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From Folk Devils to Folk Heroes: Rethinking the Theory of Moral Panics

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From Folk Devils to Folk Heroes: Rethinking the Theory of Moral Panics

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Abstract
The theory of moral panics, the concept of ‘folk devils’ and processes of ‘demonization’ have provided key analytical and conceptual tools for social scientists throughout the past 40 years. Yet, comparatively little conceptual or empirical work has focused on mirror image phenomena of collective joy, celebration and hope. By introducing a theory of ‘moral euphoria’, emphasizing the concept of ‘folk heroes’, and focusing on processes of ‘deification’, this article provides a fresh perspective within the moral panic literature, showing how certain actors may go from ‘folk hero’ fame to ‘folk devil’ infamy. Specifically, the focus falls on the politics of moral euphoria, how political leaders frequently find themselves caught up in a ‘boom and bust’ cycle of celebratory euphoria and inflated expectations upon winning an election, followed almost inevitably by dashed hopes and post-election ‘demonization’. This debilitating cycle, we argue, finds its roots in the inherent tension in modern democracies between populist pressures and tough governing realities. The article uses the example of two political leaders – Tony Blair in the UK and Barack Obama in the US – to demonstrate this argument. The conclusion reflects on disciplinary boundary-crossing and the important role of scholars in societal debates surrounding ‘heroes’ and ‘devils’.

Keywords
Democracy, demonization, folk heroes, logic of discipline, moral panics, public expectations
The theory of moral panics and the concept of ‘folk devils’ have emerged over the past 40 years as central analytical and conceptual tools within the social sciences, even entering the lexicon of public discourse (Hunt 1997). This article does not, however, review existing scholarship or apply moral panic theory to a new case. Rather, it challenges and develops the existing literature and theorizing on this topic by focusing on mirror-image social phenomena – folk heroes (not ‘folk devils’), deification (not demonization) and moral euphoria (not moral panics). And yet, such simplistic binary terms risk injecting an unnecessarily crude and unhelpful polarization into contemporary social theory. Rather, this article attempts to understand dynamics that may on occasions stimulate a transition from positive to negative social interpretations. Put slightly differently, this article focuses on transitions from ‘hero to zero’ (or vice versa) in the sense of going from ‘folk hero’ fame to ‘folk devil’ infamy.

If this attempt to understand the ebb and flow of social interpretations through a focus on ‘folk heroes’ and ‘folk devils’ (on ‘moral euphoria’ and ‘moral panics’; on demonization and deification) represents a novel approach that offers the capacity to deepen and sharpen the analytical traction and leverage of longstanding tools of sociological analysis then the empirical focus of this article is also unique: a focus on the politics of moral panics through a focus on politicians. As Flinders recently illustrated, although politicians have traditionally been defined as part of the ‘moral barricade’ – politicians defined certain individuals or social groups as deviant ‘folk devils’ – it is possible to argue that politicians have themselves, due to a range of factors, become ‘demonized’ (Flinders 2012b). Indeed, far left and right political groups have in recent years made demonizing politicians, frequently in a very aggressive and personalized format, their priority. ‘We shouldn’t demonise the government, its employees or its elected officials’, Bill Clinton told the American public in the aftermath of the shooting of Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in January 2011, ‘We can disagree with them but we ought to remember after the Oklahoma bombing, the difference between disagreement and demonization’ (see Pavia and Philp 2011). Although this positioning of politicians within ‘the gallery of contemporary folk devils’ has provoked a wide-ranging debate, this article aims to push this debate one-step further and explore why politicians may be prone to such sudden shifts in social attitudes (see also Bearfield et al. 2012; Flinders 2012c). Its central argument is therefore simple: the demands, incentives and pressures of democratic politics creates and sustains a boom-and-bust cycle of heroic expectations and dashed hopes and, as a result, frequently ensures that politicians are almost guaranteed to alternate from ‘folk hero’ to ‘folk devil’ status.

The aim of making this argument is not to defend politicians (though see Riddell 2011) but simply to use the position, role and symbolism of those who ‘step into the arena’ (to use Theodore Roosevelt’s (1910) famous phrase) and assume elected political office as a vehicle through which to deepen our understanding of social attitudes to specific groups and professions. Such an understanding will develop and finesse an emerging literature within political science that seeks to understand the emergence of ‘disaffected democrats’ in the sense of large sections of the public who appear to have become disillusioned with democratic politics and distrustful of politicians. A Guardian/ICM poll carried out in five European countries in 2011, for example, revealed that just nine per cent of the public thought that politicians acted...
with honesty and integrity (see also Hay 2007). With this data in mind it is possible to suggest that this article makes distinctive arguments across three levels.

1. **Macro-level:** A focus on the theory of moral euphoria, the concept of folk heroes and process of deification provides a valuable counterpoint to the existing literature on moral panics, folk devils and demonization.

2. **Meso-level:** The need for politicians to generate heroic expectations to some extent ensures that at some point a transition from folk hero to folk devil will occur.

3. **Micro-level:** The case studies of Tony Blair and Barack Obama provide critical insights and lessons for those who might seek to understand (or avoid) the shift from ‘hero to zero’ or ‘champ to chump’.

In order to substantiate these arguments this article is divided into five inter-related sections. The first provides a very brief synthesis of the existing scholarship on moral panics and folk devils with the intention of simply sketching out the contours of this approach, its intellectual evolution over time and more importantly those small pools of work that offer a link or bridge to this article’s focus on moral euphoria and folk heroes. Having established the conceptual and theoretical foundations, the second section offers a more detailed account of the theory of moral euphoria, the concept of folk heroes and the process of deification with the aim of cultivating a more sophisticated focus on transitions or boundaries between social attitudes and social expectations that manifest themselves in frequently strident societal responses (love and hate, fear and loathing, hope and happiness). The third section then drills-down still further by focusing on democratic theory and particularly the rather complex but frequently under-acknowledged tension between populism and democracy. It is this precise tension that arguably explains why we have seen the rise in recent decades of what has been called the ‘logic of discipline’, and why commonly ‘[P]olitics is portrayed as an arena forged upon binary distinctions—saints and sinners, triumphs and disasters, saviour to failure, hero to zero, chumps and champs, knights and knaves’ (Flinders 2012a). The experiences of Tony Blair in the United Kingdom and Barack Obama in the United States are then examined in the fourth section as critical empirical cases through which to explore these arguments. The final section reflects on the broader implications of a focus on folk heroes and moral euphoria, the benefits and risks of ‘trespassing across (disciplinary) borders’ and the implications of this article for future research.

