Commemorating catastrophe: The British press, the culture of remembrance and the 10th anniversary of 9/11

John Tulloch

Abstract
This article undertakes a qualitative analysis of British press coverage of the 10th anniversary of 9/11. It examines four national daily newspapers and their Sunday counterparts, identifies dominant themes in their coverage and reflects on the role of newspapers in the creation of social memory and the orchestration of rituals of remembrance. The article attempts to place the developments in press coverage within a wider political context. It concludes that, although 9/11 was still presented by part of the press as a day that changed history, a range of more analytic features cast doubt on simplistic explanations.

Keywords: 9/11 anniversary, bereavement, British newspapers, memorial, memory, remembrance

Introduction
The coverage of anniversaries is a fundamental characteristic of news, passed on from the origins of journalism in the saints’ calendars of the medieval church, and the almanacs and chapbooks of the 16th century. Anniversaries structure time and provide a framework of the known, expected and predictable, within which the unknown can be placed. They constitute a fundamental form of social memory. The public anniversaries we observe, fear, hold sacred or dear, link our history to the present, embody a continuing commitment to a community of memory, make a temporal map of our annual existence and tell us whom we are. Even when their subject matter is death and remembrance, anniversaries affirm the continuing life of the human community.

The mid-19th century mass circulation press assumed the role of creating and maintaining social memory within the framework of the nation-state. This became most marked in the early part of the 20th century when, in the aftermath of the First World War, there was a ‘memory boom’ and a ‘search for an appropriate language of loss’ (Winter 2006, p. 5) to mark the human cost incurred in conflict, through the mechanism of symbolic days of national mourning and renewal—now expressed by Remembrance Sunday in the UK, Anzac Day in Australia and New Zealand, and Veterans Day and Memorial Day in the US. The press provided the accounts of disaster, loss and collective bereavement, the supportive narratives of individual and group heroism, and the fables of the enemy—the evil other, ‘dark, as archetypal sin’ (MacNeice 2007)—necessary to sustain collective effort. In commemorating the
anniversary of 9/11, the British press drew on pre-existing narratives of remembrance fashioned for world wars, and constructed accounts to handle content that was different in a number of striking ways.

The event of 9/11, by virtue of media coverage, was global in its reach and readily constructed as an attack on the entire Western world and, by extension, on humanity itself. But it was also intensely localised, confined to the USA and, within that, to New York and Washington, and, within those cities, to a comparatively tiny area. While the loss of life of British nationals was heavy—67 died in the fall of the Twin Towers, the largest ever single toll of any terrorist incident involving Britons (Guardian 2002)—it was insignificant compared to the 2604 US deaths (Foderado 2009). For Britons, the commemoration was therefore both an instance of what John Thompson, in another context, describes as ‘mediated celebrations of national identity [in] which all citizens, wherever they may be, are … invited vicariously to take part’ (Thompson 1995, p. 201) and an affirmation of a wider identity, variously claimed as the West, the Anglophone and European communities, and allies of the US.

The victims to be commemorated were predominantly civilians, with the exception of a large cohort, totalling over 400, from the fire, police, rescue and other services (New York Magazine 2012). The event was broadcast live and framed as a breaking television news story. In the initial coverage, a number of British newspapers, including the Daily Telegraph, Guardian, Mirror and Daily Express, described the attacks as an ‘act’ of war (Quilty–Harper 2011). The Daily Telegraph used the banner headline ‘War on America’, while the Guardian led with ‘A declaration of war’. The Mirror widened the declaration to ‘WAR ON THE WORLD’, while the Daily Mail sought an ‘end of days’ symbolism by drawing on the language of the New Testament, in its ‘APOCALYPSE New York. September 11, 2001’ (Quilty-Harper 2011).

