

## **The new geopolitics of fear**

### **Abstract**

This century, linked to a series of geopolitical events and phenomena, an array of new fears have come to prominence. A number of academic and popular commentators have named and analysed these fears, and predicted their reach and effects on people in western countries. However, these accounts have often lacked grounding in evidence that is mounting elsewhere on the everyday sites where emotions and geopolitics meet. This paper brings together a range of evidence from social research about western fears connected to the war on/of terror. First, through examining survey evidence since 2001, I suggest that fear of terrorism in the west tends to be overblown, and that fear close to the sites of terrorism should be viewed as exceptional rather than routinised or dispersed. Second, I explore a growing body of research that shows those most affected by fear in the current geopolitical climate are marginalised minority groups. Finally, I identify recent writing on alternative geopolitics which points to some original and hopeful directions for conceptual and empirical work on fear.

### **The new geopolitics of fear**

This century, linked to a series of geopolitical phenomena including the war on/of terror<sup>1</sup>, immigration, the potential of global disease epidemics, and environmental and financial crises, an array of new fears have come to prominence (Bauman 2006; Beck 2002; Furedi, 2006, 2007; Hartmann et al 2005; Hujsmans 2006; Isin 2004; Robin 2004; Svendsen 2008). Commentators writing from a range of disciplines have named these fears, analysed them, and made predictions about the effects they have on domestic and foreign policy and community relations in western countries (in human geography, see for example Bialasiewicz et al 2007; Graham 2001, 2004; Gregory and Pred 2007; Ingram 2008; Katz 2007; Pain and Smith 2008a; Sparke 2007). This has constituted a relatively large scale and rapid shift in the political and social sciences - especially since 2001 – so that the language of emotions, particularly fear, is now popularly deployed in analyses of global events.

Much of this literature has been valuable in highlighting the oppressive and inequitable effects of globalization, securitization and the war on/of terror. But academic research is sometimes also complicit in contributing to a wider public and political discourse which elsewhere I discuss as 'globalised fear' (Pain 2009). Critiquing the explanations and processes commonly cited in the new geopolitics of fear literatures, I describe their treatment of fear as 'global' in two senses. First, in that emotions are positioned as primarily being produced and circulating on a global scale, rather than rooted in the existing biographies of places and their social relations; and second, in that they tend to be discussed as though they apply to everyone all of the time. Globalised fear is a 'metanarrative [that] tends to constitute fear as omnipresent and connected, yet at the same time analyses it remotely, lacking grounding, embodiment or emotion' (Pain 2009, 467). Earlier critiques within feminist international relations and political science raised related concerns, noting that theories of international politics and security make unfounded, damaging and unproblematized assumptions about the pattern and causality of people's emotions (Crawford 2000; see also Bleiker and Hutchison 2008). More broadly, for Ling (2000), the narratives still present in globalization research construct subjects in hierarchical and disempowering ways that echo colonial relations.

In geography, most of the analysis by political geographers has been ploughing a furrow that runs parallel, but is completely separate, to recent interest in the rich texture and implications of emotional geographies (Anderson and Smith 2001; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Davidson et al 2005). There are a handful of exceptions, including Pain and Smith's (2008a) collection, and work on affective geographies and the war on/of terror (e.g. Lim 2007 and Thrift 2007). The latter tends to be speculative rather than examining people's grounded experiences with them (see Pain 2009 for a fuller critique). Elsewhere in the social sciences, spanning geography, sociology and criminology, much longer standing bodies of work on fear of crime have significant implications for understanding the 'new' global fears that are largely untapped (Altheide 2003; Koskela 2009; Mythen and Walklate 2006; Pain 2008, 2009).

