Security Guards and Counter-terrorism: Tourism and Gaps in Terrorism Prevention

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Organisations operating in the tourism industry are high priority targets for terrorists. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks tourism destinations, hotels and modes of public transportation have regularly been targeted by terrorists seeking to convey their violent message. As such, leaders and managers in the tourism industry carefully plan their security and counter-terrorism responses, often involving the hiring of *security guards*. It is here that I believe a significant gap in counter-terrorism preparedness exists. I argue that protecting tourism destinations is only possible if consideration is given to the effectiveness of security guards and understanding that their well-being will impact upon their ability to deliver security. I want to draw attention to the often ignored *social role of security guards*. On 9/11, 42 security guards died whilst helping save the lives of thousands. They performed their jobs admirably, despite being low-paid, under-appreciated workers. In this paper I explore the social role of security guards in the context of tourism security. By drawing on representations of security guards in popular culture and reports on the state of the security guard industry, I argue that the lack of attention on the quality and well-being of guards is a significant black-spot in tourism security and terrorism preparedness.

Key Words: security guards, terrorism, first responders, preparedness.

Introduction: Terrorism and the tourism industry

The tourism 'industry' or 'sector' continues to be a highly attractive target for terrorists (Alexander, 2004: 151; Mansfeld, 1999: 30; Pizam & Mansfeld, 1996; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998; Sönmez et al., 1999). Since 9/11 tourism destinations, hotels and modes of transportation have regularly been the focus of terrorist attacks. Where tourists can generally avoid *at-risk* destinations by considering political strife in the region, crime statistics and trends, terrorist attacks can often be 'inescapable' (Sönmez et al., 1999: 13). Whilst terrorism is never random violence (see Howie, 2009a: 49), it is naturally difficult to avoid attacks when they may occur in New York City, on the Madrid commuter rail system or in the heart of London. The island resort of Bali has been targeted twice in major attacks, in 2002 and 2005, to devastating effect (Henderson, 2003, 2004; Hitchcock & Putra, 2007). The victims were affluent tourists, many of European, Australian or North American nationality. While most people with a television were able to follow the round-the-clock media coverage of the London '7/7' attacks in 2005, few paid much attention to the more deadly

attacks two weeks later in the coastal town of Sharm al-Sheikh in Egypt where suicide bombers, targeting tourists, killed 88 people (BBC News, 2005). In June 2014, terrorist organization al-Shebab stormed through a coastal town in Kenya targeting a police station, houses and hotels searching for 'non-Muslims' (AFP, 2014: 27). In a statement following the attack, al-Shebab explained that the attacks will continue in response to the Kenyan government's oppression of Muslims and 'warned tourists and foreigners to stay out of the country'. This attack occurred only eight months after the Westgate shopping complex attack in Nairobi (see paper in this volume by Schroeder *et al.*). These examples of terrorists targeting tourism are only the tip of the iceberg. Terrorists have also viewed hotels (Stafford et al., 2002), public transport (Jenkins, 2001), sporting events (Toohey et al., 2003), city centers (Coaffee, 2003; Howie, 2009a), and cultural and religious attractions (Bhattarai et al., 2005) as highly desirable targets.

The terrorist threat to tourism is not something unique to the post-9/11 world. Pizam and Smith's (2000: 132) research provides insight into the pre-9/11 effects of terrorism in tourism locations and on the tourism

industry between 1985 and 1998. They found that more than half of the terrorist attacks on tourism destinations occurred in the Middle East (54%), with Europe the second most prevalent (27%). Of the attacks targeting tourism locations, 71% of the victims were tourists (as opposed to local workers and residents). The average number of deaths per attack was 37, making terrorists targeting tourism a particularly bloody form of terrorism. Almost half of the attacks in tourism locations were carried out in urban environments, with a third occurring on modes of transport. In 45% of the attacks, guns were used. In the aftermath of these attacks, demand for tourism decreased for periods of time averaging between one and six months.

