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Communicating the terrorist risk: Harnessing a culture of fear?

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Abstract

Following the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, Madrid and London, state agencies have been bound up with the problem of how to effectively communicate the risk of terrorism to the general public. This article charts the UK government's attempts to engage in this process and illustrates how the communication of the terrorist risk meshes into broader cultural formations of crime and (in)security. Our analytical framework utilizes the risk society as the scene in which governmental strategies are parcelled up and unpacked. It is posited that the framing of the terrorist problem through the political discourse of 'new terrorism' has built upon and escalated a cultural climate of fear and uncertainty. At the level of political communication, it will be elucidated that media representations of the terrorist threat have served to further embed discourses of responsabilization. In our view such processes not only articulate a reduced notion of safety, they also pave the way for the simplistic construction of a non-white 'terroristic other' that has negative consequences for ethnic minority groups in the UK.

Key words

new terrorism; politics of fear; responsabilization; risk

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we examine some of the key problems and issues that have emerged around the communication of the terrorist risk in the UK since 2001. We wish to explore two fundamental and interconnected questions. First of all, how is the political debate about terrorism being constructed? Second, which wider conceptual questions does the politicization of terrorism raise about the way in which the state communicates with the public?¹ In order to explore these questions, we begin by locating our discussion within the wider ambit of the risk society thesis. From here, we situate dominant discourses

around the constitution and effects of new terrorism within the current cultural and political climate, focusing upon the way in which 'new terrorism' has been socially shaped by the state and (re)presented within the mass media. Tracking government communications about the terrorist threat, we go on to evaluate the veracity and efficacy of the information offered to the public. It is our contention that – be it inadvertent or purposive – distinct understandings about the nature of 'new terrorism' have been created, and these understandings have themselves impacted upon both public opinion and the formation of domestic and international security policy. Drawing upon particular examples, we posit that communication of the terrorist threat has been ambiguous, patchy and ill conceived. Further, we contend that government communications have served to individualize the risk of attack, focusing on the functions and responsibilities of citizens rather than the security duties of the state. Utilizing the concept of responsabilization we argue that these processes have exacerbated the general climate of uncertainty recognized by Bauman (2005) and made more repressive legal responses a socially acceptable possibility.

RISK, SECURITY AND NEW TERRORISM

Much has been made of the cultural ubiquity of risk within contemporary society and the ways in which risk pervades the lived experience of individuals in western cultures. Within the literature, it has been noted that risk filters through a range of cultural practices and experiences in contemporary society, including work, relationships, food consumption, leisure activities, security and personal health (see Beck, 1992; Culpitt, 1999; Caplan, 2000; Denney, 2005; Mythen, 2005a). The surge of interest in risk has led to the concept becoming a key term of reference for academic debate. Indeed, mimicking the rotation towards culture in the 1980s, it would not be stretching the imagination to talk about the 'risk turn' within the social sciences. In perhaps the best-known contribution to risk theory, Beck (1992) emphasizes both the destructive impacts of risk on the lived environment and the transformatory potential of risk within the public sphere. In a nutshell, the risk society thesis suggests that the axis of social distribution within capitalist societies is rotating away from positive problems of acquiring 'goods' (e.g. income, health care, education, housing) towards negative issues of avoiding 'bads' (e.g. crime, environmental pollution, AIDS and terrorism). Whereas the distribution of goods may be sectoral – some win, some lose – the distribution of bads has universal effects. In short, everybody loses. Accordingly, Beck (1992) holds the view that the pervasiveness of risk – both at the level of harm and cognisance – has facilitated a shift from the acquisition of social goods to the avoidance of social bads. This ideational transformation is encouraged by the intensification of media interest in risk conflicts. For Beck the media serve to 'socially explode' risk issues which would otherwise be secreted from the public. What is more, these fluctuations in media and political discourse have important ramifications for modes of communication between institutions and individuals. Instead of appealing to collective desires for the good life, the language of politics increasingly taps into individualized insecurities and fears. As Rigakos and Hadden (2002) note:

high capitalism once regarded subjects as class members and thus had capital and profit, i.e. class interest, as its aim and foundation, whereas in post-industrial, fragmented, risk societies, institutions now engage in risk communication formats to avoid bads rather than acquire goods, thus bringing daily reckoning and planning down to an individual as opposed to a class level. (p. 63)

At a surface level, this argument has some appeal. It is certainly true to say that the bads recited by Beck (1992) have arrested the attention of politicians, the public and the media in recent years, raising public sensitivity to risk. However, what remains to be explored in detail is the impact the turn towards risk as a means of interpreting and organizing experience has had on individuals. Although several commentators have refuted the suggestions of a material shift in risk distribution in western cultures, few would dispute that the idea of risk has become an increasingly important driver of policy for the state, private businesses and NGOs (see Scott, 2000; Mythen, 2004).

Nowhere is the 'risk turn' more apparent than in the current raft of policy initiatives designed to combat terrorism. In the climate of uncertainty in the UK since the July 2005 suicide bombings it is easy to see why terrorism has featured as an academic and political football. This said, it is worth recognizing that, prior to these events, several theorists had heralded 9/11 as a historical watershed that ushered in a new phase of political struggle, legislative change and military conflict (see Kellner, 2002; McLaren and Martin, 2004; Welch, 2003). Since this time, terrorism has climbed sharply up the political agenda (see Curtis, 2004; Furedi, 2005; Rothe and Muzzatti, 2005). A string of high profile incidents around the globe, including the Madrid train bombings, attacks in Bali and the school siege in Beslan have catapulted terrorism forward as a crucial issue. At the same time, entrenched conflicts in the Middle East – most notably the Arab–Israeli conflict in Palestine and the 'insurgency' in Iraq – have been sucked into the broader question of how nation states can best manage 'new terrorism'. A variety of commentators have been keen to mark off the activities of radical Islamic networks as fundamentally distinct from the operations of traditional terrorist groups. In the aftermath of 9/11, politicians, political journalists, academics and security experts began to talk excitedly about the emergence of a new form of terrorism.