Focusing on western fears in relation to the war on/of terror, this paper brings together a range of research evidence in order to evaluate political scientists' recent claims about the reach and nature of geopolitical fear, and to act as a springboard for alternative conceptual framings. Much of the empirical evidence tells a story that diverges from recent high profile texts on the new geopolitics of fear. For example, Bauman (2006) and Furedi (2007) provide carefully drawn accounts of how risk may be constructed in modern societies, but are problematic in assuming whether and how people experience and deal with fear. Both view fear as a constant, ubiquitous condition of modern societies, but it is diffuse and imprecise: "fear' is the name we give to our *uncertainty*: to our *ignorance* of the threat and what is to be *done*' (Bauman 2006, 2). However, neither references empirical work in making assertions about fear of terrorism in the west. From a view of the risk society that, like Beck's and Bauman's, foregrounds individualization, Furedi suggests that twenty-first century fear is new, in that 'we fear alone because of the difficulties we have in constructing a moral consensus'; this has 'forced individuals to look for their own systems of meaning' (100-101). He does not reflect on the inequalities between social groups living in the west in their relation to fear, which significant and longstanding bodies of knowledge about other fears strongly suggests.

This paper unashamedly focuses on a range of empirical evidence which casts light on the new geopolitics of fear (a more detailed conceptual argument is given in Pain 2009). I want to avoid falling into a 'theory versus empirics' trap: theory and empirical work should have a complementary and reflexive relationship. But in this field, there are some sharp disparities between work taking different approaches. Some of the empirical studies I review here are limited in taking an uncritical and atheoretical approach to the issue of global fear, while some recent theorisations of fear are limited by their authors' preference for speculation when strong empirical evidence is available. There are political as well as conceptual imperatives for more grounded analyses of fear, in considering what those so rapidly labelled 'fearful' have to say about their own condition, and opening up to the possibilities of resistance, hopefulness and self action. Despite this empirical focus, in the last section of the paper I draw together some of the conceptual threads encountered

throughout, and end on some more hopeful approaches that promote the scholarly integration of theory, politics and social action. These alternative approaches within geopolitics are contributing to a new empirical, conceptual and political agenda around fear.

First, I consider two divergent bodies of work which have examined fear in the war on/of terror empirically. Through examining survey evidence in western countries since 2001, I show that fear of terrorism is nowhere near as widespread among majority populations as is sometimes implied. I suggest that fear close to the sites of terrorism is exceptional rather than becoming routinised or dispersed. I then explore a growing body of research with a stronger conceptual basis, which is showing that those most affected by fear in the current geopolitical climate are marginalised minority groups.

### **'Burning with fear, terror and panic'<sup>3</sup>? Fear among majority western populations during the war on/of terror**

The manipulation of fear is prominent in recent analyses of the war on/of terror (Bauman 2006; Furedi 2007; Gregory and Pred 2007; Robin 2004; Sparke 2007). Al-Qaeda statements following the Madrid bombings in March 2004<sup>2</sup> and the London bombings in July 2005 made it clear that widespread fear among the population was one of the goals of the attacks. In reporting the aftermath of terrorist attacks, the media validated the suggestion that western fears of terrorism are widespread (Altheide 2003), and government leaders have both sought to reflect this fear, and instil it further, in speeches and election campaigns.

There have been remarkably few challenges from critical academics to the assertion that western countries are 'burning with fear, terror and panic'. This is despite previous research on fear in criminology, sociology and geography strongly suggesting that events and discourses do not automatically breed fear, and that populations reflect on, put into perspective and resist threatening phenomena (Pain 2009). To be fair, evidence on the question of terrorism-related fears has emerged only slowly since 2001. We should be cautious, too, in accepting empirical evidence

as providing a somehow 'truer' account, given the methodological problems inherent in many of the studies I discuss in this section.

Emotions are slippery when attempts are made to measure them at a point in time and space (Bleiker and Hutchison 2008; Lupton and Tulloch 1999). Importantly, in relation to terrorism, there is a difference between fear and trauma. All the evidence shows what we might expect: that being caught up in a terrorist attack, or living or working close to where one occurs, is a hugely traumatic experience. For example, on human suffering during and after the London bombings, see the London Assembly (2006) report, John Tulloch's (2006) account of his own experience, and Jenny Edkins' accounts of relatives searching for casualties after the New York and London attacks (2007, 2008). But what happens in the medium and long term, in terms of emotions among the wider population? Have western populations in general become more fearful, in the way that prominent commentators such as Bauman (2007), Furedi (2007), Isin (2004) and others writing the new geopolitics of fear literature have implied?

