2011

A Response to Jones and Smith: It's Not as Bad as It Seems; Or, Five Ways to Move Critical Terrorism Studies Forward

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In their recent article “We’re all terrorists now: critical or hypocritical studies on terrorism?” David Martin Jones and M. L. R. Smith strongly criticize Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) for a series of reasons, including a lack of evidence for CTS claims, an over-focus on deconstruction and emancipation combined with an under focus on explanation, and an ethically dubious relativism.

In this response, we agree with many of Jones and Smith’s criticisms. However, where Jones and Smith see these criticisms as undermining CTS, we interpret the concerns very differently. Instead of indicating unfixable problems, we note these issues as presenting opportunities for CTS to further develop a methodologically rigorous empirical research program.

We draw on Jones and Smith’s criticisms of CTS to point toward five areas of development for terrorism studies in general and CTS in particular.

Evidence for State Bias

In one of their criticisms of CTS, Jones and Smith determine that “to be critical requires a radical reversal of what the journal [*Critical Studies on Terrorism*] assumes to be the typical perception of terrorism and the methodology of terrorism research” (2010, 293). What is the typical perception? At base: a “pro-state bias” that excludes any research on the “more pervasive and repressive terror practiced by the state” (Jones and Smith 2010, 293). More importantly, Jones and Smith repeatedly note that these claims of a state bias are made

Received 6 September 2010; accepted 3 October 2010.

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by CTS researchers “with no direct evidence produced to support such statements” (2010, 294). In other words, as they sharply rebuke, these are “unsubstantiated accusations about the state of the discipline” of terrorism studies (Jones and Smith 2010, 294).

We agree with Jones and Smith that a monolithic orthodox terrorism studies does not exist. But empirically speaking, based on our review of forty syllabi, there *are* a series of texts regularly assigned as essential readings across a wide variety of terrorism-related courses taught in the United States. These texts include but are not limited to: Bruce Hoffman’s *Inside Terrorism* (2006); Walter Laqueur’s *The New Terrorism* (1999); Cindy Combs’ *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century* (2003); and Russell D. Howard and Reid L. Sawyer’s *Terrorism and Counterterrorism* (2006).

These four important and widely used and cited texts share at least two common features that are indicative of broader problems in terrorism studies. First, none of the texts explicitly discuss important methodological issues. By methodology, we mean an explicit discussion of the “ontological and epistemological presuppositions undergirding the initial shaping of the research question.” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xxi).¹ The explicit articulation of a methodological position is useful because it enables authors to better communicate across multiple scholarly communities where there is little agreement regarding procedural norms. This is important especially for an interdisciplinary topic such as terrorism. In addition, such transparency of methodological position sharpens the engagement between methodologically distinct approaches over issues of objectivity and interpretation; improves theorizing about researcher positionality and its impact on accessing, generating, and analyzing data; cultivates interdisciplinary work and makes space for challenging present day disciplinary boundaries (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006, xiii). All are very good reasons, it seems to us, for overcoming the methodological naiveté that haunts these particular books that are so widely used in college class rooms around the United States. Terrorism studies more generally would benefit by more explicit and nuanced discussions regarding the methodological positions taken by researchers.

Second, these texts assume or assert that terrorism may be difficult to accurately define but, at the same time, it is objectively recognizable as a threat to various entities (e.g., citizens, institutions, governments, states) that exist independently of the terrorist threat. This concern has been acknowledged by Jones and Smith as well as they write, “Interestingly, the specter haunting both conventional and critical terrorism studies is that both assume that terrorism is an *existential phenomenon*, and thus has causes and solutions” (2009, 300; emphasis added). Yet they then do not expand from this claim to scrutinize conventional terrorism studies and its naturalization of threats and the state system. This view that terrorism is an existential threat whose identity is not open to question (and states, usually, are the defenders of such threats) is not limited to terrorism studies. Indeed, it is the stereotypical “structure of knowledge in security studies” (Weldes et al. 1999, 9) in general. As Weldes et al. aptly describe the situation for security studies and we concur with regards to terrorism studies:

