

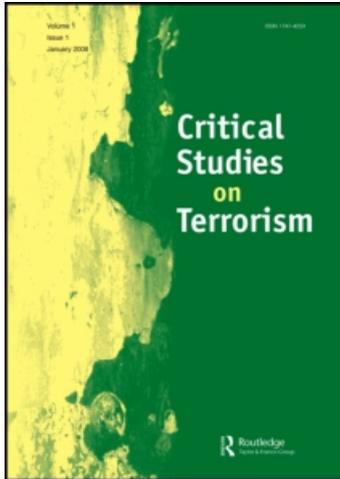
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## Critical Studies on Terrorism

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### Critical realism and historical materialism as resources for critical terrorism studies

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## ARTICLE

### Critical realism and historical materialism as resources for critical terrorism studies

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Critical Terrorism Studies can be strengthened by scholarship that draws on a combination of critical realism (CR) and historical materialism (HM). CR relates epistemological relativism (we can know the social only indirectly through our interpretation of it) to ontological realism (there is a powerfully influential social reality that includes but is much more than our knowledge claims about it) through judgemental rationalism (knowledge claims can be tested against social reality, although always in an indirect, interpreted and fallible way). We illustrate CR-informed HM's value in relation to analysing capitalism's constant remaking of the world, terrorism as an instrument of capitalist class rule and the reified thinking involved in the use of terrorism that it is inherently anti-emancipatory.

**Keywords:** war on terror; critical realism; historical materialism; capitalism; class

The central argument of this article is that Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) can be strengthened by scholarship that combines critical realism (CR) as its philosophical and methodological basis and historical materialism (HM) as its substantive theory of world politics. This is not to argue that CTS should only be based on CR and HM: that would be pointless, as it will not happen, and it would be undesirable, as these approaches do not have a monopoly on insight. We are arguing that they provide insights and advantages of their own. CR and HM do not have to be combined, and it is possible to accept one and reject the other. What we are proposing here is that, when analysing the politics of terrorism, one can use HM as the historically specific substantive theory, while treating CR as a theoretical and methodological underlying set of assumptions or potential source of mutual critique and reinforcement: used in these ways, it is an 'underlabourer' in the terms of Roy Bhaskar (1978, p. 10). Furthermore, both CR and HM are diverse and debated – for example, the meaning and value of CR as underlabourer is disputed (e.g. Hostettler 2010, Patomäki 2010a, 2010b). Hence, neither CR nor HM needs to be treated as a fixed set of commitments to which one must subscribe wholly or exclusively.

We set out the body of our argument in three steps. First, we survey CTS by categorising by approach all the articles (including longer symposium pieces) published in *Critical Studies on Terrorism (CST)* (see Table 1).<sup>1</sup> Discourse analysis (and especially thick and thin social constructivism) has predominated, but with around one-third of articles being positivist. In contrast, there have been no CR articles (cf. Stokes 2009) and only five (9%)

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could be described as being explicitly or implicitly grounded in HM, even though there is a long-standing body of HM critiques of Western counterterrorism and the West's own use and sponsorship of terrorism (e.g. Chomsky and Herman 1979, Chomsky 1988, George 1991, Stokes 2005, 2006, Blakeley 2009). The journal's editors have actively encouraged submissions that draw on CR and HM such as this article and the special issue of which it is a part (see also Jackson *et al.* 2009). It is up to those who think that CR and HM provide important resources for CTS to make the case and we have tried to do that. Second, we outline the philosophical and methodological themes in CR that we find to be useful. Third, we argue that CR-informed HM provides a substantive theory that can contribute to the ability of CTS to understand the world and the roles of terrorism and discourses about terrorism within it. In the conclusion, we set out the key components of the analytical framework developed in this article and consider their implications for CTS research.

### **CTS critiques of terrorism and the war on terror**

In recent years, the field of CTS has grown with a plethora of new books, articles and research seminars. This welcome development has undoubtedly been spurred by opposition to much of the so-called War on Terror launched under the administration of George W. Bush Jr. His war on terror saw widespread, diverse armed involvement by the United States in the South involving airstrikes, special operations, invasions and occupations, as well as extensive involvement in training of and joint operations with regular and militia forces in the South. The Obama administration has abandoned the war on terror label in favour of the phrase 'overseas contingency operations' (Burkeman 2009). It has stated its intention to shift the emphasis from force and unilateralism towards cooperation, multilateralism and advancing universal norms in US foreign policy (Obama 2010). Indeed, Obama has been steadily reducing the US military presence and combat role in Iraq and has declared his intention to do the same in Afghanistan, although thus far he has escalated US military involvement. There are also important continuities from Bush's war on terror, such as the use of rendition – secret abductions and transfer of the abductees to prisons in numerous third countries – as a counterterrorism tool (Miller 2009). The elevation of 'counterterrorism' to the status of a central dogma of governance globally has had effects worldwide and has provided actors with a new ideological resource, which means that there is a continuing need for CTS critiques.

CTS scholars have gone about their critique of the war on terror in widely varying ways. We examine post-structuralist, thick social constructivist, thin social constructivist and positivist approaches in turn, with a view to then identifying how CR or HM may enhance their work.

Only two *CST* articles (3%) are premised on the notion that the discursive exhausts the social (see Table 1). From this post-structuralist perspective, grounded in the work of Judith Butler (1993) among others, discourse refers to the inter-subjective production, reproduction and alteration of always open, incomplete systems of meaning through the performance of linguistic and non-linguistic practices. Discourses create binaries of supposedly separate and opposite subjectivities with one side of the binary represented as positive and the other negative. The 'materialisation', as Butler puts it, of discourses in the form of their reiteration means that such production of meaning is by no means purely vol-untaristic, but is actually considerably constrained. Nevertheless, meaning is unstable and open to challenge. Laura Shepherd (2008, p. 216), in stating that her goal is to promote 'a politics resistant to the dominant discourse of security/counterterrorism in the West',

Table 1. Survey of articles in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, 1(1)–3(2).