Answering this question is not straightforward, because there is relatively little intensive research on public emotions and terrorism. The studies reviewed in this section largely use opinion surveys, and some of their findings are contradictory. Many are located within medical and psychological paradigms, which inevitably tend to clinicalise emotions and reactive behaviour. Fear is sometimes measured against a benchmark of 'rational' or 'reasoned' behaviour/feeling, a dichotomy that elsewhere in the social sciences is widely viewed as unrealistic (see Lupton and Tulloch 1999; Sparks 1992). Many studies use the types of question which, when used to measure fear of crime in the past, have been subject to swingeing critiques for inviting oversimplistic and problematic assumptions about process and causality, given the complexity and situation of emotions in particular biographies, places and time (Pain 2000). As Bleiker and Hutchison (2008) argue, a much wider array of methods are needed if we are to scratch beneath the surface of the relation between world politics and emotion. These might include, for example, qualitative methods such as interviews or ethnographies, or different approaches including activist and

participatory research where knowledge is co-produced with those traditionally seen as research subjects. I return to some of these issues at the end of this paper.

Nonetheless, studies of fear have followed recent terrorist attacks on targets in New York (2001), Bali (2002), Madrid (2004) and London (2005). Taking the evidence as a whole at face value, five main findings emerge which have relevance to this paper. First, fear is only one of several emotions engendered by terrorism. Reporting on the emotions experienced by the general population in the two months following the Madrid bombings, Conejero and Etxebarria (2007) found emotional reactions among the population including sadness, disgust, anger and contempt, but fear to a lesser degree. Fischhoff et al (2003) and Small et al (2006) also identify a range of emotions among Americans after the New York attacks.

Secondly, fear is relatively high in the short term aftermath and geographically close to attack sites, but declines sharply with time and distance. Rubin et al (2005) found substantial stress amongst Londoners within the fortnight following the bombings, especially but not confined to those who had been directly affected in some way, and a stated intention to travel less by public transport. However, three months later, a larger government survey found that the vast majority of respondents had not changed their travel behaviour (Department for Transport 2006). Clearly, some people do not have any choice about how they travel, but the findings still substantiate very little evidence of fear in terms of changes in behaviour. In New York, higher levels of fear seem to have persisted for longer: Boscarino et al (2003) report that one year later New Yorkers were still very concerned about further terrorist, biological or nuclear attacks. Those living downstate (closer to the bombing site) were most fearful. Across the United States, Stein et al (2004) report that two months after the attacks, 16% reported persistent terrorism-related psychological distress. Huddy et al's (2002) study showed that while a substantial number of Americans appraised the risk of further attacks as high, only a small minority had significant levels of fear and anxiety after six months. Murray and Stein (no date, cited in West and Orr 2005) report that people in Houston were far less concerned about terrorism than people in New York, while Fischhoff et al. (2003) report that

after one year had elapsed, respondents thought that future bombings were considerably less likely to happen. In a comparison of British and Australian fears about terrorism during the Iraq war, British fears were initially higher, but declined significantly after the end of the war (Todd et al 2005).

Thirdly, insofar as comparisons are meaningful, the proportions who say that they are scared of terrorist attacks happening in these surveys are low; generally it is only small minorities of the population who report being very fearful compared with common responses to crime surveys about fear of crime, especially in high risk areas (BCS 2007).

Fourthly, to date, fear as measured in these surveys has been considerably higher in the US than elsewhere, which may be explained by the scale of the loss of life in the New York attacks; a greater sense of panic among the media (Debrix 2008); or a combination of factors which underlie the particular ways American feelings (to generalise for a moment) interact with global events. Such findings provoke much informal speculation, but have not been subject to detailed research.

Fifthly, although the implications are rarely drawn out by these authors, fear is higher among certain social groups. These include, in particular, those who are socially and economically marginalised, and racialized and religious minorities. After the London bombings, Muslims felt more fearful than other groups (Rubin et al 2005). In New York, it was women, those on lower incomes and those from non-white ethnic groups (Boscarino et al 2003). In West and Orr's (2005) study in Providence, three hours away from New York, older people and those with low levels of educational attainment were more afraid of future attacks. Several studies also compare levels of fear with political and ideological leanings: West and Orr (2005) found conservatives and Republicans to be more fearful. In contrast, others have found that those who are more fearful do not support recent US military interventions (Boscarino et al 2003) and are more pessimistic about the state's ability to cope with the risk of terrorism (Fischhoff et al 2003).

