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## **“9/11 is alive and well” or how critical terrorism studies has sustained the 9/11 narrative**

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### **Abstract**

This article argues that despite engaging in a powerful critique of the construction of the attacks of September 11, 2001 (or “9/11”) as temporal break, critical terrorism scholars have sustained and reproduced this same construction of “9/11.” Through a systematic analysis of the research articles published in *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, this article illustrates how critical scholars have overall failed to extricate themselves from this dominant narrative, as they inhabit the same visual, emotional, and professional landscape as those they critique. After examining how CTS has reproduced but also renegotiated this narrative, the paper concludes with what Michel Foucault would describe as an “effective history” of the attacks – in this case a personal narrative of how the attacks did not constitute a moment of personal rupture but nonetheless later became a backdrop to justify my scholarship and career. It ends with a renewal of Maya Zeyfuss’ call to forget “9/11.”

### **Introduction**

... I slept through 9/11...

“Pre-9/11,” “post 9/11,” “since 9/11,” “in the wake of 9/11,” “prior to 9/11,” “following 9/11”: No specific day has been quite as ubiquitous in the 21<sup>st</sup> century political landscape, and *Critical Studies on Terrorism* has led the way over the past 10 years in offering a powerful critique of the politics behind this temporal construction. From Richard Jackson (2005) to Lee Jarvis (2008) to Jack Holland (2014), many have in this journal and elsewhere engaged in a thorough investigation of the construction of “9/11” as a temporal marker – primarily one of rupture, but as Jarvis (2008, 246) argues also one of temporal linearity and timelessness. As they have demonstrated, this construction serves to justify a violent counter-terrorism response and delegitimize other possible responses such as negotiations and dialogue (Jackson 2005), creates “9/11” as a cause (of the war on terror) that itself is uncaused (Zeyfuss 2003), and silences or attempts to silence any alternative reading of the attacks. “9/11” exemplifies the observation made by Meir Sternberg (1990, 902) that: “The and-then form avoids you having to ask the ‘why?’ question.”

This article aims both to further this already rich literature and to challenge it. It aims to further it by drawing on historiographical research on the production of chronologies across the centuries and their political implications, particularly focusing on how chronologies have been used as an extension of hegemonic power, that is by extending sovereignty over lands that adopt the hegemon’s

chronology. If, as William Rowlandson (2015, 20) argues, definitions are “really a debate about who owns the words,” then chronologies are really a debate about who owns time. By successfully spreading a “9/11” timeline or chronology on the world, the US administration then led by President George W. Bush and sustained by western political leaders since has effectively extended western sovereignty over global time.

In part two, the article goes further to examine how, despite critical terrorism scholars’ critique of the construction of “9/11” as a temporal marker, many CTS scholars have actually adopted this very same construction. Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of every research article published by this journal since its inception in 2008 (totaling 219), this article will show how the CTS subfield has sustained and reproduced the narrative of “9/11” as the opening of a new era. I will argue that this has two origins. First, it reflects the fact that CTS scholars are part of the same visual, emotional, and professional landscape as mainstream international relations, security, and terrorism scholars. They are thus vulnerable to the same perceptive dispositions that Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls *habitus*. The paper thus challenges the construction of CTS as “exceptional” or immune to mainstream *habitus*. Second, I will argue that while internalizing this construction, CTS scholars renegotiated its understanding into a different temporal rupture from that put forward by the dominant “9/11” narrative. Indeed, rather than arguing that on “9/11” a relatively peaceful and orderly world was forever changed by this “new threat” called terrorism (particularly of the radical Islamic kind), CTS scholars collectively have constructed a narrative in which the “pre-9/11” world was, to be sure violent but was *progressively* inching toward less violence. It has been replaced by a “post-9/11” world in which states have given up the pretense of progress and more openly embraced violent logics and practices. The section will conclude with why such a construction remains problematic.

The final section of this paper will offer what Michel Foucault (1984, 89) calls an “effective history,” that is a history that “shortens its vision to those things nearest to it – the body, nervous system, nutrition, digestion, and energies.” Through a personal history of “9/11” – from my lived experience in New York City on the day of the attacks to its construction as a temporal marker in my life – this final section aims to offer an illustration of how what was lived as a moment of continuity on a personal level was later constructed, through an internalization of the dominant narrative, as a marker of temporal rupture. This final section aims to make me “the target of my words” (Inayatullah 2010, 2) but also offers a modest counter-narrative that may become a “kind of dissociating view that is capable of shattering the unity of man’s being through which it was thought that he could extend his sovereignty to the events of the past” (Foucault 1984, 87). In the conclusion, the article will renew Maja Zeyfuss’ (2003) appeal to forget “9/11,” arguing that it will make us better teachers and more coherent critical scholars.

**“9/11” as temporal rupture and the extension of sovereign power over time**

A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by causal necessity, but after which something naturally is or comes to be (Aristotle 1902, 31).

