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Toward a Completely Constructivist Critical Terrorism Studies

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Abstract

This paper uses Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's monism/dualism distinction to clarify ongoing methodological debates among students of critical terrorism studies (CTS). We map the distinction onto the CTS literature and emphasize the distinctive ontological starting points and the distinctive epistemological frameworks entailed by each perspective. Then we critically engage monistic, or interpretivist, CTS research, especially that of Richard Jackson. We argue for a more methodologically explicit and logically consistent interpretivist CTS and we suggest three important steps that researchers can take to achieve this aim: (i) take an explicit ontological stance; (ii) embrace reflexivity; (iii) conceptualize terrorism as a meaning-making practice.

Keywords

constructivism, critical terrorism studies, interpretivism, methodology, terrorism

Introduction

In the past few years, an increasing number of terrorism scholars have moved away from conventional terrorism scholarship's emphasis on problem-solving theory to a focus on critical scholarship. Terrorism scholarship's focus on problem-solving had meant research on terrorism was seen as outside of theoretical reflection in the discipline of international relations (IR). Previously, terrorism was studied within other related fields such as conflict resolution, strategic studies, military studies or criminology, which are

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commonly seen as having a problem-solving orientation to their topic of study.¹ Indeed, IR scholars studying political violence from a critical perspective mostly ignored terrorism as a topic of study and left it to these subfields. Thus, terrorism studies' place in IR was marginalized, an aspect that has now become exemplified in terms of the debates that are ongoing in the subfield of security studies, among conventional security scholars and critical scholars (such as the Copenhagen, Paris and Aberystwyth Schools' respective critiques of conventional security scholarship) have been missing in discussions regarding *how* to study terrorism.²

This has recently changed with the rise in critical scholarship which aims to question the conventional understandings of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Many of the criticisms have commented on some of the methodological drawbacks of conventional terrorism studies. Those utilizing the critical terrorism studies (CTS) perspective argue that conventional terrorism scholarship takes for granted the object of study (terrorism), is unreflexive about the effects of portraying particular groups of people as 'terrorist', ignores the role of the state as a producer of violence, and is uncommitted to social emancipation. CTS, therefore, claims to rectify these issues; as such, its 'core commitments' critique prevailing methods of knowledge production and voice a commitment to reflexivity and 'methodological and disciplinary pluralism'.³

While these are all commendable aims, we argue that the 'core commitments' are inconsistently followed by many CTS scholars. Our sympathies are with the more critically oriented scholarship of terrorism studies and we would like to advance its goals. We argue this is possible through a clear focus on methodology, an action that is lacking in much of CTS. In this article, we attempt two main undertakings: (1) we ask CTS scholars to be clearer about their ontological standpoints prior to research. We argue that this will be a more fruitful way of dialoguing with the mainstream (or 'conventional') terrorism scholars, if such is the aim of some CTS scholars.⁴ (2) While we support CTS' goals in general, we are more sympathetic to the interpretive monist standpoint, by which we mean an ontology wherein the researcher is seen as part of the world she researches. With this goal, we propose a completely socially constructivist approach to the study of terrorism. We conclude the paper by drawing attention to three ways in which this interpretive monist standpoint can be methodologically strengthened.

Posing the problem

What is the central problem for CTS at this juncture? The answer, we argue, is methodological. While matters of methodology are increasingly discussed by students of CTS, like other approaches to the study of politics in regards to the interpretivist turn more generally, terrorism continues to be critically studied with methods of data access and data analysis that are not rooted in an explicit discussion of the logical commitments informing their application in writing and research.⁵ Another way to phrase the dilemma is like this: no commitments, no starting points; no starting points, no logically consistent perspective. All approaches to the critical study of terrorism make certain commitments, yet few studies are explicit about the methodological standpoints and payouts of these commitments and what they logically entail for the study of terrorism. Serious methodological reflection and debate is therefore warranted.

By methodology, here, we mean an explicit discussion of the ‘ontological and epistemological presuppositions undergirding the initial shaping of the research question’.⁶ In particular, we draw from Patrick Thaddeus Jackson’s useful distinction between *dualist* and *monist* ontological presuppositions.⁷ We use the distinction to clarify the current CTS debate regarding the relationship between the researcher and the object of study and to clarify the epistemological status of social scientific findings. It is an exercise that will, first, strengthen the logical rigor of the research produced by CTS researchers, especially interpretivist researchers, and, second, encourage a more robust debate regarding important theoretical issues that are often overlooked.⁸

Below, we outline two logically distinct ontological starting points – a monist perspective and a dualist perspective – and then we map that distinction onto the CTS literature.⁹ In particular, we use Richard Jackson’s interpretivist-based research and writing as an illustrative example of a monist ontological perspective at work. We draw upon his work because he is a prominently cited author and one of the editors of a CTS book series and a journal on critical terrorism studies. We use Jonathan Joseph as an illustrative example of a philosophically dualist perspective at work. In the second subsection, we use the concept of *ontological gerrymandering*, which is the use of explanations in a way that sequesters some aspects of constructivist analysis, to critique Richard Jackson’s research. Even while he asserts that terrorism is a social fact and not a brute fact, we argue that he ends up treating terrorists and terrorism inconsistently as both a social *and* a brute fact. This inconsistent shifting is a consequence of an ambiguously defined ontological stance, which we hope to remedy with the use of the distinction between monism and dualism.

Two ontologies of CTS

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson offers a useful way of framing the current methodological debate about philosophical ontology. Our approach contrasts with that of the critical realists’ use of ‘ontology’, which is generally used to mean the object of critique or investigation. In our view, ‘ontology’ consists of the logically prior presuppositions that support or make possible that (or any other) particular methodological perspective. Following Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, we propose two ontological positions – dualist and monist. As the philosophical dualist perspective, we are conceptualizing the presupposition that enables one to argue that there are in fact entities, like terrorism, which exist independently or outside of interpretive practices.¹⁰ Conversely, we are conceptualizing the presupposition that enables one to argue that terrorism is not an entity existing independently of human interpretive practice but, rather, a social construction sustained by communities of people: this is the monistic ontological perspective at work. These are two logically distinct and consistent ontological starting points open to CTS researchers. Below, these ontological perspectives are sketched out and related to the CTS literature.

