

**IS A GREY  
WALL  
BETTER THAN  
A COLOURFUL  
WALL?**

28 months in prison for graffiti

**FREE DAZE!**

cross currents in culture ●

**variant**

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# contents

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We welcome contributions in the form of news, reviews, articles, interviews, polemical pieces and artists' pages. Guidelines for writers are available on request and at the Variant website.

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#### Front cover

New social art school, free daze! – an illegal fly-poster seeking the release of Glasgow graffiti artist Daze (Gary Shields) who was jailed for 28 months on March 20th 2008, the longest such sentence handed down in Scotland... amidst a prisons overcrowding crisis and yet further calls for reform of the penal system. Graffiti, as in the case of Daze's eight instances of malicious mischief perpetrated on the public transport system, is prosecuted both under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act (2004) and as vandalism: "the wilful, wanton, and malicious destruction of, or damage to, the property of another person". With both the most common forms of graffiti, and the most frequent strategies employed to suppress it, firmly established for decades, the effect of Shield's incarceration as an example, as argued by the judge in the case, or the long-term benefits of clean-ups are a little doubtful.

Deputy leader of Glasgow City Council, James Coleman,

quoted in the *Evening Times*, responded to the Free Daze! campaign: "I'm glad this has been brought to our attention and we will be dealing with it as a matter of urgency. We will be trying to identify the people responsible – and hopefully they'll be locked up like Gary Shields. Graffiti destroys the environment we're trying to create of a clean Glasgow. It just goes to show you the mentality of these people who have no respect for the city."

The inconclusive claims about the relation of graffiti to actual crime, or the 'fear of crime' which sustain and possibly increase this ongoing 'battle' between writers and the arm of the law, are, unfortunately, never matched by an enquiry into such salient questions as whether the public are in favour of the huge expenses incurred in policing and cleaning – such as the whopping £270,000 apparently required to remove traces of Daze.

Neither is the continuing increase of legal and commercial messages up for scrutiny. Coleman as deputy leader is

himself responsible for the recent billboard-erection spree fouling the city, including the strobing LED displays blaring out sound pollution into 'pedestrian zones' for the likes of military recruitment. According to the BBC, from May 2008, new powers in the Commonwealth Games (2014) Bill, alongside the compulsory purchase of land, will give Glasgow City Council additional rein to censor and suppress "unauthorised advertising". The excuse for this intensified criminalisation of the 'misuse' of public space is to protect the interests of private sponsors. Trading Standards officers are to be given powers to cover billboards and signs and, under warrant, search premises where they suspect 'offences' are being committed.

The good news is that, on 12th May, Daze was freed on 'interim liberation' while on appeal.

The Free Daze campaign: <http://livepetitions.co.uk/freedaze>

# The Left Hand and the Right Hand of the State

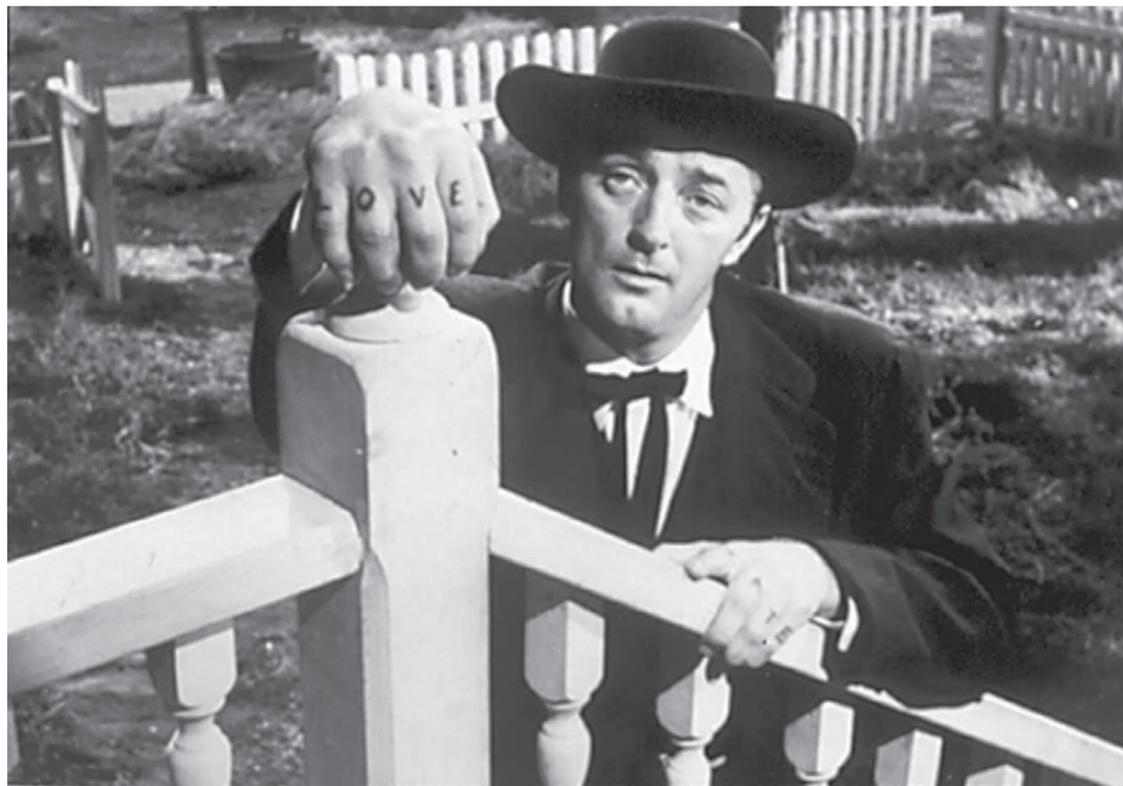
The influential sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930 – 2002) was interviewed by R. P. Droit and T. Ferenczi in 1992. Their conversation was published in *Le Monde* on 14th January that year. Why choose to reprint this interview today, over a decade and half later? Bourdieu conjures up the useful metaphor of 'the left and right hand of the State' and with it he illuminates the devastating impact of neoliberalism on social democracy and points to the willing involvement of the socialist political class in this process. As a consequence, social democratic politics in France and elsewhere were transformed beyond recognition. This was shown for some in the UK by Margaret Thatcher's greatest victory: New Labour. Moving on from such disappointments, not just in Europe but globally, political hopes are increasingly placed in nationalism, particularly of the small is beautiful variety. But the key issue that remains is how the public interest and the common good can be manifested under the conditions of corporate and financial globalisation which enforce privatisation and cut-backs on the public sector. On this dismal point the proponents of competitive nationalism refuse to give any clear answers whilst launching manifestos for what might be described as cultural rejuvenation in the global marketplace. Does the new breed of nationalist not in fact conform perfectly with the self-seeking political characteristics that Bourdieu saw degrading civic virtues...?

Q A recent issue of the journal that you edit was devoted to the theme of suffering.<sup>1</sup> It includes several interviews with people whose voices are not much heard in the media: young people on deprived estates, small farmers, social workers. The head-teacher of a secondary school in difficulty, for example, expresses his bitterness. Instead of overseeing the transmission of knowledge, he has become, against his will, the superintendent of a kind of police station. Do you think that individual and anecdotal testimonies of that kind can cast light on a collective malaise?

PB In the survey we are conducting on social suffering, we encounter many people who, like that head-teacher, are caught in the contradictions of the social world, which are experienced in the form of personal dramas. I could also cite the project leader, responsible for co-ordinating all the work on a 'difficult estate' in a small town in northern France. He is faced with contradictions which are the extreme case of those currently experienced by all those who are called 'social workers': family counsellors, youth leaders, rank-and-file magistrates, and also, increasingly, secondary and primary teachers. They constitute what I call the left hand of the state, the set of agents of the so-called spending ministries which are the trace, within the state, of the social struggles of the past. They are opposed to the right hand of the state, the technocrats of the Ministry of Finance, the public and private banks and the ministerial *cabinets*. A number of social struggles that we are now seeing (and will see) express the revolt of the minor state nobility against the senior state nobility.<sup>2</sup>

Q How do you explain that exasperation, those forms of despair and those revolts?

PB I think that the left hand of the state has the sense that the right hand no longer knows, or, worse, no longer really wants to know what the left hand does. In any case, it does not want to pay for it. One of the main reasons for all these people's despair is that the state has withdrawn, or is withdrawing from a number of sectors of social life for which it was previously responsible: social housing, public service broadcasting, schools, hospitals, etc., which is all the more stupefying and scandalous, in some of these areas at least, because it was done by a Socialist government, which might at least be expected to be the



guarantor of public service as an open service available to all, without distinction. . . What is described as a crisis of politics, anti-parliamentarianism, is in reality despair at the failure of the state as the guardian of the public interest.

If the Socialists had simply not been as socialist as they claimed, that would not shock anyone – times are hard and there is not much room for manoeuvre. But what is more surprising is that they should have done so much to undermine the public interest, first by their deeds, with all kinds of measures and policies (I will only mention the media. . .) aimed at liquidating the gains of the welfare state, and above all, perhaps, in their words, with the eulogy of private enterprise (as if one could only be enterprising within an enterprise) and the encouragement of private interest. All that is somewhat shocking, especially for those who are sent into the front line to perform so-called 'social' work to compensate for the most flagrant inadequacies of the logic of the market, without being given the means to really do their job. How could they not have the sense of being constantly undermined or betrayed?

It should have been clear a long time ago that their revolt goes far beyond questions of salary, even if the salary granted is an unequivocal index of the value placed on the work and the corresponding workers. Contempt for a job is shown first of all in the more or less derisory remuneration it is given.

Q Do you think that the politicians' room for manoeuvre is really so limited?

PB It is no doubt less limited than they would have us think. And in any case there remains one area where governments have considerable scope: that of the symbolic. Exemplary behaviour ought to be *de rigueur* for all state personnel, especially when they claim to belong to a tradition of commitment to the interests of the least advantaged. But it is difficult not to have doubts when one sees not only examples of corruption (sometimes quasi-official, with the bonuses given to some senior civil servants) or betrayal of public service (that word is no doubt too strong – I am thinking of *pantouflage*<sup>3</sup>) and all the forms of misappropriation, for private purposes, of public property, profits or services – nepotism, cronyism (our leaders have many 'personal friends' . . .<sup>4</sup>), clientelism. . .

And I have not even mentioned symbolic profits! Television has probably contributed as much as bribery to the degradation of civic virtue. It has invited and projected on to the political and intellectual stage a set of self-promoting personalities concerned above all to get themselves noticed and admired, in total contradiction with the values of unspectacular devotion to the collective interest which once characterized the civil servant or the activist. It is the same self-serving attention seeking (often at the expense of rivals) which explains why 'headline grabbing'<sup>5</sup> has become such a common practice. For many ministers, it seems, a measure is only valid if it can be announced and regarded as achieved as soon as it has been made public. In short, large-scale corruption which causes a scandal when it is uncovered because it reveals the gap between professed virtues and real behaviour is simply the extreme case of all the ordinary little 'weaknesses', the flaunting of luxury and the avid acceptance of material or symbolic privileges.

Q Faced with the situation you describe, how, in your view, do the citizens react?

PB I was recently reading an article by a German author on ancient Egypt. He shows how, in a period of crisis of confidence in the state and in the public good, two tendencies emerged: among the rulers, corruption, linked to the decline in respect for the public interest; and, among those they dominated, personal religiosity, associated with despair concerning temporal remedies. In the same way, one has the sense now that citizens, feeling themselves ejected from the state (which, in the end, asks of them no more than obligatory material contributions, and certainly no commitment, no enthusiasm), reject the state, treating it as an alien power to be used so far as they can to serve their own interests.

Q You referred to the considerable scope that governments have in the symbolic domain. This is not just a matter of setting an example of good behaviour. It is also about words, ideals that can mobilize people. How do you explain the current vacuum?

PB There has been much talk of the silence of the intellectuals. What strikes me is the silence of the politicians. They are terribly short of ideals that can mobilize people. This is probably because the

professionalization of politics and the conditions required of those who want to make a career in the parties increasingly exclude inspired personalities. And probably also because the definition of political activity has changed with the arrival of a political class that has learned in its schools (of political science) that, to appear serious, or simply to avoid appearing old-fashioned or archaic, it is better to talk of management than self-management, and that they must, at any rate, take on the appearances (that is to say the language) of economic rationality.

Locked in the narrow, short-term economism of the IMF worldview which is also causing havoc, and will continue to do so, in North-South relations, all these half-wise economists fail, of course, to take account of the real costs, in the short and more especially the long term, of the material and psychological wretchedness which is the only certain outcome of their economically legitimate *Realpolitik*: delinquency, crime, alcoholism, road accidents, etc. Here too, the right hand, obsessed by the question of financial equilibrium, knows nothing of the problems of the left hand, confronted with the often very costly social consequences of 'budgetary restrictions'.

Q Are the values on which actions and contributions of the state were once founded no longer credible?

PB The first people to flout them are often the very ones who ought to be their guardians. The Rennes Congress<sup>6</sup> and the amnesty law<sup>7</sup> did more to discredit the Socialists than ten years of anti-socialist campaigning. And a 'turncoat' activist does more harm than ten opponents. But ten years of Socialist government have completed the demolition of belief in the state and the demolition of the welfare state that was started in the 1970s in the name of liberalism. I am thinking in particular of housing policy.<sup>8</sup> The declared aim has been to rescue the petite bourgeoisie from publicly owned housing (and thereby from 'collectivism') and facilitate their move into ownership of a house or apartment. This policy has in a sense succeeded only too well. Its outcome illustrates what I said a moment ago about the social costs of some economies. That policy is probably the major cause of social segregation and consequently of the problems referred to as those of the '*banlieues*'.<sup>9</sup>

Q So if one wants to define an ideal, it would be a return to actions sense of the sense and of the public good. You don't share everybody's opinion on this.

PB Whose opinion is everybody's opinion? The opinion of people who write in the newspapers, intellectuals who advocate the 'minimal state' and who are rather too quick to bury the notion of the public and the public's interest in the public interest. . . We see there a typical example of the effect of shared belief which removes from discussion ideas which are perfectly worth discussing. One would need to analyse the work of the 'new intellectuals' which has created a climate favourable to the withdrawal of the state and, more broadly, to submission to the values of the economy. I'm thinking of what has been called the 'return of individualism', a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy which tends to destroy the philosophical foundations of the welfare state and in particular

the notion of collective responsibility (towards industrial accidents, sickness or poverty) which has been a fundamental achievement of social (and sociological) thought. The return to the individual is also what makes it possible to 'blame the victim' who is entirely responsible for his or her own misfortune, and to preach the gospel of self-help, all of this being justified by the endlessly repeated need to reduce costs for companies.

The reaction of retrospective panic provoked by the crisis of 1968, a symbolic revolution which alarmed all the small holders of cultural capital (subsequently reinforced by the unforeseen collapse of the Soviet-style regimes), created conditions favourable to a cultural restoration, the outcome of which has been that 'Sciences-Po thought'<sup>10</sup> has replaced the 'thought of Chairman Mao'. The intellectual world is now the site of a struggle aimed at producing and imposing 'new intellectuals' and therefore a new definition of the intellectual and the intellectual's political role, a new definition of philosophy and the philosopher, henceforward engaged in the vague debates of a political philosophy without technical content, a social science reduced to journalistic commentary for election nights, and uncritical glossing of unscientific opinion polls. Plato had a wonderful word for all these people: *doxosophers*. These 'technicians of opinion who think themselves wise' (I'm translating the triple meaning of the word) pose the problems of politics in the very same terms in which they are posed by businessmen, politicians and political journalists (in other words the very people who can afford to commission surveys. . .).

Q You have just mentioned Plato. Is the attitude of the sociologist close to that of the philosopher?

PB The sociologist is opposed to the *doxosopher*, like the philosopher, in that she questions the things that are self-evident, in particular those that present themselves in the form of questions, her own as much as other people's. This profoundly shocks the *doxosopher*, who sees a political bias in the refusal to grant the profoundly political submission implied in the unconscious acceptance of *commonplaces* in Aristotle's sense – notions or theses with which people argue, hut over which they do not argue.

Q Don't you tend in a sense to put the sociologist in the place of a philosopher-king?

PB What I defend above all is the possibility and the necessity of the critical intellectual, who is firstly critical of the intellectual *doxa* secreted by the *doxosophers*. There is no genuine democracy without genuine opposing critical powers. The intellectual is one of those, of the first magnitude. That is why I think that the work of demolishing the critical intellectual, living or dead – Marx, Nietzsche, Sartre, Foucault, and some others who are grouped together under the label *Pensée 68*<sup>11</sup> – is as dangerous as the demolition of the public interest and that it is part of the same process of restoration.

Of course I would prefer it if intellectuals had all, and always, lived up to the immense historical responsibility they bear and if they had always invested in their actions not only their moral authority but also their intellectual competence – like, to cite just one example, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, who has engaged all his mastery of historical

method in a critique of the abuses of history.<sup>12</sup> Having said that, in the words of Karl Kraus, 'between two evils, I refuse to choose the lesser.' While I have little indulgence for 'irresponsible' intellectuals, I have even less respect for the 'intellectuals' of the political-administrative establishment, polymorphous polygraphs who polish their annual essays between two meetings of boards of directors, three publishers' parties and miscellaneous television appearances.

Q So what role would you want to see for intellectuals, especially in the construction of Europe?

PB I would like writers, artists, philosophers and scientists to be able make their voice heard directly in all the areas of public life in which they are competent. I think that everyone would have a lot to gain if the logic of intellectual life, that of argument and refutation, were extended to public life. At present, it is often the logic of political life, that of denunciation and slander, 'slogozation' and falsification of the adversary's thought, which extends into intellectual life. It would be a good thing if the 'creators' could fulfil their function of public service and sometimes of public salvation.

Moving to the level of Europe simply means rising to a higher degree of universalization, reaching a new stage on the road to a universal state, which, even in intellectual life, is far from having been achieved. We will certainly not have gained much if eurocentrism is substituted for the wounded nationalisms of the old imperial nations. Now that the great utopias of the nineteenth century have revealed all their perversion, it is urgent to create the conditions for a collective effort to reconstruct a universe of realist ideals, capable of mobilizing people's will without mystifying their consciousness.

#### Notes

1. *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 90, Dec. 1991, special issue 'La souffrance'; Bourdieu et al., *La Misère du monde*.
2. Alluding to the author's book *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (trans.).
3. The practice whereby civil servants move to positions in the private sector (trans.).
4. François Mitterrand (President of France 1981-1995) was often praised for his '*fidélité en amitié*', and a number of personalities appointed to important posts were, according to the newspapers, chiefly noted for being his 'personal friends' (trans.).
5. *effets d'annonce* in the original, produced when a minister reduces his political action to the ostentatious announcement of spectacular decisions which often have no effect or no follow-up – Jack Lang has been cited as an example (trans.).
6. The Rennes Congress (15-18 March 1990), the scene of heated disputes between the leaders of the major tendencies within the Socialist Party; Lionel Jospin, Laurent Fabius and Michel Rocard (trans.).
7. The amnesty that was granted, in particular, to the generals of the French army in Algeria who attempted a putsch against de Gaulle's government (trans.).
8. See Bourdieu et al., 'L'économie de la maison', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 81-2, Mar. 1990.
9. Socially analogous to the 'inner cities' but in France implying peripheral housing estates (trans.).
10. As generated and taught in the institutes of political science ('Sciences-Po'), in particular the one in Paris (trans.).
11. Allusion to Ferry and Renaut, *La Pensée 68* (trans.).
12. Vidal-Naquet, *Les Juifs, la mémoire et le présent*.

# The New Bohemia

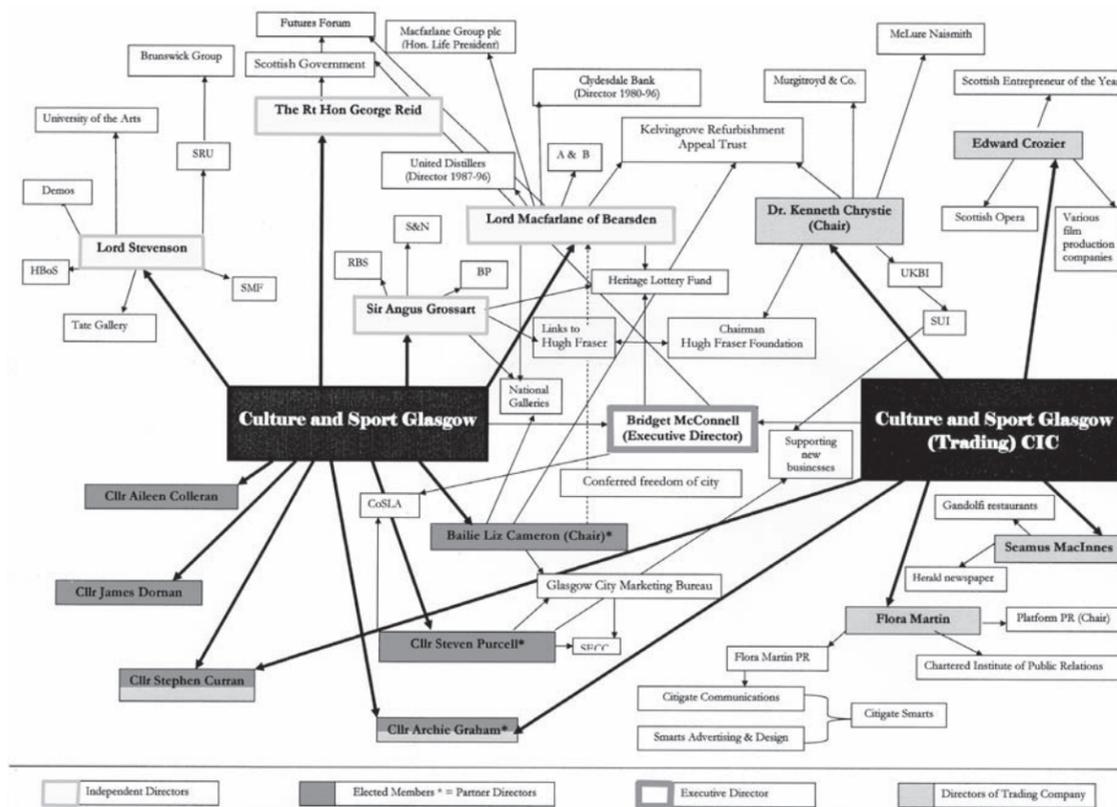
## Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt

“The referendum on Scottish devolution on September 11th 1979 was a historic moment for our country. But the ‘Yes’ result was not a mandate for politicians, civil servants, local government officers or any other public sector officials to take on extra powers ‘on behalf of the people.’”  
**Bridget McConnell, 1997**

In summer 2007, *Variant* reported on the unprecedented move of Glasgow City Council (GCC) devolving its Cultural and Leisure Services department to a private charitable trust.<sup>2</sup> The main challenges outlined at the time came from Unison – representing the majority of public sector workers affected – which objected that workers would suffer; that previous fundraising attempts offered a spurious precedent for guaranteeing future funding (which might contribute further pressure to seek private investment), that democratic accountability beyond the ‘lucky six’ councillors appointed to the board would be lost in relation to a number of key services (leading to an ‘arms-length’ private company), that the scheme represented a tax dodge (explicitly prohibited within Labour Party policy)<sup>3</sup> and that this move would compromise the credibility and fundraising potential of legitimate charities. Unison mounted a legal challenge, applying for an interim interdict against the Council’s proposals in March 2007 and seeking a judicial review of the process, both of which were unsuccessful.

In January 2007, as a result of similar concerns, Culture Minister, Patricia Ferguson, had sought reassurance about the legality of the move.<sup>4</sup> Another objection was made by Scots Tory MEP, Struan Stevenson – responding to the claims of a whistleblower presumed to be a high-level GCC official – on the grounds that the creation of a new company to oversee culture and leisure should have been put out to tender and that the state cannot directly or indirectly subsidise a company.<sup>5</sup> Competition commissioner Neelie Kroes passed the matter over to European Commissioner, Charlie McCreevy, who is widely acknowledged to be in favour of free markets.<sup>6</sup> McCreevy contacted the Scottish Executive on 10 April 2007 which, just days before Bridget McConnell’s husband lost his job as First Minister, penned a joint response with GCC, refuting any claims of illegality, which was accepted by the Commission.<sup>7</sup>

Within its first year of trading, Culture and Sport Glasgow (CSG) has given some indication of its future trajectory. Controversial proposals to allow private companies to develop businesses



in two of its parks have been strongly resisted and so far resulted in plans for a nightclub in the botanical gardens being scrapped. Initial fears about job security – especially for casual workers – appear to have been founded, with staff at Tramway being offered contracts that discriminate against artists who rely on flexibility in their paid work, thereby undermining the indirect subsidy that reaches the city’s creative practitioners through invigilation work. A year ago, *Variant* asserted that “one of Glasgow’s proud boasts is that of the free access to museums. How long will that last if the Trust gets into financial difficulties?” Somewhat predictably, it has just been announced that the feted Kelvingrove Museum will be introducing admission charges. It would seem to be an appropriate moment to take a closer look at the formation of Culture and Sport Glasgow, the overlapping networks and interests of its key personnel and the early implications of this transfer for culture within the broader strategies being devised for Glasgow, which are paralleled in other cities around the world.

With reference to city council reports and minutes, it is clear that the genesis of CSG suffered from a lack of transparency from the outset. In November 2005, in the wake of the Cultural Commission making its final report to the Scottish Executive and responsibility for cultural provision having largely been delegated to local authorities Glasgow’s Cultural Strategy was approved by the council. In her introduction to this document, Bridget McConnell (then Executive Director of Cultural and Leisure Services), affirmed the link between cultural participation and economic regeneration, highlighted the continued need for private investment in Glasgow and noted that cultural tourism accounted for 37% of all tourism to the city.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the potential of culture to increase tourism has become widely asserted as a phenomenon, with precedents ranging from Bankside (Tate Modern) to Bilbao (Guggenheim Museum), and McConnell has invoked Bilbao when discussing the new Zaha Hadid-designed Riverside Museum, due to open on the banks of the Clyde in 2010.<sup>9</sup>

It was McConnell’s proposal to create a new company to manage the city’s cultural provision, which was swiftly taken up by Councillor John Lynch (then Executive Member for Culture and Sport), abetted by Councillors Steven Purcell and Aileen Collieran, who would go on to occupy key roles in Culture and Sport Glasgow. This ultimately

led to the formation of two companies – one limited by guarantee with charitable status (with an estimated turnover of £19 million p.a.), and an additional trading arm, or Community Interest Company (CIC), to carry out those functions not deemed charitable by HM Revenue and Customs while gifting all income to the charity. While this proposal has the veneer of passing through the appropriate consultancy phase and council committees before finally being approved at a meeting of the GCC Executive Committee on 2 February 2007, it is interesting to note that Culture and Sport Glasgow and its trading arm had already been incorporated as private limited companies six weeks earlier, on 22 December 2006, with an application for charitable status having been made the day before.<sup>10</sup>

The intrusion of capital into the cultural arena is a familiar story throughout the modern period. In his landmark examination of how ruling class cohesiveness is achieved through cultural participation, G. William Domhoff describes how the Bohemian Club was founded in San Francisco in 1872 by artists, writers and musicians who subscribed to the myth of Bohemia, whereby creativity springs from poverty. This privileging of creative talent over financial means was soon displaced by more pragmatic concerns about the daily running of the club and, in the late nineteenth century, wealthy, untalented men were voted into the club, thus securing the future of its activities.<sup>11</sup> This paves the way for a detailed consideration of the financial motives informing cultural provision in Glasgow.

The diagram that begins this text details the interactions between the invited board members of Culture and Sport Glasgow and some of their external connections, which are elaborated here:

### Bridget McConnell - Executive Director of Culture and Sport Glasgow, and Culture and Sport Glasgow (Trading) CIC

As the manoeuvres outlined above demonstrate, Bridget McConnell was the driving force behind the creation of Culture and Sport Glasgow. Appointed as Director of Cultural and Leisure Services in 1998, her tenure was blighted by union wrangles over jobs and by run-ins with the city’s artistic communities about departmental policies or lack thereof. Promoted to Executive Director with negligible discussion in August 2005, reports of top council jobs being axed were appearing on the front page of the *Herald* by the following





#### The Rt Hon George Reid - Independent Director of Culture and Sport Glasgow

As Presiding Officer of the Scottish Parliament under Jack McConnell, from 2003 until May 2007, George Reid oversaw many corporate interventions into the Scottish Parliament. He was Honorary President of the Scottish Parliament Business Exchange, which was set up to 'educate' parliamentarians about business; while participants are asked to sign a no-lobbying guarantee, dues of £7,500 have tended to confine membership to representatives of trans-national corporations and professional lobbyists. One of its members is Holyrood Communications, a political communications company owned by public consultations advisory firm, Holyrood Consultations, which changed its name to 2Collaborate in 2006. On behalf of its clients the Scottish Executive, 2Collaborate launched a campaign – sponsored by Microsoft, CapGemini and the *Herald* newspaper – to advocate private interventions into public services.

As of May 2008, Reid remains a board member of the Futures Forum<sup>24</sup>, a think tank set up by the Scottish Parliament to extend its outreach work into fields such as the arts and entrepreneurship. Its foundation was, in turn, informed by the Global Business Network which involves creative futurologists such as Douglas Coupland, Brian Eno, Bruce Sterling and Francis Fukuyama and "works with Fortune 500 companies from virtually every industry and continent, as well as with many national governments, nonprofits, and foundations" to help iron out the uncertainties of global business futures.<sup>25</sup>

#### Sir Angus Grossart - Independent Director of Culture and Sport Glasgow

Sir Angus Grossart is Chairman and Chief Executive of Noble Grossart, the merchant bank he founded in 1969. Vice Chairman of Royal Bank of Scotland until 2005, Grossart has been linked with fifty business ventures, via Directorships ranging from British Petroleum to Scottish and Newcastle. His links with culture include, amongst others, trusteeships at the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Heritage Memorial Fund, vice-presidency of Scottish Opera, chairmanship of the Fine Art Society (of which Noble Grossart owns 29%) and directorship of the Edinburgh International Film Festival.

#### Lord Dennis Stevenson of Coddernham - Independent Director of Culture and Sport Glasgow

Like his fellow Independent Directors, Stevenson has multifarious business and governmental links, engendered through his work for think tanks – including Demos, the Social Market Foundation, SRU, Lexington Communications and Huntsworth PR group – which lead right to the heart of the New Labour government. His cultural involvement extends into work for the British Council, a high-profile Directorship of the Tate Gallery and an appointment as Chancellor of the University of the Arts (the powerful merger of six art and design schools in London).

#### Dr. Kenneth Chrystie - Chair of Culture and Sport Glasgow (Trading) QC

A trained lawyer, Chrystie was Partner of Glasgow-based firm, McClure Naismith, from 1972 to 2007 where he became a specialist in intellectual property law,<sup>26</sup> which is crucial to the much-vaunted creative industries. Retained as a consultant to McClure's, he also offers his services to Murgitroyd and Co, Scotland's only listed firm of patent attorneys. In July 2007, Chrystie was appointed as a Member of Strathclyde University Incubator (chaired by Ian Murgitroyd),<sup>27</sup> which nurtures nascent companies until they can thrive on their own and raises questions about conflict of interest.

#### Flora Martin - Board Member of Culture and Sport Glasgow (Trading) QC

With a background in the military side of the civil service – working at the Fleet Air Arm base near Perth and the Faslane MoD base at Helensburgh – Martin is widely considered to be one of Scotland's PR gurus. She started her own company, Flora Martin PR, in 1989, with clients largely centred on the alcohol and hotel trades. In 1996, she sold her company to Citigate Communications for in excess

of £1 million, staying on to build the turnover up to £5 million, with clients from Asda to Bank of Scotland. Stepping down to become independent in 2004, three years later she became Chair of Platform PR, which works in government relations (i.e. lobbying) and communications strategies, helping their clients to "weather controversies and cope with crises."<sup>28</sup> Martin will head Platform's new Glasgow office.

#### Edward Crozier - Board Member of Culture and Sport Glasgow (Trading) QC

Managing Director of Whisky Galore Films Limited, Director of Promenade Productions, Britannia Productions and several other media-related companies, Crozier has produced a handful of West End productions. He holds a Directorship at Scottish Opera and, in-keeping with the sporting element of Culture and Sport Glasgow, is a member of the Scottish Rugby Union Council, a Grade 'A' rugby referee and past Chairman of the Scottish Rugby Referees Association. He also currently sits on the judging panel for the Scottish Entrepreneur of the year awards.

#### Seamus MacInnes - Board Member of Culture and Sport Glasgow (Trading) QC

Seumas MacInnes is the entrepreneurial restaurateur behind the expanding Allied Irish Bank-funded chain of Gandolfi restaurants based in the Merchant City area of Glasgow, the hitherto ignored yet historical eastern edge of Glasgow city centre, which has been earmarked for development by GCC. Gandolfi is a member of the Glasgow Restaurateurs Association<sup>29</sup> which represents the main restaurants in the city and forms part of Glasgow's branding and tourism strategies. MacInnes – who is from Barra in the Western Isles – is a darling of the *Herald* newspaper; having served as a food columnist there in 2000-1.

### The Bigger Picture

In March 2004,<sup>30</sup> Glasgow City Marketing Bureau (which, it will be remembered, has CSG's Steven Purcell and Liz Cameron as its Chair and Vice Chair respectively)<sup>31</sup> branded the city with the slogan 'Glasgow: Scotland with style'. In his introduction to the brand guide, the Bureau's Chief Executive, Scott Taylor, writes "Since the launch of the brand, in excess of 535,000 additional tourists have visited the city generating £62 million in local economic benefit and delivering a 2% year-on-year increase in hotel occupancy," thus consolidating the link between the brand and the city's tourism strategy.

Glasgow City Marketing Bureau is part of a consortium – together with Glasgow City Council, Visit Scotland, Scottish Enterprise Glasgow and Glasgow Chamber of Commerce – set up to develop Glasgow's tourism strategy.<sup>32</sup> As a leading representative of three of the five partner organisations, Steven Purcell embraces tourism as a key industry within Glasgow's economic development strategy and sets the target of attracting one million visitors by 2016 to take the sector into the £1 billion p.a. bracket. The route for achieving this 80% growth in tourism encompasses a major events strategy centred on the 2014 Commonwealth Games, the aforementioned Riverside Museum and the Arena at the SECC. Capitalising on the markets for leisure and 'discretionary business tourism', the strategy makes explicit reference to the role of Culture and Sport Glasgow, the renovated Kelvingrove Museum and the regeneration of Merchant City.

As we have seen, Bridget McConnell is fully conversant with the potential of culture and sport to increase the revenue of a city through tourism, and her ambitions for Glasgow, as expressed in CSG's priorities, closely overlap with those of Glasgow City Marketing Bureau. Emphasis on cultural tourism has led to a 'festival mentality', whereby the city's support is concentrated on attracting temporary tourists rather than supporting Glasgow's creative practitioners directly.<sup>33</sup> March 2008 saw the Magners Glasgow International Comedy Festival, Aye Write! – The Bank of Scotland Book Festival – and the 16th French Film Festival. This was followed, in April 2008, by the Glasgow Art Fair and the two-week visual arts fest, Glasgow International. An annual



exhibition that quickly became biennial, Glasgow International effectively brands the exhibitions already taking place in the city's main institutions and grassroots organisations in a bid to attract visitors *en masse*. On 13 May, 2008, Katrina Brown was announced as the new Director of Glasgow International. Undertaking this role on behalf of the Common Guild – the 'public' arm of Glasgow's predominant commercial gallery, the Modern Institute – this appointment perfectly consolidates the creeping commercialisation of the art world in Glasgow.

The second exercise in branding extant visual arts activity within the city is Trongate 103, which is due to open in 2009. Led by Glasgow City Council's Department of Development and Regeneration, this will see the redevelopment of a block at the corner of Trongate and King Street – which has long housed eight arts organisations – to form a unified arts complex.<sup>34</sup> Tapping into a familiar, and often disastrous,<sup>35</sup> strategy of culture-led regeneration, this dovetails neatly with the Five Year Action Plan devised for the regeneration of the Merchant City area at the east of the city centre. This badly-punctuated document is explicit about the Council's intentions to capitalise on the potential of this area, ensuring that derelict properties are renovated and inhabited. At the time of writing, the cultural tenants of Trongate 103 have been offered five year leases based on existing rents, after which time their future is

uncertain.

Also consistent with the events-based strategy being perpetuated in the city is Culture and Sport Glasgow's involvement in the bid for the 2014 Commonwealth Games. When McConnell was promoted to Executive Director of Cultural and Leisure Services, her role grew to encompass sport. Together with husband, Jack, and GCC/CSG representatives Liz Cameron and Steven Purcell, McConnell has travelled the world as an ambassador of Glasgow to ensure that the Games come to the city. Recent reports that she may have been sidelined to protect SNP sensitivities would seem to be contradicted by the relocation of the sports development team of CSG to the Commonwealth site.

Critic of neoliberalism, David Harvey, discusses the organisation of urban spectacles, like shopping centres and the Olympic Games, to "create a positive and high quality image of place..." Serial repetition of successful models, he says, "is understandable, given the grim history of deindustrialization and restructuring that left most major cities in the advanced capitalist world with few options except to compete with each other, mainly as financial, consumption, and entertainment centres. Imaging a city through the organisation of spectacular urban spaces became a means to attract capital and people (of the right sort) in a period (since 1973) of intensified inter-urban competition and urban entrepreneurialism."<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the Commonwealth Games is viewed by the CSG team as a major opportunity for Scottish business. While accounts of Culture and Sport Glasgow have largely ignored its trading arm, the entrepreneurial muscle of Ed Crozier combined with the business-nurturing approach of Kenneth Chrystie will no doubt ensure that the maximum amount of capital is extracted from this event. In parallel with this, the hospitality-based PR work of Flora Martin and the role of influential Merchant City-based restaurateur, Seamus MacInnes, will no doubt contribute to the profitable tourist-led regeneration.

More than the sum of its parts, the creation of Culture and Sport Glasgow represents the wholesale takeover of culture by business interests. It posits a strategy for economic regeneration that depends on the whims of elite tourism and its pace of consumption in a period of economic crisis. It demonstrates an ethos that is smothering this city and others like it, regarding culture solely in terms of its use value, stripped of any emancipatory potential. Far from being considered in terms of the universal creativity to which every citizen has a right, culture in Glasgow is framed in terms of passive participation and money-making potential, with the city's burghers fast accumulating cultural capital in the process. It remains to be seen how this approach will affect the creativity of future generations as Glasgow's cultural communities are rendered impoverished and complicit in the new Bohemia.

