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Brazilians, French, and Americans Debate 9/11: Cultural Scripts of Innocence and Culpability

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The research examines Brazilian, French, and American discourse regarding the events of September 11, 2001. The article illuminates culturally specific constructions of guilt and innocence that emerged in online communities or discourse fora. The fora were hosted by flagship national newspapers in each respective country: *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Le Monde*, and *The New York Times*. The study reveals two parallel overarching scripts regarding culpability for 9/11 that appear across the three cases. Those critical of the United States frame 9/11 in terms of retributive justice as a response to the United States' actions in the world. By contrast, those critical of the terrorists condemn the use of violence on any grounds as illicit and unjustifiable. At the same time, analysis also illuminates differences in the culturally situated tropes used to determine moral concern in each forum, indicating how individuals holding similar opinions may substantiate them in culturally specific ways.

Keywords: Brazil, France, United States, 9/11, Morality, Political communication.

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, the headlines on *The New York Times*' digital edition read: "World Trade Center Toppled in Attack" (Barron, 2001) and "Horror, Alarm and Chaos Grip Downtown Manhattan" (Barnes, 2001). In the midst of the uncertainty, rumors, and panic prompted by the terrorist acts, record numbers of individuals turned to online spaces to communicate about the attacks on the World Trade Center and on the Pentagon (Jones & Rainie, 2002). While many individuals used digital venues as

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emotive spheres, others engaged in deliberative debate surrounding the causes and consequences of 9/11 (Robinson, 2005). This study takes an explicitly cross-national angle of vision to compare these processes in terms of cultural constructions of culpability and innocence. The data comes from Brazilian, French, and American online communities or fora hosted by prominent newspapers in each of the three countries. The research explores discourse generated in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, with an eye to delineating similarities across different national discourse communities. In so doing, the article sheds light on transnational reactions to 9/11 in terms of discourses shared across the cases.

At the same time, the article uncovers the differences between Brazilian, French, and American discourses by exploring the culturally situated tropes used by individuals to bolster their opinions. Together, these angles of vision reveal similarities and differences in how individuals from different cultures make sense of the events themselves, as well as how they make determinations regarding spheres of "moral concern" (Zerubavel, 1991). As analysis will reveal, although individuals of all nationalities drew upon cultural scripts to condemn the terrorist attacks, their critiques were situated along a range of collective identifications, including the universal, the transnational, and the national. Brazilian scripts articulated the most inclusive vision of the collectivity of *humanity* as worthy of moral concern, largely drawing from religious texts. By contrast, French scripts presented a transnational unity of all those adhering to French *democratic* ideals. Finally, given the cultural trauma of 9/11, Americans largely envisioned their exceptional collectivity as being bounded by membership in *the nation*.

Previous studies of 9/11 have examined the events from the vantage points of public policy (Leffler, 2003) and journalistic accounts (Zelizer, Allan, & Navasky, 2002). However, very few works examine either the discourse engendered by "ordinary" people or rely on explicit cross-national comparison of how the events were framed in particular cultural contexts. Rather, the relatively few existent works explore data drawn from either single-nation cases or regional groups sharing the same language. Those exploring American reactions underscore the nature of collective grief and solidarity (Collins, 2004), as well as the social pressure for cohesion engendered by the trauma of 9/11 (Kohut & Stokes, 2006). By contrast, studies of non-American populations, such as Vengerfeldt's (2003) examination of Estonian chat or Abdullah's (2007) exploration of Arab-language chat, indicate that two primary and opposing interpretations prevailed: those who condemned the 9/11 attacks as immoral on any grounds versus those who condemned American hegemony as motivating the perpetrators. This latter position held its strongest appeal beyond the United States' borders (Bhargava, 2002), where, in the cases of Latin America (Yúdice, 2004) and France (Rigoulot, 2004; Roger, 2002), attribution of blame to the United States was linked to a longer trajectory of discourse critical of the United States.

While valuable, none of these works considers cultural tropes from different national cases that inform the discourse. To begin to fill this lacuna, this study takes a comparative case study approach to analyze Brazilian, French, and American discourse in response to 9/11. It sheds light on both cross-national similarities and local specificities. Unlike existent work, the examination uncovers culturally specific rationales employed by individuals to support their opinions in three national cases. Further, in so

doing, the research explicates how individuals divided by culture and language may express similar opinions that they support with reference to different cultural tropes.

