
The Scare Cycle

Moral Panics and National Elections

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The whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed (and hence clamorous to be led to safety) by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary.

— H. L. Mencken

As a general rule, democratic theory tends to represent actors within representative democracies as essentially rational beings who, despite a tendency to be corrupted by the exercise of power, follow a rationality that can be accounted for. Rational choice theory, for example, sees individual choices, understood to be the result of one or another form of reasoning, as the basis of social phenomena.¹ At the more sophisticated end of the spectrum, democratic theory will even acknowledge some level of dysfunctionality in traditional institutions and argue for reform of their corporatist tendencies, as one might argue for managing the symptoms of cancer without pretence or hope of effecting a cure.² But the point remains.

1 S. M. Amadae, *Rationalizing Capitalist Democracy: The Cold War Origins of Rational Choice Liberalism*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2003.

2 See, for example, G. Soros, *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism*, New York, Public Affairs, 2000; M. Latham, *Civilising Global Capital: New Thinking for Australian Labor*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1998.

Far less understood or accounted for, for the most part, is what Maurice Brinton has called the irrational in politics.³ Working-class electoral support for radical reactionaries proposing austerity programs that would hurt them was not, Brinton felt, especially rational. The average working-class voter of middle age, far from being open to democratic politics, was probably 'hierarchy-conscious, xenophobic, racially-prejudiced, pro-monarchy, pro-capital-punishment, pro-law-and-order, anti-demonstrator, anti-longhaired students and anti-dropout'.⁴ Trying to discuss measures for the redress of working-class grievances would, Brinton felt, 'almost certainly meet not only with disbelief but also that positive hostility that often denotes latent anxiety', a fact that led him to conclude that 'certain subjects are clearly emotionally loaded'.⁵

Cognisant of such, the noted US journalist and satirist H. L. Mencken wrote at some length on what Austrian psychologist Wilhelm Reich would later, in analysing the nascent national-socialist movement, refer to as the 'mass individual'.⁶ Ideas, Mencken noted, 'leave them unscathed; they are responsive only to emotions, and their emotions are all elemental — the emotions, indeed, of tabby-cats rather than of men':

Fear remains the chief of them. The demagogues, that is, the professors of mob psychology, who flourish in democratic states are well aware of the fact, and make it the cornerstone of their exact and puissant science. Politics under democracy consists almost wholly of the discovery, chase and scotching of bugaboos. The statesman becomes, in the last analysis, a mere witch-hunter, a glorified smeller and snooper, eternally chanting 'Fe, Fi, Fo, Fum!' It has been so in the United States since the earliest days. The whole history of the country has see the melodramatic pursuit of horrendous monsters, most of them imaginary: the red-coats, the Hessians, the monarchs, again the red-coats, the Bank, the Catholics, Simon Legree, the Slave Power, Jeff Davis, Mormonism, Wall Street, the rum demon, John Bull, the hell hounds of plutocracy, the trusts, General Weyler, Pancho Villa, German spies, hyphenates, the Kaiser, Bolshevism. The list could be lengthened indefinitely;

3 M. Brinton, 'The Irrational in Politics', in D. Goodway (ed.), *For Workers' Power: The Selected Writings of Maurice Brinton*, Oakland, AK Press, 2004.

4 Brinton, 'The Irrational in Politics'.

5 Brinton, 'The Irrational in Politics', p. 260.

6 W. Reich, *The Mass Psychology of Fascism*, London, Macmillan, 1970.

a complete chronicle of the Republic could be written in terms of it, and without omitting a single important episode. It was long ago observed that the plain people, under democracy, never vote for anything, but always against something. This explains, in large measure, the tendency of democratic states to pass over statespeople of genuine imagination and sound ability in favour of colourless mediocrities.⁷

By mid-century, Mencken's observations had enjoyed development at the hands of political scientist Richard Hofstadter, who outlined the 'Paranoid Style in American politics — a style of mind, not always right wing in its affiliations ... [characterised by] heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy'.⁸ This made the persecution complex a key facet of political discourse, Hofstadter argued, systematising grandiose conspiracy theories after the style of the 'clinical paranoiac', who exhibits a 'chronic mental disorder characterized by systematic delusions of persecution and of one's own greatness'.⁹ While both he and the demagogue are 'overheated, over-suspicious, overaggressive, grandiose and apocalyptic in expression', however, only the clinical paranoiac feels the 'hostile and conspiratorial' world to be 'directed specifically *against him*'.¹⁰ The spokesman for the paranoid style, on the other hand, finds it directed 'against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not him alone, but millions of others'.¹¹ This is a significant difference, in that

Insofar as he does not usually see himself singled out as the individual victim of a personal conspiracy, he is somewhat more rational and much more disinterested. His sense that his political passions are unselfish and patriotic, in fact, goes far [as] to intensify his feeling of righteousness and his moral indignation.¹²

Such observations carry down to the present moment with a conspicuous salience. Criminological research into US national elections finds that the political preferences of white Americans are often shaped by stereotypes of African Americans as 'lazy, welfare-

7 H. L. Mencken, *Notes on Democracy*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1921, p. 22.

8 R. Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style in American Politics', in *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, New York, Vintage, 2012, p. 3.

9 Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style', p. 4.

10 Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style', p. 4, emphasis in original.

11 Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style', pp. 3–4.

