

## Affecting terrorism:

# Laughter, lamentation and detestation as drives to terrorism knowledge

The contemporary fascination with terrorism in Anglo-American popular culture, political discourse, news reportage and beyond is boundless and well-documented. In this article we explore contemporary productions of terrorism as the outcome of three drives to knowledge: laughter, lamentation and detestation. Drawing on a range of social and cultural practices – including jokes, street art, film, memorial projects, elite rhetoric and abuse scandals – we make two arguments. First, that humour, grief and hatred underpin and saturate the contemporary desire to know terrorism. And, second, that – although these drives function in multiple and ambiguous ways – they serve to institute a distance between the subject and object of terrorism knowledge, not least by encouraging us to laugh *at* those punished for terrorism, mourn *for* those lost in attacks, and direct our hatred *toward* those responsible. This analysis not only opens fresh insight on the workings of terrorism discourse in the post-9/11 period, it also points to connections between contemporary ‘critical’ work on terrorism and debate on the role of emotions and affect in international politics more broadly.

**Key words:** Terrorism; knowledge; affect; emotion; laughter; memory; grief; Foucault; Nietzsche.

### Introduction

The contemporary fascination with terrorism is boundless. In Anglo-American politics, journalism, popular culture, and everyday life there exists a seemingly insatiable appetite for

the representation, visualisation and consumption of this threat. With every new act of unconventional violence, analysts rush to extrapolate new fears and targets (Mueller 2006); assisted in their task by new systems and technologies of risk measurement (see Amoores and de Goede 2008). Geopolitical developments are scrutinised as much for their impact on, and links to, groups such as al-Qaeda, Boko Haram or ISIS, as they are in their own terms.<sup>i</sup> In domestic politics, similarly, terrorism remains a potent battleground between interested parties: the drawn-out fates of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and his fellow Guantanamo Bay inmates amongst the most prominent contemporary chips in these games.<sup>ii</sup> Films, video games, television productions and other cultural forms shape Western understandings of former and contemporary organizations, interpellating us as potential victims or heroes in their narratives (Power 2007; Sisler 2008, see also Waldmann 2012; Jackson 2015). And academia, of course, has been no less affected by this contemporary ‘boom’, witness the deluge of new publications, conferences, journals and research monies: all simultaneously indicative and constitutive of this fascination (see Silke 2004: 25-27).

The quality of much work within this recent terrorism boom has been much debated. One prominent review, for example, pointed to a series of continuing biases in its focus, including a dearth of historical contextualisation and a continuing prioritisation of ‘Islamist’ terrorism (Silke 2009; see also Gunning 2007; Ranstorp 2009). While such hand-wringing may serve strategic as well as intellectual functions (Stampnitzky 2011), it has opened space for the emergence of explicitly ‘critical’ research around (counter-)terrorism, building on a small number of earlier pioneering efforts (e.g. George 1991; Zulaika and Douglass 1996). Such work has proved particularly influential in unmasking hidden, obscured and forgotten instances of terrorism – especially in discussion around ‘state terrorism’ (Jackson *et al* 2010; Tyner *et al* 2014) – and in mapping the sites and forms of discourse through which terrorism is produced as an object of knowledge. Although much of this has focused on elite (counter-)terrorism discourse, studies of non-linguistic representational practices and ‘vernacular’ or ‘subaltern’

constructions of ‘terror’ are also, importantly, beginning to emerge (Solomon 2012; Jarvis and Lister 2013; Furtado 2015).

In this article, we contribute to these recent ‘critical’ literatures by offering an exploratory reading of three affective ‘drives’ underpinning the constitution of terrorism as an object of knowledge: laughter, lamentation and detestation. Taking inspiration from the work of Michel Foucault, Friedrich Nietzsche and others, we argue that these impulses to ridicule, grieve and fear terrorist violence are central to contemporary constructions of terrorism and recognisable across multiple discursive sites: formal and informal, organised and spontaneous. Taking such impulses as seriously as better-studied examples such as fear and anxiety contributes, we suggest, to recent critical analyses by allowing us to ask: how do different emotional responses to terrorism play into the construction of terrorism knowledge? What are the politics of laughing at, fearing and hating terrorism? And, how is affect situated epistemologically vis-à-vis terrorism?

### **Drives to knowledge**

A useful starting point for our analysis is Michel Foucault’s 1973 lectures at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. These lectures are important as part of his broader effort to tie domains and technologies of knowledge to the social practices of their emergence (Foucault 2000). In them, Foucault offers a staccatoed history of truth from the test, to the inquiry and, finally, the examination. In the former, illustrated via Homer’s *Iliad*, truth is produced by way of direct competition – a struggle against oneself, one’s opponent, or the elements – and governed by rules, through which successful completion of a designated task (swearing before the gods, taking an oath, healing after a physical ordeal, or triumphing in combat, for instance) offers evidence of the accused’s innocence (Foucault 2000: 33-38). The second mode of truth establishment – the inquiry – was consolidated, for Foucault, in the twelfth century, before going on to radically reorganise Western judicial and scholarly

activities. Tied to the birth of the modern state, truth emerges here via a densely ritualized process of investigation: it is something to be *discovered* by an ostensibly disinterested but authoritative party following consultation with evidence and the interrogation of witnesses. The examination, finally, presents us with a new mode of truth production, linked by Foucault to the disciplinary society. Here, knowledge is produced via constant, uninterrupted supervision (of deviants, for example), and intrinsically linked to social transformations (in prisons, education, the workplace), and the birth of the ‘human sciences’ (Foucault 2000: 59).