Although academic debates about the formation of 'new' or 'post-modern' forms of terrorism predate the events of 9/11 (see Lesser et al., 1999; Lacquer, 2000), from this point forth the expression 'new terrorism' began to be used as a popular currency among journalists and politicians seeking to distinguish between the activities of Islamic groups such as Al Qaeda and those of traditional terrorist organizations such as ETA, the IRA and the UVF. A cluster of factors are said to differentiate new from traditional forms of terrorism. Due to a combination of global reach, fluid formation and extensive weapons capability we are told that groups such as Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah are practising radically different and dangerous types of terrorism (Vaugh, 2004). While organizations located in Ireland, Spain (Barbarett, 2005) and Italy (Melossi and Selmini, 2001) have historically operated locally under united ideological objectives and strict hierarchies, new terrorist groups are defined by their amorphous aims, disparate organizational structure and capacity to strike across different continents (Morgan, 2004). Rather than being

locally self-financed, new terrorist groups are funded by a diverse range of sympathetic sources around the globe, including private financiers, charities and NGOs (Commission Report, 2004: 57). What is more, the new terrorism is said to be more threatening to human life, with active terrorist cells seeking to launch unannounced and spectacular 'high-lethality acts' which directly target civilians (see Lesser et al., 1999: 42; Field, 2005). These debates within security studies are highly significant given that both international military strategy and domestic political legislation recently enacted in the UK assume and presume that the nature of the terrorist threat has changed markedly in the last decade.

In response to the debate about new terrorism, some academics have been stirred to argue that the 2001 attacks on America serve as a break point in social and political relations. In this oeuvre, Beck (2002b: 9) has talked of living in a 'terroristic world risk society', characterized by political disorientation, and perpetual uncertainty: 'there is a sinister perspective for the world after September 11th. It is that uncontrollable risk is now irredeemable and deeply engineered into all the processes that sustain life in advanced societies' (Beck, 2002a: 46). Indeed, the view that there is something unique and historically significant about the events of 9/11 has been echoed in public opinion findings, with over 75 per cent of British people believing that 'the world has changed forever' as a result of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington (Worcester, 2001: 7). As Jenks (2003) posits, these events appear to have constituted some form of universal transgression. This said, other thinkers have been more circumspect about the historical significance of 9/11, resisting the temptation to see this incident as a critical interregnum. Furedi (2002), for example, points out that, despite the spectacular quality of the strikes on the United States, terrorism is a culturally ubiquitous phenomenon. Further, amidst fears about sophisticated terrorist attacks involving chemical, biological or radiological weapons, it needs to be remembered that the 9/11 attacks were 'in many ways an old fashioned act of terror, executed with low-tech facilities by a small number of zealots driven by unrestrained hatred' (p. 17). Contra Beck, Furedi believes that the current preoccupation with terrorism is symptomatic of a broader trend of focusing on the negative and destructive features of the modern age. A burgeoning 'culture of fear' has taken root in western cultures, promoted by state institutions and exacerbated by those working within the media and security industries. At the very least in the context of the discussion here – and this clearly chimes more with Furedi than Beck – it needs to be acknowledged that terrorism is a historically embedded entity, regardless of whether it is prefixed as 'new'.

Putting aside the different perspectives on the wider social significance of 'new terrorism', as far as political rhetoric is concerned we can identify a clear directive to 'think security' in the years that have passed since 9/11 (de Lint and Virta, 2004: 466). The British Prime Minister has gone as far as stating that the threat of new terrorism is comparable with that presented by Nazism in the mid-20th century (Vaugh, 2004: 5). Meanwhile, representatives of security forces involved in counterterrorism, including the police and security experts, have stressed the everyday geography of the terrorist threat (see Cowan, 2004: 3). As Beck (2001) muses, 'what is politically crucial is ultimately not the risk itself but the perception of the risk. What men fear to be real is real in its consequences – fear creates its own reality'. In the UK, there has been a heightened state of security alert since the events of 9/11 with the space between 'what is' and 'what might

be' seemingly narrowing. It is important to stress that the command to think security extends way beyond the ideological and symbolic. The prevailing discourse of (in)security has been used to justify a number of political decisions that have produced – and are reproducing – material effects. At an economic level, the British government was stung into action by the attacks on America, increasing spending on national security, beefing up security measures, passing through anti-terrorist legislation and orchestrating a campaign to inform the public about the terrorist threat.² Since 9/11 the methods and means of domestic security have become a focal subject of political debate and contestation (see de Lint and Virta, 2004; McLaren and Martin, 2004). Following on from the attacks on London transport networks, security concerns have become paramount for nery politicians – witness the heated debates about the controversial 2005 Terrorism Bill. The British state's capacity to not just think but *act* security is embedded in the rejected proposal to detain terrorist suspects for up to 90 days and to close down mosques that incite racial hatred. If we add to this the findings reported by Field (2005) that 6 per cent of Muslims in this country in the UK believe that the bombing attacks on 7 July 2005 were justified – and a further 23 per cent registered either 'a little' or 'a lot' of sympathy with the feelings and motives of those who carried out the attacks – there appear to be a set of thorny and as yet unresolved issues around social inequalities, cultural integration and citizenship that need attending to at a political level. These issues mean that processes of communication are ever more crucial for a government committed to 'thinking security'. We shall now turn to consider the ways in which the UK government has set about communicating the terrorist threat.