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#### Notes

1. Bridget McConnell, 'Culture and the New Politics: Reflections from a Small Country.' In M. Jacobs (ed.) *Creative Futures* Fabian Society, London, pp. 16-22.
2. Anon. 'O Rose, thou art sick! Outsourcing Glasgow's Cultural and Leisure Services.' *Variant*, 29, pp. 30-1.
3. This point refers to Labour's policy document *Scotland's Future: Report of the Scottish Policy Forum* which opposes the creation of charities for outsourcing services, a policy inserted at the insistence of Unison states: 'We will look at ways to ensure the legitimate incentives that apply to charities are not used as vehicles for outsourcing by local authorities.' See Gerry Braiden, 'Council's proposal to hand over museums 'against party policy.' *The Herald*, 2 March, 2007, p. 2.
4. Paul Hutcheon, 'Executive queries legality of new culture trust: Glasgow council's bid to hand over libraries and museums hits legal snag.' *The Sunday Herald*, 4 February, 2007, p. 28.
5. John McCann, 'Glasgow museums trust faces Euro probe: Investigation over claims charity is operating illegally.' *Evening Times*, 3 May, 2007, p. 2.
6. Honor Mahony, 'Free marketers in top commission posts.' *EU Observer*, 13 August 2004.
7. Gerry Braiden, 'Commissioner clears city over culture and sport trust claims.' *The Herald*, 30 August, 2007,



- p. 6. <http://www.theherald.co.uk/politics/news/display.var.1651843.0.0.php>
8. Bridget McConnell in C. Landry (ed) *Glasgow: The People, The Place, The Potential. Glasgow's Cultural Strategy*, 2006. <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/YourCouncil/PolicyPlanning.Strategy/ServiceDepartments/CultureandSportGlasgow/>
  9. M. McLaughlin, 'Museum faces delays as costs spiral to £74m' *The Scotsman*, 13 June, 2007, p. 21.
  10. Culture and Sport Glasgow Articles of Association and Certificate of Incorporation of a Private Limited Company (Company No. 313851) 22 December 2006 and letter from Burness to OSCR 21 December 2006
  11. G. William Domhoff, *The Bohemian Gove and Other Retreats: A Study in Ruling-Class Cohesiveness* Harper & Row, New York, 1974, pp. 52-54.
  12. It will be remembered that her husband, Jack McConnell, First Minister of Scotland November 2001-May 2007, had made the development of devolved powers for culture a priority. This was reflected in his 2003 St Andrew's Day speech in which he said, 'I believe we can now make the development of our creative drive, our imagination, the next major enterprise for our society. Arts for all can be a reality, a democratic right, and an achievement of the early 21st Century.' See <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/News-Extras/176>
  13. On 18 December 2002, in her capacity as Chair of VOCAL, Bridget McConnell wrote to the group charged with implementation of the Scottish Executive's National Cultural Strategy to propose a national review of local government cultural and leisure services. See minutes of Joint Implementation Group meeting 14 January 2003, item 4.6. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/About/FOI/19260/jointgroup>. This intervention led to her being copied into documents collected by the subsequent Cultural Commission (a visit to the Cultural Commission archive held in Stirling revealed that the marginalia of documents included the note 'Copies to Frank [McAveety], James [Boyle], Bridget).
  14. Convention of Scottish Local Authorities. McConnell served as Link Arts Adviser (1997-2001) and Joint Chair of the CoSLA/VOCAL Culture Strategy Task Group (2005).
  15. The Voice of Chief Officers of Culture, Leisure and Community Services in Scotland.
  16. See Scottish Executive/COSLA *Implementation of the National Cultural Strategy: Guidance for Local Authorities*, March 2003.
  17. See Eddie Barnes and William Lyons, 'Are our artists being strung along?' *Scotland on Sunday*, 22 January, 2006 p. 13. In the same article, it was claimed that McConnell had always viewed the Scottish Arts Council as an impediment to her plans of offering 'access to excellence', which may have led to its demise as a result of the Cultural Commission process. Elsewhere, it was reported that a memo was sent from civil servants to the Executive in advance of the Cultural Commission, seriously undermining the efficacy of the Scottish Arts Council, and reported a feud between Bridget McConnell and James Boyle. See Paul Hutcheon, 'Revealed: civil servants' attack on arts council: Memo sparks fears of secret agenda.' *The Sunday Herald*, 10 April, 2005, p. 10.
  18. Bridget McConnell, 'Culture and the New Politics: Reflections from a Small Country.' *op. cit.* p. 17.
  19. Paul Gilbride, 'McConnell's relative faces probe into £2 property deal' *The Express*, 26 March 2007, p. 15.
  20. Stephen Stewart, 'Chaos as council stopped by sit-in protest: Anger over cabinet system.' *The Herald*, 30 June, 2006 p. 9.
  21. Brian Currie, 'No hiding place for secrets in our new city leisure trusts: Freedom of Information pledge by Purcell.' *Evening Times*, 8 March, 2007, p. 7.
  22. Culture and Sport Glasgow. Minutes of Meeting of Board of Directors, 27 June, 2007. Note 7(4). See [http://www.csghlasgow.org/aboutus/meetings\\_minutes/](http://www.csghlasgow.org/aboutus/meetings_minutes/)
  23. Michael Grenfell and Cheryl Hardy, *Art Rules: Pierre Bourdieu and the Visual Arts* Berg, Oxford, 2007, p. 97.
  24. <http://www.scotlandfutureforum.org/sff/people.asp>
  25. <http://www.gbn.com/>
  26. Kenneth Chrystie is a founder member of The Intellectual Property Lawyers Organisation (TIPLO) based in London.
  27. <http://www.ukbi.co.uk/index.asp?PID=542>
  28. Platform PR website <http://www.platformpr.co.uk/TrackRecord.aspx>.
  29. <http://www.bestglasgowrestaurants.com/index.php?page=restaurants&id=86&start=0>
  30. There seems to be some confusion about dates in the literature. The brand guide claims that GCMB launched the brand in March 2004 while its Chief Executive, Scott Taylor, dates the inception of the *bureau* to April 2005. See Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, *Glasgow: Scotland with style: The City Brand*, September, 2007. <http://www.seeglasgow.com/glasgow-the-brand>.
  31. According to Steven Purcell's introduction to the brand guide, 'The Bureau has a team of 43 people engaged in branding and public relations; conference, meetings and incentive sales; event creation, management and marketing; conference and event accommodation bookings; ICT and finance and administration.'
  32. Glasgow City Marketing Bureau, *Glasgow's Tourism Strategy to 2016*, 2007. This strategy is predicated on the understanding that 'tourism is the fastest-growing global economic sector in terms of foreign exchange earnings and job creation' (p. 7). In considering the policy context for the strategy, it is noted that it 'takes advantage of the favourable national policy environment' (p. 4).
  33. One of the few roles of the former CLS relinquished by CSG was that of direct grant-giving powers.
  34. See <http://www.glasgow.gov.uk/en/Residents/ArtsDevelopment/Newsletter/visualart.htm>
  35. In Dublin, regeneration of the Temple Bar area led to hiked rents which precluded its former cultural tenants; the same pattern has been seen in the Shoreditch area of London, notably through the spectacular demise of the Lux Centre. Benedict Seymour, 'The Last Picture Show', *Mute*, 22, December 2001 documents the rent support originally offered to the Lux by the British Film Institute (themselves renting the building from Glasshouse developers) which was reneged upon when the BFI underwent a funding squeeze, and concludes: 'With the forced exodus from New Labour's bathetic grands projets already begun, the challenge now is to discover a 'third way' between the unaccountable bureaucracy that consumed the Lux and the culture pimping that sustains the ICA. If anything good comes out of the eclipse of the Lux it will involve creating a better, viable and contemporary form of the autonomy sought by the original cooperatives a long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away.' See <http://www.metamute.org/en/The-Last-Picture-Show>
  36. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* Blackwell, Oxford, 1980, p. 92.

# Craven New World

Tom Jennings

Documenting attacks on civil freedoms in Britain the film *Taking Liberties* (2007) was made for cinema because such a “one-sided” (read honest) appraisal of the Blair regime’s record was thought unlikely to survive the requirements of “balance” (read censorship) on television<sup>1</sup>. Supported by *Fahrenheit 9/11*’s producers, *Taking Liberties* apes Michael Moore’s populist combo of comic buffoonery and acid commentary and romps through New Labour’s neurotic erosion of rights to privacy, protest and freedom of speech, its tacit embrace of imprisonment without trial, unaccountable extradition and torture. Recounting the personal experiences of a swathe of victims, from peace protesters to those persecuted in the War on Terror; a convincing picture of escalating totalitarianism is then sketched against a background of animated vignettes showing centuries’ worth of legal ‘checks and balances’ on state power. This is all set to a jaunty Britpop soundtrack. Unfortunately, the potential of mocking the powerful is undermined by a tone veering from flippant to hysterical, before being ultimately ruined by dissolving into overstatements of incipient Nazi-ness among parliamentary leaders and an astounding cluelessness about the prospects of influencing them.<sup>2</sup>

Worse; the film’s broad-brush, knee-jerk jingoism cripples any political understanding of past or present. Ancient constitutional antecedents are all very well for patronising children with, but the routine reality of peremptory injustice in recent decades has shaped the patterns of close interference now being ratcheted up: from Northern Ireland policy, racist policing and the internment of immigrants; to Tory anti-union and criminal justice legislation and the penalisation of ‘antisocial’ behaviour. Kowtowing to globalising capitalism necessitates welfare suffering, while lower-class community, collectivity and autonomy is hammered to shortcircuit resistance. But *Taking Liberties* ignores the structural and economic frameworks within which governments discipline their subjects, let alone how they achieve apparent consent for it. Instead we’re asked to sympathise with rich US bankers suspected of corporate fraud – after all, ‘we’re all in this together’, a supposedly ‘freedom-loving’ people. This lack of analysis leaves the film wallowing in middle-class moral superiority and outrage, urging self-righteous symbolic protest. Is this more a recipe for apathy than active opposition?

The UK government legitimises the



increasing regulation of the populace in terms of administrative efficiency rather than historical precedence or legal niceties. Even a cursory questioning sees the pragmatic justifications for the National Identity Register and attendant technologies collapse like a house of (identity) cards, yet the debate stubbornly clings to nationalist sentiment<sup>3</sup>. The latest edition of *Mute* magazine helps make the stakes clearer. As Josephine Berry Slater points out: “The basic survival of the poor, undocumented or ‘illegalised’ often depends on the ability to operate [in a] ... grey zone of anonymity [which] is constantly squeezed in the interests of population management, border enforcement, welfare clamp-downs, technocratic convenience and, of course, the economy”<sup>4</sup>. In fact, precisely those realms of experience which *Taking Liberties* ignores.

Meanwhile, mainstream political discourse brooks no argument that only the free movement of capital allows society to survive and prosper; thanks to the expert, rational-market disposition of resources. But accelerating human and environmental degradation resulting from the application of neoliberal ideology generates inevitable crises, the intransigence of which is disavowed when they are treated merely as management conundrums. Thus the incipient panopticon society obsessively maximises data collection, in the pretence that mass bureaucratisation allows the competent administration of otherwise insoluble problems. In the resulting climate of increasingly routinised emergencies and attendant moral panics, and the overall prospect of multiple impending catastrophes, everyone excluded from polite society can be blamed and targeted while those fortunate enough to temporarily reap the dubious benefits of consumerism look the other way and defend ‘civilisation’<sup>5</sup>. With each burning issue merely grist to media headline-mills, ordinary current affairs paradigms plainly lack the imagination to make sense of such extraordinary circumstances. Conversely, the mysteries of the future are science-fiction’s stock-in-trade, and so what follows seeks signs of hope in recently screened dystopian visions that reflect prevailing trends in biopolitical divide and rule<sup>6</sup>.

## Unpleasantville

The Data Protection Act supposedly safeguards against abuse by making transparent what information, about us, private and state agencies collect. In recognition of the epidemic of CCTV systems across the UK (now the internal surveillance capital of the world) its scope was widened in 1998 to include visual imaging. Crime prevention budgets are increasingly syphoned off into an expanding surveillance manufacturing industry’s profits, despite failing to have any significant impact in the reduction of offences. Meanwhile, the sinister centrality of surveillance technology in New Labour’s plans for an integrated database and ID card seems threatened only by the bungling of IT entrepreneurs and bureaucrats. But, apart from the usual suspects, the wider British public seem remarkably acquiescent to intrusion. So, is the public really bewitched by

anti-social crime and terror hype, hypnotised by spectacular media, wrong-footed by seductive virtuality, and domesticated by reality TV? Given that no less a figure than the government’s Information Commissioner Richard Thomas deems us to have already “sleepwalked” into dystopia, it seems pertinent to ask – riffing on *Dr Strangelove* – whether we have ‘learned to stop worrying and love Big Brother’<sup>7</sup>.

Media art collective Ambient TV share the concern, and decided to extend their *Spy School* (2002) dramatisations of hitherto hidden assemblages of data held on citizens into a “science-fiction fairytale” patchwork comprised of visual material plucked from this matrix, with a storyline fitting the philosophical framework used to justify and regulate official omniscience. The result is Manu Luksch’s surprisingly beguiling *Faceless* (2007) – helped in part by Ballet Boyz choreography, Mukul Patel’s haunting soundtrack and Tilda Swinton’s austere voiceover – which emphasises the DPA stricture that individuals deemed uninteresting have their features obliterated, with those remaining targeted for action<sup>8</sup>. The tragic protagonist (necessarily played by Luksch herself) lacks reflexivity or emotion beyond the narcotising flow of interaction with the ubiquitous New Machine. Then, a sudden discovery: she has a face! In her job as data monitor this signifies a disturbance to the *status quo* destined to be corrected in the interests of stability and safety. But with personal identity come fragments of memory and fantasy, prompting awareness of possible pasts and futures along with uncertainty and fear. Exploiting newly incipient agency, her quest to evade oblivion is enlivened by encounters with mysterious Spectral Children, whose joyful unpredictability confounds the control apparatus. Sadly, they give disastrous advice to trust her instincts, but with no opportunity to develop such skills she soon succumbs to re-zombification.

This apparently conclusive fatalism is misleading, however, since the pivotal social engineering here occurs in reprogramming centres which brainwash people into numb passivity – not the global data-web itself (policed for deviation as administrative corollary). But how these function – or not, permitting escape – is withheld, thereby disabling viewers’ suspension of disbelief. Fittingly, the logistical nightmare of planning a coherent storyboard against the vagaries of CCTV operators complying with legislation (exposing the fiction of state-dispensed ‘rights’) mirrors the impossibility of sketching dystopian citizens with subjectivities echoing digital representations. The fairytale fails precisely because the principles behind *Faceless* were too rigorous, taking at ‘face value’ the viewpoint of power: The government’s fantasy of comprehensive knowledge of the population likewise makes scant human sense, whereas its implacable thirst for control will be far more pragmatically baleful. The film’s major artistic weakness therefore signals crucial (though unacknowledged) political potential. As its makers conclude: “The panopticon is not complete, yet. Regardless, could its one-way gaze ever assure an enabling conception of security?” Clearly, neither that nor a secure ability to conceive – and although beyond this film’s ambition, the relationships between the excluded and included (Spectral Children, and adults, and the erstwhile organic robots) would be key to dismantling the rigid walls of regimented otherness.

## Apocalypse Soon

Alfonso Cuarón’s *Children Of Men* (2006) paints a contrasting but equally ominous picture of a near future where dystopian ghosts in machines are exorcised by default – with global environmental collapse, mass starvation and a global pandemic

**TAKING  
LIBERTIES**  
SINCE 1997

Lost something?





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IN CINEMAS NATIONWIDE JUNE 8



leaving humanity infertile. Nevertheless, Bulldog Britain soldiers on, demonising tidal waves of illegal immigrants escaping societal meltdown elsewhere, its increasingly totalitarian government trumping the public's despair at impending extinction with 'homeland security' repression while benevolently distributing 'Quietus' self-euthanasia kits for those not succumbing to day-of-judgement fundamentalisms. A rag-tag resistance dodges the rampant militarised police around an exceedingly grubby and battered London in which death squads, random bombings and cages full of foreigners on their way to incarceration litter rubbish-filled streets. Woken from drunken disillusionment by an old flame's quest, Clive Owen's civil servant, Theo, then flip-flops around saving the world's only pregnant woman – fetching up in Bexhill-on-Sea dressed as monstrous concentration camp – their flight captured in superb action sequences with bravura handheld single-takes, modulated with poignant moments of stillness amidst the bloodbath as the unexpected sight and sound of infancy resurrect temporary empathy.

However, the narrative is less daring than the award-winning cinematography and set design, which achieve an effectively estranged familiarity throughout. Whereas a previous UK-set dystopia *V For Vendetta* scuppered every ounce of political nous in its literary source<sup>9</sup>, crime writer P.D. James' novel here had little anyway. So the rainbow coalition of urban guerilla 'Fishes' (a symbol used by clandestine early Christians, signposting the messianic underbelly of moral politics) opposes the fascist state only by demanding human rights for refugees. Yet these former anti-war, civil rights and green activists launch armed insurrection! The film's naff nativity fable subsequently crumbles into faith in scientific progress (the mythical 'Human Project' run by 'the best brains in the world' on the good ship 'Tomorrow'), as, in an echo of John Wyndham or J.G. Ballard's bleakly bilious postwar sci-fi critiques of bourgeois English anomie, Cuarón twists James' high-church, high-Tory spiritual self-flagellation. The elites barricade themselves in to brazen out armageddon while Theo's death, delivering (Black refugee) madonna and (female) child to sanctuary, finesses the conclusion that middle-class heroism (physical or philosophical) offers no solution.

Cuarón's first feature, *Y Tu Mama Tambien* (2001), cleverly seasoned its road-trip sex tragicomedy with a voiceover insistently detailing the contemporaneous Mexican socio-economic convulsions that the upper-class protagonists remained oblivious to. *Children of Men's* more starkly visual disjunction contrasts the immediacy of the suffering excludeds with the incapacity of the comfortable to recognise the culpability of their enlightened positions in the mess surrounding them. Slavoj Žižek interprets this philosophical infertility as the ideological

despair of late capitalism, with no sense of history or agency possible in a liberal-democratic worldview which actively fosters disaster while precluding political renewal<sup>10</sup>. Nevertheless the film's lack of engagement with the dispossessed themselves rather works against Žižek's conclusion – citing the recurrent motif of crossing water – that overcoming the present impasse requires an acceptance of rootlessness, cutting emotive ties just as the migrants have done with their physical ones. After all, a baptism into fresh solidarity chosen by cosmopolitan intellectuals – already arguable as useful strategy – scarcely compares to the nourishment of collective memory amid desperate necessity.

### Mission Implausible

The conspiracy thriller *The Last Enemy*, which occupied five primetime Sunday night slots on BBC 1 in February-March 2008, extrapolates more narrowly in projecting only several years hence, albeit with decisive technological advances considerably enhancing identity-paranoia. Returning to terror-struck Britain for his twin's funeral after working abroad, renowned mathematician Stephen (Benedict Cumberbatch) witnesses first-hand the downside of fully integrated monitoring with pre-emptive policing. Biometric ID cards are scanned in all mundane movements or transactions, and any anomaly automatically prompts armed intervention; card use being prohibited forthwith. Recruited by the Home Office's latest PR drive for computerised security, he tests the new system to discover the fate of his NGO sibling supposedly killed helping Afghan refugees afflicted with a mystery illness. Unwittingly opening sundry cans of political, corporate, diplomatic, and academic science worms, Stephen becomes a target of officialdom. With informal subsistence all but impossible, he falls in with an unlikely band of aid-workers, illegal immigrants, renegade intelligence officers ... and his brother, now also underground having faked his own death.

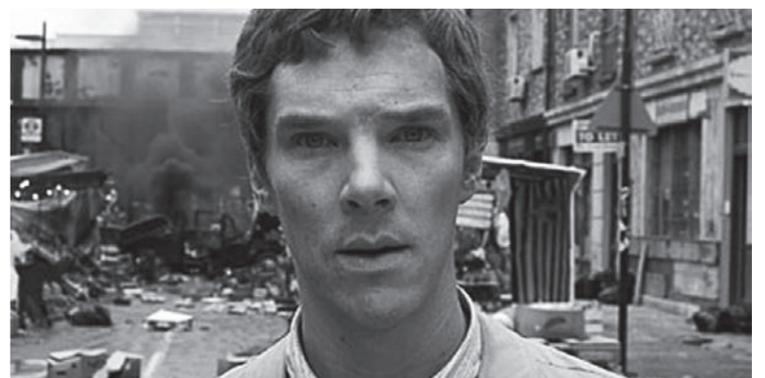
With timely scenario and entertainingly helter-skeleter pacing making for effective hokum – despite unconvincing personal ties among excessively narcissistic characters – the drama is infinitely less subversive than claimed<sup>11</sup>. At least, though, the refugees and migrants are given independent human texture, agency and social milieu, even while still depending on salvation by criminalised professionals and professional criminals – fake IDs abound, naturally, but welfare and charity staff only able to fulfil their remits by acting illegally is both original and suggestive. And while the national and international dimensions of skulduggery and cynicism also ring true, in classic parapolitical vein, they deflect attention from the nitty gritty of life for the majority in favour of the privileged significance of shallow heroes and villains acting outside of the deep structuring

logics of institutions. As in *Children of Men*, we only get glimpses of the indigenous excluded, kept safely at arms length from all other social fractions – here a mere handful of hopeless homeless abjectly selling their blood and robbing each other for peanuts in a disappointing conservative echo of ASBO rhetoric.

Even more disastrously for present relevance, problems associated with the technology are restricted to its misuse – partly through function-creep, but mainly by corrupt careerists furthering agendas unerringly encouraged by business amorality. In itself this is doubtless accurate, but New Labour's shambolic PFI roll-outs also prove the utter incapacity of the systems to deliver on processing or fit-for-purpose promises. *The Last Enemy's* effortlessly smooth operation of Total Information Awareness is, however, taken for granted. Even the supremely sinister nanotech radio-frequency tags, secretly injected into bloodstreams, appear neutral in principle – apart from their racially-specific, medical side-effects. The latter contrivance simultaneously kills both the narrative's victims and its pretensions to sharp critique of the surveillance state. Tolerably workable, hard-, soft-, and live-ware is, after all, the crux of government spin. But their likelihood is contradicted by all the available evidence<sup>12</sup> – making stolen identity a risk; victimised identity a probability; and mistaken identity, via faulty data and erroneous interpretation, a commonplace. Yet countless personally disastrous bungles and stitch-ups – which ordinary folk would have least chance of sorting – would inevitably entail disproportionately lower-class effects, which are rendered irrelevant and invisible here compared to those of noble philanthropists selflessly serving helpless clients.

### Minority Retort

More promisingly, the marginalised and repressed return with a vengeance in *Exodus* written and directed by Penny Woolcock and screened by Channel 4 in November 2007. The film attenuates the Old Testament saga down to a parochial parable set in Margate with local non-actors cast in all but a few leading roles,<sup>13</sup> for many of whom issues of migration and exclusion were immediate personal concerns. In this new testament, charismatic mayor Pharaoh Mann (Bernard Hill with suitably ridiculous barnet) has turned a formerly depressed borough – re-christened the Promised Land – into something of a BNP fantasy of a municipal fiefdom, where the respectable WASP majority have expelled from their midst a veritable anti-shopping list of undesirables. So members of ethnic minorities, asylum seekers and immigrants, homosexuals, the jobless and feckless, drunks, junkies, psychiatric cases and petty criminals have all been dumped in Dreamland – a shanty settlement nestling in the ruins of a funfair on the outskirts – and abandoned



to fend for themselves. Of course, someone still has to undertake the menial and shit-work, but scrupulous surveillance and ruthless movement restrictions ensure that the lower ranks, minutely checked-in and out, barely subsist while being unable to extricate themselves from apartheid imprisonment.

When Pharaoh's adoptive son Moses turns eighteen, he learns from liberal-minded Mrs Mann that his real Romany mother gave him up at birth hoping he might thrive among history's favoured. He resolves to search her out, having long been hurt by the condescending treatment given the family maid (another maternal substitute), but immediately witnesses the arbitrary brutal dehumanisation perpetrated by the 'Pest Control' police in Dreamland's nightmare. He feels compelled to intervene violently and becomes a fugitive there, meeting his family distaff and marrying into the riff-raff. Increasingly appreciative of the unbelievably embattled community's fortitude, spirit and potential, his tentative suggestions of unity go largely derided until his father-in-law, a gentle ghetto pedagogue, is murdered while protecting a pupil. Kickstarting feverish activity with the defiant affirmative gesture of a gigantic funeral pyre, escalating organisation and public confrontations demanding deliverance develop into outright guerilla sabotage, taking advantage of sophisticated knowhow honed individually in bonded servitude and now wielded for collective purpose. Modern biological, chemical and electronic versions of old Egypt's plagues (thus translating divine intervention from hegemonic theological support into the practical weaponry of the weak – a brave and potent, if troubling, rhetorical manoeuvre in the present conjuncture) wreak mortal havoc in the Promised Land, and finally, the defeated fuhrer caves in and strikes down the gates. The longed-for exodus, however, heralds hand-to-hand slaughter on the beach ...

There's no doubting the integrity of Woolcock's commitment, giving voice and expression to society's outcasts and fashioning working practices which flout routine mainstream pretensions and hierarchies so as to respect, celebrate and empower hidden and suppressed storytelling<sup>14</sup>. But mortal wounds to this narrative's body-politic are inflicted by its construction and focus – with a quite unwarranted mirroring of Pharaoh and



Moses and their respective spheres of influence. Dominated by high-bourgeois oedipal dynamics, the latter's sullen adolescent demeanour hamstringing any convincing capacity to engage or energise others, and (presumably unintentionally) the uprising ends up resembling a miserable vanguardist farce with scant sign of genuine grass-roots engines. Rather than cod-psychohistory, the mythos of prophecy would surely better emerge from the fine-grain of the internal conflicts and specific material circumstances of the Dreamlanders – where the awakening sense of mission fed on their own cultural fecundity rather than a resentful leader's personality deficiencies which yield predictably reactionary results. Despite its welcome attention to processes transforming suffering into struggle, then, the admittedly well-shot *Exodus* is sunk right from botched conception – with clunky structure and contrived script marooning some decent individual performances (especially from the amateurs) which appear to belong in completely separate dramatic universes<sup>15</sup>.

### Alienated: Resurrection

Worlds past, present and future eerily co-exist in a specific parallel universe in *Polly II: Plan for a Revolution in Docklands* (2006). Anja Kirschner's marvellous carnivalesque allegory of an underground underwater London after global warming leads to breached tidal barriers. The bibles drawn on here are of impeccable rabble-rousing provenance: John Gay's *Beggar's Opera* (plus its lesser-known sequel *Polly*) whose staging was deconstructed in *The Threepenny Opera*. The project,

"part satirical sci-fi, part soap opera and Brechtian 'Lehrstueck' – portrays the lives of pirates and outcasts surviving in the flooded ruins of East London, a lawless zone set to become the latest in luxury waterside living according to government plans and venturing developers' wet dreams. The film imagines a future insurrection coloured by the legacy of dispossessed peasants, political radicals, whores, sailors ... and former slaves who once inhabited East London and fought a daily battle against their subjection to poverty, displacement and judicial terror"<sup>16</sup>.

The story's thrust follows perceptive questioning by the narrator of a welter of contradictory discourses competing to structure her understanding of, and hence action within, the mayhem falteringly presided over by the feudal elite. Engaging in bitter struggle to survive, Polly and her cohorts adopt stances which mobilise them in various barely official or frankly criminal enterprises undermining the monopolisation of



resources by vested interests. With traditional certainties turned upside down, the disoriented and impoverished populace is fractured by any number of crippling hostilities and rivalries but liable to see through the morass in the difficult forging of common cause.

The resonance of an essentially pre-proletarian *Polly II* with prospects in contemporary neoliberal urban blight (euphemised as renewal, gentrification or sterilisation, depending on outlook) is tempered considerably by the iron grip of spatial mastery now pursued by the state and its corporate speculator clientele in regulating an inconvenient lower-class presence<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the unfolding strategy to cybernetically discipline the lifeworlds of previously upwardly-mobile strata is accompanied by the proletarianisation of precarious informational sectors of the middle classes, at the same time as state welfare functions are being downsized, privatised and degraded. Of course, the explicit logic and efficacy of these tactics are themselves supremely doubtful. In addition, the mass squeezing of all manner of petty-bourgeois, lumpen and working-class fractions into collective exclusion, with diverse degrees and levels of psychic and economic desperation, is unlikely to be affordable and manageable: either by the carceral containment of plantation slavery (e.g. in the US and China; possibly coming soon to Britain) or by neo-Stalinist social democracy (Latin America, South Africa). And that's before considering the ravages of ecological disaster that international capital is learning to reckon into its insane calculations. But blueprints weren't in any case Kirschner's intention:

"To some extent the plot of *Polly II* was based on actual events from the 18th century [...]. But I'm not depicting or referencing these moments so they can be measured against so many subsequent defeats or presented as easily digestible celebrations of 'heritage' or downright nostalgia (and I have little sympathy for re-enactments on that level); rather, I use them because they penetrate the present like so many callings and loopholes whose explosive potential still speaks to us"<sup>18</sup>.

Such mobile constellations of class, culture, power and practical capacity have characterised previous cycles of grass-roots responses to tectonic shifts in economic exploitation and instrumental governmentality, as revealed in many recent radical histories<sup>19</sup>. Even within the activities of the industrial proletariat as understood in more familiar Marxist terms, class composition, consciousness and praxis have been thoroughly and complexly woven through community and cultural biography in ways that elude the programmatic socialist or Leninist grasp. Paul Mason's inspirational book *Live Working Or Die Fighting: How the Working Class Went Global* (Vintage, 2008) indicates how patterns of solidarity, refusal, mutual aid and autonomy have persisted across otherwise alien centuries. Fresh modes of



orientation to the state's New Public Management are also emerging within structurally-adjusted societies in First, Second and Third Worlds – as discussed, for example, in Michael Neocosmos' innovative South African analysis which highlights the magnificent Durban shackdwellers movement Abahlali baseMjondolo<sup>20</sup>. And, despite the vicious megalomania of New Labour and the Tories' common ground – competing to punish anyone and everyone on suspicion of anything and everything – it would seem the height of arrogance to assume some unique divergence from these epochal trends in this benighted land ...

... Or perhaps not arrogance, so much as escapism – and that's the purpose of juxtaposing documentary realism and frivolous futurist entertainment here. The contemporary cultural artefacts examined work hardest of all to maintain distinctions between those whose survival is most imminently threatened and the comfort zones of aspirational experience – just when the economic and structural conditions which underwrote the flight from drudgery for the twentieth century's new middle-classes unravel before our eyes. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the surprise discovery by TV bosses of defensive, backward-looking ignorance among the depressed, so-called 'indigenous white working class'. BBC 2's *White Season* and Channel 4's *Immigration: The Inconvenient Truth*<sup>21</sup> legitimise the racism and antagonism found as intelligible responses to economic restructuring, while new migrants attempt to forge a future from starvation wages, casual hostility and official contempt. However, great care is taken for the professional media tourists to avoid the countless people and places making horizontal links, conducting joint operations, productive relationships, cultural exchanges and social interactions at the base. Thus a view of society is reproduced as no more than interlocking networks of exclusion zones, where the only negotiation between dimensions of difference – whether biological, social or economic – occurs on the state's terms at its own designated, tightly-policed sites, carried out by the market's credentialled experts. In which case, converging material situations, interests, expressions and struggles among foreigners, natives, underclasses and the new nearly-destitute simply disappear from view.

Writer Margaret Atwood called recently for a re-assessment of the respective merits of *Brave New World* and *1984*, seeing a need to measure the travails of consumer capitalism and globalisation against Aldous Huxley and George Orwell's contrasting anti-utopias<sup>22</sup>. Of course the question is misplaced, since neither hangover from Victorian middle-class moral conservatism could predict how the tortured and/or noble proles would fare in the New World Orders of their time. So these authors' best efforts to twist the enlightened (or not) liberal consciences of their milieux, thereby masquerading as ordinary folk, hardly succeed even in articulating the presence of the bulk of humanity whose quite different agendas and actions would be decisive. Irrespective of any of their strengths, *Taking Liberties* and the other fictions cited here (with the exception of *Polly II*) fail for comparable reasons – whereas tackling themes of unholy unruly otherness directly, honestly and empathetically is central, as it happens, to the most useful prognostications of sci-fi's genuinely critical dystopias<sup>23</sup>. Finally, therefore, and to reverse the point – as well as travestying Giorgio Agamben's famous notion of 'Homo sacer', the abject human object of pity<sup>24</sup>. Is it instead the achievement of *Faceless* to suggest that an empty, static, sterile existence is actually what is planned for the fortunate included?

#### Notes

1. Perhaps symptomatic of writer-director Chris Atkins' self-important naivete. *Taking Liberties* was screened on More 4 on May 6th, 2008.
2. To Atkins: "Our only hope is that Brown is desperate to claw back some of the popularity that Blair has lost, so if it becomes a big political issue then he might turn back the authoritarian tide to try and win votes" (*Socialist Review*); and "If several thousand people go to mass lone demos the Metropolitan Police will beg Gordon Brown to repeal the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act" ([www.eyeforfilm.co.uk](http://www.eyeforfilm.co.uk)).
3. Journalist Henry Porter's assiduous reporting of the ID card plans regrettably fits this template, e.g. in: 'Blair Laid Bare: the article that may get you arrested', *The*



*Independent*, 29th June 2006. The No2ID campaign's otherwise excellent coverage flirts too with civil liberties particularism (but see Martin Twomey, 'State of Denial', 2007, [www.metamute.org/en/State-of-Denial](http://www.metamute.org/en/State-of-Denial)); whereas the Anarchist Federation widen the argument decisively towards class-consciousness – in, for example, 'The Panopticon Society', at <http://libcom.org> – regular updates also appearing in the *Resistance* bulletin ([www.afed.org.uk/res/index.html](http://www.afed.org.uk/res/index.html)). Recourse to the imagined community of nation is a persistent problem with Michael Moore's work too – see, on *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), my 'Extracting the Michael', *Variant* 21, September 2004; and on Sicko (2007), 'Body Politics', *Freedom*, Vol. 69, No. 2, February 2008 ([www.starandshadow.org.uk](http://www.starandshadow.org.uk)).

4. 'Editorial', *Mute* magazine, Vol. 2, No. 7, 2008. 'Show Invisibles? Migration, Data Work' ([www.metamute.org](http://www.metamute.org)). Other excellent contributions discuss aspects of the relationships between surveillance and subjection to state control, rights and visibility, informality, legality and the enforcement of work discipline, among various segments of populations here and abroad.
5. These issues are tackled with great intelligence in Adam Curtis' groundbreaking BBC 2 documentary series, *The Trap: What Happened to Our Dream of Freedom* (2007); see my critique in 'Paradise Misaid', *Freedom*, Vol. 68, No. 10, May 2007 ([www.starandshadow.org.uk](http://www.starandshadow.org.uk)).
6. Space here prohibits consideration of otherwise relevant US titles such as *A Scanner Darkly* (dir. Richard Linklater, 2006; a *Slackers* version of the Philip K. Dick novel), *Look* (dir. Adam Rifkin, 2007; pretending to use CCTV footage), and *Southland Tales* (2007, dir. Richard Kelly; previously renowned for *Dannie Darko*). However for discussions of Strange Days (dir. Kathryn Bigelow, 1995) and *Fight Club* (dir. David Fincher, 1999), among others, see my 'Rose Coloured Spectacles', *Variant*, 27, 2006. For comprehensive popular-literary studies of utopian and science fiction subgenres, see: Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia*, Westview Press, 2000; Raffaella Baccolini & Tom Moylan (eds), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and the Dystopian Imagination*, Routledge, 2003; and Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Verso, 2005.
7. One of the themes of my 'Closed Circuit Tunnel Vision', *Variant*, 29, 2007; discussing Andrea Arnold's Glasgow-set CCTV suspense drama *Red Road* (2006). See also, for example, Twomey, note 3; and Henry Porter, 'Blair's Big Brother Legacy', *Vanity Fair*, July 2006.
8. Manu Luksch & Mukul Patel's 'Faceless: Chasing the Data Shadow', *Variant*, 31, 2008, tells the fascinating story of its production (see also [www.ambienttv.net](http://www.ambienttv.net)).
9. Alan Moore's seminal graphic novel; the film produced by *The Matrix* series' Andy & Larry Wachowski and directed by James McTeague (2005) – see my review, 'V Signs and Simulations', *Freedom*, 67, No. 7, April 2006 ([www.starandshadow.org.uk](http://www.starandshadow.org.uk)).
10. Slavoj Zizek, 2007, [www.childrenofmen.net/slavoj.html](http://www.childrenofmen.net/slavoj.html) (video clip at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbgrwNP\\_gYE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbgrwNP_gYE)). Extras on the *Children Of Men* DVD (Universal Pictures, 2007) include a 'Possibility of Hope' featurette with contributions from Fabrizio Eva, John Gray, Naomi Klein, James Lovelock, Saskia Sassen, Tzvetan Todorov and Zizek, as well as a separate 'Comments by Slavoj Zizek'.
11. See, for example: [www.bbc.co.uk/drama/lastenemy](http://www.bbc.co.uk/drama/lastenemy); Benji Wilson, *The Telegraph*, 16th February 2008; Peter Tatchell, *The Guardian*, 3rd March 2008; James Rampton, 'Caught Off Camera', *The Scotsman*, 18th February 2008. Writer Peter Berry's major headache in sustaining the sci-fi element was keeping ahead of the government's actual surveillance intentions – a problem also noted by *Judge Dredd* comic writer Alan Grant (*Sunday Herald*, 27th January 2008).
12. Meanwhile the IT providers whose promotional optimism helped translate these particular authoritarian wet-dreams into policy are now jumping ship as the bubble threatens to burst – see, for example, the Corporate Watch report 'Corporate Identity' (2006, and subsequent updates at [www.corporatewatch.org](http://www.corporatewatch.org)); and, more recently, BAe and Accenture pulling out of ID card systems tendering (after the latter's boss moved

to the Identity & Passport Service), leaving only more shamelessly incompetent profiteers still in the frame (e.g. reported in February this year at [www.silicon.com/publicsector/0,3800010403,39169811,00.htm](http://www.silicon.com/publicsector/0,3800010403,39169811,00.htm)).

13. In addition to this film, corporate art commissioners Artangel's *Margate Exodus* 2006 blockbuster (see [www.themargateexodus.org.uk](http://www.themargateexodus.org.uk)) included Wendy Ewald's *Towards A Promised Land* photographic project, with banners showing children relocated to the area from near and far due to war, poverty, repression or family crisis; a *Plague Songs* music CD with performances by fashionable (so I'm told) artistes Scott Walker, Rufus Wainwright, Laurie Anderson, Cody Chesnutt, Martyn Jaques, Imogen Heap, Brian Eno and Robert Wyatt; the 'Exodus Day' itself on 30th September 2006, held on Margate seafront with various events and performances culminating in a spectacular bonfire consuming Anthony Gormley's 80-odd foot tall *Waste Man* sculpture – built from the vicinity's rubbish, flotsam and jetsam with the help of many local folk of diverse origins – in front of thousands of Thanet residents and visitors; with Caroline Deeds' *Waste Man* documentary (broadcast on Channel 4 on 2nd December 2006) charting its production and destruction.
14. Related to but very distinct from others in European cinema's social realist and naturalist traditions – see her interview about the making of *Exodus* at [www.channel4.com/fourdocs/articles/penny\\_int.html](http://www.channel4.com/fourdocs/articles/penny_int.html); and another by Stella Papamichael from 28th June 2007 at [www.bbc.co.uk/dna/filmnetwork/A24168585](http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/filmnetwork/A24168585). Her refreshing views on the political role of art are summarised in 'Art Has No Real Power', 7th May 2007 ([http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/arts/author/penny\\_woolcock/](http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/arts/author/penny_woolcock/)).
15. Perhaps this reflects the gulf between a turncoat toff as beloved leader and the grimy multitude (or between privileged creator and the objects of her vision, for that matter ...) which the entire enterprise of *Exodus* seems to want to disavow. If so, that would be completely uncharacteristic of the best of this filmmaker's previous work, crafted from meticulous research leading to grass-roots accounts, experiences, anecdotes, characters and perspectives being central – as in the Bradford underclass trilogy *Tina Goes Shopping* (1999), *Tina Takes A Break* (2001), and the culture clash comedy *Mischief Night* (2006; see my appreciation in 'A Midautumn Night's Dream', *Freedom*, Vol. 68, No. 1, January 2007 – also at [www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk](http://www.tomjennings.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk)). Other highly original (though variously flawed) films by Penny Woolcock include *The Principles of Lust* and *The Death of Klinghoffer* (both 2003).
16. At [www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/film9891.htm](http://www.tate.org.uk/modern/eventseducation/film9891.htm).
17. See the thoughtful review of *Polly II* by Anthony Iles (2006, available at [www.metamute.org/en/Polly-II](http://www.metamute.org/en/Polly-II)).
18. From an interview with William Fowler in *Vertigo Magazine*, January 2007 ([www.vertigomagazine.co.uk](http://www.vertigomagazine.co.uk)). Note that the prescience of this vision, as well as the acclaim the film has received from many quarters, have not been accompanied by the wide distribution its quality certainly deserves and therefore the enthusiastic audiences it would doubtless receive.
19. For example, among many pathbreaking analyses, see those by Ted Allen, *The Invention of the White Race, Volume Two: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* (Verso, 1997); Sylvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation* (Autonomedia, 2004); Peter Linebaugh, 'Charters of Liberty in Black Face and White Face: Race, Slavery and the Commons' ([www.metamute.org](http://www.metamute.org), 2005); and Marcus Rediker, *Villains of All Nations: Atlantic Pirates in the Golden Age* (Beacon Press, 2004).
20. 'Civil Society, Citizenship and the Politics of the (Im)possible: Rethinking Militancy in Africa Today' (2007), at <http://libcom.org/library>. Libcom also has a useful array of articles on Abahlali baseMjondolo (which has its own website at [www.abahlali.org](http://www.abahlali.org)). For the wider context here, see the excellent collection of essays: 'Naked Cities: Struggle in the Global Slums', *Mute* magazine, Vol. 2, No. 3, 2006 ([www.metamute.org](http://www.metamute.org)); and my review of the *Favela Rising* documentary (covering Rio De Janeiro's Afro Reggae movement) in 'Riodelmption Songs', *Freedom*, Vol. 68, No. 3, February 2007 (also at [libcom.org](http://libcom.org)).
21. The *White Season*, BBC 2, March 2008, included documentaries on a Bradford workingmen's club, Polish migrants in East Anglia, the BNP in East London, and the relevance of Enoch Powell's 'Rivers of Blood' provocation three decades on; the latter also a touchstone for the three-part *Immigration: The Inconvenient Truth*, Dispatches, Channel 4, April 2008. Covering related ground, in 'Same Difference?' and 'Breaking Cover' (*Variant*, Nos. 23 and 24, 2005) I hinted at some of the implications of such inherently false multicultural dichotomies in the context of prejudicial characterisations of European Asians and Muslims.
22. In 'Everybody Is Happy Now', *The Guardian*, 17 November, 2007. Atwood herself wrote one of the many excellent post-1960s dystopias, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1986; with a film version directed by Volker Schlöndorff, 1990).
23. My personal favourites being Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Samuel R. Delany's response *Trouble On Triton* (1976) through to Marge Piercy's *Body Of Glass* (1992), Kim Stanley Robinson's *California* (1984-90) and *Mars* (1992-96) trilogies, and Octavia Butler's *Parables* (1993-98).
24. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford University Press, 1998).

