



## *Introduction*

In February 2011, British Prime Minister David Cameron gave a high-profile speech to the Munich International Security Conference. Despite war in Afghanistan and unrest in the Middle East, he said that ‘the biggest threat that we face comes from terrorist attacks, some of which are, sadly, carried out by our own citizens ... we should acknowledge that this threat comes in Europe overwhelmingly from young men who follow a completely perverse, warped interpretation of Islam.’<sup>1</sup> For Cameron, ‘We need to be clear: Islamist extremism and Islam are not the same thing.’<sup>2</sup> However, British Muslim ‘young men also find it hard to identify with Britain too, because we have allowed the weakening of our collective identity.’<sup>3</sup> Terrorism from ‘Islamist extremism’ was the fundamental challenge: ‘At stake are not just lives, it is our way of life.’<sup>4</sup> And the solution was ‘a clear sense of shared national identity that is open to everyone’.<sup>5</sup> The problem stemmed from (warped) Islam; the solution was to be more Britishness. It is that calculation, and that relationship, that this book seeks to interrogate.

In the period since the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, conflict with violent radicalized Muslims has for many in the United Kingdom apparently impacted on their lives only tangentially. Of course, this is not true for the people who died in the London bombings, or for British citizens killed in and affected by attacks abroad, such as those in Bali or Istanbul; nor for soldiers and their relations who have fought in Iraq and Afghanistan. But for the vast majority, Britain may have been involved in conflict, but Britons have not been at war. Most citizens have seemingly been spectators: watching events in the media, occasionally affected in passing, such as by

<sup>1</sup> PM’s speech, at Munich Security Conference, 5 February 2011, at [www.number10.gov.uk](http://www.number10.gov.uk) [accessed February 2011].

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*   <sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*   <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*   <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

additional airport security. However, this apparent spectator status is actually not so; the securitization of particular identities impacts upon the lives of all who are involved in these securitization processes – those whose identity is part of the securitizing agents, as well as those who are securitized. Securitization, ‘in which egotistical collective political actors (often but not always states) mainly construct their securitizations against (or in the case of security communities with) each other’ is thus often seen as a matter of high politics but, as I will argue, it is also a process that deeply affects social interaction, and everyday life.<sup>6</sup>

This book is concerned with just such processes – the ways in which ‘Britishness’ has come to be constructed in contradistinction to a new Islamist terrorist Other; and how, in the process, everyday lives are reconstructed.

Everyday lives have been deeply and profoundly affected by this conflict. It has produced a sense of ‘new times’, or ‘new realities’, which affects our expectations and our behaviours, our sense of identity. In order to gain insight into these processes, I develop the concept of ontological security: to understand the ontological security – the security of the self – not at the level of the state, as in contemporary international relations writing, but rather at the level of individuals. Ontological security is that sense of order and continuity in the life of an individual that is produced intersubjectively. In Britain, as in other countries, nationality provides one resource for the ontological security of individuals. And that sense of nationality, that Britishness, has been redefined in direct relation with the terrorist other.

As a direct result of the ‘new times’, everyday lives have been transformed profoundly, and in some cases tragically. Three examples will illustrate the range of those transformations: the highly contrasting cases of Yasir Abdelmouttalib, Robert Cottage, and Paul Chambers. For each, their experiences and their treatment by wider society has been framed by the new securitization.

In 2004, while on his way to Friday prayer at London Central Mosque, and dressed distinctively, Yasir Abdelmouttalib was identified from a bus as a Muslim and subsequently attacked by a group

<sup>6</sup> Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, ‘Macrosecuritisation and Security Constellations: Reconsidering Scale in Securitisation Theory’, *Review of International Studies* 35:2, 2009: 254.