Post-structuralist	Thick social constructivist	Thin social constructivist	Positivist	Critical realist	Historical materialist
Discourse as language and non-linguistic practices that exhaust the social: mainly productive and constitutive but also instrumental	Discourse as language: mainly productive and constitutive but also (for most) instrumental and descriptive	Discourse as language: mainly instrumental and descriptive but also constitutive and productive	Language corresponds to/approximates social reality	Knowledge claims can be tested against social reality, although always in an indirect, interpreted and fallible manner	Knowledge claims can be tested against social reality, although always in an indirect, interpreted and fallible manner
3% (2 articles: Shepherd 2008, Kofås 2010)	36% (21 articles: Burke 2008, Booth 2008, Dodds 2008, Erickson 2008, Jackson 2008, Jarvis 2008, Johnston 2008, Zulaika and Douglass 2008, Adib-Moghaddam 2009, Al-Sumait <i>et al.</i> 2009, Altheide 2009, Fierke 2009, Hoskins and O’Loughlin 2009, Hutchings and Miazhevich 2009, Lee 2009, Michelsen 2009, Svensson 2009, Bartolucci 2010, de Graaf and de Graaff 2010, Montgomery 2010, Zulaika 2010)	21% (12 articles: Barmidge 2008, Foster and Butler 2008, Sharlach 2008, Hosking 2009, Lee 2009, Oriola 2009, Pappé 2009, Tirman 2009, MacGinty 2010, Nazir 2010, Shanahan 2010, Toivanen 2010)	31% (18 articles: Geltzer 2008, Guelke 2008, Rekawek 2008, Sluka 2008, Stohl 2008, Chadwick 2009, Draghici 2009, Kaplan 2009, Rapin 2009, Ryan and Switzer 2009, Vicek 2009, Aning 2010, Jacoby 2010, Malkki 2010, Ojanen 2010, Qureshi 2010, Santos 2010, Van Dongen 2010)	0% (0 articles)	9% (5 articles: Blakeley 2008, Herring 2008, Miller and Mills 2009, Sorensen 2009, Keenan 2010)

Notes: The table includes all articles and longer symposium papers. Items referred to in the table and in these notes but not in the body of our text are not listed in our bibliography to avoid overburdening it. The items do not necessarily fall neatly into the various categories. One might argue that a particular article should be in the next category across (e.g. the thick social constructivist rather than post-structuralist category), but it would be difficult to argue that any article should be moved two or more categories across the table. We have excluded from the table articles that self-identify as external voices critical of the CTS project per se (Horgan and Boyle 2008, Weinberg and Eubank 2008, Michels and Richards 2009, Richmond and Franks 2009). We have included all articles that are not explicitly positioned by their authors as challenges to CTS on the grounds that, if their authors did not see their papers as contributions to CTS, it would be rather odd to submit the papers to, and have them accepted for publication, in a journal called *Critical Studies on Terrorism*. We identified four articles in the journal that were explicitly aimed at enhancing the counterterrorist policies of Western states (Foster and Butler 2008, Rekawek 2008, de Graaf and de Graaff 2010, Malkki 2010). As such would have been at home in any MTS journal. In the introduction to the first issue of the journal, the editorial team stated that they did not want to promote a CTS–MTS bifurcation (Breen Smyth *et al.* 2008, pp. 2–3). We presume the inclusion of these articles in the journal reflects this.

showed that even an explicitly post-structuralist perspective is compatible with an agentic, instrumental use of discourse.

The largest group of *CST* articles – 36% – is thick social constructivist. These 21 articles frame discourse differently from post-structuralists as spoken and written language alone (and hence excluding such things as physical actions and non-verbal images), with language being the means by which the social is constructed intersubjectively. The ideas of Michel Foucault, especially those in his earlier work, are implicit in these articles and referred to directly in some of them. Foucault stated that his ‘archaeology of knowledge’ is aimed at revealing the ‘relations between discursive formations and non-discursive domains (institutions, political events, economic practices and processes)’ (1972, p. 162, see also 1991, pp. 58–59; Hardy 2010). Recurrent themes feature among these articles. There are references to terrorism as a social reality and empirical testing of claims: ‘objectively the danger [to the West from non-state terrorism] is ... minimal’ (Zulaika and Douglass 2008, p. 29); ‘non-terror can become a terrorism problem and non-risk ideologically risky, while at the same time real threats go undetected’ (Zulaika 2008, p. 247); ‘there is a phenomenon called terrorism’ (Burke 2008, p. 39); and ‘the key terms relating to terrorism ... all refer to something real’ (Booth 2008, p. 72). Some in this group focus exclusively on language as productive of meaning and constitutive of the subjectivities bound up with discourses and restrict themselves to destabilising dominant discourses (e.g. Hutchings and Miazhevich 2009). However, most see language as primarily productive and constitutive, but also at times instrumental (capable of use by agents in the pursuit of goals). For example, Hank Johnston (2008) analysed the ‘strategic use of ideas’ (framing) as well as cultural determination/performance, whereas Richard Jackson (2008, p. 379) went further than most in seeing the war on terror discourse as ‘a deliberate means of distraction or misdirection from uncomfortable subjects or contrasting viewpoints’. There are also repeated references to the interests served instrumentally (as opposed to being constituted) by discourses: ‘the alleged enemies feed rhetorically into one another’s interests’ (Zulaika and Douglass 2008, p. 29); and counterterrorism discourses are used by the United States and United Kingdom as ‘global/imperial powers’ (Erickson 2008, p. 344). Causal claims also feature in these articles: for example, ‘In general, a low level of performative power has a more rapidly neutralising effect on radicalisation than large-scale, public counter-terrorism efforts’ (de Graaf and de Graaff 2010, p. 173).

