Symbols of Terror : '9/11' as the Word of the Thing and the Thing of the word

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ABSTRACT

This paper adopts a social representations approach to examine the '*9/11*' symbol which is argued to be a centrally organising, communication oriented, symbolic resource within contemporary representations of terrorism. Within the context of the events of September 11 2001 as a point of shared history which has come to be understood as a significant world event (Liu et al, 2009), the '*9/11*' symbol is argued to fulfil a triple function in contemporary representations of terrorism. Firstly, the '*9/11*' symbol provides a central anchor for the events of September 11 2001. Secondly the '*9/11*' symbol acts as a powerful rhetorical resource for objectifying the abstract concept of terrorism. Lastly, alongside the capacity to objectify the abstract, the '*9/11*' symbol also enables a counter process of transcendentalisation (Billig, 1988) whereby it transforms the object into the abstract. As a result the '*9/11*' symbol is highly suited to widespread mobilisation of easily apprehended notions defining what terrorism is, which do not readily provoke contest and are widely constructed as mundane forms of 'truth' amongst a community of users.

SYMBOLS OF TERROR: '9/11' AS THE WORD OF THE THING AND THE THING OF THE WORD

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, critical terrorism studies (CTS) has emerged as a subfield of terrorism studies able to accommodate researchers from diverse disciplines who share a "critically-oriented approach to the study of political terrorism" (Jackson, Breen Smyth & Gunning, 2009; p. 2). Within such work, the desire to examine events of terrorism within a given social, moral, historical and political context is central, and efforts to examine terrorism as socially constructed phenomena are beginning to take their place alongside the traditional body of social science research on terrorism. It is here that wide ranging analyses of terrorism discourses (E.g. Altheide, 2007; Bhatia, 2009; Dunmire, 2009; Jackson, 2009; 2007; 2005; Lazar & Lazar, 2004) make a significant contribution.

Jackson's (2005) comprehensive analysis of war on terror discourse is of particular relevance to the current work because it makes explicit a concern with the usage of the term *'9/11'* as the name for the events of September 11 2001. Jackson (2005, p. 7) states that "Such practices [of abbreviation] are neither natural or without consequence", he goes on to outline the upshot of such practices as serving "to erase the history and context of the events and turn their representation into a cultural-political icon where the meaning of the date becomes both assumed and open to manipulation". However, what remains outside the scope of Jackson's work is a psychological theorizing of how the term *'9/11'* came to occupy such a central role in shared social consciousness that spans both elite political; media; and everyday lay discourse. At further issue is *why* this arguably unique linguistic sign has endured for more than a decade, securing its place in contemporary English

language lexicon with relatively no resistance. Furthermore, Jackson (2005, p.26) argues that "'War on Terrorism' is an instance of a deliberately and carefully constructed discourse". Such a position implies that the dominance of the term *'9/11',* at least in the immediate aftermath of the events, was the result of intentional political will. The current paper however argues that, whilst the term *'9/11'* was, and remains, entirely well suited to the counter-terrorism discourse ambitions of dominant Western political ideology, it should not be understood solely as an elite political discursive achievement overlaid onto lay society. Rather, the term *'9/11'* is in large part successful because it is a fundamentally accessible representational resource that both lay and elite members of the "thinking society" (Moscovici, 1981, p. 182) have continued to co-produce since the events of September 11 2001.

Social Representations Theory (Moscovici, 2008) has been recognised to be compatible with the aims and practical undertakings of critical discourse studies (van Dijk, 2003), whilst at the same time, discursive research has been recognised to be well suited for engagement within a social representations framework (Moscovici, 2000). The current work capitalises on this reciprocity by utilizing Social Representations Theory (SRT) to interpret how and why the term *'9/11'* operates as a significant representational tool within the construction of contemporary terrorism. The concern of this paper is not with studying discursive representations *of* '9/11' where *'9/11'* might implicitly or explicitly be approached as having some accessible 'out there' qualities, rather it examines the term *'9/11' as* an active social psychological tool of representation.

Social Representations Theory

Initially developed by Moscovici (2008), analysing the transmission of the concept of psychoanalysis from the realms of science into everyday French culture, social representations are understood to be a central means of *"acquiring and communicating knowledge"* (Moscovici, 1981, p. 186). The basic purpose of social representations is to make the unfamiliar familiar. Representations provide the means of arriving at common sense ways of understanding the world amongst the "thinking society" (Moscovici, 1981, p. 182). Since the introduction of Social Representations Theory (SRT) more than five decades ago an appreciable body of research has amassed which examines social representations across diverse areas including Health, Democracy and Citizenship. There has also been a relatively recent focus toward theoretical debate and development published in English-language journals (Eicher, Emery, Maridor, Gilles & Bangerter, 2011). Recent work has emphasized the narrative qualities of social representations and highlighted the role of collective memory and shared history (Bar-Tal, 2014; Jovchelovitch, 2012; Liu & Hilton, 2005); explored the relationship between representations and identity (Howarth, 2002; 2014; Liu & László, 2007; Markova, 2007); called for SRT to become more critical (Howarth, 2006; Voelklein & Howarth, 2005); and proposed how SRT can inform the field of Political Psychology (Elcheroth, Doise, & Reicher, 2011).