12 Hofstadter, 'The Paranoid Style', p. 4.

dependent, violent, or demanding special favors'; in other words, that 'race cues often racialize white public opinion', and 'racial messages do shape the political response of white citizens', in the manner described both by Hofstadter and Mencken.¹³ When the political responses of whites feed into crime policy, this research finds the primary source of information to be what is reported by the corporate press, which as a result of the stereotyping of minorities becomes the basis of government initiatives in that regard. 'There is no evidence that political elites' initial involvement in the wars on crime and drugs was a response to popular sentiments', notes Katherine Beckett:

Public concern about crime was quite low when candidate Barry Goldwater decided to run on a law and order platform in the 1964 presidential election. Similarly, when President Ronald Reagan first declared a 'national war on drugs' in 1982 and when he called for a renewal of this campaign in 1986, fewer than 2% of those polled identified drugs as the nation's most important problem. Nor is the most recent reincarnation of the crime issue a response to popular concern, although the public's attention has certainly shifted in that direction. Only 7% of those polled identified crime as the nation's most important problem in June 1993, just before the legislative debate over anticrime legislation began. Six months later, in response to the high levels of publicity these legislative activities received, that percentage had increased to 30%. By August 1994, a record high of 52% of those polled were most concerned about crime. Gallup Poll analysts concluded that this result was 'no doubt a reflection of the emphasis given to that issue by President Clinton since he announced his crime bill in last January's State-of-the-Union Address, and of the extensive media coverage now that the crime bill is being considered by Congress'.¹⁴

Beckett concludes by noting the irony of official data indicating a decline in the prevalence of most types of crime during this period. The facts of the situation notwithstanding, racist cues provided by

13 T. Mendelberg, 'Racial Priming Revived', *Perspectives on Politics*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2008, p. 109.

14 K. Beckett, 'Setting the Public Agenda', in *Making Crime Pay: Law and Order in Contemporary American Politics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 25; M. Feeley and J. Simon, 'Folk Devils and Moral Panics: An Appreciation from North America', in D. Downes, P. Rock, C. Chinkin and C. Gearty (eds), *Crime, Social Control and Human Rights: From Moral Panics to States of Denial, Essays in Honour of Stanley Cohen*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 45.

the political class became the basis for a series of exercises in scaremongering, not least of which was the use of the scare campaign over black criminal Willie Horton by George Bush Snr during the 1988 presidential debates, culminating in a moral panic over the 'knockout game' in 2013.¹⁵

The prevalence in US national elections of scaremongering using the paranoid style to take advantage of the strong vein of irrationalism in politics is more than sufficient to invite the reframing of the democratic election cycle as a 'scare cycle'. The scare cycle contrasts with the theoretical notion of election cycles as forums for dispassionate policy debate, places where the voting public are presented with the facts and left alone to make up their own minds, as those who aspire to power scapegoat convenient targets for policy failures.¹⁶ H. L. Mencken, observing this in the 1920s, wrote that 'the whole aim of practical politics is to keep the populace alarmed, and hence clamorous to be led to safety, by menacing it with an endless series of hobgoblins, all of them imaginary'.¹⁷

Moral Panics and the Scare Cycle

One of the main problems in coming to terms with the menacing of the public with an endless series of hobgoblins is that it involves deception as a matter of course; furthermore, the capacity to carry out scapegoating campaigns also implies the power to control the meaning of words, which in turn implies the power to silence criticism. Hence scapegoating campaigns have typically only proved identifiable as such long after the fact. In the past few decades, however, sociological research into moral panics, in concerning itself with episodes in which 'a condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests',¹⁸ has expedited the process of identi-

15 M. King, 'The "Knockout Game": Moral Panic and the Politics Of White Victimhood', *Race & Class*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2015; A. Tepperman, 'Prison Weights for No Man: Interpreting a Modern Moral Panic', *Critical Issues in Justice and Politics*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2014; D. Anderson, *Crime and the Politics of Hysteria: How the Willie Horton Story Changed American Justice*, New York, Crown, 1995; T. Mendelberg, 'Executing Hortons: Racial Crime in the 1988 Presidential Campaign', *Public Opinion Quarterly*, vol. 61, no. 1, 1997; T. Mendelberg, *The Race Card: Campaign Strategy, Implicit Messages, and the Norm of Equality*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001.

16 See, for example, M. Lofgren, *The Deep State: The Fall of the Constitution and the Rise of a Shadow Government*, New York, Penguin, 2016; S. Wolin, *Democracy Incorporated: Managed Democracy and the Specter of Inverted Totalitarianism*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2008.

17 Mencken, *Notes on Democracy*.

18 S. Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, London, Routledge, 2002, p. 1.

fying scapegoating narratives, offering critical insight into the production of imaginary hobgoblins.

In the seminal *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, sociologist Stanley Cohen explored the reactions of local communities and media outlets to youth-related disturbances at a number of English seaside towns in the late 1960s. The youth involved belonged to various subcultures. He argued that a process of 'deviant amplification' was at play. Since the disturbances were largely little more than a series of brief clashes between rival youth subcultures, the reaction was disproportionate to the threat presented to the communities concerned.¹⁹ Despite producing no lasting damage to life or limb, they were presented publicly as the beginning of the breakdown of society. It was argued that the media reaction was consciously instigated as a kind of morality play by community leaders who, perceiving a threat to their privilege and power, were anxious to reassert both — paradoxically rendering themselves both cause and cure of the problem.²⁰

Seeking to make sense of this paradox, Cohen referred to a manual for disaster response groups, outlining an almost identical process for the process of 'deviant amplification', or 'the production of deviance' — the production, in other words, of imaginary hobgoblins with which to terrify the public and stimulate the desire for draconian laws that could be used later for other purposes. Cohen quoted Howard Becker to the effect that 'deviance is created by society ... Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance and by applying those rules to particular persons and labelling them as outsiders'.²¹ Deviance as a social phenomenon, then, depended far more on who had the power to define the meaning of the word and impose their own definition on popular discourse than on the particular characteristics of anyone thus labelled.²²

In practical terms, this meant that rather than responding to social crises with constructive actions addressing the grievances of those involved in conflict, the 'moral entrepreneurs' responsible for the panic sought leverage through deviance production to rehabilitate the ideological foundations of the status quo and the

¹⁹ Cohen, *Folk Devils*.

²⁰ Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 2.

²¹ Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 5.

