



Fear Appeal Construction in the Daily Mail Online: A Critical Discourse Analysis of 'Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days That Destroyed Britain'

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Abstract

The rhetorical fear appeal is a technique of political communication that seeks to elicit an emotional response in receivers with the intention of provoking them to political action desired by the rhetor. This paper examines a single example of fear appeal construction in the British press, the Mail Online's 'Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 days that Destroyed Britain' (2015), through analysis of its use of two defining political myths, a conservative myth of declinism, and the utopia/anti-utopia binary myth. I firstly examine the origins and contemporary uses of fear appeals as techniques of political persuasion, before going on to examine how these are constructed. I then go on to analyse the Mail Online article's use of these two powerful political myths, one, declinism, which I argue is utilised descriptively for the purposes of discourse construction, and the other, utopia/anti-utopia, which is utilised instructively. Finally, I propose a method of analysis combining recent approaches to the critical discourse analysis of myth with the cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion drawn from social psychology, in order to show how the Mail Online article is constructed as a discursive fear appeal.

Keywords: Fear appeal, myth, declinism, utopia/anti-utopia, critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Accusations and counter accusations of framing political strategies to arouse negative emotional responses have dominated British politics in recent years. An especially forceful condemnation of this was launched by the then Scottish National Party leader Alex Salmond who accused the BBC after the Scottish referendum campaign (2014-15) of 'institutional bias' (Green *The Independent Online* 14/09/2014). Salmond further claimed that the outcome of the referendum had been significantly influenced by a 'scaremongering campaign' (Harris *The Huffington Post UK* 18/09/2015). Dubbed at the time 'Project Fear', (Gordon *Herald Scotland* 21/12/2014) this has quickly become the popular designation given to alarmist political campaigning that seeks to persuade target populations by arousing fearful emotional responses. More recently, during the bitter European referendum campaign in the UK (2016), Brexit spokespersons accused the Remain group of pursuing 'Project Fear' in their campaign to remain within the EU (Bennett *The Telegraph* 20th/06/2016) whilst being themselves accused of similar scaremongering especially over immigration (Wright *Independent Online* 20/05/2016).

In this paper I examine the warnings of an existential threat to Britain's political and economic future from a potential Labour Government led by Jeremy Corbyn as they are expressed through a piece of journalistic fiction in the right wing British tabloid, *Daily Mail Online*. Published immediately prior to Corbyn's election as leader of the Labour Party in 2015, '*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain*' (Thomas *Mail Online* 28/08/15) takes the form of a speculative fiction and as such is a relatively unusual type of article for a serious national newspaper. The article's alarmist content is framed to appeal to the political dispositions and sympathies of its readership, the overwhelming number of whom were either Conservative Party voters or voters of the populist right wing UK Independence Party (Greenslade *The Guardian Online* 08/06/15).

I approach my analysis of '*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain*' as a rhetorical fear appeal. Below I discuss the fear appeal as a technique of media framing before going on to examine how this article is constructed discursively to produce specific emotional responses. I do so by examining its use of two political myths (Flood 2002, Kelsey 2015). Specifically a conservative myth of *declinism* (Black et al 2013, Tomlinson 2000), and the apocalyptic determinism inherent in the binary *utopia/anti-utopia* myth drama (Moynan 2000, Kumar 1987). I go on to explain that by utilising elements of Kelsey's discourse mythological approach (2015), and by combining this with the appraisal theory approach to fear appeal construction developed in social psychology, particularly by Lazerus (Lazerus 1984, De Castella et al 2009), how a CDA model of fear appeal analysis is possible. I then show that by adopting this approach it enables us to go beyond the critical examination of specific content formation to explain how such fear appeals are constructed in the first place.

2. Fear Appeals

The fear appeal is an historical component of wartime propaganda. Taylor (2003) argues that the 'time honoured' technique of atrocity propaganda, from which contemporary notions of fear appeals derive (Conway et al 2007: 200), was enthusiastically taken up by the British press during World War 1 in a 'convergence of total war and the mass media.' This allowed for the construction and circulation of stories that proved to be, not only 'good copy', but importantly, 'helped to sustain the moral condemnation of the enemy' (ibid: 180). The persuasive moral force of such stories is important according to Charteris-Black (2005), since 'by making decisions about what is right and wrong, good and bad, an individual engages in a process of self-legitimation that places them within a social group that shares those meanings' (ibid: 21). This parallels Dillard's definition of the term, defining fear appeals in their broadest sense, (as) 'messages that attempt to achieve opinion change by establishing the negative consequences of failing to agree with the advocated opinion' (Dillard 1994).

De Castella et al (2009: 3) argue that whilst identification of forms of political rhetoric that 'convey, monger, or sustain' a climate of heightened political tension and anxiety such as the War on Terror are frequent in discourse analysis approaches, they are rather less frequently used to 'specifically examine how

fear appeals are constructed.’ De Castella’s social psychological approach proceeds from an understanding of fear appeal that must include fear inducing events, situations or threats, whether historical or speculative, and that explicitly links these through discursive frames of persuasion to a course of political action or response (ibid: 3). I intend to proceed with my own analysis using this definition. I want also to adopt the distinction between fright and anxiety that Lazerus makes (Lazerus 1994, De Castella et al 2009), since I believe this more accurately captures the manipulative intent of the contemporary fear appeal.