The nature of those entities is assumed to be both given and fixed, at least for all practical purposes, and security is thus understood to mean securing these fixed entities against objective and external threats. These foundational assumptions naturalize those actors and their insecurities, while rendering contingent and problematic their actions and strategies for coping with the insecurities. Actors and their insecurities are naturalized in the sense that they are treated as facts that, because they are given by the nature of the interstate system, can be taken for granted. Taken as natural facts, states and other organized actors become the

foundational objects the taken-for-granted existence of which serves to ground security studies. (Weldes et al. 1999, 9)

For instance, as we argued earlier, Laqueur's history of terrorism offers no discussion of the methodological presuppositions informing his study. Instead, the methodological realism that informs his study goes unspoken. Terrorism is presumed to be a definable substance existing independently in the world, which is indicated clearly in Laqueur's definition: "Terrorism is violence, but not every form of violence is terrorism. It is vitally important to recognize that terrorism, although difficult to define precisely . . . is not a synonym for civil war, banditry, or guerrilla warfare" (1999, 8). And the basic substance of terrorism, according to Laqueur, is ancient and ultimately fixed, dating back to "early in recorded human history" (1999, 10). At the same time, the entities that terrorism objectively threatens, as Laqueur posits it, can range widely and includes individual citizens, royalty, religious groups, the state, and the global population in the case of biological terrorism (1999). Our point is that, for Laqueur, terrorism is presented as an objective source of insecurity for entities whose existence is taken for granted. The state is one of the taken for granted entities that can be threatened by terrorism. Thus, in much of this mainstream terrorism literature, the state cannot be an entity that is the source of terrorism.

Another example can be found in *Terrorism and Counterterrorism: Understanding the New Security Environment*.² Again, there is no discussion of methodology informing the text's collection of writings. Rather, the book reads as a prescription to the United States and its allies on how to respond to terrorists. The authors write: "terrorism, at its very roots, centers on fear and targets *our* liberal democratic values. The fear generated by terrorism speaks to *our* vulnerabilities and the government's apparent lack of ability to stop further attacks" (Howard and Sawyer 2006, xiii; italics added). As Howard and Sawyer present the scenario, the United States is an entity whose existence in the international system is taken for granted; it is threatened by essentially violent terrorists whose existence is also taken for granted. Both entities, in other words, are posited by the authors to exist independently of each other, one clearly a source of insecurity for the other.

Another often cited example is Hoffman's *Inside Terrorism*, selections of which are reprinted in the Howard and Sawyer text examined earlier. Here, again, methodological considerations and discussions are eschewed in favor of an implicit realism. Terrorism, while the meaning has historically varied, is presented by Hoffman as an objective substance with identifiable features. Terrorism "is

- ineluctably political in aims and motives;
- violent—or, equally important, threatens violence;
- designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target;
- conducted either by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia) or by individuals or a small collection of individuals directly influenced, motivated, or inspired by the ideological aims of example of some existent terrorist movement and/or its leaders; and
- perpetrated by a subnational group or nonstate entity (Hoffman 2006, 40).

In other words, in the same line of argument as Laqueur and Howard and Sawyer, Hoffman assumes and asserts the nature of terrorism as a source of insecurity in the international system and likewise he posits the existence of taken for granted entities (e.g., states) striving for security against such threats. As we argued earlier, this is the stereotypical structure

of knowledge of terrorism studies, which is composed of foundational assumptions that naturalize certain actors (usually states) and their insecurities.

