

## Missing Persons: London, July 2005<sup>1</sup>

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“Where is he, someone tell me, where is he?”

Marie Fatayi-Williams<sup>2</sup>

This paper is motivated by a concern, an anger even, at the way in which people were treated by the authorities in the aftermath of the London bombings of July 2005. In particular, communication with those searching for missing relatives or friends was one-way or non-existent. This treatment, it seems to me, provides an example of what Michael Dillon called “governing terror” and what Giorgio Agamben called “sovereign power”, the practices and processes characteristic of contemporary forms of global liberal governance.<sup>3</sup> Although clearly it would be good if people were treated better in the terrible circumstances following what we call traumatic loss, and in particular if communications with those traumatised by the events could be managed more appropriately, this is not the central argument the paper is making. The argument is rather that the way people are treated at such times is symptomatic of and plainly reveals “the contingent instrumentality of pure operationality.”<sup>4</sup> In other words, it is not a small local failure, which could be put right within existing frameworks; rather it is the inevitable product of the form of governance to which we are apparently now subject. My purpose is to elucidate ways in which governance of this type, a form of governance that has been called biopolitics or sovereign power, works, and how it is being and can be challenged or contested.

Biopolitical instrumentality does not reflect all there is to life, and traumatic events such as the 7 July bombings make this apparent.<sup>5</sup> Such events are dangerous for any form of authority that relies on a supposed ability to master contingency, to manage disaster, to provide security or to govern terror, for its authorisation. Events like this, traumatic events, threaten to reveal that governing contingency is impossible.<sup>6</sup> They provoke a recognition of the horrors of the ways we are governed and the extent to which these forms of governance not only fail in what they set out to do but miss the point. There is a contingency beyond the contingent that forms the object of contemporary governance, and it is this contingency that counts.<sup>7</sup> Events

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<sup>1</sup> This paper has benefited from many different conversations and discussions. First, I would like to thank Costas Constantinou, Oliver Richmond and Alison Watson for a very productive workshop in St Andrews where the argument of this paper was first presented and for their encouraging and challenging comments as editors. Participants in the workshop—Roland Bleiker, Kevin Dunn, Stephan Stetter, and Cynthia Weber—were very supportive, and I am grateful to Emma Hutchinson for detailed and perceptive comments afterwards. Some of the research for this paper was presented at ‘London in a Time of Terror: The Politics of Response,’ an international conference held at Birkbeck College in London. Thanks are due to the convenors, Angharad Closs and Nick Vaughan-Williams for the invitation to take part in the opening panel of the conference and for their comments afterwards, and to other participants, among them Costas Douzinas, Vivienne Jabri, Patricia Molloy, Mustapha Pasha, Julian Reid, Emily Trahair, and Rob Walker, for interesting discussions. I would like to thank Marie Fatayi-Williams especially, and not just for the conversations we had but for her work more generally. Last but not least, I am much indebted to Mick Dillon for his comments on a draft of the paper and the wonderful conversation, fortified beautifully by a whiskey or two, that followed.

<sup>2</sup> Speech given near Tavistock Square, London, Monday 11 July 2005.

<sup>3</sup> M. Dillon, ‘Governing Terror: The State of Emergency of Biopolitical Emergence’, *International Political Sociology*, 1 (2007), pp. 7-28. See also M. Dillon, ‘Governing through contingency: The security of biopolitical governance’, *Political Geography*, 26 (2007), pp. 41-47; M. Dillon and L. Lobo-Guerrero, ‘Biopolitics of Security in the 21st Century’, unpublished paper (2007), 55pp.; G. Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998); G. Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Dillon, ‘Governing Terror,’ 19.

<sup>5</sup> Or, in Dillon’s phrase, there is “more to life than meets the molecular biopolitics of contemporary biopower.” (‘Governing terror,’ 20).

<sup>6</sup> J. Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> Although “life, especially the life of populations, is characterised by contingency,” in this context “contingency is not arbitrary chance” (Dillon, ‘Governing through contingency’, 45). The contingency of the traumatic (the contingency beyond the contingent) is precisely a demonstration of the absolutely arbitrary; it is the reduction of population to a singularity: a population of one, the level at which statistics no longer apply.

we call traumatic are precisely those that reveal that whatever systems we set up to reassure ourselves that terror is governable it isn't. Although after 9/11 it began to seem as though the state, or whatever we call the place where authority resides, has taken charge of the traumatic, it has not.<sup>8</sup> Despite all the talk of the inevitability of terrorist attacks and the existence of 'unknown unknowns', sovereign power's attempts to respond to and to 'govern' what we call trauma remain inept and ineffectual as inevitably they must. The contingent that can be governed is not the same as the contingency that cannot: governing terror, to use Dillon's phrase again, is not the same as governing trauma.

One of the most prominent protests against the way in which people were handled in the aftermath of the bombings in London came from Marie Fatayi-Williams. Her "public display of grief and anger" had been a response to "frustration at the lack of communication from the authorities" who had failed to confirm her son Anthony's death despite her pleas for information.<sup>9</sup> Not only was there silence from the authorities as to naming the dead, there was a demand for detailed information from those searching for their friends and relations. Everyone was treated as a suspect: the priority was the search for the 'perpetrators', not the needs of the 'victims'. Families were plunged into a world of Disaster Victim Identification Forms, Police Liaison Officers, and stonewalling by officials. Any communication outside the protocols of disaster was disallowed.

In the aftermath of what we call disaster, communication—in this case the circulation and exchange of dead or dying bodies and information about them—has to conform to a certain discipline: it has to accept certain protocols or parameters.<sup>10</sup> In a similar way academic communication—writing in the social sciences—is forced into a particular format in order to be heard: it has to be rational and referenced, for example. In both cases, communication that falls outside these disciplinary constraints is not acceptable. It is not heard, or is at best reduced to an incoherent murmur, reverberating faintly from the margins. Its voice is "excommunicated," and only reluctantly permitted to protest in the role of 'traumatised victim', or to present alternative ways of writing in the role of 'marginalised dissident'.<sup>11</sup>

There can be a double silencing when we find academic writers joining forces, or attempting to join forces, with those who are produced as 'victims' or as 'traumatised' in an attempt to render them voiceless and excommunicated. The ways in which relatives of the missing caught up in the bureaucracies of disaster find alternative ways to perform and communicate their anguish lets us see how they are marginalised or 'disappeared' by the biopolitics or sovereign power that governs the exception or the emergency. Our attempts as academics to make their voices re-appear can often, however, remain trapped within the disciplinary practices of International Relations.<sup>12</sup> This is not only a question of academic writing, important though that is, but also a question of the relation between academic life and political action, between scholars and 'practitioners'.<sup>13</sup> Once we become or take on a certain role as 'academics', we are forced into certain protocols: our writing has to have an argument; we have to provide references; we have to write in a way that is relevant to the context in which we publish. In accepting our authorisation as academics, we have a certain obligation. Moving outside those protocols, and using our academic authorisation to perform our work, to move our audience to tears, perhaps, and to influence but not through the force of the better argument, renders us uncomfortable.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*, 233.

<sup>9</sup> Sandra Laville, "Mother's fury at 'slaughter of the innocents'" *The Guardian (London and Manchester)*, 12 July 2005, p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> 'Communication' is used here not with any connotations of the transference of previously formulated thoughts or images or events from one person to another or several others, but rather as "encompassing the multiple circuits of exchange and circulation of goods, people and messages." (A. Mattelart, *The Invention of Communication* (Minneapolis and London: 1996), xiv.)