Lazerus (1994: 234) argues that emotions are induced by core relational themes, and he makes a distinction between fear, or fright, and anxiety based on the different estimation of this in relation to the two emotional states. The core relational theme of fear, or fright, he contends, is the ‘concrete and sudden danger of imminent physical harm’ (ibid: 235). This I think fails to capture accurately the manipulative quality of contemporary fear appeals. With contemporary fear appeals the threat of harm is symbolic rather than concrete, and imminence or directness is non-specific and ambiguous, as in Conway’s description of the construction of fear appeals through ‘the enemy’s mission to destroy the dreams and ideals’ of a target population (Conway et al 2007: 200). Anxiety as an emotional description far better conveys this sense of non-physical, yet existential uncertainty and threat which I think characterises the rhetorical construction of contemporary fear appeals such as ‘*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain.*’

The rhetorical construction of a sense of uncertainty and dread characteristic of this type of fear appeal enables what Pfau (2007:219) describes as the construction of a discourse ‘in which a rhetor ‘tries to get a target audience to adopt a course of action by portraying the only alternative as some horrible disaster.’” The perception of this impending disaster, and crucially the appraisal of its specific character, danger and proximity is vital to the position I wish to develop here since it recognises that ‘specific emotional reactions stem not from situations, events, or objects but from cognitive interpretations or appraisals of these things’ (De Castella 2009: p4). Accordingly emotional reactions are not produced by the situation or occurrence directly, but by the how these are thought about, interpreted and appraised through ‘forms of socially shared cognitions’ (van Dijk, in Wodak et al 201: 66). In this way De Castella’s social psychological approach to the construction of fear appeals connects to the influential socio-cognitive model of discourse construction developed most notably in the work of van Dijk (van Dijk, 2008, in Wodak et al 2016).

Fear appeals are rhetorical strategies that ‘draw on already existing discourses and genres’ (Kelsey 2012:27), and which are in turn processed by participants through varieties of shared knowledge located in memory, a shared cognition. According to van Dijk (Wodak et al 2016: 68) ‘generic, socially shared knowledge is (applied) in the construction of personal mental models that represent our individual experiences, perceptions and interpretations of events and situations’. Further, and since our non- experience based knowledge of these things is also, always, significantly contributed to by discourses throughout our lives, both the production and comprehension of discourses requires vast amounts of acquired knowledge. This leads van Dijk to point out the inherent power differential implicit through this patterning when he says

that ‘some groups or organisations in society have privileged access to specialised knowledge and may manipulate or otherwise control public discourse and the subsequent actions of others’ (ibid: 68-69).

I argue that ‘*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain*’ provides just such an instance of this manipulative discursive practice (van Dijk, in Wodak et al 2016:71). For my analysis I accept the distinction made by Pfau (Pfau 2007; McLear 2010) that fear appeals may be differentiated between ‘dichotomous’ and ‘civic’ variants. The concern here is with the dichotomous fear appeal that Pfau identifies ‘is depressingly common in contemporary political discourse’ (2007:233). Dichotomous fear appeals ‘divide the respondent’s available options into two mutually exclusive actions (events) where one will (supposedly) occur if the other does not’ (ibid: 231). According to McLear, it is precisely this ‘closed offness’ that is characteristic of the manipulative intentions of the approach, since the ‘dichotomous fear appeal ‘aims to foreclose audience options’” (McLear 2010: 27).

The *Mail Online* piece operates according to this by presenting through a speculative fiction an account of a Corbyn led government descending irrevocably into a dystopian nightmare of economic and social collapse. It offers receivers of this text only a single alternative other than to accept this, that of rejecting political change in favour of maintaining the present status quo. Dichotomous fear appeals have this simplifying function, reducing historical complexity to fundamental binary oppositions and presenting political choice and action as one of two mutually exclusive alternatives. As rhetorical strategies they are constructed discursively using the repertoire of available discourses and genres that form what van Dijk refers to as ‘shared sociocultural knowledge’ (van Dijk, in Wodak et al 2016: 65).

Among these shared discursive resources are what Flood (2002) and Kelsey (2012, 2015) have termed political myths. Through developing a specifically critical discourse approach to the analysis of myth, Kelsey has shown how the myth of the *Blitz Spirit* was used to invoke representations of the past that served contemporary ideological ends in the immediate aftermath of the London terrorist bombings of 2007 (Kelsey, 2012, 2015). Myths, he argues, have a ‘simplifying... suppressive role, and functions ideologically in the preferred messages it delivers’ (Kelsey 2012: 25). Political myths, I contend, are the perfect conveyors for fear appeals, being ‘a narrative based representation of intangible experiences that are evocative because they are unconsciously linked to emotions such as sadness, happiness and fear’ (Charteris-Black 2012: 23). ‘*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain*’ is discursively constructed using two overlapping political myths that I set out below. First, a right wing myth of *declinism* which in the text functions as an explanatory model for the purposes of receivers, and secondly a *utopia/anti-utopia* binary myth schema which functions for receivers instructively.