**Folk Devils, Moral Panics and Demonization**

The intellectual pedigree and history of moral panic theory and the concept of ‘folk devils’ has been admirably traced by several scholars and this section does not repeat this material (see, for example, Critcher 2008). Rather, we argue simply that while this literature has seen a great deal of advancement in terms of conceptual rigour and precision, the same cannot be said for a smaller, more disparate pool of literature on counter-cultural phenomena in the form of episodes of widespread joy or celebration that frequently orientate themselves around popular heroes. It is this latter strand of material that provides the intellectual and empirical stepping-stone into the second section’s analysis of folk heroes and moral euphoria.
In relation to moral panics, there is a voluminous body of established work that adopts or modifies the seminal approaches of Young (1971) and Cohen (1972) to explore the social standing of a vast range of groups and issues. Moral panic research focuses on how specific issues become amplified into systemic concerns through a process of interpellation, framing and mediation (Hay 1995). A social group or category – the ‘folk devil’ – is identified as causing an issue of exaggerated public concern through its immoral behaviour, and, moreover, is constructed as an existential threat to the moral integrity of ‘decent’ society in a full scale demonology process (Hier 2002: 313; Cohen 1972: 44). The group is hence ‘punished’ and the ‘panic’ subsides almost as quickly as it started. Moral panic theory and the folk devil concept have been shown to be applicable to various stigmatized groups, encompassing inter alia: drug takers, mods and rockers, muggers, day-care providers, gypsies, devil worshipers, video gamers, homosexuals, juvenile delinquents, asylum seekers, ravers, street gangs, quangocrats, benefits claimants, single mothers and even the working classes (Young 1971; Cohen 1972; Hall et al 1978; Adam 2003; Victor 1998; de Young 2004; Jenkins 1998; Boëthius 1995; Bearfield 2008).

In terms of conceptual rigour, this literature has seen significant advances over the past twenty years. Goode and Ben-Yehuda (1994) provided perhaps the most significant contribution by, for the first time, conceptualizing criteria for how to evaluate the presence of moral panics. Their criteria include five indicators: concern; hostility; consensus; disproportionality; volatility (1994: 33–8). It is not necessary to discuss these criteria in any detail, beyond noting that they represented a crucial (though, as subsequent research shows, arguably problematic) first step along the road to a more conceptually and theoretically informed understanding of processes of demonization, as well as paving the way for critical discussions concerning the theoretical framework and epistemological assumptions underpinning moral panic research.

Subsequently, a second ‘wave’ of literature hence sought to drill deeper into theoretical and conceptual questions concerning moral panics and folk devils (for a review see David et al. 2011). Scholars have explored questions such as whether folk devils and moral panics should be re-conceptualized more dynamically for a ‘multi-mediated’ (McRobbie and Thornton 1995) or ‘amoral’ (Waiton 2008) society, whether moral panics can exist ‘synthetically’ without identifiable ‘folk devils’ (Ungar 1995, 2001, 2008; Béland 2005; Hier 2003; Jenkins 1999), and whether moral panic theory can be linked to deeper socio-political processes of ‘moral regulation’ (Hier 2002) or ‘de-civilization’ (Rohloff and Wright 2010). To put a number of complex arguments very succinctly, this wave of literature has suggested that the emergence of the ‘risk society’, and also basic changes in relation to communicative technology, have altered the contemporary nature and emergence of moral panics (Beck 1992; Cohen 2011: 239).

While the above literature has developed theoretically and conceptually advanced insights into ‘social structure, social process and social change’ in relation to problems of ‘demonization’ (Goode and Ben-Yehuda 1994: 31), the same cannot be said of a much smaller and disparate body of work that has focused on ‘folk heroes’ and periods of intense and arguably disproportionate social euphoria in an attempt to
understand a ‘mirror image’ problem of the ‘deification’ of certain individuals or social groups. The literature on this topic is disparate and, like an intellectual hunter-gatherer, the scholar with an interest in such issues is forced to range far-and-wide in order to map out the contours of this intellectual territory. But although Carlyle [1846] (1963) in his historical study of hero-types suggested that ‘[too] evidently this is a large topic; deserving quite other treatment than we can expect to give it at present’, very few later scholars were inclined to continue his focus, which, in turn, reflects the dominance of moral panics and folk devils within sociological analysis.

What literature that can be identified is fairly disparately stretched across the twentieth century. In the 1940s–60s the creation of popular heroes, their use as agents of social control and the link between heroes (or heroines) and forms of leadership was a significant theme of scholarship in American literary studies, and the focus was generally on developing typologies of ‘hero’ characteristics (Fishwick 1954; Klapp 1948, 1949, 1954, 1962; Jennings 1960). In the late-1970s–80s more critical studies emerged in sociological literature, taking inspiration from Arthur Schlesinger Jr’s influential 1962 essay ‘The Decline of Greatness’ (‘Ours is an age without heroes … We have no giants who play roles which one can imagine no one else playing in their stead’) (Goode 1978; Lofland 1982; Browne and Fishwick 1983). This critical edge was enhanced in media and cultural studies during the 1990s–2000s focused on the impact of the digital media and changes in popular culture in creating and promoting global über-heroes or heroines (for example, the Princess of Wales, Michael Jackson, David Beckham, Michael Jordan, and so on) (Drucker and Cathcart 1994; Kear and Steinberg 1999; John 2010). Work has also focused on periods of intense emotional outpouring (McPhail 1991; Kindleberger and Aliber 2011), building upon the seminal work of MacKay [1841] (2004) and LeBon [1896] (1960) on the analysis of crowd behaviour.

From this empirically diverse, disciplinarily eclectic range of research it is difficult to discern any theoretical or conceptual consistency, and attempts at developing conceptual or analytical frameworks for analysing folk heroes or attendant processes of societal ‘euphoria’ in the vein of the moral panics and folk devils literature are virtually non-existent. Arguably the closest modern study that attempts a similar delineation of criteria as Goode and Ben Yehuda is John Lofland’s (1982) analysis of ‘Crowd Joys’. Lofland identifies five criteria which he argues can be used to measure the ‘variable’ of ‘joy’ within social crowds:

1. Arousal or the ‘amount of overt … activity combined with display of emotion socially defined as joyous’ (357);
2. Proportion of ‘members displaying various levels of these acts’ (357);
3. Social definition ‘of the nature, meaning and import of the arousal’ – how significant it is seen to be (357);
4. Institutionalization ‘in the sense of being predesigned, planned, and regular in … occurrence’ (357);
5. Duration ‘of a single occasion of arousal and (whether this is) linked in a rapid series of occasions of arousal’ (358).