Thin social constructivism defines discourse in relation to language and sees it as mainly instrumental and descriptive while in most cases still leaving space for discourses to be productive and constitutive. Twenty-one per cent of articles (12 in total) published in *CST* fall into this category. Jeffrey Sluka (2008, pp. 178, 181) represents terrorism as being ‘both an objective reality and a cultural construct’, with the concept’s use ‘propagandistic’ and ‘fuelled by vested interests’. Ilan Pappé (2009, pp. 127, 128, 144) argued that ‘the construction of the equation of Palestinian nationalism with terrorism’ is ‘PR’ and a ‘travesty’, which has the effect of justifying ‘Israeli crimes and atrocities as acts of self-defence’. Reetta Toivanen (2010, pp. 277–278, 281) argued that ‘counterterrorism mechanisms become a “validation” for the violation of human rights’ through ‘othering’. For Temitope Oriola (2009, p. 257), the ‘misconstruing of human rights for citizenship rights’ in Canadian counterterrorism policy is part of a process of creating ‘an “internal Other”’. According to John Tirman (2009, pp. 527, 536), narratives ‘reflect and reinforce the interests of dominant groups’. He sees US-Iranian reconciliation as being hindered by national narratives and advocates an ‘attempt to write a new, common narrative’ (p. 527). The peace process in the Philippines has been damaged by the Global War on Terror, according to Soliman Santos, Jr. (2010). He objects to the ‘dominant counter-terrorism

analysis and discourse' (2010, p. 138) and argues that organisations should be labelled terrorist only if they use terrorist tactics systematically. Similarly, Timothy Shanahan (2010, p. 185) is of the view that we should 'see terrorism for what it is, i.e., merely a particular tactic for influencing behaviour, rather than, in itself, a special evil'. It can be seen that the central theme in this literature is opposition to the often deliberate and broad misapplication of the label 'terrorism' in the service of interests and in the justification of human rights abuses.

Positivism underpins 31% of *CTS* articles (18 in total): language is treated as corresponding to or approximating social reality. The word 'discourse' is used to mean simply a way of talking about something that may be true or false depending on how empirically accurate it is. Michael Stohl (2008) disputed the empirical basis of what he sees as numerous myths, including every element of the claim that terrorists are exclusively non-governmental criminals and madmen bent on a futile mission to create chaos. Asim Qureshi (2010, p. 61) examined the use of secret detention and rendition in the Horn of Africa to show that there is an African–Western alliance for which 'rights, justice and the rule of law take second place to the perceived political ambitions of the US'. Tim Jacoby (2010, pp. 99, 110) makes a similar claim in portraying a 'triangular concert of agents from the Turkish state's intelligence and special-forces organisations, operatives from Washington, and right-wing activists and paramilitaries'. He provides empirical evidence that these three 'have worked in concert to a point where at times they become indistinguishable from one another'. Their actions include 'targeting individuals of symbolic value' and 'organising collective events to terrorise opponents', and the war on terror has helped them resist reform as part of the European Union harmonisation process.

It can be seen from this survey that there is a great deal of agreement across these perspectives that Western counterterrorism policies overstate the threat from non-state terrorism; are counterproductive if the goal is reducing the threat from non-state terrorism; and are damaging to human rights and conflict resolution. The articles also provide evidence of Western and especially US resort to or complicity in terrorism through alliances with local actors in many parts of the world. Finally, analysis of language in the constitution of hegemony or in the service of interests predominates. These substantive positions are the main contribution made by *CTS*. We now turn to how CR and HM might relate to, and be a resource for the various theoretical perspectives within *CTS*.

In a classic work, Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001, p. xviii) made a post-structuralist case (referenced in some of the social constructivist *CST* articles) for 'a new left-wing hegemonic project' in which redistribution and recognition are combined in 'radical and plural democracy' through which class, gender, racial and environmental struggles are articulated. Their writings are replete with unequivocal statements about the nature of the social, such as: 'intervention by the state at ever broader levels of social reproduction has been accompanied by a growing bureaucratization of its practices, which has come to constitute, along with commodification, one of the fundamental sources of inequalities and conflicts' (2001, p. 162). This suggests that even a post-structuralist critique of the war on terror could be linked to a political project that included the issues of class, the state and neoliberal capitalism, and could involve historically specific claims about the nature of social reality. Furthermore, post-structuralism and CR are both epistemologically relativist and, as we go on to discuss, some in CR are taking an increasing interest in semiosis. However, post-structuralists, on the one hand, and advocates of CR and HM, on the other, are more likely to emphasise their theoretical differences over ontology, whether the discursive exhausts the social, how and whether one can choose between knowledge claims

and whether one can have a substantive theory of world politics (see Sayer 2000, Joseph 2011, Porpora 2011).

