

## PUBLIC RESPONSE TO 9/11 IN POLITICS: PATRIOTISM, FEAR AND LANGUAGE ISSUES

### JAVNI ODGOVOR NA 9/11 U POLITICI: PATRIOTIZAM, STRAH I JEZIČNI PROBLEMI

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#### *Abstract*

The paper with the title "Public Response to 9/11 in Politics: Patriotism, Fear and Language Issues" examines the immediate responses that emerged in American political administration after the terrorist attacks on 11 September, 2001 in New York City and Washington, D.C. Moreover, the paper analyzes the speech "We Have Seen the State of Our Union" given before the Congress on September 20, 2001, by the former U.S. President George H. W. Bush, showing the prevalent manner of the rhetoric of the then current government administration. Seeking to explain the rhetoric of the politicians after 9/11, the analysis explores several parameters. This kind of rhetoric addressed the issues connected to 9/11, and employed a great deal of patriotism-related words as well as a language that could help instigate fear and paranoia in Americans and their culture.

#### *Sažetak*

Rad s naslovom "Javni odgovor na 9/11 u politici: patriotizam, strah i jezični problemi" istražuje neposredne reakcije koje su se pojavile u američkoj političkoj administraciji nakon terorističkih napada 11. rujna 2001. u New Yorku i Washingtonu. U članku se analizira govor "Vidjeli smo stanje naše zajednice" koji je pred Kongresom 20. rujna 2001. godine dao bivši američki predsjednik George H.W. Bush, koji pokazuje prevladavajući način retorike tadašnje vladine administracije. U potrazi za objašnjavanjem retorike političara nakon 11. rujna, analiza istražuje nekoliko parametara. Ova vrsta retorike govorila je o pitanjima vezanim za 11. rujna, a koristila je mnogo riječi povezanih sa patriotizmom, kao i jezik koji bi mogao potaknuti strah i paranoju kod Amerikanaca i u njihovoj kulturi.

#### **Introduction**

The destruction on 9/11 of American symbols that were highly valued by American society undermined the feeling of safety in the USA. With the assault on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, American prosperity, and financial and military power were under attack. The initial reaction was shock, general angst and trauma, later followed by more insight and even self-reflection. The crisis, being a mass global event, was witnessed by the entire world, and it truly exhibited many traits of a televised blockbuster. Philosopher and cultural critic Slavoj Žižek suggests that 9/11 occurred as much on television as it did at the site of the attacks, the World Trade Center and

the Pentagon. He further affirms that, with the TV spectacle of the attacks, people "were introduced to the 'desert of the real'" as "the landscape and the shots of the collapsing towers could not but be reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes in big catastrophe productions" /1/. The footage of the World Trade Center towers falling was constantly repeated by the news media, and Žižek recalls that, "days after September 11, 2001, our gaze was transfixed by the images of the plane hitting one of the WTC towers, we were all forced to experience the 'compulsion to repeat' and *jouissance* beyond the pleasure principle<sup>1</sup>: we wanted to see

<sup>1</sup> Žižek has adopted Lacanian terminology in his philosophical writing. See Jacques Lacan's Seminars, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*.