3. The Declinist Myth in Political Discourse

Declinism is a historiographical narrative of the fortunes of Britain’s prosperity as a nation relative to its economic performance and to its comparative standing on the international stage (Tomlinson 2000: 9). It is considered to have

emerged as an account of national decline in the post second world war era during the late 1950's and early 1960's (ibid: 9), and reached its apogee during the 1970's. In this decade a declinist narrative fused with a sense of almost continuous political crisis (Black and Pemberton 2013, Hay 2010, Tomlinson 2000) giving rise to the 'contemporary vision of the 1970's as a dismal decade in contemporary British history' (Black and Pemberton: 2) and culminating at the end of the decade in the convulsive 'Winter of Discontent'. It is at this point, according to Hay (2010: 451), 'that the new right's account of a crisis of an overextended, overloaded and ungovernable state 'held to ransom' by the trade unions emerged and acquired resonance'. Historians have variously described the declinist narrative of the 1970's as 'constructed', (Black and Pemberton 2013) as 'ideological' (Tomlinson 2000 and 2013), and as 'mythology' (Hay 2010). A political discourse of declinism continues to describe the contemporary history of Britain through ongoing accounts of the economic crisis of 2008 and its aftermath (Black and Pemberton, 2013, Hay 2010) and, I argue, is central to the *Mail Online's* speculative fear appeal.

As others have noted (Charteris-Black 2005, Flood 2002, Kelsey 2015), to describe political events as myths is not to judge the events and their occurrence either as lies, as untruths, or to claim that they did not happen, rather it is to make an evaluation of the ways in which such events are subsequently discursively accounted for. The 'story' which inevitably accompanies an event, or period of political significance, that describes and explains it to an audience with little, no, or only partial direct experience of it, possesses the quality of myth when it is 'an ideologically marked account of past, present or predicted political events and which is accepted as valid by a social group' (Charteris-Black 2005: 23). Declinist accounts of the political crisis of the 1970's would also seem to satisfy a second criteria of Christopher Flood's (2002) influential account of political myth, that in acceptance of it as valid by a social group, 'whatever its size or constituency', that it is 'transmitted and received' as 'exemplar history' (2002: 41). Black and Pemberton (2013) similarly take this up when they describe 'negative memories and representations of the [1970's]' as having been 'hardwired... into the national and popular consciousness' during the intervening decades. Speaking specifically of the Winter of Discontent, Hay (2010) also comments, 'it is difficult to think of a moment in the political history of post-war Britain more suffused with imagery and mythology' (ibid: 456).

Subsequent analysis of Britain's economic performance in the 1970's, and of its relative standing in the world, the recurring tropes of the declinist myth (Tomlinson 2001 and 2013), have tended to challenge popular accounts of the 1970's 'as a decade of profound, even existential, crisis in Britain'. Whilst forced to accept nevertheless that there existed 'the widespread perception of crisis at the time' (Black and Pemberton 2013: 3). Black and Pemberton account for this by arguing that a constellation of what van Dijk refers to as symbolic elites (2008: 14), comprising significant elements of the media, journalists, academics and intellectuals, and politicians, contributed to the construction of a public perception of the period as 'The Great Fear' (Johnson 1985: 19). The Great Fear comprised 'fear of the unions, of inflation, of bankruptcy and of unemployment; fear of being 'swamped by the blacks', of the 'takeover by the left', and of the 'fascist threat'; fear of parcel bombs, of street violence... and finally, a generalised fear of social or national disintegration' (ibid: 129).

Tomlinson (2000) similarly argues that ‘in the 1970’s the panic about economic performance was commonly used to suggest that the whole society was on the verge of collapse’ (ibid: 89). Apocalyptic tropes link sacred myths to modern contemporary myth formations (Flood 2002; Lule 2001) and provide a dramatic language of eschatology to accompany relatively historically frequently occurring and mundane political occurrences and events. These are especially prevalent in the declinist myth discourse where several features of the economic landscape of the 1970’s have since passed into hegemonic memory, yet are still important for contemporary constructions of declinist political myths, including the *Mail Online* article. According to Hay (2010), principle amongst these are the National State of Emergency declared in 1973, the ‘Three-day Week’ during the same period accompanied by nightly ‘blackouts’, the General Election of 1974 against the backdrop of a national miners strike, the almost constant ‘stagflation’ of rising prices and rising unemployment coupled with stagnant economic demand (ibid: 448-9), persistent instability of the currency and the effects of this on Britain’s international standing culminating in the ‘humiliation’ of requiring a ‘special loan’ from the IMF during 1975-6, and ultimately the Winter of Discontent of 1978-79.

The events of that winter and their conversion into a contemporary *Sun* newspaper headline (ibid: 451), which was the first reference to the ‘Winter of Discontent’, follows a simple discursive logic. Whilst acknowledging ‘wonderful raw materials for a crisis narrative’, according to Hay (ibid: 466), ‘both tabloid and broadsheet media alike... brought this down to a very personal level, enlisting the direct experiences of bins left un-emptied, gaps on supermarket shelves, queues in supermarkets for basic commodities and so forth, in support of its crisis narrative.’ Declinism is a powerfully persuasive political myth by virtue of this, precisely because it is able to lend description to apparently, or potentially, degenerating political environments via experiences such as these that are perceived by receivers as personally important and potentially harmful, and above all, proximate.

As previously noted, the construction of manipulative fear appeals depends on the (re)production of rhetoric that will induce emotional reactions since it is the cognitive appraisal of a condition of threat, danger or crisis rather than the ‘raw materials’ themselves, that are key (De Castella et al 2009). Just as Barthes argues that mythology is a construct of history, and ‘cannot possibly evolve from the nature of things’ (Barthes 1993: 110), so ‘*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain*’ invokes hegemonic memory via the descriptive power of the declinist myth of the 1970’s to induce a negative emotional response by (re)producing the rhetoric and imagery of ‘The Great Fear’ of that time. As we shall see, and in so doing, the *Mail Online* constructs a speculative fear appeal that describes the descent of Britain into a nightmarish dystopian future which ‘only ‘serve(s) to revalidate the present as the lesser evil, and to promote a decision for no change’ (Moylan 2000: 181).