How does this relate to the argument at hand? Insofar as our analysis of forty syllabi in terrorism related classes taught in U.S. universities indicate, methodological concerns and debate are deemphasized and a focus on particular methods of data analysis and data gathering are favored. This is a problem because it limits theoretical and methodological rigor and development. Moreover, we have illustrated with the examples above, at least among the most regularly used and frequently cited texts in terrorism related courses, the claim of state bias is empirically warranted. Jackson's research (2008), which Jones and Smith apparently missed in their search of the CTS literature, also supports the claim of a state bias in the terrorism studies literature. Jackson looked at "more than 100 mainstream academic books, articles in the main terrorism studies and international relations journals, conference papers presented at ISA and APSA, and reports and websites from think tanks and research institutions" (2008, 3). Jackson's aim was to "examine the ways in which state terrorism is represented—or not represented, which in itself is a kind of representation—as a subject in the field of terrorism studies" (2008, 3).

Further still, as we have argued earlier, the bias appears in the form of an unspoken working presumption that states and terrorists are objective features of the global political environment. This unspoken presumption is taught to students in classes around the United States.

Along similar lines, our review of syllabi covering the topic of terrorism showed that no self-identified critical terrorism scholar was assigned as a required text. In other words, we agree with Jones and Smith's claim that there is no orthodox terrorism studies, but more importantly we argue that a recurring set of texts that share certain methodological presuppositions play a significant role in defining how terrorism studies is taught in class rooms around the United States. Generally, the way the sub-discipline of terrorism studies is taught excludes those voices advocating a more critical perspective and presupposes the existence of taken for granted entities and their insecurities.

Critical: What Do You Mean?

The second major criticism Jones and Smith have of CTS scholars is their lack of clarity about the term "critical" in Critical Terrorism Studies. For Jones and Smith, the word "critical" is not only associated with CTS' unsubstantiated claims regarding a state bias, but "critical" is also closely connected with "emancipatory" and "normative." The close connection that Smith and Jones makes is understandable, we argue, because a number of CTS-oriented researchers draw the same connection. But, does critical and emancipatory necessarily go together?

We argue that (i) critical can mean a range of non-traditional ways of doing research and, therefore, it is (ii) important to explicitly specify the meaning of "critical" in regards to the specific work at hand. Not all critical work aims for emancipation or is normative. These two traits are most commonly associated with the Frankfurt School of Critical theory.

For the Frankfurt School, "critical" is essentially distinguished by three features. The first and most important distinguishing mark for our purposes in this article is their claim to be able to (i) identify agents' "true interests" and that those interests are therefore (ii) "inherently emancipatory" in that they "free agents from a kind of coercion" and frustration that is externally and personally imposed (Guess 1987, 1–2). The use of the word "critical" for much of CTS seems to be strongly influenced by the Frankfurt School.³ For example, Jackson writes, "in the tradition of Critical Theory, the core commitment of CTS is to a

broad conception of emancipation. . .” (2007, 249; see also McDonald 2009 and Egerton 2009).

While the Frankfurt School is certainly an important mode of doing CTS, we argue that it is *not* the only way to conduct a critical study of terrorism. There are other ways of understanding what critical work on terrorism entails. For example, discussing security studies more than a decade ago, Karin Fierke defined “critical” as:

... the analysis is not primarily critical because it includes a range of practices that in the past have been ignored. There is not necessarily anything critical about the mere descriptions of a change, even if it includes dissident voices. This volume is first and foremost critical because it makes us *look again, in a fresh way, at that which we assume about the world because it has become overly familiar*. In this way, new spaces are opened for thinking about the meaning of the past and the present and, therefore, how we construct the future. (Fierke 1998, 13; emphasis added)

Here, in Fierke’s definition of “critical,” it means drawing attention to how meanings are formulated, identities produced and actions legitimated. And specifically in relation to the problem of a critical study of terrorism, Fierke wrote:

While the term “Critical Security Studies” sometimes refers to a school of thought that draws on post-Marxist traditions, and to the Frankfurt School in particular, I use the term in the broader sense to include a range of approaches whose point of departure is a critique of traditional security studies. (Fierke 2005, 51 Fn1)

In other words, this re-understanding of critical does not automatically equate with a discussion of the ideological foundations of orthodox terrorism scholarship or the goal of emancipation. It also does not mean that, contrary to what Jones and Smith argue (2009, 299), all critical scholarship urges conversation as a means to total understanding.