It is quite easy to see the links between Lofland’s criteria for ‘crowd joy’ and Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s criteria for moral panic. Lofland does not, however, attempt to integrate his criteria within the moral panic tradition – his concern rests more with
‘measuring’ the level of ‘crowd arousal’ than developing a theory – and he pays no attention to the subjects of his ‘crowd joy’: the ‘folk heroes’. Nonetheless, this paper agrees with Lofland’s (1982: 355-6) sentiment and seeks to ‘bring joy back into the study of collective behaviour’, as well as responding to Tony Sanchez’s (2000) later demand that ‘it’s time for heroes, again’. This paper aims to do so by using the literature identified above as an intellectual stepping stone towards a focus on ‘moral euphoria’, ‘folk heroes’ and processes of ‘deification’, tying these theoretical counterpoints to an analysis of democratic politics in order to produce new insights into the transition from ‘hero to zero’.

Folk Heroes, Moral Euphoria and Deification

The theory of moral panics is littered with ‘dimensions of dispute’ (David et al. 2011) and the intention of the previous section was not to engage with each and every one of them in great detail (many will be discussed in later sections) but simply to slice through the exiting scholarship in order to expose the relevance and significance of this article’s focus on how and why politicians may be more vulnerable to rapid ‘folk hero’ to ‘folk devil’ transitions of status than other social groups. This section is concerned with conceptual precision (see Sartori 1970) and explaining the core characteristics of the moral euphoria (theory), folk hero (concept) and deification (process) that this article seeks to promote (see Table 1, below). Not only does this overview provide a clear link with the three pools of literature discussed in the previous section but it also – as will be empirically demonstrated in the next section – provides a starting point in terms of understanding and mapping the transition ‘from hero to zero’ status (and vice versa) in general terms and more pointedly in relation to politicians. The ‘line of refraction’ therefore provides an as yet under-theorized and under-explored socio-political boundary that this article seeks to bring to the fore. Put slightly differently, there is no teleology of demonization. There is, in reality, no simple end point at which any social group is destined to be demons, villains, angels or heroines, but there is a more complex and on-going process of definition and redefinition that in some circumstances can allow certain agents to redefine themselves and their position in society and, in so doing, cross the line of refraction. Politicians, as we will see, provide a very specific and sociologically significant case through which to trace this phenomenon.

Before focusing down on politicians as agents with the capacity to swing from folk devil to folk hero status (or even sometimes to straddle this divide at the same time) it is necessary to put a little intellectual meat on the bones that are sketched-out in Table 1. What do we actually mean by the terms moral euphoria, folk hero and deification? Taking each in turn, the theory of moral euphoria is offered here to capture a specific episode of widespread and disproportional joy, euphoria, awe, celebration, ecstasy, glorification that is often captured in a spontaneous carnival-like atmosphere. ‘Disproportional’ in the sense that they raise public expectations beyond levels at which they can reasonably be fulfilled. Developments in relation to information-communication technology have added new vigour and dimensions to such phenomena and in a sense ‘moral euphoria’ as a theory of crowd, mob or social behaviour seeks to gain conceptual purchase on these beguiling, ephemeral moments in an effort to understand and explain their social significance. It is the antithesis to a moral panic. It is momentary, intense and dramatic, but is instilled with positive rather than negative emotions. Examples include specific sporting events or
Table 1. From Folk Devils to Folk Heroes: Mirror Image Developments

| Theory | Moral Panic – the momentarily intense, disproportionate and dramatic manifestation of shock, anxiety and hatred within society concerning the presumed morally deviant behaviour of ‘folk devils’. | Moral Euphoria – the momentarily intense, disproportionate and dramatic manifestation of joy, relief and hope within society concerning the presumed morally righteous behaviour of ‘folk heroes’. |
| Concept | Folk Devil – the agent of social concern (group, community, individual) that is feared by society due to the presumed moral deviancy of its behaviour. | Folk Hero – the agent of social concern (group, community, individual) that is loved and held in awe by society due to the presumed moral fortitude of its behaviour. |
| Process | Demonization – the process of symbolization, framing and discursive commentary through which certain agents become associated with almost devil-like qualities. | Deification – the process of symbolization, framing and discursive commentary through which certain agents become associated with almost God-like qualities. |

record-breaking achievements, royal marriages or births, successful rescue efforts, the surrender of an enemy or the winning of a war, scientific breakthroughs, feats of endurance or – critically – the election of new presidents or governments (Anker 2005; Dauncey and Hare 1998; Gilchrist 2006).

Just as moral panics are generally triggered by a specific event or incident, so too then are episodes of moral euphoria that correspond with many elements of what Lofland (1982: 356) labels ‘crowd joy’ (i.e. ‘a state of happiness or felicity…shared among a dispersed set of persons attending to the same object at more or less the same time and who are aware that other people are attending’). In a situation of moral euphoria the ‘folk hero’ in question is ascribed certain qualities that are deemed so remarkable or exceptional that they immediately assume an almost superhuman or God-like status. Indeed, as Schulman (1996: 73) emphasizes, it is exactly their capacity for ‘detecting the unforeseen or overlooked; in recognising patterns which elude others; in committing energy and effort beyond that expected or called for…in tolerating risk and fortune’ that makes them different: ‘the hero is exceptional’. If the social recognition of exceptional qualities or performance generate a degree of awe (a concept that is central to the analysis of folk heroes within American culture) it is also linked to the concept of hope. This is, as we shall see through the empirical case studies, a critical point.

To be defined as a folk hero is not simply to be recognized for past achievements but also for future promises as the salvation or cure to certain social ills. The folk hero may therefore emerge on the basis of their capacity – by design or mistake – to inflate the public’s expectations about their ability to address a certain topic or range of issues. In this context Bartholomew’s (2001) conceptualization of a ‘moral panic in reverse’ – and particularly the notion of ‘wish mania’ – provides a useful analytical
reference point. ‘Wish mania’ refers to ‘a rapid, spontaneous spread of false, exaggerated, or unsubstantiated beliefs within a diffuse collective such as a community, region or country’ (Bartholomew 2001: 199). Like social whirlwinds that defy attempts to control or channel their flow so ‘wish mania’ can over-amplify specific skills into generic and super-human competencies; the challenge for the focus of such social speculation (i.e. the emerging folk hero) can be to manage the politics of public expectations in a way that ensures their future performance is not inevitably destined to disappoint. To talk of being ‘destined to disappoint’ resonates with an emphasis on heroic expectations and practical realities that has already surfaced at various points within this article. It is also a phrase that leads us back into the territory of contemporary political science and widespread evidence of a decline in levels of public trust in politicians and public confidence in political processes. Indeed, concerns about the trustworthiness and credibility of politicians have in recent years led to the introduction of a range of techniques and strategies that each sought to limit the discretion and direct power of elected politicians. The ‘logic of discipline’ has therefore become a defining characteristic of recent public governance reforms or – put simply – a way of disciplining devils.

