulnerabilities. They mobilise the phrase "routinised securitised safe-guarding" to show how P/CVE has permeated across processes, practices and discourses. Heath-Kelly and Strausz (2019) point to a similar effect, and argue with the inclusion of the medical sector in the UK in prevent work that "care is positioned as an anti-terror measure, and anti-terrorism as a care intervention" (91). They found that safeguarding narratives in Prevent discourses enable health care professionals in the UK to overcome ethical and professional concerns. Heath-Kelly and Strausz' work is an important insight into how non-security professions respond to their inclusion into counterterrorism processes, similarly in managing returnees, non-security actors are implementing counterterrorism but are doing so working alongside security professionals in multiagency teams. Therefore, in this context of policy implementation, the relations between these two sets of professional groups, and how they navigate their contrasting professional traditions will give insights into how counterterrorism dilemmas are resolved.

Heath-Kelly and Strausz focus on safeguarding as the overarching narrative that softens counterterrorism in the health care sector. Underpinning safeguarding, but not fully explored in their article, is the concept of care. There is a long feminist tradition of seeing "logics of care" as positive and affirmative alternatives to other models of governance and justice. Including Carol Gilligan's *Different Voice* (1993) and Annemarie Mol's (2008) *The Logic of Care*, feminists tend to emphasise an approach to care that is based on ethics, relationality and a practical concern for improving life rather than merely finding solutions. Noddings in her research identifies two types of caring: one stage refers to the actual hands-on application of caring services and the latter, to a state of being whereby one nurtures caring ideas or intentions (2013, 1999). In other words, "caring for" includes physical labour, while "caring about" is emotional labour.



However, there is a third type of care, that is to “take care of”; taking care of a situation means to assert control over it. Of particular relevance to us is how care links to ideas of governance and security. Fiona Robinson (2011) demonstrates how the responsibility for sustaining life, for care, is essential for human security. They also show how relations of care in a range of contexts are dependent on unequal gender biases. Nevertheless, care-based logics vary according to the specific circumstances and configurations of power from which they emerge – and we should be mindful of the “hierarchies of virtue” between women that increase power disparities between providers and receivers (Mindry 2001, 1207).

Moreover, care is a relationship characterised by interdependence and connection, power and conflict (Daly and Lewis 2000, 283; Tronto 1993). Pallister-Wilkins (2015) discusses in the context of governing processes of granting asylum that care also entails control and is an expression of power. This calls our attention in SPRR to how “care” might operate in different ways for different professionals and with different effects for the women returning. This is similar to Howell’s (2011) request that the idea that military veterans deserve a particular form of benevolent care needs interrogating as it depoliticises their trauma and PTSD from operational activities in the War on Terror.

Discussions of care as a process of governance also link us to the wider use of Foucault in counterterrorism analysis. Aggarwal (2013), in their exploration of prison deradicalisation programmes, concludes that these programmes are an attempt to create docile subjects (p. 272). Elshimi (2015) engages Foucault in his discussions on deradicalisation as a technology of the self. Of particular relevance to our work on professionals and practitioners is his discussion on confessional technologies. Here, Elshimi points to the need for a verbalisation of past sins to allow for salvation (or rehabilitation), and further that experts (psychiatrists, therapist, youth and social workers, prevent officers) offer hope and salvation to extremists through radical confessions, which are subsequently recorded, codified and “reproduced into the body knowledge of radicalisation, ultimately augmenting the ‘Truth’ of radicalisation” (p.123).

Similarly, Lindekilde (2015) discussing deradicalisation initiatives in Denmark, finds the pastoral dimension of mentoring, which is essential to existing programmes is rooted in neoliberal governmentality. They note that early zeal for deradicalisation work for overarching rehabilitation and deradicalisation of belief and identity has scaled back towards limited goals focused on behaviours, such as disengagement from networks and seeking stable employment. Boukalas (2019) is more critical of the care logics within Prevent in the UK than Lindekilde, arguing that “Motivating Prevent delivery is a logic of care: an open-form, embodied logic, aiming to provide wellbeing. This care reaches the individual as therapy: through intervention in, and management of the development of emotions, cognition, and worldviews . . . and is the mould in which it forges political subjectivities”. They found that through it all the caring professional is mobilised through the state as an active citizen, in contrast to their vulnerable client who needs saving from themselves.

What is missing in this discussion of care is an understanding of gender and how this influences processes. Ni Aoláin and Huckerby (2018) highlight the phenomenon of “women-washing” in preventing violent extremism (PVE) programmes and counterterrorism policies and practices worldwide to make them appear more palatable and less threatening; this only works, however, because of an underlying gendered economy of care. Unlike in most counterterrorism activities, which are male dominated (Cook 2019; Schmidt 2020), in the case of returnees, we expect a similar process of “women-washing”



– as the mix of professionals involved in returnee management includes individuals from health and welfare sectors that are traditionally dominated by women, and we expect that this might make both returnees and state administrative measures appear more palatable while at the same time upholding war on terror security narratives.

Although outside of counterterrorism analysis, Tsinoi and Adler-Nissen's (2018) Foucault-inspired research on the "duty of care" imperative in diplomacy and assistance for citizens overseas is also relevant, given the general refusal of European governments to extraordinarily help women and children in Iraq or Syria unless they can reach a consulate. They find that populations have been reimagined as resources for mobilisation, rather than objects for protection with a pastoral logic. They show the connections between domestic reforms in welfare states and the shifts in responses to citizens in need overseas – specifically that citizens became active participants in their (own) care, rather than passive recipients of state protection. The duty of care for citizens abroad shifted away from the state, as citizens became responsible for their own protection – through vaccines, insurances, and being appropriately informed of the risks. It is assumed by the states that the "informed traveller would be able to take care of him or herself by avoiding travelling to dangerous areas, and thus reducing the risk of potentially expensive evacuation operations" (13). This inversion of the duty of care and responsabilisation of the individual through governmentality overseas, alongside the care logics of the present in safeguarding imperatives of PVE within domestic efforts, suggests potentially competing domestic/international modes of governance and security in SPRR.