As Jarvis and Holland (2014, 194-195) effectively argue, “9/11” came to be near universally adopted following a “sustained attempt” by the Bush administration soon after the attacks “to construct the date of 11 September 2001 as a marker of crisis and historical discontinuity.”<sup>2</sup> From George W. Bush’s assertion that “night fell on a different world” (quoted in Jarvis and Holland 2014, 194) to then-Vice President Dick Cheney’s characterization of that day as “a day like no other we have ever experienced” (quoted in Jarvis 2008, 246), the administration successfully called upon the US public and beyond to mark the memory as a fundamental break not only in the life of the United States as a nation, or in international politics more broadly, but in their own lives. As noted by Maja Zeyfuss (2003, 514), when Bush told his public that “each of us will remember what happened that day,” what he was saying was “nothing as it was before” (Zeyfuss 2003, 525). “Before anyone really had time to think about what it all means, about what, if anything, we should do, September 11 had already been turned into a symbol, into a watershed” (Zeyfuss 2003, 525). US administration officials, relayed by other political figures across the world, “inserted a politically driven narrative” into the “void of meaning” (Jackson 2005, 31) that immediately succeeded the attacks so that “9/11” would become “known as a horrible defining date in history” (Baker quoted in Jackson 2005, 33).

This had several functions. Importantly and in line with Aristotle’s understanding of the functions of a beginning in a narrative, “9/11” was turned into “the root, the cause, the origin” (Zeyfuss 2003, 520) – a cause that crucially was uncaused. In this narrative<sup>3</sup>, any relationship between previous US policies and the attacks was eliminated, making “9/11” a simple act of evil whose perpetrators needed to be destroyed.

It was as if nothing had ever happened before... In other words, the events of September 11 are the ‘cause’ of its policies today. We may not, however, ask how we got there lest we be disrespectful of the dead. (Zeyfuss, 2003: 520)

This construction allowed the US administration to delegitimize any questioning or even reference to the decades of violent US policy in the Middle East and elsewhere. They were irrelevant as they had not caused the attacks, and mentioning them became an unpatriotic attempt to justify these callous acts (see also Jackson 2005).

Importantly, this watershed narrative was extremely effective in both legitimizing the actions of states domestically and internationally and in delegitimizing dissenting voices. Jackson (2005) argues that the “war on terror” was written as the only natural and just response to the attacks. “One of the purposes of constructing a myth of exceptional grievance is to divest the nation of the moral responsibility for counter-violence” (Jackson 2005, 36). On the

other hand, alternative non-violent responses were delegitimized. As George W. Bush (quoted in Toros 2012, 163) said in 2003, “the only way to deal with these people is to bring them to justice. You can’t talk to them, you can’t negotiate with them.” Thus, the “9/11” narrative as a moment of temporal rupture sustained policies of violent counter-terrorism the world over and undermined those working toward non-violent responses. Furthermore, this narrative not only dominated political circles but was adopted by mainstream terrorism and security studies. To quote but a few, Bruce Hoffman (2006, 22), one of the most cited terrorism scholars, speaks of the “chain of events that began on 9/11”; Paul Wilkinson (2011, 9), in his later edition of *Terrorism vs Democracy: The Liberal State Response*, writes that “the 9/11 suicide hijacking attacks ... had a colossal effect not only on US foreign and security policy and public opinion. They had a major influence on international relations, the US and international economy and on the patterns of conflict in the Middle East.”

Many of the arguments on the political implications of the “9/11” narrative as a moment of temporal rupture have thus already been made. Here however I wish to argue that the overall effect of the “9/11” temporal narrative and of its near universal adoption was an extension of US hegemony over world time. To support this argument, it is useful to draw on historiographical work on how the establishment of eras and chronologies has historically been a means to extend sovereign power over other territories. Masayuki Sato’s (1991, 290) analysis of East Asian chronologies and the establishment of eras linked to new dynasties stresses how the adoption by other states of the new era name represented the extension of sovereign power.

It became normal practice in international relations that a country under the suzerainty of another country should use the era name of the suzerain country. This shows that an era name was a mirror reflecting the realities themselves, going beyond the sphere of symbol. (Sato 1991, 290).

In another example, the near universal adoption of the Christian Gregorian calendar with the fundamental rupture built around the birth of Jesus Christ, can be seen as part of Christian and Western hegemonic extension (Sato 1991; Mazrui 2001). For Ali Mazrui (2001, 15), it is a sign that “an informal cultural empire is born, hegemony triumphant.”

Many countries in Africa and Asia have adopted wholesale the Western Christian calendar as their own. They celebrate their independence day according to the Christian calendar, and write their own history according to Gregorian years, using distinctions such as before or after Christ. Some Muslim countries even recognize Sunday as the day of rest instead of Friday. In some cultures, the entire Islamic historiography has been reperiodized according to the Christian calendar instead of the Hijra.

Indeed, very few countries have not adopted the BC/AD or BCE/CE timeframe, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, which can be seen as much as an insistence in

maintaining their cultural and religious heritage as a rejection of Western hegemony over their time.