There is much more affinity between the thick and thin social constructivists' perspective and both CR and HM. CR offers a theorisation of social reality and its relationships to knowledge claims and judgements about them, whereas HM provides a substantive theory of the nature of interests, including class-related imperial ones, which the CTS social constructivists have not developed. Some scholars have sought to remedy the insufficient attention paid by CR to semiosis defined as 'the intersubjective production of meaning' through verbal, visual, aural and other sensory means (Fairclough *et al.* 2010, see also Fairclough 1992, 2003). Only one *CST* article has used this definition of semiosis: it examines the instrumental use of discourse among the US political elite 'to justify military interventions and security controls' and also 'to further domestic agendas and to target potentially "dangerous" groups' (Bartolucci 2010, p. 131). This subsumes the discourse-as-language approach of CTS thick social constructivists, but it stops short of the post-structuralist position that the discursive exhausts the social. Semiosis, in its CR-informed version, involves referents (social realities such as the experience of being a non-combatant influenced through terror produced by violence or the threat of it), as well as signifiers (the form of a sign such as the label 'terrorism') and signifieds (the concept of being a non-combatant influenced through terror produced by violence or the threat of it). Hence, the challenge and opportunity is two way: to understand how semiosis is constrained and enabled by the extra-semiotic aspects of persons and social relations and the physical world and vice versa (Fairclough *et al.* 2010, pp. 206–207; see also Sayer 2000, p. 62; Joseph and Robert 2004).

Advocates of CR generally position CR in opposition to positivism (see Joseph 2011, Porpora 2011). This is because, among other things, positivism sees events as things to be explained by their regularly preceding causes and expressed as generalisations, whereas CR argues that numerous and changing social mechanisms interact to generate causal tendencies. In addition, positivists assume that what exists can be known directly by observation, whereas CR is, as indicated above, epistemologically relativist. However, the *CST* articles we have surveyed are overwhelmingly empirical and not aimed particularly at deterministic generalisations. Theirs is not a stark positivism, as they are couched in qualitative and historically specific narratives that have much in common with the approach favoured in CR in seeking to exercise judgemental rationalism in the identification of causal tendencies. Furthermore, in HM they could find a theory to help them explain why strategic relationships such as those between US agents and Turkish Special Forces and paramilitaries exist and what interests they serve.

In sum, there are various points of potential compatibility between most of the CTS as it has developed thus far (especially its social constructivist variants) and both CR and HM. We now expand on what we mean by CR and HM and how they relate to CTS and the politics of terrorism.

### **Critical Realism as a philosophical and methodological resource for CTS**

Although there are many variants of CR, certain core elements can be identified. Roy Bhaskar, the most important figure in the development of CR, has argued that 'critical realism claims to be able to combine and reconcile *ontological realism*, *epistemological relativism* and *judgemental rationalism*' (1998, p. xi). This triumvirate is a standard feature of CR, but how they are combined and reconciled varies (e.g. Danermark *et al.* 2002, Wight 2006, Joseph 2011, Porpora 2011). CR relates epistemological relativism (we can

know the social only indirectly through our interpretation of it) to ontological realism (there is a powerfully influential social reality that includes but is much more than our knowledge claims about it) through judgemental rationalism (knowledge claims can be tested against social reality, although always in an indirect, interpreted and fallible way). CR tends to refer to ontological social reality as ‘mind-independent’. This can easily be misunderstood to mean ‘independent of all minds’, but this is not so. As Bhaskar has stated, ‘Social structures, unlike natural structures, do not exist independently of the agents’ conceptions of what they are doing in their activity’ (1989b, p. 38; see also pp. 174–175). This is in line with Richard Rorty’s (1989, p. 5) position that: ‘Truth cannot be out there – cannot exist independently of the human mind – because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false.’ What CR is getting at is that the social world has effects that far exceed the claimed knowledge that we create about it; that our claimed knowledge can only be interpreted, indirect and fallible; but also that the social world provides tests of that claimed knowledge (although our claimed knowledge of those tests is again inevitably interpreted, indirect and fallible). To use a standard example, most of those who work may think they are doing so simply to earn money, with no understanding that they may be reproducing neoliberal globalisation and attempting to earn money in ways that conflict with its reproduction and which could have significant costs for them.

In this framework of analysis, causal relations represent tendencies rather than reliable associations of A causing B. This pattern of tendencies is seen to be the result of underlying structures to social reality in which relations between objects are part of an open system containing many objects and relations (see Bhaskar 1978, ch. 2). There is more to reality than direct causal relations between events – there are unrealised causal powers (CR calls this the real), as well as realised causal powers (CR calls this the actual). The social world operates even if we are not aware of its patterns of operation or why those patterns exist. For example, particular aspects of capital accumulation may tend to be associated with increases in state terrorism, and that will be true even if we do not have claimed knowledge or a discourse that it is true. This demonstrates a fundamental limitation of discourse analysis as seeing the social as exhausted by existing discourses: we can examine existing discourses but also have to look beyond them. Furthermore, as Andrew Sayer (2000, p. 2) pointed out, the very fallibility of our knowledge is evidence for the existence of a social reality that exists independently of particular knowledge claims about it. For example, a substantial minority of the US public, when polled, stated that they thought that Iraq and al-Qaeda had been closely linked before 9/11, that world public opinion supported the US-led invasion of Iraq and that weapons of mass destruction (WMD) had been found after the invasion (Kull *et al.* 2003–04). The position that these three knowledge claims are false is fallible and necessarily an indirect social construction, but we have a relatively high degree of confidence that they are false. Part of what gives us that confidence is not only signifiers and signifieds but also referents, that is, the actual state of Iraq–al-Qaeda relations, negative attitudes worldwide to the invasion and failure to find physical WMD objects. These referents are making it significantly harder to turn these three minority ‘construals’ (knowledge claims) into ‘constructions’ (the establishment of intersubjective meaning) that reach beyond that minority (Fairclough *et al.* 2010, pp. 209–210).