A fundamental problem for the press with 9/11, in drawing on narratives of remembrance, was the unprecedented nature of the conflict whose victims were being commemorated. If the immediate reaction was principally to frame the event as an act of war, this was not a war in the sense most commonly used in the 20th century. It was not a conflict between nation-states, with a beginning and an end, for definable economic and geopolitical motives, nor was it for the acquisition of territory and resources, the subjugation or elimination of ethnic groups and nationalities, the creation or recovery of national prestige, or the building of a nation.

Another major difficulty lay in the motives for the attacks. The reasons given by the attackers focused on US foreign policy, including its continuing support for Israel and occupation of Islamic holy places. But media reports and interviews defined it much more widely—not only as ‘anti-Americanism’ but also as an attack on ‘secularism’ (Hitchens 2001), ‘postmodernism’ (Rothstein 2001; Hammond 2007), ‘an assault on the [American] peaceful way of life’ (Daily Telegraph 2011) and ‘globalization’ (Baudrillard 2001). In The Times, J. G. Ballard was the most eloquent definer of the attacks as ‘a sign of desperation; of a doomed rejection of modernity’: 
We may also be watching the beginning of the end of the era of comparative peace and sanity created 200 years ago by the Enlightenment. It seems that the Enlightenment is being challenged and has nothing to answer. Appeals to reason, sanity and scientific progress mean nothing to someone with a fanatical grudge against existence.

(Ballard quoted in Whittell 2001)

**British national press in context**

At the time of the 10th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, 12 daily morning newspapers and 10 Sundays comprised the British national press, owned by a small assortment of media conglomerates, trusts and individuals.

**British national daily newspapers, September 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Political orientation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sun</td>
<td>2,725,323</td>
<td>News International (Rupert Murdoch)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mail</td>
<td>2,008,817</td>
<td>Daily Mail and General Trust (Viscount Rothermere)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Mirror</td>
<td>1,143,778</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Star</td>
<td>681,268</td>
<td>Northern &amp; Shell (Richard Desmond)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Express</td>
<td>617,640</td>
<td>Northern &amp; Shell (Richard Desmond)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Daily Telegraph</td>
<td>607,186</td>
<td>Telegraph Media Group (Barclay Brothers)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Times</td>
<td>429,554</td>
<td>News International (Rupert Murdoch)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Times</td>
<td>344,583</td>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Record</td>
<td>298,010</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Guardian</td>
<td>232,566</td>
<td>Guardian Media Group (The Scott Trust)</td>
<td>Labour / Lib Dem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent</td>
<td>176,983</td>
<td>Independent Print (Alexander Lebedev)</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>i</td>
<td>184,402</td>
<td>Independent Print (Alexander Lebedev)</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
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Source: *Guardian* (2011a)
### British national Sundays, September 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Circulation</th>
<th>Owner</th>
<th>Political orientation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1,979,701</td>
<td>Daily Mail and General Trust (Viscount Rothermere)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Mirror</td>
<td>1,845,683</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror News International (Rupert Murdoch)</td>
<td>Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Sunday Times</td>
<td>984,223</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror News International (Rupert Murdoch)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The People</td>
<td>839,182</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror Northern &amp; Shell (Richard Desmond)</td>
<td>Labour</td>
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<td>703,319</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror Northern &amp; Shell (Richard Desmond)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday Express</td>
<td>680,119</td>
<td>Northern &amp; Shell (Richard Desmond) Telegraph Media Group (Barclay Brothers)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<td>The Sunday Telegraph</td>
<td>481,648</td>
<td>Northern &amp; Shell (Richard Desmond) Telegraph Media Group (Barclay Brothers)</td>
<td>Conservative</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sunday Mail (Scotland)</td>
<td>400,106</td>
<td>Trinity Mirror News International (Rupert Murdoch)</td>
<td>Labour</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Observer</td>
<td>273,015</td>
<td>Guardian Media Group (The Scott Trust)</td>
<td>Labour/LibDem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Independent on Sunday</td>
<td>154,328</td>
<td>Independent Print (Alexander Lebedev)</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
</tr>
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Source: Guardian (2011b)