Underpinning this genealogy of truth is an endorsement of Nietzsche’s earlier account of the invention of knowledge. For Nietzsche (1974) – as, subsequently, for Foucault – knowledge is to be understood as the outcome of a struggle between passions or ‘instincts’ triggered by our embeddedness in the world<sup>iii</sup>. Critiquing Spinoza’s *Tractatus Politicus* for its separation of knowledge and affect, Nietzsche (1974: 261-262) set out to counter the rationalist trajectory of Western philosophy, and to take seriously the role of the ‘passions’ in our knowledge of the world (also Foucault 2000: 11). Knowledge, for Nietzsche (in Foucault’s later terminology), is therefore janus-faced. It is a product of chance and conflict – a protracted compromise temporarily staying the conflicts between drives – rather than the product of any direct correspondence to the world: with the latter depicted as ‘chaos for all eternity’ (Nietzsche 1974: 167-169), un-beholden to any definitive law of interpretation.

For Nietzsche and Foucault alike, knowledge possesses no automatic relationship with the ‘world of things’ it claims to resemble. The connection between the two is one of contingency, not necessity. Nor are the origins of knowledge to be located in the nature or instincts of a prior, founding subject; as Foucault (2000: 9) notes, paraphrasing Nietzsche: “...between knowledge and the world to be known there is as much difference as between knowledge and human nature”. If we accept this, then power, violence, and, ultimately, politics all enter the fold, for knowledge becomes something imposed on the world and its subjects; at

once constitutive of that which it claims to represent, and necessarily imperfect. As Foucault (1984: 127) suggested in one of his most-cited passages:

we must not imagine that the world turns towards us a legible face which we would only have to decipher; the world is not the accomplice of our knowledge; there is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them.

Foucault's investigations into this problem of knowledge are well-known, and fleshed out in greater detail away from these lectures (e.g. Foucault 1998; also compare Connolly 1985 and Taylor 1985). These lectures are significant for our purposes, however, because of their endorsement of Nietzsche's account of the passions that drive knowledge. For, in a passage of particular relevance to contemporary understandings of violences deemed 'terrorist', Foucault (2000: 11) states:

*Intelligere*, to understand, is nothing more than a certain game, or more exactly, the outcome of a certain game, of a certain compromise or settlement between *ridere* [to laugh], *lugere* [to lament], and *detestari* [to detest]. Nietzsche says that we understand only because behind all that there is the interplay and struggle of those three instincts, of those three mechanisms, or those three passions that are expressed by laughter, lamentation, and detestation.

Elaborating, Foucault makes two points. First, each of these drives establishes a distance (or an attempt at distance) between the subject and object of knowledge. To laugh, lament, or detest is to resist identification with that which is being laughed at, lamented, or detested; to mark one's separation from the thing in the world. Second, each of these drives also constitutes a 'bad' relation between subject and object; knowledge is produced from a momentary impasse or compromise between the negative impulses of mockery, hostility and fear. Although

Foucault follows Nietzsche in locating these drives within the individual subject, our focus here, as will become clear, is on their operation at the level of the social.

### **Affecting Terrorism**

Nietzsche and Foucault's account of these three negative drives to knowledge has real prescience for contemporary work on the impact of affect and emotion on socio-political life. Wide-ranging and heterogeneous – one summary identifies eight trajectories of affect research across neuroscience, psychoanalysis, queer theory, and beyond (Seigworth and Gregg 2010) – this work has also begun to influence research on international politics. Christine Sylvester (2011, 2013), for instance, provides an important feminist intervention into the study of war by up-ending the traditional abstractions of International Relations (IR) theory and its concomitant exclusion of experience and emotions. Critical discussion on trauma and terrorism (Hutchison 2010), similarly, seeks to (re-)centre the phenomenological experience of war within international politics, while related studies on emotional states such as trust and humiliation significantly broaden IR's traditional parameters (Crawford 2000; Ross 2006; Saurette 2006; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008).

One useful recent contribution to this literature – the edited *Emotions, Politics and War* (Ahall and Gregory 2015) – collects several important reflections on the salience of emotions in practices of militarism and resistance, while clarifying the distinction between affect and emotion. Although often used inter-changeably, emotion refers to the culturally constituted experience of nameable feelings, and the effects that they generate. Affect, in contrast, emphasises how embodiment and materiality generate felt flows of resonance between body and mind (Connolly 2002; Massumi 2002; Thrift 2008). The distinction between affect and emotion, then, is one of 'name-ability', or as Solomon (2012: 908) puts it, affect is:

amorphous potential that remains outside of discourse, which is difficult to articulate but nevertheless has effects within discourse. Emotion, on the other hand, can be viewed as the ‘feeling’ that signifiers represent once names are attached to affect, thereby conferring on them discursive reality.

Nietzsche’s discussion of ‘drives to knowledge’ is a stimulating one, in part, because it escapes such a neat distinction between affect and emotions. On the one hand, Nietzsche situates laughter, lamentation and detestation as ‘instincts’ which precede knowledge of an object; indeed, it is the struggle between these affective drives which contributes to the distancing of object from subject, and thus its entry into the field of knowledge. This focus on a subject’s embeddedness in pre-linguistic, corporeal, drives seems more closely related to affect than emotions. But at the same time, Nietzsche’s focus on laughter, lamentation and detestation may also be read as a discussion of nameable emotional states.