COMMUNICATING RISK: MAKING UP THE 'WAR AGAINST TERRORISM'

Communicating risk to the public is increasingly central to the everyday functioning of the state (see Culpitt, 1999; Kemshall, 2002). Historically, a number of cases of poor governmental communications in the UK have led to strained relations between politicians and the public, resulting in a general culture of distrust (see Allan, 2002; Mythen, 2002; Wales and Mythen, 2002). In response to this trust deficit, over the last few years the UK government has sought to emphasize the value of effective communications in reassuring the public and winning back trust. The Strategy Unit Report (2002: 3) – a document prepared in response to public demands for the government to be more open about risk issues – urges that state agencies become more open and transparent and engage in dialogue with stakeholder groups in order to earn and maintain public trust. This message has been reinforced in recent times with direct reference to communications about terrorism: 'ever since 9/11, the Government has made it a priority to be open and honest with the public about the level and nature of the threat we face'.³

Of course, the range and depth of information made available to the public will in part be dictated by security concerns. Quite legitimately, the state and its associated agencies will not wish to impart information that could be helpful to terrorist groups

wishing to threaten national security. Yet, even factoring this caveat into the communicative equation, there is a critical disjuncture between the principle of transparency and the present flow of information about terrorism. The Strategy Unit Report (2002) clearly flags up the need for government, in times of uncertainty, to provide the public with information that can be relied upon to be open and trustworthy. Nevertheless, alongside the front-stage dissemination of information about terrorism, there have been a number of instances of national security issues being leaked back-stage. The process of leaking by government sources has been particularly notable in relation to possible strikes on the British mainland, with the media reporting a series of plots hatched by fundamentalist Islamic networks. These foiled plans allegedly include the crashing of a plane into Canary Wharf Tower, the launching of surface-to-air missiles at Heathrow, explosive strikes on the Houses of Parliament and the detonation of a bomb at Old Trafford football stadium. It remains unclear how accurate the intelligence that generated these claims was, nor indeed is it clear how, where or why this information was passed on to journalists by the government or security services. Nevertheless, it is probable that each revelation of a foiled plot – be it based on credible information or otherwise – has potentially served to ratchet up levels of public concern about ‘new terrorism’. What is more, the leaking of such information to the media – or, at the least, state intransigence in dismissing inaccurate media representations – gives cause for concern about the contradictions within government strategy. Given that Cabinet has the power to issue D-notes to pull the plug on information that presents a threat to national security, such leaks contradict the espoused policy of reassuring the public about the terrorist threat. As we shall see, it is probable that the UK government’s inaction in countering erroneous information about the terrorist threat has served to amplify rather than attenuate public anxiety.

In some respects, the dissemination of information about possible attacks may be seen as an opportunity for government to demonstrate that its intelligence agencies are operating efficiently and that an appropriate level of preparedness is in place in the event of a terrorist incident. Indeed, this was doubtless the case in relation to the drafting in of soldiers bearing heavy artillery at Heathrow Airport. However, a lack of clarity and precision about the veracity of media reports resulted in confusion and undue public concern. In this regard the Old Trafford imbroglio is even more telling. On 19 April 2004, over 400 police officers raided a number of houses and businesses in the Manchester area, arresting ten people who were interrogated for several days and subsequently released without charge. During the time in which the suspects were detained the *Sun* newspaper ran with the front-page headline ‘Man U Suicide Bomb’. The inside story titled ‘Exclusive: Man United Suicide Blasts Foiled’ gave information about how two bombers had planned to sit in separate parts of the ground to detonate their bombs in order to maximize casualties (see Osborne, 2006a: 2). As the story gathered pace, Greater Manchester Police called a press conference in which it stated the following: ‘We are confident that the steps that we have taken to date have significantly reduced any potential threat in the Greater Manchester area . . . Greater Manchester Police and Manchester United Football Club have put in place extra security measures to reassure the public of the safety of both matches’ (p. 3). It later transpired that the Old Trafford bomb plot was a total fabrication leaked by unofficial police sources to the press (p. 3). Greater Manchester

Police had found two used ticket stubs for different parts of the football ground kept by one of the Kurdish suspects detained – himself a Manchester United fan – as a souvenir. It was this finding which fantastically mushroomed out into the apparent unveiling of a major terrorist conspiracy. In the Old Trafford case, the government resolutely refused to confirm or deny the accuracy of intelligence suggesting that the stadium was the subject of a terrorist plot. The danger with such an ambivalent communicative strategy is that all too easily risk rumours begin to attach to a rolling narrative that gains cultural momentum. Again, in the Old Trafford case, the local media were quick to speculate about the possibility that Manchester Airport and the Trafford Centre may also be prime targets for terrorist groups. In so far as it is easy to select specific examples of poor communicative practice, the question remains as to how communications about the terrorist threat have been converted into meaningful understandings by members of the public. Although this is indisputably an issue requiring empirical investigation, one possible way of framing the key conceptual questions at stake is to examine the ways in which fear has been harnessed as political capital.

