Institution: University of Kent

Unit of Assessment: Politics and International Relations

Title of case study: Rendition and Torture Practices: Informing understandings of lawyers, legislators, NGOs, and journalists

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Human rights lawyers, NGOs, journalists, the public and Scottish legislators have been informed and equipped by research on rendition and torture practices. The research has been used by human rights NGOs in their investigation and advocacy work. The research has enabled journalists to make claims that could not otherwise be supported about the extent of rendition and torture, particularly the role played by the UK. Wide international media coverage of the research led to a debate on the use of Scottish airports for rendition in the Scottish parliament. The Scottish Lord Advocate then instructed a police inquiry which is underway.

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

Ruth Blakeley (University of Kent, from January 2007) has established herself as an international expert on rendition, secret detention and torture. The impacts claimed emanate from two linked projects on state terrorism. The projects are introduced, with details of the underpinning research and findings related to the impact claimed, and cross-referenced to Section 3.

State Terrorism and Neoliberalism (January 2007 - December 2008)

Underpinning Research:

When Blakeley joined Kent, she began work on her monograph, *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism* (Routledge, 2009) [3.5]. She undertook a comprehensive analysis of the widespread use of state terrorism and torture by the US and other Western states, from European colonialism to the 'War on Terror'.

Research findings related to impact claimed:

- Through its training of military forces from Latin America during the Cold War, the US military and CIA advocated torture in counterinsurgency operations [3.5];

- Based on ethnographic research within a US military training facility for Latin Americans, as part of Blakeley's ESRC funded PhD before taking up her post at Kent, Blakeley found that despite reform of the US' main training facility for Latin Americans in the early 2000s, the majority of US foreign military training is unaccountable, and there is evidence that much training still advocates violations of human rights [3.5].

The Rendition Project (From January 2010)

Underpinning Research:

In January 2010 Blakeley began a project which extended her work on state terrorism, to evaluate the development and operation of the global system of rendition and secret detention. She was awarded a £94,500 ESRC Grant [RES-000-22-4417. Start Date: 14 February 2011. End Date: 16 November 2012. Blakeley was the PI - 66.7% contribution - and Sam Raphael, Kingston University, was the Co-I - 33.3% contribution]. The project mapped the global rendition system, by bringing together and analysing large amounts of data held by numerous human rights organisations. The research and analysis have been disseminated through an extensive project website. The website houses the world's most comprehensive database of flights by aircraft known or suspected of involvement in rendition (over 11,000 flights). This flight data was secured by Blakeley's team through working with various investigators and NGOs to integrate the results from multiple Freedom of Information (FOI) campaigns and court cases. Via an interactive map embedded into the project website, users can journey through the global rendition system, following particular aircraft, flights, detainees, and companies, and can access hundreds of linked pages of original analysis by Blakeley's team, as well as background primary documentation. The website includes a comprehensive public repository of primary documents and secondary analyses relating to rendition and secret detention, all embedded within the website. Blakeley has also

published two articles that draw on this research ([3.3] and outputs 2 in REF2 submission).

Research findings related to impact claimed:

- The UK has been much more involved in rendition than previously thought, through the use of UK airports for rendition operations [3.1];

- A dozen highly suspicious flights by aircraft linked to rendition operations have landed in and taken off from Scottish airports with onward flights to locations where CIA secret prisons were operating at the time. The circuits flown by these aircraft are likely to have been rendition operations [3.1];

- Through compilation of the rendition flight database, details of the renditions of certain individuals are confirmed, and therefore their claims about their renditions are proven [3.1];

- The global rendition system has been much more extensive and dynamic than previously thought [3.2];

- Changes in rendition practices occurred, 2003-2009, primarily because human rights investigators and journalists began uncovering its workings [3.2; 3.3];

- The CIA used torture much more widely and brutally against terror suspects than the US Department of Justice had permitted [3.4].

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

3.1.   Raphael, Sam and Blakeley, Ruth, *The Rendition Flight Database,* and *The Rendition Flight Database Interactive Tool,* published on www.therenditionproject.org.uk, April 2013.

3.2.   Blakeley, Ruth and Raphael, Sam, *The Rendition Project* website: www.therenditionproject.org.uk, launched May 2012.