Data and Methods

The data were drawn from three fora hosted by flagship national newspapers in Brazil, France, and the United States: *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Le Monde*, and *The New York Times*, respectively.¹ Immediately after 9/11, these newspapers established online fora that were free and open to the public. In 2001, however, access to the Internet was highly demarcated by access-based digital inequality in all of the national cases, albeit to a more extreme degree in both France and Brazil (Revcovschi, 2004). Therefore, as Schultz (2000) found in his study of fora hosted by *The New York Times*, it was likely that many of the individuals were from the educated and middle classes who had the economic means to connect to the Internet. Therefore, although I do not make this claim, there is reason to believe that the fora populations in each country may be comprised of individuals from the same upper-middle class strata in each respective country, a group likely to strongly self-identify with what they frame as the “democratic West.”

Concerning data collection, although I observed the three communities from September 11 to October 29, 2001, all posts in this analysis come from the inductive coding of the universe of 6,288 posts generated by individuals participating in the three fora from September 11 through September 17, 2001. In the week following 9/11, individuals contributed 1,119 posts to *O Estado de São Paulo*'s “The First War of the Century,” 2,264 to *Le Monde*'s “The September 11th Attacks in the United States” and “L'Amérique,” and 2,905 to *The New York Times*' “A Nation Challenged.” While the absolute number of posts to the Brazilian site was smaller than in either the French or American cases, the surge in participation in response to 9/11 was comparable across the three sites.

Regarding methodology, in keeping with previous work on online communities (Hine, 2000; Markham, 1998), I relied on textual analysis of members' contributions to their own discourse fora. This approach allowed me to retain members' own vocabularies, as well as their culturally situated understandings, which they expressed in their own words. While postings to *The New York Times* were in English, I translated the Portuguese and French contributions from *O Estado de São Paulo* and *Le Monde* into English. All translations reflected the speakers' vocabulary as closely as possible; errors were corrected only when necessary for clarity. For example, in all quotations “America” was translated directly from the original texts “Amérique” or “America,” respectively.

As there were no existent coding schemas in the literature on cultural framings of innocence, culpability, and moral concern that were appropriate to address my research questions, I developed my own codes using an inductive approach. I used multiple rounds of code-and-recode and analytic induction

¹ A complete account of the sources of these opinions would have to address the potential linkages between discussants' opinions and the discourses presented in various media channels to which the discussants were exposed.

to develop nuanced coding categories that were grounded in the data (Charmaz, 1983; Emerson, 1983). This methodological approach was necessary to valorize subjects' culturally specific interpretations of the social world, as opposed to imposing a priori assumptions made by researchers unfamiliar with the cultural specificities in each national case. More specifically, using a grounded theory approach made it possible to use the framings that emerged from subjects' validations or condemnations of the attacks using their own categories rather than imposing exogenous categories of understanding. Finally, although I was the only coder for all posts, once I had achieved a final coding schema and implemented multiple rounds of code-and-recode, I used outside coders to ensure the reliability of the coding categories through analysis of a subset of the data (Kappa score .73; Z score > 3).

Scripts of Culpability and Innocence Across the Fora

The article uncovers these opposing interpretations through examination of some of the most salient tropes that Brazilians, French, and Americans in each online forum used to "frame" (Gamson, 1992) the events of 9/11. Across the fora, individuals determined culpability and innocence via two parallel, overarching scripts that alternately found the 9/11 perpetrators or the United States culpable for the attacks. Those critical of the United States argued that American foreign and economic policies initiated a chain of events prompting 9/11. Those critical of the attacks countered these assertions with the argument that terrorism is immoral on any grounds. In each of the cases, individuals relied on one of these scripts to judge the perpetrators of 9/11. In so doing, they framed different collectivities as worthy and unworthy of moral concern, based upon their perceived innocence or guilt.

At the same time, however, differences were equally apparent in the culturally specific tropes used to bolster these two opposing scripts. While many Brazilians employed religious metaphors and language to substantiate their arguments, those critical of the United States relied on the Biblical metaphor of reaping and sowing to argue that the United States had provoked the perpetrators to act. By contrast, those critical of the attacks employed the rationale of free will to condemn the terrorists as guilty of damaging humanity as a whole.

