AN ANALYSIS OF THE DISCOURSE EMPLOYED BY THE BRITISH GOVERNMENT TO ‘SELL’ THE WAR IN IRAQ

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Abstract

The analysis which follows is posited upon that the insecurity Britain ‘experienced’ with regard to Iraq was a cultural construction; produced, in the main, by a government discourse which positioned Iraq as a danger to the UK and the ‘West’. This functioned by drawing on existing notions of identity in the target constituency to ensure the justification had a resonance with the lived experience of the populace. In order to explore this, the paper asks two questions: How was military action justified; and what were the effects of these justifications.

Introduction

Scholars in the field of international relations have been much exercised by the invasion of Iraq, with a large variety of literature produced on the topic. The focus of much of this research has turned on why the invasion took place, who were its lead architects and the consequence for Iraq and the world. Surprisingly little has been written on ‘how’ the intervention came about; how it came to be viewed as a viable option. This paper goes some way to addressing this lacuna in the literature.

Recent scholarship has confirmed widespread suspicion that the decision to invade Iraq, taken shortly after the attack in New York, was taken by the Government in Washington alone. With the benefit of information contained within a leaked British minute, we see that the government was by July 2002 ‘working on the assumption that the UK would be involved in military action’, whilst publicly discountenancing any such notion. The following year, British troops were deep inside Iraq. Scholars such as McDonald and Jackson, working outside the mainstream Security Studies nexus, have suggested that the ‘War on Terror’ and

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its assorted adjuncts had to be discursively constructed, and, in turn, ‘sold’ to an ‘unknowing’
national and international constituency.4

A similar approach is adopted here. This is, in part, a response to the situation as it is found. In that, it would be difficult to argue that the existential threat posed by Iraq was an objective fact; after all, before the 11th of September 2001, Iraq was not seen as a major threat to world security- any threat posed by the state was supposedly contained by no fly zones and an intensive sanction regime. Moreover, suppose Iraq had produced weapons of mass destruction, what made them threatening? Why were Iraqi missiles more dangerous than their French or Israeli equivalents? The argument advanced here is that the difference can be explained by reference to the UK governments discursive construction of Iraqi identity and interests.

The analysis which follows is posited upon a similar notion, viz., that the insecurity Britain ‘experienced’ with regard to Iraq was a cultural construction; produced, in the main, through a government discourse which positioned Iraq as a danger to the UK and the ‘West’5, and which drew on existing notions of identity in the target constituency to ensure the message had a resonance. This paper engages with the notion of a constructed discourse of insecurity, and seeks to explore how it acted to justify the invasion of Iraq.

As such, this research project proceeds from two central questions

i) How was intervention in Iraq justified?

ii) What was the political effect of these justifications?

The first question allows us to explore the power of notions of identity and discursive construction. Whilst the latter opens the way for an exploration of how such constructs not only enabled military intervention, but in some sense act to constrain it; thus reminding us that even the most dominant discourses have the potential for reorientation.

Iraq: Constructed Threat


5 Tomlinson, J. Cultural Imperialism (London, Pinter, 1991) p7
Whilst there have been innumerable books and articles devoted to the causes and consequences of the war in Iraq, very little has been written on how the intervention was justified to the public; how, in other words, it was made possible. A notable exception being the study conducted by Doig et al. which focused on the synchronicity of justifications offered by the US, UK and Australia, accounting for this in terms of intelligence sharing amongst the three states. The study, whilst comprehensive in its enunciation of the similarities in justification, is somewhat inchoate in its explanation: it fails to explore how certain narratives were successful, others marginalised, and how the discourse was both enabling and constraining. This paucity of explanatory breadth is perhaps due in part to the empiricist epistemology underpinning the study.

However, ‘the War on Terror’, which as is later discussed, is consanguineous with the Iraqi campaign, has proved a fecund source of discursive study. A number of analysts have focused on the securitisation of immigration; others on the way in which US’ action in the War on Terror were normalised through discursive constructions; whilst others have explored the way in which Tony Blair’s speeches constructed a discursive environment which set the boundaries for the new security terrain in international relations.

Scholars such as Andrew Neal have built on this by adopting a 'Foucault-ian' archaeological approach, exploring how discourses have changed the boundaries of legitimate security action taken by states. The shared premise on which these studies are predicated, and which forms the basis of this paper, is that discourses structure the world as we perceive it and enable certain actions while discountenancing others; that discourses are, in short, ‘performative’. Thrall suggest that the important factor in justifying the war in Iraq to an American population was not the validity of the claims made but the ability to link them to the values of US citizens. This study leads onto a series of questions that are important for this study: By what process then did the hegemonic discourses change the political culture? How did they seek to resonate with the public, such that it became the basis of action and was not ignored? These questions are answered most clearly by constructivist and post-

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7 Doig op. cit.
8 McDonald op. cit.
9 Jackson op. cit.
10 Fairclough, N. ‘Blair’s contribution to elaborating a new doctrine of international community’ Journal of Language and Politics’ 2005: 4(1)
structuralist, who focus on the importance of identity. They hold that actors become threatening when they are discursively constructed as threatening the identity or values of a certain group.  

These studies take, as I do, what Campbell calls ‘representations of danger’ as the source of their analysis. These ‘representations’, or discourses, are analysed to elucidate their effect or ‘how they function’. Conventional approaches to the analysis of foreign policy, and indeed international relations generally, do not address such ‘how’ questions, instead concerning themselves with questions of ‘why’ something occurred. They presuppose the existence of a series of ontological foundations, a particular subjectivity, a background of discursive meaning and practice, which makes possible the practice along with the social actors themselves.

In contrast, this paper seeks to denaturalise these foundations and explore what Doty calls how-possible questions. As such, the aim of this paper is to explore how the discourse employed by the British government created objects, subjects and interpretive discourses in such a way as to attempt to justify intervention by rendering the status quo unconscionable. In order to explore this fully, the theoretic framework offered by Critical Social Constructivism will be employed.

**Critical Constructivism: Framework for Discursive Analysis**

The chosen framework of analysis utilised in this exploration of the British Government’s Iraq discourse is centred on the Critical Social Constructivism. This mode of analysis has at its centre a number of interconnected principles: Firstly, reality, as we comprehend it, is a social construction; secondly, constructions of reality reflect and reify relations of power and, in turn, certain agents (in this case the agents of the state) play a privileged role in the

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16 Ibid.
production of these realities; lastly, this form of analysis seeks to overturn naturalized dominant constructions and in so doing facilitates alternative emancipatory discourses.

**Reality**

The central tenet of constructivism is that the world is in part constituted through the practices of social subjects, and that people act on the basis of the meanings that things have for them. Insecurity is no different; this condition, too, is a cultural productions made possible through certain discourses. Meaning may, therefore, be termed a social phenomenon. That is to say, it inheres in the practice and categories through which people engage with fellow agents and the natural world; these discourses—codes of intelligibility—tell us what the world is and how it works.

