

Chapter 6 Feeling Persecuted? The Definitive Role of Paranoid Anxiety in the Constitution of “War on Terror” Television

Hugh Ortega Breton

The material and discursive consequences of counter-terror discourse on the organization of life in democratic societies are already apparent, but what about the functions of this discourse in and of itself, as a mode of communication and engagement? Through the expression and transmission of fear and paranoid anxiety this discourse justified the extension of security agency powers and legitimizes a “politics” of securitization, by redefining political and social subjectivity in terms of security and safety through “worst case scenario” thinking. But does this description of effects not read history backwards and neglect other functions of this discourse? The increased significance of emotion in public discourses as a substitute for traditional politics in the last fifteen years is not addressed by the conventional criticism that politicians have solely an instrumental orientation towards emotion. The more immediate concerns of the political elite and media producers, to connect meaningfully with the public, are not considered in such claims.

Discourse does not simply frame, it functions to engage and make sense, and to evacuate and render meaningful difficult emotions. Political elite actors and broadcast media producers are embedded, like all western actors, in the shared experience of a culture of fear, but disproportionately express this as a result of the loss of our conventional left-

right political web of meaning most acutely felt in the domain of politics.¹ Whilst some studies explain the growth of fear as a framing discourse independent of actual events, or treat fear discourse as symptomatic of the problem of disengagement with politics,² none demonstrate the interlinked functions of political discourses: emotional expression, the constitution of identities or roles and, most importantly, the production of meaning to connect with the public through discourse. To date neither evidence nor detailed discourse analysis has been produced to show how popular discourses of terror function to try and create specific meanings and produce specific identities through emotionally driven mechanisms.

This chapter analyses the audio-visual language of televised terrorism as a transmitter of public emotions in British political culture. Analysing televisual texts addresses the spectral power of images of violence, which are central to the popular rhetorical force of (counter-) terrorism discourse. I argue that (counter-) terrorism discourse functions primarily to produce emotional meanings and new roles or identities that reify vulnerability in the period 1998-2007 and demonstrate through an analysis of that discourse that it is shaped by paranoid structures of communication in order to cope with a lack of meaning and a surfeit of anxiety in political culture.

Through case studies of British mainstream news programmes, documentaries, films, the spy-thriller series *Spooks*, and the documentary drama *Dirty War*, I identify characteristics that demonstrate the attempt to cope with uncertainty and anxiety by

creating paranoid identities and understandings. This is not to pathologize or derogate this discourse. 'Paranoid' here refers to a technique of perception and understanding, which is used as a response to the loss of identity and meaning. Each example represents a consistent emotional perspective present in each text. Substantively I am looking at rhetorical devices in dialogue, speed of frames, editing, and the tone, frequency and pace of non-diegetic, (soundtrack) sound.

Risk-aversion as a feature of British politics: context and analysis

When considering the context of the risk-aversion that characterizes contemporary British politics, one has to begin with the fact that discourses are clearly over determined by their rules and precedents, by the immediate situation and by organizational factors. However, popular television programmes and other texts re-present, re-frame and re-constitute political discourse with narratives, characters, ideas and emotions. This “subjectivization” and personalization of discourse provides an opportunity for emotional expression and necessitates a critical approach developed from the analysis of identity and perception construction based upon an analysis of the emotional experience of our relationship to others. In turn, that requires that we draw on elements of object relations psychoanalytic theory and critical discourse analysis in order to fully present the relational-emotional aspects of (counter-) terrorism discourse.

In order to understand the discourse of counter-terror it is important to have an understanding of the concerns of its chief producers - the political élite. For politics to produce hegemony, for it to work, it must be meaningful. Left-right wing domestic opposition and opposition to the Soviet Bloc together created meaningful mainstream political identities up to and including the UK general election of 1992. However, mutually defining political adversaries have since fallen. The transformation of the western political sphere through the success of Clinton’s, and then Blair’s, Third Way programme should not be underestimated, even though it is the case that declining interest and participation in mainstream politics in the West considerably predates the

1990s. However that may be, the claim that we are in fact in a post-political period because mainstream political ideologies have changed so much since 1992 is to say the least highly plausible. Certainly a succession of new opponents has been created since then, not solely to justify foreign policy aims, but primarily to produce a meaningful role for the political élite through relational-emotional dynamics of popular discourse, instead of through (hitherto) conventional political ideologies.

Since the late 1980s, beginning with the furore over *The Satanic Verses*, the difference between Arabs and Muslims and non-Islamic British citizens has consistently been recalled and consolidated in the British press through stories about different clothing, schooling, beliefs, integration, relationships and criminality and racism, in a framework that problematizes British Muslims' cultural difference, in the context of government concern about social cohesion³. The significance of this characterization is that it constructs the terrorist and the terrorist threat as other, as originating from somewhere outside, and distinct from, the British nation and its way of life. This is crucial in defining terrorism as the product of an "other" culture, and this is apparent in the extensive use of discursive collocations such as 'global', 'international' and 'Islamist terrorism'. One can see how terrorism became defined as Islamic and as a threat to a so-called "British way of life", as a result of consistent reporting and how such discursive mechanisms have now become "normalized". However, the facts of the July 2005 attacks in London made such tacit assumptions increasingly difficult to sustain as it emerged that the suicide bombers were *British* Muslims. The reactions of shock and surprise this caused in Parliament led

to Blair's mediated statements to the press in 2006, where he split the "ideology of terrorism" from the "terrorists themselves". This in turn had the effect of disassociating the problem of terrorism from notions of national identity⁴. Similarly, in a 2006 ITV1 news report, one notable comment that splits the imagined audience is the remark, 'to the outside world, particularly the Muslim community'⁵. This positions 'the Muslim community', which is part of the British nation in this broadcasting context, as outside of it: it is thus alienated from the imagined community of the British nation. This is just one of many examples of how counter-terror discourse simplifies a complex situation in order to evacuate fear and anxiety.