3.3.   Blakeley, Ruth (2013), 'Human Rights, State Wrongs and Social Change: The Theory and Practice of Emancipation', *Review of International Studies,* 39 (3), 599-619. ISSN: 0260-2105. DOI:10.1017/S0260210512000186. (Output 3 in REF2 submission)

3.4.   Blakeley, Ruth (2011), 'Dirty Hands, Clean Conscience: The CIA, Detention, 'Enhanced Interrogation', and the Outsourcing of Torture', *Journal of Human Rights,* 10 (4), 544-561. ISSN: 1475-4835. DOI: 10.1080/14754835.2011.61940. [In the top three most downloaded articles from the Journal's website, April 2013]. (Output 2 in REF2 submission)

3.5.   Blakeley, Ruth (2009), *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism: The North in the South* (Routledge Critical Terrorism Studies; London: Routledge). ISBN: 978-0-415-46240-2. (Output 1 in REF2 submission)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Providing evidence to investigative journalist/film-maker to support key claims

Blakeley gave a detailed statement to libel lawyers for Lionsgate films to corroborate claims made in John Pilger's film, 'War on Democracy' (2008). This was invaluable in convincing the lawyers of the veracity of assertions that the US military had encouraged torture through its training of Latin American military forces, 1945-2000. Blakeley's statement, based on her research for *State Terrorism and Neoliberalism*, [3.5], meant that key material on the US' role in torture could be included in the film.

Influencing, informing and equipping the investigative and advocacy work of human rights NGOs and lawyers

Detailed analysis of all available flight data on aircraft linked to rendition has been made possible through the world's first comprehensive open source database of rendition flights, an interactive map, and accompanying analysis [3.1; 3.2]. The tool is accessed via *The Rendition Project* website and *The Guardian*'s website. Users can now interrogate the flight data much more systematically, alongside analysis and supporting evidence compiled by Blakeley's team, and victims of rendition can be matched to specific flights to prove their renditions took place.

The interactive flight tool was developed with the *The Guardian*'s Datablog team, following a

demonstration by Blakeley's team (July 2012) of the Rendition Flight Database [3.1] to *The Guardian* reporter, Ian Cobain, and Simon Rogers (Datablog Director). Blakeley targeted *The Guardian* because it has been one of very few international media outlets that have systematically covered rendition. Compilation of the underlying *Rendition Flights Database* was made possible after Blakeley's team shared early research findings with the Human Rights NGO Reprieve (in April 2011), including analytical content for *The Rendition Project* website [3.2], and Blakeley's article 'Dirty Hands, Clean Conscience' [3.4]. This led to Reprieve and other NGOs sharing flight data (from June 2011 onwards) obtained through various Freedom of Information requests and investigations. NGOs have also made extensive use of the rendition flights database and interactive map, and have used the easily navigable and comprehensive repository of hundreds of documents and explanatory commentary published by Blakeley's team on *The Rendition Project* website. As Clare Algar, Executive Director of Reprieve commented: 'Reprieve has formed an excellent working partnership with the Rendition Project…. [it] provid[es] far superior access to the data than was previously possible. This has enabled us to link several previously unidentified flight paths to prisoners and in turn to make data on these flight paths available to legal teams in the US and UK. We believe that our continued use of the Rendition Project map and database will lead to further such examples in the future. The Rendition Project website has swiftly become the most comprehensive online repository of rendition-related information and we and our partner organisations regularly use it in our research and analysis.' [5:2].

Changing understandings of journalists and the public on rendition and torture practices

Blakeley's research has provided journalists with evidence to support claims about the extent of UK involvement in rendition. Drawing on the data from the *Rendition Flights Database* and interactive map [3.1, 3.2], *The Guardian* published four simultaneous articles on 23 May 2013. The first lead story [5:3] explained that *The Rendition Project* proves many more renditions-related aircraft landed in UK territory than previously thought. The reporter consulted Blakeley's team on using the flight data to ensure his claims could be sustained. The second story [5:3] focused on the research project and its findings. This story described *The Rendition Project* as a 'groundbreaking research project which sheds unprecedented light on one of the most controversial secret operations of recent years'. Both stories appeared on line and in print. Two further pieces [5:5] were published by *The Guardian*'s Datablog, one, an explanation of how the data was gathered, the other, a user-guide for the interactive map. Cobain noted that *The Rendition Project* 'has given me, and others, a chance to see clearly the scope and ambition of the rendition programme …. [and] has made a great contribution to the efforts to put the puzzle together, in a way that will be enormously helpful to the public for many years to come' [5:4].