In CR, social structures are established through human practices which then pre-exist and both constrain and enable subsequent human practices. At the same time, those structures are maintained, altered or transformed through the practices of human agents who can be partly or wholly unaware of the effects they are having. This is what Bhaskar (1986,

pp. 11–129; see also Danermark *et al.* 2002, pp. 180–181, 206) calls the transformational model of social activity. Therefore, for example, US soldiers may have believed themselves to be fighting in Iraq for a variety of reasons (patriotism, fighting ‘Islamic terrorism’ and so on) or framed their involvement in such terms. However, the long-standing practices of Western imperialism in the Middle East predate their participation, while their participation both reinforces and changes these social structures, even if they are not conscious of, and indeed reject, the discourses of imperialism.

By adopting a realist ontology, we enable analyses that seek to create knowledge about the structures at work in relation to terrorism and counterterrorism. In other words, we get ontological depth. By conceiving of social structure in these terms, we can also exercise judgemental rationalism and assess the relative value of different explanations of those structures. As Bhaskar (1989a, p. 3) has argued, we can only ‘understand – and so change – the social world if we identify the structures at work that generate those events or discourses’. If we adopt an epistemological relativism without a corresponding realist ontology, we merely have competing interpretations, unless there is an attempt at some kind of middle way that draws on positivism (for a critique of that option, see Joseph (2011) and Porpora (2011)). It is not enough to simply point out the nature of dominant modes of representation as contingent social constructions, especially when the architects of the hegemonic discourses deployed acknowledge the instrumental nature of their deployment. As Paul Wolfowitz, the former US Deputy Defence Secretary, argued, the Bush Administration used the WMD discourse as the main justification for invading Iraq as it was the one ‘issue that everyone could agree on’ (quoted in AP 2003). Our argument does not mean that we need to lapse into a reductionism in which discourses are mere epiphenomena of underlying interests. Discourses operate at two levels: at one level, they are non-instrumental and produce identities and practices, and at another, they are the instruments of social agents as ideologies, propaganda, persuasion and so on, and those agents can invent, alter or even replace them. Indeed, as we have shown, although the emphasis varies, the notion that discourses can be both productive and instrumental is quite widespread in CTS, which indicates an important point of agreement with CR.

### **Historical materialism as a substantive theoretical resource for CTS**

We have illustrated how CR provides ways in general philosophical and methodological terms of relating structured reality to discourses and knowledge claims regarding terrorism, counterterrorism and associated interests. The next step is to connect them to a substantive theory of world politics. HM and CR are well suited to being integrated with each other, because HM in the non-reductionist, non-economistic and non-teleological form we favour comfortably accommodates the central commitments of CR.<sup>2</sup> Like CR, HM understands that there is much more to the social than discourse; that underlying social mechanisms generate change in the form of causal tendencies; and that social relations are inherently dynamic and changing. This final point, that social relations contain realised and unrealised potential within them for change, makes the CR–HM combination particularly congenial to the commitment of CTS to emancipatory politics and not taking the current order of things for granted as something that will continue into the future. It provides tools for understanding how that change occurs, something that requires much more than discourse analysis alone.

HM is sensitive to the characteristics of particular phenomena across scales from the micropolitics of the profit margins in particular transactions through to the macro scale of the nature of entire historical eras, and hence it can lend itself to the multiscale analysis

of terrorism and political economy called for by Hayward (2011). This is the ‘historical’ aspect of HM. The ‘materialism’ part refers to its prioritisation of analysis of the class and productive basis of societies in ways which do not merely reduce everything to economics and which see production as involving a wide range of social relations (Joseph and Kennedy 2000). This is a rather different use of the term ‘material’ as used in CR and discourse analysis (indicating the establishment of some element of social reality) and other uses (referring to wealth, physical objects or as a counterpoint to the notion of the ideational). HM is a political economy approach in that it sees the political and economic as mutually constitutive rather than spheres that can be analysed separately, or at least when analysed separately must then be brought together again to be understood properly. To see capitalism simply as an economic system, separate from politics, culture, consciousness and the natural world would be fundamentally misleading. It entails entire ways of being, thinking and feeling that may be suited to, or have contradictory effects on, its functioning.

HM seeks to analyse the dominant discourses that have enabled state and non-state terrorism and the costly, repressive practices of much of so-called counterterrorism. HM also seeks to relate these discursive practices to sustained analysis of the class and other interests and social relations within capitalism. This includes consideration of how they are used deliberately and instrumentally. Furthermore, adoption of an HM perspective can facilitate a shift from Western-centrism and state-centrism to looking at multiple perspectives, with the state re-theorised in the context of the internationalisation of capitalism and class relations at all levels, from the local to the global. CTS scholars have made commendable efforts to put state terrorism (including that used or sponsored by liberal democracies) on the agenda, while also not losing sight of the use of terrorism by Western, non-Western and anti-Western non-state actors (e.g. Blakeley 2010).<sup>3</sup> The state needs to be put on the agenda in a particular way, that is, in the context of a wider analysis of class and capital that considers all of them as part of the historically specific dynamics of neoliberal capitalist globalisation (e.g. Blakeley 2009, Herring 2010, Maher and Thomson 2011, McKeown 2011). In this way, we can move beyond simplistic, static, decontextualised dichotomies of state versus non-state terrorism, the political versus the economic and terrorist political violence versus criminal economic violence. All these dichotomies feature strongly in terrorism studies, both mainstream and critical. HM-informed analysis, as Anthony McKeown (2011) demonstrated, moves the focus away from seeing terrorism and counterterrorism as involving discrete events to be compared towards understanding the events as part of an interconnected, dynamically unfolding process of remaking social relations.