### Research approach: gendered and de-centred security governance

In order to research how returnees are simultaneously treated as victims and perpetrators, this project started not from the official policies and rhetoric of governments, but by "engag[ing] with the actual participants and actors, to analyse not simply their words but also their understandings of the meaning of those discourses" and daily actions (Côté-Boucher, Infantino, and Salter 2014, 197). We justify this approach because "engaging with the 'messy actualities' of rule in practice is not merely an adjunct to the study of government – it is intrinsic to it" (Li 2007, 293). In acknowledging the messiness of governance, we recognise it as "de-centred", involving sets of rationalities, traditions and narratives (Bevir and Brown 2019).

This is more than simply a mapping exercise, showing the multiple locations of European security governance but a way of understanding the processes of governance. This resonates with earlier work of Rosenau (2000) on "*framigration*" but also Appadurai's (1990) ideas about the multiple "scapes" and "flows" of culture applying to security governance. Alongside the expansion of counterterrorism in domestic politics and the responsabilisation of communities and individuals, we have seen the building of international governmental, quasi-governmental and supranational organisations to develop ad hoc coalitions, build cooperation and establish norms regarding counterterrorism. For example, Hedayah is one of the most well-known organisations operating internationally. Based in the Gulf, it grew from the ministerial level Global Counter-Terrorism Forum, and contributes to a norm convergence by running workshops and programmes across the world, which support a generic and homogenised global framing of violent extremism and solutions. Hedayah is well funded, well-supported and receives

considerable levels of stakeholder commitment. Recently, it developed a blueprint for a Reintegration and Rehabilitation centre for terrorist fighters and their families (Hedayah 2020). Counterterrorism security practices therefore flow within, through, and beyond the traditional apparatus of the state. This means for this project we have not only worked with those directly engaged by states or regional and international governmental organisations, but also NGOs, research think tanks, and see the emergence of an epistemic community (Brown 2019).

The governance process of counterterrorism is also gendered. Gender norms make available some strategies and tactics in governance, and create resistance to some agents but not to others. For example, Muslim women in Orla Lynch's study (2013) report that they believe that they cannot use Islamic symbols or religious language to express resistance or political activities in Europe because these are seen as threatening and therefore vulnerable to extremism (see also Saeed 2016; Rashid 2016). This is particularly noticeable for women wearing a hijab or other form of veiling, as they are more likely to be victims of Islamophobic hate crimes in Europe, which are mostly carried out by white men (Copsey et al. 2013). In all cases, gender intersects with other social categories such as race and religion to influence one's position within governance structures (Brown 2019). This is particularly relevant when we note the hyper-racialised responses to the potential return of women with dual citizenship identified in the third strand of terrorism studies research in this field. We also note that the secularised structures and principles of European agencies will also influence how religion is (or not) included within the long-term reintegration and rehabilitation of returnees (Brown 2020b). Therefore, it is important to consider how women are included in practices and policies, not only ask "where are the women" or treating sex categories as another variable in terrorism studies. We address policies and practices that target women but do so not because "gender = women" but as a way of tracking shifts and assemblages in counterterrorism and CVE generally, and explicitly highlighting the gendered nature of counterterrorism and CVE.

Research on decentred governance of security has identified both public policies and patterns of governance as contingent constructions of actors inspired by competing beliefs, which are themselves rooted in different traditions of security (Bevir and Brown 2019). Specifically, "patterns of rule, including institutions and policies, are created, sustained, and modified by individuals ... that the actions of these individuals are not fixed by institutional rules or a social logic of modernisation. On the contrary, actions arise from the beliefs that individuals adopt against the background of traditions and in response to dilemmas" (Bevir 2016, 232). For example, Cross (2019) discusses the consolidated networks among intelligence communities, and with local communities, necessitated by the inherent difficulties with trusting others with valued knowledge, the deep secrecy with some elements of the European intelligence space, and at the same time, the complexity of cases requiring intelligence sharing. They find that informality and bottom-up networking overcome barriers built up by the traditions of the intelligence community and the distrust of communities. In the case of returnees, the dilemma for practitioners and professionals is the tension between rights-based and security-based traditions of governance. For the SPRR of returnees, we expect to find similar patterns of networking, attempts to resolve differences in traditions and narratives, and modification of official formal top-down policies.

## Methodology

Adapting practice theory's dictum of "following the actors" (Bueger and Gadinger 2014, 52) so as to make normative contestations and power visible in the realm of policy implementation, we used two methods to get a mix of data focusing on practitioners. First, we relied on participant observation methods in eight activities, workshops, knowledge exchanges, and study visits carried out by various professionals, practitioners and policy officials in Europe from winter 2019 to summer 2021, and data collected from these are triangulated against formal documents and publicly available recordings produced to support these activities. Specifically, these included events organised by the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), who, building on guidance initially written in 2017, set up workshops in 2019, 2020, and 2021 for practitioners across a variety of sectors across Europe to address the SPRR of "children and their mothers" returning from Iraq and Syria.

