Afterword: September 11, 2001

Rob Shields

On Sept 11 2001 suicide teams violently hijacked four cross-country flights. After slaugh-
tering the crews, one crashed, a plane was flown into the Pentagon, and the remaining two were flown into each of the towers of New York’s World Trade Centre. Their spectacular collapse entombed thousands of global financial and commercial workers. A ‘live-on-TV’ brought home to viewers the dark side of globalization. It demonstrated the vulnerabili-
ty of cities, infrastructure and civilizations to those determined to achieve terrorist goals at any cost. Traumatized by the actual carnage of the collapse of the World Trade Centre towers, survivors exclaimed that it was ‘like something on TV,’ a cinematic nightmare, a virtual reality simulation come alive.

This infamous event is now often abbreviated ‘9/11’. It was a tragedy, was it History? It combined several elements: the destruction of a symbol of American capitalism, an attack on the dominance of the pre-eminent global city, the failure of the most technolog-
ically sophisticated surveillance systems and counter-terrorism intelligence, and the mas-
sacre of the most highly paid service-sector workers with the most prestigious MBA and professional educations. It is little wonder that the September 11 attacks became one of the most talked about current events, scripted into round-the-clock media coverage. In many countries, all Moslems became suspect, most neither in favour of terrorism nor in favour of the military retaliation of the United States and allies that followed - with its bombing of cities and civilian casualties.

The attacks were a jihad in the name of Islam and the al-Qaeda terrorist network. In the hearts of those who sacrifice themselves for their ideals, the virtual reigns over the material. Obstacles, costs in terms of lives - nothing matters but ‘The Cause’. Heavenly redemption, ‘Righteous’ justification. Terrorism is a violent form of communication which uses the lives of its victims as a message of intimidation to the rest of the popula-
tion. It brings the paranoia of film noir to the innocent spaces and times of everyday life. But unlike past forms of terrorism, which were generally accompanied by explicit demands, the aim of these terrorists seems simply to divide populations, exacerbate reli-
gious conflict between Moslems and non-Moslems, and to provoke war between states.

The subsequent bombing of Afghan cities therefore appears like a surreal enactment of exactly what the terrorists desired. As the military response mirrors the terrorist action, dispensing violence from the skies against cities and civilians, it has appeared to many...
International Terrorism as a Nomadic War Machine
Reflections on the Collapse of the World Trade Centre and its Aftermath

Joost van Loon

It took a handful of committed young men, motivated by a desire for divine gratification combined with an unhealthy dose of anger and hatred against the USA to bring an end to the world as we know it. The collapse of the World Trade Centre is now an over-signified event; generator of countless stories and reflections, emotive as well as critical ones. It has brought the world to a grinding halt, both economically and politically.

Seizing an airplane on a domestic flight in the US proved indeed the easiest bit of the whole operation. The planning and coordination, however, were far more impressive. The idea of transforming a domestic airplane, fully loaded with kerosene for a trans-continental flight, into a ballistic missile is itself quite an achievement. To arrange for such takeovers simultaneously is quite astonishing. Indeed, the logistics of ‘international terrorism’ were embarrassingly superior to those of US ‘national security’.

Never before has a ‘terrorist’ attack been so successful. Of course, the indicator of success is not the death toll. Indeed, if anything, that was the weakest part of the operation as it made the attack unspeakably horrific. The success was instead its impact on the world economy, and more specifically, on the symbolic world economy in which the USA functions as the universal flagship. The ability to tear down the twin towers of the WTC and subsequently to generate a level of anxiety and fear amongst the Americans that far outperformed the paranoid neurosis of the Cold War was the hallmark of this triumph of international terrorism.

Both professional and amateur cameras did the rest. Repeatedly, the collapse of the building was shown around the world. Over and over again evidence was presented that this act was indeed of historic proportions. Everything else paled in comparison. The logic of mass mediation was indeed inevitably predictable. So predictable that the masterminds of this attack must have known what would happen. They made the cameras work for them.
By whipping up the Western world into a frenzy of panic, the coalition between international terrorism and global media generated the next step in this brilliantly designed plan. It provoked a military response. The leaders of the Western world were indeed equal-ly predictable. They too became allies of international terrorism. Their logic was indeed fully anticipated, hence incorporated, into the planning. Operation ‘Infinite Justice’ as it was first called, with undue hyperbole, was of course fully scripted by the war machine of international terrorism. By being drawn into a War with Afghanistan, the West would quickly lose its global hegemony, which - if only for a moment - it was able to seize on the back of the death toll. Its rhetoric that this is not a war against Islam would become gradually but increasingly void because its acts would become indistinguishable from those who attacked the WTC.