Over the years, SRT has faced its share of critiques, some of the most enduring of which have raised concerns with the primacy of individual cognition (Potter & Billig, 1992; Potter & Litton, 1985) and challenged what is thought to be an overly-deterministic view of the social, which thereby underplays individual agency in the shaping of consensus (Hermans, 2003; McKinlay & Potter, 1987). In defence of such critiques, De Rosa (2006) argues that at

the heart of such concerns lies a '"*mentalist" reading of the SR construct*, assuming that

social representations are cognitive representations" (italics in original; p. 166). Voelklein

and Howarth (2005) make explicit that, from an SRT perspective, social cognition is not an

operation which occurs in the isolation of a single mind. Rather, it is embedded within, and

features as part of the social cultural environment in which the individual exists. Thus, social

representation, "is not a cognitive process or a social process; it is simultaneously both"

(Voelklein & Howarth, 2005, p. 438). On a different note, Billig (1988) highlights the

fundamentally argumentative qualities of social thinking and suggests that the processes of

anchoring and objectification might be refined, and perhaps expanded to emphasize the

rhetorical features of social representations. Moscovici (2008) is clear about the integrated

nature of language and thinking and specifies that social representations involve "languages

in conflict" (p. 151), pointing out that contest and resistance are features of social

representation that can be witnessed in language use. SR theorists have acknowledged

Billig's concerns, agreeing that greater emphasis toward argumentation is needed (Howarth,

2006; Voelklein & Howarth, 2005). The view of language as purposive social business

demonstrates basic compatibility between SRT and discursive psychology and also reflects

the union between SRT and a range of language centred approaches to examining social

phenomena. Drawing on the points outlined above, social representations are here

understood to be co-constructed, negotiated, dynamic forms of social knowledge that are

powerfully realised through language and put to various use by members, both within and

between groups. Whilst utilising SRT as a means to interpret the representational business

of the term *'9/11',* this paper also seeks to re-invigorate an interest in the study of social

symbols amongst SR researchers and increase awareness of how examining the qualities of

a given symbol furnishes an understanding of the capacity of the symbol to operate as a

powerful rhetorical resource across a range of shared social levels, including the level of the nation.

History, Conflict and Nation

Narrative research focuses on the narrative construction and transmission of social representations (e.g. Bar-Tal, 2014; Jovchelovitch, 2012; László & Ehmann, 2013; Liu & László, 2007; Liu & Hilton, 2005) and has been particularly adept at highlighting the crucial role of shared history in the genesis and development of social representations. Jovchelovitch (2012) states that "Communities create history through the ways in which they remember the past" (p. 441). Moreover, shared history is open to change, accommodates multiplicity of thinking and serves functions of social identity and group cohesion. Shared history is also politically functional, providing people with a capacity to rationalize and justify dominant social structures (Liu & Hilton, 2005). Social representations research has demonstrated the importance of shared history in the development of national, and global, social representations (Liu et al, 2005; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu & László, 2007; Liu et al, 2009). This view of shared history is also evident in classic works on the construction of the nation (Anderson, 1983; Billig, 1995). Narratives of shared history construct particular ways of understanding the past which involve "selective interpretation, biased attribution, restricted assessment of legitimacy and agency" (Liu & László, 2007, p. 87). Thus, narratives of shared history actively engender the construction of rhetorically purposeful and foundational forms of shared meaning, through which social groups, including nations, become empowered in their means of contemporary social organization.

Cross cultural research has repeatedly identified that narratives of war and conflict are core to social representations of world history (Liu, 1999; Liu et al, 2005; Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu et al 2009). Liu (1999) reported that lay representations of world history were led by a focus on the world wars and were concentrated toward events of recent history. Subsequently, in research that spanned twelve Western and Asian nations, Liu et al (2005) researched lay views of world history and similarly reported that the world wars dominated as the single most important events in world history. They also identified that a high level of Eurocentric history presided amongst all the nations sampled. In this 2005 research, the American sample ranked the Al Qaeda terror attacks on the United States which occurred on September 11 2001 as the fourth most important event in world history. However, aside from the US sample, the data was collected from all other nations prior to September 11 2001. Liu et al (2005) suggested that, given the high US ranking, coupled with the emergent Western political 'new world order', and a tendency for people to focus on recent history, the events of September 11 2001 might become increasingly central in global representations of world history. Liu et al (2009) again researched social representations of world history across twelve nations and, as before, conflict and war dominated. However, in this later research, the terror attacks of September 11 2001 received the most cross-cultural nominations after the world wars and ranked as amongst the most important events in world history by nine of the twelve nations surveyed. This included high rankings from India, Indonesia and East Timor, as well as from European nations. Reflecting upon the global importance attached to these events, coupled with the high ranking also given to the Iraq war, Liu et al (2009) proposed that the findings indicated "a significant change in how world history is represented, and opens up the possibility that the World Trade Centre bombing is becoming a "new anchor" for world opinion" (p. 679).

Whilst this body of work provides compelling evidence for the centrality of the events of September 11 2001 within global representations of world history, it does not furnish an understanding of what the representation of these events consists of, or how the representation is communicated. Yet if we are to draw on social representations theory as a means for understanding the significance of September 11 2001 as a central event in world history then such understanding is crucial. As Liu et al (2009) point out, depending on *how* the events are constructed as historical remembrances, they may contribute to a significant shift in the way that world history is represented. The current paper begins to address this concern and furnish an understanding of the representation, by asking questions of the name through which the representation has come to be known. The contention of the current work is that examining the name of the representation is of central importance if we are to fully understand the ensuing representation. As Moscovici (2008, p. 157) highlights "when we name something, we impose limits and properties, and in a sense play a part in the saturation of the object or phenomenon." Furthermore, the widespread and relatively untroubled engagement with the name that perpetuates, even within research that situates itself in a critical terrorism studies framework, risks implicitly reifying and objectifying the representation without acknowledging that the name itself is likely to play a role in the representation process. Explicit analysis of the name therefore serves to challenge such reification.