These workshops are often followed up with "conclusion" or "ex post" papers that summarise the learning and insights from those present – usually there are approximately 30 professionals and practitioners present, with an additional two or three researchers (RAN 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2019c, 2021a, 2021b, PBC and RAN, 2021). There have been other similar events run by a variety of European organisations such as the ICCT (the Netherlands) often in conjunction with RAN, and the Violence Prevention Network (based in Germany) focusing on the main European countries engaged in SPRR – which we also attended. These events are often more security focused than those held directly by the RAN. The purpose of all these events is not research but knowledge exchange and are held under Chatham House rules, unless there is a public recording. As such, individual participant consent was not requested, but permission is granted from the organisations hosting the events, and the final drafts have been shared with these organisations for verification. The EU also organise knowledge sharing and capacity-building projects with their near neighbours to establish how they have managed the SPRR of women and children from ISIS, including the Western Balkans, Central Asia and Tunisia. We were present at two of these EU events. However, while this informed our understanding of issues, we have not included the data in this article for reasons of confidentiality.

At the national level and across civil society in Europe, there have also been numerous workshops and policy briefs advising municipalities on managing the return of women and children affiliated with Daesh throughout 2020 and 2021, such as the Strong Cities Network (2020) and InfoEx (Sischka 2020; Koller 2020). These last two we did not attend and have relied on reports and other records of these events to include them in our data set. On average at each event, there were 30 people, from 15 European countries, across the events on average 20% from central government ministries; 15% from local municipalities; 30% from social and welfare sectors; 15% from medical communities; 10% from law enforcement, security backgrounds, or Exit and PVE experts; and 10% from academic or think tank research environments, including the organisers of the events. The gender balance in these events tended towards a 70:30 split in favour of women – as formal speakers and as attendees. In order to preserve the anonymity and confidentiality of each of these events and the individuals involved in them, comments and sources in this article will necessarily be generalised and not linked to specific workshops unless we are drawing on the public record. There is an iterative building of expert knowledge within the events

over the years, such that one might consider it an epistemic community of practice or security regime in place on SPRR. We analysed the data gathered to identify the governance traditions, narratives, modifications and dilemmas at work in professional conduct and deliberation of returnee management.

Second, in 2020 we conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with 15 UK practitioners and experts, as well as an online workshop for the same cohort to test ideas and review our initial analysis from the interviews. The UK interviews and workshop were under conditions of anonymity; consent to use their insights in research publications was granted by all those involved. In these interviews, 80% were women, 50% were from research backgrounds, 20% were NGO workers or community activists, 15% were from legal professions, and 15% were social, welfare, medical or Prevent<sup>3</sup> practitioners. The second approach was necessary in the UK as its withdrawal from the European Union means it is no longer involved in practitioner networks and knowledge sharing activities, and because the UK has been particularly recalcitrant in repatriating its citizens. We followed the same framework analysis approach as the participant-observation data.

The authors' institution established governance and ethical frameworks for the project; ethical approval was also awarded following the institution's protocols. We also sought permission and verification from the institutions involved and thank them for their engagement. We also received institutional financial support with the explicit aim of seeking to influence policy in this area towards more human rights, including women's rights, centred approach.<sup>4</sup>

The limitations of this research are that it disproportionately draws on the English-speaking community of practitioners. English is the working language of the EU, and only in one event was translation into English provided for a German-speaking practitioner. Most EU countries provide English language versions of their documents although where possible Dutch, French and German language official documents were accessed to supplement these (for example, RvdK and NCTV 2019). It is anecdotally noted that the Francophone world appears to be developing its own set of expectations, norms and networks in relation to PVE and counterterrorism. It would be useful for future research to explore these other security worlds and to see where that intersects with the dominant Anglophone counterterrorism world, especially in relation to SPRR.

The second limitation is that while talking to experts in this field and PVE practitioners, including those who are critical of this space, the voices of women and children seeking return are not present in this article. The community was often speaking "on behalf" of women and children returnees, and in doing so, unequal gendered and racial hierarchies in counterterrorism and counterterrorism research were made visible. Although those we interviewed, those we observed and those who participated in our workshops, did talk of individual cases of women and children returning, we have not retold those accounts here, to uphold the principle of "do no harm".<sup>5</sup> The third limitation of this work is due to the global pandemic: many of the engagement activities planned for this project were curtailed, many of the efforts by this epistemic community were also put on hold, and the lead author contracted Covid (with long-Covid symptoms) in the middle of the project. A fourth limitation is that drawing on a snapshot of these practitioner views cannot fully encompass governance issues around this subject. However, within these limitations, the insights indicate the complexity of security governance across Europe.

## Findings

The management of returnees at the global level adopts the general linear process of SPRR. It follows earlier efforts for DDRR (demobilisation, disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration) in relation to civil war and intra-state conflicts. For ease of presentation, we divide these categories into two sections – screening, including repatriation, and prosecution; and long-term rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. It is worth noting that for practitioners and professionals involved in SPRR of returnees to Europe, the second component is primarily at the planning stage given so few have returned already.

### *Screening, repatriation and prosecution*

In all the activities and workshops, screening was an implied process rather than following transparent or systematic operating procedures or protocols. Indeed, in none of the policy documents or activities was the term “screening” used. Screening is the process that determines the responses of the state and the presumed security risks the individual might play. In other contexts, this is often done by military personnel, which can lead to additional challenges for women – who are either dismissed as without risk and therefore in no need of future support; or their gender-specific needs are not addressed as militaries struggle to accommodate women’s experiences of gender-based violence within extremist environments (UN Women 2021). How someone became supported by European SPRR processes was opaque, whereby politicians and security officials appeared to want to avoid setting precedent that might occur where they were seen to set formal criteria.