of youths.<sup>7</sup> He was abused, spat upon, and then beaten so hard that he was in a coma for three months, and although he survived, he was disabled permanently by the attacks. The one assailant convicted for the assault was thirteen years old at the time of the attack. The Judge, Nicholas Madge, told him, ‘Witnesses described it as a ferocious attack. One referred to the anger in your eyes, another said you were using powerful and really hard swings.’<sup>8</sup> Such hatred of a man that the boy had never met, but who was the symbol of that which he despised with such violent passion. Abdelmouttalib was clear in his own mind as to why he was attacked: ‘All the time television talks about Osama bin Laden and I think they thought, “Let’s take revenge.” They are not human beings. No human would attack someone like this.’<sup>9</sup> And yet the court case did not find that this was a religiously motivated attack; as the Judge told the convicted perpetrator, ‘Had there been evidence of racial or religious aggravation the sentence would have been longer.’<sup>10</sup>

When he was lying in hospital, Yasir Abdelmouttalib’s mother believed that he was treated as a terrorist suspect by the police: she said ‘He was lying in a coma in hospital and we thought he might not live and the police were asking questions about which mosque did he go to.’<sup>11</sup> In contrast, Robert Cottage’s crimes were not seen through the frame of terrorism. Cottage was convicted in 2007 for stockpiling chemical explosives.<sup>12</sup> He also had BB guns, a cross bow, gas masks, two 56-kilogram bags of sugar, a box of mini flares, half a ton of rice, 34 gas canisters, a selection of pellets and an air pistol, and printed bomb ‘recipes’ from *The Anarchist’s Handbook*. He was ‘radical’ in his views, according to his wife – who had reported him to the police.

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account see Jonathan Githens-Mazer and Robert Lambert, ‘Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime: A London Case Study’, European Muslim Research Centre, January 2010, at <http://centres.exeter.ac.uk> [accessed February 2010].

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Nicole Martin, ‘Five and a Half Years for Boy who Blinded Muslim’, *Daily Telegraph*, 21 December 2004, at [www.telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk) [accessed February 2010].

<sup>9</sup> Hugh Muir, ‘Boy, 14, Beat Muslim Student in Racist Attack’, *The Guardian*, 30 November 2004, at [www.guardian.co.uk/uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk) [accessed February 2010].

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Martin, ‘Five and a Half Years for Boy who Blinded Muslim’.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Githens-Mazer and Lambert, ‘Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate Crime’, p. 34.

<sup>12</sup> See ‘Ex-BNP man jailed over chemicals’, *BBC News*, 31 July 2007, at [www.news.bbc.co.uk](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk) [accessed December 2009].

The prosecutor in Court, Louise Blackwell, reported: ‘He became more religious and controlling of her [his wife]. He removed the aerial from the television so she couldn’t watch what he described as the brain-washing material being put out by the government.’<sup>13</sup> Cottage’s case was: ‘I believe it is everyone’s God-given right to defend themselves and their families if they are attacked ... The breakdown of the financial system will inevitably put an unbearable strain on the social structures of this country.’<sup>14</sup> His claim to a defensive strategy was accepted by the Judge, Mrs Justice Swift, who said: ‘It is important to understand that Cottage’s intention was that if he ever had to use the thunder flashes, it was only for the purpose of deterrence.’<sup>15</sup> Cottage’s far-right sympathies were not seen in terms of terrorism; as the police officer at his arrest, Superintendent Neil Smith, explained: ‘He’s not a terrorist and it’s not a bomb factory.’<sup>16</sup> When, also in 2006, police received intelligence about bombs in Forest Gate in a house occupied by Muslims, there was a raid of 250 police officers, many in protective clothing, and one of the occupants was shot.<sup>17</sup> The frame of reference defined the nature of the police responses in these two analogous circumstances.

The third case is very different. Paul Chambers was and is an avid ‘tweeter’. Like many others around the world, he would fill his day with thoughts to be shared with others via the social networking site Twitter. In January 2010, he planned to fly to Northern Ireland, but those plans were jeopardized by bad weather affecting the airport in Doncaster. He ‘tweeted’ his ‘followers’ as follows: ‘Crap! Robin Hood airport is closed. You’ve got a week and a bit to get your shit together,

<sup>13</sup> Louise Blackwell, quoted in ‘BNP candidate was “stockpiling chemicals for civil war”’, *The Citizen* (Burnley), 2 July 2007, at [www.burnleycitizen.co.uk](http://www.burnleycitizen.co.uk) [accessed September 2009].