Two points can thus be summed up. One: the meaning of “critical” for CTS is not fixed. It ranges from a narrower meaning closely connected to the Frankfurt School to a broader meaning that is explicitly disconnected from the Frankfurt School. Two: because of this variation, the use of “critical” should be clearly defined by all scholars of terrorism, whether they are self-identifying as a critical terrorism scholar or critiquing them.⁴

Whose Emancipation and Where’s the Explanation for CTS?

We agree with Jones and Smith that CTS’ stated goal of “emancipation” is problematic. However, we differ with Jones and Smith as to why emancipation is problematic. Smith and Jones write that CTS believes emancipation is the “normative end” to the critical theory process (2009, 298). Additionally, Jones and Smith claim that “Ultimately, to present the world how it ought to be rather than as it is conceals a deep intolerance notable in the contempt with which many of the contributors to the journal [*Critical Studies on Terrorism*] appear to hold Western politicians and the Western media” (2009, 299). While we disagree with Jones and Smith that a questioning stance toward terrorism automatically implies a hatred of “Western politicians and Western media,” our two arguments against emancipation are methodological matters. In our caution against emancipation, we draw

on a similar critique made by critical security scholars. For example, Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde argued:

we abstain from attempts to talk about what “real security” would be for people, what are “actual” security problems larger than those propagated by elites, and the like. To be able to talk about these issues, one has to make basically different ontological choices than ours and must define some emancipatory ideal. Such an approach is therefore complementary to ours; it can do what we voluntarily abstain from, and we can do what it is unable to: understand the mechanisms of securitization while keeping a distance from security—that is, not assuming that security is a good to be spread to ever more sectors. (1998, 35)

In regards to CTS, we concur with Buzan and colleagues. A CTS closely wedded to the Frankfurt School might well, for instance, talk about what counts as “real” terrorism and they may have emancipatory goals, but as we have argued here, not all variants of CTS go in that particular direction. Strictly speaking, the CTS that we advocate should not debate over what counts as “real” terror, terrorists, and terrorism and the goal should not be focused on some emancipatory ideal.

Moreover, we argue that a focus on emancipation as a goal is problematic because emancipation ignores *whose* emancipation “we” should be concerned about. To put it a bit more sharply, with emancipation as an overarching goal, CTS would be disregarding concerns of perspective and context.⁵ Emancipation in relation to terrorism would expectedly have meanings that varied, perhaps radically, from the Western Europe/North America/Australia based scholars that advocate such an approach; a point that brings our discussion back to the value of more consistently interpretivist and constructivist approaches that focus on particular contexts and social understandings of terrorism. As such, the explanation of terrorism we call for does not lead to emancipation but to clarification of the stakes involved when social actors—whether individuals, communities or states—start using the language of terrorism in their everyday lives.

It was Clifford Geertz (1973) who wrote that our job is to have conversations with other people elsewhere and to clarify the stories they tell about their lives and activities. This is usually labeled “understanding” in the social sciences (including political science) and contrasted with “explanation,” which is taken to mean variables-based linear causality.⁶ However, we argue that linear causality and the task Geertz proposes are both different *types* of explanation. Thus, our call here is for CTS to provide explanation of terror, terrorists, and terrorism. This entails the (i) explanation of the constitutive effects of terrorism and how the category⁷ makes certain modes of action possible, even likely, while foreclosing other responses; (ii) and the explanation of how the category of terrorism can have causal effects insofar “they participate in a socially significant process of negotiating and (re)drawing boundaries” between self and other (Jackson 2006, 41; Wendt 1998). In other words, our concern is about how terrorism is implicit in legitimating certain actions and constituting particular identities of “terrorist” and, on a related note, “not-terrorist.”