ANCHORING THE US TERROR ATTACKS OF September 11 2001

According to SRT, anchoring is held to be the means through which we are able to apprehend the unfamiliar. It enables the integration of novel phenomena into our web of shared understanding and in doing so we overcome the psychological discomfort of the unknown. Anchoring involves two distinct processes: classifying and naming. "By classifying what is unclassifiable, naming what is unnameable, we are able to imagine it, to represent it" (Moscovici, 2001; p. 42).

Whilst classifying the events of September 11 2001 *as* terrorism was central to the developing representation, attempts to represent these events alongside prior acts *of* terrorism were negligible. From the outset, the events of September 11 2001 were represented as a fundamentally new, previously unseen terrorism, conceptualised as virtually without precedent in US national consciousness. Within Western political and media discourses the events of September 11 2001 were represented as the commencement of an emerging world of heightened fear and threat (Altheide, 2007; 2006; Dunmire, 2009). Central to the developing social representation was a sense of the unknown and the US presidential response constructed the events in a manner which suggested that history began again on that day (Leudar & Nekvapil, 2011). Edwards (2004) remarked "one of the first sentiments to emerge from the rubble was the idea that 11 September represented some sort of global dividing point, a transition from an orderly past […] to a present (and future) now fraught with uncertainty and menace" (p. 157).

Alongside this world changing narrative, the events were simultaneously anchored to historical representations of the entirely familiar. Front page US and UK national news headlines the following day categorised these events as acts of war. Two US newspapers

led with *"Act of War",* whilst others led with headlines which referred to attacks on the

"Pentagon" thereby communicating these events as attacks on the US military. UK

newspapers advanced a similar narrative with headlines such as "*A declaration of War*" and

"*War on America*". Jackson (2005) highlighted four defining narratives used in Western

political and media discourse following the events of September 11 2001. These included

direct comparisons to World War II, and the US cold war against communism. Jackson

(2005) argues that the events of September 11 2001 became the basis of "the discursive

construction of a national myth which gives a meaning to a collective identity" (Jackson,

2005, p. 33). Categorising the events of September 11 2001 alongside shared national

histories of wartime tragedy provides a particular context for understanding the events of

September 11 2001 as war. Indeed, representing the events of September 11 2001 as war

was pivotal to the social, moral and political legitimisation of the US led response to the

terror attacks, which were themselves represented as a 'War on Terror'(Jackson, 2005).

Classified as acts of war, a full military response was warranted, but simultaneously

classified as events without precedent elevated the belief that entire 'ways of life' were

under threat (Edwards, 2004; Johnson, 2002). Representing the events of September 11

2001 as heralding the start of some previously unknown and unimaginable world thereby

required a new model for living, or a 'new world order' (Altheide, 2007; Miller, 2005).

Constructing a powerful narrative in which the events of September 11 2001 'changed the

world' echoes comments by Liu et al (2009) who proposed that, depending on how the

events of September 11 2001 were narratively constructed, they may come to form a

"watershed interpretive moment" (p. 687) for widespread social representations of world

history. It was in this context of achieving familiarity whilst retaining unfamiliarity that a name for the events surfaced.

The business of naming is recognised to have a particular and solemn significance. Names facilitate and constrain how phenomena can be represented. In giving a name to a phenomena, "to say that something is this or that – if need be to invent words for the purpose – enables us to fabricate a mesh that will be fine enough to keep the fish from escaping" (Moscovici, 2001; p. 46). As the terror attacks of September 11 2001, were unfolding, the abbreviated date '*September 11th*', and the numerical sign '*9/11*', emerged in US media and political discourse and became swiftly adopted as a name for the events (Redfield, 2007). To speak of *'9/11'* or *'September 11th'* was, and is to speak, at least partly, of the terror attacks which occurred in the US on September 11 2001. However, what the current paper stresses is that it is also to invoke a wholly unfamiliar tongue which, from the outset, had an appeal that extended beyond the US nation. The, then, British Prime Minister Tony Blair made repeated use of *'September 11th'* in his first major public address in the month following the events (Blair, 2001), and a search of the Lexis Library database indicates that by the first anniversary of the events, the term '*9/11*' had featured in over two hundred headlines within UK national newspapers. What is indicated is that this novel sign, co-produced amongst diverse communities and integrated within the everyday English language lexicon, became the unprecedented word for the unparalleled thing.

The '9/11' ideograph

Writing from the field of cultural studies, Redfield (2007) takes an interest in, what he refers to as the 'name-date'. He highlights the representational strength of both terms as he states "the name-date itself, for which no synonyms exist and which anchors all talk and all analysis of "September 11th" to a powerful, haunting catachresis" (p. 56). The term '9/11' has been variously referred to as a metaphor (Roy, 2009); as an idiom; and as a proper-name (Redfield, 2007). However, it is argued here that these descriptions do not sufficiently capture the uniqueness of '9/11' in the English language, nor do they afford an awareness of the representational power of the term. Whilst directly concerned with single word terms in political discourse, McGee (1980, p. 15) describes ideographs as a "high order abstraction representing collective commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal". He argues that ideographs are the supreme term for symbolizing an argument, with the capacity to guide behaviour in a manner which the community recognises as appropriate and commendable. Furthermore, the power of the ideograph is such that it is unacceptable to raise challenge to its basic logic. The contention of the current paper is that the term '9/11' should be understood as an ideograph, and that when it is conceptualised in this way, the ideological power of '9/11' as a tool of representation comes to the fore.