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson says that dualism can be seen as the ontological ‘position that the world is composed ... of two orders of being’. On one hand there are ‘things’: these are the basic ‘objects of investigation’ by social scientists; on the other hand, there are ‘thoughts’ and ‘representations of these things’ held by the researcher or group of social scientists. As Jackson puts it, the underlying ‘presupposition of dualism is a kind

of gulf or radical separation between the world and knowledge of the world'.¹¹ In short, from the dualistic ontological perspective, people and their mental models are presumed to be more or less in and out of contact with objective states of affairs existing independently of them.

From a dualist standpoint, because observers presume a separation between their ideas and the world, a conversation regarding how the world 'really is' ensues.¹² Epistemologically, in other words, an ontological dualism presumes a conception of truth that renders knowledge a matter of correspondence between mental pictures and states of affairs in the world.¹³ Mind-world dualism calls forth a picture 'of a mind seeking to get in touch with a reality outside itself', to borrow from Richard Rorty.¹⁴ One prized result of this attempt to establish correspondence are the various methods of hypothesis testing, which presume an ontological dualism, or a mind-independent world against which a hypothesis can be compared, tested and gradually refined to mirror the state of affairs it purports to describe and explain. Critical realist approaches presuppose a dualistic ontology also. As will be discussed below, Jonathan Joseph offers a clear critical realist perspective on CTS. Instead of testing hypotheses, however, critical realist researchers focus on accurately describing the reality of terrorism as objectively existing social relations that interact with discourses. Speaking explicitly about that methodological presupposition would make this particular stream of CTS research more robust and would help sharpen the theoretical debate.

The second logically distinct ontological position is monism. Rather than presuming a gap between the observer and the observed, an approach informed by a monistic ontology 'dissolves the contrast between "reality" and "knowledge of reality"'.¹⁵ The monist presumption allows us to put aside the familiar distinction between appearance and reality, between subject and object, between mental and environmental contributions to knowledge, and between individuals and independently existing states of affairs, which helps put aside the correspondence theory of truth.¹⁶ In other words, a monist ontological perspective argues that 'at the most basic *logical* level it is quite impossible to disentangle that world [of things] from the practical knowledge activities that we use in constituting and studying it. *All* knowledge is therefore ideal-typical.'¹⁷ Language use is important here, as there 'is no way to think about either the world or our purposes except by using our language. One can use language to criticize and enlarge itself, as one can exercise one's body to develop and strengthen and enlarge it, but one cannot see language-as-a-whole in relation to something else to which it applies'.¹⁸ In other words, from a monistic perspective, people are seen as animals 'suspended in webs of significance' that they themselves have spun, as Clifford Geertz might say, and/or 'as nodes' in a 'causal network which binds' them 'together with' their 'environment', as Rorty might say.¹⁹

Epistemologically, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson says that in contrast to dualism, monism does *not* give rise to knowledge-making practices that focus on 'accurately reflecting the world's essential dispositional character'.²⁰ The aim is neither to test hypotheses nor to describe objectively existing social relations. This is not simply positivism with a pinch of post-positivism, as some have objected.²¹ Rather, as Patrick Thaddeus Jackson puts it, a monist perspective

ensures that scholarship is less about a presumptive effort to grasp an externally existing world, and more about a disciplined effort to envision what the world would look like if explained and understood according to some ideal-typically elaborated set of value-commitments.²²

These ideal-typical 'models or depictions' are grounded in the concrete experiences and situations of the analyst who 'is in no way completely divorced from the general situation' in which she presently operates.²³ Thus, a completely constructivist perspective emphasizes reflexivity, which we discuss further in a moment. But, in general, this entails an increased focus on the role of the researcher in producing the data accessed in the study of terrorism and an increased emphasis on the status of the categories used to study terrorism. The critical enterprise of a completely constructivist approach, instead of trying to emancipate the oppressed or accurately capture the reality of terrorism, can thus be seen as a process of 'refining' tools of analysis and using them to investigate and explain present-day and historical empirical situations. Scholarship, therefore, is a 'form of critical tool-making'.²⁴

How does Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's dualism/monism ontological distinction relate to CTS? As has been suggested above, there is a considerable amount of disagreement among CTS scholars on basic ontological and epistemological issues. Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's distinction helps clarify the debates and mark out the attendant analytical positions. To be clear, while this paper is primarily aimed at sharpening the monist and *interpretivist* side of the CTS debate, this distinction is useful for understanding the CTS literature more generally. In this subsection, we do not argue for or against a monist or dualist ontology. Rather, at base, we argue for a clarified and more explicit discussion of the hookup between observers and observed. We ask for a clarification of whether the researcher is operating within a monist or dualist standpoint. We argue that the monist–dualist distinction helps in this regard because it enables researchers to envision a division of labor with distinctive empirical pay-offs. It opens the door for a more rigorous 'big tent' approach to CTS as opposed to declaring 'one way is the only way'.²⁵ With an explicit discussion of the philosophical ontology presumed by the particular approach, researchers like Doug Stokes can more rigorously examine how political and economic structures interact with ideational factors and, at the same time, researchers like Richard Jackson can more rigorously examine how the language of the 'war on terrorism' mutually constitutes violent security policies. The monist/dualist distinction opens up space for *both* approaches to go about systematically and critically studying terrorism without conflating two distinct philosophical ontologies with each other.

In terms of dualism, Jonathan Joseph has recently called for CTS to adopt an explicitly 'philosophical realist' ontological stance in regards to terrorism. On this view, the emphasis would be on 'ontology over epistemology and [he] takes this ontology to be objective rather than intersubjective'.²⁶ By objective he means that 'social relations [can be seen] as real things "out there" that are open to investigation through the right kind of social scientific practice'.²⁷ In assessing CTS, Joseph supports a 'critique of the extra-discursive realm' that 'intersects with [the terrorism discourse]'. His goal is to get at 'the real structure of power and oppression that have an objective basis and that give meaning to the discourse just as the discourse might give meaning to them'.²⁸ In making the strong case for an ontology composed of both discursive *and* material elements and an epistemology seeking to bridge this gap by explaining what terrorism really is, Joseph offers an exemplary illustration of a dualist ontological presupposition at work.