Similarly, one can argue that the establishment and spread of the “9/11” era – best represented by the common use of “pre-” and “post-9/11” – is a discursively hegemonic move that extends US sovereignty over timeframes outside the United States. Thus, “9/11” was not only a turning point for the United States, but a global one. Examples of this can be found in government statements the world over. Manuel Valls, then French interior minister, noted in a key speech on the reform of the French intelligence services that they had to keep their focus on the terrorism threat, beginning a list of attacks that “remain in the collective memory” with the September 11, 2001 attacks,<sup>4</sup> disregarding attacks by al Qaeda in Paris in 1996. The key UK counter-terrorism CONTEST (2011: 15) strategy document concludes its Executive Summary by stating that, “International counter-terrorism work since 9/11 has made considerable progress in reducing the threats we face” – forgetting the decades of British counter-terrorism work in Northern Ireland. From 2001 to 2006, 14 African countries passed counter-terrorism legislation in what is seen as a “largely externally-driven” (Knudsen 2015) push by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee and donor governments following “United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1373 calling on member states to become party to all relevant international conventions on terrorism and to enact the necessary domestic legislation to enforce these agreements” (Whitaker 2007, 2018). Even the prime minister of the small island state of Barbados, with an extremely low terrorism threat, spoke of the need to devise a growth strategy in the “post 9/11” world.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, I argue that the narrative of “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture does more than legitimize violent counter-terrorism policies and legislation, delegitimize non-violent responses such as negotiation and dialogue, and silence dissenting voices. It extends US hegemony over world time, establishing the new “post 9/11” era much like the imposition of eras linked to Chinese dynasties in East Asia. Despite different worlds being marked by different moments of temporal rupture – the fall of the Berlin Wall for some, the Rwandan genocide for others, the 2004 Tsunami for others still – “9/11” came to be nearly universally adopted as a moment of temporal rupture, which did not completely replace these other moments but took its own place as a moment of *universal* temporal rupture.

### **Critical Terrorism Studies: Reproducing the “9/11” Narrative**

This sovereignty also extended to the sub-field of critical terrorism studies (CTS). Indeed, the main contention of this article is that although CTS has spearheaded the rejection of the “9/11” chronology, it has nonetheless succumbed to its sovereignty by internalizing and adopting “9/11” as a marker of temporal rupture. This may be inevitable. Sternberg (1990, 901) indeed argues in his analysis of power of chronologies that “the straining against the ‘tyranny of time’ throughout the ages ... only reaffirms and redefines the tyrant’s

power with each abortive rebellion.” By rejecting the “9/11” chronology, CTS is forced to restate.

However, beyond this somewhat facile argument, an analysis of the CTS engagement with “9/11” demonstrates that the CTS scholars have actually taken on “9/11” as a marker of temporal rupture. After presenting data based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of all research articles published in this journal since its inception, I will argue that this journal demonstrates both a process of internalization of “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture – the result of a powerful *habitus* in the social and professional fields inhabited by CTS scholars – and an adoption of this construction in a widespread narrative in CTS that distinguishes between a “pre-9/11 world” in which states engaged in counter-emancipatory violence but were slowly progressing toward a reduction of these counter-emancipatory practices, and a “post-9/11 world” in which states unashamedly increased these counter-emancipatory violent practices, now sustained by overt counter-emancipatory narratives.

A simple descriptive statistical analysis shows that of the 219 research articles published by this journal since its first volume in 2008 (excluding interviews, review articles, book reviews and forums), 210 articles (96 percent) made referenced to the 9/11 attacks. In total, 131 articles (60 percent) used the attacks as a moment of temporal rupture (62 percent of those referring to the attacks). “9/11” was far more used than “September 11<sup>th</sup>” or “11 September” or simply “the September” attacks with the former garnering 955 references compared to 301 for all three latter labels. Of the 955 references to “9/11,” 633 used the term as a marker of temporal rupture (66 percent) using any of the following expressions: “since 9/11,” “before 9/11,” “post-9/11,” “pre-9/11,” “after 9/11,” “prior to 9/11,” “following 9/11,” and “in the wake of 9/11.” In a search using the same language constructions for temporal rupture, any of the three labels using the word “September” represented 48 percent of the total references. Some articles were particularly prone to this construction. Excluding the Jarvis and Holland article (2014) that specifically deals with the question of “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture, five articles (Aning 2010, Lynch 2013, Pokalova 2013, Clini 2015, and Fieganbaum and Weissman 2016) referred to “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture more than 20 times, with Clini (2015) having the highest number of references at 26 in an article entitled “International Terrorism? Indian Popular Cinema and the Politics of Terror.” Another 14 articles used this construction more than 10 times. On average, counting all the 219 research articles published by *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, “9/11” was referred to as moment of temporal rupture 3 times per article published and the three “September” labels figured as temporal rupture 0.7 times per article.