3.1 Utopia/Anti-Utopia in Political Myth

Black and Pemberton (2013), referring to ‘hegemonic memories’ arising from ‘popular representations’ of the 1970’s, argues that the prevalence of dystopian imagery and the rhetoric of crisis and panic has contributed significantly to

popular memories of that time. Van Dijk (2008, Wodak et al 2016) has discussed the crucial role of memory in sifting and storing the mental models of such events. Mental models, he argues (2008: 161), are subjective categorisations ‘that form the cognitive basis of all individual discourse and interaction’. Mental models are symbiotically produced, and understood from our cognitive experience of events or actions and function to give us our personal meanings of these things, both as discrete objects, and through forming longer chains of experiential meaning in extended social discourses. He argues that there are potentially many varieties of information which contributes to the structure of our mental models of experience. These may be newly acquired, whether through direct experiences, or those mediated by texts; the traces of past experiences through earlier forming mental models to the more personal types of information contribution via individual selves, and finally through socially and culturally shared information. Mental models, accordingly, ‘embody both personal and social information, and hence serve as the core of the interface between the social and the individual’ (ibid: 161).

Mental models formed of the political events of the 1970’s by interpretive communities, who, as Kelsey (2015:29) points out includes both its producers (including symbolic elites); as well as its receivers (including symbolic elites), invoke the dramas of the declinist myth through rhetoric and imagery of economic chaos and social crisis leading to political disintegration and collapse. Bottici’s contention that it is the role of myth to bring drama onto the political stage is instructive in this regard (ibid: 26). Both Black and Pemberton (2013), and Hay (2010), have commented on how the Conservative party specifically, and the New Right generally, was able to exploit this dramatic content for electorally beneficial ends after 1979 by referring to the ‘crisis’ period as ‘Labour’s Britain’. Charteris-Black (2005: 90) has demonstrated also that in her carefully chosen use of metaphor, how Margaret Thatcher was able to construct herself as a latter day Boedicia taking on and slaying her many political foes, chief amongst these being socialism itself.

The socialist enemy, according to the developing myth of 1970’s declinism, had created a political crisis so serious, ‘as to call into question the viability of the British state’ (Black and Pemberton 2013). Dystopian imagery, basic to the declinist myth and central to the journalistic fiction of the *Mail Online* article, belongs to the genre of Utopia, and describes a society ‘in time and space that the author intended a contemporaneous reader to view as considerably worse than the society in which that reader lived’ (Moylan 2000: 155). Dystopia as the negative future realisation of a contemporary political trend is a frequently used genre in popular fiction. Anti-utopia describes utopia’s antithesis, since ‘it draws its material from utopia and reassembles it in a manner that denies the affirmation of utopia’ (Kumar 1987: 101). Anti-utopia’s, and anti-utopianism it has long been recognised (Eccleshall 1984, Moylan 2007, Sargent 2010, Sargisson 2007), is a significant feature of political conservatism in ideological opposition to what it has historically characterised as the utopian ‘fantasy’ (Sargent 2010: 121) or ‘starry eyed’ progressivism of ‘socialist or liberal programmes of social transformation (Eccleshall 1984: 67).

As Eccleshall (ibid: 64) has noted of what he calls the traditional attitude to social transformation within conservative ideology, it is the belief that the political desire ‘for liberty and equality would result in forms of despotism and

oligarchy more oppressive than any of the inconveniences and imperfections of the *ancient regime*.' Conservatism and anti-utopia connect to dichotomous fear appeals in two fundamental ways analogous to this. Firstly, a dystopian outcome is the nightmarish logic of the 'antithetical yet interdependent' (Kumar 1987: 100) utopia/anti-utopia binary. Dystopias 'make us fear the world they describe in order to encourage us to re-describe our own world and make us aware of the trajectory our current descriptions place us on' (McLear 2010: 26). Secondly, anti-utopia's make use of fear 'to preserve the status quo and to argue against systemic political change' (ibid 26).

In this way they share rhetorical similarities with dichotomous fear appeals since both can be 'used as strategies to bypass deliberation and scare audiences into adopting a rhetor's preferred alternative' (Pfau 2007: 233). The anti-utopia predicted by '*Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain*', as the inevitable outcome of a progressive political agenda centred on the eradication of social and economic inequalities in the UK, and the pursuit of international peace abroad, is entirely in keeping with these positions. The rhetoric and imagery of the myth of decline, and here its overlapping twin, the mythic anti-utopia, provides both a dramatic description of the descent into social, economic and political chaos and, organised via a dichotomous fear appeal dressed up in the *Mail Online* article as speculative fiction, 'celebrates and protects the status quo and the satisfactions that it delivers to its beneficiaries' (Moylan 2000: p131).

4. Analytical Framework

Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) stress the argumentative, adversarial and action oriented-ness of political discourse which is directed towards affecting the decision-making processes of political actors. Adopting this approach, I see dichotomous fear appeals as also rooted in the politics of political action. The use of myth in political discourse, what Flood (2002) and Kelsey (2012, 2015) term political myth, is similarly found in a definition of politics that sees decision making as a central activity, since it (myth), 'carries the imprint of the assumptions, values, and goals associated with a specific ideology or identifiable family of ideologies, that it therefore conveys an explicit or implicit invitation to assent to a particular ideological standpoint' (Flood: 42).