While the two scripts also played out in the French forum, French individuals referenced democratic ideals exemplified by *The Rights of Man* rather than religious tropes. French critical of the United States alleged that American economic and foreign policies had damaged democratic values and had thereby forced the perpetrators to act. By contrast, those critical of the attacks framed the terrorists as threatening the democratic values shared by the United States and France.

On the American forum, the overarching scripts were largely debated in terms of American exceptionalism (Lipset, 1996). Those critical of the United States challenged assertions of exceptionalism through negative framings of American foreign and economic policies, suggesting that those policies had opened the door to the attacks. Those critical of the attacks characterized the terrorists as seeking to destroy worthy foreign and economic policies, as well as the values that made the United States exceptional.

Scripts of Culpability and Innocence in O Estado de São Paulo

On the Brazilian forum, those critical of the United States employed the Biblical metaphor of reaping and sowing to frame American foreign policy as responsible for 9/11. Francisco described the United States as triggering a merited backlash: ". . . the United States is reaping what it has always sown: despotism, arrogance, exploitation etc." Adão explained that the United States was the "biggest guilty party" on 9/11:

How many peoples do they massacre with hunger stemming from their globalizing politics that exclude . . . whomever INSTITUTIONALIZES terror in the world should know that one day it will come back. In sum, whoever sows will reap!

These Brazilians employed the same causal explanation with regard to economic policies inflicted on developing nations. Diogo critiqued American "economic despotism" over developing nations:

They are reaping what they have sown, invasion and death. They think that they are the lords of the earth. This everyday genocide explodes within our country in an even crueller form in that so many die of hunger, cold, and without hope."

Tânia argued that, "All American governments and some citizens are guilty . . . We live in hunger and eternal economic crisis because of the guilt of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

Using the metaphor of reaping and sowing in tandem with assertions of culpability, these Brazilians argued that the United States both caused and merited 9/11. As the culpable party, Americans and their government were deemed unworthy of moral concern. Claudia determined that Americans were not innocent:

Americans do exactly what they want with the entire world. And when someone goes against them . . . they turn themselves into victims . . . therefore I don't think that Americans are really suffering so much. We reap what we sow. They planted arrogance and hunger in the world and now are reaping that which they have sown.

Bento expressed a similar rationale, ". . . whether politically, economically or militarily, the USA also provokes the death of millions of people in the world . . . they are not innocent. Quite the contrary. They deserve what they are getting and they deserve much more." Mateus made this linkage by comparing the perpetrators to Biblical figures who righteously defended the weak: "Just as David destroyed Goliath, no one is stronger than another. Let this make Americans more respectful of the weak and the oppressed."

However, Brazilians critical of the attacks challenged their detractors' use of religious imagery and language. Inácio critiqued the terrorists as well as those who sought to justify the attacks and deny innocence to those killed on 9/11:

I am shocked by what has happened in the USA and yet even more so by what I have read in this forum. Anyone with a conscience should mourn the death of thousands of civilians and ask God to comfort the families of the unfortunates. But there are people who manage to see this act of insane terror as something good. As if it were deserved! How can these people deserve to die!

These Brazilians refuted reaping and sowing causality by reframing the debate in terms of free will and defining culpability in terms of individual choice and agency. Rogério articulated that human beings are free agents:

We are all human beings with the liberty to act . . . In this moment we must unite in prayer for in this way we may help to alleviate the immeasurable pain which has struck at the heart of our brothers living in North America.

In response to those who blamed the United States for pushing the terrorists to act, Brazilians like Nicolau rebutted his ideological adversaries, "[God] created man with free will; every man makes his choices."

Anchoring their arguments in religious language, they judged the terrorists as 9/11's culpable actors who attacked all of humanity. Rather than challenging their opponents' claims about the past misdeeds of the American government, these Brazilians passed over them as causally irrelevant. Vítor declared the unimportance of nationality:

Here is not the place to judge the USA's foreign policy, or its military acts . . . This act was not against the State, but against individuals only guilty of living their everyday lives. It would be the equivalent of a group of Paraguayans bombing a shopping center and alleging that Brazil was violent during the Paraguayan War . . . Insane isn't it? Now we must find the authors of this deed and bring them in front of the International Court for a crime against humanity.