Although this simple statistical analysis gives a sense of the extent of this construction in CTS, a qualitative analysis of each article offers a fuller picture of how “9/11” and the “(11) September (11<sup>th</sup>)” attacks have been constructed. To begin with, “9/11” becomes a moment of temporal rupture much beyond the question of terrorism and counter-terrorism. There are thus references to a “post-9/11 culture” (Wild 2014, 434), the description of an artist as a “post-9/11

cartoonist" (Martin 2012, 475), and a reference to the "post-9/11 animal liberation" movement (Recarte 2016, 247). Although the "pre-9/11" construction is overall less used, Youngs (2009, 97) speaks of "pre-9/11 multiculturalism" for example. Some present this rupture as all encompassing. For Rykkja, Laegreid, and Fimreite (2011, 220), "Since the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent 'war on terror', the world has come to be perceived as increasingly insecure and dangerous," while for this journal's founding and chief editor, Jackson (2015, 50), the "epistemological crisis of terrorism is now an inherently expansionary, self-replicating and increasingly structurally embedded feature of the post-9/11 world." There is thus a "post-9/11 world" in CTS. In this world, little things have changed so that we are told that "after 9/11, Osama became a fashionable name in Pakistan (and throughout the Muslim world)" (Nazir 2010, 74). More important things have changed too, as Oriola (2009, 261) tells us that "national security has taken on a heightened urgency since 9/11."

Even when CTS scholars are trying to tell readers that "9/11" does not represent a temporal rupture, they still refer to "9/11." In some cases, this may be inevitable, such as for Mac Ginty (2010, 213), when he writes that the "post-9/11 adoption of social science methodologies by Western military forces is not novel," although one wonders why there is a need to mention "9/11" at all. For others, it leads to very awkward syntax in which "9/11" as a moment of temporal rupture is forced into a sentence aimed at stating temporal continuity. Thus, Milton-Edwards (2012, 219) says "far from leading the revolutionary wave and jihadi vanguard, as Islamists were characterised to be doing throughout the 1980s and 1990s and the post-9/11 era, there is already evidence to suggest that today's jihadi Islamists are struggling with the challenge of the democracy movement." Thus, the "2000s" become "post-9/11." Interestingly, only one article (Gentry and Whitworth 2011) rejects 9/11 as a "temporal marker" entirely and many of those arguing that "9/11" did not affect change in their subject of analysis at the same time reinstate "9/11" as a temporal marker. So Jeffrey Sluka (2008, 179) writes that

Amnesty International has extensively documented the fact that global human rights suffered serious setbacks and state terrorism massively escalated during the 1970s and 1980s, and that this trend continued through the 1990s and into the new century after the '9/11' terrorist attacks, which stimulated a major new global surge in state human rights abuses justified as 'counterterrorism' measures.

Thus, "9/11" witnessed a continuation of a trend, but also a rupture through its accentuation of this trend. Indeed, 19 articles presented this double approach to "9/11" both rejecting and accepting it as temporal marker.

A simple statistical analysis followed by an in depth qualitative investigation thus show that CTS has as a sub-field overall confirmed "9/11" as a moment of temporal rupture. I argue that there are two reasons for this: one is linked to an internalization of the social and professional landscape in which CTS scholars – more or less willingly – inhabit; the other, is the result of the explicit or implicit renegotiation of this narrative so that "9/11" comes to be understood as a



temporal rupture, but one that is characterized by a qualitative change in state violence rather than in non-state violence. Each argument will be dealt with in turn.

Bourdieu's (1977) practical theory and particularly his understanding of *habitus* are particularly helpful to understand how CTS scholars have internalized the dominant "9/11" narrative. *Habitus* for Bourdieu (1977, 18) is "a system of schemes of perception and thought," those "perceptive dispositions" which bring actors, "even the most disadvantaged ones," to "perceive the world as natural and to accept it much more readily than one might imagine" (Bourdieu 1989, 18). In the case of CTS scholars, these perceptive dispositions are drawn from their sharing the very same visual, political, emotional and professional landscape as that of policymakers and traditional scholars after the attacks. Thus, when Bush said that "everyone" would remember what happened that day – when he exhorted, as paraphrased by Zeyfuss (2003, 514) to "Remember. You saw it. Thousands dead" – this included CTS scholars and not only those we study or critique. CTS scholars were also "under the influence of a strong visual memory and the horror of a tragedy" (Zeyfuss 2003, 522). Thus, in the "*dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality*" (Bourdieu 1977, 72 emphasis in original), I argue that CTS scholars internalized the powerful construction of "9/11" as an exceptional moment, a moment of transformation.

This is not only an individual internalization due to a personal response to the attacks, but also arguably a collective one. Indeed, CTS scholars are part of the same professional environment as the far more numerous traditional terrorism and security scholars. We attend the same conferences (the International Studies Association (ISA) Annual Convention, the British International Studies Association (BISA) Conference, Political Studies Association (PSA) among others), sometimes publish in the same journals, and most importantly, have positioned our work *in opposition to* traditional terrorism scholarship. This positioning required – at least to some degree – a reproduction of the dominant narratives in order for them to be countered. As Michel Foucault (1984, 78) argues, the "weapons of reason" are forged by "the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition." "9/11" as a weapon of reason has also been forged by our fanatical and unending discussions and our spirit of competition with traditional security and terrorism scholars. Writing "since 9/11," "post-9/11," "pre-9/11," etc., was a means to challenge traditional terrorism scholars on their own turf and using their own language. I would argue that we thus collectively internalized the narrative of "9/11" as temporal rupture to be able to insert ourselves in the professional field of security and terrorism studies.