²² C. B. Little, 'The Social Construction of Deviance', in *Deviance & Control: Theory, Research, and Social Policy*, Itasca, F. E. Peacock, 1989, p. 381; Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 5.

legitimacy of those who represented it. In providing the power structure with a way to polarise public opinion, it also provided them with a hobgoblin or bogeyman with which to sow terror, smear critics and opponents on the basis of guilt by association, and reposition themselves as public saviours under crisis conditions of their own making. The labelling process became the basis for scare campaigns that would trigger primitive 'fight-or-flight' responses in the public, which could then be harnessed for political purposes. Thus 'social control leads to deviance', Cohen pointed out, not vice versa.²³

Given the requirement that there be control over the channels of mass communication, deviance production was, by definition, an elite-controlled process.²⁴ In Cohen's study, suppression of the root causes of the youth disturbances by a sensationalist corporate media looking to sell newspapers was a critical factor in the successful engineering of moral panics. Thus, youth alienation created by high unemployment and the fear of change in older generations triggered by the rise of youth culture were not considered. Overwhelmed by events, and either unwilling or unable to address the actual causes of the problem, older and more established community members took the easy option of demonising disaffected youth as hoodlums and thugs, and the media took advantage of the situation for their own purposes.²⁵

In such cases, where unethical, immoral, harmful, dangerous and even criminal behaviours need reconstructing as morally just and right, the group of behavioural traits understood in social psychology as 'moral disengagement' turn out to be particularly

23 E. Said, *Orientalism*, London, Penguin, 2003; K. Maryam, 'Gender, Orientalism and Representations of the "Other" in the War on Terror', *Global Change, Peace & Security*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2011; S. Reinke de Buitrago (ed.), *Portraying the Other in International Relations: Cases of Othering, Their Dynamics and the Potential for Transformation*, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012; Cohen, *Folk Devils*, p. 8.

24 'Among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandise on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The representatives of these interests have important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constrain media policy. This is normally not accomplished by crude intervention, but by the selection of right-thinking personnel and by the editors' and working journalists' internalization of priorities and definitions of newsworthiness that conform to the institutions' policy' — E. S. Herman and N. Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, New York, Random House, 2010, p. xi. See also J. Oplinger, R. Talbot and Y. Aktay, 'Elite Power and the Manufacture of a Moral Panic: The Case of the Dirty War in Argentina', in *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World*, New York, Bloomsbury, 2013, p. 263; G. Shafir and C. E. Schairer, 'The War on Terror as Political Moral Panic', in G. Shafir, E. Meade and W. J. Aceves (eds), *Lessons and Legacies of the War on Terror: From Moral Panic to Permanent War*, London, Routledge, 2013, p. 9.

25 Cohen, *Folk Devils*.

useful.²⁶ In contrast to cartoonish stereotypes of villainy as the result of a sociopathic rejection of morality per se, research into moral disengagement recognises that we rarely reject morality outright; rather, we apply it selectively. Broadly, the mechanisms of moral disengagement include:

1. Displacing or diffusing responsibility (*everyone does it, it's normal, and so on*);
2. Misrepresenting injurious consequences as beneficial to the victim (*they like it, it's good for them*);
3. Demonising and dehumanising the victim (*they are bad/evil, therefore the rules we have for regular people don't apply*);
4. Articulating a self-defence in morally absolute terms (*those who aren't for me are against me*; willing conflation of criticism of ideas/attitude/conduct/policy and attacks on person and rights).²⁷

Insofar as it constitutes a means of dehumanising or demonising of the other, deviance production can therefore be seen as a form of moral disengagement. To the extent that this is the case, moral disengagement would seem to be intimately associated with moral panics in constituting one of its characteristic facets. If moral panics create a safe space for scapegoating, the mechanics of moral disengagement act as the engine of deviance production and moral panics. While not all forms of moral disengagement appear in every episode of deviance production, moral panicking over external threats will characteristically involve falsely associating dissent, criticism, questioning, challenge, doubt, or failure to worship with the requisite level of awe, with attacks on one's person and rights on the basis of the persecutory tactic of 'guilt by association'. Deviance production will inevitably depend on a logic that boils down to victim-playing, victim-blaming and the 'false-dilemma' fallacy (*those who are not for us are against us*).

The false dilemma becomes the basis for an a priori confusion, as noted, of object and relation, in which dysfunctional, unjust and irrational social relations that produce crises can be swept under the rug in the name of persecuting the deviant stereotype now characterising a victimised group. There can be no dysfunctional social relations if they are not even acknowledged to exist. Neatly

26 A. Bandura, 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement', in W. Reich (ed.), *Origins Of Terrorism: Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, States of Mind*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990; A. Bandura, 'Moral Disengagement in the Perpetration of Inhumanities', *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1999; C. Moore, 'Moral Disengagement in Processes of Organizational Corruption', *Journal of Business Ethics*, vol. 80, no. 1, 2008.

27 Bandura, 'Perpetration of Inhumanities'; Bandura, 'Mechanisms of Moral Disengagement'.

summarising this fact in defending his declaration that ‘the means of defence against foreign danger, have been always the instruments of tyranny at home’, founding father and author of the US Constitution James Madison pointed out during the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1777 that ‘among the Romans it was a standing maxim to excite a war whenever a revolt was apprehended’.²⁸ Few have taken issue with him; the Romans too, it seems, were preoccupied with imaginary hobgoblins, not a small part of their legacy.

Hobgoblins in History

The historical background to moral panics provides further insight into the nature of scare cycles. Historical inquisitions, show trials and kangaroo courts provide precedents for today’s kangaroo court of public opinion, where trial by inquisition has been replaced with trial by a mass media devoted to the use of deviance production and victim-blaming to expedite the manufacture of consent.²⁹ As *Trumbo*, a recent Hollywood film on the subject reminds us, Hollywood in the 1950s fell to ideological hysteria and authoritarianism as screenwriters and directors were called before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and asked to answer the question: ‘Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?’ Those called before the Committee who refused to answer or to betray friendships by naming their associates were held in contempt and blacklisted from the motion picture industry as communists, in the name of defending democratic norms.³⁰

In a climate of moral panic, what belief system the accused subscribed to was immaterial; what mattered was that they had been identified as non-conformists. The Committee did not even

28 J. Madison, *Letters and Other Writings of James Madison*, Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott, 1865; Records of the Federal Convention of 1787, <<http://memory.loc.gov/ll/llfr/001/0400/04950465.gif>>, accessed 14 April 2017. The latter quote is generally updated into modern English as ‘if Tyranny and Oppression come to this land, it will be in the guise of fighting a foreign enemy’.

