WHEN THE 'OTHER' BECOMES 'US': MEDIATED REPRESENTATIONS, 'TERRORISM' AND THE 'WAR ON TERROR'

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to elaborate on the use of one of the rhetorical techniques employed in the political and mediated representation of 'Islamist terrorists' by the British print media in the aftermath of the London bombings of July 7th, 2005. This technique consists of the emphasis on making 'terrorism' and its perpetrators look 'foreign', by creating an opposition between the Nation and the 'Other' (Said, 1997). This opposition is questionable from, at least, two perspectives. On the one hand, this polarisation depends on the position of who produces the discourse. The British reaction to the bombings was a patriotic one which sought to protect the British Nation against the 'foreign enemy' (Bulley, 2008). On the other hand, though, taking into account that the bombers of July 7th were actually British, it is possible to question the actual meaning of 'us' and 'them', as well as the term 'foreign', since the 'Other' is, in this context, also a part of 'us'. The consequence is an ambiguous division between 'known' and 'unknown', 'good' and 'evil', which does not only occur in rhetorical terms, but which is also visible in ongoing conflicts, and has an impact on the 'clash of civilisations' concept.

Key words: terrorism, media representations, 'Otherness', 'war on terror', 'clash of civilisations', identity

INTRODUCTION

The study of 'terrorism' through its media representations provides a useful insight to understanding not only the phenomenon of 'terrorism' itself, but also the social and political contexts in which it occurs. The discussion presented in this paper is based on some of the conclusions reached in a study about 'terrorism' and the media. This research consisted of a comparative study of newspapers published in the immediate aftermath of two 'terrorist' events, which took place in Madrid (Spain) on March 11th, 2004 and in London (UK) on July 7th, 2005 (Sanz Sabido, 2008). This analysis was based on original Spanish and British newspaper material and its purpose was to identify any differences and similarities in the reporting of 'terrorist' events in both countries. Amongst other findings, I concluded that the concept of 'terrorism' is understood and represented differently in Britain and Spain. I also found that journalistic practices in both countries work in similar ways, although image content tends to be more salient in British front pages than in Spanish ones, where, on the contrary, more textual information is included.

However, this paper is particularly interested in the analysis concerning the British media coverage of the London bombings. The purpose is to illustrate the discursive techniques used by British newspapers in order to emphasise the patriotic exaltation of the British Nation and to make the 'terrorists' look 'foreign'. The potential consequences that may derive from the use of these techniques are also drawn upon. These consequences are related to the representation of Muslims and 'terrorism' within the framework of the 'Western' political and military agendas, and ultimately translate into concepts such as Huntington's 'clash of civilisations'.

Although this paper does not present a critique of methodology as such, it seems appropriate briefly to outline the method of media analysis that has been applied. The front pages of seven national British newspapers were analysed, including broadsheets and tabloids, which were published one day after the London bombings of July 7th. These newspapers were *The Sun*, *The Independent*, *Daily Express*, *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*. In order to analyse this material, I proposed the use of what I have called a 'holistic' method, which is based on a number of separate existing traditions. These are combined so as to offer a more comprehensive analysis, one that can overcome some of the limitations of each individual method, providing knowledge about a given text from different angles. According to this method, the components that are analysed in a text – either front or inside pages – include the textual or written content of the news article or articles (content and theme analysis methods were applied); any images or photographic content (semiotics); the structure of the page, where both text and image are combined in a certain way in relation to one another (the salience of certain elements over others was considered); and the context in which such page is produced, which refers to the social, financial and political context in which the news is formed.

The first section of this paper analyses some of the discursive properties of the material war that takes place in Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on some headlines published

in British newspapers, certain discursive practices will be drawn upon, particularly the use of rhetorical representations to create an opposition between two groups, 'us' and 'them'. I suggest that the use of the label 'foreign' to refer to second-generation British citizens within the context of a multicultural Britain must be questioned. The 'foreign' label plays a central part in the construction of these citizens' identities in terms of their belonging to a certain group, since it is closely related to numerous conflicts of political, financial and social nature in the Middle East.

In fact, it is argued that the purpose of this rhetoric is to construct a view of 'terrorism' which highlights its uncontrollable and unpredictable nature, so ultimately policies and military actions may be justified accordingly. Moreover, the emphasis on the existence of a 'foreign' ideology, which threatens to bring an end to the 'Western' society by attacking it from within, has also played a central role in public discourse and, by extension, in material actions. However, in this rhetorical process, citizens who were born in Britain, but who have a background other than British, are placed in a position where their belonging to the British society becomes unclear, which may have an effect in terms of their identity.