For managers, leaders and employees of organizations operating in the tourism industries, and for the local, state and federal officials for whom tourism safety is a priority, the threat of terrorism requires a security response. In many situations and contexts, this will involve a complex array of security systems and practices including security technologies such as metal and bomb detectors; close liaising with state intelligence and policing authorities; close screening of clients, customers and visitors; computer systems for tracking and monitoring staff and visitors; and, most importantly, a highly trained and dedicated team of security guards without whom all the security technology in the world is close to useless. It is here that I believe a significant gap in counter-terrorism preparedness persists. I argue that protecting tourism destinations is only possible if consideration is given to the effectiveness of security guards and understanding that their well-being will impact upon their ability to deliver security.

This paper has three sections. The first section contextualises the paper, presenting current literature on terrorism, tourism and security thinking. In section two, I outline the key literature that informs my understanding of the important role of security guards in counter-terrorism security. Here I explore the paradox that sees some of our most vulnerable locations being protected by undervalued, overworked and under-appreciated security staff. The existence of this paradox, I argue, is a significant blind-spot in a state's counter-terrorism efforts. In the third section, I examine the social role of security guards in the public imagination. Here I rely on representations of security guards in popular culture and security guard stories from the post-9/11 world. I conclude by arguing that counter-terrorism solutions in tourism locations require security staff be considered valuable and central to community safety.

Terrorism, Tourism and Security Thinking

Religious and pilgrimage tourism has become increasingly insecure and uncertain in the post-9/11 world. This has been the case for two related reasons;

1) Travel to risky or potentially uncertain areas, as sites of religion and pilgrimage may often be, is increasingly securitised in the post-9/11 world, and

2) Sites of religion and pilgrimage, representing sites that attract mass gathering of people, are often considered highly attractive for would-be terrorists.

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, people altered their travelling habits. Indeed, as many Americans abandoned air travel they took to their cars, which resulted in sharp spikes in interstate road deaths across the US (Mueller, 2006: 3). The air transport industry was acutely affected, and tourism and related industries paid a heavy price for the fear that swept through many parts of the world (Alexander & Alexander, 2002; Alexander, 2004).

Mueller (2006: 146) argues that terrorists will likely continue to innovate in their efforts in spreading fear and doubt. Their goal in selecting potential targets may become 'if a bomb goes off in one of those [places], it can go off anywhere'. *Uncertainty*, it seems, is their weapon of choice. Mueller notes that whilst acts of terrorism in the US have been mostly concentrated in large cities, a number of locations not in major cities have been targeted overseas, often in tourist areas. Indeed, hotels, holiday destinations, sporting events and the methods of transport to these locations have been frequently targeted by groups seeking to send a violent message to an audience.

The case of tourism in Nepal, where adventure and pilgrimage tourism is a blended tourist experience that shares similar security problems is outlined by Bhattarai *et al.*, in their 2005 work. As they argue, tourism in Nepal was increasing rapidly up until September 2001. In a nation where internal political struggles and an under-developed state apparatus meant that only the most adventurous tourists visited, 'the global social climate spawned by September 11' has had a devastating effect on its third world tourism:

> *Nepal exemplifies this situation, a country where global terrorism, couple with the ongoing domestic Maoist war, has wrecked its image as a Shangri-La . . . The World Trade Center disaster of 2001 not only increased the scale and scope of international terrorist*

activity, but it ushered in the current US administration's global "war on terrorism," significantly heightening concerns about security almost everywhere (Bhattarai *et al.*, 2005: 670).

Nepal, and many places like it in the developing world, was deeply affected by 9/11 through a heavy reduction in tourism for a number of years following the attacks. Yet, despite the age of terrorism, as security was improved on passenger aircraft and most other forms of mass transport, and technological innovation made long distance travel quicker and more affordable, there has been quick recovery in the travelling industries as more people travel by plane than ever before, with the numbers expected to increase over the next 20 years (Jansen, 2014).