29 Herman and Chomsky, *Manufacturing Consent*.

30 See, for example, R. Griffith, *The Politics of Fear: Joseph McCarthy and the Senate*, Amherst, University of Massachusetts Press, 1987; V. S. Navasky, *Naming Names*, New York, Viking Press, 1980; L. Ceplair and S. Englund, *The Inquisition in Hollywood: Politics in the Film Community 1930–60*, Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2003; R. Schmidt, *Red Scare: FBI and the Origins of Anticommunism in the United States, 1919–1943*, Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2000; N. Fischer, *Spider Web: The Birth of American Anticommunism*, Chicago, Illinois University Press, 2016.

need testimony to achieve its task; J. Edgar Hoover's 'Security Index' became the basis for the actual function of the HUAC as 'inquisitorial theatre'. Said a HUAC investigator to the *Washington Star* in 1957: 'We wouldn't be able to stay in business overnight if it weren't for the FBI'.³¹ In this respect, the HUAC operated on the same basis as every other form of the proverbial kangaroo court throughout history. The accused did not appear before the Committee to argue a case, but to demonstrate deference to the Committee and allegiance to the status quo (and the vested interests behind it). Those who failed to submit to such ideological policing, specifically aimed at Hollywood with a view to purging the cultural beacon of the Western world of *crimethink*, received the mark of otherness for daring to doubt the right of the HUAC to assume the role of thought police. Since the HUAC operated on the principle that 'those who are not for us are against us', it was taken for granted that refusal to venerate the Committee with the requisite level of awe was tantamount to a vote for Stalinism.³²

In the same vein, throughout the three centuries of the European witch-hunts, opposition to burning at the stake was identified with giving aid to witches, or even with being a witch oneself; thus does the very first line of the unhinged and misogynistic witch-hunting tract, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, declare that anyone who doubts the existence of witches is a heretic.³³ If you cast doubt on the official orthodoxy or think for yourself, the Brides of Satan win — as do the communists, or indeed the terrorists.

Much like the HUAC, the witch trials were less designed, as Silvia Federici has revealed, to save Europe from an actually existing threat than they were to neutralise a rebellious peasantry. Lately released from their feudal bonds by the decline of the feudal economy and the experience of famine and pandemic, mass deference to theocracy became notably lacking; fearing for its temporal power, the Catholic hierarchy turned to other means to protect itself.³⁴ Much like the HUAC, the witch trials functioned as

31 J. Feldman, *Manufacturing Hysteria: A History of Scapegoating, Surveillance, and Secrecy in Modern America*, New York, Pantheon, 2011, pp. 189–91.

32 'Ellen Schrecker has suggested, based on recently opened FBI files from the Cold War years, that McCarthyism should properly be renamed "Hooverism" because of the pivotal role played by the Bureau in creating the anticommunist consensus: "For the FBI was the bureaucratic heart of the McCarthy era"' — Schmidt, *Red Scare*, p. 9, fn. 2.

33 C. S. Mackay and H. Institoris, *Malleus Maleficarum, or the Hammer of Witches*, Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 1.

34 S. Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York, Autonomedia, 2008.

show trials to identify and persecute dissenters and non-conformists, terrorising those ensnared in their web with the prospect of burning at the stake, and forcing them to name their associates in ritual punishment for disobedience and non-conformity while providing the theocratic Terror with new targets. Other notorious kangaroo courts, such as the Stalinist show trials of the Great Purge of the 1930s, performed the same function. Dissidents were arrested as counter-revolutionaries and forced to give up names of their associates to avoid the firing squad; in this instance, as in the others, opposition to abuses of power was equated with support for capitalist reaction — *if you think for yourself, the counter-revolutionaries win*).³⁵

In all of the above examples, the climate of elevated emotions they produced functioned as an enabling narrative for persecution based on a fear of the other and the equally great lust for revenge, with the aid of an appropriate victim mentality and willing blindness to the difference between being criticised and being attacked. The success of this approach depended on the viciousness and vociferousness of the scare propaganda enabling it, and on the opportunities available to those so motivated to attack their political opponents in the name of upholding justice. The HUAC is especially instructive for us today in demonstrating how completely pre- and anti-democratic dynamics of fear, revenge and mob justice can weasel their way into formally or purportedly democratic systems of government, and the great damage they can do. History might exonerate the victims and condemn the perpetrators, but it can never recover what was lost to and by victims. Likewise, the hundreds of thousands of innocent lives destroyed by show trials tilting after witches, counter-revolutionaries and other deviants and evil-prone misfits can never be reclaimed, even if history later condemns the institutions that took them.

Hobgoblins and the News Cycle

The essential problem of historical show trials is the fact that the moral-panic narratives upon which they turned could be reinvented in other forms, giving rise to new deviant stereotypes, new persecutions and new bloodlettings. This is complicated by the

35 R. Conquest, *The Great Terror: A Reassessment*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008.

characteristically deceptive nature of scapegoating propaganda, and the difficulty of combating the hegemony of the corporate mass media. One particularly courageous attempt to confront this problem has been the vastly underrated seminal study of corporate propaganda by Alex Carey in his *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, which examines, among other things, the origins of the HUAC.³⁶

Commenting on the origins of what became the public relations industry (or these days 'strategic communication'), Carey notes 'three [twentieth-century] developments of great political importance: the growth of democracy, the growth of corporate power, and the growth of corporate propaganda as a means of protecting corporate power against democracy'³⁷ — factors of particular significance where the national election cycle is concerned, paradoxically enough. In a remarkable passage, while ruminating at some length on the historical relationship between these three developments and Hofstadter's 'paranoid style', Carey describes a three-stage process for the reconstruction of ideological orthodoxy under cover of what is essentially moral panic:

1. A threat (real or imagined) from outside the United States achieves a dramatic impact on popular consciousness; 2. This effect occurs at a time when liberal reforms and popular hostility to the large corporations and the power they exercise are perceived by conservative interests as a profound threat from inside the U.S. social and political system. Finally, 3. The two perceived threats merge, to the discredit of the internal reforms and of any political party, persons or policies associated with them.³⁸

We would do well to recall that this was published in 1995; I have read no eerier foreshadowings of the future than this. Some of Carey's examples are referred to above, others may be found in earlier periods of American nativism.³⁹ Carey's description of corporate propaganda in the United States recalls instances of deviance production evident in premodern and totalitarian societies, raising serious questions as to how deeply entrenched the basic assumptions fuelling them are in our own period. While some

36 A. Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, Sydney, UNSW Press, 1995.

37 Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, p. 18.