Expanding our awareness of other mainstream expressions of fear and anxiety gives us a sense of the emotionalized cultural landscape of which counter-terror discourse forms a part. The emotion of terror is present in many representations in the current historical moment outside of those that specifically address (counter)-terrorism. These representations are generally referred to as either the 'culture of fear' or a 'politics of fear'; normally denoting a conscious attempt at manipulation by government and other political actors through the use of emotive pleas which express or connote fear⁶. For example, politicians, pressure groups, charitable organizations and cultural critics have all deployed a rhetoric of fear in their work⁷. Through counter-terror discourse, terrorism becomes one overwhelming and immediate referent of this wider discourse of fear, and of a generalized experience of anxiety or uncertainty in developed western states.

Having outlined the relevant context, we can now look at risk-aversion itself more closely. Since the early 1990s risk-aversion has arguably become increasingly dominant as a means of responding to present and future social problems. There is no doubt that through the 1990s the language of risk came to be used more and more in news discourse: risk-management became a major commercial and governmental strategy. Mainstream media and cautious politicians now frame concerns about environmental catastrophe, economic recession and the potential misuse of stem cell research in terms of the possible negative consequences. Accepting the prevalence of this form of thinking, one would expect that risk-averse thinking transforms approaches to terrorism and contributes to a general cultural condition of uncertainty. Whether or not one accepts the critique of the hegemony of risk-averse thinking, the extent of the expression of anxiety and fear, given the number of different mainstream texts that feature it as a frame, suggests that there are fundamental emotional determinants shaping the so-called war on terror: through its discursive construction; at the level of interpretation; and in terms of thinking about social problems.

As Mythen and Walklate (2006) suggest, the way the British state communicates to the public through reports on terrorism provide an interesting gauge of the communicative strategies at play. They found that communicating risk to the British public involves attempting to connect and control feelings of anxiety through a number of different types of signification all representing risk anxiety. These include a distinctly Orientalist categorization of dangerous creeds and countries in the 'construction of the terrorist

“Other’”, along with other groups such as ‘asylum seekers...economic migrants’ and ‘illegal immigrants’; and a tendency toward the construction of ‘risky objects and activities (e.g. airplanes, the underground, shopping, travel)’.⁸

A number of highly emotive claims have been publicized by terrorist experts and senior intelligence officials⁹ in news stories and press reports and have also been made in undercover documentaries, such as *Dispatches: Undercover Mosque* (Tx:15-01-07 2000hrs C4). These claims and reports all convey anxiety and fear through the constitution and maintenance of an immediacy and danger to terrorism on popular television. Charges relating to Islamic fundamentalism and the terrorist threat posed by ‘Muslim extremists’ have very little empirical basis and yet they suggest that the programme producers believe that the fear they construct is meaningful and credible. While the emotions at stake here have the ring of plausibility, what is important is that this is quite distinct from the substantive problem of terrorism: namely the possibility of an increase in sympathy for terrorist atrocities; and the furtherance of homophobic and chauvinistic beliefs in British Muslim communities. This is not to deny that the representation of fear is meaningful; élites create preferred meanings, which make sense, independent of the facts. The connection between such emotional states and terrorism, however, is not a given. Rather, this connection is increasingly reiterated through dramas, film, advertising and most regularly and effectively of all, through television news. For example, in its coverage of a security emergency on a transatlantic flight, (involving a passenger having a panic attack and an explicit link to fear of terrorists) ITV1’s *News at*

Ten deployed a number of strategies to heighten the discursive emotivism. These included the use of an alarmed tone of voice, war-like battle drums, and recordings of live reports to represent what was described as a ‘climate of fear’. The programme claimed that this event was proof of ‘just how anxious both the authorities and the public have become about security in the air’ even though there was ‘no terrorist connection’ and the incident involved one person panicking and a single airline company taking precautions.¹⁰ A broader examination of TV news coverage of terrorist incidents, arrests, reports and trials suggests that such strategies are used consistently to produce immediacy and excitement in order to create an engagement with the audience. In working to create this engagement, high levels of anxiety and fear have been expressed in relation to terrorism and also Iraq prior to 2001 and consistently since then until 2008.

Terrorism is unlike any other social practice in that it is signified by its emotional component. This emphasis on emotion rather than political actors is more apparent now through the general use in the mainstream news media of ‘terror’ as abstract noun and adjective to signify ‘terrorists’ and ‘terrorism’. The use of ‘terror’ instead of ‘terrorist’ maintains the emotional sense of the concept but loses its reference to actors or their actions. In making this separation, anxiety is created because there is a lack of an object to focus on.¹¹ However, there is a modulation in the discourse between sense and reference. What differentiates counter-terrorism discourse from the myriad of other threats constructed through risk-averse thinking is its personification and immediacy compared with theoretical, long term risks. Both these aspects facilitate emotional

expression and communication by providing opportunities for identification, fantasy and the communication of anxiety and fear. In news and broader political discourse, a fearing gaze focuses on an imagined (but not fictional) network of individuals: Al Qaida, Islamic extremists and Muslim terrorists. This may be described as paranoid because there is a person or group of persons that are the object of fear. The function of this is to “other” our own cultural uncertainty about ourselves, because it is unbearable or unthinkable in direct reference to the self; and so it is instead projected onto and into mediated representations of persons constructed as other. As a result it becomes possible to construct some meaning and certainty about our uncertainty. Furthermore, in respect of this externalized threat it can be argued emotionally that we are vulnerable.

Relational aspects of emotional communication

Emotional-relational processes are evident in the framing of news and drama stories and the use of experts and political leaders to interpret terrorist events. One basic feature of both the news and dramatic genres is the referencing through binary oppositions of hero and villain, good and evil, otherwise known as polarization. Through polarization, or splitting, a clear conflict is established between two opposing sides, simplifying and decontextualizing a social problem. Ambiguous or mixed feelings are split off in order to protect “positive” feelings and to expel difficult ones by projecting them onto others, removing any ambivalence or ambiguity. However, the process of evacuating emotions through counter-terror discourse that occurs in periods of high cultural anxiety is not

obvious, because these emotions are reified through their attachment to terrorists, terrorist events and the belief that the threat poses a very real danger.