In the second section, this mediated dichotomy between 'us' and the 'Other' is considered in relation to the theory of the 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington, 1998). The absolutist opposition between 'us' and 'them' creates a situation in which it is not possible to condemn what is believed to be the cause of the attacks –participation in the 'war on terror' – and, simultaneously, condemn the attacks themselves. The ideology supporting the 'Western us' dominates over other ideologies, silencing any voices of dissent and minimising alternative debates. It will be suggested that the lack of factual information for the general public about the 'Other' and about the conflict with 'them' is one of the engines of the concept of the 'clash of civilisations'.

Some authors argue that the lack of accurate understanding of the 'Other' – from whichever position it is viewed, that is, whoever the 'Other' may be – is emphasised by the media's framing of the issues (Hussain, 2007). For example, some studies have shown that Muslims are represented as 'victims' but also as 'threats to society' (Rigoni, 2006). This type of representation causes and spreads fears of an expansion of the 'Islamic threat', supports the idea of the 'clash' and, by extension, provides a justification for launching a pre-emptive attack against the 'Other'. It will be suggested that the idea of the 'clash of civilisations' is a construction which not only serves to represent but, to a great extent, also promote, this ongoing conflict, while the true nature of the struggles is hidden: the financial, political and military interests that are being pursued under the name of freedom and democracy.

As a final introductory note, I must explain that a number of terms – such as 'terrorism', 'war on terror', 'Islamist', and 'West' – are placed within quotation marks throughout this paper. This is done with the purpose of representing that these terms are discursive and they can be questioned depending on what position they are analysed from or the context in which they are used.

'WE BRITONS' AND THE 'OTHER'

Since September 2001, the attacks in the United States and the subsequent chain of events that followed them "favoured a climate of fear and generalised bewilderment worldwide" and produced a "radicalisation of political positions" (Ferrari, 2007, p. 604). Paradoxically, this radicalisation has been justified by the attempt to bring security back to the 'West', which has, instead, suffered further 'terrorist' attacks and now faces the constant threat that these attacks may reoccur. In this climate of fear a discourse of war emerged before any actual military actions had begun and provided the basis for those actions within the frame of the 'war on terror', which translated into the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq. Faced with such important ramifications, it is essential to understand how the war in the Middle East was presented to the 'Western' audience.

The 'war on terror', or military intervention of the United States and its allies in Iraq and Afghanistan, has two dimensions. To make this point clear, it is useful to draw on Archer's model of orders of reality, in which she presents three levels: a natural order, involved with events produced naturally, such as floods or earthquakes; a practical order, which refers to material culture and practical relations and actions; and a social order, related to discursive knowledge and relations (Archer, 2001, p. 162). The 'war on terror', according to this model, belongs to the practical order, since it is not a natural event and it is happening in material terms in the Middle East. However, it also belongs to the social order, because it exists at a discursive level which pre-dated the material one.

Thus, the establishment of the category 'war' when the 2001 events took place, and the organisation of the subsequent discourse around that category, led towards the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. In this respect, Montgomery (2005) points out that "to claim that discourse determined later courses of action would be – clearly – to overstate the point; but there were discursive processes at work", even if they worked in uneven and contradictory ways (pp. 149-150). Bush (2001), in his first address to the Nation on September 11th, stated that "we stand together to win the war against terrorism", mentioning the term 'war' for the first time and initiating the move from an 'attack' to an 'act of war'. Baxi (2005) states that never before September 11th were acts of 'terror' "described in terms of a 'war', nor were the practices of 'counter-terror'" (p. 8). In Montgomery's words, what we see "at the level of public discourse is the term war (as in act of war) emerging by discursive amplification out of the difficulties of describing a tragic and horrific event" (p. 176). Bush's first mention of the term 'war' was not literal, but figurative, although it escalated until it become literal, culminating in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The crucial aspect of this discourse of war is the fact that it was strongly ideological and rhetorical. According to Ferrari (2007), a conflict frame was presented, which was based on the creation of two positions which were opposed to, and exclusive from, one another (p. 620). Indeed, the main discursive tendency observed in the media and one of the crucial points in understanding how the discourse about 'war' and 'terrorism' was constructed can be appreciated by looking into the creation of two antagonistic

positions through the rhetorical use of the pronouns 'we' and 'they'. One position is close, familiar and known, whereas the other is different, strange and mysterious. The first one takes the form of 'us' – 'the good ones' – , whereas the 'Other' is always 'them' – 'the evil ones'.