Reflecting on how the tourism industry has long suffered at the hands of the terrorist threat, Pizam and Smith (2000: 123) argue that since before the end of the Cold War, a time which will be remembered by terrorism studies scholars as the years when terrorist organizations become aware of the transformative potential of spectacular violence, terrorism has been a part of the 'travel and tourism landscape'. Crisis and risk managers began playing important roles in organizations responsible for managing locations that are regularly visited by travelers each year. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, terrorist attacks were having a significant impact on the tourism industry, leading to 'steep declines' in demand for travel and accommodation (Pizam & Smith, 2000: 124). A steep increase in fear of terrorism targeting the tourism industry led to reductions in foreign travel initially, especially from the US to Europe, but was soon followed by a slowing of terrorist acts and an increasing demand for tourism services and products. This, in turn, was followed by 9/11 – the worst non-state act of terrorism in contemporary history which was, for a time, devastating for the tourism and travel sectors (Alexander & Alexander, 2002; Alexander, 2004). Airlines and air travel related industries were acutely affected (Alexander, 2004: 155-156).

Korstanje and Clayton (2012: 10) argue that there is an inherent tension that reveals the effectiveness of terrorism as a weapon against tourism and tourism-related targets. Tourism, the authors note, 'involves freedom of movement and travel, and is a fairly effective way of disseminating cultural ideas and practices'. It is, however, precisely this *freedom of movement* that places tourists in vulnerable positions. When 88 Australians (out of a total of 202 victims) were killed in the first Bali bombings in 2002, among

the stated grievances was the decadence of Western tourists and their drunken behavior in the nightclub districts where the bombs were detonated. It may be that tourists are uniquely vulnerable to terrorism. And when one considers the religious volatility that has characterized so many parts of the world from North Africa, the Middle East, to Northern and Southern America and across Asia, tourism to religious sites and site of pilgrimage are likely to carry a heightened vulnerability as an unsecurable soft target that, if attacked, sends a powerful and violent propaganda message to witnesses throughout the world assuming cameras capture the violence. Again, the ordinary habit of photography conspires to render tourists ideal targets of those who would use violence to achieve their goals.

Mansfeld (1999: 32) argues that while the impact of terrorism on tourism industries and destinations is 'unpredictable and highly differential', there are several steps that tourism managers can undertake in order to prepare for terrorism and the threat of terrorism affecting their organizations. Mansfeld (1999: 35-36) recommends that counter-terrorism in tourism should be viewed as a 'long-term process' involving the monitoring of trends in both tourism demand and terrorism events; cooperation and integration of all operations across related industries and sectors including law enforcement, government and intelligence organizations; representation from all key stakeholders at the strategic level; information sharing, especially on security and risk; and security budgeting. A significant difficulty here is the *loss of will* that often comes into play when people begin to forget the impact and fear associated with major acts of terror. As one senior manager in a public transport organization described it, his company secures his business to the extent that he can justify his and his company's actions in the event of a post-attack legal inquiry or royal commission (Howie, 2009a: 161).

Indeed, perception is key for understanding the damage that terrorism causes and the impact on the tourism industry. It is well understood in terrorism studies scholarship that *fear of* terrorism has an impact far beyond any actual damage that terrorism causes (Friedland & Merari, 1985; Howie, 2012; Skoll, 2010). This led Richard Clutterbuck (1977: 13) to argue in his seminal *Guerrillas and Terrorists* that 'the strongest single factor which leads governments to give way to terrorists, internationally or internally, is television' (and see Howie, 2012: 33). Pizam and Smith (2000: 125) believe that this same logic is at play in the tourism industries:

Fear and insecurity about the possibilities of terrorism affect tourism demand, even when, in fact, deaths and injuries from terrorism for US citizens are statistically insignificant – less likely to occur than being struck by lightning or killed in an accident on the roads or at home. At the same time, however, terrorism has gained premier power and efficiency as a political weapon through mass media coverage and the exaggerated perceptions about traveler safety and security that this perpetuates.

