

Between the Lines: ‘Al Qaeda’, ‘Islamic Extremism’
and the Authorship of Critique

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Abstract

This dissertation has a dual purpose: firstly, to challenge hegemonic narratives which ascribe ‘al Qaeda’ a distinctly apolitical status—by engaging in a close reading of the primary statements of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri—and, second, to challenge the hegemonic parameters by which analyses of discourse are typically accredited as (il)legitimate—by deconstructing dominant readings of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘rigour’ and (re)orientating them using a ‘poststructuralist’ (discourse) analytical framework. The *footnote* is centralised as an instrument of critical rigour herein to buttress and undermine all that is written in an author’s attempt(s) to convince the reader of the ‘legitimacy’ of her/his arguments. The ultimate aim of this dissertation, then, is not to ‘explain’ or ‘understand’ al Qaeda—the dominant logic behind most academic analyses—but to continuously challenge the bases by which its ‘apoliticalness’ is secured, all the while provoking the reader to engage in *their own* interpretation of the sources presented to underwrite this argument.

The analysis opens by situating ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ within three distinct literatures: Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies, and Critical Terrorism Studies. The embedded politics of producing ‘expertise’ within these (sub-)disciplinary domains is investigated to illustrate the necessity for a separate space for critique that must reside *outside* these literatures (Chapter 1). Subsequently, prominent treatments of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘rigour’ are deconstructed via the application of Discourse Theory towards the creation of an alternative conception of what it means to engage in ‘discourse analysis’ (Chapter 2). It is in service of this alternative mode of critique that the footnote is centralised as that which may suitably synthesise ‘rigour’ and ‘reflexivity’, as applied under a broadly ‘poststructuralist/intertextual’ ontology (Chapter 3). This composite theoretical framework is then applied to investigate—and ultimately deconstruct—the hegemonic contemporary discourse of ‘Islamic extremism’, which erroneously equates al Qaeda with groups such as Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood and then compresses these identities into the category of ‘irrational’. Guided by the scholarship of Chantal Mouffe, the public discourses of these groups are interpreted within this text not as articulations of ‘irrationality’, but as expressions of *counter-hegemony* by which said groups attempt to legitimise their political programmes in accordance with the key signifiers of the War on Terror: ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ (Chapter 4). Finally, Ernesto Laclau’s theory of populism is applied to interpret al Qaeda’s discourse of mobilisation (Chapter 5). Read thus, one finds bin Laden and al-Zawahiri’s call(s) to arms to be distinctly *populist*, thereby situating al Qaeda within the pantheon of political movements that have articulated similarly counter-hegemonic discourses of resistance across time and space.

Interpreting the discourse of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri *pace* Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe—and, indeed, *vice-versa*—I ultimately conclude that there is nothing ‘new’ about the ‘terrorism’ of al Qaeda: al Qaeda should not only be conceived as a political movement, but *as a movement conceived of the political*. Moreover, this conclusion is penetrated by a concomitant (reflexive) acceptance that one cannot write politics without

being written by the political along the way—be one's focus on al Qaeda or beyond. Accentuating the primary sources on the basis of which particular arguments have been made, the ultimate identity of this dissertation, then, cannot be written by the author, but only determined by the reader.

Introduction

‘Al Qaeda, ‘Islamic Extremism’ and the Authorship of Critique

The Politics of Writing al Qaeda and Islamist Terrorism

The oft-spectacular violence attributable to ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ is, by design, highly provocative, eliciting an intense moral repugnance on the part of those who consider the purposeful targeting of civilians to be an especially unpalatable form of attack. While deliberations on ‘morality’ can never be erased from *any* engagement with ‘terrorism’—apropos the very distinction of ‘terrorism’ as a unique category of political violence—the popular whitewashing of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ as extant manifestations of ‘amorality’ cannot succeed in completely silencing the inherently political character of violent acts carried out in their name: insofar as violence *is* communication, terrorism exists as “a kind of violent language” (Schmid and de Graaf, 1982, p. 1), the articulation of which speaks a certain type of politics.

Investigations of the primary discourse(s) by which terrorist groups articulate such politics is conspicuously absent across mainstream literatures that actively reflect on ‘terrorism’, and especially so with regard to the (sub-)discipline of Terrorism Studies (see Tinnes, 2013). While the dearth of such analyses is *perhaps* understandable with reference to a ‘pre-9/11’ paradigm wherein sustained academic interest in terrorism was decidedly rare (see Reid, 1997; Reid and Chen, 2007)), it is considerably perplexing when one considers the thirst for retrospective expertise on ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ that is largely definitive of a ‘post-9/11’ security milieu (see Chapter 1; see also Silke, 2007). This is not to say, of course, that such analyses do not exist (see Price, 2013); yet an inquiry into the *form* of the limited number of pieces dedicated to an investigation of al Qaeda’s primary discourse is suggestive of a deeper epistemological problematique: to what degree do authors who seek to perform a ‘discourse analysis’ (of ‘al Qaeda’ or otherwise) paralyse their argumentative efficacy by omitting from their analysis the empirical text(s)/words upon which their arguments are based?

To take Brachman and McCants' influential 'Stealing al Qaeda's playbook' (2006)¹—as perhaps the most extreme example—the authors introduce/justify their argument as follows:

By mining [jihadi] texts for their tactical and strategic insights, the United States will be able to craft effective tactics, techniques, and procedures to defeat the movement and its followers. In what follows, this article will demonstrate the efficacy of this approach by highlighting the insights the authors have gleaned from the works of four prominent jihadi ideologues (Brachman and McCants, 2006, p. 309)

In the subsequent analysis—totalling 5,212 words—the authors present a total of 310 words of direct quotation, with this figure mainly comprised of three extended extracts that act as stylistic placeholders to introduce new sections of the paper. The authors' conclusion(s), while supposedly *informed* by a close reading, thus smacks of a hollow irony². In Reza Pankhurst's 'The Caliphate, and The Changing Strategy of the Public Statements of al-Qaeda's Leaders' (2010), the author's entire argument is submerged in the primary discourse of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri³. Of the 6,743 words dedicated to the investigation of al-Qaeda's primary discourse (excluding the introduction and conclusion), 1,098 are formed from direct quotations. While Pankhurst's piece is meticulously constructed, the author does not submit a single extract that reaches the forty-word limit after which direct quotations are generally indented in the text: of the huge corpus of statements attributable to bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, there are, seemingly, no passages that are 'worth quoting at length'. Finally, Donald Holbrook exhibits a somewhat more expansive dedication to presenting the primary discourse from which his arguments are derived. In 'Alienating the Grassroots: Looking Back at Al Qaeda's Communicative Approach Toward Muslim Audiences' (2013), one finds a ratio of 902 words of primary discourse for 6,164 words of total analysis (excluding the introduction and conclusion), with five passages quoted above forty words. Similarly, in 'Al-Qaeda's Response to the Arab Spring' (2012), Holbrook includes 1,552 words of primary discourse for 6,233 words of total analysis (again, excluding the introduction and conclusion), with six passages quoted above forty words.

¹ The article is both liberally cited within the Terrorism Studies literature and its publication in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (h-index 18) is accompanied by an addendum response from retired General of the US military, Wayne A. Downing, in which the insights gleaned from the piece are liberally praised.

² As concluded by the authors: "These observations represent a small portion of the strategic and tactical insights that can be gleaned from reading the texts mentioned in this article, to say nothing of the hundreds of texts that are circulating online. Jihadi ideologues have left their playbook lying open. The United States just needs to read it" (Brachman and McCants, 2006, p. 318)

³ As outlined in the article's abstract: "This article focuses primarily on the statements of Ayman al-Zawahiri and Osama bin Laden, with their public words traced throughout the last three decades, from Egypt to Afghanistan, to Sudan, back to Afghanistan and through the various conflicts that have happened since they have been on the run post 9/11" (Pankhurst, 2010, p. 530)

Although Holbrook's analysis is accomplished—as are those of the preceding authors—such ratios go beyond considerations of stylistic choice and are symptomatic of an argumentative structure whereby the reader's hand is tightly gripped by that of the author, as he/she is led step-by-step through what al Qaeda 'truly mean' with only fleeting reference(s) to what they actually *say*. Ultimately, one may determine by these examples—and, indeed, with regard to the *form* of journal articles in particular—that there exists limited space for academic authors *to write* analysis in such a way as to highlight the primary discourse that defines the authors' object of study *at length*. Yet, to what degree is this the fault of the author (assuming, indeed, that they wish to accentuate primary discourse in the first place)? To what degree is the impulse to minimise the visibility of primary discourse borne of a mimetic politics of (academic) administration that actively forecloses such an approach as 'too much'? Is it not the very purpose of appendices, for example, to minimise a reader's unwanted distractions, and can the same not be suggested of endnotes and footnotes (see Grafton, 1997)? Indeed, does this not speak to this University's administrative guidelines, which stipulate that the maximum word count of 90,000 must be inclusive of footnotes, endnotes *and* bibliography⁴? In our necessary efforts to streamline what we say in the analysis of discourse, what do we, as academic purveyors of knowledge, lose in the process? And further, at what cost to the reader?

Presence/Absence and the Authorship of Critique

It is my contention that the act of writing is borne of the effectual management of the space that is afforded to an author *to write*; highlighting or prioritising particular arguments therein—on 'al Qaeda or otherwise—cannot 'erase' absence in a 'zero-sum' interface, rather such acts of accreditation positively foment the presence/absence dynamic that is manifest in all texts (see Derrida, 1976). Thus, while Brachman and McCants (2006), Holbrook (2012, 2013), and Pankhurst (2010) render the primary discourse by which they inform their analyses as relatively invisible (by virtue of their (non-)submission of written marks to a page), this primary discourse cannot be ultimately 'absented' on account of its 'non-presence'. To the contrary, we know, following Derrida, that that which *has not* been written *cannot but* resonate as an ephemeral presence behind what is 'present' in the 'final' (physical) form of the text; a presence/absence dialectic which renders all texts in a perennial

⁴ Including bibliography in the word count is particularly erroneous, such that it actively punishes works which are derived from broad readings of multiple sources. For DCU's submission guidelines, see: http://www.dcu.ie/info/regulations/postgraduate_regulations_g.shtml

state of erasure⁵. We also know, following Laclau and Mouffe, that all acts of identity construction are productive of a *surplus of meaning*, entailing that ‘social agents’ can never be centralised as the ultimate authors of their own static self-identity(/ies)⁶. Instead, the social identities that are definitive of individuals are interpellated in exteriority to an individual’s attempts to define their (self-)identities as such: hence authors can never exist as social agents, but only as a series of ‘subject-positions’ permeated by an ontology of lack (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001). Oliver Marchart (further) mediates on these complex dynamics in terms of *post-foundationalism*, offering that both absence and presence coalesce in the temporary *grounding* of all meaning; as he explains with reference to Heidegger:

It is because of the inseparable intertwining between ground and abyss that the ground can be recognized as abyss and *yet keeps something of its own nature as ground*...so in a certain way, the ‘absent ground’...still functions or ‘operates’ as ground [emphasis added] (Marchart, 2007, p. 19)

Fusing the perspectives of Derrida, Laclau and Mouffe, and Marchart—by virtue of the fact that they all speak to *the political* through a relatively transferable vocabulary—the analytical and aesthetic form of this dissertation is designed to openly refract the presence/absence dialectic and the symbiotic production of a *surplus of meaning* that guarantees that an author cannot ever ‘control’ subsequent interpretations of what they write—despite their necessary *attempts* to do so (towards the [impossible] fulfilment of their self-identities *as* authors). To this end, observations submitted in the ‘main text’—which is designed to read as a relatively self-contained flow of argumentation—are supported throughout by extended extracts of primary discourse as foremostly presented in the form of footnotes⁷; and while it is the case

⁵ Indeed, one might note that the final form of this—or any dissertation—is as much a product of sources that I have cited herein, as it is a product of countless sources that I have read (watched/listened to/experienced), and yet, have decided that they do not bear sufficient relevance to the analysis so as to merit their explicit inclusion. How the reader interprets what I have written is similarly borne of *their own* experiences and interpretations of countless sources by which they are (un)informed on issues pertaining to ‘al Qaeda’, ‘Islamist terrorism’, the ‘authorship of critique’ and far beyond. It is on this basis that this dissertation will speak to many different readers in many different ways (assuming that people do, in fact, read it) and thus exists, per Derrida, in a permanent state of erasure that is irreducible to any essential characterisation.

⁶ Here, Laclau and Mouffe reflect on the ontological significance of a surplus of meaning as follows: “The incomplete character of every totality necessarily leads us to abandon, as a terrain of analysis, the premise of ‘society’ as a sutured and self-defined totality. ‘Society’ is not a valid object of discourse...We have referred to ‘discourse’ as a system of differential entities...such a system only exists as a partial limitation of a ‘surplus of meaning’ which subverts it. **Being inherent in every discursive situation, this ‘surplus’ is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice.** We will call it the *field of discursivity*. This term indicates the form of its relation with every concrete discourse: it determines at the same time the necessarily discursive character of any object, and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture. [italics in original; bold emphasis added]” (2001, p. 111)

⁷ As will be outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, the footnote is uniquely suited to this purpose, operating as an instrument of *critical rigour* to at once buttress and undermine all that is written in author’s necessary attempts to solidify their arguments as ‘their own’. It should be noted at this point that while footnotes are primarily

that I have deemed such extracts as included in the ‘main text’ to be more *directly* salient to the argument(s) at hand, those extracts submitted in the footnotes are not *necessarily* relegated to a status of less importance as a result. If my perspective on the author/reader dynamic is correct, then there will be instances whereby the reader may believe that certain extracts contained in the footnotes should be included in the ‘main text’—and/or vice-versa. It is precisely by this heterogeneous play of individual interpretation(s) that I seek to accentuate the ultimate identity of this text as that which cannot be written by the author, but only determined by the reader.

This approach is not without its potential problems, of which I am keenly aware. The most pertinent danger relates to the view that footnotes are superfluous to the text and operate as instruments of unnecessary bloat that *interrupt* the flow of argument and surreptitiously occupy space(s) reserved for the ‘main’ text⁸. By this reading, there is a significant danger that in my attempts to convince the reader of my argument(s)—by making available extended extracts of primary discourse—the reader will turn away (in frustration) from the very function of the footnote that is centralised as an integral component of this analytical approach. Second, there is the danger that by consistently buttressing the ‘main analysis’ with reference to primary sources from which they are derived, accusations of *tautology* may arise. Indeed, this dissertation may well be criticised as an embodiment of ‘lazy scholarship’ to the extent that a significant proportion of the final word count is comprised of transcribed passages attributable to other authors: a ‘negative practice’ that is perhaps best summed-up by the popular caveat that denotes specific extracts as ‘worth quoting at length’—as if all others are unworthy of this treatment.

In response to these (hypothetical) charges, I argue the following: first; the footnote is positively *embraced* throughout this dissertation as that which interrupts, occupies, and with its persistent protrusion into the ‘main text’, facilitates the heterogeneous interpretations of arguments that I wish to solidify as my own. The written form of the text cannot govern a reader’s interpretations of the arguments contained therein; thus, while I would *hope* that the reader examines every word in both ‘main text’ and ‘footnotes’—for it is to the imagined reader that I, and all authors, surely write—the availability of these sources alone stands as a

utilised to elucidate via extracts of *primary discourse* throughout this dissertation, they are also embraced as a means to provide tangential observations attendant to the ‘main text’, as per their more ‘classic’ function.

⁸ For a more detailed explication of the embedded ‘politics’ that underpins this perspective, see Grafton, 1994; 1997; Anderson, 1997; Bugeja and Dimitrova, 2006; Chapter 3.

testament to analytical rigour and to a collegial sustenance between reader and writer by which all arguments live and die.

Second, I argue that the submission of extended extracts of primary discourse to buttress the ‘main’ arguments should not be read in terms of tautology, but in terms of *rigour* and *reflexivity*. As already examined with reference to Brachman and McCants (2006); Holbrook (2012, 2013), and Pankhurst (2010)—and as will be explored in detail in Chapter 2—prominent approaches to ‘discourse analysis’ tend to centralise the legitimacy of an author’s interpretations of the empirical sources upon which they base their analyses by loosely accrediting this output with the status of ‘reflexivity’—a *de facto* condition that is seemingly activated by the very *application* of (qualitative) ‘discourse analysis’, regardless of its form. The notion that ‘reflexivity’ automatically resides in all those analyses that portend to ‘do’ discourse analysis is not accepted here; rather, I see a marked deficit in the accountability of discourse analyses based on interpretations of empirical texts that do not at the same time present extracts of said texts to justify the arguments derived therefrom. The theoretical framework employed to inquire into ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ is posited to rectify this deficiency. A brief note on its more precise constitution is useful at this juncture.

My/The Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework applied to interpret the primary discourse of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ herein relies on the vocabulary of Discourse Theory. Specifically referring to the research paradigm that emerged in the late 1970s (led by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe), Discourse Theory employs a distinct analytical vocabulary to investigate fluid dynamics of identity constitution, as take place in a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology that denies the possibility of final closure: from a Discourse Theory perspective, all identities are discursively mediated and, thus, essentially contingent⁹. The degree to which such identities become (contingently) grounded as ‘real’ is not a function some ‘natural’ or *a priori* processes of sedimentation, but of power—or what Laclau and Mouffe have signified as *hegemony*. It is upon this basis that Discourse Theorists conceive of identities as engaged in a perennial struggle of contestation within a given discursive field; thence, in the case of this dissertation, the War on Terror is conceptualised as a ‘discursive battlefield’ of

⁹ A brief extract from Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* is useful here: “Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence.” (2001, p. 107)

Self/Other relations wherein an array of discourses compete against one another to affix legitimacy to their respective political struggles.

Though Discourse Theory is by no means the only ‘critical’ approach that permits the interrogation of Self/Other dynamics within global politics (see, for example, Campbell, 1992; Der Derian, 1995; Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989; Hansen, 2006), it is well-suited as a dialectical lens through which interrogations of empirical problematiques are sutured together with paraxial reflections of the intertextual lifeworld by which all meanings are grounded as contingent: what Laclau and Mouffe—and many others (see Edkins, 1999; Marchart, 2007)—have signified as *the political*¹⁰. By the very process of inquiring into the ‘(a)politicalness’ of al Qaeda via analytical concepts made available by Discourse Theory then, a parallel investigation into the *political* ontology that animates ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ as objects of discourse is coactively pursued. Hence, while ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ form the primary ‘empirical foci’ of this dissertation, the allied inquiry into the topographical contours of the *political* arising therefrom cannot be relegated to the status of a ‘secondary concern’: these components are symbiotic and unavoidably so. This dissertation, then, while drawing on various poststructuralist/intertextual approaches/themes, inquires into the dual problematiques of ‘al Qaeda/Islamic extremism’ and ‘the authorship of critique’ specifically *via the application of Discourse Theory*. A more precise justification for its application—as opposed to contending approaches to discourse analysis, such as Critical Discourse Analysis and Discourse Theory—will be provided in Chapter 2.

For all its facilitative potential towards the provision of an alternative reading of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ however, the application of Discourse Theory herein has entailed adjustment of some of its key parameters; namely to the analytical distinction between ‘discourses’ and ‘texts’ [which typically prevents close readings of ‘texts’ to inform elucidation on abstract systems of discourse (and vice-versa); see Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002, pp. 24-59] and to the embedded assumption that an author who utilises Discourse Theory should be considered as ‘just another subject’ (Howarth, 2002, p. 131) in the production of knowledge (see Chapter 2). These perceived shortcomings are actively deconstructed throughout this dissertation *in situ* with the overarching investigation into the

¹⁰ The reader is reminded here that the application of the various analytical tools as specific to Discourse Theory—such as *hegemony*, *antagonism*, *floating* and *empty signifiers*, and logics of *difference/equivalence*—is inseparable from Discourse Theory’s umbilical derivation from a ‘poststructuralist/intertextual’ ontology.

discursive constitution of al Qaeda's '(a)apoliticalness'; the *site* at which this mutual deconstruction takes place lies somewhere between the artificial lines that distinguish 'main text' from 'footnote'/somewhere between presence and absence.

Chapter by Chapter

Chapter 1: A Tripartite of Terrorism: Situating al Qaeda in the Literatures of Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies, and Critical Terrorism Studies

The 'main body' of the dissertation opens by highlighting the diverse situatings of 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' within three distinct literatures: Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies, and Critical Terrorism Studies. This analysis is especially sensitive to the dominant ontological and epistemological contours by which knowledge on al Qaeda is *hegemonically* (and *counter-hegemonically*) produced and the disciplinary politics that accredit such knowledge as (il)legitimate. It is argued that the *problem-solving* orthodoxy (see Cox, 1981) of Terrorism Studies reifies al Qaeda as an essential(ist) object of analysis, entailing 'what causes' rather than 'how possible' investigations (Doty, 1993; cited in Jackson et al., 2011, p. 39). Accordingly, prominent analyses on al Qaeda tend to *begin* with the teleological task of searching for 'terrorism', thus eschewing longitudinal analyses of deeply contextualised social and political strata in favour of relatively parsimonious, policy-driven research output. The influential New Terrorism—which erroneously attributes a reductive irrationality and religiosity to 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism'—is particularly representative of this dynamic.

Middle East Studies (MES), on the other hand, operates a more deeply-contextualised logic of hermeneutic discovery that is borne of a longitudinal focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) as a complex geographical, cultural, and political domain. It is posited that Middle East Studies also imbues a reflexive suspicion/resistance to reductive narratives of religiosity and/or irrationality (such as that represented by the New Terrorism thesis), as pertains to its status as a field of Area Studies, the contemporary orthodoxy of which has been heavily influenced by Edward Said's *Orientalism*. It is ultimately argued that Middle Eastern Studies has produced a 'better' standard of scholarship with regard to the provision of empirical context on 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism', in spite of—or, perhaps *because* of—the relative absence of defining 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' as immediate objects of analysis towards this end. A focused problematisation of the influential post-9/11 premise

that Middle East Studies has ‘failed’ in its purpose to provide effective scholarship on ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ (largely due to the fact that it did not ‘predict’ an event of catastrophic terrorism—such as 9/11—or provide sufficient forewarning of the threat posed by ‘Islamist terrorism’) is subsequently called for, and tangentially performed throughout this dissertation¹¹.

Finally, the relatively ‘new’ literature of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) provides an accommodative space for the articulation of a range of ‘critical’ analyses that are, perhaps, more attuned to the discursive constitution of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ as ontologically contingent categories of analysis¹². Despite this amicable purpose, however, Critical Terrorism Studies’ overarching commitment to notions of ‘progress’ and ‘emancipation’—as derived from its lineage in Critical Theory—ensures that analyses of a ‘more’ critical orientation—such as those of a ‘poststructuralist’ sort—are actively pushed to the margins of CTS¹³. As is the case with regard to MES, this embedded premise is actively problematised throughout this dissertation, to the extent that the ensuing analysis is broadly committed to a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology that neither owes anything nor contributes to Critical Theory’s emancipatory project.

Chapter 2: Re-Placing Reflexivity and Rigour within a Poststructuralist/Intertextual Ontology

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to open a critical space within which an alternative reading of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ can be provided¹⁴. This is achieved by applying core rudiments of Discourse Theory as a means to deconstruct prominent (scholarly) readings of *reflexivity* and *rigour*, and proceeds by the following steps.

First, the influential concepts of ‘biographical reflexivity’ and ‘reflexive methodology’ are rejected on the basis that they endow the author with the capacity to *capture* a unified ‘self’

¹¹ This problematisation is activated, in a very limited sense, throughout this dissertation by foregrounding MES scholarship as the basis of providing appropriate empirical context on ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ where appropriate.

¹² This is not to say that such analyses are *completely* foreclosed in either Terrorism Studies or Middle East Studies; rather, that the orthodox logic that distinguishes both fields entails that ‘critical’ analyses are *less prominently* visible; as is the case with regard to Terrorism Studies.

¹³ Notwithstanding CTS’ status as a relatively ‘young’ sub-discipline/literature.

¹⁴ As will be outlined below, Chapter 2 represents one of two ‘Chapters’ dedicated to an explication of the theoretical framework that is engaged throughout this dissertation. Hence, its contents should be read as immediately informative of/informed by those of Chapter 3, which is appropriately conceived via the metaphor of a ‘staccato’.

via the provision of (auto)biographical reflections on how one's subjective influences have become *explicitly* manifest in the research output. This endeavour is considered as foreclosed by Discourse Theory such that the author can only exist in a permanent state of becoming and is, thus, not amenable to essential capture¹⁵.

Second, a deconstructive analysis is applied to dominant notions of sociological reflexivity as presented in Giddens and Beck's 'reflexive modernity', and Pierre Bourdieu's 'reflexive sociology'. The thesis of Beck and Giddens is problematised on account of its characterisation of individuals as social *agents* (rather than interpellations of subject positions) that are imbued with sufficient reflexive capacity to author their own social identities—an erroneous conceptualisation of authorship which is anathema to a 'poststructuralist/intertextual' ontology. Bourdieu's 'reflexive sociology' is similarly problematised on the basis that it prioritises the determinacy of *objective structures* to define the space(s) within which social identities can be 'reflexively' created. *Pace* Laclau, objective structures of meaning can 'exist' as images of impossible fulfilment towards which a subject can only strive, but never fulfil. A more radical notion of 'reflexivity' is thereby required.

Third, the false incommensurability between 'rigour' and 'reflexivity' as reified by two prominent approaches to (critical) discourse analysis—Discursive Psychology and Critical Discourse Analysis—is deconstructed. It is argued that 'reflexivity' is too often assumed as inherent to all 'critical' discourse analyses without being sufficiently incorporated into the *practice* of discourse analysis itself (as briefly explicated in the above with regard to prominent studies of al Qaeda's discourse). It is alternatively argued that a productive synthesis between reflexivity *and* rigour can be facilitated in a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology, which allows for close reading(s) of 'language in use'¹⁶ as a means to concomitantly reflect on more 'abstract' phenomena of discourse (and vice-versa), thus addressing a noted weakness in prominent applications of Discourse Theory that focus only on the latter.

¹⁵ To capture the 'self' by virtue of uncovering one's influences on the research process is, thus, an impossible exercise, as the identity of the author can only be contingently grounded by a multitude of interpretations owned not by the author, but by the reader.

¹⁶ The term 'language in use' is used throughout the dissertation. When done so, I refer to Jorgensen and Phillips's loose outline as follows: "People use discourse rhetorically in order to accomplish forms of social action in particular contexts of interaction. Language use is, in this sense, 'occasioned'. The focus of analysis...[is] the rhetorical organisation of text and talk" (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008, p. 118)

Chapter 3(/Staccato): Footnoting the Self in the Performance of (Discourse) Analysis

Immediately developing the deconstructive analysis undertaken in Chapter 2—and appropriately conceived as a *staccato*, by which the shift in analytical tempo warrants a swift (but-nonetheless-separate) undulation rather than the more accentuated aesthetic break that usually distinguishes the ‘beginning’ and ‘end’ of respective Chapters—the purpose of Chapter 3 is to argue that the previously deconstructed components of *reflexivity* and *rigour* can be (re-)synthesised together with components of Discourse Theory in a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology. The analysis (in)fuses Derrida’s work on *hauntology*, *trace* and *iterability* with Marchart’s concept of *post-foundationalism*—which, via Heidegger and contrary to an ‘anything goes’ notion of postmodernism, *accentuates* the temporary ~~grounding~~ of all meanings in the production of political identities—thus further inquiring the presence/absence dialectic that is inherent to the production of all written arguments. The footnote is posited thereafter as a particularly suitable instrument to refract the presence/absence dialectic to which Derrida, Marchart, Heidegger and, indeed, Laclau and Mouffe collectively speak; thence, it is conceived as a device of *critical rigour* to both buttress and undermine all that an author writes in analysis of discourse, the ultimate ‘validity’ of which can only be determined by the reader.

Chapter 4: A Discursive Battlefield: The ‘West’, ‘Islamic Extremism’ and the Dialectical Struggle for Meaning in Hegemonic and Counter-Hegemonic Discourse

Applying the theoretical framework outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, the purpose of Chapter 4 is to expose the *hegemonic* contemporary discourse of ‘Islamic extremism’—which erroneously equates the identities of al Qaeda, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood and compresses them together into the category of ‘irrational’—and to subsequently deconstruct its premises via an exposition of the public statements by which said ‘Islamic extremists’ attempt to distinguish their own separate political identities. Guided by the scholarship of Chantal Mouffe, the War on Terror is conceived as a ‘discursive battlefield’ defined by (and definitive of) competing articulations of political identity which vie to accredit legitimacy to their respective political struggles by reference to the key (*floating*) signifiers of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’. The supposedly ‘apolitical’ nature of al Qaeda’s discourse in particular is challenged via an exposition of their *alterative* articulations of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ therein, which exhibits not a *de facto* quality of ‘irrationality’, but *counter-hegemonic* resistance(s) to their imposed identity as an irrational ‘Other’.

A similar treatment is afforded to the public discourse of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood as a means to highlight the nuanced commonalities and differences as evident across all three constituents of ‘Islamic extremism’¹⁷. Particular attention is paid to the directly-antagonistic public ‘spats’ whereby al Qaeda have differentiated their political identity as ‘true believers’ in opposition to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood similarly ‘rationalising’ *their* political identities by virtue of rejecting and delegitimising al Qaeda’s doctrine of ‘Jihad’.

Chapter 5: Al Qaeda and the Discourse of Populism

The deconstruction of ‘Islamic extremism’ via Mouffe is immediately followed by an application of Ernesto Laclau’s theory of ‘populism’ to interpret al Qaeda’s mobilisational discourse. Laclau’s fundamental argument is that ‘populism’ is not determined by reference to any ‘pre-existing’ characteristics—insofar as a social movement cannot exist as *de facto* populist (or non-populist)—rather, the ‘populist’ identity of a group/movement is discernible by the degree to which they evince a populist ‘logic of articulation’, with this logic summarily comprising: i) ‘the construction of ‘the people’ as a collective underdog against the constitutive outside of the enemy; ii) the dominance of *equivalential* political demands in the articulation of collective identity and; iii) the provision of *empty signifiers* upon which to structure the demands of ‘the people’ against the prevailing political/institutional order. A longitudinal reading of Qaeda’s discourse of mobilisation via Laclau clearly evinces a populist logic of articulation. Read thus, (i) the *umma*—as a global community of believers, and the constituency to which al Qaeda’s orators speak—are constituted as ‘the people’, and extolled as underdogs who are collectively prevented from realising their ‘full’ communitarian identity (due to the continued transgressions of the ‘Judeo-Crusader alliance’¹⁸); (ii) the equivalential identity of ‘the people’ is (further) consolidated with reference to their dedication to collective violent resistance, with the *mujahideen* acting as the heroic vanguard to emancipate the *umma* from the yoke of subjugation and to propel them to ultimate fulfilment; (iii) this construction of communitarian unity is (further) sutured together via the provision of an ephemeral, utopian image of the ‘Caliphate’, which is (by ontological design) always ‘to come’. From this perspective, the necessarily *empty* form of the

¹⁷ It should be noted that while it is important to elucidate on these groups also, the primary purpose of this comparison is to further inquire into the discourse of al Qaeda by means of *comparison*.

¹⁸ This catchment terms typically refers to the US and Israel, but operates as a moniker for ‘the West’ more generally.

Caliphate—such that it does not exist, but investment in its *possibility* necessitates a centralised point of reference (a *nodal point*) to actively structure the unity of ‘the people’ in its image—can *only ever* exist as a metaphysical category, thereby contradicting hegemonic, essentialist readings which foreground al Qaeda’s call for the (re)establishment of the Caliphate as (further) evidence of their religiously-led, irrational designs towards world-domination.

Conclusion: Speaking of the Political: Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony, and the (In)Orthodoxies of Space

Finally, I will re-orientate the thematic contents of each Chapter as an interpretive lens to reflect on more *contemporary* problematiques concerning ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and ‘the authorship of critique. The analysis is structured thus: i) developing the analytical themes contained in Chapter 1, I will inquire into the embedded politics by which (il)legitimate expertise *continues* to be produced, both with reference to the study of ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and the study of social phenomena more generally; ii) developing the analytical themes contained in Chapters 2 and 3, I will inquire into the contemporary governance of an orthodox academic milieu, which enacts a particular horizon of possibilities with regard to what it means to ‘write academically’ and; iii) developing the analytical themes contained in Chapters 4 and 5, I will inquire into the orthodox parameters of a contemporary *Jihadist* milieu that was once dominated by the relative *hegemony* of al Qaeda, but is now becoming increasingly defined by the rapid advance of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in its place. In conclusion, it will be argued that across these contiguous spaces, one bears witness to the affective resonance of *the political*, which is to confirm that any/all (in)orthodoxies of space may only exist in a state of perennial contingency—an ontological inevitability that not only pervades all social and political phenomena, but the means by which we—as ‘academic’ authors—may inquire them.

Addendum: Qualifications

Before proceeding with the ‘main analysis’, a number of qualifications are in order. Firstly, there is much debate within Terrorism Studies—and beyond—as to what exactly constitutes ‘al Qaeda’: ‘al Qaeda’ is conceived throughout this dissertation—via Laclau and Mouffe—as an object of discourse¹⁹. Hence, while ‘al Qaeda’ is interchangeably signified as an

¹⁹ As similar treatment is, of course, extended to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood.

‘entity’/‘group’/‘movement’ and so on, these monikers are imbued with the reflexive recognition that such identities are not reflective of a knowable, essential entity that is available for hermeneutic discovery; rather, they reflect images of ‘al Qaeda’ that are derived from the discursive contexts in which they are articulated. What defines ‘al Qaeda’ throughout the analysis is, therefore, contextually dependent on whether their identity is being articulated via cited extracts of scholarship, the public pronouncements of George Bush, the primary statements of Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri, and so on.

Second, and with reference to the *hegemonic* discourse of ‘Islamic extremism’ in particular (see Chapters 4 and 5), this dissertation aims to provide a condensed inquiry into dynamics of identity constitution as generally pertaining to the ‘War on Terror’. Although essential parameters with regard to an ‘official timeline’ of the War on Terror do not exist, relevant discourses—derived both from official state/policy discourses of the US (and other prominent constituents of ‘the West’) and those articulated by al Qaeda and other ‘Islamic extremist’ groups—are examined only between 11 September 2001²⁰ and 20 January 2009²¹. Given the integral role of the Bush administration in shaping the dominant parameters of the War on Terror throughout this period (see, for example, Croft, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Jarvis, 2008), and given also the analytical difficulties in tracing nuanced shifts in official US discourse entailed by the transition from the Bush to Obama administrations, provision of this limited timeframe permits the close-reading of *relatively* self-contained discourses as enacted by *relatively* static actors.

This leads to the third qualification, which is to say that the ‘public discourse of al Qaeda’ is overwhelmingly comprised of statements attributable to al Qaeda’s two most prominent leaders: Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri²². The appropriate justification is as follows: it is commonly accepted that al Qaeda’s inception as a group circa 1988 and their subsequent development throughout the 1990s was foremostly driven by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri (see, for example, al-Zayyat, 2004; Scheuer, 2004; Kepel, 2006). In effect, their public articulations at this time—particularly those of bin Laden (see Lawrence, 2005)—shaped the parameters by which ‘al Qaeda’ could be presented to the world in their own words. Subsequent to 9/11, written extracts, video clips, and images have consistently

²⁰ Although the War on Terror was ‘officially’ declared on 20 September 2001, one can say, without much controversy, that its contents as an influential public discourse were immediately activated on 11 September 2001. For more context, see Chapter 4; Jackson, 2005.

²¹ This cut-off point signifies the inauguration of US President Barack Obama.

²² A very limited number of extracts attributable to other prominent figures—such as Adam Gadhan and Abu Yahya al-Libi—are provided where it is deemed useful to elucidate on specific themes of inquiry.

interpellated bin Laden and al-Zawahiri as *the* most prominent representative figures of al Qaeda—with said extracts re-articulated to buttress al Qaeda’s ‘irrationality’ and ‘religiosity’ per ‘Islamic extremism’²³. As such, limiting the vast majority of al Qaeda’s primary discourse to statements by bin Laden and al-Zawahiri facilitates a concentrated exposition of *relatively* self-contained arguments as embedded in their public discourse, thus enabling the reader “to see how the rhetorical themes and strategies are maintained and sustained across different speakers and speeches” (Jackson, 2005, p. 7). The marked difference between Jackson’s treatment of discourses pertaining to the War on Terror and my treatment of the discourses of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamic extremism’ is that while Jackson makes extended extracts of speeches available in the appendices, I seek to (more) actively incorporate extended extracts into the ‘main text’ and ‘footnotes’, as a means to (further) embellish the presence/absence dialectic, which necessarily elicits a *surplus of meaning* to all that is written in the authorship of critique. Thus, while Jackson and I speak to similar problematques, we do so from differing ontological and epistemological perspectives²⁴.

Finally, the primary discourse as attributed to al Qaeda—and attendant ‘Islamic extremist’ groups—is typically sourced from material translated from Arabic into English (save for the public statements directly published in English by Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood). As an analyst who does not speak/write/understand Arabic, my exposure to the primary discourse of these groups is *necessarily* facilitated via intermediaries whom have translated the material and made it available for public consumption. As Mona Baker cautions, however, (see also, Bassnett, 2005), one must be aware of a sedimented ‘politics of translation’ that especially accompanies translated texts related to the War on Terror:

Constructing and disseminating ‘knowledge’ about a number of communities and regions widely designated as a security threat is now a big industry. Much of this industry relies heavily on various forms of translation and, in some cases, is generated by a team of dedicated translators working on full-blown, heavily funded programmes that involve selecting, translating and distributing various types of text that emanate from Arab and Muslim countries: newspaper articles, film clips, transcripts of television shows, selected excerpts from educational material, sermons delivered in mosques... These institutions have a vested interest in portraying certain communities as inherently terrorist and extremist and do so largely by making a range of carefully selected translations available to audiences around the world, especially politicians and the media (2010, p. 362)

²³ An observation that is (perhaps unwittingly) acknowledged by President Bush in 2006: “In the five years since our nation was attacked, we’ve...learned a great deal about the enemy we face in this war. We’ve learned about them through videos and audio recordings, and letters and statements they’ve posted on websites... We know what the terrorists intend to do because they’ve told us—and we need to take their words seriously” (2006b, in Bush 2009, p. 395)

²⁴ It should also be pointed out that Jackson is openly committed to notions of ‘progress’ as pertains to Critical Theory’s emancipatory project, while he has been especially scathing of ‘poststructuralist’ analyses on this basis. See Chapter 1 for a more in-depth investigation of this dynamic.

My selection of an appropriate corpus of primary statements is sensitive to this dynamic and to that extent, I have made a conscious decision to source—insofar as possible—the primary discourse attributable to bin Laden and al-Zawahiri from more ‘neutral’ academic texts, as published by reputable presses. Bruce Lawrence’s authoritative *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (2005) and Kepel and Milelli’s *Al Qaeda in its Own Words* (2008) have been deemed most suitable in this regard. The difficulty with Lawrence (2005) is that—however accomplished—it only includes translated statements attributable to bin Laden from 1994-2004; while the majority of statements contained in Kepel and Milelli (2008)—which covers a period of 1991-2006—are abridged from the source texts. In order to rectify this deficiency, I supplement this more ‘neutral’ corpus with a wealth of primary material translated by Laura Mansfield (2006, 2007, 2008, 2009)²⁵. The amalgamation of these sources provides a composite timeline of primary statements attributable to al Qaeda for the period 1991-2008.

Relying on Mansfield could be construed as problematic given that, by her own admission, her translations are explicitly produced to satisfy the necessities of (US) policy²⁶. By my attempts to deconstruct hegemonic narratives of ‘irrationality/’apoliticalness’ via these sources, then, my work could be accused of merely *reproducing* the reductive affects of the hegemonic discourses that I wish to problematise. To omit Mansfield’s translations on this basis would be misguided, however, for the following reasons. Firstly, it would be to enact an accusation of bad faith and to characterise Mansfield’s translations as ‘inaccurate’ or

²⁵ Mansfield’s ‘al Qaeda readers’ are particularly useful, given that they contain every publically-released statement from bin Laden and al-Zawahiri (along with those attributed to other key orators) up to analytical cut-off point of 20 January 2009 (see above). Furthermore, each statement is translated in its *entirety*, as opposed to those provided in Kepel and Milelli (2008), for example.

²⁶ The foreword to Mansfield’s *Al Qaeda 2007 Yearbook* (2008) provides suitable context: “Laura Mansfield is a writer and commentator on issues regarding the Middle East, Islam, and Radical Islamic Terrorism. Laura has over 20 years of experience dealing with issues pertaining to the Middle East. She is fluent in written and spoken Arabic, and has an excellent understanding of the complex cultural, religious, and historical issues...Subscribers to her Strategic Translations and Analysis service include major libraries in the US, the UK, Germany, and Italy; various US and UK government and intelligence agencies; law enforcement agencies in the US, UK, Italy, and Germany; and many Fortune 500 companies. Laura has been a guest on both CNN and CNN International, as well as CBS News, ABC News, Fox News, Fox News UK, the BBC, and CBN (Canadian Broadcasting Network). She has been cited as an expert by many major media outlets including, World Net Daily, FrontPage Magazine, the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Sunday Mirror UK...She is a regular subject matter consultant for news agencies in the UK. The US, Germany Italy, and Israel” (2008, pp. iii-iv). It is also worth noting that Mansfield prefaces her yearbooks with the following (undated) quote attributed to Ronald Regan: “The ultimate determinant in the struggle now going on for the world will not be bombs and rockets but a test of wills and ideas—a trial of spiritual resolve: the values we hold, the beliefs we cherish and the ideals to which we are dedicated” (see, for example, Mansfield, 2007, 2008, 2009)

purposely misleading—an observation which is, in itself, somewhat undercut by the impossibility of determining any *essential* reliability of translated texts²⁷. Second, assuming a hypothetical eventuality that the statements produced by Mansfield *are indeed* tainted by a securitised politics of translation (as cautioned by Baker), the incorporation of these statements as a basis to argue against hegemonic narratives of ‘irrationality/apoliticalness’ derived thereof *would not* disintegrate the deconstructive value of the analysis. To reiterate, this dissertation does not seek to uncover a ‘true’ hermeneutic understanding of ‘al Qaeda’ as informed by their discourse, rather it seeks to *problematise* and deconstruct *hegemonic narratives* that ascribe to them an ‘irrational’, ‘apolitical’ identity by providing an alternative reading derived from the very empirical sources that sustain this hegemony: the primary public discourse of al Qaeda. As has been argued to this point—and will be explicated further—efforts to ‘buttress’ written arguments can only proceed via the production of a *surplus of meaning*, which is secondment to the subsequent interpretations of readers. The provision of an alternative reading via Mansfield stands as a *de facto* testament to this dynamic; and if it is the case that these translations are tainted by a securitised politics of translation, a critical re-orientation of the written marks that have directly helped to (in)form ‘Islamic extremism’ can surely only be enhanced by their reproduction towards an opposite function: which is to say that al Qaeda should not only be conceived as a political movement/group/entity, but a movement/group/entity conceived of *the political*.

²⁷This is not to say that parameters for accuracy do not exist with regard to practices of translation, but, rather, that a review of this literature (further) confirms there can never exist an objective metric to *essentially* determine one translator’s interpretation(s) as ‘more legitimate’ over the other. As with all scholarship, some translations are certainly ‘better’ than others, with the Translation Studies community particularly sensitive to this dynamic, as is evinced by the broad range of quantitative and qualitative measures to ensure ‘accuracy’ and ‘reliability’ (see, for example, Olohan, 2000; Pedersen, 1999; Specia et al., 2013). However, somewhat beyond this commendable dedication to quality(-control), the relative *legitimacy* of translated texts is—as with *all* knowledge; scientific or otherwise—ultimately beholden to the epistemic communities that must (subjectively) *accredit* it thus. This dynamic is aptly highlighted by Hansen, who comments as follows on the concept of ‘translation error’: “If we define a translation a production of the Target Text (TT) which is based on a Source Text (ST), a translation error arises from the existence of a relationship between two texts... Translation errors can be caused by misunderstandings of the translation brief or of the content of the ST, by not rendering the meaning of the ST accurately, by factual mistakes, terminology or stylistic flaws, and by different kinds of interferences between ST and TT. Interferences are projections of unwanted features from one language to the other and from ST to TT. They occur because of an assumption of symmetry between the languages and/or cultures which may appear in some cases, but not in the actual case. Several levels of description are affected, i.e., interferences can be characterized as cultural, pragmatic, text-linguistic, semantic, syntactic or stylistic errors. The perception of what constitutes a translation ‘error’ varies according to translation theories and norms. [emphasis added]” (2010, p.385)

Chapter 1

A Tripartite of Terrorism: Situating al Qaeda in the Literatures of Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies and Critical Terrorism Studies

Introduction: Power/knowledge/international relations

“There is...no such thing as theory in itself, divorced from a standpoint in time and space. When any theory so represents itself, it is the more important to examine it as ideology, and to lay bare its concealed perspective” (Cox, 1980, p. 128). Thus lies the logic behind Robert Cox’s seminal argument that “theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose [emphasis in original]” (ibid). Cox, of course, is not alone in positing a more critically reflexive view of world politics (see, for example, Ashley, 1984, 1988; Booth, 1991; Campbell, 1992; Der Derian, 1995; Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989; George, 1994; Hansen, 2006; Smith et al. 1996; Walker, 1993). What Cox *does* provide, however, is a framework for analysis, which not only recognises that the production of knowledge is necessarily situated within certain systems of articulation, but also provides an ethical impulse to uncover the specific power relations that govern these systems—to ‘lay bare [their] concealed perspective[s]’ (1981, p. 128). On this basis, Cox argues that the study of global politics can be delineated into *problem-solving* theory and *critical* theory²⁸. *Problem-solving* theory, “takes the world as it finds it, with the prevailing social and power relationships and the institutions into which they are organised, as the given framework for action” (ibid) while *critical* theory, “unlike problem-solving theory, does not take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question by concerning itself with their origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing” (ibid, p. 129). To be ‘critical’ per Cox is—at least in the first instance—to challenge prevailing orders of knowledge through alternative modes of critique.

Martin Hollis and Steve Smith (1991) posit an alternative dialectic. Hollis and Smith opine that the study of global politics has developed in tandem with the social sciences, deriving two ‘intellectual traditions’, each with its own story to tell: “One story is an outsider’s, told in the manner of a natural scientist seeking to explain the workings of nature and treating the human realm as part of nature. The other is an insider’s, told so as to make us understand

²⁸ Subsequent references to *problem-solving* and *critical* theory—as pertaining to Cox—will be italicised.

what the events mean, in a sense distinct from any meaning found in unearthing the laws of nature” (1991, p.1). On this basis, the study of global politics can be delineated according to the categories of ‘Explanation’ and ‘Understanding’²⁹. While ‘Explanation’ is broadly analogous with Cox’s conception of *problem-solving* theory—such that it embraces an essentialist ontology and prioritises a positivist/scientific epistemology—‘Understanding’ emphasises the value of hermeneutic interpretation³⁰ as the basis of critical difference, whereby “*action must always be understood from within* [emphasis in original]” (Hollis and Smith, 1991, p. 72). Furthermore, it is possible to understand this action through an apprehension of the intelligible structures within which it takes place: “To know what is happening when a small bit of wood is shifted, one must grasp the rules of chess and so grasp what move has been made. It is possible to argue that there is, in principle, nothing more to understand, because the ‘subjective meaning’ of an action consists in conformity to the governing rules” (ibid, p. 73). While ‘Understanding’ certainly poses an epistemological counterpoint to the orthodoxy of social science, and, in this vein, should be considered as ‘critical’ per Cox³¹, the explicit assumption that the ‘rules of the game’ can or, indeed, *should* be apprehended marks an ontological point of departure from other critical approaches—such as those labelled ‘postmodernist’, ‘post-Marxist’ or ‘poststructuralist’—which refute the very *possibility* of a finality of meaning (see George, 1994, pp. 18-29). Indeed, as Hollis and Smith accept, “If Understanding proceeds by rational reconstruction of rules and reasons for action from within, then it seems radically different from the enterprises of natural science. *How radical is radical?* [emphasis added]” (1991, p. 90). The key point here is that knowledge on global politics is produced under an ineluctable tension between orthodox/critical frames of analysis, and the degree to which these frames are inculcated as ‘mainstream’ or ‘marginal’ vis-à-vis specific literatures is determinant of how political and social phenomena become ‘known’ therein. Knowledge of ‘Al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ is borne of this tension.

This chapter will proceed through an explication of ‘orthodox’ and ‘critical’ frames of analysis, initially, drawing upon Foucault. Further, it will reflect on the mutually constitutive

²⁹ Subsequent references to ‘Explaining’ and ‘Understanding’—as pertaining to Hollis and Smith—will be capitalised.

³⁰ This premise is developed by Hollis and Smith with particular reference to the scholarship of Max Weber and Peter Winch.

³¹ Indeed, the underlying basis of Cox’s critique is tacitly accepted by Hollis and Smith, as is clearly represented by the following passage: “I do not accept the idea that we can construct a neutral theory, valid across space and time...Our theories are always for someone and for some purpose...I have to note the comment of many Critical Theorists that knowledge is a reflection of its social and political context” (1991, p. 203, p. 210)

relationship between ‘science’ and policy-relevance, which often reinforces the perceived legitimacy of ‘orthodox’ frames of analysis, at the expense of ‘critical’ frames. It will then situate ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ within three core literatures: Terrorism Studies—which is dominated by an orthodox/*problem-solving* frame of analysis; Middle East Studies—which is dominated by a hermeneutical/Understanding frame of analysis; and Critical Terrorism Studies—which is dominated by a ‘critical’ frame of analysis. It will ultimately conclude that ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ cannot be artificially distilled from the fields of interpretation within which they are situated and that are themselves governed by underlining logics of academically-accredited (il)legitimacy. By these logics, ‘poststructuralist’ analyses of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ have not been actively facilitated; it is concluded that an alternative space for such radical articulations is thereby required.

Science and the Orthodoxy of ‘Truth’

For Foucault—as for the majority of ‘critical’ scholars—social reality is necessarily contestable and cannot be separated from our subjective interpretations of it: “We must not imagine that the world turns toward us a legible face which we would have only to decipher. The world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour” (1981, p.127). Notions of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ cannot thereby exist pre-discursively; they are necessarily shaped through processes of *power* that dialectically mould ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ into temporary manifestations. Thence truth/power: “We should admit that...power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the coordinative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitutive at the same time power relations” (Foucault, 1977, p, 27)³². The difficulty for Foucault—as for most ‘critical’ scholars—arises when ‘power’ is artificially decoupled from the truth/power dialectic, leaving a false determination of ‘truth’ as solitary and self-evident. Consequently, if scholars are to reject the notion of self-evident truth as the *sine qua non* of alternative critique, then they must not only recognise the *existence* of power relations in the production of ‘truth’, they must also (reflexively) recognise the *processes by which* these power relations are performed:

³² As Foucault expands, “There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth” (1980, p. 93)

‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements. ‘Truth’ is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which induces and which extends it. A ‘regime’ of truth. (Foucault, 1987, p. 74)

‘Regimes of truth’ are thus ideological machinations. They create orthodoxies and manufacture ‘common sense’, and it is to *science* that Foucault assigns an ideological function of particular magnitude; a most powerful regime of truth that shapes the type of knowledge that is commonly accepted as ‘true’ and, therefore, accredited as legitimate³³:

When I was studying during the early 1950s, one of the great problems that arose was that of the political status of science and the ideological functions which it could serve...it is a question of what *governs* statements, and the way in which they *govern* each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures. In short, there is a problem of the regime, the politics of the scientific statement. [emphasis in original] (Foucault, 1987, pp. 51, 54-55)

Following Foucault, it can be argued that there is indeed a politics of the scientific statement and it is through the internal workings of scientific discourses that universal truths are circularly bound to a quality of ‘legitimacy’. With reference to the study of global politics, this dynamic is particularly manifest in the sedimented practices of ‘good’ social science.

Power, Prestige and Policy Relevance: The Orthodoxy of Social Science and the Production of Legitimate Social Research

As Patrick Jackson (2011) outlines, the spectre of ‘science’ has long affected the dominant parameters by which ‘legitimate’ research on international affairs has been produced, despite a dearth of inquiry into what exactly constitutes the ‘scientific’ nature of such scholarship. As Jackson puts it with reference to International Relations:

It is important to note...that the role played by ‘science’ in [International Relations] is at least conditionally, if not completely, independent of any detailed philosophical or conceptual sense afforded to the term. In debates about the proper rather than precise specifications, speaking loosely of ‘*the scientific method*’ or ‘*the philosophy of science*’ as though either of those two things actually existed...In debates about knowledge-production in [International Relations], what is most often in play is not a specific account of science, but a vague and general sensibility (2011, p. 3)

³³Vasquez neatly captures this dynamic in the following terms: “Science...is an act of power in that it imposes its criteria for determining truth on the entire society.” (1996, p. 229)

The effects of prioritising a vague notion of ‘science’ in the study of global politics are varied, yet, for Jackson, one of the most pertinent considerations relates to the artificial decoupling of (scientific) methodology from its coaxial ontological and epistemological commitments (2011, pp. 26-32)³⁴. To the extent that contemporary efforts to define “a universal, categorical scientific approach...stake their claim *precisely* on the distinction between claims about the world and claims and goals of empirical research” (ibid, p. 27)—with King Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry* (1994) of particular influence in this regard³⁵—a pervasive orthodoxy of ‘legitimate’ social scientific research has become enshrined in the prioritisation of ‘method’ and research design³⁶ as the best means towards expedient research output on ‘real-world’ issues³⁷. As Yanow and Schwartz-Shea remind us, however, method(ology)—like theory—is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose:

Methodologies are specific to particular communities of scholars and as such political... Strategies that are accredited as *legitimate means to acquire truth* gain their force from decisions of particular humans working within particular academic communities; thus there is a power element in the accreditation of knowledge [emphasis added] (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006, p. 28)³⁸

From this perspective, the hegemony of science as the standard-bearer for ‘legitimate’ inquiry lies not (only) in the specific utility of methodological concepts such as ‘generalisability’, or ‘validity’, but, tangentially, in the adoption of orthodox norms of research that are methodologically—and thus epistemologically—orientated towards discovering the ‘truth’

³⁴ This point has also been made in a number of earlier works; see, for example, such as Chalmers, 1999; Hollis and Smith 1991; Katzenstein, 1996; Kurki, 2006; Wight, 2006.

³⁵ The fastest-selling book in the history of Princeton University Press, a core text in countless academic courses and the subject of numerous articles, conference presentations, and symposiums, (see Munck, 1998, p. 37), King, Keohane, and Verba’s *Designing Social Inquiry (DSI)* (1994) is heralded as a veritable bible in the ‘quest for higher standards’ of social scientific analysis (see Collier et al., 2004; Johnson, 2006; Hoffmann and Riley, 2002)

³⁶ Aradau and Huysmans reflect on this dynamic as follows: “Methods have increasingly been placed at the heart of theoretical and empirical research in IR and social sciences more generally. Publishers fund numerous textbooks on methods, postgraduate students are required to take methodology courses (rather than, say, theory courses) and funders require long statements about method” (2014, p. 597). Similar points are raised by Jackson (2011), Law (2004), and Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, (2006).

³⁷ Ensuring ‘real-world’ importance is neatly evinced in the following passage of King et al.’s influential *Designing Social Inquiry*: “1) a research project should pose a question that is ‘important’ in the real world. The topic should be consequential for political, social, or economic life, for understanding something that significantly affects many people’s lives, or for understanding and predicting events that might be harmful or beneficial 2) a research project should make a specific contribution to an identifiable scholarly literature by increasing our collective ability to construct verified scientific explanations of some aspect of the world [emphasis in original] (1994, p. 15)

³⁸ As a corollary exposition, John Law argues: “If ‘research methods’ are allowed to claim methodological hegemony or (even worse) monopoly...then we are put into relation with such methods we are being placed, however rebelliously, in a set of constraining normative blinkers. We are being told how we must see and what we must do” (2004, p. 13)

that lies behind key phenomena—a consideration that is made all the more pertinent when one considers the value and ‘prestige’ of producing policy-relevant research.

Put succinctly, the intertwining of academy and policy has long been absolutely formative to how we think about global politics³⁹. Returning to International Relations, Stanley Hoffman effectively charted its evolution from a ‘field’ of social analysis to a ‘discipline’ of social science, “entail[ing] in each area [of analysis], a kind of masterkey—not merely an intellectual, but an operational paradigm” (Hoffman, 1977, p. 45). Lisa Anderson observes a similar dynamic wherein “History held no intrinsic interest, or more important, explanatory power, and was useful only insofar as its examples confirmed the universality of the laws these sciences seemed to be rapidly uncovering” (2003 p. 18). For Anderson, as for Hoffmann and many others, the United States has served as an epistemological incubator for a creeping orthodoxy that determines the utility of scientific analyses in accordance with the necessities of policy⁴⁰. Indeed, as Robert D. Putnam reminds us, policy-relevance “is not just an optional add-on for the profession of political science, but an obligation as fundamental as our pursuit of scientific truth” (Putnam, 2003, p. 250)⁴¹. The centrality of a US-led agenda in determining ‘important’ topics of inquiry and the *type* of scholarship that is accredited as legitimate therein is reflective of a dominant order in which reflections on the ontological and epistemological commitments of social research are buried beneath a hegemonic illusory of ‘real-world’ significance⁴². That ‘al Qaeda’ and Islamist terrorism’ were elevated as the most pressing security concern(s) of the US in the decade post-9/11 reinforces this dynamic, and reifies the logics of *problem-solving* and Explanation as the most suitable frames of analysis towards their apprehension. In an interpretive space conditioned by ‘emergency’, ‘security’ and, indeed, ‘terrorism’, critical voices on ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ are marginalised as problematic and oftentimes silenced altogether. A more in-depth

³⁹ As Nau outlines, “Scholarship and statesmanship, theory and practice, the academy and policy worlds, while they are different, are nevertheless, joined at the hip, and neither can succeed, even within its own realm, without the other.” (2010, pp. 635-636)

⁴⁰ With reference to Lisa Anderson, this hegemony was also underpinned by an intertwinement between the notion of ‘science’ and an Enlightenment-derived conception of ‘progress’ in relation to public policy: “from the very outset, social science in the United States was justified by and celebrated for its...devotion to moral improvement and the liberal purposes so characteristic of American public policy.” (2003, p. 15)

⁴¹ With ‘Putnam (2003)’ referring to Robert D. Putnam’s 2003 Presidential Address to delegates of the American Political Science Association (APSA) annual general conference.

⁴² Steve Smith explicates this dynamic with reference to International Relations: “In my view IR remains an American social science both in terms of the policy agenda that US IR exports to the world in the name of relevant theory and in terms of the dominant (and often implicit) epistemological and methodological assumptions contained in that theory. This latter dominance is far more insidious than the former, especially because it is presented in the seemingly neutral language of being ‘the social science enterprise’” (2000, p. 399)

investigation into this dynamic is necessary, beginning with perhaps the most *directly*-cogent field of study: Terrorism Studies.

Explaining al Qaeda: Terrorism Studies

'Old Terrorism'

Although a number of scholars had engaged with the subject of terrorism prior to its 'modern' advent in 1968 (see Sinai, 2007), systematic research on terrorism as a pretext to the development of Terrorism Studies began in earnest in the early 1970s. In this decade, the works of scholars such as Paul Wilkinson (1974, 1977), Walter Laqueur (1977), Richard Clutterbuck (1973a, 1973b), David C. Rapoport (1971), John Bowyer Bell (1977, 1978), Conor Cruise O'Brien (1977) and Brian Jenkins (1975, 1978) were among the most instrumental in the development of the field. These, and similar works, sought to provide understanding at a time when terrorism was at once omnipresent and ambiguous. This literature was most prominently orientated towards empirical fact-finding; scholars such as Laqueur and Wilkinson were trained historians, whilst others such as Jenkins and Clutterbuck occupied roles in various government agencies that demanded factual elucidation on an increasingly apparent threat. In echoes of the post-9/11 era, popular narratives ascribed an underlying 'irrationality' to terrorists whose actions were said to be unprecedented, and whose motivations were said to be driven by aberrant ideologies (Laqueur, 1977, p. 5). In his attempts to dispel this 'myth', Laqueur rightly asserted that there had been many historical examples of terrorist violence, ranging from the Thugs, the Zealots, and the Assassins in ancient times⁴³, to pre-modern terrorists, such as those in Ireland, Macedonia and Armenia (Laqueur, 1977, p. 11). Most notably, Laqueur presented the Russian anarchist group, the Narodnaya Volya—who operated in the late 19th and early 20th centuries—as the most significant precursor to the 'modern terrorism' of the 1970s. The defining thrust of Laqueur's argument is indicative in its drive to usurp the notion that these groups could be defined by 'irrationality' positing, on the contrary, that their violence should be considered as a continuation of politics by other means; hence his characterisation of the *Norodniks* as 'liberals with a bomb' (ibid). A similar foregrounding of 'rationality' is embedded within the early scholarship of Paul Wilkinson, who emphasised the need to contextualise 'terrorism' in

⁴³ For a more in-depth study of these three classic 'religious' terror groups, see Rapoport (1984)

relation to political and social repression and the eruption of popular grievances therein (see, Wilkinson, 1977, pp. 1-19, 23-28)⁴⁴.

As the literature developed beyond a formative logic of empirical fact-finding, associated scholars sought to apprehend generalisable causes and underlying explanations as to *why* terrorism occurs across different contexts. Psychological approaches became increasingly popular during this period, with an applied distinction between those who attributed psychopathological traits to terrorists' behaviour (see, for example, Cooper, 1977, 1978; Ferracuti, 1982)⁴⁵ and those who attributed structural socio-economic factors as determining social and political grievance(s) and, therefore, terrorism as a violent manifestation of such grievances (see, for example, Crenshaw, 1981; Corrado, 1981; Taylor and Quayle, 1984; Taylor and Ryan, 1988). As Duyvesteyn (2007) shows (see also, Horgan, 2005; Silke, 1998), the 'psychopathological' thesis was largely discredited within a relatively short period of time, resulting in an increasingly centralised explanatory framework, through which rational-scientific approaches—such as relative deprivation theory, rational choice theory, and the frustration-aggression hypothesis—became increasingly hegemonic.

The analytical foundations of Terrorism Studies were built upon a concerted challenge to rise above moralistic denunciations of terrorism towards a contextualised understanding of terrorism as a tactic or strategy for political and societal change. However horrifying the means, the purported ends of terrorist campaigns—such as the reclamation of territory, an alternative re-ordering of society in line with an identifiable political ideology and so on—were, nonetheless, 'rationally' comprehensible. In essence, distinctions between the means and ends of terrorism formed a necessary determinant of Terrorism Studies, insofar as it permitted analytical engagement with terrorism to proceeding *beyond* a moralistic politics. Towards the end of the 1990s, however, a significant strand of scholarship—developed under a now mature Terrorism Studies—collapsed the distinction between means and ends as the

⁴⁴ As Bell outlines, these considered approaches were much-needed in the face of debilitating trends in popular terrorism 'research': "There are still those who are content to apply their cherished means—feeding *the New York Times Index* into a computer to get a terrorist profile on the printout—or simply to speculate in elegant essays on the terrorist mind...Inevitably, it appears that the analysis of terror will continue to be a growth industry regularly supplied with additional spectaculars by the practitioners. The prospect of all those essays and articles dense with notes, and survey books and monographs on obscure bombers, should strike terror in the mind of the common reader" (1977, pp. 487-488)

⁴⁵See Hubbard, 1971, for an earlier explication of this approach.

basis for rational engagement with terrorism, positing an inherently ‘irrational’, ‘new’ terrorism in its place.