Disciplining Devils

A focus on the manner in which politicians frequently appear to drift from folk hero (i.e. pre-election heroic expectations) to folk devil (i.e. post-election dashed expectations) arguably provides fertile and relatively virgin empirical terrain for those interested in moral panics, folk devils, crowd theory, heroic leadership or any other cognate topic. This article does not offer a crude binary dichotomy based upon oppositional constructs, but instead seeks to focus attention on the nature of drift and fluidity across and within a spectrum (see Table 1, above). The aim of this section is to dissect democratic theory and practice in order to reveal why politicians, more than any other social group or profession, may be particularly susceptible to such sudden and aggressive ‘hero to zero’ transitions. The argument of this section is that the answer lies in the inevitable tension between populism and democracy that has, in turn, led to the hollowing-out of democratic politics and the imposition of the ‘logic of discipline’.

Democratic politics, Crick (1962: 70) warns, encourages ‘people to expect too much—and the disillusionment of unreal ideals is an occupational hazard of free politics’. In making this argument Crick was pointing to the inevitable tension between democracy and populism and the existence of multiple, diverse and frequently contradictory pressures on politicians, political institutions and political processes. Because politics revolves around the tough process of ‘squeezing collective decisions out of multiple and competing interests and opinions’, it is often messy, cumbersome, sub-optimal and difficult to understand; it cannot satisfy a world of ever-greater public expectations. Being honest about this fact, however, is generally hampered by the need for politicians to garner and sustain popular support in a competitive environment (Stoker 2006). Democracy in modern societies is not the idyll of government ‘of the people, by the people, for the people’, but is in reality an attempt to corral the disorder of (numerous and frequently irreconcilable) passions eager for satisfaction. Therefore ‘a good democratic government’, Jacques Rancière (2006: 7) suggests, ‘is one capable of controlling the evil quite simply
called democratic life’, by which he means the capacity to impose some limits or restrictions on popular demands.

Lukacs (2005) takes this point even further and focuses not only on the need to achieve a balance between popular control and stable government, but also on the manner in which democratic politics contains a host of inflationary pressures; pressures in the sense that the demands of electoral competition tend to create incentives for parties and individuals to out-bid each other and over-inflate voters’ expectations. It was exactly this tension that underpinned Brittan’s (1975: 129) writing on the ‘economic contradictions of democracy’ in the 1970s and what he called the ‘two endemic threats to liberal representative democracy: the generation of excessive expectations and the disruptive effects of the pursuit of group self-interest in the market place’. Huntington (1981) approaches the same topic from a different angle by arguing that there was an inevitable gap between the ideals of moral perfection that are often incorporated into democratic theory, on the one hand, and public criticism and the inbuilt imperfections of institutions, complex societies, and human frailty on the other (see also Niebuhr 1932). Could it be therefore that, as Ferguson (2012) argues, the nature of democratic competition almost traps politicians into a pre-election cycle of creating heroic expectations (i.e. thereby in extreme cases producing a process akin to deification and becoming ‘folk heroes’) only for those hopes to be dashed as the practical realities of post-election politics becomes clearer (i.e. leading to the demonization of politicians and their ‘folk devil’ not-to-be-trusted status)?

A growing realization that the relatively short electoral cycle twinned with the inflationary pressures of political competition create a ‘credibility crisis’ in terms of rational decision-making and long-term planning has in recent decades stimulated a shift in the nature of modern governance from politicized to depoliticized forms (see, for example, Blinder 1997) involving the transfer or delegation of responsibilities and powers from the direct control of elected politicians to a vast plethora of agencies, boards and commissions that are to a great extent removed from the pressures of electoral competition. What Roberts (2010) defines as The Logic of Discipline is therefore founded on the belief that politicians are too easily tempted to put partisan political interests before the public’s interest and that their reliance on popular support (particularly within a relatively short electoral-cycle) puts them in an invidious position when it comes to allocating scarce resources. The growth of ‘the appointed state’ (Skelcher 1998) is therefore a direct response to the tension between democracy and populism that this section has sought to bring to the fore.

And yet the intention of highlighting the tension between populism and democracy was not to engage in a broad debate about ‘the life and death of democracy’ (Keane 2009) but simply to focus back on why politicians may be especially susceptible to sudden and violent changes in public attitudes. Could it be that the widely-debated demonization of politicians reflects the existence of systemic tensions (rather than individual failings) that, in turn, deliver new insights into social attitudes and political strategies? In order to engage with this question the next section moves from theory to practice and a very brief review of the governing experiences of Tony Blair in the UK and Barack Obama in the US.
Great Expectations: Blair and Obama

As Table 1 illustrates, the folk hero sits opposite the folk devil within the collective imagination. And just as Cohen (1972: 2) famously wrote that folk devils are primarily imagined as ‘visible reminders of what we should not be’, folk heroes are ‘the embodiment of our values and aspirations…a personification of what we take to be “the good”’ (Porpora 1996: 212). The focus of this article is not on either/or but on the nexus or the social transition through which certain actors may drift from one extreme to the other (the saints to sinners, savior to failure, hero to zero, champ to chump, knight to knave, and so on). The central argument being that the tension between democracy and populism (the focus of the previous section) puts politicians in a particularly vulnerable position. Could it even be that the transition from ‘folk hero’ to ‘folk devil’ is – at the highest level – an almost inevitable element of a political career due to the simple reason that ‘One of the saddest laws of politics’, as David Marquand (1997: 335), himself both a former politician and academic, admits, ‘is that euphoria never lasts’. In order to explore this argument and tie it to a focus on the politics of public expectations this section draws upon insights offered by Tony Blair’s decade as Prime Minister in the UK (1997–2007) and Barack Obama’s first term as President in the US (2008–12). It argues that both cases display a transition from ‘folk hero’ to ‘folk devil’ status but that to some extent this ‘hero to zero’ process is an inevitable element of modern politics that, in turn, focuses attention on the politics of public expectations.

The gap, however, between the macro-level theory of moral panics and the micro-level analysis of two case studies is too wide to traverse without a meso or mid-range framework through which to bridge empirics and theory and illustrate the value of the mirror-image perspective presented in this article. It is for exactly this reason that Table 2 develops Goode and Ben-Yehuda’s (1994) influential five-part framework for assessing the existence of a moral panic with a new but complementary schema for identifying politically inspired periods of moral euphoria. This approach has itself been designed to resonate with but also advance John Lofland’s (1982) five-part approach to the identification of ‘crowd joys’ (see above). The argument being that both Blair and Obama provide critical and illustrative – but by no means unique (see final section) – examples of moral euphoria, deification and the emergence of folk heroes on whom the weight of unrealistic public expectations led to a ‘boom and bust’ transition to ‘folk devils’.