Bush's discourse was based on a persuasion strategy which works on fear of the 'Other', where both emotive states are "nothing but two sides of the same ideological space, which is the space of fear, or the space *implied* by a conflict frame and *required* by a strategy of fear" (Ferrari, 2007, p. 620). According to Ferrari, the bipolar structure of 'good' and 'evil', and 'us' and 'them', is also reflected in the opposition between 'confidence' and 'fear'. This is what forms Bush's strategy of fear, which is rooted in the conflict frame as an ideological basis of Bush's persuasion strategy from the September 11th events towards the war in Iraq (Ferrari, 2007, p. 620). This rhetoric of fear works because, during the mediated preparation for an imminent war, the idea that 'our' civilisation is in danger, because of an external threat, appeals to the endangered audience, and therefore any actions to defend themselves or 'their' society are validated.

Said (1997) states that the pronoun 'we' is used as the opposite to Islam, which is not known, familiar or acceptable, since it is outside the world that 'we' inhabit (p. xxx). However, the ambiguity of these terms matches the ambiguity of what they represent from, at least, two points of view. Firstly, this polarisation takes a different meaning depending on where the discourse originates from. Who 'us' and 'them' represent is a question of who produces the discourse, since in such mediated struggle no group is discourse-free. This means that, although this study concentrates primarily on 'Western'[1] discourse, the same kind of practice is carried out by other groups or ideologies, in this case, 'Islamist' groups.

Secondly, the meaning of the terms 'us' and 'them' can also be questioned in terms of who it includes within a given group or society. In order to illustrate this idea it is helpful to draw on a specific front page which was published on July 8th, 2005, one day after the London bombings, and which provides a significant example of the discursive 'we' as opposed to the 'Other'[2]. The front page of *Daily Express* on that date was headlined "75 killed and 743 injured by suicide bombers but … We Britons will never be defeated" (*Daily Express*, 2005, July 8). I have stated earlier that this discussion emerges from a larger research project which compares Spanish and British newspaper coverage of 'terrorist' events. One of the most significant differences between the British and the Spanish case studies, which emerged from the content and theme analyses, rests on the tone of the reaction to the bombings. British newspapers were generally more defiant against the 'terrorists', usually based on the emphasis of a patriotic reaction. This is visible in headlines such as the one mentioned above or in others like "Bloodied but unbowed" (*Daily Mirror*, 2005, July 8). British newspapers, unlike Spanish ones, employ terms such as 'intimidated', 'bloodied' or 'defeated', which are employed to convey the message that Britain may have been hit, but the Nation is still strong and will not collapse, and *they* are yet to be beaten. Although this choice of terminology is not universal if only the front pages are analysed, it does become a generalised trend when the inside articles are also considered.

Whereas Spanish newspapers defended the country's democratic system and integrity, Britain reacted in the name of the British Nation and the 'British way of life'[3], which was defended against the 'foreign'. This type of reaction has also been observed in other instances, like in the aftermath of the incidents that took place in Glasgow airport on June 30th, 2007. The headline on the front page of *The Sun* on July 4th 2007 read "Fly it in the face of terror", in reference to the British flag that served as a background image. The nationalist sense is emphasised on this occasion by the fact that the event happened in Scotland, but the opposition is presented as being between Britain and 'terror', where 'terror' becomes almost a personalised entity[4]. Like Tony Blair's excerpt, from his speech on July 7th, illustrates, "our determination to defend our way of life is greater than their determination to cause death and destruction to innocent people" (*Daily Express*, 2005, July 8, p. 6), the opposition between 'us' and 'them' is presented by referring to 'our determination to defend our way of life' as opposed to 'their determination to cause death'.

However, focusing on the use of the pronoun 'we' in the *Daily Express* headline, it seems clear that this term represents and emphasises the 'us' category, that is, 'the ones that have been attacked', 'the good ones', 'the civilised ones' and 'the ones that will stand together'. This example becomes more interesting, though, as the use of 'we' has been paired with a specific nationality, 'Britons'. This addition can be understood simply as the explicit form of an implicit meaning, that is, 'we' may have been understood as British citizens without the added explanation. However, it might have also been possible to understand 'we' not as national citizens of a particular country, but as members of the 'civilised, Western, democratic society'. After all, the United States and Spain have also been victims of previous, similar atrocities, and have also been *there*, in the same 'we' position. Nevertheless, the newspaper chose to highlight the statement that Britons will not be defeated by including the specific reference.