Splitting also allows projective identification to take place. The projective identification process can involve a whole series of identifications, introjections, and projections and is usually very elaborate and detailed.¹² This communicative mechanism is used to control other people and expel overwhelming anxieties, enabling one group to win the support of another by identifying a third group as the cause of anxiety, as is the case with the discursive construction of Islamic extremism. In both news media and dramatic fiction, these mechanisms occur between characters within a text and between newsreaders or government spokespeople and the assumed national audience. They are used to “manage” paranoid anxieties and other emotions by projecting them outwards into others such as radicalized Muslims - a way of coping with anxiety and building an identity in respect of the other. By specifying the other as the root of evil, anxiety is transformed into fear, which can be acted upon in turn by acting against the identified other. It furthermore creates two complementary identities, the protector and the potential victim. This three-way relationship is fundamental to the formation of a meaningful paranoid perception, and is a consistent feature of the examples that follow.¹³ These are the necessary identities of the logic of securitization born from the sense of vulnerability and victimhood constructed in counter-terror discourse.

Television news and drama and the emotive discourse of terror

In both news and drama, characters are central to the constitution of meaningful emotions and identities, creating opportunities for identification and projection by the audience. News stories usually address the audience as the potential victim of any given terrorist threat. On 21 August 2006, for example, ITN News told the story of the investigation of a group of arrested suspects, alleged by intelligence to have been planning to destroy planes bound for USA. This report conveys that the audience should take the threats seriously, and a direct address to the audience is made by means of a public statement by spokesperson Peter Clarke, head of the MPS Anti-Terrorist Branch. Throughout his statement, the use of the collective pronoun 'we' assumes the unity of an imagined national group vis-à-vis the perceived threat of terrorism; it immediately assumes an unambiguous difference between the viewer and the terrorist other, and a connection between the security authorities and the national audience. The emphasis, then, is on an imagined national community in unison with the police and authorities against a criminal other. We are reminded by Peter Clarke that this threat is nonetheless 'enduring' and does not just exist to ourselves physically but also to 'our' 'way of life', encompassing in its vagueness a clear attempt to connect with the audience as the protector of our potential victimhood. Ambiguity is employed in relation to ourselves, but never in our relationship to the alleged threat. Legitimacy of the polarized frame is thus achieved through the construction of an external threat vis-à-vis the audience as potential victim. The diction of the reporters and of Peter Clarke is in a familiar and authoritative, grave tone, implying a serious, foreboding and potentially dangerous situation, which is further reinforced through statements made on continuing vigilance. The extensive use of gravitas and

solemnity in 'war on terror' stories and news generally is evidence of the excessive use of emotional rhetorical devices to connect meaningfully with the public through fear or anxiety.

Such a 'battle for hearts and minds' is not limited to factual news coverage, but is also reflected in television entertainment. *Spooks* is an excellent example of this.¹⁴ In its plots, the agents often attempt to convince threatening others to trust them or to co-operate with them, and to convince people not to carry out life threatening acts. For example, in *Spooks* episode 4.4, the British agent, Adam, goes undercover as a white ethnic minority Syrian attempting to enter the UK via an illegal immigration truck and attempts to 'turn' an Islamist terrorist (Yazdi) into a double agent. Firstly, Adam has to convince the truck driver and the other immigrants that he is a *bona fide* immigrant himself. He does this by appealing to the similarities between himself and the others, by speaking Arabic and mentioning Syrian proverbs and places that the others can identify with. Anxiety around ambiguity and uncertainty is expressed through the unease caused by Adam's presence as a white, middle-class engineer from an ethnic minority in Syria. The English working-class truck driver is immediately unsettled by Adam's physical likeness to his own ethnicity, because this suggests the idea of the other being like the self, resulting in confusion and leading to anger and violence towards Adam because he does not fit into common sense distinctions. The driver's anxiety is later confirmed when he is beaten and taken by Adam's accomplices, proving to the driver and to the audience that his anxiety about a white Arab was warranted. This effectively underwrites anxiety around

ambiguity. From this example we can see that such anxiety is a product of the tension between familiarity and unfamiliarity. However, acting out this anxiety by attacking the other is also evidence of a paranoid mindset where the subject is unable to cope with ambiguity because it does not offer clear distinctions between the self and the other. Whilst undercover, Adam also projects the idea of contempt for authority by telling the target, Yazdi, that his brother has been wrongly convicted of terrorism, in an attempt to get Yazdi to identify with him. This has the effect of partially winning Yazdi's trust and again illustrates how the mechanisms of projection and identification are central to counter-terror discourse because they constitute suspicion, deception and distrust, evacuating anxiety about otherness.

The use of such mechanisms in the documentary drama format works further to reinforce this blurring between "truth" and "reality" – (Segal's 'symbolic equation' 1957) which is the well known delusional feature of paranoid interpretation. For example, the government's relationship with the public is foregrounded in the documentary drama, *Dirty War*, which presents itself as a 'pre-enactment' of something that could, on the basis of factual research, happen in the future. Documentary drama is perfectly suited to speculation and the discourses of future possibility and probability. In this respect there are similarities with contemporary news discourse where, in special studio features, journalists speculate on future possibilities. As fictional representation, *Dirty War* also makes transparent actual modes of political address. This has the effect of foregrounding the use of projective identification in an effort to convince the British public of the moral

rectitude of the politically informed élite. It also shows the centrality of emotional need to this process, by underscoring the relationship between such need and the provision of reassurance in response to it. The producers' attitude towards politicians and mandarins in this respect is also made explicit. For example, in an early conversation between a civil servant and the Minister for London, the public is constructed as an anxious agent requiring reassurance from the government, through a patronising comment made by the civil servant. A quotation on preparedness from the actual, former Minister for London (Nick Raynsford, in 2004) sets the scene at the beginning of the film and is then echoed in paraphrased form by the fictional Minister (Nicola Painswick) when she addresses the public shortly after her conversation with the civil servant:

Painswick: We believe these drills will reassure the British people that we're doing all we can to protect them against terrorism and that London is as prepared as it possibly can be. This is all part of the government's commitment to be honest about the threats we face and to put as much information in the public domain as we can.¹⁵

Such a statement positions the government as protector of the public in the face of any terrorist threat. The powerless potential victim is the ideal other for the powerful government and security authorities, because they need protection. Thus, the role of government and its agencies is defined in terms of securitization and the documentary drama works to reinforce the material importance of this as a "truth".