38 Carey, *Taking the Risk Out of Democracy*, p. 37.

39 See J. Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860–1925*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 2002.

might read conspiracy theorising in such commentary, note what Edward Bernays, the 'Father of Public Relations', wrote in his own work on the subject: 'the conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society' —

Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of ... It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world.⁴⁰

Alex Carey notes that this 'conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses' takes the form of the development of a corporate narrative that identifies the particular, sectional and partisan interests of a burgeoning corporate power with the common interest of the nation as a whole. In this narrative, defenders of partisan economic interests were provided with a means of blame-shifting by wilfully conflating criticism of one's conduct with attacks on one's rights and person, as per the false-dilemma fallacy associated with moral disengagement. It was unthinkable that one could criticise prevailing economic and social orthodoxies because they deserved it; within the binary mode of thinking, one could only be for an increasingly oligarchic status quo, or outside and against America.

It was blinkered thinking of this kind that gave birth to the HUAC. A paradox is conspicuous here in that the HUAC acted in the name of defending democratic norms while using methods previously associated with the Great Purge and the European witch-hunts. A direct comparison is unnecessary to show that the dynamics upon which the HUAC turned — the production of deviance and victim-blaming based on a victim complex enabled by a tendency to identify doubt in the prevailing orthodoxies with giving aid to the evil-doers — were identical. The false dilemma was equally serviceable whether the kangaroo court took an institutional form or the form of 'inquisitorial theatre', sustained by public opinion shaped and moulded by public-relations narratives designed to 'pull the wires which control the public mind'.

40 E. L. Bernays and M. C. Miller, *Propaganda*, New York, Routledge, 1928, pp. 9–10.

Australian Hobgoblins

The recent history of election cycles in Australia bears out this point, the most glaring example being the fallout from the terrorist attacks of 2001. Katherine Gleeson notes that this was one of several gifts of heaven-sent manna received by Prime Minister John Howard, who in using terrorism for electoral purposes set a precedent for all who followed on the basis of deviance production and scapegoating, the oldest tricks in the book. 'Historically,' Gleeson writes, 'provoked attack offers leaders an extraordinary opportunity for increased political legitimacy' —

With an election looming and trailing in the polls, the chance to engage Australia in what was perceived publicly as a legitimate war was arguably too good a political offering to pass up. According to McAllister, the Labor Party held a 13-point lead over the Liberal Party in the first six months of 2001, and looked set for defeat were it not for the vote-turning issues of border protection and terrorism. Polls throughout the world reflected the reality that voters opt to support the incumbent government in times of uncertainty and existential threat; Howard rode this wave with great success. He was remade as something of a war leader in the style of his great mentor Robert Menzies; he became the 'deputy sheriff' he had aspired to two years prior; he successfully wedged the ALP on security; he took on a new image as a gutsy conviction politician; and he promised Australians security against that which they feared (rationally or otherwise).⁴¹

As a precursor to the torrent of xenophobia and Islamophobia unleashed in September 2001 came the *Tampa* affair (in August that year), in which 438 refugees from Afghanistan were rescued by the eponymous Norwegian vessel in international waters, then denied entry into Australia. Together with the 'children overboard' affair in October, in which the government lied about refugees throwing their children into the water as their boat sank, these incidents were widely regarded as the catalysts for the Coalition victory in the November federal elections.⁴² Ian Ward noted that 'these events

⁴¹ K. Gleeson, *Australia's 'War on Terror' Discourse*, Surrey, Ashgate, 2014, p. 14.

⁴² D. Marr, M. Wilkinson and R. Ware, *Dark Victory: How a Government Lied Its Way to Political Triumph*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 2003; S. Pietsch, 'Racism from Above or Below? Official Reactions to Jewish Refugees in the 1930s and the Tampa Affair', in J. Coghlan, J. Minns and

were part of a carefully calculated Liberal Party strategy to revive its flagging electoral stocks⁴³ — one whose wild success offered a clear precedent for elections to come. While it has never been illegal to seek asylum in Australia, Howard nevertheless declared on 3AW radio his belief ‘that it is in Australia’s national interest that we draw a line on what is increasingly becoming an uncontrollable number of illegal arrivals in this country’.⁴⁴ Such comments were dabbling in both deviance production and moral disengagement; the labelling of refugees as ‘illegals’ demonised and dehumanised them while allowing Howard to play the victim of this threat to Australia’s national interest, and to victimise those who were already victims of a war he had played a part in starting.

These were also characteristic features of the children overboard affair, where on the eve of the 2001 election the Howard government claimed that asylum seekers had thrown their children into the sea as their fishing vessel sunk. These claims were false — at the time of the alleged incident the boat, with 223 people on board, including fifty-six children, was still afloat and limping back towards Indonesia.⁴⁵ A Senate inquiry established to determine what had happened later concluded that ‘[t]he story was in fact untrue’, and that the Howard government had known they were false accusations prior to the federal election.⁴⁶ The report explicitly noted that these false claims were ‘used by the Government to demonise [asylum seekers] as part of the argument for the need for a “tough” stand against external threats and in favour of “putting Australia’s interests first”’.⁴⁷ Despite these and subsequent findings against the government’s claims, the timing of a second Senate inquiry prior to the 2004 election permitted the affair to dominate that campaign too, once more helping to return the Howard gov-

A. Wells (eds), *Seeking Refuge: Asylum Seekers and Politics in a Globalising World*, Wollongong, University of Wollongong Press, 2005; G. Hugo, ‘Australian Immigration Policy: The Significance of the Events of September 11’, *International Migration Review*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2002; M. Macken-Horarik, ‘Working the Borders in Racist Discourse: The Challenge of the “Children Overboard Affair” in News Media Texts’, *Social Semiotics*, vol. 13, no. 3, 2003.

43 I. Ward, ‘The Tampa, Wedge Politics, and a Lesson for Political Journalism’, *Australian Journalism Review*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2002, p. 21.