What makes this choice even more noteworthy is the widely discussed fact that the bombers *were*, actually, also British[5]. All these considerations about this statement lead to at least three questions. First, if the discursive tendency is to separate 'us' from 'them', this cannot be successfully done on the basis of nationality as, in this case, 'they' are also Britons. Therefore, who are 'we'? What exactly does it refer to and who does it include? Secondly, the opposite consideration also applies. Since the separation between 'us' and 'them' does not work based on the nationality criterion – because the bombers, who are supposed to be aliens to 'us', are actually an integrated part of the 'We Britons' classification –, it is also valid to ask what the pronoun 'they' refers to. And last, following on from the previous points, the final question is why the term 'We Britons' was used if this choice of words is potentially so problematic.

This last question could be answered simply by pointing out that, at this stage in the aftermath of the bombings, it was still not known that the 'terrorists' were British. However, there are indications that this may not have been the case[6]. Questions about the nationality of the bombers had already been raised in various newspapers, including the same *Daily Express*, where the editorial states that "the bombs are being planted by

fanatics who *live among us* [italics added]" (*Daily Express*, 2005, July 8, p. 21). Similarly, *Daily Mail* published an article highlighting the statement "it's time to tilt the balance of justice in favour of the law-abiding and away from those who *choose to live here* [italics added] proclaiming their hatred of everything that Britain represents" (*Daily Mail*, 2005, July 8, p. 18). It seems that, even though at this point there may have been no sufficient information to know that the bombers were definitely British – or, at least, this information was not made publicly available – the prospect of this being the case was plausible enough not to proffer such a phrase.

The reason for this headline in particular, and the generalised discourse observed in the media (fomenting the opposition and hostility against the 'Other', as well as the strength and unity between 'us'), is related to what Bulley (2008) believes to be an effort to make the attacks look 'foreign' – that is, not something that 'We Britons' would do – even though almost everything about the attacks was 'domestic'. This author explains that the emphasis on "the contingency of the bombings, their extraordinary nature, their uncontrollability and 'Otherness'" by politicians and the media pursues the primary objective of justifying the foreign policies that have derived from these 'terrorist' attacks (p. 382). Indeed, while rhetorical techniques such as the ones being discussed are presented to the public in order to support and justify the war, from an International Relations point of view the 'war on terror' was justified in terms of the "protection and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms, the international or global rule of law, and ... as a worldwide installation of market-friendly democracy and freedom" (Baxi, 2005, p. 9)[7].

In this sense, Bulley (2008) states that the 'foreignness' of the attacks has a link with the 'failing state' concept (a state that cannot guarantee the freedom and human rights of its citizens), so if the attacks are the "results of another state's failure and disintegration" (pp. 385-386), then the international community must act "pre-emptively if necessary, to prevent states from failing. The terror is foreign, so it demands a proactive foreign policy" (p. 386). However, as the 'terror' actually comes from *within*, it is valid to question how supporting a war in the Middle East will solve this situation.

In terms of making the 'terrorists' look foreign, some newspaper excerpts present this tendency when describing the bomber on the bus: "He was olive-skinned, about 6ft tall, 25 years of age, basically very presentable. He looked *foreign* [italics added] and was wearing *foreign* [italics added] clothes" (*Daily Express*, 2005, July 8, p. 2). Similarly, Blair (2006) talks about a 'foreign' ideology, stating about Khan, the ringleader, that "he may have been born here. But his ideology wasn't" (in Bulley, 2008, p. 381). It is possible to question, though, what is meant by 'foreign' in a country like Britain. The Oxford Dictionary defines 'foreign' as of, from, in, or characteristic of a country or language other than one's own; dealing with or relating to other countries; coming or introduced from outside; (foreign to) strange and unfamiliar to; (foreign to) not belonging to or characteristic of. (Compact Oxford English Dictionary online)

This definition would validate the use of the term 'foreign' to describe the bomber, his clothes and his ideology, especially based on the meaning "coming or introduced

from outside". However, it is also valid to suggest that, in a multicultural country like Britain, the use of this term may need to be reviewed, since what is being considered as 'foreign' – because it looks different or is identified with a different religion or culture –, has now become an integrated part of this country. In other words, not everyone who is dressing in those 'foreign' clothes and supporting 'foreign' ideologies is a foreigner: some of *them* are, in fact, British. This takes us back to the first two questions posed above. If the 'foreign' has become British, then who are 'we' and who are 'they'?