it again and again; the same shots were repeated *ad nauseam...*" /2/. It seems that because of the ongoing repetition of the towers collapsing, people now associate the attacks almost exclusively with the WTC. Sandra Silberstein agrees: "The twin towers, a symbol of New York, became the symbol of "The Attack on America" /3/. Marc Redfield validates Silberstein's claim and explains that this is the case, because the socio-geographical space inhabited by the World Trade Center was (and is) so heavily mediatized, so utterly penetrated by representational technologies of global reach, and so symbolically at the heart of the world's various political, financial, and semiotic webs of power that the destruction of the towers could not help being at once the ultimate media event and (therefore) a haunting image of the deracinating force of communicational technology at work, disseminating images of disaster from the symbolic center of technological, capitalist, and national power /4/. The aim of this paper, however, is to analyze the public responses in American politics to the 9/11 attacks, and not to summarize the events of 9/11. The research examines the consequences of these attacks for broader U.S. culture through the language of politics. Paranoia and fear, too often encouraged through media and by the U.S. government, have always been constituent parts of American society and culture. David Altheide, who has been identifying and researching fear in American media with the help of content analysis, asserts: "Crime and threats to the public order—and therefore all good citizens—are part of the focus of fear, but the topics change over time" /5/. Altheide interrogates the "politics of fear," since the USA has managed to find threats to the American nation throughout history. After 9/11 the media exploded with coverage on terrorism, which was at the time the most recent emergent peril to the United States, soon followed by the anthrax threat. After the attacks on 9/11, the majority of Americans again felt insecure, worried and terrified. It was made worse for Americans since this was the first major attack that happened directly on American soil. Moreover, the leaders (with the help of the media) additionally helped to magnify the events with the use of expansive rhetorical gestures that pushed many American citizens deeper into feelings of despair. This effect has been well-documented in numerous studies. In his book *Terror Post 9/11 and the Media*, Altheide observes, "Numerous public opinion polls indicated that

audiences were influenced by news-media reports about the attacks as well as the interpretations of the causes, culprits, and, ultimately, the support for various U.S. military actions" /5/. Media repeatedly emphasized the fear of terrorism, and Altheide recalls that former fear stories in the media were now converted into the "terror story": "Sorrow, suffering, empathy, and pain were merged with fear and vengeance" /5/. In one of his earlier books from 2006, Altheide noted: "The collective identity of victim of terrorist attacks was promoted by news reports stressing communal suffering, as well as opportunities to participate in helping survivors and in defeating terrorism" /5/. The responses were indeed multifaceted. A Gallup Poll<sup>2</sup> from December 21, 2001, *Religion in the Aftermath of September 11* shows that there was an increased level of attendance at religious institutions for a short time in the aftermath, but levels quickly returned to those of pre-9/11 church attendance.<sup>3</sup>

Moreover, there was an upsurge in patriotism and nationalistic thinking after the attacks. In their book *In the Wake of 9/11: The Psychology of Terror*, Tom Pyszczynski, Sheldon Solomon and Jeff Greenberg, who developed Terror Management Theory (TMT), report the following:

Flags literally flew off the shelves and appeared everywhere, on cars, buildings, people's T-shirts, and even their skin in the form of tattoos. Banners, posters, T-shirts, and billboards proclaiming "United we stand," "Proud to be an American," and "God Bless America" seemed to appear everywhere. Corporate logos were quickly retooled in patriotic colors of red, white, and blue /6/.

Soon after the attacks, shopping and spending became two of the most important patriotic activities. Roger Lowenstein, an accomplished journalist for the *Wall Street Journal* illustrated his point thus: "Since the World Trade Center attack, it has been suggested that our patriotic duty now consists of investing in the stock market" /7/.

The fact that patriotism intensified in the months following the attacks was also confirmed by an-

<sup>2</sup> On their webpage, Gallup writes about their methodology center: "We are committed to using scientifically proven and accepted methodologies for Gallup polling in more than 160 countries and areas worldwide. Gallup applies rigorous research standards to its Gallup Daily tracking, Gallup Poll Social Series, and Gallup World Poll surveys." <http://www.gallup.com/178685/methodology-center.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.gallup.com/poll/5134/Religion-Aftermath-September.aspx?utm\\_source=september 2001&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/5134/Religion-Aftermath-September.aspx?utm_source=september%2001&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=tiles)

other Gallup Poll; i.e. *Have Americans Changed?* from September 11, 2002. The survey results are summarized on their webpage: "America experienced a burst of patriotism last fall that was reflected in near unanimous public support for President George W. Bush, in heightened approval of Congress and the two major parties, and in elevated levels of trust in government to handle international and domestic problems alike" (Gallup Poll). The poll admits that these severely patriotic reactions were rather short-term, and that the attacks did not have a lasting effect of change on Americans, as had first been anticipated.