# Comic & Zine Reviews

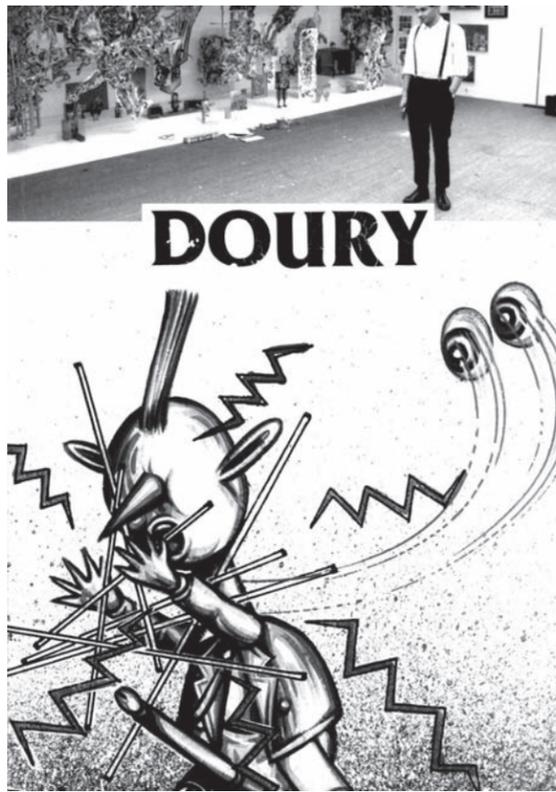
## Mark Pawson

French artist **Pascal Doury** is best known for his contributions to the **RAW** comix anthologies – intricate intensely worked black and white scraperboard illustrations, chaotic schematically drawn scenes of a small boy seemingly built from a construction kit with several extra limbs and penises, furiously driving his toy car round-and-round in a graphically precise motion blur. These simultaneously innocent and sexually charged scenes are whirlwinds of action with an entire comic book's content compressed into a single drawing. Pascal Doury was sort of a contemporary of the **Bazooka** group of painters (**Kiki Picasso**, **Loulou Picasso et al**) but his uncompromising attitude coupled with a heroin habit set him apart. Cherishing his outsider status, his work surfaced in a succession of self-published underground magazines, often collaborations with scatological scrawler **Bruno Richard** who he'd know since the age of ten.

I first saw **Pascal Doury** work in 1980s issues of **RAW** and remember staring at his graphic explosions on the oversized pages for ages, trying to find my way into them and decipher the meaning, eventually feeling a bit defeated and flicking forwards to other easier-on-the-eye strips. Attempting to get to grips with Doury's work was not helped by the fact that his drawings were censored. Ridiculously, all the numerous genitalia had been blanked out with small white numbered rectangles. Over 18s who wrote to **RAW** were sent a sheet of stickers to strategically affix in place, and I've still got my 2 sheets of dicks stickers, unused in the original envelope!

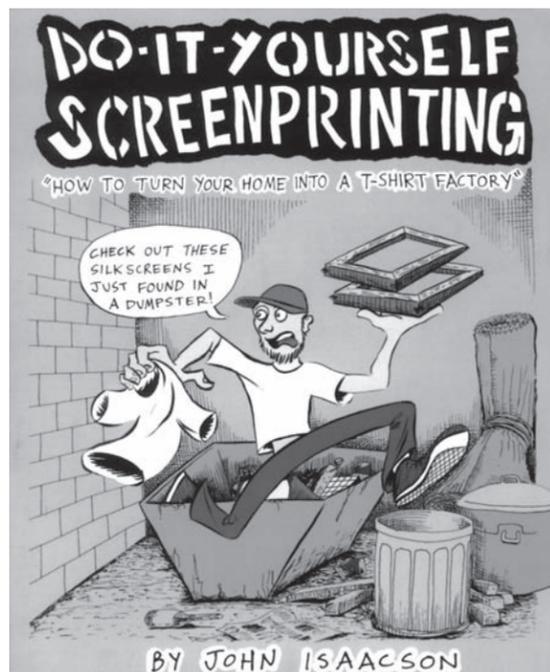
I hadn't thought about **Pascal Doury** for at least 15 years until I picked up a copy of **MOLLSUK #04, Doury** – a special issue of this magazine published by **Bongout** in Berlin. **Doury** died of lung cancer in 2001, having kicked heroin a decade earlier. This is a great, informative collection of exhibition shots, unpublished work, interviews and reminiscences by colleagues and collaborators including **Art Spiegelman** and **Gary Panter**. A fitting tribute to a unique artist. Later issues of **RAW** were published in the UK by Penguin with **Pascal Doury's** work uncensored. Secondhand copies can be found relatively easily.

Just what is it that makes today's sheds so different, so appealing to artists, musicians and illustrators? These prefabricated buildings seem to be a popular subject at the moment. I can envisage a themed park exhibition coming together with **Simon Starling's** shedboatshed (re-purposed, sailed and reassembled) next to **Comelia Parker's** smithereened **Cold Dark Matter**, alongside **Mark Dion's** **Biological Field Unit Research Station**, and there'd be curious sounds at high volume emerging from a shed with **Dj Beekeeper** inside (**Wire's** **Bruce Gilbert**). The reading area – an essential element of such an exhibition – would be inside **Mark Dion's** **Shed**. Amongst the butterfly nets and sample jars, on the bookshelf of botanists' reference books there would of course be a copy of **Walden** by self-



builder with attitude **Thoreau**, some early copies of **Viz Comic** (yes you read correctly, **Viz** were early shed adopters and always included spoof small ads for sheds), plus there'd be copies of the **Men and Sheds** books (UK, NZ and Australian versions which all share the same title). What's this here? A copy of **Sheds** by **Nigel Peake**, a collection of illustrations of sheds real and imagined. I can picture **Nigel Peake** on his travels going into local tourist information offices and asking if they know the locations of any good sheds. His drawings of real shed exteriors focus on the visual effects of being patched up, repaired and weathered. Using accumulations of scavenged materials and never seeming quite finished, these *ad hoc* buildings are meticulously recorded in fine line drawings with cross hatched detail; drawings which could be used as plans for building your own shed. The imaginary structures move into more fantastical but still practical territory. Elaborately patterned with the wooden laths themselves – reminiscent of the work of untutored obsessive self-builders and **Simon Rodia's** **Watts Towers** – these drawings are delicately, sparingly given a watercolour patina.

**John Isaacson's** **Do-It-Yourself Screenprinting** is a collection of 3 self-published comics reprinted by the always good **Microcosm Publishing**. It's part practical guide, part autobiography as we

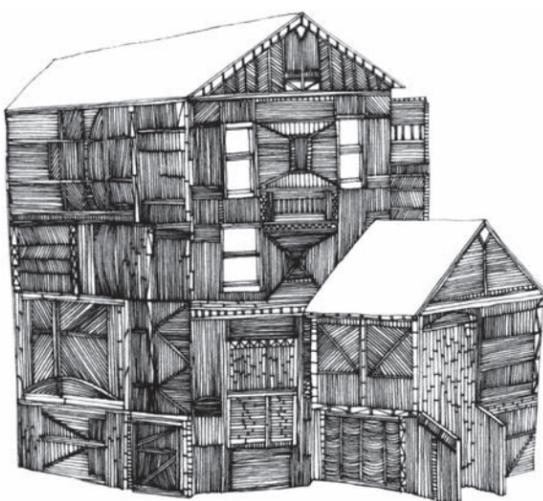


follow **John** on a personal journey into the world of silkscreening. In 'How to turn your home into a t-shirt factory' he does exactly that, starting with the basics of building frames, stretching screens, preparing artwork, exposure, printing and drying all on a nonexistent budget. His enthusiasm is clearly conveyed by the expressive drawings, which improve as the book progresses, and a desire to share his knowledge and experiences. As someone who's printed hundreds of postcards in my living room, laid out flat to dry on every available surface, leaving a small path clear to leave the room by, I can completely identify with this approach. Part 2 is a humorous account of selling his not very good t-shirt designs in Californian street markets. Berkeley is Hippy central so we get to meet an appropriately colourful cast of characters, the other traders and various time-wasting non-customers. In part 3, **John** somehow gets a job in a professional silkscreen workshop, which he barely has enough experience for. He faces a steep learning curve and asks the other workers every imaginable question about commercial silkscreening. They obligingly explain and demonstrate, conveniently providing perfect material for the comic! It turns out that all the employees sneakily work on their own projects. They quickly bond, working together to conceal their personal print jobs from the boss. For this section of the book the title switches to **Do-It-Together Screenprinting** as **John** realises that helping each other out and working together is a more efficient and enjoyable way of printing than always stubbornly adhering to the principle of **DIY**. This book can never teach you everything you need to know about silkscreening, but with some trial and error and lots of practice you'll be on the way. **John Isaacson** successfully conveys the fun and satisfaction, hassles and frustrations of **Do-It-Yourself Screenprinting**, along with lots of useful technical advice.

### AC Dickson's guide to eBay PowerSelling

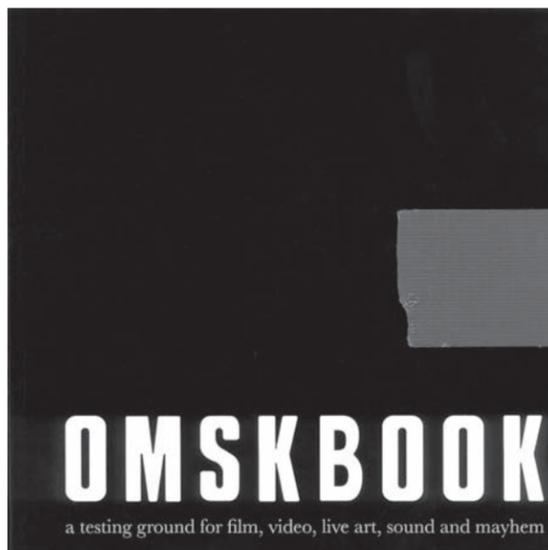


After picking up a copy of **AC Dickson's Guide To eBay PowerSelling** zine I realised that I now have a small **eBay** section on my bookshelf! Two are books by artists: **Bill Burns' Everything I Could Buy on eBay About Malaria** and **John Freyer's All My Life For Sale**. The two others are more mainstream books; a 'How to Sell...' book, and a company history. **AC Dickson's Guide To eBay PowerSelling** fits neatly between these two categories. **AC Dickson** is a Portland USA-based performance artist and filmmaker and this zine accompanies his



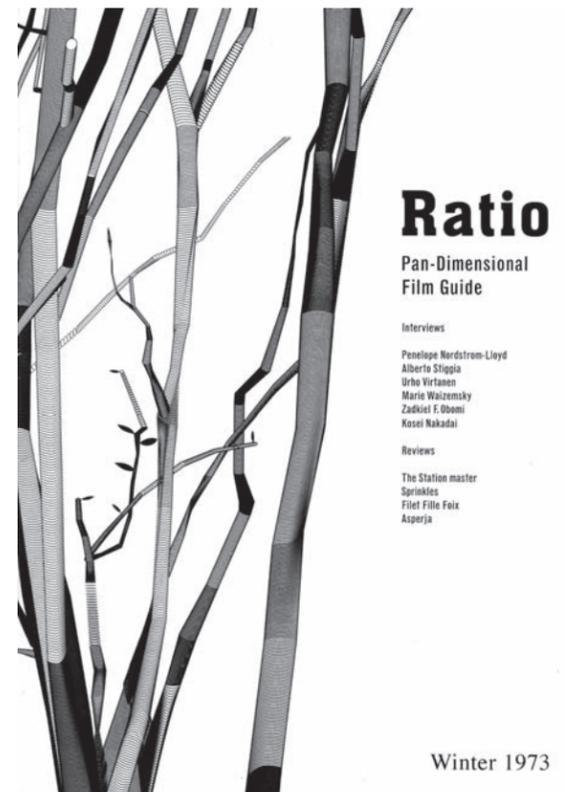
Powerselling Seminar Performances, the theme of which is 'learning-how-to-unlock-the-power-of-the-internet-for-personal-fortune-and-job-freedom-with-eBay'. In 28 practical, down to earth pages, you learn pretty much everything you'll ever need to know about selling stuff on eBay, together with some nuggets of eBay history. AC Dickson makes a living by selling items he gets from flea markets and charity shops on eBay, although I just checked and he doesn't have anything up for sale right now. He's highly enthusiastic about the opportunity that eBay has created for liberating people from the drudgery of boring jobs, enabling many sellers to become self-employed; no boss, work when you want, plenty of free time and you don't even have to speak to customers, because everything's done by e-mail. As someone who's been self-employed for years selling books and magazines by mailorder I can thoroughly recommend it, but I haven't actually got into selling on eBay yet, just read a few books about it... AC Dickson sees eBay as having democratised the marketplace, allowing millions of consumers worldwide to sell stuff directly to each. He also points out that selling stuff on eBay can be seen as an ecologically sound way to reuse or recycle unwanted items. I can imagine his impassioned presentation of these topics going down especially well in a live seminar situation. It's interesting to remember that there was an idealistic, Libertarian streak to founder Pierre Omidyar's original concept for eBay, but any remaining vestiges of these ideals seem to have disappeared as it rapidly grew into a multi-billion dollar business...

This seems to have developed into a how-to book section, so *The Garden Sketchbook* by Anna-Kaisa Laine & Emma Mills fits in perfectly. It's a pocket-sized notebook telling the story in words and drawings of their year-long project to turn a barren Cornwall council house back garden into a working vegetable and flower garden. They scavenge materials, go slightly over the top ordering organic seeds from seductive mailorder catalogues, build raised flowerbeds, and much to the amusement of their neighbours have ten tons of topsoil dumped in the front garden which they then carry by hand, two buckets at a time, into the back garden. The drawings begin by showing the garden as it was at the start of the year and how they imagine it will eventually look, then there's monthly updates as it progresses, careful drawings using a palette of green and black with the addition of bright splashes of red in the second half of the book as flowers burst into bloom. These drawings are accompanied by diary entries from both authors and detailed charts showing what they planted and what actually grew. *The Garden Sketchbook* clearly conveys their gentle and slightly haphazard approach to growing. They're delighted when crops



flourish, resigned when their vegetables are eaten by slugs and battered by the rain. Perhaps *The Garden Sketchbook* sticks a bit too literally to its title. I want to see more drawings; pictures of the front garden obliterated with tons of soil, drawings of the neighbours who are alternately bemused and encouraging, illustrations of Anna-Kaisa & Emma working in their garden or just sitting out there with a cup of tea enjoying their creation. Less slugs, more people. I want to be encouraged into thinking that I might, just might transform my pigeon shit encrusted East London 5th floor balcony into a verdant herb garden.

Omsk is a roving, collectively organised club night who've been putting on sporadic events around London since 1995. Their slogan, 'A testing ground for film, video, live art, sound and mayhem', sums up the approach perfectly. Their curated but chaotic shows have taken place North and South of the Thames in locations as varied as a squatted Bank, railway arches, and Hoxton's infamous 333 club. The programme for a 2004 show lists 7 performances, 4 installations, 8 musical acts and 25 short films, all for just £6.00 entry fee. Drifting locations and spasmodic occurrence, popping up when and where you'd least expect it, always make Omsk nights special events. *Omskbook* with its cover gaffer taped shut and austere black and red print job marks 12 years of activity. Rather than a dry documentation and historifying account of Omsk's manifestations, the book is constructed exactly as a show would be programmed: each contributor is allocated a time slot, i.e. a couple of pages to do whatever they want with, the book starts at 4pm and goes all the way through to 6am. Along the way there's a miscellany of artwork, film stills, performance scripts, DJ playlists and short contextualising essays from about 90 contributors, together with an informative how-to-put-on-your-



own-event section, plus there's a CD and a DVD. In fact the only thing that's missing is a close up photo of Omsk prime mover Steven Eastwood's notorious cycling jersey. Viewing/reading *Omskbook* with both the CD and DVD playing at the same time is recommended.

**Ratio: Pan-dimensional Film Guide** – with a subtitle like that you know you're in for an interesting ride. At first glance *Ratio* looks like a 1970s film journal; clunky layout with earnest analytical reviews of the latest international avant-garde and 'adult' releases alongside interviews with introverted auteurs backed up with small adverts for private film clubs and scholarly film themed publications. This issue's date is Winter 1973 but there's a barcode on the back cover and a website address inside. Look closer and things get curiouseer: There's an interview with filmmaker Penelope Nordstrom-Lloyd, living in self-imposed exile in the Carpathian mountains, making films with her tribe of 10 adopted kids and gradually using up her stockpile of vintage film stock; seriously strange sci-fi films; and a frightening free association session between Japanese horror Maestro Kosei Nakadai and Finnish Director Urho Virtanen (Q. Flesh freaks, knife, demon possession? A. Blood splatter liquids exorcism, shot in head, rotting corpses, child murder; exploding head, lots of blood). Some illustrations are film stills which have been drawn over and drawn through deforming the grey live action film stills into thick black outlined animation cells, others look like mutilated storyboard images with a hint of menace lurking in the background or images from half-remembered children's books. It's all very strange indeed. I felt slightly fuzzy headed before the hay fever medication you understand, but after reading *Ratio: Pan-dimensional Film Guide* now I'm completely confused and disorientated.

## Contacts

**MOLLSUK #04**, Doury A4 88 pages, 17 euros.

[www.bongout.org](http://www.bongout.org)

Bongout Showroom, Torstrasse 110, 10119 Berlin, also from NOG, 187 Brick Lane, London, E2

**Sheds**, Nigel Peake, A5 36 pages, £8.00.

[www.analoguebooks.co.uk](http://www.analoguebooks.co.uk)

[www.secondstreet.co.uk](http://www.secondstreet.co.uk)

**Do-It-Yourself Screenprinting**, John Isaacson, 188pgs, \$10.00 [www.microcosmpublishing.com](http://www.microcosmpublishing.com)

**A CDickson's Guide To eBay Powerselling**

A5 28 pgs \$2.00. [andrewdickson.com](http://andrewdickson.com)

**The Garden Sketchbook**

by Anna-Kaisa Laine & Emma Mills

A6 52 pages. £3.50? [www.atlanticpressbooks.com](http://www.atlanticpressbooks.com)

**Omskbook** 20x20cm, 154 pages inc CD + DVD  
£14.99 [www.omsk.org.uk](http://www.omsk.org.uk)

**Ratio - Pan-Dimensional Film Guide**

A4 40 pages, £6.99.

[www.thomasbarwick.com](http://www.thomasbarwick.com)

# Structural Greed: The 'Credit Crunch'

## John Barker

There have been economic and financial 'crises' ever since I remember. For most people in the world financial crises are anything from an hourly to, possibly a more privileged, monthly experience. But this is not what is being talked of now which is instead a 'major event' in the richer part of the world involving sums of money beyond our ken; billions and trillions. The fetishistic notion of 'economic collapse' then gets floated. What does this mean when there are millions of malnourished people, and when vast numbers of people are continually scrabbling for a living in the 'informal economy'?

Such 'crises' in the richer world are often dramatized as fundamental, even terminal to capitalism by anti-capitalist socialists, and sometimes by excited financial journalists. So far it's been a history of crying wolf which makes a person wary about exaggerating what is happening now in this 'sub-prime/credit crunch' sequence. Most major banks, even those that have had to write-off bad debts often in the billions, have still made profits in the billions. Equally, corporate profits in the US-epicenter have been, in capitalist terms, healthy. And yet this 'crisis' is different to others of the last fifty years, both in reality and in the way it has been presented to the public:

- Its longevity. No sooner was this crisis being put to bed – crosses nailed through hearts, frankness and reassurance offered in the same breath – than up popped another write-off. In April 2008, the Term Auction Facility in the US was increased by \$50bn and expanded the kind of assets used as collateral; precisely the kind of assets that precipitated the crisis. The Bank of England followed suit, though insisting the collateral were 'high-quality' assets. Similarly, the size of the write-offs involved seems to get bigger as time goes on.
- The expansion and extension of usury, seen in the sheer scale of credit in an era of securitization, much of it 'non-productive' but all assuming steady cash flows from those who borrow.
- Many of the bones of modern capitalism are now showing, such as the fragility of the valuation of collateral assets and their cash-flow 'assumptions'. How shaky its normally hidden infrastructure becomes when banks are afraid to lend to other banks.
- As a crisis of information in the era of the information technology revolution and with credit ratings agencies coming in for serious criticism it profoundly undermines capitalism's claim to be the only efficient assessor of risk and allocation of resources.
- The ethic of transparency, preached to poorer parts of the world, is now seen to be rooted in a financial universe that is proudly opaque.
- The self-advertised competence of Central Banks and regulators is undermined and in some ways their collusion with financial excesses is revealed. This was shown not just in the seediness of predatory mortgage lending but also in its deceptive packaging.
- More clearly seen is the dependence of so called 'free-market' capitalism on tax gathering nation states and federations. Like the present 'rescues' of banks, the system's dependence on export credit guarantees and state 'defence' spending may yet become news. Shown too is the psychopolitical forces at work in the case of the appeals to Sovereign Wealth Funds to ramp up the asset base of banks.

• Most of all, this crisis reveals that the global pot of surplus value – however much it has grown thanks to the development of East Asia and the accompanying pressure on wages elsewhere<sup>1</sup> – is always finite at any given time. This is combined with the added problem of its realisation as the urge to squeeze out more of this same surplus value. As the *Herald Tribune* put it: "In any country or business sector, there is a limit on the number of good investments."<sup>2</sup> Witness the coincident fall in the value of the dollar which is not unfamiliar,<sup>3</sup> but also the global rise in the price of basic food. While the so-called fundamentals of capitalist economies have proved to be elastic, especially when it comes to credit creation, they have been shown up by the real fundamentals of daily subsistence. Needless to say one cannot live without food and its supply cannot be turned on and off by the mouse or the remote-control.

But there is still a job to be done to contest capitalism's explanation of its own present 'crisis' by its elite, wiseguys and lickspittles. They all hope to retain their dignity and go unpunished by virtue of a limited period of purely technocratic 'mea culpa'. This self-explanation is not an exclusive monologue, but those calling for the regulation of 'free-market' capitalism in its own interest have been doing so for a long time, and to no effect.

### The Language of 'Sub-Prime'

The most public strategy of in-house explanation of the last several months' 'crisis' has been to isolate 'sub-prime' mortgages as the sole culprit, while at the same time wiseguys like Rupert Murdoch's Irwin Stelzer have emphasized how relatively small the amount involved is, and how even smaller the percentage of 'delinquent payments' – i.e. overdue for more than fifty days. Bank of England figures indicate that bonds backed by 'sub-prime' mortgages is \$0.7 trillion. This, as Donald Mackenzie has pointed out, is a lot of money. But it is only 2.5% of all non-government bonds and outstanding corporate loans.<sup>4</sup> If this huge amount of money is in fact relatively small, doesn't this then indicate a fragility to the circuits of credit and liquidity?

'Sub-prime' suggests an 'underclass' as promoted by neoliberal conservatives. Josef Ackerman, head of Deutsche Bank referred to 'sub-prime delinquencies'. Others use corporatist allusions; the loans were 'toxic', there was 'gangrene' and danger of 'contagion'. It is the language of disease in what is an otherwise healthy fantasy world where free markets are beneficial to all, similar to the 'rotten apple' line applied in those very rare cases in which police brutality is inescapably proven. But the real blow of these mortgages very clearly lands on those people who have lost their homes; people who have figured rarely in accounts of the credit crunch



except for brief TV images of a gothic-looking Detroit and stretches of empty houses in Cleveland. But this obviously has had an impact on banks too. What needs explanation is how this crisis had an impact greater than the relative amount of money involved. We should remember that neither the generic mortgage crisis, nor levels of personal indebtedness, especially in the USA and UK, came out of nowhere. The evidence of its roots can be found some years back.<sup>5</sup>

Jan Hatzius, Chief Economist of Goldman Sachs in the USA, equates what has happened to the dotcom bubble in so far as this crisis is a consequence of the mistaken belief that normal laws had been overcome and, in this case, US house prices could never fall. For the governments of the USA and UK, house prices are politically important because 'house owners' are a key voters. In the UK, the meanness and perversity of a policy of little or no new social housing has helped drive the steady increase in house prices to such an extent that no doubt many bourgeois have felt it to be their right that their properties should go on increasing in value for ever. Blindly they ran into the reality of higher rates of interest as Hatzius's analysis implies. But this does not explain the impact

on the wider financial world which is not like the dotcom bubble. This time around, mortgages for the poor at high rates of interest were just one area of riskier lending supported by the prospect of high returns. Of course, in the purview of capitalism, these mortgages were attractive because of the high rates of interest charged. Then they went even higher in the US because Federal Reserve policy at that time intended to counteract inflation. As John Lanchester has pointed out, US interest rates went up "just as many of the sub-prime borrowers were coming off their first two years of fixed-rate mortgages."<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, the money of so many poor people, and their homes with it, simply went down the pan. That wonderful amoral word 'mis-selling' comes to mind here.

These developments are still not explained simply by the picture of eager salesmen followed by eager bankers acting out of greed or the need to perform. The eagerness to squeeze money out of the poor of the developed world tells a larger story. Not so many years ago banks decided they could squeeze no more out of the poor of the lands of 'emerging markets'. In the spectacular case of Argentina they switched attention to that country's middle class. A politico-economic crisis ensued and brought a government that played successful hardball with its creditors and their international financial institution backers. 'Emerging' stock markets have since produced well above average returns for investors, but to match and amplify this the poor of the developed world were brought into play. Here too, however, the competition for even expanded surplus value, created real

Left:  
Rupert Murdoch,  
Irwin Stelzer,  
Josef Ackerman

contradictions. The holding down of real wages in the USA over a long period<sup>7</sup> in the interests of surplus value production made rising housing costs unreasonable, if not impossible, for those same wage earners and it is they who have borne the brunt of 'the crisis' in the developed world.

The process of making smart and profitable 'financial instruments' out of mortgages for the poor, mirrors those chains of sub-contracting in globalised capitalist production. With chains of production, the CEO of the multinational can deny knowledge, say, of child labour on another continent. Speculation in mortgages likewise

reveals the abstraction of finance and how far apart are the worlds of borrower and banker. Given that Deutsche Bank is said to now be the biggest landlord in Cleveland, USA, the packaging of these mortgages has made that distance even greater.

## Bankers Ain't What They Used To Be

When it comes to blaming someone else, the bourgeoisie have no equal. Central banks, regulatory agencies, hedge funds, and credit ratings agencies have all been pinpointed. These prominent damage-limiting self-explanations assume that once-upon-a-time there were bankers who were real, experienced bankers and they would have looked at the realities of where a loan was going and sensibly assessed its risk.<sup>8</sup> Over the last decade and more, as this discourse runs, they have been replaced by mathematical whiz kids empowered by the Scholes-Black equation and the power of computers who created elaborate programmes and new financial instruments designed to get an almost abstract share of the global surplus value pot. It's implied these bright guys were too clever for their own good and are without 'sound judgement'.

If that is the case, however, the degree of havoc caused is only possible because of the greater amount of credit that can be created (liquidity)

by contemporary capitalism. Increasing credit increases speculation. The mathematicians may have developed and refined a variety of derivatives, but this only provides the opportunity, as the whodunits say. Yet mathematicians did not deregulate banking, nor come up with the idea of 'securitization', nor institute the changes in the capital ratio requirement of banks enshrined in Basel II rules. A lesson drawn from the Wall St. crash of 1929, which had created misery for millions, was that investment and retail banks should be kept separate; that the ordinary depositors should not be financing the risks taken by investment banks (risks on a greater scale given the greater cash base the retail bank could provide). The lesson produced the Glass-Steagall Act which kept them separate. After ferocious lobbying by the banks, the Act was repealed in 1999.

Securitization is the creation of asset-backed securities; debt securities which are backed by a stream of cash flows. In the 1980s, the notorious McKinsey management consultancy empire "was showing its banking clients how securitization had a cost advantage relative to traditional lending. The process has massively increased international liquidity. These are first sold by the borrower to a special purpose vehicle which isolates claims for repayment against the ultimate borrower who can also keep the debt 'off balance sheet'.<sup>9</sup> It is also the case that the assets being bought with the borrowed money are themselves collateral. Such deals are 'leveraged'. From the investor's point of view the returns are likely to be greater

than on average equities, but assume that the future is tied up, that those cash flows are secure, that, in this instance, mortgages would be paid in orderly fashion by poor people.

The accusation against the first manifestation of mathematician-bankers focused on computer-programmed 'quant' or 'tracker' trading programmes. They were seen to be inflexible and to replicate each other in such a way as to cause exaggerated movements in and out of currencies and investments. It was an internal critique especially prevalent at the time of the South East Asian currency crisis of 1997-8. But they have continued to be part of 'normal practice' because they were normally profitable, though not always. In August 2007 Goldman Sachs announced that its Global Equity Opportunities Fund had lost \$1.8bn with such trading, yet this didn't stop it from announcing record profits of \$11.6bn 4 months later in December 2007. This hardly gives anyone an image of orderly accumulation!

This time around, in-house analysis has faced serious presentational problem by which widespread faults in risk assessment have to be acknowledged without notions of structural greed or capital's accumulation imperative making an appearance, or even the vicious circle described by Donald Mackenzie between liquidity and 'financial facts'. Loans which share with 'sub-prime' mortgages the promise of high returns were in 'emerging markets' – but also Private Equity buy-outs and highly leveraged Hedge Funds, the material form of what has been called "financial arbitrage capitalism." Back in May 2007, before 'sub-prime' became familiar news vocabulary, one especially shrewd wiseguy – 'star' investment manager Anthony Bolton. Bolton – having sold nearly all his bank and financial stocks – warned that large private equity deals were exposing banks to a default risk; that there had been unchecked lending to support a wave of mergers

and acquisitions, and that many of these were "covenant-lite", meaning that if such a company were to go bust the bank would have little ability to reclaim the money lent. This came at a time when in the USA there had been a record leveraged buy-out of the health capitalists HCA for \$33bn, and in the UK of Manchester United and Liverpool football clubs, touching certain sporting nerves in civil society. A report by Robert Parkes of HSBC suggested that all but the 20 biggest companies were potentially subject to such buy-outs. He estimated that ready sources of cash and debt gave private equity global purchasing power of \$4.5 trillion.

Despite the lack of interest premium in such 'covenant-lite' loans, European and USA banks were falling over themselves to make them, and did not need mathematicians to do it for them. Merrill Lynch, the bank involved in the HCA buy-out, announced that a large part of its profits came from such loans. The lack of premium was dwarfed by their sheer scale and therefore profit to the bank which, like other such banks, wanted its cut from the expanded, yet limited, global pot of surplus value; limited even where it is a matter of "buying and selling claims on future value created in future productive activity," as Peter Gowan puts it.<sup>10</sup> Private equity firms are a case where the assumption is that they will be more efficient in squeezing out surplus value from any given company usually by increasing the intensity of labour of its workforce, or by selling off the most profitable parts of the company, and that the cash

flow is guaranteed. A study by Mark O'Hare of the research company Private Equity estimated that in the decade since the mid-1990s the typical European buy-out fund had given 15-20% returns to its investors net of fees, as opposed to a far lower FTSE return. Banks, for their cut, sub-contracted the job of squeezing out the extra surplus-value to these specialists, but with few safeguards.

Anthony Bolton was not alone in speaking out in May 2007. The new chief of the US Federal Reserve, Ben Bernake, gave a warning a little stiffer than that of his predecessor Alan Greenspan who made utterances about 'irrational exuberance.' Bernake said, "I urge banks to closely evaluate the risk that they're taking (...) not only in the context of a highly liquid, benign financial environment, but in one that might conceivably be less liquid and benign". More specifically, on the 20<sup>th</sup> of the month the Financial Stability Forum, a typically *ad hoc* set-up of global financial regulators (which "brings together on a regular basis national authorities responsible for financial stability in significant international financial centres, international financial institutions, sector-specific international groupings of regulators and supervisors, and committees of central bank experts") reported to the G8 at its Potsdam meeting that "investment banks are so keen to win business from hedge funds that they are relaxing their risk assessment."

Why should this be the case? At various times, in-house analysis of the crisis has made reference to both the pressures and incentives on and for bankers to make loans. As individuals, the bonuses – often in the millions – come with the loan regardless of how it pans out. This was touched on by London broker Terry Smith: "Now you've got a divorce between the origination of the credit and the person who carries the can for its (the loan's) service."<sup>11</sup> But the bonus system is now built-in by the notion that 'the best and the brightest' must be kept by individual banks at all costs, an elitist manifestation of structural personal greed. This was referred to by the Financial Stability Forum on 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2008 in which it cites how the lavish performance pay regimes in London and on Wall St. "encouraged disproportionate risk-taking with insufficient regard to long-term risks."

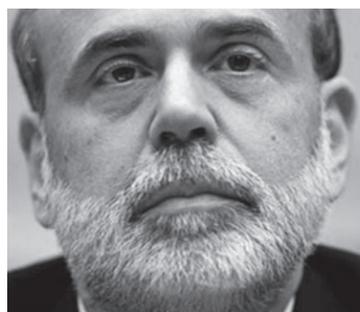
The pressure on bankers is that the real crime in their competitive world is to miss the boat when new loan opportunities are being taken by other banks. And the pressure to come up with the highest rates of return for investors usually comes from fund managers, themselves under pressure to perform. What has been most revealing is the focus on UBS Bank. They have been portrayed as dowdy virgins, tempted by high returns into an exotic world of credit derivatives which they didn't really understand. But what of the losses made by supposedly streetwise Citigroup and Merrill Lynch which lead to the resignations of the chairmen of both? Simply put, the pot of global surplus value is limited at any given time.

Mervyn King, Chairman of the Bank of England in early 2008, in front of the UK's Treasury Select Committee stated: "One of the problems is the immense pressure on fund managers to achieve above average returns. This is madness when it is not possible for everyone to earn above average returns." Here was an admission that the pot is limited, but then failed to account for structural personal greed by falling back on a familiar ahistorical standby: "But I don't think you can regulate human nature".

## "Making Your Investment Work As Hard As You Do."

This has been the slogan of advertisements for the Allianz financial outfit which appeared on the BBC World channel. It highlights the privileged position of the investor class.<sup>12</sup> Up until the recent talk of risk assessment and the lack of it, this privileged class seems to have assumed that its right to a return is inviolate. As shown by Rob Ray in *Mute* (9/8/07), this has been almost institutionalized with PFI. Through the proposed MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investment) which has been successfully resisted, such privilege was planned to be institutionalised on a global scale with private capital able to sue member states of the WTO. Instead this goal is sometimes achieved

Right:  
Anthony Bolton,  
David Einhorn,  
Ben Bernake,  
Sally Dewar



with bilateral trade deals between very unequal partners, and backed up with the threat of "investment strikes." Both are aimed at and within nation states.

What has upped the stakes is the investor now expecting a 'higher than average return' without risk. The benchmark has been from Private Equity buy-out funds with their 15-20% returns, and on "Emerging Market" funds. With these, the Morningstar investment research firm estimated that in the three years up to and including 2006, "Diversified emerging stock markets funds returned 56%, 24% and 32%, way above the 7% on domestic equities". And returns lower still from the safest, Treasury Bill, assets. Clearly such funds take a more direct share of that surplus value produced in Asia and Latin America, but they have helped create a benchmark.

In a previous 'crisis' which dominated the 1980s and beyond, that of "Third World" debt, banks with petrodollars to play with but a shortage of investment opportunities in the rich world poured money especially into Latin America. As early as 1976 Chase Manhattan generated 78% of its profits on its international operations. Increased interest rates and restructured debt packages increased the levels of repayment. Even for countries requiring no restructuring, banks increased the interest rate spreads. Over the course of the 1980s the accumulated debt of Latin America grew from \$257bn to \$452bn despite total annual interest payments of \$170bn. By 2000 the debt was \$750bn. The well-known history is that this form of free-market capitalism then needed the World Bank and a resurrected IMF to keep the show on the road and provide the discipline (with ideology attached) to ensure that higher priority was given to servicing the debt than any objectives like maintaining living standards.

### "If You Can't Protect That Which You Own, Then You Don't Own Anything."

This is what Jack Valenti, head of the Motion Picture Association of America, once said. In May 2007, Sally Dewar, capital markets sector leader at the Financial Services Authority, remarked that in the good old days before a decision to lend money by a bank was made, it would go to a credit committee of top bank executives listening to staff giving a pitch about the ability of the client to repay and on what terms. Whereas now, she said, these terms are given less consideration, and instead more importance is attached to how quickly the lender can offload the debt by selling on portions to rival banks. At the same time, this offloading of debt was supposed to make the financial world more resilient to shocks by spreading it around the world. But already by August 2007 the cry went up, "No one knows who owns this stuff." This stuff being CDOs (Collateralised Debt Obligations) and 'credit default swaps', instruments and processes whose workings have been so well documented by Donald Mackenzie.<sup>13</sup> CDOs started as forms of insurance – banks paying others to take the risk on loans or part of loans they had made – but then were taken up as profit-makers in themselves as packages of mixed debt. These too, as sophisticated forms of securitization, were put into special purpose vehicles typically registered offshore. There are different grades of what could be called 'creditworthiness'. Not unusual rates of return are 15-20%, while the highest rated offer returns better than the equivalently rated corporate or government bonds, as the McKinsey Consultancy had predicted. Many are mortgage-backed, of which, as previously shown, 'sub-prime' are a small component. What is difficult, MacKenzie shows, is valuing derivatives like CDOs. It is also an arena for mathematicians and computer power. Naturally enough 'recovery rates' (or the extent to which loans are 'covenant-lite', as Anthony Bolton put it) are a factor in determining 'value', but the most problematic is what is called 'correlation'; the degree to which one loan default might be part of a pattern, a cluster of defaults.

It is at this point that the blame game returns to the mathematician bankers. It's they, as well as the immense computer power used by 'the single-factor Gaussian cupola' (which has become the

standard and only mutually intelligible way of CDO valuation), who are at fault. By developing 'credit indices' valuation 'facts' are created but these have proved to be especially volatile. The dynamic created by defaults has, in turn, created increasingly irrational derivatives reminiscent of the 'Persian' /survive or perish' bet for dodgy cheapo airlines of the future – a great satirical riff in James Kelman's novel *You Have To Be Careful In The Land Of The Free*. The outcome, Mackenzie argues, is not that banks have been hiding their losses, but that the losses are hard to measure credibly. How, he asks, can you value a portfolio of mortgage-backed securities when trading in them has ceased? It has been down to central banks to give them a value which they may not have at all. It is this which gives the lie to the sanguine line that everything is OK, it's not a solvency crisis, but "a fairly typical liquidity crisis." Whatever else, it is not typical.

### Out Of The Shadows

Along with Metrolines, credit ratings agency companies (Standard and Poor, Moody's and Fitch) have been dragged out into the bright lights of blame. Auditors seem to have escaped any censure until the Financial Stability Forum meeting in February '08 attacked secretive off-balance accounting. Given the 'form' of the oligopoly of global auditors, this is amazing.<sup>14</sup> Metrolines are presented in the UBS category; foolish virgins who left the safe, dull business of insuring municipal bonds, to insure exotic derivatives, attracted by the returns on offer.<sup>15</sup> More venom has been directed at the ratings agencies, attacks which however, undermine a key component of *ad hoc* capitalist power.

During the 1980s and '90s this oligopoly of private companies (Standard & Poor, Moody's, and Fitch) exerted huge power over 'third world' economies, their country ratings determining what rate of interest they would have to pay on their debt, and in some instances whether they got credit at all. "The ratings agency's appearance as a non-partisan institution devoid of political affiliation, and thus motive, also conceals its disciplinary nature in terms of ideologically reproducing the 'international' standard of corporate governance."<sup>16</sup> As part of an *ad hoc* tyranny, ratings agencies may be more effective, say, than the IMF questioning the creditworthiness of Malaysia when it sensibly introduced currency restrictions during SE Asia's currency crisis. The ideological dimensions of this tyranny were illustrated in an interesting way by a commentator of the sanguine variety: Jeremy Warner of *The Independent* attacked proposals from the British government that would in some way monitor these agencies. He argued that this would mean "governments would become responsible for the ratings, thereby politicizing the whole business of credit." But as we know in so many instances, especially in the Third World, credit is already politicized in this way.