Having set out some of the basic features of CR-informed HM for thinking about terrorism and counterterrorism, we elaborate with three related illustrations of what CTS can gain. The first is an enhanced understanding of how change occurs in the contemporary era of global neoliberalisation. The second is the opening up of a research agenda on terrorism as an instrument of capitalist class rule: in case it needs to be said this can be done without making the mistake of assuming that all terrorism serves that function. The third is the argument that terrorism cannot be emancipatory as a means of resisting global neoliberalisation and capitalist class rule, in the sense that terrorism involves the kind of reified thinking that is inherently anti-emancipatory and congenial to capitalism.

### ***Capitalism – and mainstream thought – as forces for change***

The notion that CTS envisages a different world and contributes to the transformation of the existing one, whereas MTS merely operates within the existing frame of reference to solve

problems in defence of the status quo, is not justified. Robert W. Cox (1981, pp. 128–130) distinguished between problem-solving theory and critical theory in international political economy (IPE), and this has been taken up almost universally in CTS and in Critical Security Studies more generally. However, as Paul Cammack (2007) has argued, mainstream thinking about IPE has been dramatically remaking the world, most notably through the project of neoliberalisation which itself has gone through multiple phases and forms as it has sought to overcome resistance in the existing order. Truly, mainstream thought has taken to heart that the point is to change the world, not merely understand it. The reason for this is that MTS, just like mainstream IPE, is a handmaiden of an actually existing revolutionary force, that is, capitalism, and contemporary global neoliberalisation in particular. As Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels ([1848] 1996, pp. 4–5) wrote famously:

The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, hence the relations of production, and therefore social relations as a whole. By contrast the first condition of existence of all earlier manufacturing classes was the unaltered maintenance of the old mode of production. The continual transformation of production, the uninterrupted convulsion of all social conditions, a perpetual uncertainty and motion distinguish the epoch of the bourgeoisie from all earlier ones. All the settled, age-old relations with their train of time-honoured preconceptions are dissolved; all newly formed ones become outmoded before they can ossify. . . . It forces all nations to adopt the bourgeois mode of production or go under; it forces them to introduce so-called civilisation amongst themselves, i.e., to become bourgeois. In a phrase, it creates a world in its own image.

Capitalism, and in particular the drive to ensure profit through the continued and sufficiently rapid circulation of capital, motivates this overthrowing and remaking of the social order (Harvey 2010a, 2010b). Individual capitalists are not particularly motivated to serve capitalism: they pursue their own profit. Hence, the interests of particular capitalists are not necessarily in harmony with capitalism per se, and this is where the regulatory role of states and international institutions can come into play (see Maher and Thomson 2011, McKeown 2011). Such valuable ideas are the stock in trade of HM thought, but they have rarely been drawn upon by CTS.

HM also provides substantive understandings of the dynamics of change that relate to the CR notion at the philosophical level of a transformational model of social activity. If CTS does not understand how ontological reality has to be for terrorism to be possible (see McKeown 2011), then its understanding of manifestations of terrorism is limited and its thinking is of the fragmentary type for which problem-solving theory is criticised. Furthermore, CTS has a broad commitment to emancipatory change and so it needs to consider the emancipatory potential of the most potent already-existing sources of change and transformation. HM has long reflected on the ways in which the dynamism of capitalism and its related social form of liberalism and its variants can be progressive as well as reactionary in their implications.

### ***Terrorism as an instrument of capitalist class rule***

As indicated above, capitalism has an inherent dynamic of change – Particular elements of the capitalist ruling class – composed of alliances of owners and managers of capital, state elites and wider social elites seek to resist or work with that dynamic of change while protecting and advancing their own interests. There are numerous situations in which terrorism may be deployed as an instrument of the capitalist ruling class, and here we briefly outline four which may overlap and interact in reality.

First, it can be used as part of a process of shattering social formations that are pre-capitalist or capitalist in ways that are resistant to the more rapid circulation of capital. For example, terrorism, deployed by the state, by corporations or by fractions of elites in alliance with elements of urban or rural labour and reaffirmed through the use of the law, may be particularly useful for overcoming the hindrance to capital accumulation posed by small-scale subsistence farming. This process of breaking up such social formations to separate labour from the ownership of land and other means of production was called 'primitive accumulation' by Marx and rethought by Harvey as 'accumulation by dispossession' (Marx [1890] 1990, Part 8; Harvey 2005, Maher and Thomson 2011, McKeown 2011). It can be seen immediately that the distinctions between state and non-state terrorism and between the political and economic violence get in the way of understanding this, as such violence blurs all of these boundaries.

Second, the ruling class of rentier states and in rentier economies can be inclined towards using terrorism domestically, whether generally or selectively. Rentier states rely substantially on income received from foreign sources such as by exporting natural resources and by accepting aid payments, whereas rentier economies are composed of a significant degree of rentier state expenditure (Beblawi and Luciani 1987). The ruling class in such cases can more readily employ terror tactics because they are relatively free from the constraints of having to root themselves in, and hence not alienate, domestic society. This rentier position gave Saddam Hussein a relatively free hand in Iraq, for example, in deploying terror to cow the population generally and in relation to the Kurdish and Shia rebellions. Repression in post-invasion Iraq continues to be facilitated by the rentier position of elites.

Third, the use of domestic terrorism may be part of an essentially domestic response of a ruling-class formation to being destabilised by external pressure to neoliberalise and, in particular, to deregulate and privatise the economy and reduce welfare provision (McKeown 2011). Despite the neoliberal ideology that this is merely freeing individuals to act entrepreneurially and choose how to spend their own money rather than have it spent for them by the state, the process of neoliberalisation produces many losers. Ruling-class formations within particular states can use terror as one of their means of dealing with actual or potential opposition to that process. For example, although the wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda are often seen primarily in relation to ethnicity, the ruling elites of both states faced severe political problems due to requirements for them to engage in structural adjustment towards neoliberalism (Woodward 1995, Prunier 1995). These ruling elites responded to their inability to deliver in financial, service and programmatic terms by redirecting hostility from themselves towards identity-based others and licensing the most socially marginal (Mueller 2000) to go on the rampage, terrorising and dispossessing anyone who might even potentially oppose those elites.