Given the historical and philosophical distance between Nietzsche’s project and contemporary literature in IR, we leave open the relation between Nietzschean ‘instincts’ and recent scholarship on affect or emotion. What really interests us is the epistemological significance of these drives to knowledge within his work, and in Foucault’s subsequent endorsement. Whether classified as affect or emotion, Nietzsche’s ‘instincts’ may be approached as constituting the field upon which knowledge production occurs. Taking this insight seriously therefore enables researchers to explore cultural representations of entities such as terrorism, not only as forms of representation, but also as the outcome of competition between impulses to laughter, mourning and hatred. This also, importantly, enables exploration of affect or emotion as properties of social practices, rather than as merely internal, individualised, states. Nietzsche’s conception of the ‘drive’ is sufficiently broad to enable consideration of social practices of mockery, mourning and othering as collective affective instincts that, interactively, isolate an object within the field of knowledge and enable its discursive constitution.

## *Laughter*

What is the significance of laughing at terror? Despite the rush to situate 9/11 as marking a ‘death of irony’ (Markovitz 2004: 201), and accounts of a subsequent ‘public humour moratorium’ (Kuipers 2005: 74) – at least in the US – this first of Nietzsche’s drives toward knowledge has special prominence, we argue, in contemporary productions of terrorism.

Humour in general performs multiple social and psychological functions (Critchley 2002: 2-3). In the context of terrorism, specifically, a first of these is its offering a relatively straightforward coping mechanism for those seeking to come to terms with particular attacks, or future threats (see also Brown and Penntinen 2013). Laughing at terrorism here attempts to tame fear of this – ostensibly random – violence; the incongruities on which humour relies offering opportunity (if temporary) to escape more worldly concerns (Kuipers 2005: 71). One Internet site, for example, offers its collection of 9/11 jokes under the self-consciously playful banner: “This 9/11 Joke Collection Will Save America! After 5 Years, You Can LAUGH! It’s official!” (Ooze.com 2006) In so doing, it spotlights humour’s capacity to alleviate anxieties about external events (Coser 1959: 175) at the same time as it illustrates the limitations of these efforts with its ironic style (reinforced in the site’s own repeated ridicule of the jokes). By parodying political calls for a return to normality after those attacks – as Powell (cited in Jarvis 2009: 113) put it: ‘We need people to go back out to stores. We need people to go to movies and theaters. We need to restore a sense of normalcy in our life’ – the site invites visitors to share in its conspiratorial tone.

Less inclusive, but similar in function, is an incident recounted by James Der Derian (2002), wherein, “President Bush was given room to joke in a morale-boosting visit to the CIA, saying he’s ‘spending a lot of quality time lately’ with George Tenet, the director of the CIA.” On the US television show, *Saturday Night Live*, a similarly high profile figure from 9/11’s aftermath – New York Mayor Giuliani – signalled his own acquiescence to laughter in the wake of those attacks: “When producer Lorne Michaels asked the mayor if it was okay to be funny,



Giuliani joked, “Why start now?” (implicitly informing viewers that it was, in fact, okay to laugh)” (Spigel 2004). Across these examples, terrorism’s status as a contemporary taboo (Zulaika and Douglass 1996: 149-153) helps consolidate laughter’s relevance as a technique of release. Where other forms of representation break down, laughter emerges to fill a void of discourse and meaning (compare Holland 2009 with Solomon 2012).

A second, less benign, outlet for this humorous drive to knowledge is in efforts to ridicule those designated ‘terrorist’. Such comedic interventions span the determinedly offensive and personalised:

Q. Why does Osama Bin Laden carry a piece of shit in his pocket?

A. Photo I.D. (Life is a Joke.com n.d.)

To other instantiations employing heavily sexualised and racialised imagery, such as the proliferation of:

...pictures show[ing] bin Laden engaged in sex with animals, or with Bush, Saddam Hussein, or anonymous males. Others showed bin Laden’s photo at the bottom of a toilet, or a dog defecating on his picture. The few degrading pictures that did not refer to bin Laden himself were concerned with his mother or his birth, or concerned Afghan women (“Miss Afghanistan”), who were pictured as fat, hairy, or both. Finally, a fair number of pictures portrayed bin Laden either as an animal or congregating with animals such as pigs, monkeys, goats, and other “degrading” animals (Kuipers 2005: 79).

Caricatured depictions of Muslims present a particularly recurrent theme in recent ‘humorous’ productions of terrorism, with the ‘72 virgins’ trope a common source of ridicule. The apparent proximity between terrorism and Islam here builds on established Orientalist constructions (Said 1978), and continues the mockery of Muslims, Islam, Asians and Arabs so prominent in movie depictions and beyond (Shaheen 2001). In the Danish cartoon controversy, this drive

toward knowledge through ridicule culminated, of course, with social unrest and violence, albeit following politicking around the original images (Modood *et al* 2006).

These representations of terrorism contribute to a twin process of othering that has gathered apace in the first decades of the twenty-first century. On the one hand, they perpetuate the twinning of Islam with illegitimate violences (for example, in at least two of the original Danish cartoons), furthering a particular, essentialist, reading of this faith as belligerent, aggressive and inferior to ‘civilised’ Western values (Jackson 2007). At the same time, they contribute to the othering of terrorism itself, delegitimising its protagonists through ridicule and contempt. In so doing, they reproduce the alterity of individuals such as bin Laden, while minimizing and taming the danger that they pose. Although more visceral than established, acceptable, political discourse, there is, clearly, intertextuality with recent constructions of terrorism in the discourses of political elites and the frequent turn to metaphors of monstrosity, sub-humanity and evil therein (Steuter and Wills 2010).