While Joseph is illustrative of the dualist ontology at work, Richard Jackson has been steadily working to develop and clarify the methodological stance of the CTS project over the past few years. In contrast to Joseph's dualist ontology, Richard Jackson offers an alternative perspective that analyzes the language and practice of the war on terrorism and how 'they co-constitute the reality of counter-terrorism'.²⁹ For Richard Jackson,

the language of the 'war on terrorism' is not simply an objective or neutral reflection of reality; nor is it merely accidental or incidental ... Rather, it is a deliberately and meticulously composed set of words, assumptions, metaphors, grammatical forms, myths and forms of knowledge – it is a carefully constructed *discourse* – that is designed to achieve a number of key political goals: to normalize and legitimize the current counter-terrorist approach; to empower the authorities and shield them from criticism; to discipline domestic society by marginalizing dissent or protest; and to enforce national unity by reifying a narrow conception of national identity.³⁰

In contrast to Joseph who argues that 'adopting an interpretivist anti-objectivism ... is an undermining of the critical theory project' because it says nothing about *anything* in particular, Richard Jackson takes an 'interpretive logic rather than a causal logic' to critique the discourse of 'Islamic terrorism' that has developed since 11 September 2001.³¹ His critical aim is to 'describe and dissect its central terms, assumptions, labels, narratives and genealogical roots, and to reflect on the political and normative consequences of the language and knowledge production of "Islamic terrorism"', which Jackson concludes is not a discursively useful way of limiting subaltern violence.³² In short, then, in claiming that the language and practice of counter-terrorism is mutually constitutive, and by interpreting linguistic representations and their political consequences, Richard Jackson offers an exemplary illustration of a monist ontology at work.

So far, our argument here is that CTS can usefully be seen to be composed of two different ontological perspectives: dualism and monism. These two perspectives have been briefly sketched out above and mapped onto the CTS literature. This distinction between dualism and monism helps clarify the horizon of ontological possibilities available to CTS researchers, sharpens the theoretical debate, and opens the door for a bigger 'tent' of different and more rigorous research programs. The following section of this paper will further expand upon Richard Jackson's work. It is our argument that while he advocates an interpretivist approach in his methodological discussion, he persists in shifting between an interpretivist and objectivist ontological perspective. This methodological ambiguity creates confusion regarding the object of study (terrorism), the researcher's relation to the object of study, and how to study terrorism as a completely social construct. Using the concept of 'ontological gerrymandering', this following section critically evaluates Richard Jackson's work.³³ While the issue of ontological gerrymandering is not limited to his work alone, he remains one of the main proponents of an interpretivist CTS and is therefore a significant focus for critique.

Constructivist CTS and the problem of ontological gerrymandering

Ontological gerrymandering means the 'way that explanations are used in the social constructivist research on social problems'; specifically, researchers sequester some part

of the argument from constructivist analysis, which undermines their claims to have produced methodologically rigorous knowledge.³⁴ Despite his stated commitments to an interpretivist approach, Richard Jackson's work has become entangled with dualism. This entanglement undermines the constructivist logic and reproduces a reification of terrorism as a specific type of violence. In particular, his writings seem to protect the seeming *reality* of strategies of terrorism from constructivist analysis.

The problem is that Richard Jackson does not offer a clear discussion of the presumptions underlying his interpretivist perspective: namely, he does not clarify the relationship between the observer and the observed that is presumed by his approach. All research makes some basic working presumptions regarding the relationship between observers and observed. We advocate that CTS researchers be more explicit about this presupposition because it sharpens debate, enables clearer discussions across disciplinary boundaries, and because the 'Enlightenment dream of a presuppositionless social science that can aspire to transcendental truth is philosophically unsustainable'.³⁵ The point is that the ambiguity engendered by not explicitly discussing the relationship between the observer and the observed is an invitation for problems with logical rigor, clarity and the development of theoretical debate. Richard Jackson's writing is a particular instantiation of a widespread problem made possible by the general lack of methodological reflection and focused debate in the CTS literature, especially when it comes to matters relating to philosophical ontology. As we have argued above, the dualist/monist ontological distinction that we borrowed from Patrick Thaddeus Jackson can be used to clarify the ontological presuppositions of CTS.

In terms of ontological gerrymandering, Richard Jackson appears to conceptualize terrorism as *both* a real strategy implemented by state and/or non-state actors and a socially created category of actors and actions that relate to the construction of meaning, knowledge and identity. This is problematic because, following along the lines of Patrick Thaddeus Jackson's critique of identity research in IR, the study of meaning and identity in terrorism studies often suffers from reification. This reification poses 'severe theoretical difficulties' that undermine 'much of the "knowledge" produced by such work'.³⁶ The key to treating terrorists and terrorism as completely social constructs entails a methodology that preserves the socially constructed character of terrorists and terrorism 'even while using this as a basis from which to generate knowledge'.³⁷ This is something that Richard Jackson's writings, despite his commitment to a constructivist approach as identified earlier, do not do completely.

Take Richard Jackson's seminal book, *Writing the War on Terrorism*. On one hand, he argues that 'the public language of the "war on terrorism"' has been instrumentally used by the Bush administration to construct 'a whole new world for its citizens', 'where terrorism threatens to destroy everything that ordinary people hold dear – their lives, their democracy, their freedom, their way of life, their civilization'.³⁸ The danger of terrorism and the war on terrorism, as Richard Jackson presents it here, is a 'rhetorically constructed reality, or discourse'.³⁹

However, the discursive character of terrorists and terrorism that Richard Jackson gestures toward fades in and out in clarity as the reader continues. Terrorists and terrorism are reified into objectively knowable strategies that exist outside the interpretive practices of people. In particular, Richard Jackson makes multiple claims that suggest

that terrorists are individuals that exist in some form of objective reality and that terrorism inheres in certain kinds of specifiable behaviors and in certain kinds of moral substances that exist apart from the discursively constructed reality created by the community. Richard Jackson says that 'the threat of political violence in all its forms – terrorism, counter-terrorism, war, insurgency, revolution, ethnic cleansing – is real and pervasive'. He says that terrorism has a 'nature', which consists of 'the reasons why people are willing to kill themselves and others in pursuit of political goals'. He argues that terrorism inheres in certain kinds of state actions, like 'abuse of suspects and prisoners', which poses a 'moral hazard' that 'we will end up worse off than when we started', even 'becoming terrorists ourselves'.⁴⁰ As Richard Jackson sees it,

the launch of a global 'war on terrorism' has played directly into the hands of the terrorists by giving them the recognition and attention they so desperately sought; it dignifies their struggle (they are fighting a 'war' against a superpower), rewards their persistence (despite being only a small group of individuals, they have indelibly altered the world's most powerful countries and the conduct of international relations) and therefore encourages them to continue with similar actions.⁴¹

And he says that US policies in Iraq and Afghanistan 'have created a whole new generation of terrorists and made terrorism an even greater international problem by scattering terrorist networks across many more countries'.⁴² In short, the argument here is that Richard Jackson's discursive-oriented approach unintentionally, but problematically, reifies terrorists and terrorism as objective features of the environment. The ontological gerrymandering protects this description of terrorism from the constructivist logic and allows him to slip back into a dualistic mode of representing terrorism as an independently existing entity that is objectively recognizable in certain actions and behaviors of state and non-state actors.