Having aligned itself with the US – both in terms of international military policy and domestic counter-terrorist strategy – the UK government has sought to gain public support for international military excursions and the tightening-up of national law and order measures. In an attempt to gain consent for such practices, politicians and senior civil servants have established and drawn upon the discourse of ‘new terrorism’. This discourse is ingrained in the language used by government officials and the political ideals expressed through crime, security and immigration policy. In the words of Tony Blair: ‘the rules of the game have changed’ (cited in Osborne, 2006b: v). Post-9/11 a new language of global (in)security has been adopted by senior politicians, security experts and news journalists. The lexicon of the ‘war against terrorism’ depicts a titanic battle between good and evil waged against ‘terror networks’ and ‘rogue states’ (Mythen, 2005b). The ‘war against terrorism’ is indubitably a battle for hearts and minds as well as a struggle against a determined enemy. To this end, what is surprising is the indeterminacy of the phrasology and the carelessness with which it has been applied. The very expression ‘war against terrorism’ is something of a misnomer, suggesting as it does the launching of hostilities against an abstract noun rather than an identifiable nation or nations. Despite this, the vocabulary of ‘new terrorism’ has been prolific and has drawn heavily on stock wartime metaphors: ‘even when the war is not a war . . . the same mechanisms of mobilization are used: a situation of national emergency, a common enemy, recourse to community/patriarchy and warrior/masculinity, mandatory inclusion of all irrespective of interest positions’ (Steinert, 2003: 281). In our eyes, the ‘war against terrorism’ seems not to consist of a coherent and precise set of achievable objectives. Rather, it relates to a potentially disparate collection of ideas, about – among other things – foreign policy, national security, warfare, electronic systems of monitoring and crime prevention. Thus, in the UK the ‘war against terrorism’ metaphor is not simply extending into national policies about immigration, detention, identity cards, policing and surveillance; it actually appears to be driving them (see Mythen and Walklate, 2005). As Steinert (2003: 266) reasons, it is not far fetched to suggest that regulating the consequences of crime and fighting an enemy have become one and the same thing.

It is to be expected that discourses of risk will not only be based on quantitative rationality, but also framed by ethical values and choices. Indeed, the criminological canon has sought to elucidate the ways in which risk rationalities embedded within the criminal justice system are the by-products of dominant political values and historically specific ideologies (Garland, 1990; Walklate, 1999; Sparks, 2001: 169; Hudson, 2003). Nevertheless, as we will argue shortly, there is a real need for the social sciences to rally against the snap judgements, unnecessary stereotyping and military vengeance that are vectored through the 'war against terrorism' discourse. Thinking more broadly, there is an ongoing need to guard against the introduction of legislation that falls below the standard of the liberties and freedoms that formally elected democratic governments purport to protect. At an international level, the stitching together of states and groups classified as aberrant is fuelling a generalized climate of fear and hostility. It is both illogical and ideologically dangerous to lump together states with distinct cultures and histories into a single villainous 'axis of evil'. In so far as the atrocities committed by Islamic fundamentalist groups in the United States, Bali and Madrid need to be condemned, it is specious to equate the actions of a tiny minority with the motivations of huge nation states, or the proclivities of different religious faiths. As Barnaby (2003: 11) reasons, public fears about terrorism are likely to be exacerbated by pronouncements by American and British leaders, connecting the 'rogue states' that form an 'axis of evil' (i.e. Iraq, Iran and North Korea) with international terrorist groups. Again, the discourse is fluid and stretchy, with 'rogue states' metamorphosing into 'outposts of tyranny'. Similarly, the nations targeted are subject to change, with the usual suspects recently having been joined by Cuba, Belarus and Zimbabwe. In the admixture that is the 'war against terrorism', connections and mutual interests are being suggested between nations and groups without recourse to publicly presented evidence. Suffice it to say, this runs sharply against the grain of the espoused philosophy of openness and transparency. Moreover, the 'if-you-had-seen-what-we-have-seen' appeal, erroneously employed around Iraq's supposed stockpiling of WMD, is unlikely to find favour with a sceptical public with low levels of trust in government.

It is clear that the media play an important role in influencing and shaping public perceptions of crime risks (Banks, 2005; Chadee and Ditton, 2005). As Furedi (2002) argues: 'the media . . . have become increasingly interested in the subject, and terms like "risk society" and "risk perception" now regularly feature in newspaper columns' (p. 5). The promotion and/or amplification of certain issues by the media can help set the agenda on a given issue and hence amplify or attenuate a sense of danger (Schlesinger et al., 1991; Kasperson and Kasperson, 1996; Philo, 1999). The news media are dependent upon eye-catching and sensational events, and often report on crises that appeal to both base instincts and a shared sense of morality. As Cottle (2005) posits, in certain instances national media outlets can serve to conduct a moral charge that ripples outwards to stakeholder groups in society. Although different media forms will convey messages in different ways, we would argue that there is a visible moral dimension at play in dominant (re)presentations of the terrorist risk. It is likely that the narrative framing of the terrorist threat has acted as a conduit for establishing what Peelo and Soothill (2000: 136) call 'mass endorsement of morality'. While this strategy is arguably more rooted in the news values embedded within the media production process than any ideological conspiracy,

the danger is that the representation of the terrorist threat becomes misaligned with the potential degree of harm: 'hardly a week goes by without a new initiative or exercise designed to prepare us for, or defend us against, an attack by Al Qaeda or the like . . . with every incremental reaction by the police or government, so our fear levels creep up another notch' (Duffy, 2003: 1). In both the UK and the USA, government officials have worked hard to keep terrorism high on the political and media agendas, particularly in times of relative calm. A good example of this is George Bush's revelation that Al Qaeda had intended to fly a plane into the tallest building on the west coast, the 73-storey Library Tower in Los Angeles. This planned attack, to be executed by members of Jemaah Islamiyah, was uncovered by intelligence services in 2002. Four years later, in February 2006, President Bush reported the terrorist plot in a press conference, prompting the Mayor of Los Angeles, Antonio Villaraigosa, to complain that this was the first he had heard about it (Webb, 2006).