Yet such power is undermined by the present publicity which has arisen because of losses made in the rich world. David Einhorn, CEO of Greenlight Capital hedge fund, and Mackenzie differ in the nature and degree of blame attached to these agencies for giving too high a rating to many CDOs. But what they agree on is that whereas the agencies were used to rate just corporate and government bonds, much of their business is now with CDOs. Also, that there is a conflict of interests given that the agencies are businesses, and it is the issuers of debt instruments who pay the agencies to rate them.

As presented in *naked Capitalism*,<sup>17</sup> Einhorn argues that it goes further; that CDOs carry the highest fees, and that these fees were correlated with their willingness to look the other way at credit losses. Or rather, that ratings (AAA or AA+ for example) were created equal, whereas "the more complicated the paper – like CDOs – the more risk it was allowed to carry in each ratings category". This is what infuriated Anthony Bolton; the lack of premium on riskier debt and which he warned about months before Standard and Poor downrated some sub-prime-based CDOs. Mackenzie is slightly more sympathetic, given that agreeing on the value of an asset had become more difficult. But says they were/are at fault for rating

mortgage-backed securities on the basis of previous experience of default rates and the proceeds of repossession property sales, and did not take into account the bubble in house prices or the appetite for risky debt driven by investor expectations. In reality, the assumed cash flows were not there.

All this makes a credit ratings oligopoly, with the power to decide on what terms people can get credit, look amateur as well as greedy in their own way. But they cannot be blamed for this appetite for debt giving higher returns. The 'virgins' of UBS or German landesbanks were not led astray by hired malefactors and incompetents, but the pressure and greed for higher returns.

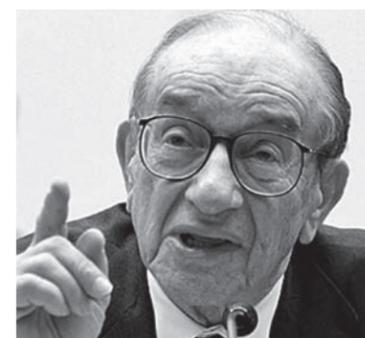
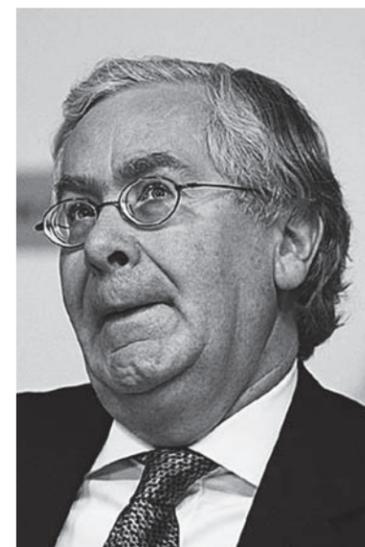
"They got this really nice house... Bought it when the price was right, and I mean: really right. Back the late Seventies you know? Before everything explodes there, prices go right through the roof; then ten or twelve years later, after all the suckers pay them, get in hock past their balls, down the prices come again... And now the banks are going under; we're all really inna shit."

George V. Higgins, 'Bomber's Law', 1993

The consequence of this crisis in the value of asset-based securities has had predictable consequences. Not knowing what securities are worth has seen banks not willing to lend to each other and tightening up on loans generally. Equally predictable in the UK, this has focused on mortgage lending but it also affects what might be called productive loans. Thus the impact of the 'credit crunch' on the real economy.

The great hegemonic strength of capitalism today is its perverse universalism. The financial system must be saved or everyone is affected. In a previous specifically 'debt' crisis, that hit Latin America right through the 1980s, the IMF and BIS (Bank for International Settlements) were brought in to save the banks from potential defaults on their loans. "The decision to ignore the normal workings of the market mechanism and allow the imprudence of the bankers to go unpunished was quite deliberate. The system had to be saved."<sup>18</sup> What happened was an unplanned resort to official recycling, which is what we are seeing now in the present crisis, with injections of liquidity from central banks. Even commentators from the Keynesian tradition who are keen on 'moral hazard' (i.e. that banks and investors should pay for their mistakes), fall back on disease imagery; how the failure of one bank would create a vicious circle of financial mistrust, further failures and a Depression such as began in 1929, and how a financial collapse would end up hurting millions of savers and investors.

The most spectacular rescuing was of Northern Rock in the UK and Bear Sterns in the USA. What stands out in both rescues even though their causes were so different – Northern Rock as a 'victim' of illiquidity – is the determination to at least maintain the fiction of a free market. In the case of New Labour it even at one point meant backing a chancer like Richard Branson until wishful thinking was no longer possible. In the case of Bear Sterns the fiction of the buy-out – on tough terms – was that it was done by the JP Morgan bank at a fire-sale price.<sup>19</sup> In this instance, the Federal Reserve was so keen to see the deal go through that it offered to guarantee the \$30bn worth of hard-to-sell mortgage-backed securities,



Above  
Mervyn King,  
Larry Summers,  
Alan Greenspan,  
George Soros

while JP Morgan played tough on voting through the deal by BS shareholders, this while it itself has an unknown exposure to credit default swaps.

These were the unavoidable public spectacles. At the same time there has also been a steady official recycling, that is the provision of credit to capitalist banks by Central Banks. This passes under the rubric of 'liquidity injection' as if this were a neutral process. The Federal Reserve was quickest off the mark. On the 16<sup>th</sup> August '07 it announced a cut in its discount rate to make it cheaper for banks with cash-flow problems to borrow money; a U-turn from their inflation concerns of just one month earlier. More to the point, they made it possible to borrow cash against assets no one seemed to want to buy (and therefore of undefinable value) with home mortgage and related assets specifically listed as acceptable collateral. The policy of restricting these loans to short periods was also abandoned. The new liquidity would be available as long as needed. The Bank of England was slower off the mark, and has been blamed for this. Starting from a hard 'moral hazard' line, described as 'Victorian', the run on Northern Rock forced it to change. At first banks could borrow from it, but publicly and at stiff rates. In December '07 it joined the Fed, ECB, Swiss and Canadian Central Banks to make a \$100bn international 'injection', offering for its part \$20bn of 3 month funds at two auctions. This time it accepted a wide range of 'high-quality' collateral, and without the penalty rate it had imposed before. Then this could be done privately and for longer periods. In late April '08, after nine months of 'credit crunch', it was announced that it would be willing to exchange government bonds for mortgage-backed securities; swaps for one year periods which could be extended to 3 years. This facility would run to between \$100-200bn. These securities were again described as 'high-quality' but the reality is that these are illiquid in the present climate for the precise reason that who can say what is 'high quality'. With house prices falling, interest rates rising, and the possibility of a sharp economic downturn, an increasing amount of mortgage debt will not produce those cash-flows, and will 'go bad'.

This Bank of England move followed a similar plan announced by the Fed which on May 2<sup>nd</sup> '08 raised the size of the 'Tem Auction Facility' (another liquidity injection process) and also allowed lower-rated asset-backed debt to be used as collateral, some of which, on the 'free market', would be priced at zero, some of which could be reliant on credit card debt, unsecured loans and auto loans. At the same time, the Fed<sup>20</sup> has been steadily cutting interest rates. This was the policy used consistently by Alan Greenspan to the point where the 'Greenspan put' became part of the financial world's own language, meaning that the Fed would always act to protect the market from losses. The policy under the new chairman, Ben Bernake, was going to be much tougher; just as wise-after-the-eventers were attacking the Greenspan legacy, blaming him for creating one asset bubble after another. In fact, since the 'crisis' began, the same policy has been followed.

The amount of credit, as of March '08, supplied officially to the US banking system far exceeds that coming from Sovereign Wealth Funds to which some banks have turned to 'strengthen' their cash base. For example, in December '07 Merrill Lynch sold \$5bn of its equity to the Singaporean government's investment fund Temaesek, and the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority has taken

a \$7.5 bn stake in Citigroup. These are entirely rational moves by these Funds, given a reluctance both to hold more dollars or to dump them, given that this would set-off a self-defeating spiral in its value. Despite the rationality and the relatively small amounts however, it is these funds which have created psycho-political and ideological anxieties, given that these are the Funds of not-white men from what might be called varieties of 'state capitalism' that had been cast into the dustbin of history by Alan Greenspan in 1998. "Foreign governments may not operate solely in accordance with normal commercial considerations," is the way these anxieties have been expressed. A characteristically ad hoc outfit, The International Corporate Governance Network, met SWF (sovereign wealth fund) representatives in Gothenberg in March, but did not call for a regulatory regime, rather that the SWFs should be transparent in their motivations. This came after the SWFs had rejected Larry Summers' (ex-US Treasury) demand at Davos that they sign up to a code of conduct, transparency and so forth. Capital is capital with a global shared class interest, but these SWFs, having been continually lectured on the subject since 1997, must have enjoyed saying, 'Well, what about transparency in your own banking system then?'

### The Invisible Hand And The Puppeteer

'Adam Smith's invisible hand has a puppeteer - the US Federal Reserve', read a *Herald Tribune* headline after the US government-organised rescue of Bear Stern, the USA's fifth largest investment bank. Calls for regulatory systems and architectures are, rather, the *quid pro quo* for this practical business of rescuing banks. Some of those making such calls are rightly keen to talk of how the free marketers, players and ideologues always complaining of government interference, run to governments for help whenever there is a crisis.<sup>21</sup> What the commentators and players (George Soros and all) demand is that new regulation of the

markets be introduced for its own sake, and that of everyone else. Apparently regulations should involve new layers of transparency, accountability and financial monitoring. In the happy world of Will Hutton, it should not be so difficult: "We must have a government that understands the delicate relationship between markets and the state and is ready to act - and a wider business culture that accepts the necessity. Business needs government and has to accept that regulation and intervention are part of the bargain."<sup>22</sup> Well that's all right then, apparently all it takes is a little delicacy and a wider culture and all will be well.

Back in August '07, Gavyn Davies, a pillar of the British power elite, was telling the Bank of England not to play the hardball game it was threatening but that it should "address some regulatory deficiencies once the crisis blows over." In the ever-more comprehensively deregulated world, such calls appear at regular moments of 'crisis'. Real heavyweights like Alexander Lamfalussy and Felix Rohatyn have said such things on and off for 30 years. George Soros, Peter Sutherland, as well as "Third World" governments that had been so currency battered, called for a 'global financial architecture' after the free movement of capital had such a devastating impact on Asian economies in 1997-8. The response from the self-confident Clinton Treasury team was that this was unnecessary and wrong. What mattered were national

regulators for transparency and accountability.

Soon after the collapse of the ironically named hedge fund Long Term Capital Management Fund, other regulatory demands were made. But all this talk was merely about calming nerves. The US Treasury obviously hoped the impetus for reform would pass before issues related to offshore banking centres,<sup>23</sup> hedge funds, or even deeper issues like capital market liberalisation, became subject to scrutiny and negotiation. Indeed in 1999, one year after the rescue of LTCM, the Glass Steagall Act was abolished! Soon after all the dire warnings of May 2007, Hank Paulson, the new Treasury Secretary<sup>24</sup> was complaining that regulations introduced after Enron were becoming oppressive and would make New York 'uncompetitive'. It is this same Hank Paulson who planned what *The Guardian* (31/3/08) headlined as the "biggest shakeup of Wall Street watchdogs in 80 years." Although suggesting a merger of some existing regulatory authorities and giving new monitoring powers to the same Federal Reserve, the same 'Club Fed' which missed the mortgage crisis, the proposals would not limit banks' exposure to credit instruments. In fact it sought to limit what regulation was capable of. "I am not suggesting that more regulation is the answer, or even that effective regulation is the answer, or even that more effective regulation can prevent the periods of financial market stress that seem to occur every five to ten years. I am suggesting that we should and can have a structure that is designed for the world we live in."

*The Herald Tribune* headline<sup>25</sup> was more pertinent: 'Treasury Proposal Gives Wall St. What It Wants'. It noted that a Wall St. lobby group, 'The Committee on Capital Markets', had released a report saying that the "shift of regulatory intensity balance has been lost to the comparative advantage of the US financial market." What also stands out in the Paulson version is his nonchalant insistence that this crisis is just one of those things, a regular period when financial excess is reined in before a new burst of lending and growth will resume on a 'sunder' basis.

In a letter to investment firm ECOFIN in September '07, UK chancellor Alistair Darling specifically warned of the dangers of regulatory overkill. Apart from demands to tackle the role of ratings agencies, the promise has been for more monitoring of a wide range of financial institutions and businesses. In the UK, this to be done by a beefed up Financial Services Authority. It is the banks who pay for the bulk of the FSA's activities, and of course they have lobbied hard to restrict any growth in regulation. It is indeed the regulation by 'principles' only that Paulson wants New York to emulate. The FSA is the same institution which failed to monitor Northern Rock for two years before its share price started to dive in April '07. It brings into question the competence as well as the will of such an agency given that the Northern Rock model of lending long, when 70% of the money with which to make them were from funds raised on the international market, was obviously flawed.<sup>26</sup>

### Beyond The Duologue

In-house analysis of the crisis has not been a monologue. There is a clear difference between those calling for regulation and more international managing of the international economy as the price of Central Bank rescues, and those from what I've called the sanguine camp. The 'regulators', also nervous that more and more interest rate cuts may not have the intended effect - as happened in Japan in the 1990s after the fall-out from a property asset bubble collapse - are often enthusiasts for 'moral hazard'. Or, rather, believe that present Central Bank policy is one of postponement and that the next credit crisis will be worse. This idea of 'postponement' figured in critiques of Keynes; that government deficit spending could only postpone capitalist realities for a period, and that in the end debts must be paid. The irony is that the neoliberal model depends on a cocktail of 'Keynesianisms', military, asset, and personal indebtedness, which might also be called privatized Keynesianism. These 'regulators' will, I believe, have little real effective policy impact, even though their concern is for the long-term and general well being of international

Right:  
Alexander  
Lamfalussy,  
Felix Rohatyn,  
Peter Sutherland



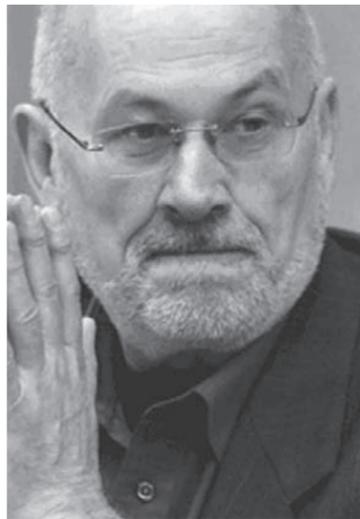
capitalism.

There are many in the sanguine camp but Jeremy Warner of *The Independent* is as representative as any. Talking first in the UK context, he argued that firmer regulation "is a complete waste of time and energy. For the moment bankers have learned their lesson and are already well ahead of the regulators in sorting out the mess they've created. They won't quickly repeat the mistakes they've just made. Whatever the new regulations put in place, markets will inevitably find a way of circumnavigating them. Come the next crisis, it will be a different door altogether through which the horse bolts. Worse still, any new regulatory obligations will help create the next crisis, such is the ingenuity of markets and the law of unintended consequences."<sup>27</sup>

The ideological assumptions here are staggering. Perhaps they should be placed first against Josef Ackermann of Deutsche Bank who confessed: "I no longer believe in the market's self-healing power." But no problem here for the likes of Jeremy Warner: The banks have learned their lesson and are ahead of the game; it's a cyclical business, just one of those things. But there is also a back-up. That the market will out, is backed up by a certain brand of fatalism. Never mind that capital does not want to be regulated, there's no point. Proponents of neoliberalism are very keen on 'inevitability', that everything is cut and dried, no one is responsible and politics are an irrelevance. Internationally Warner argues something similar; that no institution could command in "today's viciously competitive global economy". Vicious? Certainly. But selective when it comes to competitive; competitive for a share of the global pot, but dominated by oligopolies.

If neoliberal capitalism's assumptions are absolute, and its model both global and secure, there is of course truth to Warner's arguments.<sup>28</sup> The British state described by Marx could push capital to act in its long term collective interest, but this no longer seems either possible or desirable from the neoliberal point of view. Regulation and institutional arrangements are anathema except for moments when rescue is needed, because these will inevitably involve negotiations, and negotiations will involve, at however subterranean a level, notions of fairness. The private property nature of capitalism is an absolute given, not to be tampered with by either democratic institutions or notions of justice. Thus, in addition to the prospect of being given short shrift by the Sovereign Wealth Funds, it would have been ideologically difficult for the *ad hoc* International Corporate Governance Network to demand regulation in their case.

An often more radical voice has characterized the crisis as showing the evils specifically of



financial capital, that this has become 'casino capitalism'. It's certainly true that Wall Street and the City of London have political clout as well as the power to decide who gets credit and who not, and that their demand for higher than average returns (a bigger share of the global pot) has created the present crisis. This too is likely to have a negative impact on economic activity. But if a consequence of this negative impact is a mood of resentment, it would seem all too easy for 'financial' to be made synonymous with 'Jewish' or 'cosmopolitan' capital for example. Easy to imagine how an ultra-leftist turned Nazi like Horst Mahler is already pushing this version of events.<sup>29</sup>

Contemporary capitalism is not just 'financial' capitalism. 'Productive capital' on the front line of squeezing out surplus value is not doing so solely for the benefit of the banks, and besides, also puts a chunk of their realised profit into financial assets. Contemporary capitalism is not going to 'collapse'. It is vulnerable however; shown by its hysterical intolerance of any other economic model, while millions take objection to being squeezed for more surplus value whether through increased intensity of labour; or having the costs of their reproduction increased. To be superseded, or even reformed in any meaningful way, its own version of itself must be challenged; its legitimacy, competence and the self-confidence of structural greed.

#### Notes

1. In May 2006, Stephen King, MD of economics at HSBC was commenting on the size of Chinese production and India and its cheap labour; went on to say, it "has made it a lot more difficult for Western workers to demand wage increases in compensation for higher petrol prices or gas bills." And these workers will presumably be none-too-pleased. The smug patrician tone of that "presumably be non-too-pleased is a real piece of work, but the point is clear a squeeze on real wages can only make the pot of surplus value that much greater. As to surplus value, I am using this in the broadest sense of economic exploitation. That is the global pot also includes the kind of non-value production, of theft, war looting and the other dirty washing of contemporary capitalism.
2. *IHT* "The Return of Hot Money" 20/5/06
3. During a previous 'credit crisis', that of 'Third World' debt and its repayment in the 1980s, the dollar also fell
4. Donald MacKenzie "End-of-the-World-Trade": *London Review of Books* 8/5/08: [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n09/mack01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n09/mack01_.html)
5. See for example, Barker: "The D Word"
6. *London Review of Books*, 3 January 2008, 'Cityphilia', John Lancaster: [http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n01/lanc01\\_.html](http://www.lrb.co.uk/v30/n01/lanc01_.html)
7. Robert Brenner estimates that for 80% of American workers real wages have stayed at 1979 levels.
8. This hardly explains how it was Derek Wanless former chairman of NatWest was the man in charge of credit controls at Northern Rock at the time of its collapse.
9. Their role in the Enron scandal obviously did not lessen their popularity.
10. 'The Globalization Gamble: The Dollar-Wall Street Regime and its Consequences', Peter Gowan: [http://marxsite.com/Gowan\\_DollarWallstreetRegime.pdf](http://marxsite.com/Gowan_DollarWallstreetRegime.pdf)
11. *The Guardian* 15/9/07
12. 'Class' here is admittedly short hand. The privileges of rich and corporate investors are ideologically validated by the existence of pension funds as investors, and therefore of millions of not-rich people, those who, in the slogan, 'work hard'. The question of who loses when investments 'go bad' is also germane. In the case of Enron there is evidence that the biggest losers were pension funds in Republican controlled states. At the same time the fetishistic quality of the slogan is obvious; investments do not 'work'.
13. *ibid*
14. The lectures that South East Asian governments had to endure in 1997-8 on transparency, accounting standards and so on, must have caused grim mirth amongst them given the record say of Coopers & Lybrand, auditors to Robert Maxwell, Polly Peck. In good British style they changed their name by amalgamation. As PriceWaterhouse Cooper they were the auditors for Northern Rock. In fact they earned more from 'advisory' work with it, than from auditing.
15. Though one Metroline, XL Capital, is being sued by Merrill Lynch over 6 'credit default swaps' worth \$3 billion.
16. Soederbergh: *Global Financial Architecture* Zed Books
17. [www.nakedcapitalism.com/2007/11/rating-agencies-created-incentives-to.html](http://www.nakedcapitalism.com/2007/11/rating-agencies-created-incentives-to.html)
18. Soederbergh.
19. JP Morgan has played this role as government-backed leader to both enforce and represent the collective interest of banks before. It was they who took centre stage in the Situations Room of the White House at Christmas 1997 in organizing the 'bail-out' of South Korea.
20. It has been recently dubbed "Club Fed", a piece of wit that has for a long time described Federal prisons as opposed to state ones, on the grounds that such prisons are relatively cushy. This is the Fed in the Greenspan + era.
21. It should be amazing that this free market fiction should still be maintained despite the sheer size of Export Credit Guarantees, and of that R&D and profit that comes through military contracts.
22. *The Observer*
23. At the height of an earlier round of demands for regulation, Alan Greenspan argued, with a fatalism sometimes used by deregulated capital's apologists, that regulating offshore banking centres would only send such finance 'further underground.' They have proved to be indispensable to deregulated financial capitalism, e.g. the registering of SIVs in the Cayman Islands, and to recycle so much of the dirty money also indispensable to modern capitalism. This is what Loren Gouldner, following Rosa Luxemburg calls 'fictitious capital'. As I noted earlier I have used surplus value in its broadest sense to include such money.
24. Paulson, like Robert Rubin Treasury Secretary under Clinton, was a CEO of Goldman Sachs, the investment bank. 'What's good for General Motors is good for America,' is long gone, and one reading might be that it's a case of "What's good for Goldman Sachs." There is some truth in it, but it also indicates the nature of what Wright-Mills called The Power Elite, revolving doors between private capital and government as well as the military. Rubin was drafted in As CEO of Citigroup after the resignation of Charles Prince.
25. 2/4/08
26. This overuse of securitization was used to increase lending to the point where Northern Rock accounted for 20% of British mortgages at the start of 2007.
27. *The Independent* 14/9/07
28. Never mind a lack of authority to regulate, there is not even an "authority on the global scene to come out with a credible estimate of the overall exposure", to 'bad' debt, as Diane Cholyleva of Lombard St Research put it recently.
29. See also the latest from Samuel Huntington, American ultra-nationalist. The cosmopolitan globalizers are the enemies of America and some of them are American: therefore they are in effect, traitors. See his *Who Are We?* Finance capital is rather, a form particularly suited to the Power Elite.

Left:  
Hank Paulson,  
Horst Mahler,  
Alistair Darling

# Reading is an argument

## Althusser's commandment, conjecture and contradiction

Liam O' Ruairc

For many years, Louis Althusser (1918-1990) has been considered a 'dead dog', both theoretically and politically, his writings left to the gnawing criticism of the mice.<sup>1</sup> He is better known today for the murder of his wife and his internment in psychiatric institutions than for his ideas. His project is often attacked theoretically for its alleged determinism and all-pervasive vision of ideology, and dismissed politically for being motivated by the needs of Stalinism.<sup>2</sup> Althusser's central preoccupation was the renovation of communist political practice by a renewal of Marxist theory. According to a far from uncritical study, its practical effects were in fact 'theoretical destalinisation' rather than theoretical Stalinism.<sup>3</sup>

In stressing the permanence of ideology, Althusser, "follows the path which was opened up to men by the great revolutionary thinkers who understood that the freedom of men is not achieved by the complacency of its ideological recognition, but by knowledge of the laws of their slavery, and that the 'realisation' of their concrete individuality is achieved by the analysis and mastery of the abstract relations which govern them."<sup>4</sup>

As a reading of Marx, Althusser's method is sometimes accused of being "a form of subjectivism" which permits readers "to project whatever they imagined to be the case onto a particular text."<sup>5</sup> Althusser's "symptomatic reading" considers that what is left unsaid in a text – in other words its silences and absences – to be just as significant as what is said. If we want to appreciate the magnitude of Marx's theoretical contribution and draw out the real implications of Marxist thought, a simple or "innocent" reading of Marx is not enough, rather a symptomatic reading which takes into account silences and contradictions is necessary. A reading which reveals what Paul de Man calls "the dialectic of blindness and insight" at work in Marx's text has more to offer than a surface reading.<sup>6</sup> Marx's text, as Derrida would put it, has "sufficiently surprising resources" so that when Marx wrote, he said "more, less, or something other than what he would mean."

For Derrida "the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses... To produce this signifying structure obviously cannot consist of reproducing, by the effaced and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his relationship with the history to which he belongs thanks to the element of language. This moment of doubling commentary should no doubt have its place in a critical reading. To recognise and respect all its classical exigencies is not easy and requires all the instruments of traditional criticism. Without this recognition and this respect, critical production would risk developing in any direction at all and authorise itself to say almost anything. But this indispensable guardrail had always only protected it has never opened a reading."<sup>7</sup> As to projecting whatever one wants onto the text, for Paul de Man, on the contrary, "reading is an argument... because it has to go against the grain of what one would want to happen in the name of what has to happen; this is the same as saying that reading is an epistemological event prior to being an ethical or aesthetic value. This does not mean that there can be a true reading, but that no reading is conceivable in which the question of its truth or falsehood is not primarily involved."<sup>8</sup>

Regarding the accusation of denying the 'continuity' of Marx's thought, Althusser can be criticised for 'bending the stick' too far in the

direction of the mature Marx. However this is not a matter of projecting something he imagined; he is right in arguing that there is a new problematic. Alienation as a category is epistemologically not equivalent to concepts like 'relations of production' or 'surplus value'. However textually tendentious and theoretically contentious Althusser's position, the post-1845 research programme of historical materialism is, according to Gregory Elliot, "theoretically superior to and politically more significant than what preceded it."<sup>9</sup> For Althusser, the question of discontinuity in Marx's thought is not brought up as part of an academic history of ideas or of some intellectual argument about an alleged 'incoherence' in Marx's thought; it reconstitutes the Marx who was *most revolutionary* in a *scientific* sense and hence in a *political* sense. This is where the political relevance of Althusser's reading lies.<sup>10</sup> In the process of analysing the 'epistemological break' in Marx's writings, Althusser developed an anti-empiricist and non-positivist philosophy of science which gave primacy to the conceptual elaboration of scientific discoveries. His distinction between the 'object of knowledge' and the 'real object' encapsulated a simultaneous commitment to the specificity of scientific practice (the historical production and transformation of theoretical concepts) and epistemological realism (the independent extra-scientific existence of the objects of which knowledge is produced). It bears some comparison to Roy Bhaskar's transitive and intransitive objects of science.<sup>11</sup>

Althusser did not see himself as a 'Marxist philosopher' but rather a 'Marxist in philosophy'. Philosophy is the under-labourer; rather than the queen of sciences. Its purpose is to clarify and develop the theoretical framework of historical materialism.<sup>12</sup> In his philosophical under-labouring, Althusser seeks to make Marxist epistemology and the fundamental axioms for the study of social formations – concrete analysis of concrete situations – explicit. These exist in a 'practical state' throughout the writings of Marx. They can also be found in Lenin's analysis of the revolutionary situation in Russia in 1917 or Mao's distinction between the primary and the secondary aspects of contradiction.<sup>13</sup> Althusser seeks to present explicitly and systematically the methodological and epistemological assumptions underlying such analysis in a generally accessible form so that it can be developed in the concrete analysis of other concrete situations. In doing this Althusser is not a structuralist, as he emphasises the primacy of contradictions whereas structuralism negates the clash of discrepant structures that generate historical change. Structuralism postulates no articulated hierarchy of levels and no conception of contradictions between them so it cannot provide a theory of history. However in reality it is not possible to think of social structure without taking account of social conflicts, change and revolutions; that is, without accounting for the constant mutation of structures which are unstable and constituted by forces in conflict. For Althusser then structures are in fact constituted by the very conflict of those forces – an idea totally alien to structuralism.

For Althusser, materialist dialectic reality



is a pre-given, complexly structured totality, characterised by disjunctions, irregularities, uneven development and movement. It is the notion of contradiction, called by Lenin the kernel of the dialectic, which enables one to understand reality simultaneously as process and structure. Althusser has given the most adequate exposition of the materialist dialectic: "If every contradiction is a contradiction in a complex whole, structured in dominance, this complex whole cannot be envisaged without its contradictions, without their basically uneven relations. In other words, each contradiction, each essential articulation of the structure, and the general relation of the articulations in the structure in dominance, constitute so many conditions of the existence of the complex whole itself. This proposition is of the first importance for it means that the structure of the whole and therefore the 'difference' of the essential contradictions and their structure in dominance, is the very existence of the whole; that the 'difference' of the essential contradictions (that there is a principal contradiction, etc. and that every contradiction has a principal aspect) is identical to the conditions of existence of the complex whole."<sup>14</sup>

The kernel of materialist dialectics is the primacy of contradiction over identity with the concomitant emphasis upon the irreducibility of struggle, movement and transformation of one thing into another, on antagonism and non-antagonism. The theory of contradiction is therefore central to any elaboration of the theoretical bases of Marxism. In this respect Althusser was among those who promoted Marx's understanding of class as a shifting set of structural antagonisms, resisting the reduction of "the working class" to the sort of social object produced by colonial minded anthropology.

Therefore, a specific social formation is a complex and uneven relation of determinate economic, political and ideological practices in contradiction with each other within one historical mode of production. Althusser was able to provide a reconceptualisation of the structure of social formations which respected their constitutive complexity through the assignment of relative autonomy to irreducible political and ideological regions. It is no longer a matter of politics and ideology being superstructures which are being supported and produced by an economic base, forced to undergo revolutionary change when the economic base is in revolution. It is rather a matter

of seeing the articulation of the three practices, dependent on historically specific conditions. For the contradiction within each practice weighs upon the specific contradictions of the others; the whole historic situation impinges upon each moment. As Althusser wrote:

“The capital-labour contradiction is never simple, but is always specified by the historically concrete forms and circumstances in which it is exercised. It is specified by the forms of the superstructure (the state, dominant ideology, religion, politically organised movements and so on), specified by the internal and external historical situation which determines it on the one hand as a function of the national past... and on the other as functions of the existing world context.”<sup>15</sup>

According to the specific historical conditions a crisis can occur within or between political, economic and ideological practices; their specific contradictions are overdetermined by other contradictions, so that they become the arena of crisis, the principal contradiction, the contradiction whose struggle determines the future direction of the social formation as a whole. Why is the above crucial for militants? Because the analysis of the specific ‘conjuncture’ of conditions is the foundation of Marxist politics, as the possibilities for revolution are dependent upon the particular conditions created by the uneven relations constituting a social formation. To illustrate this point, Althusser takes Lenin’s writings from 1917, which reveal that it was the unevenness of the Russian social formation’s development – the combination of industry with a semi-feudal monarchy and agrarian system, confronted with the imperialist war – which made a socialist revolution possible there before the West. The process of overdetermination articulates how the ‘weakest link’ becomes the ‘decisive link’. Althusser has done more than any other contemporary theorist to clarify the concept of the ‘conjuncture’, the prevailing and determining set of material conditions, and to locate it within the science of historical materialism.

The concept of ‘structural causality’ means that the results of history are never decided in advance.<sup>16</sup> The structural causality differentiates the Marxist from any mechanistic position and, “introduces in the determination an array of different instances, which supposes that society is a differentiated whole, complex and articulated, such that the last instance (economic) fixes the real limits of all the others (political and ideological), their relative autonomy and the performance of the base itself, as well as the efficiency of this action.”<sup>17</sup>

A social formation is understood simultaneously as a concrete whole and as a multiplicity of determinations. To affirm that the economic is the determining structure in the last instance as it introduces a hierarchy of determinations is a materialist position. To indicate that it is only a determination ‘in the last instance’ amounts to a rejection of mechanical determinism, and an adoption of a dialectical position. For a long time, the specificity of Marxist determinacy had been forgotten and fell upon an evolutionist interpretation of historical events, a ‘transitive’ or ‘expressive’ causality closer to (interpretations of) the mechanistic causality of the natural sciences than to the new type of causality discovered by Marx. The concept of structural causality allows a break with evolutionism. Althusser’s thesis that ‘history is a process without a subject or without a goal’<sup>18</sup> enables a break with voluntarism and teleology. This was not a denial of historical agency. Althusser never doubted that there are subjects or historical agents, men and women who make their own history. This avoids objectivism. But they do not make it just as they please, but out of circumstances encountered and given from the past. This is why Marx noted in his ‘Marginal Notes On Wagner’, “My analytical method does not start from man, but from the economically given social period.”<sup>19</sup> This avoids voluntarism. It is nothing



other than this which Althusser wants to express in his thesis about history being a process without a subject.

For Althusser there was such a thing as ‘science’ which is outside ideology, for its discourse is precisely subjectless. This is why he did not take issue with humanism as such: only with theoretical humanism. The problem is not with practical humanism but with humanism as a problematical philosophical category.<sup>20</sup> Theoretical humanism, such as that of Sartre, ends up becoming a poetics of history, whereas Althusser’s anti-humanist problematic results with the science of historical materialism.<sup>21</sup> Althusser’s theoretical interventions have been accused of falling into mandarism and academicism. But there is a clear danger in reducing a theoretical itinerary to the vicissitudes of immediate political concerns. How can the relation of his theoretical work to his political practice be conceived?

Michael Sprinker argues, “the correct mode for conceptualising the relation of theory to politics is not, in an Althusserian view, to read off from theory the transparent evidence of a determining political practice, nor to translate immediate political commitments into a theory of political action and historical agency; rather, political practice and theoretical practice are two instances of a complex structured whole in which the development of each instance may proceed according to different historical rhythm... Theoretical practice can, as Lenin observed, be one step ahead of political practice; the only error is to believe that theory can move forward on its own, that it can be several steps in advance of political practice. Althusserian theory stands at the horizon of Marxist theoretical practice, providing the instruments with which Marxist political practice can advance.”<sup>22</sup>

But how can this be realised? Perhaps at a theoretical level, it will help militants avoid the very real pitfalls of economism and evolutionism, objectivism and voluntarism which all find their translation into bureaucratic thought and anti-democratic practice. At the level of practical political intervention, Blackburn and Stedman Jones have shown the relevance of Althusser’s mode of analysis: “The logic of Althusser’s Marxism encourages us to study the given complexity of contradictions both within any one country and in the world as a whole... If these different struggles are not correctly located at the theoretical level, it will be impossible to coordinate them at the level of political practice. Such diverse struggles would then inhibit rather than strengthen each other: A stress on the intercalation of overdetermined contradictions and a rejection of the false simplicity of the ‘expressive totality’ would seem to provide the correct epistemological starting point for an internationalist politics. This is equally true of revolutionary struggle within a single country, where political practice is posed with the same inescapable complexity. Within the decisive revolutionary class, the proletariat, it is necessary to achieve a proper combination of economic, political and cultural practice. It is also necessary to unite the revolutionary struggle of the working class with the parallel struggles of particular oppressed groups... Althusserian categories seem particularly apt for establishing the connections between the diverse forms of repression in modern capitalist social formations, without at the same time collapsing one form of struggle into another... No revolutionary... can afford to ignore the weapons of scientific criticism put at his disposal by Althusser.”<sup>23</sup>

## Notes

1. Robert Paul Resch (1992) *Althusser and the Renewal of Marxist Social Theory* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press) provides a significant exception to this trend.
2. The most famous example of this criticism is E.P. Thompson (1978) *The Poverty of Theory*, (London: Merlin). More recently, see John Rees (1998) *The Algebra of Revolution: The Dialectic and the Classical Marxist Tradition* (London and New York: Routledge).
3. Gregory Elliott (1987) *Althusser: The Detour of Theory* (London and New York: Verso), pp.336-8
4. Louis Althusser (1970) *For Marx* (London and New York: Verso), p. 240
5. Paul Smith, Letter, *Weekly Worker*, Issue 703, 9 January 2008
6. Paul de Man (1983, 2nd ed.) *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (London: Methuen). In the last years Paul de Man was alive, he laid plans for a detailed study of Marx, Adorno and Althusser. See Paul de Man (1986) *The Resistance To Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), p. 121
7. Jacques Derrida (1976) trans G. C. Spivak, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), pp. 157-158. From his interview with Michael Sprinker, it is clear that Derrida owes a lot to Althusser’s work: see Sprinker (1993) ‘Politics and Friendship: An Interview with Jacques Derrida’, in E. Ann Kaplan and Michael Sprinker (eds) *The Althusserian Legacy* (London and New York: Verso), pp. 183-233. See also Warren Montag (1999) ‘Spirits Armed and Unarmed’, in Michael Sprinker (ed) *Ghostly Demarcations: A Symposium on Jacques Derrida’s Specters of Marx* (London and New York: Verso), pp. 72-75
8. Paul de Man (1978) ‘Preface’ in Carol Jacobs, *The Dissimulating Harmony: Images of Interpretation in Nietzsche, Rilke and Benjamin* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press), p.xiii. Michael Sprinker has related de Man’s insistence on the non-subjective humanly eccentric properties of language to the Althusserian project. See Sprinker (1987) *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and Ideology in the Theory of Historical Materialism* (London: Verso)
9. Gregory Elliott, p.328
10. For a more recent overall analysis of Marx’s thought, influenced by Althusser, see Etienne Balibar (1995) *The Philosophy of Marx* (London and New York: Verso)
11. Roy Bhaskar (1989) *Reclaiming Reality* (London and New York: Verso), pp. 142-143 and 187-188
12. Alain Badiou (1966) ‘Le (re)commencement du materialisme dialectique’, *Critique*, issue 240
13. Slavoj Žižek has recently underlined the importance of Mao’s essay on contradiction. See Žižek (2007) ‘Introduction’, in Mao Zedong, *On Practice and Contradiction* (London and New York: Verso), pp.1-28. For an approach to Mao that problematises his current demonisation, see Mobo Gao (2008) *The Battle For China’s Past: Mao and the Cultural Revolution* (London: Pluto Press).
14. Althusser, *For Marx*, p. 205
15. *Ibid*, p. 106
16. An idea that Althusser will later radicalise in his ‘aleatory materialism’ or ‘materialism of the encounter’, which amounts in Alex Callinicos’s words to ‘an extreme rejection of a teleological conception of the historical process’. Alex Callinicos (1995) ‘Lost Illusions’, *Radical Philosophy*, Issue 74, pp. 42-44. See also Gregory Elliott (1998) ‘Ghostly Demarcations: On the posthumous edition of Althusser’s writings’, *Radical Philosophy*, Issue 90, pp.20-32
17. Louis Althusser (1975) *Positions* (Paris: Editions Sociales), p.153
18. Louis Althusser (1976) *Essays in Self-Criticism* (London: New Left Books) p. 99
19. Marx-Engels, *Werke*, Bd. XIX, Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1968, 370
20. See Martha Harnecker (1995) ‘Althusser and the “theoretical antihumanism” of Marx’, available at <http://www.rebellion.org/harnecker/althusser251102.pdf>
21. It is difficult to see how a multiplicity of individual acts can give birth to structures which have their own laws discontinuous from the acts which gave rise to them. The most obvious example is language, which cannot be described as a simple totalisation of all the speech-acts of linguistic agents. The subject who speaks never totalises linguistic laws by his own word. Contrary to what Sartre argues, the laws of grammar or relations of production are not intentional objects, they are discontinuous from linguistic utterances or the political and historical actions of individuals.
22. Michael Sprinker, *Imaginary Relations*, pp.204-205
23. Robin Blackburn and Gareth Stedman Jones (1972) ‘Louis Althusser and the Struggle for Marxism’, in Dick Howards and Karl Klare (eds) *The Unknown Dimension: European Marxism Since Lenin* (London: Methuen), pp 383-384

# Sense & Knowledge

## Daniel Jewesbury

Projecting Migration:  
Transcultural Documentary Practice  
Eds. Alan Grossman & Áine O'Brien, 2007,  
Wallflower Press, ISBN 978-1-9056-7404-6

Border Country  
Melanie Friend, 2007, Belfast Exposed Photography /  
The Winchester Gallery, ISBN 978-0-9524-2179-5

It always seems like a good idea for practitioners in closely-related disciplines to engage in a bit of comradely comparison of their ideas and methods, and to try and overcome the arbitrary divisions imposed upon them by the academy. Artists are always at it; showing computer scientists and engineers and philosophers and mathematicians that really, it's all just knowledge, that we're all climbing different faces of the same mountain.

The most frequent problem for these encounters concerns specialist language, and disciplinary knowledge. We often like to imagine that we are polymaths, autodidacts who can dip into the humanities, sciences and social sciences as we choose – a notion that sometimes seems to be supported by the way that 'contextual studies' are offered in art colleges, with their single-semester options on women's studies, or film studies, or media studies; and by the sheer multiplicity of discourses surrounding professional art practice itself, with their heady blend of fashionable philosophy and social theory. The idea of 'disciplinary knowledge', then, seems a little old-fashioned, even curmudgeonly, in an age of 'transdisciplinarity'; and yet, at the same time, not many artists would argue that their own specialised training counts for nothing (even art is a closed shop).