<sup>11</sup> 'Excommunication' is Mattelart's term (Interview with Armand Mattelart, this issue); for 'dissidence' in international relations writing see R. K. Ashley and R. B. J. Walker, eds., 'Speaking the Language of Exile: Dissident Thought in International Studies', *International Studies Quarterly*, 34 (1990) Special Issue; D. Campbell, *Writing security: United States Foreign Policy and the politics of identity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p 4.

<sup>12</sup> I capitalise to indicate the academic discipline, following convention for once.

<sup>13</sup> J. Edkins, ed., 'Ethics of Engagement: Intellectuals in World Politics', *International Relations*, 19 (2005), Special Forum Section.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'performative writing' is gaining currency in the humanities and social sciences. See R. J. Pelias, 'Performative

Occasionally, academics themselves become 'traumatised victims'.<sup>15</sup> And, even more occasionally, they find the courage to write from this tortuous and tortured perspective. One example is Susan Brison, who has written movingly and informatively about her experience as the survivor of a violent attack during which she was left for dead.<sup>16</sup> In the aftermath of the events of 7 July 2005 in London, two people who were caught up in the events in different ways and who beforehand had been inhabitants of the world of academia, wrote of their experiences to great effect: Marie Fatayi-Williams and John Tulloch.<sup>17</sup> Their writings help me raise some of the questions about communication, excommunication and biopolitics that interest me in this paper.

I was asked to present a piece in the opening roundtable at a conference held in London in December 2006 under the rubric 'London in a Time of Terror: The Politics of Response.' I presented some of my work for this paper. The conference was open to non-academics as well as academics, and people registering included survivors of 7 July as well as relatives of people killed that day. This meant that all the 'academics' presenting were very aware that they were not able to speak (should they have wished to) in what would have been a fairly common academic way: in abstract, theoretical terms, for example. It was also obvious that a performative presentation designed to provoke an emotional response would not be appropriate either. For once, it seemed more as if we were all in this together. We weren't outsiders and insiders, academics and practitioners. We all travelled on public transport, we all visited London; many of us lived there. There were clearly, as the organisers said in their opening address, sensitive issues at stake. There were people present for whom the questions we were to discuss would never be abstract theoretical concerns. During one of the discussions one question raised was why academics had had so little to say, why had they not spoken up more. Was it perhaps that the very academic conventions that give their voice authority can make them powerless to speak in such a context?

In the aftermath of the explosions on the London underground and in Tavistock Square in Bloomsbury on Thursday 7 July 2005, relatives of the missing were kept waiting for up to or over a week for information about where their sons and daughters, friends and family members might be. They were put through a bureaucratic process the requirements of which were applied apparently without regard for the distress they would cause. In the first part of the paper I trace some of the ways people on the streets responded to the aftermath, and look briefly at how responses to what we call traumatic events might be thought about in more general terms. I then focus on the search for the missing, and draw out how those involved attempted to express or communicate their 'trauma' in the face not only of the bombings themselves but of the bureaucratic processes of disaster management that were put in place by the authorities. The official processes, in particular the Disaster Victim Identification system, are detailed, and the way they set out to seek information—and the type of information they require—explored.

The abstract rationality of these official practices and the objective forms of communication they entail contrasts sharply with the requirements of those we call the traumatised for a personal response to their grief and suffering. The paper attempts to align itself with the latter: it tries to communicate to its readers the emotional turmoil and anger afoot in London that July amongst those most directly affected. It argues that the response to trauma taken by officialdom, the attempt by the authorities to overcome trauma by a demonstration of their authority and competence in the production of safety and security—by focussing entirely on tracking down the 'perpetrators' at the expense of paying attention to the 'victims'—is not the only possibility. It is reflective of a particular form of biopolitical sovereign authority that is

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Writing as Scholarship: An Apology, an Argument, an Anecdote', *Cultural Studies, Critical Methodologies*, 5 (2005), pp. 415-424.

<sup>15</sup> More frequently perhaps, 'traumatised victims' become academics. There are numerous examples—in 'Holocaust Studies', for example, many people now writing as academics have reached that position via a family or personal history of involvement.

<sup>16</sup> S. J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> M. Fatayi-Williams, *For the Love of Anthony: A Mother's Search for Peace after the London Bombings* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2006); J. Tulloch, *One Day in July: Experiencing 7/7* (London: Little, Brown, 2006). Tulloch's book is most notable to me for the postscript in which he addresses the bomber, Mohammad Sidique Khan, directly, as a fellow person.

increasingly prevalent but that may well not be one whose ethos we would want to endorse, were we asked. Other forms of communication, other ways of being in relation to traumatic events, were demonstrated that summer.

### The aftermath

Following the 7 July bombings in London in 2005, tributes were left at King's Cross and gathered together in a small memorial garden next to the station, temporarily supplanting what had been a cycle park. When I visited the garden on 16 July, a notice announced:

A constant memory to  
all who lost their lives  
near this place on  
7th July 2005.  
"Peace is now theirs"  
We shall never forget.

A book of condolences was available just outside the garden. In the garden itself, the space surrounding a small tree was lined with flowers, flags and messages. It was possible for visitors to enter and make a circuit of the area to read the messages, though there would not have been room for more than around two or three dozen people at a time in the garden. Instructions at the entrance asked that people refrain from taking photographs. The garden was separated from its surroundings by metal railings, and messages and flags were attached to the railings too.<sup>18</sup>

From outside the garden it was possible to photograph those visiting the interior, and to take shots of some of the messages that were orientated to the outside. The garden – later returned to its familiar role of cycle park – is situated at a corner of the façade of King's Cross Station, adjacent to a very busy traffic cross-roads, with signals for pedestrians and traffic. There is and was a continual flow of people past the area: the pavement outside would regularly be dozens deep with people weaving to and fro. The small area of contemplation was somewhat incongruous amongst the city bustle, apparently unnoticed by most passers by. Visitors were however thoroughly absorbed.

The messages in the garden were interesting. Prominent among them were messages from other cities or different national or religious groups offering sympathy and understanding: messages from the Turkish Community, the Afghan community in Walsall, from religious groups, from visitors to the city. "We are with you: All Indians in UK & all over"; "Our heart is with you just like your heart was with us"; "America stands united with London against terrorism"; "To you brave Londoners... your friends from Norway"; "Our prayers are with you. Keep the faith. From all South Africans"; "We fought together in the last war and we will always be with you till the end. Maltese Community"; "We are all Londoners: Christian, Muslim, Jew, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist"; "London: Madrid's heart is with you: Be Brave". A message in Japanese from someone called Katahira, from Sayama City Fire Station, Saitama Prefecture near Tokyo reads: "I pray for the souls of the dead and for the speedy recovery of the injured, for peace in the UK and the world. 7 July 2005." One message summed up the general feeling: "It wasn't necessary to have been born here to feel sadness for what happened in London." It seemed at first glance different from New York after 9.11:<sup>19</sup> less insular, perhaps, with messages from all over the world offering support. There was little condemnation and no asking for retaliation: "only one race is harmed by this: the human race."

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<sup>18</sup> The London authorities had obviously learned the lessons of the aftermath of Diana's death in 1997 and the street memorials in Manhattan in 2001: by July 2005 memorial activities were allowed but closely circumscribed, in this case by iron railings. See A. Kear and D. L. Steinberg, *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture and the Performance of Grief*. (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), for example, p 51.

