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"Night Fell on a Different World":

Experiencing, Constructing and Remembering 9/11[1]

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Abstract

This article explores the endurance of the pervasive framing of '9/11' as a moment of temporal rupture within the United States. It argues this has persisted despite the existence of plausible competitor narratives for two reasons. First, because it resonated with public experiences of the events predating this construction's discursive sedimentation. And, second, because of its vigorous defence by successive US administrations. In making these arguments this article seeks to extend relevant contemporary research in three ways. First, by reflecting on new empirical material drawn from the Library of Congress Witness and Response Collection, thus offering additional insight into public understandings of 11 September 2011 in the immediacy of the events. Second, by drawing on insights from social memory studies to explore the *persistence* of specific constructions of 9/11. And, third, by outlining the importance of categories of experience and endurance for constructivist International Relations more broadly.

Key words: 9/11, Terrorism, War on Terror, Memory, Time, Constructivism

Introduction

On the tenth anniversary of the events of 11 September 2001, US President Barack Obama concluded a day full of commemorative practice by addressing a 'Concert for Hope' at the Kennedy Centre in Washington, DC. At the outset of his remarks - bridging references to America's enduring spirit and Psalm 30 - emerged the following description of the '9/11' attacks:

Ten years ago, America confronted one of our darkest nights. Mighty towers crumbled.

Black smoke billowed up from the Pentagon. Airplane wreckage smoldered on a

Pennsylvania field. Friends and neighbors, sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, sons and

daughters – they were taken from us with a heartbreaking swiftness and cruelty. And on

September 12, 2001, we awoke to a world in which evil was closer at hand, and uncertainty

clouded our future. In the decade since, much has changed for Americans. We've known war

and recession, passionate debates and political divides. We can never get back the lives that

were lost on that day or the Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice in the wars that

followed (Obama, 2011).

This presentation of September 11th as a tragic and unforeseen bringer of a new,

fallen, world will be instantly familiar to followers of US political rhetoric throughout

the decade since those attacks. Augmented, on this occasion, by related remembrance

activities including ceremonies at the four crash sites, the ringing of New York's 'Bell

of Hope', and the televised reading of victims' names, Obama's remarks contribute to

the reinforcement of 9/11's now relatively uncontested status as both exceptional

event and temporal rupture. Once more are the attacks positioned here as unforeseen,

unpredicted; an event almost, if not entirely, *sui generis*. Once more, moreover, are

they positioned as a marker of transition to a present of evil and uncertainty radically

incommensurate with the immediate past.

This very specific, but particularly widespread temporal positioning of the

events of 11 September 2001 has, unsurprisingly, attracted much academic

commentary. Within this, a great deal of attention has been paid to three questions in

particular. First, how was '9/11' produced in this way within political language,

popular culture and other discursive activities (Collins and Glover 2002; Croft 2006;

Hodges 2011; Holland 2012a; Jackson 2005; Jarvis 2008, 2011; Silberstein 2002)?

Second, what were the consequences of this construction, especially in facilitating and foreclosing policy, military and legislative responses to the attacks (Jackson 2005; Jarvis 2009a; Holland 2012b)? And, third, how accurate, valid or legitimate was this pervasive inter-textual construction (Kennedy-Pipe & Rengger 2006)?[2] In this article, we seek to contribute to these discussions by focusing on a related, yet rather less explored question to date. That question concerns the *endurance* of this particular presentation of 9/11 and its continued domination of political imaginaries one decade, three administrations, and a 1.5 trillion dollar war on terror after the event.

In order to do this, the article proceeds in three stages. We begin by situating our discussion within three contemporary literatures on the construction of terrorism, time and memory. These literatures, we argue, offer valuable insight into the processes through which terrorism is produced and situated (including in time), on the one hand. And, on the other, the dynamics through which particular constructed memories persist or otherwise. The article's second section then traces the experience, construction, contestation and defence of 9/11's framing as rupture from the immediacy of 11 September 2001 to the present. This mnemonic endurance, we argue, is an outcome, first, of a logic of structural appropriateness given this framing's resonance with public experiences of the attacks. And, second, of deliberate, agential interventions by well-positioned actors attempting its defence.

The article concludes by highlighting its three contributions to relevant scholarship. These are: first, the introduction of new empirical material on public understandings of 9/11 drawn from the Library of Congress Witness and Response Collection. Second, its focus on the endurance rather than framing of this particular narration of 9/11. And, third, its highlighting of the importance of categories such as experience and endurance for constructivist IR more broadly.

Terrorism, Time and Memory

In the years since 11 September 2001 the academic study of terrorist violence has been affected (or afflicted) by a much-discussed 'boom' of activity (see Gunning 2007; Silke 2009: 34-35; Ranstorp 2009; Jackson *et al* 2011, pp. 10-11). Although much of this literature has focused on perceived transformations in the causes, techniques and technologies of contemporary terrorisms, a distinctive, if heterogeneous, 'critical' literature has also begun to penetrate debate in this area. Notwithstanding its diversity (compare Herring & Stokes 2011 with Jackson *et al* 2011), this work constitutes something of a shared effort to radically rethink the guiding assumptions and purposes of terrorism research; an effort, more provocatively, to transcend the field's self-image as an, 'adjunct to...Western counterterrorism agencies' (Brannan et al. cited in Breen Smyth 2009, p. 196). Integral to this project, and to this article's purposes, has been a body of broadly constructivist studies of 'terrorism' (see Jarvis 2009b).