It is neither possible nor necessary to provide a detailed case study of Blair and Obama within this section but it is possible to argue that both cases provide almost perfect examples of the inevitable pathologies of democratic politics that were discussed in the previous section.

‘Things Can Only Get Better’: From Blair to B-liar
‘Things can only get better’ was not only New Labour’s campaign slogan but it also captured a broader social sense of hope and aspiration that surrounded Tony Blair’s victory on 1 May 1997. New Labour had won a landslide election with an 8.8 per cent swing and had been rewarded with a massive parliamentary majority. It was clear that in terms of breadth (that is, Criteria #1, Table 2) Blair had managed to broaden Labour’s support base beyond its traditional supporters. In a study of Labour’s electoral gains in 1997, Heath et al. (2001: 138) find that ‘Labour made gains in all
Table 2. Moral Panics and Moral Euphoria: A Five-Part Assessment

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>MORAL PANIC</th>
<th>MORAL EUPHORIA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Criteria</strong></td>
<td><strong>Meaning</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Concern</strong></td>
<td>…a heightened level of concern over the behaviour of a certain individual, group or category and the consequences that their behaviour presumably causes for the rest of society.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Hostility</strong></td>
<td>…towards the group concerned as they become identified as ‘folk devils’ and therefore a threat to existing social mores.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consensus</strong></td>
<td>…a certain minimal measure of agreement in the society as a whole or in designated segments of the society that the threat is real, serious and caused by the wrongdoing of group members and their behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disproportionality</strong></td>
<td>…in terms of the instituted response relative to the level of risk or threat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Volatility</strong></td>
<td>…moral panics are highly volatile and tend to disappear as quickly as they appeared due to a wane in public interest or news reports changing to another topic.</td>
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social groups alike’ and ‘unusually large gains at the right-of-centre’, with particularly strong increases among non-traditional Labour supporting groups, most notably ‘the petit bourgeoisie (up 24 points)’, ‘non-union members of the salariat (up 18 points)’ and ‘salaried unionists (up 22 points)’. This broadening of support was, however, closely tied to the background and image of Blair and this is reflected in the fact that, around the time of the 1997 General Election, he enjoyed a public satisfaction rate in excess of 70 per cent that was far higher than the popularity of the Labour Party.
itself. Sanders (1999: 263) demonstrates the ‘Blair effect’, which encompasses his personal symbolization of the party’s break with the past and movement towards the centre-ground of British politics, showing ‘that the damage to the Conservatives inflicted by Blair’s leadership of Labour gradually increased from the time he took over as leader, eventually stabilising (by October 1995) at just over eight percentage points’. The effects of ‘personality’ on voter choice are, of course, always tempered by intervening factors such as ideology and party identity (Bartle and Crewe 2002). Yet, the extent to which media coverage and party campaigns emphasized Blair’s personal life make this period a ‘paradigmatic’ case of ‘personalization’ (Langer 2010: 63). The Labour campaign constantly placed Blair at centre stage in electoral broadcasts, in which ‘he tie(d) his personal experiences into policy positions, hence bringing political programme and person into line with each other’, while newspapers carried unprecedented levels of ‘soft’ coverage of the Labour leader’s private life (Finlayson 2002: 594; Langer 2010: 65). New Labour’s election victory has therefore been defined by several authors as a period of moral or public euphoria (see, for example, Marquand 1997) and, as one party official noted, as the votes came in ‘all around us people were close to delirium’ (Campbell 2007: 187). The government minister Peter Mandelson (2010: 218) recalls, ‘what struck me...was the sheer elation the landslide had produced in everyone’; and from a different perspective the author Anthony Seldon (2007: 265) has emphasized the manner in which Blair was elected on ‘a wave of popular emotion’ that was intimately tied-up with elements of celebrity, hope and heroic expectations; while Nicholas Jones (1997: 265) has explored the manner in which Blair was an almost ‘messianic figure’ among Labour supporters and sections of the public. The intensity (C#2) surrounding the election was arguably almost palpable as was a sense of consensus (C#3) that a period of socio-political change was about to occur. ‘A new dawn has broken, has it not’, Tony Blair (2010: 12) notes in his memoirs, ‘This gave those already stratospheric expectations another and higher orbit. I swiftly tried to take them back to Earth’.

This introduces our fourth criteria (C#4 ‘disproportionality’) and the politics of public expectations. What is interesting in this case is that New Labour had explicitly attempted to manage the public’s expectations in an attempt to ensure they remained realistic and that the party would not be ‘destined to disappoint’ should it win the 1997 election. As Blair explained, ‘we were acutely aware of the dangers of over-inflating the public’s expectations. That’s exactly why we had the pledge card with five simple promises that we then developed in the manifesto’ (Interview with Matthew Flinders, July 2010). And yet despite the party’s attempt not to engage in ‘wish mania’ it is clear from survey data that public attitudes were infused with unbridled optimism across a great range of themes, topics and policy areas (Ipsos Morí 1997a, 1997b, 1997c, 1997d; Muschamp et al. 1999; Vidler and Clarke 2005: 21).

The stratospheric expectations for Blair’s premiership appeared, initially, to be satisfied during an unusually lengthy ‘honeymoon period’ in which opinion poll ratings remained ‘consistently ten points or better than the average ratings for all Prime Ministers from Attlee to Major at the same point in their first term’ (Worcester and Mortimore 2001: 19). Yet, towards the end of his first term there were signs of ‘volatility’ (C#5); for example in the government’s response to the ‘petrol crisis’ of September 2000 ‘72% (of survey respondents) thought (Blair) was “out of touch with what ordinary people think”’ (Worcester and Mortimore 2001: 20). This trend towards
disaffection was further reflected in disappointment at lack of progress on New Labour’s ambitious public sector reform plans (Worcester and Mortimore 2001: 34–45), and arguably in the unprecedented drop in turnout at the 2001 election from 71.4% to 59.5%.

These anxieties represented only rumblings, however, of the ‘blitz’ of demonization Blair would face in the wake of revelations concerning the legality of the Iraq War in 2003 (Street 2004: 435). Nessheim (2008: 13–14) notes that ‘when no weapons of mass destruction were found, and especially when allegations were made by a BBC journalist that Downing Street had “sexed up” intelligence reports…(and) the suicide of the Government’s weapons expert, Dr. David Kelly…the Prime Minister’s credibility had taken a battering from which it never fully recovered’. Blair was singled out by the Conservative party and elements of the media for allegedly ‘lying’ about the evidence available that Saddam Hussain harbourred weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). ‘Despite the Butler Report and three previous inquiries’, note Lambe et al. (2005: 337), ‘a July (2004) ICM poll found that a clear majority of voters (55%) still thought that Blair had lied over Iraq’. By the 2005 election Blair’s reputation was damaged to such an extent that he was seen as a ‘liability’ to the Labour party (Evans and Andersen 2005: 820), and even employed a marketing company – (ironically called) Promise plc – to ‘re-brand’ his political image (Scammell 2007).