<sup>19</sup> For discussions of memorial practices in New York after 9.11 see, for example, D. Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006); J. Edkins, 'Ground Zero: Reflections on Trauma, Indistinction and Response', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 8 (2004), pp. 247-270; and J. Edkins, 'The rush to memory and the rhetoric of war', *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 31 (2003), pp. 231-251.

A little further along the same stretch of road, on the other side of the station entrance, was a hoarding on which details of missing persons were posted, behind clear plastic: "Missing: James Mayes. White, slim build, 5' 11". Hazel eyes and short curly brown hair. Last seen or heard from before London Bombings. Was travelling on the Piccadilly line from King's Cross at 8.30-9am on Thursday 7 July. If you see him please call us urgently on..."; "Have you seen this man or his car? Christian Small (Age 28). Black male. Athletic build. 5' 01" Short black hair. Brown eyes. He left home at 7.55am on Thursday 7 July 2005. Car: Mitsubishi Colt Hatchback (silver). Stations: From Blackhorse Road or Walthamstow Central via King's Cross and Finsbury Park to Holborn. Contacts...". Other posters appeared in nearby parks, attached to gate posts: "Missing: Neetu Jain. Last seen at Euston/Tavistock Square on the morning of 7<sup>th</sup> July. Please contact..."; "Karolina: Her appearance... White female, short blond hair, distinct blue eyes, 1.6m (5ft 4ins), belly-button piercing, Polish nationality (speaks very good English). She was wearing... Black trouser suit, with long-sleeved round neck black jersey, several silver rings on both hands, silver fine-medium linked chain, black heeled shoes. Personal belongings... Black handbag (keys with London Olympics 2012 key ring, pack of cigarettes, Sony Eriksson mobile phone (silver, with falling autumn leaves screen saver). Karolina is still missing!!! Karolina is still missing and if anyway can help please contact anyone of us on the following contact details...".<sup>20</sup>

In the face of the bombs, people were posting notices on hoardings and lampposts in the desperate hope that passers-by would have information. They took snapshots from albums or computer files, family photos never intended for public display, and put together descriptions of distinguishing marks, height and weight, age and colour. One can only imagine the agony of waiting that relatives and friends went through in the days before details of the identities of those killed in the explosions were released.

These missing persons posters, and the distress of people searching, hopelessly, for their family members, are familiar from New York in 2001.<sup>21</sup> After the fall of the World Trade Center Twin Towers, relatives and friends of the missing took to the streets with photographs of those they were searching for. Later, they produced photocopied sheets carrying a photograph alongside the same personal details: age, height, weight, distinguishing marks. Occasionally the posters would give full details of where the person was when they were last heard from: "Edward Pullis. Aon Insurance. 101 Floor. Please call... Last seen 78<sup>th</sup> Floor waiting for elevator. Anyone from AON who knows Edward please call". Always there was the appeal for information, any information, and the list of contact names, numbers and email addresses. The London posters were very similar, noting when people were last seen or heard from, appealing for help and evoking sympathy. The scenario is familiar to us from other disaster sites, too; in the Asian tsunami the previous December people in a different part of the world posted notices describing those lost.<sup>22</sup>

In London, the missing posters put up by relatives were taken down as missing people were identified as among the dead. In New York this didn't happen. The missing posters remained on walls in Manhattan for a long time—several years—after the names of those killed had been more or less established. *This is a person, a missing person*, they seemed to be saying. *You have found their DNA, a finger tip, other body parts, maybe. But this person is still missing: they did not come home.* The posters became memorials in themselves: what had been intended as temporary flyers designed to track down missing family members became in the end unusual shrines—memorials carrying distinguishing features, scars, weight and height, memorials still protesting the disappearances.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *The Guardian* later reported that "Magda Gluck, whose 29-year-old twin sister, Karolina, was killed at Russell Square, said the aftermath was a "big mess. It took us more than a week to find out that she was killed. It was too long to find out that kind of information." The family received compensation of £11,000." [Victims of 7/7 bombs were not given enough help, ministers admit. Alan Travis, *The Guardian (London and Manchester)* Saturday September 23, 2006.]

<sup>21</sup> J. Edkins, 'Missing Persons: Manhattan, September 2001', in E. Dauphinee and C. Masters (eds.) *The Logics of Biopower and the War on Terror: Living, Dying, Surviving* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 25-42.

<sup>22</sup> Faces of Tragedy: Survivors survey posters of missing tsunami victims in Indonesia's Aceh province. Photo by Matthew Miller. 2 April 2005. SBC Baptist Press News, Southern Baptist Convention, Baptist Press <http://www.bpnews.net/images/IMG2005249686H1.jpg> Last accessed 6 February 2007.

<sup>23</sup> Edkins, 'Missing Persons: Manhattan, September 2001.'

The placing of a bunch of flowers, the writing of a message: these are the ways in which people communicate with others who visit memorials, with the dead who are commemorated, and with the authorities—those supposed to be ‘in charge’. It is communication and witnessing that bypasses the mass media or the official channels. It takes a more direct route. Visitors like myself take photographs of these memorial sites—photographs of the photographs, in the case of the missing posters. Many people take photographs of other people at the memorial sites: a mirror of repetition to infinity of testimony and witnessing.

Is what we have here nothing more than a commemoration, the remembering of lives lost, and the paying of respects to those who died, important as that might be? A cultural process, a process of communication, that enables us to come to terms with traumatic events, a process that is now global in its reach and in the tropes and symbolic capital it invokes? There seems to me to be much more at stake than this. There always was in the memory of trauma in any case.

The commemoration of what we call traumatic events bears a particular relationship to politics and political struggle.<sup>24</sup> Those who have experienced such events have been brought face to face with the vulnerability of life and the fragility of all forms of social and political community. Events that we call traumatic are events that reveal that there is no way round this vulnerability. There are only solutions that enable life to go on, that enable us to forget the pressing uncertainties of life and death for the time being. Remembering traumatic events can be a way of refusing a language that forgets the essential vulnerability of flesh in its talk of the importance of state, nation and ideology, a way of refusing a language that pretends that certainty and security is attainable. We can never quite know who we are, or who anyone else is: once we try to pin it down, something always escapes us: we are always both more and less than what we claim to be. There is a lack at the heart of subjectivity, and, though we imagine wholeness or completeness as attainable, it is not. The social order of which we are part—what we call social reality—is fragile and incomplete too. The form of biopolitical authority that originated in the sovereign state but is increasingly becoming globalised tackles this inherent incompleteness or lack of closure in a number of ways, including through two processes that are particularly relevant here. First, through the production of what it calls failure, disaster, or emergency this form of authority sustains the fantasy that were it not for this temporary hiccup, all would be well.<sup>25</sup> Second, through processes of exclusion sovereign power or state authority produces an inside and an outside: a group of people to whom certain standards apply and another group to whom they do not. Through exclusions a social order is produced that appears bounded, complete, and safe.