Geography has a fundamental role to play in understanding these patterns and, in so doing, rethinking 'globalised' fear. After all, it is well known that terrorism is an extremely rare occurrence in western countries. Further, we know that the extent and nature of fear is highly dependent on the context, details and broader structural relation of people's lives, which shape how they relate and respond to more visible incidents. For example, the fear of crime literature suggests that when single frightening incidents occur in places which are otherwise relatively safe and privileged, the long term outlook for fear is negligible, and people are far better equipped to cope with its effects. Terrorist activity and government brutality in countries where they are more commonplace, and where everyday life is more violent and precarious, understandably create far more fear among the wider population, as a number of geographers have outlined (see for example Abu Zhara 2008; Hyndman 2007; Megoran 2008; Oslender 2007; Wright 2008). However, socio-cultural gulfs between London or New York and other locations in the UK or US affect any scaling up or generalisation about how bomb attacks might affect the wider population (see for example Pain et al 2009).

Overall, notwithstanding the methodological difficulties of these studies, they suggest that fear of terrorism is nowhere near as widespread among majority populations as the media and parts of the geopolitics literature have implied. There is even a muted sense of disappointment in some of their conclusions. A study of African-American teenagers in Georgia three months after 2001 New York attacks found they were 'not overly stressed...perhaps owing to the temporal, social and/or geographical distance from the event' (Barnes et al 2005, 201). Those teenagers who were stressed were found to have existing clinical dispositions or conditions. Beyond such general statements in this section of the literature, there is little attempt at interpretation; as human geographers we might want to ask searching questions about emotions, place and identity in relation to the lives of these Georgian teenagers, and develop methods commensurate with this task.

Yet, as the few studies show that have been conducted away from bombing sites and away from the geopolitical core show, there is a case for considering fear of



terrorism in the west as exceptional, rather than routinised or diffused. If we left it there, we might argue for the decentring of the terrorist threat against the west in theorisations of fear. Global risks and threats do not map neatly onto local fears; it is a much more complex relationship, deserving of more intensive research.

### **Unequal fears: fear among minority western populations during the war on/of terror**

The second body of evidence around fear and the war on/of terror is considerably more nuanced, methodologically and conceptually. Several of the studies reviewed below aim to give voice to the objects and subjects of fear. This is an important intellectual, empirical and political strategy to augment – and sometimes counter – the conclusions of the disparate bodies of literature I have considered so far.

A pertinent question for critical geographers is *who* might have become a more fearful subject *where* during the war on/of terror. Indeed these questions are indicated, if obliquely and accidentally, by some of the studies in the previous section. Any assumption of widespread fear tends to homogenise populations, but globalised fear is constructed and perceived as part of the condition of whiteness (Pain 2009). In contrast, many scholars have suggested that the war on/of terror has actually had most impacts on marginalised groups in the west, especially visible minority groups (see Askins 2008) identified on the grounds of race, ethnicity or religion. Poynting et al (2004) ask what preconditions have allowed the emergence of a 'culture of fear' in western societies and its deployment to further certain political agendas; they suggest it has close relation with and contingency upon particular nations' anxieties about racial and ethnic dimensions. Locating fear within those populations who are commonly demonised and feared themselves is one way of exposing this. In so doing, it is important to be aware of the disempowering effects of labelling certain people fearful; it can reinforce the association with victimhood, and overlook agency, resistance and self-action. I now examine some of this work, which tends to be more theoretically informed, locally based, and uses nuanced qualitative techniques of investigation, before sounding a note of caution.