The same poll, however, not merely validated that American people were engaging in patriotic activities in the immediate aftermath, but also asserted the presence of a fear factor among Americans:

Prior to Sept. 11, in a Gallup Poll taken in April 2001, only 4% of Americans said they were "very worried" about the chances of becoming a victim of terrorism or of a family member becoming a victim; another 20% were "somewhat worried." In the first two months after Sept. 11, those figures increased sharply. A mid-October poll found close to one-quarter of Americans "very worried" about terrorism striking their own lives, and another third were "somewhat worried," for a total of 59% feeling worried. (Gallup Poll)<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, a certain rhetoric was constantly tied to the events of 9/11, initially on the side of politicians ("war on terror," "attack," "us against them," "their war against us," "good vs. evil," the Patriot Act, rendition, "axis of evil," patriotism, threat, horror, etc.) as the leaders, who also presented themselves as the potential saviors, instrumentalized paranoia to follow an alternate plan. The idea of spreading fear on the side of politics has been presented in a range of studies. Moreover, Altheide argues that "tying terrorism coverage to an expansive discourse of fear has contributed to the emergence of politics of fear, or decision makers' promotion and use of audience beliefs and assumptions about danger, risk, and fear in order to achieve certain goals" /5/. Several scholars, including Phillip Wander, who coined the term 'prophetic dualism' in 1984, have called this type of divisive rhetoric for dividing the world into two parts, i.e. into *good* and *evil*, into *us* and *them* as President Bush did after the attacks.

In her 2012 thesis "From Crisis to War: Prophetic Dualism in President Bush's September 20, 2001 Address," Rachel E. Potucek provides a clear definition of prophetic dualism by Jamie Warner, who has extensively studied the concept of prophetic dualism in the United States: "Prophetic dualism is a moralistic foreign policy narrative that divides the world into two stark opposing forces of "good" and "evil" and asserts America's God-given superiority over the evil foe" /8/.

The paper will take a look at the rhetoric of dualism in the political arena after 9/11 on the example of the first speech after the attacks, held before the Congress on September 20, 2001, by the former U.S. President George H. W. Bush. Additionally, the paper will demonstrate that the political language of the time employs a rhetorical strategy that helps spreading fear and promoting patriotism.

### Public Response to 9/11 in Politics

After 9/11, patriotism in the USA escalated, an effect which was first visible in political language. It is not an easy task to pinpoint the definition of patriotism and/or nationalism; however, researchers seem to agree that they are both political concepts, since they have been closely related to the state throughout history. Some researchers like Charles Taylor and Maurizio Viroli see them as separate concepts, whereas Alasdair MacIntyre perceives them almost as synonymous. Rogers Brubaker also poses an intriguing question, "What does it mean to speak 'in the name of the nation'?" /9/. In comparing patriotism and nationalism, Brubaker concludes that they "are not things with fixed natures; they are highly flexible political languages, ways of framing political arguments by appealing to the *patria*, the fatherland, the country, the nation. These terms have somewhat different connotations and resonances, and the political languages of patriotism and nationalism are therefore not fully overlapping" /9/. In his article "Patriotism and Human Rights: An Argument for Unpatriotic Patriotism," Andrew Vincent addresses patriotism as a notion signifying "a specific loyalty consequent upon particular membership of a country, or, more usually, a state. In this sense patriotism is always marked out as a *particular* loyalty" /10/. Vincent adds that "the loyalties demanded from the patriot are simply to whatever values are regarded as dominant within a state or community" /10/. He further distinguishes between strong and moder-