The corollary of this conception is a recognition that insecurity and identity, rather than being external and fixed, emerge out of a process of representation through which individuals explain to themselves and others the world in which they live. Shared memories, ideals and identities are the building blocks from which the world is constituted. Such narratives construct objects and subjects within this world and define the relations between them. It is argued that through this process, insecurities are generated when identity and, therefore, interest are threatened. Thus in order to understand how intervention came about, our starting point must be the discursive ‘representations of danger’, which structured reality in such a way as to make intervention thinkable.

As the focus here is on a governmental narrative, statist discourses form the mainstay of this study (although not the entirety of it). For our purposes the central subject position, the UK, is derived from a British statist discourse. Such codes of intelligibility establish the type of subject constructed its identity, and therefore its interests. Following Althusser, this ‘interpellated’ object becomes the central object of discussion and the subject of all

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22 Ibid. pp 11-12
‘important’ insecurities.\(^{23}\) Therefore, not only is this constructed object suffering insecurities, it is also charged with acting to minimize them. Concomitant with the process of constructing state interests, statist discourses also produce state citizens – often as unified consumers of discourses of insecurity. Thus, allowing the mobilization of state subjects in support of a definition of state interest and insecurity\(^{24}\); as, it is argued here, is the case with regards Iraq.

A further notion central to this study and constructivism generally, is that discourses may be contested and as a result must be reiterated. This is resultant of the composition of culture itself, as a myriad of competing discourse; meaning reality is represented in divergent manners. As such meaning can never by fixed permanently; necessarily, it can only be temporary. This leads us to the locus of the forthcoming analysis, viz., insecurities require considerable social labour to ensure they remain a credible representation of the real. This labour takes the form of a constant reproduction of the subject and its insecurities: central to this is the rejection of counter-narratives which seek to rearticulate insecurities in ways that challenge the dominant conceptual framework.\(^{25}\) Moreover, as we will see in the case of those groups who sought to challenge the notion of an Iraqi threat, discourses often contain internal fissures and contradictions which, when exploited, may form a site of contestation within the dominant discourse. This is addressed in the latter part of this study

Although discourses are linguistic, they are also, in some senses, performative; in that they materialise in concrete practices and act to enable certain actions.\(^{26}\) This, as Barnett explains in relation to Rabin’s Oslo accord discourse, occurs through the allocation of social space for action to take place.\(^{27}\) Thus discourses of security act to lay the boundaries for what seems unconscionable. In this sense then, they are a site of power.

**Discourse & Power**


\(^{25}\) Weldes, J. Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999) p16

\(^{26}\) Hall op. cit. p46; & Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. ‘Post-Marxism without Apologies’ New Left Review 1987: 166 p 82-84

\(^{27}\) Barnett, M. ‘Institutions, Roles, and Disorder: The Case of the Arab States System ‘ International Studies Quarterly 1993: 37(3)
Culture, and discourses that constitute it, are the means from which notions of Gramscian commonsense are produced; that is to say, ‘diffuse un-coordinated forms of thought’. These ‘categories of practical thought’, define the possibilities of action but also define the limits of that action. In this sense, discourse both enable and constrain action. But how do discourses coalesce into common sense? This occurs when a particular discourse has successfully defined the relation of meaning to reality as one of representation. Thus it entails ‘the reification of constructed representations of world, thereby obscuring their constructed nature and their ideological effects’. A process which is dependent on action which imputes an empiricist epistemology to what is in fact a construction. However, crucially, in order for a construction to be viewed as credible it must have resonance with existing discursive objects. Jutta Weldes’ framework of analysis engages with such notions. Weldes utilises Althusser’s work regarding ideology to describe how through a process of articulation- the act of representing the lived world- and interpellation- the act of hailing a constituency to a viewpoint- a citizen of a state recognises themselves in the representation of identity being enacted in a particular policy. This notion of hailing forms the mainstay of the analysis to follow.

Discourses of insecurity are, further, powerful because of the agents who articulate them. In a statist analysis, it is an axiom that the collection of institutions which we call the state necessarily has a dominant constructional role. ‘National security’ is viewed as a pre-occupation of the state; indeed, it is often viewed as the only entity with a purview in such matters; therefore, some discourses of insecurity are lent credence by the fact that they are issued from the state apparatus. After all, statist discourses have the advantage of issuing through a constitutionally legitimate voice, which, perhaps more importantly, has the further advantage of being assumed to issue from institutions with access to privileged information, an eminence denied alternate security discourse. The analysis here seeks to explore these discourses by denaturalising their conceptual assumptions. This is important as it allows those counter narratives that may have been excluded as specious- outside the bounds of ‘commonsense’- to be bought to the fore.

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31 Ibid.
33 Weldes Constructing National Interests op. cit.
34 Ibid. p108-109
35 Ibid.
Emancipation & Denaturalisation

Critical constructivist analyses are committed to the exploration of the structure which conditions agents’ sense of self understanding and limits their scope of action. But how to get at such structures? A method to achieve this is found in the denaturalization of those interpretative categories which form the basis of the agents’ point of view. That is to say, the denaturalisation of the social facts and problems which make up common sense; thus, making their constructed nature evident. This is especially important to the study of (in)security, as it allows not only the critical denaturalisation of notions such as the ‘West’ and ‘Western’ values’ but also the ostensibly objective threats against such subjects.

Of course, whilst it is true to say some analytic assumptions are necessary for research to proceed, it is not necessary to make ontological assumptions about the givens of actors and insecurities. Conventional security studies falls knowingly into just such a trap, assuming the existence of collectives and objective threats and seeking to secure the former against the latter. The corollary of this is two fold: firstly, the point of view of the state is then naturalized as the primary point of view and other sites of insecurity are ignored; and secondly, insecurities come to be considered as objective facts.

In line with this critical notion, the analysis that follows seeks to destabilise the taken for granted - thus opening up possibilities for change. In order to achieve this, the latter part of the study utilises the technique of immanent critique to demonstrate the internal inconsistencies within the discourse and how, when seized upon by opponents, these provide opportunity for policy change. It may appear somewhat incongruous to concentrate on the dominant state discourses and then adjoin a section which represents the views of subjugated actors; however by using immanent critique the study achieves two things. It allows the exploration of the way even the most dominant discourses can be overcome and challenged from within the discursive frame ascribed to the issue; and this also allows those subjugated voices, which competed to define national and ‘Western’ values a voice.

36 Doty op. cit p.298
37 Weldes Cultures of Insecurity op. cit. p 20
Having thus outlined the analytic commitments of the theory, one must now look to the analysis itself.

**Structure**

This paper argues that the ‘threat’ posed by Iraq was not an objective fact but a discursive construction, designed in such a way as to resonate with particular identities; thus rendering intervention possible.

This will be demonstrated in the third chapter, with an analysis of the way in which the government discourse sought to hail notions of ‘Western’ identity. This is explored by demonstrating that the discourse construction was such as to ensure it played on already existing notion of ‘Western’ identity; with especial reference to the War on Terror, the bifurcation of civilisation and barbarism and by building on historical notions of appeasement.