Government and the public, then, are constructed here as having mutual needs. They are also constructed in relation to a third party, the terrorist, the source of threat and danger and, therefore, of “terror”. The representation of the Islamic extremist or terrorist other posing the threat is essential to the mechanism of projective identification which sustains the relationship between authorities and the electorate. In *Dirty War*, the potential victims, Londoners, are characterized as anxious, requiring reassurance, and this view of the public is constructed further through street scenes of crowds shouting and breaking through police cordons. This puts the public in direct confrontation with the emergency services, who prevent people escaping because they are contaminated. These victims are now a risk to the rest of London and as such have to be contained. Despite clear roles (protector, terrorist, victim) each group in *Dirty War* is represented as a survival risk to another group. The choice to represent the public as liable to panic goes against traditional perceptions and evidence of the resilience of the public in the face of adversity. However, as a narrative device, this makes room for the expression of fear and the dread of being let down by one’s protector, the government and the emergency services. In this way paranoia towards authority is at once represented and furthered. So far, we have seen how this discourse of terror deploys mechanisms such as projective identification and projection to produce a culture of paranoia around notions of state and security. Another key mechanism used to augment this is that of dissociation.

As mentioned earlier, there is a certain tendency toward using projection to create distance between notions of 'Britain and Britishness and notions of terror'. "Terrorism" is represented as emanating from terror camps in Afghanistan or madrassas in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; and the construction of terrorists as 'evil' opposes the veneration of 'our way of life'. There is also a focus on the Islamic and Arabic characteristics of terrorists and alleged terrorists. Strategies such as these serve to disassociate the problem of terrorism from British culture by constructing clear boundaries between Britishness and Islamist ideologies. As ambiguity about what it means to be British or political remains, it becomes necessary for the political élite to reconstruct boundaries symbolically. Hence extremist ideology is represented as dangerous and originating from "elsewhere" (and specifically from Middle Eastern terrorist camps). Issues associated with the British experience of political disengagement and atomization are entirely disavowed.

It is interesting to consider the discursive effects of these tendencies. Television news and drama also makes use of visual markers of difference to disassociate the problem of terrorism. For example, images of mosques, minarets, crescent symbols on flags and Arabic dress are used to reference the perceived origin of any threat. Such images are often accompanied by official verbal statements by security agencies and politicians, which are used explicitly to anchor these images in the language of threat. In addition, negative personality traits that have been traditionally ascribed to Arabic ethnicities - for example deviousness - are ascribed to Arabic political actors and characters.

In the 2006 ITV1 news story entitled 'Climate of Fear',¹⁶ the report again clearly locates the terrorist threat in Pakistan. Signifiers used differentiate the threat from any British identity, suggesting an unconscious move to disavow responsibility for this problem through a focus on geographical movement and cultural difference. This particular news bulletin uses a host of visual signifiers of difference: street shots, building shots, shots of people walking in the street and maps are all shown in order to construct a tangible difference between suspected terrorists and other people generally. They resonate as distinguishing features because they connote familiar traditional notions of Orientalist difference. The graphic movement from the UK to Pakistan shown in animated maps in the story is the natural direction to take for a Briton; but this movement out of Britain by British people makes them the focus of paranoid anxiety because they are presented as equally Pakistani and British, effectively differentiating them from an imagined British law-abiding self. This significantly locates the problem of terrorism outside the British nation, while at the same time insinuating that the perpetrators themselves were not British. Here a more dramatic picture of the threatening other is created through a paranoid anxiety lens. We see the representation of dread and ignorance of the other in the use of black silhouette mug shots over a map of Pakistan. The figures are human templates, which through their facelessness can conjure fantasies of terrifying capabilities.

This is determined by the speculative and investigative character of news covering terrorism and claims about terrorism. Counter-terror discourse is therefore shaped by its

speculative and projective character through the wider discourse of fear and risk anxiety. For example, in this report there is no external reference, the reporter stating that ‘the claims have not been confirmed or for that matter denied by intelligence sources here in the UK’. The report closes with, ‘even the government here fears the number could be far, far higher’.¹⁷ Fear is already the most strongly supported and objectified concept in the whole report and as it is understood as an individual emotion it is easily validated and there is no need for some external reference to confirm its validity.

The political, journalistic and dramatic practice of speculation highlights how counter-terror discourse makes use of the projection of fantasies and the management of publicized emotions as much as it subscribes to factuality. Worst-case scenarios are frequently illustrated in television news, constructing audiences as passive potential victims in a world of (unknown) known threats. Speculation is central to the future orientation of counter-terror discourse. It corroborates and amplifies the anxiety that gives rise to it through the projection of a world characterized by high level negative risks and threats. This means that counter-terror discourse has its own dynamic logic that causes the fears and anxieties associated with terrorism and other problems to grow in magnitude. Speculation in the form of projecting paranoid fantasies, (such as in the speculation on forms of Iraqi and terrorist attack found in the news) detaches perception of the threat from any empirical verifiability, increasing a sense of vulnerability. This is clearly evident in news on terrorism, where intelligence and legal requirements that evidence remain secret means that there is a huge amount of room for speculation on the

form and extent of the perceived terrorist threat. However, this clearly does not necessitate or determine speculation. For example, a statement on threats identified by national intelligence agencies by British Prime Minister Tony Blair on 11th November 2002 was used by ITN as the introduction to an extended report detailing the appropriate responses to gas attacks, germ weapons and 'dirty' bombs, when there was no evidence or reason to suggest that this was probable.¹⁸ The constituted anxiety about the threat of terrorism, however, makes such reports credible, and attempts to fix an understanding of powerlessness, uncertainty and vulnerability, feeding the cycle of projection and identification that underpins the discourse of terror. This meaning, however disturbing, is far better than no meaning at all; and it is the fear of no meaning whatsoever that the paranoid style is designed to cope with. Alongside speculation and its association with risk-aversion, there is a range of other key motifs which are also central to this discourse.