Understanding the role of the media is central to understanding the nature and threat of terrorism. As Mueller (2006: 2), argues terrorists kill on average 'a few hundred people a year'. Around the same number drown in US bathtubs each year. One astronomer puts the 'lifetime' risk of dying at the hands of terrorists globally as '1 in 80,000'. This is about the same likelihood of dying in an asteroid or comet strike on Earth (Harris in Mueller, 2006: 2). In the context of tourism, Mawby (2000: 109) describes this as the 'risk-fear paradox' where tourists fear becoming victims of crime or terrorism far beyond the calculated probability that such victimization will occur. The media, however, renders these probabilities meaningless. There is even evidence that suggests this fear can reach clinical levels of anxiety. In the weeks following 9/11, Xanax prescriptions increased 9% across the US, and 22% in New York City (Stossel, 2014: 8-9). This trend was repeated as the Global Financial Crisis neared. As stock markets 'went into free fall' prescriptions for anti-anxiety and anti-depression medication and sleeping pills increased sharply. As I have described throughout my career, the media brings distant acts of international terrorism into our living rooms and provides fertile ground for deep seated anxieties to emerge within us, leading to perceptions that we are, somehow, personally threatened by terrorists. Or, as I have argued, the media makes us all *witnesses to terror* (Howie, 2009b; 2012; 2013). When it comes to terrorism and security, perception matters. As Korstanje (2009: 69-70) argues, it was not until the 9/11 attacks that risk perception theories became popular in tourism and security research. Risk and security is about fear and emotions.

Sites that receive visitors remain highly desirable targets for would-be terrorists. Sites that many people visit create bottle-necks and mass gatherings which, from a terrorist's perspective, are an ideal "soft" target. In Australia, 'mass gatherings' are an important focus of Australia's counterterrorism preparedness (National Counter-Terrorism Committee, 2011). In this way, and from a counter-terrorism security perspective, we can potentially expand our understanding of pilgrimage security to include any site to which people are attracted at various or cyclical times of the year with the purpose of *culturally experiencing or engaging* locations that have a particular *social, cultural or religious significance*. Such locations of cultural pilgrimage include religious monuments and sites; sporting events; musical events and performances; adventure seeking locations like mountains, resorts, oceans, beaches and rivers; and a host of other tourism locations like major cities. All face similar security dilemmas that require careful, counter-terrorism based, security planning. As depicted in the security guard-themed comedy film, *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* (2009), security guards 'detect, deter, observe and report'. *Detect, deter, observe, report* – it is a powerful metaphor for officers who play a significant role in public safety whilst having no greater power than an ordinary citizens' arresting rights. Unlike police officers, security guards can be prosecuted for unlawful detention (Carlson, 1995: 67-68; Parfomak, 2004:4). They can detect problems, deter the offenders if they can, watch and tell someone. However, as I will show throughout this paper, in times of terror security guards do far more than this. Indeed, on 9/11 security guards were heroes and worked and died alongside emergency services personnel. They did so with far less acclaim, and for far less pay.

The Counter-terrorism Role of Security Guards

The role of security guards in a nation's counter-terrorism preparedness or a business' counter-terrorism security is an issue that has not been widely studied or well understood (but see Shearing & Stenning, 1983; van Steden & Nalla, 2010). It became a matter of public discussion when, in 2005, New York's city council announced a proclamation that 'Private security officers displayed great courage and professionalism as they risked their lives to maintain order, evacuate thousands and help save lives' (United Voice, 2011: 8). Once the dust had settled, 42 security guards had lost their lives in the attacks on the Twin Towers. Since security guards are such a ubiquitous part of our safety-conscious culture I have been unable to locate a reliable estimation of how many security guards were on duty that day. What we do know is, remarkably, more security guards were killed in the attacks on the Twin Towers than NYPD police officers, and they worked for far less pay, fewer benefits and support, and with less social acclaim and privilege in the community.

The social significance of security guards has received little attention in the sociology, terrorism studies, and counter-terrorism studies literatures (but see Howie, 2012: 133-154; Alexander & Alexander, 2002: 55). Studies of the role of security guards is almost exclusively housed within criminological fields where guards are viewed as law and order appendages (Sarre & Prenzler, 1998, 2000, 2011), 'private' or 'plural' policing (Loader, 2000; Jones & Newburn, 2006), or as a criminalistic population themselves. The numerous criminological contributions obfuscate what is the most dangerous black spot in domestic counter-terrorism functionality. To understand the role that security guards play in counter-terrorism it is not enough to consider their roles, practices, skills and behaviours as keepers of social control and as private police. We also need to consider their working conditions and remunerations; the expectations that people have of guards; their perceived social roles; their perceived social value and importance/relevance; their symbolic value; and their challenges, lives, well-being and health (St. John, 1991; United Voice, 2011).