This ambiguity comes through even clearer in Richard Jackson's article, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', which was part of a symposium on the topic of critically studying the problem of terrorism.⁴³ Again, while the article offers strong and warranted criticism of the conventional study of terrorism, it also illustrates well the point being made here about ontological gerrymandering. On one hand, Richard Jackson says that 'Terrorism is fundamentally a social fact rather than a brute fact; while extreme physical violence is experienced as a brute fact, its wider cultural-political meaning is decided by social agreement and intersubjective practices.'⁴⁴ On the other hand, a few sentences later, he writes in terms that suggest terrorism is a real mode of action that a variety of actors can undertake:

[CTS] views terrorism fundamentally as a strategy or tactic of political violence that can be, and frequently is employed by both state and non-state actors and during times of war and peace. As Charles Tilly puts it, terrorists range across a wide spectrum of organizations, circumstances and beliefs. Terrorism is not a single causally coherent phenomenon.⁴⁵

As Richard Jackson indicates to the reader in citing Charles Tilly, in this view, terrorism is a real, violent strategy that can be observed, understood and explained by an independent observer drawing on specialized methods of analysis.⁴⁶ Such ambiguous writing practices, which shift between a dualistic and monistic ontological stance, are persistent problems for CTS scholars, especially interpretivist-based researchers.

Along similar lines as the critique presented here, Rainer Hulsse and Alexander Spencer have argued that even though Richard Jackson and other CTS scholars seem to agree that terrorism is a discursive construct, they nevertheless treat militant actors and their 'self representations' as if they were brute facts beyond interpretation.⁴⁷ The point that Hulsse and Spencer are making is that there is a lack of clarity on an important ontological matter: what precisely is the relationship between the observer and the observed for CTS? What is the role of the researcher when studying terrorism? Richard Jackson and other CTS researchers can and should be clearer and more consistent on this point. In this sense, then, constructivist-oriented CTS research is often *less* constructivist than one might expect. CTS researchers attempt to question and critique conventional wisdom regarding terrorism, while at the same time they continue to mobilize definitions of terrorism that claim to more accurately capture some state of affairs existing independently of the researcher.

To sum up, we have argued that the ontological gerrymandering noted in Richard Jackson's research regarding the presumed relationship between the observer and the observed is a source of concern. Along with Joseph, we call for CTS researchers to explicitly clarify their ontological stance.⁴⁸ Is the danger of terrorism a completely social, *ideal-typical category* used by researchers, policymakers, citizens, media sources and militants, or, alternatively, is terrorism ultimately a special kind of *real* violence perpetrated by states and certain groups of people living under 'conditions which breed hopelessness and the resort to terror'?⁴⁹ Richard Jackson seems to suggest that the answer is *both*, which is problematic for an interpretivist approach because it contradicts more rigorous constructivist logic and therefore undermines the validity of the claim to have produced knowledge. In the following subsections, we present three ways in which Richard Jackson's (and similar) CTS works can benefit if they were to fully adopt an interpretivist monist standpoint.

Toward a completely constructivist CTS

How can CTS researchers remedy this methodological ambiguity? Elaborating further on some earlier suggestions Jacob L. Stump made, we argue that three methodological moves would be greatly beneficial to CTS scholarship: (i) to make one's ontological stance explicit and clear by specifying the relationship between the observer and observed; (ii) to explicitly embrace the reflexive implications of a completely constructivist ontology; and (iii) to explicitly conceptualize terror, terrorists and terrorism as categories (categories of analysis and categories of political and social practice).⁵⁰ Overall, we call for interpretive CTS scholars to be more philosophically grounded, explicit and reflexive about that grounding, and to adopt a practice-oriented approach to the study of terrorism. We advocate completely constructivist terrorism studies where the focus is shifted away from what terrorism is to a focus on *how social actors use the category of 'terrorism' to make sense of and act during unfolding events*.

(i) Take an explicit ontological stance

One way to help limit the problem of ontological gerrymandering sketched out above is to be more explicit about the ontological stance taken by the researcher in the methodological methods discussion of their research. This is a useful move for researchers to take more generally because authors are increasingly writing across multiple scholarly

communities where there is little agreement regarding procedural norms; plus, transparency sharpens the engagement with methodological dualists over issues of objectivity, improves theorizing about researcher positionality and its impact on accessing, generating and analyzing data, and it cultivates interdisciplinary work and makes space for challenging present-day disciplinary boundaries.⁵¹ Therefore, we strongly recommend that CTS scholars move toward an increased methodological explicitness.

The basic question CTS researchers should ask is: what is the relationship that one presumes between oneself and the phenomenon that one happens to be studying? Interpretivist researchers should stop defining terror, terrorists and terrorism as discursive creations and then treating them as if they were objective features of the social environment independent of the writer/observer. Instead of defining terrorism as 'a tool employed at specific times, for specific periods of time, by specific actors and for specific political goals', which is a definition that implies terrorism is a real thing in the world, researchers should embrace a more explicitly analytical conceptualization of terror, terrorists and terrorism as ideal-typical *categories* or *symbolic artifacts*.⁵² These are tools of analysis used by the researcher to systematically examine some unfolding situation and they make no claim to accurately capture independently existing entities. As Stump put it elsewhere, it is important for interpretive CTS scholars to keep in mind the distinction between available cultural *resources* (e.g. the discourse or symbol of terrorism) and the *topics* of their analysis (e.g. the *social construction* of terrorism).⁵³ Explicitly marking out an ontological stance is one way that CTS researchers can maintain that distinction and not reify the object of their studies.