Cobain's statement is supported further when looking at the website traffic; the result of *The Guardian*'s coverage increased national and international media coverage of the project, and vastly increased traffic to *The Rendition Project* website from around the world, as indicated by Google Analytics data. In the month following the launch of the database and interactive map, there were 20,527 unique visitors to the website (this compares with figures in the low tens per month prior to launch and coverage by *The Guardian*). Visits following launch and *The Guardian* coverage were from users in 144 countries worldwide. The bounce rate in that period (the percentage of single page visits, i.e. people leaving the site from the entrance page without interacting with the page) was 36%. This means that over 60% of visitors to the site interacted with the page they entered the site on. In that period, website visitors viewed an average of 3.95 individual pages. This shows that visitors were exploring the site and reading content. There were significant peaks when *The Guardian* published its story on 22 May, with 3,972 unique visitors that day, and on 29 May, after widespread news coverage of the extent of Scottish involvement, with 4,821 unique visits that day.

Informing and equipping Scottish legislators, and triggering Scottish police inquiry into use of Scottish airports for rendition

Following *The Guardian*'s coverage of the Rendition Flights Database and Interactive map [3.1, 3.2], Blakeley's team was approached by Calum Ross from the *Press and Journal* newspaper to further interrogate the database for flights in and out of Scotland. Blakeley's team uncovered a dozen previously unknown flights through Scotland that are likely to have been part of rendition operations, since their onward flights were to locations where CIA prisons were known to be operating when the flights took place. The circuits flown by the 12 aircraft in question were also

consistent with previous known rendition operations. These findings were covered widely in the Scottish national press [5:8; 5:9], as well as by international media organisations including the BBC [5:10] and RTV. The research findings on the use of Scottish airports were then debated in the Scottish parliament, with SMPs referring specifically to the research. As a result, in June 2013 the Lord Advocate for Scotland instructed a Scottish police investigation, citing The Rendition Project's findings. In July 2013, Blakeley's team was approached by the senior investigating officer for the Scottish police inquiry, to provide a dossier of evidence on the Scottish rendition flights as part of the investigation. Collaboration with the investigation is on-going.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Providing evidence to investigative journalist/film-maker to support key claims

1. John Pilger, 'War on Democracy', Documentary produced by Lionsgate Films, released on DVD in February 2008. The documentary was awarded 'Best Documentary' at the 2008 One World Awards, London. The film can also be watched directly on John Pilger's website: http://johnpilger.com/videos/the-war-on-democracy. This would suggest that the reach of the film is broad, and that Blakeley's research has a long-lasting impact with the availability of the film as a medium.

Influencing, informing and equipping the investigative and advocacy work of human rights NGOs

2. Reprieve published a press release on launch of the Renditions Flight Database and Interactive map: 'Major Study Sheds New Light on CIA Secret Prisons', 22 May 2013, http://www.reprieve.org.uk/press/2013_05_22_Renditions_Database/. The press release described the database as 'the most comprehensive resource so far created illustrating the CIA's programme of renditions'.

3. Corroborating statement, Clare Algar, Executive Director, Reprieve. Reprieve is among the most influential legal organisations involved in researching rendition and representing victims, so collaboration was essential to the research. Statement available on request.

Changing understandings of journalists and the public on rendition and torture practices

4. Ian Cobain, 'New light shed on US government's extraordinary rendition programme', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/22/us-extraordinary-rendition-programme?INTCMP=ILCNETTXT3487 and Ian Cobain, 'UK provided more support for CIA rendition flights than thought – study', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/22/uk-support-cia-rendition-flights.

5. Corroborating statement, Ian Cobain, Senior Reporter, *The Guardian.* Available on request.

6. James Ball, 'US Rendition: Every Flight Mapped', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/interactive/2013/may/22/rendition-flights-cia-mapped and James Ball, 'US rendition map: what it means and how to use it', *The Guardian*, 22 May 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2013/may/22/rendition-flights-graphic-explained.

7. Google Analytics Data for The Rendition Project Website, following launch of the Rendition Flights Database and Interactive Map. Data available on request.

Informing and equipping Scottish legislators, and triggering Scottish police inquiry into use of Scottish airports for rendition

8. Calum Ross, 'Urgent probe ordered into new illegal rendition claims', *The Press and Journal,* 6 June 2013, http://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/Article.aspx/3267000

9. Alistair Munro, 'Scottish Rendition Flights Police Probe Ordered', *The Scotsman,* 6 June 2013, http://www.scotsman.com/news/scotland/top-stories/scottish-rendition-flights-police-probe-ordered-1-2956834.

10. BBC, 'Rendition flights claim to be investigated by Police Scotland', *BBC News Scotland,* 5 June 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-22788443.