Individuals do not however simply reproduce dominant narratives or practices. According to Bourdieu, individuals are continuously renegotiating and transforming – sometimes in a barely noticeable fashion – social relations. Therefore, "rather than merely enacting an already established system of exchange by the following of rules, individuals renegotiate their relations with other individuals by manipulating common understandings" (King 2000, 421).

CTS scholars have not simply adopted “9/11” as temporal rupture but rather renegotiated it and adapted it for greater coherence with the other perceptive dispositions that dominate our subfield. Indeed, an analysis of the temporal rupture narrative in CTS shows that CTS scholars do not present this rupture as one between a safe world made insecure by terrorism, but rather as one of an already violent world that was made more violent by states’ use of “9/11” as moral and political justification for violent counter-terrorism practices.

This is visible in many of the arguments published in this journal. Out of the 131 articles using the attacks as temporal rupture, 58 (44 percent) present it as a moment of increase in state violence, making the latter as the single most referred to issue in the temporal rupture constructions. A qualitative analysis further reveals the extent of this: For McGowan (2016: 14) for example, “the scale of victimisation as a result of state led counterterrorism policies at home and abroad since ‘9/11’ far exceeds that of officially recognised terrorist violence.” This was largely also true prior to “9/11” as is demonstrated by studies of state violence (see Blakeley 2009), but nevertheless state violence is seen as having qualitatively and quantitatively changed with “9/11.” From discourses (“post-9/11 counter-terrorism discourse has fulfilled our worst fears” (Zulaika and Douglass 2008, 29)) to legislation (“Since 9/11, the frenetic proliferation of anti-terror laws in Australia is in a class of its own” (Oriola 2009, 260)) to practices (the attacks “stimulated a major new global surge in state human rights abuses justified as “counter-terrorism” measures” (Sluka 2008, 179)), CTS has placed a particular focus on this change.

In particular, human and civil rights and liberties are presented as under greater threat in the “post-9/11” environment. So for Hidek (2011, 254), “[s]ince 9/11, the geography of Manhattan has been saturated with surveillance technologies that serve as a living laboratory for the establishment of a ubiquitous security apparatus in domestic territory.” This threat to the rights and liberties of individuals is particularly true for Muslims living in Western countries. Cherney and Murphy (2016, 159) state that: “Since 9/11, there is a general feeling among Muslims living in the West that their communities are ‘under siege,’” due to what Oriola (2009, 261) describes as “a moral panic about Muslims post-9/11.” The situation is presented as so dire that Grossman (2014, 321) feels the need to reiterate that “‘solidarity and diversity’ can coexist in a post-9/11 world.” It is important to note that the aim of this list is not to contest that many of the elements have indeed changed in the “post-9/11” period, but rather to highlight how our subfield has reproduced and sustained, but importantly also renegotiated the construction of “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture.

There are several important conclusions to be drawn from this analysis. First, we CTS scholars are not as exceptional as we may think we are, and this can be seen by our internalization of the same construction of “9/11” that is visible in traditional terrorism, security, and IR scholars. We too saw the towers crumble, we too were told to remember that moment for its exceptionality, its extreme violence, the fear it spread in Westerners, us included. When Butler (cited in Wibben 2001, 107) says “most Americans have probably experienced something like the loss of their First-Worldism as a result of September 11 and its

aftermath,” she is also speaking about CTS scholars. To this personal response to the attacks, one can add a powerful professional one. Our work is in part relevant because of “9/11.” If terrorism were not seen and presented as “the most important threat” facing the contemporary world, our work would be less important. There would be fewer panels in conferences, fewer publications, maybe no *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, and overall fewer jobs. This article would not be published. We are, to a certain degree, professionally relevant because of “9/11” and states’ discourses and practices since the attacks.

Furthermore, this reliance on “9/11” to justify our relevance however has a cost. First, this makes some of our research ahistorical – possibly one of the worst crimes from a CTS perspective. Indeed, although numerous social and political practices may have changed in the “post-9/11” period – such as the representation of Muslim minorities, or the proliferation of counter-terrorism legislation – by universalizing “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture and spreading it far beyond counter-terrorism practice, we are imposing an alien and essentially hegemonic chronology on other fields. Feminism, culture, cartoons, names in Pakistan and elsewhere, may not have all changed drastically on “9/11.” If they did, we need to support this with evidence to justify starting our chronology on that day. I must stress that am not arguing here that any scholars cited in this paper are examples of bad practice or bad research, and I myself have written and spoken statements such as these (see part three of this article). The argument here is rather that CTS collectively has – largely unknowingly – fallen into the “9/11” chronology-trap, and that by adopting this starting point for chronologies by default and (at times) without supporting evidence, we are guilty of the same ahistoricism we regularly accuse traditional terrorism scholars and others of.