However, what we call traumatic events change this picture. The pretence that there are solutions to be found, security and certainty to be had, is seen as just that: a pretence, a fantasy. Often those who survive traumatic events find their world has changed and they want to bear witness, to remember, and particular to remember how trauma unsettles everything. They feel compelled to bear witness to what I have called trauma time, a form of temporality involving the unsettling juxtaposition of past and present as opposed to the smooth, homogeneous linear time of the state.<sup>26</sup> Those ‘in charge’ on the other hand—the authorities, sovereign power—have to remember traumatic events in different ways. There seem to be two options. Either they have to remember by scripting those events into a heroic history of the nation, of civilisation or of humanity, a story of progress towards certainty and the overcoming of doubt: a linear narrative. Or alternatively, and this seems to be a more recent strategy or one that has gained prominence recently, they have to attempt to govern terror, to take control of the contingent: they have to put in place practices of disaster management that normalise emergency and institutionalise trauma time.<sup>27</sup> One or other of these strategies is necessary. Otherwise authority would cease to be authorised. What we call social reality would be revealed as the fantasy that it is—and this is crucial—*all the time*, and not just in a

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<sup>24</sup> This argument is presented more fully in Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*.

<sup>25</sup> For an account of the production of famine as ‘disaster’ see J. Edkins, *Whose Hunger? Concepts of Famine, Practices of Aid*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

<sup>26</sup> Edkins, *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*.

<sup>27</sup> Dillon, ‘Governing Terror.’ Of course, neither of these practices can succeed: both are impossible.

“time of terror”.<sup>28</sup> Remembering trauma is then always a site of struggle, a political struggle over memory and forgetting. At stake is the form of biopolitics or sovereign power that underpins contemporary forms of governance.

According to Agamben, sovereign power works by producing forms of life as separate, distinct. In particular, it works, at least to begin with, through producing two forms of life: politically qualified life, the life of the inside, authorised life, life that can speak; and bare life, the life of the home, the life that is excluded from the political sphere, rendered mute. This distinction, like any distinction and the entities it claims to produce, is always fragile and unsustainable. Under this account, a traumatic event would be one that revealed this fragility and the impossibility of distinctions and called for a recognition of the radical relationality of existence.<sup>29</sup> What we have now, Agamben argues, is a zone of indistinction that has extended to the whole of the earth; all life has become bare life and “politics is in a state of lasting eclipse.”<sup>30</sup> A state of emergency is no longer confined to a short period of time or to a particular place but has extended to all places and all times.

In Dillon’s account,<sup>31</sup> what we have is not a zone of indistinction or a state of emergency brought about by the sovereign suspension of the law. Rather, we have a state of emergency that arises once life is conceived as always emergent, always becoming, and hence always dangerous. Not “a state of emergency born of a juridico-political analysis of sovereign subjectivities,” but one “born of a contemporary biopolitical analysis of emergent life.”<sup>32</sup> What this state of emergency, or “political emergency of emergence” then produces is “a regime of exception grounded in the endless calibration of the ...ways in which the very circulation of life threatens life.”<sup>33</sup>

In both these accounts, the form of life that liberal governance sees and that it governs is produced, in a state of emergency/emergence, as a purely bare biological life of emergence that can be and is treated instrumentally. The goal of life, envisaged in this way, is nothing but the endless circulation and reproduction of life. There is no room in this vision, seen either way, for the person or for responsibility.

In London after 7 July the victims, the injured and those who survived were treated as bare emergent life by the police, the emergency services, officials and government ministers. They were thrown back on their own resources: they comforted each other, formed survivor self-help groups, and campaigned for changes. They watched appalled as the authorities ignored their needs. In the face of what we call traumatic events the limits of sovereign forms of power and authority and the biopolitical governance of terror are made clear, as we shall see.

### **The search for the missing**

There was a palpable anger afoot that could be felt clearly in what we saw on the streets of London. An anger that was intensely political was communicated through the memorial site at King’s Cross, and through the missing posters in particular. People were angry with those they held responsible for the deaths, of course, but they were also angry with those involved in the aftermath. People, ordinary people, had not been properly treated: not by the

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<sup>28</sup> G. Borradori, *Philosophy in a time of terror: Dialogues with Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

<sup>29</sup> For a more detailed development of this argument, see J. Edkins, 'Remembering Relationality: Trauma Time and Politics', in D. Bell (ed.) *Memory, Trauma and World Politics: Reflections on the Relationship between Past and Present* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2006), pp. 99-115.

<sup>30</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*.

<sup>31</sup> There is much more to be said about the distinctions between the two ways of developing Foucault’s thinking proposed by Agamben and Dillon, but I do not have space here. The state of emergency is of course a feature of the work of Carl Schmitt as well (C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). For another reading of contemporary biopolitics that develops Foucault’s thinking, see B. Massumi, 'The Future Birth of the Affective Fact', in *Sinues of the Present: Genealogies of Biopolitics: Proceedings of the Colloquium* (Workshop in Radical Empiricism, 2005), [http://www.radicalempricism.org/biotextes/anglais\\_index.html](http://www.radicalempricism.org/biotextes/anglais_index.html). Accessed 26 September 2006.

<sup>32</sup> Dillon, “Governing Terror,” 18.

<sup>33</sup> Dillon, “Governing Terror,” 18.

bombers, not by the emergency services, not by their political leaders. They were owed more.

This anger came across very clearly in an impromptu speech made on Monday 11 July by Marie Fatayi-Williams, the mother of one of those killed in Tavistock Square in London.<sup>34</sup> Her speech was a compelling indictment of all those who use violence to try to change the world, and of the needless suffering this brings about: "What inspiration can senseless slaughter provide? Death and destruction...can never be the foundations for building society."<sup>35</sup> It was also a moving lament at the added anguish caused when information about the missing is withheld—and a plea for that information.

Marie begins her speech by holding up a photograph of her son: "This is Anthony, Anthony Fatayi-Williams, 26 years old, he's missing." The photograph stands in for the person: "This is Anthony." *Here he is. He exists. I cannot find him, no one will tell me where he is, but he exists. I did not just imagine him.* Marie is an imposing, charismatic figure, powerfully emotional and hugely strong in her grief and her conviction. She stands surrounded by relatives and supporters and a press of media in the middle of the street leading to Tavistock Square itself, as near to the site of the explosion as she can get. Behind her are large photos of Anthony. She continues:

We fear that he was in the bus explosion...on Thursday. We don't know. We do know from the witnesses that he left the Northern line in Euston. We know he made a call to his office at Amec at 9.41 from the NW1 area to say he could not make [it] by the tube but he would find alternative means to work. Since then he has not made any contact with any single person.

And she, his mother, has been able to get no information whatsoever about where he is or what happened to him:

My son Anthony is my first son, my only son, the head of my family. In African society, we hold on to sons... This is now the fifth day, five days on, and we are waiting to know what happened to him and I, his mother, I need to know what happened to Anthony. His young sisters need to know what happened, his uncles and aunties need to know what happened to Anthony, his father needs to know what happened to Anthony. Millions of my friends back home in Nigeria need to know what happened to Anthony. His friends surrounding me here, who have put this together, need to know what has happened to Anthony. I need to know.

She enumerates the web of relationships in which Anthony is entwined. He is not just a statistic, an unidentified victim of a terrorist bomb. He is a person, someone with relatives, friends, sisters, uncles, aunts, a father, a mother, friends, his mother's friends. They all need to know what happened: this need is urgent, pressing. It is an entitlement, a right. It should not be suspended or held in abeyance.

Like other relatives, Marie Fatayi-Williams will have been told to wait. She will have been told that identification is "a highly complex and sensitive process,"<sup>36</sup> that it takes time, that she must go home and wait. As if this were something quite simple and easy to do. It is not. As Anthony's friend Amrit Walia said: "We understand the police have a job to do, but it is agonising to sit and wait, which is all they have advised us to do."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Straight from the heart. *The Guardian (London and Manchester)* Wednesday 13 July 2005. Accessed 10 November 2006 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,5237594-117079,00.html>

<sup>35</sup> Straight from the heart.