Clearly, this ‘hero-to-zero’ transition ties in with a broader argument concerning the pathologies of democratic politics. A ‘heroic’ political leader initially elected on a wave of moral euphoria and inflated expectations found himself plunged into allegations of ‘devilish’ behaviour: arrogance, betrayal and lying as the complex realities and difficult choices associated with governing set in. These lead us to our second case study and an arguably more extreme example of heroic expectations and practical realities in a political context that add substance to this article’s broader arguments concerning deification and demonization.

‘Yes We Can’: The Demonization of Barack Obama

If Tony Blair’s experience represents the past then Barack Obama’s presidency certainly represents the present and contributes its own insights into the creation of folk heroes, the demonization of politicians and the tension between populism and democracy. Moreover if there was ever a case of heroic expectations and practical realities then Obama’s campaign and subsequent presidency arguably provides an incredibly timely and poignant case study.

As a now voluminous literature on the election and presidency of Barack Obama demonstrates, his election campaign generated widespread support and interest across American society (C#1) (see, for example, Maraniss 2012). More importantly, it cultivated this level of interest by explicitly raising public expectations under the election mantra of ‘Yes We Can!’ The belief in the need to hope and dream, and to raise society’s aspirations to new levels in a world that offered new challenges and opportunities was reflected in Obama’s speeches and publications during the election campaign – his books Change We Can Believe In (2008a) and The Audacity of Hope (2008b) providing key examples of this soaring rhetoric. Obama’s election produced an intense period of celebratory euphoria in which the new president was perceived to possess almost superhuman qualities. Obama’s euphoric victory rally in
Chicago reflected the hope and expectation that had fuelled his campaign and that had also endowed him with heroic – arguably iconic – ‘folk hero’ status (C#2). The *Baltimore Sun* reported voters at Obama’s post-election celebration in Grant Park, Chicago cheering ‘joyously’ and claiming a ‘transformational shift’ was taking place (Huppke and St. Clair, 2008). For Merlock Jackson et al. (2010: 40–1) this post-election celebration ‘defined a generation’:

> Enthusiastic gatherings following elections are not unusual, but the size and intensity of the Obama party were extraordinary by all measures. The Chicago celebration that took place that night (was) not unlike the rejoicing in Times Square that marked the end of World War II...People screamed at each other to be heard amid the incessant chanting of ‘Obama, Obama’ and, even more frequently, ‘Change’. When Obama finally gave his speech, his amplified voice reverberated off the nearby buildings, echoing four times, and the raucous applause and shouting added to the acoustic din. The mood, not unlike Times Square or Woodstock, was euphoric. People in the right place at the right time realised that they were part of an historical moment.

This euphoric atmosphere was present beyond Grant Park. For example, the *New York Times* reported that ‘the election of Mr Obama amounted to a national catharsis...a strikingly symbolic moment...(and) nothing short of a phenomenon, drawing huge crowds...people rolled spontaneously into the streets to celebrate what many described...(as) a new era’ (Nagourney 2008). The *Baltimore Sun* also noted inflated expectations of Obama in government, especially among African American voters (Schaller 2008). Parisella (2010) recalls that from the day of the election results to Obama’s historic inauguration speech on 20 January 2009, ‘the nation was caught up in the euphoria of change...it seemed like a cathartic moment and the advent of a transformational presidency’. These feelings are certainly reflected in opinion polling which puts Obama’s approval rating at 68% immediately after his inauguration (Gallup 2009). It is therefore possible to identify a general consensus surrounding the election of Obama in 2008 that was publicly defined as a ‘fresh start’ for American society (C#3). This consensus was reflected in the election statistics – a 63% turnout (131.3 million votes cast), the highest figure for half-a-century with increased participation from previously disconnected social groups (most notably African Americans) and Obama winning the electoral vote 365/173.

More broadly the election of Obama was, as Maass (2009) has shown, a global event in the sense that an atmosphere of joy, hope and relief was almost tangible beyond the United States, such was the power of ‘Obamania’. The belief that a new consensus had been forged was captured in Obama’s (2009) inauguration speech:

> If there is anyone out there who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, if the dream of our founders is still alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy: tonight you have your answer! It is the answer that is seen in lines of people that have stretched around schools and churches in numbers this country has never seen. By people who had waited for many hours – many for the first time in their lives – because they believed that this time must be different. It was the answer spoken by young and old, rich and poor, Democrat and Republican, black and white, Hispanic and Asian, gay and straight, disabled and not disabled. It’s the answer for those who have been told for so long by so many to be cynical, fearful and doubtful about what we can achieve if we put out hands on the ark of history and bend it towards the hope of a better day.
And yet four years on it is possible to argue that Obama’s soaring rhetoric and campaign strategy over-inflated the public’s expectations to the extent to which he was almost ‘destined to disappoint’ (C#4) (Woon 2009). Unlike New Labour in the UK, the Democratic Party’s campaign strategy arguably degenerated into a form of ‘wish mania’ to which the answer to almost any question was ‘Yes We Can!’. From closing Guantanamo Bay to introducing a new energy and environmental policy, and from stimulating economic growth to reducing unemployment, the great expectations that propelled Obama into office – the promises of change and new beginnings – quickly weighed heavily upon not only the President as an individual but on the political system more widely. Indeed, as the 2008 presidential campaign came towards an end, and particularly as public opinion surveys suggested an Obama victory was likely, Obama’s campaign team’s focus clearly shifted to an emphasis on lowering public expectations about what he would be able to achieve if elected. The sudden financial crisis and the prospect of a deep and painful recession increased the urgency inside Obama’s campaign team to bring people down to earth, after a campaign in which his soaring rhetoric and promises of ‘hope’ and ‘change’ were suddenly confronted with the reality of a stricken economy. Seeking to dampen down public expectations continued throughout the transition period following the election in an attempt to prevent ‘a vast mood swing from exhilaration and euphoria to despair’, as one of Obama’s senior advisers noted (Reid 2008). In response to questions about his immediate priorities on taking office, Mr. Obama repeatedly asserted that ‘the first hundred days is going to be important, but it’s probably the first thousand days that makes the difference...I won’t stand here and pretend that any of this will be easy—especially now’ (King 2012).