I argue that security guards have a significant place in counter-terrorism security. It could be argued that security guards are the first line of defense against suicide bombers. We might also say that security guards are the *first* first responders – already standing guard at entrances to buildings, sporting events or in the lobby of hotels when terrorists attempt their attacks. Security guards are a visible and, I argue, symbolic feature of counter-terrorism safeguards for any organization as they work alongside police and intelligence officers. As a US congressional report showed, security guards 'fill the gap' created by limited public resources and insufficient numbers of police (Parfomak, 2004: 5). Security guards, you see, are a much cheaper way of providing security, safety and the appearance of certainty (Howie, 2009a). However, there is a dark underside for those who work as security guards, often for demanding hours, little job security and minimal reward. As one security guard at an Australian defense base explains,

> *We're the first ones a terrorist or a maniac is going to see. If they've got a knife or a gun, we're the people who will cop it* (United Voice, 2011: 33).

Indeed, security guards are often the victims of terrorist attacks. In fact, there are numerous examples of security guards becoming victims of an attack due to their successful execution of their role. It could be argued that security guards face a terrible paradox – to successfully prevent an attack and be among the dead,

or, do little to stop an attack, and survive it to the detriment of those the guards are assigned to protect. These problems are not mere abstractions. In July 2011, Pakistan's *The Daily Post* reported that between 2006 and 2011, terrorist attacks in Islamabad claimed the lives of 40 security guards and seriously wounded 18 (Hassan, 2011). The murdered security guards worked at the Marriott Hotel (in one such attack 17 guards were killed); a car park at Islamabad International Airport (the guard was the only victim); and restaurants and cafes (Howie, 2012: 143).

There is an incredible paradox at the heart of the security guard industry, especially when they stand guard at sites that are highly desirable targets to would-be terrorists. We routinely ask these low-paid and undervalued workers to be on the frontline of some of our most important security operations. In some circumstances, we ask some of society's lower paid workers to save some of society's highest paid workers (as was the case on 9/11, see DiMarco, 2007; Howie, 2012: 133-154; Parfomak, 2004). Parfomak's (2004) US congressional report discussed some alarming realities:

> *In the US in 2003, around one million security guards were employed and were being paid an average full-time, annual salary of $19,400.*
>
> *This salary places security guards well below the average annual salary across all occupations in the US.*
>
> *There were only 650,000 police officers during this same year being paid on average more than double that of security guards.*
>
> *Organizations and agencies responsible for counter-terrorism paid little attention to the security guard management practices in private companies, even when those private companies were responsible for the security of important public locations.*
>
> *It was 'an open question' as to whether companies that employ security guards at vulnerable locations 'have hired, trained, and otherwise **supported** security guards to the degree warranted by the **social value**' of the places they are stationed to protect (Parfomak, 2004: 1. My emphasis).*
>
> *Intelligence indicated that it was likely that terrorist organizations pay close attention to the practices and behaviors of security guards at locations they are considering as targets.*

What right do we have to expect underpaid and undervalued workers to protect us when terrorists strike? Surely, security guards would have little reason to risk their lives in defending strangers from becoming victims of terrorism. Yet, evidence from the 9/11 attacks suggest that security guards will be nothing short of heroic when required. Gabriel Torres, a security guard in building 5 of the World Trade Center, risked his life to save others and saw many of his colleagues do the same. He rang his mother to tell her he was okay, but also to tell his wife and son that he loved them since he was about to risk his life in performing his job – 'I gotta do what I gotta do' (in DiMarco, 2007: 101). Gabriel saw his colleagues running into one of the Towers as it collapsed to the ground. Ralph Blasi, a security manager working in a building across the street, had often asked his guards what they would do if there was a disaster and dead bodies littered the streets. 'The consensus was always that they would run' (Blaisi in Fink & Mathias, 2002: 57). But on 9/11, guards did not run. Blaisi had 60 guards working for him that day. Not one ran. On the contrary, they guided 45 thousand people out of Manhattan, saving countless lives. Then, there is the story of Rick Rescorla – a security manager working in one of the Towers. He ignored security advice that his building was not at risk and evacuated, saving the lives of almost 3000 workers. Unfortunately, Rescorla died in the Towers' collapse. He kept running back into the Towers to save as many people as possible (Wisloski, 2011, and see rickrescorla.com).