Verkuyten (1995) is concerned with the symbolic nature of social representations and the way in which social symbols are central to the mobilisation of public opinion. He states that "Symbolic meanings can take shape and durability in perceivable forms that become the

accepted expressions of these meanings: social symbols" (p. 265-6). Moscovici (2001) also

notes the importance of symbols for representation. Referring to iconic national symbols

such as national flags and state buildings, he points out that "What they *do* is out of

proportion to what they *are*" (p. 21). Furthermore, symbols are a component of shared

social narratives, contributing to how stories are told and how they are understood (Liu &

László, 2007). Symbols facilitate a significant degree of persuasive power which resides in

their avoidance of the explicitly stated features of an argument and might typically serve to

highlight an ideological position. When symbols are used in place of words the argument is

communicated unspoken and thereby is able to operate out of view and beyond contest

(Elcheroth et al, 2011). The symbol is the sensory perceivable object that acts as the

recognisable expression of the symbolic referent. Symbolisation is an active process of

meaning construction, where the sign becomes infused with meaning and is communicated

as the embodiment of that meaning (Verkuyten, 1995). What is particularly interesting

about the '*9/11*' ideograph is that it closely approximates a symbol that was already in use,

heavily infused with symbolic meaning and operational as a powerful cultural symbol prior

to the events of September 11 2001. As the '*9/11*' ideograph became the name for the

terror attacks of September 11 2001, the pre-existing symbolic meaning further anchored

the representation to additional categories of meaning.

In discussion of the anchoring process, Orfali (2002) states that people "return to what is

already known, how the already known can be used in the present situation, even if the new

is "totally" new" (p. 400). The digits 9-1-1 have a longstanding role as the national telephone

number for America's emergency services and, as such, when the events of September 11

2001 occurred, these digits were already replete with symbolic content. Such is the

significance of these numbers as a shared sign of emergency and emergency response in the

US that Redfield (2005) argues that they were already "drilled into the consciousness of

most inhabitants of the American landmass north of Mexico" (p. 58). Thus, from the point of

inception, the '*9/11*' ideograph was infused with notions of danger, threat and panic as well

as invoking a trusted call to action. Discussing why war narratives are so central to lay

histories, Liu and László (2007) highlight that conflict arouses extremes of emotion, and

emotion generates affective bonds within communities. Referring directly to the events of

September 11 2001, they state that the emotional impact was like "a thousand stones

hitting the community lake all at once, with ripples of emotional sharing carrying seeds of

information to create a shared new representation at great speed" (p. 93). Naming the

events of September 11 2001 by recourse to this known cultural concept of emergency

anchored the events to a formidable sense of highly charged negative emotion readily

accessible to the nation, able to operate alongside familiar notions of war, and a pervasive

sense of the unknown, ensuring a powerful union between symbolic form and content. Its

success in becoming embedded in use beyond the US nation is indicative of the power of

symbols as ready tools of communication suited to the mass mobilisation of public opinion

(Verkuyten, 1995).

Finally, in considering how the events of September 11 2001 were anchored, it is important

to recognise how the name deviates from existing traditions and consider what this new

kind of name obscures. Traditionally, events of terrorism with land based targets are named

in connection with where they occurred (E.g. 'The King David Hotel bombing' which

occurred in Jerusalem 1946; 'The Bishopsgate bomb' which occurred in London in 1993, 'The Bali bombings' of 2002). This is also the case for prior terror attacks in the US (E.g. 'The Wall Street bombing' of 1920; 'The Oklahoma City bombing' of 1995). Indeed, even the prior attack on the World Trade Centre was, and remains, commonly referred to as 'the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing'. These names serve to situate important material aspects of the events within the representation. Specifying a geographical location and an indication of the particulars of the event are important organising features of the developing representation. Traditional names anchor the events directly into the place at which they occurred such that 'the 1993 World Trade Centre bombing' could not have happened anywhere else at any other point in time. Nor can it be readily interchanged with other categories of events. Similarly, 'The Oklahoma city bombing' would not satisfactorily stand in place of another class of terror attack such as a plane jacking. In contrast, the *'9/11'* ideograph provides no information regarding where in the world, or when in the world, these events took place. As Jackson (2005) highlights: "the actual date has become linguistically iconic and divorced from its temporal moorings [….] the notation of '9-11' is no longer fixed in time or geography; it is rhetorical shorthand for the day of America's tragedy and suffering – a date whose meaning is no longer contested." (p. 33). What the current paper points out is that the flexibility and mutability noted by Jackson can be understood as the upshot of its ideographic form of representation. On some level it is always connected to the events of its origin, it anchors these events, yet without any binding features it offers a powerful means to move beyond them. Void of any explicit content, and communicating without words, it gives little cause for challenge, yet it retains the ability to counter any challenge it does receive by deferring back to the particulars of the originating events.

In sum, through the inter-related processes of classifying and naming, a shared understanding of the events of September 11 2001 emerged. Primarily classified by recourse to existing narratives of war and conflict, and simultaneously classified as events without precedent, the '*9/11*' ideograph represents the event as unique, distinct from previous representations of terrorism. Due to pre-existing symbolic meaning, the '*9/11*' ideograph is instantiated as a highly emotive call to action, infused with notions of emergency, panic and threat. As the ever re-circulated name of the thing, the *9/11*' ideograph is "isomorphic with the structure of traumatic damage, on the one hand, and with the working of technical reproducibility and mass mediation, on the other" (Redfield, 2007; p. 57),   with the flexibility to either call forth the particulars of September 11 2001 or move beyond them dependent on the rhetorical business at hand.