In making this argument, they framed the WTC victims as first and foremost members of humanity rather than citizens of a particular nation state. Rosana said, "It was not only the USA that was victimized . . . all of humanity suffers the consequences of the inhuman acts committed." Significantly, in defining 9/11 as a strike against all humanity, these Brazilians expanded their sphere of moral concern to every human being by framing the "us" as a metaphysical collectivity damaged by the terrorists. As Jacobina declared, "May GOD help us. We have all lost in this. The entire world has lost in these attacks that affect all people . . ."

Scripts of Culpability and Innocence in Le Monde

The French forum was also divided between those condemning the United States and those condemning the attacks. Like their Brazilian counterparts, French critical of the United States framed the United States as responsible for 9/11. Jacqueline articulated, "Americans, who to a large extent contributed to this state of global geopolitics, are responsible for all of this." Fabien confirmed, ". . . the USA can generate such hate and despair by their warlike policies of conquest that there are people who have the

courage or the folly to undertake such an operation . . ." Like their Brazilian counterparts, these French explicitly defined both American economic and foreign policies as prompting 9/11. Bertrand explained, I am in complete agreement that what happened this September 11 is a declaration of war against the USA and the capitalist system." Sophie stated, "It is not a military war that has given the USA totalitarian power over the entire world, but economic warfare.

However, unlike Brazilians, these French eschewed religious frames in favor of reference to democratic values undermined by the United States. Frédéric articulated, "If the USA were really democratic . . . all of this would not happen." They claimed that, unlike France, the United States was not a democracy. Margot determined, "America is not liberty; it is neoliberalism. The USA is not a democracy but a moneyocracy." Rather, as Édouard argued, "America kills democracy by deliberately hindering most countries to install democratic regimes . . ."

Further, these French framed American economic and foreign policies as damaging French democratic values as exemplified by *The Rights of Man*. Christophe stated that the United States must, ". . . respect *The Rights of Man*, freedom of speech, equitable sharing of wealth between the northern and southern hemispheres." Dorotheé elucidated that American economic policy ". . . undermines the values of equality, fraternity, and liberty . . . the acts of 9/11 sadly lead us to confront the scene of the inevitable barbarity of ultraliberal capitalism." For these French, *The Rights of Man* provided the most viable solution to American betrayal of democracy, a betrayal undertaken through capitalistic hegemony. Josette asserted that the United States must respect ". . . a true strategy for developing countries based on *The Rights of Man*." These French equated such violations of *The Rights of Man* as a warrant to characterize Americans as a culpable actor unworthy of moral concern. Jacques declared that, ". . . they have the impudence to consider themselves the victims. How shameful! What unbearable arrogance!" Adrienne stated: "OUT OF THE QUESTION TO RESPECT . . . THOUSANDS OF DEAD AMERICANS!!!!!!!!!!!! . . . AMERICANS ARE ONLY PAYING FOR . . . THEIR OWN ERRORS . . ."

However, parallel to the dynamic on the Brazilian forum, in response to these critiques of the United States, French critical of the terrorists condemned their compatriots for excluding Americans from their sphere of moral concern. Éléonore charged:

Shame on the French who do not feel bad for the children who are dead in the planes,
for the horror that these human lives experienced, people like you, your husbands, your
wives, and your children. To the French who still have a bit of humanity left within them:
Speak louder.

Further, like Brazilians, these French asserted that the terrorists — not the United States — were guilty of 9/11. However, unlike Brazilian framings of solidarity with humanity, these French emphasized their solidarity with those who shared democratic values. Fabien expressed commitment to "*The Rights of Man* coming from British habeas corpus and the American Revolution." Élisabeth characterized her support of Americans as a defense of the French ideals epitomized in *The Rights of Man*:

1685: Habeas Corpus . . .

1776: Liberation of the American people . . .

1789: Declaration of *The Rights of Man* . . .

These dates and these events show that England, America, and France founded universal values which I continue to support cost what it may . . . faced with this barbarous attack . . . I adhere to . . . democratic values . . . Today I have chosen my camp and I support the American people. — An ordinary citizen.

Gautier explained that it was vital to defend shared democratic values targeted by the terrorists,

Even if we are not always in agreement with the United States' position, I believe that today it is necessary to stand by their side. After all, our constitution is very close to theirs and our values are the same.