Over the last ten years a number of different issues and practices have been used to express anxiety in relation to terrorism: failed states (the 'war on terror' in Afghanistan and Iraq); epidemiology (nuclear proliferation, chemical or dirty bombs); immigration and asylum-seekers; and communications technology (the international spread of Islamic extremism via the internet). What these examples share in common is an expression of anxiety in relation to the invisible transgression or infiltration of national and physical borders which denote specific identities. In addition these promote the production of the victim identity perception of vulnerability in relation to the persecutory other. A manifest concern about border integrity is interpreted here as a latent concern about identity

because fear and anxiety are attached to the idea of (illicit) movement across the borders which cohere and define national and embodied identities. For example, there is extensive speculation on the terrorist threat in terms of viral or biological gaseous attacks, reports about MRSA outbreaks and dirty (nuclear) bombs.¹⁹ In this form terrorism is represented as extremely disturbing because it is invisible and formless, constructing a meaning of vulnerability to attack.

Such speculative fantasies are also evidence of another aspect of paranoid perception: anxiety catastrophe, or the fantasy of annihilation so prevalent in the high volume of major films with apocalyptic or destructive narratives. This focus on the freedom of transnational communication enabled by the Internet is metaphorized visually through the use of large moving image visuals showing an extensive network of linkages. Thus we are told that the terrorist threat is increasing and the meaning of vulnerability is produced and further reinforced²⁰. Both ways of representing the threat are evidence of wider state concerns with management of different aspects of the contemporary world. Their association with terrorism increases the sense of threat or of being 'at risk' associated with both issues and with terrorism itself. In different ways both also problematize boundary-crossing. At an abstract level, both are concerned with objects which invisibly cross traditional physical and biological boundaries, making them difficult to identify and contain. This expresses not only a general anxiety about human action and interaction, but also a more specific anxiety about the ability to contain such threats, given that they transcend traditional physical borders by virtue of their gaseous and electronic forms

respectively. This concern with identification and containment is also evidence of anxiety with self-identification and with national identity, leading to a projection of these anxieties by associating them with international terrorism and immigration. They are another example of the real difficulty with ambivalence and ambiguity apparent in counter-terror discourse in its consistent attempts to construct clear symbolic boundaries.

The emotional-relational nature of counter-terror discourse

The need for the British political élite to construct a new adversarial other to create meaning for hegemony and legitimization is crucial to understanding discourses covering terrorism. Counter-terror discourse is used to express anxiety and fear in the form of a perceived threat posed by an other that bears only marginal correspondence to actual incidences of British terrorism. This other, however, must be understood as in a direct, dynamic relationship to a nationwide sense of uncertainty about identity and inextricably linked with that, a crisis of meaning felt most keenly at the political-national nexus of Britain. As a result of the dominance of risk-averse and narcissistic modes of thought there has been a shift towards a structure of feeling that has a narcissistic, fearful understanding of subjectivities and our perception of others as its basis. The Third Way has turned out to be both emotional and paranoid.

Evaluating the emotional-relational aspects of terror discourse narratives show us how far we have come from rational social and political webs of meaning we utilized in the recent past. The actions of media producers and politicians through counter-terrorism discourse

attempt to address the problems of disengagement and lack of identity, which for the media is a commercial problem, through creating an emotional engagement with audiences. In so doing, this discourse at once gives expression to and circulates the unspecified anxieties and specific fears of the political élite and mainstream media producers.

Conclusion

Counter-terror discourse is shaped by the paranoid style that I have discussed above. It refers to a form of coverage and speculation that projects and projectively identifies with distinct audience groups, emotionally splitting “good” from “bad” by claiming that a specific group poses a serious threat to a dominant “way of life”. The polarization of paranoid projections functions to counter ambivalence, ambiguity and a general uncertainty of contemporary identities and knowledge claims by constituting distinct representations of good and evil. This presupposes the construction and reproduction of vulnerability, anxiety and suspicion through the paranoid style, substituting previous political discourses in helping to make sense of the everyday experiences of anxiety and uncertainty. As a result, paranoid identities of potential victim, protector and persecutor are created and reproduced, coping with the fragmentation of political identity and meaning by containing and making a specific type of sense out of the fear and anxiety this breakdown of politics has produced.

The knee-jerk reactions to events that are now a common precursor to legislation can be seen as the acting out of such difficult feelings. In wanting to be seen to be doing something, governments and policy-makers appear to reject the opportunity to think about and understand their anxieties and fears in greater complexity. This works to produce an altered material reality that restricts civil liberties. In doing so, distrust and suspicion are objectified through increased security and detention powers and public campaigns promoting surveillance. In order to undo the workings and effects of counter-terror discourse, anxiety and uncertainty must be challenged wherever found as the basis for decision making, in order to create alternative, rational modes of thinking about these problems. What is required is a new political opposition that values liberty and is not intimidated by uncertainty but which rather sees it as an opportunity. Such a shift would help to reveal the vacuity and lack of confidence that stifles British politics today and which both depends upon and simultaneously sustains a discourse of terror inculcated in fear and paranoia.