At the turning of the Third Millennium, we are witnessing - for the first time in the history of ‘western modernity’- the rise of a ‘nomadic war machine’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988) that is no longer inferior to the state-apparatus. ‘International terrorism’ is indeed perpetrated by an unholy alliance, or better assemblage, of forces that include the super-machine. On the contrary, like a virus said to cause AIDS, its virulence increases with the apparatus against nomadic attacks. None of these appropriations has weakened the war national terrorism. Again, Bin Laden can claim success even if he had nothing to do with many people in the West are more than happy to play their part in the proliferation of interconnected to the al-Qaeda network or Iraq, the sheer number of hoaxes already shows that of al Qaeda. The seeds of this evil were sown further back in time, during the unholy alliance between the CIA, the ISI, and the Mujaheddin which sought to overthrow the Afghan gov-ernment that was held in place by the Soviet Union.

The rise to power of the nomadic war machine of international terrorism should not come as a surprise. Nomadic war machines have always been strong contributors to the collapse of civilizations. Their innovations have always been more powerful than the sys-tems of securing and regulating through which the state-apparatus evolved. Indeed, in nearly all technological lineages, the figure of the nomad appears at the horizon. Nomads are particularly effective in making new assemblages. State apparatuses in turn derive their power from consolidating those combinations, imposing a grid of anticipation and control. This is why official history and royal science always favour the state-apparatus. This is also why both generally fail to anticipate the rise of nomadic war machines.

Western modernity has never been completely independent from principles of nomadism. Indeed, the de-territorializing force of capitalism could be seen as a nomadic instinct. This is why seizing control over a domestic airplane was relatively easy. The needs of travellers, both in terms of speeds and narrowing margins of profit, simply out-weighed the needs for increased security and regulation. The same applies to internation-al finance, which not only supports western businesses but also the nomadic war machine of international terrorism. And we should not forget communications. Mass media have been highly effective disseminators of terrorism, and snail-mail is now a prime vehicle for bio-terrorism.

The nomadic war machine of international terrorism simply uses what is already there, but creates new assemblages of forces. The Western state apparatus, clinging on to a high-ly contradictory rhetoric of nationalist particularity and rhetorical universalism, unwit-tingly feeds the virulence of this war machine. Whereas for states such as Israel, Turkey and China, terrorism is a term used to legitimate unrestrained violence against civilian populations, preferably those of ethnic groups that cannot claim the sovereignty of a nation-state, ‘international terrorism’ makes a mockery out of such labels. One does not need the legitimacy of a sovereign nation state to fight one.

If all of this sounds like a celebration of violence, I sincerely apologize. However, those who insist that something had to be done, in response, should seriously consider whether their preferred alternative, military action against Afghanistan, is turning out to be such a wise one. Of course, we were told that there is no alternative. This TINA-syn-

Spatial Hauntings
Seemingly overnight, the September 11th terrorist attacks in the United States have caused Americans to question their steadfast belief in broad civil liberties. The rethinking of racial profiling, in particular, has occurred in light of allegations that the September 11th hijackers lived counter intuitive lives while in the U.S. and also significantly deviated from the single and economically marginalized profile of the (Israeli constructed) Palestinian suicide bomber. Subsequently, as fears of the ‘Other’ in the U.S. grow, the near universal opposition to racial profiling across the country continues to erode. However, despite re-emerging public support for racial profiling, the term itself continues to elude simple explanation or definition. Initially, the term was circulated in response to a slew of complaints from African American and Latino communities who found themselves disproportionately stopped on U.S. Highway 95, the major North South Interstate in the Eastern U.S.. In the 1980s the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency and the U.S. Department of Transportation had singled out the Interstate as a key North-South drug trafficking route. Early definitions thus generally focused on the act of “…policing black and Latino motorists or pedestrians solely because of their race.” (Hurley 2001). Such definitions therefore called into question the practice of literally “policing” the spatial mobility of America’s racial minorities.

In the past few years though instances of racial profiling have seemingly appeared in all aspects of society, not solely on one or two key Interstate highways. Racial profiling has come to define, in its broadest articulation, an act of racism or prejudice. Accordingly, the most vocal critics of racial profiling, American civil rights leaders Al Sharpton, Coretta Scott King, and Jesse Jackson have dubbed racial profiling the civil rights issue of the 21st century. However, a tertiary reading of many of Sharpton’s comments on recent racial profiling calls into question the distinction between individual acts of racial prejudice, broader law enforcement use of racially coded criminal “profiles”, and technologically institutionalized forms of racial discrimination. For instance, in responding...
Spatial Hauntings

words, both Sharpton, and later law enforcement agencies themselves, came to define personal travel, mobility, and navigation. In other words, both Sharpton, and later law enforcement agencies themselves, came to define racial profiling as a pattern of behaviour by law enforcement – evidence that suggested a disproportionate number of arrests and stop and seizures against members of minority communities.