Consequently, screening is ad hoc and requires individuals in Iraq and Syria to demonstrate that they are not a risk to national security. It is not clear where authority and decision-making in screening processes lies. In some cases, it would appear to be government ministers, in others, national counterterrorism officials, while in others, it lies with diplomats in neighbouring third-party countries (Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon). Whoever holds ultimate responsibility, the burden of proof shifts away from the state, to the aspirational returnees who are responsabilised with providing sufficient information to demonstrate their case. To say this is challenging is an understatement, given the lack of resources – from electricity and sanitation, to limited access to mobile data or telephones to access lawyers or the paperwork about their case, and the refusal of state security officials to reveal the evidence they hold about an individual. The quest for knowledge about the individual returnee also places a burden of storytelling upon women. Their ability to recall details accurately and in a linear coherent manner was seen as a measure of their reliability of their experiences, and therefore their trustworthiness as a returnee.

However, because there was no clear process or protocols, the women had no idea regarding what to tell, what might be deemed incriminating, and what might help their case for support. Lawyers working on behalf of women seeking return to Europe, including those at our workshop and in NGO activities, discuss the hundreds of pages of testimony from their clients in efforts to demonstrate that they are not a threat to national security, and the frustration at receiving tabloid newspaper reports from government officials as “evidence” to the contrary. As the viability of repatriation was constantly said to be on a “case-by case” basis, screening therefore became a quest for more quantities of

data, more knowledge, more information, about individuals and their experiences, without necessarily understanding what was needed or why. The screening processes relied upon an implicit assumption that radicalisation and terrorism could be made knowable and rationalised, through the acquisition of more data at the individual level (Managhan, 2017).

However, because the women's own narratives were deemed insufficient evidence, this meant additional requests for knowledge from NGOs and local authorities. In one meeting in 2021, an official said, "we don't know who is in the foreign section [of Al Hol] ... the local authorities don't have the knowledge". In another regional event, considerable time was spent discussing how identity could be established of children, relying on old social media posts, family videos and photographs, birth identity papers from family, DNA samples and attempts to align this with images of children in camps and statements and medical data from children. They said this could take a year to actualise. One research organisation reported offering such detailed assessments to EU officials to determine who was deserving of return, and those who should remain. They offered to share their research notes that they had gathered of those in Iraq and Syria, with detainees' permission, along with their preliminary psychological assessments, including ratings on 288 variables asked about in interviews and observations of levels of radicalisation at three different time points (before leaving to join ISIS, peak commitment to ISIS and presently). The preference for quantitative data is evident here too. This mimics findings by Rosga and Satterthwaite (2012) about how indicators and quantifiable measures are prioritised in human rights governance.

The lack of due process and clear pathways for return also provided opportunities to exploit the vulnerabilities of women in Iraq and Syria, as lawyers and human rights activists in the UK workshop discussed. They commented that security and government officials imply to the women and their families over the phone that if they are forthcoming with information, then they would facilitate repatriation. However, when this transaction of information ends, or if the women cannot provide valuable insight, then these agents "disappear". At another event in the UK hosted by a security think tank, high-level elites in counter-terrorism and overseas operations, saw this as a reasonable response to filling the "knowledge gap" that prevented them from making informed decisions about security risks.

Another tacitly accepted element of the ad-hoc screening process of returnees was that there were hierarchies and priorities for repatriation. The practitioners at the workshops did not question this hierarchy, and saw it is an inevitable consequence of the politicisation of this field. In one meeting, they discussed the advantages of the "child first" agenda, which allowed practitioners to neutralise discourses of security risks by presenting European states as "rescuing" children from the harms of extremism. The hierarchy was based on a narrative about the "innocence" of young orphaned children, as they presented less risk given the lack of "knowledge" they had and the lack of knowledge about them. In contrast, those with more "knowledge" were deemed more risky, as knowledge was presumed to link to ability and motivation to participate in Daesh. This was highly gendered, with young girls seen to have the least knowledge due to the gender segregation and expectations of seclusion for women in Daesh territories, whereas adolescent boys and young men were granted more freedoms, were expected to participate more, and therefore more "exposed" to extremism. As discussed earlier, these gender stereotypes in the screening and repatriation process have been criticised

by the UN Special Rapporteur Ní Aoláin, (2021). However, at the same time, this hierarchy prioritised those with the least “data” and information about their identity, and therefore seemingly the most difficult to repatriate within the bureaucratic processes. Therefore, normatively the SPRR regime and practitioners, as well as policy makers, can present themselves as a “virtuous community” rescuing children, but in practice put into place barriers lest the “undeserving” are repatriated (Sokhi-Bulley 2016).

Among practitioners, the discussion about barriers to repatriation was framed as external to the efforts of officials who wanted to help, but “politics” (international, local and in Europe) and lack of reliable knowledge prevented them. Throughout the interviews and activities, professionals and practitioners presented themselves as willing agents in an uncooperative system. For example, at a UN-led meeting in May 2021 discussing the Women Peace and Security agenda and preventing violent extremism, the EU representative speaking outlined what they saw as the considerable efforts they were making to facilitate the return of women and children from Iraq and Syria, and explained that they were establishing gender-sensitive guidelines to support member states. Similarly, a foreign ministry representative complained in 2020 about the dependency they had on third-party countries for repatriation and identification efforts. They discussed the lengthy processes of negotiation and the complex permissions and bureaucratic processes required from different agencies and semi-official local actors to enable women to leave Iraq or Syria, enter Turkey and then return to Europe.

A consequence of the screening process being ad hoc and framed as problematic due to the lack of data, the initial repatriation of women and children is also dominated by the quest for knowledge. The desire to make “knowable” the returnees, led to a focus on physical and mental health assessments. On arrival, unless requiring immediate hospitalisation, women and children are held in specialist rooms at airports so that they can be interviewed by security, police and welfare officials. In most European countries, these are recorded on camera so that the women and children only have to answer questions once. The other reason for these specialist rooms is to allow mothers and children time to say goodbye, as in most European countries mothers and children are separated. In all countries, women and children are subject to a series of psychosocial assessments, varying from a period of 72 hours observation and interviews, to a sustained 3-month period of assessment carried out locally.