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.gallup.com/poll/6790/Americans-Changed.aspx?utm\\_source=september 2001 religion&utm\\_medium=search&utm\\_campaign=tiles](http://www.gallup.com/poll/6790/Americans-Changed.aspx?utm_source=september+2001+religion&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=tiles)

ate patriotism, with strong patriotism demanding complete loyalty. Similarly, Leonie Huddy and Nadia Khatib propose a difference between “constructive and blind patriotism” /11/. They describe blind patriotism as the reluctance to criticize and consider criticism of the homeland or nation. They equate blind patriots as “typically conservative,” since blind patriotism “is both ideologically divisive and closely aligned with nationalism and ethnocentrism, blurring the distinction between patriotism and nationalism” /12/. Vincent’s concept of strong patriotism and Huddy’s and Khatib’s category of blind patriotism could be interpreted as nationalism or at least on the verge of nationalism, which is thus regarded as stronger than patriotism. On the one hand, patriotism is often merely love of homeland, allowing criticism and consideration. Yet, Vincent argues that even with patriotism, “love of country is not love of a language or ethnicity, but rather of political liberty” /10/, referring in his article to the U.S. and possibly the European Union. Nationalism, on the other hand, is always imperceptive of any self-reflection in the sense that it attempts to avoid admitting to any faults. Still, the boundaries between the two remain somewhat blurred and indistinct. In this paper, the researcher will follow Brubaker and those who explain patriotism and nationalism as two separate concepts. Furthermore, one can notice that the 9/11 responses in politics were definitely at least on the verge of nationalism, when the politicians and later the media presented America’s exceptionalism, democracy, freedom, prosperity and consumerism as the greatest American virtues, employing language that was ideologically divisive. So, in accordance with Vincent’s claim mentioned above, these are the values expected from American patriots. Moreover, Redfield confirms the presence of nationalism in U.S. culture: “The atavistic nationalism so prominent in U.S. political and mass-mediated culture has, in my view, much to do with the political, technical, and socioeconomic developments that led twentieth-century “mass culture” per se to be tagged as “American” /4/.

In his nationally televised speech “We Have Seen the State of Our Union” given before the Congress on September 20, 2001, former U.S. President George H. W. Bush commended the American nation “for their resolve while pledging to use the country’s armed forces in a ‘war on terror’” /12/. In 2002, Silberstein published the book *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11*,

where she assigned the motivational, but especially highly pedagogical style of Bush’s rhetoric to his speech, “which is high on realism and certainty,” with the aim “to demonstrate thoughtful deliberation” /3/. However, in her analysis she soon conceded that another characteristic of his speech was “strategic misrepresentation” with “other potential omissions” /3/; e.g. Bush avoided providing answers as to why war was the only way to conquer terrorism.

In the immediate aftermath, President Bush and his administration instantly declared a war against terrorism, later shortened to a ‘war on terror’, seeking revenge for the injustice suffered by the American nation: “Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom. Our grief has turned to anger, and anger to resolution. Whether we bring our enemies to justice, or bring justice to our enemies, justice will be done” /13/. He stated that the “enemies of freedom [had] committed an act of war against our country,”<sup>5</sup> and in the continuation of his speech he disclosed that, after collecting evidence, they had identified the enemies as “a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al-Qaeda” /13/. He also explained why the alleged enemies of freedom hated America, and the reason behind their animosity appeared rather simple: “They hate our freedoms—our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other” /13/. Silberstein agrees when analyzing his speech that, “[t]his [the characterization] is, at best, a simplification” /3/. This highly patriotic speech<sup>6</sup> does not involve even the slightest trace of self-reflection or self-criticism, or consideration of whether America had done wrong in the past, since the attacks are ascribed only to envy of

<sup>5</sup> Krista de Castella and Craig McGarty conducted an appraisal theory-based content analysis “to systematically examine emotional appeal in the political rhetoric of three former Western leaders” (De Castella and McGarty 92). They confirmed that Bush’s divisive rhetoric constitutes “bipolar representation of “us” and “them” and the portrayal of the “evil other” with language that is simplistic, dichotomous, and reductionistic” (De Castella and McGarty 87). The second and third theme that are characteristic for the “war narrative,” as they put it, are “the depiction of terrorists as motivated chiefly by a hatred of the (in this case, Western) values” and “information “security,” secrecy, and opacity” (De Castella and McGarty 88). All three themes coincide with Bush’s rhetorical strategy, as will be shown in this paper.

