Introduction

THE juxtaposition of 'terror' and 'culture' is provocative: after all, is terror not the antithesis of culture? Terror represents the brutal, the barbarian, the destructive, and culture is that which represents the highest achievements of humanity. Perhaps. Yet the meaning of terror is constructed; and culture influences opinion and attitudes powerfully at the popular level as well as through 'high' culture. The meaning of terror attacks, and what should be done about them, is produced and reproduced by political elites *and* by the producers of popular culture. Without understanding what has occurred in America at the level of popular culture, its meaning and impact, it is not possible to fully comprehend the American crisis discourse that is the 'war on terror'.

Discourses create and reflect identities, and thus they construct those who are our allies and those who are our enemies. When not in flux, they settle who 'we' are, and who 'they' are; what 'we' stand for, and what 'they' mean to 'us'. They construct the space for 'our' legitimate activity, and the space for the behaviour we will (and will not) tolerate from 'them'. At times 'we' and/or 'they' construct such hostility that violence results, and lives are lost. And both 'we' and 'they' may blame the other, and engage in absolution of responsibility. The creation and expansion of such constructions is mostly played out in and through a crisis, and it is crises that are the engines of radical discursive change. Crises often mark the origins of a particular discourse, and a discourse that emerges with credibility in a crisis – in a sense, that which gives the crisis meaning – will soon take on the hallowed status of 'common sense' amongst those concerned with the issues both raised and threatened by that specific crisis. These dynamics have been played out many times, and in many places, and at present they represent the roles being adopted both by the United States and its enemies in America's 'war on terror'. That 'war' is a social construction, as indeed is that which we call security, the very meaning of which varies according to context, place and time.

This book analyses the discourse that emerged from the impact of the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001. America's 'response' to those attacks was not obvious, not 'natural', nor based on some objective standard of 'common sense'. Policy had to be built on a narrative that could be shared amongst those who felt threatened; and that had to be America's government and, importantly, American society as a whole. The construction of that narrative was an elite project: but that elite in contemporary America is not just government, it also exists in many other social institutions, in the media and in popular culture. In an age of immediate and mass communication, that narrative had to be constructed speedily, and it had to contain a logic that credibly responded to the threat now identified: there had to be an action plan that followed logically (and thus had credibility) from its own precepts. And to function, it had to be based on a particular foundational image, which was to be the memorialisation of the events of 11 September 2001. The shock of the crisis led to the construction of a new narrative, which was but one of many possible narratives, and one which led to new policy direction, which subsequently became institutionalised. As Richard Jackson put it, 'Within the confines of this rhetorically constructed reality, or discourse, the "war on terrorism" appears as a rational and reasonable response; more importantly, to many people it feels like the right thing to do.'[1] That new narrative, though, could not of course be completely new; it had its own past, or genealogy – it had to connect with pre-existing narratives in the United States. But it felt new, it seemed like the only solution to the new terrible problems that had to be faced.

Any new policy programme prescribed in and through this new discourse would inevitably be challenged over time. Policy programmes decay in the normal course of debate as issues and attitudes change over time; and new crises are constructed, ones that produce different discourses that take different directions. In short, there is a pattern of social responses to crisis here, and it is that process that will be examined and developed throughout this volume.

For many hundreds of years, discursive practices in England created a distinction between the accepted, 'native', population (the 'we') and

[1] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 2.

the Jewish, 'outsider', population (the 'they'). Jews were exploiters, moneylenders, parasites upon the indigenous population in the general construction, so perfectly displayed in the portrayal of the character of Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. It was this discursive construction of 'we' and 'they' that set limits to the legitimate and acceptable activity of the Jewish population, and movements in these discursive practices created the policy programme of the expulsion of the Jews from England, enacted in the reign of Edward I, king of England (1272–1307). Shylock, the despised and ridiculed moneylender in *The Merchant of Venice*, sets a trap for Antonio, who represents all the 'we-ness' denied to Shylock, when he needs to borrow money. The trap is set when Shylock offers a horrible deal:

> If you repay me not on such a day,
> In such a place, such sum or sums as are
> Express'd in the condition, let the forfeit
> Be nominated for an equal pound
> Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
> In what part of your body pleaseth me.[2]

The arrangement is readily accepted by Antonio, and the collision course – the emerging crisis – then becomes the core of the play.