<sup>36</sup> London Assembly, Richard Barnes AM (Chair) "Report of the 7 July Review Committee." June 2006. Vol 1, Report. 157pp. Paragraph 9.3 p. 98.

<sup>37</sup> "Missing people sought after bombs." BBC News Sunday 10 July 2005. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/london/4666679.stm>. Last accessed 18 October 2006.

Difficulties and delays started on the day of the bombings. To begin with, there had been unforeseen delays in opening the Metropolitan Police Service Casualty Bureau telephone lines. This service was designed for people to report relatives or friends as missing. According to the London Assembly Review of 7 July, delays in opening Casualty Bureau phone lines were due to an incorrect connection at the New Scotland Yard switchboard.<sup>38</sup> This meant that the line was not working at all until after 4pm on the day of the bombings. By then people were frantic with worry about those missing, and those with injured relatives had no means of finding out about them and getting to the right hospital other than contacting hospitals directly. When the phone lines did open, there were 42,000 attempted calls in the first hour. The system was hopelessly overloaded and it was taking people more than three hours to get through, even with their phone on automatic redial. According to one man whose wife was seriously injured, this was unforgivable:

The thing that caused me absolutely unnecessary extra anguish and grief on the day, and I think many other people, was something that to me is incomprehensible and inexcusable, and that is the failure of the Central Casualty Bureau emergency number... It took me slightly more than three hours, if my memory is correct, to register my wife as somebody who was missing and presumably involved. That needs to be addressed. It really really really does need to be addressed.<sup>39</sup>

The delay could have meant someone with a relative in a critical condition not getting to their bedside before they died. To add insult to injury, the Casualty Bureau number was not a free number.

However, delays, technical inadequacies and overload were not the chief problem in my view. The difficulty was that there was in fact no source of help for families in locating their friends and relatives. Neither the Casualty Bureau nor the ineptly named Family Assistance Centre set up two days later was designed to help families locate missing relatives. The Casualty Bureau was the "first stage in the criminal investigation and formal identification process"<sup>40</sup> not a mechanism for providing worried members of the public with information about relatives. Although counsellors and other advisors from voluntary organizations like the Salvation Army were present, the prime focus of the Family Assistance Centre was just as clear as that of the Casualty Bureau. Its focus was on "gathering information: personal and forensic details of people who were potentially injured or killed in the attacks, to assist in the identification process."<sup>41</sup> The phrase "gathering information" is crucial here. As the London Assembly Report points out, "this met the needs of the Metropolitan Police in conducting their investigation and identification process,"<sup>42</sup> but it was absolutely no help to those searching for family members:

The Centre was not prepared to give out information, only to collect it. People searching for their loved ones have one primary need: information. They may also have practical needs, but their main concern is to find out the whereabouts of their loved one. They may not need bereavement counselling in the first few days – the need for information is paramount.<sup>43</sup>

Among other things, "families and friends need a reception centre to provide a central contact point, when hospitals and other authorities identify survivors."<sup>44</sup> All that was provided were various under-staffed and difficult to access points with which families could register details of missing persons. Indeed, the families were more likely to get help and feedback by posting

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<sup>38</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 7.3, p. 84.

<sup>39</sup> London Assembly, Richard Barnes AM (Chair) "Report of the 7 July Review Committee." June 2006. Vol 3, Views and information from individuals. 296pp., p. 43.

<sup>40</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 7.2, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.9, p. 99.

<sup>42</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.9, p. 99.

<sup>43</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.9, p. 99.

<sup>44</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.5, p. 98.

missing persons posters on park railings and standing outside stations pleading for information than from filing an official missing persons report, and they knew it. Outside King's Cross Station, a reporter spoke to Craig Laskey, whose friend Lee Baisden was missing:

My hope is that Lee is OK, is traumatised and is wandering around somewhere. We have tried the hospitals but they are very resistant to telling you everything. It has been very frustrating dealing with the authorities. The information flow is all one way. They are willing to take information but not to release anything at all.<sup>45</sup>

At this point, according to the same report, the number of confirmed deaths in the bombings was 52, and there were still 56 people being treated in seven hospitals: "Staff said they had all been identified, dashing the hopes of those clinging to the belief that their loved ones may be alive." This was on Wednesday 13 July.<sup>46</sup>

There is some confusion about exactly how long full identification of the bodies took; it was somewhere between seven and ten days before relatives were notified and the bodies of victims identified and released for burial. In one place the London Assembly report notes: "It took ten days for all those who were killed on 7 July to be formally identified by the police"<sup>47</sup> In another comment on the same page, the report says: "The correct identification of the deceased was a highly complex and sensitive task, and this was completed within 7 days."<sup>48</sup> Although according to one report Inner North London Coroner Dr Andrew Reid had said the bodies of the bombers would be treated in exactly the same way as those of the victims,<sup>49</sup> their bodies were in fact held for much longer. All four were released in the last week of October 2005. The body of Shehzad Tanweer was buried in Pakistan; relatives of Mohammad Sidique Khan asked for the body to be kept in the mortuary pending another post mortem.<sup>50</sup> Inquests have yet to be held into any of the deaths of 7 July; according to reports, these will take place in June 2007, with inquests on victims and suspected bombers taking place at the same time.

Anthony Fatayi-Williams' father and uncle (a former Nigerian foreign minister) were informed of Anthony's death by two police officers on Wednesday 13 July; they were invited to identify him.<sup>51</sup> When they saw the body, they noted remarkably few injuries and described the body as 'well-preserved'. According to the inquest opened on Thursday 14 July, identification had been made from dental records.<sup>52</sup> There would seem to be no reason why the family could not have identified the body before 13 July. Why was this not attempted, when Anthony's mother was crying out for information?

According to Marie Fatayi-Williams' account, her first contact with the Metropolitan Police was when she was phoned in Nigeria on Friday 8 July by an officer asking whether she would be flying out to London and when, but saying nothing in response to her questions.<sup>53</sup> When she arrived at Heathrow on the Saturday morning, she was met by another Metropolitan Police Officer. Again she got no response to her questions, though she later wrote "it's obvious to me now that the tragic news could have been delivered straight away. Instead, his

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<sup>45</sup> Duncan Gardham and Nicole Martin "How much blood must be spilled, a mother asks" *Daily Telegraph* (London). 13 July 2005. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml;jsessionid=V1AYTHXQSP1ZVQFIQMFCFF4AVCBQYIV0?xml=/news/2005/07/12/nvict12.xml> Accessed 14 November 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Gardham and Martin, "How much blood must be spilled."

<sup>47</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.1.

<sup>48</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.3.

<sup>49</sup> "Bomb Victim IDs may take weeks—Coroner." *The Guardian* (London and Manchester) Friday 15 July 2005, p 7.

<sup>50</sup> Joshua Rozenberg, "Relatives of Tube bomber want another post mortem," *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 29 October 2005. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/core/Content/displayPrintable.jhtml?> Accessed 15 November 2006.

<sup>51</sup> Yusuph Olaniyonu and Frank Kintum, "Anthony Fatayi-Williams Body Recovered," Online Nigeria, Friday, July 15, 2005 <http://nm.onlinenigeria.com/templates/?a=3831&z=12>. Accessed 15 November 2006.