To characterize broadly, relevant recent constructivist studies have sought to chart the narrative, rhetorical and other discursive devices that enable and support articulations of 'terrorists' and 'terrorism'. In common with related work elsewhere (for example, Adler 1997, Hopf 1998, Wendt 1999), this literature approaches both the world and our knowledge thereof as, in part, socially constituted (Guzzini 2005). Thus, in the context of terrorism, as Hülsse and Spencer (2008, p. 572) argue, what is required is not only an ontological recasting of our object of study, such that the signifier terrorism is detached from any straightforward connection to an extra-

discursive reality. But, in addition, a new research agenda that both corresponds to, and follows, the move from terrorism to 'terrorism' as:

> a social construction, hence a social fact produced in discourse. Accordingly, research needs to focus on the discourse by which the terrorist actor and his or her actions are constituted. Terrorism can only be known through the terrorism discourse. This is why we suggest a shift of perspective in terrorism studies, from the terrorist to terrorism discourse. Instead of asking what terrorism is like (what structures, strategies and motivations it has), we need to ask how it is constituted in discourse (Hülsse and Spencer 2008: 572).

So doing, as Stump and Dixit (2012, p. 207) argue, involves reorienting our gaze as analysts, "..away from what terrorism is to a focus on *how social actors use the category of 'terrorism' to make sense of and act during unfolding events*" (original emphasis).

As might be expected, constructivist interventions of the sort advocated and pursued by the above authors are marked by considerable diversity. Indeed, both of these arguments emerge within appeals for a 'thicker' understanding of terrorism discourse than presently offered within much 'critical terrorism studies' literature (see also Herring & Stokes 2011). These differences aside, however, and with very few direct forebears (although see Fortin 1989; Feldman 1991; Zulaika & Douglass 1996), this literature has now hosted numerous efforts to unpack the structuration and functions of contemporary terrorism discourse. In so doing, it has explored, *inter alia*: designations of self and other therein; representations of the threat, risk or insecurity posed by terrorism to various referents; rhetorical legitimisations of counter-terrorism campaigns; the gendered nature of (counter-)terrorism discourses; and, the ways in

which particular events and violences are positioned as 'terrorist' (see, amongst many others, Rai 2004; Devetak 2005; Jackson 2005; Winkler 2006; Jarvis 2009a). If, to date, skewed toward the deconstruction of Western elite discourses, more recent contributions have also begun unpacking non-Western and non-elite constructions (Bartolucci 2010; Göl 2010; Nazir 2010).

The importance of this research, we argue, is twofold. First, the ontological shift from terrorism to 'terrorism' opens space for the entrance of new materials, methodologies and questions into terrorism research. Media reportage (Spencer 2010), political speech (Jackson 2005), video games (Power 2007; Sisler 2008), films (Riegler 2010), body art (Croft 2006) and memorial websites (Jarvis 2010, 2011) all now enter this field's remit. In the process, they contribute to a far more detailed understanding of terrorism's percolation through sites and practices of social, political, and everyday life. Second, these literatures also further understanding of the politics of terrorism by facilitating detailed genealogies of 'terrorists' and 'terrorisms', their contexts and histories, reproductions and resistances, as well as their (dis)continuities over time (for example, Jackson 2006). Crucial, here, for many, is an effort at 'critical destabilisation' (Jackson 2009, p. 77), centred on the exposure of moments of bias, selectivity, exclusion, aporia or inaccuracy within terrorism discourse.

This article's focus on the persistence of 9/11's temporal framing attempts to contribute to these constructivist studies. In so doing, it speaks also to a more specific body of literature centred on the importance of temporal claims and arguments within terrorism discourse. Indicative of a wider IR engagement with questions of time (for example, Hom 2010; Hutchings 2007), this work demonstrates the extent to which contemporary depictions of 'terrorism' are always in part organized around temporal

tropes. Thus, a number of authors writing after '9/11', for instance, pointed to that event's widespread production as an interruption of 'normal time' (Campbell 2002; Jackson 2005; Jarvis 2009a). Others highlighted the recurrence of historical metaphors - most obviously 'Pearl Harbor' - in efforts to situate and make sense of what happened that day (Noon 2004; Angstrom 2011). Critical readings of the 'new terrorism' construction explore the significance of this temporalisation for amplifying the threat of contemporary groups (Burnett & Whyte 2005; Spencer 2006). While explorations of seemingly antithetical tropes of backwardness, barbarity and savagery highlight the blurring of spatial *and* temporal boundaries in contemporary terrorism discourse (Cloud 2004). Other authors still, finally, explore the functions of imagined futures within constructions of the terrorist threat, including the prominence of worst-case and catastrophic scenarios (Aradau and van Munster 2012). Mueller (2006, p. 9), for instance, highlights the repeated transformation of unusual events into harbingers of equivalent or worse disasters in the context of unconventional violence and beyond. Aretxaga (2001, p. 141), similarly, points to the constant sense of unease and dread created within a ceaseless, "...temporality of waiting, waiting for the next attack, waiting for the spread of a virus, waiting for the killing of terrorists".