44 J. Howard, interview on Radio 3AW, Melbourne, <<http://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-12043>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

45 T. Kevin, *A Certain Maritime Incident the Sinking of SIEV X*, Melbourne, Scribe Publications, 2004.

46 Senate Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident, *Report of the Senate Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident*, Canberra, Commonwealth of Australia, 2002, <https://www.aph.gov.au/binaries/senate/committee/maritime_incident_ctte/report/report.pdf>, p. xxi.

47 Senate Select Committee on a Certain Maritime Incident, *Report*, p. xxi.

ernment to office.⁴⁸ Such was its disdain for Howard's '[cynical exploiting of] voters' fears of a wave of illegal immigrants by demonising asylum-seekers', that even the usually ultraconservative *Australian* newspaper entitled one story, 'PM's Credibility Blown out of the Water', adding that 'this disturbing saga still has a long way to go'.⁴⁹

Not one to let facts get in the way of inquisitorial theatre, however, Howard continued to campaign on 'border protection', to great media fanfare led by papers like *The Australian*, famously declaring that 'we will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come', and continuing to stir the pot with comments to the effect that 'this campaign, more than any other that I have been involved in, is very much about ... having an uncompromising view about the fundamental right of this country to protect its borders'.⁵⁰ Border protection was never in question, though Howard's insinuation that it was carried the implicit assumption, rarely challenged by the mass media, that Australia's adherence to international refugee conventions was undermining Australian sovereignty. Howard's victim complex in this respect reflected his moral disengagement, manifest in his victimisation of unfortunates later found to be legitimate refugees — many of whom eventually resettled in New Zealand.

Rick Kuhn notes that this campaign strategy provided Howard with a way to promote the unpopular austerity platform that had seen the Liberal Party lose the 'unlosable' 1993 election. With a hat tipped to the rising figure of Pauline Hanson, whose policies he would eventually appropriate as a strategy to undermine her political support, racism provided an eminently suitable distraction — one that could be combined with Reaganite counter-terrorism narratives and incipient xenophobia in the wake of the September 11 terrorist atrocities in the United States.⁵¹ These inevitably received similar

48 AAP, 'Children Overboard to Dominate Campaign', *The Age*, 1 September 2004, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/09/01/1093938945905.html>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

49 P. Walkers, 'PM's Credibility Blown out of the Water', *The Australian*, 22 February 2002; K. Arlington, 'Children Overboard the Most Despicable of Lies: Hawke', *The Age*, 24 August 2004, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/08/24/1093246520431.html>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

50 J. Howard, 'Election Speeches, 2001', *Election Speeches Online*, <<http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/2001-john-howard>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

51 R. Kuhn, 'The Rise of Anti-Muslim Racism in Australia: Who Benefits?', paper presented to the Humanities Research Centre Work-in-Progress Seminar, Canberra, Australian National University, 20 February 2007; S. Poynting and V. Mason, 'The Resistible Rise of Islamophobia: Anti-Muslim Racism in the UK and Australia before 11 September 2001', *Journal of Sociology*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2007; S. Poynting and G. Morgan, *Global Islamophobia: Muslims and Moral Panic in the West*, London, Routledge, 2016; M. Toaldo, *The Origins of the US War on Terror: Lebanon, Libya and American Intervention in the Middle East*, London, Routledge, 2012.

treatment according to the established script. Howard led the way in linking terrorism and illegal immigration, declaring on the AM radio program on 19 September 2001 that ‘every country has a redoubled obligation in the light of what has happened to scrutinise very carefully who is coming into this country’⁵² — the linking of one existential threat to another being an example of another noted phenomenon that moral panic researchers have called ‘convergence’.⁵³ In another speech, Howard announced that Australian voters ‘must also ask themselves who is better able to lead this country in the dangerously different strategic and economic circumstances in which the country now finds itself’⁵⁴ — being ‘tough on terrorism’ was now a campaign platform.

As the basis for the scare cycle, such talk also begat the ‘Pacific Solution’, whereby refugees to Australia would be warehoused offshore, which by 2005 had cost \$220 million, in addition to the \$336 million spent on a new 800-bed detention camp on Christmas Island, and \$58 on Manus Island.⁵⁵ As it turned out, the border protection industry would become a useful Keynesian economic stimulus and job-creation program — for border guards, Australian Federal Police (AFP) officers, as well as their suppliers and outfitters — with few complaints from the paragons of laissez-faire capitalism about state intervention in economic life. Indeed, as one commentator put it, ‘stopping the boats is bad for business’.⁵⁶ Howard gloated as he was re-elected that people would ‘remember that period that I stopped the boats’.⁵⁷

In 2004, Howard again deployed the rhetoric that had worked so famously four years before.⁵⁸ In this, as before, he had the help of Toby Ralph, known these days for taking a job in 2007 for the

52 M. Willacy, ‘PM Responds to Latest Issues’, *AM*, Radio National, 19 September 2001, <<http://www.abc.net.au/am/stories/s370207.htm>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

53 S. Hall, C. Critcher, T. Jefferson, J. Clarke and B. Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State and Law and Order*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 220.

54 Howard, ‘Election Speeches, 2001’.

55 F. Walker, ‘Royal Way’s the Only Route to Heal Tampa Shame’, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August 2005, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/opinion/royal-ways-the-only-route-to-heal-tampa-shame/2005/08/21/1124562735781.html>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

56 B. Bicakci, ‘The Border Protection-Asylum Industry’, *Overland*, 23 August 2013, <<https://overland.org.au/2013/08/the-border-protection-asylum-industry/>>, accessed 20 May 2017; A. Loewenstein, ‘Stopping the Boats is Bad for Business’, *The Age*, 3 August 2013, <<http://www.theage.com.au/comment/stopping-the-boats-is-bad-for-business-20130802-2r4vy.html>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

57 L. Schwartz, ‘Howard’s Boat People Claim “Rubbed”’, *The Age*, 2 July 2005, <<http://www.theage.com.au/news/immigration/howards-boat-people-claim-rubbed/2005/07/01/1119724809508.html>>, accessed 21 May 2017.