Some care is needed here, as much of this work examines experiences of violence, abuse, harassment and discrimination without exploring fear itself; while some also focuses explicitly on fear. Many studies document increased violence against Muslims and Arabs in the west in the aftermath of terrorist attacks (Dunn et al 2007; Hopkins 2004, 2007c; Human Rights First 2008; Kwan 2008; Poynting and Noble 2004; Sander 2006; Sirin and Fine 2007). For example, Ahmad (2002, 101) charts 'unrelenting, multivalent assault on the bodies, psyches, and rights of Arab, Muslim and South Asian immigrants' across the United States immediately after the 2001 New York attacks. Islamophobia peaks at particular times, especially during the series of 'security scares' which the UK has experienced before and since the 2005 London bombings, and at these moments Muslims feel more fear both of the possibility of terrorist attacks, and of everyday abuse. Yet a longer term process of the racialization of Islam in a number of western countries has set in since 2001 (Dunn et al 2007; Hopkins and Smith 2008), leading to a malaise of routinized, normalized harassment and discrimination (Pederson et al 2006; Poynting and Noble 2004). As well as physical or verbal incidents, many researchers have documented a generalized feeling of insecurity and discomfort. Noble (2005) discusses the cumulative impact of the 'small things'; uncivil behaviour towards Muslim and Arab Australians from neighbours, police, fellow workers or students, drawing on Giddens' notion of ontological security to develop a notion of comfort. This echoes feminists' analysis of the spectrum of systemic violence, where small acts relate to violence through engendering a sense of 'structural vulnerability' (Stanko 1990; Young 1990).

Bodily markers that are perceived to denote Muslimness, such as men's beards or women's veils, speech, and markers in the visual landscape such as mosques determine targets and places for attacks and abuse (Hopkins 2004; Poynting and Noble 2004; Sander 2006). This emphasis on visual cues means that it is not just Muslims who suffer 'anti-Muslim' racist acts (see Puar 2007). These 'new' hate crimes reflect a much wider and longstanding racism (McAuliffe 2007), and enter already multiply-layered experiences of fear and associated constraint for particular groups, as Green and Singleton's (2007) study of young South Asian women

demonstrates. Recognising diversity among Muslims is crucial in these analyses. There is much evidence that women suffer most abuse on the streets (Poynting and Noble 2004), partly because those who wear a veil become more visibly 'Islamic' (Ang 2002; Hopkins 2004; Kwan 2008; Sander 2006). Although there may be 'a stunning lack of curiosity about masculinities' in academic narratives about terrorism in the west (Enloe 2006; and see Hunt and Rygiel 2006 on the absence of gendered analysis more generally in the war on/of terror), important recent work such as Dwyer et al (2008), Hopkins (2006), Mohammed (2005) and Noble (2007) has explored the texture of Muslim masculinities and femininities in a changing geopolitical climate.

Fear itself becomes materialised in different ways (Pain and Smith 2008b), one of which is the effects that it has on mobility, behaviour and lifestyle as well as emotional disposition. Fear engendered by the war on/of terror and associated hate crimes can be charted through a series of actions and adaptations of targeted communities, ranging from avoidance of certain spaces, constraining one's appearance and behaviour in public space to cultural and political accommodation (Ahmad 2002; Kwan 2008). Fear cuts across different places, resulting in self- and forced exclusion. In a nuanced study, Hopkins (2004, 2007c) describes significant effects on young Scottish Muslim men's emotional geographies and use of public spaces, while for young American Muslims the war on/of terror and the volatile geopolitical climate has conscientized the daily active negotiation of multiple identities (Sirin and Fine 2007). Such strategies echo those of other marginalised groups in the west who experience higher than average levels of fear of crime (Pain 2000; Stanko 1990). The geographical bounding so clear in studies of fear of terrorism on majority populations is noticeably absent: in Australia, Poynting and Noble (2004, 18) have identified 'a pervasive landscape of fear and incivility fundamentally alters the social opportunities for Australian Arabs and Muslims to function as citizens'. Meanwhile, while growing spatial segregation between Muslims and majority white populations in western cities may be popularly identified as evidence of growing fearfulness or wish to be separate, it is more a product of discrimination and Islamophobia (Phillips 2006; see also Hopkins and Smith 2008).