This sub-set of critical terrorism research is significant, we argue, because it illuminates the extent to which terrorism discourses are saturated with particular constructions of time. Representations of terrorist violences and groups, and likewise representations of counter-terrorism campaigns, are dependent upon and filled with claims to particular pasts, presents and futures, and the relations between them. Thus, if we approach terrorism and terrorists as social constructions, it is imperative we also engage with the organisation of such act(or)s into specific temporal cartographies.

Hence, we suggest, the importance of exploring the endurance of 9/11's scripting as rupture.

Before embarking on our analysis there is one further sense in which time figures in our discussion. For, productions of 9/11's meaning and temporalities - whether by politicians, filmmakers, authors or architects - are also, of course, engagements with the past in the present. Whatever happened on 11 September 2001 is not only being (re)told in subsequent accounts of radical interruption. It is also being (re)produced and *remembered*. More than a decade after the attacks, 9/11 has already become situated within a complex of mnemonic processes and activities (see Jedlowski 2001, p. 30): processes that are inherently social and shaped by contemporary interests as much as the event's raw ontological material. In this sense, 9/11's temporality is itself inherently temporal: an outcome (contingent, precarious, incomplete) of contestation within and over the field of representation that includes, importantly, representations of time.

Although, perhaps, more often descriptive than explanatory (see Armstrong and Crage 2006, p. 725), there exists an important literature on collective and social memory that centres on the robustness of particular engagements with the past. Dominated, again, by constructivism (Jedlowski 2001, p. 33), a diversity of models of mnemonic endurance have been posited here; a product, in part, of the spread of empirical cases explored (see for instance Spillman 1998).[3] Olick and Robbins (1998, pp. 129-130), for instance, identify three ideal types of memory's persistence: instrumental, cultural and inertial. The former concerns intentional efforts to maintain or re-animate particular pasts. Cultural accounts, in contrast, emphasize the continuing relevance of particular pasts for contemporary generations. While inertial

persistence, finally, refers to the reproduction of memories out of custom, tradition or unthinking habit.

An alternative schema focused on comparatively contemporary events is offered in Armstrong and Crage's (2006) exploration of how the 1969 New York Stonewall riots became widely accepted as the gay liberation movement's point of origin. Comparing those riots to other events of that era, they posit four factors that help explain mnemonic persistence of the sort explored here. First, an event must be viewed as commemorable, or worthy of commemoration, by relevant actors. Second, mnemonic entrepreneurs must have sufficient capacity (monetary, institutional, authoritative, technological and so forth) to encourage and perpetuate remembrance. Third, a commemorative practice such as a parade or monument must resonate with its intended audience (see also Wagner-Pacifici 1996). Criteria here may include the perceived appropriateness of a particular mnemonic vehicle, or the extent to which alternative demands compete for the audience's attention. And, fourth, the selected commemorative vehicle must facilitate institutionalisation to assist with a memory's endurance over time.

These frameworks are useful in highlighting the role of structures *and* agents in the persistence of particular memories. Whilst the 'raw' ontological content of an event and its context may appear to suggest the fact or shape of its remembrance, the labour and resources of actors (individual or group) are integral to an event's passage into, and continuation in, memory (for example, Winter 2000). At the same time, those actors are always socially located: they script the past according to available interpretive resources, remember in relation to the memories of other individuals and groups (complementary and contradictory), and draw on and employ vehicles and technologies of memory that exist in the present (Winter & Sivan 2000, pp. 27-29;

Jedlowski 2001). As we now argue in the case of 9/11, the interplay of both sets of factors has been central to the continuity of this construction of temporal rupture. Structurally, we argue this framing endured because it resonated with public experiences of the event before its sedimentation in discourse. And yet, in terms of agency, we highlight its vigorous defence within successive US political administrations: pointing to its significance as a scripted point of origin for the ensuing war on terror. For, as argued below, alternative or counter- readings to this particular temporal positioning were actively resisted by the discourse and practice of government officials in the administrations of Presidents Bush and Obama.

From September 11th to '9/11'

The following discussion explores the endurance of 9/11's framing as temporal rupture in four stages. We begin by highlighting public experiences of the attacks as a moment of historical closure. A second step then explores the discursive work within early official constructions of '9/11', arguing this contributed a sense of temporal 'opening' to emerging understandings of this event. The third part identifies attempted contestations of this increasingly consolidated narrative, and the section concludes by exploring the movement from construction to commemoration.