Despite the long-term decline in circulation due to the internet, as well as the existence of a large number of regional and local newspapers, and a vibrant broadcasting sector including the BBC (the largest broadcaster in the world), the London-based morning newspapers remained the dominant influence on the daily news agenda for the UK media (Cole & Harcup 2009, pp. 20–2). This was because of the primacy of London as a news source in the media economy of the UK, compared to the US, and European countries (Cole & Harcup 2009, pp. 20–2). Other factors included the continuing high level of newspaper readership. Despite the inroads of the internet, over nine million Britons still bought a daily newspaper, and over 20 million read one. National newspaper brands successfully colonised the internet, notably the Daily Mail, The Guardian, The Times and The Daily Telegraph. Mail Online, the online counterpart of the Daily Mail, for example, is (at January 2013) the most visited newspaper website in the world (see Ponsford 2012). These factors ensured that the resilience of the British newspaper press, diagnosed by Michael Bromley and Stephen Cushion (2002) in their work on the press response to 9/11, was still largely in force.
Over the preceding 30 years, there was a high degree of convergence in news values between the so-called broadsheets or ‘quality’ national newspapers and the tabloids (see Barnett 1998; Bromley 1998; Tulloch 2009). This was accompanied by a substantial degree of ‘tabloidisation’—that process by which the popular news values of human interest, scandal and domestic issues shape the news agenda at the expense of politics and foreign affairs coverage (Tulloch 2009). One response was a ‘panic over tabloid news’ diagnosed by Colin Sparks (2000)—a grande peur about cultural decline as a result of the alleged ‘dumbing down’ of media consumption, its impact on standards of knowledge and the capacity to participate within the public sphere.

**Methodology**

For the present study, the July to September 2011 coverage by four national daily newspapers and four Sundays was chosen for detailed qualitative analysis. The newspapers were The Times, The Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and The Guardian, together accounting for a daily circulation of approximately 3.28 million (or just over a third of the total), and their four Sunday sister newspapers, The Sunday Times, The Sunday Telegraph, The Mail on Sunday and The Observer, with a joint circulation of approximately 3.7 million. This provided a substantial, right-of-centre political bias—but a reasonable representation of the overall bias in the daily and Sunday press—with the Mail embracing the values of the populist right, the Telegraph a more moderate one-nation conservatism and The Times supporting, at this stage, the Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government, after backing ‘New Labour’ in the preceding three general elections (1997, 2001, 2005). The Guardian and Observer remained reliably left-of-centre, fluctuating between supporting the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, while proclaiming adherence to 'liberal' values in politics rather than economics. The entry of the Lib Dems into the Coalition with the Conservatives had pushed the Guardian towards the Labour party, as that government embarked on a program of swingeing public service cuts and hardline economic liberalism.

All these papers have embraced, to a varying degree, some aspects of tabloidisation. This is most noticeable in terms of format. The Mail assumed the tabloid format in 1971, after being published as a broadsheet from its launch in 1896 as the ‘The Busy Man’s Daily Newspaper’ with no story longer than 200 words (Tulloch 2000). But in the lower middle class, middlebrow market in which the paper has generally fished, the format is described as ‘compact’. The Times took until November 2004 to opt for the so-called compact format. In deliberate contrast, the Guardian was relaunched in the slimmer ‘Berliner’ format in 2005 (Guardian n.d.) midway between a broadsheet and a tabloid. Only the Telegraph retained the old broadsheet format, a decision largely backed by its over-50, middlebrow conservative audience. The Sundays have remained more conservative, with the Sunday Times, Observer and Sunday Telegraph retaining the broadsheet format. The Mail on Sunday was launched in 1982 in a compact format.

After a close reading of the eight newspapers over the study period, utilising Factiva, a total of 132 discrete stories were identified—in news, feature and editorial
sections—from July 1 to September 30, directly concerning themselves with the 10th anniversary of the events of 11 September 2001 and events that flowed therefrom.