OBJECTIFICATION AND TRANSCENDENTALISATION: '*9/11*' AS SOCIAL REPRESENTATION OF TERRORISM

For SRT, objectification primarily serves to materialise the abstract or to change "the word of a thing into the thing of the word" (Moscovici, 1981, p. 199). To objectify is to bring abstract concepts to life, to make them 'real'. The figurative nucleus of a social representation adapts over time to accommodate new phenomena and remain compatible with surrounding representations (Moscovici, 1981). As new phenomena are named and classified *as* something, they are available for use in the world, providing new resources that can be drawn upon to materialise the abstract. Distinguishing between anchoring and objectification, Moscovici (2000) states that anchoring is "inner-directed it is always putting

in and taking out objects, persons and events which it classifies according to type and labels with a name", whilst objectification is "more or less other-directed, draws concepts and images from it to mingle and reproduce them with the outside world, to make things-to-be-known out of what is already known" (p. 54). As the particularised events of September 11 2001 were introduced within the common stock of terrorism knowledge they became accessible as an additional, widely recognised 'reality' of terrorism with the capacity to objectify what terrorism is. Moreover, when these events are represented by invoking the '*9/11*' ideograph, the particulars of the events simultaneously recede, allowing the object to transform into the abstract.

Symbols and Objectification

The business of materialisation is the central purpose of social symbols (Verkuyten, 1995). The symbol gives form to the abstract such that a national flag can be the materialisation of a national identity. Crucial to the success of social symbols as resources in social life is that they can be used by people as an everyday resource for psychologically participating in symbolic meaning. Verkuyten (1995) argues that this requires an additional process through which the material is transformed into the abstract. Verkuyten (1995) aligns this with Billig's (1988) outline of transcendentalisation which Billig proposes operates as a counter-process to objectification. Billig (1988) argues that such a process enables the world of objects to be transformed and become streams of abstract consciousness. Whilst Billig primarily discusses this in relation to religious worldviews, Verkuyten (1995) contends that the ability to transcend the object is an essential aspect of symbolism, which ensures that symbols retain an active role in social psychological life. Transcendentalisation enables symbolic meaning to

remain open and fluid, allowing multiplicity to exist and symbolic meaning to alter over time. Social symbols are argued to have thee central characteristics which enable them to accommodate diverse meanings and yet convey the totality of a concept such that it is experienced as a complete means of understanding (Verkuyten, 1995). Firstly, they communicate complex and varied meanings in a simple, condensed format which is accessible to all members of the group, providing a sense of familiarity with the concept such that all users believe they know what is being represented without requiring greater knowledge. In other words, social symbols convey meta-knowledge. Elcheroth et al (2011) argue that meta-knowledge actively communicates a sense of knowing what it is that other people amongst the group think, and meta-knowledge is argued to be highly persuasive in developing mass opinion. Secondly, symbols enable people to share in something beyond the realms of speech. This is significant for political communication, whereby moving beyond speech can position argument beyond contest (Elcheroth et al, 2011). Finally, symbols are affect-based, emotionally charged features of a social representation. Powerful emotional content within a social representation is known to generate strong bonds amongst a community (Liu & László, 2007). By virtue of these characteristics, the '*9/11*' ideograph enables the abstract concept of terrorism to be objectified as material 'reality' whilst simultaneously, the material object of terrorism is transcended allowing participation in abstract meaning-making.

Terrorism is an ideological concept which does not reside in any particular material act. Acts come to be known as terrorism only when they are consensually interpreted as a particular kind of social action (Harré, 2004), and the ideological concept of terrorism is not a settled

one. Terrorism very much meets the criteria of an essentially contested concept (Gallie, 1964) and as such it is unsurprising that different groups disagree about what terrorism is, and work to maintain their own interests. However, debates about what terrorism is do not only occur on an inter-group level. Given that contradictory themes and argumentation are normative features of common sense thinking (Billig, 1987), it is to be expected that terrorism has long evaded singular consensus even amongst those who broadly share social representations of terrorism. Over decades research has reported on the lack of consensus amongst academic and political definitions of terrorism (e.g. Martin, 2003; Schmid & Jongman, 1988; Silke, 2008). However, such contestation does not imply that there is abject disagreement. Coady (2004) refers to guiding heuristics that are accepted within a community of users as being central to what terrorism is, thereby pointing to the capacity for contrary themes to exist within the shared common sense of the group. Within widespread social representations of terrorism, this indicates that broad consensus regarding the abstract concept can prevail whilst a degree of space for challenge and disagreement is maintained. However, a critical argument of the current paper is that when the '*9/11*' ideograph is invoked as the generic 'word of the thing', powerful categories of meaning are elevated and contestation is downgraded.