Second, we run the risk of partially depoliticizing – and indeed exonerating – the very state violence that we are trying to expose. By turning the “War on Terror” into “post-9/11” state violence we are at least semantically accepting that these are “responses” to “9/11.” Much of this is part of the critique already put forward by CTS of the traditional terrorism approach to “9/11” and its aftermath (as discussed in part one). The “post-9/11” construction – even if it focused on state violence – assumes that the violent response *chosen* by state actors was the only course of action. It is presented as a natural knee-jerk reaction to “9/11.” Thus, whether acting excessively or not, states are exonerated from firing the first shot in this narrative. “9/11” remains the cause that was uncaused (Zeyfuss 2003). Furthermore, it turns “9/11” into the cause of some cases of state violence that CTS and others have demonstrated to be unrelated to the attacks themselves, the 2003 invasion of Iraq being a prime example of this. From the extraordinary manipulation of intelligence findings to the military-industrial agenda pursued by the George W. Bush administration, there are few left arguing that the Iraq war was a “response” to “9/11” (Kauffman 2004), and incorporating the war in Iraq and its aftermath into a “post-9/11” narrative maintains this exonerating smokescreen we have worked so hard to remove. Indeed, pushing this argument further, it can be argued that much of today’s “War on Terror” – from domestic counter-radicalization strategies, to western and non-western alliances to defeat the so-called Islamic State, to state policies toward refugees and migrants – are

more connected to the war in Iraq and its subsequent ramifications than they are to the al Qaeda which carried out the September 11, 2001 attacks. Thus, the terrorism/counter-terrorism landscape that we are in today is arguably far more of a “post-2003 world,” including the near-15 years of insurgency experience for both state and non-state actors and the recent question of returnees, than a “post-9/11 world.” Such an internalization of the “9/11” narrative as temporal rupture – however renegotiated – arguably undermines some of the key principles and goals of CTS: It risks making our research ahistorical and risks at least partially exonerating the very state violence we have spent 10 years exposing.

### **The Stoics and Reflexive Narratives**

How can this internalization and adoption of the dominant “9/11” construction be undone? One means may be a reflexive analysis of how this construction has crept into each of our lives. Reflexive analysis is what allows human beings to be not only the result of “internalization of externality” but also of the “externalization of internality.” Through moments of reflection, we can transform *habitus*. Indeed, drawing on the Stoics, Bourdieu invites us to judge a human being by their second reaction to an event, rather than their first.

The Stoics used to say that what depends upon us is not the first move but only the second one. It is difficult to control the first inclination of *habitus*, but reflexive analysis, which teaches that we are the ones who endow the situation with part of the potency it has over us, allows us to alter our perception of the situation and thereby our reaction to it. It enables us to monitor, up to a certain point, some of the determinisms that operate through the relation of immediate complicity between position and dispositions. (Bourdieu in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 133).

In this final section, I thus aim to engage in a reflexive analysis of how “9/11” went from being a moment that did not shake my inner self to a moment that marked the start of a clear chronology in my professional life as a CTS scholar.

Inserting itself in the broader move toward autoethnographic work in international relations and security studies (see for example the work of Inayatullah 2010, Dauphinee 2013, and powerful work published in the *Journal of Narrative Politics*), this section stands as an “owning up” to the very behavior critiqued in this article and illustrates how such a transformation can occur in its minutiae. It comes from the need to “make myself the target of my words” (Inayatullah 2010, 2). It is also the result of the adoption of a methodology that is driven by the desire “to show rather than tell,” to “exhibit a process of discovery, rather than steer towards a conclusion” (Inayatullah 2010, 2). Thus, this personal narrative or Foucauldian “effective history” hopes to illustrate intimately how the “9/11” narrative came to be internalized and negotiated over time in one CTS scholar.

It also offers an alternative story. Carol Cohn (2000, 146) argues that “stories circulate like paper currency, passed on from hand to hand, without anyone ever seeing, or asking to see, the gold that backs it up.” She goes on to say: “As in any other institution, the power of the stories comes not from their evidentiary value (even though they are often offered as evidence), but from their ability to condense and symbolize something that people believe and think important.” We have all been told endless times the story of how “9/11” changed the life of the young (white) American man who saw the towers falling on TV and realized he needs to fight to defend his people. The aim of the final section is thus also to offer another story in which “9/11” itself did not represent a temporal rupture, but rather a story of continuity that can be passed on as a counter-narrative.