Darren Kelsey (2015) provides a very useful model of this process, what he calls DMA, or discourse mythological approach. DMA constructs its approach to the analysis of myth by separating myth from ideology and seeing them instead, as Flood does, as separate but related categories. Myths, he argues (ibid: 28), should be considered as the drama laden narratives or stories by which ideology is carried or conveyed and disseminated via interpretive communities. Kelsey presents his model graphically as a circuit, in which 'discourse constructs the story (myth) that carries the ideology, whilst ideology also informs the construction of discourse' (ibid: 29). The implied intertextual and re-contextual processes inherent in his model are indicators of the (ever) presence of history to this approach, in which 'analysis is concerned with myth, popular memory and national narration' (Kelsey 2012: 27).

DMA argues that ideology is carried by myths in a historical process in which

‘interpretive communities consider the different ways in which texts are read, consumed and understood’ according to their conceptual maps (Kelsey, 2015: 30), or, to use van Dijk’s terminology, ‘their mental models’ (van Dijk 2008; Wodak 2016). My approach applies Kelsey’s methodology in the following ways. Firstly, by arguing that the construction of popular memory in the *Mail Online*’s article is intertextually pursued through the construction and reproduction of ‘familiar messages, signs and symbols’ of the declinist myth, particularly of, and since, the 1970’s. Secondly, by identifying through the use of the binary utopia/anti-utopia myth the *Mail Online* article as strategic political discourse, a dichotomous fear appeal, ‘oriented towards decision-making that can ground action’(Fairclough and Fairclough 2012: 22).

It is the contention here that the overlapping myths, declinist and utopia/anti-utopia, function differently in the *Mail Online* article but complement one another. The declinist myth operates descriptively by re-contextualising the rhetoric and imagery of periods of past political crisis and panic, and construing them in the present as hegemonic memories through shared mental models. The rhetorical construction of the utopia/anti-utopia myth operates instructively by warning its community of readers of the inevitable and catastrophic future outcome of pursuing a particular course of political action in the present. Since this is a dichotomous fear appeal, and not its open, deliberative and ‘civic’ alternative, it is discursively constructed ‘to argue for a single political or ideological viewpoint rather than to open a discussion of political alternatives’ (McLear 2010: 30).

For example, Pfau (2007) points to the significance of the recursive character of fear in the dichotomous fear appeal, since, he argues, ‘rhetorical intensification’ of fears already established ‘is almost always a sure sign of the very kinds of logical distortion and audience manipulation traditionally associated with fear appeals in political discourse’ (ibid: 231). By contrast, in the ‘civic’ fear appeal variant he argues that the character of fear differs (ibid: 233), representing unrecognised or underappreciated threats to community wellbeing with the political effect of this being to open up ‘deliberative possibilities’ in ways described by Fairclough and Fairclough as commensurate with *reasonable* political action (2012: 26). The dichotomous fear appeal analysed here, uses recurrent past and future context categories of the declinist and utopia/anti-utopia myths to close down alternative potentialities in the present, and to advocate instead ‘pragmatic’ political action in the sense meant of this by van Dijk (2016: 67), ultimately a rejection of political change, and acquiescence instead to the present status quo.

For van Dijk (2016), it is context categories that give discursive structures their essential political dynamic, and that as he further points out, ‘some of these structures may be more efficient than others in the process of influencing the minds of recipients in the speaker’s or writer’s own interests’ (2016: 226). Myths, within the context category of the fear appeal, provide the perfect discursive structures for the *Mail*’s manipulative political text, since they can ‘serve as the necessary interface between socially shared political cognitions on the one hand, and personal beliefs on the other (van Dijk 2012: 159)’. Kelsey (2015: 29) describes this with respect to the discourse mythological approach in terms of the properties of myths operating at the micro and macro levels of social cognition as ‘societal stories reflecting ideals, ideologies and beliefs,

whilst more broadly upholding familiar narratives or models for social life.’

Here there are similarities between van Dijk’s socio-cognitive approach to political discourse analysis, Kelsey’s discourse analytical approach to political myths, and the social psychological approach taken with respect to the construction of fear appeals by De Castella, et al (2009). As noted earlier, for them it is the *interpretation* of actions or events, rather than the direct experience of the events themselves that is the crucial determinant for the evocation of a kind of emotional reaction (ibid: 4). To demonstrate this they turn to appraisal theory and adapt Richard Lazarus’s (De Castella et al 2007; Lazarus 1999) cognitive-motivational-relational theory of emotion to show how fear inducing rhetoric in political discourse can invoke emotional reactions, along with ‘the articulation of a political program and calls to support a course of action’ (De Castella et al: 3).

This model proceeds from the identification of three key appraisal components that I want to posit as discursive fields of analysis for the *Mail* article (see table below), and that in turn define what Lazarus terms as the core relational theme, which I have argued previously is best described as *anxiety*. The three key appraisal components are, respectively, motivational incongruence, motivational relevance and uncertain coping (De Castella et al 2009; Lazarus 1994: 237) and are set out in the table below.