Passions run high about *The Merchant of Venice*. When released as a film in 2004, cultural reaction in America was strong.[3] Forrest Hartman, for example, represented the views of many when he deplored 'such a blatantly anti-Semitic work', being very uncomfortable with 'the material, which I find despicable'.[4] He argued that the play's conclusion on ethnic relations 'seems a horrible position to perpetuate in our supposedly enlightened society. Particularly when we find our country engaged in what many enemies see as a religious conflict.'[5] That is, Hartman believed that *The Merchant of Venice* reproduced religious exclusion, the very antithesis of America's commitment in the 'war on terror'. The hostility to the film was such that the director, Michael Radford, felt

[2] William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*, act I, scene iii.
[3] *William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice* was released in 2004 by Sony, directed by Michael Radford (who also wrote the screenplay).
[4] Forrest Hartman, '"Merchant" peddles superb acting, racist themes', *Reno Gazette Journal*, 24 February 2005, at http://www.rgj.com/news/stories/html/2005/02/24/93105.php [last date of access to a website is in square brackets by month and year throughout the book: here 3/2005].
[5] Hartman, 'Merchant'.

it necessary to defend Shakespeare himself from the charge of being anti-Semitic.[6] And the contemporary resonance of the play is such that this is by no means unusual. No less a body than the Royal Shakespeare Company itself addresses the question of 'Shakespeare and race' on its website.[7] Was Shakespeare merely reporting the attitudes of the time, as Radford (and presumably the RSC) maintains? Or was he, in so doing, perpetuating those attitudes, reproducing them from one community to another, and from one generation to the next, the essence of Hartman's critique?

Hartman is clearly persuasive on the point that such cultural reproduction is powerful. Attitudes that are embedded into a variety of popular texts – today that would include novels, films, television and other cultural products – produce and reproduce those views of the world in their readership. Shakespeare's work is, today, the provenance of high culture. But it was not at the time it was written, when Shakespeare spoke to a wide swath of opinion, bridging high and popular culture. Which is why Shylock's most famous speech in the play is so important:

> If you prick us, do we not bleed?
> If you tickle us, do we not laugh?
> If you poison us, do we not die?
> And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?
> If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.[8]

The excluded Jew, Shylock is saying, will learn from his treatment at the hands of the Christian; and if Christians right wrongs through revenge, so will the Jew. The behaviour of the majority ('we') would be reproduced by the socially excluded ('they'). So what was it that Shakespeare was reproducing: society's anti-Semitism, or a more tolerant view of inclusion, by illustrating the lessons that the majority teaches the minority? The ambiguity in *The Merchant of Venice* creates argument, but it is debate based on the notion that behaviour patterns can be reproduced through cultural power. Thus, the argument, as exemplified by the positions expressed by Hartman and Radford, is

[6] Michael Radford, 'Shakespeare and the Jews', *Movienet*, 2004, at http://www.movienet.com/wsmerchantofvenice.html [3/2005].

[7] 'Shakespeare and race', RSC Exhibitions, Royal Shakespeare Company, at http://www.rsc.org.uk/picturesandexhibitions/action/viewExhibition?exhibitionid=9&sectionid=3 [4/2005].

[8] *The Merchant of Venice*, act III, scene i.

about *what* is reproduced, rather than the principle of reproduction itself.