Experiencing September 11th as Rupture: An Ending

For many ordinary American citizens, the lived experience of the events of September 11th was conditioned by two significant factors. The first concerns the distinctive American 'security culture'[4] comprising the perception of geographical distance and a myth of invulnerability afforded by this sense of isolation (e.g. Gaddis 2004). "Kindly

separated by nature and a wide ocean from the exterminating havoc of one quarter of the globe; too high minded to endure the degradations of the other", as Jefferson (1801) put it in his inaugural address, this culture has sustained a pervasive and enduring sense of American invincibility. Before '9/11', this located the US as untouched and untouchable: distanced from the dangers and insecurities prominent elsewhere in the world.

As with all narratives, this particular security culture relied upon a selective and porous reading of the historical record. The burning of the White House in 1812, Pearl Harbor, Sputnik and even the Cold War's near misses are all accounted for as too long ago, distant or insignificant, or even as further proof of American invulnerability. Despite this, it remained a powerful myth that helped underpin an intersubjective understanding of what it meant to be fortunate enough to live in the United States. The events of September 11th, then, very directly challenged this self-understanding, appearing, for many watching Americans, to invalidate the myth's promises and assumptions. Danger and large-scale illegitimate violence was suddenly and dramatically relocated in the contemporary American 'Homeland'.[5] And, from this, a central route to understanding what it meant to *be* an American within the US became, very quickly, far less secure. The resulting perception, for many, was that life was unlikely ever to be quite the same.

These feelings were expressed repeatedly by the American public in a series of interviews conducted in the days and weeks after 9/11 under the Library of Congress' Witness and Response Collection. This exceptional collection by a network of amateur ethnographers, folklorists and social scientists details experiences amongst the US general public from 11 September 2001 to 1 November 2002 (and beyond). Engaging with a demographically, socially and geographically diverse range of

interviewees these unstructured interviews employed the same model implemented in an earlier project following the Pearl Harbor bombings.[6] For the purposes of this research, all existing interviews were listened to between September 11th and December 31st 2001, although our interest in immediate experiences of 9/11 means we concentrate on the earliest of these. This collection is particularly important, we argue, in providing access to the words and ideas of 'ordinary' US citizens in the wake of September 11th, often prior to their (re)alignment with emerging official discourse. Thus, with respect to temporal rupture, US security culture, and the dawn of a new era, for example, in the words of one individual:

> I did not really believe it because we live in the United States and basically the whole concept of living in the United States is freedom, living in a very sheltered world where you just never would think of a war, or attack…I have always felt safe in America…[now] I don't know if I could necessarily say if I am safe…a lot of people in America were feeling so secure, they were feeling like the US is invincible…we are not invincible…we need to get out of our bubble and realize that we are just in the same ballpark as everyone else (Bauch 2001).

Conducted so soon after September 11th, comments such as this offer access to public experiences and early constructions of these events before interaction with official framings. With many of the interviews predating Bush's pivotal 20 September address to Congress, they help chart the evolution of public opinion on the attacks, which became increasingly harmonized thereafter around the official narratives of the Bush administration. This particular interviewee was typical in voicing concerns that the events had generated a cultural shift marked by the shattering of an American security. Hence, the prevalent perception that what used to pass as 'normality' was unlikely to return: "We no longer appear to be chosen people. We are just as

susceptible to mass devastation as any other part of the world" (Anderson 2001). Yet, as others noted, this 'new' vulnerability could also be read as a return to a long-distant past: "[I] thought it was something in history" (Waters 2001); and, "This has made everyone open their eyes...we are not invincible" (Moe 2001).

With this illusion of invincibility invalidated, an era defined by a particular security culture promising American safety was seen to have ended. Perceived no longer as untouchable, hitherto unquestioned assumptions of security were now condemned to the past tense: "I feel spoiled; that *I've been* a spoilt American … [living in] an untouched, unspoiled culture" (Grayson 2001, emphasis added). This particular, culturally informed, reading of the events of September 11th relied on a learned knowledge that had become effectively imperceptible to many Americans. Previously an, "island exempt from this kind of violence, witnessing it only from the safe distance of the TV screen" (Zizek 2002, p. 45, also Gaddis 2004), September 11th "directly involved" the US (Zizek 2002, p. 49). As Peker (2006, p. 33) recounts, "violence of this magnitude collided with, and mutually excluded, almost two hundred years, the subconscious reality and awareness of being isolated from a chaotic world".

This perception of temporal and cultural rupture comprised one half of the context informing the highly personalized experience of September 11th for many Americans (Holland 2009). The second half – a failure to narrate the attacks in their immediacy – both arose from and compounded the first. Following ten years of intense analysis, it is easy to overlook the extent to which events at the time were deemed resistant to comprehension and description. Yet, for some Americans, that which had unfolded simply, "made it difficult to talk … speaking clearly wasn't really happening at that point" (Bisson 2001). For others, even more strikingly, the events of

September 11th, in their immediate aftermath, were quite literally "unspeakable" (Hiller 2001).