Anti-terrorism and anti-Muslim feelings in the west have collided with growing unease about the consequences of international migration from poorer countries, and especially the demonization of asylum seekers and refugees (Ang 2002; Haldrup et al 2008; Noble 2005; Poynting et al 2004). Anti-Islamic media coverage in Europe and US after terrorist attacks has been partly to blame for increased hate crimes (Sander 2006). As Poynting et al (2004) put it, the Arab Other has become a contemporary folk devil, and the media racialize particular neighbourhoods, construct them as Muslim and places of violence/crime (Dunn et al 2007). Strong antipathy towards asylum seekers, and especially those from Muslim countries, has grown since late 1990s and has been encouraged by government statements and policy (Dunn et al 2007). It undoubtedly feeds into commonplace violence and abuse against these groups (Amas and Crosland 2006). Immigration, terrorism and racism become conflated in people's own interpretations of their experiences of violence in public space (Pain et al 2009; Poynting and Noble 2007). Moreover, the political and social landscape that sexual minorities in the US navigate has shifted, as heteronormative discourses about home and family emerge from government strategies that produce and reproduce fear in the war on/of terror (Cowen and Gilbert 2008; see also Puar 2007).

When it comes to the very tangible fear effects of the war on/of terror on racialized and religious minorities, western governments fail to protect the vulnerable, and enact policies that further victimize them. For the Arab immigrant communities in Staeheli and Nagel's (2008) study, government securitization strategies have increased fear. Western government policies are failing to keep pace with the rising violent hate crime documented above (Human Rights First 2008). Terrorism and racism have become implicated in the detail and justification of migration restrictions (Hujsmans 2006; Hyndman and Mountz 2007), as has targeting under stop and search laws. State actions including increasingly harsh restrictions on 'Muslim-looking' people (Olund 2007; Robin 2004) further increase hate crimes. Meanwhile, anti-terrorist legislation is widely regarded as deleterious to the civil

liberties of Muslims in the west (for example, see Robin 2004 on the US context), which also increases rather than allays fear for these groups.

### **Historicising, spatialising, scaling fear**

The note of caution here is not about these findings, which chart but most likely underplay the effects of racism and xenophobia in the west. It is rather to resist the temptation to identify them primarily in relation to recent geopolitical phenomena such as the war on/of terror, which longstanding racism in these countries and places long pre-dated. There is nothing new about these twenty-first century hate crimes, although that is not to say that these fears can not be viewed as geopolitical. An historicized view sees recent everyday-global violences in relation to the west's colonial past as well as its recent political relations with other countries (Ahmad 2002; Ang 2002; Appadurai 2006). Flint (2004), for example, is careful to place his analysis of organized racial hate groups within the 'geohistorical context of US hegemony' (165). These entrenched forms and effects of fear do undergo constant subtle shifts; Hopkins and Smith's (2008) exploration of the recent recasting of relations of race and religion shows how religion is becoming increasingly racialized and the politics of fear consequently rescaled, retrenching segregation in the west. Likewise, Ahmad (2002) noted a possible shift in US race relations after the New York attacks, with some signs of greater unity and cohesion among white and black communities but greater exclusion of Arabs, Muslims and South Asians. Attention to the longevity of globalised fears does, however, place current day (re)discoveries of the spatiality, form and nature of these emotions in some perspective.

Most authors cited in the previous section are not shortsighted in relation to this. At a conceptual level, what this literature contributes is movement between the global and everyday in a way that collapses their artificial scaling (Pratt and Rosner 2006). As Pain and Smith (2008b) have suggested elsewhere, it is more useful to see fear as made up of a range of multiscale influences constituting an assemblage, rather than assuming the spatial hierarchy where global processes have local impacts on feelings. For example, Pederson et al (2006), in their examination of resurgent Orientalism in Denmark, locate fear in broader political relations between East and

West, but as manifested in sensuous everyday encounters between immigrants and ethnic Danes. In a study of young people's fears in England and New Zealand, Pain et al (2009) find that their geopolitical concerns are relatively insignificant compared to longer-standing everyday concerns. Their participants were not worried about terrorism, and black and minority ethnic young people did not view the effects of the war on/of terror on everyday racism as new. Horschelmann's work with young people (2008) demonstrates the inadequacy of the global/local binary as a way of framing emotional geographies, and Hopkins (2004, 2007a) identifies how constructions of nation, region *and* local community together make the experiences of young Muslim men in Scotland unique.