(ii) *Embrace reflexivity*

A completely constructivist researcher should further embrace the implications of reflexivity. This is defined as a turning back on oneself or 'a process of self reference'.⁵⁴ In conceptualizing reflexivity, it is useful to think of multiple relations of reflexivity that extend along a spectrum. On one end of the spectrum are those researchers who attempt to suppress reflexivity. They strive for objectivity or to break out of their own limited perspectives. The goal of this kind of research, as we indicated above in the discussion of the dualistic ontology, is to offer descriptions and explanations that are claimed to more or less accurately mirror external states of affairs. On the opposite end of the spectrum are researchers that embrace experiential and perspectival knowledge claims. Instead of suppressing reflexivity, a more comprehensive embrace of reflexivity appreciates 'the "accomplished" character of *all* social activity' including 'the basic assumptions, discourse, and practices used in describing' the experiential world.⁵⁵

How does this spectrum of reflexivity relate to interpretive CTS? Compared to conventional terrorism studies, which is dominated by unspoken dualistic assumptions and a lack of reflexivity, interpretive CTS is stronger here. Richard Jackson, for instance, has emphasized that CTS

evinces an acute sensitivity to the ways in which terrorism knowledge can be deployed as a political technology in the furtherance of hegemonic projects and directs attention to the interests that underlie knowledge claims. Thus, CTS starts by asking: who is terrorism knowledge for, and what functions does it serve in supporting their interests?⁵⁶

While this is certainly a start in an agreeable direction, we argue that reflexivity should be seen as more than a matter of seeking to understand whose interests CTS knowledge serves. This is an important step, but it is not sufficiently reflexive for an interpretive CTS approach that aims to produce systematic and critical social knowledge.

More precisely, at least two additional aspects of reflexivity should be included in CTS research. The first aspect that is particularly relevant for ethnographically oriented research on the everyday practices of terrorism takes the fieldworker beyond the notion of her having effects on the data. Researchers, at the very least, should explicitly describe how they play an active role in producing their data. Or, as Clifford Geertz put it, 'anthropological writings are themselves interpretations, and second and third order one's to boot'.⁵⁷ 'What is 'collected', if anything, are the researcher/analyst's observations and interpretations (taped, noted or both) and copies of relevant documents, as Dvora Yanow describes the process.⁵⁸ Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass' book, *Taboo and Terror*, is an excellent example of an interpretive, ethnographically informed CTS study that nonetheless fails to adequately embrace a comprehensive reflexivity.⁵⁹ The authors note that:

as anthropologists working in the field, we have lived many years in communities that have produced 'terrorists'. As a practical matter, we could not simply demonize and then shut them out of our awareness. We know that this personal experience with violent politics makes us vulnerable to various criticisms. Yet it is the very strategy of 'tabooing' subjects one has never spoken with or contemplated face-to-face that we will question on both intellectual and moral grounds.⁶⁰

However, the authors never offer more of an explicit discussion of how they organized and produced the data they accessed and interpreted. There is little discussion, for instance, relating to how the authors and the other sides of any particular encounter accomplished some workable definition of their meeting or even of 'terrorism' itself. The (objective) terrorist subject is taken for granted and it is only interpretations of that subject that are assumed to be different. In that direction, we call for explicit discussion among CTS scholars relating to how the author and the reciprocators are responsible for co-producing the very data under scrutiny.

Second, a methodological commitment to reflexivity fundamentally changes the status of one's empirical claims. A commitment to reflexive scholarship should shift the researcher's attention to *the very instruments she uses to produce knowledge relating to the discourse of terrorism*. 'Strategy of terrorism', in a more properly reflexive sense, should be seen as a more or less useful category employed by researchers and other communities of social actors. Current CTS scholarship does not adequately reflect on the status of the tools used in analysis. Subsequently, there is a methodological taken-for-grantedness among interpretive CTS research: not only is terrorism reified as a real thing existing independently of researchers, but so are the tools used to study terrorism. To closely borrow from, paraphrase and slightly alter Rogers Brubaker's discussion of the problems befuddling the study of nationalism: the issue with the dualist treatment of terror, terrorists and terrorism as real entities is that it adopts *categories of practice* as *categories of analysis*.⁶¹ It takes a conception inherent in the practice of terrorism and in the workings of the modern state and state system – namely the realist, reifying conception

of terrorists and terrorism as real entities existing independently in the world – and it makes this conception central to the critical study of terrorism. ‘Reification is a social process, not only an intellectual practice.’⁶² And as analysts ‘we should certainly try to *account* for this social process of reification’, which is the process through which terrorism is concretely generated in practice. ‘But’, Brubaker says, ‘we should avoid unintentionally *reproducing* or *reinforcing* this reification [of terrorism] in practice with a reification of [terrorism] in theory.’⁶³ That issue of reifying terrorism and the tools we use to study terrorism are precisely the problems that are of concern here. CTS scholars can intentionally avoid this problematic reification of the conceptual equipment they use to study terrorism by taking the additional step of reflexivity into account as they write and in the methodological section of their works.⁶⁴

(iii) *Conceptualize terrorism as a meaning-making practice*

If one conceptualizes terrorism as a meaning-making practice, the researcher’s focus is shifted toward the concrete ways in which social actors use the symbol of terrorism in the course of everyday interactions and how actors orient their conduct to symbols of terrorism. To be clear, we are not advocating subjective idealism and we are not claiming that beyond perception nothing exists. Our research does not deal with terrorists’ motives, or policymakers’ ideologies regarding terrorism, or with researchers’ mentalities. This is because, from a practice-oriented standpoint such as ours, motives and mentalities are important only insofar as they are used during particular social interactions by social actors making sense of terrorism. In other words, mental states and discussions of motivations are important in our viewpoint as they become communicated and part of a repertoire of ‘our’ understandings of terrorism. Without that communication – or, language used – ideologies, mentalities and motivations cannot be accessible or understood. Hence, our focus is on the observable practices (both linguistic and nonlinguistic) of terrorism that speakers use to produce some meaningful social understanding and mode of conduct. With that shift, we move away from definitions and descriptions of terrorism to the everyday practical work that goes into producing the terrorist actor and counter-terrorist response. This is a call to study terrorism as a socially constructed phenomenon in which the meaning-making practices of social actors and the related identities take center stage, which is different to the claim that terrorism is an ideational condition that interacts with material factors.