‘New’ Terrorism

The New Terrorism thesis was put forward by a number of prominent scholars in the late 1990s to account for—what they considered to be—a seismic shift in the continuum and, indeed, very nature of terrorism. Key works include those of Walter Laqueur (1996,1999); Bruce Hoffman (1998, 1999); Mark Juergensmeyer (2000, 2003); Magnus Ranstorp (1996); Ian Lesser, Ashton B. Carter, John Deutch, and Phillip Zelikow (1999); and John Arquilla, David Rondfeldt, and Michelle Zanini (1999)⁴⁶. For proponents of the ‘new’ terrorism, ‘religion’ had come to be identified as the primary motivation for violence, with the rational goals of national independence and social change that characterised ‘old’ terrorism giving way to mass murder:

Traditional terrorism, whether of the separatist or the ideological (left or right) variety, had political and social aims, such as gaining independence, getting rid of foreigners, or establishing a new social order. Such terrorist groups aimed at forcing concessions, sometimes far-reaching concessions, from their antagonists. The New terrorism is different in character, aiming not at clearly defined political demands, but at the destruction of society and the elimination of large sections of the population. In its most extreme form, this new terrorism intends to liquidate all satanic forces, which may include the majority of a country or of mankind (Laqueur, 1999, p. 81)

The change of direction evidenced in Laqueur’s scholarship is profound; a doyen of the formative literature that sought to ‘rationalise’ seemingly irrational violence, his work shifted from dispelling characterisations of irrationality to vociferously asserting them. As Brian Jenkins similarly reflects:

At one time, I wrote that terrorists wanted a lot of people watching, not a lot of people dead. They were limited...by self-constraint...Terrorists had a sense of morality, a self-image, operational codes, and practical concerns... But these constraints gave way to large-scale indiscriminate violence as terrorists engaged in protracted, brutal conflicts...and as ethnic hatred and religious fanaticism replaced political agendas....Overall...jihadists seem ready to murder millions, if necessary. Many of today’s terrorists want a lot of people watching and a lot of people dead (2006, p. 119)

While these pronouncements are profound in isolation, their affective power must be considered in relation to popular Western policy discourses of terrorism/counterterrorism that have absorbed and reproduced the central tenets of the New Terrorism discourse: Laqueur et

⁴⁶ Other less formative, but important works, include: Kushner (1998); Guelke (1998); Benjamin and Simon (2000); Ramakrishna and Tan (2002); Morgan (2004)

al. have not merely spoken *of* irrationality, but have directly spoken irrationality to policy. The endorsements that proudly adorn the back cover of Laqueur's *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (1999) are indicative⁴⁷: Vincent Cannistraro⁴⁸ praises the book as “the best single volume I’ve seen on the phenomenon of terrorism and political violence”; James Woolsey⁴⁹ advises prospective readers that “If you read only one book on terrorism, this should be it”; while John Deutch⁵⁰ opines that “Laqueur’s excellent book gives us a badly needed historical and cultural context for terrorism”, providing “a better analytic basis for judging terrorist behaviour and proposed government responses”. The embedded hyperbole of book endorsements aside, these prominent policy-makers’ willingness to proudly apply their name to this work is tragically enlightening, for Laqueur’s ‘badly needed historical and cultural context for terrorism’ includes questioning the mental state of ‘new’ terrorists—thus revisiting a largely discredited thesis within Terrorism Studies—and interpreting large swathes of the ‘non-Western’ world through a crude Orientalist caricature:

Could it not be shown that most terrorists of the past were perfectly normal men and women and that their opting for terrorism was a rational choice rather than a mental aberration? That terrorist violence, in other words, was a political phenomenon and thus essentially different from ordinary crime or psychopathology. The question might be legitimate with reference to the terrorism of the period between 1870 and 1970. It does not relate to recent changes. (Laqueur, 1999, p. 93)

Traditional terrorists exist, yet not all terrorist groups are self-respecting...[in] the Middle East, Central Asia, South East Asia...attitudes regarding the value of human life are different...there is a basic difference between Europe and America and the parts of the globe where human lives count for little. (Laqueur, 1999 pp. 82, 91)

As the events of ‘9/11’ unfolded, the catastrophic terrorism foretold by New Terrorism scholars seemed to offer a clearly compatible frame of interpretation. The prominent discourse of world leaders and political commentators⁵¹ sounded starkly familiar:

⁴⁷ For a broader discussion of the academy/policy matrix in relation to the New Terrorism discourse, see Burnett and Whyte, 2005; Miller and Mills, 2010; Jackson et al., 2011.

⁴⁸ With over 27 years of service with the CIA, Cannistraro is an eminent policy figure who has also held influential posts such as Director for Intelligence Programs at the National Security Council under US President Ronald Reagan. See <http://security.nationaljournal.com/contributors/vincent-cannistraro.php>.

⁴⁹ James Woolsey has served the US government in a number of roles, including Director of the Central Intelligence from 5 February 1993–10 January 1995. See <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/books-and-monographs/directors-and-deputy-directors-of-central-intelligence/wools.html>.

⁵⁰ Primarily an expert in chemistry, Deutch served as the Chairman of the Commission to Assess the Organization of the Federal Government to Combat the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction from 1998-1999. See <http://mit.edu/~chemistry/deutch/biography.html>

⁵¹ The discourse of George W. Bush and Tony Blair is especially prominent in this regard.

I think...people ought to understand that we're dealing with evil people who hate freedom and legitimate governments, and that now is the time for freedom-loving people to come together to fight terrorist activity ... No threat, no threat will prevent freedom-loving people from defending freedom. And make no mistake about it: This is good versus evil. These are evildoers. They have no justification for their actions. There's no religious justification, there's no political justification. The only motivation is evil. (Bush, 2001c)

[T]his mass terrorism is a new evil in our world. The people who perpetrate it have no regard whatsoever for the sanctity of human life ... This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We, therefore, here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends ... and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our world ... We are democratic. They are not. We have respect for human life. They do not. We hold essentially liberal values. They do not. As we look into these issues it is important that we never lose sight of our basic values. But we have to understand the nature of the enemy and act accordingly" (Blair, 2001)

It was thus, through an interpretive frame of 'irrationality', that 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' were thrust into the global spotlight.

The Post-9/11 Literature on Al Qaeda

Though al Qaeda is most prominently accepted to have been in operation since the late 1980s/early 1990s, directly-related analyses were conspicuously sparse in the pre-9/11 period, constituting a mere 0.5% of articles in *Studies in Conflict and Violence*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence* (see Silke, 2007). The events of 9/11 facilitated a relative 'explosion of academic interest on terrorism', with up to 80% of articles focused on al Qaeda and related topics of inquiry, such as those directly-pertaining to 'Islamic/Islamist terrorism' (see Silke, 2004; 2007; 2009)⁵². A number of debilitating trends have accompanied this 'explosion', such as the proliferation of one-time authors and instant 'terror experts'⁵³; an over-reliance on secondary sources as the basis for 'new' (peer-reviewed) research output⁵⁴; and a tendency to eschew historical reflection in contextualisations of modern terrorism (see Ranstorp, 2006, 2009; Silke, 2007 2009; Miller and Mills, 2009, 2010; Duyvesteyn, 2007). Despite these substantial difficulties, a number of accomplished articles and books have been produced by reputable scholars within the field, and it is against this background of 'mixed'

⁵² Indeed, with the publication of a book on terrorism in the English language every six hours, Silke estimated in 2007 that if current trends were to continue, 90% of terrorism studies literature will have been written post-9/11 (quoted in Sheperd, 2007)

⁵³ As Miller and Mills (2009, 2010) note, these 'experts' often lack substantial academic training and in many occasions have never been subjected to the rigours of peer-review (see also, Ranstorp, 2009). The Terror Expertise Research Portal (facilitated by CTS scholars Prof. David Miller and Tom Mills) forms an extremely useful resource in this respect: http://www.powerbase.info/index.php/Terrorism_Expertise_Portal.

⁵⁴ Many of which function as glorified literature reviews; see Silke, 2009.

scholarship that core themes have emerged, centred upon thematic questions of a) *who/what is al Qaeda?* and b) *what does al Qaeda want?*

Who/what is al Qaeda?

Research pertaining to *who/what is al Qaeda* can be primarily split into two categories: explorative accounts that mix journalism with academic scholarship; and studies that utilise a range of theoretical models to ‘capture’ al Qaeda’s structure. The works of Bergen, (2002, 2006); Burke (2004a, 2004b); Corbin (2003); Gunaratna (2002); Riedel, (2010); Tawil, 2011; and Wright (2006) are indicative of the first category. This research, whilst not very explorative in a ‘scholarly’ sense, helps to provide a solid empirical base from which further inferences about the group can be drawn. The works of Farley (2003), McAllister (2004), Mishal and Rosenthal (2005) and Gutfraind (2009) are reflective of a more theoretical approach. In the absence of sufficient empirical data to ‘know’ al Qaeda’, these analyses apply theories of business firm innovation, order theory, Dune organisations, and ‘dynamic modelling’, respectively, to infer its structure. Consensus is decidedly rare: McAllister (2004) argues that al Qaeda’s networked structure will contribute to its ultimate dissolution, while Mishal and Rosenthal (2005) refute the very notion that al Qaeda’s structure has ever operated as a ‘network’; Sageman argues against the significance of a centralised al Qaeda command-structure, while Hoffman argues the contrary, focusing on its influence and potential for expansion in areas of central Asia in particular (see Hoffman and Sageman, 2008); Eilstrup-Sangiovanni and Jones (2008) engage network theory to argue that the threat posed by al Qaeda is overblown, while Farrell (2011) argues that the strength of al Qaeda’s ‘franchises’ is indicative of an organisation that is stronger than ever before. In light of the Arab Spring/Arab Uprisings and the outbreak of protracted conflict in Syria, Peter Bergen (2012) argued that al Qaeda has been left behind by a sweeping tide of change across the region, while Bruce Riedel (2012) argues that al Qaeda has exploited the ‘Arab Spring’ and associated uprisings in Libya and Syria to establish safe havens and re-group across numerous territories. Though the specific content differs, the underling logic behind the thematic question of *who/what is al Qaeda* remains static: a knowable entity called ‘al Qaeda’ exists, it poses a significant threat to international security, and scientific inference represents the best means towards its apprehension.

What does al Qaeda Want?

Prominent inquiries into *what al Qaeda wants* can be delineated according to assumptions as to their (ir)rationality. In direct parallel to ‘new terrorism’ scholarship, works such as Benjamin and Simon (2003), Gregg (2009), Harris (2002), Howard (2008), Jenkins (2006), Jordan and Boix (2004), Juergensmeyer (2003), Mascini (2006) and Schurman-Kauflin (2008) emphasise the irrational nature of al Qaeda’s terrorism, which is predicated on theologically-driven imperatives, or in extreme cases, pure psychosis. Harris, for example, characterises al Qaeda as a group of psychotics who are engaged in ‘nothing less than fantasy’—an ideological struggle driven by religious appeasement⁵⁵; Gregg (2009), following Juergensmeyer (2003), argues that al Qaeda are driven by divine imperatives and actively engaged in a millenarian ‘cosmic war’; Mascini (2006) argues that al Qaeda’s strategy or choice of tactics are unchecked by considerations of public support; while Harris (2010), reviewing Schurman-Kauflin (2008) for *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, wholeheartedly endorses the author’s view that al Qaeda’s motivations are driven by ‘perverse sexual desires’ and a ‘criminal’ mind-set⁵⁶ (2010, pp.464-465). Invoking his position as a high-ranking member of the US military, Harris recommends that:

the U.S. armed forces, especially the Marine Corps and the Special Operations Command, should incorporate [Schurman-Kauflin’s] behavioral indicators into every aspect of theatre war-fighting plans and operational procedures, and particularly country and area studies... Case officers and counterintelligence agents could use these behavioral indicators to identify and turn terrorist group members who are on the verge of escaping the group. For those whose mental disturbance is too far fractured to be deterred, neutralization is perhaps the end result (ibid, p. 464)

Though sensationalised accounts of al Qaeda’s ideology have been particularly pervasive⁵⁷, a significant number of scholars have emphasised the political nature of al Qaeda’s tactical and strategic doctrine. A brief sample includes: Abrahms (2005), Blanchard (2010), Jones and Smith (2010), Martin and Smith (2011), Nacos (2003), Raufer (2003), Sedgewick (2004), Scheuer (2004) and Payne (2009). These works serve to maintain Terrorism Studies’ formative assumption that ‘terrorism’ is utilised as a violent means towards the realisation of political ends, thus situating ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ squarely within the bounds of ‘rationality’. Herein, al Qaeda’s strategic rationale is attributed to the following goals: 1) to force the US to remove their troops from Iraq, Afghanistan and the broader MENA region; 2)

⁵⁵Indeed, in direct alignment with the New Terrorism theory, he asserts that their use of violence functions “not a means to an end but an end in itself” (Harris, 2002, p. 10)

⁵⁶ As Harris submits, “The basic premise of a terrorist’s behavior is criminal and a criminal’s action or crime against his or her victims inculcates terror in both the victim and the victim’s family and friends” (2010, p. 465)

⁵⁷ According to Silke (2009), this trend peaked in the period 2004-2006.

to coerce the US to cease its support of oppressive regimes across the MENA region; 3) to mitigate and ultimately break US support for Israel; 4) to pressurise local regimes—through violence—towards their collapse; 5) to establish domestic Islamic polities governed by *Shari'a* law in their place and; 6) To expand the establishment of Islamic polities towards an eventual (re)establishment of a global Islamic caliphate⁵⁸.

While considered analyses that present a political rationale at the heart of 'al Qaeda' are extremely welcome in the current research environment—and many of these works are highly accomplished—the tacit assumption that al Qaeda's goals are oriented towards the eventual realisation of a global Islamic Caliphate is highly problematic. The reasons are two-fold: firstly, it retrospectively binds al Qaeda's 'political' rationale to an exaggerated spectre of global domination and theocratic rule. Second, and more importantly, it determines al Qaeda's strategic doctrine as essentially 'knowable', thus reinforcing an orthodox perception of 'al Qaeda' as a 'bounded object of knowledge' (Jarvis, 2009), which elicits 'what causes', rather than 'how possible' questions (Doty, 1993; cited in Jackson et al., 2011, p. 39). As I will outline in Chapter 5, interpreting al Qaeda's discourse through the lens of Ernesto Laclau's populism offers a significant challenge to these perspectives. On this reading, the Caliphate is situated as a *necessarily* ephemeral category, the actual realisation of which is foreclosed by the very ontological contingency that gives rise to the unifying image of the Caliphate. Such interpretations not only challenge what we 'know' about al Qaeda, but challenges the embedded orthodoxy with regard to what it means to produce 'legitimate' readings of terrorism.

Understanding al Qaeda: Middle East Studies

The Growth of Middle East Studies

With the establishment of Area Studies programmes in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the United States sought to advance its knowledge of specific geographical regions,

⁵⁸ A similar typology is provided thus by Paul Wilkinson, under the heading 'What are [al Qaeda's] major beliefs and aims?': "They believe in establishing strict shari'a religious law rule. They aim to expel the US and other 'infidels' from the Middle East and from Muslim lands everywhere. They want to topple Muslim regimes which they claim to be betraying 'true' Islam and collaborating with the US and its allies. *Ultimately, they aim to establish a pan-Islamic Caliphate (super-state) uniting all Muslims.* Al Qaeda has declared a jihad or holy war against the US and its allies and has set up a World Islamic Front for Jihad declaring it is 'the duty of all Muslims to kill US citizens –civilian or military, and their allies everywhere'...al Qaeda firmly believe they will ultimately succeed because they are certain Allah is on their side [emphasis added]" (2011, p. 42)

relative to considerations of national security and foreign policy. Dedicated centres for the study of the Middle East were established at Columbia University and the Universities of Indiana, Michigan and Pennsylvania in 1946 (Hajjar and Niva, 1997, p. 3), before Middle East Studies (MES) was officially established as a discipline by the Committee on Near Eastern Studies in 1949 (Kramer, 2001, p. 5). In perhaps the most significant development of this formative period, the United States passed Title VI of the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958, which entailed a centralised source of funding for the production of policy-relevant scholarship on the region. As Middle East Studies grew rapidly throughout the 1950s and 1960s, its research output was driven by a cross-fertilisation between social scientific and interpretive approaches (such as anthropology and ethnography), with the latter, initially at least, in service to the former (see Hajjar and Niva, 1997; Bill, 1996; Valbjorn, 2004)⁵⁹. Indeed, the field's seminal professional organisation, the Middle East Studies Association (MESA), was established in 1966 with a specific commitment to sustain this epistemological synthesis of research output (Hajjar and Niva, 1997, p. 3). However, as the literature developed—through core journals such as *Middle East Journal*, *Middle East Report*, *Review of Middle East Studies*, and the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*—it quickly became apparent that the bulk of research output arising from Middle East Studies was decidedly *un*-scientific. For example, in his survey of the Middle East Studies literature in 1967, William Zartman concluded that “if one were to adopt a strict definition of political science ‘that would insist on fully explicit concepts and theories, hypothesis testing, and social-scientific experimentation’, very few studies on the Middle East would qualify” (1976, quoted in Bilgin, 2004, p. 426). Similarly, as Rex Brynen reported in 1986, single-case studies comprised 84.3% of articles published in core MES journals, while only 9.3% of articles used comparative approaches, 5% of articles used statistical methods and 1.4% engaged with quasi-experimental methods (cited in Bilgin, 2004, p. 426)⁶⁰.

⁵⁹ Following Szanton, though the immediate genealogy of Area Studies relates to the security policies of the United States, it has subsequently developed into an umbrella term, distinguishable by the following traits: “(1) Intensive language study; (2) in-depth field research in the local language(s); (3) close attention to local histories, viewpoints, materials, and interpretations; (4) testing, elaborating, critiquing, or developing grounded theory against detailed observation; and (5) multi-disciplinary conversations often crossing the boundaries of the social science and humanities” (2004a, p. 3)

⁶⁰ Similarly, a RAND report commissioned to evaluate Title VI scholarship concluded that, “We found talking with faculty at area centers that their own training often makes it difficult for them to translate scholarly research into an applied format useful to policymakers. This is particularly true for humanities faculty who presently dominate some of the largest Middle Eastern centers. . . academics must be willing to adapt their work to the needs of decisionmakers” (McDonnell et al. 1981, p. 30)

The steady recession of ‘scientific’ analyses from the core of Area Studies—and Middle East Studies within it—prompted a heated interjection from Political Scientists in the 1990s, as the utility of the culturally-specific knowledge produced by Area Studies was called into question. Robert H. Bates’ first letter to members as the President of the American Political Science Association (APSA) is illustrative. Launching a scathing attack on Area Studies, Bates characterised the field as ‘highly problematic’ (quoted in Johnson, 1997, p. 171) on account of its ‘failing to generate scientific knowledge’ (quoted in Hanson, 2009, p. 159)⁶¹. For Bates, as for many Political Scientists, the specific, culturally-informed scholarship on complex social phenomena that had come to define the analytical logic of Area Studies—and Middle East Studies within it—formed a marked impediment to the production of superior scientific knowledge. As Tessler et al. reflect:

The tension between area studies and disciplinary social science is not new. Discipline-orientated scholars, who place emphasis on the development of general theoretical insights, have for many years argued that the work of area specialists lacks rigor, and, above all, that it is not scientific in that it favors description over explanation, lacks analytical cumulativeness, and shows no interest in parsimony and generalization. Area studies research, these critics also contend, is *overly preoccupied with detail and specificity*. Though rich in factual information about particular places or particular ties, it offers little to those with broader interests, applied, as well as theoretical. [emphasis added] (1999a, p. viii)

As the debate progressed into the early 2000s, it became increasingly accepted that Middle East Studies was in a state of relative crisis, having substantially deviated from its original function to produce *problem-solving*, policy-orientated scholarship (see Heydemann, 2002). In 2001, Martin Kramer’s *Ivory Towers Built on Sand: The Failure of Middle Eastern Studies in America* offered a devastating, highly influential and timely attack on the hermeneutic orthodoxy of Middle East Studies⁶². Kramer’s criticisms were familiar: Middle East Studies had become too critical of US foreign policy, its analysis was un-scientific and its focus on organic phenomena such as ‘civil society’—at the expense of pressing security concerns such as ‘Islamic radicalism’, for example—was evidence of “yet another lavishly funded intellectual failure, on a scale only America could afford.” (2001, p. 57)⁶³. For Kramer, as for

⁶¹ Clarifying his position in 1997, Bates argues that, “I’m very strongly in favor of area studies, but I think the way it is done causes real problems...It’s got to be done right. It’s got to be done with a view toward central social-science issues, toward abstracting out what is general” (quoted in Shea, 1997)

⁶² *Ivory Towers Built on Sand* was published in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, though the bulk of research for the piece was conducted prior to 9/11. See Kramer, 2001.

⁶³ In an enlightening passage, Kramer rails on the ‘obscure’ nature of much MES scholarship, deeming it wholly as practically irrelevant to the production of actionable knowledge: “Flush with taxpayers’ money, dozens of scholars rushed off to the Middle East to conduct ever-more obscure research on ‘masculinities in Egypt’, ‘perceptions of the deaf in Islamic society’, or ‘the dance of the Nubians’” (2001 p. 93)

a number of prominent scholars (including, Daniel Pipes, Stanley Kurtz and Bernard Lewis), the denigrating culture of Understanding that had come to define Middle East Studies could be identified in a number of exemplary works, with none more culpable than Edward Said's *Orientalism*:

Had [Middle East Studies] enjoyed the luxury of gradual evolution, [it] may well have created a new symbiosis, with greater power to explain the Middle East—after all, the ultimate purpose of the enterprise. Instead, Middle Eastern studies came under a take-no-prisoners assault, which rejected the idea of objective standards, disguised the vice of politicization as the virtue of commitment, and replaced proficiency with ideology. The text that inspired the movement was entitled *Orientalism*, and the revolution it unleashed has crippled Middle Eastern studies to this day. (2001, p. 22)

Orthodoxy and Orientalism: The Development of a Critical Awareness

Though engagement with 'Orientalism' had always formed a central theme of Middle East Studies⁶⁴ (see, for example, Tibawi 1966; Malek, 1969; Fanon 1970), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) propelled this concept to the very forefront of the field (see Hatem, 2009). Utilising Foucault, Said's work exposes the power relations behind 'Orientalist' discourses, which essentialises identities of the 'Orient' as fundamentally different, inferior and irrational to the Western-centric identities of the 'Occident'. Said characterises 'Orientalism' as follows:

- 1) [There is an] absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, underdeveloped, inferior;
- 2) Abstractions about the Orient...are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities;
- 3) The Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalised and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically 'objective';
- 4) The Orient is at bottom something either to be feared...or to be controlled (Said, 1978, pp. 301-302)

Said's third point is especially pertinent as it suggests that the Western-centric superiority underlying 'Orientalism' is not just cultural, but epistemological, entailing: "a comprehensive and systematic picture of an Islamic civilization...explained with western concepts and methodology... firmly in the lineage of the positive social sciences and [bearing] an unmistakable positivist epistemology" (Volpi, 2010, p. 17). Following Volpi, one can argue

⁶⁴ And, indeed, of its antecedent field, Oriental Studies. See Binder, 1976.

that the greatest contribution of *Orientalism* lies not in its specific critique of ‘Orientalist’ discourses, but in its emblematic challenge to recognise how social and political phenomena that define the ‘Middle East’ are *known*. On this point, Kramer et al. are correct: with *Orientalism* published at a specific time in the history of the US academy where critical spaces were already being expanded through feminist, postmodernist and Third World scholarship (Shohat, 2009, p. 19), and when collective Arab frustration at US involvement in the region was especially pronounced (Falk, 2005, p. 70), the initial ‘shock waves’ (ibid) produced by its powerful critique have become interwoven within Middle East Studies to the extent that much of what has been produced in the field since 1978 has been fundamentally shaped by Said’s work (see Sullivan and Ismael, quoted in Bilgin, 2004, p. 427)⁶⁵. As Fred Halliday put it:

At the core of the argument around ‘Orientalism’ is one central, and enduring, question, namely: in what terms can we as social scientists approach the analysis of contemporary Middle Eastern society...with what concepts, general theories, values, questions?” (1993, p. 145)

As an emblematic critique that pervades the very epistemological contours of Middle East Studies, ‘*Orientalism*’ can thus be held-up as a powerful signifier that continuously enacts a ‘critical awareness’ within the field, whereby contextual nuance and the formation of culturally-specific knowledge are enhanced⁶⁶ as the most suitable means of inquiry, and reductive characterisations of ‘Otherness’ are, in the main, rigorously challenged. The careful treatment of ‘Islamism’ within MES is testament to this critical awareness.

From Islamism to al Qaeda: An Organic Understanding

‘Islamism’, as a social phenomenon, cannot be neutrally defined, given that any such definition is dependent on the analytical framework within which it is engaged⁶⁷. At this juncture, however, it is useful to provide a working definition of ‘Islamism’, with Graham Fuller’s⁶⁸ outline appropriate to this task: “an Islamist is one who believes that Islam as a body of faith has something important to say about how politics and society should be

⁶⁵ I refer here to scholarship that both advances Said’s work, and rejects its underlying premise(s).

⁶⁶ I say ‘enhanced’ here, as this logic was already in place within MES, as derived from its original heritage to Oriental Studies and its subsequent evolution into a field of Area Studies.

⁶⁷ As Volpi puts it: “What constitutes political Islam cannot be encapsulated in a definition that is accepted by all and that refers to exactly the same set of ideas and practices. This is so because the views and processes that are at the heart of Islamism are themselves repeatedly re-constructed by individuals, communities and institutions. What the ‘fundamentals’ of Islam are, just like what the fundamentals of politics are, constitutes the contested terrain on which all debates about political Islam take place.” (2011, p. 9)

⁶⁸ Graham Fuller is broadly recognised within—and, indeed, beyond—Middle East Studies as a leading authority on Islamism.

ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and who seeks to implement this idea in some fashion” (2003, p. xi). In seeking to affect the order of politics and society, Islamism is necessarily situated within a social and political landscape dominated by authoritarian rule, thus tying its specific consideration as an analytical problematique to one of Middle East Studies’ most definitive puzzles: *what explains the persistence of authoritarian rule across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)?*⁶⁹ While Orientalist explanations certainly exist (see, for example, Garfinkle, 2003), they are typically rejected by mainstream analyses that emphasise the structural determinacy of autocratic regimes which impedes effective civil society and negate meaningful democratisation⁷⁰ (see, for example, Schlumberger and Albrecht 2004; Anderson, 1997, 2006; Bellin, 2004; Heydemmann, 2007; Perlmutter, 1981; Vatikiotis, 1987). Clearly, the recent ‘Arab uprisings’ pose a pertinent challenge to this hypothesis (see Bellin, 2012; Gause, 2011; Pace and Cavatorta, 2012), yet as the literature comes to terms with these developments, the central logic that has informed mainstream understandings of regional authoritarianism remains static: the persistence of authoritarianism across the Middle East and North Africa reflects a specific political order that has developed through the relative control of public space (see Brynen et al., 1995, pp. 3-4). Herein, ‘Islamism’ can be conceived as a counter-hegemonic movement that competes for public space through articulations of social and political change. In this vein, sharp distinctions must be made between Islamists that operate within the existing space through ‘participation’ and Islamists that circumvent it through ‘resistance’⁷¹; indeed, as Cavatorta succinctly puts it: “Islamist movements, even within the same country and therefore operating under similar authoritarian constraints and in similar cultural settings differ wildly in terms of ideological beliefs, policy positions and methods of action” (2012, p. 187).

Cavatorta’s sentiments are reflective of the mainstream MES literature in which Islamism is carefully represented as a dialectical phenomenon—defined by, and definitive of, specific Islamist groups (see, for example; Binder, 1988a; Bayat, 2007; Burgat, 2003, 2008; Clark, 2004; Kepel, 1985; Rubin, 1998; Wiktorowicz, 2000, 2001a, 2004). A similar balance is

⁶⁹ It is commonly denoted that an inter-paradigm debate exists along thematic questions of ‘what explains the failure of democratisation’ on the one hand, and ‘what explains the persistence of authoritarianism’ on the other. The entrenchment of authoritarian rule has been such that the former has largely come to be replaced by the latter (Anderson, 2006; Cavatorta, 2012)

⁷⁰ This structural control is typically interpreted as a function of the strategic institutionalisation of power and the use of repressive state apparatuses generated/generative thereof.

⁷¹ As similarly offered by Hafez, “contrary to prevailing academic and journalistic wisdom about why Muslims rebel, violent insurgencies in the Muslim world...generally speaking, are a defensive reaction to predatory state repression” (2003, p. xvi)

extended to representations of ‘Salafism’ (see, for example, Esposito, 1997; Heikel, 1983; Jansen, 1986; Weismann, 2001; Wiktorowicz, 2001b;) and Wahabbism (see, for example, Cook, 1992; Faksh, 1997; Delong-Bas, 2004; Sirriyeh, 1989) as theological bodies of thought—defined by, and definitive of associated, ideologues such as Ibn Taymiyya (see, for example, Ahmed, 1998; Morabia, 1979), Sayyid Qutb (see, for example, Binder, 1988b; Carré, 1984; Haddad, 1983; Khatab, 2002, 2006; Moussalli, 1992) and Mawlana Mawdudi (see, for example, Ahmad, 1967; Lerman, 1981; Nasr, 1996). Likewise, in-depth analyses of the Muslim Brotherhood (see, for example, Aly and Wenner, 1982; Abed-Kotob, 1995; El-Awaisi, 1998; Lia, 1998; Shadid, 1988), HAMAS (see, for example, Abu-Amr, 1993; Barghoutti and Hajjar, 1993; Hroub, 2000; Milton-Edwards, 1992; Taraki, 1989), and Hizb’allah (see, for example, AbuKhalil, 1991; Norton, 1998; Usher, 1997) inform a temporally progressive contextualisation of ‘Islamist extremism/terrorism’, as defined by the social and political strata in which they operate.

This wealth of organic, temporally progressive and contextually comparative understandings is also definitive of how ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ are signified in the post-9/11 MES literature⁷². Indicative works include: Wittes (2008), who distinguishes between three main categorisations of Islamist movements—non-violent political groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, local/national militant Islamist groups such as Hamas and Hizb’allah, and *Takfiri* Islamist groups such as al Qaeda and its affiliates; Burgat (2008), who utilises an analytical dialectic of national and global identity to distinguish between the Muslim Brotherhood(s), violent and non-violent Salafist groups and al Qaeda; Strindberg and Warn (2005), who apply a similar approach to compare Hizb’allah, Palestinian rejectionists and al Qaeda; Gilles Kepel’s authoritative *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* (2006), which intricately situates al Qaeda within a wider context of violent and non-violent Islamism across the MENA; and Devji (2005, 2008), who situates the categories of ‘Jihad’ and ‘militant Islam’ within broader processes of globalisation and cosmopolitan discourses of ‘humanity’.

⁷² Much like Terrorism Studies, prominent studies that focus specifically on ‘al Qaeda’ did not exist prior to 9/11. As the previous analysis shows, however, MES had produced a significant volume of scholarship on the social and political strata from which al Qaeda have arisen, and to which they speak. One can argue, therefore, as I do, that MES had been speaking about ‘al Qaeda’ long before this term was retroactively called into existence by popular security discourses in a post-9/11 milieu.

The Need to 'Know': Expertise and Understanding in a Post-9/11 Milieu

From the above, it is possible to distil certain consistencies with regard to how 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' are 'known' within Middle East Studies. Firstly, Orientalist accounts of 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' as fundamentally 'different', 'new' or 'irrational' are programmatically rejected in place of careful, nuanced understandings. Second, structural influences, such as the hegemony of authoritarianism and its associated closure of political space are consistently highlighted as contextual determinants of al Qaeda and associated groups' use/non-use of violence. Third, the recognition of Islamism as a dialectical phenomenon that is defined by, and definitive of, individual groups allows 'al Qaeda' to be contextualised as at once similar/different to other Islamist groups—both violent and non-violent. Fourth, MES scholarship is accommodative to interpretations of 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' as categories of discourse, thus offering an epistemological counterpoint to essentialised accounts (such as those that dominate Terrorism Studies) while allowing for critical reflection on *how* these discourses have been produced. Fifth, MES draws on a rich history of expertise to provide unparalleled representations of Islamic and Islamist thought as informed by (in)famous theologians such as ibn Tamiyaa, Sayyid Qutb and Mawlana Mawdudi, who are themselves referenced and (re)articulated by al Qaeda and other 'Islamist terrorist' groups. Sixth, Middle East Studies primarily operates a hermeneutic epistemology that facilitates deep Understanding(s) of 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' from the inside-out, as opposed to traditional social scientific approaches, which tend to provide superficial Explanations of 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' from the outside-in.

Yet, despite the virtues of Middle East Studies in providing unrivalled understandings of the social and political strata that underpin 'Islamism'—and, therefore, 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist' as violent manifestations of protest and resistance borne from these strata—the fact that MES did not specifically '*predict*' 9/11 and/or the concomitant rise of 'Islamist terrorism' has solidified an already prominent view that MES is impotent in terms of its original task of policy-relevance. As Heydemann reflects:

Crisis is the handmaiden of introspection...even as demand for expertise on the Middle East and Islam ballooned after September 11, the attacks also generated a wave of criticism and debate about the state of Middle East studies and its track record in helping to make sense of those awful events (2002, p. 102)

The extent of this crisis is perhaps most starkly represented by US congressional bill HR 3077 (2003), which called for the establishment of an International Higher Education Advisory Board with the power to “monitor, apprise and evaluate a sample of activities supported under [Title VI funding] in order to provide recommendations to the Secretary and the Congress for the improvement of programs under the title and to ensure programs meet the purposes of the title” (Lockman, 2004)⁷³. In other words, the output of MES could only be deemed as legitimate if it had provided specific *problem-solving* prescriptions to tackle the threat of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’, which it was considered not to have done. Though HR 3077 was eventually voted down in the US Senate—having passed through the House of Representatives—the policy-orientated move to leverage the provision of Title VI to change the very *nature* of MES scholarship is starkly emblematic of the embedded superiority of ‘scientific’ and predictive approaches over their hermeneutical and critical counterparts. Said’s third principle of ‘Orientalism’ once again comes to mind⁷⁴. That popular discourses of ‘Orientalism’—which MES has so stridently resisted—have become popularly revived at a time when considered understandings of the Middle East are more crucial than ever, is not only tragically ironic, but positively debilitating:

We now have an Islam industry—a popular and political culture that encourages the production of books, articles, and movies that deal with Islam and the Middle East...September 11th has only increased the rate of production of sensational works that promise to reveal the true evil intentions of Muslims and Islam. Scholarly works receive less attention; and the public seems eager to consume books and articles that contain the persistent dogmas and recycled clichés of classical Orientalism, or of the production of the terrorism industry (AbuKhalil, 2004, pp. 130-131)

Deconstructing al Qaeda: Critical Terrorism Studies

First Order Critique and the ‘Broad Church’ of Critical Terrorism Studies

Formulaically conceived between 2005-2007⁷⁵ (see Jackson, 2007a), Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) has rapidly developed through numerous books, articles, conferences, research

⁷³ As highlighted by Elizabeth Brumfeild, the establishment of an adjunct “seven-member Advisory Board, composed of two representatives from federal agencies with national security interests, would have authority to investigate international studies centers activities and to make recommendations intended to promote the development of programs that will reflect diverse perspectives and the full range of views on world regions, foreign language, and international affairs” (2004)

⁷⁴ “3) The Orient is eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself; therefore it is assumed that a highly generalised and systematic vocabulary for describing the Orient from a Western standpoint is inevitable and even scientifically ‘objective’” (Said, 1978, p. 301)

⁷⁵ Though ‘critical’ analyses on terrorism had been proffered for decades, Critical Terrorism Studies was specifically realised as a standalone sub-discipline through the establishment of the Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Contemporary Political Violence (CSRV) at Aberystwyth University in 2005 (Jackson et al.,

projects and the establishment of a dedicated journal, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*⁷⁶. Critical Terrorism Studies is, of course, defined by the body of knowledge that its literature brings to bear⁷⁷, but much akin to Critical Security Studies (see Booth, 2005a; Brincat et al., 2012; Krause and Williams, 1997; Wyn Jones, 1999), its programme is explicitly multi-faceted, embracing an accommodating unity for critical perspectives on terrorism on the one hand, and a normative commitment to emancipatory progress on the other. Consequently, it is most prudent to interpret Critical Terrorism Studies by its composite ‘images’⁷⁸.

In its first image, “CTS can be understood as a critical orientation, a sceptical attitude, and a willingness to challenge received wisdom and knowledge about terrorism...a very broad church that allows multiple perspectives...to be brought into the same forum with the attendant benefits for intellectual dialogue and debate” (Jackson et al., 2009b, p. 222). In order for CTS to meet these criteria, it must, in Gunning’s words, “explicitly challenge state-centric, problem-solving perspectives and call into question existing definitions, assumptions, and power structures.” (2007a, p. 237). ‘Orthodox terrorism studies’—as it has become retroactively signified in CTS discourse—is thereby challenged on “its poor methods and theories, its state centrality, its problem-solving orientation and its institutional and intellectual links to state security projects” (Jackson, 2007, p. 1; also see Gunning 2007, Jackson et al. 2009; 2011) through the application of ‘first order critique’, which “criticis[es] the discourse on its own terms and expos[es] the events and perspectives that the discourse fails to acknowledge or address” (Jackson, 2009, p. 74). A number of works are indicative. For example, Toros (2008) takes Terrorism Studies to task on its manifest lack of fieldwork; Stohl (2012) examines how the application of quantitative methodologies determines popular

2009b, p. 3); the Critical Studies on Terrorism Working Group (CSTWG) in 2006, and a dedicated conference entitled ‘Is it time for a Critical Terrorism Studies?’ in October 2006 (Jackson, 2007a, pp. 225-226). Its ‘core commitments’ were subsequently published in a Symposium section of *European Political Science* (2007, Vol. 6, No. 3)

⁷⁶ This journal was officially established in 2007. Its first issue was published in January 2008.

⁷⁷ Here, I apply Richard Jackson’s criteria for the definition of Terrorism Studies to Critical Terrorism Studies: “As with any academic field, terrorism studies is in large part constituted by an identifiable and fairly consistent set of shared assumptions, narratives, and labels about its primary subject—a widely and broadly accepted body of ‘knowledge’ concerning the definition, nature, effects, threat, causes, and responses to the phenomenon called ‘terrorism’—as well as an accepted array of knowledge-generating practices. These narratives, assumptions, and knowledge-generating practices function to define the field’s ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical-normative approaches and can be found in much of the field’s primary output, particularly by its leading scholars. In addition, they are reproduced continuously in conferences, seminars, media commentary, public reports, databases, and expert testimony to official bodies.” (2009, p. 66)

⁷⁸ I am, by no means, the first author to reflect upon the multiple facets of Critical Terrorism Studies (see, for example, Jackson, 2007a, 2009; Gunning, 2007a, 2007b; Breen Smyth, 2007; Jarvis 2009). Whilst my reading of CTS draws influence from these works, it provides a nuanced critique of its contents with a parallel focus on how ‘poststructuralist’ analyses are treated therein.

‘truths’ on terrorism; Miller and Mills (2009; 2010) outline how ‘terrorism expertise’ shapes dominant understandings of terrorism; while Blakeley (2007, 2009) challenges the common consensus that ‘terrorism’ exists as an explicitly sub-state phenomenon by (re)introducing the concept and very *possibility* of Western state terrorism into prominent terrorism discourse(s) (see also Jackson et al. 2010). It is within this image that we initially encounter ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’; albeit indirectly, through the discursive interlocutor of ‘9/11’⁷⁹.

Introducing the seminal CTS text, *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (2009), the authors offer:

In the years since the 9/11 attacks, the study of terrorism has undergone a major transformation...and is probably one of the fastest expanding areas of research in the Western academic world. However, much of the literature is beset by a number of problems, limiting its potential for producing rigorous empirical findings and genuine theoretical advancement. In response to these weaknesses in the broader field, a small but increasing number of scholars have begun to articulate a critical perspective on contemporary issues of terrorism.” (Jackson et al. 2009a, p. i)

Similarly, in ‘a critical research agenda for the study of political terror’, Breen Smyth opens her argument as follows:

A significant proportion of recent literature on ‘terrorism’ is characterised by a number of troublesome features. First, it tends towards a-historicity, presuming that ‘terrorism’ began on 11 September 2001 and ignoring the historical experiences of numerous countries and the already burgeoning literature on terrorism published prior to 2001. Second, it exceptionalises the experience of the United States (US) and al Qaeda, positing it as a ‘new type of terrorism [that] threatens the world’ (Sageman, 2004: vii). The lines that had been drawn in the 1990s between ‘old’ and ‘new’ terrorism...are now accompanied by a deeper line between pre- and post-September 11...the field shows a worrying tendency to ‘wipe the slate clean’, betraying a focus on method at the expense of motivation and political context. (2007, pp. 260-261)

By consistently foregrounding ‘9/11’ in relation to the ‘troublesome features’ of ‘orthodox terrorism studies’, ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ are tangentially signified *as* ‘orthodox terrorism studies’ to the extent that they represent an underlying *problem-solving* logic that must be deconstructed and, ultimately, transcended. Attendant questions ask not *who/what is al Qaeda?* and *what does al Qaeda want?*, but *what does ‘al Qaeda’ represent?* and *what are its associated effects?*

⁷⁹ By ‘9/11’, I also include reference(s) to its various synonyms, such as ‘11 September’, ‘September 11th’, and so on. This is true for all uses of this signifier throughout the dissertation.

Representing 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' in Critical Terrorism Studies

A scan of the existing CTS literature shows that of 180 articles published in *Critical Studies on Terrorism* to July 2014, a solitary article contains 'al Qaeda'⁸⁰ in the title: 'Six rather unexplored assumptions about al-Qaeda' (Geltzer, 2008). Here, the author engages with prominent debates within the 'orthodox terrorism studies' literature, and reflects on how 'al Qaeda' is situated therein. Alternative analyses typically engage with 'al Qaeda' vis-à-vis the categories of 'Islamic', 'religious' and/or 'Jihadist' terrorism. For example, Gunning and Jackson problematise reductive discourses of 'religious terrorism'⁸¹, which serve to 'depoliticise and securitise' the political logic of so-called 'religious terrorists' (2011, p. 382); Bartolucci (2010) investigates how the political elite in Morocco consolidates power by strategically recalling the threat of 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamic extremism'⁸²; while Richmond and Franks chart the effects of an 'Islamic extremism' discourse in Jammu and Kashmir, which renders "debate or questions relating to root causes [as] more or less non-existent" (2009, p. 208). Richard Jackson's accomplished deconstruction of 'Islamic terrorism' is perhaps most ardently representative of this literature, aiming to:

draw attention to the contestable and politicized character of the dominant narratives, the ways in which 'Islamic terrorism' is interpreted and socially constructed as an existential threat and the means by which broader discourse functions to promote a number of discrete political projects and reify a particular kind of political and social order. (2007b, p. 425)

A second, interrelated strand of the literature engages with the processes and effects of counterterrorism practices, which have been fundamentally shaped by 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' as associated categories of threat. Here, Appleby (2010) highlights the counter-productive attempts of the British Labour government to distil the label of 'terrorism' from 'Islam'; Ojanen (2010) examines the counter-productive processes of terrorist profiling in the name of 'countering terrorism'; de Graaf and de Graaff (2010) reflect on the epistemological frameworks that inform counterterrorism knowledge; Rod Thornton (2011) critiques counterterrorism practices at UK universities, including the surveillance of library activity; Kassimeris and Jackson (2012) examine how the discursive categories of 'threat and blame' contained within counterterrorism discourses perpetuate discriminatory practices against British Muslims by constructing Muslim culture as 'antithetical' and 'other; while

⁸⁰ Inclusive of its semantic variants, such as 'al Qaida', 'al Q'aida', and so on.

⁸¹ With al Qaeda seen as its 'quintessential terrorist group' (Gunning and Jackson, 2011, p. 377)

⁸² As Bartolucci submits: "'terrorism' is widely associated with 'Islamist/ic terrorism' and 'Islamist/ic radicalism', and since 2001 it has become increasingly associated with the al-Qaeda network" (2010, p. 123)

Hickman et al., (2012) reflects on particular social adjustments made by British Muslims in response to their popular accreditation as ‘suspect communities’⁸³.

By highlighting the lived experiences of terrorism subjects in various contexts, the everyday affects/effects of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ are crystallised as sources of critique and form a target for normative change; CTS does not simply seek to deconstruct prominent narratives of terrorism, it seeks to change them. It is in this light that CTS’ second image becomes apparent, as a project for emancipatory progress.

Critical Terrorism Studies: Emancipation, Poststructuralism and the Future of al Qaeda

CTS’ engagement with the concept of emancipation is complex. On the one hand, there is a recognition that CTS must continue to facilitate “scholarship that seeks to problematise traditional approaches to the study of terrorism but which may not necessarily sign up to an explicitly emancipatory political agenda” (McDonald, 2007, p. 252). On the other hand, there is a tacit agreement that CTS must progress beyond a deconstructive logic most immediately definitive of its first image, or risk descending into irrelevance. As Jackson et al. put it, “the CTS project will most likely succeed or fail to the extent that it can go beyond critique and deconstruction and generate a clear, achievable, and credible research agenda of its own (in which critique and deconstruction will nevertheless remain a central concern)” (2009b, p. 216). From this perspective, Critical Terrorism Studies is both made possible and constrained by a circular logic of deconstruction that can only be arrested through the provision of ontological fixity. Critical Theory provides this fixity, offering a ‘philosophical anchorage’ (Booth, 1999, p. 43, quoted in McDonald, 2007, p. 253) that situates CTS between the dichotomous poles of essentialism and ‘poststructuralism’:

[A]pplying insights from the Welsh School and other Critical Theory sources...to the study of terrorism can offer an important alternative to both traditional and post-structuralist approaches to terrorism. It offers a powerful tool for the investigation and critique of the dominant approach. But it also offers a rich, theoretically-grounded framework through which an alternative conceptualisation of terrorism and a concrete research agenda emerges—thus marking a crucial difference from post-structuralist work which has critiqued traditional studies but has largely failed to move beyond deconstructing existing discourses (Toros and Gunning, 2009, pp. 88-89)

⁸³ Such measures include: “not discussing politics (e.g. at work), avoiding certain areas of the city, being careful on the telephone and Internet and taking care not to mention al-Qaeda or terrorism, even in jokes” (Hickman et al., 2012, p. 98)

By employing components of Critical Theory, CTS operates a ‘self-reflexive minimal foundationalism’ (ibid, p. 92) that prioritises discursive representations of ‘reality’, but maintains a basic distinction between subject and object. Consequently, ‘emancipation’ is contributory to two functions: firstly, in moving CTS *away from* both ‘traditional’ and ‘poststructuralist’ understandings of terrorism; and second, in moving CTS *towards* an ideal of realisable progress. While a ‘complete’ delineation of CTS’ normative commitments is not possible⁸⁴, Jackson et al. provide a basic outline:

Despite post-structuralist objections to the notion of emancipation and its past implication in hegemonic projects, we see an emancipatory commitment to ending avoidable human suffering in most critical research on terrorism. In this, we follow Richard Wyn Jones (2005: 217-220) and Hayward Alker (2005: 192) in positing that all critical research derives from an underlying conception of a different order and thus contains an ‘emancipatory’ element. Here, we understand emancipation as a process of continuous immanent critique rather than any particular endpoint or universal grand narrative; a process of trying to construct ‘concrete utopias’ by realising the unfulfilled potential of existing structures, freeing individuals from unnecessary structural constraints, and the democratisation of the public sphere...Within the context of terrorism studies, we see it as a normative commitment to both ending the use of terrorist tactics...and to addressing the conditions that can be seen to impel actors to resort to terrorist tactics. (Jackson et al., 2009b, p. 224)

As intimated here—and, indeed, as explicitly stated elsewhere within the literature—CTS’ intellectual lineage in ‘Welsh School’ Critical Security Studies (CSS) is fundamental to its second image as an emancipatory project⁸⁵. The appropriate starting point therefore lays with Ken Booth who posits that at its most basic, “Emancipation is the freeing of people (as individuals and groups) from those physical and human constraints which stop them carrying out what they would freely choose to do” (1991, p. 319). In this vein, “To be emancipatory, acts and strategies of resistance must be driven by an *explicit ethic*—an ‘idea of the ideal’ [emphasis added]” (2012, p. 71). By committing to an explicit ideal of ending ‘the use of terrorist tactics’ and ‘addressing the conditions that...impel actors to resort to terrorist tactics’ (Jackson et al., 2009b, p. 224), CTS certainly aligns with Booth’s vision. It is, however, through an intellectual affiliation with Richard Wyn Jones in particular that CTS’ vision of ‘emancipation’ becomes more concretely refined.

⁸⁴ Indeed, this is not possible, even on CTS’ own terms, as the dialectical process of ‘immanent critique’ is itself held as continuously ‘incomplete’.

⁸⁵ Given this shared lineage—and CTS’ concomitant status as a relatively ‘immature’ literature—it is instructive to develop a focused explication of its second image in tandem with CSS’ more established emancipatory framework.

Building on the work of Booth, Wyn Jones has advanced an image of CSS as a *project* of normative progress, made realisable through the distillation of ‘concrete utopias’ from abstract ‘ethical ideals’⁸⁶ (see Wyn Jones, 1999, pp. 76-78; 2005, pp. 229-232). Three criteria are provided towards this end. First, “visions of concrete utopias must be consistent with whatever deeper notions of the grounding of emancipatory potential are deployed” (1999, p. 77). This principle is immediately identifiable in the first image of CTS, which facilitates direct engagement with orthodox discourses of terrorism as a means towards their transcendence. From this perspective, the ‘first order critique’ of CTS operates in service to an ‘ethical ideal’ where ‘terrorism’ is no longer talked about, precisely by talking about ‘terrorism’.

Second, “prescriptions...of a more emancipated order must focus on realizable utopias...If they succumb to the temptation of suggesting a blueprint for an emancipated order that is unrelated to the present, then critical theorists have no way of justifying their arguments epistemologically” (ibid, p. 77). CTS scholars have highlighted a number of strategies that situate emancipatory progress within ‘presently-existing’ frameworks (see Jackson et al. 2009b, pp. 229-231). CTS’ commitment to the re-activation of ‘subjugated knowledge(s)’ on terrorism is of particular interest here. This strategy has progressed on two fronts. (i) With the recognition that “Critical approaches to the study of terrorism are not new” (Jackson, 2009a, p. 1) and that the vast majority of scholarship on ‘terrorism’ was published outside of terrorism studies between 1988 and 2001 (Gordon, 2004, p. 109; cited in Gunning, 2007a, p. 237), CTS has leveraged its influence as an established academic field to foment increased exposure of existing works, by means of consistent referencing within the literature⁸⁷ and the publication of retrospective book reviews and commentaries in *Critical Studies on Terrorism* (see, for example Jackson, 2009c, Townshend, 2009) in particular. (ii) CTS has committed to the re-activation of relatable epistemological frameworks that align with ‘critical’ interpretations of terrorism. As Jackson et al. put it, “it is imperative to broaden the research agenda to include the wider social context, other forms of violence, and non-violent behaviour in terrorism research...Here, terrorism research can benefit from cognate disciplines and theories, such as social movement theory, area studies, and anthropology,

⁸⁶ As Wyn Jones notes, this call for more ‘concrete’ realisations of abstract notions of ‘emancipation’ returns to a wider discontent with Adorno and Horkheimer’s ‘unwillingness’ to “move beyond very generalized exhortations concerning emancipation, empowerment, freedom, and happiness to provide descriptions of the characteristics of a more emancipated society.” (2005, p. 229)

⁸⁷ These works include: Herman, 1982; Herman and O’Sullivan, 1989; George, 1991a; Zulaika and Douglass, 1996; Chomsky and Herman, 1979; Chomsky, 1981; Zulaika, 1984.

among many others” (2009b, p. 230). To date, CTS has most ardently facilitated the ‘de-subjugation’ of anthropological Understanding, which, as Sluka argues: “brings to critical terrorism studies what it brings to the study of human conflict in all its forms—a *cultural* perspective...and the ‘Enlightenment vision’ that research should be applied for the improvement of the human condition [emphasis in original]” (1992; cited in Sluka, 2009, p. 138). Similarly, Dalacoura (2009) has highlighted the potential of Middle East Studies to provide deeply contextualised analyses of terrorism, while Jackson (2012, p. 15) has recently pointed to MES as a specific target for (further) ‘de-subjugation’. To date, considered alignment between MES and CTS has not been realised, though their dominant epistemological frameworks are surely compatible towards a CTS vision of emancipatory progress.

Third, “in addition to basing their visions of concrete utopias on realizable, immanent possibilities, critical theorists should also restate their understanding of emancipation as a process rather than an end point...There is always room for improvement; there is always unfinished business in the task of emancipation” (Wyn Jones, 1999, pp. 77-78). This criterion in particular must be set against Wyn Jones and Booth’s explicit dedication to praxis⁸⁸, which forms a necessary condition of ‘real-world’ progress: “at the end of the day, there has to be an attempt to impact upon practice; that remains the ultimate test of the usefulness of the critical approach (Wyn Jones, 2012, p. 100)⁸⁹. On this point, CTS scholars are in agreement: “If a critically-informed research praxis is distinguished by its explicit commitment to human emancipation, an important component of CTS research is to try to influence policy...not being concerned with policy relevance is not an option for scholars committed to human emancipation” (Jackson et al. 2009b, p. 226). CSS and CTS have harnessed suitable strategies towards this end. For example, Wyn Jones and Booth have proffered support for ‘legitimate’ social movements (Wyn Jones, 1999, p. 161; cited in Peoples and Vaughan-Williams, 2010, p. 27) and ‘progressive’ organisations, such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International and Oxfam (Booth, 1991, p. 326 cited in *ibid*, p. 28). Similarly, CTS scholars have highlighted the emancipatory potentialities of intellectual activism that supports “non-violent action against repression” (Herring, 2008, p. 197) and facilitates the (re)articulation of

⁸⁸ As Wyn Jones puts it, “part of the task of theory with emancipatory intent is to delineate and clarify the choices being faced in the practical realm...theory can give direction to action; theory and practice can be consciously unified in praxis.” (1999, 76)

⁸⁹ Ken Booth similarly reflects on this point: “Praxis is the coming together of one’s theoretical commitment to critique and political orientation to emancipation in projects of reconstruction” (2005b, p. 182)

subjugated voices from the global South (see *ibid*; Raphael, 2009). Finally, CSS scholars have called for attendant analyses to penetrate mainstream debates on ‘security’ more deeply (see Wyn Jones, 2012), while CTS scholars have called for similar influence with regard to ‘terrorism’ (see Jackson, 2008)⁹⁰.

While CTS scholars have reflected on the potential ‘dangers’ of shaping research output to policy requirements, there is, nonetheless, an assertion that “it is possible to maintain access to power and critical distance at the same time, but it takes a great deal of care, sensitivity, and intellectual struggle.” (2009b, p. 236). Much of this ‘care and sensitivity’ is, however, clearly predicated on an identity of CTS that is situated *away* from the (supposed) philosophical relativism of ‘poststructuralism’, which bears little relevance to ‘real-world’ concerns or, therefore, policy-relevance:

[I]n contrast to post-structuralist studies, a Critical Theory approach does not necessarily limit us to examining the ‘discourse of terrorism’—important though that is—but permits the study of a form of violence that can be called ‘terrorism’... It can accept that there is a category of violence formed by its repetition, to be understood within a particular socio-historical context (Toros and Gunning, 2009, p. 92)

[T]here is a danger that critical scholarship, with its understandable concern for interrogating the discursive foundations upon which the study of terrorism is founded, will become so self-conscious that it becomes simply the study of its own (and other) discourses and progressively disengages from the empirical study of political violence and its foundations in the ‘real’ world... A related danger is that CTS will come to be viewed as a largely post-structuralist or constructivist project with theory associated ontological and epistemological positions, and other approaches... will be discouraged from participating in CTS’ activities and debates (Jackson et al., 2009b, p. 233)

The irony here is that despite repeated calls from associated scholars to avoid CTS’ association with—or, indeed, its denigration into—‘poststructuralism’, an extended explication as to what constitutes ‘poststructuralism’—beyond its obvious status as an intellectual outlier to CTS’ second image as an emancipatory project—is conspicuous by its absence. Extending legitimacy to ‘poststructuralism’ only insofar as its associated logic of deconstruction is contributory to its first image, CTS effectively defines the subject of terrorism as one “in search of a vernacular expression of transcendence ensconced within the immanent matrix of modernity” (Pasha, 2012, p. 108). The explicit support of ‘legitimate’ social movements, and ‘progressive’ NGOs made by Wyn Jones and Booth, along with CTS

⁹⁰ This is not to say that these categories are mutually exclusive, of course; rather, it is merely to note that CSS focuses more intently on the category of ‘security’, while CTS is focused more intently on the category of ‘terrorism’.

scholars' calls to embrace intellectual activism, form succinct cases in point. As Wyn Jones argues, "Politics involves making choices: choices between different visions of the ends pursued, and choices between different means of pursuing them" (2005, p. 229): CTS' choice to pursue a political vision of emancipatory progress towards the 'end' of terrorism reifies a critical space in which 'poststructuralism' is to be seen, but not heard. As Pasha argues:

[T]he yardstick of purity can only produce exclusionary spaces of praxis. Recognition of injustice and inequality requires judgement. [Critical International Relations Theory] cannot be faulted if it welds analysis with judgement. The problem...lies elsewhere: in the singularity enclosed within the idea of emancipation and a conception of the subject of the emancipatory project that refuses to step outside a particular...cosmology (2012, p. 112)

Conclusion

At one of many conferences organised around the 10-year anniversary of 9/11, Thomas Hegghammer began the opening session with a rhetorical question: "what did we know about al-Qaeda before 9/11?...The short answer is not a whole lot. With the exception of a few scholars like Giles Kepel, the academy largely missed the rise of al-Qaeda" (Hegghammer, 2012, pp. 26-27)⁹¹. On the face of it, Hegghammer's assertions are absolutely correct; the dearth of direct scholarly knowledge on al Qaeda forms a paraxial companion to the perceived failings of the intelligence community, the depth of which became clear on 11 September 2001. The subsequent clamour for retrospective knowledge on 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' has produced an avalanche of scholarship that has sought to capture these phenomena—with *problem-solving/Explanation* frames of interpretation dominating over alternative perspectives. The recent publication of *al Qaeda* (Cruickshank, 2012) forms an emblematic case in point. Over 2,304 pages in length, this five-volume anthology—heralded as "*the go-to resource*" and "destined to be valued a vital one-stop research and pedagogic resource"—is dominated by counterterrorism analysts, assorted policy-makers and identifiable Terrorism Studies scholars. Indeed, the contributions of Marc Sageman, Bruce Hoffman, Peter Bergen and Paul Cruickshank comprise 34 chapters out of a total of 108 or 31%. In stark contrast, contributions from identifiable MES scholars, such as Quintan Wiktorowicz, Thomas Hegghammer, Mohammed Hafez and Brynjar Lia, comprise 8 out of

⁹¹ For full conference proceeding, of 'Ten Years Later: Insights on al-Qaeda's Past and Future through Captured Records', see Fenner et al., 2012.

108 articles or 7%. The anthology does not contain a single contribution from an identifiable Critical Terrorism Studies scholar. *Al Qaeda* is available at a price of \$1,400⁹².

Operating as a most powerful ‘regime of truth’ predicated on the perceived legitimacy of ‘good’ social science and policy-relevance, the prioritisation of a *problem-solving/Explanation* orthodoxy in *knowing* ‘al Qaeda’ has come at the expense of alternative frames of analysis. Not knowing *specifically* about ‘al Qaeda’ before 9/11 does not imply that such knowledge did not exist; rather it implies that there is a knowable entity called ‘al Qaeda’, it poses a significant threat to international security, and social scientific inference represents the best means towards its apprehension. The careful, organic Understanding provided by Middle East Studies may not have spoken of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’, but it had been producing deeply contextualised analyses on the social and political strata within which ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ have been situated since long before ‘9/11’. The veritable fetish for *problem-solving* expertise that these attacks have elicited must be put into longitudinal perspective.

Critical Terrorism Studies has chosen its position of relative exile; a counter-hegemonic field of critique which seeks to engage with orthodox discourses of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ in order to transcend them. In seeking to provide an accommodating unity for alternative perspectives foreclosed by the epistemological contours of ‘orthodox terrorism studies’, its first image as a ‘broad church’ provides an ‘open’ space for critique that creates a false unity for contending perspectives. CTS’ first image is symbiotically defined by its second image as an emancipatory project, thus inculcating a vision of emancipatory progress that limits the subject of terrorism to one that is situated within particular cosmology of Enlightenment thought. The potential perpetuation of this image bears significant ramifications not only for how we ‘know’ ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ at present, but for how they may become ‘known’ in the future.

An alternative articulation of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ is required.

⁹² Described as a “collection of the best scholarly research and serious writing on Al Qaeda” that “will be welcomed by researchers, students, and counter-terrorism specialists”, one must wonder to whom the \$1,400 price is most realistically affordable.

Chapter 2

Re-Placing Reflexivity and Rigour within a Poststructuralist/Intertextual Ontology

“What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?”

(Derrida, 1982, pp. 320-321)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to open a critical space within which an alternative reading of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ may be provided. Towards this end, deeply ingrained notions of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘rigour’—as located in specific ‘critical’ analytical programmes—are deconstructed by exposing them to components of Discourse Theory. Performing this deconstruction *in situ* with Discourse Theory allows for key elements of these programmes to be (re-)moulded into a composite (discourse) analytical framework that facilitates the close analysis of ‘language in use’⁹³, whilst recognising the necessarily contingent nature of all interpretations derived from such reading(s), as pertains to the a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology to which Discourse Theory speaks⁹⁴.

I begin this deconstruction by problematising dominant readings of ‘biographical reflexivity’ and ‘reflexive methodology’, which endow the author with the capacity to *capture* a unified ‘self’ by virtue of providing (auto)biographical reflections on how one’s subjective influences are manifest in the authorship of critique. I view this endeavour as foreclosed by a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology such that the author—as a subject permeated by

⁹³ It should be noted that the close examination of ‘language in use’ is typically foreclosed by prominent applications of Discourse Theory. The theoretical framework outlined in this Chapter—and in Chapter 3—however, will synthesise the close analysis of language in use in a way that is compatible with the dominant onto-epistemological commitments of Discourse Theory.

⁹⁴ It is by this operation that prominent notions of ‘reflexivity’ and ‘rigour’ will retain their definitive functions as key components of social/political analysis, but will be suitably adjusted via their exposition to a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology. Hence, I conceive reflexivity and rigour as being *re-placed* in/by the preceding analysis, rather than *replaced*, per the title of this Chapter.

ontological lack—can only exist in a permanent state of becoming and is, thus, not amenable to essential capture⁹⁵.

Second, I challenge dominant notions of sociological reflexivity as presented in Giddens and Beck's 'reflexive modernity', and Pierre Bourdieu's 'reflexive sociology'. In the case of Beck and Giddens, they posit that (second) modernity is defined by (and definitive of) an inherent capacity for individuals to biographically write their own social (self-)identities. Problematised via Discourse Theory, one finds that this approach effectively characterises individuals as social *agents* (rather than as subjects) that are situated *outside* the heterogeneous configuration of the social that secures the very category of 'self-identity' to be contingently (im)possible. Bourdieu's 'reflexive sociology', which more ardently recognises the contingent nature of social practice(s), nevertheless prioritises the determinacy of *objective structures* of meaning, which effectively define the space under which social identities can be 'reflexively' created. This premise is similarly rejected on account of the fact that *objective structures* cannot exist as such; rather, *pace* Laclau, objective structures of meaning can only 'exist' as images of impossible fulfilment towards which a subject can only strive, but never fulfil. A more radical notion of 'reflexivity' is thereby required.

Third, I deconstruct the false incommensurability between 'rigour' and 'reflexivity' as reified by two prominent approaches to (critical) discourse analysis: Discursive Psychology and Critical Discourse Analysis. It will be argued that 'reflexivity' is too often assumed as inherent to all 'critical' discourse analyses without being sufficiently incorporated into the *practice* of discourse analysis itself. Similarly, the 'rigorous' quality of discourse analyses is too often premised on social scientific indicators of (il)legitimacy, which are orientated towards the essentialisation of knowledge as being 'true' beyond an author's presence in the production of this knowledge. I argue that a productive synthesis between reflexivity *and* rigour can be facilitated in a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology, which allows for close reading(s) of 'language in use' to concomitantly reflect on more 'abstract' phenomena of discourse (and vice-versa), thus addressing a noted weakness in prominent applications of Discourse Theory which focus only on the latter.

⁹⁵ To capture the 'self' by virtue of uncovering one's influences on the research process is, thus, an impossible exercise, as the identity of the author can only be contingently grounded by a multitude of interpretations owned not by the author, but by the reader.