British coverage of the 10th anniversary of 9/11 balanced a set of familiar elements. They included the remembrance of the dead in rituals and memorials, the celebration of heroes and the denigration of perpetrators. A limited range of other elements also featured, flowing from the function of media to establish context and meaning; raise awkward questions; skirt, explore and break taboos; and embrace the shock of the new and incomprehensible within the framework of the old and familiar. In the run-up to the anniversary, both the Telegraph and Guardian adopted an overall template to package some of the coverage and fashion it into thematic coherence, with the Guardian labelling coverage ‘The 9/11 decade’ and ‘9/11: 10 Years On’ and the Telegraph labelling it ‘9/11 anniversary’.

Such imposed thematic and typographical devices constituted a space within which the reporting of the ceremonies in New York and elsewhere for 11 September, and background stories in the run-up to the anniversary, could be placed. Within this space, a range of five principal themes—frequently recurring motifs in the coverage—could also be developed. 1) Remembrance: the description of social acts designed to recall the events, including speeches; 2) Bereavement: the description of the continuing human loss created by the events; 3) Memorial: descriptions or discussions of the physical and social embodiment of effort to give expression to remembrance and bereavement; 4) Threats: concerns about alleged continuing risks of new atrocities; 5) Lessons: the consideration of what, if any, historical lessons were derived from the 9/11 experience, and the status of continuing threats.

The use of ‘themes’ is in part inspired by the extensive literature on ‘framing’ or ‘principles of organisation’ first identified by Erving Goffman in 1974 (cited in Allan 2004) to define social interactions and subsequently developed by numerous media scholars including Todd Gitlin (1980) to explain the ‘principles of selection, emphasis and presentation’ involved in the manufacture of news (Allan 2004). Frames are usefully defined by Reese (2001, p. 11) as ‘organising principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world’. But framing methodology is diverse, and for the present study, which does not involve any analysis of newsroom operation or editorial decision-making, it was felt more appropriate to adopt a simpler model with a small selection of very broad, descriptive themes to cover some general issues.

**Remembrance**

For the ceremonial on the day itself, newspapers adopted a rhetoric of remembrance that presented the rituals in New York as globally significant. ‘Ten years on, the world remembers’ proclaimed the Mail (Leonard 2011c) in a feature that emphasised the established patterns in ‘a public outpouring of grief [that] has become an annual event’, ‘a day marked by quiet patriotism and sombre emotion’. But the story posed an implicit question: what is there new to say about this?
Lower Manhattan was bathed in sunshine yesterday, just as it had been …
Once again, the mourners gathered solemnly where the Twin Towers once stood …
Once again, there was the mournful lament of bagpipes …
And once more came the reading out of the names of all who died …

(Leonard 2011c)

This tolling build-up is rhetorically released by the statement that the differences this year are the existence of a permanent memorial, the death of Osama bin Laden and the claim that ‘economic fears have replaced security ones for Americans’ and that ‘many want to move on from 9/11’ (Leonard 2011c).

This hints at closure, but although British journalism here plays with ‘9/11 fatigue’—the perception that the level of remembrance might reasonably be scaled back—it is raised with careful respect, as it would be at a funeral. As a junior partner in grief, the UK demonstrates a reluctance to fully indulge it, and breach definitively an uncertain taboo.

However, Peter Lewis (2011) in the Mail boldly starts his review of ‘Terrorism: the Eleventh Day’ (Summers & Swan 2011) by stating:

By the time you read this, it is more than possible you will be suffering from 9/11 fatigue.

The colossal trauma of the downing of the Twin Towers is awe-inspiring however often it is replayed … [But] after the tide of eyewitness testimony, articles and documentaries, even novels and films that it has inspired, what more is there to be said?

(Lewis 2011)

Lewis uses the essayist/columnist’s prerogative to play with the taboo before rejecting it in favour of the need to explore ‘unanswered questions’ about the military response, an ‘utter failure’ subsequently covered up by ‘orchestrated mendacity’, and the involvement of Saudi officials (Lewis 2011). Lewis’s playful review is also exceptional in alluding to what is claimed to be bin Laden’s chief motive—the liberation of Palestine and his expectation that the US would become embroiled in a retaliatory war in Afghanistan that would bleed it to financial defeat.