To help illustrate the differences between the approach to “explanation” in CTS advocated here and other models, we draw from Alexander Wendt. He argued that variables-based approaches maintained two key assumptions that “reflect the central objective of causal stories, which is to explain changes in the state of some variable or system” (Wendt 1998, 105) As these assumptions relate to terrorism studies, they might look like this: variable based approaches to terrorism (i) assume that terrorists and terrorist attacks (the independent variable) exist independent of their consequences (e.g., change in voting

behavior) and they (ii) assume that X temporally precedes Y (e.g., Berrebi and Klor 2008). Constructivist explanations, Wendt argues, violate these two assumptions because constitutive theories have fundamentally different objectives than causal explanations and theories, “which is to account for the properties of things by reference to the structures in virtue of which they exist” and not to explain change between variables (1998, 105). As a result, “the ‘independent variable/dependent variable’ language that characterizes causal inquires makes no sense, or at least must be interpreted very differently” (Wendt 1998, 106).

Instead of looking at variables, we advocate a focus on causal mechanisms as tools for explanations. Social mechanisms work within a different definition of causality⁸ rather than at the conventional linear variables-based approach that is common in much of social science, including terrorism studies. Mechanisms are used by researchers to explain both constitution and causation (e.g., Tilly 2005; Gubrium and Holstein 1997).⁹ We argue that the assumptions of constitutive explanations preclude *specific* understandings of causation, like variables-based approaches that focus on systematic cross case correlation, but it should not be seen to preclude *all* modes of causal explanation. Our point is that Wendt’s claim is too broad in scope. It downplays the empirically observable practices that occur in everyday contexts in favor of referring to preexisting structures. If the focus of analysis shifted away from already existing structures and shifted toward the “*continual maintenance*” (Jackson 2004, 282) of those structures in the course of daily life, then the relationship between constitutive and causal explanation could be seen in a different light. In this new light, constitutive and causal explanations are *not* fundamentally different. Indeed, both are used within the context of studying terrorism.¹⁰

To sum up, the research program we call for here is not about emancipation or the normative goals of CTS but about furthering research into a processes and mechanisms-based explanation to terrorism. We believe this provides a way to get beyond Jones and Smith’s criticism that there is excessive relativism and an anti-Western sensibility in current CTS research.

Relativism, Objectivism, and Contextualism

Jones and Smith are also critical of CTS for being, in their view, relativist. They write that CTS researchers appeal to “relativism and the bizarre ethicism it engenders” in their attempts to “empathize with the terrorist other,” which is a “histrionic” effort (Smith and Jones 2010, 298). They add that CTS is filled with “anti-Western self-loathing” (Jones and Smith 2010, 293) and say that “both Islamist and critical theorists share an analogous contempt for Western democracy” (Smith and Jones 2010, 298).

On one hand, Jones and Smith use the word “relativism” as a rhetorical flourish in their effort to condemn and de-legitimate certain approaches to the study of terrorism. Their concern is not with the usefulness or empirical payout of such approaches, only that relativism undermines their legitimacy. As a pointed matter, however, researchers like Jonathan Potter, who does not examine terrorism, have nevertheless developed and extended empirically rich research in support of relativism (2000).¹¹ Our basic point is that Jones and Smith should look more closely at relativist research more generally and in regards to terrorism in particular before they offer facile criticisms that avoid the important theoretical and methodological issues at stake in the CTS debate.

On the other hand and in broader conceptual terms, we are critical of the relativist/foundational dualism assumed by Jones and Smith. What Jones and Smith decry as relativist, we argue is the opposite. It can be considered as attention to context and situations that

we are calling for. Along with Bent Flyvbjerg, we argue that “the polarity relativism-foundationalism is just another artificial dualism that makes it easy to think but hard to understand” (Flyvbjerg 2002, 99) the issue of terrorism. How, then, do we get around this issue? The relativist-foundational dualism can be overcome, Flyvbjerg says, by going the route of Foucault who replaced the dichotomy with “situational ethics, that is, by context” (2002, 99). Against the commonplace understanding of relativism as meaning “without norms” or where “anything goes,” Flyvbjerg argues that Foucault’s contextualism depended on the effective limits of the present and the circumstantially available norms rooted in historical and personal contexts. In short, “humans cannot think or do just anything at any time” (Flyvbjerg 2002, 99–100). The limits to what can be thought, said, and done are practically sustained within and through social norms. Or as Flyvbjerg put it:

For Foucault the socially and historically conditioned context, and not fictive universals, constitutes the most effective bulwark against relativism and nihilism, and the best basis for action. Our sociality and history, according to Foucault, is the only foundation we have, the only solid ground under our feet. And this socio-historical foundation is fully adequate. (Flyvbjerg 2002, 101)

So, against universal emancipatory aims championed by CTS scholars wedded to the Frankfurt School and against the relativism Jones and Smith fear, we advance a CTS that is especially sensitive to particular contexts. We advocate focusing on the cultural resources available within particular contexts and their histories, possibilities, and limitations, and how terrorism relates to these unfolding processes. In other words, our aim is to move CTS toward a *practice* oriented approach to terrorism that is both nonessentialist and productive of philosophically rigorous and systematic social knowledge.

Terrorism as Practice

Our final call for CTS is to study terrorism as practice. Jones and Smith write that terrorism is an “abstract noun” (Jones and Smith, 300). More precisely, they critically say:

Interestingly, the specter haunting both conventional and critical terrorism studies is that both assume that terrorism is an existential phenomenon, and thus has causes and solutions. . . For a strategic theorist the notion of terrorism does not exist as an independent phenomenon. It is an abstract noun. More precisely, it is merely a tactic—the creation of fear for political ends—that can be employed by any social actor, be it state or non-state, in any context, without any necessary moral value being involved. (2009, 300)

On one hand, we agree with Jones and Smith’s assessment that there is a predominant assumption among both conventional and CTS researchers that terrorism is an independently existing phenomenon. Granted, re-conceptualizing terrorism as a tactic is a step toward a more reflexive position regarding terrorism.¹² Charles Tilly (2004, 2005) and Richard Jackson (2007) have already made similar arguments toward re-conceptualizing terrorism as a tactic and/or strategy. But we disagree with where Jones and Smith take their argument. This is because re-conceptualizing terrorism as a strategy (e.g., Tilly 2005) or a tactic (Jones and Smith 2009) still maintains that “terrorism” is an objectively existing phenomenon.

This is why we explicitly call for a methodologically rigorous study for CTS. Instead of looking at terrorism as a tactic or a strategy (Jones and Smith 2009; Tilly 2005), we advocate

a research program that studies terrorism as practice. By doing so, the focus would shift to how the discourse and/or symbol of terrorism is used by states, individuals, communities, or by researchers to produce and stabilize certain identities and policy courses.

A research program focusing on the practice of terrorism also limits the possibility of reifying terrorism by explicitly keeping separate the analytical models we use to study terrorism from how our research participants orient their behaviors towards “terrorism.” In particular, the distinction is drawn from nationalism scholar Rogers Brubaker and we argue that it would be a useful step for CTS scholars (and terrorism scholars more generally) to take in clarifying their methodological stance. Brubaker emphasized that researchers maintain a working distinction between the ideal typical *categories of analysis* that he uses to systematically study the social world and the *categories of practice* that the subjects’ of his study use to politically engage other communities (2005, 15). He indicated that this distinction prevents students of nationalism from taking the “conception inherent in the *practice* of nationalism and in the workings of the modern state and state-system—namely the realist, reifying conception of nations as real communities—and . . . mak[ing it] . . . central to the *theory* of nationalism” (Brubaker 2005, 15). Taking into methodological account this distinction, we argue, would equally benefit students of terrorism studies. It limits researchers from reifying terrorism or strategies of terrorism as real things existing independently in the world and would enable analysts to “*account* for this social process of reification,” which is when terrorism becomes “momentarily yet powerfully” embodied in practice (paraphrasing Brubaker 2005, 16). In other words, our role as researchers should be to examine situations where terrorism is articulated and the actions and identities thus legitimated.

