

## **Book Review: Whitney Hatton (2020) Extremism and the Prison System. A Handbook for Practitioners Countering Islamist radicalisation, 83 pp**

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### **Review**

After a quick glance at the numerous publications on the subject of radicalisation and the related prevention landscape your head might be buzzing with author names, terms and theoretical considerations on risk assessments tools or risk management approaches. However, simply because the field of de-radicalisation or prevention of radicalisation has accumulated such a large collection of scholarly publications does not mean there is nothing left to explore. Notably necessary are still more evidence and empirical findings. Furthermore, even when evidence for a specific relationship between factors or the effectiveness of countermeasures exist, this does not automatically lead to a concrete change in daily prison practice handling the delinquent or endangered person. Results and findings from research are in need of translation into suitable advice for front line prison practice. As practitioners in the criminal justice system, we lack guidelines to develop tailored and individual approaches to case management, risk-need-assessment and evaluation.

*Extremism and the Prison System. A Handbook for Practitioners Countering Islamist radicalisation* is a response precisely to these preliminary considerations for a critical

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inventory of ‘what works’. Published in 2020 and available as a digital publication edited by the Centre for Criminology in Wiesbaden, Germany (Kriminologische Zentralstelle e. V., KrimZ), this handbook provides evidence-based guidelines for practitioners for their work with extremists by using appropriate interventions. The publication was co-funded by the *International Security Fund of the European Union* and addresses predominately prison staff and administrations interested in the fundamentals of (de-)radicalisation as these relate to the detention practice. The book is written by Whitney Hatton, a researcher at the Wiesbaden Center of Criminology.

This *Handbook for Practitioners* has an overarching aim: to provide a comprehensive compendium of practical factors, which could influence how we deal with Islamic radicalisation and religiously-motivated extremism in prison. The Handbook also provides guidance to prison staff on how to develop a tailored action plan for each individual case (p. 9). The handbook is divided in four parts. **Part one** (p. 11 ff., “Sorting first impressions”) emphasizes that every day contact puts juridical staff in both a challenges and opportunities of countering Islamist radicalisation in prison (p. 11). Observations and impressions can be gathered. The working terms for the classification of persons posing a threat to public are very helpful for front-line-staff (p 11 ff.).<sup>2</sup> Prisons are considered as breeding grounds for radicalisation.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, radicalisation in prisons is a rare phenomenon in Germany according to Handbook itself (see p. 13 f.).<sup>4</sup> “*But whenever thought it is rare, immediate action must be taken whenever there are signs of recruitment by a prisoner*” (p. 15). Detention can therefore be both, part of the problem and part of the solution (p 18). The **second part** (“Creating the action plan”) utilises the principle of Case Management in criminal justice system and describes the individual work steps and emphasizes tools for risk-need-assessment and evaluation of de-radicalisation and disengagement process ( p. 21 ff.). Chapter 3 (“Choosing the right intervention”) explains central aspects of a multi-perspective approach. This holistic approach is known as “Dynamic Security Approach” (p. 27 ff.). **Part**

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<sup>2</sup> For different types of radicalisation see Christian Illgner, Ein Plädoyer für eine differenzierte Betrachtung von Radikalisierung: zu den theoretischen und praktischen Möglichkeiten der Beschreibung individueller Unterschiede mittels Idealtypen. In: *Bewährungshilfe* 65/4/2018, *Bewährungshilfe*, S. 325 – 336.

<sup>3</sup> The finding is essentially based on a scientific study by the International Center for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), *Extremist Offender: Management in Europe: Country Reports* King’s College London. Prisons are also often breeding grounds for abuse of minor detainees.

<sup>4</sup> In Germany, only the Bremen case of Harry S. is documented.

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**four** (“Obtaining the necessary support”, p. 70 ff.) provides guidance on the previous three chapters by means of a checklist. If external support is needed to manage the limited resources in prison – for example religious counsellors, psychosocial or cognitive interventions or vocational training – standards should be taken into account and followed. The *Handbook for Practitioners* gives brief guidelines for ensuring the suitability of any externally or in-house designed intervention programme (p. 69 f.).

**Part 3** (“Choosing the right intervention”) is recommended as a particularly adept overview for the reader as each objective is considered with a closer focus on the significance of the detention environment and general prison structures. (De-)radicalisation involves and is dependent on several interconnected factors, and it is from this multifactorial perspective which the author writes (see p. 30). The author argues that structures (such as "detention environment and general prison structures", see p. 29) for (de-)radicalisation processes have been long ignored stating, "The answer to a multifaceted phenomenon can only be a multifaceted proposal" (see p. 30). Accordingly, the chapter three is divided into three parts and addresses "three levels of action where interventions can be implemented" (p. 30). The micro-level (focused on detainees), meso-level (options for interventions and prison staff) and the macro-level (the prison-system) are linked to (de-)radicalisation: *“The intervention-team should align their choice of individual and structural interventions as closely as possible with the resources and needs of the detainee, of staff and, and of the specific detention center”* (p. 30). On the “meso-level”, further training and skill development for prison staff by following the train-the-trainer principle” is necessary to create a different knowledge base for interventions on the micro-level. Regular revision of the progress of the intervention measures with the intervention team are highly important for social problem-solving processes in prison (p. 43 ff.).<sup>5</sup> Both staff and detainees need social, emotional, and problem-solving skills (p. 57). Respect, fairness, trust and support prevent stress and violence and combine to form a “Dynamic Security Approach” (p. 66 f.). If this does not succeed, extremists and terrorists fill the gap and recruit vulnerable inmates.