Critique Aaron Winter

Ortega Breton's argument, with examples taken from a medium that many either rely on for their knowledge or take for granted as entertainment is important, particularly considering what can and has been justified through fear in the name of counter-terrorism, Islamophobia, torture, illegal wars and the erosion of civil liberties. These have indeed provoked little or no resistance from a well entertained and misinformed public. The focus on British media, public and politics also marks this piece out as a significant contribution, in a context in which American global hegemony and imperialism have resulted in America's not only leading the 'war on terror' but also dominating popular culture. These two factors together have led to the American media's getting the great

majority of analysts' attention, most notably *24*. In addition to opening up the analysis to the media and discourses of a coalition partner, the chapter also comes at an interesting point in time as American attitudes have become less gung-ho and supportive, and more critical: President Obama has announced that he will be closing Guantanamo Bay and banning torture and Jack Bauer faced war crimes charges in Season 7 of *24*. Although more critical American documentaries, TV and film have been produced, the more critical and nuanced UK *Spooks* (renamed *MI5* for the American audience) has also been shown in the US. The question is, what does the appeal of British 'war on terror' TV and discourses in the USA say about, or how will they influence, the transformation of American 'war on terror' discourses? There is a sociological argument underlying Breton's analysis and providing its theoretical context: the Furedian argument that in recent years we have allegedly become more risk-averse and that a culture of fear has developed in which emotion has become a substitute for traditional politics, political engagement and analysis; and that this is encouraged and manipulated by political élites and the media. The Furedian discourse is popular amongst academics, think tanks, journalists and talking heads for its ability to frame, describe and criticize the 'current state of affairs'. The overall theoretical, historical and sociological discourse is that the period that we are living in is a period of decline, headed in the wrong direction and/or dominated by fear and emotion, and the war on terror not only illustrates this but manipulates and perpetuates it. Among phenomena cited, as well as fear of terrorism, are MMR and paedophiles. While I agree with Breton's argument – and he goes further than either Furedi, who treats fear and emotion as a symptom of political disengagement, or others, who represent fear as a de-contextualized framing mechanism, by looking at the interconnected functions of political discourses, emotional expression, identity and meaning – the underlying Furedian discourse raises a number of issues that should be discussed and debated. First, can the 'war on terror' be accommodated as part of that same phenomenon and trajectory, or is it not too exceptional and too international, particularly in respect of the more everyday and localized, or national, moral and political panics? Second, if what links them is the culture of fear, and if we accept that this does in

fact exist and that emotion is a dominant element of political and social discourse, is this something new (and if so, were previous generations tougher or more repressed than ours)? I would argue ‘no’ to both questions. There is a long history of moral panics and national political panics in the UK, as well as considerable scholarship about them: for instance, mods and rockers in Clacton, Brighton and other sites in the 1960s as discussed by the father of moral panic theory, Stanley Cohen; the ‘black mugger’ in the 1970s and 80s as discussed by Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy; the panics over MMR, paedophiles and ‘political correctness going mad’ in the 1990s; and ‘hoodies’ in the noughties. Or consider international political panics: for example, those over post-colonial West Indian and Asian immigration in the 1950s onwards, from, most notoriously, Enoch Powell’s ‘Rivers of Blood’ speech to fears of a nuclear apocalypse in the 1980s and terrorism in the noughties. This leads to the last question: is this fear that we are talking about emotional and ‘cultural’ or ideological and political? Fear can be seen through the lens of emotion, an ahistorical human psychological characteristic or capacity manifesting in response to historical events and developments – although Ortega Breton criticizes and rejects this analytical use. It can also be seen through the lens of politics and ideology, and more specifically populism. While fear is a dominant, if not constitutive, characteristic of populism, there are two others. First, the belief that the ‘people’ are being manipulated by ‘élites’ (government, media and finance) in order to serve their interests. Second, a nostalgic interpretation of history which claims that society and culture are in decline, having been betrayed by élites or outsiders. I would argue that while claiming to be analyzing and criticizing those who both produce and consume such fears of the present and fantasies of the past, the Furedian discourse actually replicates the populist one. Yet, unlike the populist, the Furedian discourse does not identify with the ‘people’ but criticizes them for their susceptibility to manipulation and their emotional responses to political problems and societal decline, seeing that characteristic as indicative of a parallel political decline. Obviously what we have in both cases is a case of reification: for the emotional populist it is the alleged source of the fear, be it the state, medical establishment or immigrant, and for Furedi it is fear and emotion (on the

level of both academic analysis and social criticism). There has been a long history of interpreting and displacing the political onto the emotional and psychological as Furedi and others do. Perhaps the best example, and most relevant in this context – especially in light of Ortega Breton’s use of the term ‘paranoid’ – would be Richard Hofstadter’s *The Paranoid Style in American Politics* and Martin Seymour Lipset and Earl Raab’s *The Politics of Unreason*. These scholars were critics of so-called radical politics and social decline in the post-war period, in defence of the liberal hegemonic order of the time and were part of what became known as neo-conservatism which provided the intellectual justification for Bush’s war(s). Therefore it is not surprising that they have re-emerged in the post- 9/11 context. It is in this sense that I would not only question the use of fear or emotion as an analytical category, as it has a great deal of political and ideological baggage.

Response Hugh Ortega Breton

Popular cultures are central to the discursive construction of the politics of securitization: so as well as retrospectively legitimizing this ideology, they actually constitute it. This, and its achievement, is what my work focuses on. The close attention to character relationships and ideas in popular texts demonstrates the fundamental psycho-cultural aspect of securitization, showing that the paranoid style is a coping technique responding to a crisis of identity and meaning in western societies. Hence the need to shore up and fortify boundaries between the self and others, both discursively and geopolitically.

Given the increased emotionality within the mediascape in the last fifteen years, in which we are all implicated, we are not experiencing a manipulation of fear and vulnerability by political élites and sympathetic experts, but rather a relational emotive engagement which resonates with the wider current western cultural perception of risk influenced discourses.

Winter's first question regarding the significance of British terror discourse drama in the context of the American audience and polity is a very interesting one but unfortunately outside the limits of this study because to answer it requires audience research. *Spooks* consolidates the Bush administration's perspective on terrorism by representing it uncritically from the perspective of an other, thus confirming to the American self the accuracy of its own perception of a threatening world. Second, and regarding 'moral panics': my argument concerns not that phenomenon, but the qualitatively different panics about *agency* of the 1990s and beyond, as distinguished by Furedi (but also going beyond him). Moral panics, when they do occur, are likely to be framed in the language of risk rather than moral decline because of a less confident and relativist approach, as was the case with the recent problematization of youth street culture and stabbings. Finally, Furedi's argument is indeed, I think, a socio-cultural one: for what it demonstrates is the importance of meaning in politics and society and how risk-conscious thinking and a therapeutic ethos has been utilized in the absence of a future-orientated political ideology. The emotionalized identity-discourses that fill the vacuum left by politics are historically over-determined by the growth of therapeutic culture, the expansion of mediatized culture, the growth of risk-thinking and the demise of modernist politics. In attempting to explain something of the mechanisms of emotional expression that constitute identities and ideas, however, I depart from Furedi in foregrounding the currently unconscious provenance of identity and meaning creation processes over the propagandistic use of emotions. For example, the constitution of the 'terrorism problem' as international entails strong unconscious processes of splitting, disassociation,