Security guards play a vital role in the tourism industry. They are ubiquitous features of travel – in airports, hotels, resorts, events, and monuments – and important contributors to travellers' perceptions of safety and security. With the significant threat that terrorism poses to the tourism industry, security guards are asked to play important roles in tourism counter-terrorism functionality.

Imagining Security Guards in Popular Culture

As Momus (in Žižek, 2014: 141-142) argues, 'Certain scenarios in the real world can be as absurd as jokes, self-evidently laughable, no matter how tragic they are'. He argues that 'Comedy is a legitimacy crisis followed by the sudden appearance of a cornucopia'.

Security guards occupy an ambivalent place in contemporary society. We often imagine security guards as figures of failure, the subjects of jokes and humiliation. When they are not viewed as satirical under-achievers, they are often viewed as dangerous and potentially violent members of the social fringe,

criminalistic and uncertain. Indeed, security guards are pilloried in many different forms of popular culture. The Southern Californian, pro-marijuana legalization music group, *Kottonmouth Kings*, included a song on their 2004 album condemning security guards for their violent tactics for crowd control especially against younger people, their aggression, and their paradoxical desire for power but low social standing:

> *All these security guards, running around shows always acting hard.*
> *Why can't we get along, party all night until the break of dawn.*
> *Why don't you leave us alone? ...*
> *Acting like you're a cop but you ain't got no badge.*
> *Trying to take my pot then you're getting a toe tag.*
> *Searching people's pockets, acting like a true jake.*
> *I can see you buying steroids with your minimum wage* ('Leave us alone', Kottonmouth Kings, 2004).

Media reports on security guards often highlight criminality, delinquent behavior, and violence. In scholarly circles, studies of security guards are often housed in criminological discourses where the emphasis is on security guard's role as an appendage to legitimate policing forces and organizations or as private police – a literal replacement for the inability of police forces to deliver reliable public safety. In Australia, this was a significant concern during the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne in 2006 where security workers and guards significantly outnumbered police force members (Ker & Murphy, 2006). In the lead-up to the Games, there was considerable public debate about the role of security guards in public safety. After revelations that the original tender for Commonwealth Games security had failed to elicit a large enough pool of applicants in a timely fashion leading to a re-issue of the tender months before the Games began, security analyst Myles Newlove (2005) argued that

> *You're going to have security guards being used in the Commonwealth Games that are ill-equipped and not trained to a level that is required for searching of vehicles for explosive devices.*

This debate was framed in discourses of security guard criminality. An Australian sporting personality had been killed the previous year by an over-zealous security guard at a Melbourne hotel. Criminality and

incompetence were almost assumed, and many believe that the Melbourne Commonwealth Games were vulnerable to a terrorist attack.

A November 2010 report by the labour union representing security guards in Australia, the *Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union* (LHMU) (renamed *United Voice* in 2011) tells a similar story. They suggest that the demand for security guards spurred by the threat of terrorism to Western cities has led to the market becoming flooded with 'rogue' providers that have set off 'a ferocious price war' that has seen quality of security guards drop significantly. Profits in the security guard industry have subsequently been made by 'cutting corners' through understaffing, enforcing excessive working hours, lax regulation of health and safety, and by hiring dangerously unqualified, untrained guards (LHMU, 2010: 6; Howie, 2012: 142). In the report there are many examples of media stories depicting weak and ineffective security. The following is a selection of headings from articles recently published in Australian newspapers:

Concerns organised crime infiltrating private security firms

Security guards reprimanded for undue force

Security chief faces drugs, firearm charges

Security laws bent to allow brazen rorting

Private police out of control

Guilty plea on unlicensed security

Elderly man thrown out of Sunshine hospital after complaining about wait

Security firm flouting laws

Student sues for 'slavery': $200 for 158 hours work

Security operator stole $390,000 (LHMU, 2010: 5, 18, 21-26, 31, 42).