<sup>6</sup> De Castella and McGarty also recognized “patriotic appeals to unity and strength” in Bush’s speeches (de Castella and McGarty 95).

American prosperity and privileges, such as freedom. Such responses are no longer merely patriotic, but already rather nationalistic. Žižek thus proposes that it is vital to “deconstruct, doubt, distantiate oneself” from these exact ‘freedoms’ /1/. Žižek doubts this (Western) illusion of freedom with governments wishing to control all aspects of life, and states that “our ‘freedoms’ themselves serve to mask and sustain our deeper unfreedom” /1/.

Nevertheless, in such traumatic times, it is normal to feel shock, grief and even anger, and people need reassuring words. Yet in his speech, Bush attempted to console the American nation by further instilling fear among the American people and presenting himself and his government as the ones who would help save America from these enemies and protect Americans and their land. “Our nation—this generation—will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future [...] We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail”<sup>7</sup> /13/. Altheide writes that the reassurance of keeping America safe was delivered in the manner of “near-hysterical calls” in the “propaganda of fear, hate, and control” /5/. Additionally, Bush’s language appeared threatening, setting himself and the government far-reaching goals and making unrealistic promises: “The Taliban must act and act immediately. They will hand over the terrorists, or they will share in their fate [...] Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated” /13/. He continued to issue threats against the enemies: “We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or rest” /13/. Bush also adopted the radical and divisive rhetoric of our side vs. their side, of good vs. evil, civilization vs. primitivism, leaving little room for options and thus creating a false dichotomy. For him, the matter seemed basic: “Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” /13/. Žižek poses several rhetorical questions on the choice between ‘democracy and fundamentalism,’ which are the two poles that Bush wanted to differentiate between: “Is it not that, within the terms of

this choice, it is simply not possible to choose ‘fundamentalism’? What is problematic in the way the ruling ideology imposes this choice on us is not ‘fundamentalism’ but, rather, *democracy itself*: as if the only alternative to ‘fundamentalism’ is the political system of liberal parliamentary democracy” /1/. Such a political perspective is, of course, deceptive, and the solutions offered seem too simplistic, even blinding. Martha Stout claims that this standpoint of the American government provides “an extra boost to our [American] well-known sentiments of being the biggest and best, but it also abandons us [Americans] in a dangerous position of ignorance regarding the actual roots and possible futures of terrorism” /14/. Even more, in *9/11: The Culture of Memorialization*, David Simpson offers what might seem a surprising twist in comprehending the Derridean concept of the “autoimmune system of the West,” promoted by the Bush administration and also proposed by Stout: “Every imagining of the other is an encounter with the self: *they* are *us*. The phantasm of international terror—everywhere and always, unseen and ready to strike—is the reflection of global capitalism ...” /15/.

Resorting to this kind of rhetoric on the part of the U.S. authorities, i.e. the rhetoric of fear and general panic, is not new in American society. After reading or listening to Bush’s speeches, one is reminded of the rhetoric in the style of John Wayne and the Wild West, ‘wanted dead or alive’. Public fear-mongering has been part of American culture since the USA was founded as a country, a hypothesis found in many critical works and also in Samuel Chase Coale’s article “Conspiracy and Paranoia in Contemporary American Politics and Fiction: The Mouse and the Snake.” Moreover, Coale perceives President Bush “as the product in many ways of the American apocalyptic, paranoid, fundamentalist right wing in politics” /16/, also claiming that, “Paranoia and conspiracy are ... as American as apple pie and violence” /16/. One can think of many instances of fear-mongering, paranoia and consequently conspiracy thinking in the U.S. history. In the article “The Politics of Terrorism Fears,” Richard Jackson enumerates several occasions of fear in the U.S. history of fear: “Historical responses to the fear of violent anarchists, communists, the dangers of illegal drugs, rogue states, and weapons of mass destruction, for example, provide a ready-made set of interpretive frames and strategic responses ...” /17/. Jackson calls American culture, a “cul-