The multiplying comedic dynamics of the War on Terror therefore play a considerable role in the constitution of terrorism as an object of knowledge. Through social practices of joking and mockery, a separation is asserted between the subject and object of knowledge production. We laugh *at* the object of the joke, rendering it intelligible through its entrance into the field of knowledge. And, by laughing and appreciating the aesthetic qualities of the joke, we participate in terrorism’s consolidation as a particular form of threat: one that is variously depoliticised, tamed, and ridiculed in the above examples. This drive to laughter helps to constitute terrorism within what Ranciere (2004) terms ‘the distribution of the sensible’: the regimes of perception which determine what is seen and unseen, spoken and unspoken – subsequently determining what can be thought, made and done.

The instinct of laughter, however, has ambiguous – and even contradictory – results for terrorism’s production, as it also lends itself to alternative, conflicting, knowledge around this threat.<sup>iv</sup> There are numerous examples of humour’s use for the contestation of dominant

(counter-)terrorism discourse and practice – from routines or episodes in popular television shows such as *Saturday Night Live* and *South Park* (Spigel 2004: 255-259), through articles penned for sardonic newspapers such as *The Onion*, to filmic productions including *Team America: World Police*. In the latter, for instance, an over-zealous US is critiqued for the ineptness of its attempts to restore global order (Gow 2006). Other interventions instead interrupt the banalities of everyday life, such as in the case of irreverent street art depicting President Bush as Mickey Mouse, lipsticked, or kissing Saddam Hussein (Mathieson and Tapias 2007). More coordinated efforts include the activities of groups like ‘Space Hijackers’ (2006), a self-styled ‘Anarchitect’ movement on whose website one can download templates to adhere to road crossing boxes with such messages as ‘Anti-terror finger print scanner: Please place your index finger here’.

As the above indicates, humour therefore has multiple manifestations in the contemporary politics of terror. On the one hand, it poses critical potential to expose and challenge the contradictions and assumptions of the War on Terror (Heath-Kelly 2012). Yet, while jokes might disrupt security imaginaries, humour can also facilitate the embedding of intrusive security technologies in public locations by changing the mood (Leese and Koenigseder 2015). As Leese and Koenigseder (2015) chart, the sharing of jokes between airport personnel and travellers during, for instance, body scanning can serve to reduce anxiety around such technologies, normalising the latter’s existence. Humour, as a drive to knowledge, then, has unpredictable manifestations in this context. Not only does it contribute to, and underpin, the constitution of terrorism as a particular type of security threat. It may also be brought to the service of those who would contest established regimes of security and surveillance: blurring the boundaries between humour’s critical and conservative functions (Critchley 2002).

Lamentation, as the expression of sorrow, is the second drive we explore here as an affective condition of emergence for terrorism knowledge. In this context, we witness the production of terrorism as an object of knowledge through sanctioned expressions of grief which work to decry a slaughter as unprovoked, random and unreasonable. Lamentation – which constitutes a boundary between acceptable ‘strategic’ violence (war, collateral damage, deterrence) and the excessive, irrational violence of ‘terrorism’ – is particularly evident in four contemporary cultural forms discussed below: immediate practices of condemnation; iconographies of the slain; the resolve to triumph; and permanent memorials to victims of terrorism. Each of these displaces acts of violence from the realm of understanding, rationality or empathy. Indeed lamentation ‘knows’ terrorism through constituting this threat not as something to be tamed through ridicule, as in the case of laughter above, but as something rationally un-knowable and exceptional. These processes demonstrate a fierce determination to refuse knowledge of the strategic motivations for violent action (Jackson 2015), and render terrorism an absolute, excessive slaughter beyond the realm of intelligibility (Agamben 2005; Heath-Kelly 2013; Jackson 2005).

The first stage in lamentation emerges in the official and immediate condemnations that typically follow that moment in which a bomb goes off or a massacre occurs. Despite their sheltered distance from mass casualty events, world leaders are often first on the scene – using broadcast media to issue tirades of displeasure and sorrow. The coordinated lamentations of European leaders after the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks, and the prolific public uptake of ‘Je Suis Charlie’ memes across social media, provide recent examples of such state-sanctioned sorrow (Molloy 2015). As, more recently still, did global outpourings of grief following the November 2015 attacks in Paris (Shearlaw 2015) and – in different context – the 2016 nightclub shooting in Orlando, Florida. Such lamentations for the victims banish the motivations for any attack from the civilised polity, locating them in a realm of barbarism juxtaposed to the modern world. UK Prime Minister David Cameron (2015a), for instance, responded to the 2015

shooting of holidaymakers in Tunisia by articulating the event in opposition to the ‘whole world’, which had been shocked by the brutality of those posing an ‘existential threat’ to the West. In so doing, he drew on previous lamentations of War on Terror leaders including Bush, Blair, Obama and Brown (Carr 2015).

Although condemnations such as these immediately follow substantial attacks, they would seem to make little sense in-and-of-themselves: no one would expect political nonchalance or pleasure following the murder of citizens. The necessity of these statements is, therefore, connected to the War on Terror’s symbolic landscape, in which lamentation fulfils two functions. First, in terms of crisis management, leaders are advised to minimise a disaster’s political ramifications by appearing empathetic with bereaved publics and communicating this effectively (Boin *et al* 2005). Lamentation thus serves to consolidate the association between political leaders and the polity, mitigating any perception of elite aloofness. Second, lamentation through condemnation constitutes and performs the boundary between a civilised rational political realm and that lying beyond; holding the identity of the barbarian high to consolidate the identity of the civilised (Campbell 1992; Gregory 2004; Agamben 2005; Jackson 2005). News-texts which enact disastrous events for their audiences are both structured by, and consolidating of, cultural identity discourses around pity and compassion (Chouliaraki 2006); their audiences are brought into being as witnesses through invitation to virtually participate in the mediated suffering of distant others (Kyriakidou 2015).