I would suggest that these two categories, 'us' and 'them', are constructed positions characterised, on the one hand, by very broad features, due to the vast amount of people *belonging* to each group, and, on the other hand, by some specific, more relevant attributes which make them part of one group and not the other. These are the attributes that make very heterogeneous groups seem homogeneous, which ultimately leads to generalised terms such as 'Western' society, 'democratic state' or 'capitalist state'. Even though these terms refer to different aspects of a country's system and organisation, they are all used to describe 'us', whereas the 'Others' are identified as 'Islamists', 'fundamentalists' or 'radicals'. In relation to the 'Other', a metonymic twist gives grounds for a label which names the whole group after a minority within the same group, even though not every member of that group agrees with or shares those specific attributes used for labelling and stereotyping purposes. As with the 'Western us', this is also a vast and ambiguous group to define.

A 'CLASH OF CIVILISATIONS'?

Earlier I stated that the discursive points presented above ultimately have a link with theories such as the 'clash of civilisations'. This is a concept that has encountered numerous criticisms and updates since Huntington suggested the term. He states that religion is "perhaps the central force that motivates and mobilises people" (Grim & Finke, 2007, p. 636) and, therefore, is the basis of every value-system, in a way that every world civilisation is based around one of the major religions. He matches each country with one of those religions and suggests that social conflict emanates from the 'clash' between countries of different faiths. In general terms, Huntington establishes that the major divide between civilisations is the one between 'the West and the Rest' "because only the West valued 'individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, the rule of law, democracy, free markets'. Therefore the West (in reality, the United States) must be prepared to deal militarily with threats from these rival civilisations" (Ali, 2003, p. 299).

One of the critiques that Huntington's ideas encounter is the fact that it is not possible to identify one country with one religion. To state that Arabs are Muslims and Europeans are Christians is inaccurate and far from reality. There are usually different religions cohabiting within each country and, not only that, but "religious hegemonies can and do change: Spain was once a Muslim land and Algeria was a Christian land. ... History fails to reflect Huntington's simplified image of religious uniformity or stability" (Grim & Finke, 2007, p. 636). Ali (2003) makes a similar point in reference to Islam, stating

that "the world of Islam has not been monolithic for over a thousand years" (p. 300) and people of different faiths live together in the same country without necessarily having conflictive situations. In fact, it is argued that many inhabitants of the same country and different religions have more in common amongst themselves than with citizens of other countries that follow the same beliefs. Huntington's idea of having one single civilisation has also been criticised, as it is believed that *forcing* religious homogeneity within one country can actually be the cause of conflict – as it is indeed the case –, and having one civilisation where one religion is imposed is likely to become the cause of religious persecutions[8] on a larger scale.

On a different note, there have been studies that suggest different explanations for the 'clash of civilisations'. Following the publication of the Danish cartoons of Prophet Mohammed in 2006, Hussain (2007) suggests that this was an example of civilisations clashing, although the media's framing of the subject was "inherently flawed" (p. 112), not helping to provide the audience with an accurate understanding of what had really happened. His main point is that both worlds have a considerable lack of objective knowledge about each other, which is emphasised by the media's role. This author analyses several aspects of the misrepresentation and misinformation of each of these civilisations about each other, to the extent that he does not talk about 'clash of civilisations' but a 'clash of misconceptions'.

On a similar note, Ali (2003) states that many conflicting ideologies have existed in the world – such as capitalism, socialism, communism, Nazism – and that they were all based on the principle that "the less you know, the easier to manipulate. With the triumph of one ideology and the total collapse of the other, the space for debate and dissent" narrows dramatically (p. 281). Ali raises an essential point in relation to knowledge about any conflicting ideologies and how much room there is for discussion. Indeed, one of the main engines of the current 'clash of civilisations' – if such 'clash' exists – is the lack of factual information for the general public to assimilate and determine what their position is in terms of the conflict.

Lewis (1990) states that the ongoing conflict between the 'West' and the Middle East is "no less than a clash of civilisations – the perhaps irrational but surely historic reaction of an ancient rival against our Judeo-Christian heritage, our secular present, and the worldwide expansion of both" (p. 6). Lewis also adds that it is essential that the 'West' is not "provoked into an equally historic but also equally irrational reaction against that rival" (p. 6). Yet, if this 'clash' attends to historical reasons which translate in potentially irrational feelings in the present, it is possible to question why the concept of 'clashing civilisations' is being promoted through rhetorical uses and discourses, such as the ones discussed in the previous section, which foment division and further struggles. In these lines, it can be argued that this term is part of the construction of the 'clash' itself, in order to attend to certain political agendas. However, Lewis dedicates some attention to the roots of this conflict, and he believes that imperialism is, amongst others, one of the potential causes of the existing tensions. Imperialism is certainly one of the most recurring issues in explaining the critiques against