To conclude then, we call for a five-pronged research agenda for CTS: (i) de-naturalizing the state and its practices relating to those considered “terrorist,” (ii) a clear specification of methodological commitments, including what is meant by “critical,” (iii) a deemphasizing of “emancipation” as a goal and a focus on social mechanisms-based configurational analysis, (iv) a sensitivity to context when studying terrorism, and (v) the study of terrorism as practice, thus avoiding reifying a dominant understanding of “terrorism.”

Notes

1. Here, we are arguing that “ontology” means the *presumption* made by the researcher about her or his relationship to the object of study. “Epistemology” means the way of knowing logically entailed by the starting ontological stance.

2. This book (or sections from it) was assigned reading for more than half of the syllabi we examined for 2007–2009 courses on political violence/terrorism. The syllabi were all from U.S.-based academic institutions and available online.

3. For instance, recently Jonathan Joseph argued against the influence of Robert Cox, neo-Gramscians, post-structural, and constructivist CTS scholars (e.g., Gunning 2007 and Jackson 2005, 2007) who are moving the project toward a discursive ontology. Joseph supports a classically critical CTS that draws from Marx, Adorno, Horkheimer, and the critical discourse analysis of Norman Fairclough who focused on both the texts that generate meaning and the “non-semiotic features of social structure” that constrain discourse (2009, 94–95 & 97). While Joseph identifies Robert Cox as moving too far in the intersubjective direction, from the perspective of a completely constructivist perspective we argue for, Cox and Joseph are both ontological dualists.

4. For a review of the classification of the various schools of critical security studies, see Wæver (2004), c.a.s.e Collective (2006), and Krause and Williams (1997). In terrorism studies, such classification does not exist as all “critical” scholarship is assumed to work similar presuppositions, including emancipation and “relativist pall” (Jones and Smith 2009).

5. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson (2008) argues that all social science speaks from an ontologically distinct perspective that makes certain presuppositions. There is no presuppositionless social science, in other words.

6. This point was also raised by Alexander Wendt who argued that explaining and understanding are both kinds of explanations.

7. Here, our understanding is that terrorism is a symbolic category that entities—individuals, states, communities—use in the process of constituting their and others' identities.

8. For more on non-variables-based or "configurational" causality, see Jackson (2006)

9. Tilly outlines both constitutional and causal mechanisms in chapter 9. Similarly, Gubrium and Holstein note that ethnomethodologists appeal to conversational mechanisms to explain how interactions, selves, and situations are reflexively constructed on the spot.

10. Their relationship is more complex and dynamic, to be sure, as Jackson indicates by creatively rereading Wendt's interpretation of Hegel's master-slave example: "*Masters* do not cause slaves, and vice versa, but *the master-slave relationship* is causally involved in the processes which maintain both 'masters' and 'slaves,' as it is referenced by the people involved in maintaining the social institution" (Jackson 2004, 282). Jackson directly critiques Wendt's reading of the master-slave relationship, which goes like this: "masters and slaves are caused by the contingent interactions of human beings; they are constituted by the social structure known as slavery" (1999, 25).

11. For a longer discussion of "relativism," see Edwards, Ashmore, and Potter, (1995), 25–49; Reprinted as Derek Edwards, Malcolm Ashmore, and Jonathan Potter, "Death and Furniture: Arguments Against Relativism," in Mary Gergen and Kenneth Gergen, eds., *Social Construction: A Reader* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2003), 231–236.

12. By reflexivity, we mean the act of turning back on oneself, of reflecting on oneself (Davies 2008, 4) and, in more comprehensive instances, of reflecting on one's tools of analysis and how they are implicated in socially constructing a particular reality (Pollner 1991; Jackson 2008).

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