*Projecting Migration* is an anthology presenting work that transgresses multiple boundaries. Its materials are produced by visual anthropologists, ethnographers, documentarists and film and video artists, sometimes working in collaboration with one another, all of whom are engaging with themes of diaspora, migration, and representation, between and within cultures and in various forms. The practices, then, are disparate, and so, importantly, is the manner in which those practices approach and discuss their subjects. Importantly, the editors don't attempt to impose a spurious *post hoc* unity of approach onto the enterprises they present; but they do outline, quite precisely, how best to conceive of their aims, and what's at stake in the venture. In their introduction, Grossman and O'Brien posit a splicing of the concepts of 'habitus' – the term Bourdieu coined to denote a level of learned or conditioned behaviour that is nonetheless performed by conscious 'agents' – and 'the everyday' – Henri Lefebvre's mechanism for describing the particularised forms of resistance employed by individuals to confront or work around or within overarching structures and institutions. "In positing a critical convergence of 'habitus' and the 'everyday', we advocate a media practice-based response to what Arjun Appadurai calls the 'optical challenges posed by the global' that demand a 'new... pedagogy... for producing and sharing knowledge about globalisation, elicited from the bottom up'..."<sup>1</sup>

The ambition of the collection, then, is no less than to discover new ways of looking; and through that, new ways of knowing. It's clear that these cannot come only from one existing 'optical practice', since the challenge is to methodology and perception as much as to conditions and structures.

That said, there is perhaps an assumption in the book that social science, particularly anthropology and its language, are somehow a universal context, to which all the various other methodologies and practices should ultimately relate. There are some reasons why this might at least be a good starting point; within the last 30 or 40 years, the discipline of anthropology has revolutionised its understandings of what it means to observe



Border Country Melanie Friend

and to represent a subject; the 'deep reflexivity' described by anthropologists, and their account of how the position of the author in large part accounts for the work, would certainly be useful for many artists to consider before embarking on another 'community project'. Artists seeking to 'portray' a 'community' they've met for two hours every other Thursday for the last three months might also choose to reflect on the 'longitudinal project', which anthropologists sometimes embark on for months or years, without preconceptions, at the outset, of how they might document their encounter.

But inevitably something is lost in the translation here, not between the various informants and their interlocutors, but between the various contributors to the book. The difference in expectation even between types of quite narrowly-defined 'documentary' practice, let alone between the array of very distinct approaches described in this book, means that certain aspects of process and research are privileged by the book's social studies slant, while some questions concerning the manner of presentation, that's to say, specifically aesthetic concerns important to visual art, in its gallery context, are underemphasised. It's clear that there are visual anthropologists interested in the approaches and techniques of visual art, but reluctant to consider those apparently 'external' presentational or experiential devices through which artists introduce a reflexive 'distance' into their practice; and there are artists willing to present their work in terms of anthropology without necessarily being acquainted with its particular disciplinary reflexivities.

Immediately worth mentioning are chapters by the Canadian-Lebanese artist Jayce Salloum, and by the collaborative duo of David Coplan and Gei Zantzinger. Salloum's account of his ongoing 'untitled' series of video works, shot in Lebanon, France, the former Yugoslavia and elsewhere, argues most clearly, of all the contributions in the collection, that existing modes of 'documentary' may be entirely inadequate for the type of 'intersubjective', and yet broadly political, work that he pursues. He describes his work, which he has installed in a series of permutations as he adds further material to it, as an 'active archive': the pieces could be watched in their entirety, but crucially are not 'durational'. Rather, Salloum makes a virtue of the collisions that occur in the gallery, between different types of material – interviews, repurposed archive footage, general 'observational' shots in his various locations – and between different contexts and locations.

Coplan and Zantzinger's collaboration is unusual for the period of time over which it

stretches. Respectively an anthropologist and an ethnomusicologist, they collaborated in the mid-1980s on an ethnographic film exploring the performative song forms of Lesotho, which 'dramatise' the life of the migrant workers who travel to work in the mines of South Africa. After performing preliminary field work, during which he recorded and translated some of the songs, Coplan then sent the transcriptions to Zantzinger, who, responding to the various modes of imagery and address used in the songs, worked out how they might film them. The account given of this original process, with all its inventive and responsive approaches to the material, is fascinating in itself, but the point of the chapter is to explore their subsequent reworking of the material they filmed when, 20 years later, DVD technologies offered new possibilities for representing the songs and their social contexts within the workers' communities. Once again, the chapter directly questions what might be expected of a documentary and what it might hope to achieve over the course of its life.

It's also essential to mention the DVD-ROM that accompanies the book, and which documents the projects described in each chapter. This is an invaluable addition, enabling the book to be used as a truly 'open' document, with references in the text pointing to specific clips on the DVD; the disc itself is easy to navigate, well-designed and well-authored. In a work that's based so specifically on practice as research, though, this might have been an opportunity to expand the field of references beyond the textual and theoretical – in other words, the DVD could have archived not just the contributors' own projects, but also excerpts of the work that they would regard as the 'visual references' for their practice. This is an important consideration for practice-based research generally, and whilst there are obvious problems of copyright, there should be the possibility of developing some means of 'visual citation' in a scholarly context such as this. Documentarists and artists respond to visual ideas just as they respond to written texts and theoretical positions; it's crucial to acknowledge this if visual practice is to be more fully embedded in a meaningful research context.

It's not clear that the extremely ambitious objectives of this collection are met equally in all the contributions. It's enormously significant, however, that the goals have been stated with such clarity. It's for other practitioners now to respond to them, and to consider exactly how effective 'transdisciplinarity' might be achieved.

Questions of how to look, and how and what to represent are brought up immediately by Melanie Friend's troubling book of photographs *Border*

*Country*. The book documents spaces in various 'immigration removal centres' around Britain (one of the provisions of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 was that 'detention centres' were euphemistically renamed 'removal centres'). Friend's photographs are all evacuated of subjects, so what we focus on are the banal details of the detainees' surroundings: the peculiar architecture of the suspension of humanity, made more oppressive for its sheer mundanity. The photographs might be disturbing, in their cold starkness, but there is a more unsettling feeling that, for multiple reasons, this project doesn't and can't work.

Extremities of circumstance, such as those in which Friend's subjects find themselves (choosing not to 'portray' them photographically, she includes an audio CD that contains interviews with various detainees), are arguably not 'representable' in the manner that Friend attempts; or rather, it's highly doubtful whether the representation is capable of conveying anything whatsoever of the 'experience' to us as viewers. Friend is clearly aware of the limitations and constructedness of her medium, and she wants to unsettle the images with the interruptive audio interviews, so that the refugees' stories and questions flow into the empty spaces shown. But even then, Friend is unable to discern, to describe and to unpick the multiplicity of 'depersonalising' relations of power in which the asylum detainee is caught. These are not only the obvious powers that hold them where they are, and which describe and define them, as rightless, stateless non-citizens (even whilst ordering these non-subjects to present themselves before the state), but also the framing power of Friend's aestheticising gaze, which awkwardly squares the ethical circle of their 'representation' by choosing not to show them at all. In Friend's interior photographs, the ordered rows of furniture tellingly describe their recent human occupants, and by extension the stream

of such occupants now 'removed'; but in her own eerie evacuation of the spaces there's almost a double erasure, a further removal – an aesthetic completion of the state's task.

In the book's contextual essay, Mark Durden describes the 'neutrality' of Friend's photographs, and this apparently innocuous claim reveals more than might immediately be apparent.<sup>2</sup> The photographs are anything but 'neutral': they're highly stylised, super-detailed, high-colour images, coolly composed and framed in a manner betraying an absolute awareness of the formal obsessions of contemporary European art photography. Perhaps what Durden means is that, for photographers like him, this 'style' is so ubiquitous that it's non-style, so internalised that one doesn't have to think about it, just set up the lights, point the camera and let the lens dissect the photographic subject. Friend is quite obviously aware of the immense problems with documentary's conceit to be able transparently to 'know' its subject, but with her too-clever attempt to circumvent the problematic altogether, she shows that she is, albeit reluctantly, thoroughly caught within it. How can 'experience' as an excluded non-citizen be made 'knowable' to the viewers of a rarefied series of photographs applying high German aesthetics to the spaces of state racism and arbitrary disappearance? The (presumably liberal, well-intentioned, already sympathetic) viewer of Friend's photographs knows nothing more afterwards about how this human conveyor belt functions as a thoroughly integral part of their state.

Friend's interviews are harrowing, depressing, frustrating – but they are not, crucially, enabling. They permit no solidarity, no active engagement, because they posit their subjects as passively caught in an ultimately incomprehensible (and unalterable) situation. They offer a record of the informants' stoical dignity and intransigent humanity, but they also serve as bleak 'memorials': most of them have now either been deported, or,

in a few cases, have been granted leave to remain; either way, they pass out of the limited, narrow range of the microphone, of no further interest because, one way or another, they have shed their 'total identity' as 'asylum seekers'. There's a very clear sense in which this determined positioning of the subjects, and the lack of reflexivity that it reveals on the part of Friend, as interviewer, merely repeat or perpetuate the ongoing dehumanisation.

There are no formal qualities to the experience of being made stateless. The cold detachment of Friend's photographs, and her failure to interrogate this as she might have hoped through the audio interviews, together produce a kind of haughty 'compassion' that's ultimately thoroughly counterproductive. It's essential that artists continue striving to find ways of representing the new or drastically reconfigured experiences of subjectivity that globalisation occasions, and that these representations engender new forms of knowledge. But this knowledge must be of that kind described by Johannes Fabian, and cited by Grossman and O'Brien:

"Sense and knowledge must not be confused. Sense or meaning can be brought along: they affirm and support – most of the time ideas or values already held... The term *knowledge* [...] should be reserved for insights that the knower does not already possess and that, when they occur, change the knower."<sup>3</sup>

#### Notes

1. Alan Grossman & Áine O'Brien, 'Introduction' in Grossman & O'Brien, p. 6
2. Mark Durden, "'Who is more human than the other?'" in Friend, p. 52
3. Johannes Fabian, quoted in Grossman & O'Brien, p. 10.

# Hindutva, Modi, and The *Tehelka* Tapes

## The Communal Threat to Indian Secularism

Neil Gray

“Communal politics is essentially the manipulation of social consciousness based on religion for political purposes.”

K.N.Pannikar<sup>1</sup>

“The danger to India, mark you, is not communism. It is Hindu right-wing communalism”.

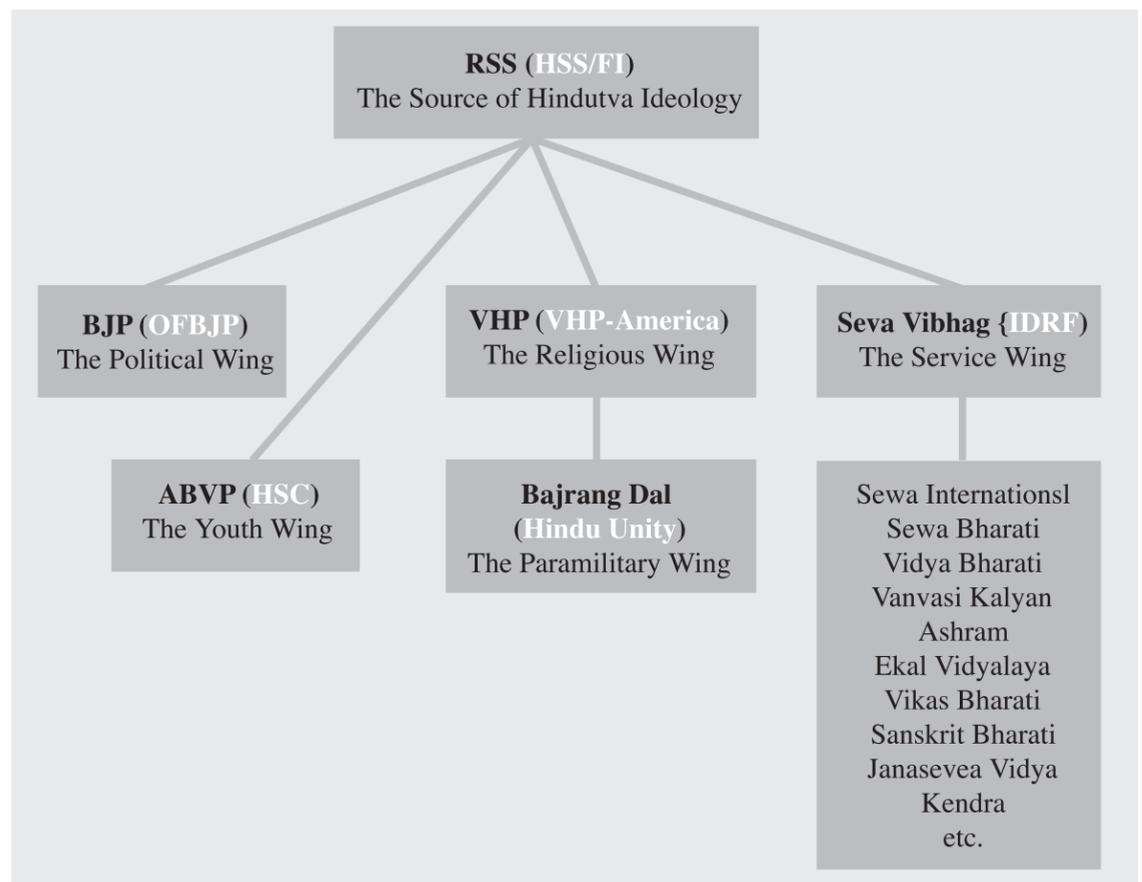
Jawaharlal Nehru 1963

Hindutva is a communalist Hindu Nationalist ideology seeking to equate the very idea of ‘Indian-ness’ with ‘Hindu-ness’. The chief exponents of Hindutva are organised under the umbrella of the Sangh Parivar organisation, avowedly inspired and influenced by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), a “social and cultural organization” with a known fascist pedigree and a Hindu majoritarian political agenda. The importance of this movement can be gauged by the presence within its ranks of the former ruling party of India, now the main party of opposition, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the fact that over 80% of the Indian population identify themselves as Hindu (when asked to proffer a *religious* identity). This represents a potentially enormous vote-bank for Hindu fundamentalist groups to draw from. The undoubted crucible of Hindutva hegemony in India is the state of Gujarat, “a laboratory of hate”<sup>3</sup>, held by the notorious BJP Chief Minister Narendra Modi. For many people, a religiously communalised Gujarat represents, in microcosm, the deeply problematic “Face of India’s future”<sup>4</sup>.

Evangelical neo-liberal advocates and boosters, fronted by the bought media worldwide, are busy extolling the ‘competitive’ and ‘dynamic’ virtues of India’s de-regulated economy, boasting year on year 9% growth rates, while leaving (in a less celebrated statistic) 77% of the population living on less than half a dollar a day. Disavowal is a necessity for the perpetuation of neo-liberal narratives, and the concomitant emergence of this virulent form of ultra Hindu Nationalism (Hindutva) has been largely neglected in the celebratory discourses surrounding the Indian economy.

The horrific pogrom of over 2,000 Muslims in Gujarat (December 2002) by Sangh Parivar activists, assisted and abetted at all levels of the state, has gone down in infamy. Investigations by NGOs and Indian State Commissions have revealed complicity and culpability in the highest levels of state government, right up to Modi himself. The state courts however, under Modi’s tenure and reportedly at his behest, have so far failed to satisfy civil rights groups’ demands for justice. The issue recently erupted again after the celebrated ‘sting’ of late October 2007 by *Tehelka* magazine. A *Tehelka* reporter managed to infiltrate a rightwing Hindu organisation for six months, to obtain damning spycam video footage of Hindu activists bragging about killing Muslims and detailing the support they received from the highest echelons of state government.

These confessions were the first time that members of Sangh Parivar had openly admitted their culpability, and the crucial new evidence helping to substantiate the reports of various civil rights and human rights groups following the Gujarat genocide of Spring 2002.



### Sangh Parivar Combine – ‘The Family’

Gujarat, under the BJP, is the experimental “petri-dish” in which Hindutva has emerged most violently. It is important to acknowledge its historical development within the wider network of Sangh Parivar groups. This broad alliance (Sangh Parivar translates as ‘Family of Associations’) provides right-wing Hindu fundamentalist groups with a varied base of platforms from which to advocate communalist positions. A hegemonic “constellation of forces”, produces fluid and varied discourses around Hindutva, and allows it to maintain a face for every occasion – from the outright sectarian hatred of the Bajrang Dal to the ‘respectable’ parliamentarianism of the BJP. Established in



Right:  
Narendra Modi

1980, The BJP led the ruling NDA (National Democratic Alliance) coalition government from 1998 until its electoral defeat in 2004 by the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA). The party is now recognised as the main opposition party in India and is a political force of undeniable weight and influence, ruling five states without need of political allies and forming part of a coalition government in four others.

Understanding the ideological role of the RSS-led Sangh Parivar in the BJP’s political ascendancy is crucial for an understanding of contemporary Indian politics. L.K Advani, current leader of the BJP and long-time member of the RSS, elucidated the links between the RSS and the BJP position in 1990: “There has been a conscious effort on the part of the *swayamsevaks* [RSS volunteers] who are *working in the BJP* to make each one understand the ideological base to which we belong, and our connections with sister organizations [...] which are all based on the inspiration from RSS”<sup>5</sup> [my italics]. He continued: “We have to intensify our efforts to project the viewpoint of the RSS, which is not being reflected, so that with the *instrumentality of the BJP* in politics it gets more acceptance...”<sup>6</sup> [my italics]. This instrumentalist, entryist, line (from an allegedly non-political organisation) is openly acknowledged on the BJP’s Gujarat state Government website. The website declares that the RSS participates in politics, “...most often by deputing its pracharaks [apparatchiks] to BJP and other supplementary organizations”<sup>7</sup>. The former Indian Prime Minister, Mr. Vajpayee, the current BJP President, Mr. Advani, and the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi were all deputed to the BJP in this manner<sup>8</sup>.

More generally the Sangh Parivar, of which the BJP is but one component, consists of innumerable sister organisations with connections to the RSS. The main groups, however, are the Parivar ‘trident’ of the BJP, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), and the Bajrang Dal, each performing their own function under a ‘division of labour’ for the promotion of Hindutva. The VHP also known as

'The World Council of Hindus', clearly stated its objectives on its inception in 1964. These were, "...To consolidate 'Hindu society', to spread the Hindu values of life, to establish a network comprising all Hindus living outside India, and to 'welcome back all who had gone out of the Hindu fold and to rehabilitate them as part and parcel of the universal Hindi society'"<sup>9</sup>. The VHP have been at the centre of most of Hindutva's major National mobilisations, and were the central organising force behind the hugely significant demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque – a conspicuously sordid cause celebre for the communalist cadres.

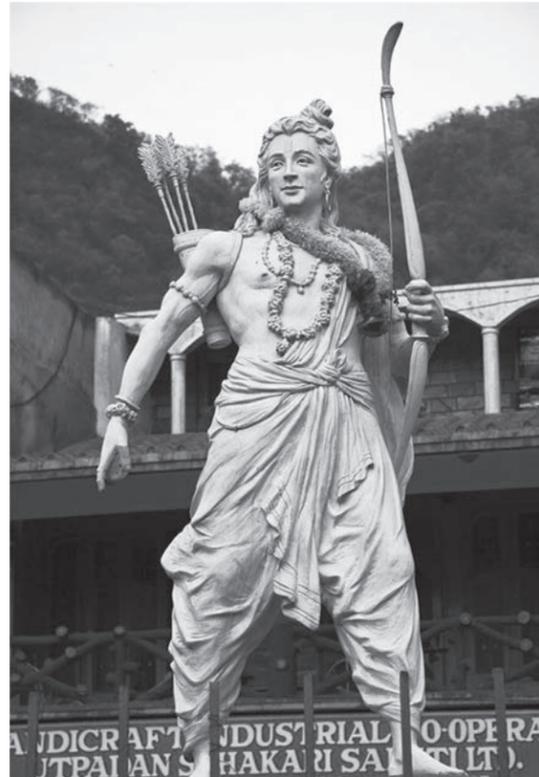
Completing the trident is the Bajrang Dal, the "violently energetic youth wing of the VHP"<sup>10</sup>. Paul Brass, an authority on Indian riots, has characterized the Bajrang Dal as "a fighting 'protection' squad for the other organizations, a somewhat pathetic, but a nevertheless dangerous version of the Nazi S.A"<sup>11</sup>. The Bajrang Dal are the 'goons' of the Sangh Parivar; an 'uncontrollable' element known for their provocative agitations, and enthusiasm for violence at the service of the Sangh. Often operating outside the formal structures of the 'family', their actions (appreciated in private by 'respectable' elements within the Sangh) can be publicly disavowed and characterised, if need be, as the 'spontaneous' and emotional response of "the will of the people" operating outside the jurisdiction of the main Hindutva organisations.

The central ideological role of the RSS in the Sangh Parivar is an open secret. Advani's statements above are but one manifestation of that. The declarations, on the record, of M.S. Golwalker, an RSS founding father and key influence on Sangh Parivar ideology, baldly intimate the nature of that link.

## Golwalker – The Fascist Face of The RSS

The RSS was founded by Dr. Hedgewar in 1925. He was succeeded on his demise by M.S. Golwalker, who led the organisation from 1940 to 1973. Inheriting the title 'Supreme Leader', Golwalker was a defining influence on the Sangh Parivar over a thirty-year period. The central themes and concerns of the Sangh are unambiguously championed in his writings: a demonised Muslim 'Other', religious nationalism, anti-secular, anti-democratic ideology, and the prevalence of typically lamentable unscholarly forms of historical revisionism. In 1951 the academic Jean Curran described Golwalker's *We Our Nationhood Defined* (1938) as 'The Bible' of the RSS. His admiration for Nazi Germany is evident from frequent references to it in this text and others. He clearly intimates that the concept of 'German National pride' in 1930s Germany was widely discussed, and admired, by his comrades in the Hindu nationalist camp: "*German national pride has now become the topic of the day. To keep up the purity of the Nation and its culture, Germany shocked the world by her purging the country of the Semitic races – the Jews. National pride at its highest has been manifested here*" [my italics]<sup>12</sup>.

For Golwalker, the instructive value of the Nazi's genocidal policy was clear: "Germany has also shown how well-nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences [...] to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by" [my italics]<sup>13</sup>. According to Golwalker, the alleged violation of Indian racial purity and national pride had its defining moment with the arrival of Muslims in the sub-continent: "Ever since that evil day, when Moslems first landed in Hindu-sthan, right up to the present moment, the Hindu nation has been gallantly fighting on to shake off the despoilers... The Race Spirit has been awakening"<sup>14</sup>. This 'race-spirit', in an important departure from Nazi racism, has a specifically Hindu sectarian character in the Hindutva formulation; the religious basis of which allegedly provides the correct social and political context for the Indian nation: "...in Hindusthan, Religion is an all-absorbing entity... With us, every action in life, individual, social or political, is a command of Religion. We make war or peace, engage in arts and crafts, amass wealth and give it away, indeed we are born and we die – all in accord with religious injunctions"<sup>15</sup>.



Left: Statue of Ram

Crucially, Hindu nationalist politics are to be conducted as 'a command of Religion'. The secular Nationalist politics fought for and instituted in the Indian constitution by the Indian Congress Party "...put the race on the wrong track", by propagating the concept of *Territorial Nationalism* rather than *Hindu Nationalism* (or Hindutva): "The idea was spread that for the first time the people were going to live a National life, the Nation in the land naturally was composed of all those who happened to reside therein and that all these people were to unite in a common 'National' platform and win back 'freedom' by 'Constitutional means'"<sup>16</sup>.

Jawaharlal Nehru was a pivotal figure in the Indian independence movement and the first Prime Minister of independent India. His generous vision of India as "an ancient palimpsest" embracing all layers of religious and racial groupings, and his notion of a non-sectarian, secular, democratic India, which including all these groups on an equal basis, is lambasted by Golwalker: "...we began to class ourselves with our old invaders and foes under the outlandish name – India – and tried to win them over to join hands with our struggle. The result of this poison is too well known"<sup>17</sup>. According to Golwalker, the antidote to this 'poison' is an authoritarian and sectarian, pseudo-inclusive Hindu Nationalism. What the 'Hindu Nation' should entail, he makes abundantly clear: "The foreign races in Hindusthan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming no, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – *not even citizen's rights*"<sup>18</sup>.

The current RSS website openly acknowledges the organisation's debt to Golwalker: "With his great erudition, he cogently propounded the historical and sociological background and the logicity of the concept of Hindu Rashtra [Hindu nation or polity]"<sup>19</sup>. The political leaders of the BJP ("India's largest political party" according to the BJP website) who were deputed from the RSS, can lay equal claim to this abhorrent heritage.

## Gujarat – A Hindu Jihad

"Last night a friend from Baroda called. Weeping. It took her fifteen minutes to tell me what the matter was. It wasn't very complicated. Only that a friend of hers, Sayeeda, had been caught by a mob. Only that her stomach had been ripped open and stuffed with burning rags. Only that after she died, someone carved 'OM' on her forehead".

Arundhati Roy<sup>20</sup>

"... We made the whole plan... to start a Hindu jehad [sic]... we were successful in Gujarat..."  
Dhimant Bhatt, BJP<sup>21</sup>

Over 2,000 people, mainly Muslim, were slaughtered in the Gujarat riots of 2002, with more than 150,000 people forced into refugee camps. One refugee camp with 6,000 residents was located on the site of a Muslim graveyard leaving residents to sleep in the open between graves. The riots severely affected at least twenty-one cities and sixty-eight provinces throughout Gujarat<sup>22</sup>.

Ostensibly, revenge was the reason for the carnage. The violence in Gujarat was triggered after a Muslim mob's torching of two train coaches on the Sabarmati Express at the Godhra train station on February 27, 2002. Fifty-eight passengers, including Sangh Parivar activists returning from Ayodhya, were killed in the horrific attack. The immediate reaction of Narendra Modi, the BJP Chief Minister of the Gujarat state government, was to claim that the massacre had been engineered by the Pakistan ISI (Inter Services Intelligence). No evidence was given for this highly inflammatory revelation. The situation was further provoked by his decision to publicly parade the charred bodies in an emotive and provocative cavalcade from Godhra to Ahmedabad<sup>23</sup>.

The Concerned Citizens Tribunal hold Chief Minister Modi culpable for inciting the brutal revenge attacks which followed, claiming that the evidence collected was: "...not sufficient to come to any conclusion that the attack on S-6 coach was a pre-meditated one"<sup>24</sup>. Despite the Hindutva leadership's preferred line of an "ISI hand" behind the attack, evidence gathered from eye-witness reports and the Banerjee Committee indicate that the horrific massacre was a spontaneous gross over-reaction by a Muslim mob to provocations from Hindutva activists returning from Ayodhya. A Muslim 'conspiracy' remains unproven in the courts, despite reports of bribery and coercion by Sangh Parivar activists in an attempt to prove that high-ranking Muslims were involved<sup>25</sup>.

A Human Rights Watch (HRW) report based on testimonies collected by the Citizens' Initiative, a coalition of over twenty-five NGOs, confirmed the scale and savagery of the ensuing genocide. In Naroda Patia, located just across the road from the State Reserve Police (SRP) quarters, "...at least sixty-five people were killed by a 5,000-strong mob that torched the entire locality within minutes". Sexual abuse and gang rape were rife: "We were 400-500 people on the terrace... The girls were stripped and then two men held them down by legs and arms. Those who raped were 20-25 in number. The girls screamed so loud that even now when I remember my blood boils". Other residents related similar experiences: "They took young girls, raped them, cut them, and then they burned them"; "Some girls even threw themselves into the fire, so as not to get raped". A Human Rights Watch report summarised: "Gravediggers testified that most bodies that had arrived – many were still missing – were burned and butchered beyond recognition. Many were missing body parts – arms, legs, and even heads. The elderly and the handicapped were not spared. In some cases, pregnant women had their bellies cut open and their fetuses pulled out and hacked or burned before the women were killed"<sup>26</sup>.

In the Chamanpura area of Ahmedabad, 65 people were slaughtered when they attempted to shelter from the riots at the home of Ehsan Jaffrey, a former Member of Parliament who had previously criticised the BJP government. Mansoori Abdulbhai lost nineteen members of his family in the attacks: "First they cut people so they couldn't run and then they set them on fire. One or two women were taken aside and gang-raped. After five hours the police came and brought us here. It was so well planned". Mehboob Mansoori lost his whole family: "They burnt my whole family [...] Eighteen people from my family died [...] the bodies were piled up. I recognized them from parts of their clothes used for identification. They first cut them and then burned them". Before the slaughter started in earnest, the attackers pelted stones at the building and victims testified to hearing the mob chanting religious slogans eulogising Ram, the hero of the Hindu epic, 'The Ramayana': "Ram, Ram, Jai Ram [Ram, Ram, Praise Ram]"<sup>27</sup>.

The police participated in the atrocities alongside the rioters. A thirteen-year old boy saw police murdering young men: "The police was with

them. The police killed seventeen- and eighteen-year-olds. The mob also burned down our home. At 10 a.m. they went after our mosque...". A father witnessed the police shooting his son: "My son was running to save his life and the police shot him [...] no one was answering the police phone. The police took their side and not ours". Many victims testified that the police led the mobs directly to their homes and places of business. Emergency calls to the police went unheeded or were met with responses such as: "We don't have any orders to save you"; "We cannot help you, we have orders from above"<sup>28</sup>. The attacks were clearly part of a "meticulously planned pogrom"<sup>29</sup> against the Muslim community. Witnesses testify that the mob specifically targeted Muslims and their businesses. Computer printouts of Muslim voter lists and business addresses, reportedly obtained by Sangh Parivar cadres from the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, were an integral part of the carnage<sup>30</sup>.

While Narendra Modi characterised the pogrom as a "spontaneous reaction", this implausible description of events was repudiated by Human Rights Watch who maintained that, "...the attacks on Muslims throughout the state were planned, well in advance of the Godhra incident, and organized with extensive police participation and in close cooperation with officials of the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party, BJP) state government". The report further stated: "The groups most directly responsible for violence against Muslims in Gujarat include the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP], the Bajrang Dal, the ruling BJP, and the umbrella organisation Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps, RSS)..." These organisations – The Sangh Parivar – are described in the report as "militant groups that operate with impunity and under the patronage of the state". The report emphatically concluded: "The attacks against Muslims in Gujarat have been actively supported by state government officials and by the police"<sup>31</sup>.

Despite the findings of Human Rights Watch and the National Human Rights Commission, Narendra Modi was re-elected as Chief Minister soon after the riots with a majority of 127 out of 182 seats.

### The Tehelka Sting

The *Tehelka* sting operation, revealed just prior to the Gujarat December election of 2007, compounded the allegations of NGOs after the Gujarat riots of 2002. This time, however, the testimony came from the perpetrators themselves. Several members of the Sangh Parivar were caught on tape admitting their role and that of the state government in the Gujarat genocide. Based on the evidence obtained from covert spycam footage, the case alleging Sangh Parivar collusion with the government of Gujarat in the riots of 2002 is overwhelming.

Bajrang Dal leader, Babu Patel, had this to say about police complicity in the riots: "By the end, there were about 700-800 bodies. They were all removed... The Commissioner came that night and said that if there were so many dead at one place, it would create trouble for him... So he had the corpses picked up and dumped all over Ahmedabad..."; "The Muslims kept making calls to the police, kept running to the police... They had one man called Salem [...] he got into a police jeep... got right inside... I myself caught him and dragged him out... The cops said kill him, if he's left alive, he'll testify against us... He was taken a little way away and finished off right there...". Patel also admitted that Chief Minister Modi perverted justice to get him released from jail: "Narendrabhai [Modi] got me out of jail... He kept on changing judges... He set it up so as to ensure my release...". Modi allegedly enforced a change of judges three times until the 'right' one was found: "Next he posted a judge named Akshay Mehta... He never even looked at the file or anything... He just said [bail was] granted... And we were all out... We were free... For this, I believe in God... We are ready to die for Hindutva..."<sup>32</sup>.

Suresh Richard also gave evidence of police complicity: "The police were with us... I can tell you so myself even now [...] That day was great... They were shooting right in front of us... They must have killed 70 or 80 or more... didn't even spare women...". Richard also claims that the



Right: Mural of 'Gujarat carnage'

police informed the rioters of Muslims hiding in a sewer: "...That was when the police called us... They said some Muslims were hiding in this sewer [...] we closed the lid and weighted it down with big boulders... Later, they found eight or ten corpses in there...". Crucially, Richard alleges on tape that Chief Minister Modi arrived on the evening of the riots at Naroda, where 200 people had been "butchered and burnt" to 'bless' the rioters: "...around 7.15, our Modibhai [Modi] came... Right here, outside the house [...] He went around to all the places... He said our tribe was blessed... He said our mothers were blessed [for bearing us]..." Babu Patel corroborated that Modi visited and encouraged the rioters: "Narendrabhai [Modi] had come to see that things didn't stop the next day... He went all around Ahmedabad, to all the places where the *miyas* [Muslims] were, to the Hindu areas... told people they'd done well and should do more..."<sup>33</sup>.

The VHP's Ahmedabad president, Rajendra Vyasa, corroborated allegations that Modi tacitly approved the riots: "...he gave us a free run to do whatever we wanted [...] the police was with us... Please understand what I'm trying to say — the police was on our side...". Hareesh Bhatt, a BJP member of the legislative assembly for Godhra, confirmed a widely held suspicion that Modi allowed the rioters a fixed period to take their revenge: "He had given us three days... to do whatever we could. He said he would not give us time after that... He said this openly...". Ramesh Dave of the VHP also stated that Modi, enraged by the Godhra massacre, ensured that the cadres could unleash their 'revenge' without undue restraint from the already communalised police: "...He was in a rage... He's been with the Sangh from childhood... His anger was such... he didn't come out into the open then but the police machinery was turned totally ineffective [...] the police were very helpful... very helpful [...] because, after all, what were the police? ... The police were Hindu too"<sup>34</sup>.

The *Tehelka* operation substantiates, with self-confessions comprising crucial evidence, what was revealed by a host of media reports – the investigations of Communalism Combat; the Concerned Citizens Tribunal report; the Human Rights Watch report; and the National Human Rights Commission – before and after the genocide. Teesta Setalvad of Communalism Combat is one of India's most trenchant critics of Communalism. She believes that what the spycam tapes "blatantly revealed" could have been exposed as early as 2003, "...if the trials that have been stayed since November 2003 had been re-investigated, transferred and prosecuted. If the deliverance of justice had been speedy and fair. If the courts had responded to the victims' plea for justice and not succumbed to the state's efforts at delay and digression"<sup>35</sup>.

The Sangh Parivar, however, were well prepared for the battle to subvert legal processes after the genocide. Dhimant Bhatt and Deepak Shah, members of the BJP, told *Tehelka* that key

members of the Sangh Parivar – including the BJP, VHP, Bajrang Dal, and RSS – met on the night of the Godhra incident to make a plan of action for retaliation and to constitute a panel of advocates to defend the rioters. Narendra Patel and Mohan Patel of the RSS told *Tehelka* that after the riots the RSS had formed a body to provide legal aid to Hindu rioters. The VHP ensured that lawyers with sympathy to the VHP represented both the prosecution and the defence in many cases involving the rioters. The VHP general secretary of Gujarat, Dilip Trivedi, also admitted to *Tehelka* that he had organised the Sangh Parivar response to all the riot cases in Gujarat, "...from coordinating with government lawyers and defence advocates to talking to cops who were reinvestigating the riot cases". Everybody knew, he boasted, that after the riots, he had camped in every district holding meetings with government prosecutors, his own workers and police officers<sup>36</sup>.

The Gujarat Advocate General, Arvind Pandya, also made a series of astonishing revelations to *Tehelka*. Pandya has been selected to represent Modi's Gujarat government before the Nanavati-Shah investigative Commission. In the *Tehelka* report Pandya claims that Modi had given oral instructions to the police to "be with Hindus". That had it not been for Modi the Hindutva mobs could not have taken their "revenge" for the Godhra killings. That had there been a non-BJP government in power in 2002 the riots would never have happened. Pandya himself said that the mass killing of Muslims in Gujarat should be celebrated every year as "victory day", and that crippling Muslims was better than killing them, as a crippled Muslim would also serve as a "living advertisement" of what Hindus were capable of. For Pandya, having a "Hindu-based" government at the time of the riots was a "happy coincidence"; "The people were ready and the state was ready", he told the reporter<sup>37</sup>.

How much more evidence is required to oust the BJP government in Gujarat and imprison the parties guilty of murder, one might ask? The Gujarat electorate again answered this question with a comprehensive turnout for Modi in the December elections of 2007, re-installing the BJP government, and Narendra Modi as the Chief Minister for his third term, with 117 seats out of a possible 182.

### Congress Demise and Hindutva Hegemony

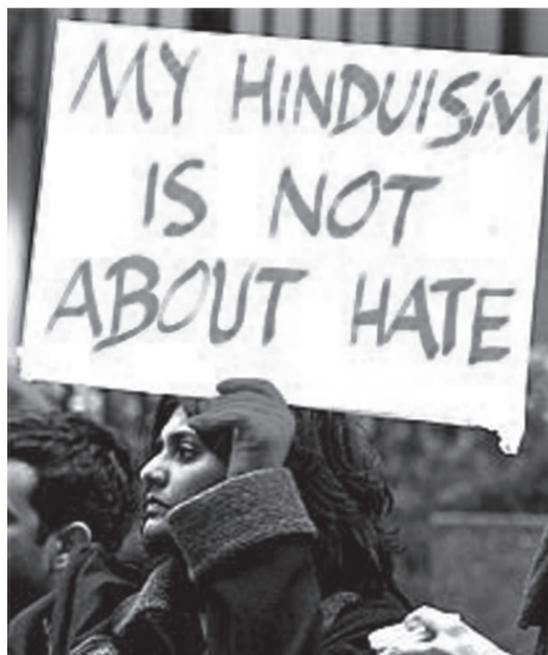
That Narendra Modi and the Hindutva right have been returned to power for the third time is a severe indictment of the political system and rule of law in India. Many have pointed the finger at the Congress for its ineptitude, lack of coherent policies, and moral surrender in facing the challenge of Hindu fundamentalism. Radhika Desai, researcher and writer, argues that while the Congress, the traditional party of the poor in India, have played vote-bank regionalist politics, pandering to shifting constituencies according

to exigency, the Hindu right has successfully consolidated a middle caste and upper middle-class caste constituency in Gujarat and elsewhere in India. Hindutva, according to Desai, performs a "major service" to the Gujarati propertied classes by increasing violent competition with the Muslim bourgeoisie of the state: "Among the 9% Muslims of Gujarat, there is also a large bourgeoisie and riots provide plum opportunities to settle business scores"<sup>38</sup>. She also notes how sectarian ruptures in the new 'religious borders' have reconfigured Gujarat's urban geography, through riots, "...with blatant connections to real estate transactions". Muslims, who no longer felt safe after the riots, left behind property and position "...to be grabbed by those who feel secure in current conditions"<sup>39</sup>.

For Desai, one of the major political tragedies in India is that the lower classes and castes with the deepest investment in secularism and egalitarian economic development "...have only ever been offered populist and opportunistic forms of political mobilisation". Indira Gandhi's 1970s re-institutionalisation of the Indian National Congress (INC) towards spectacular, nominally welfarist and populist sloganeering, and the failure of her Garibi Hatao (Abolish Poverty) campaign to alleviate inequality has led to a middle-class alienated from the Congress, and a crisis of faith in the Congress among the poorer parts of the electorate. The Indian National Congress, "evading its vocation" as a party of the poor, an always fragile position given their Faustian pact with industrial and rural elites in the nationalist independence project, has become nothing more than a "protest vote repository" trading on the reputation of its more progressive founders, while providing little or no hope for an impoverished multitude. The failure of the Congress-led coalition central government to take the legal action within its power on Gujarat, underscores its vacillating fear of losing the 'Hindu vote' and deeply undermines its credibility as a secular force<sup>40</sup>.