A social constructivist approach to terrorism would be best suited to study *how* representations of terrorism and their reality are socially produced through linguistic and non-linguistic practices. A researcher can focus on established textual practices related to historical documents or more dynamic, everyday practices related to bodily performances and interactions.⁶⁵ Explaining terrorism, to borrow from Jonathan Potter, is not a matter of ‘denying the existence of tables’ or terrorists, but rather a matter of ‘exploring the various ways in which their reality is constructed and undermined’.⁶⁶ For the purpose of our argument here, therefore, the linguistic practices of terrorism and terrorist are used by social actors in various contexts to produce some effect, to stabilize some social arrangement or undermine its stability; the content of that particular use of terrorism is a matter for the researcher to inductively discern.

Within a social constructivist understanding of terrorism, as we suggested above, the distinction between discursive (or ideational) and material realms are set aside. Indeed, as Michel Foucault understood it, if discourse is to encompass the symbolic and orientations to such symbols, then the question of an 'extra-discursive realm' does not make sense.⁶⁷ We argue that this is where a completely constructivist CTS should lead: to a way of studying terrorism in which the materialist/idealist divide so much beloved of recent international relations scholars should be discarded. This divide only makes sense under a dualist ontology – one in which there is a presupposition of there being a separation between the world and representations of it. In the interpretivist monist perspective we outline here the focus shifts to social interactions as foundational and discussions of the materialist/idealist distinction are relevant only to study how the distinction is used in practice. In IR, the distinction is often invoked to shield the seeming objective reality of something (for example, terrorism). We posit that, from our standpoint, the distinction is irrelevant to analysis since our focus is not what is (or is not) terrorism but how boundaries and identities are formulated, communicated and legitimated. Terrorism does not make sense until it is articulated and communicated in practice and until people use it in the process of constructing boundaries and identities. The focus then shifts to how the political community itself – the one that invokes 'terrorism' and has acts and actions justified in its name – is formulated. How have articulations of terrorism emerged within particular contexts? How are they popularized and sustained? What is their effect on identity formation and boundary-making? More specifically, what does the use of the language of terrorism say about how a particular group – whether everyday citizens, policymakers or militants – deals with the construct? In short, conceptualizing terrorism as a meaning-making practice leads to an empirical study of how articulations of terrorism and related practices are concretely used by interpretive communities to produce some effect, especially in terms of boundary-making and identity formation.

Conclusion: The way forward for interpretivist CTS

As we have argued throughout this article, an important problem haunting CTS is methodological. There is very little explicit discussion of the methodological commitments informing CTS studies more generally. We urge both dualists and monists to be clearer about the philosophical ontology informing their research. This move will sharpen theoretical debate, bring to the foreground the distinctive empirical payouts of each position, and more finely differentiate the plurality of approaches studying the problem of terrorism.

Relating to interpretive CTS, the particular problem that we identify as a major concern is that of ontological gerrymandering, which is basically when terrorism is treated as a discursive construction *and* an independently existing state of affairs. We have argued that, for interpretivist CTS, preserving the independently existing reality of terrorism is a mistake because it undercuts the rigor of constructivist logic and therefore challenges the validity of the claims to have produced knowledge. For a research program such as the one we are calling for, the distinction between the observer and the observed, between material and ideational, is nonsensical.⁶⁸

Analyzing terrorism as a concept that is used in practice by various social actors is not to deny that terrorism exists but to say that what counts as terrorism has to be represented and communicated for it to exist. Hence, it is the use of the symbol terrorism and communities' orientations towards it that are central. Indeed, for a completely constructivist approach, whether or not terrorism exists is less important than *how* terrorism and terrorists are constructed in practice and the identities and policies that are authorized therein. As Foucault suggested, there is neither a 'secret origin' to any particular discourse and nor are there 'extra-discursive structures' which take precedence over discursive explanations. These are sites where interpretive repertoires expand and shift and where new strategies come into play. To seek an origin to a discourse, especially an origin in what is 'already said' prior to the emergence of the discourse itself, is therefore to proceed towards a pointless analysis.⁶⁹

In security studies in general, a similar understanding of ontology is best explicated by critical security scholars who adopt a social constructivist approach to security. For example, Jutta Weldes et al. ask how is it that the United States is more likely to be threatened by Russian than by British nuclear weapons, and to be more afraid of Pakistani than of British nuclear weapons, even though none of them has been used against the United States.⁷⁰ Their answer is that insecurities are social constructions: they are based on historical associations and identities and supported by everyday interactions that embody 'collective discourse'. Indeed, as Weldes et al. succinctly put it when explaining social construction, 'it is the discursive constitution of the threat represented by nuclear weapons that we refer to as "construction", and it means not that the weapons have been made up but that their meaning has been molded in discourse'.⁷¹ One may argue that the directions in which missiles are pointing are part of what constitutes them as threat. We call for a similar understanding of terrorism as having its meaning 'molded' in social acts and practices by social actors.

In such an interpretivist approach, practices are important because they *constitute* identities, interests and actors, which is precisely the opposite view to that which assumes and argues that actors have unified, pre-given identities and interests that generate specific motivations and policies. Analyzing how concepts – those of terrorism and terrorist, for example – are used in practice by various social actors is thus useful in describing how different conditions of possibility (apart from the conventional narrative of (good) states countering (evil) terrorists) may be possible. Articulations of terrorism are therefore constitutive of the 'problem' of terrorism and are central to analysis and not supplementary to it. In his *Politics of Security*, Michael Dillon makes this clear:

language is not simply a tool, no matter how much we seek to instrumentalize it. It is something to which we are handed over, something in which we are caught up ... we are played out in language and may experience existence differently as we come to experience the play of language differently.⁷²

Such a view, therefore, maintains the agency of social actors by looking at what language used by them *does* in practice, particularly in terms of constituting subjects and objects and legitimating specific outcomes. This obviates the need to have (or base research on) an authentic form of political violence called 'terrorism' or to debate the existence of 'extra-discursive structures' that supposedly define the essential nature of terrorism.