Ultimately, I present the footnote as an appropriate mechanism to facilitate a *rigorous* analysis of discourse which is imbued with a *reflexive* acceptance that the meanings produced thereof can never belong to the author who has committed them to text⁹⁶. To analyse discourse in this vein is not to attempt to uncover a hermeneutic ‘truth’ that lies *behind* any text; rather, it is to actively release the ‘centralised meaning’ of any/all written arguments to a multitude of interpretations that can only be made in exteriority to the author’s ‘original’ intentions (intentions which could never have existed as a totality in the first place, per the radical heterogeneity of the political which overflows the production of all ‘centralised’ meaning). To accept and subsequently *embrace* this dynamic—by foregrounding the primary sources by which an author ~~grounds~~ their argument(s) to text—is to effectively re-place reflexivity and rigour in a poststructuralist ontology.

Capturing the ‘Self’: Autobiography in Reflexive Methodology

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to be ‘reflexive’, in the first instance, is to be “capable of turning, deflecting, or bending (something) back” (2009). Tracing definitions of the ‘reflexive’ from the spheres of linguistics⁹⁷ and logic⁹⁸ into literary theory⁹⁹ and the social sciences¹⁰⁰, reflexivity becomes increasingly signified by a recognition of the self in the research process—an analytical gaze ‘bent back’ towards the author and, further, towards their embedded subjectivities. As Michael Lynch opines, “Like confession, reflexive analysis does not come naturally”, rather “it requires a tutorial under the guidance of a particular programme” (2000, p. 36). Lynch’s analogy is correct insofar as it is generally asserted that acting as or becoming a reflexive researcher entails some sort of struggle against the grain of more ‘orthodox’ forms of social analysis¹⁰¹, which emphasise the need to maintain objectivity in the research process¹⁰². Authors such as Etherington (2004), Watt (2007) and Schon (1983), for example, stress the need to ‘become’ reflexive researchers and provide specific

⁹⁶ Be this text inscribed on paper or screen.

⁹⁷ “*Grammar and Linguistics*. Of a grammatical element or its meaning: that refers back to the subject of the clause or sentence in which it is used [emphasis in original]” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009)

⁹⁸ “*Math. and Logic*. Of a relation: that always holds between a term and itself. [emphasis in original]” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009)

⁹⁹ “*Literary Theory*. Self-referential, self-reflexive; *spec.* (of a text, artwork, etc.) that consciously calls attention to itself or its process or production. [emphasis in original]” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009)

¹⁰⁰ “*Social Sciences*. Of a method, theory, etc.: that takes account of itself or esp. of the effect of the personality or presence of the researcher on what is being investigated. [emphasis in original]” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009)

¹⁰¹ With regard to the study of global politics, I refer to the categories of Explaining and *problem-solving* theory in particular. See Chapter 1.

¹⁰² This is primarily constructed as achievable through subscription to centralised (primarily positivist) notions of methodological rigour. See *Designing Social Inquiry* (King et al., 1994; see also Chapter 1)

guidelines towards this end—pieces of scholarship akin to the ‘self-help’ genre of literature designed to guide the businessperson towards ‘success’¹⁰³. Just as ‘success’ for the businessperson is portrayed as something to be obtained through the undertaking of a sequence of necessary steps, ‘reflexivity’ is vaunted as a status to be achieved by the social science practitioner through a process of ‘reflection’¹⁰⁴.

Essentially, reflection enables the ‘reflexive researcher’ to realise a mimetic sense of self-presence within their work by explicitly capturing the embedded subjectivities that inform the research process. As Wanda Pillow puts it, “a focus on how does who I am, who I have been, who do I think I am, and how do I feel affect[s] data collection and analysis” (2003, p. 176). In order to be sufficiently reflective/reflexive, written articulations of one’s appropriate influences must be sufficiently represented within the *text*, with autobiography popularly prescribed as an appropriate mechanism for self-representation. Thus, as Smith puts it, while biography ‘writes lives’,

Autobiography is a special case of life writing...[it] suggests the power of agency in social and literary affairs. It gives voice to people long denied access. By example, it usually...eulogizes the subjective, the ‘important part of human existence’ over the objective, ‘less significant parts of life.’ It blurs the borders of fiction and non-fiction. And, by example, it is a sharp critique of positivistic social science. (1994, p. 288)

This brief extract highlights two key considerations. Firstly, autobiography is an articulatory device imbued with the potential to represent an author’s influences on their research output, hence, it stands in contrast to positivistic social science, which minimises the notion of ‘self-expression’ through scientific standards of ‘good practice’. Second, autobiography is distinguished as a ‘method apart’ from regular forms of biographical reflexivity¹⁰⁵ that are embedded within a range of critical approaches—particularly those that engage in interrogation(s)/deconstruction(s) of perceived ‘Others’ (see, for example, Campbell, 1992;

¹⁰³ Prominent titles in this genre include: *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* (Covey, 2004), *On Becoming A Leader* (Bennis, 2009), *How to Be a Star at Work* (Kelley, 1998) and *Now, Discover Your Strengths* (Buckingham and Clifton, 2001)

¹⁰⁴ For more in-depth accounts on the perceived differences between reflexivity and reflection, see Bleakely, 1999; Hummell and Choplin, 2000; May, 1998.

¹⁰⁵ Here, I refer to the work of Wengraf et al. (see also Chamberlayne et al., 2003) who argue that the social sciences have experienced a ‘biographical turn’ in which “personal and social meanings, as bases of action, gain greater prominence” (Wengraf et al., 2002, p. 245). A similar ‘narrative turn’ is currently in vogue in contemporary International Relations scholarship; see, for example: Blieker and Brigg, 2010; Brigg and Blieker, 2010; Doty, 2010; Edkins, 2013; Lowenheim, 2010; Inayatullah, 2011a, 2011b

Elshtein, 1995; Gray, 2008; Foley and Valenzuela, 2005)¹⁰⁶. Whilst it can be argued that autobiography and biography are both critical devices to challenge the orthodox basis of social scientific inquiry, *autobiography* assumes that effectively recognising the self within the research process is a function of agency.

By affording a heightened sense of agency to the author—who is, inescapably, a subject—the autobiographical method has, perhaps unavoidably, facilitated a marked tendency towards self-excess (see Kenway and McLeod, 2004; Maton, 2003; Pels 2000; Woolgar, 1988). Is it really necessary, for example, to outline one’s experience of a childhood in rural Ireland in order to justify one’s research on migration (see Gray, 2008)¹⁰⁷? Does the disclosure of personal vignettes such as those of Humphreys (2005) really serve as a guide to a greater standard of reflexivity in qualitative research, as he opines¹⁰⁸? Perhaps such authors are correct in arguing that greater degrees of self-description result in higher levels of self-reflexivity, yet it can also be argued that there is an inevitable contradiction in the use of ‘autobiography’ as a means to intimately engage with the personal ‘self’, as its continued use by multiple ‘selves’ explicates ‘autobiography’ to a macro-methodological category that is very much removed from the individuality of the intimate ‘self’ from which the very concept of autobiography is born(e). If we recognise a transferable methodology of ‘knowing the self’ and apply it to individual selves, then can it not be argued that this serves as an implicit acceptance that ‘individual selves’ exist as relatively transferable objects under the encapsulating concept of ‘autobiography’? In this vein, it could be argued that the ‘self’ is reduced to a fundamental essence to be obtained by the ‘reflexive researcher’—again—much

¹⁰⁶ As Denzin and Lincoln remark in relation to ethnographical and anthropological studies in particular, “Researching the native, the indigenous Other, while claiming to engage in value-free inquiry for the human disciplines is over. Today researchers struggle to develop situational...ethics that apply to all forms of the research act and human-to-human relationships. We no longer have the option of deferring the decolonization project.” (1994b, p. 24)

¹⁰⁷ From Gray’s perspective, “emotionally mediated apprehensions of the object of study and the practice of critical reflexivity cannot be separated when conducting research. This is because emotional (dis)identification and attachments are central to the framing of the object of study, to the interaction of feeling and thought in the research process and to why the production of particular knowledge matters” (2008, p. 947)

¹⁰⁸ Humphreys recalls specific events on his journey to becoming an academic as examples of increased personal reflexivity. For example: “OK, Jo is on her feet now talking about corporate branding. She’s an impressive speaker, setting the scene, using SPAM brilliantly to illustrate the persistence of a brand. Then suddenly she says, ‘There’s even a Monty Python SPAM song, and I’m sure that Michael on the back row will give us a rendition’ . . . OK, there’s no time for horror or nerves, and there seems to be no choice, so here goes...SPAMSPAMSPAMSPAMSPAMSPAMSPAM...’ There’s some spontaneous laughter and applause, I get a warm feeling of acceptance that I hug closely to myself, feeling at home and very comfortable in this room full of academics.” (2005, p. 847)

as ‘success’ is to be obtained by the businessperson. If this is indeed the case, then how much space does ‘autobiography’, popularly conceived, actually afford to ‘self’-expression?

Although the use of ‘autobiography as method’ is one of the most popular forms of reflexive practice, many authors have attempted to realise an exogenous standard of ‘reflexive methodology’ that operates beyond the immediacy of autobiographical description by reducing the gap between the theory and practice of reflexive analyses. Towards this end, authors typically outline examples of their own applied methodologies and have encouraged others to do the same (see, for example, Gergen and Gergen, 1991; Davies et al. 2004; Mauthner and Doucet, 2003). The problem here, however, is that these works, and many others that operate in a similar vein, contain a level of explicit self-reference that is akin to the very ‘autobiographical method’ that they wish to ultimately transcend. Mauthner and Docuet’s text (2003) is particularly representative of this approach: the authors begin by outlining the ambivalence of ‘reflexivity’ in social research and call for a more focused explication of ‘reflexivity during the research process’, yet can only do so by relating personal experiences of their doctoral research; this is similarly the case with Davies et al. (2004). These works are thus representative of a dilemma that lies at the heart of the very concept of ‘reflexive methodology’, for if the critical epistemological approach that guides the author’s methodology is steeped in the generally accepted axiom that subjectivity is necessarily included in (critical) research, then how can one who seeks to explicate a transferable ‘reflexive methodology’ above the level of the self avoid the mimesis of self-reference? As Steve Woolgar asks, “If I try to make a film about boredom, to what extent can I *avoid* making a boring film? [emphasis in original]” (1988, p. 20). Perhaps it could be argued that embracing autobiography to ultimately justify other transferable methodologies is an epistemological contradiction in the aphoristic Machievallian sense of a necessary means, yet surely the very use of ‘autobiography’ in this process adds weight to its conceptual validity and, hence, to its reification as a symbiote of ‘reflexive methodology’.¹⁰⁹

In seeking to realise ‘methodology’ as a means of encapsulating the self under a general call towards ‘self-reflexivity’, those who seek to apply ‘reflexive methodologies’ only succeed in creating nuanced incarnations of ‘selves’ that are generally transferable across a spectrum of

¹⁰⁹ Indeed, apropos Chapter 1, Critical Terrorism Studies is confronted with precisely the same mimetic dilemma with regard to navigating its composite images as (1) a ‘broad church’ for critical perspectives on terrorism and; (2) an emancipatory project for normative progress, as derived from its lineage in Critical Theory.

false individuality, thereby escaping the very notion of the ‘self’ that they wish to articulate. If, therefore, ‘reflexive methodology’ is a fundamentally flawed exercise in the quest towards the impossible status of ‘self-reflexivity’, then perhaps the key to realising ‘reflexivity’ lies not in methodology, or, indeed, in its dialectic of self-realisation, but, rather, in the very surroundings that constitute the ‘self’: the social world.

Reflexivity and Society: Reflexive Modernisation and Reflexive Sociology

Moving away from the endeavour to encapsulate or create specific reflexive methodologies are myriad scholars who conceptualise reflexivity as embedded in society. Within the vast sociological literature, two perspectives have served as the foundation for much debate—the reflexive modernisation thesis, as associated with Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, and Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘reflexive sociology’ (see, for example, Adkins, 2003; Kenway and McLeod, 2004; Lash, 1993; McNay, 1999).

Giddens and Beck: Reflexive Modernisation

According to the reflexive modernisation thesis of Giddens and Beck, we are currently in the midst of a second modernity that can be differentiated from the first modernity in a number of ways¹¹⁰. It is premised, for example, that second modern societies are imbued with the force of globalisation that has eroded the territorial boundaries of the nation state; that the increasing ubiquity of freedom and equality within second modern societies has created an intensification of individualism; and that in second modern societies, gender roles have been transformed from their traditionally sedimented positions (see Beck et al. 2003, pp. 6-7; Beck, 2000; see also Cassel, 1993, p. 296). For Giddens and Beck, these phenomena are symptomatic of increased levels of social awareness to the extent that assigned categories of identity can and have been challenged towards the establishment of *new* categories within society¹¹¹. In essence, then, we encounter a reflexive modernisation that denotes an increased level of *agency* in opposition to structure (Lash, 1994, p. 111; cited in Adkins, 2003, p. 22)

¹¹⁰ As Beck et al. offer, “By the premises of first modern society, we mean the *foundations of its self-description*: the explicit or implicit assumptions expressed in the actions and self-understandings of citizens, the goals of politics and the routines of social institutions [emphasis added]” (2003, p. 4). For a more in-depth explication of ‘first modernity’, see *ibid*, pp. 4-6.

¹¹¹ In this sense, process and outcome are intrinsically synonymous, as it is through a *process* of reflexivity that ‘reflexive modernity’ has been realised; hence the synonymy of ‘second modernity’ and ‘reflexive modernity’. Indeed, per Beck et al.: “The hypothesis of a ‘reflexive’ modernization of modern societies examines a fundamental societal transformation within modernity. Modernity has not vanished, but it is becoming increasingly problematic...the transition to a reflexive second modernity not only changes social structures but revolutionizes the very coordinates, categories and conception of change itself” (2003, p. 2)

whereby “external forms of authority are replaced by the authority of the individual” (ibid, p. 23). Hence, as both a product of and a causal precept to ‘reflexive modernity’, increased levels of agency within second-modern societies entail that “socially-prescribed biography is transformed into biography that is self-produced and continues to be produced” (Beck, 1992, p. 135).

In asserting the primacy of (auto)biographical agency in the continuous constitution of modern societies however, many authors argue that Beck and Giddens appear to assume an ability on the part of the individual to step outside the very lifeworld that they are supposed to have constituted (see Lash, 1993; Adkins, 2003), towards a choice of self-constitution that seemingly transcends the structural constraints that situate the societal subject. Similarly, the very notion that reflexive modernisation has come to replace—or perhaps more appropriately, is in the process of ‘replacing’—a first modern society assumes that society can be *re*-structured, rather than continuously *de*-structured vis-à-vis post modernity (see Beck et al., 2003, p. 3, p. 24). Taking it that society can be *re*-structured then, Beck and Giddens implicitly assume that the ‘rules of the game’ can be apprehended and that a relatively fixed conception of society can be re-created in a new guise, towards a new totality. By asserting the very *possibility* of a totalised society, the ontological category of the social is implicitly accepted by Giddens and Beck to exist in a relative state of flux, but an *apprehendable* state of flux, nonetheless—one that remains available for complete comprehension. As such, positions of a more radical constructionist orientation that would foreclose the very possibility of a totalised society—such as those denoted as ‘postmodernist’, ‘poststructuralist’ and ‘radical feminist’, for example—are denied by Beck and Giddens’ sociology of reflexivity:

Subjectivity develops within the boundaries assigned by the life situation accompanying a given social position. Transgressions of these boundaries do not call them into question but rather confirm them through being regarded as deviances or exceptions. The inclusion of the individual in diverse social, institutional and cultural networks does not as a rule lead to contradiction, but rather to a single, well-defined, unambiguous social identity (Beck et al., 2003, p. 24)

Bourdieu: Reflexive Sociology

Given Bourdieu's vast research output, it is especially difficult to represent the particularities attendant upon his 'complete' theory of reflexive sociology¹¹². Nevertheless, we can reflect on a basic premise of Bourdieu's sociology such that dichotomies of object/subject relations—per the classic materialism/idealism dichotomy that is embedded within social science—do not adequately explain the actions of social agents and/or the workings of society itself (see Swartz and Zolberg, 2004, pp. 9-10). Rather, for Bourdieu, object and subject relations coalesce and interact in the 'intrinsically dual' nature of life that is "at once objective and subjective, external and internal, material and symbolic, patterned yet improvised, constrained yet (conditionally) free" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 27). Bourdieu aims to capture and theorise the relationship between objective structures and the subjective practices working within them through an exposition of the interrelated spaces of *field* and *habitus* (see, for example, Bourdieu, 1977, 1988; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Thus conceived, *fields* are designated as self-contained spaces that exist within society (e.g. economic fields, academic fields, political fields etc.)¹¹³ and are imbued with their own logic and capacity to both influence and limit social action; or as Bourdieu describes it, "a relational configuration endowed with a specific gravity which it imposes on all the objects and agents which enter it" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 17). Accordingly, 'free' agency does not exist—the individual is instead situated in a societal lifeworld of operational capabilities, which dictate that individual's capacity to act within a given situation (thereby, the agent is actually a subject). Hence, individuals' agency is limited to how they adapt themselves to the space that is offered by the determinate field, and this adaptation is imbued in their *habitus*, which can be abstractly defined as "a system of internalized dispositions that mediates between social structures and practical activity, being shaped by the former and regulating the latter" (Brubaker, 2004, p. 43)¹¹⁴.

¹¹² Pierre Bourdieu boasts a vast catalogue of published academic work, having authored 500 articles and over 40 books before his death in 2002 (see Brubaker, 2004, p. 17)

¹¹³ All of which can (and do) overlap. See Adkins, 2003, pp. 22-23.

¹¹⁴ Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus* as a concept that can be used to transcend the classic subject/object dichotomy of social analysis is well suitably highlighted by the following passage: "It is [the] dialectic of objectivity and subjectivity that the concept of *habitus* is designed to capture and encapsulate. The *habitus*, being the product of the incorporation of objective necessity, of necessity turned into virtue, produces strategies which are objectively adjusted to the objective situation even though these strategies are neither the outcome of the explicit aiming at consciously pursued goals, nor the result of some mechanical determination by external causes." (1988, p. 782)

Although on first impressions it may appear that Bourdieu's conception of the primacy of the field ensures dedication to a structuralist ontology, the concept of habitus as 'a structuring structure that itself has been structured' (Widick, 2003, p. 685) ensures that any power imbued within societal structures is tempered by the *relative* agency of the subject to adapt themselves to that structure through their own habitus¹¹⁵; habitus is, after all, "a *modus operandi* of which he or she is not the producer and has no conscious mastery" (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 79). There are, however, varying 'degrees' of habitus; the extent to which individual agents/subjects can attain knowledge of—and thus negotiate—particular fields is dependent on how they *habitually* adapt to that field, as is often conceptualised as a 'feel for the game'¹¹⁶. It is this ability to successfully discern a 'feel for the game' that, denotes reflexivity within a given societal configuration vis-à-vis potential within subjects towards "the systematic exploration of the unthought categories of thought which delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 40). For Bourdieu, therefore, "[t]he point of a reflexive sociology is precisely to lay bare the impersonal behind the personal, to discover the social in the heart of the individual person" (1993; cited in Pels, 2000, p. 13).

The foundations of reflexive sociology as laid down by Bourdieu have led many authors to expand on this core conception of reflexivity as a discerning of the 'unthought categories of thought' embodied in habitus. Lash (1994), for example, applies this conception of reflexivity to communities that interact *collectively* with the field, and thus, moves reflexivity further away from the level of individuality found in the reflexive modernisation thesis of Giddens and Beck. As such, Lash prioritises a situated reflexivity rather than an objective reflexivity that is "not separated from the everyday but is intrinsically linked to the (unconscious) categories of habit that shape action" (Adkins, 2003, p. 25). Schirato and Webb take a similar view of Bourdieu's reflexivity as a 'collective process', but are keen to remind us that "[a]t the same time, it is important to remember that reflexivity can and does inform individual practices, since fields themselves are partly constituted through, and articulated in terms of, the individual practices of members of the collective" (2006, p. 551). We see in Bourdieu's

¹¹⁵ As Bourdieu himself puts it: "[Habitus] is an open system of dispositions that is constantly subjected to experiences, and therefore constantly affected by them in a way that either reinforces or modifies its structures" (1992, p. 133)

¹¹⁶ Elucidation on this point is provided by Bourdieu and Wacquant: "having the feel for the game is...to master in a practical way the future of the game, is to have a sense of the history of the game. While the bad player is off tempo, always too early or too late, the good player is the one who anticipates, who is ahead of the game" (1992, p. 81). See also Bourdieu, 1988, p. 782.

reflexive sociology, therefore, a very different view of an embedded reflexivity to the highly individualised biographical reflexivity that drives societal change in the thesis of Giddens and Beck. Both perspectives advocate power on the part of the individual to affect societal change, but for Bourdieu, this power is necessarily constrained by the societal conditions within which the ‘agent’ operates—hence the primacy of the field over habitus, with ‘habitus’ itself perceived as the very *fit* of how the agent adapts to the field.

In seeking to transcend the subject/object dichotomy by theorising through the dialectical concepts of habitus and field, Bourdieu nonetheless appears to come down on the side of objectivism: his theory is based on the existence of objective structures within which subjective practices play out towards a *fit* between object and subject. Yet this fit only appears to occur in one way: through the adaptation of the habitus to the field (see Butler, 1997). What of the possibility of the adaptation of the field to the habitus? In this sense, one could argue that the objectivism apparent within Beck and Giddens’ reflexive modernity is ultimately inverted in the Bourdieusian view. Despite recognition of an ontological flux operating ‘beneath’ the objective level and despite recognition of ‘reflexivity’ as embedded within the potentiality of uncovering the ‘basis’ for one’s habitus—as formed underneath these structures—it is the objective structures of society (fields) that are ultimately and definitively constitutive of the individual. Thus conceived, the reflexivity of a discovery of self-identity in a Bourdieusian sense is one that is ultimately based on *relative* discovery under an objective structure. In this orientation, to gain more knowledge of the self is to gain more knowledge of the objective structure that ultimately shapes the self; thus, it is to gain more knowledge of an ‘objective’ society. If this is indeed the case, what space, then, does reflexivity afford those who would challenge all notions of ‘objective’ understandings of the social world?

Deconstructing Reflexivity

Discourse Theory

Somewhat confusingly, ‘Discourse Theory’—also ‘discourse theory’—is often employed within the social sciences as a descriptor for an overarching theory of the study of discourse. In this text, however, Discourse Theory refers to the specific research paradigm that emerged in the late 1970s (led primarily by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe), offering “a new analytical perspective which focused on the rules and meanings that condition the

construction of social, political, and cultural identity” (Torfing, 2005, p. 1). More acutely, “Discourse Theory investigates the way social practices systematically form the identities of subjects and objects by articulating together a series of signifying elements available in a discursive field” (Howarth et al. 2000, p. 7)¹¹⁷. Drawing inspiration from interpretive sciences such as hermeneutics (e.g. Weber, Gadamer), philosophy (e.g. Heidegger, Hegel), psychoanalysis (e.g. Lacan, Freud), structural linguistics (e.g. Saussure) and deconstruction (e.g. Derrida, Kristeva), discourse theorists examine how structures of meaning make certain forms of conduct possible within society and renders other conduct less so (Howarth, 1995, p. 115).

In examining the *possibility* of certain forms of conduct over others, Discourse Theory draws on the later Foucault in holding *power* as intrinsic to all iterations of knowledge within society (see, for example, Foucault and Gordon, 1980). For discourse theorists, analysis of such power relations *must* be situated in terms of discourse, as society itself is wholly discursive: “Our analysis rejects the distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices. It affirms that every object is constituted as an object of discourse, insofar as no object is given outside every discursive condition of emergence.” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 107). This recognition of an intertextual ontology entails that the discontents of society can be perceived in ways typically foreclosed by positivist conceptions of politics. Therein, as per Foucault, truth cannot be given by the externally existing world, rather, truth is a function of language: “truth is always local and flexible, as it is conditioned by a discursive truth regime which specifies the criteria for judging something to be true or false” (Torfing, 2005, pp. 13-14). In highlighting the conditioning effect of a ‘discursive truth regime’, Torfing, through Foucault, is referring to embedded power configurations that are integral to all instances of discourse. As such, by problematising contingent power relations that tenuously ‘define’ society, discourse theorists set out to *inquire* ‘society’ rather than inquire into how to

¹¹⁷ It should be noted here that the notion of a discursive *field* as pertains to Discourse Theory is foremostly derived from Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* and entails a very different orientation than Bourdieu’s ‘field’. Aiming to reflect a definitely more heterogeneous conception of the political (and thus, the discursive terrain by which social identities are created), Laclau and Mouffe outline a discursive field as follows: “The incomplete character of every totality necessarily leads us to abandon, as a terrain of analysis, the premise of ‘*society*’ as a sutured and self-defined totality. ‘Society’ is not a valid object of discourse... We have referred to ‘discourse’ as a system of differential entities... such a system only exists as a partial limitation of a ‘surplus of meaning’ which subverts it. **Being inherent in every discursive situation, this ‘surplus’ is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice.** We will call it the *field of discursivity*. This term indicates the form of its relation with every concrete discourse: it determines at the same time the necessarily discursive character of any object, and the impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture. [italics in original; bold emphasis added]” (2001, p. 111)

properly comprehend it¹¹⁸. Given that any meaningful identification of society and the individual therein are both outcomes of contingent discourses, how, then, can discourse theorists make *any* solid claims about social phenomena which are already and perennially in a state of flux¹¹⁹?

Although the onto-epistemological orientation of Discourse Theory abhors the concept of a total fixity of meaning, it nonetheless emphasises the possibility and necessity of meaning *making*—the caveat here being the ultimate contingency of any construction of meaning (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 7). As Marchart puts it,

as soon as we accept that society cannot be grounded, and never will be, in a solid foundation, essence, or centre, precisely that impossibility of foundation acquires a role which must be called (quasi-)transcendental with respect to particular attempts at founding society...Every foundation will therefore be a partial foundation within a field of competing foundational attempts (2007, p. 7)

The ‘validity’ of attendant analyses that utilise Discourse Theory are not restricted by their recognition of an intertextual ontology—such that any mediations on a temporary society can only be temporary in and of themselves—rather, judgements as to whether discourse theorists are saying ‘something solid’ about the world are derived from instantly familiar parameters:

Laclau and Mouffe’s approach purports to offer superior accounts of social and political phenomena by attacking the theoretical assumptions and inconsistencies of competing approaches, and adducing argument and evidence, which would be more *persuasive* than other accounts and interpretations. [emphasis in original] (Howarth, 2000, p. 115)

The criteria for judging an application of Discourse Theory as ‘good/bad scholarship’ is, therefore, not based on any (supposedly) objective measures such as ‘generalisability’ and ‘falsifiability’, as is the fashion in positivist-orientated social science; rather, it is for those in associated epistemic communities to ratify whether or not a certain piece of scholarship is (in/)valid. If Discourse Theory is, like all scholarship, beholden to relatively identifiable epistemic communities that tenuously define its parameters, how, then, are we to perceive of the relative limits with regard to how its analytical tools can be applied to inquire into particular social *problématiques* (such as terrorism)?

¹¹⁸ Indeed, by accepting all ontological understandings as protruded by perennial flux, ‘proper/stable/essentialist’ understandings of political phenomena therein are, by definition, impossible.

¹¹⁹ Indeed, this rhetorical inquiry touches on—and subsequently rejects—the popular accusation of ‘philosophical idealism’ that is often levelled at discourse theorists. See, for example, Smith, 1998.

Despite the various analytical tools that have been applied in the name of Discourse Theory¹²⁰, its programme is primarily one of ontological critique—it explicitly eschews a fixed methodology that can be applied *prima facie* to a multitude of social phenomena across time and space¹²¹. More specifically, Discourse Theory operates a ‘problem-based approach’ to social analysis which prioritises the object of inquiry as the basis for selecting an appropriate theory/methodology, as opposed to a method-based approach, which aims to “‘vindicate a particular theory’” rather than “‘illuminate a problem that is specified independently of the theory’” (Shapiro, 2002, p. 601; quoted in Howarth, 2005a, p. 318)¹²². Individual scholars’ choices as regards the application of Discourse Theory are, therefore, *relatively* free under the acceptance of general onto-epistemological ‘logics’ that have been, and continue to be, enacted in its name (see Glynos and Howarth, 2007). Accordingly, Discourse Theory should not be conceived as a ‘theory’ or analytical framework *per se*, but, rather, as a *theoretical analytic*: a “context-dependent, historical and non-objective framework for analysing discursive formations” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986, p. 184, cited in Torfing, 1999, p. 12)¹²³. As per Derrida, analysts who engage Discourse Theory in order to inquire into specific *problématiques* should be seen as “bricoleurs—willing to use the analytic tools at hand, and prepared to store them for later use if their truth value is seriously questioned” (1967, p. 285; cited in *ibid*). The overarching point to be made here is that scholars who apply techniques of Discourse Theory *are* saying something solid about the

¹²⁰ These include analytical concepts such as *hegemony*, *antagonism*, *empty signifiers*, *floating signifiers* and *chains of equivalence*, to provide but a brief sample.

¹²¹ As Torfing puts it, Discourse Theory is “Neither a theory in a strict sense of a more or less formal set of deductively derived and empirically testable hypotheses, nor a method in the strict sense of an instrument for representing a given field from a point outside it” (1999, p. 51)

¹²² As Shapiro elucidates, “making a fetish of prediction can undermine problem-driven research via wag-the-dog scenarios in which we elect to study phenomena because they seem to admit the possibility of prediction rather than because we have independent reasons for thinking it worthwhile to study them. This is what I mean by method-drivenness” (2002, p. 609). Essentially, the problematic determinism of method-based research can be summed up by the adage that “if the only tool you have is a hammer, everything around you starts to look like a nail” (*ibid*, p. 598)

¹²³ As Howarth and Stavrakakis summarise, “Put briefly, while discourse theorists acknowledge the central role of theoretical frameworks in delimiting their objects and methods of research, thus rejecting crude empiricist and positivist approaches, they are concerned to prevent the *subsumption* of each empirical case under its own abstract theoretical concepts and logics. In other words, instead of applying a pre-existing theory on to a set of empirical objects, discourse theorists seek to *articulate* their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research. The condition for this conception of conducting research is that the concepts and logics of the theoretical framework must be sufficiently ‘open’ and flexible enough to be adapted, deformed and transformed in the process of application. This conception excludes essentialist and reductionist theories of society, which tend to predetermine the outcome of research and thus preclude the possibility of innovative accounts of phenomena. It also rules out the organic development of the research programme as it tries to understand and explain new empirical cases [emphasis in original] (2000, p. 5)

social world: the contingent nature of the social does not mean that nothing solid can be said about it¹²⁴.

In sum, an analysis employing Discourse Theory is a contingent analysis of discursively constructed relations which are conceived of as contingently structured formations within a contingent ‘society’ that exists in perennial flux. Bearing a strong sense of subjectivity at all levels of analysis (i.e. both the individual’s engagement with society and, as constructed through discourse, the contingency of society itself) what does Discourse Theory’s conception of society entail for the theories of reflexivity as outlined thus far, and concomitantly, what does this entail for a conception of ‘reflexivity’ within a broadly poststructuralist/intertextual ontology, to which Discourse Theory belongs?

Challenging Reflexivity

Contra Giddens, Beck, and Bourdieu

In two previous sections of this chapter, I exposed prominent conceptions of reflexivity with reference to the ‘reflexive modernisation’ theory of Giddens and Beck, and Pierre Bourdieu’s ‘reflexive sociology’. I attempted to show how Beck and Giddens’ concept of ‘second modernity’ affords such abundant autobiographical potentiality to social ‘agents’, that they can effectively author their own self-identities *beyond* the societal lifeworld that animates them (in fact) as subjects. Similarly, I attempted to show how Bourdieu’s conceptions of reflexivity (as embedded within the subjectivities of practice, and further distilled in performances of *habitus*), whilst more societally situated than Giddens and Beck, is nevertheless positioned as that which is *relative* to the primacy of objective societal structures. Both positions are anathema to my understanding of a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology to which Discourse Theory speaks. In order to challenge these perspectives, it is instructive to turn Laclau and Mouffe’s alternative treatment of ‘objectivity’ and the ‘subject’, as originally outlined in their seminal text, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985/2001).

¹²⁴ Indeed, those scholars that choose to apply a discourse theoretical approach to social analysis engage in diverse and nuanced scholarship on a range of issues; from articulating a unique view of Rastafarian movements as resistance through identity construction (Smith, 1994) to an alternative analysis of the discursive construction of Third Way Politics in contemporary Europe (Bastow and Martin, 2005). Also see Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000; Torfing and Howarth, 2005.

Laclau and Mouffe's articulation of the societal individual (the subject) can be succinctly highlighted by how they address a dual problématique: "the problem of the discursive or pre-discursive character of the category of subject; and the problem of the relationship among different subject positions" (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp. 115-116). Their response to the first problem is clear:

Whenever we use the category of 'subject'...[we] do so in the sense of 'subject positions' within a discursive structure. *Subjects cannot, therefore, be the origin of social relations*—not even in the limited sense of being endowed with the powers that render an experience possible—as all 'experience' depends on precise discursive conditions of possibility [emphasis added] (ibid, p. 115)

Here we see a clear difference to the theory of Giddens and Beck, which assumes that individuals can author their own individualised (self-)identities, as gleaned from the autobiographical potentiality imbued in second modern societies. Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, conceive of individuals as situated subjects within a discursively constituted society that is *necessarily* contingent. Given that the subject is 'constituted' by their 'subject positions', to escape this positioning (towards the objectification of the very society that creates and sustains their identity) is impossible¹²⁵.

On the second issue, Laclau and Mouffe show how dichotomous categories of social identity are perennially unsustainable. In doing so, Laclau and Mouffe deconstruct the binary opposition of man/woman to show how, even in the seemingly most 'obvious' of simple dichotomies, there is always an 'overdeterminism' of subject identity within society which is borne of the dialectical flux that permeates (and thus contingently defines) society in the first instance. The perennially temporary nature of society dictates that any structural positions within it are necessarily engaged in perennial flux also:

The category of subject is penetrated by the same ambiguous, incomplete and polysemical character which overdetermination assigns to every discursive identity. For this reason, **the moment of closure of a discursive totality, cannot be established at the level of 'meaning-giving subject', since the subjectivity of the agent is penetrated by the same precariousness and absence of suture apparent at any other point of the discursive totality of which it is part.** 'Objectivism' and 'subjectivism'; 'holism' and individualism' are symmetrical expressions of the *desire* for a fullness that is permanently deferred [italics in original, bold emphasis added] (ibid, p. 121)¹²⁶

¹²⁵ As Mouffe summarises: "It is...impossible to speak of the social agent as if we were dealing with a unified homogeneous entity. We have rather to approach it as a plurality, dependent on the various subject positions through which it is constituted within various discursive formations" (2005a, p. 372)

¹²⁶ This unfulfilled desire for fullness, as an ontological condition for existence itself, is derived from Lacanian psychoanalysis and is prominently denoted by Laclau and Mouffe, and other discourse theorists, as 'an ontology of lack'.

Whilst Laclau and Mouffe deny the actualisation of any objective reality within society, it is important to note that they attribute great relevance to the *idea* of an objective reality vis-à-vis its constitutive effects on ‘society’, as captured by the concept of *antagonism*: “If language is a system of differences, antagonism is the failure of difference: in that sense, it situates itself within the limits of language and can only exist as the disruption of it—that is, as metaphor” (ibid, p. 125). Despite the effect of the ‘objective metaphor’ of antagonism on the social however, we are reminded as to the impossibility to be anything other than a metaphor, a vision of constituted objectivity that remains an impossible dream(/nightmare): “Society never manages fully to be society, because everything in it is penetrated by its limits, which prevent it from constituting itself as an objective reality” (ibid, p. 127). From this, one can draw a conceptual parallel to distinguish between Laclau and Mouffe and Bourdieu vis-à-vis the *affect* of objective structures on subjective practices within society. The key difference in this parallel is that while Bourdieu assumes *existing* objective structures to determine subjective practices, Laclau and Mouffe assume the *idea* or *metaphor* of objective structures to determine subjective practices. Thus, the ‘objectivity’ at the core of Laclau and Mouffe’s theory is actually of a contingent and subjective nature and, as such, the contingent orientation of ‘society’ as conceived by Laclau and Mouffe is maintained; all the while Bourdieu’s relative separation between objective structures and subjective practices (minimal though this may be) still stands.

Contra Autobiography as Method

Given that Discourse Theory emphasises the contingent nature of society as constructed by/through discourse, the notion of uncovering a totalised ‘self’ via the ‘autobiographical’ method of reflexivity, as addressed earlier, is conceptually foreclosed. This is, fundamentally, an ontological consideration, for if the (societal) subject is inescapably tied to a society which constitutes its very existence and this society is defined by a multiplicity of discourses that exist in perennial flux, then the self *cannot but* exist in a state of perennial flux also. As David Howarth notes, the ability to articulate a unified self through an exposition of first-person narrative is denied within a broadly ‘poststructuralist’ framework—to which Discourse Theory speaks—such that “post-structuralists focus on the polysemic and distorting effects of language, which weakens both its capacity to express our innermost thoughts and experiences, as well as the constitutive sovereignty of a subjectivity that pre-

exists language in some way” (2005a, p.320)¹²⁷. The ‘I’ of autobiography is, therefore, an impossible allusion:

The ‘I’ is the moment of failure in every effort to give an account of oneself. It remains the unaccounted for and, in that sense, constitutes the failure that the very project of self-narration requires. Every effort to give an account of oneself is bound to encounter this failure, and to founder upon it (Butler, 2005, p. 79)

As per Butler, the unattainable limits of totalised meaning that necessarily escape the subject’s attempts to ground the ‘self’ as a unified whole are guaranteed by what Laclau and Mouffe, through Lacan, determine as an ontological condition of lack. While this inescapable condition frustrates the subject’s perennial attempts to ground the self as a totality, it does *not* foreclose the performative aspect of the (un)grounding process (see Marchart, 2007)¹²⁸. Herein, the ‘self’ *exists*, but only as *trace*—a (re)productive vessel of the intertextual lifeworld within which all meaning is relational and all iterations of the self (re/dis)appear. While a subject cannot ‘know’ the limits of its constitution—for they are created and performed in the very act of ‘giving an account of oneself’ (Butler, 2005)—their ephemeral presence can, nonetheless, be abstractly recognised:

I am interrupted by my own social origin, and so have to find a way to take stock of who I am in a way that makes clear that I am authored by what precedes and exceeds me, and that this in no way exonerates me from having to give an account of myself. But it does mean that if I posture as if I could reconstruct the norms by which my status as a subject is installed and maintained, then I refuse the very disorientation and interruption of my narrative that the social dimension of those norms imply. *This does not mean that I cannot speak of such matters, but only that when I do, I must be careful to understand the limits of what I can do, the limits that condition any and all such doing.* In this sense, I must become critical [emphasis added] (ibid, p. 82)

Following Butler, speaking of oneself *can* be achieved in the act of authorship, but the subject should recognise that any such attempt is necessarily conditioned by the ontological limits that deny the self’s existence as a whole or static entity. These limits should not be conceived as a negative force, for they are symbiotic to the creation of meaning; they are *productive*. It is here, upon the productive limits of meaning-making—which cannot be grasped by those who seek to make meaning—that I seek to re-place reflexivity within a broadly poststructuralist/intertextual ontology; a reflexivity that does not seek to capture the

¹²⁷ John Lechte expands along similar lines: “...the subject is never simply the static, punctual subject of consciousness: it is never simply the static phenomenon captured in an imaginary form of one kind or another—one that may be communicated to others; it is also its unspeakable unnameable, repressed form which is knowable through its effects” (1994, p. 142)

¹²⁸ This premise will be explored in much greater detail in Chapter 3.

self, but does not deny that such attempts are made by the author. Indeed, I will argue that reflexivity abounds at the site of the author's *attempts* to ground meanings, a reflexivity *that is inscribed in the very act of writing itself*. Henceforth, the analytical question becomes not *if* reflexivity 'exists' within a 'poststructuralist ontology', but *where* and *how*? The answer, as always, lies in the text.

Rigour and Reflexivity: Poles of Distinction or False Dichotomy?

Though Discourse Theory forms the bedrock of the *theoretical analytic* that will be applied to the primary statements of al Qaeda in the proceeding chapters, it will be supplemented by introducing the notion of a performative reflexivity that abounds at the site of writing. As I will outline, this supplementation synthesises both *rigour* and *reflexivity* within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology to permit the close reading of 'texts'—most commonly associated with 'discourse analysis' and largely rejected by discourse theorists—as the basis of investigating/deconstructing social and political dynamics, such as those associated with 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamic extremism'. Towards this end, it is instructive to situate Discourse Theory in relation to the discourse analytical paradigms of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discursive Psychology (DP) for two reasons.

Firstly, Discourse Theory, CDA and DP share a common social constructionist basis, such that they all assume discourse(s) to be constitutive of reality (see Mills, 1997); indeed, as Jorgensen and Phillips have shown "all three draw on structuralist and poststructuralist language theory, but the approaches vary as to the extent to which the poststructuralist label applies" (2008, p. 6)¹²⁹. Situating Discourse Theory along this structuralist/poststructuralist continuum expedites the investigation and transference of shared concepts, such as 'language

¹²⁹ 'Structuralist/poststructuralist language theory' relates, most fundamentally, to the concept of the signifier, as originally articulated by structural linguistics pioneer, Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure developed his notion of the sign by emphasising the dialectic nature between the 'concept' and the 'signifier'. Thus, although a tree (concept) is a physical object, it is only a tree because it has been 'signified' as such by the imposition of its relevant signifier, in this case, the word 'tree'. Furthermore, the signification of a concept only attains its meaning in relation to what it is not; i.e., a 'tree' is only tree, because it is not a 'wall', or a 'cat' etc. (see Saussure et al. 1986, pp. 66-69). Whereas Saussure emphasised the fixed relationship between one signifier and its concomitant signified (thus affixing meaning as permanent)—which would come to form the basis of 'structuralism—discourse theorists (and 'poststructuralists' more generally) assert that for each signified, there exist countless other possible signifiers that could have been used, or may yet be used, depending on the cultural and societal context. Meaning is, therefore, never totally fixed; however, discourse theorists attempt to mediate upon the *relative* and temporary fixity—especially with regard to identity—in relation to social and political dynamics.

in use'¹³⁰, 'reflexivity' and 'rigour', that will be incorporated into the *theoretical analytic* to be engaged in the proceeding chapters¹³¹. Second, as a broader consideration, the choice of any particular means of inquiry should be justified in relation to alternative options that are available within closely-related spheres of relevance, but which have been declined by the researcher¹³². The explication of CDA and DP not only satisfies these requirements, but in doing so, further elucidates the theoretical nuances of Discourse Theory.

Critical Discourse Analysis

While Laclau and Mouffe's abstract conception of discourse has facilitated unique analyses of various phenomena at particular moments in time and within specific social domains (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008, p. 20), its commitment to an intertextual ontology nonetheless forecloses the close-reading of text(s) and 'everyday discourse' as an epistemological fallacy¹³³. Critical Discourse Analysis, on the other hand operates a similar problem-based approach to social analysis, but maintains an onto-epistemological distinction between discursive and non-discursive phenomena¹³⁴ and reifies a further distinction between discourses and texts therein:

Discourse implies patterns and commonalities of knowledge and structures whereas a *text* is a specific and unique realization of a discourse. Texts belong to genres. Thus a discourse on New Labour could be realized in a potentially huge range of genres and texts, for example in a TV debate on the politics of New Labour, in a New Labour manifesto, in a speech by one of New Labour's representatives and so forth [emphasis in original] (Wodak, 2008, p. 6)

¹³⁰ Here, I follow Jorgensen and Phillips's delineation of 'language in use' as follows: "People use discourse rhetorically in order to accomplish forms of social action in particular contexts of interaction. Language use is, in this sense, 'occasioned'. The focus of analysis, then, is not on the linguistic organisation of text and talk as in critical discourse analysis but on the rhetorical organisation of text and talk" (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008, p. 118)

¹³¹ Though it has, in fact, been engaged throughout this dissertation up to this point.

¹³² Here, I agree (in principle) with Wodak's perspective that, when talking of discursive approaches to analysis, "It is important...to acknowledge that discourse analysts and scholars employing various methods of discourse analysis should be required to present their theoretical background and consider other approaches beyond the necessarily limited scope of their school, discipline or academic culture" (2008, p. 6)

¹³³ As Barnard-Wills puts it: "Laclau and Mouffe's statement that 'it is sufficient that certain regularities establishing differential positions exist for us to be able to speak of a discursive formation' demonstrates how discourse is far from synonymous with 'text' or 'language' as in other discourse analytical approaches" (2012, p. 67). It is of further use to cite Michael Shapiro, who provides a broader interpretation of this unavoidable contradiction, insofar as the search for 'meaning' in texts is a process of meaning-making in itself: "To appreciate the effects of...textuality, it is necessary to pay special heed to language, but this does not imply that an approach emphasising textuality reduces social phenomena to specific instances of linguistic expression. To textualize a domain of analysis is to recognize, first of all, that any 'reality' is mediated by a mode of representation and second, that representations are not descriptions of a world of facticity, *but are ways of making facticity*. [emphasis added]" (1989, p. 13)

¹³⁴ On this basis, Jorgensen and Phillips distinguish CDA as "less post-structuralist than Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory" (2008, p. 7)

For CDA scholars—as for a range of analysts who subscribe to the notion of Discourse Analysis as “the close study of language in use (Taylor, 2001b, p. 5)—*texts* form the empirical matrix from which to understand broader discourses that structure and mediate the ‘reality’ of social phenomena. Taking it that texts—as CDA conceives of them—are somewhat equivalential with regard to the basic form of their empirical content¹³⁵, Critical Discourse analysts have facilitated robust methodological frameworks¹³⁶ which can be applied to analyse a multitude of texts across time and space. Norman Fairclough’s methodological framework is exemplary: it provides neatly categorised steps for analysing text within a broader CDA agenda of inquiring and deconstructing power relations which mediate the ‘truth’ of societal discourses—such as ‘racism’ and ‘Thatcherism’—in order to change them¹³⁷. An abridged version is hereby provided for context:

- 1) Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect.
- 2) Identify obstacles to it being tackled, through the analysis of,
 - a. The network of practices it is located within
 - b. The relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned
 - c. The discourse (the semiosis itself)

--Structural analysis: the order of discourse
 --Interactional analysis
 --Interdiscursive analysis
 --Linguistic and semiotic analysis

- 3) Consider whether the social order (network of practices) in a sense ‘needs’ the problem
- 4) Identify possible ways past the obstacles
- 5) Reflect critically on the analysis (1-4)

(Fairclough, 2001, p. 125)

¹³⁵ It should be noted that while CDA analysts typically accept that their shared conception(s) of what constitutes a ‘text’ has become more ‘multimodal’, the ‘text’ is foremostly defined to represent ‘language in use’ as that which lies in contrast to *broader*, more inclusive categories of ‘discourse’, but is nonetheless inclusively positioned therein: “[c]ritical discourse analysis has...moved beyond language, taking on board that discourses are often multimodally realized, not only through text and talk, but also through other modes of communication such as images” (Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 292; quoted in Wodak and Meyer, 2009a, p. 16)

¹³⁶ It is important to note that while associated authors share certain core commitments, there are nuanced differences between, for example, Ruth Wodak’s Discourse Historical CDA approach, Taen Van Dijk’s socio-cognitive CDA approach, and Norman Fairclough’s variant of CDA, which is generally more focused on the influence of power and ideology on social practices, as mediated through discourse(s). See Wodak and Meyer, 2009b.

¹³⁷ This commitment to emancipatory progress is derived from CDA’s intellectual lineage in Critical Theory (see, for example, Van Dijk, 2001; Fairclough et al. 2011); as has similarly informed the research programmes of Critical Terrorism Studies and Critical Security Studies. See Chapter 1.

This systematic treatment of discourse and text is, as it stands, incompatible with the *theoretical analytic* of Discourse Theory; the ‘critical’ framework under which it is performed, however, is even more problematic:

Critical theories, *thus also CDA*, want to produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection. Thus, they are aimed at producing ‘enlightenment and emancipation’. Such theories seek not only to describe and explain, but also to root out a particular kind of delusion. Even with differing concepts of ideology, critical theory seeks to create awareness in agents of their own needs and interests [emphasis added] (Wodak and Meyer, 2009a, p. 7)

Here, Wodak cites a horizon of self-awareness and self-creation akin to the biographical reflexivity found in Giddens and Beck, one that posits the ability of the agent to step outside of the very lifeworld that constitutes her/his existence towards ‘emancipatory progress’—a move which is, of course, incompatible with Discourse Theory¹³⁸. Wodak’s commitment to Critical Theory is not without proviso, however; indeed, as is most relevant to this discussion, she calls for the critical researcher to be more visible in the research process:

What is rarely reflected in [Critical Theory] is the analyst’s position itself. The social embeddedness of research and science, the fact that the research system itself and thus CDA are also dependent on social structures, and that criticism can by no means draw on an outside position but is itself well integrated within social fields...Researchers, scientists and philosophers are not outside the societal hierarchy of power and status but are subject to this structure (ibid)

Wodak’s answer to the Critical visibility deficit within CDA is to call for the critical analyst to embrace and enhance a recognition of their positionality in their research; in effect, *to become more reflexive* (see also, Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 293). CDA seeks to maintain a tenuous balance between embracing the unique positionality of the reflexive critical analyst on the one hand (which is specific in time and space) and tying the legitimacy of its output to exogenous methodological frameworks on the other (which is not). While these two positions are not *de facto* incommensurable, they are problematic; indeed, by Wodak’s own admission, the CDA community has yet to adequately address this problem:

¹³⁸ Here, it is instructive to recall Chantal Mouffe’s articulation of the social agent: “We can...conceive the social agent as constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’ that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences, constructed by a diversity of discourses, among which there is no necessary relation, but a constant movement of over-determination and displacement. The ‘identity’ of such a multiple and contradictory subject is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification. It is therefore impossible to speak of the social agent as if we were dealing with a unified homogeneous entity. We have rather to approach it as a plurality, dependent on the various subject positions through which it is constituted within various discursive formations” (2005a, p. 372)

It seems to be beyond controversy that qualitative social research...needs concepts and criteria to assess the quality of its findings. It is also indisputable that the classical concepts of *validity*, *reliability* and *objectivity* used in quantitative research *cannot be applied in unmodified ways*. ‘The real issue is how our research can be both intellectually challenging and rigorous and critical’ (Silverman, 1993: 144)...Within CDA, there is little specific discussion about quality criteria...nevertheless, rigorous ‘objectivity’ cannot be reached by means of discourse analysis, for each ‘technology’ of research must itself be examined as potentially embedding the beliefs and ideologies of the analysis and therefore guiding the analysis towards analysts’ preconceptions” [emphasis added] (Wodak and Meyer, 2009a, pp. 31-32)

By constructing its programme for analysis as a *theoretical analytic* and rejecting any exogenous ideal of methodology, Discourse Theory eschews this problem of incommensurability that stumps CDA. Discursive Psychology, on the other hand, embraces a notion of methodology that is heavily derived from social scientific orthodoxy and positions it at the very centre of its analytical programme—a move which creates its own unique problems.

Discursive Psychology

Discursive Psychology (DP) is a form of social psychology which seeks to investigate ‘social texts’ in order to attain a better understanding of social life and social interaction (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 7). DP maintains the basic social constructionist position that discourses are constitutive of ‘reality’ and like CDA (but unlike Discourse Theory), it distinguishes between discursive and non-discursive practices. Indeed, with reference to Jorgensen and Phillips’ structuralist/poststructuralist continuum, we can determine that DP is least enamoured with ‘poststructuralist tenets’, viewing discourse *most* intently in terms of ‘language in use’:

The context in which our study is situated is...quite different from post-structuralism...What post-structuralism has not done is address everyday discourse—people’s talk and argument—nor has it been concerned with materials which document interaction of one kind or another. In some ways, therefore, our general aim is to pursue post-structuralist questions with the analytic fervour of social psychologists, but in a domain of materials which has been most thoroughly explored by ethnomethodologists and conversation analysts. (Wetherell and Potter, 1992, p. 89)¹³⁹

Discursive Psychologists seek to reflexively ‘unpack’ the rhetorical organisation of text and talk that individuals operationalise in their attempts “to accomplish forms of social action in

¹³⁹ Indeed, Jonathan Potter has developed this point further: “Constructing the research topic as *discourse* marks a move from considering language as an abstract system of terms to considering talk and texts as parts of social practices...Much of what is distinctive about [DP] is a result of following through this move rigorously and...following it through in the arena of method. [emphasis in original]” (2003, p. 785)

particular contexts of interaction” (ibid, p. 118). Much like CDA, DP embraces the reflexive positionality of the author within the research, but promotes a more strict dedication to methodological rigour¹⁴⁰, as primarily inspired by the orthodoxy of Ethnomethodology (see Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984) and Conversation Analysis (see Hammersley, 2003; Korobov, 2001; Speer, 2003; Schegloff, 1997, 1999; Wetherell, 1998)¹⁴¹. This dedication to methodological rigour is apparent throughout the canon of DP analyses, but is perhaps most ardently represented in Wetherell and Potter’s ‘Ten stages in the analysis of discourse’¹⁴². Taking steps eight (‘validity’) and nine (‘the report’) respectively, the authors outline:

A set of analytical claims should give coherence to a body of discourse. Analysis should let us see how the discourse fits together and how discursive structure produces effects and functions. If there are loose ends, features of the discourse evident in the data base that do not fit the explanation, we are less likely to regard the analysis as complete and *trustworthy* [emphasis added] (ibid, p. 170)

...the final report is a lot more than a presentation of the research findings, it constitutes part of the confirmation and validation procedures itself. *The goal is to present the analysis and conclusions in such a way that the reader is able to assess the researcher’s interpretations. Thus, a representative set of examples from the area of interest must be included along with a detailed interpretation which links analytical claims to specific parts or aspects of the extracts.* In this way, the entire reasoning process from discursive data to conclusions is documented in some detail and each reader is given the possibility of evaluating the different stages of the process, and hence agreeing with the conclusions or finding grounds for disagreement. [emphasis added] (ibid, p. 172)

This commitment to rigour is similar to that found at the heart of a positivist epistemology—DP’s dedication to a social constructionist epistemology simply places it within a discursive framework¹⁴³. As Wodak and Meyer (2009a) have specifically noted in relation to CDA, ‘rigour’, as conceived within a discursive framework, cannot *directly* emulate the logic of positivism, however; it must be sufficiently tempered in order to align with the basic social constructionist commitments that deny the objectivity of knowledge production. While

¹⁴⁰DP draws from a range of influential fields and promotes methodological pluralism. They do not seek to put forward a standardised methodology, as such, but, rather, they seek to distil foundational tenets of research inquiry from an *assortment* of research methodologies. As such, studies in Discourse Psychology tend to heavily incorporate standardised indicators of ‘good’ social science in the vein of *validity, reliability, and replicability* (see Taylor, 2001)

¹⁴¹ As Korobov observes, Conversation Analysts recognise the impact of power relations on how meaning is generated in/through rhetorical discourse, but seek to bracket these power dynamics by foregrounding methodological rigour: “CA believes that sometimes power differences are not mobilized as the basis for every interaction. They believe in a certain degree of rigor and systematic-ness—a conviction to stick with what is actually said and to ground observations in the details of interactions more so than in the theoretical apparatuses of this or that analyst” (2001, p. 3)

¹⁴² These ten steps are taken from Wetherell and Potter’s *Discourse and Social Psychology* (1987), which is broadly conceived as *the* foundational text of the Discursive Psychology approach.

¹⁴³ One notes the title of Wetherell et al.’s seminal guidebook for discourse analysis, *Discourse as Data* (2001), as particularly apt.

Wodak, Meyer, and others have struggled to align the indicators of ‘good’ social science with a broader CDA framework, DP’s approach has been to explicitly embrace *reliability*, *validity* and, in particular, *replicability* as classic indicators of ‘good’ social science and to ensconce reflexivity behind them as a latent parenthesis that allows the researcher to say at once, ‘I am critical, I am reflexive, but above all, I am rigorous’:

For a researcher who accepts the principle of replicability...the aim is to enable a future researcher to replicate the project and, hopefully, confirm the findings. Other researchers, including most discourse analysts, may not expect that the research will, or even can, be replicated, but still use the section to describe the setting up of the project, and the collection and analysis of the data. The difference is that a researcher who accepts the concept of reflexivity...will not necessarily edit out problems and false starts: the aim is not to ‘smooth’ or idealize the research process. The researcher uses this account to acknowledge her or his own relationship to the research and discuss the constraints and limitations which operated. In addition, by describing exactly what was done, the researcher enables readers to assess the research (Taylor, 2001a, p. 41)¹⁴⁴

DP’s minimisation of reflexivity—to briefly acknowledge its inherence to critical analyses before proceeding with the analysis itself¹⁴⁵—is precisely what sociologist Melvin Pollner (1991) laments in his timely critique of the fall of radical reflexivity¹⁴⁶ within Ethnomethodology—a highly influential precursor to DP (see Garfinkel, 1967; Heritage, 1984)¹⁴⁷. As Pollner saw it, radical reflexivity, as an epistemological cornerstone of Ethnomethodology, had been steadily eroded by an increasing tendency among Ethnomethodologists to legitimate research output vis-à-vis the standard indicators of ‘good’

¹⁴⁴ It should be noted here that although this extract focuses on ‘replicability’ alone, ‘replicability’ is held, by Taylor, to encompass both reliability and validity: “Both reliability and validity come together in the third criterion, **replicability**, which is a means of evaluating the research project as a whole. The test here is whether a future researcher could replicate the project and produce the same or similar results. This will require... that the original research is not only well-designed but also fully described in the report of the research. [emphasis in original]” (2001b, p. 318)

¹⁴⁵ Indeed, this dynamic is starkly represented in the Potter and Wetherell’s foundational treatise of DP—*Discourse and Social Psychology* (1987)—thus setting a solid foundation upon which this ideal would be further reified by subsequent applications of Discourse Psychology: “How should we deal with the fact that our accounts of how people’s language use is constructed are themselves constructions? It is possible to acknowledge that one’s own language is constructing a version of the world, while proceeding with analysing texts and their implications for people’s social and political lives. In this respect, discourse analysts are simply more honest than other researchers, recognizing their own work is not immune from the social psychological processes being studied. Most of the time, therefore, the most practical way of dealing with this issue is simply to get on with it, and not to get either paralyzed by or caught up in the infinite regresses possible. (1987, p. 182)

¹⁴⁶ As Pollner outlines, “Radical reflexivity—the recursively (Platt 1989) comprehensive appreciation of the ‘accomplished’ character of *all* social activity—enjoins the analyst to displace the discourse and practices that ground and constitute his/her endeavors in order to explore the very work of grounding and constituting.” (1991, p. 370)

¹⁴⁷ Here, it is important to recall that Ethnomethodology, along with Conversation Analysis, has been instrumental in the development of Discursive Psychology: “Ethnomethodology as a discipline is concerned with a wide range of features of the way social life is put together...it is of particular interest here because of the lessons it provides about how language is used in everyday situations.” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987, p. 19)

social science (1991, p. 372)¹⁴⁸. Channelling the authority of Garfinkel (1988) however, Pollner reminds us that “every aspect of the sciences—‘truth’, ‘objectivity’, ‘logic’—are glosses for in situ work that can only be discovered in and through actual work site participation” (ibid, p. 373). To pass off a minimal reflexivity, per Pollner, is to bypass the integral importance of recognising the inescapably subjective ontology within which Ethnomethodological analyses are situated¹⁴⁹. Eroding the centrality of radical reflexivity thereby enhances the standing of social science orthodoxy in its place, for their identities—in this formation—are dialectically bound. Applying Pollner’s critique to DP, it is not enough to simply recognise a latent reflexivity before quickly ‘getting on with the empirical analysis’, as Potter and Wetherell posit: reflexivity cannot simply be bracketed as that which is implicit by virtue of the fact that one is ‘doing critical analysis’. A more rigorous synthesis of both the theory *and* practice of reflexivity is required; one which, I believe, can be accommodated within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology.

Conclusion

In sum, the minimisation of a ‘critical’ reflexivity in the face of an image of rigour that is heavily derived from ‘social scientific’ orthodoxy reifies a false dichotomy whereby the extension of one must come at the cost of the other. CDA recognises the problematic nature of this incommensurability but ‘gets on with the analysis’ in the absence of an adequate solution—reflexivity, here, is held to its most basic function: a discursive synonym for the banal recognition that one’s analysis is sufficiently ‘critical’. DP, on the other hand, has failed to adequately problematise this incommensurability; rather, from the very beginning, it has simply grafted ‘rigour’ from its social scientific orthodoxy and transplanted it deep into its methodological framework, which looms over its entire analytical programme. Here, once again, reflexivity is held to its most basic function: a discursive synonym for the banal recognition that one’s analysis is sufficiently ‘critical’. By fusing rigour and reflexivity to components of Discourse Theory, I will show that this synthesis, which has proven so problematic to both DP and CDA, can be accommodated under perhaps the most ‘critical’ stage of all: a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology. The first step in this process is to examine how meanings are contingently grounded (but grounded nonetheless), as this forms

¹⁴⁸ This is perhaps best captured in the following: “Although a significant feature of ethnomethodological self-understanding in early work, radical reflexivity has diminished to the point that most contemporary studies view themselves almost entirely in terms of their capacity to represent empirical structures.” (Pollner, 1991, p. 372)

¹⁴⁹ As elucidated by Pollner, “What escapes the gaze of inquiry preoccupied with the world are the ontological practices that create the rim and thereby shape the arena within which such spectacles and their observers occur” (1991, p. 376)

the very basis of how meaning is made within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology. Towards this end, I now turn to Oliver Marchart's conception of *post-foundationalism*.