Of course, the ways in which people respond to terrorist attacks such as 7/7 are only partly determined by the incident itself and/or the scale of the disaster. Acts of terrorism are accorded different meanings in line with what they culturally signify and represent. Although the effects of what Cohen (2002) has called 'meta-images of chaos' are yet to be fully understood, it is clear that terrorist attacks are given meaning through cultural, political, economic and social processes. Culturally proximate events – such as 9/11, 3/11 and 7/7 – become longstanding points of media and political reference, while others such as the Beslan siege in Northern Ossetia fade fast. Public responses to terrorism are shaped not solely by the nature of the emergency but also by pre-existing assumptions, underlying cultural values and political attitudes. The capacity of the mass media to cohere emotions and to appeal to moral notions of what a decent society should look like should not be understated (Cottle, 2005: 50). It does not take a seasoned social scientist to locate the politically loaded discursive construction of a Terrorist Other, pictured and framed through the lens of Anglo-American political elites. It is worth pointing out that, prior to 9/11, relatively little attention was given to the activities of Al Qaeda. Since this time, the Al Qaeda network and its frightening cluster of terrorist cells have received almost permanent political and media exposure. There is more than a sneaking suspicion that the vacuum left by the evaporation of the Cold War enemy has been eagerly filled by the new terrorist (see Curtis, 2004). The enhanced 'visibility' of Al Qaeda echoes Joffe's (1999) sentiments about shifting conceptions of the Other: 'in periods of crisis, when anxiety is raised, the out-group moves from being represented as mildly threatening, a challenge to the core values of the society, to being seen as the purveyor of chaos' (p. 23). Following the political line, dominant media representations of radical Islam have de-humanized and demonised in equal measure, encouraging the public to accept a separation between rational western citizens and a monstrous terrorist Other. This reductivist separation between good and evil is at the heart of George Bush Jr.'s appeal to the American public. In the 2006 State of the Union address, the president called for 'the end of tyranny', urging 'the enemies of freedom' to cease purveying 'an ideology of terror and death' (Bush, 2006). It is axiomatic to state that such either-or reasoning has knock-on consequences for attitudes towards human rights and civil responsibilities:

The balancing of rights has gone: the only rights that matter for most people are the safety rights of selves and loved ones. The sense of shared risk, shared responsibility has also gone: we cope with risk by a constant scanning of all with whom we come into contact to see whether or not they pose a threat to our security, and the only way we can operate this scanning is by adopting stereotypes of safe and risky kinds of people. (Hudson, 2003: 74)

As Hudson reasons, terrorism is an inherently complex and polymorphous phenomenon that should not be reduced to base-level political rhetoric. The Hobson's choice the public have been offered – 'either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists' – is, in reality, a non-choice, given that there is no real possibility of thinking in-between or out of kilter with the dominant position (Goh, 2004: 4). Naturally, the accentuation of difference leaves little room for rational attempts to understand the values, objectives and/or grievances of terrorists and instead reduces the terrorist to an inhuman object of hate. The presentation of the terrorist as abject and ultra-deviant meshes into a wider framework through which moral judgements are decided upon and retributive consequences dished out. Media and political construction of the non-white terroristic Other cannot be disassociated from misguided and unsavoury racist reprisals such as the six-fold increase in religious hate crimes in the three weeks following 7 July 2005.⁴

Following Garland (1996), Hudson (2003) notes that 'the range of harms responded to within the framework of the self has shrunk and the range of those responded to within the framework of criminologies of the other has expanded' (p. 203). Relating this general observation back to the functions of government, we can see how criminologies of the Other find their place within what Beck (2002a) has called the 'surveillance state', a body politically dominated by military and security concerns. The surveillance state is one which follows strict immigration procedures, polices its borders zealously and does not discourage xenophobia. While it would be stretching the imagination to claim that these descriptors perfectly apply to the British state, it is clear that current surveillance procedures have incongruent effects. The uneven regulatory impacts of strategies of regulation and surveillance is writ large through the seven-fold increase in the number of Asian people stopped and searched by the British Transport Police following the July 7th bombings (Dodd, 2005).

Having grounded our discussion within the wider framework of the risk society and outlined the key factors at play in the discursive formation of the 'war against terrorism' it is now necessary to explore the association between the language of terrorism and current government policy in the UK. Following on from this analysis, we go on to speculate on the cumulative impacts of these processes on public understandings of risk and everyday security strategies. In the conclusion, we consider the potential efficacy of government incursions and the more fundamental conceptual questions that the issues we have raised invite.