A second stage of post-terrorist lamentation is evident in the iconographies produced of slain victims. Following initial condemnation, media outlets rush to obtain victims’ names, ages, and home photographs. Expansive tableaux of photographs are subsequently splashed across newspaper pages and screens broadcasting rolling news channels. British newspapers, for example, competed to obtain everyday images of the victims of the Tunisia shootings for publication, while The New York Times’ *Portraits of Grief* series of photographs and vignettes about 9/11’s victims now offers a permanent web resource and published (688 page) book

(New York Times 2002). In these iconographies, the slain are symbols of the everyday – the working mother, the recent graduate, the promising entrepreneur – constituting an imagery of wholesomeness to which the sorrow of lamentation can take hold. The proliferation of Internet sites commemorating victims of terror arguably pluralises this mnemonic dynamic, offering visitors to these sites opportunity to reminisce and reflect on – and therefore to help (re)produce – the (story of those) victims and the tragedy of their premature killing (see Jarvis 2010).

This iconography refuses any possibility that terrorism's victims are in any way representative of political structures which oppress and wage violence upon others. Instead, it performs a tableau of righteous sorrow, in which victims are randomly selected exemplars of common decency. In this rendering, tourists are not targeted by militants because the tourism industry is economically and politically exploitative; likewise, financiers and metropolitan denizens are not contextualised within their membership of countries at war. Instead, lamentation protests the slaughter of individuals connected by nothing but quotidian goodness. But terrorism is seldom random. Shopping centres, tourist nightclubs, commuters in the metropolis and stockbrokers are selected to send a message. This is sometimes understood as the communicative aspect of militant violence (Schmid and Jongman 2005), which attempts to create terror in a broader population. This is terrorism's political dimension, where bodies complicit in the structural oppression of another group become fodder for militant discursive re-narration - practiced through physical violence (Heath-Kelly 2013). But, by lamenting the innocent victims of random slaughter, mourning affectively refuses strategic explanations for violence.

A third aspect of lamentation, the 'resolve to triumph', builds upon this spectre of random, meaningless horror to express a will to conquer all such future violence. Political elites lament the deaths of the innocent while promising justice – juridical or military – for (other) perpetrators of violence. What is particularly interesting about the constitution of terrorism knowledge vis-à-vis this resolve, is its shifting contextualisation. During the Northern Ireland

conflict, for instance, the British state responded to attacks on the mainland via a discourse of terrorism as crime. Prime Minister Thatcher famously refused to recognise the political status of ‘special category’ detainees of the Maze prison, instead constituting terrorism as a problem of criminal disorder. As she put it in response to the 1981 Hunger Strikes of Maze inmates: ‘Crime is a crime, is a crime. It is not political’. And, yet, the British government still simultaneously lamented terrorism as an existential threat to democracy necessitating the will to triumph (Bingham 2013).

Since the end of the Cold War and the events of 9-11, the tone of lamentation has shifted. The will to triumph is now performed against the crimes of an enemy beyond crime; one whose behaviour is constituted as an exceptional threat driven by apocalyptic ideology (e.g. Laqueur 2000; Cameron 2015b). This enemy must be defeated, but also cannot be defeated: perpetual vigilance is needed because we can never be assured of our preparation and prevention success. Hence the need for ‘unshakeable resolve’ in the face of endless threat (Cameron 2015b). This reworking of lamentation is particular to the cultural context of the War on Terror and its situation within resilience discourses of security following the latter’s migration from sectors of ecology and engineering. Resilience – as the proactively instituted capacity to recover from shock – now serves to balance the articulation of unending, unpreventable threat with the capacity for post-traumatic recovery (Lentzos and Rose 2009; Bruijne *et al* 2010; Lundborg and Vaughan-Williams 2011; Heath-Kelly 2015).

The concluding stage in lamentation – memorialisation – further demonstrates the importance of affective drives to terrorism knowledge. Memorialisation trends have drastically shifted in relation to terrorism. Before the War on Terror, Britain did not build memorials to the victims of ‘terrorist’ attacks.<sup>v</sup> Despite a long history of bombings associated with the Northern Ireland conflict, lamentation traditionally led to the placing of plaques. The Birmingham pub bombings of 1974, for instance, which killed 21 people, are marked with a plaque in the grounds of the city centre cathedral. The IRA’s Brighton hotel bombing which

targeted the ruling Conservative Party's conference of 1984 was met with a reconstruction of the Brighton Grand Hotel and a simple plaque in the lobby, while the enormous Manchester bomb of 1996 (which destroyed the city's commercial centre) was commemorated with a plaque placed upon a post box which survived the explosion.