A thousand days later and it appears that the contrast between heroic expectations and practical realities have fuelled something of a backlash against Obama and a process that can (and has) been defined as one of demonization (#5). The demonization of Barack Obama arguably differs from the partisan attacks that have for decades been accepted as part of the ebb-and-flow of presidential politics due to the manner in which the anti-Obama camps have adopted a personal, inflammatory and frequently race-based approach. ‘There is no invective too repugnant’ Colbert King (2012) concludes ‘[or] too vicious to throw at the President of the United States’. This shift to outright ‘attack politics’ is displayed within the American media through a slew of books that have sought to promote a simple narrative: Obama is evil (see Klein 2012; Limbaugh 2012; Freddoso 2011). As Chip Berlet (2010) has illustrated, ‘the most militant anti-Obama ideologues construct frames and narratives based on a dualistic worldview in which Obama [is] demonised and scapegoated for existing economic, social, and political problems’. The right-wing ‘Tea Party’ movement, which emerged through 2009 as a mainstream political force (Williamson et al. 2011), characterized Obama as inter alia a ‘Nazi, fascist, communist, socialist, monarchist or racist’ (Jacobsen 2010: 2). Politically wounded by this sustained and brutal character assassination, Obama’s job approval average dropped from nearly 70% in January 2009 to just 50% in January 2010, while those actively disapproving rose from just above 10% to over 40% over the same period (Williamson et al. 2011: 3).

The argument here is not so crude or inaccurate to suggest that Barack Obama has become a ‘folk devil’ within American Society but it is using his presidency to highlight two core features that are strangely common amongst political careers: first,
the dynamics of electoral competition caused him to become entangled in a process of ‘wish mania’ that meant he was to some extent ‘destined to disappoint’ exactly because he had created a ‘moral panic in reverse’ (i.e. the positive belief that he could deliver all things to all people); and secondly, the lexicon of devilry and demonization has become part of the (public and explicit) language of contemporary ‘attack politics’ in a form that simply did not exist when Young and Cohen were writing in the 1970s (Buell and Sigelmann 2009).

Despite their obvious differences, the experiences of Tony Blair and Barack Obama provide crucial insights into the pathologies of democratic competition, the politics of public expectations and the transition from ‘folk hero’ to ‘folk devil’. Both cases provide an episode of moral euphoria that was rapidly followed if not by a focused moral panic then by a broader sense of social disenchantment and frustration. The pre-election mantra that ‘things can only get better’ may have propelled New Labour into office but quickly became something of a poisoned chalice (see, for example, Toynbee and Walker 2001); across the Atlantic ‘Yes we can!’ has rapidly changed into ‘No we can’t!’ (or at best ‘Yes, we can but it is going to take a very long time!’). The question this leaves us with is whether a politician could ever win office without capturing the public’s imagination and inspiring such hope and expectation? Historically, political parties who have sought to bring to attention ‘inconvenient truths’ requiring a significant lowering of expectations regarding increasing living standards, such as those associated with the Green movement, have been electorally ineffective against structurally privileged ‘materialist’ or ‘anthropocentric’ parties based around traditional class politics and arguably unsustainable promises of exponentially increasing living standards (Richardson and Rootes 1995: 8–14). Would ‘We might be able to do it!’ or ‘I’ll do what I can!’ ever underpin a successful election campaign?6 The tension this question reveals and the links between our case studies is provided by the following extract from Tony Blair’s (2010: 15) memoirs:

When Barack Obama fought and won his extraordinary campaign for the presidency I could tell exactly what he would have been thinking. At one level, the excitement and energy created by such hope vested in the candidate has the effect of buoying you up, driving you on, giving all that you touch something akin to magic. The country is on a high and you are up there with them... At another deeper level, however, you quickly realise that though you are the repository of that hope and have in part been the author of it, it now has a life of its own, a spirit of its own and that spirit is soaring far beyond your control. You want to capture it, to tame it and harness it, because its very independence is, you know, leading the public to an impossible sense of expectation. Expectations of this nature cannot be met. That’s what you want to tell people. Often you do tell them. But the spirit can’t be too constrained. And when it finally departs, leaving your followers with reality—a reality you have never denied and which you have even sought to bring to their attention—the danger is disillusion, more painful because of what preceded it.

Blair’s sentiment offers a clear link to Crick’s concerns regarding the dangers of ‘unreal ideals’. It also helps add tone and texture to an argument concerning the social role and position of politicians and why they may – due to a variety of factors – be more prone than other social groups to violent shifts in public attitudes. Put slightly differently, democratic politics brings with it a danger of creating a relationship based on deception, not a form of deception necessarily designed to
mislead or trick but one based on the hope that hard work and hard choices can somehow be avoided; that there are, after all, simple and pain-free solutions to complex problems. There are no simple answers to complex problems, which is why politicians are arguably trapped into a boom-bust cycle of public expectations which generates the transition from ‘folk hero’ to ‘folk devil’.

‘Them’, ‘Us' and the Art of Trespassing

Great thinkers, Berlin (1979) argues, can be divided into two categories: hedgehogs and foxes. Hedgehogs tended to know a great deal about only one thing; whereas foxes were able to think and act without trying to locate their lives, actions and ideas within a fixed view of the world. The vaunted professionalization of the social sciences in the twentieth century arguably bred hedgehogs rather than foxes as scholars focused on mining and protecting their niche, on knowing ‘more and more about less and less’. The fox-like ‘art of trespassing’ has arguably been lost in the sense of possessing a willingness and confidence to ‘step over the borders between one discipline and another, without seeing them as rigid divisions’ (Hirschman 1996: 658). This ‘art of trespassing’ inspired influential books by C. Wright Mills (1959) and Crick (1959), but fifty years later the social and political sciences have arguably lost this quality (Shapiro 2005). It is in this context that this article has attempted to range far and wide to argue that moral euphoria, folk devils and deification present a critical counterpoint to moral panic theory and its attendant concepts and processes. It stressed how the need for politicians to generate heroic expectations creates folk hero to folk devil transitions; and, through the Blair and Obama case studies, it demonstrated how this perspective offers important insights and lessons in understanding ‘hero to zero’ transitions. The aim of this final section is to very briefly continue the mirror-image theme by focusing on the implications of these arguments at three levels:

1. Micro-level: The need to refine and develop the analytical tools through which we examine both folk devils and folk heroes.

2. Meso-level: In many ways the transition from a ‘folk hero’ to a ‘folk devil’ vis-à-vis politicians is just too obvious and a more interesting set of questions revolves around how devils can become heroes again.

3. Macro-level: The debate about demonization and deification raises broader questions about the nature of ‘public sociology’ and the professional responsibilities of social and political scientists to the public.