<sup>7</sup> De Castella and McGarty claim that fear has been offered “as tool of coercion that promises citizens increased protection only if they consent to the policy changes and measures advocated by their leaders” (De Castella and McGarty 90).

ture of fear," and cannot cease to provide examples of "seemingly dangerous categories of people" that were at different times in U.S. history represented as threats to the American nation (of course, according to U.S. authorities): "the various "red scares" of the frontier confrontations with Native Americans, the Palmer Raids, and McCarthyism in the 1950s; the "brown scare" of German citizens during the two world wars; and the "yellow scare" of Japanese Americans in World War II that led to the incarceration of thousands of innocent Japanese people in concentration camps /17/. Several other examples will be revealed subsequently.

In her book *Paranoia Switch*, Stout observes the matter of terror and fear in the American society from a neuropsychological point of view. She presents a brief overview of U.S. history in regard to its "limbic wars, destructive struggles with small cadres of people who have tried to enlarge their projects or their influence by using whatever our collective anxieties happened to be at the time" /14/. Stout offers three examples from U.S. history: the rise of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War, the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans, and McCarthyism, and applies her theory to the time after 9/11, as well. To show the phenomenon of fear-mongering in the media, she selected several headlines that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* between December 1941 and February 1942, with which she argues that "the psychological tenor of the American press was terrifying" /14/. She conducted a comparable survey after 9/11 and found alarmingly similar results in headlines published in *The New York Times* between September 2001 and December 2002. She established that "fear once again became our leading story, along with the usual shades of fear-consolidated allegiance" /14/. Apart from Stout's examples, one can think of another occurrence of the American dual worldview, i.e., of our side vs. theirs: Altheide mentions that the bipolar rhetoric was typical of the Cold War era, too, dividing the world into two powers, the USA and Soviet Union.

Stout describes six stages of every limbic war, stages which tend to overlap and can be easily applied to the period after 9/11. The first stage is usually a war or an attack, followed by *group trauma* or, as Stout puts it, "a traumatic event that installs a nonconscious paranoia switch in the minds of a nation's citizens" /14/. The second stage involves *fear broker(s)* who "use the public's

fear to pursue a private agenda" /14/. These alternate plans are usually power and control, and as Stout points out, "Authoritarian fear brokers remind us, frequently and dramatically, of how much danger we are in, whether or not the remaining threat is significant or even real" /14/. People are then *retraumatized*, and people feeling frightened tend to seek solace in someone who simultaneously announces danger and promulgates himself as the protector. According to Stout, this stage is vital, as on it depends it whether a limbic war can happen at all—i.e. whether the nation decides to follow the fear brokers. The third stage is called *scapegoatism*, in which the leader blames another group or race of people for the crisis and uses "hatred's poison as a tool" /14/. Often, during *scapegoatism* the allegedly guilty group of people "is only tangentially, or symbolically—or not at all—related to the disaster that traumatized the nation in the first stage" /14/. After the scapegoats are determined, it is time for the fourth stage—*cultural regression*—which represents the peak of the process, demanding exacting vengeance and causing intolerance. Stout clarifies: "Typically, encouraging an us-versus-them atmosphere impels a tidal wave of patriotism across the traumatized nation" /14/. The fifth stage—*recognition and backlash*—is the beginning of the end of a limbic war when "protests begin, small and uneasy at the beginning, growing larger and bolder as time goes on" /14/. *Regret and forgetting* constitute the last stage of the process, when "fear begins to ease, often years later" but questions remain "why we allowed ourselves to be so easily co-opted into an authoritarian agenda" /14/.