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<sup>5</sup> Problem solving skills have been used in different contexts of social work and could be learned not only by professional staff, but also by Prison and Probation Officers See Durnescu, Core Correctional Skills, 2020, reviewed by Vollbach, Forum Strafvollzug, 5/2021.

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This handbook is relevant for prevention work with individual cases in a prison setting. Based on the evidence provided, the best prevention measures against radicalisation are properly run prisons, where staff are trained in issues such as identifying and preventing radicalisation (as well as mental health issues or preventing self-harm in order to be more effective in prison work). If external support is needed to manage the limited resources in prison – for example religious counsellors, psychosocial or cognitive interventions or vocational training – standards should be taken into account and followed. The *Handbook for Practitioners* gives brief guidelines for ensuring the suitability of any externally or in-house designed intervention programme. It is particularly the “Dynamic Security Approach” (part 3, p. 66 f.) which catches the attention of the reader. We see a comparable approach to Dynamic Security with the wider concept of applied criminology<sup>6</sup>, again a concept which is deeply embedded in practice in the Federal State of Bremen. For this “Dynamic Security Approach” practitioners need to have a broad range of skills, competencies and exposure. Throughout the book, we note the key role which front line prison officers necessarily take in the de-radicalisation process. Prison officers are not merely tasked with opening and closing cells, whilst only psychologist have care responsibility for treatment focus work. Well-trained prison officers are shoulder-to-shoulder with prisoners day and night, and are integral to how the modern prison designs and implements initiatives to prevent radicalisation<sup>7</sup>. It is recommended that professionals meet on a regular basis in focus groups (“peer reviews”, “clinical supervision”, p. 58) to monitor their work and share work experience. Staff also benefits from training courses on mental hygiene. The methods and analyses in the focus groups could be based on discussions and hermeneutic case analyses focusing on different methods, such as biographical analysis with the mentioned method of ‘applied criminology’. This is different from applying forensic manuals, such as the mentioned assessment-tools VERA-2-R or TRAP 18 for risk and need-assessment (see p. 22 ff.). This recommended

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<sup>6</sup> The method of ‘applied criminology’ explains how this method can help to detect the relevance of extremism when applied on an individual case. The method facilitates the risk- and need-assessment and risk-management and evaluation, required by law (Bock, Kriminologie, 5. Auflage 2019). See also: Vollbach, Strafvollzug in Bremen, gestern, heute und morgen, Forum Strafvollzug, 4/2021, S. 273-276.

<sup>7</sup> European initiatives in lifelong learning and vocational education of prison staff are beginning to address this need for additional training. Examples of current Erasmus+ initiatives are Corrections Careers ([www.careersincorrections.com](http://www.careersincorrections.com)), Prison Officer of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ([prison-officers21.org](http://prison-officers21.org)) REEDU, which trains staff in an inclusive approach to young people’s social rehabilitation and DIGICOR ([digicor-corrections.eu](http://digicor-corrections.eu)), which raises staff awareness of the relevance of digital skills for successful reintegration.

holistic approach is already in practice in the prison system of the Federal State of Bremen, Germany<sup>8</sup>. A positive prison climate is of great importance for the prevention of radicalisation in prison. Research presented in the Handbook provides some evidence that discrimination and hostility may evoke intense feelings and might form the basis of a ‘cognitive opening’ for radicalisation which may lead inmates to align with subcultures in prison, promoting aggression, hostility, violence and radicalisation. Extremists satisfy the detainee’s basic needs for belonging and recognition, which they might not be able to find in the world outside or in prison.<sup>9</sup> Otherwise, the risk of radicalisation after prison is significantly greater than during prison with dynamic security approach when the prospects of many released prisoners for social participation in society are rather poor.

At the beginning, we asked for guidelines to develop tailored and individual approaches to case management, risk-need-assessment and evaluation. This handbook offers a profound insight into challenges and opportunities of countering Islamist radicalisation in prison and provides an innovative scientific approach towards holistic practice in Germany.<sup>10</sup> In introducing this Handbook for Practitioners, a gap between theory and practice was addressed. This publication is very well suited to bridge this gap and should be available on the desks of those responsible on site and made required reading. In addition, the holistic and practitioner-focused approach means that what the reader takes away from this Handbook will be at least complementary, if not wholly transferrable to other sub-groups in prisons, with specific reference here to the rise of left and right wing extremism.

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<sup>8</sup> See Vollbach, Strafvollzug in Bremen, gestern, heute und morgen, Forum Strafvollzug, 4/2021, S. 273-276.

<sup>9</sup> See Bock, Radikalisierung als. Ein Essay mit der Absicht der Verfremdung. Neue Kriminalpolitik, 2017, S. 450 ff.; sowie Bock, Radikalisierung als biographischer Prozess – kriminologische Überlegungen zum Einstieg und Ausstieg, neue Kriminalpolitik 2020, S. 490 ff.

<sup>10</sup> See Vollbach, A (2017), Extremismus und kriminelle Gefährdung. Ein Beitrag zur Interventionsplanung und Prävention in der Strafrechtspflege. Neue Kriminalpolitik (20/1/2017), 62-74.

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