<sup>14</sup> Quoted in Duncan Campbell, ‘Ex-BNP Candidate Jailed for Stockpiling Explosives’, *The Guardian*, 31 July 2007, at [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk) [accessed September 2009].

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Charlotte Bradshaw, ‘Ex-BNP Man Held in “Bomb” Swoop’, *The Citizen*, 2 October 2006, at [www.burnleycitizen.co.uk](http://www.burnleycitizen.co.uk) [accessed September 2009].

<sup>17</sup> See for example Nigel Morris, ‘Police Forced to Apologise for Forest Gate Terror Raid’, 9 June 2006, at [www.independent.co.uk](http://www.independent.co.uk) [accessed September 2009]; for analysis see Katherine E. Brown, ‘Contesting the Securitisation of British Muslims: Citizenship and Resistance’, *Interventions* 12:2, July 2010: 171–82.

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otherwise I'm blowing the airport sky high!!'<sup>18</sup> Five days later, this message was identified by a manager at the airport, reported to airport security, and onwards to the police, who arrested Chambers, and after a seven-hour interrogation and the seizure of his computer, he was charged under the 2003 Communications Act, which makes it an offence to send 'indecent, obscene or menacing messages over a public electronic communications network'.<sup>19</sup> A Senior District Crown Prosecutor wrote to one of Chambers's supporters: 'The starting point under the public interest test is that it is always in the public interest to prosecute unless there are significant circumstances not to do so. In this case, given the times in which we live and the concern caused to the airport security staff, it was decided that no such circumstances exist.'<sup>20</sup> Chambers was found guilty, had to pay fines and fees of £1,000, and lost his job because he had a criminal record. After the trial District Judge Jonathan Bennett set out his judgement in *R v. Paul Chambers*, including the assessment that

I have to consider the final part of the 'tweet' – '*otherwise I'm blowing the airport sky high*'. The context is we live in a society where there are huge security concerns particularly in relation to airports and air travel. I do not need to repeat the very real incidents there have been in the UK in recent years let alone worldwide. With that background I can have no doubt that the remark posted by the defendant is menacing.<sup>21</sup>

That is, Chambers's comments had a different legal force because of the 'context'.

In such ways, everyday life is transformed by processes of securitization. The securitized Muslim identity was a reason for Abdelmouttalib's near fatal beating, for Cottage's actions to be seen as that of a non-terrorist and for Chambers to gain a criminal record. In this book,

<sup>18</sup> Chambers, quoted in Paul Brooke, 'Frustrated Air Passenger Arrested under Terrorism Act after Twitter Joke about Bombing Airport', *Daily Mail*, 19 January 2010, at [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk) [accessed May 2010].

<sup>19</sup> Tim Bradshaw, 'Fine over Twitter Message on Blowing up Airport', *Financial Times*, 11 May 2010, at [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com) [accessed June 2010].

<sup>20</sup> Name withheld, Senior District Crown Prosecutor in a letter to M. Flaherty, dated 17 March 2010, reproduced at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) [accessed May 2010].

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Bennett's judgement of 10 May 2010 is at <http://jackofkent.blogspot.com> [accessed July 2010]; italics in the original.

I seek to identify the ways in which Britishness – like all identities, one in motion and constantly being reframed and regrounded – has been constructed in contradistinction to a newly securitized identity: that of the Radical Other, the ‘jihadi’ British Muslim. The trope of Otherness ascribed to (British) Muslims and the developing trope of Britishness that will be shown to exist in a variety of social spaces, from jokes to the way people express reactions to moments of drama, impacted not only on defence policy and policing, but throughout official practices.