In the years following the events of September 11 2001, the '*9/11'* ideograph has become a central symbol in social representations of terrorism. It is regularly selected from the shared stock of common sense knowledge in order to attribute meaning to events as they occur. In elite and media discourse, the '*9/11'* ideograph is habitually treated as an uncontroversial name for the events of September 11 2001 (Jackson, 2005). Thus, even when academic or

media debate raises critical challenge to dominant social, political, moral activity of so-termed '*9/11* discourse' the ideograph is re-produced and re-circulated anew. Amongst the most telling demonstrations of the representational strength of the '*9/11*' ideograph is its capacity to serve as the name for a variety of subsequent, separate events of terrorism. With each occasion that the '*9/11*' ideograph is re-cycled as the name of subsequent events, all that is bound up within the '*9/11*' ideograph is re-told and re-invigorated, whilst further embellished with the horror of the new events. Moreover, with each new event that adopts the name, all that is bound up with the '*9/11*' ideograph becomes the anchor for that new event. As Moscovici (2000) states: "The nouns we invent and create to give an abstract form to complex substances and phenomena become the substance of the phenomena" (p. 53)

The UK terror attacks which occurred in London on July 7th 2005 were swiftly named '*7/7*' by the UK media. According to the Lexis library database, by the first anniversary of the events, the '*7/7*' ideograph had appeared in over nine hundred UK national newspaper headlines. The uptake of this ideograph as the name for a British based terror attack is both indicative of the symbolic power of the '*9/11*' ideograph, implicitly accepted as the objectification of terrorism, and reflects an interesting capacity for mutability of the ideographic form. As highlighted earlier, the form of the '*9/11*' ideograph is such that it does not communicate a fixed historical date. The symbol remains linked to events that occurred on a given date but it is not bound to them. The symbolic content of the '*9/11*' ideograph which anchors the specific events of September 11 2001 simultaneously objectifies the abstract concept of terrorism such that the '*9/11*' ideograph is a symbol synonymous with terrorism itself. The naming of the UK terror attacks on 7th July 2005 *as* '*7/7*' conjoins these separate events. The

attacks of July 7th 2005 resonate with notions of terrorism that the *'9/11'* ideograph objectifies whilst different ways of understanding the attacks on 7th July 2005 are obscured. Given that the UK has its own long history of terrorism and has therefore amassed an existing stock of shared knowledge and a settled tradition for naming, which has included location information, this ready shift to an entirely different kind of name is indicative of September 11 2001 being represented as a global event (Liu et al, 2005). Indeed, on the day following September 11 2001, UK national newspaper front page headlines included *"War on the World"* and *"Apocalypse"*, communicating that these events were not only visited upon the US but upon a global society. Verkuyten (1995) highlights that symbols are a vital means to communicate "rapidly and in an accessible way with the masses" (p. 271). The emergence of the *'9/11'* ideograph in mutated *'7/7'* form, readily communicated that the July 7th 2005 UK terror attacks could be understood through the lens of September 11 2001. It also permitted the events of July 7th 2005 to be routinely treated as an extension of the events of September 11 2001 promoting a sense that the same systems of meaning would be required in order to comprehend these new events. Drawn into this future context, the *'9/11'* ideograph shifted from being the 'word of the thing' to become 'the thing of the word'.

In a similar manner, the terror attacks that occurred in Madrid on 11th March 2004 became known as '*11-M*', a name readily engaged within ongoing US terrorism discourse and which also features in European contexts. Alongside which, the terror attacks that occurred in Mumbai on 26th November 2008 became widely referred to in Western media and political discourse as '*India's 9/11'* or '*26/11'*. Roy (2009) strenuously objects to the naming of these

events as '*India's 9/11*' and refers to the name '*India's 9/11*' as "toponymic displacement" (2009, p. 315) which serves to collapse these separate events into a shared history. Roy (2009) argues that "9/11 is hyper-mnemonic, recalling the singularity of the events in New York with such insistence that all other dates, times and places vanish; or the reverse, each renewed appeal to the memory of the attacks inaugurates a hyperbolic forgetting" (p. 316). The SR process of objectification is understood to be one in which the business of remembering is simultaneously an act of forgetting (Jovchelovitch, 2012). In the course of materialising the abstract, the origins of that which we objectify within our everyday language and social practices become disappeared. As Moscovici (1981) states "The purpose of objectifying, after all, is to forget that a work, a configuration of matter, is the product of our activity" (p. 201).

Whilst acknowledging that there have been a number of major events of terrorism in the West that have occurred since September 11 2001 that have not adopted a '*9/11*' derivative name, the capacity of the *'9/11'* ideograph to become the name for subsequent terror attacks is a striking demonstration of the representational power of the ideograph. This capacity not just to objectify the abstract but also to transcend the objective world, both in terms of material events of September 11 2001, and the materiality of future events. Capable of subtly mutating and shifting through time and place, ready to be invoked as the name for future events, the '*9/11*' ideograph is an ever transcendent symbolic resource in social representations of terrorism. As future events become familiar through the '*9/11*' ideograph, the material 'truths' of the new event are relegated and the abstract phenomena of terrorism is realised through the symbolic meaning of the *'9/11'* ideograph. It is also

noteworthy that, in constructing representations of events that do not take up the '*9/11*' ideograph as a name for the new event, the ideograph nevertheless remains available as a central tool of terrorism representation. Explicit reference to '*9/11*' as a set of objective material events, and/or positioning new events in the context of a 'post *9/11* era' are rarely far from view. Discussing the strategy of generalisation as a tool of discursive manipulation, van Dijk (2006) argues that generalisation of the events of September 11 2001 is a most notable example of the manipulation of US and global views about terrorism. Whilst the current paper makes no claim about political intentionality or manipulation, what it does argue is that it is the '*9/11*' ideograph itself which leads the way in this business of generalisation. It drives a forgetting such that the particulars *of* a given event are no longer particular *to* a given event.

What the above examples indicate is that the '*9/11*' ideograph fulfils a crucial function in contemporary terrorism discourse as a powerful rhetorical resource that steers dominant notions of what terrorism is. To borrow from McGee (1980) it is a "one term sum" (p. 7) for a hotly contested ideological concept which does not court or readily acquiesce to challenge. Whilst initially surfacing as the anchor for unfamiliar events or the 'word of the thing', its capacity to both objectify the abstract and transcend the object has facilitated it in also becoming 'the thing of the word'. All that is bound up with the '*9/11*' ideograph is repeatedly elevated in contemporary representations of terrorism, even when the material events of September 11 2001 are not the focus.