In early 2019 and 2020 professionals at meetings were most concerned with the physical health of women and children, as reports about the conditions of the camps made them hypervigilant of transmittable diseases. By 2021, professionals involved in these initial assessments of those few who had already returned, explained that notwithstanding general malnutrition, physical health and cleanliness were high among women and children, but that they suffered from complex PTSD and other forms of trauma. For example, professionals from Scandinavian countries reiterated in meetings the need for early counselling and therapy for women returnees, and in France, there was an emphasis on psychiatric care and trauma specialists needing to be involved (Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) 2021b). This meant that repatriation processes followed the trend in terrorism policy of treating “radicalisation” as a medical and psychological condition, rather than a process inflected with politics and structural factors. This is also a gendered process; it has been noted how women’s participation



in terrorism and extremism is more readily “explained away” by officials and counter-terrorism practitioners as a consequence of their “weak minds” and lack of rationality (Sjoberg and Gentry 2014; Brown, 2020a).

For prosecution efforts, there was some variability across countries. However, the majority of countries sought prosecution of adults, and children were nearly always placed in state care or other family members became their guardians. The prosecution of women was reported as more challenging than for men because of the lack of clear evidence of their participation in terrorist or extremist activities. In some cases, this meant women were sometimes prosecuted for non-terrorism related offences, such as kidnap. This also means that women may not get the same access to rehabilitation and deradicalisation support given to those convicted of terrorism-related offences.

In some countries, travel to Iraq and Syria is not a criminal offence or was not at the point of departure, and support for a terrorist group needs to be established more firmly than geographical proximity. In the workshops and online webinars, security professionals and those working within ministries of justice exerted pressure for the primacy of prosecution and an assumption of prosecution, but this was challenged and resisted by welfare professionals and those who work with “formers”.<sup>6</sup> Finland, exceptionally, has stated that even in cases where there may be cases for prosecution of adults, this would be detrimental to the wellbeing of children within the SPRR process by unnecessarily adding an additional layer of trauma; it also has a detailed plan for child SPRR (SOCCA 2019; Maack 2021). However, as discussed below, this adds a complication regarding rehabilitation and reintegration support on offer for them and their children, that then requires the active support and consent of the women returning.

The desire for more knowledge was a way of attempting to demonstrate the objectivity and reasonability of screening and repatriation processes, even as it is demonstrably unpredictable and unsystematic. If returnees are “knowable” and individually “responsibilised” for their actions (even if taken to Iraq or Syria as a child by family members), then their repatriation becomes a policy and practice dilemma that can now be solved. Prioritising the case-by-case basis and presenting this as a formalised process reinforces the methodological individualism found more broadly in the shift to “radicalisation” in PVE and counterterrorism (Brown, 2020a). SPRR as a solution to returnees becomes the proper management of risk by experts – because terrorism is no longer problematised as a political issue rooted in grievances but a psychosocial problem rooted in individual vulnerabilities. This replicates wider critical terrorism studies findings of counter-terrorism governance (Dresser, 2018; Heath-Kelly and Strausz 2019; Bevir and Brown 2019). It also allows distancing language that reduces the role of the environment or structural conditions in the creation of “returnees” as a category of citizens. There is one exception to this trend, where one welfare practitioner, who had previously worked with criminal gangs, said in one workshop, “we still need to know why our city produced so many fighters” (Strong Cities Network’s survey 2020), something the same practitioner repeated at another workshop a year later.

### ***Rehabilitation and reintegration***

The second part to SPRR is longer term rehabilitation and recovery. It is in this phase that we see most connectivity with existing Prevent or deradicalisation practices. Rehabilitation can be considered as a set of measures aimed to support the transition

from being associated with Daesh to a citizen of the community, abandoning the use of violent means to achieve change, generating income to cater for families' needs and avoiding recidivism. Rehabilitation may take place in residential centres or communities and includes deradicalisation, psychosocial support, and mental health counselling, and supporting those with physical disabilities. Reintegration should also cater to specific needs and harness the capacities based on their various skills and experiences of each individual. Reintegration processes should be community-based and led, and address social, economic and political dimensions as identified by communities (African Union 2018). In Europe, these broader frameworks and community engagement remain underdeveloped, in part due to the small number of returnees, but also because of the individual methodologicalism identified earlier. There are three sets of narratives that frame women's experiences of rehabilitation and repatriation: a belief in rescue, protection, and recovery.

Rescue is an essential component of the reintegration narrative. The life stories and traumatic experiences of women and children allow a victim narrative to be asserted, and local officials can be patriarchally benevolent – should they so wish. Elsewhere, it has been demonstrated how gendered “rescue” and “victim” narratives are deployed in soft counterterrorism measures that limit the agency of women who are affiliated with terrorist and violent extremist groups, and thereby limit their deviancy from gender norms Brown, (2020a; Huckerby 2020).

The rescue narrative also shapes the identities and agencies of counterterrorism officials. As rescuers and heroes in the war on terrorism, they protect themselves from complicity in the lowering of human rights thresholds, the invasive interventions into people's everyday lives and excessive use of force in stop-and-search tactics or dawn raids. Instead, for example, practitioners in SPRR talked of their efforts to support returnees. One counsellor in an event in 2021 talked of the outside office hours work they engaged in, and a social worker of the extra lengths they went to build trust with the returnees family after the breakdown in relationship with police in the previous years, and how they navigated formal processes to allow the extended family to remain with returnee children in hospital. Fieldnotes of the event highlight the inferred expectation in the following conversation that returnees and their families should be grateful for the “over and above” support of welfare professionals, but also that they saw themselves as bringing compassion and understanding to the processes. This reflects insights by Heron (2007) and Mindry (2001) on the racial and gendered “helping imperative” that drives development governance and discourse. Although genuine in their efforts, we can also see parallels with the protection racket identified in other anti-radicalisation processes (Brown, 2020a; Sjoberg and Peet 2011).