The societal ‘context’ referred to by District Judge Jonathan Bennett in *R. v. Paul Chambers* is a product of securitization. And that process of securitization has had impact upon the way in which official practice operates. In July 2004 – a year before ‘7/7’ – £8 million was invested in the launch of ‘Preparing for Emergencies – What You Need to Know’. This 22-page leaflet was printed and sent to 25 million households, and was designed, through subsequent updates, to alert citizens to what they needed to do at home, at work and when travelling to minimize the risks of emergencies taking place, and to mitigate their effects should they take place. Inevitably, terrorism is seen to be one of those risks. And the danger to the transport system was particularly emphasized.<sup>22</sup>

### Keep alert

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

Remember to:

- be vigilant
- look out for suspicious behaviour, vehicles or packages
- do not hesitate to tell the police

Establishing new routines in everyday behaviour was a key part of the ongoing exercise. These should be seen as a part of everyday activity, and should not overwhelm other routines; they should simply be added as a normal part of ‘our’ routines, as below.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> ‘Helping to Prevent a Terrorist Attack’, at [www.direct.gov.uk](http://www.direct.gov.uk) [accessed October 2009].

<sup>23</sup> ‘Current threat level’, at [www.homeoffice.gov.uk](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk) [accessed October 2009].

### What should you do?

You should always remain alert to the danger of terrorism, look out for suspicious bags on public transport or any other potential signs of terrorist activity you may encounter.

But you should not let the fear of terrorism stop you from going about your day-to-day life as normal. Your risk of being caught up in a terrorist attack is very low.

As part of the general work connected with preparing for emergencies, local authorities have been developing risk registers, focusing on *risk* rather than on *threats*. Yet of course, terrorism issues have to be considered – and ‘new’ forms of terrorism at that. Staffordshire, for example, explains:

This does not mean that we are not considering threats within our risk assessment work, but given the sensitivity of the information supporting these risk assessments and the potential for use by adversaries, specific details will not be made available via this web-site. Threat scenarios that are being considered include, for example, Chemical, Biological, Radiological attacks and Electronic attacks, e.g. affecting utilities and communications, attacks on crowded places and attacks on transport systems.<sup>24</sup>

Communicating the sense of threat has been particularly significant in London since the events of ‘7/7’ the Metropolitan Police have run a variety of campaigns to alert members of the public ‘with concerns about suspicious behaviour to report them to the confidential Anti-Terrorist Hotline’.<sup>25</sup> Police campaigns have focused on the everyday nature of the threat all around – the threat from within, as it were. This is not to say that the more fearful elements of the ‘new terrorism’ were ignored. The Home Office’s Office for Security and Counter Terrorism has focused in particular on the dangers of terrorists developing chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosives threats, one of the key markers of the concern with the ‘new

<sup>24</sup> ‘Staffordshire Community Risk Register’, *Staffordshire Prepared*, at [www.staffordshireprepared.gov.uk](http://www.staffordshireprepared.gov.uk) [accessed October 2009].

<sup>25</sup> The quote, and the following documents, are reproduced at *Metropolitan Police*, ‘Latest News’, February 2007, at <http://cms.met.police.uk> [accessed October 2009].

terrorism'. The website explains that 'Our aim is to become a centre for excellence in countering CBRNE terrorism. This includes identifying and driving the improvements needed to counter the CBRNE threat, from prevention to preparation for an attack, and investing in scientific research to enable greater understanding of the threat and ways to improve our response.'<sup>26</sup> In February 2007, the Metropolitan Police launched new posters under the heading 'Terrorism If you suspect it Report it'. In the first, the everyday nature of the terrorist threat was stressed; everyone, in their everyday working and home life, needed to be alert. Worrying signs were everyday, with images surrounded by text: the camera ('Have you seen anyone taking pictures of security arrangements?'); the white van ('If you work in commercial vehicle hire or sales, has a sale or rental made you suspicious?' and 'Do you know someone who travels but is vague about where they are going?'); the personal computer ('Do you know someone who visits terrorist-related websites?'); and the mobile phone ('Anonymous, pay-as-you-go and stolen mobiles are typical. Have you seen someone with large quantities of mobiles? Has it made you suspicious?').<sup>27</sup> A second poster followed the same theme. There was a picture of a padlock ('Are you suspicious of anyone renting commercial property?'); an everyday bottle of chemicals, presumably for cleaning ('Do you know someone buying large or unusual quantities of chemicals for no obvious reason?'); facial protection ('Handling chemicals is dangerous. Maybe you've seen goggles or masks dumped somewhere?'); a passport ('Do you know someone with documents in different names for no obvious reason?'); and a credit card ('Cheque and credit card fraud are ways terrorists generate cash. Have you seen any suspicious transactions?').<sup>28</sup> The threat was all around us, and in our everyday lives, communicated powerfully with the imagery of everyday items. In the latter poster, the passport was a British one, reinscribing the local, British nature of those threatening 'our' security. To add to this, a postcard was produced, one side of which read as follows:<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear, and Explosives', *Office for Security and Counter Terrorism, Home Office*, at <http://security.homeoffice.gov.uk> [accessed October 2009].