Overall, the evidence is overwhelming that those most affected by fear in the current geopolitical climate are marginalised minority groups. Since 2001 we have not seen a new landscape or architecture of fear, nor a seachange in the relations between geopolitics and emotions. Rather, the research reviewed above suggests more of the same – unequal, excluded and hidden fears – being remade and reinscribed. The research that has been done also suggests that issues other than terrorism continue to be more important. The lesson for geopolitical analysis is that we need to place new (terrorist) threats carefully in time and space, and within existing conceptual work on social and spatial inequality. A number of geographers have explored issues relevant to fear in diverse parts of the global south (for example Abu Zehra 2008; Gregory 2004; Hyndman 2007; Megoran 2008; Oslender 2007; Wright 2008) where everyday life is more precarious and risky. Such research might be drawn into productive conversation with research on fear in the global north, as many parallels exist.

### **Alternative geopolitics: new directions for conceptualising and researching fear**

'Just as the formal actors of international politics have been disembodied, offering a 'spectator' theory of knowledge, so too are their critical geopolitical commentators undifferentiated by the marks of gender, race, class, sexuality or physical ability. Critics stand at an ironic distance...without having to

disclose their own location. The language of critical geopolitics is presented as being as universal as that which it seeks to create, and yet it is a western form of reasoning, dominated again by white, male academics.'

(Dowler and Sharp 2001, 167).

I have argued that while the mainstream critical geopolitics literatures have deployed the language of fear, they have often done so with an empirical base that is shaky or absent. Fear is largely referenced by experts rather than those feeling fear. The resulting assumptions about fear in some ways reflect aspects of the state discourses they critique. Geographers have not assumed widespread western fears to the same problematic extent as writers such as Bauman (2006) and Furedi (2007), but the evidence reviewed here underlines the importance of continuing to divert attention to the fears of the marginalised, whether in the global north or south. Alternative approaches exist which are beginning to address this need: tackling conceptual and empirical work and, often, political praxis, in ways that avoid some of these traps. In particular, four closely connected approaches have been forwarded in recent years that provide promising directions for conceptualising and researching the geopolitics of fear.

First and most longstanding, a feminist geopolitics has been alive and well for a number of years. Clear manifestoes were written by Dowler and Sharp (2001) and Hyndman (2001); in critiquing mainstream critical geopolitics, they suggested that future research should work harder to embody, locate and ground geopolitical events and processes. A well-established body of work has connected the geopolitical with the everyday (Enloe 1989; Hopkins 2007a; Hyndman 2003; May 1999; Secor 2001) and challenges the idea that the two are discrete scales (Pain and Smith 2008b; Pratt and Rosner 2006). Writers such as Katz (2004) and Secor (2001) also insist on the potency of a 'microscale' geopolitics of the everyday, which relates closely to my arguments about fear here. Feminist standpoints, then, are helpful in identifying some principles in approaching emotions in relation to geopolitical phenomena and events (see Ahmed 2004). Feminist approaches might also promote more grounding of theories about fear in a shifting geopolitical climate, to counter

the tendency for fear to be referenced by experts, and instead uncovering and prioritising the perspectives of those who are supposed to be fearful/feeling. A central tenet – while one not always adhered to by feminist researchers (see Stanley and Wise 2000) – is the integration of theory and practice, either at individual or collective levels, but always explicitly. Emotions inform, justify and figure in some studies in feminist critical geopolitics (in particular, see Jennifer Hyndman's work, 2003, 2007), although in general there has been relatively little attention to fear, especially in western locations. Peter Hopkins' work (2004, 2007b) is one exception, interrogating the masculinities of young Muslim men as expressed in their use of space and feelings of security in Glasgow.

Second, Sara Koopman (2008) has argued for a perspective she calls 'alter-geopolitics': new proposals and practices that challenge hegemonic geopolitics and create new geopolitics. She draws attention to grassroots movements that build international relations of solidarity in opposition to dominant forms of geopolitics, arguing that academics might become involved in struggles where the principles of feminist geopolitics are already being translated into political reality. In relation to geopolitical fears, activist movements and new coalitions that are emerging in response to terror, hate crimes and community fears are materializing varied geographies of hope (Ahmad 2002; Oslender 2007; Weber 2006; Wright 2008). Koopman (2007) herself has explored contradictions between activist stances on the major geopolitical issues and the micropolitics within activist worlds, in which there may also exist inequality, fear and violence. Like Hyndman (2003), she urges more attention to the body in reformulating understanding of the linking of these scales, and as a site of resistance.