the 'West'. Ali (2003), for instance, states that "the most dangerous 'fundamentalism' today – the 'mother of all fundamentalisms' – is American imperialism" (p. xiii). Although Lewis dismisses the idea that imperialism is the root of Muslim hatred against the 'West', Ali seems certain that the American imperialist attitude is at the heart of the problem, amongst other reasons. In this sense, the root of the 'clash' is precisely the *Manichean* division, illustrated above, between 'us' (the 'good' ones) and 'them' (the 'evil' ones), where 'we' are the ones in possession of the ultimate truth and, therefore, have the absolute right to impose it on others (who are downplayed and not considered as equal to 'us').

However, in terms of what characteristic of the 'Western' society causes this conflict with other civilisations, such as the Islamic one, it is interesting to observe that some authors point at their democratic systems, whereas other authors suggest that it is related to globalisation or the cultural imperialism that is affecting countries all around the world. In any case, as stated by Blair on July 7th, the 'British way of life', as an example of the broader 'Western' way of life, was under attack on July 7th as well as on September 11th and March 11th, so the 'Western' way of life may be understood as a general term to define the different aspects that describe this civilisation and differentiate it from others. These differing opinions in relation to the precise causes of conflict between the 'West' and the 'Rest' constitute another symptom of the ambiguity which characterises the division between 'us' and 'them' that I mentioned earlier.

In fact, one of the most frequent causes of tensions that authors point out is the question of Israel, which is the manifest instance that illustrates this problem from several angles: support for a country whose very right to exist is a point of contention among some (Muslim and non Muslim) states and groups; displacement of Palestinians; presence of a 'Western' force with its imperialist-capitalist-democratic views within the Middle East; the religious implications attached to the lands that are being disputed; and the power that the 'West' acquire by having such presence in this conflictive zone. This power is not only political but also of great economic value due to the vast production of oil in the Middle East. Drawing on the rhetorical division that I presented on the previous section, it could be argued that Israel is, in fact, an 'Other' within the Middle East – the ultimate 'Other' – from the point of view of those countries which surround it, which reject it and are in continuous tensions with it. However, from a 'Western' discourse perspective, Palestinian nationalism is the source of 'evil' and a threat to Israel and the stability of the whole region. The argument that the meaning of 'us' and 'them' is relative, since it is discursively dependent on the position of the speaker, is, therefore, observable not only rhetorically but also in every aspect of this conflict in material terms.

On a different note, with regards to the representation of Muslims in the media, Rigoni (2006) states that some mass media represent Muslim converts simultaneously as "a 'victim' and a 'threat to society'", which has the "effect, if not the aim, of causing or encouraging the primary fears of an expansionist Islamic force, and to give credence to the assumptions of a 'clash of civilisations'" (p. 75)[9]. According to this statement,

the reason for applying the concept of a 'clash' between rival civilisations is, once again, to emphasise the feelings of fear and insecurity towards an enemy and, as a consequence, provide a justification for attacking the 'Other'. By highlighting the idea that *our* civilisation is in danger because of an external threat, any actions to defend *our* society or to retaliate are automatically validated, but before this happens, it is essential to define a division between what is acceptable – 'us', 'our' society – , and what is not acceptable – the 'evil Other'. This is done, as I have argued previously, rhetorically and by emphasising the differences over the similarities, the foreign qualities against the domestic ones. This becomes more complicated, though, when the 'Other' – the 'foreign' – is embedded within 'us'. In other words, when 'We Britons' – or 'We Westerners' – are not able to differentiate anymore between the 'real us' and the 'Other', the term ultimately becomes void of meaning, adding to the confusion, the potential feelings of fear and insecurity towards an enemy which is now *within* and impossible to delimit.

In reference to Huntington's theory of 'clashing civilisations', he predicts, before the events of September 11th took place, that Islam is one of the main menaces to the 'West' and that, if it joined with another civilisation, they would become a great threat. In these lines, he states that "the world is not one. Civilisations unite and divide mankind … blood and belief are what people identify with and what they will fight and die for" (Grim & Finke, 2007, p. 636). According to Ali (2003), these views provide the 'West' with a "simple but politically convenient analysis" which works as an "extremely useful cover for policy-makers and ideologues in Washington and elsewhere. Islam was seen as the biggest threat because most of the world's oil is produced in Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia" (p. 299). Said (1997) also points out that there is no other religion or culture which represents a more serious threat to the 'Western' civilisation than Islam but, similarly, he states that the upheavals that are taking place in the 'Islamic' world "have more to do with social, economic, and historical factors than they do unilaterally with Islam" (pp. lii-liii).