<sup>27</sup> 'Van Poster 1', note 25.

<sup>28</sup> 'Lock Poster', *ibid.* <sup>29</sup> 'Postcard', reverse, *ibid.*



**COMMUNITIES CAN  
 DEFEAT TERRORISM.  
 YOU CAN HELP MAKE  
 LONDON A HOSTILE  
 PLACE FOR TERRORISTS.  
 TERRORISTS NEED RECRUITS.**

Do you know someone whose behaviour has  
 changed suddenly?

**TERRORISTS NEED PLACES TO LIVE.**

Are you suspicious of your tenants or neighbours?

**TERRORISTS NEED TRANSPORT.**

Has a vehicle sale or rental made you suspicious?

**TERRORISTS NEED STORAGE.**

Are you suspicious of someone renting  
 commercial property?  
 Let the police decide if the information you have  
 is important.

The main message was also reproduced as a window sticker, to be widely distributed and shown. And, to further the campaign by the Metropolitan Police, a radio advert was produced, with the following statement:<sup>30</sup>

**Female voice-over:**

How d’you tell the difference between someone just video-ing a crowded place and someone who’s checking it out for a terrorist attack?

How can you tell if someone’s buying unusual quantities of stuff for a good reason or if they’re planning to make a bomb?

What’s the difference between someone just hanging around and someone behaving suspiciously?

How can you tell if they’re a normal everyday person, or a terrorist?

<sup>30</sup> ‘Radio Script’, *ibid.*

**Male voice-over:**

The answer is, you don't have to.

If you call the confidential Anti-Terrorist Hotline on 0800 789 321, the specialist officers you speak to will analyse the information. They'll decide if and how to follow it up.

You don't have to be sure. If you suspect it, report it.

**THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE TAKE PHOTOS EVERY DAY.****WHAT IF ONE OF THEM SEEMS ODD?**

Terrorists use surveillance to help plan attacks, taking photos and making notes about security measures like the location of CCTV cameras. If you see someone doing that, we need to know. Let experienced officers decide what action to take.

Using classic advertising techniques – female voice to draw the listener in (trustworthy, caring, everyday), and the male voice to impose authority – the short radio advert was yet another way of making the threat to 'us' real, local and immediate.

The 2008 anti-terrorism campaign was extended beyond the Metropolitan Police area, to include those other parts of the United Kingdom with direct experience of the new terrorist threat – West Yorkshire, Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. The imagery was simpler; perhaps the 2007 campaign had produced posters that were too cluttered and somewhat off-putting to the eye. So for 2008, instead of a range of everyday items and tools, each poster focused on just one. The first image was of a camera, with the instruction:<sup>31</sup>

**THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE HAVE MOBILES.**

**WHAT IF SOMEONE WITH SEVERAL SEEMS SUSPICIOUS?**

**YOU SEE HUNDREDS OF HOUSES EVERY DAY.**

**WHAT IF ONE HAS UNUSAL ACTIVITY AND SEEMS SUSPICIOUS?**

<sup>31</sup> 'Camera', at [www.met.police.uk](http://www.met.police.uk) [accessed October 2009].