Based on the categories discussed, we can say that widespread representations of terrorism symbolised via the '*9/11*' ideograph are understood as world changing, war-like events which stimulate powerful negative emotions such as fear, threat and panic. However, as social representations theorists have repeatedly demonstrated, social identity is critical to social representations (E.g. Duveen, 2001; Elcheroth et al, 2011; Howarth, 2014; 2002; Moloney & Walker, 2007). Without giving due consideration to identity it is not possible to explain why people adopt differing perspectives, make use of differing representations, or advance some representations whilst disputing others. Crucially, "identity is as much concerned with the process of being identified as with making identifications" (Duveen, 2001, p. 257). Social representations of shared history that support the construction of national identity have implications for how ethnic identity and national identity relate (Liu & Hilton, 2005; Liu & László, 2007). Group based identities of culture, religion and ethnicity are critical within representations of terrorism. They enable 'terrorists' to be known as 'certain kinds of people', and conversely they encourage a belief that 'certain kinds of people' can be known as 'terrorists'. The ethnic and religious identities which feature in representations of terrorism regularly overlap with at least one ethnic sub-group that share in a national identity. This is the case with representations of September 11 2001 where the Muslim identity of those directly involved in perpetrating the attacks is held up as a paramount in representations of the events. What is of particular interest here is the way in which the '*9/11*' ideograph reinforces and polices particularised ideas about ethnic and religious identity within ongoing representations of terrorism.

On July 22nd 2011 a series of terror attacks occurred in Norway which became the lead story for many national newspapers the following day. A UK newspaper devoted the front page

to these events and led with the headline which named the event as '*Norway's 9/11*' (Flynn & Hughes, 2011) and another UK newspaper made similar initial reference to the events as '*Norway's 9/11*' (Harris , 2011). Again this bears witness to the power of the '*9/11*' to travel across time and space and between strikingly different events. However, on this occasion, the '*9/11*' ideograph did not take hold. Billig (1988) argues that just as it is possible to anchor a new experience to that which is already known, it is also possible to resist something as being a something through a process of particularising. Thus "anchors cannot only be cast, but they can be hauled up" (Billig, 1988, p. 13). One central difference between the varied events successfully represented through the '*9/11*' ideograph and this rejected event relates to the differing ethnic and religious identity of the actors involved. Specifically, the perpetrator of the Norway terror attacks was quickly identified as non-Muslim and as a vehement supporter of extreme-right anti-Muslim political ideology. Thus, the actor embodied an identity that was wholly at odds with the Muslim identity shared by those who perpetrated the terror attacks of September 11 2001, an identity broadly shared by perpetrators of the other events discussed. Given the wealth of terrorism research which evidences the continual and often implicit interweaving of Muslim identity and terrorist identity in media and political discourse (E.g. Dwyer & Uberoi, 2009; Erjavec & Volcic, 2006; Jackson, 2005; Kilby & Horowitz, 2011; Lazar & Lazar, 2004; Richardson, 2001), this separation of the events in Norway as *not* '*9/11*' can be reasonably argued to be connected to the non-Muslim identity, and anti-Islamic ideology of the perpetrator. What this highlights is that whilst the '*9/11*' ideograph is a powerful means of communicating generalised notions of what terrorism is, representational boundaries exist and one potential boundary transgression occurs when powerful but implicit assumptions about terrorist identity are not upheld.

Furthermore, the attempt to name the Norway events by recourse to the '*9/11*' ideograph was met with active condemnation by some UK media commentators (Brooker, 2011; MacKinnon, 2011). Such activity highlights that whilst the routine use of the '*9/11*' ideograph is rarely questioned, this does not equate to an unthinking use. With each accepted use of a social symbol the community of users acknowledge the suitability of the symbol to stand on behalf of the events. Whilst there is some degree of flexibility, social symbols operate within socially sanctioned boundaries such that "society will inflict penalties on those who use ideographs in heretical ways" (McGee, 1980, p. 15). Moral disputes about the legitimate use of the '*9/11*' ideograph further reflect the way that this symbol enables transcendence from the world of objects to abstract thought. These disputes are not over the material facts of the events in Norway, or the original events in the US. They are disputes over how the material events might be interpreted and utilised in relation to one another and whether or not they can be classified alongside one another as the same kind of social phenomena.

In sum, the '*9/11*' ideograph objectifies the abstract concept of terrorism, infusing it with the all the materiality of the events of September 11 2001, and in doing so it defines terrorism in 'real' terms which obscure the contested nature of the abstract concept. Simultaneously, the '*9/11*' ideograph transcends the materiality of specific events of terrorism, including those of September 11 2001. The symbolic qualities of the name encourage a forgetting of specific events whilst elevating broad notions of what terrorism *is.* The ideograph is available to be re-circulated as the name for new events, each time re-presenting itself as both object and abstract. However, as the final example highlights,

whilst routinely used with little remark, the '*9/11*' ideograph maintains acceptable boundaries and not everything that might be represented as terrorism is permitted to use the symbol.