If one returns merely to the speech delivered by Bush to the American nation after the attacks, let alone to the events of 9/11, one could apply all these stages of a limbic war to the process. The trauma of 9/11 as the first stage was amplified in the second by the nation's leader: "Tonight we are a country awakened to danger [...] The terrorists' directive commands them to kill Christians and Jews, to kill all Americans [...] including women and children. [...] There are thousands of these terrorists in more than sixty countries [...] They stand against us, because we stand in their way" /13/. In the third stage, scapegoats were immediately found to help "heighten the population's anxiety and paranoia" /14/. President Bush was convinced that the attacks were committed by the "group [al-Qaeda] and its leader—a person named Osama bin Laden" /13/. Lat-

er, the administration began blaming not only Afghanistan, as in the first speech, but also Iraq. As Stout correctly indicated, there was that “peculiar twist,” when the “offending out-group” is not related to the events. After some time, it became clear that the events of 9/11 were not connected to Iraq, “against which nation we [the American nation] unleashed the overwhelming force of our fear and rage” /14/. Even during the speech, Bush had begun to divide, which is typical of the fourth stage, not only the nation but the world into those who supported his authority and the plan of enhancing their political power behind it, and those who did not. He manipulated people by separating these two groups into good vs. evil, and by that stirred patriotic, even nationalistic emotions among American citizens.

Soon after 9/11, the civil liberties of American people began to be seriously curtailed, as the government began strengthening security and exerting control, even over online communication and financial information. Pyszczynski, Solomon and Greenberg describe this intrusion into people’s lives and reduction in their freedoms as some of the most tragic effects of the terrorist attacks:

Security at airports has been increased massively. Long lines, hand searches of luggage, x-ray inspection of packages, chemical screening of shoes, and bodily pat downs are now an accepted part of air travel. The U.S. Congress acted quickly to heighten the power of law enforcement authorities to conduct clandestine observations, including wiretaps, searches, and other potential invasions of our privacy. Random searches of cars, monitoring information on the Internet, and more careful scrutiny of foreign visitors are other examples of the steps being taken or proposed to increase our safety and avert the potential for future attacks /6/.

Within weeks after the attacks, the Bush administration prepared an Act of Congress, called the USA PATRIOT Act, which is an acronym for *Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism* Act. The Act passed the legislation immediately and fear ruled the nation for a while. Stout recalls that in the immediate aftermath “gun sales increased by as much as 50 percent in some states, and according to FBI reports, background checks for handguns also rose dramatically” /14/. Because of the overwhelming calls for safety from the government, Americans

again felt frightened and felt the urge to protect themselves.

Another public response that went hand in hand with the 9/11 events was the desperate need for protection, and thus for national heroes. The first proclaimed hero was the then current mayor of New York City, Rudy Giuliani. Silberman declares: “As New York became America’s City, Giuliani became a national leader,” who in her opinion, “led through his dual rhetorics of strength and compassion” /3/. Correspondingly, on 8 October 2001 in his *New Yorker* piece “Rudy’s Rules,” Hendrik Hertzberg concurs: “In cheering Rudy, we have also been cheering our city, and our firefighters and our cops and our rescue workers” (Hertzberg). Furthermore, when writing about heroes, Pyszczynski, Solomon and Greenberg delineate the behavior and attitude towards fire fighters and police workers at the time after the 9/11 crisis: “Police and fire personnel, both in the targeted cities and throughout the country, were hailed as heroes, finally getting some much deserved appreciation for their efforts [...] The outpouring of admiration for the heroic helpers can be thought of as exemplifying this tendency to identify with heroes in response to reminders of our own finitude” /6/. Another indication of how strongly people felt about their heroes at the time was the October 29, 2001 cover of the weekly magazine *The New Yorker*. It pictured several children at Halloween, dressed up exclusively as fire fighters and police officers and walking around New York City in their pursuit of trick-or-treat. Real heroes replaced super heroes in popular costumes.