projection and denial in order to ignore the evidence that points to a nationally based cultural malaise. British counter terror discourse focuses predominantly on characteristics of terrorists that constitute them as other and as fearful, rather than on their embeddedness within a British emotionalized cultural milieu. The object-relations theory of analysis is the most appropriate tool here, precisely because of its utility in analyzing the emotional construction of perception when married to the socio-cultural concept of ‘structure of feeling’. It is through this theoretical synthesis – combined with the cultural grasp of Furedi’s work – that mediatized ‘thought-feelings’ (Williams 1977) are approached as historically constituted and constitutive of subjectivities, not only in the last decade but for the foreseeable future.

Notes

¹ See F. Furedi *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*, London: Routledge, 2004 and *Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*, London: Continuum, 2005.

² For example, D. Altheide *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, Lanham: Alta Mira Press, 2006; Furedi op. cit. and *Invitation to Terror: The Expanding Empire of the Unknown*, London: Continuum, 2007 respectively.

³ See E. Poole, *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2002, *passim*.

⁴ See Bulley 2008 'Foreign' Terror? London Bombings, Resistance and the Failing State in *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* Vol.10 No.3 August.

⁵ *News at Ten*, 21 August 2006 (ITN)

⁶ See R. Jackson, R., *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005, *passim*.

⁷ See for example UK Opposition leader David Cameron, 15 November 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6151602.stm>; Martin Bright, *New Statesman* 8 November 2007, <<http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/martin-bright/2007/11/terrorism-legislation>>; Amnesty International Report 2007, <http://www.amnesty.org.uk/news_details.asp?NewsID=17360>; Peter Osborne *The Independent* 15 February 2006, <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/the-politics-of-fear-or-how-tony-blair-misled-us-over-the-war-on-terror-466623.html>>; Wole Soyinka, *Reith Lectures 2004*,

<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith2004/lectures.shtml>>; Adam Curtis *The Power of Nightmares*, 14th January 2005, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/3755686.stm>>; Furedi, *Culture of Fear*, op. cit. and Altheide, op. cit.

⁸ G. Mythen and S. Walklate S. 'Communicating the terrorist risk: harnessing a culture of fear?', *Crime Media Culture* 2, 2006, p. 138.

⁹ E. Manningham Buller, Head of MI5, June 2003; BBC1 *10 O'Clock News*, 5 November 2007, statement by Jonathan Evans, Director General, MI5; Channel 4, 2007. *Dispatches: Undercover Mosque* Tx:15-01-07 2000hrs C4, Hardcash Productions Ltd. 2007 (Filmed summer 2006). Investigative documentary including secret filming using hidden cameras in a Birmingham mosque. This form of investigative journalism is underpinned by an overt 'will to reveal'; to get under appearances to show 'the truth'. The programme is a presentation of this audio-visual surveillance footage, published DVDs and 'expert' academic opinion as evidence. The programme featured the expression of homophobic and sexist opinions and the religious and financial connections between some Islamic organisations and Saudi Arabia.

¹⁰ News at Ten 16 August 2006 (ITN)

¹¹ See especially D. Meltzer, 'Terror, persecution, dread - a dissection of paranoid anxieties', *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49, 1968, pp.396-400. The emotions he included in the category 'paranoid anxieties' are terror; confusion; 'nameless dread'; catastrophic anxiety; persecution; hopelessness; despair and helplessness.

¹² See H. Segal, *The Work of Hanna Segal: A Kleinian Approach to Clinical Practice*, Jason Aronson: Free Associations, 1986.

¹³ See Note 11, Meltzer, op. cit.

¹⁴ The fictionality of this example does not detract from its importance here. In many ways, there are echoes between the construction of news narratives and those of fiction. *Spooks* writers use actual news and political events to shape their narratives, increasing their rhetorical and emotive force. In turn these stories bolster or reinforce the narratives shown in news by replicating them. By adding an additional personal and intelligence service point of view suspicion of the omissions of news stories expresses paranoia about the facticity of the news genre.

¹⁵ *Dirty War* 5:03-5:22 minutes.

¹⁶ News at Ten on 16th August 2006 (ITN)

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *News at Ten* Tuesday 11th November 2002 (ITN)

¹⁹ ibid. See in this connection Chapter 5 by Fran Cetti.

²⁰ *10 O'clock News* 5 November 2007 (BBC)

Appendix: Programmes used

***10 O'clock News* 5 November 2007 (BBC)**

A statement by the new head of MI5, an expert on Al Qaeda and international terrorism, focused on the problem of youth being radicalized in this country: he said there were 2,000 terror suspects in the UK and claimed that Pakistan and Somalia were the areas with the highest concentration of extremist cells. The report focused on the importance of networks and the internet in recruiting new terrorists and featured interviews with Anas Altikriti of the British Muslim Initiative and Dr Sally Leivesley, a security analyst.

***News at Ten* 21 August 2006 (ITN)**

The investigation of the alleged liquid bomb plane plot; this was the first time information was released on the 10 August arrests. It was also notable because the police presented it as displaying an unusual amount of transparency of an investigation. It appeared in a late-night

bulletin after ten days of regular updates and discussion. So it appears within a well developed discourse of the potential danger of this plot. This was the headline story in a programme that featured seven stories, five of which concerned relationships with Pakistanis, perhaps an unconscious attempt to solidify all aspects of self-other differentiation together.

News at Ten 16 August 2006 (ITN)

Directly addresses the anxiety of authorities in responding to alleged threats in the aftermath of the arrests that foiled a plot to blow up transatlantic flights (the headline story, *Climate of Fear*). This story covers a false security alert on a transatlantic flight, a stowaway who managed to get to USA secretly in a plane and a report speculating on the number of suspected British terrorists training in Pakistan.