<i>Key Appraisal Components for the production of anxiety (fear) derived from Lazarus’ (1994)</i>	<i>Appraisal Characteristics of De Castella et al’s Model of Fear Appeal Construction (2009).</i>	<i>Discursive Fields of the Mail Online’s Speculative Fear Appeal: Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain.</i>
Motivational Incongruence	Whether the situation or event as described is perceived as dangerous and the estimation of the degree of potential threat.	Danger, threat and dread in the 1970’s myth of declinism and the ‘Great Fear’.
Motivational Relevance	The degree of personal relevance, or importance attached to a political situation or event as described.	Social division, cultural impoverishment and violent disorder: The political consequences of social dreaming.
Uncertain Coping	Ability to cope with and manage the situation effectively toward the eventual resumption of environment stability	Political Pessimism and National Decline - Crisis Preceding the Restoration of Authority.

5. Discussion and Findings

In *Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain* evocations of the disastrous consequences of electing a left wing government as an alternative to the contemporary politics and economics of austerity provided the central mechanism for an elite instruction to reject radical change for the preservation of the political status quo. The three appraisal themes outlined in the preceding table (section 4.0) are all present in the article, which I discuss

below, and operate persuasively for the promotion of an anxiety response. Statements that establish motivational incongruence do so through deployment of rhetorical strategies that are designed to provide a contextual, or explanatory framework based on the myth of declinism and the 'great fear'. These are concerned in particular with evoking crisis imagery from the political past, specifically the 1970's, and superimposing this onto a speculative future.

Statements of motivational relevance emphasise a close proximity between the appraisal of events depicted and degree of personal threat assumed, connecting the drama of precipitous and violent political decline to personal insecurity and disempowerment. An important component of this is that motivational relevancy is emphasised in the text as established through connections made between the exercise of political will through personal values, judgements and actions, and the consequences and responsibilities that potentially flow from these. Motivational incongruence is evoked through the binary opposition utopia/anti-utopia by which the descent into a speculative dystopian future is a consequence of personal and collective 'social dreaming' (Sargisson 2007). A secondary appraisal theme, Uncertain coping, arises from and requires the presence of these others. Uncertain coping is established in the text through rhetorical appeals that make plain a low expectation of the ability of the country to be able to cope with profound and existential political shocks, the result of chaos brought about loss of authority.

5.1 Declinism and 'the Great Fear' - Evoking Danger, Threat and Dread: Motivational Incongruence.

Danger, threat and dread are prefaced in the first sentences of the article with London described having descended at the end of Corbyn's doomed premiership into nightmarish violence, with its 'myriad burning buildings, rioters, looters and demonstrators fighting on the city streets.' The narrative thus establishes global coherence via a reverse chronology structure. As Richardson points out (2007: 71), journalism, and especially tabloid journalism, typically organises narratives by what he refers to as the 'inverted pyramid, or climax first structure.' Structuring narrative in this way places the most important information at the head of the story, typically including its central dramas, main protagonists, themes and topics (ibid: 71). This is important here for two reasons. First, because within the opening three paragraphs the author is able to identify the article's central protagonist, Jeremy Corbyn, describe his chaotic and violent demise and reasons for it, evoke the dramatic setting and contextual background of this drama, and then explain that these events occur in a fictionalised, though realistic and proximate timeline. Secondly, and since this article is a fear appeal, the function of the 'climax first' structure in placing the most dramatic and viscerally the most traumatic events first establishes immediately those criteria relating to the appraisal of danger, threat and dread that are core related fields of motivational incongruence.

Danger, threat and dread is further evoked by use of familiar genres from the declinist discourse, particularly that of economic crisis leading to the erosion of Britain's status and prestige on the national and international political stage. These rely on the deployment of two image rich and striking metaphors of decline. The widely known crisis health metaphor 'sick man of Europe' from the

1970's and 1980's (Hay 2010 Charteris-Black 2005), which is here transposed to a 'basket case Britain' of irreconcilable social and economic conflict. Additionally the flexible, visceral and contemporary crisis metaphor of 'perfect storm', which in the text is used to explain the convergence and culmination of several specific economic consequences of existential threat. The political use of metaphor as a persuasive rhetorical device is noted by Richardson (2007), O'Shaughnessy (2004) and by Charteris-Black (2005: 13), who accounts for the impact of health metaphors in particular, since, as he says, they are derived 'from a basic paired set of fundamental human experiences: life and death' (Charteris-Black 2005: 100).

The use of 'basket-case Britain' in the opening paragraph references three examples of the collective memory of the 1970's crisis. Britain's spiralling national debt, the consequent requirement for the sitting Labour Government of that time to seek emergency loans from the IMF and European Central Bank, and the long industrial wage disputes with mainly public sector workers and their unions (Hay 2010: 410). The connection between the speculative decline prefigured in the *Mail Online* article and its origins in the 1970's crisis is made further explicit in this section in a warning about a future Corbyn led government's attempts to redistribute wealth through raising of the top rate of income tax. This, it states, amounts to a 'throwback to the 1970's – the last time Labour tried to defy economic reality.' This warning is framed by concerns for the ramifications of such an ideological assault on the structures and assets of the capitalist class, and ultimately upon capitalism itself. By utilising metaphors of declinist myth, the article is able to warn that such an intervention is doomed to failure, evoking the authority of experience of the past to make a speculative connection to the reality of a future economic disaster. A high rate of income tax the article states, would raise only 'rock bottom revenues', bringing with it its inevitable economic consequences. Thus, declining tax revenues brought about through attempts to 'defy economic reality' by taxing the rich punitively, are shown to have devastating consequences for all, including the interpretive community of *Daily Mail* readers.