Chapter 3(/Staccato)¹⁵⁰



Footnoting the Self in the Performance of (Discourse) Analysis¹⁵¹

On Contingent Ground(s): Post-Foundationalism and the Play of Political Difference

To this point, the proposition that analyses associated with Discourse Theory do not say anything solid about social phenomena on account of their dedication to ‘anti-foundationalism’ has been effectively debunked. It is worth re-emphasising here that Discourse Theory has *never* situated its *theoretical analytic* within an anti-foundational matrix—its programme has been consistently centred on the interrogation of how meanings (and, by extension, identities) become contingently grounded without ever becoming fully constituted as a totality; as Laclau puts it, “no identity is closed in itself but is submitted to constant displacements...they are constituted through essentially topological processes which do not refer to any ultimate transcendental foundation” (2005b, p. 6). Oliver Marchart (2007) masterfully develops this premise by weaving an intricate philosophical sketch that (re)situates political theorists such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Claude Lefort and Ernesto Laclau as purveyors of ‘post-foundational political thought’, itself most immediately identifiable in contrast to ‘anti-foundationalism’:

Post-foundationalism...must not be confused with *anti*-foundationalism or a vulgar and today somewhat outdated ‘anything goes’ postmodernism, since a post-foundational approach does not attempt to erase completely such figures of the ground, but to weaken their ontological status. The ontological weakening of ground does not lead to the assumption of the total absence of grounds, but

¹⁵⁰ Staccato is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as follows: “Detached, disconnected, i.e. with breaks between successive notes. Used adj. or adv. as a direction to a performer to render a passage in this style; also as n., a succession of disconnected notes” (2014). Available at:

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/188575?rskey=EZA1Hj&result=2&isAdvanced=false#eid21118578>

¹⁵¹ As per the description provided in the introduction, the following analysis (in)fuses Derrida’s work on *hauntology*, *trace* and *iterability* with Marchart’s concept of ‘post-foundationalism’—which, via Heidegger and contrary to an ‘anything goes’ notion of ‘postmodernism’, *accentuates* the temporary grounding of all meanings in the production of political identities—thus further inquiring the presence/absence dialectic that is inherent to the production of all written arguments. The footnote is ultimately posited as a particularly suitable instrument to refract the presence/absence dialectic to which Derrida, Marchart, Heidegger and, indeed, Laclau and Mouffe collectively speak; thence, with reference to the analysis undertaken in Chapter 2, it is conceived as a device of *critical rigour* to both buttress and undermine all that an author writes in analysis of discourse, the ultimate ‘validity’ of which can only be determined by the reader.

rather to the assumption of the impossibility of a *final* ground, which is something completely different as it implies an increased awareness of, on the one hand, contingency and, on the other, **the political as the moment of partial and always, in the last instance, unsuccessful grounding** [italics in original, bold emphasis added] (Marchart, 2007, p. 2)

What Marchart determines as the post-foundational condition is one in which “the quest for grounds is not abandoned (like in the case of a simple-minded *anti*-foundationalism), but is accepted as a both impossible and indispensable enterprise” (ibid, p.9)¹⁵²; the very *impossibility* of closure is thus central to the very *possibility* of meaning and vice-versa¹⁵³. This argument is derived most prominently from Martin Heidegger’s concept of the a-byss (*Ab-grund*) and his concomitant submission that ‘Der *Ab-grund* ist *Ab-grund*’—‘the ground is a-byss, the a-byss is ground’—which Marchart interprets into the very sinews of post-foundationalist thought:

By underscoring, on the one hand, the ‘Ab’ in *Ab-grund*, and, on the other, the ‘grund’ in *Ab-grund*, Heidegger stresses the fact that the two dimensions have to be differentiated in some way but, at one and the same time, *cannot* be differentiated neatly, as they are ceaselessly crossing over into each other. It is because of the inseparable intertwining between ground and abyss that the ground can be recognized as abyss and **yet keeps something of its own nature as ground**...so in a certain way, the ‘absent ground’...still functions or ‘operates’ as ground [italics in original, bold emphasis added] (Marchart, 2007, p. 19)¹⁵⁴

Following Marchart and Heidegger, one can assert that the grounding of meaning through the *a-byss* produces a contingent essence of absence which is at once present and at the same time always and already under erasure¹⁵⁵; a function which Marchart specifically attributes to the play of *political difference* that operates between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’. The distinction between ‘politics’ and ‘the political’ is not only of integral importance to post-foundationalist thought, but to how Discourse Theorists—*who are purveyors of post-foundationalist thought*—conceive of the ontological conditions within which contingent

¹⁵² As Marchart follows on, “It is within the medium of such reflection on the grounding/ungrounding dimension of all social being that post-foundational political thought unfolds.” (2007, p. 9)

¹⁵³ The following passages suitably elucidates this important dynamic: “In claiming that the ground remains present in its absence, we underline the fact that the ground’s absence does not imply that the process of grounding comes to a halt. On the contrary, the ground remains, to some extent, ‘operative’ *as* ground only on the basis of its very absence, which is why the absence of the ground must not be envisaged as ‘total’ cancellation, as ‘mere’ absence [emphasis in original] (Marchart, 2007, p. 18). Similarly, “The ultimate grounding of a system is not impossible because the latter is too plural and our capacities are limited, but because there is something of a different order, something lacking, which makes pluralisation itself possible by making *impossible* the *final* achievement of a totality [emphasis in original]” (Marchart, 2007, p. 17)

¹⁵⁴ As Marchart continues: “The a-byss is the never-ending deferral and withdrawal of ground, a withdrawal which belongs to the very nature of the latter and cannot be separated from it” (2007, p. 19)

¹⁵⁵ Or as Derrida might put it, *différé*d (see Derrida, 1982, pp. 3-27). Indeed, we must, in this context, remember the influence of Heidegger’s work on ontology to the work of Derrida—himself identifiable as perhaps the most important figure vis-à-vis ‘poststructuralism’.

social identities are created. As such, it is instructive to turn to Chantal Mouffe, who—channelling Heidegger and Carl Schmitt—offers a neat summary:

By the ‘political’, I refer to the dimension of antagonism¹⁵⁶ that is inherent in human relations, antagonism that can take many forms and emerge in different types of social relations. ‘Politics’, on the other side, indicates the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual because they are affected by the dimension of ‘the political’ (2000, p. 101)¹⁵⁷

Though Laclau and Mouffe and associated discourse theorists apply the logic of *political difference* to classically identifiable political phenomena (see, for example, Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000b; Howarth and Torfing, 2005), it is important to remind ourselves that—withstanding the fact that *political difference* is enacted in and through these phenomena—*political difference* sutures the grounding/de-grounding of *all* meaning. As interpreted through a post-foundationalist lens, then:

If we...come to think of the difference between politics and the political *as (temporal) difference, that is to say, as a process of oscillation and dislocation which renders impossible any static ground*, then isn’t that difference just another way of indicating and thinking about contingency? If this is so, if the political difference is just another (paradoxical) form of speaking about the groundlessness on which we stand, then the consequence would be that it becomes impossible for us to approach the concept of the political in a purely nominalistic fashion (which would simply be *anti-*, not *post-*foundational), as one concept among many within the polis-family of words. **[Political difference] is not an object—or concept—among others to be analysed but, rather, it is the very name of the horizon of constitution of any object—including the constitution of our own position as conceptual historians or political theorists** [italics in original; bold emphasis added] (Marchart, 2007, p. 58)

As Marchart—interpreting a range of prominent political theorists—articulates it, the *political difference* that conditions the grounding of meaning affects not only the signification of ‘abstract’ political and social structures which the ‘conceptual historian’ or ‘political theorist’ mediates upon, it mediates how the ‘conceptual historian’ or ‘political theorist’

¹⁵⁶ For the sake of expediency, I refer to antagonism here, through Mouffe, as that fractious/productive condition which drives the creation of temporary identities, which are ~~grounded~~ in/by the play of *political difference*: “When we accept that every identity is relational and that the condition of existence of every identity is the affirmation of a difference, the determination of an ‘other’ that is going to play the role of a ‘constitutive outside’, it is possible to understand how antagonisms arise” (2005a, p. 2). Indeed, as Marchart remind us, the concept of antagonism is so central to the production of meaning for Laclau and Mouffe, that “a certain degree of antagonization is a necessary precondition for meaning to arise. Without antagonism—no meaning.” (2007, p. 146)

¹⁵⁷ Dyrberg’s mediation on politics and the political serves as a useful accompaniment to Mouffe’s summary: “The political can be seen as potentials of actualizations vis-à-vis systems of differences, which insert politics in a temporal and spatial matrix. Politics is the practice of structuring the political function, which consists in instigating directions in the hegemonic terrain, and to actualizing the potential through articulations where systematic limits are delineated. It is in these processes that the identity of the subject is given in relation to its spatial and temporal insertion into systems of differences.” (2006, p. 252)

ground meanings of *themselves* in the very process of writing about political and social phenomena: they too are conditioned by the play of *political difference* that moulds the ontological world(s) they seek to investigate; they are inescapably plugged into its matrix¹⁵⁸. Taken thus, authorship *itself* must be conceptualised through the prism of *political difference*.

Embracing this condition allows us to supplement the prominent perspective held within Discourse Theory which espouses the author as ‘just another subject’¹⁵⁹—one whose research output is (in)validated by “a particular community of practitioners who share a common discourse” (Howarth, 2002, p. 128; also see Howarth, 2000, p. 130). While I accept these broad parameters to a degree, I seek to re-position the role of the author therein as one that is reflexively produced *at the site of writing*—the site at which the author *attempts* (and ultimately fails) to ground an identity of themselves in relation to the social and political phenomena that they mediate upon—in the case of this study, for example, ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamic extremism’. Not only does this move allow for an alternative conception of reflexivity within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology, it also allows for the incorporation of *rigour* into the *theoretical analytic* premised on Discourse Theory (a move which both CDA and DP fail to achieve), which, as I will argue, facilitates the close reading of texts to inform our (contingent) understandings of ‘abstract’ social and political phenomena. In order to fulfil this move, I now (re)turn to Jacques Derrida.

Re-Placing Reflexivity within a Poststructuralist/Intertextual Ontology

Writing the Author-as-Subject

With the publication of *Writing and Difference*, *Speech and Phenomena* and *Of Grammatology* in 1967, Derrida effectively heralded the ‘arrival’ of poststructuralism (see Harland, 1987, p. 125). Derrida’s initial move was to deconstruct Husserl’s phenomenological dictum that prioritised ‘speech’ over ‘writing’ as the path to one’s ‘true’

¹⁵⁸ As offered by Marchart: “we are not the subjects of enactment [of the political], since, as much as we enact the political, we *are* enacted by the political. As much as the ‘event’ of the political cannot be brought about volutaristically, we always bring it about whenever we act.” (2007, p. 176)

¹⁵⁹ This assertion is neatly represented by David Howarth’s submission that: “Practitioners of discourse theory do not claim to be conducting ‘value-free’ or ‘objective’ investigations. It is a basic assumption of the perspective that the discourse theorist is always situated in a particular discursive formation. In other words, s/he has been constituted as a subject just like any other subject. What is challenged by the discourse theorist is the claim that values can be *derived* or *deduced* from the philosophical and theoretical assumptions of discourse theory. In this sense, anti-foundationalism does not give rise to a certain set of substantive political and ethical positions. It does, however, rule out positions based on foundational presuppositions [emphasis in original]” (2002, p. 131)

intentions in the articulation of meaning. For Derrida, not only does writing hold priority over speech, but it challenges the very idea that ‘true’ intentions either exist or can be communicated as such, for “writing supplements perception before perception even appears to itself” (1978, p. 282). Derrida’s explication of a ‘poststructuralist’ ontology is further premised on a deconstruction of Saussure’s dialogical affixation of meaning between signifier and signified, entailing a contingent lifeworld in which a multitude of meanings float and ground not as the manifest output of a synthesis between signifier and signified, but as *trace*—an essence of meaning that is imbued with “the materiality of the signifier *and* the ideality of the signified [emphasis in original]” (Howarth, 2000, p. 40). In Derrida’s own terms, *trace* is both living and dead, both inside and outside a “presence-absence” (1976, p. 43)¹⁶⁰ which ‘exists’ under erasure: that which is perennially *différé*¹⁶¹. Derrida would later come to categorise the play of *trace* in terms of *hauntology* (1994, p. 10, 63, p.202)¹⁶², which for Marchart determines how we must view the post-foundationalist condition: “where we stand today, ontology is available in no other form than, to use Derrida’s term (1994), ‘hauntology’—an ontology haunted by the spectre of its own absent ground” (2007, p. 163)¹⁶³. Operating under this condition, the author loses effective control of the meaning that

¹⁶⁰ Derrida continues: “The trace is the opening of the first exteriority in general, the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside: spacing. The outside, ‘spatial’ and ‘objective’ exteriority which we believe we know as the most familiar thing in the world, as familiarity itself, would not appear without the grammé, without difference as temporalization, without the nonpresence of the other inscribed within the meaning of the present, without the relation to death as the concrete structure of the living present... The presence-absence of the trace” (1976, pp. 42-43)

¹⁶¹ Though Derrida’s writings on *différance* are notably complex, a most compact elucidation of the concept can be found in the following passage: “Difference is what makes the movement of signification possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of a past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to a future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not, to what it absolutely is not: that is, not even to a past or a future as a modified present. An interval must separate the present from what it is not, in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby also dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and in particular the substance or subject” (1982, p. 13)

¹⁶² As further elaborated by Derrida: “Repetition *and* first time: this is perhaps the question of the event as question of the ghost. What is a ghost? What is the *effectivity* or the *presence* of a specter, that is, of what seems to remain as ineffective, virtual, insubstantial as a simulacrum? Is there *there*, between the thing itself and its simulacrum, an opposition that holds up? Repetition *and* first time, but also repetition *and* last time, since the singularity of any *first time*, makes of it also a *last time*. Each time it is the event itself, a first time is a last time. Altogether other. Staging for the end of history. Let us call it a *hauntology* [emphasis in original]” (1994, p. 10)

¹⁶³ Marchart’s absorption of Derrida’s thought vis-à-vis *trace*, *différence* and *hauntology* entails that post-foundationalism is, in a sense, inseparable from its exegesis and it is such that Derrida’s thought can be re-interrogated in order to account for the role of the *author-as-subject* in the creation of meaning; an important reflection on the role of the author that is somewhat absent within post-foundationalism and, by extension, Discourse Theory.

they attempt to ascribe to a text at the very moment of inscription; they are, in effect, dead¹⁶⁴. This death—brought about by the author’s very attempt(s) to communicate precisely what they mean¹⁶⁵—should not be grieved as a loss, however, for it breathes life into writing by exposing the written mark to a multitude of possible interpretations¹⁶⁶:

For a writing to be a writing it must continue to “act” and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of a temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written “in his name.” (Derrida, 1988, p. 8)

The ‘death of the author’ is, thus, a necessary corollary of writing, and while there exist no ‘hidden meanings’ behind a text (only interpretations) the author does not disappear *completely* from their inscriptions; rather, the author continues to *haunt* the text, embodied within *traces* of meaning¹⁶⁷ which, as Howarth puts it, “exhibit a minimal sameness in the different contexts in which they appear, yet are still modified in the new contexts in which they appear” (2000, p. 41)¹⁶⁸. Derrida delineates this concept in terms of *iterability*:

Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written (in the usual sense of this opposition), as a small or large unity, can be *cited*, put between quotation marks; thereby it can break with every given context, and engender infinitely new contexts in an absolutely nonsaturable fashion. This does not suppose that the mark is valid outside its context, but on the contrary that there are **only contexts without any center of absolute anchoring**. This citationality, duplication, or duplicity, this **iterability** of the mark is not an accident or an anomaly, but is that...without which a mark could no longer even have a so-called “normal” functioning. **What would a mark be that one could not cite? And whose origin could not be lost on the way?** [*italics in original; bold emphasis added*] (Derrida, 1982, p. 320-321)¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ Of course, Foucault—like Barthes—has also posited the author as ‘dead’; the absence of whom/which forms a necessary corollary to the very function of writing itself: “Writing unfolds like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind. Thus, the essential basis of writing is not the exalted emotions related to the act of composition or the insertion of a subject into language. Rather, it is primarily concerned with creating an opening where the writing subject endlessly disappears” (1980, p. 116)

¹⁶⁵ In a sense, the author is *always already dead*, but it is the inscription of writing that confirms it, for writing is the *moment* of authorship—it is the perennially incubatory site of an author’s instantly symbiotic performances of life and death.

¹⁶⁶ As pertains to the written words of Derrida, “To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a sort of machine which is productive in turn, and which my future disappearance will not, in principle, hinder in its functioning, offering things and itself to be read and to be rewritten.” (1988, p. 8)

¹⁶⁷ As Alvensson and Skoldberg put it, “the realisation of the intentions of the author—his or her directions concerning referents—are, as it were, deferred indefinitely, they have only left a ‘trace’ in the work” (2000, p. 156)

¹⁶⁸ Farrell provides a similarly useful summary: “Different utterances, on different occasions, can have the same meaning, and any linguistic expression must be capable of being repeated, and of being recognized as the same expression, on occasions different from the present one” (1988, p. 53)

¹⁶⁹ As Derrida offers elsewhere: “In order for my “written communication” to retain its function as writing, i.e., its readability, it must remain readable despite the absolute disappearance of any receiver, determined in general...Such iterability...structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is

Pace Derrida (and, subsequently, Marchart), one can contend that while the ‘original meaning’ grounded by the author is de-grounded at the very moment that they write, the author’s *trace* resides in the inscriptions of text which are reproduced in many different contexts: the author *is*, in effect, *iterable trace*¹⁷⁰. It is such that the author and the text are interminably intertwined, enraptured by a mutually (un)fulfilling desire such that one cannot ‘live’ without the other, for, ultimately, they *are* one another:

The text is a fetish object, and *this fetish desires me*. The text chooses me, by a whole disposition of invisible screens, selective baffles: vocabulary, references, readability, etc.; and, lost in the midst of a text (not *behind* it, like a *deus ex machine*) there is always the other, the author. As institution, the author is dead: his civil status, his biographical person have disappeared...but in the text...I *desire* the author: I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine [emphasis in original] (Barthes, 1975, p. 27)

Following Derrida (and Barthes), to have one’s textual mark (re)iterated by an exterior source is thus to have one’s identity as an author performed in exteriority: just as I have (re)iterated the identities of Derrida, Marchart, Laclau and Mouffe and others by reproducing segments of their texts in mine, so my identity as an author will be accorded and (re)iterated by other readers/authors and by events that lie beyond my control¹⁷¹. To accept this condition is to accept that one’s interior understanding of oneself as an ‘author’ will always be superseded by one’s exterior positionality as a subject¹⁷²; it is to accept one’s identity as neither author nor subject, but both: thence *author-as-subject*¹⁷³.

involved...A writing that is not structurally readable-iterable-beyond the death of the addressee would not be writing” (1988, p. 7)

¹⁷⁰ Roland Barthes evinces a similar sensitivity to this dynamic, as neatly encapsulated here: “There are those who want a text (an art, a painting) without a shadow...but this is to want a text without fecundity, without productivity, a sterile text...The text needs its shadow: this shadow is *a bit* of ideology, *a bit* of representation, *a bit* of subject: ghosts, pockets, traces, necessary clouds: subversion must produce its own chiaroscuro.” [emphasis in original] (1975, p. 32)

¹⁷¹ As Foucault puts it, “It would seem that the author’s name, unlike proper names, does not pass from the interior of a discourse to the real and exterior individual who produced it; instead, the name seems always to be present, marking off the edges of the text, revealing, or at least characterizing, its mode of being. The author’s name manifests the appearance of a certain discursive set and indicates the status of this discourse within a society and a culture...The author function is therefore characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.” (1980, pp.123-124). I argue, here, that this ‘mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society’ can be read in terms of academia itself, and, more specifically, the circular function of citing appropriate authors as the basis of an argument’s (in)validity within particular academic fields. It is important to note that, even if this exterior citation does not actually come to pass, academic writing is *conditioned* by this possibility and the concomitant desire of the subject to accede to these paradigmatic standards of (il)legitimacy: we, as academic authors, surely write towards this end; towards recognition, validation and the (ontological) fulfilment of existing as an ‘academic’. This dynamic will be further touched upon in the Conclusion.

¹⁷² Indeed, as Derrida notes: “The ‘subject’ of writing does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing is a system of relations between strata: [Freud’s] mystic pad, the psyche,

It is important to accentuate here that acceding to the category of *author-as-subject*—such that we embrace the inevitable impossibility of grounding what we ‘truly’ mean in the act of writing¹⁷⁴—does not dilute the significance of one’s *attempts* to ground meanings as ‘true’ representations of what one hopes to communicate at a given point in time. *Attempts* are absolutely integral to the production of meaning and the creation of identities, for without them, no mark would be written, no *iterable trace* would traverse the play of *political difference* and, hence, the ‘author’ will never have ‘died’ in the act of writing, for they will have never been provided with a chance to live. Simply put—as Brummans, interpreting Derrida, reminds us—“we write...ourselves into—and out of—being” (2007, p. 724).

Taken thus, the author’s choice of words, sentences and syntax; their citations of influential authors and particular points of view and so on are *all* constitutive of their contingent identity—they are *traces* of the ‘self’ as embodied within the text, which are re-*iterated* by those external to us¹⁷⁵. This is, I assert, what is entailed by reflexivity read within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology, it is a reflexivity that does not *bend backwards* towards the ‘self’ as a centralised totality—as is the dominant logic in alternative readings—but one which is *bent forwards* by the active participation of the *author-as-subject* who readily accepts the inevitable release of one’s fragmented ‘self’-identity to essential drift through the very act of writing¹⁷⁶, by providing other readers/authors with the fertile grounds

society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found” (Derrida and Ronse, 1982, p. 114)

¹⁷³ This dual recognition of oneself as both ‘author’ and ‘subject’ can be further justified by returning to Judith Butler: “I am interrupted by my own social origin, and so have to find a way to take stock of who I am in a way that makes clear that I am authored by what precedes and exceeds me, and that this in no way exonerates me from having to give an account of myself. *This does not mean that I cannot speak of such matters, but only that when I do, I must be careful to understand the limits of what I can do, the limits that condition any and all such doing* [emphasis added] (2005, p. 82)

¹⁷⁴ In this vein, we must remind ourselves that the subject is not a passive vessel whose identity is determined by a structuring field (as per Structuralism) for the structuring field itself—from which the subject (reflexively) receives its identity—is not whole; thus, the subject must move to supplement this lack: “The condition for the *emergence of the subject (=the decision)* is that it cannot be subsumed under any structural determinism, not because he is a substance of his own, but because structural determination—which is the only being that this so-called subject could have—has failed to be its own ground, and it has to be supplemented by contingent interventions [emphasis added]” (Laclau, 1996, p. 57)

¹⁷⁵ One can also say that this process is accelerated by the very logic of academia, such that it promotes the referencing of existing sources to validate ‘new texts’ which are, themselves, submitted in the hope of being referenced by others towards external validation and an internal(ised) animation towards (ontological) fulfilment.

¹⁷⁶ As Derrida puts it, “a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription... evident. This allegedly real context includes a certain ‘present’ of the inscription, the presence of the writer to what he has written, the entire environment and the horizon of his experience, *and above all the intention, the wanting-to-say-what-he-means, which animates his inscription at a given moment.* But the sign possesses the characteristic of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor

for their perpetual deconstruction¹⁷⁷—a condition which, as Derrida offers, is already and always active within the text itself:

...there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works...Deconstruction cannot be applied, after the fact and from the outside, as a technical instrument of modernity. Texts deconstruct *themselves* by themselves, it is enough to recall it or recall them to oneself [emphasis in original] (Derrida, 1989, p. 123)

It can be argued, therefore, that to *increase* reflexivity within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology is to *more acutely* represent one's *attempts* to ground 'original meaning' within the text: it is, essentially, to provide *more* of the text, for doing so increases the *iterabile* marks within which the *author-as-subject* resides and propels him/herself forward towards perpetual deconstruction and re-fragmentation; a move which, in our case (as scholars), is driven by an institutionalised desire to attain the ultimate validation of our peers. Committed thus, an author can—unlike with discourse analytical approaches such as CDA and DP—fuse reflexivity *with* rigour when engaging 'poststructuralist' modes of analysis that treat discourse foremostly as abstract systems of meaning. And what better form of rigour than its most classic textual incarnation: the footnote.

Footnoting the 'Self': The Cadence of Rigour and Reflexivity

Footnotes have, as Anthony Grafton puts it, a 'curious history' (1997)¹⁷⁸. Having enjoyed their popular zenith during the Renaissance, Enlightenment and Romantic periods, footnotes have since fallen increasingly foul of dominant trends of modern scholarship, which quite often promote the streamlining of information over meticulous reflection, in the name of technological progress¹⁷⁹. Indeed, apropos the earlier observation(s) that knowledge on 'al Qaeda' and 'Islamist terrorism' is borne of an embedded politics of (il)legitimacy, it appears that the footnote has itself been *footnoted* as an illegitimate means of producing knowledge on social phenomena, as affected by an underlying demand for epistemological expediency. Charting the footnote's relegation to the literal margins of the American academy—and beyond—at a time when technology was becoming increasingly influential with regard to the

consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e. abandoned it to its essential drift [emphasis added]" (1988, p. 9)

¹⁷⁷ This is not to say that all authors do not accede to this inevitable performance of identity, but that the *author-as-subject* recognises this inescapable condition and positively embraces it as a function of reflexivity.

¹⁷⁸ Grafton's *The Footnote: A Curious History* (1997) is—to my knowledge—the only dedicated history of the footnote—a curiosity in itself, given that the footnote is thought to have originated in Western scholarship in the 17th century (see *ibid*)

¹⁷⁹ A fact that is quite ironic, given that footnotes were most widely embraced during the Enlightenment period—a manifest instrument of the desire to combine a scientific logic of verifiability with the need to streamline the referencing of other texts (see Grafton, 1997; Pollak, 2006)

popular consumption of (written) output, Bruce Anderson's snapshot of the mid-to-late 1990s is enlightening:

The decline of the footnote has been linked to changes in the publishing business. College libraries, corseted by budget squeezes, are no longer the principal buyers for the books produced by some academic presses. These books are now packaged to attract a broader audience, the [*New York Times*] says, with 'catchier titles, snappier covers, more and better illustrations and fewer footnotes and bibliographies'. (1997)¹⁸⁰

Bugeja and Dimitrova's (2006) study of hyperlinked footnotes—held as the 'modern' incarnation of the classic note—confirms that this dynamic continues apace. Examining their use in three top-ranked Communications journals¹⁸¹ over four years, the authors conclude that:

Of the total 416 citations, only 61% were still accessible. Additionally, 19% of the online footnotes contained an error in the URL, and 63% did not provide an access date in the published citation. Of those links that were still active, only 58% matched the cited content (2006, p. 115)

These depressing statistics fly in the face of the classic function of the footnote, which is to provide immediate accessibility to the sources that the author has used to validate their argument(s)—a function of rigour which classic historians, in particular, have incorporated into their very identities as purveyors of an objective 'truth'¹⁸². Read thus, footnotes have historically been used to provide sufficient source material to convince both the general reader and appropriate epistemic communities that the author "has done an acceptable amount of work, enough to lie within the tolerances of the field" (Grafton, 1997, p. 22)¹⁸³.

Though this logic of rigour has not changed *per se*, modern historians have imparted the footnote a slightly different function; to "make clear the limitations of their own theses even

¹⁸⁰ In more recent times, a study from Tenopir et al. analysing the impact of electronic sources on academics' reading patterns found that academics are more likely to quickly browse electronic sources, while they are more likely to examine hard copies of articles more meticulously: "the average number of readings per year per science faculty member continues to increase, while the average time spent per reading is decreasing. Electronic articles now account for the majority of readings, though most readings are still printed on paper for final reading" (2009, p. 5)

¹⁸¹ These are *Human Communication Research*, *Journal of Communication*, and *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*. (Bugeja and Dimitrova, 2006, p. 115)

¹⁸² As Grafton puts it, "Footnotes are the humanist's rough equivalent of the scientist's report on data: they offer the empirical support for stories told and arguments presented. *Without them, historical theses can be admired or resented, but they cannot be verified or disproved* [emphasis added]." (1997, p. vii)

¹⁸³ It should be reiterated here that discourse theorists accept precisely the same dynamic in relation to the 'validity' of their studies: "While the truth or falsity of its accounts are partly relative to the system of concepts and logics of discourse theory used (as in any other empirical inquiry), the ultimate tribunal of experience is the degree to which its accounts provide plausible and convincing explanations of carefully problematized phenomena for the community of social scientists." (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 7)

as they try to back them up” (ibid, p. 23). In the hands of the modern historian, then, the footnote essentially becomes a *critical* device of rigour, seeking not to solidify the ‘truth’ of the text, but to openly embellish its essential contingency:

In documenting the thought and research that underpin the narrative above them, footnotes prove that it is a historically contingent product, dependent on the forms of research, opportunities, and states of particular questions that existed when the historian went to work. Like an engineer’s diagram of a splendid building, the footnote reveals the occasionally crude braces, the unavoidable weak points, and the hidden stresses that an elevation of the façade would conceal...*footnotes buttress and undermine, at one and the same time* [emphasis added] (ibid, pp. 23, 32)¹⁸⁴

In this context, Derrida’s assertion that “there is always already deconstruction, at work *in* works [emphasis in original]” (1989, p. 123) becomes immediately familiar, despite the obviously differing ontological and epistemological commitments.

Indeed, Derrida himself has utilised the footnote as an instrument of critical rigour on numerous occasions. In *Glas* (1986), for example, he engages the footnote to elucidate—almost *ad nauseam*¹⁸⁵—the historical development of certain key concepts and their prominent definitions, while in ‘Living on: Border Lines’ (1991), he actively deconstructs the false distinction between the ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’ text—a falsity that is facilitated by the very physical form of the book¹⁸⁶—by running an extended narrative along the bottom margin of the page (in the form of a ‘note to the translator’) that continuously interrupts that which lies above it (and vice-versa)¹⁸⁷. Weaving a dual narrative that visibly arrests what are popularly conceived as the ‘natural borders’ of a text, Derrida thus theoretically *and* physically overflows ‘Living on: Border Lines’ at every opportunity and denies it the possibilities of complete reference (see Kamuf, 1991, p. 255). In effect, he utilises an

¹⁸⁴ As Grafton continues: “Historical footnotes resemble traditional glosses in form. But they seek to show that the work they support claims authority and solidity from the historical conditions of its creation: that its author excavated its foundations and discovered its components in the right places, and used the right crafts to mortise them together. To do so they locate the production of the work in question in time and space, emphasizing the limited horizon and opportunities of its author...*Footnotes buttress and undermine, at one and the same time* [emphasis added]” (1997, p. 32)

¹⁸⁵ In places, the footnotes occupy over four-fifths of the page. Not that I, of course, am in a position to criticise this move as particularly ‘over-zealous’.

¹⁸⁶ Indeed, Derrida is decidedly suspicious and somewhat dismissive of the very form of the physical form of the book: “The idea of the book...is profoundly alien to the sense of writing. It is the encyclopaedic protection of theology and of logocentrism against the disruption of writing...against difference in general” (1976, p. 18)

¹⁸⁷ In the ‘main text’, Derrida submits a critique of how Maurice Blanchot attempts to structure meaning in *La Folie du Jour* and *L’Arret de Mort*, paying particular attention to the spatial placement of paragraphs, sentences, page-breaks, and so on within these texts.

extended footnote¹⁸⁸ to deliver an accentuated visual performance of how a text deconstructs itself, elucidated here by the concept of *double invagination*:

Invagination is the inward refolding of *la gaine* [sheath, girdle], the inverted reapplication of the outer edge to the inside of a form where the outside then opens a pocket...*double invagination* comes about [at] the place where the invagination of the upper edge on its outer face...which is folded back...‘inside’ to form a pocket and an inner edge, comes to extend beyond (or encroach on) the invagination of the lower edge, on its inner face...which is folded back ‘inside’ to form a pocket and an outer edge... [emphasis in original] (1991, pp. 255-256)¹⁸⁹

Reading the footnote through Grafton and Derrida, one can determine its function to be both rigorous and critical at the same time¹⁹⁰. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate to affix the footnote, as a device of critical rigour, to the logic of a *forwards-facing* reflexivity, entailing that to provide more of the text is to provide more of one’s *attempts* to ground a ‘true’ representation of their arguments—not towards a new totality (of either one’s argument(s) or one’s identity as an author) but towards further fragmentation and deconstruction to be performed in exteriority¹⁹¹. Accordingly, to engage in a close reading of primary statements to reflect on social and political phenomena (such as ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’) does not relate to a naïve hermeneutical attempt to represent the ‘truth’ of either the source text itself or one’s subsequent interpretations of it—it is to accept, as *author-as-subject*, that both the source text and one’s written interpretations of it deconstruct themselves in the play of *political difference*, leaving only *traces* of an argument which, by the very function of academia itself, are (in)validated by relevant epistemic communities. If the primary purpose of analyses based in Discourse Theory is, truly, to provide ‘more persuasive accounts’ of important social and political phenomena (Howarth, 2000, p. 115), then surely an acutely accentuated performance of critical rigour—which increases the visibility of the texts that one uses to inform their close analyses of discourse—is inherently appropriate, not to say required.

¹⁸⁸ It should be noted that Derrida’s ‘secondary narrative’ in ‘Living on: Border lines’ (1991) does not take the *precise* form of the footnote, (i.e. sequential numbers placed in the main text which refer the reader to the sub-text that resides under its dividing margin), but mimics it in terms of its physical appearance and elongated placement along the bottom margin of the page. Its aesthetic form is, in effect, one extended footnote that runs parallel to the ‘main text’ for the length of the entire essay.

¹⁸⁹ As Derrida continues, “the chiasma of...*double invagination* is always possible, because of what I have called elsewhere the iterability of the mark...*double invagination*, wherever it comes about, has in itself the *structure of a narrative [récit] in deconstruction* [emphasis in original]” (1991, p. 267), thus reinforcing our observation that the text always deconstructs itself by virtue of its *iterability*.

¹⁹⁰ ...in both its theoretical or physical forms.

¹⁹¹ One is reminded that the play of *political difference* conditions not only the radical contingency of social and political phenomena that we mediate upon, but conditions the radical contingency of all that we write in our *attempts*—as authors—to analyse these phenomena.

Conclusion

I have attempted, in the preceding analysis, to put forward a nuanced *theoretical analytic* that allows for the synthesis of reflexivity and rigour—as performed at the site of writing—in order to make an author’s *attempts* to ~~ground~~ meaning in the analysis of discourse more visible to those in relevant epistemic communities who ultimately judge such analyses as (in)valid. The submission of this *theoretical analytic* is premised on the problematisation of embedded notions of ‘reflexivity’—such as those proffered by popular applications of ‘methodological reflexivity’ as well as those contained in the influential theses of Giddens, Beck and Bourdieu—which erroneously render authors as self-aware producers of their own, (self-)proscribed identity(/ies). Constructing reflexivity in this way denies the appropriate recognition of authors as *subjects* whose *attempts* to constitute their own identity(/ies) by virtue of articulating ‘what they really mean’ can never be fulfilled. To accept this condition, I argue, is to recognise that the author can never be imbued with sufficient authority to define themselves or their arguments as belonging to them; rather, it is to posit that the ‘author’ can *only ever* exist as a subject whose intended meanings are de-centred from the very moment they incise a mark to a page. Read thus, the author’s ‘self’-identity is rendered as dead at the very moment of inscription—hence, the author only exists *as* trace, a transcendental figure kept alive by the reader’s interpretations of the arguments by which the author *attempts* to write her/himself into existence. It is in this sense that an author can only ever be defined as such in exteriority to what they have written: to accept this inevitability is to write not as an author, but as *author-as-subject*.

While it is one thing to *accept* this condition, it is quite another to positively *embrace* it. To this end, the *footnote* is centralised as an instrument of *critical rigour*, acting, firstly, to accentuate the text as an incubatory site for heterogeneous interpretations of written marks and; second, serving as a corrective to the erroneous assertion that one automatically adheres to a minimal standard of what it means to be ‘critical’ when one engages in ‘discourse analysis’ (as is reified by prominent applications of Critical Discourse Analysis and Discursive Psychology in particular). Foregrounding the sources by which an author seeks to buttress (but cannot help but undermine) their arguments *via* the footnote represents a *de facto* challenge (and performed corrective) to the embedded orthodoxy of (critical) discourse analyses whereby ‘reflexivity’ is assumed as an epistemological position that lies *behind* the analysis of discourse without being explicitly incorporated into the *practice* of discourse analysis itself.

At this point it is important to more intently situate the theoretical and practical nexus of this chapter relative to the phenomena of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’. I believe, strongly, that the incorporation of core concepts derived from Discourse Theory—such as *empty* and *floating signifiers*, *chains of equivalence*, *antagonism* and *hegemony*—provide a unique basis for an effective alternative reading of these phenomena. Discourse Theory’s abstract notion of ‘discourse’ (see Jorgensen and Phillips, 2008) is particularly problematic towards this end, however, such that it forecloses the close-reading of texts to inform these interrogations¹⁹². Given that a large corpus of primary texts attributable to al Qaeda has been used to highlight their ‘irrationality’ and to solidify their status as outliers relative to other ‘terrorist’ and ‘Islamist’ groups, to minimise the visibility of these statements is, in my view, anathema not only to this study’s *theoretical analytic*, but to the very problem-based logic that informs Discourse Theory. The statements of ‘al Qaeda’ and associated ‘Islamic extremists’ that inform the proceeding analysis are liberally presented—both in the ‘main’ text and the footnotes—to facilitate the reader to judge the means by which I define my arguments, in accordance with my dedication to a *forward-facing* reflexivity¹⁹³. By accentuating the visibility of associated primary statements to inform an alternative reading of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’, I situate the authority of my arguments squarely within the text. Ultimately, there can be nothing more persuasive than that.

¹⁹² This is immediately recognisable in a range of prominent analyses that utilise Discourse Theory. While extracts from ‘primary sources’ *are* provided at times, their presence relevant to the entirety of the analysis is patently minimal (see, for example, Adamson, 2000; Andersen, 2005; Bastow and Martin, 2005; Bowman, 1994; Nidia and Burgos, 2000; Smith, 1994). Indeed, of this list, Nidia and Burgos’s (2000) study is perhaps the most conspicuous—the authors *do not engage a single quotation* from a primary source in their quest to reflect on the historical development of the ‘Mexican revolutionary mystique’.

¹⁹³ More specifically, it should be noted that though analyses of primary discourses are offered in Chapters 4 and 5 towards differing problematiques, the primary discourse cited for any particular point borne thereof is *not* assumed to be pertinent *only* to that point. Indeed, it is my desire to facilitate a productive overflow of primary discourse in all Chapters to refer back (and forth) to one another in the process(es) of analysis and for the reader to become patently familiar with a broader notion of al Qaeda’s public discourse in the process. The same logic applies to my explication of Laclau and Mouffe’s specific frameworks for analysis. Indeed, this logic is reflective of Laclau and Mouffe’s recognition of an ontology in which *all* discourses are necessarily productive of—and constituted by—a ‘surplus of meaning’ (see Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, pp. 109, 111)

The artificial border(line) created by the ‘end’ of this Chapter forms a suitable point of departure from one ‘component’ of this dissertation to the other¹⁹⁴: the analysis that proceeds hereafter could not have been written without reference to the *theoretical analytic* as outlined in the preceding analysis; similarly, this *theoretical analytic* would itself disappear into an abstract irrelevance, were it not for its application to ‘empirical’ phenomena—in this case, ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamic extremism’. With this dynamic in mind, the remainder of the analysis is structured as follows: in Chapter 4, the primary public discourse(s) of al Qaeda, Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood will be used to challenge these groups’ erroneous conflation as collectively ‘irrational’, per a hegemonic discourse of ‘Islamic extremism’. Channelling the scholarship of Chantal Mouffe, the War on Terror is conceived as a discursive battlefield within which (*hegemonic* and *counter-hegemonic*) discourses compete against one another to secure legitimacy around the (*floating* signifiers) of ‘democracy’ and ‘freedom’. Interpreting the public discourse(s) of these groups via ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ not only entails a powerful counterpoint to the hegemony of ‘Islamic extremism’, it also permits a unique reading of how constituents of ‘Islamic extremism’ differentiate their identities from one another by virtue of their public discourse(s). In Chapter 5, Ernesto Laclau’s theory of populism will be employed to interpret the mobilisational discourse of al Qaeda (and, indeed, vice-versa)¹⁹⁵. *Pace* Laclau, it will be argued that al Qaeda’s public discourse clearly accedes to the key characteristics by which ‘populism’ is articulated. It will be subsequently argued that contrary to dominant readings, al Qaeda can be viewed as a fundamentally populist movement—a political entity that is itself borne of *the political*—thus situating their struggle within a pantheon of violent and non-violent political movements who have articulated similar discourses of resistance across time and space. Finally, in the Conclusion, a selection of pertinent themes examined throughout the dissertation will be re-orientated in contemporary political contexts, thus providing some initial observations on: i) how logics of (il)legitimacy *continue* to shape the epistemological contours of social science output (as develops themes primarily explored in Chapter 1); ii) how logics of (il)legitimacy *continue* to shape orthodox conceptions of what it means to write ‘academically’ in a contemporary

¹⁹⁴ Though this ‘borderline’ should not be seen to signify a specific point along an analytical spectrum that is determined by ‘lineal progress’: this dissertation—like all manifestations of writing—does not neatly unfold, rather, its structure folds in upon itself akin to the process of ‘double invagination’ as previously outlined by Derrida.

¹⁹⁵ And to thereby (further) challenge the reductive charge of ‘apoliticalness’ attributed to al Qaeda that lies at the heart of ‘Islamic extremism’.

communicative milieu (as develops themes primarily explored in Chapters 2 and 3) and; iii) how violent manifestations of *the political*—in this case the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)—*continue* to perforate a hegemonic terrain of *neo-liberal* politics, the underlying logic of which seeks to defeat ‘terrorism’ by means of silencing associated groups’ (il)legitimate articulations of political grievances (as develops themes primarily explored in Chapters 4 and 5).

Chapter 4

A Discursive Battlefield: The ‘West’, ‘Islamic Extremism’ and the Dialectical Struggle for Meaning in Hegemonic and Counter-Hegemonic Discourse

“Perfect democracy would indeed destroy itself. This is why it should be conceived as a good that exists as good as long as it cannot be reached”

(Mouffe, 2000, p. 137)

Introduction: Chantal Mouffe and the Hegemony of Neo-Liberal Politics

Though both Laclau and Mouffe have, from their earliest writings, challenged essentialist understandings of social democracy (see Laclau and Mouffe, 1985), Mouffe, in particular, has developed this premise through a series of important works (see Mouffe, 1993, 2000, 2005b, 2013)¹⁹⁶. Mouffe’s primary target for critique is what she views as a ‘politics of consensus’; ‘rationalist’, ‘universalist’ and ‘individualistic’ visions of politics (see Mouffe, 1993, p. 2; Rummens, 2009)—such as those put forward by Giddens and Beck, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas, for example—which attempt to negate the radical heterogeneity of the political¹⁹⁷. For Mouffe (as for Laclau), the intrinsically heterogeneous nature of the political ensures that *all* politics is conflictual¹⁹⁸; hence, any/all forms of ‘*consensus* politics’ that posit images of universal inclusivity—either in the present or in the future—serve not to dissolve ‘self/other’ distinctions, but to (further) entrench them. As Mouffe puts it, “every consensus is by necessity based on acts of exclusion” (2005a, p. 111)¹⁹⁹ and it is such that ‘neo-liberalism’—a

¹⁹⁶ This, of course, is not to say that Laclau does not contribute to this critique in subsequent works; rather, Laclau has focused more intently on articulations of collective identity-formation in relation to ‘populism’. For discussions on ‘splitting the difference’ between Laclau and Mouffe, see Wenman, 2003; Smith, 1998.

¹⁹⁷ As Mouffe outlines, this negation is not only impossible, but positively dangerous: “To negate the political does not make it disappear, it only leads to bewilderment in the face of its manifestations and to impotence in dealing with them.” (2005a, p. 140)

¹⁹⁸ Once again, it is instructive to remind ourselves of Mouffe’s distinction between politics and the political. As summarised in her most recent book, *Agonistics*: “By ‘the political’, I refer to the ontological dimension of antagonism, and by ‘politics’ I mean the ensemble of practices and institutions whose aim is to organize human coexistence. These practices, however, always operate within a terrain of conflictuality informed by ‘the political’” (2013, p. xii)

¹⁹⁹ Indeed, as Mouffe offers elsewhere: “there is no consensus without exclusion, no ‘we’ without a ‘they’ and no politics is possible without the drawing of a frontier.” (2005b, p. 73)

discursive formation²⁰⁰ which Mouffe holds as the dominant image of contemporary consensus politics—can only present Western-centric ideals of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ to be universally ‘true’ by assigning alternative articulations of these concepts to be invalid and/or irrational. To reflect on this dynamic is, in the language of Discourse Theory, to reflect on the *antagonistic* dimension that conditions the generation of all/any (temporary) social identities²⁰¹:

[W]hat constitutes the condition of possibility of a signifying system—its limits—is also what constitutes its condition of impossibility—a blockage of the continuous expansion of the process of signification...if the systematicity of the system is a direct result of the exclusionary limit, it is only that exclusion that grounds the system as such (Laclau, 1994, pp. 168-169)²⁰²

In other words, a signifying system—in this case, *neo-liberal* discourse—cannot accede to the values it ascribes to an *antagonistic* (enemy) Other, for reference to the Other constitutes the very limits of (im)possibility that allows for the constitution of the signifying system itself²⁰³. The degree to which a ‘neo-liberal’ discourse is determined as superior relative to alternative discourses cannot be conceived as a naturalised function of ‘rationality’ or ‘emancipatory progress’²⁰⁴, therefore; rather, its relative authority must be conceived as a function of *hegemony*:

²⁰⁰ Here, I refer to Torfing’s definition of a discursive formation: “A discursive formation is a result of the rearticulation of a variety of discourses into a relatively unified whole. Liberal democracy is a discursive formation as it consists of a variety of different discourses which have been articulated in and through hegemonic practices.” (1999, p. 300)

²⁰¹ The concept of *antagonism*, along with *hegemony*, forms the referential core of Laclau and Mouffe’s political approach (and by extension, that of Discourse Theory). It is embedded within the very logic of what Derrida might call *différance*, which posits that no identity can ever be grounded as a totality. As clarified by Laclau and Mouffe: “If language is a system of differences, antagonism is the failure of difference: in that sense, it situates itself within the limits of language and can only exist as the disruption of it...Antagonism escapes the possibility of being apprehended through language since language only exists as an attempt to fix that which antagonism subverts.” (1985, p. 125). Mouffe would later re-articulate the logic of *antagonism* as ‘the political’ in *The Democratic Paradox* (2000), yet, it is important to note that the concepts of ‘the political’ and ‘antagonism’—as put forward by Laclau and Mouffe, at least—do not *replace* one another; rather, each category is inter-referentially implied.

²⁰² Torfing summarises this position as follows: “All identities and all values are constituted by reference to something outside them, which has the character of a subversive margin preventing the possibility of an ultimate fixity” (1999, pp. 6-7)

²⁰³ Torfing, interpreting Žižek, puts it thus: “[T]he antagonistic force is held responsible for the blockage of our full identity, and this permits the externalization of our constitutive lack as subjects to the negating Other, which thus becomes the positive embodiment of our self-blockage ([Žižek 1990]: 253). As a result our political actions will tend to be guided by the illusion that the annihilation of the antagonistic force will permit us to become the fully constituted ‘we’ that we have always sought to be.” (1999, p. 129). Indeed, one might note that it is precisely this dynamic that punctuates the impossibility of an author to effectively write their own totalised (self-)identity.

²⁰⁴ Insofar as these approaches attempt to foreclose the radical contestability of the *antagonistic* dimension that is constructive of (political) identities.

To speak of hegemony means that every social order is a contingent articulation of power relations that lacks an ultimate rational ground. Society is always the product of a series of practices that attempt to create a certain order in a contingent context. These are the practices that we call ‘hegemonic practices’. Things could always be otherwise. *Every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities*. A particular order is always the expression of a particular configuration of power relations. It is in this sense that every order is political [emphasis added]. (Mouffe, 2013, p. 131)²⁰⁵

Taking *antagonism* and *hegemony* as the basis of identity construction, then, we must accept that competing articulations of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ do not represent naturalised manifestations of *irrationality* or unwieldy interruptions to ‘emancipatory progress’: their very articulation is, in fact, representative of the naturally conflictual terrain of politics and should be conceived as valid insofar as their articulation is constitutive of *counter-hegemonic* discourses—those that challenge the *hegemony* of the dominant discourse/social order. The problem, per Mouffe, is that the entrenchment of *neo-liberal* consensus—whereby its concomitant political system of liberal democracy is popularly conceived as the only legitimate outlet for political expression²⁰⁶—has constrained an accommodating space for naturally-occurring *counter-hegemonic* forms of political expression to the extent that

²⁰⁵ Here, Mouffe outlines the concept of hegemony in relation to the dialogic between ‘self/other’, which directly draws on Derrida’s concepts of *difference* and the ‘constitutive outside’: “It is because every object has inscribed in its very being something other than itself and that as a result, everything is constructed as *difference*, that its being cannot be conceived as pure ‘presence’ or ‘objectivity’. Since the constitutive outside is present within the inside as its always real possibility, every identity becomes purely contingent. This implies that we should not conceptualize power as an *external* relation taking place between two pre-constituted identities, but rather as constituting the identities themselves. This point of confluence between objectivity and power is what we have called ‘hegemony’ [emphasis in original] (Mouffe, 2000, p. 21)

²⁰⁶ Summing up a significant proportion of *The Democratic Paradox*, Mouffe offers reflection on ‘liberal democracy’ in the following passage. It is upon this basis that I foremostly justify the investigation of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ as the key ‘floating signifiers’ of the War on Terror: “liberal democracy is an articulation that combines two different traditions: liberalism, with its emphasis on individual liberty and universal rights; and democracy, which privileges the idea of equality and ‘rule by the people’, i.e. popular sovereignty. Such an articulation is not a necessary but a contingent one; it is the product of a specific history. The liberal democratic model, with its particular conception of human rights, is the expression of a given cultural and historical context, in which...Judeo-Christian tradition plays a central role. Such a model of democracy is constitutive of our form of life and it is certainly worthy of our allegiance, but there is no reason to present it as the only legitimate way of organizing human coexistence and to try to impose it on the rest of the world. It is clear that the kind of individualism dominant in Western societies is alien to many other cultures, whose traditions are informed by different values. Democracy, understood as ‘rule by the people’, can therefore take other forms—for instance, forms in which the value of community is more meaningful than the idea of individual liberty. *The dominant view...asserts that moral progress requires the acceptance of the Western model of liberal democracy because it is the only possible institutional framework for the implementation of human rights*. This thesis has to be rejected, but that does not necessarily mean discarding the idea of human rights. Human rights might, in fact, continue to play a role, but on the condition that they are reformulated in a way that permits a pluralism of interpretations [emphasis added]” (2013, pp. 29-30). The constitutive distinction between liberalism and democracy is similarly touched on by Margaret Canovan: “modern democracy is an uneasy combination of two fundamentally different sets of principles, liberal on the one hand and populist/democratic on the other. ‘Liberalism’ is concerned with individual rights, universal principles and the rule of law, and is typically expressed in a written constitution; whereas the ‘democratic’ strand is concerned with the sovereign will of the people, understood as unqualified majority rule and typically expressed through referendums.” (2004, p. 244)

specific *antagonisms*—which are inherent to the political—have erupted in ‘extreme’ forms²⁰⁷, such as ‘right-wing extremism’ (see Mouffe, 2005c) and global ‘terrorism’ (see Mouffe, 2005b)²⁰⁸.

Mouffe’s critical logic is undoubtedly sound (as will be evinced in the analysis below), yet her characterisation of terrorism therein is somewhat problematic. For instance, Mouffe abstractly describes terrorism as “the product of a new configuration of the political which is characteristic of the type of world order being implemented around the hegemony of a single hyper-power” (2005b, p. 81) and although she is careful to note that there exist a number of contributory factors vis-à-vis ‘terrorism’²⁰⁹, she does not provide any significant detail as to what they might be²¹⁰. Without being overly-critical of Mouffe— for her purpose is to reflect on the dangers of consensus politics, rather than the specificities of ‘terrorism’ per se—she appears to fall into the familiar trap of designating ‘terrorism’ to be that which one “knows when they see it”²¹¹, a definitional truism which has tended to reinforce both orthodox onto-epistemological frameworks for *explaining* (Hollis and Smith, 1991) terrorism and state-centric logics for designating specific forms of violence and/or political expression to be (il)legitimate (see Chapter 1).

²⁰⁷ Suitable elaboration on ‘extreme’ manifestation of antagonism(s) is provided by Mouffe: “the absence of an effective pluralism entails the impossibility for antagonisms to find agonistic, i.e. legitimate, forms of expression. It is no wonder that, when they explode, those antagonisms take extreme forms, putting into question the very basis of the existing order. The issue is once more the negation of the dimension of the political and the belief that the aim of politics—whether at the national or the international level—is to establish consensus on one single model, thereby foreclosing the possibility of legitimate dissent. *The lack of political channels for challenging the hegemony of the neo-liberal model of globalization is, I contend, at the origin of the proliferation of discourses and practices of radical negation of the established order* [emphasis added]” (2005b, p. 82)

²⁰⁸ Here, I am in agreement with Francisco Panizza: “In its extreme form, antagonism may include an element of physical violence... But antagonism is not necessarily about physical violence or even the threat of violence. Rather, it is a mode of identification.” (2005b, p. 6)

²⁰⁹ This awareness is perhaps most particularly apparent in the following passage from *On the Political*: “It is certainly the case that there is a correlation between the now unchallenged power of the USA and the proliferation of terrorist groups. Of course in no way do I want to pretend that this is the only explanation for terrorism, which is due to a multiplicity of factors. But it is undeniable that it tends to flourish in circumstances in which there are no legitimate political channels for the expression of grievances” (Mouffe, 2005b, p. 81)

²¹⁰ Pertinent analytical questions for terrorism scholars in this regard might include: What groups constitute terrorist groups and why? What acts constitute terrorism and why? How is terrorism different from alternative forms of political violence (or, indeed, state violence)? How do specific terrorist groups constitute their political identities in an *antagonistic* way *beyond* their use of violence? All of these questions remain unaddressed in Mouffe’s sweeping engagement with ‘terrorism’, yet form the analytical backbone of both Terrorism Studies and Critical Terrorism Studies.

²¹¹ This position is made patently clear in the following statement from influential Terrorism Studies scholar, Paul Wilkinson: “As for identifying objective criteria for identifying terrorist activity, common sense indicates the general public in most countries in the world can recognise terrorism when they see campaigns of bombings, suicide bombings, shooting attacks, hostage-takings, hijackings and threats of such actions, especially when so many of these actions are deliberately aimed at civilians.” (2011, p. 4)

I wish to address this gap by supplementing Mouffe's analytical framework with a (critically) rigorous analysis of the (discursive) processes by which *hegemonic* and *counter-hegemonic* discourses compete for legitimacy in relation to two key signifiers of the War on Terror; namely, 'freedom' and 'democracy'²¹². Proceeding thus, I will outline how the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and al Qaeda are equivalised under a simplifying label of 'Islamic extremism', before utilising these groups' public discourse(s) as a means of challenging this equivalisation. By these means, I (hope to) offer a nuanced deconstruction of the hegemonic War on Terror discourse as based on the primary discourse of those groups who collectively comprise its defining enemy Other—an approach which directly addresses deficiencies within the current literatures of Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies, and Critical Terrorism Studies, which have thus far failed to accommodate similar analyses as situated within a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology²¹³. In order to facilitate this analysis, it is necessary to (further) unpack the analytical toolkit offered by Discourse Theory.

Articulation, Nodal Points, Chains of Equivalence and Floating/Empty Signifiers: The Analytical Toolkit of Discourse Theory

The starting point here is that "all identity emerges through the articulation or rearticulation of signifying elements" (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 7), with *articulation* defined as "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulatory practice." (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 105)²¹⁴. Though signifying elements themselves do not bear any essential meaning, Laclau and Mouffe provide that temporary meaning is affixed at particular *nodal points*, "privileged signifiers or reference points...in a discourse that bind together a particular system of meaning or 'chain of signification' (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 8)²¹⁵. It is in this sense that the signifiers of

²¹² See footnote 206.

²¹³ It should be noted here that engaging in a discursive analysis of the War on Terror is nothing 'new' (see, for example, Croft, 2006; Jackson, 2007b). The main novelty of this Chapter—insofar as one conceives of it as a standalone piece of work (which I do not)—is based on accentuating the discourse of Islamic extremists as the basis for deconstructing the hegemony of the Western-centric War on Terror discourse. In order to facilitate this analysis, it is necessary to outline—in depth—how the hegemony of the War on Terror discourse is sustained before turning to deconstruct it.

²¹⁴ It is important to note here that, as per the ontological commitments of discourse theory, the category of 'articulation' implies the interproductive interrelationship between hegemony and antagonism, as discussed in the main text above. As Mouffe outlines in an interview with Carpentier and Cammaerts: "There is no meaning that is just essentially given to us; there is no essence of the social, it is always constructed. The social is always the result of a hegemonic articulation; every type of social order is the product of a hegemony as a specific political articulation" (2006, p. 4)

²¹⁵ Laclau and Mouffe put it thus: "Society never manages to be identical to itself, as every nodal point is constituted within an intertextuality that overflows it. *The practice of articulation, therefore, consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds*

‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ *float* (i.e. ‘*floating signifiers*’) and are only imbued with meaning to the degree to which they become affixed vis-à-vis *nodal points* within an articulated system of meaning/chain of signification²¹⁶. The substantive (/hegemonic) character of these signifying systems is further derived from a productive oscillation between the dual logics of *equivalence* and *difference*, which mutually produce and subvert one another in the *articulation* of political demands and social identities²¹⁷. Stavrakakis provides a useful summary:

The logic of equivalence, associated with the paradigmatic pole of language...reduces the number of positions that can be combined in a discourse, leading to a paratactical division of the political space that simplifies political struggle into an antagonism between ‘us’ and ‘them’, good and evil. (2004, p. 257)

In other words, under the *logic of equivalence*, a signifying system attempts to consolidate its self-identity by negating the legitimacy of a competing signifying system (see Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 11); George W. Bush’s statement on 20 September 2001 that ‘either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists’ provides a stark example of the logic of equivalence in action²¹⁸.

The *logic of difference*, on the other hand:

tends to expand what linguists call the syntagmatic pole of language...[and] is dominant in discourses that stress *inclusivity*: the continuous articulation of more and more elements (political demands,

from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursively...The social is articulation insofar as ‘society’ is impossible. [emphasis in original]” (2001, pp. 113-114)

²¹⁶ Jorgensen and Phillips provide useful clarification: “Nodal points are floating signifiers, but whereas the term ‘nodal point’ refers to a point of crystallisation within a specific discourse, the term ‘floating signifier’ belongs to the ongoing struggle between different discourses to fix the meaning of important signs. Thus, ‘body’ is a nodal point in medical discourse, and a floating signifier in the struggle between medical discourse and alternative treatment discourses” (2002, pp. 28-29)

²¹⁷ Indeed, this mutual constitution is borne of the very political ontology of what Marchart might describe as *post-foundationalist*: “just as the logic of difference never manages to constitute a fully sutured space, neither does the logic of equivalence ever achieve this. The dissolution of the differential character of the social agent’s positions through the equivalential condensation, is never complete. If society is not totally possible, neither is it totally impossible” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001, p. 129)

²¹⁸ To take another example appropriate to terrorism and political violence, Margaret Thatcher’s statement in relation to Irish Republican prisoners seeking ‘political prisoner’ status during hunger strikes in 1981 clearly seeks to negate a competing discourse of political legitimacy, thus buttressing the ‘legitimate’ self-identity on the part of the British state as its mirror image: “Those terrorists will carry their determination to disrupt society to any lengths. Once again we have a hunger strike at the Maze Prison in the quest for what they call political status. There is no such thing as political murder, political bombing or political violence. There is only criminal murder, criminal bombing and criminal violence. We will not compromise on this. There will be no political status.” (Thatcher, 1981)

ideological principles etc.) entering into a relation of combination. [emphasis added] (Stavrakakis, 2004, p. 257)

By this logic (of *difference*), attempts are made to weaken the relative fixity of key (floating) signifiers that have been accorded with specific meanings within competing signifying systems before²¹⁹ rearticulating them in a new signifying system²²⁰. Al Qaeda's attempts to expose the US' hypocritical espousal of 'freedom' before²²¹ (re)articulating their own 'version' of 'freedom'—as broadly conceived under the emancipatory jurisdiction of Allah—is illustrative of a *logic of difference* in action²²².

Logics of *equivalence* and *difference* are separated as two distinct analytical categories in the vocabulary of Discourse Theory and one logic may certainly be emphasised over the other in specific signifying systems²²³. Yet, it must be stressed that every *articulation* of political demands/social identities proceeds via the creation of *equivalential chains* (which attempt, but always fail to affix a 'fullness' of meaning to these demands/identities) that are perennially interrupted by the *logic of difference*. This *logic of difference* emanates from competing discursive systems' attempts to affix meaning to *floating signifiers* via the creation of their own *equivalential chains*. It is in this sense that politics itself can be conceived as “a

²¹⁹ The term 'before' is used here for aid of analytical clarity only. Processes of weakening existing signifying chains (Other) and rearticulating them anew (Self) do not necessarily precede or follow one another; rather, they operate as *symbiotic* processes that are always implied in one another to some degree, regardless of what particular aspect of this process is most immediately 'apparent' to the researcher.

²²⁰ The example provided by Howarth and Stavrakakis with regard to South Africa under apartheid in the 1970s and 1980s illuminates this point: “In this quintessential logic of difference, the National Party sought to expand its bases of consent by differentially incorporating 'Indians', so-called 'Coloureds' and certain categories of 'urban blacks' into the dominant order by offering them certain political, social and economic concessions. In doing so, the South African state endeavoured to disarticulate the growing political alliances between these groups, thus weakening the anti-apartheid opposition” (2000, pp. 11-12)

²²¹ See footnote 218.

²²² The complex interrelationship between logics of *equivalence* and *difference* is *essential* to the proceeding analysis—both in this Chapter and in Chapter 5. The following summary by Jacob Torfing is hereby submitted towards further clarification: “Within discourse, meaning is constructed either in terms of *difference* or *equivalence*... In some situations, the logic of *difference* predominates, in others, the logic of *equivalence* prevails. Most often, meaning is constructed both through the assertion of *difference* and the *articulation of chains of equivalence*. There is no ultimate centre that is capable of invoking a totalizing discursive closure but tendentially *empty signifiers* will tend to function as *nodal points* for the partial fixation of meaning.” [emphasis added] (2005, p. 14)

²²³ As again elucidated by Torfing: “There is no simple identity between... equivalential identities since they are only the same in one aspect while being different in others (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 128). The relations between difference and equivalence is, in other words, undecidable. The discursive identities are inscribed both in signifying chains that stress their differential value, and in signifying chains that stress their equivalence. The tension between the differential and equivalential aspects of discursive identities is unresolvable, but political struggles may succeed in emphasizing one of the two aspects. Emphasis on the equivalential aspect by the expansion of chains of equivalence will tend to simplify the social and political space by delimiting the play of difference. The collapse of difference into equivalence will tend to involve a loss of meaning since meaning is intrinsically linked to the differential character of identity” (1999, p. 97)

double operation of breaking and extending chains of equivalence” (Laclau, 2004, p. 334). Given the centrality of *chains of equivalence* to the construction of political and social identities, then, further elucidation is required.

Deriving most immediately from the logic of *equivalence*, *chains of equivalence* are comprised of *particular* and *universal* components. Herein, the links of the chain (the *particular*) represent specific demands of a discourse (for example, the Muslim Brotherhood’s demand for the establishment of an independent judiciary within Egypt), whilst the chain itself (the *universal*) represents the overarching ‘quality’ that binds these individual links together (i.e. an encompassing discourse of Political Islam)²²⁴. In other words, in processes of *articulation*, the very links of the chain of equivalence (the *particular*) come to be subsumed by a representation of the entire chain itself (the *universal*), though one cannot entirely subsume or replace the other²²⁵. Interpreting ‘Islamic extremism’—which incorporates groups such as al Qaeda, Hamas, and the Muslim Brotherhood—as a *chain of equivalence* in the overarching War on Terror discourse, the *particularities* of these groups’ activities, tactical differentials and ideological nuances become subsumed under a *universal* label of ‘Islamic extremism’, which signifies an irrational, religiously-led compunction towards violence and a *de facto* threat to the security of the US/the West.

As a final consideration, it is important to stress that although a *universal* representation of *chains of equivalence* comes to the fore in catchment terms such as ‘Islamic extremism’, it signifies an identity that can never be fully realised. Refracting the very basis of the political itself—which is protruded by a perennial lack—discourses necessarily function *as if* this fullness is achievable, by striving *towards* the realisation of an ‘impossible ideal’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000, p. 8)²²⁶. In the vocabulary of Discourse Theory, such ‘impossible

²²⁴ As explained by Laclau: “This means that each individual demand is constitutively split: on the one hand it is its own particularised self, on the other, it points, through equivalential links, to the totality of other demands” (2005b, p. 37); similarly, “particularities...without ceasing to be particularities, assume a function of universal representation” (Laclau, 2000, p. 56)

²²⁵ Jorgensen and Phillips effectively sum this dynamic as follows: “What...key signifiers have in common is that they are empty signs: that is, they mean almost nothing by themselves until, through *chains of equivalence*, they are combined with other signs that fill them with meaning. ‘Liberal democracy’ becomes liberal democracy through its combination with other carriers of meaning such as ‘free elections’ and ‘freedom of speech’ [emphasis added]” (2002, p. 50). Though the authors do not use the terminology directly, ‘Liberal Democracy’ can be said to constitute the *universal* characterisation of the chain of equivalence, whereas ‘free elections’ and ‘freedom of speech’ can be said to constitute the *particular* elements therein.

²²⁶ As Howarth and Stavrakakis continue, “Societies are thus organised and centred on the basis of such (impossible) ideals” (2000, p. 8)

ideals' are referred to as *empty signifiers*, which Laclau usefully explains by reference to a Hobbesian state of nature:

[I]n a situation of radical disorder 'order' is present as that which is absent; it becomes an *empty signifier*, as the signifier of this absence. In this sense, various political forces can compete in their efforts to present their particular objectives as those which carry out the filling of that lack. To hegemonize something is exactly to carry out this filling function...politics is possible because the constitutive impossibility of society can only represent itself through the production of *empty signifiers* [emphasis added] (Laclau, 1996, p. 44)

As Howarth and Stavrakakis continue,

the articulation of a political discourse can only take place around an *empty signifier* that functions as a *nodal point*. In other words, emptiness is now revealed as an essential quality of the *nodal point*, as an important condition of possibility for its hegemonic success [emphasis added] (2000, p. 9)²²⁷

As I will outline in Chapter 5, the restoration of the 'glorious Caliphate' represents an *empty signifier par excellence* in al Qaeda's primary discourse—just as the reclamation/realisation of a 'homeland' represents an *empty signifier par excellence* in nationalist discourses—yet in the immediate context of this chapter, 'national security' or the implied possibility of 'victory' in the War on Terror²²⁸ constitutes an *empty signifier* of the hegemonic War on Terror discourse: neither can ever be fulfilled, but such 'impossible ideals' are necessary for the creation of *chains of equivalence* that give meaning to their respective political causes and galvanise a sense of Self, against a threatening, ephemeral Other, which functions as its required constitutive outside.