These French framed 9/11 as prompting them to choose between democratic values shared with the United States and the destruction of those values at the hands of the terrorists. Hélène defined criticisms of the United States as attacks on French values:

. . . the attacks in the United States bring back to the fore a more or less dreary pseudo ideology that refuses to accept that the future of the world depends on certain values, while the negation of these values will condemn their authors to self-destruction. These values are: democracy, liberty of thought, justice . . . Their negation signifies dictatorship, fatwa, Sharia . . .

Geoffroy contended,

I have often criticized the United States . . . but absolutely nothing justifies these ignoble acts . . . in the case of grave crisis like this one, democracies must forget their differences and close their ranks against their adversaries.

Although more narrow in scope than the Brazilian use of humanity, in this way these French also used transnational frames to include Americans within their own sphere of moral concern based on shared democratic values.

Scripts of Culpability and Innocence in The New York Times

Americans also espoused one of the two scripts common to the Brazilian and French fora. Like their Brazilian and French counterparts, Americans critical of the United States framed the United States government as culpable of sponsoring foreign policy and economic exploitation that pushed the perpetrators to act. Karen stated that the "United States government has supported terror tactics and totalitarian violence throughout the third world . . ." Carl argued that,

. . . as a world power, an empire in everything but name, the USA has over the past few decades, directly or indirectly, caused the deaths of millions of people in its efforts to guarantee energy sources and cheap labor to fuel its economy . . .

Further parallel to Brazilians and French critical of the United States, these Americans believed that, faced with American political and economic hegemony, 9/11's perpetrators had no option but violence. Samantha wrote, "It's no wonder that those being steamrolled by our "business friendly" policies are striking back the ONLY way they can."

However, unlike their Brazilian and French counterparts, Americans critical of the United States maintained that American citizens were worthy of moral concern. They did so by narrowing their frame of reference to condemn specific foreign policies perpetuated by the American government, while still mourning its citizens. Matt argued that all victims were worthy of concern:

Was it right? No. Did those people deserve to die? No. But let's not lie to ourselves. Let's be big enough to admit why this is happening. Crying for the lives lost in NY and DC? You should be. It was a tragedy. But, then, try to remember to cry now and then for the countless millions of people we slaughter out of CNN's sight; try to cry for the people we exploit and destroy all across the world.

By equating all political violence as equally blameworthy, these Americans argued against American exceptionalism. Further, by defining their own governments' activities as immoral rather than exceptional, these Americans framed their fellow citizens as equally innocent as those global citizens harmed by U.S. foreign policy. According to Tim, "We are paying for our immoral foreign policy and unfortunately those who make these policies are 'safe.' Only the innocents are losing their lives . . . I am not against any people, but I am against our immoral government policy." While criticizing their government, these Americans stipulated that governmental guilt should not be paid by innocent citizens. In so doing, they defended the collectivity of American citizens as worthy of moral concern, rather than exceptional.

However, unified by the trauma of 9/11, other Americans refuted any such critiques of the United States by articulating their belief in American exceptionalism. Mike championed American foreign policy as superior:

Stop being foolish. Stop blaming U.S. foreign policy as well! It is impossible to be perfect, but our nation does the best that it can. Why is it that the peace-loving countries around the world have offered full cooperation? Because our foreign policy is the BEST!

Anne framed the United States as, ". . . the beacon of hope for oppressed people. . ." Charles defended American foreign policy: "By blaming United States' policy, you are empowering terrorism. There is no excuse for this mad act — none whatsoever. . . I would not like to see what the world . . . would be like without America. . . So let's give American policy the benefit of the doubt, shall we?" Philip confirmed his

belief that American foreign policy was exceptional albeit imperfect: "Do I think the United States has lived up to the ideals it preaches? No. But we aspire to them better than anyone, anywhere, ever."

In response to critiques of American economic policies, these Americans redefine the American economic model as another facet of exceptionalism. Frank celebrated the United States' economy: "Let whoever did this know THIS: there are still another 200-something million Americans who live and work for the BEST economy in the world!" Smith linked economic exceptionalism to tropes of personal liberty:

(despite it's [sic] flaws): AMERICA IS A COUNTRY WHERE YOU CAN CHOOSE WHO LEADS YOU, YOU CAN PARTICIPATE IN A FREE-MARKET ECONOMY, AND YOU CAN LIVE YOUR PERSONAL LIFE THE WAY YOU DESIGN IT.