While the Left dithers the poor suffer. In stark contrast to the neo-liberal rhetoric of 'Shining India' and 'Vibrant Gujarat', the poverty and inequality statistics in India are devastating. A *Frontline* magazine report by Parful Bidwai declares that: "...income and wealth inequalities are rising alarmingly in India". The statistics beggar belief. The 77% of the Indian population on less than half a dollar a day translates into 840 million citizens. In the global hunger index India ranks 94, way below China, and lower even than the basket case of Pakistan. Almost one half of India's children are malnourished and underweight. A recent analysis of 'Patterns of Wealth Disparities in India during the Liberalisation Era' (*Economic and Political Weekly*, September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2007) shows that there was: "...a perceptible (and probably underestimated) increase in inter-personal wealth inequality in India between 1991 and 2002". In the same period, the top ten per cent of the population increased its overall share of the national wealth to 52 per cent, while the share of the bottom fell to 0.21 per cent. 100,000 HNIs (high net-worth individuals with assets over \$1 million) now hold \$350 billion in assets, or approximately half of India's entire gross domestic product. Patwant Singh, author of *The Second Partition: Fault Lines in India's Democracy*, sums up: "...Several hundred million have been left to starve...while the country's new urban rich, indifferent to - if not contemptuous of - their luckless fellow countrymen - coarsely flaunt their new found wealth"<sup>41</sup>.

Narendra Modi and the BJP government in Gujarat have consistently pointed to Gujarat's apparently healthy economic status as proof of their administrative success, but disavowal is again the major alibi. Shivam Vij points out that Narendra Modi has consistently swelled Gujarat's growth rates to 12% in public declarations, while the real figure, according to his own government's statistics is nearer 8%. To achieve this figure, Gujarat's debt burden has detonated; the state is now: "...one of the highest indebted states in the country"<sup>42</sup>. Farmers are reeling from the debt. In the year 2006-2007 alone, 148 farmers were driven to suicide. Gujarat has also taken a nationwide lead in privatising health infrastructure. In the 6-35 month age group, 80.1% of all children suffer from anaemia. In 'Vibrant Gujarat' though, poverty doesn't exist. In order to mask its real extent the



Left:  
Hindu protest  
against Modi

Gujarat government has expediently re-adjusted poverty lines. The generally accepted international figure is a measly \$1 dollar a day. The Gujarat government, however, has deemed that urban dwellers on more than \$0.45 dollars a day are no longer poor. Village dwellers fare even worse with a rate of \$0.30 dollars a day deemed a satisfactory figure. The impact on the 're-adjusted' is severe. Those gerrymandered above the poverty line now receive no benefits from poverty alleviation and development programmes<sup>43</sup>.

This is the punitive, polarised, neo-liberal economic context in which Hindutva has emerged. Radhika Desai argues that neo-liberalism can find within its own operations no "adequate hegemonic ideology" to mask such ferocious social fissures. She places the emergence of Hindutva alongside the growth of New Right, neo-conservative discourses which emerged under Reaganism and Thatcherism in the '80s. For Desai, Hindutva, like neo-conservatism, is the, "...counterfeit answer to the accelerating universalism of capitalism, which it supports and promotes"<sup>44</sup>. Hindutva, as a culturalist discourse, provides the means to mask the savage material realities wrought by economic liberalism under an increasingly authoritarian capitalist class. Emerging as a keen neo-liberal alibi, Hindutva successfully transmogrifies rage and resentment borne of inequality and poverty into spiritual reflection and partisan identity politics. Meanwhile it provides a 'ready-made' scapegoat in the form of a demonised Muslim 'Other'.

The success of Hindutva, however, transcends the mobilisation of the disaffected masses. The stabilization of the Hindutva vote amongst India's "...richest, most educated and socially elevated sections has, in recent years, become fully clear"<sup>45</sup>. Hindutva features all that this powerful class could wish for: "Neo-liberal economic policies, Hindu assertion, [and] the full range of stances towards Muslims and others with the capacity to disturb their comfortable position by demanding their rights"<sup>46</sup>. For Desai, the hegemonic influence of particularist cultural discourses overlaying and obscuring the murderous edges of 'integrated world capitalism' represents: "the ingenious reality of the right today". Hindutva, both supplementing and obfuscating neo-liberalism, epitomises this tendency in its own particular form. The failure of the Congress to represent the needs of the labouring poor and sub-alterns, and the concomitant failure of the new social movements, to find an adequate hegemonic replacement, has, for the moment, opened up the ground for the religious right.

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44. Desai, R. 'Slouching Towards Ayodhya', Three Essays Press.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.

# Propaganda Compliant Society

## Alex Law

somewhere between stocks & share  
and the 'commonsensical' editorial

pity the poor arts page  
thinking itself alone

Tom Leonard, *Reports from the Present*

Media failure poses a stark conundrum for civic nations. Where, as a matter of course, it naturalises the rule of dominant groups' mass communications and provides rather inhospitable ground for nurturing democratic values. Public discourse is instead forced through narrow institutional channels amenable to the ruling consensus. This vision of a spoiled public interest is bad news indeed for those nations that pride themselves on the democratic vitality of their civil societies.

Mass communications made nationalism possible.<sup>1</sup> With the onset of modernity stimulating the spread of print capitalism, geographically separate groups of people became socially arranged as a special kind of a community, a specifically national one, united by newly-minted ancient bonds. Today, appeals are made about preserving, or better still reinventing the nation; all the better to fend off market processes that impose cultural standardisation and political homogenisation.

In England, the call has been put out by left-wing and liberal nationalists like Billy Bragg, Jeremy Paxman and Paul Kingsnorth to rescue what is distinctive about English national culture from rapacious corporations and overcentralised government. This alternative Orwellian England includes the English pub – "probably the best know international symbol of our folk culture" – bookshops, orchards, post offices, dairy farms, and street markets.<sup>2</sup> Such appeals to a 'national folk culture' not only carry with it the danger of accepting right-wing national mythology uncritically, it also issues in a false opposition to neoliberalism in the essentialist idea of an authentic organic folk community.

'Britain' here is too often appealed to as a universally neutral source of identity in contrast to the selfish particularities of small nation nationalism.<sup>3</sup> For instance, one Scottish academic countered arguments for devolved public broadcasting by arguing that the BBC symbolises the best of British values: "Scottish broadcasters are embedded in the most admired broadcasting organisation in the world".<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside the BBC's own class bias, both in staffing and programme content, and notwithstanding its reputation as a supposedly impartial arbiter of the public interest, at an overt level it failed to resist political intimidation and New Labour threats to public funding.

One need not be a crude materialist to notice that, amidst the unselfish altruism of nationalist rhetoric, the social base of nationalism often rests on groups that are suitably positioned to gain from it – not just politicians but also cultural workers like writers, academics, lawyers, journalists.<sup>5</sup> Smaller nations within Britain are certainly no strangers to the attractions of cultural nationalism. Cultural workers in Scotland demand more resources in support of a distinctively Scottish media and arts policy, while others, albeit a minority, are satisfied with the existing distributive terms of centralised British control.<sup>6</sup>

In Scotland an inter-locking network of elites has endured since at least the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> For much of that time Britain existed as an unquestioned platform for elite self-interest. Of course, the personnel and functions have changed since then, from industrial capitalist families, to financiers, to corporatists, through to the political, business and culture elites of the neoliberal present.

Scotland is a small nation with meshing social circles where elites gather to profit from their mutual connections. Close interpersonal relations, sometimes literally family relations, eases the profitable mobilisation of social capital and cultural capital. A journalist in the investigative tradition, Paul Hutcheon, has tirelessly mapped the contemporary nature of 'McCroneism' in Scotland. Hutcheon found that around fifty MSPs had put their spouses, children and in-laws on the payroll.<sup>8</sup> Of course, this is not unique to Scotland. However, devolution was meant to represent a departure from the Old Corruption of sleazy Westminster.

Here political devolution has also had the effect of diverting attention from the emergence of neoliberal elites springing from the very same soil as civic nationalism.<sup>9</sup> Whatever the democratic arguments for devolution, it has proven to be a boon for elite groups in Scotland in other ways. Access to, management of, and influence over the devolved institutions has been lubricated by public relations and its auxiliary wings in the Scottish media.<sup>10</sup>

With the election of a minority Nationalist administration, the political, business and cultural elite founded on largesse under the control of Labour Party apparatchiks in Scotland has been forced to reorient itself. This has not proven to be a shattering experience for the well connected since the SNP administration is wide open for public relations interventions, in which they themselves are proven adepts. So while the 2007 Scottish election disturbed some entrenched Labourist networks, the permanent elite in Scotland carry on, usually out of sight. In Edinburgh's Princes Street, for instance, the New Club allows business, legal, political, state, and professional elites to mingle unobtrusively with each other.<sup>11</sup>

### Mistaken Conspiracy

Nations such as Scotland like to claim that they are founded on a robust civil society. They further lay claim to the civic values of rationality, democracy, personal liberty, pluralism and tolerance. At the heart of this is a free and open system of mass communications, where dissent can be aired, claims to truth verified, gaps in understanding acknowledged, and where a tolerable consensus emerges through the gravitational pull of 'public opinion'.

The books under discussion here explode this as an image of how mass communications actually function in a neoliberal world. In *A Century of Spin*, David Miller and William Dinan plot with scholarly care the real extent and corrosive nature for democracy of the public relations industry on both sides of the Atlantic. They drag into the glaring light of day the truly dirty business of corporate PR as the handmaiden of the most powerful interests that rule over society.

In a context where PR operatives much prefer to remain unnoticed and unchecked in the shadows and background, Miller and Dinan's dogged research has allowed them to piece together usually unnoticed inter-connections. They push public relations into a spot where it would rather not be – at the forefront of our attention. Building on a wide range of sources and their own previous studies, they expose the extent and function of public relations and the global web of corporate elite entanglements.

Piecing together the dense PR web of deceit, Miller and Dinan are at pains to distinguish their cataloguing of propaganda activities from the wilder shores of conspiracy theorists. Conspiratorial efforts are indeed part of the staple of many of the groups Miller and Dinan analyse. But by linking the disparate, not to say antagonistic interests of, for instance, Freemasonry, Marxism and Zionism, febrile right-wing conspiracies typically misrecognise how the

elite coalition of power structures are defined all the way through by specific kinds of class interests.

Neither are these structures always hidden away from view. Much corporate propaganda goes on in full view of those who are prepared to look. Corporate visibility is made plain in many forms, from trade associations, lobby groups, and policy planning vehicles.<sup>12</sup> There is no need to settle dogmatically on the simplistic conspiracy idea of isolated groups of malign individuals who possess disproportionate causal powers to explain wider, complex and uncertain social and political phenomena.

Of course, small conspiratorial groups do exist. In their detailed coverage of the public relations industry Miller and Dinan demonstrate as much. But this is not a sufficient condition to explain the efficacy of corporate propaganda. Indeed, it proves counter-productive where it diverts attention from much wider, more deeply embedded structures of domination.

Part of this explanation is provided by Nick Davies in *Flat Earth News*. Davies, a seasoned, award-winning journalist with the *Guardian*, dissects conspiratorial theories that purport to explain away the degradation of the craft of journalism by recourse to the dubious character of individual journalists. It is unlikely that there are any more flawed personalities working as journalists than are working as academics or lorry drivers or any other occupation for that matter.

Not all journalists are unprincipled, corrupt hacks and careerists, although some may be. A major problem here is that the flawed personality theory of media distortion fails to account adequately for the systemic character of the distorted newsprint consensus about the nature of the world around us. "Individual corruption only masks the *structural corruption* (should we even talk about corruption in this case?) that operates on the game as a whole through mechanisms such as competition for market share".<sup>13</sup> Neither is the overt influence of corporate advertisers sufficient on its own to profoundly distort newspaper reporting on a daily basis, although the daily delivery of audiences to advertisers remains a profound shaping mechanism for media content.<sup>14</sup>

Nor are explanations adequate that point to the interference of the nasty newspaper proprietor. Of course, there are examples of this from Northcliffe through to Murdoch. But there are substantial differences from the old-style Citizen Kane owner models of political interference to a Murdoch, for whom the pursuit of profit appears to be pathological, hence his bias for political rulers from Thatcher to Blair; and an ability to operate flexibly within political systems as distinctive as Australia and China.

Perhaps then the unseen influence of ideology, where journalists share the same narrow political and moral worldview, might account more adequately for media distortion. In this case a broad consensus exists among journalists around selective 'news values' that results in stories that chime with dominant interests. This is the staple of media studies explanations of media bias. Undoubtedly, like the baleful influence of advertising, this forms part of an explanation for media failure. But where it remains stuck at the level of the (false) ideas in isolated journalists' heads that gives rise to misrepresentations in newspaper stories it becomes divorced from the workaday institutional reality that journalists find themselves caught, day in and day out.

### Inside the News Factory

The power of *Flat Earth News* – and the reason that media insiders are apoplectic about it – is that media failure is firmly fixed by Davies to the terra firma of deskilling inside the journalist labour process. Davies likens this to a 'news factory' recycling unreliable secondhand information by

'churnalists', itself set within a wider neoliberal political economy of incessant cost-cutting by the new breed of managers of national and local newspapers – a ruling caste Davies likens to 'grocers'.

Neither does Davies take the easy option and look at the obvious sources of media failure – the sloppy chequebook journalism of the tabloids. Instead, he looks at the hardest test case for scrutinising his hypothesis of media failure. With the help of academics at Cardiff University he examines the 'quality press' – *The Times*, the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Daily Mail* – papers, with the exception of the latter, that like to see themselves as sophisticated, thorough, objective and reliable. However, while separate chapters are highly critical of the *Sunday Times*, the *Observer* and the *Daily Mail* little in comparison is said about media failure in Davies' own paper the *Guardian*.

The Cardiff researchers analysed the routine practices of news judgment, fact-checking, balance, criticism and general evidence of interrogating sources across 2207 domestic news stories in these papers selected over a random two week period. By comparing these pieces to the source material they found that only one in eight stories were generated by journalists themselves. In other words, the vast majority of pieces in quality national titles – 80 per cent – derived, at least in part, from secondary sources – from wire copy and PR – rather than being generated by reporters themselves.

It is rare indeed that such stories are openly attributed to the PR business. Instead, 'churnalists' either plagiarise wholesale or cannibalise the secondary sources to suit the house-style of their title. As the Cardiff researchers note, "any meaningful independent journalistic activity by the press is the exception rather than the rule".<sup>15</sup> Degraded, deskilled journalism now churn out stories rather than craft them. Press releases are recycled not as some aberrant practice of a few unscrupulous chancers. They are the debased common currency of the news industry, reproduced and regurgitated inside each news factory. As Davies puts it:

"Do what the others do, be exclusive, steal other people's exclusive, sell papers, sell a bunch of second-hand ideas, save money, make money, make friends, hurt enemies, hype it, ramp it, tweak it, match it to a picture, match it to a space, splash it on the front, bury it inside. This isn't a conspiracy. It's just a mess".<sup>16</sup>

Churnalism is sector-wide. Journalists face similar pressures across national and local titles to rapidly repackage largely unchecked second-hand sources of often dubious provenance, reliability or accuracy.

James Nesbitt's portrayal of nocturnal journalist Max Raban in the paranoid political thriller *Midnight Man* (ITV, 2008) might seem far fetched as he rakes through the bins of celebrity and establishment figures. In fact the real-life Max Raban, Benjamin Pell, aka 'Benji the Binman', unearthed among plies of rubbish documentary evidence of establishment corruption that eventually exposed the Jonathan Aitken scandal, though only after an aggressive cover-up attempt.<sup>17</sup>

In this case, the public interest was served but in many others the privacy is invaded of individuals who have not made a career for themselves in the name of the public. Media corruption also encourages the theft of personal information from public databases by private investigators, former police officers and civil servants. With breathtaking hypocrisy the same media that complain that public standards of decency are collapsing routinely rely on deceit, bribery and theft. "Many of these organisations have been the loudest voices in the law-and-order lobby, calling for tougher penalties against

villains, tougher action against anti-social behaviour, even while they themselves indulge in bribery, corruption and the theft of confidential material".<sup>18</sup>

Media failure is more directly related to the storms and stresses of class struggle than many students of media textual content are prepared to allow. Davies precisely dates the defeat of journalistic labour to Saturday 25 January 1986 – the night Rupert Murdoch broke the power of the print unions at Wapping. What followed was a decisive redistribution of resources from labour to capital in the news industry as profit-making escalated while thousands of print jobs were eliminated.

Ironically, the sectional strength of the print unions' closed shop was widely reviled at the time as 'greedy' and 'selfish' for forcing from employers relatively high wages and generous staffing levels. But journalists depended on it for the protection of their own conditions of work autonomy more than they perhaps realised. With the utterly ineffectual leadership of the labour movement, from the TUC to right-wing Labour leader Neil Kinnock, Murdoch's victory over the print unions some twenty years ago began a process, that as Davies argues, "released a chain reaction of internal changes which have had a devastating effect on truth-telling journalism".<sup>19</sup>

Union-busting strategies in 1980s Britain, like Murdoch's and the Great Miners Strike of the previous year, bore a close resemblance to 'the Mohawk Valley Formula' described by Miller and Dinan. Devised by US corporate propagandists in the 1930s, the National Association of Manufacturers (NAM) fought to defend corporate interests against the encroachments on capital posed by renewed labour militancy and the New Deal.

NAM thrashed out a union-busting strategy which integrated the symbolic violence of public relations with the physical violence of the employers and the state. The Mohawk Valley Formula, named after the site of the Remington Rand factory, "included discrediting union leaders by calling them 'agitators', threatening to move the plant, raising the banner of 'law and order' to mobilize the community against the union, and actively engaging police in strike-breaking activity, then organizing a back-to-work movement of pro-company employees".<sup>20</sup>

Public relations here is not an added extra that tough-minded employers can use to merely present their case more effectively to win wider consent for their actions. It is thoroughly integrated into union-busting activities to coercively enforce worker compliance, create demoralisation among activists, and propagate a feeling that resistance is futile in any case.

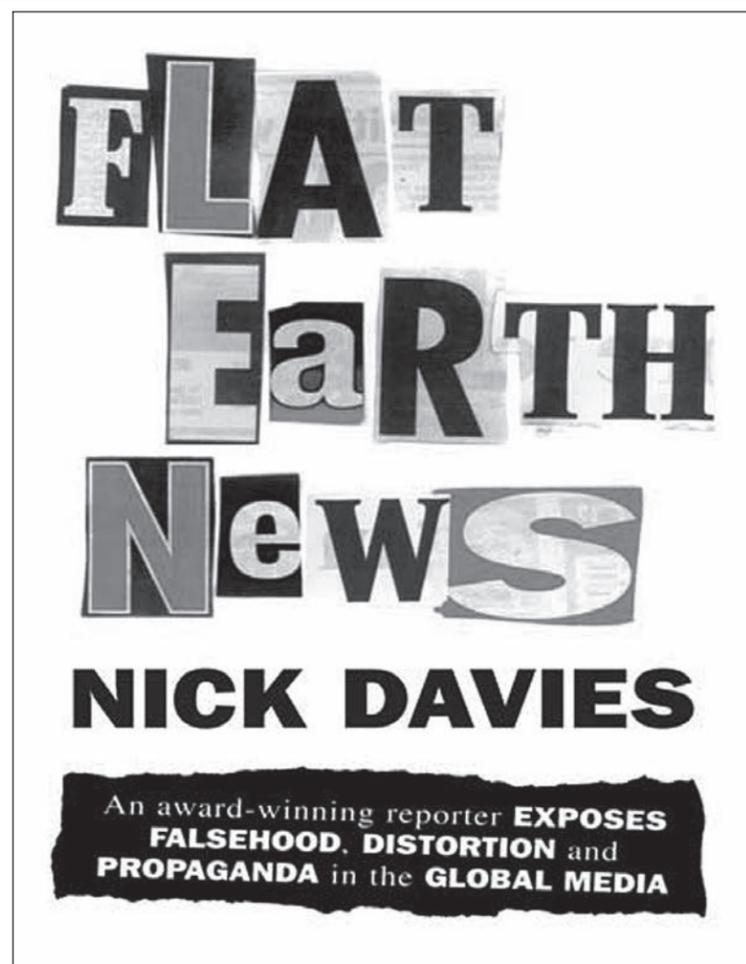
### Grocery Bills

Deskilling is imposed on journalists by the ruthless corporate profit-seeking of owners and managers. Like so many other honourable professions, journalism is feeling the effects of proletarianisation through the loss of control and autonomy over the production of news values.

Under the grocer's imperative to cheapen the costs of production and raise the flow of revenue a transition has been effected. As the pressure mounts for individual journalists to produce a greater output in the number of stories processed, an earlier accent on the quality of news shifts to one of sheer quantity.

"Journalists who are denied the time to work effectively can survive by taking the easy, sexy stories which everyone else is running; reducing them to simplified events; framing them with safe ideas and safe facts; neutralising them with balance; and churning them out fast."<sup>21</sup>

The new rules of news production include the



demand to run only those stories that are cost-effective, that is to say, cheap, quick and safe to cover. In this way the new consensus of news values has been reorganized on a more thoroughly conservative basis. Anything too controversial or radical that crosses powerful corporate or political interests is avoided since it might prove fatally expensive.

Churnalists must therefore at all costs avoid the media 'electric fence' where a story conflicts with powerful vested interests. It has been traditionally left to the Official Secrets Act and libel law to safeguard dominant power. This is now supplemented by dense layers of electric fencing provided for powerful interests by professional lobbying groups. Davies gives the example of the pro-Israeli lobby, which ferociously harasses news editors with the costly charge of 'anti-Semitism' where stories offend against Israel's own public relations effort.

Under such pressures it is safer to seek cover under appeals to 'neutrality', 'objectivity' and 'balance'. If in doubt, churnalists can always produce a counter-claim to cancel out any implied criticism of powerful interests in the few maverick facts that escape the conservative consensus. This is less about gathering facts to produce a truthful account than it is a matter of convenience.

All facts are selected over other ones and arranged interpretively in some kind of narrative sequence. The danger arrives when official sources are accepted at face value as authoritative while scepticism is reserved only for non-official sources. Such naïve reliance on official sources informed the *Observer's* pro-war coverage of Iraq, leading to the dissemination of propaganda which was all the more effective since the *Observer* is a paper with a left-liberal reputation.

At the same time as propagandising the government's case for invasion, the *Observer* repeatedly suppressed a genuine story of world-historical importance from its US correspondent Ed Vulliamy. Supported by a well-placed ex-CIA source, in the midst of the patriotic agitation for anti-Saddam intervention created by a compliant media, Vulliamy established that Saddam had no weapons of mass destruction and there was no evidence linking Iraq to al-Qaeda.<sup>22</sup>

"The great blockbuster myth of modern journalism is objectivity, the idea that a good newspaper or broadcaster simply collects and reproduces the objective truth. It is a classical Flat Earth tale, widely believed and devoid of reality. It has never happened and never will happen because it cannot happen. Reality exists objectively, but any attempt to record the truth about it always and everywhere necessarily involves selection ... In this sense, all news is artifice".<sup>23</sup>

Contrariwise, 'balance' is rarely demanded to counter the consensus statement of fact reported as a matter of uncontroversial routine. When making the case for the Iraq war and occupation, the media did not routinely seek out its radical opponents to correct or balance government propaganda. What began as an honourable journalistic convention to tell the truth from all sides without fear or favour has become, Davies argues, "a coward's compromise aimed at dispatching quick copy with which nobody will quarrel".<sup>24</sup>

It is little wonder that so much news even in the 'quality press' is dominated by inane and anodyne 'human interest' stories. As radical media critics have long argued, revenue can be increased if no one is affronted by unpalatable truths about the world. Just don't be boring. Send us trivia. Above all, don't offend against some fictitious idea of the average consciousness of the newspaper reading public. If this ideal readership is deemed by papers like the *Daily Mail* to be steeped in lower-middle class racist prejudices then newspaper content will 'reflect' this by excluding black people from their coverage unless they conform to criminal stereotypes.<sup>25</sup>

Proprietors demand that newspapers realise their commodity value rather than serve as a public record of truth, accuracy and accountability. The Fourth Estate is in reality less different from an estate agent than its once revered traditions of investigative detachment and irreverence might suggest. Living on a diet of continually regurgitated morsels, the grocer mentality views the press as consumer diversion while the unremarked news industry consensus helps to deepen the homogenisation of values in the blanded-out incorporated world.

Complexity and uncertainty, openness and dialogue about gaps in knowledge, are reduced to a one-dimensional recycling of the diet of ignorance. As Davies notes: "A mass of human life – domestic poverty, world poverty, labour movements, the whole backstory about Islamist terrorism, real politics, international trade – is

consigned to the margins".<sup>26</sup> Little wonder then that many Americans were genuinely bewildered that their country could become the object of terrorist attack or their government despised in unfamiliar places with funny names and bizarre beliefs and customs.

Gaps in knowledge are smoothed over by the self-comforting clichés made available by the ready-made consensus. A real veil of ignorance is thrown over the divided, contested, uncertain and antagonistic nature of the world. As consensual stories are selected and re-told according to the commercial imperative of grocer-managers, more-and-more is pumped out about less-and-less.

By de-contextualising events and personalities, meaning is culled and the import of social and political processes, material interests and entrenched structures is lost. A phoney consensus consisting of the recycling of public relations designed to serve in the interest of dominant groups' demands that everyone does their patriotic duty and join in the latest moral panic.

Is Davies exaggerating for effect and perhaps notoriety, as some of his industry colleagues argue? Hardly. Newspapers that are engaged in often fierce market competition with each other nevertheless manage to arrive at a remarkable unanimity about what is selected for coverage, what angle to take, and how to present it. In part this is because they simply copy, plagiarise and steal from each other. If this involves falsehood, distortion and propaganda, the consensus ensures that it is in the interest of every title to keep the propaganda show on the road regardless. After all, taken from our habitual forms of perception the earth does indeed look flat.

Many industry insiders have reacted angrily to *Flat Earth News* David Leppard, former editor of the *Sunday Times* Insight team and now assistant editor, who, while threatening legal action, *inter alia* objected to Davies's "breathtaking arrogance", "substandard methods", "hypocrisy", "a toxic tissue of rumour and innuendo", "littered with falsehoods and the most bizarre conspiracy theory".<sup>27</sup> Instead of exposing the inner workings of the 'free press' to legal scrutiny, industry colleagues have encouraged Leppard to settle his differences with Davies, who in raising such unsettling matters is condescendingly dismissed as a utopian "romantic lefty of a certain age".<sup>28</sup> Others accept much of the general drift of his analysis but object to the tone. John Sweeney, a reporter on BBC's *Panorama*, itself subject recently to a consumerist makeover, described Davies' prose as "po-faced, flat-footedly on the high ground, ungenerous".<sup>29</sup>

Davies' account of the transformation of the news industry from high journalism to debased churnalism is far too rosy-eyed in places about a lost 'golden age' of reporting where truth-seeking once upon a time supposedly represented a defining goal. In addressing the institutional contradictions of the function of the news industry in a liberal democracy, Davies concludes pessimistically that the trouble with the British press is that it is becoming Americanised. In support he cites a passage from John Nichols and Robert McChesney's book *It's the Media Stupid* "in the place of informed debate or political parties organizing along the full spectrum of opinion, there will be vacuous journalism and elections dominated by public relations, moronic political advertising and limited debate on tangible issues. It is a world where market and commercial values overwhelm notions of democracy and civic culture, a world where depoliticization runs rampant, and a world where the wealthy few face fewer and fewer threats of political challenge".<sup>30</sup>

It is not the case that an otherwise untarnished British media is being corrupted by foreign imports. Here again the universal values of fair play, honesty, and decency of British nationalism slip by largely unnoticed.

Davies fails to engage with the critical analysis of industry outsiders like Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky's *Manufacturing Consent* or David Edwards and David Cromwell's *The Myth of the Liberal Media*.<sup>31</sup> In both cases, media failure is

explicated through an 'institutional critique'. Herman and Chomsky account for American media failure through a refined model of the circuit of propaganda as a self-disciplining, self-selecting (and self-delusional) market system of 'filters'. Edwards and Cromwell plot a similar market propaganda operation in the British liberal media, which typically likes to see itself as a courageous defender of truth-seeking. Using Media Lens email correspondence, left-liberal journalists evince glib and complacent certainties about the veracity of the universal value of the highly selective, media biases they construct.<sup>32</sup>

Davies likewise imagines that insider status gives journalists like himself privileged access to the truth when in fact some critical distance may be necessary from industry machinations, interpersonal rivalries and jealousies, and unspoken ideological assumptions. Having said this, Davies' identification of the commercial imperative behind deskilling and the degradation of craft skills in journalism accurately diagnoses the bases of media malfunction. Notwithstanding the tenacity of certain reporters in holding to the ideal of journalism as a craft, *Flat Earth News* represents a substantial contribution to dispelling unnecessary illusions about 'disinterested reporting' beyond the ranks of industry insiders.

## Public relations: anti-social movement

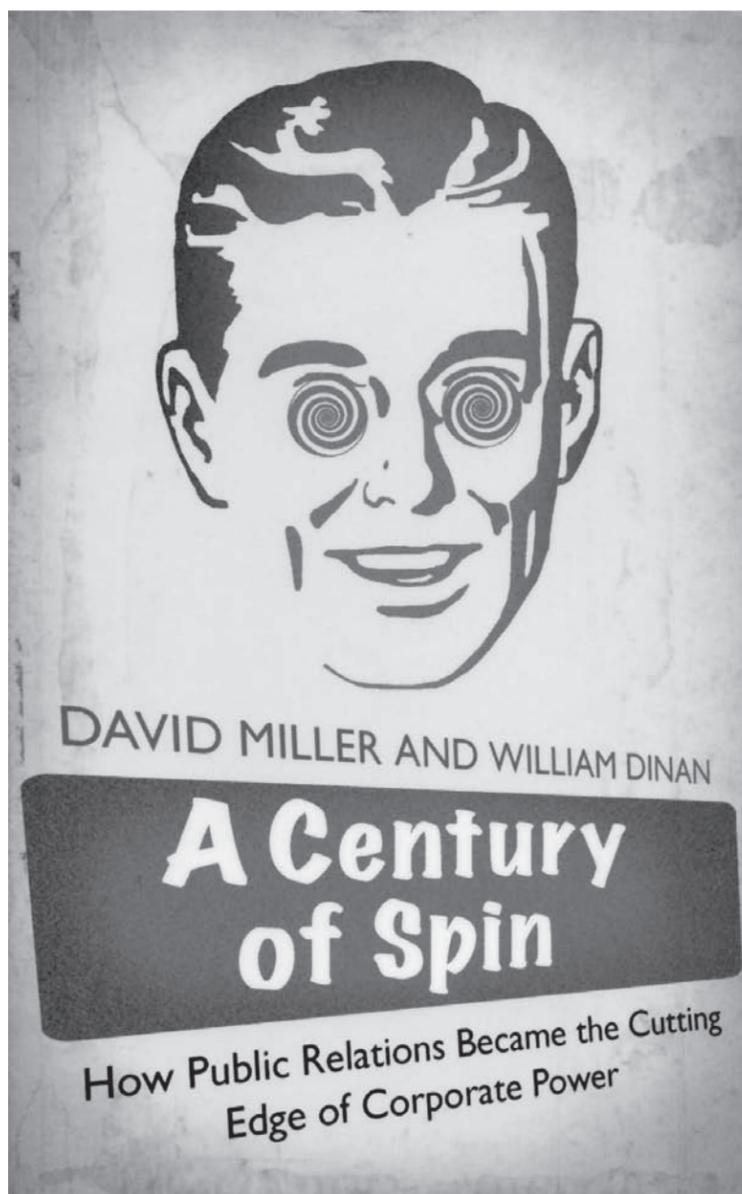
Work like Davies' performs a vital public service. Deep-rooted media failure corrupts the intellectual capacity to analyse reality competently and to discuss and debate democratically from well-informed positions. One example of this, for instance, is the echoing claim by corporate and technocratic interests that we live in or will soon enter something called 'the knowledge society'. In fact, the very opposite appears to be the case. If the news industry is an important source of knowledge about the world then we are sadly deluded about the creative, invigorating and emancipatory role the 'knowledge' supposedly plays in society.

'Propaganda society' is a more accurate term for the systematic circulation of untruth and ignorance. In fact the very idea of knowledge society is itself a public relations fiction, concealing as it does the degradation of knowledge-intensive work that Davies maps in the transformation of journalists into churnalists. In a rampant promotional culture, PR likes to conceal its own role in creating spurious 'pseudo-evidence', 'pseudo-incidents' and 'pseudo-groups' – or 'AstroTurf' because they lack any genuine grassroots support.

Whether it is fronting for big oil, tobacco, agribusiness, private health, pharmaceuticals or the porn industry, AstroTurf attempts to subvert democracy by manipulating public processes. AstroTurf can suck in unsuspecting bystanders behind phoney slogans of 'freedom', 'fairness', 'justice', 'choice' or 'science', as part of a sustained effort to discredit oppositional social movements or simply to confuse the issue and create doubt in the minds of the wider audience for its message.

Twenty years of employer onslaught on working conditions has made journalists vulnerable to the unrelenting pressures of the Fordist reorganisation of news production. In the news division of labour, churnalists rely on wire agencies and PR to supply the material for processing since they themselves lack the time and resources to create their own conditions of news production. But PR is no neutral source of verifiable reportage. It is always 'interested' material, advanced on behalf of social and political groups in a fight to define and shape reality according to specific stakes they hold in the game.

Fordism is an apt metaphor here since fabrication is the very essence of PR. It is the function of PR to make news happen according to a more or less predetermined script, whose narrative remains forever faithful to the interests of those that pay for their services. From its inception, PR has operated behind the scenes



of many of the key political events of the last century as a corporate social movement. Perhaps that ought to be 'anti-social movement' since it contrives to keep the corporate game going by representing the interests of dominant groups as the socially universal ones parroted by the media consensus.

Here Davies might have grounded his instructive examination of the PR sources of churnalism within a wider historical sociology of neoliberalism, something that Miller and Dinan see as essential to account for the rise of corporate propaganda.

Public relations advance particular interests under the guise of the universal as a cartel might fix the market price of crude oil. There is – as Miller and Dinan note in a reference to the Woody Allen character who turns up at every major event – a Zelig-like quality to PR. It is impossible to do justice to the thick weave of PR organisations and individuals that Miller and Dinan assiduously unravel. Out of the welter of detail they construct an intelligible narrative of the historical rise of the industry in the UK and USA.

Three phases of corporate political activism emerge here. The first was a corporate response to resist and manage the threat of universal suffrage in the decades around the First World War. Most urgent was the elite fear of the mob, brought to a fever pitch with the success of the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in October 1917. Organisations like the Economic League were formed out of the more frankly-titled business coalition National Propaganda to prosecute a "crusade for capitalism".

A second phase of corporate propaganda – a term which could no longer be used publicly because of its association with wartime militarism – attempted to cancel out social reformism and the nationalisation of key industries. In the 1940s and 1950s free market restoration was fiercely advocated by then fringe intellectuals like Friedrich von Hayek and through the conduit of the Mont Perlin Society (1947) and the American Enterprise Institute (1943). They did not carry out public propaganda directly but attempted to act as an intellectual clearing-house for winning hegemony among elite groups only. Such was the disdain in which the democratic masses were, and are still, held.

In the 1970s a new wave of corporate propaganda began to secure a firmer political base as the Keynesian-welfare settlement proved vulnerable to the onset of economic and political crisis. A fraction of the ruling elite in Britain even planned a military coup in order to break the labour movement.<sup>33</sup> More 'mainstream' anti-labour think tank propagandists like the Institute of Economic Affairs, the Social Affairs Unit and the Adam Smith Institute fought to exercise ideological leadership within the Conservative Party. An anti-labour, Atlanticist free market restorationism became the organising principle not only of think tanks but also of employer class-based organisations and, ultimately, the Thatcher and Regan governments.

In such ways, corporate propaganda prepared the ideological and political ground for the roll-out of neo-liberalism over the past thirty years. Miller and Dinan show how this was extended and deepened through the activities of what they call the social movement for global capital. Policy planning and networking has come to be organised on a transnational basis through obscure forums such as the Bilderberg Group (1957) and the Trilateral Commission (1973).

The emergence of transnational elite networks coincided with a proliferation of global PR. Far from being a minor cottage industry, PR is concentrated in the hands of a few gigantic firms. Their activities extend way beyond lobbying and public relations to include marketing, advertising, sponsorship, news and entertainment. It is no accident, as they used to say, that PR growth coincides with the neoliberal roll-back of the state. Here the same elite groups that formulated market restoration policies in think tanks and that lobby on behalf of business interests, are also the same

ones that benefit from promoting privatisation for governments, act as consultants in the tendering process, and market the public presentation of operational performance – truly, a finely integrated propaganda-industrial complex.

Public relations became installed as a matter of political routine in the 1980s in a way never quite seen before. Miller and Dinan argue that this represented a profound assault on the possibilities for democratic government in the public interest. Above all, this has had a pernicious effect on the Labour Party as a reformist alternative to market restorationism.

Reformism's seduction by corporate propaganda, Miller and Dinan argue, was carried by a right-wing Labourism besotted with the Cold War Atlantic alliance. A generation of Labour politicians shared with the CIA and corporate-funded think tanks the paranoid delusion that the party might be on the eve of being transformed into a radical, left-wing mass organisation of committed Marxists. Some left to set up the centrist Social Democratic Party. Others remained to support leaders like Neil Kinnock and John Smith. Their increasing appeasement of business interests culminated in the desperate act of the so-called 'prawn cocktail offensive' of the late 1980s in order to 'establish trust' with business leaders.<sup>34</sup>

Ambitious young careerists embraced market restorationism and propaganda techniques more wholeheartedly than the demoralised ranks of Old Labour. An altered neoliberal course was set by Blair and Brown's New Labour. Although mired in Tory 'sleaze', lobbying, PR, private fundraising, and new think tanks conspired to give New Labour a resolutely pro-business flavour. New Labour think tanks like Demos displayed faddish virtuosity at repackaging corporate platitudes. Beyond the elite propaganda-industrial complex such efforts were viewed as little more than a lobbying front for corporate and political sponsors. Over the past decade "a new ruling nexus between New Labour, lobbying and PR firms, think tanks and corporations" established itself, although by May 2008 this nexus seems to be coming apart before our eyes.<sup>35</sup>

This is not simply down to the superior propaganda of David Cameron and the New Conservatives. Lest anyone is confused about Cameron's base, Miller and Dinan spell out their commitment to naked class power through the range of market restorationist groups in which New Tories are active. As an ex-corporate communications executive with Carlton TV, Cameron is certainly steeped in the 'dark arts' of public relations. His elite supporters are deeply rooted in market fundamentalist, neo-conservative think tanks and lobby groups.

### National *Illusio* and its Discontents

Miller and Dinan favour the term 'propaganda' despite its redolence of crude wartime jingoism and misinformation. Unlike 'spin' or 'public relations', propaganda smacks not only of manipulation but more accurately connotes the form of structurally organised power invested in the process. For them traditional debates about the relative importance of consent and coercion in political rule are misplaced when it comes to corporate propaganda.

Instead, Miller and Dinan claim that they develop "a new approach to the relations between power and communication".<sup>36</sup> This is elaborated more fully in their final chapter as one of understanding how power is reproduced by constantly setting ideas within the context of the struggle between material interests. Corporations are less interested in the hegemonic leadership over society through consent than they are determined to impose and enforce compliance to their rule. "Leadership here refers not to leadership of the popular classes but leadership of the elite."<sup>37</sup>

Polemics about consent and elites have centred for a long time on the interpersonal comings and goings of ruling groups. Miller and Dinan similarly work at the level of interpersonal relations among elite groups. There is a long, honourable tradition

of this, from C. Wright Mills, through Ralph Miliband, to recent journalism of George Walden and Hywel Williams.

But it is doubtful if elites can be conceived adequately as a unified coherent subject organising and being organised by its own propaganda effort. An excessive focus on the immediate social and political milieu of elites produces its own blind spots. Changes in individual or group personnel of the ruling class (or elite) in no way changes the mechanisms by which this form of rule is reproduced.

It is essential to move beyond interpersonal relations to the operation of impersonal forces. This is where the 'normal' state of things – including the vision and division of the world into competing nations, states and corporations – inflicts violence in its most systemic form and is, therefore, the most taxing to arrest and overhaul.<sup>38</sup>

How this is organised is an imperative from the point of view of capital accumulation, that is, as a specific form of class reproduction. However, neoliberal capitalism is not a smooth space for free market restoration and private interests. Both capital and state are internally divided by their own specific interest and position within the wider structures of accumulation and geopolitical advantage. To state the matter in this way in no way diminishes the hegemony of neoliberal accumulation strategies among the transnational ruling class, especially Anglo-Saxon capitalism.

Ruling elites are certainly interested in compliance. In Miller and Dinan's verdict, "one of the most important aspects of propaganda is that it organises conduct even in the absence of fully informed consent. It secures compliance". They seek to regulate the routine practices of propaganda and misinformation into decontextualised and depoliticised channels, to make contentious politics the stuff of expert or managerial technique, and reduce democracy to a docile promotional and presentational process.