Fourth, the use of domestic terrorism by a ruling-class formation can be conducted as part of a strategic alliance in which an external actor plays a powerful role. This can be seen in the case of the conduct in recent decades of US-backed state terrorism in Colombia, although the state is formally liberal democratic (Stokes 2006, Maher and Thomson 2011). This kind of US-backed class-based terrorism involving state, corporate and paramilitary actors to promote an appropriate climate for United States and wider international capitalist investment has a long history across Latin America, but also elsewhere such as Indonesia under Suharto or Iran under the Shah (Chomsky and Herman 1979, Blakeley 2009, McKeown 2011).

All four situations outlined – accumulation by dispossession, rentier repression, domestic stabilisation in response to externally driven neoliberalisation and externally backed

class repression – are ones in which terrorism can be functional for class rule under capitalism. A CR-informed approach understands that the goal of the analysis is to use our knowledge of what exists to gain insights into the deeper structures of existing and potential social relations. The focus is on identifying changing but not fixed relations, not least because of human capacity to reflect. We see that there is not a necessary relationship between capitalism and terrorism, but that capitalism does contain propensities for it. Certainly, terrorism has had its place in overcoming actual or potential opposition to capital accumulation or to particular capitalist elites, but legitimacy and consent are more likely to serve their interests as measured by their most secure and maximal accumulation of capital. A thoroughly internalised acceptance of capitalist modes of being would make disciplining through terrorism superfluous in many respects.

### ***Terrorism as an expression of reified thinking congenial to capitalism***

Even terrorism that is aimed at opposing capitalism per se, or particular expressions of it, can also serve capitalist class rule. Anti-capitalist terrorism has ranged widely from the revolutionary terrorism of small groups trying to provoke and lay bare what they see as the essentially repressive nature of the capitalist state, to Stalin's vast system of state terrorism, to local, ad hoc acts against accumulation by dispossession. Jonathan Joseph (2011) draws on a classic essay by Leon Trotsky (1911) to argue that the use of terrorism by those resisting capitalism or aspects of it shows a failure to understand that terrorism itself is founded on the kind of reified thinking that facilitates and is facilitated by capitalism. Reification lies in seeing a social relation as a thing or an object outside of ourselves and outside of social relations. The reasoning behind Joseph's argument is that supposedly revolutionary terrorism is premised on the fallacy that emancipation can be produced by a revolutionary vanguard when the social conditions are not ripe for participation of the mass of society in that revolutionary change (see also Trotsky 1909). It rests on the assumption that the apparatus of capitalist class rule does not have deep social roots and can be destroyed by a little bit of violence and a lot of fear. For HM, this is a fallacy, as emancipation, whatever specific content it may end up having, would have to involve change in the dialectically related individual consciousnesses and collective social relations of actively engaged subjects. To put it another way, emancipation is not something that can be done for you or to you or with your role limited to being an onlooker to a spectacle. This is different from arguing that terrorism always fails or cannot achieve objectives as part of a wider struggle.

In critiquing terrorism as an expression of reification, Joseph has opened up a way of grounding CTS more firmly in normative terms. It also provides space to revisit the normative relationship between HM and terrorism and provides good grounds for rejecting any claim that the type of HM articulated here is soft on terrorism when those using it claim that it is for revolutionary anti-capitalist purposes. Many adherents of HM have rejected the supposedly bourgeois morality that terrorism is inherently morally objectionable, in favour of a morality that terrorism is wrong if it serves the interests of the ruling class against the working class, and right if it helps capitalists smash pre-capitalist social formations as a necessary step along the way to arriving at socialism through the full working out of capitalism.<sup>4</sup> That kind of line is one we reject on many levels – for its teleology, its determinism and its endorsement of the morally repellent practice of terrorism. The fact that terrorism is not an abstract thing but a specific social relation has been grasped at some levels by critics of the war on terror, but its full implications have not. According to a leader in *The Independent* (2001) newspaper: 'You cannot declare war on a tactic: it is as if President Roosevelt responded to the attack on Pearl Harbor by declaring war on

bombing'. To take the point further, Terry Jones (2002) put it this way: 'How do you wage war on an abstract noun?' (see also Crichton 2007).

Critiquing terrorism in this way opens up numerous productive lines of enquiry. For example, Timothy Bewes (2002, p. 12) pointed out that the classic quote from Marx and Engels provided above about capitalism's tendency to sweep away even the newly conceived before it can ossify, suggests that capitalism is, in this sense, a de-reifying force. Perhaps, drawing on the HM concept of contradiction (in which social forces pull in opposing directions at the same time) and the CR concept of generative tendencies, capitalism both reifies and de-reifies, thus shutting down some potentially emancipatory spaces while opening up others. Nick Couldry maintains that neoliberalism comprehensively dominates the contemporary world and that 'neoliberalism evacuates entirely the place of the social in politics and politics' regulation of economics' (2010, p. 2). Certainly, neoliberalism involves a greatly intensified drive towards commodification as a necessary part of transforming all that it can reach as objects to be bought and sold in market relations.