For me, “9/11” was not born on September 11, 2001. In fact, I slept through the attacks. I was less than three miles away in a flat in Brooklyn, barely asleep after an overnight shift at The Associated Press where I worked as an editor on the International Desk. My 90-something landlady sent her West Indies carer to knock on my door, “Mrs. Rosy thinks you should see this.” I don’t remember if both towers had already fallen, one I think had and I may have seen the second one fall live on TV. I can’t be sure. I thought of my friend Amy, who had left the AP to work for the Wall Street Journal, the offices of which were in the World Financial Center, across the street from the World Trade Center. She lived nearby in Brooklyn and I walked to her house and rang her doorbell over and over again. I remember screaming her name. It was completely useless as she clearly was not there. I walked further up toward the Brooklyn Bridge, woke up my cousin and aunt (night owls). By midday, I stood on the Brooklyn promenade – one of my favorite places in the entire world – and watched the fire, the ashes, the paper blow across the East River into Brooklyn. The only thing I remember clearly was a man selling throwaway cameras, saying something along the lines of, “Don’t miss your chance! Take a picture of history as it happens!” I remember being both disgusted by his callousness and in awe of his quick thinking: “The World Trade Centre has collapsed? Time to make a buck!” That is maybe the only feeling I remember of that day, being impressed by how life went on. By 6 pm, I took the subway: The F Train that usually passes under Lower Manhattan had been diverted but it took me right into work at Rockefeller Center. I was not even late to work that day. I was not afraid or shaken. I felt for the people who died and their families, but my heart did not break that day.

My heart had broken on March 29 of that year and in the week that followed the death of my friend, Kerem Lawton. My “First-Worldism,” as Butler calls it, had been lost six months prior, when a young man who resembled me in personal history, education, profession, and cheek – someone just like me – had been killed reporting on the shelling of a village in Kosovo, part of the spillover from the conflict in neighboring Macedonia. By September 11, I knew already that violence could rip even nice middleclass professional families, shatter our misplaced sense of security. I had already seen the pain but also the void and incomprehension left by sudden death, particularly the sudden death of young professionals, so “full of life” as so many of those killed in the towers were. Kerem’s death and the pain it caused in those who loved him had shaken me to the core, undermined my trust in the world, shattered the arrogant belief that

things (for us) “would be okay.” My body had already been inhabited by pain and occupied by fear months before the attacks.

My eyes had also already seen massive destruction – destruction far greater than that of the Twin Towers. In August 1999, I had covered the earthquake that had destroyed thousands of homes across 200 kilometers and killed more than 17,000 people in Western Turkey. I had already seen building after building flattened like stacks of pancakes. So many buildings had collapsed that many of them did not see any rescue operation for days. So I remember – much more vividly than any visual memory of the September 11 attacks – sitting with a woman at the bottom of a pile of rubble as she screamed the names of her two children. They were trapped or dead underneath the building and no one was looking for them. Proper rescue teams had not yet arrived in her town and the few surviving local firemen were working to extract people from another building further down the road where other parents pleaded with them. So we sat there on that warm morning of August 17, 1999, surrounded by death.

Over the years, however, people have found far more interesting the fact that I was in New York for “9/11” than in Turkey for the earthquake. They either ask “How was it?” or more politely wait for me to tell them “how it was.” I usually tell my story of how I slept through it – it leads to some surprise, some laughter. Then I quickly go on to say that what I do remember vividly is Bush’s speech to the joint houses on September 20, 2001. This is where *my* “9/11” narrative begins, contributing in its own small way to the CTS narrative of “9/11” as temporal rupture, one in which states’ increased their direct, structural and cultural violence under the banner of counter-terrorism. I tell of how tears rolled down my face as I saw New Yorkers in a hip bar of Hell’s Kitchen cheer on Bush as we watched him on a giant screen promise war onto the world. Then I remember the feeling of discomfort, even offense, when I found a framed picture of the still-standing Twin Towers with a hand-written note saying “America, love it or get out!” in a hole-in-the-wall coffee place where I’d get my breakfast on my way to work every morning. Countless times I have told the story of how I “remember” thinking, “I just want my coffee, not a lecture on patriotism!” I recount the discomfort of being a foreigner, even in New York where everyone is a “New Yorker,” how I eventually left the United States, gave up journalism, and went back to university to study conflict resolution and focus on terrorism.

“9/11” thus came into my life as a temporal rupture that changes the character of New York from a welcoming cosmopolitan city to a culturally violent nationalistic environment in which I did not feel welcome. The attacks that I lived through without going through profound shock or pain – possibly because I had been jolted by both shock and pain just a few months earlier – and that did not come to represent a sharp moment of rupture in my life *became* such a moment months and then years after the attacks. Indeed, this narrative strengthened the more I studied global counter-terrorism practices, dialogued with other CTS scholars, and challenged mainstream security and terrorism studies in *their* construction of “9/11.” This invariably entered my own writing. So my book (Toros 2012) makes seven references to the attacks, six of them as temporal rupture. The references are also all-encompassing as I speak of a “pre-

September 11 landscape” (Toros 2012, 19). In my teaching, although I argue that terrorism has many aspects not changed “since 9/11,” I then point at the differences that do exist in “pre-9/11” and “post-9/11” terrorism, particularly in state violent responses. I may have slept through the attacks and later been struck by the continuity of life, but in the months and years that followed them, “9/11” became a part of my personal and professional narratives as a moment of temporal rupture.