Here it is vital to disentangle propaganda and compliance since they run from quite different sources and have distinct effects. While propaganda has its origins in the self-conscious acts of elites, compliance with a prefabricated consensus is brokered through what Pierre Bourdieu called 'symbolic violence'. "Symbolic violence is a violence practised in and through ignorance, and all the more readily in that those that practice it are unaware they are doing so, and those experiencing it unaware they are experiencing it."<sup>39</sup>

In concealing the self-interested structure of its own particularity, propaganda relies on condescension towards the particular interests of inferior classes in society. The use of codified language by public relations as the universal lubricant of elite self-interest hopes to dispel or at least neutralise the expression of contrary interests by structuring what may be said legitimately.

Ideologies, such as those that take the existence of competitive nationalism and markets for granted, are all the more effective when they take the appearance of neutral, universal, objective social facts. Where it is exercised through symbolic violence as opposed to physical violence, domination and exploitation, exclusion and marginalisation, are not recognised as injustice.

Complicity with the necessity of the game, above all of market competition, is premised on a tacit consensus around disinterested and universalising norms, rules and conventions, something that all reasonable people observe and endorse. This is what Bourdieu further names *illusio*

"*Illusio* is the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing that playing is 'worth the candle', or, more simply, that playing is worth the effort ..., to participate, to admit that the game is worth playing and that the stakes created in and through the fact of playing are worth pursuing; it is to recognise the game and to recognise its stakes."<sup>40</sup>

Bourdieu's focus on the *illusio* of symbolic violence is not at all the postmodern one of free floating discourses that so exercises Miller

and Dinan.<sup>41</sup> Symbolic violence draws attention to the practical nature of consciousness under conditions of material domination and structural interests. Human beings do not pray because they believe in God; they believe in God because they get on their knees to pray. Similarly, people do not comply because they believe in propaganda or nationalism. On the contrary, propaganda and nationalism are the effects of the mundane quotidian practices of compliance.

If neoliberalism was the only game in town then the practical exigencies of compliance would be guaranteed forevermore. This is far from obviously the case for two reasons. First, the practices produced by neoliberalism are self-contradictory in a way that no amount of corporate propaganda can obscure. The baleful consequences of even partial market restoration undermine the positive claims made on its behalf by corporate propaganda, as the currently deepening financial and economic crisis testifies. This also means that even governments formerly committed to its tenets may be forced to revise the relationship between the state and private capital, though admittedly only after desperate measures to save the status quo are falsified by experience.

Second, propaganda can become self-deceiving. While corporations and governments may co-opt moderate NGOs and campaign groups, they are too divorced from political realities to sense when the ground is shifting from under their feet. Examples of this are evident in the anti-capitalist, global justice and anti-war movements. Even as they tried to recover from 'the shock of Seattle', where the World Trade Organisation was closed down by protest in 1999, "the new found confidence of the neo-liberal vulgate was quickly undermined and they went from defeat to defeat – in Iraq, at Cancun, with the 'Non' vote in the Dutch and French referenda on the EU constitution".<sup>42</sup>

Bourdieu claimed that he may have been "indulging in utopia" in demanding that sociologists, journalists and cultural workers use their skills to minimise symbolic violence and, in this way, begin to roll back domination by the hidden forces of neoliberal communication. "I would like to imagine a critical programme bringing together scholars and artists, singers and satirists, with the aim of putting to the test of satire and laughter those journalists, politicians and media 'intellectuals' who fall in too glaring a fashion into abuse of symbolic power."<sup>43</sup>

'Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media'

Nick Davies, London, Chatto & Windus, 2008

'A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power',  
David Miller and William Dinan, London and Ann Arbor, MI, Pluto Press, 2008

## Notes

1. A case most famously proposed by Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 1991), p. 36. However, see the important critique of Anderson's thesis by Howard Wollman and Philip Spencer, "'Can such Goodness be profitably discarded?'" Benedict Anderson and the Politics of Nationalism', in Alistair McCleery and Benjamin A. Brabon, *The Influence of Benedict Anderson*, (Edinburgh, 2007). Available from Merchiston Publishing, Scottish Centre for the Book, Napier University, Craighouse Campus, Edinburgh, EH10 5LG.
2. Paul Kingsnorth, 'So, is it alright to be an English nationalist?', *New Statesman*, 21 April 2008
3. Michael Billig's *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995) remains an indispensable guide to understanding the operation in everyday routines of the self-deluding conceits and dangers of the big nationalisms of Britain and the United States.
4. Brian McNair, 'Broadcasting's devolution debate', *Media Guardian*, 13 August 2007. If global reputation is the criteria, then perhaps Scottish broadcasters should license themselves through Al Jazeera.
5. Michael Hechter, *Containing Nationalism*, (Oxford, 2000).
6. Iain McWhirter, 'And now for the news ... broadcast from Scotland', *Sunday Herald*, 12 August 2007.
7. John Scott and Michael Hughes, *The Anatomy of Scottish Capital* (London, 1980) provides the classic study of interlocking elite ownership of capital. Scott and Hughes chart continuities of ownership, control and communication through to the managerialist reorganisation of the propertied classes in Scotland.
8. Paul Hutcheon, 'Revealed: MSPs who put their family on the payroll', *Sunday Herald*, 23 September 2007.
9. A forthcoming book, *Neoliberal Scotland* (Cambridge, 2008), edited by Patricia McCafferty, Neil Davidson and David Miller, will attempt to provide some remedy for this in the case of one of the devolved nations.
10. Philip Schlesinger, David Miller and William Dinan, *Open Scotland? Journalists, Spin Doctors and Lobbyists* (Edinburgh, 2001).
11. David Miller and William Dinan, *A Century of Spin: How Public Relations Became the Cutting Edge of Corporate Power*, (London, 2008), p. 80.
12. Miller and Dinan, p. 81.
13. Pierre Bourdieu, *On Television and Journalism* (London, 1998), p. 17.
14. See Media Lens, 'Flat Earth News – the Inside View', [www.ukwatch.net/article/flat\\_earth\\_news\\_the\\_inside\\_view\\_part\\_two](http://www.ukwatch.net/article/flat_earth_news_the_inside_view_part_two)
15. Nick Davies, *Flat Earth News: An Award-Winning Reporter Exposes Falsehood, Distortion and Propaganda in the Global Media*, (London, 2008), p. 53.
16. Davies, p. 153.
17. Davies, pp. 280-281.
18. Davies, p. 286.
19. Davies, p. 62.
20. Quoted in Miller and Dinan, p. 52.
21. Davies, p. 147.
22. Davies, p. 330ff.
23. Davies, p. 111.
24. Davies, p. 133.
25. Davies, p. 373 ff.
26. Davies, p. 136.
27. David Leppard, 'Book is toxic tissue of rumour and innuendo', *Press Gazette*, 17 February 2008.
28. Stephen Glover, 'These reporters should wage their war in the press, not the law courts', *The Independent*, 18 February 2008.
29. John Sweeney, 'More bad news', *New Statesman*, 21 February 2008.
30. Quoted in Davies, pp. 396-7.
31. Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* (New York, 1988); David Edwards and David Cronwell, *Guardians of Power: The Myth of the Liberal Media* (London, 2006).
32. See <http://www.medialens.org>
33. Miller and Dinan, p. 69. [*The Times* also openly advocated an authoritarian solution to the 'enemy within': "The most calm and respectable people come to believe that the only remaining choice is to impose a policy of sound money at the point of a bayonet."]
34. Miller and Dinan, pp. 139-140.
35. Miller and Dinan, p. 156.
36. Miller and Dinan, p. 7.
37. Miller and Dinan, p. 180.
38. Slavoj Zizek, *Violence: Six Sideway Reflections* (London, 2008).
39. Pierre Bourdieu, 'Question of words: A more modest view of the role of journalists', in *Political Interventions: Social Science and Political Action* (London, 2008), pp. 321-2.
40. Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the Theory of Action* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 76-77.
41. See Miller and Dinan, chapter 11.
42. Miller and Dinan, p. 97.
43. Bourdieu, 'Question of words', p. 323.

# Fortress Britain

## Muhammad Idrees Ahmad

"The public has to be more alert", warned one "international terrorism expert" in the *Daily Mail* late last year, because Scotland "is set to become another Israel within five years". "[A]nti-terror measures will soon become a common feature of life", he assured the audience, and called for "routine arming of police officers" and increasing children's "awareness of the dangers of terrorism" and for them to be "encouraged" to report anything "out of the ordinary".

The oracle of doom was one Amnon Maor, identified as the head instructor of counter-terrorism for the IDF and Israeli border police.<sup>1</sup> Maor is working with security firm 360 Defence, based near Glasgow, which is "training Scottish police, military and civilians in security techniques". This wouldn't be the first time the British police benefits from Israeli anti-terror expertise. The police squad that carried out the extrajudicial execution of the young Brazilian electrician Jean-Charles de Menezes in the London underground had received similar training.

In the post-September 11 world, writes Naomi Klein, Israel has pitched its "uprooting, occupation and containment of the Palestinian people as a half-century head start in the 'global war on terror'."<sup>2</sup> Britain has since been furnished with its own unpopular occupation of Arab land – and the lessons from Israel are not lost on its architects. In disaster lies opportunity – and the only thing more useful than a thing to fear is fear itself. The give away line in Maor's prescription above is his offer to increase children's awareness of the dangers of terrorism – absent the real thing, fear will suffice. The Prime Minister may not have many achievements to his name, but he can claim patents to 'Fortress Britain', whose battlements sit on a foundation of fear.

### The Power of Nightmares

In October 2001 it was revealed that the Pentagon was consulting Hollywood writers and producers specialising in spy thrillers and disaster flicks to imagine future attacks in order to best prepare for them. Developments such as the colour-coded threat alerts that change hue at the Department of Homeland Security's caprice have alarmed even cold war hawks like Zbigniew Brzezinski. Lamenting the 'culture of fear' he writes:

"Fear obscures reason, intensifies emotions and makes it easier for demagogic politicians to mobilize the public on behalf of the policies they want to pursue... Such fear-mongering, reinforced by security entrepreneurs, the mass media and the entertainment industry, generates its own momentum."<sup>3</sup>

In Britain each of the New Labour government's political missteps has been accompanied by similar fear-mongering. While a terrorist threat does exist, its magnitude is wildly exaggerated. The European Police Office (Europol) released its first report on terrorism last year which listed 498 terrorist attacks for Europe in 2006; only one was attributed to Muslims. The majority – 136 – were carried out by the Basque separatist group ETA; only one of them deadly. When it came to the arrests on terrorism related charges, however, a good half were Muslims.<sup>4</sup>

It began with the 'Ricin plot': the highly publicised arrests, national hysteria and front page headlines. There was no Ricin, or a plot. It wouldn't be until 2005, well after Colin Powell had used it in his case to sell the Iraq war to the UN, that the ban on reporting on the case was finally lifted and the public apprised of the truth.<sup>5</sup> The February 2003 'terror alert' had Blair scrambling tanks to Heathrow, timed conveniently to coincide with the large scale demonstrations against the coming war. Notable support in the media came from BBC propagandist Fred Gardner, long suspected of ties to the intelligence services<sup>6</sup> which were themselves busy fanning the fire. Simon Jenkins, the

conservative columnist noted, "In 2002-03, before the Iraq war, the security service supplied the Cabinet Office with a weekly catalogue of 'terror fears' – anthrax, smallpox, sarin, dirty nuclear devices and a Christmas bombing campaign – to soften public opinion for the war."<sup>7</sup>

In June 2006, 250 heavily armed police men acting on 'specific intelligence' raided a home in Forest Gate arresting two young Muslims, shooting one in the process. The chemical weapons that they were alleged to have possessed were never found. Both were acquitted without charge. The police apologised. On August 10th, 2006, a day after then Home Secretary John Reid had hinted that new anti-terror measures were in order; the Deputy Commissioner of Metropolitan Police, Paul Stephenson, announced that the police had foiled a plot to commit "mass murder on an unimaginable scale". Officials were soon conceding that the immediacy and scale of the threat may have been "exaggerated"; however, the scare succeeded in deflecting attention from Blair's widely-denounced manoeuvres preventing a ceasefire in Lebanon. From Beirut, an outraged Robert Fisk wrote:

"Stephenson's job is to frighten the British people, not to stop the crimes that are the real reason for the British to be frightened...I'm all for arresting criminals...But I don't think Paul Stephenson is. I think he huffs and he puffs but I do not think he stands for law and order. He works for the Ministry of Fear which, by its very nature, is not interested in motives or injustice."<sup>8</sup>

In November 2006, the MI5 director general Eliza Manningham-Buller warned of a violent threat from 1,600 suspects in 200 groups that could last "more than a generation". Although she identified government policy towards Iraq as the main factor contributing to the rising radicalism, Blair endorsed the statement. He continued his scapegoating of Muslims with the periodic reiterations of the 'Islamic threat' to rationalize the fear, repression, lies and resentment brought in on the heels of the Iraq war. When Blair announced that "the rule of the game have changed", no one took it more seriously than the tabloid press; they demonstrated just how toxic things could get when gloves come off with government sanction. Jonathan Freedland of the *Guardian* confessed:

"I try to imagine how I would feel if this rainstorm of headlines substituted the word 'Jew' for 'Muslim' – I wouldn't just feel frightened. I would be looking for my passport."

One can't miss the Islamophobic nature of much of the hysteria when one compares the difference in the treatment of the cases of Robert Cottage and David Bolus Jackson of the BNP with that of Mohammed Atif Siddique. The case of the former two, arrested for the possession of rocket launchers, a "record haul of chemicals used in making home-made bombs", extremist literature, and bomb-making information, barely got covered in national media; the latter, a 20 year old, received front page attention and eight years in prison for merely downloading extremist literature, and his attorney, Aamer Anwer, got charged with 'contempt of court' for calling the trial a "tragedy for justice".

The new MI5 chief, Jonathan Evan, raised the fear factor a year on with the warning that 15-year-olds were being "groomed" for terror and that there were up to 2,000 people involved in "terrorist-related activity". Recalling Donald Rumsfeld's "unknown unknowns", the man appointed by John Reid with Tony Blair's approval, bizarrely added "there are as many again that we don't yet know of". Described variously as "lurid", "inflammatory", "highly ideological", "playing Halloween", it came on the eve of the Queen's address calling for yet another terror bill. The institutional imperative of self-preservation may

also have been at play: MI5 has already expanded by 50% with eight new regional offices, and will have doubled in size by 2011. Eyebrows have been raised at these very public interventions by the heads of a clandestine service. Simon Jenkins noted that chiefs of the secret service have long feared that the absence of a public profile may diminish funding appropriation. "The answer of both MI5's Evans and MI6's John Scarlett is to join the fear factory."<sup>9</sup>

...the only thing more useful than a thing to fear is fear itself...

### Taking Liberties

The assault on constitutional rights that started in the US with Clinton's 'Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty' law of 1996 was replicated in Britain with the 'Terrorism Act 2000'. Section 41 of the Act granted police the right to detain terror suspects for up to one week without charge (criminal law on the other hand requires that suspects be charged within the first 24 hours of arrest, or be released). Section 44 granted police stop and search rights all across Britain – it has since been used against: Kevin Gillan and Pennie Quinto for protesting outside Europe's biggest arms fair in London; the 82-year-old Walter Wolfgang for heckling Jack Straw at the Labour Conference; Sally Cameron for walking on a cycle-path in Dundee; the 80-year-old John Catt for being caught on CCTV passing a demonstration in Brighton; the 11-year-old Isabelle Ellis-Cockcroft for accompanying her parents to an anti-nuclear protest; and a cricketer on his way to a match over his possession of a bat.

In the United States, September 11 occasioned the most robust assault yet on civil liberties in the form of Bush's 'USA Patriot Act' leading eminent constitutional law professor Sanford Levinson to describe Carl Schmitt, the leading authority on Nazi legal philosophy, as "the true éminence grise of the Bush administration" to the extent that the Administration (advised by Dick Cheney's lawyer, David Addington) espoused a view of presidential authority "that is all too close to the power that Schmitt was willing to accord his own Führer".<sup>10</sup> The respected lawyer Gareth Pierce noted equally worrying tendencies in the UK:

"Blair bulldozed through Parliament a new brand of internment. This allowed for the indefinite detention without trial of foreign nationals, the 'evidence' to be heard in secret with the detainee's lawyer not permitted to see the evidence against him and an auxiliary lawyer appointed by the attorney general who, having seen it, was not allowed to see the detainee. The most useful device of the executive is its ability to claim that secrecy is necessary for national security."<sup>11</sup>

The 'Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001' succeeded in ramming through measures that had been rejected in the 2000 Act. The 'Criminal Justice Act 2003' doubled the period of detention without charge to 14 days. Although the government suffered a significant setback when the Law Lords swept aside the indefinite detention ruling since it broke European human rights legislation (described by the Law Lords as "draconian" and "anathema" to the rule of law it was seen by Lord Hoffmann as a bigger threat to the nation than terrorism). Charles Clarke, the Home Secretary, immediately made clear

his intention to undermine it. The government obliged by subsequently passing the 'Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005' which gave the Home Secretary the right to use Control Orders and opt out of human rights laws.<sup>12</sup>

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in London on July 7, the government upped the ante with the 'Terrorism Act 2006', which doubled – yet again – the detention period to 28 days, a period far longer than any other state in the western world. The bill marked the first parliamentary defeat for Tony Blair, whose original proposal was for 90 days detention without charge.

Blair's determination to deflect attention from the failures of his scandal-ridden government by turning the war on terror into a permanent undeclared state of emergency appeared finally to have hit a wall. However, despite a noticeably prudent start, Brown's multiplying political problems soon had him reaching for Blairite nostrums. He renewed the case for doubling the period of detention without charge (subsequently reduced to 42 days). This despite the fact that the newly appointed Home Secretary Jacqui Smith had conceded that circumstances had not yet arisen where it had been necessary "to go beyond 28 days". Seumas Milne reported in *The Guardian* that,

## anti-Terrorism legislation castigates Universities for teaching students “theoretical tools for understanding the world”

“it's widely acknowledged in Westminster that a key motivation for this latest assault on long-established rights and freedoms is Brown's determination to wrong-foot the Tories tactically and portray them as soft on terror”.

The deleterious effects of a creeping surveillance state cannot be discounted. While the public may have little enthusiasm for an ID card scheme after discs containing personal details of 25 million individuals were lost by the government, Brown remains adamant. Given the government's record for handling personal data, proposals for a universal register of citizen's DNA samples is very worrying. So are Tony Blair's remarks about identifying problem children who may grow up to pose a menace to society by intervening before they were born.<sup>13</sup> A new plan under the government's e-borders scheme would require each person entering or leaving UK to answer 53 questions including “credit card details, holiday contact numbers, travel plans, email addresses, car numbers and even any previous missed flights”. Taken when a ticket is bought, the information, it was reported, “will be shared among police, customs, immigration and the security services for at least 24 hours before a journey is due to take place.”

When popular shows bear names like 'Big Brother', the appurtenances of mass surveillance society, such as the 4.2 million CCTV cameras, become an acceptable, even desired, part of the

scenery. Privacy International rates Britain as an “endemic surveillance society” and, according to Timothy Garton Ash, the British state collects more data on its citizens than did the Stasi in East Germany. The more than 3,000 new criminal offences introduced under the Labour government have also turned privatized prisons into a growth industry. Today Britain has a higher incarceration rate than China, Burma or Saudi Arabia.

While the terrorist threat today has nowhere near the intensity of the IRA campaign, police are using military aircraft such as the Britten-Norman Islander used previously only in Northern Ireland during the Troubles. Reaper robot drones of the type being used in Afghanistan will also be in operation during the Olympics.

### Reign of the Terrorologist

Riding the back of the raft of anti-terror legislations are the terrorologists and the 'security' entrepreneurs; and they have found green pastures in Fortress Britain. With governments unwilling to address political causes, the trend is increasingly one of framing the subject in cultural terms: 'they hate our way of life', 'they hate our freedoms' etc. This clears the way for the terrorologist to step in and sell a toxic brew of cultural stereotypes and pop psychology packaged in pseudo-academic jargon. In his study of the trade, James Petras detects the following “eerily predictable patterns”:

“They use a common language to describe their subjects and their environment; they are extremely ideological under a thin veneer of scientific jargon; they possess a keen sense of selective observation; they always pretend to possess a psychological understanding though few if any have dealt close up with their subjects in any clinical sense except perhaps under conditions of incarceration and interrogation.

Their style...slippery with euphemisms when it comes to dealing with the violence of their partisan states... Psychobabble provides a 'legitimate' sounding channel for... assuming a state of civilized superiority in the face of their dehumanized subjects. Indeed, the dehumanization process is central to the whole terrorist-political-academic enterprise...”<sup>14</sup>

One consequence of earning an elevated place in official demonology is that the bar for those passing judgement drops radically. When it comes to Islam, Muslims and their alleged links to terrorism, any shoddy indictment will pass muster. Doom-laden sensationalism makes for good copy; it makes no demands on rigour and scepticism, and a stable of 'experts' is readily at hand to amplify fear. The degree to which this has penetrated public discourse was demonstrated by the *Big Issue* – a publication generally about as provocative as a phonebook – with a front page story on 'cyber terror' and 'online vigilantes'. Trotting out a stable of 'terror experts' the story served as a platform for several tendentious claims (“There are no longer clear boundaries between real-world cells and 'amateurs' assisting terror plots via their computers”; “al-Qaeda is equal in the media war”). Rather than question why a dubious source such as Evan Kohlmann – the man used as a 'expert witness' in the Atif Siddique trial, who “has no expertise beyond ... an internship at a dubious think-tank”<sup>15</sup> – should be consulted by Scotland Yard, the story served as a puff piece for three Israeli lobby hacks. Rita Katz has served in the Israeli military; Aaron Weisburd runs Internet Haganah (Hebrew name for the paramilitary that later became the IDF) a project of the Society for Internet Research that works with the Mossad-linked Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center; and both Katz and Kohlmann are protégés of Steve Emerson whose own expertise includes having seen “the hallmarks of Middle Eastern terror” in the Oklahoma bombing (actually carried out by Timothy McVeigh, a decorated white Christian war-hero).

The trade of the terrorologist is not new: incubated in the Reagan administration's earlier 'war on terror', its proponents had been exposed and elegantly debunked by Edward Hermann. September 11 ushered in a new breed – ubiquitous, ideological, and relentless. Some, such as Rohan

Gunaratna of the St. Andrews-based Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV), reinvented themselves over night as 'experts on al-Qaeda'. Gunaratna's book *Inside Al Qaeda* became an instant best-seller, even though before the date his expertise was limited to South Asian groups, such as the Tamil Tigers. In the book he claimed he was the “principal investigator of the United Nations' Terrorism Prevention Branch”. However, after a *Sunday Age* investigation, he admitted that no such position existed. Intelligence services have been generally dismissive of his claims. However, despite all this, he keeps making appearances as an 'expert witness' at various UK prosecutions and in media reports.

CSTPV itself bears some scrutiny. Established by an alumni of the RAND Corporation (a US think-tank which played a key role during the Cold War; satirized as the 'Bland Corporation' in *Dr. Strangelove*; it was an enthusiastic supporter of the arms race), the Centre has links to the government and intelligence agencies. Shaping discourse on terrorism through its two influential academic journals, *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*, CSTPV emphasises terror directed against states, while mostly ignoring violence by states, excluding however those not allied to the West ('Hell is other people', Sartre might say). Reports by the Centre have been used by the government to rationalise permanent anti-terror legislation. The RAND-CSTPV nexus also has stakes in the Iraq conflict through its links to mercenary firms operating in the country. However, despite the conflicts of interest, the Centre's embedded expertise remains much in demand.<sup>16</sup>

CSTPV's output may be ideological; but it still retains a degree of sophistication. With the low demands on rigour, joining the fray now are some actors less restrained. In early 2006 it was revealed that authorities at several universities, including my own, were co-operating with Special Branch as a result of a recently published study by the right wing Social Affairs Unit. Conducted by Anthony Glees, the Director of Brunel Centre for Intelligence and Security Studies, the study claimed to find evidence of Islamist, animal liberation and British National Party recruitment on UK campuses. The evidence comprised of the fact that people who have been arrested under anti-Terrorism legislation attended universities at some point. It castigated Universities for teaching students “theoretical tools for understanding the world”, such as Marxism, which could lead to further radicalization when students moved “from campus to Mosque”. Policy Exchange, another dubious neoconservative outfit, shouldered its way into the debate with an Islamophobic report on extremist literature being promoted through various Mosques which, to the BBC's credit, was publicly debunked by a Newsnight investigation. This, however, did not deter Policy Exchange members from using the report to lobby the EU.

### Hero and Horse

On November 18, 1822, the *Observer* reported that nearly “a million bushels of human and inhuman bones” had been imported in the previous year from Europe into the port of Hull. Battlefields swept alike of the “bones of the hero and the horse which he rode” delivered their haul to Yorkshire bone grinders who reduced them to granular state. “In this condition they are sold to the farmers to manure their lands.”<sup>17</sup> Two centuries on, the gap between the 'support our troops' rhetoric and reality has yet to be bridged.

An internal report into the state of the British Military obtained by *The Independent* on May 11 reveals that soldiers are living in such poverty that they can't even afford food, with many living on emergency food voucher schemes set up by the Ministry of Defence (MoD). “Commanders are attempting to tackle the problem through 'Hungry Soldier' schemes, under which destitute soldiers are given loans to enable them to eat” the paper reported. With its proclivity for market solutions, the tradition of soldiers getting three square meals a day for free has been replaced with

# What interests policy makers is not so much the military, but the *cult* of military.

a controversial Pay as You Dine (PAYD) regime, which charges soldiers not on active duty for their meals, leading many into debt.

Likewise, slightly more than a year back on March 11, 2007, the *Observer* had revealed the shocking picture of neglect and poor treatment of wounded soldiers returning from Afghanistan and Iraq. It reported, for example, that “the youngest British soldier wounded in Iraq, Jamie Cooper, was forced to spend a night lying in his own faeces after staff at Birmingham’s Selly Oak Hospital allowed his colostomy bag to overflow. On another occasion his medical air mattress was allowed to deflate, leaving him in ‘considerable pain’ overnight despite an alarm going off.” Another complaint alleged that one soldier “suffered more than 14 hours in agony without pain relief because no relevant staff were on duty”. (This, of course, is as much a reflection of the chronic lack of surplus within the health system as it is of the wider militarised draw on public resources.) The MoD has already revealed a serious shortage of medical staff in the armed forces:

“There was a 50% shortfall in the number of surgeons required by the army, an 80% shortfall of radiologists and a 46% shortfall of anaesthetists.”<sup>18</sup>

Soldiers in the field haven’t fared any better: for example, both Reg Keys and Rose Gentle lost sons in Iraq due to the lack of proper equipment. Iraq has taken its toll on an overstretched military. Due to “continuing high level of operational commitment” an MoD report has revealed, “more than 1 in 10 soldiers were not getting the rest between operations they needed.” The report also referred to a “continuing difficult environment for army recruitment and retention”. With a high number of officers and other ranks going over voluntarily with another 2,000 awaiting approval of their applications to quit, the armed forces as a whole are nearly 7,000 under strength, the report revealed.<sup>19</sup>

The crisis has caused the military to redouble its recruitment efforts with visits to Scottish schools up by more than 180% in the last three years, *The Herald* revealed. The news comes only weeks after the National Union of Teachers voted to block future military careers’ presentations “to pupils as young as 14” in England and Wales. “Despite the outlay of almost £500m, in 2006-07 the field army – the frontline operational part of UK ground forces – missed its ‘gains to strength’ (GTS) recruitment goal by 12%. In 2007-08, it achieved only 63% of its target.”<sup>20</sup> (In the US, the military has been reduced to enlisting former convicts and the mentally ill.) The degree of desperation is also evident in the recent advertising campaign for military recruitment: the military experience is presented as a sanitized adventure, an adrenaline-soaked escape from ennui. High-minded calls of duty and honour have been replaced with ones such as “for the travel, for the action, for the adventure”; “for the fun, for the friendship, for the Friday nights”.

The MoD caused much consternation among the National Union of Teachers when it distributed materials on the Iraq war for use in schools. The ministry was accused of “misleading propaganda” which “unethically” targeted recruitment materials at schools in disadvantaged areas. One worksheet described the purpose of the UK mission in Iraq as “helping the Iraqis to rebuild their country after the conflict and years of neglect”. Touting “achievements” in “security and reconstruction” it failed to mention the US-led invasion, its legality, Iraqi civilian deaths or the absence of WMDs. This is not the MoD’s only advance on the classroom. Another example is the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (DSTL) outreach programme, which sends DSTL scientists to talk to university and school students to encourage them to think about a career at the lab. According to Frances Saunders, the chief executive, DSTL sponsors “year-in-industry students, and are working with the MoD to develop school lesson texts to get people interested in the science behind defence.” Although DSTL already has strong links with universities including Southampton, Imperial, Oxford and Cambridge,

Saunders plans to broaden this network.

Not since Suez has the military suffered a greater loss of prestige. RAF airmen in Cambridgeshire were recently advised against wearing uniforms in public in order to avoid being “verbally abused” for their participation in Afghanistan and Iraq. With the demoralizing effect of ill-conceived interventions abroad, the struggle for politicians is then of rehabilitating the myth of the military, rather than the military itself. What interests policy makers is not so much the military, but the *cult* of military. Plans are also underway to introduce US-style citizenship ceremonies for children and a new public holiday to celebrate ‘Britishness’ by 2012, as part of “wide-ranging proposals to strengthen British citizenship.”

In sharp contrast to the decrepit military stands the fortunes of the private military industry. The preference of recent governments for market solutions has facilitated the transfer of most military R&D to the private sector, with giants like QinetiQ and BAe Systems securing plum deals. When the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (Dera) was split in two in 2001, QinetiQ, a British company with links to the US-based Carlyle group, absorbed the majority of its activities. Along with a raft of other lucrative PFIs, the private military industry is set to benefit from the largest to date, involving at least £14 billion of taxpayers’ money, for a privatised Military ‘Academy’ at St Athan in the Vale of Glamorgan to train all-service personnel and private ‘security services’. The corporate bonanza in Iraq has had Private Military Contractors – mercenaries – reaping windfalls profits for investors with stakes in the businesses, such as Frederick Forsyth and former Foreign Secretary Malcolm Rifkind (of Aegis and ArmorGroup respectively). The lure of salaries, at times reaching as high as £1,000 a day, may be one reason why the military is losing so many of its men to the mercenary business.<sup>21</sup>

While the defence establishment has long complained of funding shortages for the forces, the R&D budget remains secure. The MoD, it was reported, has promised not to raid the R&D budget to pay for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, this injunction doesn’t apply in the reverse, as it has been revealed that the Conflict Prevention Fund set aside for clearing landmines and removing arms from conflict zones was being raided to pay BAe Systems to subsidise the £5m-£10m servicing cost of six Tornado jets in Iraq. The measure was needed because the MoD has closed its own state-of-the-art facility for servicing Tornado jets presented as a way of saving £500m over 10 years.<sup>22</sup>

Sensing opportunity as the war on terror grinds on, its neoconservative architects have swooped in from across the Atlantic to establish a presence in Britain. With ties to the arms industry and the neoconservative wing of the Israel lobby, the Henry Jackson Society seems to be assuming the role that the Committee on Present Danger played in the United States. Its Israel-centric worldview, as exhibited by its roster of speakers, predisposes it towards perpetual conflict. The support for a militarized ethnocracy is not the natural inclination of a liberal-democratic Britain; it can only be sustained in a context where Israel can be seen aligned with Britain in an overarching conflict against a common enemy. So it is that the Israel lobby has contrived to pass its enemies off as those of the ‘West’. HJS appears well placed to sustain

this state of conflict should the Tories get in as its supporters include two of David Cameron’s key advisers. It is a dangerous confluence of interests.

Fortress Britain in the end is as much a consequence of ill-conceived alliances as it is a response to the neoliberal order’s need for distraction from its inherent contradictions. While not nearly as unscrupulous as his predecessor, Gordon Brown’s growing travails may lead him to seek the politician’s time-honoured remedy: to scare the hell out of the population. One only hopes that Fortress Britain is the apogee of what Tony Blair had set in motion with his promise to stand “shoulder to shoulder” with George W Bush in his so-called ‘war on terror’, because things could always be worse.

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## Notes

1. Might he be the same Amnon Maor of the squad of six Israeli border policemen who back in 1994 were sentenced to six months in prison with one year suspended sentences and a fine of NIS 1,000 each, for brutally assaulting an Arab in a supermarket whose cart had accidentally knocked one? “The six also arrested a passerby who witnessed the beating, and had asked them to stop and to show identification”, the *Jerusalem Post* reported. The Judge castigated them for abuse of authority and violating “all norms of acceptable behaviour”. (*Jerusalem Post*, 8 December 1994)
2. Naomi Klein, ‘How war was turned into a brand’, *The Guardian*, 16 June 2007
3. Zbigniew Brzezinski, ‘Terrorized by “War on Terror”’, *Washington Post*, March 25, 2007
4. European Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2007; David Miller, ‘The statistical invisibility of Islamist “terrorism” in Europe’, *Spinwatch*, 23 May 2007
5. Duncan Campbell, ‘The ricin ring that never was’, *The Guardian*, 14 April 2005
6. Gardner admits that the Mi6 tried to recruit him while he was stationed in Cairo, however, he insists he turned them down. See David Rowan, ‘Interview: Frank Gardner’, *Evening Standard*, 15 June 2005
7. Simon Jenkins, ‘These fear factory speeches are utterly self-defeating’, *The Guardian*, 7 November 2007
8. Robert Fisk, ‘If You Want the Roots of Terror, Try Here’, *The Independent*, 12 August 2006
9. Seumas Milne, ‘A pointless attack on liberty that fuels the terror threat’, *The Guardian*, 8 November 2007
10. Sanford Levinson, ‘Torture in Iraq & the rule of law in America’, *Daedalus* Summer 2004
11. Gareth Peirce, ‘Was it like this for the Irish?’, *London Review of Books*, 10 April 2008
12. See *ibid* for a description of the true onerous nature of the control orders, especially for detainees with families.
13. Henry Porter, ‘The way the police treat us verges on the criminal’, *The Observer*, 29 October 2006
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16. J. Burnett and Dave Whyte, ‘Embedded expertise and the “War on Terror”’, *Journal for Crime, Conflict and the Media*, 2005, 1(4): 1-18.
17. Quoted in the incisive study of the social consequences of conflict, *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning* by veteran correspondent Chris Hedges.
18. Jonathan Owen and Brian Brady, ‘Soldiers need loans to eat, report reveals’, *The Independent*, 11 May 2008; Ned Temko and Mark Townsend, ‘Scandal of treatment for wounded Iraq veterans’, *The Observer*, 11 March 2007
19. Richard Norton-Taylor, ‘Under-strength and under strain as experienced soldiers queue to quit’, *The Guardian*, 23 November 2007
20. Ian Bruce, ‘Army visits to Scottish schools soar by 180% in three years’, *The Herald*, 12 May 2008
21. ‘Corporate Mercenaries’, *War on Want*, 30 October 2006
22. David Hencke, ‘MoD plans raid on landmine removal fund to keep Tornados flying in Iraq’, *The Guardian*, 10 March 2008

# Nationalism and Neoliberalism

Neil Davidson

Supporters of free market economics have always been ambivalent towards nationalism. In an important book called 'Nation, State and Economy' (1919), the leading Austrian neoclassical thinker Ludwig von Mises argued that it was natural for human groups, who shared a common language, to adopt national identities, although these need not be coterminous with state boundaries, as the example of the Germans showed.<sup>1</sup> Given the practical difficulties of establishing a world state to oversee the capitalist system, nation-states were as good a basis for establishing the necessary legal framework for economic activity as any other; but when nationalism was used to mobilise popular support for state activities which impeded the competitive operation of the world market, then it became a danger to economic rationality, as understood by representatives of the Austrian school. Nationalism as the mobilising principle with which to establish a free economy was acceptable to them; nationalism as collective interference in the free economy was not.

Neoliberalism follows neoclassical economics in relation to nationalism, as in so much else. Neoliberals tend not to describe themselves in these terms, but as supporters of globalisation, which they assume has to be capitalist in character. Turn to any of the contemporary works which extol the benefits of this process and we find nationalism indicted for an extensive litany of crimes, including making militarist threats to peace, erecting protectionist barriers to free trade and expressing racist hostility to migrants. The movements for an alternative globalisation which emerged in Seattle during 1999 are routinely accused of wanting to prevent third world development for selfish nationalist reasons.<sup>2</sup> Yet if we look beyond the rhetoric of neoliberal publicists to the behaviour of neoliberal politicians and state managers we find a different attitude towards nationalism. As David Harvey has noted, "the neoliberal state needs nationalism of a certain sort to survive".<sup>3</sup> To understand why, we need to be clear about what neoliberalism is.

## The Consequences of Neoliberalism

By 'neoliberalism' I mean those interlocking economic and social policies that have become the collective orthodoxy since the mid-1970s. Although the following list is by no means exhaustive, any attempt to catalogue them would include: flexible labour markets, deregulation of financial markets, removal of protective tariffs and subsidies on essential goods, privatisation of state-owned industries and utilities, commodification of services once provided free at the point of use, and the shift from direct and progressive to indirect and regressive taxation. These have been adopted by states, including the remaining few that claim to have superseded capitalism, of which China is incomparably the most important, and by transnational institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, which police

international development and (in)stability in the interests of the global order. The emergence of neoliberalism as a conscious ruling class strategy, rather than an esoteric ideological doctrine, took place in response to the end of the post-war boom in the 1970s, but in changed conditions created by that boom: above all, the unprecedented expansion of international trade, the advent of cross-border production in order to utilise world forces of production rather than those of one territorial state, and the creation of 'offshore' banking and flows of money capital unlimited by national boundaries. More than any other development, this last one made government policies vulnerable to attack when they were seen to be acting against the interest of capital. Unlike factories, money can be moved and is not dependent on protection of a territorial state or states. States had not become completely powerless in the face of markets, of course – that is the myth of globalisation cultivated by politicians seeking to shift responsibility for neoliberal policies onto supposedly 'great impersonal forces' over which they had no control. Neoliberalism represented a choice, but it was a choice increasingly difficult to avoid so long as the goal was the continuation and expansion of capitalism at all costs.<sup>4</sup>

Neoliberalism has not succeeded in reducing either poverty or inequality; but far more fundamentally, from the perspective of the international capitalist class, it has failed in terms of the system itself. It has not recreated the conditions for capital accumulation which existed during the Great Boom. Above all, it has failed consistently to increase the rate of profit. To the extent it has intermittently done so, it has not achieved rates comparable to those between 1948 and 1974.<sup>5</sup> Accumulation has come to rely on increasing productivity on the one hand (making fewer people work harder) and decreasing the share of income going to labour on the other (paying workers less in real terms), but that is not physically sustainable indefinitely. Furthermore, the suppression of real wage levels, notably in the UK and USA, has encouraged the very dependence on borrowing which has now entered crisis. Far from this being a means of 'consumers' to add to their possessions – as moralistic accounts imply – it has been driven by their need to maintain personal liquidity through loans, mortgages, credit, overdrafts and the rest, precisely to meet the costs of the ultra-commodified world neoliberalism has created. But an economy which requires systemic debt to maintain expansion is scarcely in a healthy condition. The real success of neoliberalism has been to transfer wealth and resources to the ruling class and its hangers-on. There are, however, limits to this process. The opportunity provided by opening up the hitherto closed Stalinist economies was a once-and-for-all operation. Similarly, there is a limit to how far wealth can simply be transferred from the public to the private sector; for ultimately this is simply relocating existing money and resources within the system. But capitalism can only survive through expanding production, not mere personal enrichment.

## The Necessity for Nationalism in the Neoliberal Order

Nationalism is the necessary ideological corollary of capitalism. The capitalist class in its constituent parts has a continuing need to retain territorial home bases for their operations.<sup>6</sup> Why? Capitalism is based on competition, but capitalists want competition to take place on their terms; they do not want to suffer the consequences if they lose.

In one sense then, they want a state to ensure that they are protected from these consequences – in other words, they require from a state more than simply providing an infrastructure; they need it to ensure that effects of competition are experienced as far as possible by someone else. A global state could not do this; indeed, in this respect it would be the same as having no state at all. For if everyone is protected then no-one is: unrestricted market relations would prevail, with all the risks that entails. The state therefore has to have limits, has to be able to distinguish between those who will receive its protection and those who will not. But the state cannot simply be the site of particular functions, with no ideological attachment; capitalists have at least to try to convince themselves that what they are doing is in a greater 'national' interest, even if it is plainly in their own. Without some level of self-delusion, mere gangsterism will result. Therefore, when Liah Greenfield describes the 'spirit of capitalism' as "the economic expression of the collective competitiveness inherent in nationalism – itself a product of its members' collective investment in the dignity and prestige of the nation", she is turning history on its head.<sup>7</sup> It is the collective competitiveness of capitalism, expressed at the level of the state which requires nationalism as a framework within which competitiveness can be justified in terms of a higher aspiration than increased profit margins. If 'Britain' – or for that matter, 'Scotland' – is to be collectively competitive then this obviously means that individual British (or Scottish) companies must be individually competitive, but they are in competition with each other as much as with foreign rivals. In the course of this competition some will fail. Their failure, however, is a contribution to national survival, comparable, perhaps, to the sacrifice of soldiers in the field: competition is the health of the nation, just as war was once held to be the health of the state.