All in all, it is important to reflect on the connection between what the West has said about Islam and what various Muslim societies have done in a reactive way (Harris, 2006, p.23), because the "'word politics' by which each side sets up situations, justifies actions, forecloses options, and presses alternatives on the other" are created through a cycle of "back-and-forth between the West and Islam, the challenging and the answering, the opening of certain rhetorical spaces and the closing of others" (Said, 1997, p. lvi). These tendencies alternate a number of actions and reactions between two sides – 'us', 'them', the 'good' ones or the 'bad' ones, whoever these may be and whatever form they may take –, which translate, ultimately, into what is known as a 'clash of civilisations'.

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this paper was to draw upon one of the rhetorical techniques used within UK politics and the British print media in order to create representations of 'Islamist terrorists' in the aftermath of the London bombings of July 7th. This technique – the rhetorical creation of two antagonist positions, 'us' and 'them', in order to refer to

the 'good' Nation and its 'evil' enemy – , has been explained and illustrated based on mediated examples of this division. By the end of the discussion, I have argued that the ultimate purpose of this technique is to emphasise the 'foreign' nature of 'terrorism' and its perpetrators look 'foreign', in order to foment the feeling of insecurity and struggle, so the need for foreign policies to avoid further 'terrorist' attacks is widely understood and so military actions rising from such policies are deemed justified.

Whereas, in this sense, 'Islamist terrorism' is presented as a 'foreign' entity, having an effect on the creation of the identities of British-born citizens who come from other backgrounds, it is also necessary to point out another problem. Certain news articles revealed the fact that the Muslim community should not be blamed for the bombings, as most Muslims are peaceful and do not agree with this type of activity or method. In any case, the way Islam is generally portrayed in the 'West' seems to have one simple meaning but, in fact, this generalised meaning is only a partial and incomplete understanding of the Islamic religion and society (Said, 1997, p. lvii). In fact, Islam is a much more complex term than is portrayed in the 'West', since this term designates the varied life that goes on in the 'Islamic' society, which includes more than 800 million people[10], millions of square miles of territory, and dozens of societies, states, histories, geographies, cultures (Said, p. l).

The difficulty is that, in Said's words, there is a "close affiliation between language and political reality", and "everything about the study of Islam in the contemporary West is saturated with political importance" (p. lvii). Within this politically and discursively-charged context, *Manichean* approaches like the division between 'good' and 'bad' help create a separation between the 'just and correct we' and the 'evil Other', ultimately uniting the Nation against the threat. However, it can be concluded that in this struggle there is no right or wrong – or, in other words, there is no such *Manichean* dichotomy as political leaders have attempted to present – , but two groups with opposed interests who take military and political actions based on discursive justifications.

The media and the language used by it play a fundamental role in the shaping of public discourse, and this also applies to 'terrorism' and the 'war on terror'. Wollin (2008) states that, in the aftermath of September 11th, Americans were "propelled into the realm of mythology", explaining that myths do not provide an argument or a demonstration, and they do "not make the world intelligible, only dramatic", while heroes' destructive actions automatically acquire justification (p. 10). Silberstein (2004) also refers to the way language was used in that period of national crisis, stating that through public rhetoric "patriotism became consumerism, dissent was discouraged ... public language (re)created a national identity. Words helped many things happen. An act of 'terror' became an act of 'war'" (p. xiii). I have also discussed the patriotic feelings and the national identity that resulted from the events of July 7th (which had previously been observed in the United States after September 11th), and the discursive move from a 'terrorist' attack to an 'act of war', which set the basis for the subsequent war.

With regards to the patriotic reaction after September 11th, the representation of the United States standing together against the 'enemy' and other patriotic images and

initiatives which have later been repeated in other countries, raised concerns due to "the potential legislative correlates of ubiquitous flag waving", in reference to the risk that *post*-9/11 measures pose, compromising "fundamental civil liberties" (Silberstein, 2004, p. 122). The paradoxical situation is that, this fight, which is supposed to defend democracy and civil liberties is, in reality, endangering them.

I have suggested that one of the foundations of this ongoing conflict is related to, in some cases, the provision of misleading information, including the reading of religious texts that have been taken out of context. However, these are not the only reasons to explain the violence, and they are just factors that affect – in a negative way – the development of the conflict. Grim and Finke (2007) argue that "picturing such violence merely as a corruption of religion fails to account for the displacement and death of people because of their religious orientation" (p. 635) – as in the case of Palestine as well as the sectarian massacres in Iraq. This explanation also ignores the political and financial interests that are being pursued by the United States and its allies, and which have nothing to do with religion or with the corruption of it.