Without a language to articulate what was being witnessed, American citizens struggled to make sense of unfolding events so distant to the normality of American security culture. Lacking an overarching narrative to situate and explain 9/11, American citizens spoke of the "weight of imagining" required within efforts to comprehend what was happening (Farrell 2001). This silence resulted from the lack of a pre-existing language to articulate violence – and especially terrorist violence – on this scale, in this place, at this time. Absent a ready-made narrative template, politicians fell silent; the media resorting to repetition and looped images accompanied by pictures of viewers 'looking speechlessly… in lieu of language' (Morris 2004, 401, 404; also Derrida & Borradori 2003). In the words of the American television channel Fox 5, these were 'images that defy language' (Fox 5 2001).

It is unusual that events fall beyond the boundaries of existing political and foreign policy discourse. Meaning production is usually managed through the regularities of established and widely understood narratives. The *desire* and *yearning* to comprehend an event that had shattered existing ways of *knowing* American life (Edkins 2003), was reinforced and compounded by the initial difficulty of offering explanation. The disproving of security truths and the lack of official narratives to make sense of events came together to create an uneasy and overwhelming 'void in meaning' on September 11th 2001 (Campbell 2001; Holland 2009; Nabers 2009). Together, this cultural invalidation and linguistic lack were the twin arms of a post-September 11th void that held Americans in a stunned silent embrace (Holland 2009). This void, as simultaneous wrong (voided) and lack (devoid), held within it a clear

sense of rupture, albeit one significantly biased toward an ending than beginning. A condition and era of peaceful, protected innocence was now deemed lost, if, at this stage, it was not yet clear what would come next. As described now below, this would depend on those with the social power to articulate a response.

Constructing 9/11 as Rupture: A New Era

The void in meaning that embraced Americans in the immediate shadow of September 11th was uncomfortable and unwelcome. The apparent resistance of the events to their subsumption within existing political and foreign policy discourses meant September 11th was highly traumatic for many witnesses (e.g. Edkins 2003). With sovereignty so dramatically threatened on September 11th, it fell unsurprisingly to the Bush administration to articulate a response. This began on the evening of September 11th, although the process was neither easy nor intuitive. As Frum (2003, p. 127) recounts, Bush's evening Address to the Nation was little more than 'a doughy pudding of stale metaphors' lacking the moral clarity of subsequent speeches. And yet, by the time of his Congress address on September 20th, the official response to the events of September 11th was clear and powerful. More importantly, it was one that drew on, reinforced and extended the lived experience of 9/11 as a moment of temporal rupture.

From September 11th through to intervention in Afghanistan five weeks later, the Bush administration delivered a sustained attempt to construct the date of September 11th 2001 as a marker of crisis and historical discontinuity. Succinctly, for Bush, September 11th was the day when 'night fell on a different world' (2001a). This rupture was presented in dramatic and absolute terms: 'September 11th marked a dividing line in the life of our nation' and a new time of war (Bush 2002a). It, '…cut

a deep dividing line in our history – a change of eras as sharp and deep as Pearl Harbour' (Bush 2002b; also Jackson 2005; Jarvis 2008; Silberstein 2002). As Bush had earlier argued: 'The last time I spoke here, I expressed the hope that life would return to normal. In some ways, it has. In others, it never will' (Bush 2002b).

Underpinning this sense of transformation was a realisation that the enduring myths of American security culture had been dramatically undone. September 11th 2001 would mark the moment when the United States transitioned from safety to danger, security to fear, and peace to war. As President Bush argued:

> …the stakes have changed. After September the 11th, the world changed. It changed for a lot of reasons. Perhaps the most profound reason on a foreign policy perspective, or from a homeland security perspective, is that we're no longer protected by two big oceans. Used to be if there was a threat overseas we could deal with it if we chose to do so, but we didn't have to worry about something happening here at home. It used to be oceans could protect us from conflict and from threats (Bush 2002e).

This was a perceived collapse of previous temporal and spatial securities he returned to many times throughout the following months:

> Before September the 11th - if you can remember that far back - we all thought oceans could protect us from attack. The nation thought we were secure from any gathering danger that might be occurring somewhere else. After all, our history pretty well predicted that we would be safe. But everything changed on that morning and it's important for our fellow citizens to understand that everything did change (Bush 2003).

This rupture, from peacetime to wartime, was both enabled and reinforced through the construction of '9/11' as a moment and marker of crisis. At the same time,

importantly, it was a discursive construction that drew upon the lived experience of the events considered above.

If the disassembling of the national security culture helped Americans to experience September 11th as a moment of dusk, the Bush administration took the vital step of (re)constructing the attacks, also, as a moment of dawn. Although innocence, safety and peace were located, now, in a previous era, it was not immediately clear that war would replace them over, for instance, heightened vigilance, enhanced toleration of difference, or reduced interventionism abroad. Constructing September 11th as a moment of crisis thus required a double articulation of the events themselves and of a solution to the morbid, underlying condition they were claimed to represent. The shifting of historical epochs is written in the construction of crises which frame both problem and solution; danger and opportunity (see Hay 1996; also Croft 2006; Holland 2009; Hassan 2010). By framing September 11th as symptomatic of an underlying global terrorist network, fuelled by radical Islam, the Bush administration could logically portray an era of 'war on terror' as the necessary response. The official American response thus entailed both the construction of September 11th as a break with the past *and* the simultaneous ushering in of a new era in which the US would be focussed on fighting and killing terrorists. The symbolic marker of this crisis – comprising morbid condition, rupture *and* solution – would be the now near universally adopted '9/11'. This marker, when uttered, brings forth not only (real and imagined) recollections of the lived experience of September 11th 2001, but also the solution to the events of that day as they were constructed in the official response of the Bush administration.[7]