Reintegration in meetings over the past two years was specifically framed as a concern for children who are encouraged to return to normal schools to give them a better future, but who display complex PTSD, and are prone to violent outbursts, which limited their ability to fully profit from education. This was perceived as being specifically a concern for young boys who had normalised violence as a reaction to conflict (RAN 2021a). Another concern for some professionals is children who have spent some time living with Daesh being unwilling to accept women in positions of authority and leadership; they see them as socially conditioned towards accepting extreme gender ideologies. This has emerged as a core concern for a group of education practitioners, whether the children could adapt

to gender equal European societies. However, some welfare professionals also expressed surprise that as returnee children they encountered ready acceptance of “European” gender relations. Children were seen as more capable of “bouncing back” than adults.

To help with the “return to normal”, all participants agreed that only limited people should be informed of the children’s past in Iraq and Syria. This then raised the example where a child responded in an argument with other children, how they should watch out because “his dad had killed your dads”. Based on this example, they worried this might lead to further bullying, undue media attention and other parents withdrawing their children from school as they did not want their children associating with so-called “terrorist children”. In this case, there was a desire to limit children returnees’ discussion of the past to appropriate venues (therapy) and attempts to mitigate the fact that they could not control children’s play or interaction with peers. In this discussion, those from security backgrounds present did not appear concerned, despite public discourses of children as “cubs of the caliphate” (Cook and Vale 2019).

PVE practitioners from the Balkans attended the European meetings due to their greater experiences in SPRR, and it was seen as an opportunity for European practitioners to learn from others; this included a study visit to Kosovo in 2019 (RAN 2019c). They highlighted that for adult women, reintegration is acknowledged as harder than for men. Concerns that women may face more limited futures as they will struggle to find employment, and self-employment pathways are structured along stereotypical lines: encouraging sewing for women, for example, and mechanics for men. Yet for women returning, one traditionally appropriate mode of employment, care work (caring for elderly, children or vulnerable persons), is likely to be prohibited from them through administrative or judicial control orders for fear they might pose a radicalising risk to others. Another matter discussed was whether reintegration into communities is not desirable for the women returning, for two conflicting reasons. Either women sought emancipation and freedom from community gender norms or community gender norms reinforced extremist logics that supported their radicalisation. This is in tension with the dominant idea from deradicalisation models that families, communities and familiar environments support the building of new identities and networks to avoid recidivism.

The rescue narrative is formalised through a shared understanding of safeguarding and protection as the primary objective of SPRR. By focusing on rescue, security officials framed their support as one of protecting communities and vulnerable persons from (re)radicalisation, and practitioners from welfare sectors to focus on safeguarding and promoting wellbeing. The idea of protection allowed security and welfare officials to form temporary alliances and cooperation even as they resisted each other in other areas – such as over information sharing, surveillance and the primacy of prosecution.

The reliance on medical knowledge and existing social institutions also means that there is a dominant secular narrative that struggles to address religious and spiritual experiences and concerns. It creates a tension with models of radicalisation that rely on individual acceptance of violent ideologies, as those experts involved in managing their return could not easily address the counter-ideological component of their experiences. Only in 2021 workshops were it that practitioners identified the need for specialist “Islamologists” to support the information gathering processes at the point of repatriation. It was agreed that professionals could not be expected to become “experts in religion” but would need guidance on how particular Islamic and Arabic terms might

be used by returnees and that some training for professionals of the specifics of Daesh might be needed. The assumption here is that professionals and practitioners are outsiders to Muslim communities.

In the case of the returnees, the workshops also demonstrate the dominance of a racialised secular citizenship rather than specific Islamophobia. For example, for orphaned children or those children whose mothers are facing prison to be fostered in households of similar religious background and cultural and language norms were emphasised, but for those [white] orphans of convert women, finding Muslim foster households was not a priority. In the UK, those we observed and interviewed felt they lacked knowledge of key Islamic terms and experiences. This has also led to instances of Islamophobia. For example, one measure of deradicalisation applied to returnees is when they no longer wear “excessive” religious dress, and they perform according to the already-determined “good Muslim” category and have successfully been “soul-trained”<sup>7</sup> (c.f. Quarashi 2018).

However, tensions emerged with the safeguarding directives, as some practitioners focused on the needs of women returning, and others prioritised the needs of children. For women returning, concerns regarding the weaponisation of children by Daesh meant some practitioners were worried about the lack of appropriate maternal bonds, while others expressed a desire to ensure the family unit remained together to support women’s reintegration and rehabilitation. Security practitioners more frequently raised concerns that mothers supported the ideologies of Daesh and have or would radicalise their children, such that children were viewed as future terrorist threats. Mother–child relationships became a security concern.

In 2021, RAN and the EU hosted different meetings to discuss motherhood in relation to returnee rehabilitation, expressing concern for long-term parenting and parent–child bonds (as part of child wellbeing) and identified how motherhood and parenting for mothers returning from Daesh needed reframing. One tragic case of motherhood was discussed at a meeting in 2021, where a child repatriated without their mother continuously behaved in a risky manner (such as running in front of moving cars), said it was because “mama said she’d love me when I was dead”. Rehabilitation was also assumed to require women accepting wrongdoing in their association with Daesh. Therefore, it was reported that some women, when interviewed on return, emphasised how they would attempted to act as good mothers or wives, emphasising how well they had provided for their children’s physical needs (often at their own expense) even under the harsh conditions of the IDP camps.