Popular culture seemingly views security guards as a fringe, unruly and dangerous species. Quick to anger, poor and unsophisticated, useless and ultimately expendable. In films they are often killed with little concern or consequence. In *The Matrix* (1999) security guards are slaughtered en masse whilst doing nothing more than performing their jobs. The metaphor of 'the agents' becomes one of expendability. As Morpheus explains to Neo, 'The Matrix is a system, Neo. That system is our enemy . . . these people are still part of that system and that makes them our enemy'. In *American Psycho* (2000) security guards in large

buildings in New York City were easy targets of antihero Patrick Bateman's frustrations. He unnecessarily kills a guard in a building he mistakenly enters. This is a metaphor for sameness and a social commentary on the horror of an indistinguishable identity and insignificance, something apparently exemplified by security guards – *every building has them, and they pass by mostly unnoticed*.

Paul Blart: Mall Cop (2009) tells the story of security guard Paul Blart (played by Kevin James), who works in a large shopping complex in New Jersey. I argue that the portrayal of security guards in this movie typifies the place of security guards in the social imagination. Paul Blart is white, overweight, and unmanly. His comedic buffoonery, incompetence, and failure to be a *real* cop is the context for his transformation from loser to unlikely hero. In a telling scene, Paul Blart is showing a new guard the procedures for protecting the mall:

Blart: Hey. Paul Blart. Ten-year veteran.

Sims: Wow. Veck Sims.

Blart: Well, Veck Sims, welcome to the show. Let's mount up … So what made you want to pursue security?

Sims: I never finished high school. This is all I could get (Carr, 2009; Drew's Script-O-Rama, no date).

The suggestion that being a security guard is evidence of failure, of being a drop-out, is quickly negated as it becomes apparent that Sims is that other form of security guard in the social imagination; *the criminal*. Betraying his colleagues, Sims violently takes control of the mall and holds several employees as hostages. He assembles a group of social misfits at the same social level as the security guard – a skater punk, a BMX rider, and tattooed and pierced young people. Paul Blart is the only man willing to stand up to these social misfits and resist, despite being hopelessly untrained and incompetent. As his manager reminds him,

Listen, I think you're making a big mistake. SWAT's on the way. And I'm not gonna sugarcoat it, you're untrained, you're unarmed. And let's face it, son, you present a huge target (Carr, 2009; Drew's Script-O-Rama, no date).

His personal transformation is mirrored by a pop-cultural reflection on the roles of security guards and a realization that it is an 'undervalued job' but 'an honorable task' (Plotz, 2013: 173). The metaphor is

then tripled as his awakening is depicted via his pathway from femininity to white masculinity. The film's message is that there are, apparently, no small roles in this life – only *small white men*. Paul Blart is able to reclaim his masculinity and redeem his life from the supposed obvious inferiority of his profession.

The film reminds viewers that security guards may be expected to be heroes when circumstances call for it. Indeed, Paul Blart realizes his value, his role, and is able to save the day in true Hollywood fashion by *faking incompetence*. In this crucial scene Paul Blart pretends during a fist fight to succumb to his *Achilles heel* – he pretends to faint due to hypoglycemia. In the moment when the *bad guy* relaxes believing Blart is defeated, he administers a vicious sweep kick that takes the villain down.

Žižek (2014: 88-89) has made a similar argument in relation to George W. Bush's presidency and Dan Quayle's Vice-Presidency. He argues that Bush's 'slips' – those many moments when he would say something odd, wrong or ill-considered – may actually be psychoanalytic 'supreme slips', thereby providing more truth than any ordinary, "correct", language could ever hope to. The secret psychoanalytic twist is that *incompetence is the ideal place for genius to hide*. You can achieve a lot when people expect little from you. As Žižek (2014: 89) explains, these slips:

> . . . *get a little bit more interesting when pure tautology is emphatically offered as a causal explanation; see the following slip of Quayle: "When I have been asked who caused the riots and the killing in Los Angeles, my answer has been direct and simple: Who is to blame for the riots? The rioters are to blame. Who is to blame for the killing? The killers are to blame.*