Thus demarcates the basic contours of the War on Terror, conceived—via Discourse Theory—as a discursive battlefield within which competing discourses contest the affixation of meaning with respect to the extension and breaking of *chains of equivalence*. With this analytical framework in mind, I now turn to investigate processes of identity formation therein, not towards the discovery of any essential or causal 'truth' between signifiers and their corresponding signified, but, rather, towards a problematisation of 'Islamic extremism' and an(/my) alternative reading of the War on Terror.

²²⁷ As Laclau outlines, although there is an important distinction to be made between *floating* and *empty signifiers*, "The distinction is...mainly analytic, for in practice empty and floating signifiers largely overlap: there is no historical situation where society is so consolidated that its internal frontier is not submitted to any subversion or displacement, and no organic crisis so deep that some forms of stability do not put limits on the operativity of the subversive tendencies." (2005b, p. 43).

²²⁸ As countless authors have noted, the use of the word 'war' in this context embodies an assumption that it can be won, or conversely, lost.

Hegemony: ‘Islamic Extremism’, ‘9/11’ and the Articulation of *Equivalence*

In an interview during the 2008 Presidential campaign, US senator John McCain, speaking on the War on Terror, declared ‘the enemy’ as follows: “We are facing a transcendent evil of radical Islamic extremism that wants to destroy everything we stand for and value” (‘2008 election interview with Charlie Gibson’)²²⁹. In this brief statement, the specific identity(/ies) of the enemy that constitute ‘Islamic extremism’ is concealed and yet immediately activated by a familiar characterisation of the Other: that which exists to annihilate the values that constitute the very identity of the US (and, by extension, ‘the West’). Interpreted through the lens of Discourse Theory, one can see a move to consolidate meaning accorded to the *floating signifiers* of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’, without specific reference to the signifiers themselves²³⁰; they are semantically hidden, and yet insofar as the identity of the US/Western Self is constituted by reference to the meanings attributed to ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’, they are inherently implied and are effectively present. Read thus, ‘Islamic extremism’ can be conceived as a *chain of equivalence*; and one which is sufficiently *hegemonic* such that the *universal* characterisation signified by ‘everything we stand for and value’ immediately activates the *particularities* of this chain to an attentive audience well-adjusted to a familiar vocabulary²³¹. The appropriate task, as an analyst utilising Discourse Theory, is to chart a contingent genealogy²³² of how this vocabulary has secured such relative *hegemony* over time²³³. To facilitate this task, I now turn to a key *nodal point* around which ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ have been articulated: ‘9/11’²³⁴.

²²⁹ As McCain similarly put it in 2010, “We are facing the transcendent challenge of the twenty-first century, and that is radical Islamic extremism.” (Hibbard, 2010, p. 239)

²³⁰ Of course, on the one hand, this is a function of the decision of the author to assign these categories as the appropriate *floating signifiers* vis-à-vis the War on Terror.

²³¹ More specifically, this is a vocabulary that includes myriad identifiable terms such as ‘evil’, ‘al Qaeda’, ‘fanatics’, ‘murderers’, ‘caves’, ‘radical Islam’, ‘Muslim Brotherhood’, ‘hiding’, ‘Salafism’, ‘Hamas’ ‘terrorism’, ‘plotting’, ‘weapons of mass destruction’, as will become evident in the primary discourse as submitted in the proceeding analysis.

²³² There cannot be *one* genealogy, rather any genealogical analysis is fundamentally based on the author’s interpretation of the materials to which he/she has been exposed and has chosen—purposefully or not—to include/omit in their analysis. It is in this sense that the analysis I provide cannot be naturally secured as an authoritative reading of such developments, rather it can only be submitted as an *alternative* reading; and one among many.

²³³ Indeed, I remind the reader here that without *particular* meanings affixed to these signifiers, the *universal* representation of the chain of equivalence that McCain activates in 2008 would itself be meaningless (and vice-versa)

²³⁴ As Reyes remarks on the importance on the centrality of prominent nodal points (such as, in this case, 9/11): “If a nodal point is the site of a particular discursive concentration—the point at which several associative chains are condensed—then it is more likely to be apparent in a series of similar terms rather than the recurrent use of a single term” (quoted in Howarth and Torfing, 2005, p.242). As such, ‘9/11’—and its alternative monikers of September 11th, and so on—should be considered as a strategic referent point around which

Speaking on 11 September 2001, George W. Bush announced to the world: “Thousands of lives were ended today by *evil, despicable* acts of terror...America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for *freedom* and *opportunity* in the world. And no one will keep that light from shining” [emphasis added] (2001a). Over the proceeding weeks, Bush’s message—as well as that of associated world leaders—remained consistent, as the Self/Other dichotomy that would come to define the War on Terror—and ‘Islamic extremism’ as a dominant *chain of equivalence* therein—*immediately* took shape around key signifiers of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’:

16 September:

Great tragedy has come to us, and we are meeting it with the best that is in our country, with courage and concern for others. *Because this is America. This is what our enemies hate and have attacked.* And this is why we will prevail...I want to remind the American people that the prime suspect’s [Osama bin Laden] organisation is in a lot of countries- it’s a widespread organization based on one thing: terrorizing. They can’t stand freedom; they hate what America stands for...we’ve never seen this kind of evil before. But the evil-doers have never seen the American people in action before, either, and they’re about to find out [emphasis added] (Bush, 2001b)²³⁵

20 September²³⁶:

Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom...On September 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country...Americans have questions tonight. Americans are asking. Who attacked our country? The evidence we have gathered all points to a loosely affiliated terrorist organisation known as al Qaeda...Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world—and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere...They are sent back to their homes or sent to hide in countries around the world to plot evil and destruction ... Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber—a democratically elected government...They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other...These terrorists kill not merely to end lives but to disrupt and end a way of life...This is not, however, just America’s fight. And what is at stake is not just America’s freedom. This is the world’s fight. This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom...We are in a fight for our principles. (Bush, 2001c)²³⁷

prominent discourses of the War on Terror often-times—but not always—rotate. Alternative *nodal points* exist—and are touched upon in the proceeding analysis—yet few are as powerful and foundational as ‘9/11’ as a means to signify the ‘origins’ of the War on Terror and , therefore, the enemy defined as its constitutive Other.

²³⁵ A similar narrative is put forward by Tony Blair, speaking here on 11 September 2001: “this mass terrorism is a new evil in our world. The people who perpetrate it have no regard whatsoever for the sanctity of human life... This is not a battle between the United States of America and terrorism, but between the free and democratic world and terrorism. We, therefore, here in Britain stand shoulder to shoulder with our American friends...and we, like them, will not rest until this evil is driven from our world...We are democratic. They are not. We have respect for human life. They do not. We hold essentially liberal values. They do not. As we look into these issues it is important that we never lose sight of our basic values. But we have to understand the nature of the enemy and act accordingly” (2001)

²³⁶ This speech marks the official declaration of the ‘War on Terror’.

²³⁷ Speaking to a French community in the US on 19 September 2001, Chirac asserted, “Once more, as in the past, democracies will prevail, together we shall prevail. Long live the United States. And long live France.” (‘U.S. Representative Don Young (R-AK) Holds Hearing on the Status of the Airline Industry’)

25 September:

I think 100 percent of the Japanese people ought to understand that we're dealing with evil people who hate freedom and legitimate governments, and that now is the time for freedom-loving people to come together to fight terrorist activity... No threat, no threat will prevent freedom-loving people from defending freedom. And make no mistake about it: This is good versus evil. These are evildoers. They have no justification for their actions. There's no religious justification, there's no political justification. The only motivation is evil. (Bush, 2001d)²³⁸

8 November:

This new enemy seeks to destroy our freedom and impose its views. We value life; the terrorists ruthlessly destroy it. We value education; the terrorists do not believe women should be educated or should have health care, or should leave their homes. We value the right to speak our minds; for the terrorists, free expression can be grounds for execution. We respect people of all faiths and welcome the free practice of religion; our enemy wants to dictate how to think and how to worship even to their fellow Muslims... We wage a war to save civilization itself. We did not seek it, but we must fight it—and we will prevail. (Bush, 2001e)²³⁹

As is foremostly the case with state discourses on terrorism, '9/11' was instantly interpreted through a patently *moral* frame; those responsible for this spectacle were driven by 'barbarism'²⁴⁰ rather than any sense of rational, instrumental utility. Further, and as outlined in Chapter 1, a similar perspective was put forward via the influential New Terrorism thesis, which—much like prominent state discourses following 9/11—foregrounded the vacuous morality of a 'new', transcendental terrorism, attributed religious fundamentalism as a *cause* of violence²⁴¹ and eroded the classic distinction embraced within the early Terrorism Studies literature between the means and ends of terrorism. With embedded predictions of 'catastrophic' and 'mass-casualty terrorism' to come, the spectre of an event resembling 'a

²³⁸ As submitted by Germany's Foreign Ambassador to the US, Wolfgang Ischinger: "Sept. 11 has re-established a common trans-Atlantic sense of purpose... Europeans and Americans share not only the same values—above all, the dignity and freedom of every human being—but also the same challenges" (Smith, 2001)

²³⁹ This is well represented in the following marks offered by Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres: "Now America has become a target for reasons which are not necessarily her own. Terrorism was directed at America to frustrate her democracy, to weaken her respect for human rights, to reduce her enterprise, and threaten her individualism so she would not be able to help others. This was an assault of the very existence of humanity." ("Remarks By Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres To The United Nations General Assembly")

²⁴⁰ As submitted by Attorney General of the United States, John Ashcroft on 24 September 2001: "Ladies and Gentlemen of the Judiciary Committee, the attacks of September 11 drew a bright line of demarcation between *the civil and the savage*, and our nation will never be the same. On one side of this line are *freedom's enemies, murderers of innocents* in the name of a *barbarous* cause. On the other side are friends of freedom; Today I call upon Congress to act to strengthen our ability to fight this evil wherever it exists, and to ensure that *the line between the civil and the savage*, so brightly drawn on September 11, is never crossed again. [emphasis in original] (Ashcroft, 2001; quoted in Jackson, 2005, p. 49)

²⁴¹ Gunning and Jackson reflect on this tendency as follows: "many studies on 'religious terrorism' openly state, or at least strongly imply, that the religious element is a central cause of violence. In other words, it is not a 'soft' concept which simply describes the way in which religious justifications are used to legitimise tactics or motivate followers. Rather, there is an implicit assumption that religious ideas have the power to *cause* the violence. In this sense, religion is viewed, under certain conditions, as a 'root cause' of contemporary terrorism" (2011, p. 373)

9/11' had effectively become animated as a spectacular reality on 11 September 2001, thus conferring, to an extent, retrospective legitimacy on the New Terrorism thesis and its erroneous claims to truth. In the subsequent clamour for information on this 'new' threat²⁴², the voices of associated experts—deeply embedded within policy circles—perforated the public discourse (see Burnett and Whyte, 2005; Miller and Mills, 2009, Jackson et al. 2011)²⁴³, and whether by cause or coincidence—for it is impossible to determine any 'true' causality here—the overlap between academic and policy discourses affixed an identifiable 'vocabulary of threat' vis-à-vis '9/11' (and, thus 'Islamic extremism').

It followed that '9/11' was consistently invoked—and continues to be invoked—as an instantly recognisable means to provide a knowable quantity to an essentially *unknowable*, abject²⁴⁴ enemy—a horrific visualisation of what the machinations of the Other would look like if successfully (re-)realised. Subsequent attacks—in either their realisation or latent potential²⁴⁵—have come to be measured against the referential apogee of '9/11'; for instance, the Madrid bombings in 2004 and the London bombings in 2005 have often been signified via the familiar monikers of '3/11' or '11-M' (see Hamilos, 2007) and '7/7', while sufficient preparedness against terrorism has often been constituted by a desire to avoid 'another 9/11'²⁴⁶. The following extract from British Prime Minister Tony Blair²⁴⁷ provides a more focused exposure of this dynamic:

²⁴² As Copeland outlines, "One week after the 11 September attack, 16 of the top 20 titles on Amazon.com best-seller list were books related to terrorism, intelligence or prophecy about calamities and 'the end of times.'" (2001b, *supra* note 1)

²⁴³ For example, reviewing the first edition of Giles Kepel's authoritative *Jihad: The Trail of Political Islam* for popular US publication *The Atlantic*, the influential Terrorism Studies scholar Walter Laqueur offers that while Kepel's book is "probably the best introduction to Islamism currently available", the fact that it did not predict an instance of catastrophic terrorism such as 9/11 ensured that the book was, effectively, "a study in intelligence failure" (2002)

²⁴⁴ Here, I refer to the concept of abjection, as attributable to Julia Kristeva: "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. A certainty protects it from the shameful—a certainty of which it is proud holds on to it. But simultaneously, just the same, that impetus, that spasm, that leap is drawn toward an elsewhere as tempting as it is condemned. Unflinching, like an inescapable boomerang, a vortex of summons and repulsion places the one haunted by it literally beside himself" (Kristeva, 1982, quoted in Debrix, 2005, p. 1157)

²⁴⁵ As Bush puts it: "Every success against the terrorists is a reminder of the shoreless ambitions of this enemy. The evil that inspired and rejoiced in 9/11 is still at work in the world. And so long as that's the case, America is still a nation at war." (2007a, in Bush, 2009, p. 468)

²⁴⁶ In this sense, it can also be argued that '9/11' has acted as an effective *empty signifier* since 11 September 2001, as each moment in which another '9/11' is not (re-)realised is constituted as an on-going victory against an enemy which is continuously plotting to exact similar spectacular events. This is particularly apparent with regard to the consistent memorialization of 9/11 as both an affirmation of the US national character and a reassurance that the threat that underpinned 9/11 remains: "Next week, America will mark the fifth anniversary

The true enemies became “the West” and those Islamic leaders who co-operated with them. The extremism may have started through religious doctrine and thought. But soon, in offshoots of the *Muslim brotherhood*, supported by Wahabi extremists and taught in some of the Madrassas of the Middle East and Asia, an *ideology* was born and exported *around the world*. The worst terrorist act was 9/11 ...But the reality is that many more had already died not just in acts of terrorism against Western interests, but in political insurrection and turmoil round the world. Over 100,000 died in Algeria. In Chechnya and Kashmir political causes that could have been resolved became brutally incapable of resolution under the pressure of terrorism. Today, in well over 30 or 40 countries terrorists are plotting action loosely linked with this ideology. Its roots are not superficial, therefore, they are deep, embedded now in the culture of many nations and capable of an eruption at any time [emphasis added] (Blair, 2006)²⁴⁸

Interpreted through Discourse Theory, ‘9/11’ is *articulated* here as a referential lynchpin—a *nodal point*—that links together a range of signifiers into a *chain of equivalence* that effectively moulds individual groups, territories and attacks into a *universal* whole of ‘Islamic extremism’. Conversely, and at the very same time, though the War on Terror encompasses a battleground against *particular* groups that perform violent manifestations of an enabling ideology, this ideology is constructed as prior to such acts and thus causal (see, also, Gunning and Jackson, 2011; Gunning, 2012). In this interpretation, ‘Islamic extremism’ exists simultaneously as both the result of *and* predicate to performances of ‘terrorism’. It is in this sense that targeting ‘Islamic extremism’ entails destroying both the causes and

of September the 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks. As this day approaches, it brings with it a flood of painful memories. We remember the horror of watching planes fly into the World Trade Center, and seeing the towers collapse before our eyes. We remember the sight of the Pentagon, broken and in flames. We remember the rescue workers who rushed into burning buildings to save lives, knowing they might never emerge again. We remember the brave passengers who charged the cockpit of their hijacked plane, and stopped the terrorists from reaching their target and killing more innocent civilians. We remember the cold brutality of the enemy who inflicted this harm on our country — an enemy whose leader, Osama bin Laden, declared the massacre of nearly 3,000 people that day — I quote — ‘an unparalleled and magnificent feat of valor, unmatched by any in humankind before them.’ In five years since our nation was attacked, al Qaeda and terrorists it has inspired have continued to attack across the world. They’ve killed the innocent in Europe and Africa and the Middle East, in Central Asia and the Far East, and beyond. Most recently, they attempted to strike again in the most ambitious plot since the attacks of September the 11th—a plan to blow up passenger planes headed for America over the Atlantic Ocean. Five years after our nation was attacked, the terrorist danger remains. We’re a nation at war—and America and her allies are fighting this war with relentless determination across the world.” (Bush, 2006b in Bush 2009, p. 394)

²⁴⁷ This speech is entitled ‘Not a Clash between Civilisations, but a Clash about Civilisation’.

²⁴⁸ As Blair continues: “The different aspects of this terrorism are linked. The struggle against terrorism in Madrid or London or Paris is the same as the struggle against the terrorist acts of Hezbollah in Lebanon or the PIJ in Palestine or rejectionist groups in Iraq. The murder of the innocent in Beslan is part of the *same ideology* that takes innocent lives in Saudi Arabia, the Yemen or Libya. And when Iran gives support to such terrorism, it becomes part of the same battle with the *same ideology* at its heart...Fundamentally, for this *ideology*, we are the enemy [emphasis added]” (Blair, 2006). The geographical breadth of the terrorist threat is similarly communicated by President Bush, “A terrorist underworld—including groups like Hamas, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, Jaish-i-Mohammed—operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centres of large cities.” (Bush, 2002) and Senator John Kerry “today the agents of terrorism work and lurk in the shadows of 60 nations on every continent” (2004)

symptoms of associated violence²⁴⁹: ‘victory’ in the War on Terror—an *empty signifier*, the fulfilling of which cannot be achieved, but the existence of which is essential for the articulation of *chains of equivalences* that attempt to fill this void—can, therefore, only be *fully* achieved by eradicating this ideology at its root. Read thus, a strategy to ‘win’ the War on Terror by spreading (US) values of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ should be interpreted not just as an instrument of (neo-liberal/neo-conservative) foreign policy²⁵⁰, but as an ontological move to fill the constitutive lack that prevents the US from realising its ‘full’ Self-identity:

This war is more than a clash of arms—it is a decisive ideological struggle, and the security of our nation is in the balance. To prevail, we must remove the conditions that inspire blind hatred, and drove 19 men to get onto airplanes and come to kill us. What every terrorist fears most is human freedom -- societies where men and women make their own choices, answer to their own conscience, and live by their hopes instead of their resentments. Free people are not drawn to violent and malignant ideologies—and most will choose a better way when they are given a chance. So we advance our own security interests by helping moderates, reformers, and brave voices for democracy. The great question of our day is whether America will help men and women in the Middle East to build free societies and share in the rights of all humanity. And I say, for the sake of our own security and we must. (Bush, 2007a)²⁵¹

Given, as has been established, that the threat of ‘Islamic extremism’ is predominantly constituted via its *oppositional* values vis-à-vis ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’, it stands to reason that ‘moderates’, ‘reformers’ and ‘brave voices’ for democracy cannot include those constituted as ‘Islamic extremists’, even in cases whereby such groups have called for the introduction of a ‘Western-style’ democracy (the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt) or have been elected to power via democratic means (Hamas and Hezbollah)²⁵². This dynamic is perhaps most plainly evident in the US’ *National Security Strategy* (2006), which was published less

²⁴⁹ “From the beginning, the War on Terror has been both a battle of arms and a battle of ideals—a fight against the terrorists and their murderous ideology” (Bush, 2006a, p. 9)

²⁵⁰ Indeed, returning to ‘9/11’ as a key *nodal point* of US self-identity, Bush has utilised the quality of American virtue associated with brave defiance to ‘9/11’ as a means of framing proactive policies towards the eventual defeat of terrorism. Recalling the events that took place on United Airlines flight 93, he submits: “For too long our culture has said, “If it feels good, do it.” Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: “Let’s roll.” In the sacrifice of soldiers, the fierce brotherhood of firefighters, and the bravery and generosity of ordinary citizens, we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We’ve been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass” (Bush, 2002, in Bush, 2009, p. 111)

²⁵¹ This dynamic is similarly illuminated by the following extract: “Democracy is the opposite of terrorist tyranny, which is why the terrorists denounce it and are willing to kill the innocent to stop it. Democracy is based on empowerment, while the terrorists’ ideology is based on enslavement. Democracies expand the freedom of their citizens, while the terrorists seek to impose a single set of narrow beliefs. Democracy sees individual as equal in worth and dignity, having an inherent potential to create and govern themselves. The terrorists see individuals as objects to be exploited, and then to be ruled and oppressed” (Bush, 2006a, p. 11)

²⁵² This move is practically foreclosed, for to do so would be to dissolve the limits of the signifying system by which the US identifies itself. This observation will be further embellished with reference to Mouffe’s concept of *agonistic* politics in the Conclusion chapter.

than two months after the electoral victory of Hamas. Herein, Hamas' victory is accepted as a legitimate insofar as it constitutes an expression of the mechanics of 'democracy' in action²⁵³, yet legitimacy cannot be conferred upon Hamas, unless/until they are seen to fulfil the underlying values of 'democracy' by which the US identifies *itself*²⁵⁴. For instance, two paragraphs before the first mention of Hamas, it is outlined that:

Elections are the most visible sign of a free society and can play a critical role in advancing effective democracy. *But elections alone are not enough* – they must be reinforced by other values, rights, and institutions to bring about lasting *freedom*. Our goal is human *liberty* protected by democratic institutions. [emphasis added] (Bush, 2006a, p. 3)

The *Strategy* continues:

The elected Hamas representatives...have an opportunity and a responsibility to uphold the principles of democratic government, including protection of minority rights and basic freedoms and a commitment to a recurring, free, and fair electoral process. By respecting these principles, the new Palestinian leaders can demonstrate their own commitment to freedom and help bring a lasting democracy to the Palestinian territories. But any elected government that refuses to honor these principles cannot be considered fully democratic, however it may have taken office. (ibid)

In subsequent speeches made by Bush, it is clear that Hamas' victory via democratic election is viewed as an unfortunate aberration²⁵⁵, as their image as enemies of 'freedom' and 'democracy' is (re)articulated by consolidating their equivalential identity as 'Islamic extremists' with other violent groups, such as al Qaeda and Hezbollah:

This struggle is waged with the technology of the 21st century, but at its core it is an ancient battle between good and evil...In truth, the men who carry out these savage acts serve no higher goal than their own desire for power. They accept no God before themselves. And they reserve a special hatred for the most ardent defenders of liberty, including Americans and Israelis. And that is why the founding charter of Hamas calls for the "elimination" of Israel. And that is why the followers of Hezbollah chant "Death to Israel, Death to America!" That is why Osama bin Laden teaches that "the killing of Jews and Americans is one of the biggest duties." And that is why the President of Iran

²⁵³ Indeed, as Bush accepts: "The Palestinian people voted in a process that was free, fair, and inclusive" (2006a, p. 5)

²⁵⁴ These conditions, of course, change by virtue of their performance on the part of the US, but, nonetheless, it is prudent to include the following summary taken from 2006 *National Security Strategy*: "Participation in elections by individuals or parties must include their commitment to the equality of all citizens; minority rights; civil liberties; voluntary and peaceful transfer of power; and the peaceful resolution of differences. Effective democracy also requires institutions that can protect individual liberty and ensure that the governments responsive and accountable to its citizens. There must be an independent media to inform the public and facilitate the free exchange of ideas. There must be political associations and political parties that can freely compete. Rule of law must be reinforced by an independent judiciary, a professional legal establishment, and an honest and competent police force." (Bush, 2006a, p. 3)

²⁵⁵ As Bush argues: "[People] fear that democracy will bring dangerous forces to power, such as Hamas in the Palestinian Territories. Elections will not always turn out the way we hope." (2007b)

dreams of returning the Middle East to the Middle Ages and calls for Israel to be wiped off the map. (Bush, 2008, in Bush, 2009, p. 560)²⁵⁶

Finally, given that the threat associated with ‘Islamic extremism’ is constituted as an underlying ideology defined against ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’, the Muslim Brotherhood, as a non-violent manifestation of this ideology, can also be brought into this *equivalential chain*; despite nuanced doctrinal differences. Hence, we see a clear linkage within the ‘Islamic extremism’ discourse between those groups that use violence—who are often specifically labelled as ‘Islamic terrorists’ (e.g. Hamas, Hezbollah and al Qaeda)—and those that do not. For instance, ‘Islamic terrorist’ groups are often unified by their common mission to restore the dominance of Islam in the lands of Islam²⁵⁷; read thus, the violent resistance of Hamas vis-à-vis Israel is constructed not as the group’s *raison d’être*, but, rather, as a tactical step towards the imposition of an Islamic theocracy and the eventual subjugation of a ‘free’ society²⁵⁸. This is similarly the case with the Muslim Brotherhood, who are often portrayed as a ‘feeder organisation’ and/or ‘pre-cursor’ to ‘Islamic terrorism’²⁵⁹ and whose relative expansion is viewed as an insidious move towards the realisation of similar ends, albeit, via different (non-violent) means²⁶⁰.

²⁵⁶ This dichotomy is further encapsulated in the following passage: “Critics point to the violence in Afghanistan, or Iraq, or Lebanon as evidence that freedom leaves people less safe. But look who’s causing the violence. It’s the terrorists, it’s the extremists. It is no coincidence that they are targeting young democracies in the Middle East. They know that the success of free societies there is a mortal threat to their ambitions—and to their very survival. The fact that our enemies are fighting back is not a reason to doubt democracy. It is evidence that they recognize democracy’s power... Still, some argue that a safer goal would be stability, especially in the Middle East. The problem is that pursuing stability at the expense of liberty does not lead to peace—it leads to *September the 11th, 2001* [emphasis added] (Bush, 2007b)

²⁵⁷ As Walzer submits, “Islamic terrorists don’t call themselves freedom fighters; they have a different mission: to restore the dominance of Islam in the lands of Islam.” (2002, p. 2)

²⁵⁸ This is well represented by the following extract taken from the editorial page of the Wall Street Journal, written in the immediate aftermath of the murder of Dutch filmmaker, Theo Van Gogh: “Europe needs to stop rationalizing the irrational hatred that possesses Islamic terrorists. Islamic terror is not the result of some “failed integration policy” or of some real or imagined Muslim grievance supposedly caused by U.S. Middle East policy. It is fuelled by a totalitarian ideology that seeks world domination and the subjugation of infidels and the West. The sooner Europe comes to terms with this truth the sooner it will begin to combat the fanaticism that claimed the life of Mr. van Gogh.” (‘The Van Gogh Murder, 2004)

²⁵⁹ The following paragraph from a Council on Foreign Relations report neatly elucidates this dynamic: “The original Egyptian organization has spawned branches in 70 countries. These organizations bear the Brotherhood name, but their connections to the founding group vary and some of them may provide financial, logistical, or other support to terrorist organizations. Some terrorist groups—including Hamas, Jamaat al-Islamiyya, and al-Qaeda—have historic and ideological affiliations with the Egyptian Brotherhood. In addition, some of the world’s most dangerous terrorists were once Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood members, including Osama bin Laden’s top deputy Ayman al-Zawahiri. The organization is like ‘stepping stone’, says Evan Kohlmann, an international terrorism consultant...[For] someone who is interested in dedicating their lives to a radical Islamist cause, it can be a pathway up...to a more serious dealing with Islam.” (Crane, 2005)

²⁶⁰ Commenting on the Muslim Brotherhood’s expansion into Europe for the influential journal, *Middle East Quarterly*, Lorenzo Vidino—deputy director at the Investigative Project, a Washington D.C.-based counterterrorism research institute—argues that, “What most European politicians fail to understand is that by meeting with radical organizations, they empower them and grant the Muslim Brotherhood legitimacy. There is an implied endorsement to any meeting, especially when the same politicians ignore moderate voices that do not

One can also discern a trend within associated Terrorism Studies literature whereby the Muslim Brotherhood are portrayed as having an implicit linkage to ‘Islamic terrorism’ by virtue of their intertwinement in the genealogical development of ‘radical Islam’²⁶¹. Typically, one finds that the roots of this abject ideology are traced from the writings of Ibn Taymiyyah in the 14th century, to those of Mohammed Abduh in the late 19th century, to the establishment of the Brotherhood by Hasan al-Banna in 1928, to the writings of Sayyid Qutb (a major Brotherhood ideologue and radical thinker). The net effect of this equivalisation is that, frozen in their historic association with ‘Islamic extremism’, contemporary incarnations of the Muslim Brotherhood are innately linked with ‘Islamic terrorism’²⁶², regardless of the Brotherhood’s consistent disavowal of violent protest and active participation in ‘Western-style’ democratic systems of government (see, for example, Lynch, 2009)²⁶³. In this vein, ‘Islamic extremist’ organisations such as the Muslim Brotherhood—far from offering a moderate alternative to the violence of ‘Islamic terrorism’—form the very essence of the problem:

Although a core Islamic state able to modernize Islam was and is absent, core Islamist terror organizations able to reunite Muslim nations in Jihad do exist. Islamic resurgencies are seeking reunification and reconsolidation and this is being spearheaded by terrorist organizations...Success and governmental support and their own manifestos have ensured that the Hizbullah and Islamic Brotherhood organizations take the initiative in uniting terror organizations and, in doing so, the Muslim world...The success and long reach of the Islamic Brotherhood Organization has been established. Al Qaeda, which has captured the world’s attention and resources for the past two years, is just one of its cells (Schbley, 2004, p. 210)²⁶⁴

have access to generous Saudi funding. This creates a self-perpetuating cycle of radicalization because the greater the political legitimacy of the Muslim Brotherhood, the more opportunity it and its proxy groups will have to influence and radicalize various European Muslim communities. The ultimate irony is that Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna dreamed of spreading Islamism throughout Egypt and the Muslim world. He would have never dreamed that his vision might also become a reality in Europe” (2005, p. 33)

²⁶¹ From Laqueur’s perspective, for example, “[across the Middle East], as in Egypt, terrorism has been endemic for decades, most of these groups were offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood” (1999, p. 143)

²⁶² As Leiken and Brooke note, “the Brotherhood have repeatedly tried to distance themselves from the legacy of Sayyid Qutb, although given his centrality to the group’s early establishment and his often revered status within Islamist circles as a central ideologue within the organization, such a disassociation has required something of ‘a surgeon’s touch.’” (2007, pp. 113-114)

²⁶³ The Brotherhood has repeatedly outlined their advocacy towards democracy and participation in democratic elections. Within Egypt, however, the Brotherhood had been officially banned, and so, could not directly run for election previous to 2005. In 2005, the Brotherhood attempted to overcome this obstacle by running well known Brotherhood members as ‘independents’. Despite a harsh crackdown by the Egyptian authorities on candidates following the group’s pseudo first round success, the group still managed to win over one fifth of seats in the Egyptian parliament through the affiliated ‘independents’. See Meital, 2006.

²⁶⁴ This dynamic is similarly explicated in the following: “The Americans have been stuck inside this idea of a ‘war on terror’ since September 11, they are not asking the right questions. You can always slaughter terrorists—there are endless reserves of them. We should not be attacking the effects of terrorism but its causes: Wahhabite ideology, Saudi Arabia and the Muslim Brotherhood. But no one will touch any of those.” (Chouet, quoted in Moutot, 2006)

In sum, ‘Islamic extremism’—conceived here as a *chain of equivalence* within a broader War on Terror discourse—operates via the compression of a range of identities and values into a simplified and overarching distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’; Self and Other. I have attempted to show how this *equivalence* is sedimented around the key *floating signifiers* of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’, which are themselves welded together vis-à-vis key *nodal points*, such as ‘9/11’, the un-(re)realisation of which constitutes a continuous and indefinite victory in the War on Terror in the absence of any ultimate (/full) victory which is, by (ontological) design, always *to come* and therefore, impossible²⁶⁵. While I will interpret al Qaeda’s primary discourse via a similar *logic of equivalence* in Chapter 5, I will, for the remainder of this chapter, deconstruct the ‘Islamic extremism’ narrative by interpreting associated groups’ public discourses via a logic of *difference*. Doing so allows for an elucidation of the discursive processes by which said groups attach alternative meanings to the *floating signifiers* of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ and thereby disrupt the hegemonic fixity of meaning by which their collective identity as ‘Islamic extremists’ is externally imposed.

Counter-Hegemony: The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, al Qaeda and the Articulation of Difference

A Common Enemy? The US/the West as Other:

Corresponding to the terms of the ‘Islamic extremism’ discourse, associated groups should articulate a *de facto* hatred for the liberal values of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ that define the United States and, indeed, the Enlightened West²⁶⁶. Examining the public discourse(s) of attributed groups, it becomes immediately clear that criticism of America’s articulations of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ does indeed form a common theme, yet this shared criticism is not necessarily based on attacking Western *articulations* of these values *per se*, rather, it is primarily based on highlighting the US/the West’s hypocritical espousal of said values²⁶⁷. In effect, then, these groups’ overt attempts to disrupt the hegemonic fixity of ‘freedom’ and

²⁶⁵ It is in this sense that 9/11 constitutes an *empty signifier par excellence* in relation to the War on Terror.

²⁶⁶ The popular dichotomisation between ‘the West’ and ‘Islam’ as opposing embodiments of Enlightenment/anti-Enlightenment thought is summarised by Roxanne Euben as follows: “the reflex to dismiss fundamentalism as irrational or pathological is not merely a product of the almost habitualized prejudices and fears operative in the relationship between ‘the West’ and ‘Islam’ but...also a function of the way a post-Enlightenment, predominantly rationalist tradition of scholarship countenances foundationalist political practices in the modern world.” (1999, p. 14)

²⁶⁷ As will be outlined, while both the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas articulate notions of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ that are instantly relatable to Western-centric conceptions of same—and, indeed, have participated in democratic systems—al Qaeda are virulently critical of the Western-centric, infidel system of democracy, and chastise both the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas on these grounds.

‘democracy’ are situated within a moral spectrum of right and wrong, as the counter-hegemonic struggle for meaning takes place upon familiar (battle)grounds:

Muslim Brotherhood

The West’s support of oppressive regimes in the Middle East is one of the major reasons behind Islamists’ growing skepticism of the West’s genuine belief in democracy. The provoking example is the Hamas led government, which has been democratically elected by the Palestinian people only to find itself under siege by the international community led by the United States and Europe. This act clearly illustrates a huge gap between the West’s political discourse and its political action in reality; a gap that undermines the trust between Islamists and the West. (Katatny, 2006)

Hamas

We wonder how America will make the peace and in the other hand (sic), it gives full support to the Zionist entity to kill everything is a Palestinian (sic) and show its objection to the international community decisions which convicted the Zionist entity (‘Why now Mr. Bush’)

The American administration, which has been preaching democracy and the respect of people’s choices, is called before all others to support the will and choice of the Palestinian people. Instead of threatening them with boycotts and cutting aid, it should fulfill its promises to help in the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital (quoted in Hroub, 2006, p. 25)

Al Qaeda

The freedom and democracy that you call for is for yourselves and the white race only; as for the rest of the world, you impose upon it your monstrous destructive policies and government, which you call ‘friends of America’. Yet you prevent them from establishing democracies. When the Islamic party in Algeria wanted to practice democracy and they won the election, you unleashed your collaborators in the Algerian army on them, and attacked them with tanks and guns, imprisoned them and tortured them—a new lesson from the American book of democracy (Bin Laden, 2002, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 169)²⁶⁸

Of course, criticism of the US and the West among various political groups across the Middle East and North Africa (and beyond) has long been recognised as a popular frame of resistance to accompany more localised political concerns (see Burgat, 2008, pp. 31-54; Esposito and Voll, 1996; Feldman, 2004; Tibi, 2002). Indeed, the populist mechanics of this move have been explicitly recognised by al-Zawahiri²⁶⁹ and, in this vein, al Qaeda’s strategic innovation

²⁶⁸ The discourse of al-Zawahiri forms a neat accompaniment to Bin Laden precisely on this point: “O’ Muslims, the West’s principles and morals are hypocritical, believing that what is lawful for it is unlawful for anyone else. They think it is fine to bomb us and kill our women and children, but off limits for us to respond. They also think is [sic] fine to destroy and storm mosques in Afghanistan and Iraq, but it is not okay for us to know what is going on in torture places in so called Monasteries...Bush said in his last speech that the future of the United States depends on its fight against injustice and terrorism. But the U.S. did not and does not realize its real interests here. The U.S. is spreading injustice at the hands of its friends like Sharon, Musharraf, Mubarak, Abdullah ibn Hussein, and Zain el-abdeen bin Ali.” (2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, pp. 68-69)

²⁶⁹ The following extract is taken from a letter written by al-Zawahiri to the-then leader of al Qaeda in Iraq (ISI) Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi, pleading with him to stop targeting the Shi’a population in Iraq and to foment unity

to target the US and the West (the ‘far enemy’) as a means to pressurise domestic regimes across MENA (the ‘near enemy’) can be construed as a violent realisation of this logic in action (see Chapter 5; see also, al-Zayyat, 2004; Burgat, 2008; Gerges, 2005, 2011)²⁷⁰. For other constituents of ‘Islamic extremism’, however, critique of the US does not tend to manifest itself in violence, and is typically maintained as an instrument of popular mobilisation to their political cause²⁷¹. Further, the US’ designation of ‘Islamic extremism’ as the predominant constitutive outside in the War on Terror is not directly reciprocated—the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas do not *foremostly* define themselves against the constitutive outside of a US/Western Other; rather, their concerns are more patently local (see, for example, Roy, 2011; Tamimi, 2007; Robinson, 2004; Gunning, 2009; Abuirshaid, 2013). Nonetheless, one can see concerted attempts by these groups to disrupt and resist the ‘Islamic extremism’ discourse by speaking directly to, and of, the US/the West (as per the *logic of difference*). For example, the Muslim Brotherhood has consistently communicated their desire to engage in dialogue with the US and the West²⁷² (see Leiken and Brooke, 2007), and have specifically attempted to resist their simplistic identity as ‘precursors to’ and ‘supporters of’ violence²⁷³. Similarly, Hamas have consistently denied that their violence is borne of an

between the Sunni and Shi’a masses around a common external enemy instead: “The Muslim masses- for many reasons...do not rally *except* against an *outside occupying enemy*, especially if the enemy is firstly Jewish and secondly American [emphasis added]” (al-Zawahiri, 2005b, p. 4)

²⁷⁰ The strategic aim, per bin Laden and al-Zawahiri, has always been to ‘strike at the head of the snake’ (i.e. the US as the ‘far enemy’) in order to weaken the relative power of domestic regimes (i.e. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and others as the ‘near enemy’) towards a re-ordering of the political and social orders within these countries. For an authoritative analysis on this strategy, see Gerges, 2005.

²⁷¹ Indeed, this is clearly evident in the following statement by Hezbollah’s influential ideologue, Hassan Nasrallah: “Today, the resistance is in good shape, and doing better than ever before. When George Bush speaks about an ‘Eastern alliance,’ and the important countries that are part of it, then moves on to [speak about] our region, and brackets Hezbollah and Hamas together, it is actually a testament to the ability of these two groups to influence the situation in the region. The fact that America wants to engage in an open confrontation with the resistance is proof that this resistance is able to confront and confound the situation, and impose its own conditions. All its threats, accusations, and scaremongering do not scare us—and should not scare you, either, for we have gone through all sorts of situations in our lives. We should put our trust in God, prove our presence on the battlefield, never retreat, and be able to defeat any enemy who invades and occupies our land, no matter who he is.” (2002, in Roe, 2007, p. 265-266)

²⁷² Taken from the Muslim Brotherhood’s online repository of public statements, the following extracts are enlightening: “We believe that the dialogue with the west is the ideal method to bridge the dividing gaps and resolve all grievances. In this regard, we welcome a constructive dialogue that promotes rapprochement among civilizations to avoid an imminent clash... We wish that any potential dialogue would result in strengthening the bonds among all nations and cultures so we can all live in a world free of violence or hatred” (‘El-Shater: We Do Not Promote An Anti Western Agenda’); “there are complex problems between the West and Muslim world but I would not call [The War on Terror] a Crusade. That is why we wish to engage the West in an open and civilized dialogue to cut the road short on extremists from both sides” (‘Prominent MB leader Responds to Bin Laden Statements’)

²⁷³ As a key activist within the Egyptian Brotherhood explains, “The West has a lot of misconceptions, such as linking the Muslim Brotherhood to violence or believing that we are a Machiavellian movement which is trying to turn Egypt into a caliphate [Islamic state] or dictatorship... We are trying to correct all these misconceptions” (Kneil, 2008)

irrational hatred of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ by contextualising it as a necessary response to Israeli aggression and occupation²⁷⁴, while they have often called for the US to recognise their political authority and to enter into dialogue²⁷⁵ (particularly so in the aftermath of the 2006 elections)²⁷⁶ on the basis of the very values of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ by which the US identifies itself²⁷⁷ (see also Hroub, 2006; Tamimi, 2007; Abuirshaid, 2013).

Furthermore, each of these groups has actively sought to distinguish their individual identities by differentiating themselves from al Qaeda, who—as outlined in the above—form the referential lynchpin of ‘Islamic extremism’. With reference to ‘9/11’, for example—a key *nodal point* of ‘Islamic extremism’—the Muslim Brotherhood²⁷⁸ and Hamas²⁷⁹ have vociferously condemned the attacks, thus effectively placing themselves within a global

²⁷⁴ In an article written by Political Bureau Chief Khalid Mish’al and published in the *Guardian*, he submits that: “Our message to the Israelis is this: we do not fight you because you belong to a certain faith or culture. Jews have lived in the Muslim world for 13 centuries in peace and harmony; they are in our religion ‘the people of the book’ who have a covenant from God and His Messenger Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be respected and protected. Our conflict with you is not religious but political. We have no problem with Jews who have not attacked us—our problem is with those who came to our land, imposed themselves on us by force, destroyed our society and banished our people...if you are willing to accept the principle of a long-term truce, we are prepared to negotiate the terms. Hamas is extending a hand of peace to those who are truly interested in a peace based justice.” (2006)

²⁷⁵ This is effectively captured by the following passage: “The Islamic Resistance Movement was elected to protect the Palestinians from the abuses of occupation, based on its history of sacrifice for the cause of liberty. It would be a mistake to view the collective will of the Palestinian people in electing Hamas in fair and free elections under occupation as a threat. For meaningful dialogue to occur there should be no prejudgments or preconditions. And we do desire dialogue. The terms of the dialogue should be premised on justice, mutual respect and integrity of all the parties.” (Abu Marzook, 2006)

²⁷⁶ As Palestinian Prime Minister and Hamas leader Isma’il Haniyah asserts: “Do policymakers in Washington and Europe ever feel ashamed of their scandalous double standards? Before and since the Palestinian elections in January, they have continually insisted that Hamas comply with certain demands...Hamas has been freely elected. Our people have given us their confidence and we pledge to defend their rights and do our best to run the affairs through good governance. If we are boycotted in spite of this democratic choice—as we have been by the US and some of its allies—we will persist, and our friends have pledged to fill the gap.” (Haniyah, 2006)

²⁷⁷ As Muslim Brotherhood member Abu Marzook submits: “For the sake of peace, the United States must abandon its position of isolation and join the rest of the world in calling for an end to the occupation, assuring the Palestinians their right to self-determination. We appeal to the American people’s sense of fairness to judge this conflict in light of the great thoughts, principles and ideals you hold dear in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the democracy you have built. It is not unreasonable to expect America to practice abroad what it preaches at home” (2006)

²⁷⁸ Indeed, the Muslim Brotherhood’s dedicated English website (www.ikhwanweb.com) contains a repository of articles filed under ‘MB vs AQ’, which are dedicated to rejecting their conflation with al Qaeda. The following statements attributed to Mohammad Morsi and Dr. Mohamed Habib (first deputy chairman of the MB) are illustrative: “The Muslim Brotherhood has a moderate attitude. We reject and don’t commit violence. We condemn those who carried out the 9/11 attacks regardless of their belief or religion. We also condemn what the US did before 9/11, after 9/11 and its current terrorism against mankind.” (‘Morsi: 9/11 a global calamity, not only for U.S.’)

²⁷⁹ Azzam Tamimi provides an overall context: “Hamas has become increasingly visible in the world’s media, and a very negative image has often been presented, mostly filtered through the views of Israel and its supporters. This has prompted the senior Political Bureau officials to seek advice on how to counter such negative publicity...in the aftermath of the events of 11 September 2001...Hamas began to feel that an image-building initiative was needed, in order to counter the efforts by certain hostile media and academic quarters to identify all Islamic movements and organizations with al-Qaeda” (2007, pp. 149-150)

community of ‘rational’ sympathisers²⁸⁰ who have expressed collective solidarity and moral outrage in their wake. This move lies in stark contrast to the public pronouncements of al Qaeda in which ‘9/11’ is centralised as an effective *nodal point* to (further) highlight the embedded hypocrisy of US/the West’s Self-identity (as the virtuous embodiment of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’) and the *umma*’s inherent right to violent self-defence against the consistent transgressions of the US/the West in ‘Muslim lands’:

when they saw the gang of criminals in the White House misrepresenting the truth, whose idiotic leader claim that we despise their way of life—although the truth that the Pharaoh of the age is hiding is that we strike them because of their injustice towards us in the Islamic world, especially in Palestine and Iraq, and their occupation of Saudi Arabia—the *mujahidin* decided to overcome this obfuscation and to bring the battle right into their heartland...There came a group of young believers with dishevelled hair and dusty feet, who had been chased all over the world...they attacked the enemy with their own planes in a brave and beautiful operation, the like of which humanity has never seen before destroying the idols of America. They struck at the very heart of the Ministry of Defense, and they hit the American economy right at its heart too. They rubbed America’s nose in the dirt, and wiped its arrogance in the mud. As the twin towers of New York collapsed, something even greater and more enormous collapsed with them: the myth of the great America and the myth of democracy. It became clear to all that America’s values are the lowest, and the myth of the ‘land of the free’ was destroyed, as was the myth of American *national security*...all praise and glory to God. [emphasis in original] (Bin Laden, 2003b in Lawrence 2005, pp. 193-194)²⁸¹

Indeed, it is telling that the English-language website of the Muslim Brotherhood²⁸² contains reams of articles in which they specifically differentiate their political agenda from that of al Qaeda²⁸³ by denouncing violence and expressing dedication to conceptions of ‘freedom’ and

²⁸⁰ As Milton Edwards and Farrell effectively outline, many influential groups across MENA sought to immediately rein in impromptu street celebrations of the 9/11 attacks. Indeed, Hamas’ Sheikh Ahmed Yassin specifically resisted the knee-jerk conflation of Hamas and al Qaeda in the wake of these developments: “We in Hamas: Our battle is on the Palestinian field. We are not ready to move our battle out of the occupied Palestinian territories” (Farrell, 2001, in Milton Edwards and Farrell, 2010, p. 89)

²⁸¹ As similarly articulated by bin Laden: “The events of 22nd Jumda al-Thani, or Aylul [September 11] are merely a response to the continuous injustice inflicted upon our sons in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, southern Sudan, and other places, like Kashmir. Those who condemn these operations [9/11] have viewed the event in isolation and have failed to connect it to previous events or to the reasons behind it. Their view is blinkered and lacks either a legitimate or a rational basis. They merely saw others in America and the media decrying these operations, so they did the same themselves...These blessed successful strokes are merely a reaction to events in our land in Palestine, in Iraq, and in other places...It was not nineteen Arab states that did this deed [9/11]. It was not Arab armies or ministries who humbled the oppressor who harm us in Palestine and elsewhere. It was nineteen post-secondary students...who shook America’s throne, struck its economy right in the heart, and dealt the biggest military power a mighty blow, by the grace of God Almighty.” (2001d, in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 148-149)

²⁸² This website can be accessed at <http://ikhwanweb.com>.

²⁸³ As already noted, many of these articles can be found under the dedicated repository labelled ‘MB vs. AQ’, (available at <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/articles.php?pid=86>). As a brief aside, this differentiation is further apparent in a statement released immediately following the death of Osama bin Laden in 2011: “The MB believes in democracy based on Islamic reference, rejects violence and terrorism, and calls for the Western world to stop linking Islam with terrorism and to correct the erroneous image that has been intentionally promoted for a long time, especially after the 9/11 attacks. The Brotherhood sees that problems in the Middle

‘democracy’ that are akin to hegemonic articulations of said values espoused by the US/the West. As prominent leaders of the MB, Dr. Essam El Erian and Dr. Mohamad Habib put it respectively:

The fact that Mr. Bin Laden considers participating in the democratic process and running for legislative elections; [sic] to be against Islamic principles is indeed a compelling evidence of the different ideology and methodology between the Muslim Brotherhood and Al Qaeda...comprehensive reform could only be achieved through peaceful channels and without resorting to violence...Since the creation of Muslim Brotherhood in 1928; [sic] it viewed participating in legislative councils as natural and conforms to the principles of Islam unlike what Mr. Bin Laden believes (‘Prominent MB leader Responds to Bin Laden Statements’)

The world now have come to realize the crystal clear difference between the Muslim Brotherhood’s ideology and that of Al-Qaeda network to which Dr. Al Zawahri belongs; we—the Muslim Brotherhood—reject completely the methods and actions by Al-Qaeda network and completely denounce violence and terrorism, and staunchly support peaceful change and reform (‘Habib: Muslim Brotherhood Rejects Al-Qaeda’s Ideology’)²⁸⁴

Similar moves are evident within the public discourse of Hamas, which is—since their decision to contest the 2006 elections, especially—centred around their willingness to engage in Western-style democratic participation:

Hamas has its own agenda that is not compatible with Al Qaeda’s. Hamas is a political movement serving the Palestinian people but meanwhile resisting an occupation and will only work within these boundaries...**We certainly differ from Al Qaeda. Hamas believes in political participation and democracy and sees no contradiction with Islam in this regard** [emphasis in original] (‘Hamas: We Are No Al Qaeda’)²⁸⁵

East are best solved by the citizens of that region and that the US should not interfere in their internal affairs.” (‘The MB Stands for Justice and Freedom’)

²⁸⁴ Habib offers a further, detailed explication of the differences between the Muslim Brotherhood and violent *jihadis*, such as al Qaeda, by the following parameters:

“The phenomenon of violence groups represented in al-Qaeda led by Osama Bin **Laden**, Salafiyah Jihadiyah and takfeer groups is accidental in the Islamic history; the main reason behind the emergence of such groups lies in suppression practiced by dictatorial governments backed by some western powers that have imperialist interest [sic] in this region.

2- Muslim Brotherhood (MB) is totally different from such groups in terms of its ideologies and dynamic methodology, this difference amounts to an ideological separation.

3- MB always emphasizes in its formal papers and documents on adopting peaceful reformist approach and respecting the values of *democracy*, *human rights*, and the right of all nations for *self-determination* and resisting occupation.

4-MB differentiates between the legitimate resistance and rejected [sic] terrorism. Legitimate resistance and the right to resist against occupation are acknowledged by all international charters and pacts, while rejected terrorism denotes any form of terrorism committed against civilians and peaceful people.

5- Some decision makers in the West are responsible for the current congestion in Arab and Muslim world due to their unlimited support for Israel and their silent on occupation crimes in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq, in addition to overlooking violations of human rights in Arab and Muslim countries.

6- Some US offices commit a grave historical mistake by standing against the Arab and Muslim people’s desire for change and reform. Supporting the Arab suppressive regimes, such offices back the wrong horse [italics added; bold emphasis in original] (‘How the Plot Underscores al-Qaeda’s Weakness’)

²⁸⁵ Khaled Meshal similarly justifies Hamas’ struggle (2004) in contrast to that of ‘other groups’, including al Qaeda: “The vision of Hamas does not permit what is called today violence except in the face of the occupier

'Freedom' and 'Democracy' in the Public Discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas

To this point, then, we see an initial divergence between 'Islamic extremist' groups' public discourse in relation to the US/the West's (hegemonic) *articulations* of 'freedom' and 'democracy': while all highlighted groups have criticised the hypocrisy of the US/the West in relation to their arbitrary performances of said values—particularly in terms of their foreign policy vis-à-vis the MENA region—the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas have actively sought to engage with the US/the West and have, indeed, each entered into political processes that are broadly homologous to performances of 'freedom' and 'democracy' that the US/the West espouses as the basis of 'rational' political engagement.

This is most immediately apparent with regard to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood who, having previously participated in national elections in 1941 and 1945, formed an alliance with the liberal, secular Wafd party to contest the 1984 parliamentary elections, winning a combined 59 out of 454 seats (Harnisch and Mehan, 2009, p. 190)²⁸⁶. This symbolic amalgamation between religious and secular values enshrined within democratic processes would continue to define the Muslim Brotherhood's counter-hegemonic challenge to authoritarian rule in Egypt, despite the 'official' embargo on participation placed upon them by the Mubarak regime (see *ibid*, Wickham, 2011)²⁸⁷. The Brotherhood's commitment to democratic participation became more apparent in the early 1990s²⁸⁸, as prominent spokespersons publicly emphasised the compatibility of democracy with Islamic

enemy. Our battle is confined to the Zionists, who occupied our land in Palestine. Although the United States provides most weapons, including Apache helicopters, F-16 planes, and missiles, to Israel, and although it had arrested Dr. Musa Abu Marzouq, we did not open a battle with the United States. We confined our battle to the Israeli occupation. In the Arab arena, there are Islamic groups that have a vision, which permits operations in their own countries against the police and the army. There are also other groups that have a vision, which allows them to open a front with the United States. It is not our business to engage in arguments about the Islamic rulings of these operations. This is the duty of scholars and Ulama. However, our position is always against exercising violence inside our Arab and Islamic countries and against the sons of our nation, whatever the justifications and differences" (quoted in Paz, 2004, pp. 2-3)

²⁸⁶ Harnisch and Mehan relate the significance of this move as follows: "By the late 1980s...it became clear that participation in an electoral system was not simply a strategy of attaining power or influence for the Brotherhood. Rather, democracy was a system that the group publicly claimed to support for ideological reasons and to fully commit itself to upholding. In subsequent years, democracy has become a central element in the Muslim Brotherhood's vision of what the Egyptian regime should look like. More specifically, the Ikhwan (Brotherhood) has begun to call for an 'Islamic civil state' (*dawla madaniyya Islamiyya*) that operates largely on democratic principles. [emphasis in original]" (2009, p. 190)

²⁸⁷ The 2005 elections are a noted exception, whereby Mubarak accorded *relative* freedom to the Muslim Brotherhood to openly participate. Following a significant popular vote for the Brotherhood however, the Mubarak regime engaged in a sweeping crackdown against the Brotherhood soon thereafter (see Wickham, 2011)

²⁸⁸ As Wickham (2011, p. 206, *supra* note 3) relays, the MB boycotted the elections in 1990 and since then—before the fall of Mubarak—they have run candidates as independents.

jurisprudence (*fiqh*)²⁸⁹ as well as their commitment to the pragmatic development of their official agenda along ‘democratic’ lines (see Rutherford, 2006; Wickham, 2011)²⁹⁰. In a highly significant demonstration of this commitment in 1990, the Brotherhood officially supported a ten-point consensus statement (with nine other opposition parties) as the basis for democratic reform in Egypt, the contents of which read very similar to the hegemonic virtues of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ that are centralised as the basis for ‘rational’ governance by the US/the West²⁹¹:

1. Commitment to the human rights and public liberties mentioned in shari‘a and international law;
2. An end to the state of emergency and martial law;
3. A lifting of restrictions on the formation of political parties;
4. The independent supervision of elections by the judiciary;
5. The adoption of the parliamentary system in which the executive power will be vested in the cabinet, which is selected from the party with the majority;
6. Guarantee of the right of the People’s Assembly to amend the budget; granting the Shura Council [i.e. the Upper House] powers of oversight and legislation;
7. Choice of the president through direct election from a list of several candidates, with a limit of two terms;
8. The compatibility of all legislation passed with shari‘a, with emphasis on the rights of non-Muslims to follow their own religious law in case of contradiction;
9. The independence of the judiciary;
10. Freedom of the press and media from government control and equal opportunities for all political parties in the official media (Ghadbian, 1997; cited in Harnisch and Mehan, 2009, p. 192)

²⁸⁹ As Dr. Essam al-Erian, submits: “The Brothers consider constitutional rule to be the closest to Islamic rule... We are the first [in Egypt] to call for and apply democracy, and we are devoted to it until death.” (Kotob and Sullivan, 1999, quoted in Harnisch and Mehan, 2009, p. 191)

²⁹⁰ This is notable in the development of the Brotherhood’s official discourse on democratic politics, as distinct from the stated position of founding member, Hassan al-Banna (see Abdelkader, 2011). As influential Brotherhood theologian Yusuf al Qaradawi puts it: “I am aware that the martyred Imam Hassan al-Banna deplored partisan life and the establishment of parties in Islam due to what he witnessed in his time of parties that divided the *umma* in confronting the enemy. They were parties that revolved around individuals instead of clear goals and platforms. It is all right if our interpretation differs from that of our Imam, may God have compassion on him, for he did not disallow those who came after him to have their own interpretations, especially if circumstances change and positions and ideas evolve. Perhaps if he lived till today he would see what we see. Fatwas change with changing times, places, conditions, especially in ever-changing political affairs. Those who know Hasan al-Banna know that he was not rigid but developed his ideas and policies according to the evidence available to him.” (quoted in El-Ghobashy, 2005, p. 384)

²⁹¹ The genealogical compatibility between fundamental rights as attributed to ‘Western’ systems of jurisprudence and Islamic systems of same is effectively summarised by Kamali: “Contemporary Muslim countries already have available a legacy of experience and precedent in constitution-making, which is generally predicated on the binary division of rights and liberties into either constitutional or ordinary. But since constitutionalism, which was closely imitated in the post-colonial period by newly emerging Muslim states, is a Western phenomenon, many of these countries have not attempted to forge a link with their Islamic heritage. However, the foreign origin of this legacy does not necessarily forbid nor make reprehensible, endeavours to forge just such links. Indeed, much of the legacy may be retained or formulated in the light of the *Shari‘ah* guidelines. This would develop harmony and coherence in the legal and cultural experiences of contemporary Muslims and consequently may be considered highly worthwhile.” [emphasis in original] (1997, pp. 23-24)

This trend continues into the War on Terror, wherein the Brotherhood have been keen to analogise their counter-hegemonic struggle with those of other (secular) democratic activists and reformists throughout the world²⁹², while further stressing that their dedication to an Islamic civil state (*dawla madaniyya Islamiyya*) is entirely compatible with secular, Western-centric principles of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’²⁹³ (see el-Ghobashy, 2005; Lynch, 2009). An accompanying range of political demands is highly visible in their substantial election manifestos of 2005 and 2007, in particular (see Harnisch and Mehan, 2009), in which specific policies are articulated pertaining to ‘freedoms, human rights and rights of citizenship’, ‘industrial development’, ‘agricultural development’, ‘education and scientific research’, ‘economic reform’ and ‘supporting civil society’ among others (‘The Muslim Brotherhood’s Program’; see also, Rutherford, 2006). A brief section of the 2005 manifesto—published before participation in *relatively* free elections under Mubarak—is hereby provided as a referent example:

[W]e believe in...freedoms such as freedom of belief...freedom of expression in all peaceful and legal forms, freedom of forming political parties, freedom of movement and travel, freedom of student activities in schools and universities...As for the basic human rights, they are represented in:

1. The right of the individual and the family of having a sufficient standard of living. All people are equal in fighting the temporary poverty represented in the unemployment of the qualified graduates, and the chronic poverty represented in the personal reasons facing individuals such as illness, disorder of the social values, lack of skills, illiteracy and unfair distribution of wealth...
2. The right of having health care, which is related to what the people need, not to their ability to pay the costs of this precautionary and medical care...
3. The right of basic education, and providing job opportunities and productive employment. Educating girls and children in the rural areas (especially in Upper Egypt) is considered an economic right...
4. The right of having a house is a social right; it includes constructional planning and infrastructure policies such as roads, water, sewerage, electricity and communications.
5. The umbrella of insurance rights should include all the classes of the society. Private insurance and solidarity funds play an important role in activating these rights.

²⁹² This dynamic is effectively communicated by/in the following extract: “Conservative reformers, whether from the Muslim Brotherhood or others are indeed peace advocates and their political agenda is no different than any liberal party or civil reform movement especially when it comes to their focus on achieving political reform and economic development for their people as long as they all eventually respect the people’s explicit choice and their right of self-determination. I believe that the Muslim Brotherhood have won a popular mandate after the last elections which requires us to continue to coordinate with all other parties and civil institutions, regardless of their ideologies, for the sake of the country’s best interests” (‘El-Shater: We Do Not Promote An Anti Western Agenda’)

²⁹³ As contained in the Muslim Brotherhood’s 2007 programme for election: “Islam requires a state to practice and protect it and to follow its method, just like the liberal solution also requires the same. Due to the fact that Islam denies the religious authority, the state in Islam is a civil one where the nation sets up its systems and institutions; as the nation is considered to be the source of authorities. This is an independent human judgment, among many others, that change and improve within the fixed bases of the Islamic jurisprudence, and its ruling reference over the nation and the government authorities in a unique intellectual order; thus, it is a civil state based on applying the Shari`ah and the restrictive ordinance of the Almighty.” (‘The Muslim Brotherhood’s Program’)

6. Women should have the right of the groups that need more care, in order to perform their duties towards their families on the one side and towards society on the other, and to guarantee their rights in the political, economic and cultural fields. Also, the child has the right to protected childhood, and to his problems being solved, especially the homeless child, child laborer, child drug addict and morally bereft.

7. The state should take care of those who have special needs through providing schools and care centers, and educating them according to their abilities in order to allow them to keep their rights in life and to help their families with the expensive costs of their care. ('The Muslim Brotherhood's Program')²⁹⁴

Turning to Hamas, it must be immediately recognised that *articulated* political demands in relation to 'freedom' and 'democracy' are necessarily tempered by their dual identity as a violent resistance movement and a *da'wa* organisation which is heavily involved in the development of Palestinian civil society (see Bhasin and Hallward, 2013; Dalacoura, 2011; Gunning, 2009; Hroub, 2006; Jensen, 2009; Klein, 2007; Milton-Edwards and Farrell, 2010; Mishal and Sela, 2000; Roy, 2011; Tamimi, 2007)²⁹⁵. Though both facets of their identity are fundamentally intertwined—and any separation thereof can only be artificial²⁹⁶—Hamas' participation in the January 2006 legislative elections²⁹⁷—having boycotted the 1996 presidential and legislative elections and the 2005 presidential elections largely on account of their opposition to the Oslo Accords (see Bhasin and Hallward, 2013; Long, 2010)—marks a temporal zenith in their evolution as a pragmatic political movement willing to embrace the mechanics of 'Western-style' democracy in service of their ultimate goal of achieving Palestinian statehood (see Hroub, 2006; Hovdenak, 2009a; Klein, 2007; Milton-Edwards,

²⁹⁴ A more explicitly 'moral' frame accompanies the following extract, also from the 2007 election manifesto: "The members of the Muslim Brotherhood consider themselves Islamic preachers who use the wisdom and the good preaching in order to apply Allah's law as He ordered through the available peaceful means, existing constitutional institutions, and the fair ballot boxes. This will be done through:

1. Raising the moderate man who adheres to the creed he chose without compulsion, and to its moral standards and behaviors.
2. Reiterating that complete freedom for everyone is a basic right that was granted by the Almighty. It is considered the base of establishing the civilization of nations.
3. Establishing that society should have mechanisms and rules to set up a rightly guided regime based on justice and equality among all people of the nation without discrimination based on color, race or religion.
4. Making use of the experiences of modern civilization which do not clash with the fixed principles of the Shari`ah, such as: separation of the authorities, plurality of parties, and peaceful circulation of power through fair elections.
5. Refusing the use of violence to unlawfully grab the rights of other nations and individuals. ('The Muslim Brotherhood's Program')

²⁹⁵ As communicated by the Hamas Political Bureau in the late 1990s, "In spite of the overwhelmingly militant image Hamas has in the minds of many people in the West, Hamas is not a mere military faction. It is a political, cultural, and social grassroots organization with a separate military wing [the 'Izzadin al-Qassam Brigades] specialized in armed struggle against Israeli occupation. Apart from this clandestine military wing, all other sections within Hamas function through overt public platforms." ('This is What We Struggle For' in Tamimi, 2007, p. 267)

²⁹⁶ As Gunning proposes, "Hamas cannot be reduced to its use of violence...it must be studied in the wider context of Palestinian society and politics, and...any analysis must include (though not stop at) an attempt to understand Hamas on its own terms" (2009, p. 3)

²⁹⁷ Candidates ran as representatives of the 'Change and Reform' party.