Third, Kye Askins (2008) has recently used the term 'transformative geopolitics' in arguing for a new (grounded, microscale) sense of geopolitics that challenges hegemonic relations and promotes more positive interactions, emphasising that difficult encounters laden with problematic histories still hold the potential for positive change. Such transformative social interaction, in and across places of encounter, is also illustrated by the work of Michelle Fine (Fine et al 2007; Sirin and



Fine 2007), whose research combines scholarship with activism through which marginalised communities draw immediate gains. Askins and Pain (2009) discuss the messiness of interactions on a long term participatory action research project on geopolitical change. Elsewhere, Askins outlines the personal and emotional dimensions of her local/global activism situated as an academic (Askins 2009).

Fourth, I have called for an emotional geopolitics (Pain 2009), with three suggestions for academic research. First, we might rework our understanding of geopolitics conceptually, to understand how emotions are deployed, played out and felt in geopolitical events and phenomena. For example, Staeheli and Nagel (2008) show how a grounded assessment of 'security' forces a rethinking of the concept. Second, a wider band of researchers might take up epistemological challenges that feminist researchers have laid down for decades, around politically involved, reciprocal research relations with groups on the sharp end of fear. Third, I argue for a commitment to praxis among geopolitical writers that refocuses attention on resistance, agency and action; again, moving out of isolation in ivory towers and collaborating with social movements. In methodological terms, further qualitative research will greatly improve knowledge about fear in relation to the war on/of terror; but the shift to participatory research also offers to change the terms of knowledge production by approaching this jointly. Freire's (1972) concept of conscientization is a useful tool which underpins these three related goals. Geographical research through this lens might focus on people's strategies for resisting or contesting globalized fear in everyday life, as our study of young people's 'global' and everyday fears has suggested (Pain et al 2009). The ongoing research discussed earlier into unequal fears reviewed earlier provides further examples of grounded experiences of geopolitical hate among racialized and religious minorities in the west (e.g. Haldrup et al 2008; Pederson et al 2006; Poynting et al 2004). Deploying the notion of conscientization directly, Cahill has pursued participatory action research with young people of colour in sites in the USA affected by geopolitical change that exemplifies 'focusing on the quotidian to demonstrate how our subjectivities are inextricably connected with global processes such as economic restructuring and immigration' (Cahill and Katz 2008, px), as well highlighting and

encouraging young people's potential to affect political change at different scales themselves (see Cahill 2007 and forthcoming).

As well as fear, then, these alternative approaches to geopolitics forefront hope, in the capacity to contest hegemonic geopolitics and struggles for positive social change, both in individual lives and collective movements. Emotions, in the face of geopolitical issues, are not necessarily passive, negative and disempowering; they already lead to individual and collective action (Wright 2008). This constitutes perhaps the most important message for future research on the new geopolitics of fear. And, just as anyone who deals with emotions acts on them in one way or another, we as scholars also have the capacity – and some responsibility – for acting on our findings, and discovering new ways to contribute to communities' own processes of challenging and changing hegemonic geopolitics. In terms of the current knowledge gaps identified in this paper, this might also fundamentally shift what we think we know about the new geopolitics of fear.

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### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>The 'war on terror' which was declared by George Bush after the 2001 New York attacks is equally considered a war *of* terror by many left scholars. As Cowen and Gilbert (2008) argue, fear is central to its operation: as well as being a war on terrorism it has been, ostensibly, a war to protect from fear, in reality one which must invoke fear to succeed.

<sup>2</sup>I avoid ethnocentric shorthands such as 9/11, 11-M or 7/7 for specific terrorist attacks on western targets.

<sup>3</sup> From an internet statement of the Secret Organization of al-Qaeda in Europe, who claimed responsibility for the July 2005 bombings in London.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4660391.stm> accessed 4th June 2008.

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