In the United States, too, the 259 victims of Pan Am flight 103, bombed *en route* to New York in 1982, would have received no memorial had their families not eventually persuaded authorities to construct a memorial cairn in Arlington cemetery (Britton 2008: 5). Even the first attack on the World Trade Center received only modest memorialisation in the form of a fountain placed between the twin towers on the plaza. It was the Oklahoma bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in 1995 which stimulated the emergence of contemporary mega-memorial culture (Linenthal 2001), now replicated in the aftermath of 9-11. In Oklahoma, as with post-9-11 New York, we have seen the construction of enormous memorial plazas and museums upon the sites of terrorist attack. Yet there is no great divergence between the numbers killed in Oklahoma and those on Pan Am 103 – or between those killed in the London bombings and the 1974 Birmingham attacks – so why the divergence in memorial response?

The shift in memorialisation occurs, we suggest, with the transition towards the War on Terror; 'towards' because the Oklahoma bomb preceded the 9-11 attacks by six years. It was at this point that the US lost its Cold War narrative, its existential enemy, and faced the acceleration of neoliberalism without an anchoring point for its national identity. It was at this point too, that the cultural connection of lamentation to the simple plaque and discrete fountain came loose. The drive to lament broke free, in chaotic Nietzschean fashion, to spark new forms of terrorism knowledge through mourning. Terrorist attacks attained new hyperbolised significance as devastating events perpetrated by an apocalyptic enemy of civilisation (Agamben 2005; Jackson 2005), and memorialisation culture changed to accompany this shift in identity construction: plaques, simply, would no longer suffice to commemorate events of



‘global significance’. Now, as consolidated by the imagery of the ‘endless’ war on terror, the deaths of commuters are reimagined as heroic losses in an eternal struggle between good and evil and a new aesthetics of tragedy and conquest emerges out of the re-configuration of lamentation’s affective field.

### *Detestation*

The third Nietzschean passion within the production of, here, terrorism knowledge is detestation. Through hating, repelling and shaming its object, detestation works, we suggest, to confirm and reproduce an uncomplicatedly antithetical self/other relationship; a dynamic that becomes especially acute in cases practices of humiliation waged upon the captured, frightened or dead terrorist body. Humiliation takes many forms here, but serves to remove recognition of its recipient as sentient and human, degrading them to the level of abjection. Julia Kristeva (1982) writes of abjection as a visual recognition of horror which breaks down the separation of subject and object, destabilising the viewer’s subject position. The feeling one endures on viewing a loved one’s corpse, for example, renders one’s own death palpable and brings the illusions of Cartesian subjectivity come crashing down before the brute materiality of decaying flesh and juices. Yet, practices of detestation performed upon terrorist bodies do not induce horror within their perpetrator, quite the contrary. Rather, the abjection of the terrorist body is purposefully enacted to *induce* that body’s separation from the categories of human, rights-bearer and recognised being. Humiliation of the terrorist body drives a separation between the object and the discursive category of human, so that terrorism can be ‘known’ through its abjection.<sup>vi</sup>

The purposeful and functional inducement of abjection upon another’s body is discussed, in different wording, in Elaine Scarry’s (1985) seminal exploration of torture. Scarry’s treatise explores the unique quality of pain, such that it destroys access to language. There are no words which can adequately express severe pain – hence the resort to screaming

- because pain's affective power removes one from the Cartesian subject position, revoking one's status as a speaking, human subject. Torture, for Scarry, is therefore a purposeful dehumanisation which removes its victim's access to language. Interrogatory questions are barked *as if* their answers were crucial, but their role is only to force a detainee's self-betrayal. Although performed as crucial by the regime, such questions become irrelevant to the person suffering extreme pain – who will say anything to make the pain stop. Agony-induced confessions function as nothing more than a performative testament and the captive's loss of 'world, self, and voice' (Scarry 1985: 35). That shrinking world of the captive – now positioned as a torturer's puppet performing required scripts – exists in dialectic with the expanding worlds of the torturer and the regime; the latter, here, having doubled their voices by appropriating those of the tortured (Heath-Kelly 2013: 24-26).

Drawing on the insights of Kristeva and Scarry to illustrate Nietzsche's point on the epistemological significance of affective drives, we argue that abjection is enacted upon the terrorist body as a manifestation of the detestation drive which again renders distant the subject and object of terrorism knowledge. Where violence and humiliation are inflicted upon bodies to produce them as abject, their perpetrators do not experience abjection's horror because the detestation drive separates the terrorist body from sentient personhood and inserts it instead in the place of Agamben's (1998) *Homo Sacer*. The terrorist body – now reconfigured as the figure that can be violated or killed without incurring punishment – becomes a repository of knowledge to be accessed via the visiting of a hatred-induced 'test', to return to Foucault's history of truth with which we began our discussion.

This analysis of detestation enables us to understand the pervasive humiliation and excessive violence waged upon bodies during the War on Terror. The scale of these practices, as witnessed at Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, and in the everyday humiliation incurred by persons subjected to Islamophobic treatment far exceeds the instrumental violence required to injure or kill: for instance in the dismemberment of Afghan civilian corpses by coalition soldiers

(Gregory 2015). Instead, such violence brutally targets the body to remove traces of its ontological status as human. The ‘Afghan kill team’, for example, staged confrontations with unarmed civilians during the Coalition invasion of Afghanistan before brutally deconstructing their human forms, beating them beyond recognition after death, and removing body parts as trophies in what became known as the Maywand District Murders (Ibid).