In constructing these definitions of the United States as exceptional, these Americans defined their nation not by its mistakes, but by their vision of the United States. Philip held up the United States as the exemplar of the global good neighbor:

Like America or not, who's there when another country needs disaster relief? Or food to feed their starving kids? Or any other kind of help? The United States, that's who. We may not be perfect but we do more for other countries than they ever did for us.

Whereas Brazilians and French critical of the attacks included Americans in transnational spheres of moral concern of humanity and democracy, these Americans based their moral concern on nationality. Sarah quoted Leonard Pitts, Jr. to the forum: "As Americans we will weep, as Americans we will mourn, and as Americans, we will rise in defense of all that we cherish."

Conclusions and Implications

Two overarching scripts concerning the perpetrators and victims of 9/11 were worked out in parallel fashion by contributors to each of the fora. Across the case studies, Brazilians, French, and Americans condemned either the United States or the 9/11 terrorists. In all fora, individuals critical of the United States agreed that American foreign and economic policies were to blame for pushing the perpetrators to act. Those critical of the terrorists condemned political violence against civilians on any grounds. Regardless of nationality, individuals relied on these larger scripts to make determinations about culpability and innocence vis-à-vis 9/11. Further, they employed these determinations of culpability to include or exclude different collectivities from their own salient spheres of moral concern.

At the same time, however, individuals in each forum drew on culturally specific tropes to bolster these views. In the Brazilian forum, religious tropes were the single most salient construct employed by those participating in the forum. While these individuals did not explicitly identify as Catholic or Protestant,

over one-third of all posts used Biblical or explicitly Christian terminology.² Those critical of the United States relied on the Biblical metaphor of reaping and sowing to argue that the United States initiated and merited the attacks. In response, those critical of the attacks employed the rationale of free will to find the terrorists responsible for their own actions against all of humanity as symbolic victim. These findings resonate with previous research confirming that, both historically and today, Brazil is one of the most religious countries in the world (Pew, 2008). This analysis underscores the salience of the religious tropes as prominent cultural repertoires within larger Brazilian world views (Stoll, 1990; Burdick, 1996).

Analysis of the French forum confirms how the French reproduced the same overarching scripts as their Brazilian counterparts, but with reference to different cognitive authorities. French proponents of both scripts based their arguments on the centrality of democracy and *The Rights of Man*, which they linked to their own value systems. While those critical of the United States agreed with their Brazilian homologues that the perpetrators were forced to act, the French substantiated this view by framing American foreign and economic policy as undermining French democratic ideals. In like manner, both those French and Brazilians who found the terrorists culpable believed that transnational collectivities were worthy of moral concern post-9/11. Yet, whereas Brazilians defined humanity as victim, the French narrowed their definition of victimhood to those who espoused French democratic ideals. As with the Brazilian case, these findings are in keeping with previous scholarship examining how French nationals have used democracy as a cultural trope to make value-based distinctions between collectivities (Lacorne & Judt, 2005; Revel, 2002; Roger, 2002).

While still following the overarching scripts, in the American forum, proponents of both factions largely concerned themselves with critiquing and affirming American exceptionalism. Like their Brazilian and French counterparts, Americans critical of the United States framed governmental policies as blameworthy, inciting the perpetrators to act. However, while Brazilians and French taking this stance did so to exclude the United States and its citizens from spheres of moral concern, these Americans employed this framing to drive a wedge between themselves and their guilty government. Their implicit critique of American exceptionalism allowed them to argue that their government was guilty of 9/11; however, as members of the citizenry, they were innocent. This strategy opened the door for them to frame all American citizens as unexceptional and therefore worthy of moral concern like any other victim of political violence. Yet, even these qualified critiques were unacceptable to other Americans in the aftermath of the attacks. Americans critical of the attacks rebutted their interlocutors with fierce defenses of American exceptionalism. They framed themselves as innocent victims in a nation that had contributed much to the world through its flawed yet superior foreign policy and economic system. For these Americans, defense of the national collectivity was paramount to their insistence on collective grieving and inclusion in a national sphere of moral concern. This dynamic is explained by theories of cultural trauma. Post 9/11, Americans from a range of ideological persuasions felt compelled to demonstrate their membership in the national collectivity (Smelser, 2004) and to envision the United States in idealized terms (Ryn, 2003). In this revival of populist patriotism, Americans who critiqued their nation were rebuked as "Leftists who stray