The fourth chapter explores the manner in which the justifications were linked to notions of national identity. The emphasis here is on Britain as a state that ‘plays by the rules’, a notion which is juxtaposed with the perfidious and aggressive Iraqis.

The final chapter deals with the non-constructive part of discursive constructions. That is, firstly, the way in which the French counter-narrative was marginalised and opposition was moved to the periphery by deploying a ‘support our troops’ narrative. With the second part of the final section using immanent critique to explore how the discourse not only enabled action but also acted to constrain it, by creating expectation that discourse be met with action.

**Hailing the ‘West’**

One of the most prominent discursive themes elucidated by the British government, focused on the necessity of intervention in terms of protecting a set of ‘Western’ values and ‘Western’ international society. This occurred through the enunciation of that which was ‘threatened’ by
the Iraqi regime: international society and certain values associated with the ‘West’; and the creation of justificatory ‘frames’\textsuperscript{39} that defined Saddam Hussein’s regime as an ‘other’ to the ‘Western’ identity.

This is a not uncontroversial contention for two reasons: firstly, the discourse made little use of terms such as the ‘West’; and secondly, the debate surrounding the intervention saw grave disagreement between Continental Europe and the USA, the states that traditionally fall under the term the ‘West’. However, in contrast to this, it is suggested here that in fact the ‘West’ was a vital signifier for the UK government discourse.

With regard to the first issue, whilst the ‘West’ as a term was rarely used to denote the entity which was threatened by Saddam, the values being undermined had more often than not a ‘Western’ provenance. Whilst the government sought to suggest that all states had an interest in the enforcement of UN Security Council Resolutions and the non-proliferation of Nuclear weapons, the intervention was primarily framed within the context of promoting ‘Western’ values and conceptual objects. This is especially so with regards to: Saddam’s abuse of human rights which were much enumerated in the second dossier\textsuperscript{40}, the notion of which is derivative of ‘Western’ modes of thought; his flagrant breaches of international law; and his complete disavowal of ‘Western’ Liberal Democratic forms of government.\textsuperscript{41} These were often worked together into a larger civilisation / barbarism bifurcation, with the dividing lines drawn on the basis of ‘Western’ notions of civilization.

Whilst the debate between Europe and the US regarding intervention led some analysts to contend that there was a cultural schism separating the Martian Americans and Venusian Europeans\textsuperscript{42}, one may equally contend the opposite to be the case. The controversy over the second UN Security Council resolution, it is argued here, actually reinforced the need for a coherent ‘Western’ approach and actually saw an increasing prominence given to the interpellation of the ‘West’- in part, as a panacea to the Bush administrations continuing resort to the language of unilateralism.

\textsuperscript{39} Barnett op. cit.
\textsuperscript{40} HM Government. FCO. \textit{Saddam Hussein: Human Rights Abuses}. London: Bfs, 2002. HEREAFTER 2nd Dossier
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid. ; & HM Government. FCO. \textit{Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Assessment of the British Government}. London: Stationery office, 2002 HEREAFTER 1\textsuperscript{st} Dossier
\textsuperscript{42} Kagan, R. ‘Power and Weakness; why the United States and Europe see the world differently.’ Policy Review June & July 2002:113
As such, the hailing of the ‘West’ is considered in the forthcoming analysis. The first section explores the attempt to frame the intervention in Iraq as part of the war in terror, through the attempt to directly link al-Qaeda and Iraq and also through an attempt to position them as part of a similar category of ‘new’ threat. Following this, the second section explicates the implicit Civilisation/Barbarism bifurcation ascribed to the situation and the attempt to draw historical parallels in terms of the characteristics of past dictators and the failed policy of appeasement.

**War on Terror Discourse**

In the wake of the Kosovo intervention in 1999, Tony Blair gave his eponymous Chicago speech in which he tentatively outlined his view of international relations: calling for the ‘qualification’ of the ‘non-intervention principle’ and the recognition of the universalisation of international threats wrought by globalisation.\(^{43}\) At the turn of the Millennium, the notion of pre-emptive intervention to safeguard ones own state and the rights of other peoples was in its infancy; the events of 11\(^{th}\) of September saw it come of age. According to Kampfner, after the attack in Manhattan there was a feeling across the British Government that ‘nothing would be the same again’.\(^{44}\)

Whilst the events drew near universal condemnation, there was a degree of confusion as to how to linguistically define the attacks; there was not immediately a discursive frame appropriate for the task.\(^{45}\)

However, by the following month the British government had constructed a narrative which firmly situated the attacks within his earlier post-Kosovo narrative:

‘[September 11] marked a turning point in history, where we confront the dangers of the future and assess the choices facing mankind... He [Bin Laden] will not desist from

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\(^{44}\) Kampfner op. cit. p 111

further acts of terror. They [the Taliban] will not stop helping him. Whatever the dangers of action we take, the dangers of inaction are far, far greater.46

The event is clearly portrayed as exceptional and the language deployed is apocalyptic and anticipates action to remedy the situation. The continued threat posed by al-Qaeda is articulated into a chain of signifiers including the Taliban and those who ‘finance terror, launder their money, those that cover their tracks’. This over-arching threat is then presented as a critical existential danger to ‘humankind’ itself. This is the utilisation of fear to legitimise action against a threat that surrounds, and could be ‘anywhere’; the suggestion that those who ‘assist’ terrorists are equally a part of the threat is purposefully broad and allows a widening of the scope of necessary beyond al-Qaeda.

The contention that there is no point of negotiation with the ‘them’ of the bifurcation, coupled with the notion of a new post-September 11th world are distinct features which came to frame the subsequent debate over Iraq.47

War on Terror: Iraq

In the lead up to the war in Iraq, the Bush administration repeatedly drew analogies between Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda. Saddam and the Islamic terrorists were repeatedly articulated together, to such a degree that at the time of the invasion 70% of Americans believed there to be a direct link between the Iraqi dictator and the New York attack.48 Whilst the British government forswore such directness, they nonetheless subtly articulated the threat posed by al-Qaeda and that of Saddam’s regime.

A year after the New York attacks, Blair made a speech outlining the government’s appreciation of the new international security terrain:

‘...suppose I had come last year on the same day as this year - September 10. Suppose I had said to you: there is a terrorist network called al-Qaeda. It operates out of

47 Ibid.
Afghanistan... It has been condemned by the UN in the strongest terms. Unless it is stopped, the threat will grow. I want to take action to prevent that. Your response and probably that of most people would have been very similar to the response of some of you yesterday on Iraq'.

This is a subtle construction to employ. The War on Terror and the Afghan campaign, which largely constituted it, was by this time an accepted part of the political landscape of Britain; the subject position was already existent and reasonable secure; it drew comparatively little controversy, and was seen as a largely just and proportionate action aimed at degrading the threat posed by al-Qaeda.

This uncontroversial mission to combat terrorism is thus implicitly extended to Iraq; through the attempt to articulate the terrorist threat and Saddam’s regime together: thus positioning the 11th September attacks as an implicit justification for an intervention in Iraq.