What I’d like to suggest however, is that racial profiling is much more than stereotyping, much more than a simple “mind set”, or evidence of past behaviour. One could argue that if no clear distinction is made between prejudice and profiling, the act of discrimination can be much more easily dismissed as an individuated case of racism, as was evidenced in Harvard Law Professor Margo Schlanger’s comment that: “The challenge of the racial profiling cases is that we start with statistics to get inside the heads of police officers.” (Pritchard 2001). What’s ultimately missing, of course, from such perspectives is a fundamental understanding of both the process of profiling and ultimately, the deployment of a “profile” itself. If racial profiling is merely conceived in individual terms, then the criminal profile would simply be a subconscious picture of a probable criminal. While some individual law enforcement officers hold such racist views, as the stereotype definition of profiling would highlight, there is also ample evidence to suggest that such views have been purposefully cultivated, indeed institutionalized through police training and tactics. Obscured by the mound of news reporting on individual cases of racial profiling, the state of New Jersey released documents that discussed the legalities of the “drug courier profile”. Moreover, the profile was discussed in institutional terms as a blueprint of sorts for police officers – one which singled out minority groups as probable criminals. In the mid-1980s the state of Florida also circulated guidelines to its police outlining the “Common Characteristics of Drug Couriers”, including a discussion of “ethnic groups associated with the drug trade” (Harris, p. 5).

As politicians across the U.S. sought to dissociate themselves from such institutionalized forms of racial discrimination – including both candidates in the recent presidential election – various law enforcement agencies have moved to delete overt racial elements of profiling. Resulting techniques and technologies of profiling, have begun to rely heavily upon spatial and behavioural variables, particularly those associated with personal travel, mobility, and navigation.

In response to heightened security even before the September 11 terrorist attacks a select few American airports began instituting the Computer-Assisted Passenger Pre-screening System (CAPPS). While the exact workings of the system are a closely held secret, various reports have suggested that CAPPS constructs a terrorist profile by drawing upon passenger records, not race, ethnicity, or nationality per se. Passengers who “fit the profile” have their luggage tagged and extensively searched. Needless to say, while race is seemingly taken out of the equation, the profiling of travel patterns would obviously focus law enforcement attention on specific international routes and their corresponding national citizens. Thus from a spatial perspective, CAPPS profiling is but an extension of the profiling of minorities in overwhelmingly affluent and white neighborhoods or on U.S. Interstate 95. Ultimately, though what sets CAPPS apart from law enforcement profiling/training, and what further sets such profiling policies apart from the broader social definition of racial stereotyping (or individual acts of racism), is the increasingly institutionalized, and subsequently insinquent, discriminatory power of social classifications, be they under the headings of travel, behaviour, or race.

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References


Internet profiling works in much the same way. Individual’s identity are not so much profiled, as are their paths (and hyperspacial clicks) on the world wide web (Elmer 1997).
It is the building, whose presence is mysteriously absent in every kind of social or cultural theoretical discourse, in which the ideology of all these ‘imagined communities’ and ‘imagined environments’, is contained, materialised and symbolised. It is within the space and form of the building in which the social is most frequently constituted, in which its visual image announces its presence - in the city, in the nation, and in various distinct worlds. It is also, in this post cold-war era of ‘peace’, the presence and structure (as well as media-transmitted images) of the building that we are learning to see as the most important symbol of live and lost causes: in India, for the communalist Shiv Sena and the right-wing BJP, the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya; in England, for the negotiating statements of the IRA, the Hong Kong Bank in the City of London; in the United States, for the splinter groups of an Islamic jihad, the World Trade building in New York; ... and for the right-wing, anti-government militia, the Federal Building in Oklahoma City. As the barbed wire and electronic security systems are dismantled from the often ruralized, distant borders of the nation-state, they are re-installed around the perimeters of vulnerable icons in the city.

It is not just that the urban public or private building becomes a manageable project for one, or a larger cadre of politically-motivated activists; it is also that it is, already, a signifier of some organization or ideology which, when invaded, blown up or burnt down, takes on an additional level of signification. It focuses the lens of the journalist’s camera, the eye of the camcorder, the direction of the mobile TV. It is always the image of the building - rarely the diffuse and ungraspable ‘city, and even less, the ‘imagined community’ of the ‘nation’- which is used to fix our gaze on the limited space of the rectangular screen (King 1996:101).

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References