2006; Milton-Edwards, 2007; Milton-Edwards and Farrell, 2010; Gunning, 2009). Though Hamas had become a movement that embraced both ‘ballot and bullet’ at this point (Milton-Edwards 2007), it should be noted that (violent) resistance to Israeli occupation constituted—and continues to constitute—their primary identity (see Wagemakers, 2010)²⁹⁸; as such, democratic participation does not replace the (violent) resistance effort in the public discourse of Hamas, rather, it compliments it:

Due to our conviction that we are defending one of the greatest bays of Islam; due to our responsibility towards our struggling people and their holy and just cause; due to our duty to contribute in reforming the Palestinian reality, to alleviate the suffering of our brave people, consolidate their resistance and protect them against corruption; and due to our hope to consolidate our national unity and to reinforce the domestic Palestinian front: we decided to participate in the Palestinian legislative elections 2006...Such participation [is] meant to be backing up and support[ing] the Intifada and resistance program assented by the Palestinian people as a strategic option to end the occupation...Hamas is entering these elections after having succeeded, with God’s help, in affirming its line of resistance and in ingraining it deep in the hearts of our people (‘The Text of Hamas legislative elections Program’, p. 1)²⁹⁹

This democratic pragmatism is in stark contrast to the popular accusation by those who attribute an irrational fundamentalism on the part of Hamas, which has often been solidified in the hegemonic War on Terror discourse by crude reference to the Hamas Charter³⁰⁰. As Tamimi (2007) and Hroub (2006) outline, however, Hamas have steadily come to disassociate themselves from the confrontational and patently religious frame that characterises the charter, with this evolution particularly evident in three key documents: the 2005 electoral

²⁹⁸ This is neatly captured in the following extract: “Hamas was elected on the basis of protecting the resistance project. Hamas was elected on the platform of protecting the resistance project. And the movement will do all it can to ensure that. There are existing Palestinian security institutions in need of some reform in order to make them of greater service to the security of the Palestinian people” (‘Will Hamas maintain the resistance against the Israeli occupation as before?’)

²⁹⁹ The decision to contest elections must also be contextualised in relation to Hamas’ opposition to the Oslo accords (see Gunning, 2009): “The opinion Hamas took after the Oslo accords was that these accords are [doomed] to fail. Any objective and rational study of these accords could not reach another conclusion... The reasons behind Hamas’ rejection of Oslo are now clear to the world. Any agreement that is one-sided and is dictated by the occupation upon the victims is not a basis for true peace... Prior to Oslo, Hamas’ position called for elections in order for the Palestinian people to elect their representatives and leadership. This position remains the same today. The Palestinian people need a truly democratic process in which the whole Palestinian people participate in choosing their leadership. The elections must include all levels: local, legislative, and presidential. And the preparation and monitoring of the elections must be a joint effort by all parties and movements. And with Oslo declared dead by the whole world, it is unacceptable for Oslo (and its unjust conditions against Palestinians) to remain an albatross around the Palestinian people’s neck.” (‘Hamas Question & Answer’)

³⁰⁰ The charter was published on 18 August 1988, approximately nine months after the establishment of Hamas (see Tamimi, 2007, p. 147). As Hamas’ Khaled Meshal put it in an interview with Sherifa Zuhur, the charter “should not be regarded as the fundamental ideological frame of reference from which the movement takes its positions” (Zuhur, 2008, p. 31). As further relayed by Meshal to Azzam Tamimi: “the text of the Charter does not reflect the thinking and understanding of the movement”, rather, it may constitute “an obstacle, or a source of distortion, or a misunderstanding regarding what the movement stands for” (2007, p. 149)

platform, its draft programme for coalition government and its cabinet platform, as present on 27 March 2006 (see Hroub, 2006, p. 6; Tamimi, 2007, pp. 292-316; see also, Gunning, 2009). As with the Muslim Brotherhood in the above, Hamas' political demands are notably analogous to Western-centric articulations of 'freedom' and 'democracy' and although their electoral platform is encased within a linguistic framework of Islamic jurisprudence, its contents are specifically tailored towards Muslims and non-Muslims audiences alike³⁰¹, as conforms to the basic principle of *Al-Hurriyyah al-Diniyyah* (Freedom of Religion)³⁰².

As leader Ismael Haniyeh put it in 2006:

We [fully] realise that reinforcing *shura* (consultancy) and democracy requires hard work to impose the rule of law, renounce factional, tribal and clan chauvinisms, and lay the foundation for the principle of equality among people in terms of duties and rights. The government will work to protect the constitutional rights of all citizens so as to protect the Palestinian people's rights and freedom...The government also undertakes to protect the rights of every citizen and to firmly establish the principle of citizenship without any discrimination on the basis of creed, belief or religion, or political affiliation. (quoted in Hroub, 2006, p. 23)

Furthermore, and as with the Muslim Brotherhood in the above, the political demands communicated within Hamas' 2006 electoral platform pertain to a broad range of social spheres, including; 'Legislative Policy and Judicial Reform', 'Public Liberties and Citizen Rights', 'Educational Policy', 'Social Policy', 'Women, Children and the Family', and 'Economic, Fiscal, and Monetary Policy', to name but a few (see Tamimi, 2007, pp. 292-316; ('The Text of Hamas legislative elections Program')). A brief sample, taken from the section on Domestic Policy, is hereby provided as a referent example:

1. Preserving national Palestinian invariables and resisting any attempt to compromise or concede them.
2. Preserving the Palestinian presence in Jerusalem and supporting it politically, economically, socially, and culturally; resisting the enemy's attempts to Judaize Jerusalem; and protecting the Islamic and Christian Palestinian holy cities from Zionist desecration.
3. Safeguarding political liberties, pluralism, the freedom to form political parties, resorting for arbitration to the ballot boxes, and the peaceful alternation of power are considered the best

³⁰¹ As Hamas leader Haniyeh puts it: "Our government will strive for the deepening of relations and consultation with the Arab and Islamic surrounding, for it is our strategic depth...Our cause is both an Arab and Muslim responsibility, and therefore it touches not only the life and future of the Palestinian people but also the life and future of all Arabs and Muslims" (2006; in Hroub, 2006, p. 26)

³⁰² Kamali explains the concept of *Al-Hurriyyah al-Diniyyah*, as pertaining to the *Shari'ah* as follows: "Freedom of belief, like all other freedoms, operates as a safeguard against the possible menace of oppression from superior sources of power. This is also essentially true of the Islamic concept of this freedom: as Fathi Uthman observes, 'No power of any kind in the Islamic state may be employed to compel people to embrace Islam. The basic function of the Islamic state, in this regard, is to monitor and prevent the forces which might seek to deny the people their freedom of belief'" (1997, p. 87)

- framework for regulating Palestinian political activity, and guaranteeing reform, combating corruption, and building an advanced Palestinian civil society.
4. Deepening the bonds of national unity, adopting dialogue, and resorting to logic in addressing internal disputes and prohibiting fighting and all forms of the use of force or the threat to use it within the domestic framework.
 5. Establishing respect for public liberties (freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, freedom of work etc.) as the living reality of the Palestinian people. (in Tamimi, 2007, pp. 294-295)³⁰³

'Freedom' and 'Democracy' in the Public Discourse of al Qaeda

Al Qaeda vs. the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas

Unlike the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, al Qaeda have never engaged with what al-Zawahiri has called the 'religion of democracy'³⁰⁴ as a tactical means of furthering their struggle. Indeed, both Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood have come under fierce criticism from al Qaeda for their respective decisions to engage with a means of representation that, by its very form, represents a fundamental betrayal of *tawhid* (monotheism)³⁰⁵, which serves as the cornerstone of al Qaeda's (theologically-derived) self-identity³⁰⁶. Al-Zawahiri has written extensively on this subject, most notably in his book *The Bitter Harvest* (c. 1992)³⁰⁷, in which he provides a devastating critique of the Muslim Brotherhood³⁰⁸ for embracing what limited

³⁰³ With further reference to the encapsulation of democratic participation within a framework of resistance, the 'Conclusion' section of the charter offers the following: "The blessed a'-Aqsa Intifada has created new facts on the ground that have rendered the Oslo program a thing of the past, and different parties, including the Zionist occupation, have already spoken about 'burying Oslo.' Our people today are more united, more aware, and more invincible. Hamas is approaching the elections having, with the help of Allah and in cooperation with all the honorable ones, reinforced the method of resistance and engraved it in the minds, hearts, and souls of our people." (in Tamimi, 2007, p. 315)

³⁰⁴ As al-Zawahiri remarks: "Democracy is a new religion. In Islam, legislation comes from God; in a democracy, this capacity is given to the people. Therefore, this is a new religion, based on making the people into gods and giving them God's rights and attributes. This is tantamount to associating idols with God and falling into unbelief, since God said: 'The command is for none but God. He has commanded that you worship none but Him'." ([1991/1992] in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, p. 184)

³⁰⁵ Kepel and Milelli provide a very useful outline: "*Tawhid*, expressed in the declaration of faith... In the Quran, the sura beginning 'Say: He is God, the One and Only' (Quran 112) is called the sura of the *tawhid*. Several movements have made oneness the center of faith... Today, Salafist movements have taken it up, to battle what they see as idolatry, promoted by democracy and its institutions. Zawahiri considers that these institutions go against Islam, since they presume to take over God's leadership of the world." [emphasis in original] (2008, p. 319, supra note 2)

³⁰⁶ The central importance of *tawhid* to al Qaeda's self-identity is evident in the following passage attributable to al-Zawahiri: "either legislation comes from God alone, and one refers to him in case of conflict, in accordance with our words ('There is no god but God'), or one gives the right to legislate to others, like the people and their delegates, referring to them in case of conflict. This is tantamount to worshipping gods, peers, and associates alongside God... we cannot reconcile loyalty with God's unbelieving enemies, affection for them, or praise for them and their impious doctrines, like consultation, positive law and democracy. None of this can be reconciled with faith" (1992, in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, pp. 171-172)

³⁰⁷ The full title of the essay is 'The Muslim Brotherhood's Bitter Harvest of Sixty Years'. See Kepel and Milelli, 2008, p. 171.

³⁰⁸ *Bitter Harvest* was written by al-Zawahiri while a member of the Egyptian al-Jihad group (a *takfiri* group which sought to overthrow the Egyptian regime towards the realisation of an Islamic state governed according

means of ‘democratic’ participation had been afforded to them under Egyptian rule³⁰⁹. For al-Zawahiri, the ultimate sin of the Brotherhood, in embracing this infidel system, lies not merely in the theological betrayal of *tawhid*, but also the concomitant acceptance of the very authority of the Egyptian regime that the Brotherhood portends to challenge and (eventually) overthrow without resorting to violence³¹⁰. Thus, in al-Zawahiri’s writings—both as a member of al Qaeda and the Egyptian al-Jihad before it—the *takfiri*³¹¹ state (Egypt) and its infidel system of democracy are one³¹²: one cannot hope to overthrow a ruling regime by acceding to the paltry space for faux-opposition that it provides; the system *itself* must be circumvented, by Jihad and the rifle alone³¹³. By virtue of its democratic participation, the Muslim Brotherhood—then, as now—is thus condemned to reap a bitter harvest of scant

to the *Shari’ah*), before al-Zawahiri would officially ‘align’ with al Qaeda (or the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and Crusaders) in 1998. See Kepel and Milelli, 2008.

³⁰⁹ It should be noted that the affirmation of *tawhid*, does not foreclose the possibility of ‘democratic’ participation within Islam. Indeed, turning to the influential *salafist* scholar Abu’l-A’la Mawdudi—who ardently promoted a conception of *tawhid* which has influenced many *jihadists*—his rejection of ‘democracy’ on the basis that “there can be no reconciliation between Islam and democracy...because they contradict one another” (Tibi, 2002, p. 187) should be contextualised by comparison to his notion of ‘theo-democracy’: “A more apt name for the Islamic polity would be the ‘kingdom of God’ which is described in English as a ‘theocracy’. But Islamic theocracy is something altogether different from the theocracy of which Europe has had bitter experience...The theocracy built up by Islam is not ruled by any particular religious class but by the whole community of Muslims including the rank and file. The entire Muslim population runs the state in accordance with the Book of God and the practice of His Prophet. If I were permitted to coin a new term, I would describe this system of government as ‘theo-democracy’, that is to say a divine democratic government, because under it the Muslims have been given a limited popular sovereignty under the suzerainty of God. The executive under this system of government is constituted by the general will of the Muslims who have also the right to depose it” (Mawdudi, 1976, pp. 159-160 in Esposito and Voll, 1996, p.24). See also, Goddard, 2002, pp. 5-6.

³¹⁰ This is encapsulated in the following passage: “not only did [the Muslim Brotherhood] fail to condemn rulers who do not govern according to revealed law; it went so far as to recognize, in words and in deeds, these rulers’ legitimacy, and allowed this judgment to spread in its ranks. The Brotherhood recognized the legitimacy of secular parliamentary institutions (parliament and its democratic elections), which was of invaluable use to the tyrants, since it enabled them to accuse the jihadist groups of illegitimacy—according to infidel laws, of course.” (al-Zawahiri, 1992, in Kepel and Milelli, 2009, p. 172)

³¹¹ Kepel provides a detailed explication of *takfir* thus: “[*Takfir*] derives from the word *kufr* (impiety), and it means that one who is, or claims to be, a Muslim is declared to be impure: by *takfir* he is excommunicated in the eyes of the Community of the Faithful. For those who interpret Islamic law literally and rigorously, one who is impious to this extent can no longer benefit from the protection of law. According to the consecrated expression, ‘his blood is forfeit’, and he is condemned to death” (2006, p. 31)

³¹² This is represented by the following passage: “Even if their constitutions affirm that the state is a democracy and the state religion is Islam, this does not lessen unbelief. It is as if someone were to say: ‘I testify that there is no god but God, and Muhammad is his Prophet, and Musaylima is his Prophet’. Would anyone doubt that this is heresy? Therefore, someone who claims to be a Muslim and cites a democratic or socialist thinker becomes an unbeliever and an apostate; God said: ‘And most of them believe not in God without associating others as partners with Him.’” (al-Zawahiri, 1993 in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, p. 188)

³¹³ This is a reference to the Palestinian ideologue, Abdullah Azzam, who heavily influenced both bin Laden and al Zawahiri and, as Hegghammer puts it, represents “the preeminent theoretician of global jihad” (2008b, p. 97). Azzam argued that *takfiri* regimes could only be overthrown by force and that non-violent participation represented a futile means towards this end. It is in this sense that the external enemies which continue to subjugate the *umma* must be resisted by ‘jihad and the rifle alone’: “No negotiations, no conferences, no dialogue”(in Hegghammer, 2008b, p. 99; see also, Lia and Hegghammer, 2004; McGregor, 2003)

reward³¹⁴:

The Muslim Brotherhood...have chosen to be passive and to abandon jihad for the sake of God, although jihad is the greatest duty of Islam. This is despite all the catastrophes that have befallen our nation and despite the US and Jewish occupation of our lands and the tyranny of the (local) rulers and their aggression on Muslims...The Muslim Brotherhood youth must realize that the new crusader onslaught will not be pleased with them until they join the faith of the infidels and that all the tricks of politics and pacification will not work. It is better for the youth of Islam to carry arms and defend their religion with pride and dignity instead of living in humiliation in the empire of the New World order (al-Zawahiri, 2001a in Mansfield, 2006, p. 168)

Previous to their decision to contest the 2006 elections, Hamas were constructed as relatively equivalential within al Qaeda's public discourse: a legitimate *tawhid* group that had rightly resisted the infidel system that had contributed to the 'selling out' of Palestine³¹⁵; one which rightly used violence to resist the Judeo-Crusader alliance³¹⁶; and one which rightly sought to establish the rule of God via the implementation of *shari'ah*:

America and the western leaders always say that Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, and other such militias, are terrorist organizations. If self-defence is terrorism, what is legitimate? Our defense and our fight is no different to that of our brothers in Palestine like Hamas. We fight for 'There is no God but God.' The word of God is the highest and that of God's enemies is the lowest. So let us relieve the oppression of the poor people in Palestine and elsewhere. (Bin Laden, 2001d, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 152)

Following Hamas' electoral participation and subsequent victory, however, al Qaeda's attitude towards their 'Palestinian brethren' significantly altered, as they began to equalise

³¹⁴ For al Zawahiri, the seeds of this bitter harvest were sown by the Brotherhood's founding member, Hassan al-Banna: "Hassan al-Banna was already guilty of all the infractions to religious prescriptions that the [Muslim Brotherhood] has [contemporarily] committed: flattering rulers and praising them unduly, giving them legitimacy, recognizing constitutional legitimacy, respecting the constitution and democratic practice, participating in democratic elections...demonstrating political opportunities by participating in partisan conflicts, and rejecting violence. Hassan al-Banna had already committed all these sins. We might add, addressing those who claim that the Brotherhood today has moved away from Banna's methods and policy, that it is inaccurate to say so. The data cited in this book show without a doubt that Banna was the first to adopt such deviations." (1992, in Kepel and Milelli, 2009, p. 175)

³¹⁵ This 'selling out' mostly references signed accords, which have been governed by Western powers and are, therefore, constructed as instruments of domination pertaining to the Judeo-Crusader Alliance. The most commonly referenced agreements are: the Sykes-Picot Agreement, the Madrid Conference of 1991, the Oslo Accords, and the Roadmap. As al-Zawahiri puts it in the following passage: "We know very well that Palestine will not be liberated through elections but through struggle and Jihad for the sake of God... There have been a few official statements that accept and respect the agreements signed between the PA and Israel. This means that those who released those statements accept the Madrid, Oslo and Roadmap agreements along with others that admit surrender. This is a dangerous deal which should be dropped immediately." (2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 73)

³¹⁶ The 'Judeo-Crusader alliance'—also prominently referred to as 'Zionist-Crusader alliance', the 'Judeo-Christian alliance' and combinations thereof—is a name attributed to Israel and the United States, which together represent the 'external enemy' of the *umma*, which al Qaeda portends to both represent and defend as its effective vanguard. See Chapter 5 for s more in-depth explication of the Judeo-Crusader alliance as the 'external enemy'.

the folly of their tactical innovation with that of the Muslim Brotherhood³¹⁷. Essentially, by engaging in a democratic process that bears the imprint of the very (Judeo-Crusader) enemy that they are committed to resist, Hamas' non-violent actions are construed as *enabling* (further) subjugation of Palestine, thus contravening—in al Qaeda's view—Hamas' *raison d'être* and exalting al Qaeda's identity as true defenders of the *umma* in their stead. A close reading of al Zawahiri's first public statement addressing Hamas' electoral victory (released on March 4 2006) provides an effective explication of this dynamic.

Al-Zawahiri immediately opens his statement by (re-)affirming *jihad* as the 'only solution' to overthrow the Egyptian regime—and, indeed other, *takfiri* regimes—towards the subsequent realisation of 'freedom' and citizens' rights, as granted under the lawful jurisdiction of Allah³¹⁸. Al-Zawahiri then constructs Palestine as an absolute cause of resistance for *all* Muslims, arguing that it is the (external) Judeo-Crusader enemy that ensures the continued subjugation of the Palestinian people³¹⁹. He then accuses 'internal enemies' within the Palestinian Authority (against whom Hamas have consistently centred their identity as legitimate defenders of Palestine (see Bloom, 2004)) of historically neglecting the Palestinian cause by equivalising their participation within a Western-derived democratic system with the tacit acceptance of official agreements³²⁰ that have sealed Palestinians' tragic fate up to this point³²¹, before warning that future participation within this system will simply continue this cycle indefinitely (as corresponds to the central message of *The Bitter Harvest*):

³¹⁷ Indeed, in the following excerpt, al-Zawahiri equivalises the failing of the two groups as follows: "The [Muslim Brotherhood's reform] program ignores the fact that the political activity cannot be correct except under an Islamic system. If this system is absent, then the political practice, in accordance with the rules, constitutions, and regulations means both clear and inherent recognition of the legitimacy of such [a] system. Thus, there is no difference between those who practice politics under a secular constitution and those who practice politics under a constitution imposed by the invaders and occupiers. Both practice politics in accordance with the rules that are dictated to them and forced upon it by a non-Islamic regimes [sic]. Regrettably the HAMAS leadership committed both errors" (2008a, in Mansfield, 2009, p. 106)

³¹⁸ "As long as [apostate] governments stay in power, lives will be wasted, rights will be limited and corruption will be spread everywhere. The only solution and response should be Jihad because it is the only way to overthrow these kinds of governments in order to establish an Islamic rule that will respect the rights and honors of its citizens, fight corruption and spread justice and equality." (2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 61)

³¹⁹ "The reality of the conflict is that the Israeli occupation of Palestine is in the forefront of the Crusaders' mission against Islam and Muslims. The dimensions of the conflict include the confrontations between the world-wide Muslim community on one side and the Christian West on the other side. So Palestine is the worry for all Muslims...every Muslim in Palestine is a part of the world-wide Muslim community and is responsible for supporting all of this community's issues." (al-Zawahiri, 2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, pp. 70-71)

³²⁰ These agreements mostly reference the Madrid conference of 1991, the Oslo Accords, and the Roadmap Agreement (see, for example, al-Zawahiri, 2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 73)

³²¹ "The seculars in the PA have sold Palestine. Recognizing and legitimizing [their powers] is against the way of Islam. In the eyes of Islam, they are criminals. Palestine does not belong to them, nor is it a property that they can simply abandon. Sharing one legislative council and regarding their position of selling Palestine, which is against Islam, as a legitimate stand while accepting that the final judge between us and them is the number of votes is a clear opposition of Quranic teachings." (al-Zawahiri, 2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 71)

If we accept [the Judeo-Crusader alliance's] authority and their system, then we've accepted their signed agreements. This also means if those criminals win majority in any future elections, then we will have to accept their position of selling out Palestine. It is not the right of any Palestinian or non-Palestinian to give up a grain of Palestinian soil (al-Zawahiri, 2006c, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 71)

Al-Zawahiri signs off his statement by imploring Hamas to 'see beyond' the enemy's empty enticement to power and to reaffirm the values that had—in their view—made the group relatively equivalential to al Qaeda before their decision to contest legislative elections:

The Crusading-Zionist enemy entices some of us to be in power and lures them to accept some free-movement at the expense of agreeing to some of the conditions of the game. Then it pressures them to accept the test of these conditions. Therefore, we must confront the enemy's plot with a plan based on the creed of jihad, while holding on to the Sharia law and rejecting the agreements of surrender...Perhaps one may ask, what is the harm in achieving political gains, even if it's done in stages or little-by-little? The answer is that there is a heavy price to be paid for such moves. Is it for 80 seats in Gaza that our creed is lost and agreements of surrender are accepted?...if we sacrifice our Sharia rule, and legitimiz[e] those who sell their nations and sign agreements of surrender, in hopes for liberating earth, alleviating injustice or protecting, then we will lose our faith and our lives. In the meantime, earth will still be occupied, injustices present and sacredness violated. (al-Zawahiri, 2006c in Mansfield, 2007, pp. 74-76)³²²

Subsequent to this statement, a protracted public feud developed between al Qaeda and Hamas³²³ (see Cragin, 2009; Hovdenak, 2009b; Lynch, 2009; Paz, 2004, 2010) wherein al Qaeda's critique oscillates between vociferously chiding Hamas on the one hand, and imploring them to return to their 'true' (*equivalential*) identity as a violent, monotheistic, 'beacon of jihad' on the other. Once again, the strategic virtue of engaging violence as the *most effective* means of realising social and political change takes centre stage. A representative snapshot is hereby provided:

For the sake of retaining one third of the seats in this ridiculous government, HAMAS leadership has abandoned the rule of Shar'iah. It has also ceded most of the Palestinian territories. For one-third of the seats of this ridiculous government, they abandoned the resistance movement and accepted the government of bargaining; they abandoned the movement of martyrdom operations and accepted the government of respect for international resolutions; they abandoned the heroic struggler movement and accepted the domesticated beggar government; they abandoned the movement of penetrating the enemy throngs with explosives and accepted the government of playing with words in the halls of palaces. For a third of the seats in the government, they abandoned the rule of Shari'ah and bowed to the international legitimacy (al-Zawahiri, 2007a, in Mansfield, 2008, p. 38)³²⁴

³²² It should be noted that Hamas immediately rejected the advice of al-Zawahiri and (further) distanced itself from the group. See Hovdenak, 2009b; 'Hamas Rejects al-Qaida's Support'; 'Hamas: We Are No Al Qaeda'.

³²³ Although this feud has not officially 'ended' as such, it was most apparent in 2007 and 2008.

³²⁴ A similar dynamic is evinced in the following passage: "I ask the leadership of HAMAS, first, not to turn away from the rule of Shari'ah, and to only agree to participate in elections on the basis of an Islamic constitution. And I ask it, second, that if it is given the choice between abandoning government and abandoning Palestine, it should abstain from government, hold on to Palestine and choose Jihad and resistance instead of a

How can you make all religion for God the essence of your resounding speeches and dazzling slogans and move the people and awaken enthusiasm among the youth and then as soon as you knock at the doors of the twisted and lame politics, take cover under the dome of the polytheist Palestinian Legislative Council and meet with the infidels and travel east and west; you shun it with your deeds and you insult it with your words... where is your religion, oh leaders of Hamas, from the case of implementing the Shari'ah, all the Shari'ah which you slaughtered with your own hands, when you agreed to follow the infidel religion of democracy...One who listens to your interviews and statements can [no] longer differentiate between you and the secular movements; you declared them as your brothers and befriended and allied yourselves with their leaders and followers...Oh, Qassam Brigades³²⁵! Where is the revenge? Where are the fires? Where are the bombs? Where is Ibn-Ayyash to renew your glory and show us the enemy's towers collapsing? You are like a beacon to jihad and outshine all others. Al-Aqsa Mosque was engulfed in cheerfulness as the pious fell for its sake and you gave hope to it and it saw all wrongs being righted with determination and today, it has regretfully been covered in sadness because of the polished dialogues. (Al-Libi, 2007a, in Mansfield, 2008, pp. 83, 85, 87)

One sees, then, in al Qaeda's discourse, a counter-hegemonic articulation of 'freedom' and 'democracy' that, on some levels, appears to align with the reductive dichotomisation at the heart of 'Islamic extremism': democracy is an infidel system and those who embrace this system can be equivalised as extensions of the (external) enemy and betrayers of *tawhid* (and, thus, patently different from al Qaeda, despite some shared theological bases). 'Freedoms' realised under this system are wholly illegitimate, therefore, and simply serve to prop up the infidel and *takfiri* regimes that continue to subjugate the *umma*, as is patently highlighted via the plight of the Palestinians, and other constituents³²⁶. While it might be tempting to attribute merit to the reductive narrative at the heart of 'Islamic extremism' on this basis, to do so would be to belie the breadth and concomitant nuance of al Qaeda's public discourse in relation to 'freedom' and 'democracy' as articulated over time. To highlight this point, I now turn to provide a longitudinal analysis of Osama bin Laden's public discourse, as contextualised vis-à-vis the broader Islamist oppositionist movement in Saudi Arabia.

Osama bin Laden and Saudi Arabia³²⁷

Islamist opposition in Saudi Arabia steadily rose in the 1970s, punctuated by the seizure of the Great Mosque in Mecca in 1979 by 200-300 Islamists affiliated with Juhayman al-Qtaibi (see Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2007)³²⁸. A highly controversial event, the siege announced

third of the seats in the municipal council of Gaza and Ramallah" (al-Zawahiri, 2007b, in Mansfield, 2008, p. 97)

³²⁵ This is a reference to the clandestine military wing of Hamas, the Izz-al-din-al Qassam Brigades.

³²⁶ The breadth of particular constituents with regard to the *umma* will be outlined in detail in Chapter 5.

³²⁷ Components of this section are developed from work presented in my MA Dissertation: *Behind the Rhetoric: Is the Belief in al Qaeda's Irrationality Justified?* (2006)

³²⁸ Niblock provides useful context on the groups as follows: "Juhayman maintained that people were not obliged to obey rulers who failed to follow the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, even though they might claim to be

on the (inter)national stage that the Saudi government's policies were not aligned with the stated (Islamic) principles, upon which they based their legitimacy³²⁹. Although the event *itself* did not achieve much popular support, the group's highly-public articulation of resistance resonated with many Saudis (especially disillusioned youth)³³⁰ who had become particularly frustrated with the state's unequal distribution of the vast oil revenue it accrued during the economic boom of the 1970s³³¹. With the ensuing economic collapse in 1981³³², collective frustration grew, and with it, the relative strength of the Islamist opposition, in what became known as the 'Islamic Awakening' (*al-sahwa al-islamiyya*) (see Vassiliev, 1998; Hegghammer, 2008a; Kepel, 2004; Fandy, 2008). The reaction of the Saudi state to the *sahwa* was twofold: on the one hand, it suppressed the majority of public dissension through mass arrests, sweeping censorship and a ban on the formation of autonomous political parties. On the other, it provided a limited space for legitimate articulation to a small pocket of the Islamist opposition—a strategic move to placate dissension that only served to contribute to its subsequent growth (see Atwan, 2006; Kepel, 2004; Fandy, 2008)³³³. The *sahwa* leaders exploited what little space was available for effective resistance by directly addressing their concerns to the state's 'religious establishment', an administrative and advisory body comprised of often revered Islamic scholars known as the *ulema* (chief Mufti of whom was Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Baz), the purpose of which is to ensure that state policy is governed in accordance with Islamic principles.

Though the religious establishment was far from neutral with regard to state affairs—in contradiction to its 'official' function—it nonetheless formed the most viable intermediary link between the state and Islamist opposition. With the invasion of Kuwait by Iraq on 2 August 1990, the *ulema*—at the behest of King Fahd—endorsed the station of US and other

ruling in the name of Islam. The message, then, conveyed a rather unsophisticated but nonetheless powerful reiteration of the egalitarian and puritanical creed which 'ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab had first elaborated" (2006, p. 79)

³²⁹ Indeed, by centralising Islamic discourse as the basis of their political affairs, the Saudi state "had lent some degree of legitimacy to opposing groups who spoke the language of Islam. In effect, this catapulted the Islamic forces to the center of the opposition and enabled them to set the public agenda" (Faksh, 1997, p. 92)

³³⁰ As Menoret puts it: "If Islam is pivotal to the identity of the young people, it is because they see it as both an unquestionable space and a space for free discussion, because they can express within it either submission or opposition to the dominant norms" (2005, p. 204)

³³¹ Per Menoret, "The appearance of Islamism [in Saudi Arabia] should be tracked back to the oil boom of 1973" (2005, p. 105), with the Islamist challenge, "precisely a revolt against the skewed distribution of oil wealth" (2005, p. 117)

³³² Indeed, the Saudi state would not record another budget surplus until 2000 (see Menoret, 2005, pp. 140-141)

³³³ As Giles Kepel observes: "[I]n allowing the ideologues of the "awakening" to speak out publicly and proselytize openly during the 1980s, the royal family had hoped that this fringe group of radicals, mostly students, would fall in line with the dynasty's interests. The doctrinal foundations on which the *sahwa* rested, however, made such an alliance impossible" (2004, p. 182)

foreign troops on Saudi soil, with Sheikh Bin Baz issuing two accompanying decrees, the first authorising US deployment per Operation Desert Shield (14 August 1990), and the second permitting Muslim troops to join military operations against Iraq, per Operation Desert Storm (January 1991) (Lawrence, 2005, p. 3). For an Islamist opposition whose articulations of resistance centred on the state's hypocritical espousal of Islamic values as undermined by their enacted policies, these edicts were positively cancerous and prompted two landmark challenges: the Letter of Demands and the Memorandum of Advice.

Submitted in 1991, and on the back of a similar letter signed by 43 secular intellectuals³³⁴, the Letter of Demands is a petition comprising over 400 signatures (from prominent secular and Islamist figures). Amalgamating (secular) liberal and Islamist opposition demands within an Islamic framework, its content can be summarised as follows:

The Letter called for the establishment of a *majlis al-Shurah* (Consultive Assembly) to handle the state's domestic and foreign policies, according to Islamic law; the revision of all state regulations and laws in the political, economic and administrative sectors, to make them consistent with Islamic law; the choosing of 'qualified and ethical' people for state office; the establishment of justice and equality, where people have clearly defined rights and duties; the acceptance of the principle of accountability for all state officials, especially those in influential positions; the establishment of just policies for the distribution of public funds and the adoption of measures to prevent the waste and exploitation of resources, with the adoption of an Islamic economic system; the implementation of reforms in the military; ensuring that the media reflects the Islamic identity of the state; building a foreign policy reflective of the interests of the nation and avoiding alliances which contradict Islam; developing and supporting the religious and *da'wah* institutions; integrating all judicial institutions and ensuring the independent status of the judiciary and ensuring the rights of the individual and society in accordance with the *shari'ah*, (Alshamsi, 2003, p. 168, cited in Niblock, 2006, p. 95)

The Memorandum of Advice—a culmination of documents, tapes, and sermons bound together into a single document—was submitted to the *ulema* in July 1992. Signed by over 400 activists, including Saudi Arabia's most prominent *sahwa* leaders, it is more extant framed by the demands of the Islamists; nonetheless, the Memorandum should be viewed as a basic extension of the Letter of Demands (see Fandy, 1999) and can be summarised as follows:

The Memorandum of Advice was presented to the government in July 1992. The demands now were more narrowly Islamist [than was the case with the Letter of Demands]: the role of the '*ulama* and *du'ah* (preachers, literally 'callers') in society should be enhanced; the *shari'ah* should be

³³⁴ As Menoret outlines, the 43 secular intellectuals in question requested a list of ten reforms; namely, "[the] creation of a consultative assembly, reopening of the municipal councils, modernization of the juridical system, guarantees of greater media freedom, reform of the religious police and 'greater participation of women in public life, within the scope of the sharia'" (2005, p. 124)

comprehensively applied; the Islamic judicial authority should be strengthened; the violation of human rights and human dignity by the regime should be stopped; administrative reforms should be carried out so as to prevent corruption and ensure justice; an Islamic financial and banking system should be established so as to prevent existing non-Islamic financial and economic practices; the state welfare system should be reformed; the weakness in the country's military infrastructure, shown up by the Gulf War, should be addressed and the army should be enlarged and improved; the media should be made to maintain and protect Islamic identity, defend Islam and promote Islamic causes and values; and the country's foreign policy should encompass the propagation of Islam to all parts of the world, unifying Muslims and supporting Islamic causes. (Alshamsi, 2003, pp. 168-169, cited in Niblock, p. 96)

The Memorandum represents an expression *par excellence* of the *sahwa* movement's non-violent resistance to state authority³³⁵, yet its confrontational framework was seen as patently inadequate among a growing constituency of *jihadists* who—fresh from the recent 'victory' of the *mujahideen* over the Soviets in Afghanistan—favoured violent resistance towards the implementation of social and political change (see Atwan, 2006; Hegghammer and Lacroix, 2007; Scheuer, 2011). It followed throughout the 1990s that the *jihadist* and *sahwa* camps became increasingly intertwined, as their predominantly equivalential political demands vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia were effectively separated by their (un/)willingness to engage in violence as a means of realising them³³⁶. The public discourse of Osama bin Laden is borne of this context.

A close acquaintance of key associated leaders such as Sheikhs Salman al-Awdah and Safar al-Hawali, bin Laden vociferously supported the *sahwa* movement (see Scheuer, 2011, p. 80; Atwan, 2006, pp. 145-174)³³⁷. Following the government's sweeping crackdown on Islamist opposition in 1994, what limited space for political dissension had been available was now effectively cauterised, and it was in this context—in the summer of 1994—that bin Laden

³³⁵ As Hegghammer and Lacroix put it: "Sahwa Islamists...never openly question the state's legitimacy, only criticizing (although sometimes with virulence) its policies, which they strive to change through nonviolent, institutional means" (2007, p. 118)

³³⁶ Hegghammer and Lacroix provide a useful summary: "In the first half of the 1990s, jihadists and rejectionists started to mix...Although they represented two different cultures-rejectionists being men of introspection and jihadists being men of action-their views converged on many important issues. Most importantly, they influenced each other, as many rejectionists became more interested in politics whereas the jihadists adopted the rejectionists' strong distaste for the Saudi state. By the late 1990s, many rejectionists had joined the jihadists and left for Afghanistan or elsewhere. By the early 2000s, the growing polarization of the Saudi Islamist field between reformists and jihadists left little room for the rejectionists" (2007, p. 118). See also, Hegghammer, 2008; Lacroix, 2004; Hegghammer, 2010)

³³⁷ Indeed, bin Laden specifically denounces Bin Baz' tacit support for the detention of the *sahwa* leaders in the following: "When the regime decided to attack Sheikhs Salman al-Auda and Safar al-Hawali, who had stood up for the truth and suffered much harm, you issued a juridical decree condoning everything suffered by the two sheikhs, as well as justifying the attacks and punishments suffered by the preachers, sheikhs, and youth of our *umma* who were with them. May God break their fetters and relieve them of the oppressors' injustice" (Bin Laden, 1994, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 8)

established the Advice and Reform Committee (ARC)³³⁸ in London³³⁹. Conceived as “simply a continuation of those reformers who have been working for decades” (Bin Laden, quoted in Bergen, 2002, pp. 91-92)³⁴⁰, bin Laden—like the *sahwa* leaders before him—targeted the religious establishment as the most appropriate outlet for effective critique. He consistently advocated his direct approval of the political demands articulated in the Memorandum of Advice³⁴¹, attaching a copy of the Memorandum to his first ARC statement (an open letter to Sheikh bin Baz)³⁴²; the contents of these early statements strike a patently familiar tone:

[The spread of corruption] can be seen in the enactment of man-made laws that deem illegal acts to be permissible, the worst of which is the practice of usury, which is now widespread in the country thanks to the usurious state institutions and banks, whose towers are competing with the minarets of the two Holy Sanctuaries³⁴³ ... it is surely well known that the usurious regimes and laws with which these banks and institutions are working are legitimate in the eyes of the ruling regime and officially certified by it ... The political and economic crises that the country is suffering, and the crimes of all varieties that have spread through it like wildfire, are a punishment from God (Bin Laden, 1994, in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 6-7)

³³⁸ The ARC’s ‘mission statement’ is as follows: “The Committee for Advice and Reform is an all-encompassing organization that aims at applying the teachings of God to all aspects of life” (Bin Laden, 1994, quoted in Fandy, 1999, p. 181). Based on interviews with members of the ARC, Fandy relays the organization’s four main aims: “(1) to eradicate all forms of Jahiliya (pre-Islamic or non-Islamic) rule and apply the teachings of God to all aspects of life; (2) to achieve true Islamic justice and eradicate all aspects of injustice; (3) to reform the Saudi political system and purify it from corruption and injustice; and (4) to revive the hezba system (the right of citizens to bring charges against state officials), which should be guided by the teachings of the top ulama.” (1999, pp. 181-182)

³³⁹ Bin Laden has publicly explained this decision to base the ARC in London as follows: “Due to the government ban on *freedom of expression*, the group finds it necessary to set up its operations abroad [emphasis added]” (1994, quoted in Fandy, 1999, p. 181)

³⁴⁰ Bin Laden’s submission to journalist Abdel Bari Atwan in 1996 is enlightening in this regard: “When the Saudi government clamped down on the country’s *ulama* in September 1994, dismissing those who dared speak out from their posts in universities and mosques, banning distribution of their tapes, effectively banning them from speaking, I took a personal decision to start saying what was right and denouncing what was wrong. We set up the Advice and Reform committee to speak the truth and make matters clear” (Atwan, 2006, p. 167)

³⁴¹ As submitted in 1994, “Honourable Sheikh, our considerable concern at the state of our *umma* and our scholars such as you is what motivated us to remind you of all this. For we esteem you and those like you too highly to think that the ruling regime could exploit you in such a terrible way and throw you in the face of every preacher and reformist, or that every word of truth and call to honesty would fall silent at your juridical decrees and opinions, as happened with your response to the Memorandum of Advice and the Committee for the defense of Legal Rights, and others” (1994, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 12).

³⁴² This is accompanied by the following critique: “These apostate rulers [the Arab regimes] who are fighting against God and His Messenger have no legitimacy or authority over Muslims, and they are not acting in the interests of our *umma*. But through these juridicals of yours [bin Baz] you are giving legitimacy to these secular regimes and acknowledging their authority over Muslims, in contradiction of the fact that you have previously pronounced them to be infidels [a reference bin Baz’ authorisation of the Letter of Demands]. This has been made clear to you by a select group of scholars and preachers in their appeal to you to refrain from issuing such juridical decrees. We enclose a copy of this appeal to remind you and bring it to your attention again.” (1994, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 10)

³⁴³ [T]he minarets of the two Holy Sanctuaries’ is a reference to Mecca and Medina, the two holiest sites in Islam.

When the forces of the aggressive Crusader-Jewish alliance decided during the Gulf War—in connivance with the regime—to occupy the country in the name of liberating Kuwait, you justified this with an arbitrary juridical decree excusing these terrible acts, which insulted the pride of our *umma* and sullied its honor, as well as polluting its holy places. You considered this to be a way of seeking help from the infidels in your time of need, neglecting the curbs and restrictions such a call for help necessarily imposed (ibid, p. 7)

Although bin Laden was trenchantly critical of the apostate Saudi regime and the religious establishment whom he accused of ‘betraying the *umma* (by acceding to its apostasy), he did not specifically advocate the use of violence as a means of implementing social and political change in Saudi Arabia until his most famous public edict: ‘Declaration of *Jihad* against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries’ (1996). Contrary to its somewhat caricatured image as a vitriolic statement of hatred aimed at the US/the West, the Declaration is, rather, couched as an overarching critique of the Saudi regime, which has betrayed the *umma* by virtue of its suffocation of ‘freedom’ on the one hand, and its collaboration with the infidel (external enemy) US/the West on the other. The justification for violence in the Declaration is appropriately framed as a *necessary* tactic borne of the cauterisation of effective space for non-violent opposition within the Saudi Kingdom. Accordingly, the contents of the Memorandum are endorsed at length³⁴⁴, with the justification

³⁴⁴ The following passage provides extensive context: “The glorious Memorandum of Advice, was handed over to the king on Muharram, 1413 A.H (July 1992), which tackled the problem, pointed out the illness and prescribed the medicine in an original, righteous and scientific style. It described the gaps and the shortcoming in the philosophy of the regime and suggested the required course of action and remedy. The report gave a description of: (1) The intimidation and harassment suffered by the leaders of society, the scholars, the heads of tribes, merchants, academic teachers, and other eminent individuals; (2) The situation of the law and the arbitrary declaration of what is Halal and Haram (lawful and unlawful) regardless of the Shari’ah as instituted by Allah; (3) The state of the press and the media which become a tool of truth- hiding and misinformation; the media carried out the plan of the enemy of idolising cult of certain personalities and spreading scandals among the believers to repel the people away from their religion, as Allah, the Exalted said: { surely- as for- those who love scandal should circulate between the believers, they shall have a grievous chastisement in this world and in the here after} (An-Noor, 24:19); (4) Abuse and confiscation of human rights; (5) The financial and the economical situation of the country and the frightening future in the view of the enormous amount of debts and interest owed by the government; this is at the time when the wealth of the Ummah being wasted to satisfy personal desires of certain individuals!! While imposing more custom duties and taxes on the nation. (the prophet said about the woman who committed adultery: ‘She repented in such a way sufficient to bring forgiveness to a custom collector!!’); (6) The miserable situation of the social services and infra-structure especially the water service and supply, the basic requirement of life; (7) The state of the ill-trained and ill-prepared army and the impotence of its commander in chief despite the incredible amount of money that has been spent on the army. The gulf was clearly exposed to the situation; (8) Shari’a law was suspended and man made law was used instead; (9) And as far as the foreign policy is concerned the report exposed not only how this policy has disregarded the Islamic issues and ignored the Muslims, but also how to help and support were provided to the enemy against the Muslims; the cases of Gaza-Ariha and the communist in the south of Yemen are still fresh in the memory, and more can be said...In spite of the fact that the report was written with soft words and very diplomatic style, reminding of Allah, giving truthful sincere advice, and despite of the importance of advice in Islam - being absolutely essential for those in charge of the people- and the large number who signed this document as well as their supporters, all of that was not an intercession for the Memorandum. Its content was rejected and those who signed it and their sympathisers were ridiculed, prevented from travel, punished and even jailed. Therefore it is very clear that the advocates of correction and reform

of violence proceeding thus:

Quick efforts were made by individuals and by different groups of the [Saudi] society to contain the situation and to prevent the danger. They advised the government both privately and openly; they sent letters and poems, reports after reports, reminders after reminders, they explored every avenue and enlisted every influential man in their movement of reform and correction. They wrote with style of passion, diplomacy and wisdom asking for corrective measures and repentance from the ‘great wrong doings and corruption’ that had engulfed even the basic principles of the religion and the legitimate rights of the people. But *-to our deepest regret-* the regime refused to listen to the people accusing them of being ridiculous and imbecile. The matter got worse as previous wrong doings were followed by mischief’s [sic] of greater magnitudes. All of this taking place in the land of the two Holy Places! It is *no longer possible* to be quiet. It is not acceptable to give a blind eye to this matter ... it is very clear that the advocates of correction and reform movement were very keen on using peaceful means in order to protect the unity of the country and to prevent blood shed. Why is it then *the regime closed all peaceful routes and pushed the people toward armed actions*, which is the *only choice left* for them to implement righteousness and justice [emphasis added]. (Bin Laden, 1996b, sourced from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa_1996/)³⁴⁵

One sees, then, in bin Laden’s early statements that the eventual support for the use of violence does not *subsume* articulated demands for specific ‘freedoms’—which are tangential to those articulated in the Memorandum—rather, it forms a tactical means by which such freedoms can be effectively realised. Indeed, in the myriad statements released by Bin Laden since the Declaration, his articulated demands for political reform in Saudi Arabia are similarly framed, addressing—and evolving—a number of core demands originally articulated in the Memorandum, with reference to topics of importance such as the economy³⁴⁶; the laws and regulations of the state³⁴⁷; the role of the *ulema*³⁴⁸; the rights of the

movement were very keen on using peaceful means in order to protect the unity of the country and to prevent blood shed. Why is it then the regime closed all peaceful routes and pushed the people toward armed actions?! which is the only choice left for them to implement righteousness and justice” (Bin Laden, 1996b, sourced from http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa_1996/)

³⁴⁵ Please note that this extract is sourced thus (http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/military-july-dec96-fatwa_1996/), and not from Lawrence (2005), as the Declaration is reproduced in Lawrence (2005) in its abridged form only, and devoid of this important context.

³⁴⁶For example, “People are struggling with the basics of everyday life, and everyone talks frankly about economic recession, price inflation, mounting debts, and over-crowding. Low-income government employees talk to you about their debts in the tens or hundreds of thousands of riyals, whilst complaining that the riyal’s value is declining dramatically. Domestic debts owed by the government to its citizens have reached 340 billion riyals, and are rising daily due to usurious interest, let alone all the foreign debt. People are wondering, are we really the biggest source of oil in the world? (1996a, sourced from Lawrence, 2005, p. 28) “All we need to do to clean up this issue [of the Saudi regime’s fallible economic policy] is to point to the huge arms deal, or what you might call the huge theft- for they amount to the same thing- which is known as the al-Yamama contract, which comes to more than \$30 billion- this was a humiliation five years before the Gulf War. But when the war actually started there was no positive effect from this deal to be seen, nor from any of the hundreds of other deals that have been made. When I emigrated from my country to defend you, the unemployment rate was low. If we estimate the number of unemployed at 100,000, then we can divide the value of the deal, \$30 billion, into 100,000, which comes to 1,125,000 riyals per head. If these funds were put into publicly owned companies, in a legitimate way and into generating work for the unemployed, and if they were spent on their own people, like the poor, the miserable, and those in debt, then the people’s condition would improve” (Bin Laden, 2004b, in Lawrence 2005, p. 265)

people³⁴⁹; and Saudi Arabia's military³⁵⁰ and foreign policy³⁵¹.

Ultimately, one can say that the 'freedoms' articulated by bin Laden are not so different from those sought by oppositionists who have thought it tactically prudent to employ dialogue and participation as the most effective means towards these ends. Contrary to the reductive narrative at the heart of 'Islamic extremism', which characterises Qaeda's use of violence as an 'end in itself', bin Laden's exaltation of *jihad*—as with al-Zawahiri and, indeed, Sayyid Qutb³⁵² before them—does not evidence an irrational compulsion towards violence, but,

³⁴⁷ For example, "Whoever has been given insight by God and ponders the regime's conduct will find this reality [the selectivity of enforcing certain laws] being played out in front of their eyes, both in domestic and foreign affairs: dominion and obedience apply to the order of the king and not to God almighty- what the king declares lawful becomes lawful, what he prohibits is forbidden, for in his eyes it is the true right as king to legalize or prohibit what he wants" (Bin Laden, 2004b, in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 257-258)

³⁴⁸ For example, "The religious organisation in Saudi Arabia ... plays the most ominous of roles. Overlooking the question of whether or not it fulfills this role intentionally, the harm which has resulted from its efforts is no different from [that which has resulted] from the efforts of the most ardent enemies of our *umma* ... However, there remain in Saudi Arabia a good number of honest scholars and students who work according to their teachings, and who have taken visible and daring stances against the activities of unbelief which the regime is perpetrating. The regime has striven to keep these scholars in the shadows and then to remove them, one way or another, from being effective elements in the lives of the people of the community." (Bin Laden, 1996c, in 2005, p. 34)

³⁴⁹ For example, "You [the Saudi regime] ... have a choice between two paths. One: to restore to the people their trusteeship in a peaceful way and to let the people of the country choose a Muslim ruler who will rule according to God's book and the *hadith* of the Prophet. Two: to refuse to give people their rights back, to continue oppressing them and depriving them of their rights, to exploit certain people by paying them money out of the nation's public funds so that they beat and kill their brothers and cousins who have rejected your authority. But you should know that things have gone far enough already, and that when people rise up to demand their rights no security apparatus can stop them" (Bin Laden, 2004b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 273)

³⁵⁰ For example, "For the first time, the Crusaders have managed to achieve their historic ambitions and dreams against our Islamic *umma*, gaining control over the Islamic holy places and the Holy Sanctuaries, and hegemony over the wealth and riches of our *umma*, turning the Arabian peninsula into the biggest air, land, and sea base in the region ... All this happened on the watch of the region's rulers, and with their active participation- in fact, these are the people actually implementing the plans of our *umma*'s enemies. This invasion was financed by these rulers using our *umma*'s wealth and savings." (Bin Laden, 1995/1996, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 16)

³⁵¹ Here, in a statement issued in 2004, bin Laden addresses the Saudi government's support for similar regimes throughout the Middle East that suppress Islamist opposition; a criticism that was communicated in the Memorandum of Advice over 12 years previously: "As for foreign policy, the ruling families have responded to America's wishes, leading the way in treachery. King Hussein of Jordan, for example, continued the policy of betrayal started against Palestine by his grandfather ... as well as his father. And his son Abdallah II has continued the same course, while Muhammad VI in Morocco is following the same path of treachery pursued by his father and grandfather before him ... This government in Riyadh has entered into a global alliance with Crusader unbelief, under the leadership of Bush, against Islam and its people, as happened in Afghanistan, and the conspiracies in Iraq, which have not yet ended. They opened up their bases to the American forces so that they could conquer Iraq, which helped the Americans and facilitated their occupation" (Bin Laden, 2004b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 254)

³⁵² Speaking of the distinction between dialogue and violence as a means to change/overthrow *takfiri* regimes, Qutb submits that: "Undoubtedly, this message [of persuasion] does strive through tongue and speech. But when? Only then when people are free to accept this message...But when...material influences and impediments may be ruling, *there is no recourse but to remove them with force*, so that when this message may appeal to the heart and reason of man, they should be free from all such shackles and bonds to pronounce their verdict open-heartedly. [emphasis added]" (2002, in Moaddell and Talatof, p. 232; quoted in Lynch, 2006, p. 206)

rather, a carefully constructed alternative to the very system participation that has only served to maintain the realisation of such ‘freedoms’ as perennially out of reach³⁵³. For any scholar of terrorism and political violence, this logic must be rendered as immediately familiar; that it is couched in an intricate ‘Islamist’ discourse and articulated by the face of the great Other of our time cannot, and should not, dilute this fact:

Our countrymen who reject armed confrontation with the governments in order to restore their rights are engaging in a huge fraud. You can’t get rights restored by a regime whose ruler is an apostate and who rejects everything except the force of arms, who knows that he has on his side these purveyors of blatant error, as well as those who have called directly for acts contradictory to Islam. They have helped the infidels to occupy the lands of Islam, as some of them have stated, under the deceitful cover of helping to get rulers to respect human rights, or the others who mix truth and falsehood and cooperate with the infidels to occupy our lands. It’s true, with their refusal to remove these apostate rulers by force, their approach can only bring one outcome [failure]. (Bin Laden, 2004b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 261)

Conclusion

To recall Laclau and Mouffe, “Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre” (2001, p. 112), and as outlined in the above, such an attempt at singularity is pursued in the War on Terror via ‘Islamic extremism’—a hegemonic discourse which operates to *equivalise* a multitude of complex political identities into a relatively simplistic Self/Other dichotomy, the inclusive/exclusive parameters of which are governed by an interpretive frame of (a)morality. As further outlined by Laclau and Mouffe, while “the logic of equivalence is a logic of the simplification of political space...the logic of *difference* is a logic of its expansion and increasing complexity [emphasis added]” (2001, p. 130)³⁵⁴. Interpreting the public discourse(s) of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and al Qaeda via a *logic of difference*

³⁵³ Indeed, for al-Zawahiri (as for bin Laden), the fruits of this lesson are painfully apparent in the experience of the Algerian FIS, who having being elected to power via democratic elections in 1992, suffered a brutal crackdown in their wake, as the international community turned their backs: “a new awareness is increasingly developing among the sons of Islam, who are eager to uphold it; namely, that there is no solution without jihad. The spread of this awareness has been augmented by the failure of all other methods that tried to evade assuming the burdens of jihad. The Algerian experience had provided a harsh lesson in this regard. It proved to Muslims that the west is not only an infidel but also a hypocrite and a liar. The principles that it brags about are exclusive to, and the personal property of, its people alone. They are not to be shared by the peoples of Islam, at least nothing more than what a master leaves his slave in terms of food crumbs.” (2001 a, in Mansfield, 2006, p. 205)

³⁵⁴ Of course, while all discourses are borne of the criss-crossing of equivalence and difference, an analyst can (and, indeed, must) discern whether one logic is dominant over the other in relation to particular discursive articulations. On this point, it is useful to recall Torfing once again, who offers, with reference to Laclau (1995), that “all social identities are crossing-points between the logic of equivalence and the logic of difference...Neither the logic of equivalence nor the logic of difference will dominate completely...they subvert each other. However, the undecidable relation between the two logics can temporarily be fixed in a determinate hierarchy” (1999, pp. 125-126)

exposes nuanced counter-hegemonic articulations which are—by my analysis—orientated towards two primary functions: first, to weaken the signification of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ by which these groups’ collective identity as ‘Islamic extremists’ is erroneously imposed (by speaking directly to ‘Western/US’ articulations of same) and; second, to affix an expansive range of alternative political demands to ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ as a means to signify their individual political identities as different not only from the hegemony of neo-liberalism, but different from one another. It is in this sense that the simple equivalisation at the heart of ‘Islamic extremism’ can be challenged on its own terms.

At this point, then, an initial attempt has been made—via Mouffe—to argue against dominant narratives which confer a reductive ‘apolitical/irrational’ identity upon al Qaeda and associated groups. While an examination of the public discourse(s) of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood has been essential to this endeavour, it should be noted that the primary focus of this dissertation is to expose and challenge the ‘apoliticalness’ as ascribed to al Qaeda *in particular*³⁵⁵; it is towards a deeper investigation of their public discourse that I now turn. Reading al Qaeda’s mobilisational discourse through Laclau’s theory of ‘populism’ in the proceeding chapter, it is argued that al Qaeda can, and indeed *should* be interpreted as ‘populist’—insofar as they accede to Laclau’s criteria of a ‘populist logic of articulation’—thereby (further) discrediting simplistic narratives which attempt to foreclose any/all characterisations of al Qaeda as an extant ‘political’ entity. Of course, the arguments made in this chapter—and the primary discourse provided for their justification—are not, and, indeed, *cannot* be constrained by the artificial borders pertaining to ‘Chapter 4’/‘Chapter 5’. Rather, recalling the unavoidable production of a *surplus of meaning* that elides in accordance with the polysemic nature of all texts³⁵⁶, I do not merely *accept* that the contents of ‘Chapter 4’ and ‘Chapter 5’ will necessarily flow into/interrupt one another: I write on this basis. By continuing to foreground the primary discourse by which I mark my arguments, I

³⁵⁵ Indeed, while specific reflections on the public discourse(s) of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood contribute to a nuanced understanding of these groups, positioning these observations alongside those pertaining to al Qaeda has facilitated elucidation on the discourse of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri by way of comparison.

³⁵⁶ I have argued this point in detail in Chapters 2 and 3. It is useful, however, to provide further context of the polysemical nature of texts via Derrida: “If dissemination, seminal *difference*, cannot be summarized into an exact conceptual tenor, it is because the force and form of its disruption *explode* the semantic horizon. The attention brought to bear on polysemia or polythematism doubtless represents progress in relationship to the itinerary of the monothematic writing or reading that is always anxious to anchor itself to the tutelary meaning, the *principal* signified of a text, that is, its major referent. Nevertheless, polysemia, as such, is organized within the implicit horizon of a unitary resumption of meaning, that is, within the horizon of dialectics...a teleological and totalizing dialectics that at a given moment, however far off, must permit the reassemblage of the totality of a text into the truth of its meaning, constituting the text as *expression*, as *illustration*, and annulling the open and productive displacement of the textual chain. [emphasis in original]” (Derrida and Rouse, 1982, p. 45)

intend to offer a more visceral representation of a *composite* argument that traverses Chapters ‘4’ and ‘5’—which is to say that al Qaeda should be conceived not only as a political movement, but as a movement born(e) of the political.

Chapter 5

Al Qaeda and the Discourse of Populism

Introduction: Ernesto Laclau on Populism

Any explication of Laclau's vision of populism must begin by distinguishing it not as an ontic category—by which the prominent literature on populism seeks to uncover its 'essential' components (as underpinned by the sedimented orthodoxy of 'social science'; see, Taggart, 2000, p. 2; Canovan, 1981; 1999; 2004)³⁵⁷—but an ontological one (see Laclau, 2005b, pp. 32-33, 44). Owing to the radical heterogeneity of the political, any attempts to attribute groups/movements as populist by virtue of their alignment with pre-existing principles of 'populism' will always be overdetermined by an 'avalanche of exceptions'³⁵⁸. Per Laclau, political practices cannot be *a priori* determined as 'populistic'; rather, 'populism' is signified as a 'particular logic of articulation':

Political practices do not *express* the nature of the social agents but, instead, *constitute* the latter...To put it in slightly different terms: **practices would be more primary units of analysis than the group—that is, the group would only be the result of an articulation of social practices.** If this approach is correct, we could say that a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual *contents* identifiable as populistic, but because it shows **a particular logic of articulation** of those contents—whatever those contents are [*italics in original, bold emphasis added*] (Laclau, 2005b, p. 33)³⁵⁹

If it is not groups *per se*, but associated discourses that determine conceptual alignment with Laclau's vision of populism, then the analytical task of the Discourse Theorist is to

³⁵⁷ Laclau laments the state of the orthodox populist literature as follows: "we can say that progress in understanding populism requires, as a *sine qua non*, rescuing it from its marginal position within the discourse of the social sciences—the latter having confined it to the realm of the non-thinkable, to being the simple opposite of political forms dignified with the status of a full rationality...Its dismissal has been part of the discursive construction of a certain normality, of an ascetic political universe from which its dangerous logics had to be excluded." (2005a, p. 19)

³⁵⁸ This is neatly represented in the following: "If we attempt to [find a 'pure' populism], we enter into a game in which any attribution of a social or ideological content to populism is immediately confronted with an avalanche of exceptions." (Laclau, 2005a, p. 32)

³⁵⁹ This does not entail, of course, that we cannot determine *any* commonalities in relation to populism. Francisco Panizza, for example—who embraces the theoretical vocabulary of Laclau in relation to populism—considers populism as "more likely to become the dominant mode of identification" (2005b, p. 11) in the following circumstances: 1) 'a breakdown of social order and the loss of confidence in the political system's ability to restore it'; 2) 'the exhaustion of political traditions and the discrediting of political parties'; 3) 'changes at the level of the economy, culture and society, such as economic modernisation, shifts in demographic balance between social classes and ethnic groups and globalisation; 4) 'populist politics are linked to the emergence of forms of political representation outside traditional political institutions' (*ibid*, pp. 11-13)

investigate if/how public discourses pertain to this logic's defining features³⁶⁰, which Laclau describes thus:

We only have populism if there is a series of politico-discursive practices constructing a popular subject, and the precondition of the emergence of such a subject is...the building up of an internal frontier **dividing the social space into two camps**. But the logic of that division is dictated, as we know, **by the creation of an equivalential chain between a series of social demands in which the equivalential moment prevails over the differential of the demands**. Finally, the equivalential chain cannot be the result of a purely fortuitous coincidence, but has to be consolidated through the emergence of an element which **gives coherence to the chain by signifying it as a totality**. This element is what we have called *empty signifier*. These are all the structural defining features which enter, in my view, into the category of populism [italics in original, bold emphasis added] (ibid, p. 44)

In broad sum, a populist logic of articulation is dialogically determined, firstly, by the construction of an enemy Other, apropos to which 'the people' are 'interpellated as a collective underdog' (ibid, p. 44); second, by the dominance of a logic of *equivalence* over *difference* in the articulation of collective identity and; third, by the production of *empty signifiers* around which to structure the equivalential political struggles of 'the people'³⁶¹ (see ibid, p. 44; see also Howarth, 2005b, p. 204). By means of elucidation, one might argue that 'Islamic extremism' can be characterised as a *broadly* populist discourse, save for the fact that Bush's appeal to 'the people' (to take its most important facet) is not foremostly structured around the creation of the collective US Self in the image of 'underdogs' (see Panizza, 2005b; Howarth, 2005b); nor does it seek to foment 'progress' or 'revolution' on behalf of 'the people' by circumventing the dominant mode of articulation (neo-liberal discourse) or its associated institutions (via liberal democracy)—indeed, as Mouffe (2005c) has outlined, it seeks to expand it.

Conversely, the discourses of those consigned as 'Islamic extremists' can be determined as *more* populist³⁶², given that they more pertinently satisfy Laclau's criteria (and, further, those

³⁶⁰ As Marchart puts it simply, examining discourses rather than 'groups' represents the necessary starting point for analyses of populism, such that, with reference to 'populist' articulations of protest, "it is through the discursive articulation of protest that the identity of the protesters is articulated in the first place" (2012, p. 230)

³⁶¹ This third point is supported by Howarth, who similarly reflecting on Laclau's framework, offers that: "in order to constitute [the] political frontier dividing the people from the establishment—the production of equivalential effects amongst the particularities that make up the people—populist discourses are necessarily predicated on a certain passage through the universal. There is, in other words, an appeal to *all* the people within a delimited sphere or domain, and the elaboration of ideologies and symbols designed to realise these goals. [emphasis in original]" (2005b, p. 204)

³⁶² As Laclau puts it: "To ask oneself if a movement *is* or *is not* populist is, actually, to start with the wrong question. The question that we should, instead, ask ourselves, is the following: *to what extent* is a movement populist [emphasis in original]" (2005b, p. 45)

put forward by Francisco Panizza (2005b, pp. 11-14))³⁶³, which accentuate the importance of *circumventing* the dominant system(s) of administration that define the hegemonic political horizon³⁶⁴ (see, also, Mouffe, 2005c). Yet, if I am to argue here that the discourses of those ascribed as ‘Islamic extremists’ are *more populist*, does this, then, not entail that the logic of *equivalence* is more dominant in the articulation of their political demands, given that the analytical litmus test per Laclau’s populism is determined by the extent to which “equivalence dominates [a movement’s] discourse” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 45)? By extension, does this not entail that my reading of these groups’ public discourse(s) via a *logic of difference* in the preceding chapter fundamentally contradicts this statement? How can one interpret the discourse(s) of particular groups as dominated by *equivalence* on the one hand, and *difference* on the other? Some qualifications are required.