Abjection is enacted upon these bodies, we argue, to violently assert their separation from dignified human life. And it is no accident that such excessive violence has become a recurrent feature of the War on Terror: a conflict presaged upon a binary distinction between the civilised world and the barbarous terrorist. As feminist philosopher Adriana Caverero (2011; also Gregory 2015) shows in her discussion of contemporary violence as ‘horrorism’, the War on Terror is part of a developing trend in conflict away from violence as mere instrumental force. Drawing on Carl Schmitt’s (2007) work, Caverero argues that war had previously been governed by legal codes enforcing strict separations between combatants and civilians, war and peace, based on the affordance of respect and recognition towards combatants. The emergence of the figure of the partisan in the twentieth century, however, challenged this vision of warfare, depicted by Schmitt (2007: 37) as an ungovernable fighter who:

‘refuses to carry weapons openly, who fights from ambush, and who uses the enemy’s uniform, as well as true or false insignias and every type of civilian clothing as camouflage’.

The figure of the partisan could not be incorporated into the binary separating military and civil affairs, and was thus classified as a rogue element from whom all legal protections regarding detention and summary punishment should be removed. The figure of the partisan was disruptive as it fell between existing categories of knowledge; its unknown-ness provoked affective reactions of detestation to re-secure the discourse of warfare. For example, the partisan disrupted any distinction between combatants and non-combatants. Warfare became

dislodged from the discourse and practice of instrumental violence practiced upon recognised and rights-bearing enemies. In this void, an affective landscape of detestation emerged to re-enable a separation between legitimate and illegitimate fighters meriting different levels of moral and legal recognition.

There is similarity between Schmitt's discussion of the partisan as extra-legal participant in warfare, and the Bush administration's War on Terror discourse of the 'enemy combatant' as unlawful fighter in the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq. Under this legal code, the United States shrugged off previous requirements to apply the Geneva Convention to its enemies within the War on Terror, given their unconventional military status. The detestation of the figures of 'terrorist' and 'enemy combatant', evident in the removal of respect awarded other conventional fighters, was then expressly connected to practices of abjection subsequently performed on their bodies.

This excessive, detestation-induced, waging of violence upon bodies within the conflict constituted (alongside drives of laughter and lamentation) the emergence of contemporary terrorism knowledge. Beyond the desecrations in Afghanistan by coalition forces, one might also consider episodes of torture and humiliation at detention camps including Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, U.S. forces held detainees in a prison camp at Abu Ghraib – and it later emerged that their treatment of these detainees included sodomy, forced public masturbation, the forced performance of homosexual acts between detainees, and the construction of naked detainee pyramids (Richter-Montpetit 2007). Some of the most famous images from the camp show army reservist Lynndie England leading a crawling prisoner around the cells on a leash (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007: 58-87).

This sharing of photographs of detainees stacked into naked pyramids by their guards was designed to humiliate: a public continuation and normalisation of the abjection enforced upon the bodies of detainees. The photograph of the naked pyramid of detainees was used as a screensaver at the Abu Ghraib internet café; other photographs of abuse were circulated

between and beyond guards at the prison, including via email chains (Mirzoeff 2006). This performance of abjection and cruelty upon the Orientalised bodies of detainees was so normalised that the recording of visual evidence of abuse was deemed unimportant. Indeed, these strategies of sexual humiliation and detestation were also rampant at Guantanamo Bay and the British Camp Bread Basket, as well as in historical colonial detention practices in Kenya and Northern Ireland. One might, therefore, speak of a historical paradigm of sexualised, gendered and racialized abuse (Mirzoeff 2006; Armstrong 2014) which functions to humiliate detainees and enforce abjection upon them.

Beyond the treatment of detainees in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, we see a similar trend in the global distribution of images of dead terrorist leaders. The detestation of leaders such as Osama Bin Laden and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi resulted not only in their assassination, but in the subsequent, post-mortem, abjection visited upon their bodies. In both cases, images of the normally-taboo corpse were projected worldwide in an assertion of triumph. The brutalised and bloated bodies of Bin Laden and al-Zarqawi became fodder for an expression of collective relief in the United States, that finally the American narrative of supremacy and justice could resolve the events of 9/11 and assert the marginalisation of jihadist organisations (Stevenson 2011; Jarvis and Holland 2014). The pictorial and textual representations of the deaths of such leaders place them within a colonial reading of international relations, where the U.S. appears decisive, strategic and heroic compared to a feminised portrayal of bin Laden's final moments (widely storied as his) hiding behind his wife's body, and a silencing of Pakistani contributions to the war (Dixit 2014).

In a revealing detestation of the bodies of bin Laden and Zarqawi, the convention to avoid publication of images of dead bodies appears, therefore, revoked. The abjection of the material form of the terrorist is functional and even desirable to the extent that a Hollywood movie (*Zero Dark Thirty*) has been made regarding the death of Bin Laden, so that viewers might consume the operation's heroic narrative and relive the jubilation expressed about his

death in numerous post-mortem street celebrations of his extra-judicial murder (The Telegraph 2011). In contrast to Kristeva's original reflections on the horror induced by dead bodies, there is no empathy here with the detested terrorist. Instead, practices of detestation induce a separation between the subject and object, between the rights-bearing citizen and the terrorist, which reproduce the discursive conditions required to know the latter as the global bandit, barbarian and excessive figure beyond legal regimes of warfare.

## **Conclusion**

In this article, we have argued that contemporary (re)productions of terrorism are saturated by laughter, lamentation, and detestation. These affective drives to knowledge are evident in discursive sites as diverse as jokes, formal memorials, the abuse of detainees and civilians, and elite political language. Importantly, these drives play out and combine in different, 'chaotic' (Nietzsche 1974: 167-169), ways across time and space: hence the changing nature of official commemorative practices in the movement from plaque to monument, and the emergence of new opportunities for humour presented by transformations in security regimes such as the introduction of body scanners at airports.