Notes

- 1 This trend continues today in the United States where most of the terrorism courses are studied as part of courses on Homeland Security.
- 2 Critical approaches to terrorism, those that question the conventional methodology, have been from fields outside IR, such as anthropology, sociology and rhetoric.
- 3 Richard Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', *European Political Science*, 6, 2007, pp. 244–51. For a more in-depth examination of the subfield of terrorism studies, especially the weaknesses of conventional terrorism studies, see Part I of Richard Jackson, Marie Breen Smith and Jereon Gunning (eds), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009). The chapters there examine the field of terrorism studies (including connections with counter-insurgency and intelligence, rather than IR) in greater detail than we have been able to do here. Our goal here is not to list yet more reasons why a critical approach to the study of terrorism is necessary. Instead, it is to propose ways in which both critical and conventional terrorism scholars can sharpen the ongoing methodological debate by clearly outlining the ontological and epistemological presuppositions inherent in their own work.
- 4 We would like to make it clear that we are not advocating that all CTS scholars *should* dialogue with conventional terrorism scholars. Instead, we are arguing that a commitment to methodological plurality on both sides requires a clear outlining of ontological standpoints from all terrorism scholars. As such, the similarities and differences between terrorism researchers can be discerned and dialogue (or disagreement, as the case may be) can proceed.
- 5 For a discussion of methodology and CTS see Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies'; Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005); Jonathan Joseph, 'Critical of What? Terrorism and its Study', *International Relations*, 23, 2009, pp. 93–8; Jacob L. Stump, 'The Artful Side of the Terrorism Discourse: A Response to Hulsse and Spencer', *Security Dialogue*, 40, 2009, pp. 661–5. For more on the interpretivist turn see Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, 'Introduction', in Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea (eds), *Interpretation and Method* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2006).
- 6 For more on the interpretivist turn see Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 'Introduction', p. xxi. In contrast to the scientific realist who argues that ontology is first because it is the nature of the object that limits our 'cognitive possibilities' (Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology: Dualism, Monism and IR Theory', *Review of International Studies*, 34, 2008, p. 130), we argue that 'ontology' here means the *presumption* made by the researcher about her relationship to the object of study. 'Epistemology' means the way of knowing logically entailed by the starting ontological stance.
- 7 Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology'.
- 8 See Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method*, and Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology', p. 132.
- 9 To be clear, we are not claiming that Richard Jackson or Jonathan Joseph used the language of monism and dualism. These are conceptual tools that we use to cut up the field of CTS in useful ways that can sharpen the methodological debate.
- 10 For example, see Doug Stokes, 'Ideas and Avocados: Ontologizing Critical Terrorism Studies', *International Relations*, 23, 2009, pp. 85–92. Stokes says this: 'I am not arguing that a discourse approach cannot accommodate these types of questions, but the epistemological critique of dominant ways of seeing the world, should not also elide an ontology of the deeper structures and dialectical relationships between the political, economic and discursive spheres.' We argue that Stokes's comment is made possible because he presupposes a dualistic philosophical ontology. In other words, one can only talk about 'seeing the

world' on one hand and, on the other hand, talk about 'the deeper [economic and political] structures' as dialectically interacting, if one presumes that the world is in fact fundamentally composed of two distinct spheres: objective material things and subjective ideas. Our point is that Stokes's argument would be sharper if he were more explicit about his dualist philosophical ontology.

- 11 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology' p. 132.
- 12 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology', p. 132.
- 13 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Situated Creativity, or, the Cash Value of a Pragmatist Wager for IR', *International Studies Review*, 11, 2009, p. 658.
- 14 Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (New York: Penguin, 1999), p. xxii.
- 15 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology', p. 149.
- 16 Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. 47.
- 17 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology', p. 147.
- 18 Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. xix.
- 19 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 5; Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, p. xxiii.
- 20 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology', p. 133.
- 21 Joseph, 'Critical of What?', pp. 93–8.
- 22 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Situated Creativity', p. 658.
- 23 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Situated Creativity', p. 658.
- 24 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Situated Creativity', p. 658; John Shotter, *Cultural Politics of Everyday Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), pp. 203–7.
- 25 The 'big tent church' metaphor emerged during the 2010 International Studies Association conference panel entitled 'The Future is Critical: The Critical Turn in "Terrorism" Studies'. Generally, we agree with the metaphor of a big tent church for CTS. At the same time, we argue that methodologically sharp, explicit and robust positions do not preclude the big tent church. Indeed, it is by sharpening methodological and theoretical debates that more pluralistic and finely differentiated CTS will develop.
- 26 Joseph, 'Critical of What?', p. 93.
- 27 Joseph, 'Critical of What?', p. 95.
- 28 Joseph, 'Critical of What?', pp. 94–5, 97. Further comment is called for here. Against the influence of Robert Cox, neo-Gramscians, poststructural and constructivist CTS scholars, 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. While Joseph identifies Robert Cox as moving too far in the intersubjective direction, from the perspective of a completely constructivist perspective offered in this paper, Cox and Joseph are both ontological dualists. Both claim that certain material features underlie and/or interact with discursive structures. Moreover, from our perspective, Marx, Adorno, Horkheimer and Fairclough were all researchers operating from a methodologically dualist perspective, which is clearly indicated by Joseph's description of the difference:

The point being emphasized here is that the early critical theorists were not the kind of intersubjectivists that followers of Cox might suggest; their motto was not so much 'theory is always for someone and some purpose' but rather, that dominant theory often represent the logic of capitalist exchange relations and reified social forms.

- 29 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 2.
- 30 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 2.