Much of the work published in the English language on security issues is developed from a rather different assumption to that uniting Hartman and Radford: that it is possible – and indeed desirable – to be able to identify *objective* threats. After all, security issues are often about the most important issues affecting a state: the continued existence of that state itself. A security crisis arises when there seems no alternative other than the use, or the threat of use, of military force to produce a resolution. And if there might be doubts about intentions, they have often been swept away by the use of devices such as 'worst-case analysis', in which 'they' are so threatening that 'we' simply have no choice other than to assume that 'they' will 'get us' if the opportunity arises. 'We' assume the worst, and plan on that basis.

What, though, if the 'objective' nature of a threat was only the last stage of a process that is much more social in its character? Security, then, would be a constructed good, one that varies across time and space. The emergence of a security crisis would have gone through various social phases, in which 'we' are identified and solidified, 'they' are identified and demonised, and when discourses are fixed, 'their' unreasonable demands upon 'us' are enumerated. The crisis emerges when these interests clash, by which time they have been constructed as 'objective' interests and, in the violence of war, have 'objective' outcomes.

A crisis is therefore itself constructed in and through social interaction. It is given meaning through social processes, through a decisive intervention which gives meaning to the situation and which also provides a route for future policy. That is, there are no objective ontological criteria that a crisis must fulfil to be a crisis: a crisis is one when it permeates discourse, and creates new understandings and, thereby, new policy programmes. Antonio faces a crisis that has real, objective power when he cannot pay his debt, for Shylock then demands the pound of flesh so lightly agreed to earlier. Both are playing social roles: the loyal, trustworthy Christian with whom 'we' are to identify, and the cruel, money-obsessed Jew, who represents 'them'. Those roles have not been constructed in isolation from one another; but instead they were mutually constituted. The groups have identified particular roles for their identities in the interaction of their collective society. So the crisis is a social one; and it is resolved by a decisive intervention,

when Portia gives a new interpretation that leads to a new policy programme:

> This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;
> The words expressly are 'a pound of flesh':
> Take then thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;
> But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
> One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
> Are, by the laws of Venice, confiscate
> Unto the state of Venice.[9]

'We' have found a resolution to the crisis that frustrates 'them'. But there is more – Portia enunciates the new policy programme that flows from the decisive intervention. Shylock has threatened the life of a Venetian, and custom and law require that he should be punished by losing his wealth, unless of course he converts to being a Christian. And in so doing, 'we' triumph over 'them', because 'they' join with 'us'.

'Crisis' is an oft-used word to describe a large number of situations. Antonio's crisis became one for Shylock through the decisive intervention of Portia, who gave a new understanding to that crisis. This new interpretation, this new discourse, could only work because of pre-existing power balances constructed through the roles that the individuals were to play: Shylock was the outsider, despised by all insiders for being successful in the only legitimate space available to medieval European Jews. And outsiders are always subject to the power to create meaning held by the insiders, new meaning to substantiate the position of the powerful.

Crisis was at the origin of the American state, a sentiment ably expressed in a pamphlet published in 1776 by Thomas Paine, entitled *The American Crisis*.[10] In his State of the Union speech in 1811, President Madison ended 'I can not close this communication without expressing my deep sense of . . . crisis . . .' ahead of the war with Britain that was to see the White House burnt to the ground the following year.[11] Such international crises were to continue for America – the

[9] *Merchant of Venice*, act IV, scene i.
[10] Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, 23 December 1776, at http://odur.let.rug.nl/~usa/D/1776-1800/paine/AC/crisis01.htm [4/2005].
[11] President Madisons, 'State of the Union' speech, 5 November 1811, at http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson_images/lesson572/MadisonStateUnion.pdf [4/2005].