<sup>52</sup> "Inquest into oil executive opens," *The Daily Telegraph* (London) 14 July 2005. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/main.jhtml?xml=/news/2005/07/14/uinquest.xml&sSheet=/portal/2005/07/14/ixportaltop.html> Accessed 14 November 2006.

<sup>53</sup> Fatayi-Williams, *For the Love of Anthony*, 38.

bureaucratic bosses had dispatched this man not to end my agony of uncertainty, but to ascertain that Mrs Fatayi-Williams had arrived as intended.”<sup>54</sup>

Relatives of Samantha and Lee, a couple who both died as a result of the bombings, did not get a formal identification of Samantha until 16 July, nine days after she gave her full name to her rescuer at Russell Square. In the words of a letter from the family to the London Assembly Review, this is the story:

Sammy was found alive and gave her name, Samantha \_\_\_\_\_, to her rescuer, and he then passed her on to the emergency staff in the ticket hall of Russell Square, where she died. When we were phoning every hospital in London, it came to one and we asked if there was a Mr Lee \_\_\_\_\_ or a Samantha \_\_\_\_\_ and they said there was a Miss Samantha \_\_\_\_\_ and they would find out more details for us. When she came back she said she was mistaken. If a person is found alive there needs to be a way of transferring their name with the person, ie: plaster, pen, anything. As this mistake built up our hopes so much. It then took until 16 July to be notified of her identification. We were never asked if we could or would like to see her or be with her. We do not know where her body was kept. Was it in every way being looked after humanly and with respect? <sup>55</sup>

Why was it not possible for this family to be with the body? Why was the information that she was dead withheld from them?

The story of another woman, this time someone who was killed at Aldgate, was similar.<sup>56</sup> During the ‘identification process’ prints and DNA swabs were taken from the victim’s house; CCTV pictures were obtained of her on her way to London on the morning of the bombings. Finally, after ten days, an identification was made. This person too, like Samantha, was alive after the bombing: a fellow passenger sat with her waiting for the emergency services to arrive. When they did arrive she was still alive, and they treated her; she died a few minutes later. Surely her injuries cannot have been so horrific that her parents could not have identified her by sight? Why was it necessary to delay the identification by ten days?

### **Disaster Victim Identification**

“Nobody in authority seemed to be thinking of us as people with emotions”  
*Marie Fatayi-Williams*<sup>57</sup>

The London Assembly Report highlights some of these stories.<sup>58</sup> The committee made a point of asking survivors and relatives for their views, in person, in public hearings or private, and by written submissions—the first time this has been done in the aftermath of a disaster, amazingly. The report stretches to 157 pages, with the second volume of 279 pages being devoted to transcripts of meetings and correspondence with organisations and the third volume (296 pages) to views and information from individuals. It is an excellent report, which raises many questions and makes a series of important recommendations, as I will discuss later. However, on the question of the identification process, it seems to be the view of the committee that given that “this was the first time a Resilience Mortuary had been set up in the UK” and that “the Mass Fatalities Plan had only been completed a few weeks before 7 July”:

The establishment of the Mortuary by 10 pm on 8 July was a remarkable achievement. The correct identification of the deceased

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<sup>54</sup> Fatayi-Williams, *For the Love of Anthony*, 48.

<sup>55</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 3 p. 223.

<sup>56</sup> Paula Dear 'Don't wait for me tonight, mum' BBC News <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/5098448.stm>, accessed 12 November 2006.

<sup>57</sup> *For the Love of Anthony*, 86.

<sup>58</sup> London Assembly, Richard Barnes AM (Chair) “Report of the 7 July Review Committee.” June 2006. Vol 1, Report. 157pp; Vol 2, Views and information from organisations. 279pp; Vol 3, Views and information from individuals. 296pp.

was a highly complex and sensitive task, and this was completed within 7 days.<sup>59</sup>

The brief report known as “Lessons Learned” published later by the Home Office and the Culture Secretary, which runs to a much shorter 32 pages,<sup>60</sup> can be seen as in many ways a response to some of the issues raised powerfully by the Assembly report. Some of the suggestions it makes are laughable—for example, it suggests that a recorded message should be made available for callers trying to get through to the Casualty Bureau. When it comes to the question of identification, the report suggests that more could be done to explain the process:

It is essential to ensure absolute certainty before a family is told about the death of a loved one and this may take time. We hope that, by explaining the nature and complexity of the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) process to families in full, and by improving the way the police communicate with families, we will be able to make the experience less distressing for them. We are working up a series of information sheets for victims of major emergencies that we will collect together in an online library. These will include a sheet about the DVI process, to be distributed by Family Liaison Officers and at Assistance Centres. In addition, the police are reviewing the training for Family Liaison Officers so that they are better aware of the DVI process and the issues for families.<sup>61</sup>

What then is the “nature and complexity of the Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) process,” and why was it used in London on 7 July?

The International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol) Manual on Disaster Victim Identification was first published in 1984 and later revised and circulated to all Interpol member countries “to encourage the compatibility of procedures across international boundaries, which is essential in these days of ever-increasing world travel.”<sup>62</sup>

As a process, the system of Disaster Victim Identification is eminently straightforward and clear. There are three forms to be completed: a yellow Ante Mortem (AM) form, a pink Post Mortem (PM) form and a white Comparison report. When all three forms are completed and an identification has been made, they are filed together under a set of cover pages provided, the AM and PM forms being interleaved to make comparison of data easier. The cover pages and the Victim Identification Report, on white paper, are the final parts to be completed. They are filled in by a panel of experts (police officer, pathologist, odontologist) before a death certificate can be issued or a body released for burial. The final stage links a particular “DEAD BODY”, identified by nature, place and date of disaster and number, with a particular “MISSING PERSON” identified by name and date of birth.

The Ante Mortem and Post Mortem forms<sup>63</sup> each comprise 15 pages arranged in seven sections and covering: personal data (AM form only)<sup>64</sup>; recovery of body from site (PM form only); description of effects (clothing, jewellery, etc); physical description and distinguishing

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<sup>59</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 9.3 p. 98. *The Guardian* had noted on 12 July that following the Madrid bombings in 2004 where more than 190 people died most of the bodies had been identified within 24 hours and most were buried within three days of the attacks. (Giles Tremlett, “Spanish reaction: Admiration mingled with astonishment over calm response,” *The Guardian, London and Manchester*, 12 July 2005, 3).

<sup>60</sup> UK Cabinet Office, John Reid (Home Secretary) and Tessa Jowell (Culture Secretary), “Addressing the lessons from the Emergency Response to the 7<sup>th</sup> July 2005 London Bombings: What we learned and what we are doing about it.” 22 September 2006. 32pp.

<sup>61</sup> UK Cabinet Office, “Addressing the Lessons” Paragraph 49, p. 12.

<sup>62</sup> The International Criminal Police Organization—Interpol, “Disaster Victim Identification.” Accessed 6 February 2007 <http://www.interpol.int/Public/DisasterVictim/Default.asp>. The manual is available at <http://www.interpol.int/Public/DisasterVictim/guide/default.asp>

<sup>63</sup> The forms are available at <http://www.interpol.int/Public/DisasterVictim/Forms/Default.asp> accessed November 15 2006.