² Although the literature indicates the importance of the competition between Catholicism and Evangelical Protestantism, as well as syncretism and Afro-Brazilian traditions such as Umbanda and Candomblé, almost no reference was made in the data to the Orixás or other religious traditions.

from the flag" (Kohut & Stokes, 2006, pp. 288). In dialogue with these works, examination of the American data offers evidence of the increased salience of American exceptionalism in a time of national cultural trauma.

As the differences between these cultural tropes indicate, individuals holding similar opinions may substantiate them in culturally specific ways. At the same time, uncovering the similarities common to the Brazilian, French, and American cases illuminates how opposing scripts may be shared across different nationalities and collectivities. In light of 9/11, this dynamic is particularly important because the attacks prompted these individuals to make determinations about who they believed to be deserving of moral concern. For Brazilians and French critical of the United States, neither the United States' government nor its citizenry merited moral concern because they had violated other collectivities. Americans critical of their own government carved out a bifurcated symbolic position that removed them from the abstraction of culpable government, but maintained their inclusion in the collectivity of any victims of any political violence. In both of these cases, these distinctions were based on the consequence attributed to actions of past violence that excluded the perpetrator from moral concern on 9/11.

By contrast, for Brazilians, French, and Americans critical of the attacks, moral concern was situated along a range of collective identifications, including the universal, the transnational, and the national. These Brazilians offered the most inclusive vision of the collectivity of humanity as worthy of moral concern. These French provided a transnational umbrella that welcomed all those who espoused French democratic ideals. Yet, it was Americans who envisioned the smallest exceptional collectivity that was bounded by membership in the nation.

In conclusion, in exploring both transnational similarities and nuanced differences between the cases, the work makes several contributions. While the majority of work done on American reaction to the attacks concentrates on American solidarity post-9/11, this analysis also explores dissenting opinions offered by those Americans critical of their government. The data reveals that the majority of these Americans expressed a hybrid reaction to 9/11 that condemned the attacks, while emphasizing their belief that American foreign policy had opened a door to political violence. Equally important, unlike the majority of studies of non-American interpretation of the attacks, this work explicitly compares how non-American nationals alternately defended and judged the United States by using specific cultural tropes or "cultural repertoires" (Lamont, 1992). These findings yield insights into the ways in which cultural tropes are replicated and contested in highly polarized interactive environments. By revealing how both transnational scripts and culturally specific tropes were employed to make sense of 9/11, the research uncovers how universalistic arguments may be shared by individuals separated by culture and language, as well as how particularistic arguments relying on specific cultural tropes are often context-independent. Equally important, the research reveals how these arguments may be woven together to make determinations about moral worth, exclusion, and inclusion.

Finally, in exploring the rationales that individuals in online discourse fora employed to defend and condemn different social actors, this analysis illuminates how moral boundary making may occur through new forms of communication. By examining such processes in mediated environments, the work challenges technodeterministic assumptions about the power of global technologies to homogenize

culture. In so doing, this research makes clear the glocal nature of mediated communication in which local culture remains ever salient and replicated by those using common global technologies. More specifically, the article reveals the tensions between transnational similarities and, at the same time, local differences between forum participants. This tension was captured by a poster to *The New York Times* forum who wrote: "Never before have the citizens of the world had access to such instant communications like e-mail and Internet postings. Instantly we can show either our support or our hatred." From this perspective, the work indicates that although global citizens will increasingly communicate via new communication technologies, it is likely that they will employ them in culturally specific ways that reproduce the local, albeit on global platforms.



Laura Robinson is Assistant Professor of Sociology at Santa Clara University. She studies the impact of new media on different kinds of social relationships, groups, and processes, including economic relationships and political communities. Robinson's current research studies digital inequality in different cultural contexts. Previous publications explore online interaction and norm building, national and collective identities, and cultural discourse in Brazilian, French, and American environments. Her Web site is www.laurarobinson.org.

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