58 Shafir and Schairer, ‘The War on Terror’.

Australian Constructors Association to develop a strategy for unleashing a 'politically damaging campaign' against the Australian Labor Party unless it toned down its opposition to the government's WorkChoices legislation,⁵⁹ the Association clearly recognising Ralph's skill in blame-shifting. *Crikey* notes that the plan 'was shelved when Labor agreed to postpone its plans to abolish the building industry watchdog'.⁶⁰ Howard's re-election speech made sure to make hay with popular fears of terrorism, alleging that 'terrorism has cast a dark cloud over the world', and that 'it is a challenge that must be repulsed, and a challenge best repulsed by us being determined to live the lives of a free and democratic society'.⁶¹ He added, 'whether popular or not, I will never hesitate to do whatever is right and necessary, to protect Australia and the Australian people against the threat of terrorism'.⁶²

As the already toxic political discourse was further inflamed by such comments, spilling over into ugly episodes such as the Cronulla race riots of 2005, Howard pressed on, claiming it was in 'Australia's national interest' to support the continuing war on terror, even as this created the conditions for the rise of Islamic State, as Paula Matthewson has saliently observed:

While it may be eminently logical to bolster security measures to deal with the rise of organised and lone wolf terrorists at home, it makes little sense to participate in a military campaign similar to the one that caused home-grown extremists to arise in the first place.⁶³

Otherwise preoccupied with the emotions of the moment, however, the kangaroo court of Australian public opinion failed to notice or anticipate the possibility of such developments. In 2003, *The Onion* quipped: 'If you thought Osama bin Laden was bad, just wait until the countless children who become orphaned by U.S. bombs in the

59 B. Debney, 'Kill the Poor: the Death of Satire and the Sociopathy of the Rich', *CounterPunch*, 25 February 2016, <<http://www.counterpunch.org/2016/02/25/kill-the-poor-the-death-of-satire-and-the-sociopathy-of-the-rich/>>, accessed 20 May 2016.

60 M. Knot, 'The Power Index: Spinners, "Appalling" Toby Ralph at #8', *Crikey*, 9 February 2012, <<https://www.crikey.com.au/2012/02/09/the-power-index-spinners-appalling-toby-ralph-at-8/>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

61 J. Howard, 'Election Speeches, 2004', *Election Speeches Online*, <<http://electionspeeches.moadoph.gov.au/speeches/2004-john-howard>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

62 P. Matthewson, 'Friendship and War: Abbott Should Tread Carefully', *The Drum*, 15 September 2014, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-09-15/matthewson-friendship-and-war-abbott-should-tread-carefully/5743112>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

63 Matthewson, 'Friendship and War'.

coming weeks are all grown up',⁶⁴ as today they now are, with the predicted consequences now bemoaned by all and used as an excuse for further responses along the same lines as those that created the problem to begin with, *ad infinitum*.

Lacking new major events to seize on, Howard was ousted from office in 2007, although he left a lasting legacy — attack ads from both sides of the political fence seeking to capitalise on the priming of hateful negativity throughout the electorate.⁶⁵ In 2013, news-media doyen Laurie Oakes noted with approval that 'Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is turning back the tide on the boats', recalling that 'Rudd once promised not to "lurch to the Right" on border protection' — no one was complaining that he was adhering to Hofstadter's paranoid style too.⁶⁶ As the saying goes, however, those who live by the sword die by it too: an unprecedented scare campaign around Rudd's proposed Resource Super Profit Tax (RSPT) on mining radically undermined the government and contributed to Rudd's downfall in June 2010, reminding us of Carey's observation regarding the growth of democracy alongside the growth of corporate power, the latter in this case funding a supreme example of a constructed scare campaign via the amplification of what it meant to be Australian.⁶⁷

Having taken advantage of the unprecedented corporate-funded scare campaign, Prime Minister Julia Gillard likewise pandered to the prevailing sentiment regarding refugees, eventually managing to have the Australian mainland excised from the migration zone for the purposes of avoiding national commitments to international refugee conventions — something Howard had tried to do and failed, his backbench having determined the strategy too merce-

64 *The Onion*, 'This War Will Destabilize the Entire Mideast Region and Set Off a Global Shockwave of Anti-Americanism vs. No It Won't', 26 March 2003, <<http://www.theonion.com/multiblogpost/this-war-will-destabilize-the-entire-mideast-region-11534>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

65 P. Coorey, 'Attack Ads: A Sign of the Federal Campaign to Come', *The Age*, 26 March 2007, <<http://www.smh.com.au/news/state-election-2007/attack-ads-a-sign-of-the-federal-campaign-to-come/2007/03/25/1174761283936.html>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

66 L. Oakes, 'Prime Minister Kevin Rudd is Turning Back the Tide on the Boats', *The Herald Sun*, 19 July 2013, <<http://www.heraldsun.com.au/news/opinion/prime-minister-kevin-rudd-is-turning-back-the-tide-on-the-boats/news-story/9451bcf6cf5c4bb816fa5f527e34468>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

67 S. D. Marshall, 'How Much Does It Cost to Bring Down a Prime Minister? The Story of the Australian Mining Tax', SSRN, 19 October 2012, <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2342475>, accessed 20 May 2017; M. Knott, 'The Man Who Killed Rudd's Mining Tax', *The Weekend Australian*, 29 November 2011, <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/business/business-spectator/the-man-who-killed-rudds-mining-tax/news-story/851da8b4dc89dc8f1d34b236eba50737>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

nary and dishonest.⁶⁸ Following the example of her predecessor, Gillard too died by the sword, this time at the hands of Howard's disciple Tony Abbott, who in making his election strategy the production of deviance through three-word scare slogans demonstrated that he had learnt his lessons well.⁶⁹ Abbott declared at around this time: 'What we will ensure is that we are not played for mugs by the people-smugglers and their customers ... we will not be taken for a ride as a nation and a people'⁷⁰ — though if he had sincerely wanted to break the people smugglers' 'business model', he only needed to permit the asylum seekers entry into the country in line with international refugee conventions. Not being serviceable to scare-cycle narratives, however, such options were off the table.