Contesting Rupture: Rewriting 9/11

This particular construction of 9/11 has, as several have argued, been remarkably dominant throughout the years since the attack (for example, Jackson *et al* 2011, pp. 62-66). In the media, and in popular culture, narratives have focused upon the epochal transition signalled by those events, with the US now engaged in an unprecedented type of war at home and abroad (e.g. Holland 2011). This has been a politically significant scripting of time (see Jarvis 2008), centred on the experience of September 11th and the words of the Bush administration, which have infiltrated myriad layers of political, social and cultural life.

As should be expected, however, the gradual consolidation of this constructed rupture was far from uncontested. Alternative writings of the attacks' temporal position surfaced from a number of sites in the aftermath of 11 September 2011, and, indeed in the years that have since passed.[8] Amongst the most interesting of these were a series of competing scriptings offered by prominent figures within the Bush administration itself. Then Secretary of State for Defence Donald Rumsfeld, for instance, pointed to 9/11's capacity to be read rather differently in his revealing remarks at Carlile Barracks, Pennsylvania in 2006: "Though we think of September 11th as the first day in the Global War on Terror, it wasn't the first day for the enemy. Extremists had declared war on free people decades ago" (Rumsfeld, 2006). Reread thus, as he had earlier noted, "Those we mourn today were not the first victims in the war declared against us by the extremists, nor were they the last" (Rumsfeld, 2004). Even President Bush (2007), several years later, argued similarly, referencing al Qaeda's earlier violences against the USS Cole and beyond: "...when you really think about it, the September the 11th attack was not the first attack".

These alternative - official - constructions of 11 September pull 9/11's status as a marker of discontinuity into question in two important ways. First, in Rumsfeld's

2006 comments, attention is drawn to the narrated, social, grounds of 9/11's temporal positioning. Although possessing of inaugurative significance for some observers, located within alternative writings or alternative histories this sense of discontinuous significance rapidly decreases in import. Second, by locating 9/11 respectively as a declaration of war, bringer of first casualties, and first attack on the US and its interests, these accounts also evidence the frequent elision between different claims to newness and discontinuity within this broad constructed rupture. This construction, in other words, draws on and potentially blurs a range of quite different beginnings that might have been separated.

These alternative constructions within the Bush administration's writing of the war on terrorism were not intended to challenge or undermine the broader claim to 11 September as radical discontinuity that functioned, increasingly, as the war on terror's originary moment. More explicit critiques of this construction did, however, emerge from elsewhere; critiques focused, frequently, on the existence of significant continuities within the global system spanning the pre- and post-11 September divide. Academia, unsurprisingly, contained its share of dissenting voices. In a much-discussed piece, for instance, Kennedy-Pipe and Rengger (2006, p. 540) distinguish between the perception and reality of the 11 September attacks, arguing:

> ...9/11, rather than heralding a new era in world politics, was merely symptomatic of certain
> key aspects of world politics that should be familiar to all serious students of the field but
> which, for a variety of reasons...seem to have been forgotten in the aftermath of the attacks.

Fred Halliday (2002, p. 235), in his characteristically critical voice, argued similarly, noting:

September 11 did not 'change everything': the map of the world with its 200 or so states, the global pattern of economic and military power, the relative distribution of democratic, semi-authoritarian and tyrannical states remains much the same. Many of the greatest threats to the world, and many of the problems which are least susceptible to traditional forms of state control (the environment, migration, the drugs trade, AIDS), long pre-dated September 11.

Satirical interventions into the war on terror were evident too as efforts to contest this construction of 9/11's world-changing significance. Newspaper cartoons critical of this 'new' conflict's excesses offered ample material for those, "...seeking to critically comprehend some of the ongoing visual and political consequences of 9/11 and the declaration by the Bush administration of a long-term 'War on Terror'" (Dodds 2007, p. 166). Online forums included under- as well as over-whelmed responses to the attacks; the naming of historical and contemporary equivalents of 9/11 but one technique for interrupting this writing (Jarvis 2011; also Simpson 2006, pp. 13-18). And, as a poignant email circulated after the attacks illustrated, claims to exceptionality, uniqueness and rupture rest not only upon a partial (incomplete and perspectival) reading of history. But, also, their reinforcement via commemorative practice:

35,615 children died out of starvation on September 11, 2001.
victims: 35, 615 children (source: FAO)
where: poor countries
special tv programs: none
newspaper articles: none
messages from the president: none
solidarity acts: none
minutes of silence: none
victims mourning's: none

organized forums: none

pope messages: none

stock exchanges: didn't care

euro: kept its way

alert level: zero

army mobilization: none

conspiracy theories: none

main suspects: rich countries (cited in Collins 2002, pp. 168-169).