## Conclusion

If the aim of this article were only to point an accusatory finger at my colleagues and myself in CTS, it would be of minimal utility. The article has indeed illustrated through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of all research articles published in this journal that CTS has also been guilty of constructing “9/11” as a moment of temporal rupture. It has argued that this can be traced to an internalization of the *habitus* by CTS scholars both personally as human beings emotionally affected by the attacks and professionally as scholars inserting themselves in the narrative dominating security and terrorism studies. This internalization however has come with a renegotiation of this narrative that has transformed “9/11” from a moment of rupture that separates the safe 9/11 world to one threatened by terrorism, to a moment of rupture from a violent but slowly improving world to one now driven by the increasingly violent logics of counter-terrorism and state repression. The article argued that this CTS narrative puts us at risk of being guilty of the very ahistoricism we accuse traditional terrorism scholars of and more importantly of depoliticizing state “responses” to “9/11.” The final section of the article offers an example – a story – of how a relatively untraumatic experience of the attacks became a “9/11” narrative that strengthened over time and became part of the collective CTS narrative.

This article though aims to do more than point an accusatory finger or indulge in a public *mea culpa*. It is an appeal to heed Zeyfuss’s appeal (2003) nearly 15 years ago in which she urged critical scholars to “Forget September 11.” Such a collective act of forgetting no doubt has costs. “9/11,” as argued in this article, has helped CTS be relevant, be listened to, even by those simply intent on dismissing or denigrating our arguments. Ten years into CTS however I believe we have the professional and institutional strength to abandon this problematic platform: Taking a step down at this point is not as costly as it may seem. But if we forget “9/11,” what do we replace it with? A coherent CTS answer is: We replace “9/11” with whichever starting date is most relevant to the subject at hand. Thus Indian or American cinema may have indeed transformed after the September 11, 2001 attacks, but they may not have, and an investigation into their endogenous chronology is essential. The same thing is true for cartooning, culture, and the first names preferred in Muslim-majority countries. Each of these areas of research – many of them only tangentially related to terrorist and counter-terrorist violence – are likely to have very different chronologies from the dominant “9/11” one. We could go further and focus on the repetitive everyday nature of political violence, moving altogether away from an understanding of time “as project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding;

time as departure, progression, and arrival – in other words, the time of history” (Kristeva, Jardine and Blake 1981, 17), in favor of a cyclical understanding of time that one can find in feminist methodologies (Felski 2000, 2002). Whichever avenue we choose, we should finally liberate research from the hegemonic “9/11” chronology. We can start by ensuring that each time we use “9/11” as a temporal marker, we have carried out a thorough investigation (via whichever methodology one may choose) and can provide the supporting evidence that demonstrates that “9/11” was indeed a temporal rupture.

In this move away from the hegemonic chronology we will be aided by the increasing realization that “9/11” may have finally past its sell-by date. Anecdotally, in the past few years, several of my students have had difficulty placing “9/11” accurately in a timeline, referring to the attacks that took place on September 9, 2001 or in September 2011. Indeed, to someone born in 1999, the attacks make as much sense in a timeline beginning six years ago as in one beginning 16 years ago. And such forgetting may go beyond the younger generations. In 2016, then US presidential hopeful Donald Trump spoke of “7/11” (the convenience store) instead of “9/11,”<sup>6</sup> and according to a poll carried out by the Pew Research Centre the same year, only 68 percent of American adults can correctly identify 2001 as the year of the attacks.<sup>7</sup> This is not ignorance as much as a natural passage of time in which the visual and emotional memory of an event slowly dissipates.

In the case of our students, we are therefore not only sustaining the “9/11” narrative, we are actually instilling it by asking them to adopt intellectually a collective memory that, in their case, is not individual. As argued by several authors in critical studies of memory, “the ‘past’ is a production of the present” and “sensory experiences cannot be processed into memories without reliance upon social frameworks of language and political understanding” (Heath-Kelly 2012, 1; 2013). In this case, we are imposing social frameworks of language and political understanding on students who do not have the sensory experiences of the attacks. We are actually imposing hegemonic memories on them, rather than simply sustaining them. Thus, for them and for us this article concludes with an appeal to return to one of the founding principles of CTS: embedding our analysis in the socio-historical context of violence. For some analyses “9/11” may still be relevant, but for most, we may do ourselves, our students, and everyone else a favour and finally forget “9/11.”

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<sup>2</sup> Jarvis (2008) points out that “9/11” was not only one of temporal discontinuity but also one of temporal linearity (since America was once again being called up to defend world order) and timelessness (in the endless battle of good versus evil). However, as he illustrates, the presentation of “9/11” as a temporal break was and remains the dominant narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Narrative here is understood as “the primary way by which human experience it made meaningful” (Polkinghorne in Wibben 2011, 43). Importantly, as Wibben (2011, 43) argues: “Narratives both enable and limit representation – and representation shapes our world and what is possible within it. Narratives, therefore, are profoundly political.”

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Archives/Archives-ministre-de-l-interieur/Archives-Manuel-Valls-mai-2012-avril-2014/Interventions-du-Ministre/Reforme-du-enseignement>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.barbadosparliament.com/uploads/document/ddfd976f0200ee092a9ad8149798f134.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2016/04/18/politics/donald-trump-9-11-7-11-mix-buffalo/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2016/09/07/15-years-after-911-a-sharp-partisan-divide-on-ability-of-terrorists-to-strike-u-s/>