Thus the intention, clear in the discursive similarities, is to utilise the subject position, The International Community Acting Against Terrorists, opened after the War on Terror began, and refocus it to the Persian Gulf by articulating Iraq and al-Qaeda together. The grave tone and the use of the phrase ‘unless it is stopped, will grow’ emphasises the urgency of action and positions inaction as unconscionable and illegitimate. This clearly mirrors the enunciations regarding the unceasing nature of the threat from al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

While the link between the two was, in fact, at best tangential, the articulation had the clear potential to suggest otherwise: firstly, acting to distort the relationship between Iraq and al-Qaeda, leading some to accept a direct connection between the militant group and the Ba’athist regime; and secondly, even if no one did accept that Saddam had a hand in New York Attacks, the construction acted to position Iraq as a state that ‘would’ assist terrorist if they were able to do so or simply impute an identity to it that is analogous in type to al-Qaeda- one is constructed through a juxtaposition with ‘Western’ identity.

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49 Blair, A. Labour Conference Speech 02/10/01 op. cit.
50 Kellner, D. ‘9/11, Spectacles of terror and media manipulation’ Critical Discourse Studies 2004: 1(1)
This latter conception, based on a similar categorisation of identity, was reinforced in the Prime Minister’s speech to the Commons and his pre-war address to the nation:

‘[the] world faces a new threat: of disorder and chaos born either of brutal states like Iraq, armed with weapons of mass destruction; or of extreme terrorist groups. Both hate our way of life...’  

The two phenomena are articulated together in terms of their desire to harm the ‘West’, and therefore, from within the discourse there is an internal logic which suggests they share the same interests- as interests form the basis of identity- and so inaction leaves one open to the same danger as would inaction against Islamic Terrorists. This is the real and less contestable character of the War on Terror discourse: not a direct linkage between Iraq and al-Qaeda but an indirect similar categorisation. The ‘threat’ posed by Iraq may be in fact qualitatively different in terms of aim, method and ideology from that posed by al-Qaeda but the discourse acts to articulate the two together. They are formed together in an over-arching threatening identity, the ‘them’ posing a credible danger to ‘us’.

This discursive construction was not the sole means of hailing the ‘West’, alongside the War on Terror narrative there operated a constructed bifurcation between ‘Western’ Civilisation and Barbarism.

**Civilisation/Barbarism and Democracy/ Dictatorship**

The process of hailing the ‘West’ is focused on modes of address that constitute who ‘we’ and ‘they’ are, and, especially who ‘you’ are, through the inscription implicit in the communication. As conceived here, this is a process of interaction in which ‘subject positions’ are created and to which the target is ‘hailed’.

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‘Western’ states, with Britain amongst them, were constructed as democracies, politically liberal, moderate and experienced in peaceful international competition. Put simply they were paradigms of virtuous governance. However, for this identity to be accepted, a degree of naturalisation was necessary. By what method did this take place? And how did this construction change conscionable action with regard to Iraq?

The primary means to achieve this naturalisation was the juxtaposition of the ‘West’ with the Iraqi dictatorship. Thus allowing the essential character of the ‘West’ to emerge in opposition to the Iraqi characteristics. The clearest vehicle for this was the second dossier, which documented the Iraqi regime’s scorn civil liberties and their embrace of torture, the subordination of the individual to the state and curtailment of free speech.52 Set against this discursive background, the Prime Minister then delineates the government’s view of the ‘West’:

‘We take our freedom for granted. But imagine not to be able to speak or discuss or debate or even question the society you live in. To see friends and family taken away and never daring to complain. To suffer the humility of failing courage in face of pitiless terror... Leave Saddam in place and that is how they will continue to live... they detest the freedom, democracy and tolerance that are the hallmarks of our way of life’.53

The opposition between ‘we’, ‘Western’ Democracies, and ‘them’, ‘totalitarian, illiberal regimes’ was a feature of the ‘Western’ discourse which was hegemonic throughout the Cold war. This is continued here, not only making a paradigm of the ‘Western’ Liberal Democratic form of government but also, as a corollary of idealising it, constructing the conduct of such states as superior and beyond reproach. The underlying message is that Iraq is an illiberal and aggressive nation in the mould of the former USSR, which scorns the legal framework of the civilised world. In contrast to the ‘West’, who seeks to act through international institutions and abide by the law, Iraq is dangerous and unpredictable; thus, one may need to take action to ‘remedy the problem’- this is the discourses power. Alongside the more obvious effect of framing ‘Western’ action as benign it also has a further effect. In creating a universally benign image for ‘Western’ States, it is efficacious in enveloping those members of the

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coalition who are ambivalent to human rights and democracy within the overarching identity of a benign ‘West’.

This construction of a ‘Western’ identity presaged the dismissal of notions of ‘imperial conquest’ as misunderstanding of the ‘true nature’ of the action; intervention was a burden, rather than a capricious act of domination. It was a reluctant responsibility ‘which we don’t shirk’, to use Blair’s words. This construction was reiterated through the suggestion of historical parallels which had connotations of clear cut evil being fought by the clearly just. Due to the scepticism of public opinion, it was necessary to reinforce the identity construction through less ambiguous constructions. This sought both explicitly and implicitly to invoke the spectre of the Second World War, specifically relying on two narratives: domination and appeasement.

**Domination and Appeasement**

The domination narrative imputes certain aggressive characteristic to the identity of Saddam’s Iraq and provides the contextual background necessary for the appeasement narrative to function. The focus of the former is the threat to ‘Western’ Civilisation posed by the continued existence of the Iraqi dictatorship. This notion is predicated on the ‘immutable characteristics of the dictator’ already extant in the security imaginary of the ‘West’, resultant of both the Second World War and Cold War. The vision of the danger posed by Saddam’s regime is apocalyptic:

‘He [Saddam] has twice before started wars of aggression. Over one million people died in them. When the weapons inspectors were evicted from Iraq in 1998 there were still enough chemical and biological weapons remaining to devastate the entire Gulf region’.

There is an attempt to suggest that although the UK is not directly threatened, there may be a threat to the stability of the whole world - to civilisation as we know it. An effective link is

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formed between collective ‘Western’ identity and the survival of world order. Europe and America may be unscathed but a nuclear or biological attack on Israel would lead to destruction on a scale that is unprecedented and would mean an irreparable change to the ‘Western’ way of life. This discursive construction necessarily implores some sort of action to address the threat. The choice is either diplomacy or intervention. The appeasement discourse seeks to foreclose the diplomatic route by pointing to the failure of European policy to Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

A comparison with Munich and the failed policy of appeasement was repeatedly invoked both implicitly, by the first dossier which suggests South East Europe could be threatened within 45 minutes and therefore by not acting against Saddam one is appeasing him; and explicitly by the Prime Minister on innumerable occasions:

‘..we have been victims of our own desire to placate the implacable....to hope that their was some genuine good in a regime whose mind is in fact evil...The only relevant analogy is with history, we know what happened. We can look back and say: there’s the time; that was the moment; for example, when Czechoslovakia was swallowed up by the Nazis- that’s when we should have acted’.57