The importance of these alternative writings is not, for this article, the validity of their critiques (implicit or explicit), or of their efforts to re-position 9/11 and its significance. Rather, it is to demonstrate that the emergence and consolidation of this increasingly pervasive writing of rupture was neither self-evident nor uncontested. Counter-constructions of the event's historical location were available, and indeed offered, from very early after its unfolding: constructions that incorporated, frequently, a critique of the war on terror's legitimacy. These temporally focused critiques have continued throughout the war on terror, in recognition of the importance of 9/11's framing as temporal rupture (e.g. Tsui 2012). The question, therefore, becomes why was this one, particular, framing of the attacks ultimately became so successful.

Defending Rupture: America at War

As time has passed since September 11th 2001, it would be expected that the often-visceral memories of the events might soften, fade or become less politically efficacious. In his evening Address to the Nation, on September 11th, Bush insisted

that 'none of us will ever forget this day' (2001c): a statement with which it is difficult to disagree over a decade later. That this is the case, of course, is not an organic or unmediated reflection of the attacks' significance; but rather, the outcome of numerous official and unofficial acts of memorialisation throughout the time that has now passed. As memory is usually evaluated less negatively with time (Fivush et al 2003, p. 1110), maintaining the political efficacy of speaking '9/11' has necessitated deliberate performative investment. Official attempts at memorialisation have included Bush's arguments that 'each of us will remember what happened that day, and to whom it happened. We'll remember the moment the news came – where we were and what we were doing' (2001a). Unofficial attempts reminded Americans similarly that, 'it is easy to let time dim the memory of what our peace-loving nation experienced on September 11. Let us remain ever vigilant that this should not happen' (Remember-9/11.com, see also Heller 2005; Simpson 2006; Jarvis 2010).

This defence of the memory of '9/11' is politically important. In reminding Americans of those events and the importance of their remembrance, official and unofficial practices alike served to confirm a particular framing of '9/11' as temporal rupture and instigation of a new era of war. As Bush stated in his Address to Congress:

> Some will carry memories of a face and a voice gone forever. And I will carry this: It is the police shield of a man named George Howard, who died at the World Trade Center trying to save others. It was given to me by his mom, Arlene, as a proud memorial to her son. This is my reminder of lives that ended, and a task that does not end. I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people (2001a).

The construction of the events of September 11th 2001 in this particular form, ensures that to evoke their memory through the now ubiquitous '9/11' simultaneously validates the militaristic interventionism of the war on terror. Put otherwise, it confirms the moment of transition from peacetime to wartime that official narrations of the day co-constructed and relied upon. It was a framing that has been kept alive and continually reaffirmed in the memorialisation and defence of '9/11'.

The particular framing of '9/11' most frequently invoked through mnemonic practices after the attacks was forged at the interface of the experience of September 11th and the construction of '9/11'. Only six weeks after the events, the Library of Congress Witness and Response project records that one interviewer was moved to ask a fellow American citizen, 'why are you not flying the flag?' (Dunn 2001). Following over a month of carefully crafted official constructions of '9/11', public displays of patriotism had already become the appropriate and expected response to events of that day. This default position of paying homage to the 'fallen' of September 11th has since been continually reaffirmed. Candlelight vigils, readings and commemorative objects such as New York's tile displays have frequently and repeatedly invoked national imagery, usually in the form of the Stars and Stripes, as a reflection of the intimate linkage between 'nation' and '9/11' in public acts of mourning and remembering the events of September 11th.

Again, this was not an obvious or natural link.[9] While many Americans experienced a sense of rupture on September 11th, it was through the words of the Bush administration that these events were concretized as a moment and marker of crisis; it was through foreign policy discourse that September 11th 2001 achieved near hegemonic understanding as the moment the world changed and *war* was declared on the American *nation*. Through acts of remembering and attempts to defend the

memory of '9/11', support for this war was maintained in the decade after September 11th 2001. It is why remembering '9/11' – as a particular, contingent and contestable yet limiting, dangerous and hegemonic framing of the events of September 11th 2001 – is a deeply political act, demarcating and continually reaffirming the parameters of possible response (see Vaughan-Williams and Stevens 2008), to the extent whereby some have argued that we may in fact be better off if we were to forget '9/11' altogether (Zehfuss 2003). However, ten years after the now infamous events, the motif, 'we will never forget', appears as central today as in the immediate wake of September 11th.[10] For, as President Bush's successor in the White House told those present at a Pentagon memorial tribute on the attacks' 11th anniversary:

> no matter how many years pass, no matter how many times we come together on this hallowed ground, know this - that you will never be alone. Your loved ones will never be forgotten. They will endure in the hearts of our nation, because through their sacrifice, they helped us make the America we are today - an America that has emerged even stronger (Obama 2012).

In this sense, if night had indeed fallen on 'a different world', '9/11's anniversary, for President Obama, provided a poignant opportunity to remember "...that even the darkest night gives way to a brighter dawn" (Obama 2012).