world wars, the crises with the Soviet Union in the cold war. In October 1962, with Soviet missiles on the way to being deployed in Cuba, President Kennedy told the people that his 'Government feels obliged to report this new crisis to you in fullest detail.'[12] But crises were also 'domestic'. In the words of President Lincoln: 'In my opinion, it [pro-slavery agitation] will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed.'[13] American crises were therefore 'domestic' as well as 'international' in their construction. The Great Depression was a crisis; so was the pressure raised by the civil rights movement in the 1960s. By the 1970s, crises could be moral as well as economic and social: President Carter spoke of America's moral and spiritual crisis.[14] And crisis is at the heart of America's contemporary 'culture wars'. For Wayne Baker, one view of the 'crisis of values is the division of society into opposed groups with irreconcilable moral differences. This view is expressed in the popular view that America is engaged in a "culture war" between two opposed moral camps with incompatible views of the American way of life.'[15] Certainly, as will be seen later in this volume, America's 'culture wars' motivate very differing political and cultural judgements. The 'culture wars' have continued since radical groups launched attacks on conservative ways of living in the 1960s; conservative backlashes have been symbolised by the electoral victories of Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan.[16] In the wake of popular protest against the Iraq War, Bevin Alexander published a popular book of conservative response entitled *How America Got It Right: The US March to Military and Political Supremacy*.[17] Cultural behaviour patterns have

[12] President Kennedy, 'The Cuban Missile Crisis speech', 22 October 1962, at http://www.famousquotes.me.uk/speeches/John_F_Kennedy/2.htm [4/2005].

[13] Abraham Lincoln at Springfield, 17 June 1858, http://www.bartleby.com/251/1001.html [4/2005].

[14] President Carter, 'Energy and the national goals – a crisis of confidence', 15 July 1979, at http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimmycartercrisisofconfidence.htm [7/2005].

[15] Wayne Baker, *America's Crisis of Values: Reality and Perception* (Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 17–63. Baker argues that despite the 'culture wars', there are commonalities: 78% of Americans pray every day, and 96% are 'proud to be American'.

[16] Douglas Kellner, *Media Culture: Cultural Studies, Identity and Politics Between the Modern and the Postmodern* (London: Routledge, 1995), especially pp. 18–19.

[17] Bevin Alexander, *How America Got It Right: The US March to Military and Political Supremacy* (New York: Dutton, 2005).

been politicised by this ongoing cultural struggle between liberal and conservative perspectives, and a variety of issues are thereby politicised. Al Franken's contribution from the liberal perspective was a top-selling book entitled *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right*.[18] Bernard Goldberg's high selling book was called *100 People Who Are Screwing Up America* (from the conservative perspective): number 2 in the list was Arthur Salzberger, the publisher of the *New York Times*; unsurprisingly, Michael Moore achieved the number 1 position.[19] Neither Franken nor Goldberg sought to be balanced or fair: neither sought to convince others. As Richard Brookhiser put it in the *New York Times*, the contributions of Franken and Goldberg 'are part of the puppet theater of modern political discourse'.[20]

Crisis has thus shaped who 'we' and 'they' are between Americans and others, and between Americans themselves, and thus 'crisis' plays a constitutive role in American society. The 'war on terror' that has emerged in the United States since the decisive intervention that gave meaning to the events of 9/11 thus has created dividing lines – 'we' and 'they' – that cut across both international and domestic lines. Crises have occurred throughout American history. Each time they have been constructed, and have been given contemporary meaning through the lens of the decisive intervention that came to shape each crisis. A genealogy of any particular crisis would identify alternative understandings of the crisis, and with them alternative policy programmes, but alternatives that have been silenced by the noise of the successful interpretation.[21] Producers of particular decisive interventions will inevitably include political elites, and thus this competition between understandings of a situation is intensely political. But it is not enough to consider political elites alone. Those responsible for the production of a decisive intervention, one capable of shaping a policy programme following the creation of a shared understanding of a particular crisis,

[18] Al Franken, *Lies and the Lying Liars Who Tell Them: A Fair and Balanced Look at the Right* (New York: Dutton, 2003).

[19] Bernard Goldberg, *100 People Who Are Screwing Up America* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005). Goldberg put Franken at number 37.

[20] Richard Brookhiser, '100 people who are screwing up America: who is number one?', *New York Times*, 28 August 2005.