This construction has specific consequences. In light of the domination narrative, actions to develop Iraqi missiles or military forces- even if short range and therefore not powerful enough to reach their main enemies in the ‘West’- are viewed, as per the first dossier, as acts of aggression, rather than as defensive forces.58 If the characterisation of the Iraqi arms programme as aggressive is taken up, the ‘lessons of appeasement’ may then be invoked. Essentially the message portended is: one must be steadfast in the face of acts of aggression now, lest the threat grows until ‘British Sovereign Base’s’ and South ‘West’ Europe are threatened with annihilation by nuclear weapons.59

The evocation of this, ‘lesson from history’ has a further effect beyond persuasion. It acted to delegitimise further diplomatic efforts, rendering them as a compromise with evil similar to that of the 1930s. This is important, as by this point the UN route to intervention had

57 Blair 18/03/03 op. cit
58 1st and 2nd Dossiers op. cit.
59 1st Dossier op. cit. p6
effectively been foreclosed, and this gave implicit support to rejection of counter-narratives calling for further diplomatic efforts and, indeed, the rejection of those calling for it as wishing to make a compromise with evil. The discourse doesn’t allow this to be countenanced and acts to construct a ‘Western’ identity which must be prepared to intervene anywhere in the world to stem aggression, irrespective of whether there is a tangible military danger to one’s own state. The pre-existing discursive articulation of aggression and dictatorships, as exemplified by the paradigmatic dictator, Hitler, was potentially a persuasive narrative, as within it there is an implicit hailing of certain emotionally loaded identities connected with the 2nd World War. However, although the notion of the foolishness of appeasement has attained an ‘epistemic realism’, the articulation of Saddam and Hitler was never anywhere approaching ‘fixed’; not in the sense that Saddam’s regime was not odious— for that identity was reasonably stable— but because there was a general doubt about Saddam’s capacity to conduct an aggressive war.

However, the overall construction demonstrates the discourse’s ability to inscribe a certain identity to Iraq. Without the concerted effort of the UK discourse, the similar categorisation of al-Qaeda and Iraq is unlikely to have occurred, as one is a trans-national Islamic terrorist group and the other an apostate Arab state. By building on the emotional resonance inherent in any hailing related to 11th September and memories of Hitler and appeasement, the justification plays to exiting identities— thus making it all the more powerful. This type of discourse constructs insecurity in such a poignant way as to render remedial action a part of the internal logic of the discourse. This is developed when the nation state is hailed.

**Hailing the Nation**

Hailing the nation is a very different proposition than hailing the ‘West’. A long term territorial entity such as the UK has a number of sediment identities which are derivative of the long history of its component parts. It is materially different than the amorphous grouping of states that fall under the heading of the ‘West’; it has defined borders and a population contained within it who share a Social Imaginary. This is the pool of extant cultural raw materials from which national identities and its corollary, national interests are formed60; as

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60 Castoriadis op. cit. p128
Wendt suggests, identity is key to interest. This imaginary provides a shared language, with which politicians may represent a state’s identity in such a way that it resonates with the lived experiences of the concrete individuals hailed. It is suggested here, that this understanding of the identity of the state serves to limit the conditions of possibility for action. Therefore when representing the threat posed by Iraq, the government had to link the issue to the ‘sedimentary’ forms of identity of the anthropomorphised state; if this was completed inadequately, then the articulation would be rejected by the hailed population as not congruent with lived experience.

In order to garner support from the populace, the government set about a dual discursive process of interpellation and articulation with the aim of demonstrating that the UK was rendered insecure by the Iraqi regime. The structure of this chapter follows the discursive construction. It begins with an exploration of the manner in which after identifying Iraq’s ‘Weapons of Mass Destruction’ programme, the British government attempted to ascribe to it a threatening identity; rather, than the representation it ascribes to its own nuclear weapons or Israel’s supposed nuclear programme. Secondly, it delineates the subject position that the government tried to open up—which took the form of appropriations of existing already formed interpellations— which sought to make their conception of the threat posed by Iraq conscionable; and therefore, meant intervention ‘came to be regarded as the only viable course of action’.

Us and Them: Nuclear Deterrent and WMD

Although no nuclear or biological weapons were found in Iraq after the invasion, the threat posed by Iraq formed a central tenet of the justification offered by the British authorities for intervention. The first dossier produced by the government focused on Iraq’s supposed weapons of mass destruction programme. This fifty five page document begins with a foreword by the Prime Minister, in which he explains that the information within this is the product of the latest intelligence gathered by, amongst others, GCHQ and the Secret

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61 Wendt op. cit. p398
62 Weldes .Constructing National Interests op. cit. p102
63 Doty, R. Imperial Encounters (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p 30
Intelligence Service and collated by the Joint Intelligence Committee; it was ‘unprecedented for the government to publish this kind of document’. 64

This has an important discursive consequence. The security services, especially GCHQ, have a largely respected identity within the social imaginary of the UK; conceptualising them as an impartial instrument of the state. Thus by articulating the dossier to the nodal point of the security service, the information within it is given a degree of credence beyond which the government itself could muster. The impression given is that the intelligence is driving the policy, rather than vice-versa. This reference to ‘intelligence sources’ and ‘the belief of the intelligence service’ is a constant refrain at the heart of the discourse.

Utilising this base of credibility, the government exhaustively detailed Iraq’s historical and contemporary weapons programme. Concluding that Iraq is continuing to attempt to produce, or is in possession of a number of weapons of mass destruction, or WMDs for short. 65 However, the mere presence of missiles in Iraq does not, in itself, determine the meaning of such an installation. Undoubtedly, as the dossier points out, ‘the detonation of a 20-kiloton nuclear warhead over a city might flatten an area of approximately 3 square miles’ 66; this is a matter of physics. But this general recognition of the destructive power of nuclear weapons is not the basis of the Government’s case. It was necessary, for justificatory purposes, that a threatening meaning be articulated to the weapons that went beyond their destructive capabilities. After all, Britain has a nuclear arsenal, as, it is believed, do the Israelis, yet these stockpiles are not seen as an intolerable threat to international security. 67 Similarly a wide range of meanings could have been articulated to the Iraqi missiles them, not least that they were defensive. That is not to suggest that the supposed missiles were not a threat, merely that they were ascribed a contingent meaning that need not have been so.

However, this was discounted by the discourse which sought to achieve two interconnected things: differentiate Iraqi weapons of mass destruction from British or allied weapons of mass destruction; and in so doing articulating an aggressive, threatening meaning to them.

64 1st dossier op. cit. p6
65 2nd dossier op. cit. p 20
66 1st dossier op. cit. p13
67 George, M. ‘Nuclear Weapons and the Gulf’ Foreign Affairs 1991: 70(4) p1
In order to differentiate, it was necessary for the policy makers to frame the Iraqi missiles in a particular way. Hence the prevalent use of the abbreviation WMD. As Richardson points out, this phrase was little used before 2001 and seems to be directly related to American and British justification narratives.68 It differentiates ‘us’ from ‘them’, they have WMD, we have a ‘strategic nuclear deterrent’69; thus the term allows ‘us’ to be conceptualised and ‘them’ framed. This, then, allows a free hand in inscribing a meaning on the missiles which doesn’t then have a connotative consequence for the domestic ‘nuclear deterrent’.