As is clear from subsequent events, however, stages five and six of a ‘limbic war’ followed; people began doubting and later disagreeing with the invasion of Iraq and admitting to the mistakes committed. On November 25, 2001, Michael L. Rothschild published an article with the title “Terrorism and You—The Real Odds” in *The Washington Post*, where he assessed the probability of a person falling victim to a terrorist attack. He established that the odds for such events were minimal; at the same time, Rothschild warned against the paranoia that was spreading across the country and encourages people to stay realistic: “While we need to be made aware of potential dangers, we also need to understand the true probabilities of these risks” (Rothschild). Nevertheless, on the first anniversary of the attacks, David Remnick and Hendrik Hertzberg wrote a

"A Year After" comment in the September 16, 2002 *New Yorker* magazine, labeling the situation of the previous year thus: "A blind and righteous pacifism was not an option after September 11<sup>th</sup>" /18/. It is obvious that responses remained both various and conflicted.

An important question, posed by Stout as well, follows: why does the general public accept the fear brokers and yield to fear and paranoia? She claims that because people have already been frightened and traumatized, it is relatively easy for leaders to increase "the fear of an entire population of vulnerable people in the wake of a national trauma such as 9/11" /14/. According to Stout, it is not difficult to control "injured human beings by means of their reflexive, trauma-instilled vulnerability to fear" /14/. Consequently, shocked and petrified people tend to remain faithful to those promising to protect them, and to ignore the fact that "these self-avowed 'protectors' are also scaremongers" /14/. Stout makes an analogy with a battered wife who experiences a mixture of emotional turmoil, "fear, paranoia, and submission" on the one side, and "the rise of authoritarian protector" on the other /15/. She further applies this example of an individual to the nation.

Undoubtedly, the media helped politicians to instigate fear and paranoia after 9/11. Several scholars have attempted to answer to what extent the media was influenced by politics and how much it echoed the politicians' ideas. It has often been established that the 9/11 trauma was even hyper-magnified by the media, which consequently transformed the crisis into "virtual trauma,"<sup>8</sup> a term coined by Marc Redfield, but this is already a topic of its own.

### Conclusion

The paper has focused on investigating the immediate public responses to the events of

9/11. Moreover, the paper outlines the responses to 9/11 on the part of the then current political administration, portraying to what extent fear, patriotism and rhetoric in general in politics contributed to the discourse of 9/11. With the aim of illustrating the rhetoric of politics after the events of 9/11, the paper looked at a speech delivered by the former U.S. President Bush on September 20, 2001. This speech, as well as other political speeches of the time, showed traits of patriotism, even nationalism proclaiming America's exceptionalism, expressing the wish to find the perpetrators as soon as possible, and emphasizing the danger the American nation was supposedly encountering. Since the events of 9/11 were a mass global event, repeatedly witnessed by all Americans, it was not too difficult to spread fear among the already frightened nation. The paper also presented several polls that were conducted in the aftermath to document how the American nation followed their leaders.

### Notes

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<sup>8</sup> Redfield understands the term "virtual" in this case as "the trembling of an event on the edge of becoming present: one that is not fully or not properly "actual" (Redfield 2). He continues to declare that the 9/11 trauma remained—at least for those who were not victims of the attacks—virtual; i.e. "something mediated, technically produced, not properly real" (Redfield 3). Redfield claims: "For those who had the protection of distance, the September 11 attacks were not "really" traumatic; they were a spectacle: a famously, infuriatingly cinematic spectacle" (Redfield 3). This physical, technological possibility of the *virtual* boomed just around 9/11, since the first years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have seen rapid development of virtual reality. Also the movie "The Matrix" in 1999 had a considerable cultural impact.



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