THE STATE, RESPONSIBILIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF FEAR

In addition to vindicating potentially repressive forms of legislation, it is also possible to discern how the ideology of 'new terrorism' demands that citizens are not only fearful of the terrorist Other, but also take on responsibility for managing their safety in the ever presence of this terrorist Other. Pertinent here is Garland's (2001) notion of an emergent 'culture of control' typified by the restructuring of criminal justice policy in the UK and the USA. By using the culture of control paradigm Garland conveys an understanding of the way in which the state has adapted to its failure to solve the problem of crime and in so doing has become centrally occupied with controlling crime, an issue that requires quite a different frame of reference. This process of adaptation has three strands to it: denial, acting-out, and responsabilization. In this article we have already considered some aspects of the first two of these strands. Aspects of denial and acting-out are self-evident in the calls for tightening of the laws in relation to terrorism on the one hand and the emotive language used to denounce terrorist activities and reassure the public on the other. However, strategies of responsabilization arguably have a far more subtle edge. Garland develops this idea as a way of depicting the kinds of policies that encourage citizens into 'victimization avoidance' (Karmen, 1990) and thus invite them to work in partnership with crime-control agencies to ensure their safekeeping. As we shall see, it is possible to discern such a strategy of responsabilization being used in efforts to harness a culture of fear, minimally associated with the criminal socially excluded Other, maximally the new terrorist (Hughes, 2004; Greer and Jewkes, 2005).

Not only does the reductivist thinking associated with the 'war against terrorism' harness our fears, it also invites us to be involved in managing the terrorist risk as a logical step towards ensuring our own safe keeping. In order to fully understand the likely nature of public anxiety generated by the exchanges delineated above it is important to recognize that fears about terrorism are pieced together via cultural and linguistic interactions as well as becoming real through physiological and psychological processes. As Tudor (2003) points out, fear is a macro and a micro response, determined by everyday habitat, cultural practices and social structures on the one hand, and bodies, personalities and social subjects on the other. It follows that, in order to properly grasp fears about terrorism, we need to attend to the cultural networks through which such fears are constructed and actualized. Fear is not free floating. Rather, it is indexed to self-resources, individual experiences and the formation of coping strategies (Lee, 2001; Salecl, 2004). Further, as with crime in general, fears about terrorism will be related to locale and bound up with understandings of place (Banks, 2005; Chadee and Ditton, 2005). The complex dynamics that constitute 'fear' mean that managing it is likely to be a messy process, as Burkitt's (2005) analysis of emotional public responses post the Madrid bombings shows. This said, articulations of anxiety that extend – and are reinforced – over long periods of time are likely to both condition and increase levels of fear among the public. As Welch (2003) persuasively argues, in the USA and the UK, the 'war on/against terror/ism' has deployed a range of discursive techniques. The discourse of 'new terrorism' invites fear at many

different levels; from for example, constructions of risky objects and activities (e.g. airplanes, the underground, shopping, travel) through to the categorization of dangerous classes, creeds and countries. In the latter case, sections of the UK media have bundled together 'asylum seekers', 'economic migrants', and 'illegal immigrants', indicating the potential for any or all of these groups to be inclusive of, or the breeding ground for, terrorists (see Hughes, 2004). But how do these different techniques of harnessing fear join up with the process of responsabilization?

As Garland (2001: 126) suggests 'the state's new strategy is not to command and control but rather to persuade and align, to organise, to ensure that other actors play their part', and key to this encouragement 'are publicity campaigns targeted at the public as a whole' (p. 125). In the case of the UK, it is important to note that such notions of 'choice' and 'responsibility' are firmly entrenched within New Labour ideology. More precisely, the New Labour view of the active citizen as an independent agent, contrasts sharply with the undesirable dependent subject reliant on the state (see Clarke, 2005: 450). One good example of responsabilization in action is the 2004 emergency advice campaign implemented to educate citizens about what to do in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) terrorist attack. As part of a drive to inform the public about how to respond to emergency situations the UK government launched a national campaign to prepare the public for major incidents. A 22-page emergency advice booklet was launched by government in association with safety pressure groups and the Association of Chief Police Officers. The booklet was delivered to 25 million households at an estimated cost of £8 million, made available on the internet and supplemented by advertisements on radio and television. The booklet provides first aid advice, tips on stocking up with provisions and emergency contact numbers. From a governmental perspective, the dissemination of the booklet was driven by the desire to inform citizens of effective measures for self-protection and to reassure the public about the steps being taken to protect against terrorism.⁵ Figure 1 is extracted from the government advice leaflet 'Preparing for Emergencies: What You Need to Know' (2004).

We would argue that the balance of information in the emergency advice booklet is skewed towards the individual – 'what you can do to protect yourself and your community against risk' – and away from the state – 'what we are doing to protect you'. The advice leaflet is decidedly mute about the mobilization and organization of emergency services, information about which agencies would be responsible for which types of incident and the range of equipment and resources available to attend to emergency situations. Moreover, there are several areas in which positive and reassuring information might have been communicated. For example, the public have heard very little about the government's overall counterterrorist strategy, headway made in the so-called 'war against terrorism' or advice about different types of terrorist threat. Instead, the advice offered tends to individualize emergency situations, to responsabilize people for their own risk management rather than clearly laying out institutional security strategies.