News at Ten Tuesday 11 November 2002 (ITN)

In the aftermath of the Bali bombing, Prime Minister Tony Blair gave a speech informing the public that security forces were on high alert and regularly obtained evidence suggesting possible terrorist attacks. He talked about 'a new type of war' he thought could be won but at a price and he warned everyone to be vigilant but to not panic. The

second half of the report features speculation on different forms of possible terrorist attack: germ, nuclear and poison gas.

***Spooks* (David Wolstencroft, Kudos BBC 2002-present): Season Two, Programme Two (2003)**

Available at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/spooks/>>.

Working with an Algerian agent, the MI-5 team attempt to uncover a plot to explode suicide bombs originating in a mosque in Birmingham. The programme centres on the relationship developed with the Algerian agent who goes undercover at the mosque and the perceived risk in carrying out such a strategy after losing their first undercover agent. The programme also features a generational conflict between the moderate older Muslim community leader and the younger, radical Muslims perceived to be influenced by the leadership of a foreign, radical cleric.

***Spooks op. cit.:* Season Four Programme Four (2005)**

Available at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/spooks/>>.

The team attempts to prevent a terrorist attack in London by convincing a known terrorist to become a double agent. Adam goes undercover as a Syrian on an illegal immigrant truck attempting to enter the UK in order to make contact with the terrorist. After

apprehending the man, the team mistakenly decide to trust him to interrogate a foreign dignitary suspected of terrorist involvement. Their strategy fails when the terrorist murders him. The programme explores the personal motivations of terrorists.

***Dirty War* (Dan Percival, BBC/HBO 2004)**

Dirty War tells the story of a nuclear bomb attack in the heart of London. It was broadcast on 26 September 2004 (UK) and 24 January 2005 (USA) and is also available as a DVD. There are four subplots, which come together with the explosion of a 'dirty bomb': the making of the bomb, the fire fighters' morale and safety; the politician's quandary over preparedness and reassurance-panic; and the Muslim detective's discovery of the plot. It has a number of key characteristics that define it as tending predominantly towards a paranoid mode of expression by taking for granted certain themes in the discourse on terrorism and representing a sense of vulnerability and the destruction caused by an attack. *Dirty War* represents a well developed condemnation of a lack of preparedness to nuclear attack, focused on senior government, alongside a particular depressive or counter-paranoid understanding of why terrorist acts occur. *Dirty War* prioritizes the representation of prevention of attack through

investigation, and disagreements between emergency services and government. It represents the urban British (London as symbolising Britain) "self" as the victim of malevolent persecution and the government's general mismanagement of relationships with the public and Muslims in particular.

Bibliography

Altheide, D.L. (2002) *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Clarke, S., Hoggett, P. and Thompson, S. (eds)(2006). *Emotion, Politics & Society*, London: Palgrave.

Dunant, S. & Porter, R. (eds.) (1996) *The Age of Anxiety*. London: Virago.

Fairbairn, W.R.D. (1952) *Psychoanalytic Studies of the Personality*, London: Tavistock Publications Limited and Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Furedi, F. (1992) *Mythical Past, Elusive Future, History and society in an Anxious Age*, London: Pluto Press.

(2005a) *Culture of Fear: Risk Taking and the Morality of Low Expectation*, London: Continuum. Revised edition first published: 2002. First published 1997, London: Cassell.

(2005b) *Politics of Fear*, London: Continuum.

(2007) *Invitation to Terror*, London, Continuum.

Hall, S. (ed.) (1997) *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, London: The Open University and Sage Publications.

Hofstadter, R. (1964) The Paranoid Style in American Politics in *Harper's Magazine* November pp.77-86. Url: [The Paranoid Mentality](#)
Date accessed: 11/02/2005.

Klein, M. (1946) Notes On Some Schizoid Mechanisms in (1997) *Envy & Gratitude and other works 1946-63*, London: Vintage. pp. 2-21.

Layton, L, Hollander, N.C. & Gutwill, (eds.) (2006) *Despair and Hope in a Culture of Denial in Psychoanalysis, Class and Politics: Encounters in the Clinical Setting*. London: Routledge.

Melley, T. (1999) *Empire of Conspiracy: The Culture of Paranoia in Post-war America*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Meltzer, D. (1968) Terror, Persecution, Dread-A Dissection of Paranoid Anxieties. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 49. pp.396-400.

Meltzer, D. (1998) *The Kleinian Development*. London. Karnac Books

Mythen & Walklate, (2006) Communicating the terrorist risk: Harnessing a culture of fear? in *Crime Media Culture* Volume 2(2) 123-142.

Ogden, T.H. (1979) On Projective Identification, *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* Volume 60. pp. 357-373.

O'Donnell (2000) *Latent Destinies: Cultural Paranoia and Contemporary US Narrative*, Durham; London: Duke University Press.

O'Malley, P. (2004) *Risk, Uncertainty and Government*, London: Routledge Cavendish

O'Malley (2006) 'Criminology and Risk', in G. Mythen and S. Walklate (eds) *Beyond the Risk Society: Critical Reflections on Risk and Human Security*. Berkshire: Open University Press, pp.43-60

Parish, J. & Parker, M. (eds.) (2001) *The Age of Anxiety: conspiracy theory and the human sciences*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Poole, E. (2002) *Reporting Islam: Media Representations of British Muslims*. London. I.B. Tauris.

Rothstein, H, Huber, M and Gaskell, G. (2006) A theory of risk colonization: the spiralling regulatory logics of societal and institutional risk, *Economy and Society* Volume 35 Number 1 pp.91-112

Said, E.W. (1978) *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books

(1997) *Covering Islam: How the media and the experts determine how we see the rest of the world*, London: Vintage (fully revised edition with new introduction).

Segal, H. (1957) Notes on Symbol Formation. *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 38, 391-397.

Walklate, S. (ed.)(2007) *Handbook of Victims and Victimology*, Willan Publishing.

Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zizek, S. (2002) *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, London: Verso.