- 31 Joseph, 'Critical of What?', p 94; Richard Jackson, 'Constructing Enemies: "Islamic Terrorism" in Political and Academic Discourse', *Government and Opposition*, 42(3), 2007, p. 395.
- 32 Richard Jackson, 'Constructing Enemies', p. 395.
- 33 S. Woolgar and D. Pawluch, 'Ontological Gerrymandering: The Anatomy of a Social Problems Explanation', *Social Problems*, 32, 1985, pp. 214–27; Jonathan Potter, *Representing Reality: Discourse, Rhetoric and Social Construction* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 1996).
- 34 Potter, *Representing Reality*, pp. 183–7; Woolgar and Pawluch, 'Ontological Gerrymandering', pp. 214–27.
- 35 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Foregrounding Ontology', p. 130.
- 36 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Whose Identity?: Rhetorical Commonplaces in "American" Wartime Foreign Policy', in Patricia M. Goff and Kevin C. Dunn (eds), *Identity and Global Politics: Empirical and Theoretical Elaborations* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), p. 170.
- 37 Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Whose Identity?', p. 169.
- 38 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, pp. 1–2.
- 39 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 2.
- 40 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 4.
- 41 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 185.
- 42 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, p. 185.
- 43 Richard Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies'.
- 44 Richard Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', p. 247.
- 45 Richard Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', p. 248.
- 46 Charles Tilly, *Explaining Social Processes* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2008), p. 5. Tilly discussed his methodological stance in a number of writings. He outlines the position that 'informs the essays in this volume' and distinguishes his critical realism from a more naïve realism. He wrote:

No social scientist can declare flatly, 'I saw it, so what I say is true.' But it is perfectly feasible to say that a theory conforms more closely to what we can jointly observe of the social environment than the next best available approximation. In such a view, relative truth is possible, but always remains subject to revision as a better approximation comes along.

The point being made here is that Tilly is ultimately a philosophical realist. He called his approach 'relational realism'. See Charles Tilly, *Stories, Identities, and Political Change* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002, pp. 5–6, 33–4, 75. See also Charles Tilly, 'Terror as Strategy and Relational Process', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 46, 2005, pp. 11–32, and Charles Tilly, 'Terror, Terrorism, and Terrorists', *Sociological Theory*, 22, 2004, pp. 5–13. In these articles, Tilly conceptualizes the strategy of terror, terrorists and terrorism as real things that exist in the 'social environment', and he argues for the recurrent social mechanisms that he invokes to explain the cause of terror, terrorists and terrorism as real features of that environment. Also, for a criticism and comparison between a pragmatic and realist methodological stances with regard to explanation, see Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, 'Situated Creativity'.

- 47 Rainer Hulsse and Alexander Spencer, 'The Metaphor of Terror: Terrorism Studies and the Constructivist Turn', *Security Dialogue*, 39, 2008, p. 576.
- 48 It should be noted that there is a difference between our treatment of ontology and that of Joseph. As a critical realist, Joseph treats ontology as an objective social relation that is the object under investigation. We are talking about philosophical ontology, which is not about the ultimate nature of the object of study; rather, we are using ontology to indicate the relation one presumes between ourselves and the object of study. Either way, Joseph is advocating increased ontological clarity, which is commendable for many of the same reasons that we have elucidated regarding the ontological clarity that we advocate.

- 49 Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terror*, p. 186.
- 50 Stump, 'The Artful Side of the Terrorism Discourse', pp. 661–5.
- 51 Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 'Introduction', p. xiii.
- 52 Richard Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', p. 248; Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 14–15; Dvora Yanow, *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2000).
- 53 Stump, 'The Artful Side of the Terrorism Discourse', p. 664.
- 54 Charlotte Aull Davies, *Reflexive Ethnography: A Guide to Researching Selves and Others*, 2nd edn (New York: Routledge, 2008).
- 55 Melvin Pollner, 'Left of Ethnomethodology: The Rise and Decline of Radical Reflexivity', *American Sociological Review*, 56, 1991, p. 370.
- 56 Richard Jackson, 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies', p. 246.
- 57 Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, p. 15.
- 58 Yanow, *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*, p. 27.
- 59 Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass, *Taboo and Terror: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- 60 Zulaika and Douglass, *Taboo and Terror*, p. x.
- 61 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p. 15.
- 62 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p. 15.
- 63 Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, p. 16.
- 64 See James Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed and War* (New York: Blackwell, 2002), and James Der Derian, 'The Terrorist Discourse: Signs, States and Systems of Global Political Violence', in James Der Derian (ed.), *Critical Practices in International Theory: Selected Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 68–97. A lack of clear methodological specifications on the part of terrorism researchers has led to a lack of clarity about what is being researched (and how the research program should proceed). Der Derian made this claim well before the recent surge of studies on terrorism in his book *Antidiplomacy*. Writing in 2002, Der Derian claimed,
- During the 1980s terrorist studies became a fortress-haven at the edge of the social sciences, a positivist's armory of definitions, typologies, and databases to be wielded as much against the methodological critic as the actual terrorist who might call into question the sovereign reason and borders of the nation-state.
- Here, the problem of the lack of a clear definition of ontological and epistemological stances on the part of the terrorism researcher is pinpointed.
- 65 Stump, 'The Artful Side of the Terrorism Discourse'.
- 66 Potter, *Representing Reality*, p. 7.
- 67 Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), p. 23. Foucault described the task of analyzing discourses as, 'A task that consists of not – or no longer – treating discourses as groups of signs ... but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. It is this acknowledgment that analyzing the language and practices of terrorism as constitutive of identities and issues that is missing from much of current terrorism studies.
- 68 In IR, Nicholas Onuf, 'Constructivism: A User's Manual', in Vedulka Kubalkova, Nicholas Onuf and Paul Kowert (eds), *International Relations in a Constructed World* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998), p. 59, wrote:

Fundamental to constructivism is the proposition that human beings are social beings, and we would not be human but for our social relations. In other words, social relations make or construct people ndash; ourselves – into the kind of beings that we are. Conversely, we make

the world what it is, from the raw materials that nature provides, by doing what we do with each other and saying what we say to each other. Indeed, saying is doing: talking is undoubtedly the most important way that we go about making the world what it is.

Like Onuf, our work also takes language and practices as constitutive of identities and interests while not completely adhering to the more rules-based constructivism that Onuf outlines.

- 69 Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 25.
- 70 Jutta Weldes, Mark Laffey, Hugh Gusterson and Raymond Duvall, *Cultures of Insecurity: States, Communities and the Production of Danger* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 12.
- 71 Weldes et al., *Cultures of Insecurity*, p. 12. One may argue that the direction in which missiles are pointing (an 'observation') determines their level of threat and this is 'outside of discourse'. However, observations themselves (and 'pointing towards' as linked with 'more threatening') are themselves imbued with past meanings and are not objectively neutral. Indeed, we have been claiming throughout that an 'objectively neutral' standpoint is impossible within a completely constructivist approach. Once again, it is social actors' orientations towards symbols (including missiles and their directional status) that is foundational to our approach.
- 72 Michael Dillon, *Politics of Security: Towards a Political Philosophy of Continental Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 116.

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