Žižek (2014: 89) notes that whilst this explanation was unacceptable to many and was ridiculed in some circles, there is a strong tenant of conservative, neo-liberal ideology that supports it – *systemic forces are not to blame for violence. Individuals are. They should be responsible for their actions!* Bush Junior, for his part, gave the world this oddity – 'I believe we are on an irreversible trend towards more freedom and democracy – but that could change' (in Žižek, 2014: 90). Bush's slip contains a flawless ideological logic. Freedom and democracy is irreversible, until it isn't. A similar twist can be found in a *Futurama* (1999-2013) episode where the robot, Bender, meets God in space. Bender asks, 'So do you know I'm going to do something before I do it?' God responds, 'Yes'. Bender, unsatisfied, quizzes, 'What if I do something

else?' God plainly replies, 'Then I don't know that' (Dietter, 2002). An action is only real once it has happened. Before it has happened it is in a state of quantum uncertainty. *God only knows what we will do, not what we don't do.*

It is in this context that we should understand the final ironic twist in *Paul Blart: Mall Cop* (2009). Blart is assisted by his security manager to neutralize the final bad guy – a member of the police SWAT team – who is also a bully from Blart's high school – yet another metaphor portraying security guards as social losers and non-security others as successful 'winners'. As viewers we are led to believe that a police officer has shot this mastermind of the mall siege, but as the camera pans back we learn that a security guard has taken the policeman's gun from his holster and delivered the triumphant bullet. The films' message is clear – police officers will often be looked on to provide public safety as first responders, but security guards are already there, already keeping you safe. They are the *first* first responders.

Conclusion: Who is Responsible for our Safety?

Korstanje and Clayton (2012: 11) argue that tourism managers and terrorist organizations share something in common; 'Both tourism and terrorism rely on media management; the creation and manipulations of beliefs and perceptions'. Similarly, security often has more to do with providing the appearance and feeling of safety than providing actual, physical security. Indeed, security guards are mostly employed to deter vandalism, prevent minor violence and damage. In short, to keep the peace, broadly defined. They cannot use violence, are often unarmed, and have little hope of stopping a determined criminal or terrorist. This is especially the case for suicide bombers. Denying a suicide bomber entry to a building or secured site will likely result in their device being detonated amidst security guards or some other crowded, public area. We ask security guards to preserve the safety of others and it has sometimes cost them their lives.

The words *security guard* carry particular, often negative, connotations. It implies refusal of entry, illegitimate control of public space, and the unlawful use of force. However, we hope that when disaster strikes, security guards will help, perhaps even come to our rescue as they did on 9/11. If their actions on that day are any indication, then security guards will be heroes when the unthinkable happens – a major terrorist strike in a large city. This may even involve guiding the wealthiest and most affluent members of

the business world to safety and working hand-in-hand with policing and emergency services in saving thousands of lives. We hope they will do this despite the fact that they are low-paid and enjoy low social status. That is, perhaps, a big ask.

Leaders and managers working in the tourism industry should consider the consequences of having low-paid, highly stressed, under-valued security guards in their employ (United Voice, 2011: 32). There are two sides to this coin

1) Will cheap security provide effective protection? and

2) Is it morally acceptable to ask low-paid workers to risk their lives when their job calls for it?

There are many precedents in industry where security guards are sometimes highly trained and well paid – at defence sites; at government and other important buildings and locations; at some sporting events; cultural and religious events; at nuclear, power and water facilities; and in war-zones. It could be argued that there are many circumstances where highly effective security guards are essential. *Why are sites of tourism not among them?* It is a challenging question for which there may often be very good answers – perhaps your corner of the tourism industry is low-profile; in a non-volatile location; does not regularly see mass gatherings of people; or a host of other reasons. Whilst a security over-reaction would provide terrorism with an unnecessary role in what would be an over-anxious life, we should also remember that preventing terrorism is never just the responsibility of government and policing agencies. And we should all be mindful of the well-being of those who are responsible for our safety, especially when they are security guards employed in private companies.

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