At the micro-political level this article has clearly presented little more than a proto-theory in the sense of a first-stage schema for analysing moral euphoria. What is, however, interesting about this embryonic approach is that the ‘ten dimensions of dispute’ that David et al. (2011) identify in relation to the theory of moral panics (moral regulation; under-dog focus; normativity; etc.) apply in equal measure to any analysis of moral euphoria (that is, they are mirror-image dilemmas). But one way of moving beyond many of these ‘dimensions of dispute’ would be to draw upon Sartori’s emphasis on conceptual infolding and the identification of sub-species. Examined from this perspective it could be argued that despite the burgeoning literature on folk devils very little of it has sought to identify specific forms of devilry.
In this vein, Bearfield (see Bearfield et al. 2012: 19) attempts to refine Flinders’ arguments on the demonization of politicians by identifying ‘four different [folk devil] narratives, each reflecting a type of corruption capable of igniting a moral panic’. His analysis of the political science literature leads him to identify four types of (political) folk devil (the law breaker; the rule breaker; the immoral and the unfaithful). If Bearfield’s four-fold typology provides a more sophisticated grasp of the politics of moral panics and devilish forms of behaviour then there must also be a need for a similarly refined set of counterpoints in terms of moral euphoria and heroic behaviour. In this regard, Klapp’s (1962: 27-49) typology of folk heroes (‘splendid performers’, ‘heroes of social acceptability’, ‘independent spirits’ and ‘group performers’) may offer food for thought.

And yet to generate typologies of either folk heroes or folk devils in the political sphere risks not only reinforcing a false and problematic dualism between ‘them’ and ‘us’ (Hatier 2012) but more importantly losing sight of this article’s focus on the transition between such social interpretations. More specifically, it could be argued that by focusing on heroes to devils this article has sought to explain a relatively well-known social phenomenon famously captured in Enoch Powell’s adage that ‘All political lives, unless they are cut off in midstream at a happy juncture, end in failure, because that is the nature of politics and of human affairs’. In this regard the case studies examined above provide particularly rich insights into a broader global pattern in which elected leaders rarely, if ever, manage to sustain high-popularity ratings beyond their first term. With this in mind the critical transition is not so much from ‘hero to zero’ but from ‘zero to hero’ or – more precisely – how jaded politicians who are subject to plummeting public opinion ratings can regain some form of ‘folk hero’ status. One interesting future research agenda might hence look at the ‘rallying around the flag’ effect as a social concept which highlights the manner in which the popularity ratings of politicians and governments tends to increase significantly in times of social crisis (either perceived or real) (Mueller 1970; Norris 2003; Hetherington and Nelson 2003).

To mention ‘crises’, however, provides an opportunity to engage in one final form of mirror-image reflection that focuses attention not on the role of ‘folk devils’, in general, or politicians (in particular) but on the role of the reader of this article. Although suggesting that the social and political sciences might be suffering something of an existential crisis about their broader social role and relevance is not exactly novel (see Flyvbjerg 2001; Stratham 2002 for contributions to an on-going disciplinary debate). With this debate in mind, could it therefore be that social and political scientists may actually be in some way responsible for the emergence of an increasingly large and diverse ‘gallery of folk devils’? Put slightly differently, could it be that ‘the suddenness and intensity of each succeeding squall, the arbitrary way in which groups of offenders are plucked from context and skinned alive as public enemies, and – this is very telling – the careless shrug of shoulders when it subsequently turns out an accusation was false or unfair’ (Parris 2012) might actually be a symptom of the decreasing social relevance and visibility of the social and political sciences? Although the recent growth of ‘relevance’ as criteria for research assessment exercises certainly constructs the image of an engaged scholarly community, Colin Hay’s (2009: 587) argument that the imbibing, teaching and promotion of rational choice-theoretic assumptions about self-interested behaviour has been ‘fuelling the contemporary culture of political cynicism’ perhaps suggests
that social scientific methods may deserve greater attention in this debate. The debate about demonization and deification therefore arguably raises far broader questions about the professional responsibilities of social and political scientists to the public than are currently being asked. How this relates to the notions of ‘public sociology’ – let alone a ‘public political science’ – are, however, issues that other scholars will have to discuss and explore.

Notes

1. The authors would like to thank Sandey Fitzgerald, Cécile Hatier, Robert Elgie, Matt Sleat, Domonic Bearfield and members of the Moral Panic Research Network for their assistance or comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. Clinton’s sentiment echoes from a very different perspective the argument of the Dutch politician Pym Fortuyn in April 2002. ‘The government and the media has demonised me personally’, Fortuyn argued on live national television, ‘and if something were to happen to me then they will be partly responsible, and they can’t just walk away and say “I’m not the one committing this attack”. They helped to create the climate, this atmosphere. It needs to stop’. Two weeks later he was murdered.
3. A phrase adapted from the sub-title of Anne Tiernan and Pat Weller’s (2010) Learning to be a Minister: Heroic Expectations, Practical Realities.
4. Although as Welch (2004) suggests in relation to ‘denial’ and ‘panic’ during the public reaction to 9/11, extreme emotional trends can sometimes be identified simultaneously. One example of this, to follow from Welch’s theme, might be the reaction to recent Western military intervention in Afghanistan in which military servicemen have routinely been glorified, whilst alleged supporters of the Taliban have been demonized.
5. Robin Sears (2010) would later look back and note, ‘If successful political leadership is about expectations management, the President and his advisors had signaly failed long before he even won the democratic nomination. They would respond that only by reaching for the stars could they have overcome the “inevitability” of Hillary Clinton’s nomination…Obama over-promised and under-performed’.
6. Lech Wales did in fact win the Polish presidential election in 1990 using the slogan, ‘I don't want to, but I've got no choice’ (‘Nie chcę, ale muszę’), while in Iceland the originally satirical ‘Best Party’ won a plurality of the vote in the 2010 local Reykjavik elections despite promising to break all its election promises when in office.
7. See also Hirschman (1998).
8. Lech Walesa, for example, won the Polish presidential election in 1990 but was defeated in 1995; Kim Campbell’s high public popularity soon declined after she won the 1993 General Election in Canada and she lost office just months later; in the Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko emerged as the hero of the ‘Orange Revolution’ and was elected President in 2005 but rapidly lost public support and was eliminated in the first round of voting in the 2010 elections; Rolandas Paksas was elected President of Lithuania in 2003 but was impeached in 2004; Ehud Barak became Prime Minister of Israel in 1999 but lasted less than two years; in the Republic of Ireland Brian Cowen became Taoiseach in 2008 but quickly became the least popular incumbent in the history of Irish opinion polling.
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