Abbott's use of three-word slogans (for example, 'Stop the Boats') provides relevant context for the recent 2016 double dissolution election, triggered by the failure of a Bill to reinstate the Australian Building and Construction Commission (ABCC). Minister for Industrial Relations Senator Michaelia Cash alleged of the construction industry that 'the level of industrial unlawfulness in this sector adds to the cost of every project', thereby hurting productivity (and, by implication, the national good, as per Carey's corporatist narrative referred to above).⁷¹ Cash alleged that the upshot of these attacks on productivity and idealism was that 'Australians pay more'; she and the government remained silent, however, on the rising cost of electricity thanks to the \$48 billion in taxpayer funds spent augmenting the power grid.⁷² The failure of

68 M. Phillips, 'Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Excising Australia from the Migration Zone', *The Conversation*, 17 May 2013, <<https://theconversation.com/out-of-sight-out-of-mind-excising-australia-from-the-migration-zone-14387>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

69 *The Advertiser*, 'Prime Minister Julia Gillard: Why We Must Stop the Boats', 26 September 2011, <<http://www.adelaidenow.com.au/ipad/prime-minister-julia-gillard-why-we-must-stop-the-boats/news-story/6c9e592ae9d4b88b2b812d61c42a39ec?>>, accessed 20 May 2017; A. Rourke, 'Tony Abbott, the Man Who Promised to "Stop the Boats", Sails to Victory', *The Guardian*, 8 September 2013, <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/07/australia-election-tony-abbott-liberal-victory>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

70 B. Hall and D. Harrison, 'We Won't Buckle to Threats of Self-Harm: Morrison', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 July 2013, <<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/we-wont-buckle-to-threats-of-selfharm-morrison-20130708-2plig.html>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

71 J. Marszalek, 'Master Builders Australia: Nation Held to Ransom by Union Thugs', *The Courier-Mail*, 22 March 2016, <<http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/master-builders-australia-nation-held-to-ransom-by-union-thugs/news-story/cdad2a5c3c2d6eb8f2f9ed2c8fb676c>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

72 J. Hill, 'Power Corrupts How Network Companies Lined Their Pockets and Drove Electricity Prices through the Roof', *The Monthly*, July 2014, <<https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2014/july/1404136800/jess-hill/power-corrupts>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

the Turnbull government's scare narrative to capture the public imagination in light of such inconsistencies perhaps goes some way towards explaining Turnbull's reversion to xenophobia in the face of low approval ratings prior to the 2016 election. Similar behaviour has also been a marked characteristic of his US counterpart in Donald Trump, both as a campaign strategy and a response to low approval ratings, evidencing Ghassan Hage's contention that 'Muslim-bashing has become de rigeur and widely seen by politicians as a route to popular success', as has war against their countries.⁷³ This fact certainly proved a salient one for Pauline Hanson, returned at the recent election to the Senate as the spokesperson for her revitalised One Nation party.⁷⁴

For his part, the Assistant National Secretary for the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Dave Noonan, said supporters of the ABCC had

... engaged in a campaign of smear and disinformation calculated to induce a moral panic in the community about the construction industry ... The reason for that is simply to persuade the public to accept draconian laws in relation to industrial relations that would not otherwise be acceptable.⁷⁵

To the extent that in initiating another stage of the scare cycle the government was reading from the age-old script of moral panicking and witch-hunting, Noonan may have been unaware how right he really was.

73 G. Hage, *Is Racism an Environmental Threat?*, Cambridge, Polity, 2016, p. 5; M. Brull, 'Into the Abyss: Right on Cue, Desperate Malcolm Turnbull Turns on Minorities', *New Matilda*, 31 October 2016, <<https://newmatilda.com/2016/10/31/into-the-abyss-right-on-cue-desperate-malcolm-turnbull-turns-on-minorities>>, accessed 20 May 2017; *New Matilda*, 'The Oldest Trick in the Journalism Playbook', 26 March 2015, <<https://newmatilda.com/2015/03/26/oldest-trick-journalism-playbook>>, accessed 20 May 2017; G. Greenwald, 'The Spoils of War: Trump Lavished with Media and Bipartisan Praise For Bombing Syria', *The Intercept*, 8 April 2017, <<https://theintercept.com/2017/04/07/the-spoils-of-war-trump-lavished-with-media-and-bipartisan-praise-for-bombing-syria>>, accessed 20 May 2017; N. Clairmont, 'Is Trump an Ur-Fascist?', *The Atlantic*, 5 October 2016, <<https://www.theatlantic.com/notes/2016/10/fascism/502841>>, accessed 20 May 2017.

74 R. Carmody, 'Election 2016: Pauline Hanson's One Nation, Greens Pick Up Final WA Senate Seats', *ABC Online*, 1 August 2016, <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-08-01/election-2016-one-nation-greens-win-wa-senate-seats/7677290>>, accessed 25 May 2016.

75 B. Schneiders and C. Lucas, 'Building Watchdog's 15 Police Referrals in 7 Years Score No Convictions', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 March 2014, <<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/building-watchdogs-15-police-referrals-in-7-years-score-no-convictions-20140323-35bto.html>>, accessed 25 May 2017.

Conclusion

As scapegoating narratives become intertwined with national elections and the news cycle — devoted to the vested interests of the billionaires who own and control the mass media and the task of manufacturing consent through deviance production — historical forms of panic-driven scapegoating may be seen as precursors to contemporary varieties. Just as history repeats in the appearance and reappearance of campaigns of persecution carried out by witch-hunts, literal and otherwise, so too is the election cycle being reduced to a scare cycle in which electoral success is measured in terms of the capacity to menace the public with imaginary hobgoblins.

Election campaigns in Australia over the last fifteen years at least have far more in common with the kangaroo courts of history than contests of policy traditionally associated with representative democracy — more even perhaps than the personality contests that have tended to substitute for policy debates in the contemporary period. Where scaremongering becomes a basis of election cycles, its narratives provide candidates with pretexts to reconstruct themselves as defenders of the nation, regardless of their actual track record, or their support for the kind of neoliberal social and economic policies producing disastrous effects for the living conditions and opportunities of majority populations. In doing this, they represent a tacit admission of failure on the part of those seeking to exonerate themselves of blame, and of a broader failure of the system overall.