After the process of differentiation, the government discourse set about the construction of a threatening identity to the WMD. This took the form of suggesting that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction were apt to be used in aggressive way against British bases and allies, and by emphasizing that Iraq’s possession of them was contrary to international law.

In order to firmly articulate Iraq’s aggressive plans for the missiles, the government narrative explicitly suggested that Iraq’s current military planning specifically envisages the use of chemical and biological weapons’.70 A mantra repeated by the Prime minister at the TUC, where he spoke of not ‘allowing him to use the weapons he has’.71 This is then re-affirmed by a list of previous occasions on which Iraq has used such weapons72 and the re-assertion that they pose a danger to ‘NATO members and UK sovereign bases’.73 However, more important than this construction was the forceful enunciation of Iraq’s disregard for norms of international law. Unlike the US discourse, which paid little heed to this, the British government deliberately orientated the British case for intervention around Saddam’s disregard for international norms, so as to ensure it played to already exiting British subject positions.

**International Law**

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68 Richardson, J. Analysing Newspapers (London: Macmillan, 2007) p 188
70 1st Dossier op. cit. p17
71 Blair op. cit. 10/09/02
73 1st Dossier op. cit. p6
This meant the repeated assertion that Iraq was, ‘flouting the will of the UN’74 and that ‘we have to remain strong and remain true to the demand that the United Nations has made that he disarms himself of these weapons.’75 This positioned the missiles as more than a threat to the territory of the UK- which was difficult to discursively maintain, in light of revelations regarding the origins of the threat claimed in the dossier- and instead positioned Iraq’s non-compliance with Security Council Resolutions as a threat to the actual system of international law itself. Meaning that it was therefore a double threat: to both the territorial integrity of Iraq neighbours and the system of legal norms which govern inter-state relations. Having thus established the ‘meaning’ of Iraq’s possession of Weapons of Mass destruction, the government then attempted to suggest this was threatening to British interest, which were in turn constructed from notions of British identity; with the intention of ensuring the intervention narrative resonated with the maximum number of people.

In order to create this specific subject position, the government sought to draw on existing identity narratives extant in the social imaginary- in order that its construction should ‘make sense’ to the populace. These were orientated in such a way as to be rendered insecure by the already constructed threat.

Some, such as Parmar, have argued that this identity and attendant interest were largely drawn from specific historical notions based on the British empire.76 However, one may argue that rather than empire being key to the global interventionist position, it was actually Britain position as former super-power that was emphasised; presumably as a significant proportion of the population are ambivalent about empire, but not about the disconnected notion of Britain as a world leader. The government sought to construct a British identity which was primarily concerned with ‘playing fair’ and standing up for the principles of the UN and International law; and whose identity was, therefore, threatened by Iraq’s flouting of the international rules.

By way of the process of articulating threatening notions to Iraq’s supposed WMD and creating a specific notion of British identity, the national interest attendant has already been

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74 Blair op. cit. 10/09/02
76 Parmar, I. ‘I’m proud of the British Empire: why Tony Blair backs George W. Bush’ Political Quarterly 2005:76 (2)
created. As Wendt asserts, ‘identities are the basis of interest’. \( ^{77} \) This is because British interests are necessarily the corollary of the representation of identity and its relation to Iraq (the relation being one of threat). They appear to be a matter of logic: Britain is a state which possesses nuclear weapons and is a long time proponent of international law, and therefore, it is in its interest to take action to remove the Iraqi weapons, which are aggressive and which threaten the system of international law. As Castoriadis asserts:

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\text{‘Problems can be constituted as these specific problems, presenting themselves to...a particular society as tasks to be completed, only in relation to an imaginary central to the given society...What for each society poses a problem in general...is inseparable from its way of being in general’}.^{78}
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Thus, the justificatory discourse had constructed a chain of signifiers between Iraqi WMD, aggression and a danger to international law, and a British identity which would necessarily have an interest in intervening in the situation.

However, although subject positions may be created, if it proves implausible and fails to makes sense of a concrete individual’s lived experience, then the discourse would not succeed in orientating the public to a particular position; in this case to a stance where intervention seems the natural course of action.

This said, if one was prepared to accept the existence of Iraqi nuclear and chemical weapons— for that was the major stumbling block— then the discourse had a relatively strong resonance. In that, the subject position was deliberately designed to resonate with the public by way of: firstly, portraying Britain as a benevolent and fair country— mirroring how people would like to see their state, as an anthropomorphised version of themselves; and secondly, because it drew on notions of historical identity. The foremost identity narrative harks back to the time when Britain was a world power and early proponent of international law. This was rendered explicit by the Prime minister in his eve of war address, in which he adopted a somewhat Churchillian tone:

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\(^{77}\) Wendt op. cit. p398  
\(^{78}\) Castoriadis op. cit. p 133
‘Britain has never been a nation to hide at the back but even if we were it wouldn't avail us... As so often before on the courage and determination of British men and women serving our country the fate of many nations rest’.  

By implicitly making reference- and using language evocative of- already existing objects and identities within the social imaginary, the concept is given a resonance which it might otherwise lack. In a manner similar to Hall’s assertion that the Thatcherite discourse was successful in constructing new subject positions because it appropriated already existing interpellations, one could argue that the strength of the government's discourse was that it did play on already existing identity narratives; the central issue as to whether one was interpellated by the discourse pivoted on whether Iraq did indeed possess such weapons—rather than if they posed a tangible threat to UK interests.

Thus it becomes axiomatic that intervention in Iraq was framed as a manifestation of historical identity narratives, which gave the discourse an enhanced salience for its claim that Iraq was both an existential threat and a threat to a core identity of the UK. This then, demonstrates both the power and inherent closeness of identity, threat and action and the manner in which politicians utilise the state power matrix to emphasise particular identity narratives and link them to policy decisions.

**Non-constructive Part of the Discourse: Rejection of Counter Narratives**

Identities and interests are by their very nature contingent; even the most dominant of articulations may be challenged and, in turn, broken. Thus, creating and reproducing identities requires considerable discursive labour, especially in the field of national identity. As the political process entails a variety of competing voices seeking to hail a constituency, it is necessary to defend an articulation of identity from alternative narratives which seek to destabilise it. This is especially the case with political action which is the corollary of certain articulations of identity.

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80 Hall 1988 op. cit. p49
81 Campbell op. cit. p 8
82 Hall 1986 op. cit. p 53
As one would expect, a divisive and vociferous debate like that regarding Iraq, saw political leaders defend their conception of the situation and forcefully reject their opponent’s alternative narrative.

This was clearest on two occasions: primarily, when the government sort to marginalise the French government and its Iraq discourse; and to a lesser extent, on the eve of war, when the Prime minister implicitly called for a patriotic hiatus in debate as the troops were poised on the Iraqi border.