Conclusion

The memory of 9/11 remains an important and painful one for many Americans. This article has attempted to demonstrate some of the ways in which that memory both emerged and endured, drawing on literature(s) from Memory Studies, Constructivist

International Relations and Critical Terrorism Studies. Bringing the combined insights of Spillman (1998), Olick and Robbins (1998) and Armstrong and Crage (2006) to bear on the case study of 9/11 we have attempted to demonstrate the following. First, 9/11 has been instrumentally narrated by strategic agents with the institutional capacity to have their words and voices widely heard. Second, this framing resonated widely and deeply, due in part to its ability to account for the experience of events for many Americans. This perceived appropriateness was reinforced by the relative scarcity of persuasive alternative constructions. It continues to have cultural relevance today, moreover, not least because of its importance for US national identity and foreign policy.[11] Third, the commemorative vehicles promoting the preservation of a particular memory of 9/11 are varied, operating at official, state levels and in personal, private capacities. This forms a wide and powerful set of practices of remembering, which have helped to guarantee the institutionalisation of a contingent narrative of 11 September 2001 as a moment of temporal rupture. That these practices of remembering are now so sedimented in everyday and public life raises, moreover, the risk of inertia, as citizens and politicians unthinkingly reinforce a politically significant narrative from habit and custom. As the article has shown, while contestation has been apparent, dominant discourses promoting the defence of 9/11 as temporal rupture have tended to drown out critical voices.

In making these arguments, this article has attempted to offer four principal contributions. First, we have drawn on an important and under-used primary resource in the historical record that is invaluable for highlighting 'lay' experiences of 9/11 within the US: the Witness and Response Collection at the Library of Congress. As demonstrated above, data contained therein enables a piecing together of the experience and evolution of American understandings of 11 September 2001. Second,

the article has brought together several overlapping literatures, demonstrating

synergies between broadly constructivist insights in IR, terrorism research, and

Memory Studies, which can help us to unpack the continued resonance of elite

constructions of 9/11. Third, driving against a tendency in IR to focus on elites, the

article has deliberately returned to and emphasized the experience of 9/11 for ordinary

Americans.[12] This is crucial, we suggest, to understanding the context within which

later official narratives would resonate. And, fourth, this article has updated the

insights of scholars such as Jackson (2005) and Holland (2012a) by focussing on the

continued relevance of official narratives of 9/11. Eleven years on from 11 September

2001, a particular dominant memory of the day shows little sign of abating in its

significance for contemporary American identity, politics and foreign policy.

Bringing these literatures and empirical materials together has enabled us to situate

the resonance of official constructions of temporal rupture within the context of the

experience of 9/11 for ordinary Americans, and to begin to understand their

endurance and defence over a decade after the attacks.

Notes

[1] We thank the editors and three anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article. Any errors remain our own.
[2] A related literature seeks to contrast constructions and realities of the threat posed by terrorism (e.g. Mueller 2005, 2006); one that connects to conceptual discussion on 'threat inflation' (e.g. Kauffman 2004; Flibbert 2006).
[3] Compare, for example, Novick (1999) and Finkelstein (2003) on the Holocaust.
[4] Understood as a shared body of assumptions, belief, norms and associated practices related to the security of the state and/or other social actors. Security cultures are thus 'patterns of thought and argumentation that establish pervasive and durable security preferences by formulating concepts of the role, legitimacy and efficacy of particular approaches to protecting values. Through a process of socialisation, security cultures help establish the core assumptions, beliefs and values of decision-makers' and the general public about 'how security challenges can and should be dealt with' and, more fundamentally, about what *is* a security challenge or what is likely to become one. This definition is developed from Williams (2007, p. 279).
[5] Graham (2007) notes the increasing significance of the 'Homeland' trope after '9/11'.
[6] Where the Pearl Harbor project attempted to record the views of the "man on the street", the 9/11 research was far more likely to be pursued in homes, schools, and workplaces. Interviews were arranged and conducted in a similar, unstructured, fashion, however, albeit with marked replication of themes therein, especially as greater time elapsed since 9/11.

[7] Research into flashbulb memories has shown that recollections of the experience of September 11th were increasingly brought into line with knowledge of '9/11' learned in later days and weeks. See, for example, Luminet and Curci (2009).

[8] Indeed, efforts to articulate '9/11' as something other than an act of terrorism were also evident after the attacks within academia and beyond, including as a criminal or military act (see Jackson *et al* 2011: 62-67).

[9] And it is, of course, extremely problematic. See, for instance, Cythia Weber's 'I am an American' project, and Butler (2004).

[10] See, for instance, commemorative patches in preparation at '9-11 Patch Project'.

[11] This continuing importance is, of course, itself in part a product of this particular construction of temporality (see Jarvis 2009a: 60-61). Our thanks to one reviewer for pointing this out.

[12] As one reviewer helpfully identified, this effort speaks also to recent engagements with the 'vernacular' or 'everyday' in International Relations and Security Studies (for example, Jarvis & Lister 2013).

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