It is important to emphasize that the process of responsabilization is connected not only to changes in political strategy, but also forms part of a broader macro-social shift in the relationship between the individual and the state. Commenting on wider changes in public policy, Young (1999) has traced a move from the inclusive to the exclusive

society, heightened in recent years by what he refers to as 'vindictiveness' (see Young, 2003 about the rise in religious hate crimes referenced earlier). This shift provides the space in which intolerance can breed and fear of the Other (vindictiveness) can manifest itself. This shift has resonance not only for the character of criminal justice, but also for the balance of responsibility for risk between citizens and institutions. Responsibilization

helping to prevent a terrorist attack

"All information received by the hotline is researched and investigated before any police action is taken. Let us decide whether the information you have is valuable or not. We still very much need your help to reduce the danger posed by terrorists. Indeed, a number of serious terrorist crimes have been thwarted thanks to the eyes and ears of the public."

Peter Clarke, Deputy Assistant Commissioner
ACPO National Co-ordinator of Terrorist Investigations



You can call the Police Anti-Terrorism Hotline on 0800 789 321. All calls will be treated in confidence. If you believe there is an immediate threat to life, call 999.

You may have vital information. If you hear, see or come across anything that may be linked with terrorist activity, please tell the police. They want to hear from you.

Terrorists need...

A place to live: Are you suspicious about any tenants or guests?

To plan: Have you seen anyone pay an unusual amount of attention to security measures at any location?

Money: Individuals may set up bogus bank accounts, copy credit cards, return goods for large cash refunds.

Equipment: If you are a retailer, do you have any cause to be suspicious about anything being bought?

Possible signs of terrorism

Our ability to prevent a terrorist attack does not depend on the authorities alone. How well we cope also depends on you.

Links to useful information and advice can be found at www.preparingforemergencies.gov.uk



"Countering terrorism is MIS's highest priority. Working closely with our law enforcement and intelligence partners, we strive to keep the UK safe and make it difficult for terrorists to operate here. But public vigilance, good sense and co-operation are just as important and essential components of the UK's response as a whole." Eliza Manningham-Buller, Director General of the Security Service (MIS)

Terrorist bomb attacks mostly happen in public places, especially where people gather or travel.

- Be vigilant
- Look out for suspicious behaviour, vehicles or packages
- Do not hesitate to tell the police

Keep alert

Public safety is our first priority in all decisions about public information or warnings. It is the Government's policy to issue warnings when the public can take action in response to a specific or credible threat. Such warnings will also provide further information that will help the public respond effectively.

Government policy on terrorism

FIGURE 1 Government advice leaflet

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then is not confined to crime and crime prevention. It reflects and taps into the ongoing, and changing relationship between the citizen and the state that is ingrained within the shift from liberal to neo-liberal democracy. As Jessop (2002) has convincingly argued, this kind of movement reflects a move from the determined state to the hegemonic state, typified by the predominance of 'hegemonic projects that seek to reconcile the particular and the universal by linking the nature and purposes of the state into a broader – but always selective – political, intellectual, and moral vision of the public interest, the good society, the commonweal, or some analogous principle of societalisation' (p. 42). As Hunt (2003) points out:

Responsibilization is always double sided. It lays down a norm against which individuals, groups, or individuals may evaluate their own conduct. But it also opens up the possibility of moralisation in so far as others may seek to hold individuals to that standard, regardless of whether or not they have accepted the responsibility. In this sense responsibilization always involves moralisation. (p. 183)

It is within this moral vision of the good society or the commonwealth – and the ideological processes of moralization (who is and who is not Other) that underpin this – that various forms of responsibilization bid us to do a portion of the state's safety work not only in keeping ourselves safe but also in evaluating the conduct of others (Clarke, 2005: 452). As Hudson (2003: 65) reasons, suspect individuals and groups do not have to perpetrate crimes to be identified as criminal. In the same way, respectable citizens do not have to encounter crime to identify themselves as victims. In encouraging 'us' to notice and report the unusual in 'them', the socially acceptable targeting of 'them' becomes vindicated. If we are in agreement that such strategies contribute to this effect then their potential links with the coercive powers of the state become clearer.

The coercive tendencies of the state have been well documented within the social sciences, with a range of theorists pulling out the ideological strategies of the state and its capacity to use a mix of legislation, surveillance and direct force to maintain social order (see Hillyard and Percy-Smith, 1984; Offe, 1984; Biglino, 2002; Hillyard, 2002; Coleman, 2005). Tilly (1985) once waspishly described the role of the state as a protection racket whose legitimacy in this capacity has been sustained by its ability to coerce order as well as having access to the means of maintaining order. In the West, the coercive energies of the state have been directed towards dangerous classes in dangerous places (Coleman, 2005: 142; Hall and Winlow, 2005: 44), but, as Chevigny (2003: 91) has observed, 'even more basic to that work seems to have been a promise of safety, to the poor as much as to everyone else'. Moreover, as Loader and Walker (2004) state:

The state continues to have ultimate authority over who may resort to coercion, if not to other non-coercive 'disposals'. Equally, while there are many examples of non-state security provision and even self regulation, generally speaking the state, even if it chooses not to exercise this capacity, still retains an in-the-final-instance authority to decide on, supervise or license (i.e. decide who decides) the other spheres of regulations and provision. That is to say, at least in its own terms – and of course its reach may be greater than its grasp – the state structures the security network both in its

presence and its absence, both in its explicit directions and in its implicit permissions.
(p. 224)

This promise of safety for us all lies at the root of the state's ability to turn increasingly compromising liberal understandings of freedom into neo-liberal notions of surveillance that Innes (2001) has dubbed 'control creep'. This process has been commented on in the Australian context in relation to the aftermath of the Madrid bombings (Head, 2004). Such 'control creep' manifests itself in a number of different ways, from the extension of legislative powers through to the discourses deployed to render such measures thinkable. We would argue that these processes have been, and are, clearly discernable in the UK in the way in which 'new terrorism' has been constructed, the feelings that representations of terrorism may unlock, and the way in which such feelings are tapped into and harnessed for political purposes. It is within these processes that we can discern exactly who or what society is to be kept safe from and what the role of individual citizens might be in contributing towards a secure environment. The ways in which the terrorist threat has been communicated and the processes that these mechanisms tap into are a clear example of how responsibility, risk and control have become embedded in our understandings of fear and security.