The climate generated under these circumstances has led some authors to state that there is a 'clash of civilisations' between 'Western' and 'Islamic' societies. I have argued that it is essential to understand – or, at least, be aware of – the truth about the 'Other', so misrepresentations and misunderstandings can be questioned and, ultimately, avoided. Conflicts which are based on irrational or unfounded fears may possibly be prevented. With a more accurate knowledge of the 'Other', feelings of hatred may potentially be reduced. This is not only a key point in international terms but, having observed that the boundaries between the 'Other' and 'us' are blurred by the fact that the 'Other' can also be one of 'us', it becomes imperative to take steps towards better knowledge and communication. As Cox and Marks (2003) state, "it is only through mutual understanding that respect can be promoted and provide a basis not only for peaceful co-existence but for mutually beneficial and enhancing relationships" (p. 8). It is also essential that objectivity is present in every "learned discourse about other societies, despite the long history of political, moral, and religious concerns" felt about the alien, the strange and different (Said, 1997, p. lvii). Accordingly, I suggest that it is essential that all parties involved acquire a better understanding of each other as a starting point, hopefully, for a peaceful coexistence.

This is not a simple issue, nor is it easy to resolve. The lives of many citizens have been affected so far, both in the 'West' and in the Middle East, on account of disputes that date back years and even centuries. What runs the risk of being represented as a religious problem is actually associated with historical, financial, political and – only partly – religious issues, as well as serious exacerbations of existing negative feelings due to further military incursions, imperialist attitudes and biased forms of discourse. Mediated discourses need to provide the audience with objective information about political debates and disputes, and move away from generating and supporting division and the idea of 'clashing civilisations' as in the examples illustrated above.

ENDNOTES

1. References to the 'West' are not meant geographically but in political, ideological and financial terms.

2. These and the following observations were the result of the application of the proposed 'holistic' method presented earlier. Although this methodology is a combination of a number of existing traditions, the main method of discourse analysis employed here is content analysis.

3. Tony Blair mentioned the 'British way of life' during his speech on July 7th, 2005. He stated that "we will hold true to the British way of life throughout".

4. Within the frame of the 'war on terror', 'terror' has acquired a new dimension and, instead of being a method towards an end, it is considered as the enemy itself.

5. Mohammed Sidique Khan, Shehzad Tanweer and Hasib Hussain were born in Britain as second-generation British citizens. Germaine Lindsay was born in Jamaica and moved to Britain when he was five months old.

6. Prime Minister Tony Blair's official spokesman was asked on July 7th whether Mr Blair's comments on Islam indicated that he had evidence linking the attacks to Al Qaeda or similar groups, to which he responded that it was "too soon to go into the issue of responsibility" and he further clarified that "the PM chose his words carefully. He believes it's important that we make sure whoever carried this out does not in any way achieve the goal of dividing the UK one against each other" (*Daily Express*, 2005, July 8, p. 6). This cautious statement raises the question of how much information was already at hand or, at the very least, what the suspicions were at this stage, as the focus on a possible division within the UK may suggest that the attacks were carried out from within.

7. Shortly put, this war on terror remains by definition a 'just war', raising the question only of how far the nomenclature may retard its efficient pursuit. Baxi points out, though, that Bush's 'war on terror' "instantly de-focuses antecedent or ongoing forms of state and international 'terrorism'. ... This war mobilises an infinite potential for counter-terror response by the coalitions of willing states against nomadic insurgents and states that supposedly or allegedly harbour them", forfeiting their "status as co-equal sovereign formations instantly upon the fabrication of their status as 'rogue', 'outlaw', or 'failed' states" (Baxi, 2005, p. 9).

8. Grim and Finke define 'religious persecution' as the "physical abuse or displacement due to one's religion", which has been a form of social conflict recorded throughout history. They point out that no religion is exempt from persecution even today. Having admitted that different religions co-existing together have the potential for conflict, they also affirm that "the attempt to regulate cultural and religious consensus within countries results in greater religious persecution". (Grim & Finke, 2007, p. 634)

9. Rigoni's study shows that the reality is that most adult converts make their choice at the end of an intellectual process, but only British Muslim press choose to highlight this fact.

10. According to Said, this figure was correct in 1997 when his book *Covering Islam. How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* was published.

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