<sup>64</sup> The fact that there is no space for name on the form that the authorities recovering bodies use could explain why even when the victim had given a name before they died it did not link with the body.

marks (tattoos etc); medical information that may assist identification; dental information; and 'other'. The assumption here is clearly that we are dealing with dead bodies: there is no provision for people who die during the rescue process, only for those who are already dead. The two forms are completed separately. The AM form is completed by those interviewing the relatives, and the PM form by those recovering bodies from "the disaster site." The instructions ask that the AM forms be completed and forwarded as quickly as possible and that full and detailed information is obtained since "it is impossible to know what data will be found from the disaster site." The onus is on the relatives to put down everything they can think of. And the AM form is extremely detailed. For personal effects details of all clothing, shoes, jewellery, watches, glasses, personal effects and identity papers carried must be given, down to details of keys carried, purse/wallet etc. This section covers three pages. Then a full physical description is needed beginning with height, weight, build, race, hair. The description required includes great detail. For example, the nose: Is it small, medium or large? Pointed, Roman or alcoholics? Is it concave, straight or convex? Turned down, horizontal or turned up? Are there marks of spectacles or not? Any other peculiarities? The same details are required for other facial features: forehead, eyes, eyebrows, ears, facial hair, mouth, lips, teeth, smoking habits. And it goes on: chin, neck, hands, feet, body hair, pubic hair, scars, skin marks, tattoos/piercings, malformations, amputations, circumcision. Finally, it asks for a full list of medical conditions: AIDS? Addictions? Pregnancies? IUD?

This type of information, in this amount of detail, was presumably being collected from relatives in the London bombings, perhaps even over the phone to the Casualty Bureau.<sup>65</sup> It is recognised that there will be a far greater number of people reported missing in the early stages than there are casualties in the end, so that it doesn't make sense to complete AM forms in great detail at an early stage. In London, the total was 7,823.<sup>66</sup> Even if the information was collected later, one has to ask how necessary the detail was in all cases, when it appears that the majority of victims were in the end identified by dental records. Much of the information included in the form would not be regarded anyway as satisfactory confirmation of identity. According to a report in *The Independent*, 'primary' evidence, sufficient on its own for identification, includes fingerprints, dental records, DNA, or "a unique identity feature, say, a pacemaker with a serial number of it." If none of these is available, then some combination of 'secondary' forms of evidence may be acceptable: "marks and scars, blood group, jewellery, X-ray, and deformity."<sup>67</sup>

As relatives spotted, the collection of data through the Casualty Bureau or the Family Assistance Centre as part of DVI is a very one-sided process. Relations of the missing complete more or less exhaustive details of their family member on the AM forms, which are immediately passed to the police. The primary role of the family liaison officer allocated to relatives of the missing is as part of the investigation: the liaison officer works on behalf of the police, specifically to assist in the gathering of information. The police and forensic experts working with the bodies of victims also collect information and complete forms. However, these PM forms are not made available to relatives. Indeed relatives are not given any details, even of the most general sort, of the bodies recovered. They are kept very much in the dark until they need to be contacted for further information. A matching process takes place behind closed doors as it were, and it is only when a positive identification has been made that family members are informed. Remains are released for burial and death certificates issued at this point. Before then, the bodies belong to the Coroner not to the next of kin. The information belongs to the Coroner too. There is no provision for identification of the body by relatives as part of the process. The rationale for this is that "visual recognition" is "unscientific" and prone to inaccuracies. The face has disappeared as a means of identification: tattoos can be used, but face recognition by someone who knows the person is not allowed.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Marie Fatayi-Williams confirms that this is the case: she was asked repeatedly whether Anthony was wearing a watch. Since she had not been staying with him on the morning of the bombings she did not know. Personal communication 7 December 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Alan Travis, "Victims of 7/7 bombs were not given enough help, Ministers admit," *The Guardian (London and Manchester)* Saturday September 23, 2006

<sup>67</sup> Jason Bennetto "Terror in London: Police identifying victims of Asian tsunami switch." *The Independent, (London)*, July 12, 2005 [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qn4158/is\\_20050712/ai\\_n14719312](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qn4158/is_20050712/ai_n14719312). Accessed 12 November 2006.

<sup>68</sup> Bennetto "Police identifying victims"

There has been a longstanding battle by survivors and relatives bereaved in 'disasters' of all types to ensure that the authorities dealing with the aftermath pay attention to their needs.<sup>69</sup> The group Disaster Action, whose members are all survivors or people bereaved in disasters—including, as they note on their web site,<sup>70</sup> the Zeebrugge ferry sinking, King's Cross fire, Lockerbie air crash, Hillsborough football stadium crush, Marchioness riverboat sinking, Dunblane shootings, Southall and Ladbroke Grove train crashes, the 11th September attacks in the United States and the Bali bombing—produces guidance on issues related specifically to disaster victim identification. This stresses the importance to the bereaved, both relatives and friends, of knowing the cause of death, in some detail, and the need to be with the person after death or to view the body, whatever its condition. In the case of missing persons, Disaster Action stresses that "friends and family members may go to great lengths to find them themselves, regardless of other efforts or advice by the authorities. This may include travelling to disaster zones, temporary mortuaries, hospitals, etc. It is important that their families feel reassured that all that could be done is being or has been done to find, recover and establish the identity of all the victims."<sup>71</sup>

### **The production of emergency**

But is all that could be done being done? Why are relatives of the missing, like Marie Fatayi-Williams and many others, left to wander the streets, distraught and helpless?

In the case of the London bombings of 7 July, a convincing argument can be made and was made—the London Assembly enquiry found it convincing—that *in the circumstances* all that could be done was being done. However, we need to pay much more attention to what these 'circumstances' were, and how they came to be defined as such. In the end it was the treatment of what happened on 7 July as a disaster that led to the invocation of the DVI process for the identification of the bodies of those killed. To what extent was that appropriate? It may seem obvious that what happened was a disaster, an outrage, "a terrible and tragic atrocity that has cost many innocent lives" in the words of Prime Minister Blair.<sup>72</sup> The Government's Emergency Committee met without hesitation that morning. There is no doubt that a large number of people were affected by the bombings: 56 people died, including the bombers, 700 were injured, "1,000 adults and 2,000 of their children ... suffered from post-traumatic stress as a result of their experiences on 7 July [and] 3,000 others are estimated to have been directly affected."<sup>73</sup>

However, what counts as an emergency or a disaster is not largely a question of numbers. In the bombings at Aldgate and at Edgware Road taken separately the numbers of fatalities were no greater than a bad road traffic accident. There is a choice as to whether an incident should be treated as a 'disaster' and whether, for example, all the intricacies and complexities of the Disaster Victim Identification processes need to be invoked. This is, or rather should be, a political choice. As such, it needs to be justified; delays in the identification of bodies cannot be argued to be the result of the circumstances when those circumstances (the treatment of what had happened as 'a disaster') were not an automatic result but a political decision. What had happened on 7 July was appalling; it was arguably made worse by invoking the bureaucratic apparatus of disaster management.

In a number of cases clearly there will have been reasons why under no circumstances could identifications have been made more quickly. On the other hand, there are several cases where an immediate identification could almost certainly have been made. And in most cases, with a different approach to the identification process—that is, under different

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<sup>69</sup> D. Hare, *The Permanent Way or La Voie Anglaise* (London: Faber & Faber, 2003).

<sup>70</sup> [www.disasteraction.org.uk](http://www.disasteraction.org.uk) accessed November 15 2005

<sup>71</sup> Disaster Action, "When Disaster Strikes – Disaster Victim Identification: Issues for Families and Implications for Police Family Liaison Officers (FLOs) and Coroner's Officers (COs)" p. 3. <http://www.disasteraction.org.uk/guidance.htm> accessed 6 February 2007.