Nationalism does not simply unify territorially demarcated sections of the bourgeois culture; it plays an equally important function for capital in fragmenting the working class. Georg Lukacs once pointed out that one of the ways in which the bourgeoisie tries to prevent workers achieving coherent class consciousness is by "binding the individual members of those classes as single individuals, as mere 'citizens', to an abstract state reigning over and above them".<sup>8</sup> But it cannot be an 'abstract state'; it has to be a very concrete, particular state founded on a sense of common identity. For the working class, nationalism arises from two sources. One is from the spontaneous search for a form of collective identity with which to overcome the alienation of capitalist society. National consciousness is therefore an alternative to class consciousness, but is rarely a complete alternative, since reformism is effectively the means by which nationalism is naturalised in the working class. But the other source is the deliberate fostering of nationalism by the bourgeoisie in order to bind workers to the state and through the state binds them to capital.<sup>9</sup> Hence the absurdity of claims by Tom Nairn that "what the extra-American world should fear is not US nationalism but the debility of the American state", as if the nationalism was not the means by which the American state mobilises popular support behind imperialist adventures like those in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>10</sup>

The application of neoliberal policies over the past thirty years has increased the alienation and atomisation which is the normal condition of everyday life under capitalism, but it has also

“the neoliberal state needs nationalism of a certain sort to survive”

done more. "Capitalism needs a human being who has never existed", writes Terry Eagleton, "one who is prudently restrained in the office and wildly anarchic in the shopping mall."<sup>11</sup> But precisely because these human beings do not exist, because the economic and the social are not as separate in life as they are in academic disciplines, the anarchy, the emphasis on self-gratification, self-realisation, and self-fulfilment through commodities has tended to permeate all relations, with uncertain consequences. In the face of the resulting 'social anarchy and nihilism', Harvey notes, with perhaps excessive restraint, "some degree of coercion appears necessary to restore order".<sup>12</sup> Unchecked, the future will be as foreseen by George Steiner at the fall of the Berlin Wall: a combination of repression and commodification, "The knout on the one hand; the cheeseburger on the other."<sup>13</sup> But repression on its own will not produce the degree of willing acceptance which the system requires.

In these circumstances nationalism plays two roles: it provides a type of psychic compensation for the direct producers which is unobtainable from the mere consumption of commodities, and it acts as a means of recreating at the political level the cohesion which is being lost at the social. It is no accident that the nationalist turn in the ideology of the Chinese ruling class became most marked with the initial opening up to world markets in 1978 and the suppression of the movement for political reform in 1989, which was followed by a 'patriotic education campaign'; the general tone of which continues to this day, as in different ways Taiwanese and Tibetans have discovered to their cost.<sup>14</sup> Britain is in no position to criticise the Chinese in this respect: two of the most disgraceful statements to have been made by Gordon Brown – from an admittedly crowded field – are that we should stop apologising for the British Empire and that British jobs should be the preserve of British workers.

### Problems of Blowback

The division into national territories has always helped to allocate where the devaluation or destruction of capital occurs, as one set of state managers attempt to protect their 'own' capitals from the pressure of global crisis at the expense of other sets attempting the same. This occurs most sharply in cases of actual military conflict: "In an age of mass politics all interstate wars are nationalist wars, conducted in the name of nations and purportedly in their interests".<sup>15</sup> But war is scarcely the only, or even the most common form of geopolitical rivalry. Edward Luttwak describes the new rivalries as "geo-economics" or "warfare by other means"; "In it, investment capital for industry provided or guided by the state is the equivalent of firepower; product development subsidised by the state is the equivalent of weapon innovation; and market penetration supported by the state replaces military bases and garrisons on foreign soil as well as diplomatic influence." These are not simply analogies. As Luttwak notes, war may be "different from commerce, but evidently not different enough"; "In particular, an action-reaction cycle of trade restrictions that evoke

retaliation has a distinct resemblance to crisis escalation that can lead to outright war".<sup>16</sup>

But what Luttwak calls the "adversarial attitudes" mobilised by states can of course escape the control of those who initially fostered them. Ian Kershaw suggests that one of the reasons the Japanese military elite were forced into the Second World War was that it had encouraged levels of mass chauvinism and expectations of military-territorial expansion from which it could not retreat without provoking popular hostility: the generals were trapped in a prison of their own devising.<sup>17</sup> Norman Stone argues more generally that the First World War could not have been brought to a negotiated end by the end of 1916 no matter what the politicians and generals may have wished, because the nationalist hatreds they had encouraged, now amplified by the deaths, injuries and destruction, had acquired their own 'momentum' and called forth leaders committed to victory.<sup>18</sup> But similar outcomes can be found in the neoliberal era. Gowan has argued that Conservative hostility to the EU, now inherited by New Labour, is inexplicable at purely policy level, given the neoliberal programme upon which EMU (Economic and Monetary Union) is designed to institutionalise and to which all British parties are committed. But because the neoliberal reforms have so singularly failed to rejuvenate the British economy, other than by enriching a new rentier class, it would be exposed to competition which would reveal underlying weaknesses that neoliberalism was supposed to have corrected. Resurgent imperial nationalism was unleashed for the purposes of defending one version of the interests of national capital, but now prevents British politicians and state managers from pursuing any other strategy, however rational from their perspective.<sup>19</sup>

But there is another danger for ruling classes too, namely that neoliberal nationalism will lead to the fragmentation of neoliberal states. Harvey writes: "Margaret Thatcher, through the Falklands/Malvinas war and in her antagonistic posture towards Europe, invoked nationalist sentiment in support of her neoliberal project, though it was the idea of England and St George, rather than the United Kingdom, that animated her vision – which turned Scotland and Wales hostile."<sup>20</sup> But would the hostility of (some) Scottish and (some) Welsh people have been less had Thatcher conveyed a sense of Britishness rather than Englishness? Gordon Brown is currently trying to do the former, with no real success. The difficulty here is a deeper one. Because nationalism is such an inescapable aspect of capitalist development, the first response to intolerable conditions is to seek to establish a new nation-state, although this is usually only possible where some level of national consciousness already exists, as it does in Scotland. In other words, neoliberalism may require nations, but it does not require particular nations.

### Alternatives to Nationalism?

In spite of the risks, however, it is not clear what could replace nationalism as a means of securing even the partial loyalty of the working class to the capitalist state and preventing the formation

of class consciousness. (Football doesn't quite do it although it sometimes appears to be one of the candidates). Early on in the neoliberal era, Raymond Williams noted that "a global system of production and trade" also required "a socially organised and socially disciplined population, one from which effort can be mobilised and taxes collected along the residual but still effective national lines; there are still no effective political competitors in that".<sup>21</sup> In many ways, nationalism took over the role of religion as 'the heart of a heartless world' and it is not clear how the latter could reclaim that role. The resurgence of religious belief is real, although not extensive enough to roll back all the achievements of secularisation, and it is almost everywhere subordinated to local nationalisms. And there is a further difficulty. One

...neoliberalism may require nations, but it does not require particular nations.

ideological aspect of the 'War on Terror' has been a revival of a pre-Marxist or vulgar Enlightenment critique of religion, focussed on the supposedly backward nature of Islam. For this critique to carry any credibility, however, it must be extended to all religions; hence the appearance of books with titles like 'Against all Gods', 'The God Delusion' and 'God is not Great'. My point here is not the absurdity or moral bankruptcy of highly paid establishment intellectuals like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens posturing as heroic opponents of religious tyranny, but the fact that there is a division within bourgeois thought on the subject of religion which makes it unusable as the principle means of achieving ideological cohesion.

Could loyalties be transferred upwards to a global or even regional state? Montserrat Guibernau has argued that the European Union will ultimately require "European national consciousness" to give coherence to the otherwise uneven group of nations which comprise that body.<sup>22</sup> But as Benedict Anderson writes, "in themselves market-zones, 'natural'-geographic or politico-administrative, do not create attachments. Who would willingly die for Comecon or the EEC?"<sup>23</sup> Nor could loyalties easily be transferred downwards to individual capitals. It has been known for workers to support their company, even to make sacrifices to maintain it in business. But this tends to happen where these are local, well established and where workers are employed on a long-term basis. Where workers make sacrifices in terms of job losses, worsened conditions and – as happened in the USA during the 1980s – actual

cuts in pay. They do not do so because of loyalty to the firm, but because they see no alternative that does not involve the even worse fate of losing their job entirely. Individual managers or 'team-leaders' may internalise the ethos of McDonalds or Wal-Mart, but workers cannot: the reality of the daily conflict between themselves and the employer is too stark to be overcome. Beyond this, even those companies which still retain health insurance and pension arrangements come nowhere near providing the integrative functions of even the weakest nation-state. It is of course possible for workers outside a company to celebrate its achievements – but only because it is national.<sup>24</sup>

## Conclusion

Neoliberalism is a reorganisation of capitalism and, like all forms of capitalism, it needs both the territorial nation-state form and the ideology of nationalism. For Scots, perhaps closer to the establishment of a nation-state than at any time since 1707, the point is of extreme importance. There are many reasons, including Trident, Afghanistan and Iraq, why no-one should lift a finger to preserve the British imperial state; but that is a tactical consideration. If the argument of this article is correct, then forming a new nation-state will not in itself relieve the pressures that make that option an attractive one. In social terms, the minority SNP government is operating close to the limits of reformism, largely in order to build an electoral base at the expense of the Labour Party.<sup>25</sup> The limits are set by its adherence to the neoliberal economic agenda and they will be reached very shortly. When that happens, regardless of whether Scotland is in or out of the UK, we would do well to remember that, ultimately, nationalism of any sort is – to paraphrase a slogan of 40 years ago – part of the problem, not part of the solution.

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## Notes

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# The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain

Daniel Jewesbury

*The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain*  
Arun Kundnani, 2007, Pluto Press, ISBN 978-0-7453-2645-0

For all the time that politicians, columnists and activists spend discussing it, racism is seldom defined with any precision or accuracy, or indeed in any way that might inculcate an awareness of its complex, multiple nature and origins. It's most often understood simply (and yet very specifically) as discrimination, by an individual, on the basis of another individual's skin colour. Sir William Macpherson's report into 'matters arising' from the murder of Stephen Lawrence asserted that this discrimination may be practised, fostered or encouraged, even unwittingly, by institutions as well as individuals; a fairly mild, reasonably obvious statement, which nonetheless seemed to create consternation at the time.<sup>1</sup>

But Macpherson's slight extension of racism's mode of operation (refuted, at any rate, soon afterwards by the government who caused it to be written<sup>2</sup>) brings us no closer to describing what racism actually is, if indeed it's more than just simple discrimination. Racism can be construed as an *effect*, arising from a broad range of conditions of disparity: historical, economic, ideological, and crudely political. In this interpretation, it is the *expression* of all of these conditions, and as such it is ultimately symptomatic of the inequalities inherent in what we now call 'the global order'. But racism can simultaneously be understood to lie within the originary inequality itself, to be implicated at the cause, in the rationale lying behind policy and law, so it is in its nature cyclical – as a system of belief, a way of thinking difference, it is implicit in the basic legal and social structure of our modern state, and, expressed as a set of behaviours, it is then perpetuated by this structure.

One of the most persuasive and accessible historians of the roots and forms of racism, Paul Gilroy, emphasises what he terms 'racialisation', the ideological and historical processes by which thinking in terms of race became first possible, then predominant, and finally unavoidable.<sup>3</sup> Gilroy details a history of 'racialised thinking', the positing of a type of ineluctable difference determined by biological categories of race. The basis of racism lies in this troubled history of the thinking of the concept of race itself. But this thinking is not static, and nor are the social contexts upon which it is brought to bear; so biological race is inflected now as cultural or ethnic difference, and is no less irreducible. As Kundnani points out,

"... race is a socially constructed concept that is both wider in its range and more profoundly rooted in the history of the nation than is commonly supposed. Moreover, the restriction of the concept of racism to 'colour' difference has concealed the full range of ways in which racism has operated in Britain, including against Jews, Gypsies and the Irish."<sup>4</sup>

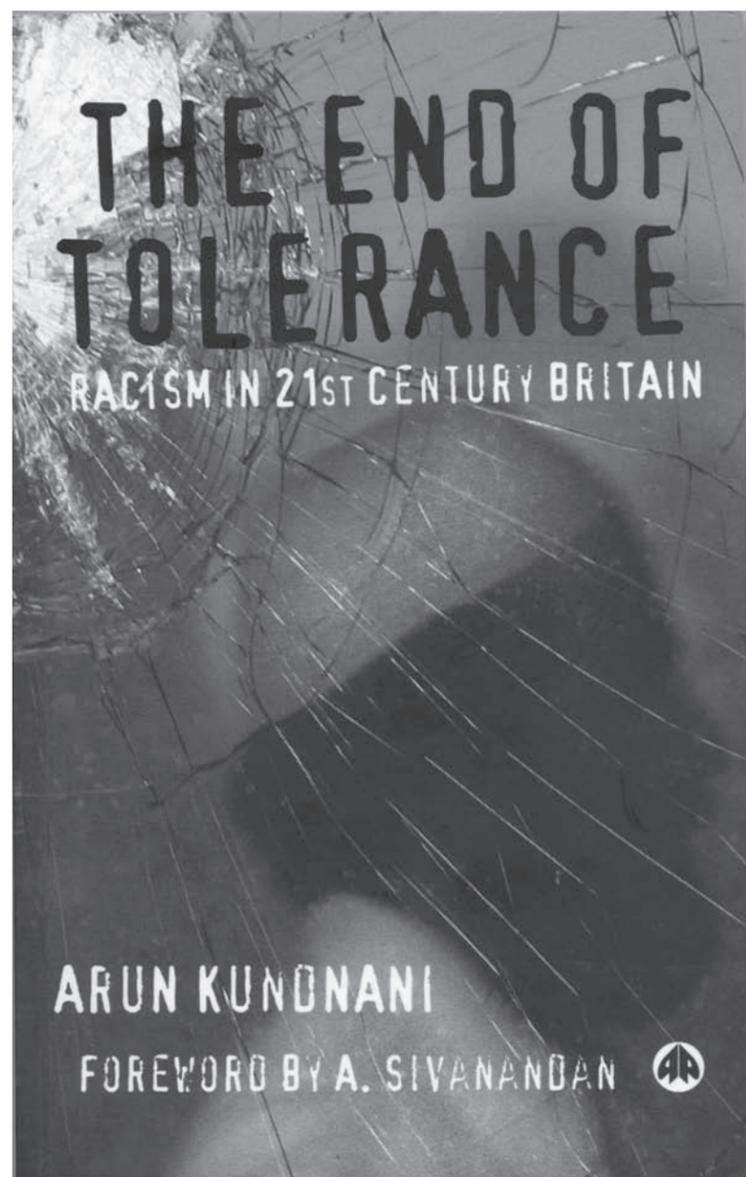
This is extremely pertinent to any current discussion of racism, which is now, in Britain as elsewhere, overwhelmingly directed against Muslims. Columnists and commentators of many political persuasions pronounce that anti-Muslim sentiment is not racism at all, since Islam is a religion, not a race; such argument betrays not only an ignorance of the workings, history and logic of racism, contemporary or otherwise, but also an adherence to a rather literal and outdated concept of 'race'. As a legitimisation of discrimination in law and vilification in society, anti-Muslim racism is every bit as real as the anti-Semitic racism that

was propagated so blithely by the British rightwing press of the 1930s.

In order to substantiate this already complex definition of racism, one must also account for the way in which relations of power are implicated in racism. Racism (as effect) is the public enactment of a prior disparity of power between one group and another; indeed, far from being 'anti-social', racism is a violent demonstration that this disparity has already been sanctioned, historically, within society and the state.<sup>5</sup> Most often, a group that experiences racism has received its identification, its definition as a coherent group, from the powerful group (it has been 'overdetermined from without'), in order that it can be 'acted upon'. (And, as Kundnani demonstrates, this identification can change to suit current policy: in the late 1990s, second- and third-generation British Pakistanis found that they had ceased to be 'Asian' and had become 'Muslims'.) But racism is not merely the expression of this power relationship (calling someone a 'black bastard'); for the power relationship is itself shaped and defined *by racism*. This is why, within a British context, anti-white feeling amongst, say, black or Asian groups cannot be called 'black on white racism': because the unequal relationship that defines racism is entirely absent in this situation.<sup>6</sup>

It might appear that *The End of Tolerance* is about far more than just racism; but then, racism itself is about far more than 'just racism'. The task that Kundnani sets himself is to guide us through the many contributory factors to 21st-century British racism, to show how old arguments are given new articulation, how, in the process, racism becomes more, not less institutionalised, its causes becoming more tortuously misrepresented, and how, as a consequence, its comprehension grows more difficult. Most significantly, and most damningly, he examines rigorously the contribution made by government. Whilst any citizen of average intelligence is aware of the essential duplicity of their government, it is nevertheless extremely disturbing to realise, as one reads the book, the extent to which government action and policy – sometimes knowingly pernicious, sometimes merely feckless and populist – has been the single most active agent in the promulgation of a new racism. To this end, he describes in turn the details and effects of New Labour's radical restructuring of immigration, asylum and nationality law; its reckless and calamitous foreign policy (both before and after the 11th of September 2001); its repressive and cavalier instincts in criminal justice; its contempt for international conventions and doctrines of universal human rights; its subservience to globalised corporate interests very often in direct conflict with the interests of British citizens; and its framing of, and pandering to, a populist agenda around issues of cultural identity, in the interests of maintaining its electoral base with white middle-class voters.

A picture emerges of policy and legislation that, accustomed as we are to viewing it always through the exigencies of the current moment, is usually only visible in fragments: the disparate statements and actions, consultation documents and acts of parliament are considered in painstaking detail, and one starts to appreciate that, incrementally, an entire regime of racist ideology has been constructed over the last decade, one which goes further in terms of law and consequence than anything enacted by the governments of Thatcher or Major (whose own more overtly racist, but,



in many ways, less thoroughly invasive and far-reaching policies the Labour opposition of the time regularly spoke and voted against).

## Multiculturalism

A great angst is at large in the country at present, amongst government ministers in particular; about communities (almost always Muslim) who 'refuse' to 'integrate' into British society and culture: they speak their own languages, at home and on the street; they follow an alien religion; they wilfully dress, eat and behave differently; and they live in 'no-go' areas that 'British people' (that is, white Britons) are afraid of entering. The main problem with this overall diagnosis lies not in its individual inaccuracies, but in the inference drawn: that these communities have willingly cut themselves off from the 'shared values' of society, that they are an alien and potentially hostile presence living amongst the host community (a phrase which carries obvious and intentional connotations of parasitism), and that we should not be expected to tolerate this any longer; as we have done, so blindly, for so many decades. After all (it is argued) it is precisely this toleration, under the guise of multiculturalism, which brought us to this situation in the first place.

There are a great many misrepresentations in this set of attitudes. Small distortions are piled upon greater falsifications to create a thoroughly mendacious, thoroughly racist picture of minority communities in Britain, and their situations and concerns. The notion that multiculturalism 'allowed' communities to 'self-segregate', by encouraging the expression of their culture on an equal footing is one of a series of reversals of

cause and effect that render the argument fairly worthless. As Kundnani writes,

"... the policies that were implemented in the 1980s in the name of multiculturalism were a mode of control rather than a line of defence. Multiculturalism in this sense referred to a set of policies directed towards taking African-Caribbean and Asian cultures off the streets – where they had been politicised and turned into rebellions against the state – and putting them in the council chamber, in the classroom and on television, where they could be institutionalised, managed and commodified. Black culture was turned from a living movement into an object of passive contemplation, something to be 'celebrated' rather than acted upon. The method for achieving this was the separation of different ethnic groups into distinct cultural blocs, to be managed by a new cadre of ethnically defined 'community leaders', and the rethinking of race relations in terms of a view of cultural identity that was rigid, closed and almost biological..."<sup>7</sup>

By refocusing communities on a politics of competitive recognition, multiculturalism had the desired effect of fragmenting a broad-based movement that had, by the time of the Brixton, Handsworth and Toxteth riots of 1981, become a dangerous challenge to state authority. "The often conservative community leaderships tried to insulate their clans from the wider world, not... to strengthen group identity... but rather to protect the structures on which their power depended. Ethnic identity became an escape from a racist society rather than the basis for a challenge to it."<sup>8</sup>

So a partial segregation of minority communities, who were kept at arm's length both from the 'centre' and from one another; was one of the consequences of multiculturalism<sup>9</sup>; this was exacerbated, particularly in northern England, by a combination of rapid industrial decline and openly discriminatory housing policies, which led to workers and families who had previously been side by side in the same mills, factories and streets gradually being screened out to separate parts of town. Over time, in towns like Oldham or Bradford, this division became entrenched and self-perpetuating; damp, cramped ghettos, centred around the Victorian back-to-backs vacated by rehoused white families, at least offered some safety for Asians who didn't wish to risk racist attacks on the overwhelmingly white estates. The 1988 Education Act and its doctrine of parental choice further encouraged segregation; infamously, a year earlier, parents in Dewsbury had set up their own 'white' school in a room above a pub, on the grounds that their local school had too many Asian students.

This portrayal of two decades of managed, multifaceted discrimination as *self-segregation*, a *refusal* to integrate, and as something which is therefore the fault of the communities in question, is typical of the insidious nature of contemporary racism. Its apparently 'commonsensical' explanation of the segregation that clearly exists is also difficult to counter. Through careful, detailed argument, Kundnani turns the proposition on its head: it was neither state pandering to cultural difference, nor unwillingness to mix, that led to our segregated cities and society; rather, it was years of conscious, racist manipulation and exclusion of communities, conducted for short-term political advantage.

The demand now made of these communities is that they surrender their obstinate difference and declare their allegiance to as-yet-undefined 'British values' (as far as they can be identified, these seem, paradoxically, to be the very 'values' attacked in successive government legislation over the last decade). That the call for integration must simultaneously be accompanied by an agonised quest to invent a 'British' identity into which to integrate is, in the circumstances, only mildly amusing. The current focus on Muslim communities' non-integration is of course sharpened by the supposed threat they pose – a threat upon which there seems to be consensus across the political spectrum. Kundnani develops this: "What had before been interpreted as a problem of Asians living in separate *cultures* has, since 9/11, been taken to be a problem of Muslims living by separate *values*."<sup>10</sup>

If the very existence of cultural diversity within the nation has now come to be perceived

as a threat, what hope is there for anti-racism? The type of pluralist solidarity that Kundnani calmly advocates now seems tantamount, in the state's terms, to a call for bloody racial rioting on the streets of Britain. Clearly, the potential for collective action is severely restricted by the demonisation and suspicion directed at British Muslims (who can nowadays only be framed in a positive manner when they are supporting spurious government-authored definitions of 'moderate Islam', and thus attacking the externally perceived and misrepresented ills of their community). Kundnani notes that, today, "anti-racism" is reduced to a conflict-management exercise carried out by the state, which does not grasp the underlying causes of racism and leaves existing power relationships in place."<sup>11</sup> One could comment that the state grasps the underlying causes of racism only too well.

The distorted debate over integration has a corollary, which has also been discussed with tedious regularity lately, the issue of religious tolerance. Just as the state now depicts Islam as uniquely anti-democratic, violent and authoritarian, and therefore the 'enemy within' British society, so a raft of 'secularists' of various persuasions argue that it is directly opposed to the very Enlightenment values that define and guarantee the rights and freedoms that we in the West cherish. For both parties, the fact that the men who bombed London on the 7th of July 2005 were born and raised in this country adds to the apparent urgency of delivering this challenge to Islam. Notwithstanding the fact that these defenders of 'the Enlightenment' rarely acknowledge the limits of their own positivistic world view (Theodor Adorno was not the only Western citizen to suppose that imperialism, totalitarianism and the gas chambers were a culmination of scientific rationalism, rather than its monstrous, aberrant deviation), the broader question that this raises concerns the nature of solidarity. We find ourselves in a pale re-enactment of the political territory of the 1960s and '70s, when the British Left was perfectly happy to welcome immigrant communities under its umbrella, so long as their 'sectional', identitarian demands could be made subservient to the movement's programmatic 'universalism'.

For 'integrationist feminists' as Kundnani calls them, denouncing practices such as wearing the veil, forced marriage and 'honour killing' (usually the only examples of the patriarchal nature of Islamic culture that these commentators can cite, because they are the most visible to the outsider; and so are disproportionately reported in the media), "combating violence against Muslim women is seen as fighting against a culture, while combating violence against white women is seen as a fight for rights".<sup>12</sup> Kundnani points out that denunciation of inequality in Muslim communities almost never amounts to actual solidarity with women's groups within those communities. And when the government chose to target forced marriage, instead of working with Muslim women, "solutions were sought in tightening up immigration controls; those trying to escape abusive marriages faced the threat of deportation rather than support and protection".<sup>13</sup>

"Renunciation of one's identity becomes a prerequisite for emancipation, and a new kind of superiority is entrenched in the name of feminism. State coercion is then justified as a possible means for bringing about this "emancipation"... Behind this "integrationist feminism" lies the tendency to regard the West as the sole bearer of enlightened progress and the European Enlightenment, not as one particular expression of universal values, but as the only possible expression for all time."<sup>14</sup>

Kundnani argues, fairly vaguely at times, it must be said, for a pluralist tolerance which can make this kind of 'cultural supremacy' obsolete, but the question that remains unanswered is whether one *can* voice disapproval of, or disagreement with, Islamic religious culture without automatically being co-opted into a mainstream 'secularist Enlightenment' agenda. The answer may lie in a reappraisal of the question; or rather, in stating that another question might be both more pressing and more revealing. Why is it that a defence of the 'progressive' gains of bourgeois Western society necessarily involves an attack, specifically and

most immediately, on Islam, rather than on any of the reactionary tendencies in our own culture? It often appears that much of this attention is the result of ignorance and laziness, an uncritical rush to 'comment' on whatever appears to be most topical. Furthermore, it's at least arguable that to set out one's secularist or socialist argument solely in reference to the predominant, stereotypical portrayal of the repressive, alien nature of Islam is itself reactionary: it further alienates the very individuals struggling to build progressive politics from the basis of their membership of the Muslim community. This isn't in any way a renunciation of the responsibility to criticise or to analyse, for fear of somehow causing offence. It's simply a caution that anti-racism – the central, most fundamental element of any progressive politics – must be based on solidarity, and that solidarity requires a relationship between equals.

"In a context in which anti-Muslim racism is institutionalised by the 'war on terror', it is natural and necessary that Muslims organise *as Muslims* in fighting the specific racism they face. Confronted by an intensely anti-Muslim political culture, Muslims cannot be expected to leave their religious identity behind when they enter the public sphere. To do so would only reinforce the mistaken belief that there is an incompatibility between Islam and democracy."<sup>15</sup>

## Globalisation

British racism cannot be understood only in the context of conditions within Britain, and the larger part of Kundnani's book sets about putting these conditions in the setting of the global factors that nourish racism everywhere. Ultimately, his plea is for a particular form of 'global citizenship', as the only ethical response to the structural inequalities of a world where corporations move capital unimpeded across borders and between territories, while nation states police the movement of people across the same borders.

Throughout, Kundnani combines historical overview with analysis of contemporary situations. So, for example, accounts of postwar immigration from the Commonwealth, the origins of International Monetary Fund (IMF) 'structural adjustment' programmes in the Third World, and historical conflicts in Sri Lanka and Afghanistan give important context to discussions of the development of present-day asylum and immigration law and foreign policy priorities. This gives Kundnani's argument depth and authority, even if it can sometimes make the forces he describes seem depressingly unassailable. Many contemporary polemics fail adequately to historicise the mysterious and vaguely-defined phenomena that comprise globalisation; Kundnani's measured descriptions of its origins and evolution make his work a valuable corrective. He describes the way in which IMF and World Bank debt 'restructuring' packages have repeatedly impoverished debtor nations and helped to breed repressive regimes, friendly to neo-colonial political and business interests, from Suharto in Indonesia, to Pinochet in Chile, Moi in Kenya and Abacha in Nigeria. He details how the US and UK over decades selectively sponsored other brutal administrations in Africa and the Middle East for the purposes of immediate regional leverage, only to turn away refugees subsequently displaced by conflict in those states. And through all such considerations he underlines the convergence of Western corporate and political interests at the global level.

This is most clearly the case in chapters on immigration, asylum and the 'market-state'. Analysing the four major pieces of immigration legislation put onto the statute books by New Labour, Kundnani demonstrates how the treatment of refugees has deteriorated rapidly in ten years.<sup>16</sup> During this decade, successive Home Secretaries have striven for two ends. Firstly, they have attempted to make conditions here so unattractive to potential refugees that they are deterred from attempting to come. Presumably, this is in large measure a populist approach, since the Home Office's own research accepts that those fleeing their homes halfway round the world have very little knowledge of provision available here, and choose a destination based instead on existing or previous connections with a country, and

perceptions of it as safe.<sup>17</sup> Under Section 62 of the 2002 Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act, the Home Secretary has the power arbitrarily to detain an asylum seeker until the settlement of their case (this is euphemistically referred to as the 'fast-track procedure'); an enlargement of the Home Office's estate of detention centres was announced in May 2008. At any time, around two-thirds of those in detention under Immigration Act powers are asylum seekers, and roughly five per cent of all asylum seekers are in detention centres.<sup>18</sup> Statistics do not even exist for the numbers kept in prisons or police cells.

Secondly, entry into the UK for those without papers has been made much more difficult. Former Home Secretary Jack Straw, quoted by Kundnani, comments that the Geneva Convention "gives us the obligation to consider any claims made within our territory... but no obligation to facilitate the arrival on our territory of those who wish to make a claim".<sup>19</sup> Nearly all refugees will only be able to have their case considered once they have arrived in the UK. "And the only way they can do that is by some form of clandestine entry into the country: either stowing away in a lorry or boat, clambering on the undercarriage of a moving Channel Tunnel train or using forged documents."<sup>20</sup> And whilst, in theory, Article 31 of the Geneva Convention recognises that illegal entry of a country is sometimes necessary for persons escaping persecution, the government continues to criminalise those who are forced to use people traffickers to get to the UK. Furthermore, "those asylum seekers who do travel to the UK legally with a valid passport are told by the Home Office that they could not be a genuine refugee, on the assumption that the authorities in the home country would refuse to allow a genuine dissident to obtain one."<sup>21</sup> Roughly two-thirds of all asylum applications are refused, even in many cases where the applicants have independently verified proof of torture. Out of 380 decisions made on applications by Iraqis in the first quarter of 2008, 280 were refusals.<sup>22</sup>

If the government's approach to asylum has the effect of giving trade to the people traffickers, so too does the market's continued demand for low-paid, unprotected labour; many failed asylum seekers, driven into destitution by the summary withdrawal of support and unable to return home, find themselves working illegally, with no rights and no legal protections. Others come expressly to work for 'gang bosses' in the agricultural industries, and find that after 'deductions' for accommodation and transport to work every day, they have next to nothing to live on (not that there is much living to be done after an 18-hour day picking crops). The new five-tier, points-based 'managed migration' system is supposed to streamline entry into the UK for those coming to work, but it institutes a 'guest-worker' system under which low-skilled workers will have limited or no access to employment protection during their stay in the country, and on termination of their contract will have no right to remain. Migrants are now valued only as economic assets: there must be free movement of 'labour' – that is, of individuals as productive resources, servicing the demands of the 'flexible' marketplace wherever it may need them – but the right of individuals to live safely, free from persecution, must be restricted and rationalised as much as possible.

The effect of an asylum policy principally aimed at deterring applicants, of failed claimants becoming destitute in large numbers, and of low-paid, unprotected workers finding themselves constantly on the brink of illegality, is the effective criminalisation of large numbers of non-EU migrants. The supposed 'proud tradition' of Britain's welcome to the displaced of the world (something of a myth to begin with, as many Jews fleeing Nazi Germany or East African Asians escaping Idi Amin could testify) is reduced to a squalid, dehumanising numbers game, with the government eagerly setting itself targets for numbers it will deport by the end of the year.

The precise details of ministerial statements on the imminent existential threat posed by immigration, even those that gain some brief notoriety, have the habit of slipping from public consciousness very shortly after they've disappeared from the headlines and opinion

columns. Successive acts of parliament redefine the territory until it's unclear which rights exist and which have been repealed, who is welcome and who unwelcome. What persists, what is nurtured, is a generalised, non-specific fear and paranoia. The asylum seeker, the illegal immigrant, the economic migrant, all these various 'underclasses' of non-citizen or para-citizen come to represent the same thing: a gathering, innumerable encroachment, threatening the fragile 'being' of the state. The great merit of Kundnani's work is his ability to trace the connections between the domestic contexts of racism and the many aspects that bear down on the discussion, and legislation, of immigration and asylum. Likewise, chapters linking Britain's foreign policy adventures and their aftermaths (current, recent and more distant), with the progressive withdrawal of civil rights, the extension of arbitrary executive powers to detain and deport, and the new regime of control orders and internment, illustrate the bluntly racist motivations behind an extraordinarily repressive array of measures.

Nevertheless there are problems with the book, mostly editorial in nature. Many of the book's different chapters originated as articles for *Race & Class*, of which Kundnani is editor. The original articles, closely argued, densely substantiated pieces of sociological research, could have been more extensively reworked to make them fit together better: the book's 200 pages feel longer, partly because of the book's great scope, but also because its chapters jump between complex topics fairly unpredictably. Also, because of the essentially hermetic nature of each chapter, there's a certain amount of repetition or, conversely, spreading of related information between disparate chapters. There is a certain chronology imposed on the contents, but this soon becomes lost because of the number of subjects tackled by Kundnani in his twelve chapters. Closer editorial attention might also have achieved a greater evenness of tone throughout: some chapters begin with extensive historical or contextual notes (which in places, such as the first chapter, read like a school history textbook), and move to personalised 'case study' illustrations of the topic at hand, statistical or quantitative analysis, or passionate polemic. Kundnani is a sociologist first and foremost, and his expertise is the book's strength, but he is also a perceptive and persuasive activist-writer, and he (or his editors) perhaps should have decided who might be the book's primary audience.

There's a narrowness to his terms of reference too, no doubt due in part to his social scientist's suspicion of the 'cultural turn' in the politics of race and class. His cursory, two-page summary of everything in postcolonial theory from Stuart Hall to Homi Bhabha does him no favours (Gilroy doesn't warrant a single mention); whilst it's true that postcolonial critics challenged the 'politically black' identity of the 1970s (the discarding of which he presents as a uniquely retrograde step), just as they challenged all such overarching categorisations of identity, the solidarity of broad interests of culture, race and class that he espouses would be supported by those critics too; and 'political blackness' was already under attack, as he himself shows, from other directions. At this point his history is less than complete.

Finally, and most surprisingly, there are some basic errors in the use of statistics: in chapter 10, for example, he quotes Home Office asylum figures for the second quarter of 2006 to show the number of asylum seekers in detention, but reads the wrong column: "by June 2006, there were 2,285 being held in detention centres, despite a lower rate of asylum claims than in 1997".<sup>23</sup> There were indeed 2,285 people detained under Immigration Act powers as of the 24th of June 2006, but only 1,705 of these had ever sought asylum at any stage. This is a small, and perhaps quite pedantic quibble, but any text that straddles a line between pure sociology and anti-racist activism needs to be doubly sure of its numbers: it's the easiest way for an opponent to discredit the whole enterprise.

## Universal rights

"... asylum seekers do not ask for British charity; they claim rights as global citizens in an age when

the national sovereignty of poorer nations has been eroded. Through its part in the empire of global capitalism, Britain carries with it a profound obligation to today's migrants... It is an obligation that runs through the dirty politics of sponsoring foreign regimes that oppress their own people, in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria and elsewhere... It runs through the wealth that Britain continues to extract from Africa and Asia... Ultimately, it is an obligation to treat today's migrants, not as scroungers or opportunists or victims of some self-created calamity of which little is known, but as global citizens. It is in the very processes of globalising capitalism, which Britain has led and profited from, that their global citizenship derives."<sup>24</sup>

It turned out that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their human rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them... The conception of human rights based upon the assumed existence of a human being as such broke down at the very moment when those who professed to believe in it were for the first time confronted with people who had indeed lost all other qualities and specific relationships except that they were still human."<sup>25</sup>

Hannah Arendt's words of half a century ago seem to ring with a new urgency (but nothing in this discussion is really new, just endlessly revisited; the phrase 'never again' really must be the most callous irony, the rhetorical equivalent of putting one's hands over one's eyes and ears). The governments of highly-developed nations carry out foreign invasions in the name of 'humanitarian intervention' – in the name, that is, of *abstracted* 'human rights', belonging to no-one and yet *ultimately* enforceable; at the same time, they abnegate their duty to protect those made destitute and stateless by their actions, and raise the possibility of 'opting out' of the Geneva Convention on Refugees (where extra-territorial rights were defined and promised for the first time), or the European Convention on Human Rights, because they no longer feel the lavish protections they afford are 'appropriate' to our age, with its new security concerns. As Arendt so mordantly points out, one's universal rights are only an issue when it is finally impossible to protect them.

We might follow Slavoj Žižek in arguing that we must not therefore dismiss human rights as "a reified fetish", well-intended but worthless: rather, this stage of globalised neocolonial capitalism is precisely the point at which these rights can posit the political space proper; the point at which the individual subject – the refugee, the internee, the illegal worker – is able to assert their exclusion, their statelessness, their absolute repudiation, as the only meaningful point from which to assert the "universality of the social itself": and they *become* the *universal political subject*.<sup>26</sup> On these terms, it could not be more essential for anti-racists in Britain to build positions of solidarity with those struggling to make this most fundamental of assertions, for the sake of every subject.

## Notes

1. Sir William Macpherson (1999) *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry* (London: The Stationery Office), <<http://www.archive.official-documents.co.uk/document/cm42/4262/4262.htm>>.
2. Kundnani quotes former Home Secretary David Blunkett, who in 2003 told Black and Asian Home Office workers that 'institutional racism' was 'a slogan' that 'missed the point'. Kundnani, p. 131.
3. See particularly Gilroy (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness* (London: Verso) and (2000) *Between Camps* (London: Allen Lane).
4. Kundnani, p. 15.
5. Of course, certain types of crude, overtly racist behaviour are (often somewhat belatedly and begrudgingly) outlawed by the State, but this apparent paradox simply testifies to the gulf that can exist between appearance and actuality: whilst racialised thinking underpins the workings of the State, the government can distance itself from the 'working out' of this thinking, separating cause from effect in a manner that we shall return to later.
6. As has been exhaustively argued elsewhere, white people's act of identifying themselves 'as white' is, in a curious way, an act of *disidentification*, of claiming to have no race, much in the same way as individuals often presume themselves to have no accent. See Theodore W. Allen (1994) *The Invention of the White Race: Volume One: Racial Oppression and Social Control* (London: Verso); Alastair Bonnett (2000) *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives* (Harlow: Prentice Hall); David Roediger (1991) *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London, Verso). Also see Suzanna Chan (2005) 'Some notes on deconstructing Ireland's Whiteness: Immigrants, emigrants and the perils of jazz', *Variant 22*, available at <<http://www.variant.randomstate.org/22texts/Whiteness.html>>; and the journal *Race Traitor*, available at <<http://racetraitor.org>>.
7. Kundnani, pp. 44-45.
8. Ibid., p. 45.
9. For a further consideration of the history and problematics of multiculturalism, see Daniel Jewesbury (2006) 'Show some disrespect!' in *Mute 2:2*, available online at <<http://www.metamute.org/en/show-some-disrespect>>
10. Ibid., p. 127.
11. Ibid., p. 133.
12. Ibid., p. 138.
13. Ibid., p. 139.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., pp. 185-186.
16. The four acts are, in order of implementation, the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, etc.) Act 2004 and the Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006. Multiple Statutory Instruments have also been passed under the terms of these acts, for example, those providing for the 'fast-track' asylum procedure and the new five-tiered points-based managed migration system.
17. See Kundnani, p. 77.
18. Home Office Research Development Statistics (2008) *Asylum Statistics: First Quarter 2008*, at <<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/asylumq108.pdf>>.
19. Kundnani, p. 68.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., p. 69.
22. Home Office, op. cit.
23. Kundnani, p. 159.
24. Ibid., p. 71.
25. Hannah Arendt (1958) *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland, Ohio: Meridian Books), pp. 292-297.
26. Slavoj Žižek (2005) 'Against Human Rights', in *New Left Review* no. 34, p. 131. Available to download free at <<http://libcom.org/library/against-human-rights-zizek>>.

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**Nationalism and Neoliberalism** Neil Davidson   **The End of Tolerance** Daniel Jewesbury