Firstly, to accept such a move as contradictory is to posit that discourse(s) can be deduced either via a logic of *difference* or *equivalence* and that, furthermore, such discourse is available for ‘true’ or ‘correct’ interpretation. As previously outlined, this is not the case: all articulations of political identities are borne of the criss-crossing between *equivalence* and *difference*; both logics are necessarily implied in one another and their separation is ultimately borne of an artificial intervention made by the researcher, based on their interpretation of the discourse(s) at hand³⁶⁵. Second, Discourse Theory is epistemologically aligned with a ‘problem-based’ approach to research, whereby its application is dictated—or at least ‘should be’ dictated—by the nature of the problem upon which the researcher seeks to

³⁶³ See footnote 358.

³⁶⁴ Indeed, of all the characteristics attributed to populism within the prominent literature, a focus on circumventing existing political institutions forms a prominent reference point. In a notably influential study, Taggart defines populism as follows: “it is possible to suggest that populism is a reaction against the ideas, institutions and practices of representative politics which celebrates an implicit or explicit heartland as a response to a sense of crisis; however, lacking universal key values, it is chameleonic, taking on attributes of its environment, and, in practice, is episodic. Populism is an episodic, anti-political, empty-hearted, chameleonic celebration of the heartland in the face of crisis.” (2000, p. 5)

³⁶⁵ Here, I find Torfing’s mediation on this point as to be most effective: “There is no simple identity between...equivalential identities since they are only the same in one aspect while being different in others (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 128). The relations between difference and equivalence is, in other words, undecidable. The discursive identities are inscribed both in signifying chains that stress their differential value, and in signifying chains that stress their equivalence. The tension between the differential and equivalential aspects of discursive identities is unresolvable, but political struggles may succeed in emphasizing one of the two aspects. Emphasis on the equivalential aspect by the expansion of chains of equivalence will tend to simplify the social and political space by delimiting the play of difference. The collapse of difference into equivalence will tend to involve a loss of meaning since meaning is intrinsically linked to the differential character of identity” (1999, p. 97)

reflect³⁶⁶. Third, and immediately deriving from the second point, my aim in the preceding chapter (the problem towards which I applied Discourse Theory) was to take what I view as the simple homogenisation of political identities via ‘Islamic extremism’ and disrupt this equivalence by exposing its embedded assumptions to the range of political demands articulated by said groups, as interpreted via a *logic of difference*³⁶⁷.

I wish to address an ancillary, but no less important problem in this chapter: namely, to provide an alternative reading of al Qaeda’s vision of the Caliphate—which is centralised in dominant discourses as an actualisable goal to which al Qaeda tailor their strategy—by situating it, via Laclau, as an *empty signifier*, which helps to construct ‘the people’ (the *umma*) and forms but one component of a broader populist discourse. Applying Laclau’s framework of populism to this problematique therefore *compels* a conceptual foregrounding of *equivalential* elements of al Qaeda’s discourse; to do otherwise is not to apply Laclau’s framework at all. The application of this framework not only allows for the elucidation of specific components of al Qaeda’s discourse, but offers (further) reflection of the heterogeneous political ontology by which these components are formed. By these means, I will ultimately conclude that al Qaeda can be identified as a populist movement, per their articulated discourse, thereby (further) challenging the view that they are fundamentally ‘apolitical’ and, thus, somehow ‘other’ to the ontologically-determined processes by which *all* social movements articulate their collective political identities³⁶⁸.

³⁶⁶ It is important to remind the reader at(/on) this point that Discourse Theory should be characterised as a *theoretical analytic*, rather than a methodology.

³⁶⁷ Indeed, it is in this sense that I have *attempted* to write Chapter 4 as an analytical intervention which refracts the very basis of the political to which both Laclau and Mouffe speak. To elucidate via Torfing: “It has been argued [per Laclau and Mouffe] that the unlimited rule of the logic of difference is prevented by the absence of a fixed centre, which renders complete totalization, and thus closure, impossible. The partial fixation of meaning within discourse produces an irreducible surplus of meaning which escapes the differential logic of the discourse in question. However, the expansion of the logic of difference is not only prevented by its lack of a deep foundation in a fixed centre capable of revealing the full essence of all social identities. It is also prevented by the presence of an alternative logic of equivalence which collapses the differential character of social identity by means of expanding a signifying chain of equivalence” (1999, p. 96)

³⁶⁸ I defer also to Laclau’s view, as contained in *On Populist Reason*, that, “My attempt has not been to find the *true* referent of populism, but to do the opposite: to show that populism has no referential unity because it is ascribed not to a delimitable phenomenon but to a social logic whose effects cut across many phenomena. Populism is, quite simply, a way of constructing the political (2005a, p. xi)

Analytical Tools: Creating ‘the People’ as the *Sine Qua Non* of Populism³⁶⁹

Through an initial outline of what Laclau determines as a ‘populist logic of articulation, it becomes apparent that its structural components are sutured together by virtue of creating ‘the people’; an articulatory practice which, for Laclau, represents the *sine qua non* of populism³⁷⁰. Before applying Laclau’s framework to the discourse of al Qaeda (and vice-versa), further clarification on ‘the people’ is required.

Laclau’s fundamental argument in relation to ‘the people’ is that its discursive construction is based on the need to fill a perceived ‘lack’ which frustrates the ‘harmonious continuity of the social’:

There is a fullness of the community which is missing. This is decisive: the construction of the ‘people’ will be the attempt to give a name to that absent fullness. Without this initial breakdown of something in the social order—however minimal that something could initially be—there is no possibility of antagonism, frontier, or, ultimately, the people” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 85)

Clearly, the constitution of ‘the people’ here reflects Laclau’s view (via Lacan) of the political itself in terms of an ‘ontology of lack’ and so there is not much, at this point, to determine ‘populism’ as any different from other articulations of collective identity. This is where the dominance of *equivalence* comes into play, for it is via the *equivalisation* of a range of (*different*) political demands that the ‘people’ is positioned as “the only legitimate totality” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 81) towards the filling of this lack. Concomitantly, populism requires those who portend to speak for all: “In order to have the ‘people’ of populism, we need something more: we need a *plebs* who claims to be the only legitimate *populus*—that is, a partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community [emphasis in original]” (ibid, p.

³⁶⁹ Given that the analytical tools submitted and developed in Chapters 2 and 3 envelops the theoretical vocabulary as articulated by both Laclau and Mouffe (and subsequent scholars of Discourse Theory), the provision of many key terms, such as *hegemony*, *articulation*, *equivalence*, *difference* and *floating signifiers*, in the following section will not be explained anew.

³⁷⁰ It should be noted that Laclau offers a concentrated deconstruction of the prominent literature on populism in *On Populist Reason* (2005), in which, ‘the people’ is examined, but not—in Laclau’s view—sufficiently treated as an integral component of all populist articulations. For Laclau, ‘the people’ has always represented an integral category vis-à-vis populism. Indeed, as Stavrakakis (2005) points out, the central importance of ‘the people’ has been clearly evident throughout Laclau’s scholarship early writings, long before he would submit his most ‘complete’ theory of populism in *On Populist Reason* (2005): “Despite the wide diversity in the uses of the term, we find in all of them the common reference to an analogical basis which is *the people*...it is certainly true that reference to ‘the people’ occupies a central place in populism [emphasis added]” (Laclau, 1977a, p. 165, in Stavrakakis, 2005, p. 230). Finally, on this point, it is useful to note that Laclau would later submit that constructing ‘the people’, in fact, represents the ‘main task of democratic politics’ (2006)

81)³⁷¹ and it is such that ‘the people’ requires to be represented not by a leader *per se*, but by the *symbol* of a leader³⁷².

Put more succinctly, *empty signifiers* act as *nodal points*, which crystallise a broad range of political demands (*difference*) articulated on behalf of the ‘people’ into a configuration of overarching *equivalence*³⁷³. The image of ‘the leader’ represents but one such *empty signifier*; alternative images may include an inclusive ‘justice’ for a persecuted minority (see, for example, Yavuz, 2007); a ‘homeland’ for a displaced populus (see, for example, Quandt et al., 1973; Hammer, 2005); and, as I will posit, a ‘Caliphate’ for a disjointed *umma*³⁷⁴. In essence, we can say that while the precise form of the people’s investment in an object of fulfilment (an *empty signifier* crystallised as a *nodal point* in a chain of *equivalence*) will differ, the *logic* that underpins the exaltation of such an object is guaranteed insofar as populism represents a refraction of the political horizon within which all collective identities must strive for an impossible fullness:

there is no populism without affective investment in a partial object. If a society managed to achieve an institutional order of such a nature that all demands were satisfied within its own immanent mechanisms, there would be no populism but, for obvious reasons, there would be no politics either. **The need to constitute a ‘people’ (a *plebs* claiming to be a *populus*) arises only when that fullness is not achieved, and partial objects within society (aims, figures, symbols) are so cathected that they become the name of its absence.** [*italics in original; bold emphasis added*] (2005a, pp. 116-117)

³⁷¹ Recalling the contents of Chapter 4, this observation should immediately chime with al Qaeda’s assertion that, as opposed to Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, they are the legitimate defenders of the *umma*, as determined by their unflinching dedication to *tahwid*. As will be outlined in the Conclusion, this position has been radically challenged by the establishment and meteoric rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), who are themselves denouncing al Qaeda as illegitimate defenders of the *umma*.

³⁷² As Laclau reflects: “The so-called ‘poverty’ of the populist symbols is the condition of their political efficacy—as their function is to bring to equivalential homogeneity a highly heterogeneous reality, they can only do so on the basis of reducing to a minimum their particularistic content. At the limit, this process reaches a point where the homogenizing function is carried out by a pure name: the name of the leader” (2005b, p. 40)

³⁷³ Without the ‘simplifying’ operation of *equivalence*, the range of political demands would simply be too broad to amass a composite ‘people’ around an effectively inclusive collective identity.

³⁷⁴ Some clarification on the term ‘a disjointed *umma*’ is required here. The *umma* most prominently signifies a *unifying* ‘spiritual’ connection between a community of believers, which transcends geographical and, oftentimes, temporal borders (see, for example, Halliday, 2002). By its most prominent interpretation, then, the *umma* serves as a *de facto* signifier of collective communal unity. In al Qaeda’s discourse, while such collective unity is signified by ‘the *umma*’, this unity is represented as that which is continuously interrupted and suspended by various antagonists(/antagonisms): most specifically, those represented by the ‘Judeo-Crusader alliance’ and their ‘client regimes’ across the Middle East and North Africa. As will be outlined in the main analysis below, an image of communitarian fullness—a *fulfilled umma*, the ultimate totality of which will be manifest in/by the incremental establishment of Islamic emirates and the ultimate (re-)realisation of the glorious Islamic Caliphate—is that which perennially looms on the horizon. By constructing the contemporary form of the *umma* as existing in an indefinite state of becoming, then, al Qaeda’s orators can effectively justify the need for corrective action in order to remove the *source* of this indefinite suspension. Offering a solution to the ‘disjointed’ nature of the *umma* towards an image of ultimate fulfilment—and thus, ‘re-jointment’—is precisely what structures al Qaeda’s mobilisational call to arms, which is also to define what makes ‘the *umma*’ possible as a category of identity in the first place.

Concomitant to this ontological condition, an outside enemy must be assigned as *responsible* for the perennial *dislocation* of the social order that prevents ‘the people’ (/the *umma*) from realising its ‘full’ identity. The removal of this enemy thereby constitutes an actionable goal around which ‘the people’ can (further) *equivalise* its disparate range of political demands and, in essence, perform its collective identity. Taken thus, ‘Death to America’ or ‘Jihad is the solution’ cannot be read as articulations of blind hatred or proof of an underlying irrationality, but expressions of collective frustration against the figure that is held as responsible for suspending the ‘people’ in a permanent state of becoming. So long as this enemy continues to exist, ‘the people’ will continue to be determined by its efforts to remove it: the figure of the enemy is what both sustains and prevents ‘the people’; without it, there can be no horizon of possibilities, and ultimately, there can be no populism.

Finally, one can determine that ‘the people’, whatever its character, “is going to present two faces: one of rupture with an existing order; the other introducing ‘ordering’ where there is basic dislocation” (Laclau, 2005a, p. 122) and while up to this point, the focus has been upon how ‘the people’ is created vis-à-vis *empty signifiers* (apropos the second face), it is important to recognise the concomitant contribution of *floating signifiers*, which function more intently to disrupt the *internal* frontiers of the existing order (apropos the first face)³⁷⁵. The operational contribution of *floating signifiers* (‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’) has already been examined in relation to their disruption of the ‘internal frontiers’ of the War on Terror (via ‘Islamic extremism’). The proceeding analysis, however, specifically focuses on the role of *empty signifiers* vis-à-vis al Qaeda’s attempted constitution of ‘the people’ (the *umma*), as pertains to a populist ‘logic of articulation’. While (further) inquiry into the function of *floating signifiers* per al Qaeda’s mobilisational discourse will not be *explicitly* undertaken from this point, the significance of alternative treatments of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ cannot but resonate with al Qaeda’s ‘populist’ logic of articulation: an analytical focus on

³⁷⁵ An appropriate delineation of the interrelationship between *empty* and *floating* signifiers is provided by Laclau as follows: “As we can see, the categories of ‘empty’ and ‘floating’ signifier are structurally different. The first concerns the construction of a popular identity once the presence of a stable frontier is taken for granted; the second tries conceptually to apprehend the logic of the displacements of that frontier. In practice, however, the distance between the two is not that great. Both are hegemonic operations and, most importantly, the referents largely overlap. A situation where only the category of empty signifier was relevant, with total exclusion of the floating moment, would be one in which we would have an entirely immobile frontier—something that is hardly imaginable. Conversely, a purely psychotic universe, where we would have a pure floating without any partial fixation, is not thinkable either. So floating and empty signifiers should be conceived as partial dimensions—and so as analytically distinguishable—in any process of hegemonic construction of the ‘people’. (2005a, p. 133)

empty signifiers in Qaeda's mobilisational discourse does not entail that the contribution of *floating signifiers* is thereby compressed into an invisible irrelevance. Rather, overflowing the artificial borderlines denominated by Chapters '4' and '5', examinations of *empty signifiers* and *floating signifiers* therein resonate in tandem with one another, acting as mutual footnotes to what is inscribed to the page at a particular point by virtue of what is not³⁷⁶.

The necessary components of Laclau's populist 'logic of articulation' have now been adequately outlined and may be summarised as follows: a) 'the construction of 'the people' as a collective underdog against the constitutive outside of the enemy; b) the dominance of *equivalence* over *difference* in the articulation of collective identity and; c) the provision of *empty signifiers* around which to structure and unify the demands of 'the people' against the prevailing political/institutional order. It is in accordance with this framework that I now turn to (re)examine the discourse of al Qaeda through a 'populist' lens.

Reading al Qaeda through the Lens of Populism

The Construction of 'The People' as a Collective Underdog against the Constitutive Outside of the Enemy

As Laclau reminds us, a populist logic of articulation requires "the building up of an internal frontier dividing the social space into two camps" (2005b, p. 44) and it is the 'Judeo-Crusader alliance'—comprising the US and Israel and, more generally, the West—that most prominently fulfils this role in al Qaeda's discourse. At once 'internal' to the struggle of the *umma* (by virtue its links with *takfiri* regimes across MENA in particular and its direct actions towards the 'occupation' of 'Muslim lands') and 'external' to it (by virtue of its oppositional value-system and the enshrinement of 'freedom' and 'democracy' per neo-liberal discourse), the orators of al Qaeda are all too aware of its capacity to inspire collective resistance and to effectively create an image of 'the people' as its oppositional entity. Indeed, al-Zawahiri has made explicit reference to this dynamic on a number of occasions:

The Muslim masses--for many reasons ... do not rally *except* against an *outside occupying enemy*, especially if the enemy is firstly Jewish and secondly American [emphasis added] (2005b, p. 4)

³⁷⁶ It is in this vein that the primary sources submitted to buttress specific arguments throughout these Chapters can be—and I hope *will* be—recalled by the reader towards their own unique understanding(s).

...stepping up the jihad action to harm the US and Jewish interests creates a sense of resistance among the people, who consider the Jews and Americans a horrible symbol of arrogance and tyranny (2001a, in Mansfield, 2006, pp. 110-11)³⁷⁷

Corresponding to a populist logic of articulation, ‘the enemy’ must be enshrined as that which frustrates ‘the people’ from realising their full identity and it is in this vein that despite the relative absence of al Qaeda-led operations in the Occupied Territories (see Hroub, 2009), Palestine (which is centralised—via Jerusalem—as a prospective ‘hub’ of an Islamic Caliphate to come) is consistently referenced as a *cause du jour*—with the Judeo-Crusader alliance charged with its continued subjugation³⁷⁸:

How can the poor mothers in Palestine bear the murder of their children at the hands of the oppressive Jewish policemen, with American support, American aeroplanes and tanks? Those who distinguish between America and Israel are true enemies of the *umma*. They are traitors who have betrayed God, His Prophet, and their *umma*, who have betrayed its trust and who numb its senses. These battles cannot be seen in isolation from each other, but must be seen as part of the great series of fierce and ugly Crusader wars against Islam (Bin Laden, 2001c, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 138)

Further, with the Judeo-Crusader alliance largely defined with reference to its (*kuffar*) system of democratic participation, the subsequent embrace of this system by the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas can be effectively conflated as tacit support for the Judeo-Crusader alliance, thus constituting a betrayal of Palestine and, by extension, the *umma*³⁷⁹. Constructing the narrative in this way allows for the effective division of an encompassing social space between ‘them’ and ‘us’, thus consolidating al Qaeda’s identity as the righteous [*tahweed*] vanguard of ‘us’ (‘the people’/the *umma*) at the expense of all other pretenders³⁸⁰.

³⁷⁷ This dynamic is similarly represented in the following: “The one slogan that has been well understood by the nation [the Muslim *umma*] and to which it has been responding for the past 50 years is the call for the jihad against Israel.” (al-Zawahiri, 2001a, in Mansfield, 2006, p.210)

³⁷⁸ In this passage, al-Zawahiri explicitly reflects on the mobilisation capacity of ‘Palestine’ as follows: “The undeniable truth is that Palestine is not only the cause that has been igniting the feelings of Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia for the past fifty years, but also a rallying point for all the Arabs, believers or unbelievers, good or bad.” (2001b, in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, pp. 197-198)

³⁷⁹ This dynamic is effectively represented by the following attack on the Hamas leadership: “The leadership of Hamas needs to select one of two choices: either to be a leadership for a local movement, stuck in a narrow spot of this vast land, with national liberation as its only interest and has nothing to do with the issues of the Muslim nation and ready to accept any political system that will be forced upon them, and that they are ready to cope and bow down to the international and Arab resolutions so the international community can be pleased with them. Or to be the leadership of an Islamist Jihadi movement that will work on accomplishing the doctrine of God on earth, to fight so that religion can all be to God and to represent the central cause of the jihadi Muslim nation in order to liberate its lands and to establish its caliphate. *Therefore it is a part of the Muslim nation, fighting for one nation with one doctrine against one enemy...* I call upon [Hamas] to be aware that by confronting the traitors, the agents and the sellers of Palestine they will step ahead on the way to victory so beware, beware of retreat and to go back because of the tricks of the political solutions and the regional bargains and they need to rely on their God and plead him for victory, peace and steadfastness. [emphasis added]” (al-Zawahiri, 2007, in Mansfield, 2008, pp. 194-195)

³⁸⁰ As outlined by Panizza, this move is wholly representative of a populist logic of articulation: “In populist discourse, politics and political parties are often considered as divisive institutions that should be eliminated, or at least purified of factions and particularistic interests, to allow the people to become united. Institutions,

While al Qaeda's calls for violence against the Judeo-Crusader alliance in the Occupied Territories has been largely muffled by the presence of other groups in the region—particularly Hamas—it is nonetheless *essential* for al Qaeda to make that call; read via Laclau, the liberation of Palestine thereby represents a powerful *empty signifier* to unite 'the people' against those responsible for its continued subjugation:

Defending Palestine is a responsibility for all Muslims. You should never give up Palestine even if the whole world drops it. In Palestine we don't face the Jews only, but the anti-Muslim world coalition led by America the Crusader and the Zionist. We know who killed Ahmed Yassin and Rantissi [leaders of Hamas assassinated by Israel], it wasn't Israel alone that killed them. The U.S. and Europe and our leaders supported them in their act... We shouldn't wait for the American, English, French, Jewish, Hungarian, Polish and South Korean forces to invade Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, Yemen and Algeria and then start the resistance after the occupier had already invaded us. We should start now... Oh young men of Islam, here is our message to you, if we are killed or captured, you should carry on the fight." (al-Zawahiri, 2004, in Mansfield, 2006, pp. 234-235)³⁸¹

The extracts in the above, while premised on articulations of Palestine, also reflect an important recurring theme whereby the specific policies attributed to the Judeo-Crusader alliance are amalgamated to form but one part of an overarching 'crusade' that transcends time and space^{382,383}. This crusade, which is *led* by the 'external' Judeo-Crusader alliance, also comprises 'internal' 'client' regimes across MENA whose engagement with the 'external

parties and established politicians that pretend to represent the people muffle the voices they claim to represent and betray their followers. In contrast, the leader claims to have a direct rapport with the people that allows him to advance their interests without becoming prisoner to the powerful" (2005b, p. 22)

³⁸¹ Again, Palestine is centralised in the following aspect to represent but one component of the overarching machinations of the Judeo-Crusader alliance and their client regimes in MENA: "One of the most important objectives of this new Crusader campaign, after dividing up the region, is to prepare it for the establishment of what is called the state of Greater Israel, which would incorporate large parts of Iraq and Egypt within its borders, as well as Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, the whole of Palestine, and a large part of Saudi Arabia. Do you know what harm and suffering Greater Israel will bring down upon the region? What is happening to our people in Palestine is just a small example of what they want to repeat in the rest of the region courtesy of the Zionist-American alliance: murder of men, women, and children, incarceration, terrorism, destruction of houses, bulldozing of fields and razing of factories. People are living in constant fear and alarm, expecting death to come at any moment from a missile or bomb destroying their house and killing their womenfolk. How will we respond to our Lord on the Day of Judgement?" (Bin Laden, 2003b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 189)

³⁸² The construction of this image is neatly represented in the following passage: "The occupation of Baghdad is only one practical stage in what the United States has already thought and planned. The entire [Gulf] region was targeted in the past, it has been targeted now and will remain targeted in the future. What have we prepared for that? The current Zionist-Crusader campaign against the *umma* is the most dangerous and rabid ever, since it threatens the entire *umma*, its religion, and presence. Did Bush not say that it is a Crusader war? Did he not say that the war will continue for many years and target 60 states? Is the Islamic world not around 60 states? Do you not realize this? Did they not say that they want to change the region's ideology, which vents hatred against the Americans? What they mean by this is Islam and its peak. They know full well that they will not enjoy our wealth and land as long as we remain *mujahid* Muslims. So, learn this and keep it in your mind [emphasis in original]" (Bin Laden, 2004a, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 215)

³⁸³ As noted by Richard Bonney, only an 'excessively long' period of occupation would justify the call for a defensive Jihad—which forms the theological basis of al Qaeda's call to defensive *Jihad* (2004, p. 123)

enemy’—in contradiction to their stated dedication to Islam³⁸⁴—secures their identity as the ultimate betrayers (*takfiri*) of the *umma*³⁸⁵. Accordingly, the violent struggle of the ‘people’ must be directed towards a composite enemy that frustrates its ‘true’ identity from both inside and out:

Those forces that consciously support tyrants through their own free will are partners in the injustice being done to Muslims. I appeal to the people of the Islamic nation to oust their leaders who supported those tyrants, and select strong and honest leaders who can shoulder their duties under the current difficult circumstances and defend the Islamic nation... This is as far as concerns those forces that have diverted the course of **our march from within**. As to **how to resist these enemy forces from outside**, we must look back at the previous Crusader wars against our countries to learn lessons that will help us confront this onslaught... There can be no dialogue with the occupiers except with weapons. If we look at the nature of the conflict between us and the West, we find that when they invaded our countries more than 2,500 years ago they did not have a sound religion or ethics. Their motive was to steal and plunder... When our adherence to our religion weakened and our rulers became corrupt, we became weak and the Romans returned, waging their infamous Crusader wars. They occupied the al-Aqsa Mosque, but after 90 years we regained our strength when we returned to our religion. Thus, with the help of God, we regained the al-Aqsa Mosque at the hands of a wise leader who pursued a sound approach. The leader was Salah-al-Din... whose pinnacle is *jihad* in the cause of God... Muslims, if you do not punish the Crusaders for their sins in Jerusalem and Iraq, they shall defeat you because of your failure. They will also rob you of the land of the Two Holy Sanctuaries. Today [they robbed you] of Baghdad, and tomorrow they will rob you of Riyadh and so forth unless God deems otherwise. Sufficient unto us is God. [*italics in original, bold emphasis added*] (Bin Laden, 2004a, in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 216-219)

Finally, if, per the above, circumvention of the dominant system via *jihad* is highlighted as the only viable solution towards the realisation of the people’s ‘true’ identity, then the spectre of ultimate victory must be constructed as a somewhat realistic prospect. Hence, one finds that the *umma* are repeatedly painted as *virtuous* underdogs, possessing an exalted moral fortitude which, in the face of overwhelming power, will carry ‘the people’ to victory *once again*³⁸⁶. Past triumphs attributed to the *umma*—via prominent figures such as Salah-al-

³⁸⁴ Indeed, one finds in the following extract how these parties are linked together by virtue of Palestine: “In conclusion, I say that the way to liberate Palestine is clear and obvious theoretically, however, when it comes to actions on the ground, disputes grow up, for it is well-known that there is no way to free Palestine except by fighting the so-called ‘Islamic’ governments and parties, which surround the Jews on all sides, but keep us away from reaching them.” (Bin Laden, 2008, in Mansfield, 2009, pp. 156-157)

³⁸⁵ This is well represented in the following extract: “The global kuffar has put into place a set of international laws against Allah’s shari’ah. This kufr has contaminated our educational systems with apostasy and heresy. It has trapped our economies in the chains of usury. It has undertaken its program of limiting our population and consequently our sisters and daughters have become barren. And by sheltering under the labels of information technology and culture, it has leashed [sic] a storm of decadence and immorality that has ruined the ethics and character of the young generation and resulted in the death of shame in the Muslim societies and under this very same global structure of kufr both the theoretical as well as hands-on training of the thinkers and politicians of the Muslim world started on a basis of atheism in order to make them more capable of upholding western ideologies and values under the cloak of democracy... these international idols imposed upon this ummah of tawheed factions and rulers who instead of prostrating themselves to the Lord of the Ancient House, the Kaaba prostrate themselves to the lord of the White House. (Gadahn, 2007, in Mansfield, 2008, pp. 232-233)

³⁸⁶ Reflecting on a number of ‘defeats’ incurred by the US at the hands of the *mujahideen*, Al Qaeda spokesperson Adam Gadahn said the following: “How, American’s [sic] may ask, is it possible [sic] the

Din³⁸⁷, the Prophet Muhammad³⁸⁸ and Al-Muthanna al-Shaibani³⁸⁹, for example—are thereby weaved together with contemporary victories—such as those recorded over the Soviets in Afghanistan³⁹⁰ and against the present-day Crusaders in Iraq³⁹¹ and Afghanistan³⁹²—to

strongest and best equipped army on earth has been defeated by lightly armed mujahideen? The answer is self-evident. Right triumphs over might. Even Americans have an understanding of this concept as attested to by the numerous novels, cinematic productions, and television programs in which the weaker party wins against all odds. And most of you are familiar with the story of David and Goliath and indeed with the story of Moses and Pharaoh, and many other similar biblical stories. And I daresay many of you have become familiar with the story of Islam, and how the Muslim Arabs conquered most of known world [sic] in the space of a few decades in defeat of the tyrants of their day with little more than their faith and the clothes on their back. Your problem...lies in your flawed understanding of what is right and who are the weak and oppressed victims...Muslims know what true values are. True values are those values which Americans ridicule and deride and cast doubt upon because they know nothing of them, Values like adherence to God's true religion, like liberating oneself and others from oppression, like honor[,] dignity and self-respect, like chastity and moral uprightness, like truth in word and deed, like showing mercy to the innocent, defenseless, and helpless, and fighting for them, and like giving ones [sic] life for these values.” (Gadahn, 2008, in Mansfield, 2009, pp. 3-4)
³⁸⁷ “When Egypt and Syria were unified after the death of Nur al-Din, the mujahid Sultan Salah al-Din managed to win the Battle of Hattin and free Jerusalem. Only then did the wheel of history turn against the Crusaders” (al-Zawahiri, 2001b, in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, p. 199). See main text above also.

³⁸⁸ While specific triumphs attributed to the Prophet are noted, his words are *most* often used as a basis for reflecting on his own victories in the name of Islam, and in effect—by their re-articulation via bin Laden et al.—imploing contemporary followers to remain steadfast in *their* current Jihad. The following passage is indicative: “[p]rayers and peace blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, who said, “I was sent with a sword in my hands so that only God Almighty is worshipped without equal. He put my sustenance in the shadow of my spear, and disgraced and humiliated those who oppose my order. He who imitates another is not better than them.” (Bin Laden, 2003b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 187)

³⁸⁹ Here, Bin Laden eulogises on al Shaibani: “our *umma* possesses enormous powers, sufficient to rescue Palestine and the rest of the Muslim lands. However, these powers have been fettered and we must work to release them. For our *umma* has been promised victory...History has shown in recent centuries that it is able to fight and resist the so-called superpowers. But before discussing this, I should mention an incident which is relevant to the subject of fighting the superpowers. Historians tell us that al-Muthanna al-Shaibani came to Medina seeking the Caliph Umar's support in fighting the Persians. For three days Umar petitioned people's help, but not a single person came forward. Realizing the fear in people's hearts at the difficulty of fighting a superpower, Umar told al-Muthanna to describe how God had granted him victory against the Persians in order to rid them of their fear. So al-Muthanna began to tell them what had happened and to motivate them, saying: ‘O you people, don't let them frighten you, for we have defeated and humiliated the Persians, capturing the best parts of the agricultural region of Iraq. We outwitted them and gained ascendancy over them’. So the people were inspired. Abu Ubeid al-Taqafi stood up and was given the banner by Umar and the people followed him into battle. And I say like these noble men: O you people, don't let America and its army frighten you, for by God we have struck them and defeated them time and again” (Bin Laden, 2003b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 191)

³⁹⁰ As bin Laden outlines: “I say that the battle isn't between the al-Qaeda and the global Crusaders. Rather, the battle is between Muslims—the people of Islam—and the global Crusaders. And that organization, with the grace of God, used to work with our Afghan *mujahidin* brothers, and people used to ask us: ‘How will you defeat the Soviet Empire?’...The Soviet Empire has become—with God's grace—a figment of the imagination...So the One God, who sustained us with one of His helping Hands and stabilized us to defeat the Soviet Empire, is capable of sustaining us again and of allowing us to defeat America on the same land, and with the same sayings. [emphasis in original]” (2001b, in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 108-109)

³⁹¹ Al-Zawahiri provides a suitable warning in the following passages: “My...message is to the American people who are drowning in illusions...I tell them, O' liars and greedy war merchants, who is pulling out of Iraq and Afghanistan, you or us? Whose soldiers are committing suicide out of desperation, you or us? To the American mother I say, if the defense ministry called you to tell you your son is coming back in a coffin, remember Bush. To the British wife I say, if you got a call telling you your husband is coming back home with his body paralyzed, amputated or charred, remember Blair” (2006a, in Mansfield, 2006, p. 309); “The correct picture is that there are two facts in Iraq. The first is that America has been defeated, and the second is that the Americans are leaving Iraq, and the Islamic State of Iraq [a *jihadist* group linked to al Qaeda] is staying there, by the grace of Allah. [emphasis in original]” (2008b, in Mansfield, 2009, p. 276)

construct a tangible collage of (military) achievements that serve as the basis of ultimate victory: an *empty signifier* of impending fulfilment that cannot ever be achieved, but that which necessarily structures the very basis of al Qaeda's populist call to arms.

The Dominance Of Equivalence Over Difference In The Articulation Of Collective Identity

The basis of al Qaeda's discourse of mobilisation is to create and consolidate a sense of unity, a oneness of 'the people' equivalised under the 'true' word of God (*tawheed*) who are collectively opposed to the constitutive outside 'enemy'. As al-Zawahiri puts it plainly, "We don't want a single rank full of holes through which the Crusaders and Jews can come in; rather, we want unity around the word of Tawheed" (2007b in Mansfield, 2008, p. 95). With the Judeo-Crusader alliance presenting an indefinite threat that transcends time and space, those who constitute the *umma* are consolidated in the first instance as transient victims, but—importantly—victims who possess sufficient power to emancipate *themselves* from this mimetic circularity, should they unite in (violent) resistance:

Those who maintain that this war is against terrorism, what is this terrorism that they talk about at a time when people of the *umma* have been slaughtered for decades, **in response to which we do not hear a single voice or action of resistance?** When the **victim** starts to avenge the innocent children in Palestine, Iraq, southern Sudan, Somalia, Kashmir, and the Philippines, the hypocrites and the ruler's jurists stand up and defend the blatant unbelief- I seek God's help against them all. The masses have understood the issue...The people of knowledge have agreed that allegiance to the infidels and their supporters against the believers is among the biggest contraventions of Islam. There is no strength or power save with God. [*italics in original; bold emphasis added*] (Bin Laden, 2001c, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 135)

It is in this vein that the orators of al Qaeda portend to lead by example, acting as mere facilitators of an emancipatory resistance³⁹³ that is prescribed by God himself:

³⁹² In the following extract, bin Laden explicitly analogises the incremental gains of the *mujahideen* in the early stages of the resistance against the [US-led] occupiers to those experienced against the Soviets in Afghanistan previously, thereby constructing a clear sense of progress and the (realisable) spectre of an inevitable victory to be (re-)achieved: "I bring you the good news that the *jihad* in Afghanistan is going well today, and that things are improving for the *mujahidin*, by the grace of God. Here, we are in the third year of fighting, and America has not been able to achieve its goals. Instead it has become embroiled in an Afghan quagmire. And as for what America considered to be victories in the first months of the war, after they captured some cities as a result of the withdrawal of the *mujahidin*, it is no secret to military experts generally, and to those who know Afghanistan particularly, that this was a tactical withdrawal in line with the nature of...the Afghans generally throughout their long history of guerrilla warfare...This is the same tactic by which they previously conquered, by the grace of God, the army of the USSR, [a victory] which was ensured after they began to use guerrilla warfare and increased the rate of operation to two a day. So the Americans are in a sorry plight today, unable either to protect their forces or to form a government that can protect its own leader, let alone others. [*emphasis in original*]" (2003b, in Lawrence, 2005, pp. 203-204)

³⁹³ As al-Zawahiri attests: "To the mujahideen everywhere, may God grant you glory. To our brother, the virtuous shaykh, the scholar, Abu-Abdallah Usama bin Ladin, and to our brother, the virtuous shaykh Ayman al-Zawahiri, and to our brother, the virtuous shaykh, Mullah Muhammad Omar, and to our brother, the virtuous

Depending on God, I say that God has made Al-Qa'ida successful in conveying its message to the Muslim nation which responded favourably with it. God has enabled it to expand and spread. Many groups have joined al-Qa'ida some of which have been announced and others have not. This is all thanks to God's favour and the blessing of the blood of martyrs, may God accept them as martyrs. I don't forget in this regard to pray God to accept the martyrdom of the 19 heroes whom God made a means to break America's arrogance and change the path of history. This is a favour from God which he confers on whomever he wishes (al-Zawahiri, 2006d in Mansfield, 2007, pp. 461-462)

Propagating the narrative in this way allows for the leaders of al Qaeda to be effectively positioned *among* the 'people'; indeed, it is not by coincidence that the asceticism and heroic deeds of bin Laden in particular derive a consistent theme of sacrifice for the *jihad* in al Qaeda's primary discourse³⁹⁴. As Laclau reminds us, the 'people' of populism requires "a *plebs* who claims to be the only legitimate *populus*—that is, a partiality which wants to function as the totality of the community [emphasis in original]" (2005b, p. 81) and by this function, the sacrifice of al Qaeda's leaders is dually positioned as at once for the '*umma*' and for 'God'. Appropriately, one finds a taut reciprocation between the words of al Qaeda's leaders and those of the *mujahideen*, whose wills are often re-appropriated into al Qaeda's primary discourse as a testament to(/of) the *umma*. Indeed, it is precisely by the words and deeds of martyrs such as Hafiz Uthman, for example—re-appropriated by leader Adam Gadhan and communicated to the masses in the below—that the *plebs* voice their claim to be the legitimate *populus* and the unity of the 'people', which al-Zawahiri so desperately seeks, is effectively performed into existence:

If the Kuffar (infidels) of the globe fear someone, it is [the] few mujahideen. Why is this so? Assess the reason behind each case, and you will find it to be the same. The mujahideen sacrificed everything

shaykh, Abu-Umar al-Baghdadi, the amir of the Islamic State of Iraq, and to our brother, the virtuous shaykh, and to the commanders of jihad in America, in Europe, in Australia, in Africa, in Asia, and everywhere, in Afghanistan, in Chechnya, in Palestine, in the Philippines, in Kashmir, in Pakistan, in Turkistan, in Sudan, in Lebanon, in Thailand, and everywhere else, may God protect you, look over you, and make you among the best of the Mujahideen. God's peace, mercy, and blessings upon you all. My mujahideen brothers, I remind you to be mindful of God and to continue your jihad against the non-believers and the infidels, especially against the criminal non-believers of America, the tyrants, and against their partners, supporters, and hypocritical apostate followers. I end with a reminder to the victorious jihadist factions everywhere, you must hold on to your brotherhood, your unity, and your ranks." (2008c, in Mansfield, 2009, p. 298)

³⁹⁴ Indeed, in the following passage from a statement attributed to bin Laden—in which he reflects on his experiences of the Afghan Jihad—he appears to even exalt *himself* as a strategic means to foment a pervasive image of self-sacrifice by example: "It was a sort of big boarding house, a large villa we had rented, where the young Arabs [of the Afghan Jihad] were housed. Its administration was made up of several sections: military, administration, training, departures... Osama Bin Laden spent about half a million rupees a month just on running costs: around twenty-five thousand dollars. And when the office was under a lot of pressure, in 1985 and 1986, Osama bin Laden decided to go and live there by himself...but, at the same time, he was thinking about a better way to contribute to the Afghan Jihad. Instead of spending money and paying to support the jihad, he decided to implement projects that would be useful to the Afghans: to build mountain roads, dig tunnels and shelters to protect the Afghan mujahideen from air bombardments. This took place in agreement with the brothers who owned the enormous Bin Laden corporation and who helped a good deal by sending earthmovers, bulldozers, and power generators to Afghanistan." (Bin Laden, 1991, in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, p. 41)

they possessed--their lives, their fortunes, their families—and left their homes for the sake of Allah, and performed jihad to hoist the banner of Islam. For instance, look at Sheika Osama...it was the same Osama before, blessed with so much wealth and living a life of content. But today, after he sacrificed everything for the sake of Allah, the mere thought of him terrifies Bush and gives him nightmares. Why? All because of his sacrifice for Islam, and Allah has elevated him in status of such heights that he will be remembered for centuries by the Kuffar, Allah willing...my last will and advice to you is this: keep the banner of jihad raised high, and sacrifice your body, soul, and everything you have for it. The gardens of your Lord await us; they are our true objective! Our true abode is paradise! (quoted in Gadhhan, 2007, in Mansfield, 2008, pp. 242, 243)³⁹⁵

The notion of reciprocal sacrifice in servitude of an ideologically-determined ideal of communitarian fullness—whether via Marxism, Nationalism or other ideologies—is, of course, nothing new; the precise *form* of this call in prominent *Jihadi* discourse is, however, derived from a particular vocabulary, with the exaltation of *jihad* as an ‘individual duty’ among its most important facets³⁹⁶. As Wiktorowicz notes (2005, 2006; see also, Bonney, 2004; Kepel, 2006; Lahoud, 2014; Meijer, 2009; Wagemakers, 2008) the genesis of this concept can be traced through the writings of prominent theorists, including Ibn Tamiyaa, Sayid Qutb, Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi and Abdullah Azzam³⁹⁷, but it is the discourse of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri in particular that repackages its relevance to bear the imprint of contemporary political landscapes (see also Devji, 2005):

At this stage, it is the duty of the Muslim Ummah to bear arms against the trespassing invaders and their interests. Everyone who trespasses on the Muslim Ummah must have his hand cut off, whether this aggression is in Chechnya, or in Afghanistan, or Kashmir, or Iraq, or Palestine or Somalia. And

³⁹⁵ Osama bin Laden introduces the will of martyr Walid al Shehri as follows: “Abu Mus’ab Walid al-Saqili al-Shehri—and his brothers made a covenant with Allah that they would be victorious for his religion and they were true to their covenant, and they died without having changed. We consider them so and Allah is their Reckoner. And there passed after them the men of Islam, foremost among them the courageous fighter Ahmad Fadeel Nazaal al-Khalaylah—Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi, May Allah have mercy on them all. And it remains for us to do our part. So I tell every young man among the youth of Islam: it is your duty to *join the caravan* until the sufficiency is complete and the march to aid the High and Omnipotent continues [emphasis added]” (Bin Laden, 2007b, in Mansfield, 2008, pp. 300-301). Walid al Shehri signs off with a similar call to unity which circumvents the dominant system of non-violent participation: “What is preventing you from going forth and going out and emigrating and performing jihad? Are you waiting for Fatwas from the Ulama who stay behind? Such fatwas will never be issued by those, unless Allah wills otherwise, or do you want Fatwas from the evil Ulama of the rulers, who have ruined the religion and worldly life? Was ask Allah to take revenge on them.” (quoted in bin Laden, 2007b, in Mansfield, 2008, p. 311)

³⁹⁶ The concomitant unity between dedication to jihad, the *umma* and God is well represented in the following extract from al Qaeda leader, Abu Yahya al-Libi: “[T]he third pillar on which the Jihadist methodology stands...is loyalty and disloyalty, in doctrine, concept, behaviour and action. This deep concept of faith, which is the strongest knot of faith, as the authentic hadith says, is among the most important and greatest of the things on which the Jihadist methodology is founded. Any scratching or playing with it means to shake and disturb the jihadist march from inside and liquefy it in an ugly way by giving precedence to imaginary so-called interests with which the fundamental of religion and its mainstay is destroyed. Loyalty includes the right of help, aid, love, and affection...The Muslims are one nation, from their east to their west and from their north to their south, and equal in that are the red and the black, the Arab and the non-Arab, and the near and the far. Almighty God says: ‘The believers, men and women, are protectors one of [sic] another’” (2007b, in Mansfield, 2008, p. 286)

³⁹⁷ Azzam, in particular, developed this concept in his hugely significant text, *The Defense of Muslim Territories Constitutes the First Individual Duty*. Extracts can be found in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, pp. 102-109. See, also, Pankhurst, 2010.

along with this confrontation of the invaders, the Muslim Ummah must also beware of those defenders of the invaders who stab it from behind, and must strive from today to work for their removal” (al-Zawahiri, 2007b, in Mansfield, 2008, p. 106)³⁹⁸

This extract is particularly apt in that it captures al Qaeda’s consistent efforts to position the enemy as both an internal and external threat while concomitantly defining the communal bond of the ‘people’ by virtue of their collective dedication to violence as a means of removing this threat. As is evident throughout al Qaeda’s broader corpus, while the *mujahedeen* are vaunted as the most dedicated guardians of the *umma* towards this end—acting essentially as its vanguard³⁹⁹—it is the individual duty of *all* constituents to dedicate themselves to the armed struggle, irrespective of whether such constituents engage in violent acts:

If we are in agreement that the victory of Islam and the establishment of a caliphate in the manner of the Prophet will not be achieved except through jihad against the apostate rulers and their removal, then this goal will not be accomplished by the mujahed movement while it is cut off from public support, even if the jihadist movement pursues the method of sudden overthrow. This is because such an overthrow would not take place without some minimum of popular support and some condition of public discontent which offers the mujahed movement what it needs in terms of capabilities in the quickest fashion. Additionally, if the Jihadist movement were obliged to pursue other methods, such as a popular war of jihad or a popular intifadah, then popular support would be a decisive factor between victory and defeat (al-Zawahiri, 2005b, p. 4)

If individual *jihad* is an obligation upon our entire *umma* today, then it is even more so for the youth than it is for the old. Financial *jihad*, likewise, is an obligation today, particularly for those who have the resources, rather than those who don’t. It is part of God’s grace to our *umma* today that He has opened the hearts of many of the youth to pursue *jihad* for His sake, and to provide for His religion and His servants. So our *umma* has a duty to assist and encourage them, and to facilitate their affairs so that they can defend it from injustice, shame, and sin. It also has a duty to maintain the *jihad* that exists today and to help it with all its might, for this *jihad* is very dear to us in Palestine, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Kashmir, Indonesia, the Philippines, and other lands of Islam. The banner of *jihad* will only remain aloft in these states, despite the enemies’ fierce attacks, by the grace of God and by the indescribable dedication of the *mujahidin*, giving their blood, sweat, and tears. We pray to God to accept them as martyrs. (Bin Laden, 2003b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 203)

One sees, then, how the ‘people’ in al Qaeda’s discourse is synthetically bound across space and time by virtue of an *equivalential* discourse which sutures the use of violence to

³⁹⁸ As al-Zawahiri attests elsewhere: “jihad has become a duty for all Muslims to cleanse the lands of Muslims from their enemies who have launched a new Crusader campaign led by the US who leads a pact of Jews and Crusaders in order to occupy the lands of Muslims, loot their wealth, violate their honor, occupy their sanctities, degrade their prophet and Qu’ran, and change their beliefs” (2008c, in Mansfield, 2009, p. 299)

³⁹⁹ This dynamic is sufficiently evidenced in the following passage: “[Interviewer:] who will carry the burden of mobilizing the nation to the field of confrontation with its enemies? [Zawahiri:] The mujahid vanguards of the Muslim nation, because the organizations that affiliate themselves with Islam that have abandoned jihad and recognize the legitimacy of the tyrants are too weak to confront the attacking enemy. The Muslim nation with its mujahid vanguard stands alone on the confrontation field, defending the nation’s creed, sanctities, homelands, and resources.” (al-Zawahiri, 2006d, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 393)

transcendent notions of communal sacrifice (and vice-versa)⁴⁰⁰. That this equivalisation is couched in a vocabulary derived from Islamic principles does *not* confirm the crude causal relationship between Islam and ‘Islamic terrorism’, as is often put forward within simplistic academic and policy discourses (see Gunning and Jackson, 2011; Gunning, 2012); rather, reading this operation through the lens of Laclau’s populism situates al Qaeda’s discourse within the pantheon of populist movements which necessarily create the ‘people’ in an effort to circumvent the existing political frontier towards social change and ontological fulfilment. Read thus, there is nothing quintessentially ‘new’ about al Qaeda’s terrorism; nor is there anything ‘new’ about the presentation of a utopian image of unity to structure the contemporary struggle of a political movement—‘Islamic Caliphate’ or otherwise.

The Provision of Empty Signifiers: (Re)Establishing the Islamic Caliphate

Embedded within popular understandings of al Qaeda is the associated goal to (re)establish a global Islamic Caliphate—a Muslim ‘superstate’⁴⁰¹ that, if realised, would operate as a neo-fascist dominion to steadily erode the ‘freedoms’ by which the ‘West’ is popularly defined⁴⁰²⁴⁰³. Analyses such as those by Charters (2007) and Bloomfield (2011) confirm that the popular analogy made between ‘Jihadism’ and ‘fascism’—as encapsulated by the oft-cited

⁴⁰⁰ Indeed, in the following excerpt released by al Qaeda, bin Laden speaks directly to those *mujahideen* in a training camp, who are preparing to lay down their lives in servitude of the *umma* and, ultimately, towards ‘victory’: “So, talk yourselves into the martyrdom operations. Encourage yourselves a lot. In the beginning, you won’t be used to the idea and you will think it is a difficult thing. But you only came here because in your heart is love of Allah and love of His Messenger, peace be upon him. We consider you to be so and we don’t exonerate anyone before Allah. So talk to yourself, because to the same degree that the number of young men who carry out martyrdom operations increases, the time of victory gets closer, with Allah’s permission.” (Bin Laden, 2006b, in Mansfield, 2007, p. 350)

⁴⁰¹ As Richard Jensen, writing in *Terrorism and Political Violence* puts it: “In the place of the evil nation state—and here is where it seems to me al-Qaeda diverges from anarchism—Bin Laden and his followers want the establishment of an enormous Islamic Caliphate, a millenarian kingdom of justice on earth where sharia law will be applied absolutely and that would include all areas which have, or have had in the past, an Islamic population” (2008, p. 590). Prominent Terrorism Studies scholar Paul Wilkinson also puts it thus: “Ultimately, [al Qaeda] aim to establish a pan-Islamist Caliphate (super-state) uniting all Muslims” (2011, p. 42)

⁴⁰² Here, David Ronfeldt—senior analyst at RAND—argues for a neo-tribal understanding of al Qaeda as the best means to counter the group, should they eventually seize sufficient power and establish a Caliphate: “The tribal paradigm may be useful for rethinking not only how to counter Al Qaeda, but also what may lie ahead if Al Qaeda or an affiliate ever succeeds in seizing power and installing an Islamic caliphate somewhere... Were an Al Qaeda-inspired caliphate to take root, we can be pretty sure that it would combine hyper-hierarchy and hyper-tribalism, while leaving marginal, subordinate spaces for economic markets and little if any space for autonomous civil-society networks. When this has occurred in the past, the result is normally fascism.” (2005)

⁴⁰³ As Bush put it in ‘Address To A Joint Session Of Congress And The American People’: “We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions - by abandoning every value except the will to power-they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.” (Bush 2001f, in Bush, 2009, p.67-68)

term ‘Islamofascism’⁴⁰⁴—is highly erroneous; yet however useful, such studies problematically reify al Qaeda’s ‘Caliphate’ as a totalising system that is central to their strategic vision of incremental, material progress. Therein—and thus somewhat complimentary to reductive ‘Islamic extremism’ discourses⁴⁰⁵—the (re)establishment of the Caliphate is solidified as an *actually* realisable goal towards which the orators of al Qaeda strive, rather than operating as an ephemeral image of unity to elicit a groundswell of support in service of what one might deem as more realistically achievable goals, such as the political and social reforms called for by al-Zawahriri and Bin Laden in relation to Egypt and Saudi Arabia, for example (see Chapter 3; see also, Pankhurst, 2010).

As effectively captured by al-Rasheed et al. (2013a; 2013b), contemporary recollections of the Caliphate are deeply embedded in nostalgia and collective memory, acting as a composite rhetorical device to structure the political struggles of various Islamist movements—both violent and non-violent⁴⁰⁶. Interpreting al Qaeda’s Caliphate as an *empty signifier* per

⁴⁰⁴ Perhaps its most prominent advocate—Christopher Hitchens—defends the use of the term as follows: “The most obvious points of comparison would be these: Both movements are based on a cult of murderous violence that exalts death and destruction and despises the life of the mind... Both are hostile to modernity (except when it comes to the pursuit of weapons), and both are bitterly nostalgic for past empires and lost glories. Both are obsessed with real and imagined ‘humiliations’ and thirsty for revenge. Both are chronically infected with the toxin of anti-Jewish paranoia (interestingly, also, with its milder cousin, anti-Freemason paranoia). Both are inclined to leader worship and to the exclusive stress on the power of one great book. Both have a strong commitment to sexual repression—especially to the repression of any sexual ‘deviance’—and to its counterparts the subordination of the female and contempt for the feminine. Both despise art and literature as symptoms of degeneracy and decadence; both burn books and destroy museums and treasures.” (2007)

⁴⁰⁵ The material possibility of the Caliphate is similarly appropriated by ‘Islamic extremism’ discourses, with the presentation of the word of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri serving as sufficient proof: “They hope to establish a violent political utopia across the Middle East, which they call a ‘Caliphate’—where all would be ruled according to their hateful ideology. Osama bin Laden has called the 9/11 attacks—in his words—“a great step towards the unity of Muslims and establishing the Righteous... [Caliphate].” This caliphate would be a totalitarian Islamic empire encompassing all current and former Muslim lands, stretching from Europe to North Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. *We know this because al Qaeda has told us.* About two months ago, the terrorist Zawahiri—he’s al Qaeda’s second in command declared that al Qaeda intends to impose its rule in ‘every land that was a home for Islam, from [Spain] to Iraq. He went on to say, “The whole world is an open field for us.’ We know what this radical empire would look like in practice, because we saw how the radicals imposed their ideology on the people of Afghanistan. Under the rule of the Taliban and al Qaeda, Afghanistan was a totalitarian nightmare—a land where women were imprisoned in their homes, men were beaten for missing prayer meetings, girls could not go to school, and children were forbidden the smallest pleasures like flying kites. Religious police roamed the streets, beating and detaining civilians for perceived offenses. Women were publicly whipped. Summary executions were held in Kabul’s soccer stadium in front of cheering mobs. And Afghanistan was turned into a launching pad for horrific attacks against America and other parts of the civilized world—including many Muslim nations. The goal of these Sunni extremists is to remake the entire Muslim world in their radical image. In pursuit of their imperial aims, these extremists say there can be no compromise or dialogue with those they call ‘infidels’—a category that includes America, the world’s free nations, Jews, and all Muslims who reject their extreme vision of Islam. They reject the possibility of peaceful coexistence with the free world. Again, hear the words of Osama bin Laden earlier this year: ‘Death is better than living on this Earth with the unbelievers among us.’ [emphasis added]” (Bush, 2006b in Bush, 2009, p. 395-396)

⁴⁰⁶ This is neatly summed in the following passage: “Beyond its historical reality, for some contemporary Muslims the caliphate is a concept that is used for a variety of purposes and with diverse consequences, and also

Laclau's populism only acts to support this observation (albeit one that is more attuned to the contingent nature of the political), with the following passage providing a representative snapshot:

Just as armies achieve victory only when the infantry occupies territory, the Islamic movement of jihad will not triumph against the world coalition unless it possesses an Islamic base in the heart of the Muslim world. *All the means and plans that we have reviewed for mobilizing the nation will be for naught, unless they lead to the establishment of a caliphate in the Muslim world...* If successful operations against the enemies of Islam and the severe damage inflicted on them do not form part of a plan aiming to establish an Islamic state at the heart of the Muslim world, they will be no matter what their magnitude, nothing more than harassment, which can be contained and overcome after some time and despite a few losses. Clearly, the establishment of an Islamic state at the heart of the Muslim world is not an easy goal, but *the hope of the Muslim community lies in the restoration of the caliphate* [emphasis added] (al-Zawahiri, 2001b, in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, p. 199)

Here, one finds the Caliphate positioned as central to al Qaeda's violent struggle—and, thus, the communitarian unity of the 'people'—and yet devoid of any details with regard to both its final form and the necessary steps that the *umma* may take towards its ultimate realisation⁴⁰⁷. Yet, while the ephemeral nature of al Qaeda's Caliphate has stumped many 'orthodox' analyses, the (absent) form of this emptiness is accommodated within Laclau's framework as an integral component of populist discourses—at once impossible and necessary to the struggle of the 'people':

[I]n the locus of the totality, we find only...tension. What we have, ultimately, is a failed totality, the place of an irretrievable fullness. This totality is an object which is both impossible and necessary. Impossible, because the tension between *equivalence* and *difference* is ultimately insurmountable; necessary, because without some kind of closure, however precarious it might be, there would be no signification and no identity [emphasis added] (2005a, p. 70)

By this reading, then, the Caliphate must *always* resonate behind any actualisable goals to which the orators of al Qaeda speak; indeed, it can *only* exist, as Devji puts it, as a metaphysical category⁴⁰⁸. Suitably, one finds that even in the most tactically informed

a vision of an ideal Islamic polity within which their grievances would be resolved and aspirations *fulfilled*. Some—predominantly young—Muslims find in the calls for the caliphate a discourse of empowerment. Some ideologues regard the caliphate as an Islamic duty and call upon Muslims to strive towards its establishment. On certain occasions Muslims respond by joining rallies, conferences and demonstrations in support of the call, while a small minority of intellectuals, preachers and activists theorize the centrality of the caliphate as a religious duty in pamphlets and booklets, and more recently on vivid web pages...the memory of the caliphate as the bastion of pan-Islamic aspirations remains anchored in utopian visions about power, *unity*, glory and *uniformity* [emphasis added]" (Rasheed et al. 2013b, pp. 2, 3)

⁴⁰⁷ As Pankhurst observes, "While al-Qaeda has manuals detailing military and terrorist techniques and papers discussing the theological position of the use of weapons of mass destruction...there is no book or paper regarding the Caliphate they are supposedly seeking." (2010, p. 550)

⁴⁰⁸ In Devji's words, "The caliphate is not a political vision so much as a metaphysical category. It remains only an ideal, with neither a description nor any concrete plan to set it up. And in fact the caliphate's role thus far is simply conceptual, allowing the jihad to abandon the political geography of the Cold War, made up of national

instructions, the Caliphate looms as that which is always to come—a footnote of (im)possibility to buttress an underlying plurality of political demands. There is, therefore, a substantial distinction to be made between al Qaeda’s *realisable* struggle to implement Islamic states (or ‘emirates’)—which they argue are in place in theatres such as Afghanistan and Iraq—as opposed to the patently *unrealisable* implementation of the Caliphate, under which all Islamic states (or ‘emirates’) would theoretically serve:

The Islamic movement in general and the jihad movement in particular must lead the battle to raise the community’s awareness by doing the following:

- exposing the rulers who are fighting Islam;
- emphasizing the importance in the Muslim faith of Muslims’ remaining loyal to Muslims, and not to unbelievers;
- making every Muslim responsible for defending Islam, its sanctuaries, nation, and homeland;
- cautioning against palace ulema and reminding the community that the ulema of jihad and the imams of sacrifice have a right to be defended and supported;
- exposing the extent of aggression against our religion and its holy places, and the plundering of our wealth;
- finally, by pursuing the goal of establishing an Islamic state in the heart of the Muslim world: the jihad movement must follow a plan aimed at establishing an Islamic state it can defend on a territory in the Muslim world; from there, it will lead the struggle to restore the rightly guided caliphate after the Prophet’s model.” (al-Zawahiri, 2001b, in Kepel and Milelli, 2008, pp. 198-199)⁴⁰⁹

Finally, it is important to note that the Caliphate’s status as an *empty signifier* not only structures future accomplishments attributable to the *umma*, it confers a broader sense of purpose to defend and solidify that which has already been achieved in its name (as an object of fulfilment):

Embodying something can only mean giving a *name* to what is being embodied; but, since what is embodied is an impossible fullness, something which has no independent consistency of its own, the ‘embodying’ entity becomes the full object of the cathectic investment. The embodying object is thus **the ultimate horizon of what is achievable**—not because there is an unachievable ‘beyond’, but because that ‘beyond’, having no entity of its own, can be present only as the phantasmatic excess of

states grouped into various alliances, for a completely de-territorialized and even anti-geographical space, since the caliphate imagined by the jihad possesses neither centre nor periphery” (2005, p. 84)

⁴⁰⁹ Here—directly answering a question inquiring into the importance of the Caliphate—al-Zawahiri utilises the unifying image of the Caliphate as a means to connect different ‘franchises’ of al Qaeda—including al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb: “1. We are of the view that the jihad of the brothers in the Islamic Maghreb is a sincere step, God willing, on the road to the Caliphate. 2. The appearance of the emirates that you mentioned is a qualitative transformation in the jihad of the nation to reach the Caliphate. We hope this will be close, God willing. Jihad over the past three decades is witnessing giant historical leaps. 3. I have explained before that jihad apostate governments as an inevitable step, sooner or later, to remove obstacles on the road to the Caliphate” (2008a, in Mansfield, 2009, p. 96)

an object through which satisfaction is achievable [*italics in original; bold emphasis added*] (Laclau, 2005a, p. 119)

Hence, one can conclude that the Caliphate operates as an *empty signifier par excellence*, uniting past with present/present with future⁴¹⁰ and providing a continuous pulse to the *umma* never to lay down arms while its possible realisation continues to define the political horizon of communal fulfilment:

[M]y brothers in the jihad movements in Iraq must realize that th[e] signs of the Caliphate state have begun to loom on the horizon, and for this reason, the forces of infidelity and treason have come together in an effort to suppress them... They must emphasize the serious effort to set up the Caliphate state which is by consensus an unchanging demand of the Shari'ah. They must emphasize the liberation of Muslim's homelands from the occupiers, particularly Palestine, the Arabian Peninsula, and every Muslim land occupied by the infidels, because it is the individual obligation of every Muslim since the fall of Spain (al-Zawahiri, 2007c, in Mansfield, 2008, pp. 403, 404)

In providing advice to his jihadi 'brothers' in Iraq, al-Zawahiri holds a mirror up to the very basis by which al Qaeda articulates the 'people' and sustains the *mujahideen* as its vanguard. The reflection cast is, surely, populist.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis combines to study Laclau's populism *with* al Qaeda's discourse⁴¹¹ to provide a) an (alternative) understanding of al Qaeda's discursive constitution of collective identity and b) a nuanced understanding of the ontological constitution of the political, to which 'populism' necessarily speaks⁴¹². A number of important observations come to the fore. Firstly, one finds that despite a particular vocabulary comprising terms such as '*takfir*', '*kuffar*', '*umma*', '*jihad*' and '*tawheed*', al Qaeda's discourse of mobilisation is squarely positioned within the pantheon of political movements—both violent and non-violent—that have similarly espoused a populist *logic of articulation* as the basis of constructing their

⁴¹⁰ This amalgamation between past, present and future is well represented by the following extract: "I say that, in general, our concern is that our *umma* unites either under the Words of the Book of God or His Prophet, and that this *nation* [the Muslim *umma*] should establish the righteous caliphate of our *umma*, which has been prophesied by our Prophet in this authentic *hadith*: that the righteous caliph will return with the permission of God. The *umma* is asked to unite itself in the face of this Crusader's campaign, the strongest, most powerful, and most ferocious Crusaders' campaign to fall on the Islamic *umma* since the dawn of Islamic history [*emphasis in original*]" (Bin Laden, 2001b, in Lawrence, 2005, p. 121). A more 'tactically' grounded account is similarly provided by al-Zawahiri: "Muslims have established an Islamic emirate in each of Afghanistan and Iraq, but they have not restored their caliphate yet. We pray to God that this will take place soon through His grace. The proof is that each of them control large areas in Afghanistan and Iraq...the establishment of the Islamic state or emirate is a religious duty and a realistic necessity" (2008a, in Mansfield, 2009, p. 133)

⁴¹¹ I do not situate one as prior to the other as analytical categories, per Discourse Theory's identity as a *theoretical analytic*. See Chapter 2.