Psychological and social welfare professionals expressed concerns that the mental wellbeing of the children was not considered by mothers returning or by wider families. Social welfare practitioners expressed frustration when those returning reject support, or when families who take on guardianship roles for children returning minimise the trauma of life under Daesh. These practitioners saw the refusal to engage in counselling or therapy, as irresponsible. They expressed concern that families thought the children repatriated only needed “cookies and love”. This nurturing impulse of families was seen as a rejection of the secular and rational state authorities, whose medial and expert knowledge should have been accepted but was not.

Women who had returned earlier in the conflict from Iraq and Syria are also reporting to practitioners that they are not given the opportunity to discuss their experiences with communities or with families. For women, the lack of a network of “formers” and the lack of opportunities to interact with other returnees was seen as a barrier to their reintegration. This is in contrast to men’s experiences in exiting extremist groups, where there is a growing network of “formers” and support mechanisms across Europe. Additionally, in the past, data show that men’s violence in conflict zones (such as the Balkans) was accepted as within the bounds of acceptable Muslim masculinities, whereas women’s engagement now in Iraq and Syria fundamentally transgressed community gender norms (Brown 2018). This stigmatisation and silencing of women leads, on the one hand, to exaggerated fears when there is a data breach, but also minimising women’s knowledge about the conflict and extremism.

### Discussion: care and control

Across the research, there was a dominant self-identification as professionals who “care”: they cared about, cared for, and took care of returnees. In this case, the professionals care “about” and care “for” potential returnees, and this double logic of “care” operates alongside a logic of control to determine who is “taken care of” (Pallister-Wilkins 2015).

Similar to humanitarian governance, we found that practitioners in our research “oscillat[ed] between sentiments of sympathy, on the one hand, and concern for order, on the other hand, between politics of pity and policies of control” (Fassin 2005, 366). For example, “care for” is demonstrated at the reception centres at airports for women and children returning, often brightly coloured with toys for children to play with, and with immediate medical provision and treatment. As highlighted, practitioners stressed the need to place children’s wellbeing first and to consider them as victims of trauma, of violence and of radicalisation. On the other hand, control is exercised at these same centres; while women and children are asked to recount and talk about their experiences (while being recorded, so they do not have to repeat themselves), they are also being assessed for the threat they pose to society and social order. To borrow from Pallister-Wilkins (2015), they are both “at risk” and “a risk”. While practitioners talked of the importance of a “case by case” basis to determine levels of need and seeming to accept uncertainty in the Exit process, they also stressed the role of establishing protocols and gathering detailed information about the returnees from questionnaires, medical reports, psychological evaluations and evidence from Syria and Iraq to “build a picture”. Here, practitioners and professionals use care in an attempt to reconcile a modernist rationality where they can “know”, control and solve for radicalisation with the complex reality of returnee lives.

Another element of “care” falls under the idea of “self-care”. Foucault tells us that the care of the self in the Imperial period is to constitute oneself as a “morally valid” subject (Foucault 2005, 129). Self-care is the foundation for becoming a “Good Citizen”: “the liberal sovereign self: rational, self-owning, and independent, with a moral compass that enables him to consider the interests of others” (Anderson 2013, 3). On the one hand, decisions by women in Iraq and Syria to “marry their way to the border” or as a way to increase their security while living near or in the displacement camps, welfare professionals saw these as examples of the women’s strategic agency and examples of their

resilience and self-care in terms of physical labour (caring *for* oneself). In contrast, security professionals interpreted these decisions as indicators of affiliation and support for ISIS – a failure to care *about* oneself.

Another self-care explanation for continued intervention in the women's lives on return was that, as stories of domestic and sexual abuse were recounted (prior to travelling to the conflict zone and within it), security officials saw this as a sign of women's (unfortunate) dependency on men, confirming that they could not be independent or self-rational, which meant they were seen as permanently at risk of radicalisation unless they did a lot "self-work". This compares to the treatment and assessment of domestic violence (DV) victims by police, who frequently assessed that DV victims often returned to their abusers. This led to an effort to engage women in a "project of the self", as a solution to their radicalisation. At the InFoEx workshop in Berlin in 2019, recommendations from practitioners constantly framed the returnee Exit process as that of "stabilising" individuals (Koller et al. 2020).

Generally, we have seen how the War on Terror racially and Islamophobically constitutes those who are irredeemable or incapable of becoming "liberal subjects" (that is, a morally valid subject) and those who are defined (accurately or not) by their opposition to liberal freedoms (such as terrorists) as operating in a state of exception (Kienscherf 2016). Young teenage boys in displacement camps, for example, are being held in what human rights groups have warned is becoming Europe's Guantanamo (Rights and Security International 2021). However, through the ethics of care within the decentred security governance via the framing of self-care, the boundaries of risk shift to allow women and young children seeking return to Europe to be viewed as redeemable – rehabilitable. The continually at-risk returnee is in need of "safeguarding" – in which personhood is made and remade in terms of vulnerability and resilience – and through the technologies of care, to become responsibly "self-governing". This is because, as Foucault notes, the care of the self "implies a relation with others insofar as proper care of the self requires listening to the lessons of a master. One needs a guide, a counsellor, a friend, someone who will be truthful with you" (Foucault 1997, 287). Here, by presenting women as without the ability to perform the necessary self-care to exit independently, but with the potential to acquire it, practitioners put themselves in these caring roles.