**Marginalising the French Narrative**

Unlike in the US where prominent conservatives often publically questioned the patriotism of those opposed to the war in Iraq, the British government made relatively few direct attacks on domestic opponents; perhaps sensing it would not aid their case. However, after the failure to attain a second Security Council Resolution to authorise the use of force in Iraq the government did feel able to vociferously attack the French and their stance over Iraq; which effectively meant they could virulently attack the case of their domestic critics- who shared the French position- without drawing the opprobrium which surely would have attended such a direct attack.

As Kampfner points out, in the weeks before the invasion the Cabinet and leading officials lead an orchestrated campaign against the French President and foreign minister, suggesting they were the sole reason that the proposed UN resolution had failed.83 The Prime minister, in the House of Commons’ debate on war, outlined why they failed to reach a consensus on action:

‘The basic construct [the resolution] was gathering support. Then, on Monday night, France said it would veto a second resolution whatever the circumstances’.84

This point was pressed home by Gordon Brown, who claimed the French were a ‘barrier to agreement and we have to see whether we can overcome that’, and Alistair Campbell, who accused them of ‘poisoning the diplomatic bloodstream’.85

83 Kampfner op. cit. p288
84 Blair 18/03/03 op. cit.
85 Australian Broadcasting Corporation 20/3/03 [Accessed on 1st February2009] Available at <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/s806736.htm>
These attacks had several consequences, by rejecting the French narrative, which questioned the articulation of Iraq and aggressive WMD, the government implied that French action was not centred on conviction but a capricious desire to stymie British and American action; thus articulating a hostile and illogical identity around the opposition nodal point. This not only gave the false impression that France was the only state on the Security Council opposed to action but more importantly, that but for French intransigence the resolution would have been passed and thus the action would have had an unequivocal base in law. By adducing this representation of the situation, the intervention was lent a patina of legality.

Domestic opposition was often labelled unpatriotic, as ‘siding with the French’, who in turn ‘sided’ with the Iraqis. Thus a connotative chain was constructed from domestic opposition all the way to Saddam Hussein. The way in which this acts to silence critics is explicated by Mattern: ‘Actors wield the power politics of identity to trap their victims with a non-choice between relinquishing their dissent and complying with the ‘we’ or erasing... some part of their own identity’; in this instance, the identity which would be erased would be that of a citizen with the best interest of the nation at heart. The discourses’ terms render this choice unavoidable.

Drawing on a long term notions of national rivalry, this narrative was seized on by some sections of the media, who portrayed Chirac as ‘endangering world security’ and who, subsequently, sought to whip up a patriotic frenzy against the French. A frenzy that could then be transmuted to a certain indirect support for action. It is interesting to note that a discourse of French intransigence only appeared after the final attempt to gain a resolution had failed.

Allied to this process, and somewhat less prominently, there occurred a last minute plea to support the policy by way of the invocation of a ‘support the troops’ narrative.

**Patriotism and ‘Support for our Boys’**

In the USA, the Bush administration’s discourse proved very successful in forestalling divisive debate on Iraq by advancing a patriotic narrative which had the effect of compelling opposition politicians to accede to it, lest they be labelled unpatriotic. Whilst in America

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this was an overt feature of the discourse from the very beginning, in the UK it was much less overt and was only invoked in the last few days before war- but was no less a feature.

The Prime minister alluded to such notions in both his speech opening the debate on war, and also in his pre-war address to the nation. He firstly spoke of the loss of face if, with troops encircling Saddam, we were to forswear action; and subsequently, of the deleterious effect on ‘our armed forces - brave men and women of whom we can feel proud, whose morale is high and whose purpose is clear.’ 89 This is then underscored with further rhetoric: ‘As so often before on the courage and determination of British men and women serving our country the fate of many nations rest’.

This clearly is not an explicit attack on opponents; however, by repeatedly attempting to articulate the government’s policy decision to ‘our armed forces’, those same opponents are implicitly marginalised and, to an extent, silenced. In that, the articulation renders an attack on the policy an attack on the troops, who are beyond reproach. This did, at the time of the invasion, provide an amount of vicarious cover for the discourse; although, one should note, this was short lived.

A recognition of both these attempts to frame opponents as either unpatriotic and disconnected from ‘sedimented’ national identity, or intransigent and uncaring of the global security situation, is crucial in understanding the relative successes and failures of the discourse (and it popular resonance). The attempt to silence counter narratives is a vital part of any holistic discursive construction, as culture, from which threat is constituted, is made up of innumerable competing discourses which vie to explain reality. 90 Thus to become common sense, it is necessary to push other narratives to the periphery.

**Immanent Critique**

Having elucidated the nature of the discourse propagated by the Government, it is now necessary to look to the second part of the critical project: an assessment of the relative successes, or otherwise, of the justificatory constructions. How did they serve to limit, as well

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89 Blair 18.03.03 op. cit.
as enable, action by creating expectations that words are actualised? This assessment is complex, as the metric of success is difficult to define. However, an attempt must be made as it is vital for the paper's argument, in that it is predicated on the notion that discourses are performative - that they enable action.

In March 2003, just prior to the beginning of the invasion, polls suggested a majority of the US’ population favoured the invasion. Krebs and Lobasz, suggests that the ‘War on Terror’ discourse resonated strongly with the population, because of the confluence of the lived experience of 9/11 and the patriotic consensus prevalent in Washington: thus rendering counter narratives less resonant and giving the government’s narrative a near unchallenged dominance. However, in the UK, widespread division and discourse was attendant on the plans for intervention.

An analysis of British opinion polls, show a near even split between those in favour of intervention and those against. Opinion fluctuated around the 40-45% mark, dependent on the time of the poll and the organisation polling (with the Guardian poll showing the public as being most critical of the invasion). Which begs the question: are discourses, really, important when it comes to justifying and enabling action? When assessing such notions, one could adumbrate facile interpretations on both sides: around half the populace supported the war and so it was successful; and the obverse, only half the population supported the invasion - there was no majority in favour - therefore it was unsuccessful. Neither of these propositions is wholly satisfactory, they fail to explore how narratives offered in support of justification actually acted to create axes of dispute, which destabilised government discourse and could be a point of change. Thus we must look to a different mode of assessment.

A worthwhile method to gauge the ‘strength’ of the discourse is Immanent Critique, a technique advocated by Critical Terrorism Scholars (especially the Welsh School). This

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92 Krebs & Lobasz. op. cit. p417
Marxist Hegelian method of analysis\textsuperscript{95}, which is posited on a non-positivist epistemology, has much to offer in terms of bringing to the fore ‘subjugated voices’ which sought to destabilise the government discourse.\textsuperscript{96}

Immanent critique’s power lies in its ability to explore constructed social reality, from its own standpoint. Schroyer describes the process as a means of ‘restoring actuality to false appearance’ by describing ‘what a construction holds itself to be, and then confronting it with what it is in fact ’.\textsuperscript{97} When applied in this instance, it connects with the discourse, adopting its method of analysis, terminology and empirical categories, and locates disjunction within it; thus highlighting space for radical change within the narrative itself.\textsuperscript{98}

The corollary of this is two fold: firstly, it highlights the internal inconsistencies within the justificatory discourse; and, in turn, enables the praxeological end of locating possibilities for radical change within the existing order.\textsuperscript{99} This allows the explication of the inherently constraining- as well as enabling- power of the discursive construction.