⁴¹² This refers to Laclau's observation that understanding populism constitutes "the royal road to understanding something about the ontological constitution of the political as such" (2005a, p. 67)

communitarian struggle⁴¹³. That al Qaeda's call(s) to circumvent the system towards social change and ontological fulfilment takes the form of *violence*—which is justified via a 'religious' discourse—does *not* confirm them as outliers to the history of 'terrorism' or, indeed, other violent political movements; rather, it confirms their place among those movements who have articulated similar discourses of resistance across time and space. To briefly recall Laclau:

a movement is not populist because in its politics or ideology it presents actual *contents* identifiable as populist, but because it shows **a particular logic of articulation** of those contents—whatever those contents are [*italics in original, bold emphasis added*] (2005b, p. 33)

Interpreting al Qaeda's articulation of the Caliphate vis-à-vis a populist logic of articulation similarly disrupts its prominent characterisation as somehow 'strange' and 'unique' to an 'apolitical', 'irrational' and '*transcendent*' terrorism that proceeds in pure servitude to a higher power. Situating the Caliphate as an *empty signifier par excellence* in al Qaeda's populist discourse of mobilisation certainly confirms its status as a transcendental category, but this transcendental quality is not indicative of a desire on the part of al Qaeda's leaders to exalt violence as a means to expedite the transference of the *umma* from this life to the next⁴¹⁴. Instead, the transcendental quality of the Caliphate is evident as that which traverses the topography of the *political*, operating as a utopian object of investment (an *empty signifier*) that is *required* to structure the political horizon of what may be possible for the *umma* and, indeed, how the *umma* can actually be constituted in its name. It is in this vein that al Qaeda's so-called aspirations for global domination—which are often commonly defined with direct reference to the Caliphate—must be placed in context. By this analysis, then—and all that has preceded it—one can argue for an alternative conception of al Qaeda as a movement which exudes a 'political' quality, both in terms of the realisable visions of social

⁴¹³ As Howarth outlines, the enactment of a populist 'logic of articulation' cuts across distinctions of 'nationalism', 'authoritarianism', 'democratic fronts' and so on. By the preceding analysis, I would add al Qaeda's brand of 'Jihadism' to this mix: "populist politics admit of more than one political form depending on the ideological elements they comprise and the way in which they are socially constructed. Both these aspect depend to varying degrees on the social and cultural context in which populist movements operate, which means that populist movements can take on authoritarian, nationalist, civic or popular-democratic forms, while still exhibiting a distinctively populist style and language of politics" (2005b, p. 205)

⁴¹⁴ This notion, as popularly attributed to 'religious terrorism', is perhaps most ardently represented by Mark Juergensmeyer's influential concept of 'cosmic war'. Writing in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, Heather S. Gregg of the Naval Postgraduate School (California) neatly embodies how prominent treatments of Juergensmeyer's thesis have been incorporated into hegemonic discourses that interpret al Qaeda's terrorism to bear a transcendental, 'religious' quality: "A useful framework for investigating al Qaeda's ideology and its impact on the Muslim world is Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer's concept of 'cosmic war,' which argues that religions use violence when they believe that spiritual battles are occurring in the here-and-now and that these battles require its adherents to participate in the ultimate battle of Good versus Evil in defense of the faith. Al Qaeda's message conforms to the logic of cosmic war thinking." (2009, p. 189)

change that is definitive of their discourse, and the political horizon of heterogeneity that conditions their very articulation.

Conclusion

Writing *the Political*: Hegemony, Counter-Hegemony and the (In)Orthodoxies of Space

Introduction

The preceding analysis poses an expansive challenge to the *hegemonic* discourse of ‘Islamic extremism’—which attributes to al Qaeda and other constituent groups a distinctly *apolitical* status—by providing an alternative reading derived from the public discourses of ‘Islamic extremists’ themselves. This challenge proceeded on two counts.

Firstly, it was argued that interpreting the public discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas, and al Qaeda via a logic of *difference* exposes a diverse range of political demands that are unique to these groups’ (self-)articulated programmes for social and political change; including demands that are, in many cases, very similar to the articulations of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ by which the US/the West is prominently defined. By conceiving ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ not as essential categories of meaning but as *floating signifiers* upon which the War on Terror is contested as a ‘discursive battlefield’, the simplistic perspective that the ‘rational’ US/the West embodies ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’, while the ‘irrational’ constituents of ‘Islamic extremism’ embody its oppositional values—as if articulations of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’ may only proceed in a zero-sum interface—is effectively eroded on its own terms.

Second, it was argued that reading al Qaeda’s mobilisational discourse through Laclau’s theory of populism evinces a populist ‘logic of articulation’ by which countless social and political movements have enacted similar discourses of collective resistance across time and space. Read thus, the provision of a range of *empty signifiers* (e.g. the Caliphate) towards the continual constitution of the ‘people’ (the *umma*)—and the continual constitution of ‘al Qaeda’ as legitimate vanguards of the *umma*—represents not the machinations of an irrational, ‘apolitical’ group/movement. Rather, insofar as ‘populism’ refracts something of the nature of *the political* as such, it represents an attempt to effectively *equivalise* a broad range of political grievances that exist on behalf of ‘the ‘people’/the *umma*, and to provide

attendant strategies to circumvent a dominant horizon of politics that prevents the ‘people’/the *umma* from being realised as an ontic totality. One can say, then, that the (violent) agenda of al Qaeda is not only driven by political concerns, but that ‘al Qaeda’ is itself born(e) of *the political*. To this extent, the ‘apoliticalness’ at the heart of ‘Islamic extremism’ is, again, eroded on its own terms.

If the deconstruction of ‘Islamic extremism’ as undertaken in Chapters 4 and 5 represents the most salient component of this dissertation, it may seem prudent to consider the analysis undertaken in Chapters 1, 2, and 3 as that which merely *precedes* and accommodates this deconstructive exercise. Indeed, there can be no doubt that these Chapters are welded together by a sense of incremental progression towards a common purpose, which may be briefly summarised as follows: in Chapter 1, prominent understandings of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ were exposed and deconstructed (across the literatures of Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies, and Critical Terrorism Studies), whereupon it was concluded that an alternative space for more radical interpretation(s) of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ is required. Chapter 2 began the process of providing precisely such a space by deconstructing dominant conceptions of *reflexivity* and *rigour* in accordance with the onto-epistemological commitments of Discourse Theory. Finally, in Chapter 3, it was posited that the previously-deconstructed fragments of *reflexivity* and *rigour* can be (re-)synthesised in a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology (to which Discourse Theory speaks) via the provision of extended extracts of primary discourse to embellish key arguments, as presented in both the ‘main text’ and ‘footnotes’.

While this narrative is surely accurate insofar as it offers a neat snapshot of some of this dissertation’s main facets, to accept it as *the* definitive face of the preceding analysis would be to belie the inherent ‘messiness’ of the writing process and the inevitable generation of a *surplus of meaning* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) that renders the ‘lineality’ of *any* argumentative structure as a necessary, but impossible illusion. In recognition of this dynamic, I intend to utilise the remaining pages not to (further) summarise each Chapter as they have been presented thus far, but to *re-orientate* their contents as an interpretive lens to reflect on more contemporary problematiques. In doing so, I wish to explicate what I believe to be, *in fact*, the most definitive analytical contribution of this dissertation: to critically inquire (in)orthodoxies of space and the cadence of *hegemonic* and *counter-hegemonic* relations therein, as specifically relating to the dual problematiques of ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and ‘the authorship of critique’.

This inquiry is structured as follows: firstly, developing the analytical themes contained in Chapter 1—which set out to examine the embedded politics by which (il)legitimate expertise on ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ is produced—I will inquire the contemporary governance of an orthodox academic/policy nexus that *continues* to be dominated by a hegemonic ‘*problem-solving/scientific*’ epistemology, both with reference to the study of ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and the study of social phenomena more generally. Second, developing the analytical themes contained in Chapters 2 and 3—which set out to challenge and re-orientate the embedded parameters by which an author may perform *reflexivity* and *rigour* in a poststructuralist/intertextual ontology—I will inquire the contemporary governance of an orthodox academic milieu, which dictates that the very *analytical aesthetic* of this dissertation represents a *counter-hegemonic* challenge to pre-defined conceptions of what it means to ‘write academically’. Finally, developing the analytical themes contained in Chapters 4 and 5—which set out to deconstruct the ‘apoliticalness’ attributed to al Qaeda and associated constituents of ‘Islamic extremism’—I will inquire the orthodox parameters of a contemporary *Jihadist* milieu that was once dominated by the relative *hegemony* of al Qaeda, but is now becoming increasingly defined by the rapid advance of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) in its place⁴¹⁵. In conclusion, it is argued that across these contiguous spaces⁴¹⁶, one bears witness to the affective resonance of *the political*, which is to confirm that any/all (in)orthodoxies of space may only exist in a state of perennial contingency, and governed—in Laclau and Mouffe’s terminology at least—by *hegemonic* and *counter-hegemonic* relations. To the extent that I have reflected on this dynamic across a number of contexts, I hope to have elucidated, to some extent, the inherent heterogeneity that is not only definitive of all social phenomena, but also the means by which ‘we’, as ‘academic’ authors (may) attempt to write about them.

⁴¹⁵ Indeed, the ultimate irony here is that al Qaeda is now bearing witness to its incremental downfall, as accelerated by a group created in its own image, and one that is *more* effectively enacting a political discourse of violent revolution that al Qaeda have shaped over decades.

⁴¹⁶ One should note that in many ways, the spaces mentioned here do not align with one another in any *immediately*-apparent way, beyond their treatment as individual components pursuant to this dissertation’s broader analytical narrative. By virtue of the fact that the preceding analysis has weaved these categories together, however, they are thereby rendered as contiguous and thus amenable to the analysis as performed below.

The Politics of (Il)Legitimacy and Continuing Resonance of ‘al Qaeda/Islamist Terrorism’

An examination of recent Terrorism Studies, Middle East Studies and Critical Terrorism Studies literature (2012-2014) indicates that the explosion of academic interest on ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ definitive of a ‘post-9/11’ security milieu (see Ranstorp, 2009; Silke, 2009) has somewhat plateaued⁴¹⁷. In Middle East Studies, the initial shockwaves produced by the ‘Arab Spring/Arab Uprisings’ have given way to renewed considerations of the persistence of authoritarianism and regional dynamics of Arab identity (see, for example, Bellin, 2012; Inbar, 2013; Smith, 2013; Valbjorn and Volpi, 2014; Volpi, 2013)—a familiar horizon of politics, the genesis of which far precedes the emergence of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’⁴¹⁸. In Critical Terrorism Studies, what was once an embryonic focus on the (negative) affects of counterterrorism has now developed into its most obviously-identifiable strand of output (see, for example, Boukalas, 2014; Heath-Kelly, 2012; Lee and Lister, 2013; Martin, 2014), with the *immediate* visibility of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ (further) relegated to the margins as a result. Finally, in Terrorism Studies, a more holistic focus on issues pertaining to (counter)insurgency and radicalisation seems to be taking hold (see, for example, Cragin, 2014; Kim and Blank, 2013; McCauley and Moskalenko, 2014) and accompanied by the (re-)examination of classic problematiques—such as the relationship between ‘intellectualism’ and political violence, for example (see Rimon and Schleifer, 2013)—spaces for re-examination that may well have been facilitated by the steady recession of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ as the most prescient objects of inquiry⁴¹⁹. While it appears, then, that ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’ are not as *directly* affective of the hegemonic parameters of inquiry that presently define these literatures, their influence nonetheless resonates between the lines.

As was outlined in Chapter 1, the prominent perspective that Middle East Studies ‘failed’ in its duty to predict ‘a 9/11’ and the concomitant threat of ‘Islamist terrorism’—which was erroneously forewarned by the New Terrorism thesis in Terrorism Studies—was accelerated

⁴¹⁷ The perspective has been informed by a scan through each issue of the relevant journals pertaining to each discipline (see Chapter 1) from January 2012 to July 2014. While it is impossible to determine any authoritative view with regard to the constitution and current ‘trends’ appropriate to these literatures across a short timeline, it nonetheless provides a basis for *initial* reflections, such as those outlined in the below.

⁴¹⁸ Though, of course, the rise of ‘Islamism’ as an amorphous discourse of resistance undoubtedly contributed to the inception of ‘al Qaeda’ and ‘Islamist terrorism’; see Chapter 1.

⁴¹⁹ This is not to say, of course, that these analyses do not now exist, but that, simply, there has been, in this author’s view, an identifiable shift *away* from these categories, as the most salient objects of analysis in a contemporary academic landscape.

throughout the 2000s, as influential (neo)conservative scholars (such as Daniel Pipes, Stanley Kurtz, and Martin Kramer) led calls for the re-evaluation of the field and the ‘un-scientific’ epistemology that had come to dominate it. Prioritising ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ as a problem that warranted an immediate and dynamic response, it was in the shadow of a burgeoning War on Terror that HR 3077 (2003) was submitted to the US Congress, which proposed a range of intrusive mechanisms to ‘monitor, appraise and evaluate’ (see Lockman, 2004) research output produced from Area Studies—and Middle East Studies therein—on the basis of its (ir)relevance to the chief security problem(s) of the day. Though the Bill was ultimately defeated in the US Senate, its progress to an advanced stage is indicative of an underlying logic which continues to articulate the need for *scientific* research to speak directly to interests of *national security* (and vice-versa). Marc Sageman’s recent polemic ‘The Stagnation in Terrorism Research’ (2014) is emblematic of this logic’s continuing pulse. Drawing on his experience as a ‘trained social scientist’ and ‘intelligence analyst’, Sageman opines that “we have a system of terrorism research [in the US] in which intelligence analysts know everything but understand nothing, while academics understand everything but know nothing” (2014, p. 12). While a critique of Terrorism Studies on the basis of its research output is nothing new—and especially with regard to ‘post-9/11’ Terrorism Studies—Sageman’s suggested panacea is all too familiar: the intelligence field is in need of *scientific* training⁴²⁰, whilst Terrorism Studies’ social *scientists* should be provided with hitherto classified data in order to make more accurate observations towards the supposed holy grail of all research on terrorism—deciphering its *causes*⁴²¹.

Sageman’s call to centralise a scientific epistemology as the basis of more directly-actionable, policy-orientated Explanations of terrorism appears not to be in vain; indeed, the recent submission of the Frontiers in Innovation, Research, Science and Technology (FIRST) Act of 2014 (HR 4186) to the US Congress indicates that the encompassing desire for expediency,

⁴²⁰ As Sageman puts it: “Intelligence analysts often do not have the methodological concepts (as opposed to computers and software tools) to investigate all the information to which they are privy. Very few have a graduate degree in the social sciences with solid methodological training to deal with the evidence they have. From my observations, they commonly look only for confirmatory evidence and do not bother searching for disconfirmation—the essence of the scientific method” (2014, p. 10)

⁴²¹ This is represented by the following passages: “A serious impediment to scholars, whether fully dedicated to terrorism studies or only occasionally participating in such a study, is the lack of the availability of comprehensive and reliable data. The U.S. government has neither released relevant data about terrorist plots nor funded the methodological accumulation of detailed and comprehensive data that might shed some light on the question of the turn to political violence... Unfortunately, more ambitious attempts to set a research agenda have not been compelling enough to either consolidate findings into some scholarly consensus or to generate a large research project about the process of turning to political violence. So far, academia has failed to provide deep insights into the turn to political violence.” (Sageman, 2014, pp. 6, 8)

both in terms of the problems researched and the theoretical/methodological frameworks employed to resolve them, continues apace. If ratified in its current form⁴²², the FIRST Act would impose strict criteria on research funding provided by the National Science Fund (NSF) (which currently has an annual budget of \$7.4 billion; see Stratford, 2014a) on the basis of prospective projects' explicit relevance to issues of *national security* (see 'About the National Science Foundation'). For those (mainly Republican) Representatives and Senators who support the Bill, the fact that a significant proportion of NSF funding has been shifted away from the natural sciences to the social sciences is especially unpalatable⁴²³; that the riposte from prominent academics to the contrary seeks to protect and (re-)exalt the importance of social science research by *further accentuating* the virtues of a scientific epistemology is, perhaps, even more alarming (see Jaschik, 2013; Stratford, 2014a, 2014b)⁴²⁴. Regardless of the outcome, then, the fact that this debate is currently proceeding within the parameters of 'whose science is best?' is especially concerning for those academics in the US who wish to obtain funding for inquiries that may not *directly* serve the interests of national security and/or proceed via a *critical* approach.

Of course, what is at stake here is not merely access to a funding pool of \$7.4 billion, nor is this consideration exclusive to the geographical borders of the United States; rather, what is at stake is the (further) compression of an orthodoxy by which (il)legitimate critique on social phenomena may proceed in both the United States *and beyond*. What space within this orthodoxy for the careful output offered by Middle East Studies—a field that is already

⁴²² On 30 May 2014, the bill passed through the US House of Representatives, supported by a vote of 321 to 87 (see Stratford, 2014b)

⁴²³ As Republican Representative Lamar Smith outlines: "Unfortunately, there has been a shift in priorities at the National Science Foundation (NSF) away from basic research in engineering and the physical sciences toward social/behavioral/economic (SBE) studies. In his budget proposal for fiscal year 2015 the president proposes to increase SBE by more than 5 percent while freezing or cutting funds for engineering and physical sciences." (Smith et al., 2014)

⁴²⁴ This is adequately captured by the following statement made by Peter McPherson and Hunter Rawlings: "A key principle is that federal scientific agencies, guided by their advisory boards, should continue to set priorities for funding within and among the full range of scientific disciplines. This bill, however, significantly cuts specific areas of National Science Foundation (NSF) research. First, it cuts the social, behavioral and economic sciences, which are vital to solving our economic, health and security challenges. Better understanding and combating terrorism and cyber warfare, improving disaster preparedness, fighting crime and changing behaviors to combat global health problems are just a few of the many areas where such research has played a major role. Second, the bill cuts the geosciences, which are critical to understanding our planet. The NSF, guided by the independent National Science Board, has for decades prioritized its portfolios to advance the nation's scientific and research enterprise, and to address major societal and economic challenges. The results have been extraordinary. To move away from this practice is troubling." (Smith et al., 2014). The appropriate biographies of McPherson and Rawlings are as follows: "*Hunter Rawlings, president of the Association of American Universities, has been president of Cornell University. Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities, has been president of Michigan State University and deputy secretary of the U.S. Department of the Treasury.* [emphasis in original]" (ibid)

tainted with an erroneous characterisation of ‘irrelevance’ as informed by post-9/11 revisionism and further tainted by its ‘failure’ to effectively predict the Arab Spring (see Gause, 2011)⁴²⁵? What space for Critical Terrorism Studies, the very creation of which was premised on the need to counteract the *problem-solving* nature of Terrorism Studies (as distilled in analyses of ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ in particular)? To the extent that International Relations and its sub-disciplines continue to exist as ‘American social sciences’ (see Acharya, 2011; Hoffman, 1977; Smith, 2000), it appears that critiques to the contrary must further *embrace* their positions of relative exile and continue to articulate *counter-hegemony*.

Between the Lines: Spaces for ‘Academic’ (Self-)Articulation

It can be argued that a contiguous dynamic is also evident with regard to the orthodox academic space(s) by which research output—on ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and far beyond—is produced; which is to say, the *hegemonic* parameters by which an author *may* effectively write critique. Indeed, this dissertation is uniquely placed as an interpretive vehicle to investigate this dynamic: for authors such as I who wish to fulfil their identities as ‘academics’, it is generally advised that a (successfully-passed) PhD dissertation should be essentially dismantled and re-worked in the form of journal articles, as *generally* preferable to a book published by a reputable academic press (see Caro, 2009; Johnson, 2011). Yet, to what degree is it possible to replicate within such space(s) the liberal footnoting that is so definitive of this dissertation’s analytical aesthetic, not to mention the poststructuralist/intertextual ontology from which it is derived⁴²⁶?

By means of elucidation, an examination of the top thirty journals in International Relations—identified by ‘impact factor’ per the Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports index⁴²⁷—evinces a clear hegemony of positivism accompanied by an underlying *problem-*

⁴²⁵ Indeed, from Gause’s perspective, the irony of MES scholars failing to predict the Arab Spring is rooted in the field’s ‘obsession’ with analysing the persistence of authoritarianism: “Explaining the stability of Arab authoritarians was always an important analytic task, but it led some of us to underestimate the forces for change that were bubbling below, and at times above, the surface of Arab politics. It is impossible for social scientists to make precise predictions about the Arab world, and this should not be a goal. But academics must reexamine their assumptions on a number of issues, including the military’s role in Arab politics, the effects of economic change, on political stability, and the salience of cross-border Arab identity, to get a sense of how Arab politics will now unfold.” (2011, p. 90)

⁴²⁶ I write, at this juncture, as a subject of academia; an ‘early-career researcher’ who must strive to raise their profile towards the (impossible) fulfilment of my identity as an ‘established academic’.

⁴²⁷ The Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports, along with the increasingly influential Google Scholar Metrics (<http://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/metrics.html#metrics>), is viewed as the most reliable indicator

solving logic that reifies such spaces as typically unaccommodative to *critical* analyses, and especially those of a ‘poststructuralist’ sort. Of course, ‘poststructuralist’ analyses have always been required to navigate the *inside/outside* divide of International Relations (see, for example, Der Derian and Shapiro, 1989; Walker, 1993; Edkins, 1999) and are, to that extent, pre-disposed to speaking (still) a ‘language of exile’ (Ashley and Walker, 1990)⁴²⁸. Examining the submission guidelines of those ‘critical’ journals perhaps *most* accommodative to the language of ‘poststructuralism’ (as per the Thomson Reuters metric outlined above)⁴²⁹, however, evinces a curious—and yet familiar—logic of constraint: *Security Dialogue* provides space for articles of between 8,500 and 9,500 words (inclusive of all *endnotes*) and requires that “[end]notes should be used *only where substantive information is conveyed to the reader* [emphasis added]” (‘Security Dialogue: Notes for Authors’); *Millennium* provides space for articles of between 7,000 and 9,000 words (inclusive of footnotes) and requests that prospective authors “use footnotes *sparingly* for *brief citations* of works of wide interest and *critical importance* to the argument. [emphasis added]”⁴³⁰; *International Theory* accommodates expansive articles of up to 15,000 inclusive of notes *and* bibliography, with the caveat that “[b]revity is encouraged and shorter papers will be advantaged in acceptance decisions” (‘International Theory: Submission Guidelines’); finally, the *European Journal of International Relations* provides that “[m]ain articles should normally be within 8-10,000 words, and under no circumstances longer than 12,000 words, *including all notes and references* [emphasis added]” (‘Sage Manuscript Submission Guidelines: European Journal of International Relations’).

Reviewing Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation—where the theoretical analytic is most acutely enacted—one finds a total of 20,038 words of ‘main text’ to 22,484 words of ‘footnotes’; or a ratio of 0.891:1. Applying this ratio to the submission guidelines of said journals (assuming adherence to the maximum-permitted word count) entails the following hypotheticals: 4,477 words of main text to 5,023 words of footnotes for an article submitted to *Security Dialogue*; 4,241 words of main text to 4,759 words of footnotes for an article submitted to *Millennium*; 7,069 words of main text to 7,931 words of footnotes (which does

of the relative impact of specific journals. Details can be found at <http://thomsonreuters.com/journal-citation-reports/>

⁴²⁸ Indeed, to that extent, published articulations of ‘poststructuralism’ operate as statements of *counter-hegemony* by their very existence.

⁴²⁹ Namely, *Security Dialogue*; *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*; *International Theory* and; *European Journal of International Relations*.

⁴³⁰ Submission guidelines for *Millennium* are contained in a .doc format, and can be found at: http://www.uk.sagepub.com/repository/binaries/doc/New_Book_Review_Guidelines.doc

not take into account the need to submit a potentially expansive bibliography thereafter) for an article submitted to *International Theory*⁴³¹; and 5,655 words of main text to 6,345 words of footnotes (again, excepting the bibliography) for an article submitted to *European Journal of International Relations*. While there are a number of obvious deficiencies to such a crude metric, its application nonetheless sheds light on an administrative orthodoxy by which an alternative critique such as that contained in this dissertation *may* be subsequently *constrained* if/when dissected and re-submitted via the dominant channels of publication⁴³²⁴³³. What, then, or perhaps *where*, are the alternatives?

A survey of contemporary International Relations/Security Studies offers much evidence of *counter-hegemonic* resistance(s) to the orthodox spaces by which academics are typically permitted *to write*. Three brief examples suffice to elucidate. Firstly, the recent ‘narrative turn’ in IR/Security Studies provides a *de facto* alternative of sorts by facilitating the reorientation of classic forms of academic writing into more accessible, expansive and *jouissant* forms, by means of novel-writing, storytelling, film, and autobiography, for example (see Auchter, 2014; Dauphinee, 2013; Der Derian, 2009; Edkins, 2013; Inayatullah, 2011a, 2011b; Jackson, 2014; Weber, 2011)⁴³⁴. Second, one finds that academics have increasingly embraced more ‘instantaneous’ spaces for communication—such as those provided by blogs and other forms of social media—thus undercutting the *hegemonic* and less-than instantaneous spaces by which peer-reviewed ‘academic’ output is typically produced (see Carpenter and Drezner, 2010; Nexon, 2012b; Saideman, 2014). Third, one finds an increasingly discernible shift towards ‘open-access publishing’ whereby academics

⁴³¹ Incidentally, the bibliography for this dissertation stands at: 14,725

⁴³² Of course, in the absence of large-scale study into how articles procured from this dissertation are *actually* received across these journals with reference to the ‘main text/footnote’ ratio, one cannot know for certain the extent to which they would be rejected/accepted on this basis. However, my purpose here is to outline existing structural factors which would, surely, make acceptance of an article more difficult on account of the fact that it would present a *de facto* challenge to the orthodoxy of what constitutes academic articles’ acceptable analytical aesthetic.

⁴³³ Indeed, this point reflects, in many ways, a pragmatic consideration for the ‘academic’ author: on the one hand, publication in ‘high-end’ journals guarantees a certain level of exposure and a *de facto* accreditation of one’s work such that it is deemed of sufficient quality to have passed through the accentuated rigours of peer-review popularly associated with such journals. On the other hand, if one measures the impact of research output by the increasingly influential metric of an author’s *individual* h-index—whereby ‘h-index is the largest number h such that h publications have at least h citations’—then it is simply more prudent to publish shorter, snappier papers in journals which are not accredited with such a high impact factor and, thus, *may* not be beholden to such rigorous/(restrictive) practices of peer-review and the relative constraints of an extended ‘turnaround time’ from the submission to the publication stage’ (see, for example, Johnson, 2011; Mahoney, 1977; Paedoe, 2014)

⁴³⁴ Indeed, the launch of the *Journal of Narrative Politics* in March 2014 appears to signify a *de facto* recognition of the *need* to circumvent the hegemonic ordering of space prominently afforded to academics *to write*. See <http://journalofnarrativepolitics.com/>

have chosen to circumvent publishing houses and associated copyright restrictions in favour of *direct* engagement with prospective readers (see Nexon, 2012a; Rid, 2012)⁴³⁵.

Invariably, one finds resistance at each turn. Hence, the ‘narrative turn’ is open to classic critiques per the *problem-solving/Explaining* orthodoxy of IR/Security Studies⁴³⁶, while its facilitation of nuanced output via the orthodox channels of academic publication ensures that—for better or worse—performances of *counter-hegemony* embedded therein do not challenge a politics of academic administration from *outside* its defining structures. On the second point, it is instructive to recall a recent motion (January 2014) tabled by the Governing Council of the International Studies Association (ISA)⁴³⁷ that proposed a ban on editors of ISA journals⁴³⁸ from the practice of blogging. Explicitly premised on the need to “maintai[n] and promot[e] a professional environment” (Saideman, 2014), the implied assertion that “blogging is somehow antithetical to constructive debate” (ibid) seems somewhat out of step in an age increasingly defined by the instantaneity of communication. And yet, this action—which I conceive as an attempt to maintain *hegemony* over the ‘(il)legitimate’ production of academic knowledge—should not come as much of a surprise: such staunch resistance is practically guaranteed by an orthodox politics of administration that *must* orientate any attempts to write otherwise as Other, to some degree, and, thus, potentially dangerous. Similarly, and with reference to the third point, moves towards user-driven open-access publishing—as evinced by popular websites such as academia.edu, for example—have had to navigate a growing number of takedown requests from prominent publishing houses (see Howard, 2013), as well as a familiar politics of (il)legitimacy by which many commentators have supported open access *in principle*, but worry about the

⁴³⁵ This is not to suggest a clean distinction between academics embracing instantaneous and open-access publishing on the one hand, with publishing houses striving simply to prevent such efforts on the other. In fact, publishing houses have increasingly adapted to these contours (and perhaps in an effort to maintain relative control of influential publication practices). The Palgrave Pivot series, for example, accommodates publication of research ‘at its natural length’ of between 25,000 and 50,000 words, and promises a quick turnaround time of twelve weeks (see <http://www.palgrave.com/page/about-us-palgrave-pivot/>). Many journals—such as those managed by Routledge—now make articles available online before printed journals are released. Finally, SAGE has, since 2010, made available a small number of open-access journals that seek to retain the ‘normal’ standards of peer-review most prominently associated with more ‘traditional’ journal forms, while adequately answering the increasingly pervasive demand for open-access to academic articles. While such moves are important—and one might say positive to a certain degree—it is my contention that they represent reactions to a much more significant *counter-hegemonic* challenge, which is borne of a necessity to circumvent the dominant, stagnant channels of publication, as continue to constitute the *hegemonic* orthodoxy of academic publication.

⁴³⁶ Not to mention the risk of propagating an ontological fallacy of capturing the ‘self’ via a process of autobiography; see Chapter 2.

⁴³⁷ The International Studies Association (ISA) is, perhaps, the primary academic body pertaining to International Relations/International Studies and especially so with regard to critical approaches to International Politics, as opposed to, say, the influential American Political Science Association (APSA).

⁴³⁸ Many of which rank prominently in the Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Reports index; see above.

potential dilution of academic standards in the process⁴³⁹ (see Fishman, 2011). Perhaps, one might argue, the increasing visibility of *counter-hegemonic* resistance(s) to the orthodoxy of academic space signifies a precursor for meaningful change that will significantly alter the horizon of possibilities with regard to what it means to write ‘academically’. On the other hand, perhaps it merely signifies the growing pains of an academic community that must adjust—like everybody else—to the dynamics of a more instantaneous communicative milieu. Insofar as I attempt to control the identity of this dissertation, I wish for it to make a contribution to the first possibility.

To this end, *I conceive the analytical aesthetic of this dissertation to stand as a minor, but nevertheless counter-hegemonic statement of resistance to the hegemonic ordering of ‘academic’ space in which it is placed.* The irony, of course, is that this *counter-hegemonic* potential is suspended in an incubatory state, dependent on the rigours of peer-review by which assigned examiners must accredit the arguments contained herein as (il)legitimate pursuant to a successfully-passed PhD dissertation and, therefore, (im)permissible for further dissemination. While on one level, this observation reflects a necessary dilemma attendant to all pieces of critique wilfully subjected to the rigours(/politics) of peer-review, it is, perhaps, especially pertinent to this analysis, given its dedication to a *forward-facing reflexivity* (as performed between ‘main text’ and ‘footnote’) and the potential difficulties in replicating this analytic aesthetic in ‘orthodox’ academic spaces such as those outlined in the above. In sum, it can be argued that this dissertation is born(e) of an uneasy existence inside/outside the boundaries of what it means to write ‘academically’: to the extent that a PhD dissertation is typically viewed as a ‘stepping-stone’ for those (such as I) who wish to pursue a career in academia, it may *only* exist as a working draft of potentiality. On the other hand, the extent to which the analytic aesthetic has been enacted *up to this point*—which is performatively definitive of my *embryonic* identity as an ‘academic’—is dependent, in many ways, on the relatively open parameters for argument-construction as uniquely afforded by the relatively ‘open’ template of a ‘PhD dissertation’.

I find myself, then—like all ‘academics’—interminably caught between writing in a way that is agreeable to the (impossible) ideal of what I wish to communicate, while *having to* write in

⁴³⁹ As Josh Fishman outlines: “A new survey of nearly 40,000 scholars across the natural sciences, humanities, and social sciences shows that almost 90 percent of them believe open-access journals are good for the research community and the individual researcher. But charges for publishing and the perception that open-access journals are of lower quality than traditional publications deter scholars from the open-access route, according to the Study of Open Access Publishing report, by an international team of researchers.” (2011)

a way that is amenable to the sedimented structures of what it means to write ‘academically’ in a particular, pre-determined context⁴⁴⁰. I am reminded at this point that any *attempts* to fulfil my identity as an author will always be superseded by my positionality as a subject of both *politics* and the *political*; insofar as I (must) write as *author-as-subject*, interpretations of the arguments inscribed upon these pages lie beyond my control. This dissertation does not belong to me.

Antagonism(s): the US/the West, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham

As a final consideration, it is instructive to further explicate the heterogeneous affectivity of *the political* with regard to the shifting (in)orthodoxies of a contemporary *Jihadist* space, in which the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)⁴⁴¹ is attaining an increasingly hegemonic status at the expense of al Qaeda. I will briefly recall how al Qaeda were themselves rendered as the *antagonistic* force *par excellence* in relation to the neo-liberal orthodoxy of the War on Terror, before turning to examine how their significance as the defining face of a post-9/11 *Jihadist* milieu is currently being eroded via the very (ontological) contours of potentiality that made al Qaeda possible in the first place.

Revisiting the scholarship of Chantal Mouffe, she contends that the pursuit of a consensus-based ‘cosmopolitan’ democracy—which has been/is currently being advanced via the expansion of a *neo-liberal* framework—is anathema to the very ontological function of the political, which is constituted by/constitutive of perennial flux. Antagonistic articulations of identity therein—such as those attributable to the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and al Qaeda—do not derive a collective monolith of ‘irrationality’ that reflects the US/the West as its opposite entity; rather, these articulations form *counter-hegemonic* expressions of *difference* that refract the very ontological nature of the political by which they are formed. That some of these articulations—most notably in relation to al Qaeda—have manifested themselves in violence does *not* dilute this fact; indeed, apropos Baudrillard⁴⁴² and Mouffe, such violence highlights the dangers of an effectively-closed space for ‘democratic’

⁴⁴⁰ Or face a *de facto* de-legitimation of its contents; a risk which a PhD candidate simply cannot afford.

⁴⁴¹ One should note that as of 1 July 2014, ISIS officially renamed themselves as simply ‘the Islamic State’. However, they will continue to be signified as ‘ISIS’ in the below for analytical clarity, as it is unclear the degree to which this label will now be employed in pertinent discourses to describe the group.

⁴⁴² Reflecting on 9/11 in his essay ‘The Spirit of Terrorism’, Baudrillard submits, “When global power monopolizes the situation... when there is such a formidable condensation of all functions in the technocratic machinery, and when no alternative form of thinking is allowed, what other way is there but a *terroristic situational transfer*? It was the system itself which created the objective conditions for this brutal retaliation. By seizing all the cards for itself, it forced the Other to change the rules. And the new rules are fierce ones, because the stakes are fierce. [emphasis in original]” (2003, pp. 8-9)

articulations of *difference* (be this closure orientated via authoritarianism, a globalised consensus of neo-liberal *hegemony*, or, indeed both):

The absence of recognized alternatives to the dominant hegemonic order has prevented those who have tried to resist this order from finding legitimate forms of expression... We should be aware that envisaging the aim of politics—be it at the national or international level—as the establishment of a consensus around one single model eliminates the possibility of legitimate dissent, thereby creating a favourable terrain for the emergence of violent forms of antagonisms (Mouffe, 2013, pp. 19-20)⁴⁴³

Mouffe's critique of the hegemonic closure of space for alternative articulations of political demands is accompanied by her vision of an alternative sphere of 'radical democracy'⁴⁴⁴. Instead of attempting to *negate* antagonism(s) (per the associated hegemony of neo-liberal democracy) she advocates that a space be opened whereby contesting articulations can be effectively accommodated, thus negating the need for *violent* antagonisms to arise in the first place⁴⁴⁵. With reference to Carl Schmitt, Mouffe argues that the confrontational/oppositional/differential nature of antagonism needs to be maintained within a 'radical' democratic space such that protagonists will *always* identify themselves against one another⁴⁴⁶. However, by providing a sufficient space in which all parties recognise the relative hegemony of all political demands—thereby recognising that there cannot be a *de facto* (il)legitimacy to any/all said demands⁴⁴⁷—constituent participants could come to view

⁴⁴³ Indeed, it is instructive to recall Mouffe characterisation of 'global terrorism', such that it exists as "the product of a new configuration of the political which is characteristic of the type of world order being implemented around the hegemony of a single hyper-power" (2005b, p. 81)

⁴⁴⁴ It should be noted that Mouffe's vision differs from other universalist conceptions of 'radical democracy', such as those attributable to Giddens and Beck, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas, for example. Indeed, in the true spirit of the radical democracy to which she speaks, her articulation of radical democracy is constituted by difference to these visions: "Those universalistic versions of radical democracy are grounded on an evolutionistic and statist conception of moral development, and they require the availability of an 'undistorted communication' and of a final rational reconciliation of value claims. In other words, they envisage the possibility of a politics from which antagonism and division would have disappeared. Our understanding of radical democracy, on the contrary, postulates the very impossibility of a final realization of democracy. It affirms that the unresolvable tension between the principles of equality and liberty is the very condition for the preservation of the indeterminacy and undecidability which is constitutive of modern democracy. Moreover, it constitutes the principal guarantee against any attempt to realize a final closure that would result in the elimination of the political and the negation of democracy." (Mouffe, 1995a, p. 13)

⁴⁴⁵ As Mouffe puts it: "We need to realize that, instead of trying to bring about a consensus that would eliminate the very possibility of antagonism, the crucial task both in the domestic and international domain is to find ways to deal with conflicts so as to minimize the possibility that they will take an antagonistic form." (2013, p. 23)

⁴⁴⁶ Indeed, it is upon this very basis that I argued in the previous section that alternative forms of 'academic writing' are being similarly resisted by those who enact a *hegemonic* politics of (academic) administration.

⁴⁴⁷ *Pace* Mouffe: "Democracy requires...that the purely constructed nature of social relations finds its compliment in the purely pragmatic grounds of the claims to power legitimacy. This implies that there is no unbridgeable gap between power and legitimacy—not obviously in the sense that all power is automatically legitimate, but in the sense that: (a) if any power has been able to impose itself, it is because it has been recognized as legitimate in some quarters; and (b) if legitimacy is not based in an aprioristic ground, it is because it is based in some form of successful power." (2000, p. 100)

each other not as *enemies*, but as *adversaries* in what Mouffe determines as a condition of ‘agonistic pluralism’:

The novelty of democratic politics is not the overcoming of this us/them opposition—which is an impossibility—but the different way in which it is established. The crucial issue is to establish this us/them discrimination in a way that is compatible with pluralist democracy. Envisaged from the point of view of ‘agonistic pluralism’, the aim of democratic politics is to construct the ‘them’ in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an ‘adversary’, that is, somebody whose ideas we combat but those whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question. This is the real meaning of democratic tolerance, which does not entail condoning ideas that we oppose or being indifferent to standpoints that we disagree with, but treating those who defend them as legitimate opponents (2000, pp. 101-102)

While Mouffe has written much on ‘agonistic pluralism’ and ‘radical democracy’, she is not overly forthcoming on the processes by which such a space may be realised (see Howarth, 2008). Nevertheless, one can say that so long as the hegemony of neo-liberal democracy continues to be challenged by articulations of difference in relation to the defining values of ‘freedom’ and ‘democracy’—and so long as *violent* articulations of said values continue to be judged in terms of their extant (a)morality—there can be no such space⁴⁴⁸. For the US(/the West)/al Qaeda to afford any sense of mutual legitimacy to one another would require a dissolution of the very foundations upon which each party has identified themselves in *opposition* to one another. Simply put, the fecundity required for the US(/the West)/al Qaeda’s relationship to migrate from a sphere of antagonism to one of agonism⁴⁴⁹—as Mouffe tasks the purpose of ‘radical democracy’—simply does not exist: the US/the West *needs* al Qaeda as its antagonistic enemy, as al Qaeda needs it. Perhaps, in time, ‘al Qaeda’ will ‘cease to exist’, yet the ontological conditions that guarantee that alternative political demands will always protrude and interrupt any attempts at universal consensus ensures that the closure of space for legitimate articulations will always be challenged and most likely, many of these challenges will take violent forms (of which al Qaeda is but one). Such is the nature of *the political*/such is the nature of terrorism.

⁴⁴⁸ As Mouffe puts it, “[the] moralisation of politics leads to the emergence of antagonisms that cannot be managed by the democratic process and redefined in what I propose to call an ‘agonistic’ way... It is clear that when the opponent is defined in moral terms, it can only be envisaged as an enemy, not as an adversary. With the ‘evil them’ no agonistic debate is possible” (2005c, p. 59)

⁴⁴⁹ Mouffe specifically compares antagonism in relation to agonism as follows: “While antagonism is a we/they relation in which the two sides are enemies who do not share any common ground, agonism is a we/they relation where the conflicting parties, although acknowledging that there is no rational solution to their conflict, nevertheless recognize the legitimacy of their opponents. They are ‘adversaries’ not enemies. This means that, while in conflict, they see themselves as belonging to the same political association, as sharing a common symbolic space within which the conflict takes place.” (2005b, p. 20)

It is with great irony, therefore, that the self-proscribed identity of al Qaeda as ‘the legitimate vanguard’ of the *umma* is itself bearing witness to the inevitable protrusion of the *political*. At time of writing⁴⁵⁰, various Jihadist groups are actively competing against one another in the theatres of Syria and Iraq in particular—both by arms and by word— thus posing something of a crisis (of identity) for al-Zawahiri as the surviving face of an ‘old’ al Qaeda, which still seeks to foment a ‘oneness’ of ‘the people’ around a synthetic dedication to the ‘true’ word of God (*tawheed*) and the (violent) repulsion of the Judeo-Crusader alliance as its defining (external) enemy. While al-Zawahiri’s endeavours to differentiate al Qaeda from Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood along such lines have been facilitated by immediately-apparent differences between the groups in terms of theology and strategy, in the case of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), the unity of al-Zawahiri’s ‘al Qaeda’ is being fractured by a group created *in its own image*⁴⁵¹. Indeed, ISIS’ vocabulary of resistance appears to be almost identical in form to that developed by al-Zawahiri and bin Laden: they have dedicated themselves to overthrowing the existing systems of governance by means of a communal dedication to *jihad*⁴⁵²; they strive to establish ‘Islamic emirates’ in the MENA region (with their centres in Baghdad and Damascus)⁴⁵³; and all this towards the eventual realisation of an ‘Islamic Caliphate’ that would transcend existing state borders and unify a protean *umma* around the one true word of God (*tawheed*)⁴⁵⁴. Similarly, their *modus operandi* in Syria and

⁴⁵⁰ 6 July 2014.

⁴⁵¹ The Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS)—also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant; the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria; and the Islamic State—is a Jihadist group, the nucleus of which extends back to al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), as once led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi. Led by a reclusive figure in Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, ISIS was officially declared in 2012, comprising the Islamic State of Iraq (formerly al Qaeda in Iraq) and the officially-sanctioned al Qaeda subsidiary, Jabhat al-Nusra. This announcement caused a fracture between al Qaeda(/Jabhat al-Nusra) and ISIS, as al Zawahiri did *not* accede to this amalgamation. Nevertheless, its direct roots in al Qaeda in Iraq—and by extension, its association with al-Zawahiri and bin Laden’s ‘al Qaeda’—as well as its articulation of an almost-identical discourse of resistance ensures that ISIS can be conceived as a group created in al Qaeda’s image.

⁴⁵² In the following passage—and echoing the sentiments of bin Laden and al-Zawahiri—ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi compels potential *mujahideen* to join the armed resistance on account of their duty to de-subjugate a victimised global *umma*: “[T]ake up arms, take up arms, O soldiers of the Islamic State! And fight, fight! Beware of becoming deluded and losing strength. Beware, for the *dunyā* [state] has come to you reluctantly, so kick it down, trample it, and leave it behind you. Indeed, what is with Allah is better and more lasting. Indeed, the *ummah* of Islam is watching your *jihad* with eyes of hope, and indeed you have brothers in many parts of the world being inflicted with the worst kinds of torture. Their honor is being violated. Their blood is being spilled. Prisoners are moaning and crying for help. Orphans and widows are complaining of their plight. Women who have lost their children are weeping. *Masājīd* (plural of *masjid* [mosque]) are desecrated and sanctities are violated. Muslims’ rights are forcibly seized in China, India, Palestine, Somalia, the Arabian Peninsula, the Caucasus, *Shām* (the Levant), Egypt, Iraq, Indonesia, Afghanistan, the Philippines, Ahvaz, Iran [by the *rāfidah* (shia)], Pakistan, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria and Morocco, in the East and in the West. So raise your ambitions, O soldiers of the Islamic State! For your brothers all over the world are waiting for your rescue, and are anticipating your brigades.” (al-Baghdadi, 2014)

⁴⁵³ See footnote immediately below.

⁴⁵⁴ As submitted in ISIS’ English-language magazine *Islamic State Report*: “It was only a matter of time before the oppressive *tawaghit*[idolatry] of the Muslim world would begin to fall one-by-one to the swords of the

Iraq runs in parallel to that of the officially al-Qaeda-sanctioned Jabhat al-Nusra, combining a fierce dedication to armed insurgency with the provision of *dawa* services to the local communities of captured territories designed to attract for the group sustainable levels of popular support⁴⁵⁵, the absence of which effectively signalled the death-knell for its immediate predecessor, the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI; previously known as al Qaeda in Iraq) (see Zelin, 2013a, 2013b; 2014)⁴⁵⁶.

An official statement released by al Qaeda (on 3 February 2014) denying its affiliation with ISIS is enlightening of al-Zawahiri's efforts to maintain relevance in the face of the meteoric rise of its progeny, which is currently estimated to boast an enlarged cadre of between 7,000-15,000 fighters (see Black et al. 2014; Nordland and Rubin, 2014), and financial reserves of close to \$2 billion (Bolton, 2014; Chulov, 2014; Moore, 2014); Nordland and Rubin, 2014)⁴⁵⁷. The statement implores unity among jihadist ranks (in accordance with al Qaeda's

mujahidin, who would raise the banner of tawhid, restore the hukm [law/meaning] of Allah, direct the masses back to the prophetic manhaj of jihad and away from the corruption of democracy and nationalism, and unite them under one imam. One milestone after another would be reached in spite of the multitude of opposition that stood in the way of the truth. Last week, the mujahidin of the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham reached yet another significant milestone on the path to restoring the prophetic khilafah [caliphate]. As the operation to capture Ninawa and advance towards Baghdad and the Rafidi [Shia] strongholds to the south was underway, the lions succeeded in taking control of the border region between Wilayat Al-Barakah in Sham, and Wilayat Ninawa in Iraq, and in demolishing the barriers set up to enforce the crusader partitions of the past century.” (Islamic State Report, Issue 4: Smashing the Tawaghit the Borders of the Tawaghit’, p. 3). It should also be noted that an Islamic Caliphate was actually declared by ISIS on 1 July 2014. However, insofar as it represents an idea that remains to be fulfilled, it *still* functions as an *empty signifier par excellence*.

⁴⁵⁵ This extract from issue 3 of ISIS’ *Islamic State Report* discusses the importance of providing social services in Iraq’s Anbar province: “The state would then continue its policy of governing any liberated areas in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunnah, providing civilians with a range of social services based on the needs of the population and locality, and educating, recruiting, training and deploying more and more Muslims eager to play their role in rebuilding the Islamic khilafah [caliphate].” (‘Islamic State Report, Issue 3: Islamic State Liberates the City of Mosul’, p. 1). The magazine also shows pictures of victorious Mujahideen handing out sweets to the general public to ‘celebrate their victory’ (ibid, p. 3). Indeed, issue 2 of the magazine, entitled: ‘Farmers Reap the Rewards of Their Harvest by Giving Zakah’, is entirely premised on the provision of social services by ISIS, while the first issue, entitled ‘Propagating the Correct Manhaj’, is based on outlining how ISIS will provide Imams and Khateebis to ‘educate society’. Indeed, as also provided in Issue 1, ISIS runs its own ‘Office of Consumer Protection’. (‘Islamic State Report, Issue 1: Propagating the Correct Manhaj’, pp. 4-6)

⁴⁵⁶ As Zelin outlines, ISIS are keen to avoid repeating the mistakes of past insurgency efforts in Iraq, in particular—which alienated public support and led to the ultimate demise of al Qaeda in Iraq—with their *dawa* services patently more inclusive and, even, light-hearted at times: “In Aleppo, al-Bab, al-Dana, Jarabulus, Azaz, and other cities, ISIS speakers frequently exhort people on the virtues of jihad and fighting the Assad regime, sometimes balancing the speeches with fun, fair-like activities like tug-of-war competitions... Besides light-hearted activities aimed at endearing themselves to the people, ISIS members have also provided aid to civilian protestors in Damascus, free medical services to locals in Jarabulus, bags of food to the needy in rural Aleppo, and below-market fuel to residents in Deir al-Zour governorate. These materials have been branded with the group's black flag, illustrating that ISIS has significant organizational and financial resources as well as a clear intent to publicize its charitable aims. The group has also put up billboards in various areas to reinforce its *dawa* message, bearing slogans such as ‘Yes to the rule of sharia in Manbij.’” (2013a)

⁴⁵⁷ As was seen in relation to the immediate clamour for expertise on al Qaeda in the post-9/11 period, these figures should be approached with an appropriate degree of caution.

vision of a legitimate resistance)⁴⁵⁸, re-embellishes the words of bin Laden as central to al Qaeda’s contemporary identity (see below), while—recalling the function of *floating signifiers* within a ‘discursive battlefield’—it constructs al Qaeda as more ‘rational’ than ISIS by emphasising their dedication to inclusive ‘freedoms’ and ‘democratic’ representation⁴⁵⁹:

Al-Qaeda would like to reconfirm some of the important meanings in the Jihadi work for example [sic]. 7. *Shura and united work and making important decision after consultation between the Mujahideen and endorsement of their leaders. 8. *That problems between the Mujahideen are solved among themselves and not through the media. 9 * That we are part of nation [sic] and that we don’t take their right to choose who will rule them as long as he meets Islamic requirements. 10. and we don’t hasten to create Islamic states/emirates without consulting scholars, leaders, mujahideen, and then enforcing it on people. 11. Making sure we mobilise the nation around main issues [sic] which is the ideology of Osama bin Laden who elevated it with the jihadi work... 13. *Making sure to get rid of behaviours that will harm the Jihad therefore [sic] we published the ‘*General Instructions*’ document. 14. *Distancing from any behaviour that will result in oppressing a Mujahid or a Muslim OR a non-Muslim... 18. We call upon all those who have religion to take care of the Jihad and work to extinguish this Fitnah by stopping this fight. 19. And then settling the affairs by Islamic Courts to judge between the Mujahideen. [emphasis added] (‘Translation of al-Qaeda statement on Feb.3, 2014 Acknowledging ISIS officially isn’t part of AQ’)

The ‘General Instructions’ document cited in the above—which is characterised as an *essential* overview of al Qaeda’s doctrine—is further indicative of al-Zawahiri’s efforts to reaffirm al Qaeda’s significance. He begins by recalling achievements made to date against the Judeo-Crusader Alliance⁴⁶⁰ before re-emphasising their status as *the* primary enemy of the *umma*⁴⁶¹ (in spite, perhaps, of the realities on the ground which dictates that foregrounding

⁴⁵⁸ This is perhaps best evinced by the following passage: “1. Qae'dat al-Jihad (AQ) declares that it has no links to the ISIS group. We were not informed about its creation, nor counselled. 2. Nor were we satisfied with it rather we ordered it to stop. ISIS is not a branch of AQ and we have no organizational relationship with it. 3. Nor is al-Qaeda responsible for its actions and behaviors. 4. The branches of AQ are those that have been announced by the Central Command, those are the ones we acknowledge. 5. With our assurance of loyalty and love and support for every Mujahid and our care for all our Muslim and Mujahid brothers.” (‘Translation of al-Qaeda Statement on Feb. 3, 2014 Acknowledging ISIS officially isn't part of AQ’)

⁴⁵⁹ Indeed, on this point, it is notable that Western discourses are articulating (and perhaps absorbing) a similar distinction. ISIS has been labelled as ‘too extreme for al Qaeda’ in countless popular media reports, for example (see McClam, 2014; Sherlock, 2014; ‘The Islamic State of Iraq and Greater Syria: Two Arab countries fall apart’, 2014), while current US Secretary of State John Kerry has recently submitted that ISIS “are more extreme even than al-Qaeda” (Runnigen, 2014)

⁴⁶⁰ “What transpired during the revolutions in the Arab world is a proof of waning American influence. After receiving relentless blows at the hands of the Mujahideen in Afghanistan and Iraq and facing constant threat to its national security since September 2001, America decided to create some outlet to allow the release of public pressure in Muslim countries. However, the situation blew up in the face of its proxies. By the permission of Allah, the coming stage will witness further decrease in American influence on world affairs and further retreat of America into its own shell, which will also weaken the governments of its allies an[d] proxies.” (al-Zawahiri, 2013)

⁴⁶¹ “In the military sector, focus should be maintained on constantly weakening the head of international disbelief (America) until it bleeds to death both militarily and financially, its human resources are drained and it withdraws to its own shell after reaching a stage of retreat and seclusion, (sooner rather than later, with the permission of Allah). All Mujahid brothers must consider targeting the interests of the western Zionist-Crusader alliance in any part of the world as their foremost duty. They must exert efforts to the best of their ability for this purpose.” (al-Zawahiri, 2013)

the US/the West as the primary enemy in Syria comes as something of a stretch⁴⁶²). In-fighting between Jihadist factions is denounced at length⁴⁶³, while he consistently refers to the necessity of linking ‘local’ components of al Qaeda’s struggle to its overarching *global* resistance effort⁴⁶⁴—thus recalling the original basis by which al Qaeda distinguished its identity as existing apart from myriad other Jihadist groups in the 1990s. Finally, al-Zawahiri explicitly pleads for followers of al Qaeda to distribute this document *en masse*, lest it become lost in the cacophony of competing voices which are collectively defining Syria and Iraq as the most significant battlefields of contemporary Jihad:

We call upon the heads of all groups and organizations that work under Qaidatul Jihad Organization (Al Qaida) and all our supporters and sympathizers to spread these guidelines amongst their followers, whether in positions of responsibility or ordinary individuals; for his document contains no hidden secrets, rather it is a general policy guideline. Its purpose is only to secure the interests established by the Shariah and avert harm in this stage of the Islamic Jihadi work by interpretive judgment (Ijtihad) that does not oppose the rulings of the Shariah and conforms to its principles (al-Zawahiri, 2013)

In response, ISIS spokesperson Abu Muhammad Al-Adnani has vociferously rejected the various charges made by al-Zawahiri, accusing the ‘emir of al Qaeda’ *himself* of fracturing the unity of the Mujahideen (as opposed to the unification achieved by bin Laden)⁴⁶⁵ and

⁴⁶² Indeed, al-Zawahiri’s justification of the Judeo-Crusader Alliance as the primary enemy by virtue of their “proxy” involvement in Syria seems particularly desperate and far-fetched: “In Syria, the struggle against them is based on the fact that the rulers of Syria do not allow the mere existence of any Islamic entity, let alone a Jihadi one, and their bloody history of trying to uproot Islam is a well-known fact” (al-Zawahiri, 2013). Interpreting this move via Laclau highlights the inherent dangers of extending the distance between the particular components of a *chain of equivalence*, such that this lack of tautness may entail the dilution of a populist articulation—hence allowing for more competing articulations—such as those offered by ISIS in this case—to come to the fore in their stead: “[t]he more extended the equivalential chain, the less ‘natural’ the articulation between its links, and the more unstable the identity of the enemy (located on the other side of the frontier)... In the case of a specific demand formulated within a localized context, it is relatively easy to determine who is the adversary; if, however, there is an equivalence between a multiplicity of heterogeneous demands, to determine what your goal is and whom you are fighting against becomes much more difficult” (Laclau, 2005b, p. 231)

⁴⁶³ “The stance regarding other Islamic groups: a. We cooperate on what we agree and advice and correct each other on what we disagree. b. Our basic confrontation is with the enemies of Islam and those who hold animosity towards Islam. Therefore, our differences with other Islamic groups should not distract us from confronting the enemies of Islam on the military, propogational, ideological or political fronts. c. If a group that claims allegiance to Islam is ever involved in fighting against us alongside the disbelieving enemy, it must not be responded with more than a minimal response that would be sufficient to stop its aggression, so as to close the door of strife amongst Muslims and to avoid harming those who do not fight alongside the enemy.” (al-Zawahiri, 2013)

⁴⁶⁴ “Avoid entering into an armed clash with the local regimes, except if forced to do so, for example when the local regime is a part of the American forces, as in Afghanistan; or where it wages war against the Mujahideen on behalf of the Americans, as in Somalia and the Arabian Peninsula; or where it does not tolerate the mere presence of Mujahideen, as in the Islamic Maghreb, Syria, and Iraq. However, entering into an armed conflict against them must be avoided whenever it is possible. *If we are forced to fight, then we must make it clear that our struggle against them is a part of our resistance against the Crusader onslaught against Muslims* [emphasis added]” (al-Zawahiri, 2013)

⁴⁶⁵ “You [al-Zawahiri] have placed yourself and your base (ie. Al-Qa’idah) today before 2 unavoidable options: Either that you continue upon your error and be stubborn and insist upon it, and the splitting and killing amongst the Mujahidin continues in the world Or, that you recognise your error and your fault and you correct it and you

accusing al Qaeda of deviating from *their own word(s)* (a charge that al-Zawahiri has previously made against Hamas)—words that once secured them as the legitimate vanguard of the *umma*⁴⁶⁶. Indeed, at one point, he takes specific aim at the abstract nature of al-Zawahiri's contemporary statements, with his penchant for 'populist slogans' specifically denounced as out of touch with the operational necessities of an effective Jihad which is raging 'on the ground':

It is enough for you so as to not lead into great error and wide corruption as we were advised and warned of by Az-Zarqawi, Al-Libi, the leaders of Al-Qa'idah may Allah have Mercy upon them both, and that you call all of the Muslims to Jihad and fighting all (the armies mentioned prior) with a direct invitation to renounce the words and terms which are alien to the Mujahidin such as 'the popular uprising' 'the Intifadah of the masses', 'advocacy movement', 'the people', 'the masses', 'strife' and 'struggle' and other words. Replace them with clear and legitimate Jihad, and a direct invitation to carry arms and renouncing silmiyyah (pacifism) and especially in Egypt to fight the apostate army, the army of Al-Sisi the new Pharaoh of Egypt (Al-Adnani, 2014)

Amid concerns of a protracted civil war between Sunni and Shia factions, al-Zawahiri is effectively helpless to prevent the incremental disintegration of al Qaeda's significance, as it is steadily overshadowed by the advances of ISIS. Armed mainly with the power of public communication—as their fighting cadre dwindles and their financial reserves continue to evaporate (see Bergen et al, 2013; Burke, 2013; Gerges, 2011)—it is fitting that the current leadership of al Qaeda—and those close to them⁴⁶⁷—are particularly irked by what they view as ISIS taking the words of al-Zawahiri 'out of context' and re-articulating them outside of/beyond their original purpose:

When [Tandheem al-Dawlah]⁴⁶⁸ disobeyed him and rejected [al-Zawahiri], and the Mujahideen testified against their claims that they do not have a binding ba'yah to him (Sheikh Ayman), they

change course And here we are extending our hands to you again, to be the worthy successor to the best predecessor; for the shaykh Usama bin Ladin united the Mujahidin upon one word, while you disunited them, split them and dispersed them in total dispersion.” (al-Adnani, 2014)

⁴⁶⁶ After elongated passages of text taken from key al Qaeda figures, such as Osama bin Laden, Abu-Musab al-Zarqawi, Abu Yahya al-Libi and Suileman Abu Ghayth, Adnani laments: “This is the Qa'idah of Jihad that we knew of, and this is its manhaj (methodology), and whoever substitutes from it then we substitute them. This is Al-Qa'idah that we loved, this is Al-Qa'idah that we allied ourselves with, this is Al-Qa'idah that we supported. This is Al-Qa'idah, this is Al-Qa'idah that terrorised the nations of disbelief and plagued the sleep of the tyrants. This is Al-Qa'idah that ran through our blood and dwelled in the depths of our hearts, we respected it, we supported it, we revered it, we honoured it and held it in high esteem; and we were not to obey any but its leadership.” (Al-Adnani, 2014). He later proceeds to heavily chastise al-Zawahiri in the following terms: “[y]ou are the one who saddened the Muslims and allowed the enemies to rejoice over the state of the Mujahidin for you supported the treachery of the insidious one and supported it, you burned the souls, caused the hearts to bleed, you are the one who kindled and fueled the fitnah, and you are the one who shall extinguish it if you want to, God willing. So reassess yourself and stand with a stance to Allah fixing with it that which you corrupted” (2014)

⁴⁶⁷ The proceeding quote is attributed to Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi; a highly influential Jihadi-Salafist scholar (see Wagemakers, 2009) who has long voiced his explicit support for the core leadership of al Qaeda, and has consistently endorsed the contents of their public statements (see Zelin, 2012)

⁴⁶⁸ Tandheem al-Dawlah is an alternative name for ISIS/Islamic State.

began to justify their sin and their transgression against the Mujahideen, as well as their rebellion against their leaders and their rejection of the advices of their leaders, under the guise that al-Qaeda has deviated from the path of Jihad. They also [justified their claims] by picking holes in the statements of the words [of the leaders], which in reality are free from Islamic errors. As a result of the words [of their leaders], their criticism and prejudice is an indication of their ill-understanding and false goals. All of this is done in order to justify their sins, their repudiation and their splitting of the ranks of the Mujahideen. These justifications prove their superficiality, shallow thinking, their loose fiqh...and their over-exaggeration of matters [by] giving them more than their weight... I heard the most recent statement of al-Adnani⁴⁶⁹, which is a sample of this [mentioned traits]. It is also a sample of many other attributes, which are scattered in their other statements, in which they clearly state their refusal to the adjudication instructed by the Commander, Sheikh al-Zawahiri (al-Maqdisi, 2014)

Regardless of any eventualities in relation to the current situation in Iraq and Syria, by his attempts to consign competing groups as mere *footnotes* to a(/his) *Jihadi* grand narrative, al-Zawahiri is bearing witness to a harsh lesson of *the political* such that he cannot control the re-articulation of what he has written towards an ‘altogether different purpose’, nor can he control the protrusion of such ‘footnotes’ into the ‘main text’ of a (*Jihadi*) narrative. Al Qaeda’s previous existence as a leviathan-figure of *Jihadi* resistance may well have aided in maintaining competing articulations of (*Jihadi*) politics at bay for a time, but this formation could *never* be sustained as a natural state of affairs; rather, it could only ever be sustained as a contingent *grounding* of orthodoxy that was *always* beholden to the natural potentiality of contestation and the protrusion of *counter-hegemony*—for it is by such potentiality that the existence of al Qaeda was made possible in the first place⁴⁷⁰. Like all articulations of politics, al Qaeda will live and die by *the political*, continuing to ‘exist’ in a perennial flux between presence and absence/relevance and irrelevance. The means by which one may *write* about such phenomena is born(e) of the very same dynamic.

Conclusion

Writing about *the political* is not a straightforward endeavour. Insofar as one attempts to ‘capture’ in some way that which essentially eludes capture, one must live with the constant realisation that their efforts to create ‘truth’—which is what surely animates the process of writing insofar as an author *must* believe in the legitimacy of what one means to say—are undermined at every turn. As pertains to the dual problematique(s) of ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and ‘the authorship of critique’, I must now concede that neither component

⁴⁶⁹ Al-Adnani is a prominent spokesperson for ISIS. See, for example, ‘ISIS Urges Militants to march to Baghdad’; Smith-Spark and Fantz, 2014.

⁴⁷⁰ Faisal Devji has recently argued that: “Precisely because it possessed no space of its own...al-Qaeda’s rhetoric, and its practices, had always been drawn from the world of its enemies...al-Qaeda operated not as an external enemy but rather internally, by turning the logic and instruments of the West against itself (2014, p. 434). What now for al Qaeda when they gaze into this space, only find an all-too familiar face staring back?”

precedes or proceeds the other; rather, they are ineradicably bound in an inter-referential space within which the words of Laclau, Mouffe, bin Laden, al-Zawahiri (and countless others) have been weaved to form a composite argument that transcends any attempt to lineally define it as such. In recognition of this dynamic, my efforts to present at length the justifications for my argument(s) as rendered between ‘main text’ and ‘footnote’ may not provide an ‘enjoyable’ experience for the reader; yet, at the very least, I hope that this aesthetic has provided a facilitative terrain upon which the *jouissance* of writing *itself* can be effectively presented to the reader and that a multitude of interpretations *away* from the meanings I have attempted to *ground* as my own have been (further) facilitated as a result⁴⁷¹. If I have, in some way, succeeded in this endeavour, perhaps *then* I will have paid sufficient respect to *the political* ontology that elides across these pages—that which has informed (and has been informed by) my inquiries into ‘al Qaeda/Islamist terrorism’ and the ‘authorship of critique’, but that which remains no closer to essential capture.

⁴⁷¹ Indeed, as Derrida puts it, “we cannot write what we do not wish to erase, we can only promise it in terms of what can always be erased” (1989, p. 123)

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