Additionally, although in need of greater consideration than the focus of this article, within the framework of self-care was the importance of self-care for professionals through having appropriate support mechanisms to prevent "burn-out". This is a shift from earlier studies of counterterrorism professionals, which reported that they avoided routines of self-care and wellness (Wilder 2014).

A further question raised within frontline counterterrorism work relates to who does the "caring for". An assumption is made that it should be the family, but they are not always viewed as a protective force against future radicalisation. In one European country, professionals talked of a case where children were repatriated to grandparents who later revealed their own sympathies for ISIS. Families therefore had to demonstrate their suitability for caring roles. In another country, a case was reported that the extended family of a repatriated young boy whose deceased father was a celebrated jihadi fighter attempted to return him to Iraq/Syria and treated the young boy as a celebrity. Practitioners also expressed fears that women returning would be under

pressure to remarry into jihadist sympathiser families in “reverence to the children of martyrs”. There was a tension too with the assumption that communities should be involved and prepared to assist with the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children while seeing these same communities as “hotspots” of terrorist sympathies. We can see further how this narrative confirms a priori beliefs that “communities are hard to reach” and “hard to work with” – pushing the responsibility of radicalisation back onto minority, often socially and economically disadvantaged communities. Officials working for municipalities and cities were cautious about the role of communities in facilitating the Exit processes of returnees due to uncertainty about how returnees could contribute positively to their communities. Here, there is a failure to see how communities also have a kind of expert or folk “knowledge of” radicalisation and extremism (Pearson, Winterbotham, and Brown 2021).

The logics of care and control of returnees allow the community of practice to distance themselves from the securitising logics of counterterrorism. The idea of caring about and for the returnees enable them to express their professionalism and establish this area of policy and practice as within their remit as much as if not more than the security service. In the German federal guidelines, it is explicitly stated that coercive and repressive measures would not be effective and advocated for holistic, interdisciplinary approaches led by “returnee coordination” centres (BMI 2019). As counterterrorism has expanded, the case of returnee management and Exit work shows how security officials are decentred and side-lined in the returnee management processes. Their traditions and expectations are pushed to the background, as “caring for” and “caring about” the returnees shape Exit work. This emotional labour allows for a repositioning of the returnees as vulnerable and “at risk”, rather than immediately as threats to national security. However, “taking care of” the returnees reveals that security actors still have control over determining who is returned and the conditions of their eventual “release” from state surveillance. Therefore, while care logics allow for nurturing and consideration of the wellbeing of returnees, there remain inherent power hierarchies within global governance structures.

## Conclusion

Despite populist security measures and hypersecuritized discourses relating to European women and children who are currently trapped in Iraq and Syria, professional efforts are in place to support their SPRR. These efforts are incomplete, relying on pre-existing frameworks of PVE and through the ad hoc “case by case” approach lack systematisation and consolidation. Nevertheless, they operate with the expectation that this policy dilemma can be resolved by making the women and their experiences more knowable through ongoing assessments, medicalisation, therapy and welfare-based interventions. For children, there is also the expectation of speedy normalisation and reintegration as they are positioned as resilient and adaptable.

In contrast, women’s rehabilitation is seen as more complex, and involves more control if they resist “care”. The management of women, of young boys and young girls is based on gendered presumptions of risk and radicalisation. We also see how competing traditions and narratives are held together through underlying logics of “care”. These underlying logics of care are not harmonious or always nurturing; they



create hierarchical relationships bound up with emotional burdens (care about) as well as practical burdens (care for) and control (care of). The objective is the creation of “good citizens” who are self-governing through sustainable, holistic measures. These underlying logics allow us to see how security governance operates in practice – as incomplete, contested, and often with contradictory narratives or traditions, and yet, resilient.

## Notes

1. Holy pilgrimage – this is a term used by Daesh supporters to describe the journey foreign nationals made in order to live within the Caliphate.
2. The term “returnees” is used to describe those seeking to return, in one of various stages of returning, or who have returned from Daesh to Europe. It does not differentiate between those who returned through their own endeavours, those who returned voluntarily with support from their home countries and third parties, or those who are repatriated involuntarily.
3. In the UK “Prevent” is part of the national counter-terrorism strategy, and each region and metropolitan area and police forces have Prevent officers working with local government authorities, police, education establishments, health care institutions and other sectors to facilitate case management, radicalisation awareness training, and resilience policies.
4. The research was overseen through the University of Birmingham ethical research processes in accordance with disciplinary and professional associations’ best practices in relation to consent, confidentiality, data management processes, and the ethical use of data to “do no harm”. It was administered through the College of Arts and Law Ethical Research Committee (Reference number ERN\_20-0196).
5. For example, a number of women and children are actively pursuing cases in national courts, others are dependent on the good will of officials to gain re-entry, and others fear for their lives in Iraq and Syria, and we do not wish to inadvertently disrupt their security or efforts to return home.
6. “Formers” is the term used to describe those who have “exited” extremism; they are former members of violent extremist or terrorist organisations.
7. Foucault identified surveillance governance as a process of “soul training” that enabled the automatic functioning of power: to transform individuals so that they self-regulated their behaviours in line with prescribed social norms (Lyon, 1994; Foucault 1997).

## Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the reviewers of this paper for their early recommendations to focus more on the ethics of care. We would also like to thank the special edition editors and the journal editorial team for their support during a challenging year. Research for this article was supported by the Research England QR Award “Gender, Religion and Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism and EXIT work” (January–April 2020).

## Disclosure statement

Dr Katherine Brown has worked occasionally as a consultant for RAN on matters relating to gender and radicalisation, and she has provided expert witness testimony in court cases involving ‘returnees’. F. Nubla Mohammed has no conflict of interest.

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