If neoliberalism is the most reifying form of capitalism there has been, it is in this respect the version of capitalism most conducive to resort to terrorism, whether to enforce capitalist class rule or to (in a self-defeating manner) attempt to oppose it. And yet, in another contradiction, it also contains other generative tendencies towards forms of rule and subjectivity that can work against resort to terrorism. The notion of some pre-reified past leading to a reified present that might be replaced by a de-reified future sounds suspiciously teleological. Perhaps it makes more sense to think of ourselves as inherently inhabiting the contradiction of managing to de-reify in some ways, but getting caught up in reifications in others, with our relationship to both structured yet dynamic and changing (Bewes 2002, pp. 11–12). CR-informed HM lends itself to countering reification with its focus on change, on generative tendencies and on the relational, even as we reflect on whether its abstractions about these changing, tendential relations may be unable to avoid a degree of reification in a dialectical, contradiction-filled process.

Trotsky hits the nail on the head about the willingness of ruling elites to label any resistance to them as 'terrorism', while excluding state-sanctioned mass slaughter from their pontificating about the illegitimacy of violence and the absolute value of human life. Another leading HM theorist and political activist Karl Kautsky (1919, especially ch. 7) wrote an extended essay on terrorism shortly after the 1917 Russian Revolution that contained numerous propositions that we can examine further for their possible adaptation to the contemporary world. He distinguished between the terrorism deployed in ad hoc fashion by desperate and already-brutalised mobs, and the systematic, planned use of terrorism by states 'in order to grind down elements ... which seemed to those rulers to be dangerous'. Furthermore, rulers who used such tactics, he observed, can simultaneously be 'highly cultivated men who were filled with the most humane feelings'. When terrorism is used ineffectively, he suggests that the consequences are liable to be different for the rulers and the ruled. The rulers for the most part retain power and privilege despite the blood and fear, whereas the ruled, in creating political-economic disruption by attempting revolution through terror, are liable to find themselves in still greater misery. This is another reason to doubt the emancipatory value of resort to terrorism. When the ruled do use terrorism, it may anyway be as a mob led by elements of the more privileged but insecure sections of society: there are echoes of this in the events of the 1990s in Rwanda and former Yugoslavia (Mueller 2000).

Kautsky's critique of terrorism is above all an exploration of the differential relationship to values of classes within capitalism and underlines our argument that HM provides resources for a normative rejection of terrorism. He argued that ruling elites can resort to

effective use of terrorism without feeling the strain of dissonance with their own values because the use of terrorism is consistent with their values, whereas the use of terrorism in the French Revolution of 1789 was so contrary to the values of that movement that it undermined the revolution from within. We have provided reasons above for thinking that these negative consequences will inherently be the case for those struggling against the negative consequences of capitalism. Kautsky perceived the shift in the nineteenth century among the masses from a mob to an organised, more conscious working class as an essentially humanising dynamic that would enable it to abandon its resort to futile terrorist tactics. If that pattern exists at all now, it is difficult to see it, although it is possible that it exists in particular places. The issue is much more one of trying to make sense of a world which has advanced consumer capitalism and liberal democracy intimately mixed with securitised poverty, both locally and globally. But within that changed context, the question remains as to how to advance the interests of those who are in diverse respects bearing the costs of global neo-liberalisation, in the understanding that resort to terrorism can be expected to have an anti-emancipatory effect on social relations.

## Conclusion

CTS has achieved a great deal in a short space of time. Those achievements could be extended further with the resources provided by CR and HM. CR helps us at the levels of philosophy and methodology by relating epistemological relativism (we can know the social only indirectly through our interpretation of it) to ontological realism (there is a powerfully influential social reality that includes but is much more our knowledge claims about it) through judgemental rationalism (knowledge claims can be tested against social reality, although always in an indirect, interpreted and fallible manner). Furthermore, CR characterises social reality as having three levels: our knowledge claims about its nature, social reality as it exists now and potential social reality. CR-informed HM provides a substantive theory that can contribute to the ability of CTS to understand the world and the roles of terrorism and discourses about terrorism within it. Crucial to any emancipatory project is the idea of change, and this approach is a major resource in understanding how change happens. CR-informed HM shows that capitalism constantly remakes the world, in part by means of thinking that goes far beyond status quo-orientated problem solving. It can also be used to explore how terrorism can be an instrument of capitalist class rule: this does not mean that it is always or solely a means of such rule, of course. It also helps us understand how the use of terrorism involves the kind of reified thinking that it is inherently anti-emancipatory. There are areas of common ground and potentially fruitful mutual learning between CR-informed HM and all other categories of CTS perspective even where major disagreements remain.

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## Notes

1. We have no reason to think that the balance of CTS-type pieces that have been published in other journals and in other forms will be dramatically different from that indicated in that table.

2. We use the labels HM and Marxism broadly interchangeably, but mostly use the former as the latter label tends to focus the discussion more specifically on the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. For an overview of what HM has to offer security studies generally, see Herring 2010. For more on CR and HM/Marxism, see Brown *et al.* 2002.
3. Paul Wilkinson (forthcoming), a key figure in MTS, has also taken up the issue of state terrorism recently. His cases are Saddam Hussein's policies towards the Iraqi Kurds; Indonesia's policies towards the East Timorese; former Yugoslavia; and Rwanda in 1994. In writing about Indonesia and East Timor, he shows himself to be willing to discuss the state terrorism of an ally of the West. How exactly he handles that case, and whether and how he engages with the idea of use and sponsorship of terrorism by liberal democratic states, or with their relationship to capitalist globalisation, remains to be seen when his book is published.
4. Marx himself can be quoted as speaking and writing both for and against the use of terrorism. He wrote approvingly in 1848 of 'Revolutionary Terrorism' and in 1849 of 'red terror' as the only means of accelerating the overthrow of the old order, but in 1870 wrote approvingly of the non-resort to violence by the proletariat. See Kautsky 1919, ch. 6.

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