Laughter, we have shown, serves multiple, ambiguous functions in the affective landscape of terror. At once it helps to: constitute terrorism as a particular type of – depoliticised, and perhaps manageable – threat; normalise counter-terrorism practice and technologies; and facilitate the contestation of this normalisation (for instance in the case of irreverent street art). Lamentation, similarly, proceeds via multiple pathways, including immediate condemnations of specific attacks, the production of iconographies of the slain, official memorialising practices, and promises of future hope and justice in the 'resolve to triumph'. Here, too, space for ambiguity exists. The first three of these practices combine to mark the event-ness of a particular tragedy (although the familiarity of these practices of course highlights equivalences with similar events). The 'resolve to justice' narrative, in contrast,

inserts a linear temporality into a tragedy's aftermath: telling a story of eventual future recovery and return to normality. Importantly, each contemporary manifestation of this drive explored above again works to militate against discussion of terrorism's rationalities or, indeed, politics. Detestation, finally, is particularly acute, we have argued, in the waging of excessive violence upon the bodies – living and dead – of those deemed terrorist by others. Indeed, it is the power of this third drive to knowledge that helps to account for the absence of empathy we might expect to accompany the witnessing of abjection brought on by such horror and humiliation.<sup>vii</sup>

Taking these drives to knowledge seriously is important because it sheds light on the emergence of particular types of (counter-)terrorist knowledge, and on the connections between seemingly discrete social and discursive practices. It also, we suggest, helps to account for the resonance or success of particular productions of terrorism within and beyond, say, popular culture or elite political speech (Solomon 2012). Contemporary 'critical' work on terrorism has been particularly productive in charting the discursive framing of 'terrorists' and 'terrorism', in relation to US foreign policy (e.g. Jackson 2005; Holland 2009; Jarvis 2009); terrorism 'experts' (Stampnitzky 2011); 'ordinary' citizens (Jackson and Hall 2016), and beyond. It has spent less time, however, connecting to contemporary research on affect and emotions in International Relations (e.g. Crawford 2000; Ross 2006; Saurette 2006; Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Solomon 2012), despite the prominence of terrorism as an example in some this work.<sup>viii</sup> Our focus, here, on drives to (terrorism) knowledge is intended therefore to offer opportunity for connecting these research agendas, given the significance of laughter, lamentation and detestation in the structuring of (counter-)terrorism's affective terrain, at least in the Anglo-American world. By beginning our analysis with Foucault and Nietzsche's earlier discussion, moreover, we hope also to highlight the value of canonical texts in political theory to each of these literatures. As argued above, Nietzsche's 'drives' or 'instincts' problematise the affect/emotion distinction which underpins much recent research in this area. They also, however, encourage researchers to delve into the epistemological significance of practices of

humiliation, lamentation and laughter as social, collective phenomena which stabilise the production of discourse. Laughter, lamentation and detestation are more than reactions to an event. Rather, they constitute objects of knowledge by affectively framing them as separate from the knowing subject. As Sara Ahmed (2004) has argued, emotions institute the distinction between inside/outside and psychological/social: our capacities to feel result in the articulation of objects (distinct from the body) which impact *upon us* – constituting the separation.

Although we have employed Foucault and Nietzsche's tripartite distinction between laughter, lamentation and detestation to structure our discussion, this should only be taken as a heuristic: one which is able to spotlight ambiguities within, competition between, and continuities across, specific inventions of terrorism. There is, we suggest, real scope for further investigation of alternative 'drives to knowledge' – such as, for instance, anxiety and fear (Robin 2006) – and their intersection with those discussed above; as well as for greater comparative work on the dynamics of such drives beyond the global North, our primary focus here. Our hope, however, is that the above discussion provides insight into some of the ways in which terrorism knowledge is produced, captured and disseminated via mechanisms of mockery, memory, malevolence and beyond, and on the importance of the underpinning drives to knowledge which render such practices sensible.

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<sup>i</sup> Witness, for example, fears that ISIS fighters would exploit Europe's so-called 'migrant crisis' articulated by Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom Independence Party amongst others (Riley-Smith 2015).

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<sup>ii</sup> On 4 April 2011, the US Attorney General announced that these ‘9/11 conspirators’ would face military trial at Guantanamo Bay, instead of the civilian trial earlier promised, see Holden (2011).

<sup>iii</sup> Sara Ahmed (2004) makes a similar argument using a feminist approach in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*.

<sup>iv</sup> We are grateful to one of the anonymous reviewers for highlighting this point.

<sup>v</sup> Although in an outlying example, a memorial known as the ‘River of Life’ was constructed in Warrington after the 1993 IRA bombing. The authors are grateful to Dr. Patrick Pinkerton for communicating this point.

<sup>vi</sup> Drawing from Freudian insights, psychoanalytic literatures on disgust similarly explore the connection between visceral bodily feelings of disgust and the entry into (or reproduction of) the symbolic order (Greenberg & Mitchell 1983). Our thanks to the editorial board for highlighting this connection.

<sup>vii</sup> At the time of revising this article, news was emerging of a new ‘hate memorial’ marking the spot of Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel’s death: the perpetrator of the 2016 Bastille Day attacks in Nice, France (Morgan *et al* 2016). Although beyond the scope of this article, this seemingly spontaneous development – made up of stones, spit, rubbish and graffiti – points to a potentially interesting development at the intersection of lamentation and detestation in the politics of terror.

<sup>viii</sup> Our thanks to one of the anonymous reviewers for this.