Unemployment, the cost of welfare, and inflation the article says, would all 'sky rocket', whilst the economy inevitably would shrink as a consequence. Tomlinson (2000) has shown how the consequences for prices of the economic crisis of the 1970's holds particular symbolic importance for the declinist myth of that period. The article invokes this through the 'perfect storm of financial catastrophe', by describing the reappearance of stagflation as prices continue to rise and demand in the economy declines. Further identifiers of the 1970's declinist myth are also deployed such as 'sharp increases' in prices for basic commodities as bread, the inability of hospitals to pay for routine procedures and medicines, and the closure of factories and high street shops. The iconic declinist imagery of blackouts, referring to the 'three day week' periods of 1973-4, are interposed with the similarly iconic memories of an earlier period of British austerity, food rationing. In this metaphorical 'perfect storm', appraisal components come together connecting threat of crisis to personal losses and concerns. The abstract structures of the macro economy and their symbolisers, inflation and taxation, prelude examples of the experiential micro economy of *Mail Online* readers forming a discursive linkage that connects the decline of the micro economy experienced by the *Mail's* interpretive community, with ideological assaults meant to 'soak the rich' through redistributing wealth in the

macro economy.

5.2 Social Division, Cultural Impoverishment and Violent Disorder: The Political Consequences of social Dreaming (Motivational Relevance)

Evaluation of the importance of events is closely connected in Lazerus's (1994) core relational theme anxiety to patterns of cognitive appraisal that relate to the estimation of the degree of personal danger and proximity that is attached to them. Statements of motivational relevance in the text relate to the imminence of threat and danger presented by the violent collapse of society into a dystopian near future. What are constructed as existential national threats are directly attributable to a betrayal of 'our' values, and the substitution of these by 'their' values, and are a consequence of the seductive but ultimately insidious and destructive logic of the utopia/anti-utopia myth binary.

This is framed throughout the text by the nominative construction of Corbyn's Labour government through the attachment of negative ideological labels. Words and statements such as 'Commie', 'Communist', 'hard-left', 'far left', and references to 'Militant Tendency', 'socialism in one country', 'The Red Flag' and a 'siege economy', are used frequently and repetitively. Indexical choices such as these when used to define individual and collective social actors are, according to Reisinger (2008: 99), significant of the construction of populist rhetoric. Negative left-wing labels used in close semantic relation to the Labour Party are doubly suggestive in this context being also evocative of the rhetoric of the declinist myth 'in an association between socialism, immorality and evil' (Charteris-Black 2005:97). The suggestive implication of a relationship between socialism and decadence are present in the description of Corbyn's physical and mental health at the conclusion of his premiership. The descriptions of him as 'frail', under 'strain', 'broken', and 'trembling'; but also 'baffled, bewildered and bemused' by the evidence of the failure of his political vision, is narratively constructed as analogous to that of the country which he has almost destroyed, a 'basket-case Britain.'

This, according to the text, is the result of a series of disastrous political choices and judgements to which the *Mail Online* apportions degrees of responsibility and blame through what van Dijk has called 'discursive group polarisation' (2008: 226). Binary oppositions are framed in the text as being both the causes and the consequences of disastrous political decision-making that the *Mail* attributes to personal and political mendaciousness, and/or naivety. The article identifies at least three binary group polarisations that are generational, young vrs old; ideological, 'conservative' vrs 'socialist'; and cultural, traditional vrs radical. These are framed in terms of the opposition of values, and discursively through the utopia/anti-utopia myth.

Young people are identified as responsible in the first instance for enabling the 'ruination' of Britain by electing a Corbyn led Labour government. The article states that 'an astonishing 83 per cent of 18-25 year olds turned out to give him their vote.... galvanised by a brilliant social media campaign'. The reasons for their voting in such numbers are described in crudely instrumental terms. The young are seduced with promises of 'free university education, no student debt and guaranteed jobs.' They are cynically manipulated by Corbyn whose persona

resembles that of the mythic *trickster*, an archetypal figure at once seductively playful and wilfully destructive (Lule 2001: 24). This dualism is considered by the *Mail* to have a dramatic allure for the young in particular, highlighted by the almost gleeful rejection of what are identified in the text as belonging to core national values. For example, Corbyn supporters are described as enthusiastically responding to his refusal to observe the conventions of political obsequiousness to the monarchy, or deference to the 'special relationship' with the United States, and as being 'thrilled' at his refusal to accept the rules of orthodox political alignments in his defiant support for 'Islamic terrorist organisations'.

In contrast the older generation is 'shocked' at the country's inexorable slide towards an authoritarian dystopia via the appeal of utopian 'false promises' for the young, and the simultaneous rejection of what is discursively constructed as realism, being the preservation of the status quo. Realist and utopian positions are especially emphasised in relation to foreign policy with respect to national security where the consequences of 'social dreaming' in relation to defence disarmament are implied to have directly threatening personal consequences. The article states that having destroyed the 'special relationship' with the United States by his identification of the US as 'our most wicked enemy', Corbyn then makes a 'grovelling apology' for the Iraq War of 2003, before drastically cutting defence spending and ultimately abandoning the country's independent nuclear deterrent. As a direct consequence, 'US President Donald Trump announced that America could no longer regard Britain as a reliable ally.' This leads to calls for Britain's expulsion from NATO and the imposition of economic sanctions. Whilst the article describes a ratcheting up of threats to personal security through unilateral disarmament, so it simultaneously warns of reigniting the dangers of an historical and contemporary national antagonist. A powerful and covetous Germany, who 'made it plain that Britain could not escape the medicine taken by other EU nations that had found themselves in crisis.' Written prior to Britain's momentous decision to exit from the European Union in 2016, the longstanding anti-EU *Mail Online* warns ominously that 'London would have to take its orders from Berlin just as Athens had done,' in 2015.