The narrative employed by the government led to the contestation of certain notions within the discourse, which have been exploited by opponents of the invasion. The key areas of contestation within the government discourse focused on the following constructions: the notion that Britain and International Society would be less ‘insecure’ after the removal of the Ba’athist regime; that an invasion would bring the Iraqis relief from brutalisation and a newfound enjoyment of freedom and democracy; the notion that, as the troops were poised on Iraq’s doorstep, they should be supported in final act; and central to Blair’s discourse, that Britain was legally permitted and indeed obligated to take action against Iraq.

Concomitant with the former critique, immanent possibilities for reorientation were evinced in the governments narrative which held that the invasion would render the UK and International society more ‘secure’. This was a particular site of contestation, so prevalent as to destabilise the discourse; not least because this critique was offered by many, including

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{95} Antonio, R. ‘Immanent Critique as the core of Critical theory’ British Journal of Sociology 1981:32(3) pp332
\item\textsuperscript{96} Milliken, J. ‘The study of Discourse in International Relations: a Critique of Research’ European Journal of international relations 1999:5(2) p 240-242
\item\textsuperscript{97} Schroyer, T. The Critique of Domination (New York: G Brazillier, 1975) pp 30-31
\item\textsuperscript{98} McDonald, M. ‘Emancipation and Critical Terrorism Studies’ European Political Science 2007:6(3) pp 253
\item\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
former law officers and security experts. This axis of contestation was much seized upon by opponents.

This is vital, in that if the war cannot be said to render the ‘West’ more secure- against weapons of mass destruction or terroristic attacks- or at least no less secure, then the discourse is fundamentally weakened. Notionally, the war as security enhancing cannot coexist with a counter delineation which suggests the opposite.

Moreover, the rhetorical commitment to stop the ‘brutalisation’ of the Iraqis, to put an end to the: ‘barbaric prisons for political opponents…and the terrible violence’ was a refrain which was first articulated before the war – and oft repeated after no weapons of mass destruction were found. As was the notion that spreading democracy and liberty was an axiomatic improvement from the repression of Saddam. The underlying notion here is that the lot of the Iraqi would be improved if action were taken to remove Saddam Hussein; that the aim was, in part, emancipatory. The critical riposte to such prescriptions has been multi-pronged. The first of which is, unsurprisingly, an emphasis on the detrimental effect the war is likely to have on the Iraqis whom we are ostensibly acting to protect.

Alongside this, opponents have pointed to the contradiction in the notion of going to war to uphold ‘Western’ societal values when a large proportion of the states supporting action a somewhat adumbrative commitment to the emancipatory principles of Freedom and democracy. The juxtaposition of the presumed death toll with the stated aim of freeing Iraqis from brutalisation, along with the less than noble human rights records of some members of the coalition, demonstrates a contradiction in the narrative and creates space for the latent potential for policy reorientation. Rejecting the government narrative and instead suggesting the driving force was oil, many opponents sought to suggest a narrative that actually focused on the good of the Iraqi people- which overall, according to their discourse, was best guaranteed by lifting sanctions rather than a large scale invasion.

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100 McDonald op. cit. p 256
101 Blair 18/03/03 op. cit
As has been mentioned, in the weeks immediately prior to the invasion, the Prime minister deployed a ‘support the troops’ narrative, thus, implicitly suggesting that to criticise the decision to go to war at such time would be akin to criticising the troops. This was a somewhat controversial pronouncement on the part of the Prime Minister, and was unsurprisingly subject to considerable criticism. Blair’s speech to the House of Commons, implicitly suggesting that criticism of action should stop as the troops were poised and ‘morale was high’ was subject to much debate; with many questioning the notion that troops relished the opportunity to take part in a war which was of dubious legality. Trans-national opposition groups countered this powerful argument by taking the underlying message and obverting it. This message accepted the central premise of supporting the troops, but attempted to break the articulation between the troops and the government policy; an articulation which had previously given the government a degree of discursive cover.\(^{106}\) Thus to support them was now to seek to prevent the war.

The most powerful critique of the British government discourse was centred, as one would expect, on the ostensibly central justification for intervention. The legalistic arguments for the war, which centred on the need to act in order to protect international law in the face of Saddam’s apparent infraction of several Security Council resolutions\(^ {107}\), left the discourse open to destabilisation when a second resolution failed to materialise. This justification became the primary route through which to focus dissatisfaction; the illegality of the war – as opposed to immorality or any other category – became the *cri da coeur* of the anti-war movement. The representation of intervention as an act to preserve the legal order, invoked by the government to justify, was destabilised, as it no longer accorded with individuals’ self-understanding of the situation.\(^ {108}\) Thus, the contingent articulation between Britain as an actor who was seeking to protect the legal system was, for many, broken; in its stead, the nodal point Britain was articulated with illegality.\(^ {109}\) As this was the primary focus of the British Governments justification and also the site of prominent immanent possibilities, it renders the case for intervention considerable weaker.

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\(^{109}\) Stop the War Coalition *Irraq a Monstrous Crime* [Accessed 3\(^{rd}\) March 2009 ]Available at <http://stopwar.org.uk/component/option,com_frontpage/itemid,1/>
Thus we see that while dominant government discourses are an undoubted site of power, they are not unassailable. Meaning is only ever contingent; it can never be wholly fixed. This means that the most marginalised actor can challenge the state discourse if they can demonstrate prominent enough examples of internal inconsistencies within the discourse. This said, it is undoubtedly the case that discourses emanating from state power matrix, with its privileged access to the media, enjoy a greater ability to fix meaning and attendant interest.

**Conclusion**

This paper has argued that the ‘threat’ posed by Iraq was not an objective fact but a discursive construction, which was constructed in such a way as to resonate with particular identities, thus rendering intervention possible.

In explaining how the intervention came to take place, it has been suggested that varying narratives were employed; with each hailing a certain subject position already existent within the lived consciousness of the individual. The ‘West’ was hailed through the interpellation of notions of historical and cotemporaneous identities which were constructed in relation to ‘other’ that were Iraq. A similar process has been elucidated with regard to the hailing of certain national identities from the already existent security imaginary.

Allied to this process, the narratives that were marginalised as part of the discursive construction were also enunciated. Demonstrating that the construction of threat is not just a constructive process and that notion of national identity and national interests are not fixed but a matter of politics and construction.

Finally, and crucially, whilst demonstrating throughout the study how discourses can serve to enable certain courses of action, the final section also demonstrate how internal inconsistencies within the discourse can serve to restrict action. Utilising Immanent Critique, a technique which is advocated by the Welsh School, allowed the demonstration of how discourses were challenged as well as constructed and the degree to which they were successful.
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