CONCLUSIONS

Outlining how SRT can inform political psychology, Elcheroth et al (2011) suggest that we should pay close attention to how certain forms of communication construct strong political realities whereby political issues are conceptualised in ways that have implications for the kinds of solutions that might be ruled in or out. In the political 'new world order', dominant representations of terrorism carry significant implications for how terrorism should be dealt with. There is therefore a need to explore features of social representations of terrorism that are widely treated as mundane forms of truth. Whilst mining the representations held by differing communities would doubtless identify multiplicities of understanding and highlight variable ways in which representations of September 11 2001 are rhetorically engaged, there would remain a consensual view of these events as being amongst the most important in world history (Liu et al, 2009). Dominant notions of shared history held by national and global communities wield significant ability to minimise challenge, and given that shared history plays an important role in the construction of political realities, the way that events of September 11 2001, as a focal feature of terrorism, are consensually constructed as historical events has implications, not least for issues of international relations and national unity (Liu & Hilton, 2005).

This paper examined one key element of the social representation of September 11 2001, namely the '*9/11*' ideograph, which features widely in terrorism discourses both within and

between nations. Drawing on Verkuyten's (1995) outline of social symbols, the '*9/11*' ideograph is argued to provide a central means for anchoring the events of September 11 2001, and for objectifying the abstract concept of terrorism. In addition to this, the '*9/11*' ideograph provides a means for transcending the materiality of terrorism, enabling people to engage in abstract meaning making. Capable of moving back and forth between its function as a marker of material events and as a token of abstract thought, the '*9/11*' ideograph is a highly flexible rhetorical resource suited to mass mobilisation of easily apprehended notions of what terrorism is, which includes simplistic ideas about who terrorists are.

It is worth re-stating that SRT fundamentally contends that representations are co-constructed, perpetuated and reproduced throughout the 'thinking society' by diverse communities of users. In keeping with this, the current paper does not claim that the *'9/11'* ideograph is being 'done to' society as some kind of intentional elite undertaking. Rather it is the ongoing accomplishment of all members of society, lay and elite alike. The point is perhaps that, strong political realities are more readily achieved when elites make their own particular use of powerful tools of representation which are routinely engaged with as unproblematic truths amongst wide-ranging and diverse communities.

Edwards (2004) rebuked the name '*9/11*' as "inappropriately glib" (p. 159) in its suitability to depict the events that it represents. Whilst agreeing with his characterisation of the name, what this paper contends is that it is this very quality which makes it a highly successful symbolic resource. The '*9/11*' ideograph and all its modified forms, exude a benign simplicity which assures widespread and repeated use by a diverse community of users. It

has become an embedded feature of varying realms of elite and lay discourse which operate in national and global contexts. The reach of the ideograph in communicating contemporary representations of terrorism encourages its acceptance as 'meta-knowledge' (Elcheroth et al, 2011), suggesting to members that it represents what other people think. The simplicity of the ideograph belies an imposing rhetorical force, encouraging lay and elite users to feel that they know what is being represented whilst only needing to confront what it is that they know when ideological boundaries are tested. This serves to further downplay contest and encourage repeated use, thereby promoting a hegemonic representation of terrorism. Furthermore, when meta-knowledge is recognised to be accepted and supported at the level of the nation, then individual and sub-group support for the representation has crucial implications for remaining accepted within the national group (Elcheroth et al, 2011). This alerts us to the potential for national identity to find itself in conflict with ethnic and religious sub-group identities where terrorism is concerned. With respect to the nations most directly discussed here, this highlights a challenge facing British Muslim and American Muslim members. Namely, they are confronted with an ongoing dilemma whereby disavowal of the *'9/11'* representation and the assumptions it fosters regarding Muslim identity encourages antagonism with the national majority (cf. Liu, Lawrence, Ward & Abraham, 2002). Yet quiet acceptance of the '*9/11*' representation can facilitate a pejorative re-casting of Muslim identity which may pose further significant challenges for maintaining positive ethnic sub-group identity within the nation and foster even greater antagonism.

Lastly, in terms of making a contribution to SRT, this paper has endeavoured to re-ignite interest, both in the analysis of social symbols as features of social representations, and in

greater exploration of the process of transcendentalisation amongst SR researchers. In this respect, this paper is greatly indebted to the earlier work of Verkuyten (1995) and Billig (1988). Analysis of the *'9/11'* ideograph supports the argument of Verkuyten (1995) who proposed a differential between the meaning that is conveyed by social symbols and that which is conveyed by language such that symbols are better able to convey a holist understanding in a simple and condensed format and do not require an incremental progression of thought which is more typical when language is used. The current paper further suggests that when symbols become the focus of the analysis, the fluidity of a representation is emphasized, encouraging the analysis to expand from one in which the process of objectification is paramount to a dual concern both with the objectification of abstract concepts and the counter-process of transcendentalisation. Placing such an emphasis on the ways in which the object is transcendentalised serves to locate the generative qualities of social representations more centrally, which in turn ensures that the dynamic, often conflicting and argumentative (Billig, 1988) qualities of social representations can be more readily engaged with. Such an approach may facilitate greater engagement with SRT amongst discursive researchers where discursive analysis is concerned to illuminate contradiction and conflict as central features of discourse. With respect to the current analysis, the '*9/11*' ideograph is perhaps unusual in that it embodies all the properties of a social symbol but has a semiotic form that is routinely embedded within textual as well as spoken language communication. Thus, the '*9/11*' ideograph can be studied as a normative feature of written or spoken discourse and therefore readily lends itself to discursive analysis. Future work which examines how the '*9/11*' ideograph is locally enacted as an embedded feature of terrorism discourse would doubtless furnish greater

understanding the role of the *'9/11'* ideograph in the discursive construction of 'terrorism' and of 'terrorists'.

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