5.3 The spectre of terminal decline and apocalypse averted: Uncertain coping and the restoration of authority

Fear appeals invoke anxiety in the final instance when an event or situation is appraised as being extremely difficult and potentially impossible to cope with. Statements which confer the secondary appraisal theme uncertain coping are present when a sense of profound pessimism is linked to the existential threats and concerns conveyed by the primary appraisal components (Lazarus 1991: 236; De Castella et al 2009: 5). *Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days that Destroyed Britain* is a fictional anti-utopian story, a political myth that exists in binary relation to the utopian story for which it is its antithetical twin. Like many of the most well known anti-utopias, the *Mail* article imagines political dystopia as a consequence of 'social dreaming' (Sargisson 2007: 26) which becomes manifest by a descent into state authoritarianism through national decline. As the social and economic situation of the *Mail's* speculative fiction deteriorates still further, so the negative logic of progressive political change

becomes increasingly apparent.

The institution of Prime Minister, conferred on Corbyn by the naivety and poor political judgement of the young, is imagined as threatening to pass from democratic accountability to dictatorial rule, the inexorable and seemingly irreversible slide into despotism. Corbyn's own party is unable to control him, and is subsequently purged. Normally functioning checks and balances of the democratic political process are described breaking down as members of government associated 'with the hated Blairite past' are denounced by Corbyn's new regime via public confessionals, reminiscent of the Stalinist show trials of the Soviet Union. Here the nominative labelling of the Labour Party as 'Communist' and 'hard left' makes association with the state communism of the Soviet era conceptually plausible, even self-evident.

Slide towards authoritarianism and political dystopia is further signalled by curtailment of press freedoms through legal censorship, and by Corbyn's 'desperate pleas for the people to rally against the forces of capitalism.' Consistent with dominant frames of the declinist myth the article goes into considerable detail in its description of an argument over economic policy involving Corbyn, whom it describes as becoming increasingly vengeful and authoritarian in his policy responses as the situation in the country rapidly deteriorates, and Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England. Carney is indexically referred to as coolly authoritative in contrast to Corbyn, and delivers wry self-assured observations about the essentialism of economic markets, even as he prepares to leave the country having been punitively sacked by Corbyn.

Accompanying familiar imagery of 1970's declinism the article uses contemporary examples as descriptive indicators of the slide into crisis. These are discursively aligned to give a sense of proximity and immediacy, whilst as well conveying a sense of finality and loss. The article describes the pop band 'One Direction' as heading out of the country on tour never to return, and similarly the football stars of the Premier League as departing for lucrative financial rewards abroad. 'A multi-billion pound league became a two-bob back-water with second rate players, poverty stricken clubs and half empty stadiums,' the article states, connecting economic ruin to the ruin of Britain's popular culture. Elsewhere, having established authorial sympathy for a long running strike by the police, the article describes the final breakdown of law and order, declaring [that] 'the disorder that had played out on the streets of Athens a decade earlier were now replayed on a vastly bigger scale. As riots became commonplace, families lived under self-imposed curfew.' The use of Athens as a recent example of the near collapse of a European state resulting from severe economic and social crisis is additionally referenced by the use of a photograph depicting riot police engulfed in flames from a petrol bomb during disorder there in 2015.

It is at this point in the narrative, as the drama of myth appears to have reached its denouement in apocalyptic violence and dystopian chaos, that the article's core manipulative logic is revealed. Disaster is avoided at the last moment and authority reinstated. The restoration of social order is achieved precariously nonetheless, which is consistent with the appraisal of uncertain coping. The *Mail* attributes Corbyn's ultimate downfall to a degree of national good fortune as an increasingly enfeebled prime minister, literally the 'sick man' of Britain's decline, is described as ultimately 'lacking the stomach' to become Dictator, and

chooses instead voluntary political exile. Simultaneously, constitutional authority is restored only via the belated exercise of parliamentary democracy necessitated by the political courage of a rejuvenated Conservative Party. Here the leader of the opposition, imagined in the article as the prominent right wing MP Boris Johnson, emerges to lead a vote of no confidence in Corbyn, forcing his decision to flee the country. Only at this late hour, according to the *Mail Online*, is national destruction averted and the authority of political realism restored.

6. Conclusion

The *Mail Online* article ‘Prime Minister Corbyn and the 1000 Days Which Destroyed Britain’ presents a speculative Labour government with a Corbyn premiership as an existential threat to Britain, that brings with it near total national destruction. It is a strategic political discourse in the sense meant of this by Fairclough (2012: 24), in that it directs readers towards actionable rejection of the politics of wealth redistribution, social equality and peace through disarmament, and ultimately persuades them towards acceptance of the historical status quo, offering only this as an alternative to the dystopia of progressive politics. Consistent with the strategic discursive logic of the dichotomous fear appeal, it does so via a narrative strategy of the triumph and restoration of traditional forms of authority and order, out of political chaos and disorder. Such tropes are familiar in both journalism and popular literature and as Lule (2001: 36) points out, fundamental to mythic storytelling. By approaching fear appeal construction through a critical discourse analysis of its use of myth, it is intended that this paper makes a contribution to the expanding knowledge of the role and significance of myth in the production of political and journalistic discourse.

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