CONCLUSION

To be clear, we would not suggest that the discursive construction of 'new terrorism' is an unproblematic linear activity, less still that the 'war against terrorism' is a body of politically mediated ideas passively and uncritically accepted by a homogeneous 'public'. It is to be expected that the localized and routine cultural practices that shape personal fears about crime (Walklate, 1998; Banks, 2005: 170) will be similarly operative in relation to perceptions of the terrorist risk. Further, the regulatory processes set in chain to mitigate the terrorist risk are not irresistible or non-retractable. As Hudson (2003: 224) comments, perhaps we do not need to engage in 'wasting time deliberating the constitutionality of torture or killing'. What we need to spend time engaged in is a discourse that ensures that the price we pay for security is not our liberty in every sense of the word. If we are to come to an informed understanding of the intricacies of the processes to which we are party, it is necessary to try to grasp some of the inherent complexities highlighted here. In particular, we need to think hard and critically not only about political policy and forms of legislation, but also about methods of risk communication. This includes the cultural, political and social context in which risk communications are constructed, the ways in which individuals make sense of such communications, and how information may or may not be absorbed and transformed into public or private anxieties.

This article has outlined some of the ways in which the UK government has sought to communicate the risk of new terrorism to the public. We have sought to ground the process of communication within the broader context and culture of the risk society, examining the social construction of the terrorist threat through an analysis of contemporary political and media discourses. In our view, the snowballing discourse of 'new terrorism' is amiss both

in terms of the messages conveyed and the levels at which it attempts to engage with the public. Our central proposition has been that government appeals made through the discourse of terrorism have sought to harness public anxieties and fears for political ends in diffuse ways, from the construction of the terrorist Other and its elision with other groups defined as problematic, to the way in which the processes of responsabilization have been extended to increase the range of risks requiring individual strategies of management. We would argue that the issues surrounding human security need to be theorized and researched outside of an alarmist paradigm which accepts 'new terrorism' as a cataclysmic force and/or an irreversible process. It is vital that criminologists have meaningful and critical things to say about 'new terrorism', and that the prickly issues which surround the 'war against terrorism' are not seen to be outside the ambit of the discipline. A more sophisticated perspective might seek to revisit some of the key concepts that have historically been used in debates about terrorism and safety as a means of challenging taken-for-granted assumptions about human security. In short, we may need to take a steadying step backwards in order to place a firmer foot forward. In such a retrospective mode, we might profitably begin by unravelling and interrogating the concept of fear.

Fear, like risk, burns in many different degrees and greater attention needs to be paid to the different strata which make up the generic experience of fear (Chadee and Ditton, 2005: 330). It may also be theoretically useful to disassemble the associated concepts of safety and protection. We ought perhaps to be asking more dangerous and oppositional questions, such as whom we are seeking safety/protection from, when and under what circumstances (see Walklate, 2004). In this regard, it is an empirically important question as to whether or not there is a 'culture of fear' or 'cultures of fear'. Moreover, we might go on to investigate how safety-seeking behaviour is mediated by age, place, ethnicity, gender, class and broader conceptualizations and understandings of nationhood on the one hand or personal identity on the other (see Hall and Winlow, 2005: 44; Kearon et al., forthcoming).

To return to our central thesis, the content and the accuracy of communications about the terrorist threat has wider significance for the constitution of liberal democracy. The very quality of democracy depends upon public access to a free and undistorted range of information. Without unbiased information it is difficult for people to make informed choices about cultural, political and economic issues. Of course, when governments are dealing with terrorism, security considerations will dictate that it is not always possible to pass on all available knowledge to the public. Yet there is more than a suspicion that this constraint has been expedient for the UK government in that it has given them *carte blanche* to pick and choose which information to pass on to the public and which to withhold. To this end, we would concur that the communication of the terrorist risk has been expanded and shrunk to fit with New Labour's wider political project (see Chu, 2006: 1). Arguably, this has not led to an instructive and balanced range of information being provided and may have fostered public mistrust and a growing atmosphere of suspicion. The 'leaks' alluded to earlier have done little to reduce public anxiety – indeed they are likely to have had the opposite effect. Making sense of reactions to risk communications requires that we endeavour to unravel the ways in which public anxiety is presently constituted. In order to do this, a number of difficult and prescient questions still need

to be asked about how different publics might be making sense of the terrorist threat in relation to dominant political constructions of insecurity. Here we have asked just one: is the politicization of fear a constructive way to keep people on your side?

Notes

- 1 For the purposes of this article we use the term 'public' generally, while recognizing that 'the public' is constituted by a range of different stakeholders with diverse interests.
- 2 In the UK, the government has pledged that the amount spent on national security will rise from £1 to £2.1 billion per year between 2004 and 2008.
- 3 See <http://www.ukresilience.info/ctkeyfacts.htm>.
- 4 Reported on BBC1 Evening News on 4 August 2005.
- 5 See <http://www.ukresilience.info/ctkeyfacts.html>.

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