[21] In a different context, I have tried to illustrate this by looking at the construction of a new European security framework in the early 1990s: 'The return of architectural debate', *European Security*, 9:3 (Autumn 2000).

have to include the creators of popular culture in a society such as that of contemporary America.

It is one thing to suggest that popular culture reproduces discourse, even that it amplifies it, and quite another that it (co-)produces it. Reproduction takes place in a variety of forms – television, film, media, organised religion – those that transmit particular understanding. The comprehension of 'we' and 'they', and the characteristics that define each, have been played out in many contemporary art forms, and may well spread such understandings more widely and more deeply than official political statements. That which is thought about an issue may affect more people if reproduced in an episode of a popular television programme than in a speech of the President. Which is, of course, why political advisors monitor television and other aspects of contemporary culture with such care.

But what of the claim that popular culture *(co-)produces* discourse? This is to say, in effect, that the political elite and some producers of popular culture are mutually constructed in the contemporary United States. One cannot articulate a political project without impact upon popular culture; popular culture is not comprehensible without considering the political. Not all political discourse is apparent in popular culture (consider, for example, the nuances of taxation policy); not all elements of popular culture are political in a sense understood by the political elite. But the articulation of a particular understanding of crisis, the formation of discourse, occurs both at the level of the political elite and at that of popular culture. Their mutual constitution means that the way in which the crisis of 9/11 came to be understood was produced by both the Bush administration *and* many cultural producers in the United States.

In order to understand this phenomenon – political and cultural dimensions of the production and reproduction of the 'war on terror' discourse in the United States – this volume will seek out the political in the cultural. And manifestations are found in interesting places: humour; tattoos; religion. As the first chapter examines, each impacts upon the policy programme that is the 'war on terror'. By looking broadly for the political, this book seeks to develop an understanding of contemporary security studies through an understanding of the 'war on terror' as discourse. Although the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States were 'real' – real people died, real buildings were destroyed – 'reality' is still constructed in particular ways. Those events

happened; but what we take from those events depends upon a process of social interaction. Chapter 2 seeks to situate 9/11 in the context of work on crises. On this view, crises are socially constructed, and competing discourses in a crisis are resolved by the success of one, the 'decisive intervention', which names and creates agreed meaning for the crisis event over the claims of other constructions. That 'decisive intervention' creates an understanding, a meta-narrative, one which 'explains' the event to general satisfaction, and then constructs and reconstructs a variety of practices. The meta-narrative orders experiences and thought according to claims of a universal truth. Chapter 2 therefore establishes the concept of the social construction of crises, and postulates a process. Chapter 3 examines how that meta-narrative – the 'war on terror' – became widely spread throughout the United States. 9/11 constituted an *American* sense of emergency, and a very particular American sense of emergency at that. The decisive intervention, articulated in and through the Bush administration, was able to build on a particular narrative of 9/11, although that was only one of a number of possible narratives. There was, in short, nothing 'inevitable', nothing 'objective' about America's 'response' to 9/11. It all had to be constructed intersubjectively.

One of the central tools was a process of memorialisation of the events of 11 September 2001. In books, on television, in novels, and in many other particular acts, it became social common sense that 9/11 had to be remembered and commemorated. But, of course, embedded within this memorialisation was a particular understanding of what September 11th meant, and that understanding was reproduced further not simply by political decree from the President – although the statements of senior politicians are important – but was produced and reproduced through popular culture, including pop music, blockbuster films and the popular novel. In such ways, a foundational myth was created about America and American-ness, and about friendly others and enemy peoples and ideas, all through meanings attributed to the 'reality' of 9/11.

Political leaders are empowered in times of insecurity. And thus, as a source for understanding the nature of the narrative, to comprehend the essence of the discourse, the statements of the political leadership are vitally important. However, those declarations and actions are insufficient for a full understanding, and so the study of international relations can benefit by engaging with cultural studies. As a distinctive field of