<sup>72</sup> BBC News UK. "In full: Blair on bomb blasts. Statement from Downing Street, 1730 BST 7 July 2005" <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4659953.stm> accessed 12 November 2006.

<sup>73</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 11.6.

circumstances, under circumstances not defined as 'a disaster', under circumstances not scripted by the biopolitical practices of 'governing terror'—there is no reason why families should have been kept in limbo for seven to ten days.

What is called 'sovereign power' and the production of states of exception or 'disaster' are closely interrelated. The type of politics that leads to the invocation of a 'disaster' or 'emergency' affects not only how the tracing of missing persons is handled, but also the treatment of survivors, and, more broadly still, the treatment of people in general 'in a time of terror'<sup>74</sup>. This returns us to the questions of forms of authority and power that were broached at the start of this essay.

Sovereign power is a type of governance that normalises the emergency, the disaster, by setting out rules and procedures for dealing with it. This has not only been the case since 7/7 or 9/11; it can be found in attempts to set out rules for humanitarian intervention in conflict zones, to 'do no harm', to deal with famines and other events perceived through the discourses of sovereign power as exceptional, as failures of the system, as disasters. Exceptions were always, as Agamben has shown so clearly, intimately related to the norms they serve to instantiate. When the state of emergency and its accompanying zones of indistinction spread to encompass the terrain of politics in its entirety, all life becomes bare life. Such a form of life is seen by sovereign power as worthy of being saved, but of little else. As we have seen, it is not worthy of respect or of dignity, in life or in death.

What we saw in London after 7 July can also be read as a prime example of how the "general economy of the contingent" that liberal biopolitics puts in place works.<sup>75</sup> Governing terror, in the sense of attempting to govern the contingent, leads to an approach to policy making and management that is "comprehensively technologised," and where "biopolitical government begins to find its nihilistic rationale and ultimate test in the operational competence it displays as a service provider of emergency relief and emergency planner of emergence."<sup>76</sup> As a form of governance it is not something that has been brought about by the 'War on Terror' which it predates it by a long way, though it is amplified by it. The technologisation to which it gives rise works to the detriment of those caught up in it: the form of life that the governance of terror recognises as life is "a continuous process of complex, infinitely contingent, circulatory transactional emergence." According to Dillon, what is at stake, and what must be contested if biopolitics itself is to be contested, is this account of life, a "life of pure operationality [that] renders the state of emergency normal."<sup>77</sup>

The traumatic events surrounding the sudden deaths of partners, friends and relatives on 7 July made it quite clear that "there is more to life than meets the molecular biopolitics of contemporary biopower."<sup>78</sup> The lack at the heart of the hypersecuritisation to which biopower is driven in its attempts to govern the dangers of emergent life is revealed. 'Governing terror' cannot pause to respond to those suffering loss: it has to rush around madly trying to secure emergent life as if that were the only game in town.

## Conclusion

I would like once again to express my sympathy and sorrow for those families that will be  
grieving so unexpectedly and tragically tonight.  
*Prime Minister Tony Blair, Statement 17.30 7 July 2005*

Condolences communicated in advance of the fact are a danger sign: a sign of an attempt to govern trauma, to appropriate it, take charge of it and normalise it through rituals of memory and grief. George Bush expressed his condolences on the morning of September 11 at around 9.30 am—before the buildings had fallen in Manhattan and before the plane had

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<sup>74</sup> Borradori, *Philosophy in a time of terror*.

<sup>75</sup> Dillon, "Governing Terror," 9.

<sup>76</sup> Dillon, "Governing Terror," 15, 18.

<sup>77</sup> Dillon, "Governing Terror," 24.

<sup>78</sup> Dillon, "Governing Terror," 20.

crashed in Pennsylvania. Those to whom Blair offered his condolences on 7 July 2005 could not have been grieving that night, though they would undoubtedly have been distraught. Families were still trying desperately to find out what had happened: ringing round friends, trailing round hospitals, trying to get through to the Casualty Bureau, taking the first flight to London. They couldn't get any news of their missing sons, daughters, mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, friends or partners. They could not possibly begin to mourn. No one could or would tell them whether the people they were looking for were dead or alive.<sup>79</sup>

What I have argued in this paper is that the distress they suffered is a symptom of a more deep-seated problem. The reason for the appalling delay in letting families know what had happened can be traced back to the automatic invocation of a state of emergency and its attendant bureaucracies. This state of emergency or exception also involves the production of life as bare life: life with no political say, life as nothing but emergent biological life. To the bureaucracies of biopower the lives at stake in a disaster are merely lives to be saved; the quality of life is of little importance, and neither are the wishes and needs of the individuals involved. The forms of life that go along with a politics of exception entail the absence of proper political life. People are no longer seen as important in themselves, each for what they are or might be. They are only either bare life—life that can go home and carry on, walk away from the disaster, or dead bodies that can be matched in due course with names and dates of birth of missing persons and filed away. If what went wrong after 7 July is to be put right, this is what needs to change. It is a major change. As the London Assembly report put it:

There is an overarching, fundamental lesson to be learnt from the response to the 7 July attacks, which underpins most of our findings and recommendations. The response on 7 July demonstrated that there is a lack of consideration of the individuals caught up in major or catastrophic incidents. Procedures tend to focus too much on incidents, rather than on individuals, and on processes rather than people. Emergency plans tend to cater for the needs of the emergency and other responding services, rather than explicitly addressing the needs and priorities of the people involved.<sup>80</sup>

Their conclusion is that “a change of mindset is needed to bring about the necessary shift in focus, from incidents to individuals, and from processes to people.”<sup>81</sup> What is being suggested here is a rethinking of how we expect our policing and emergency services to behave in relation to us, and by extension, how we would like our governments to behave.

This is a change that is not only needed at a time of emergency or in a ‘time of terror’; it is needed all the time. Indeed the argument is that our politics has become little more than a permanent state of emergency or exception, where the respect owing to each and every life has disappeared. Life becomes nothing more than bare life, to be used instrumentally. If life dares to disagree, if people challenge the government or the processes of governance, then the solution is to persuade, to educate, to patronize, not to listen and debate. If people don't like the Disaster Victim Identification process, for example, if they want to make sure the bodies of the dead are “treated humanly”, then all we need apparently is a library of online information sheets that explain the DVI process to them and a fully trained Family Liaison Officer to make sure they go along with it.

What has been isolated here, in the aftermath of the bombings of 7 July, is a collision between the liberal biopolitical governance of terror and the incalculable, the traumatic, that which escapes governance. Relatives do not just accept what they are told. They do not just go home and wait. They walk the streets, they put up missing posters, they protest the injustice to anyone who will listen. However, the form of biopolitical governance that was

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<sup>79</sup> For the development of a similar idea about how “responding to threat requires the time of government to be politically corrected,” see Massumi, ‘The Future Birth of the Affective Fact.’ Thanks to Nick Vaughan-Williams for drawing my attention to the similarities here.

<sup>80</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 1.15, p. 9.

<sup>81</sup> London Assembly Report Vol 1, Paragraph 1.17, p. 9

exemplified by the particular forms and practices of official communication that were evident after the London bombings is not unique to these circumstances. It is both emblematic and symptomatic of the treatment of all life as bare life or as the emergent life of the biopolitical governance of terror, in a situation where the state of emergency is rapidly becoming the norm. We need to take note before we all become nothing more than a list of physical characteristics and distinguishing marks, dead bodies in all but name.