Many narratives re-explored the experience of 9/11 and were closely linked to narratives of heroism—the celebration of individual and collective bravery. Like war memorials, part of the press coverage attempted to unite the arenas of ‘private memories, family memories and collective remembrance’ (Winter 2006, p. 139).

Just as mourners trade memories of the deceased in the lead-up to a funeral, all the newspapers were in the market for fresh, newly excavated memories of 9/11, especially with a British angle. Indeed, like tedious guests who hardly knew the victims, there was a small plague of self-justifying memoirs by senior British
politicians and public figures. Christopher Meyer, British Ambassador to the US, in Washington at the time of the attacks, offered in the *Daily Mail* what purported to be an insider’s recollection of the reaction of Condoleezza Rice to the attack: ‘cool and collected’ and already alleging ‘a possible connection to Iraq, which would have to be investigated’ (Meyer 2011). He recalled his anxiety that the embassy was next door to the vice-presidential residence turning to ‘horror’ when he found that the usual security protection had been removed.

> I urgently called Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of State, a good friend who believed in action not words. ‘For Pete’s sake, Rich, they’ve taken away our protection! We are sitting ducks!’

(Meyer 2011)

Predictably, he was told to get lost. In the same newspaper David Blunkett, Home Secretary at the time of 9/11, gave a laboured description of receiving the news via mobile calls from his sons, before using his feature as a jeremiad to justify his subsequent restrictions on civil liberties, including an attempt to introduce identity cards (Blunkett 2011). George W. Bush’s only interview on the events of the day was given to the National Geographic channel. Extracts were carried by many British newspapers. In the *Guardian* the National Geographic program’s director described Bush’s account of how he was personally affected:

> He said it felt like he was suddenly in the fog of war. There were rumours that his ranch in Texas and the White House were under attack and he genuinely didn’t know what was going on for a period of time.

(Schnall cited in Hickman 2011).

Travel journalists such as Graham Boynton in the *Daily Telegraph*, skirted the perils of ‘disaster tourism’ and linked vivid memories of 9/11 with a visit to the contemporary city:

> On my first morning in Manhattan I take a walk down to my own personal 9/11 shrine. It was a bar in Tribeca called Yaffa’s … If most people’s memory of 9/11 is defined by the burning towers, mine is defined by those hardened firefighters sitting at Yaffa’s long bar with tears rolling down their cheeks …

(Boynton 2011)

But Boyton finds the bar has been replaced by a Mexican restaurant, a symbol of the way in which the city has moved on and ‘recovered its in-your-face swagger’ (Boynton 2011).

Typically, British papers grabbed at any available narratives involving Britons in the central rituals of remembrance. Hilary Clinton’s invitation to the light welterweight world champion at the time, Amir Khan, from Bolton, England, for a
White House dinner on 10 September with other Muslim sportsmen, heavy with PR significance, received respectful attention:

Khan, who has previously criticised the US authorities, admitted he was ‘delighted’ with the offer and was in London this week renewing his visa.

(Daily Telegraph 2011)

To a large extent, this coverage might be said to represent the increasingly celebrity-driven news agenda of the British press. But, ironically, the most electric British story was related to the continuing revelations of phone hacking by reporters for the News of the World. Explosive allegations surfaced in the London Daily Mirror, that attempts had been made to gain access to the voicemails of 9/11 victims—an extraordinary breaching of taboos about respect for victims and their families, and potentially ruinous for the huge US interests of News International (Daily Mirror 2011; Pilkington 2011a). But overall, the taboos of grief were observed in the mainstream press.

Bereavement

Few British journalists in the run-up to the anniversary moved away from the central news centres of New York and Washington. However, a few newspapers broadened the bereavement theme to include casualties suffered as a result of the ongoing ‘9/11 wars’ in Iraq and Afghanistan. Ed Pilkington in the Guardian, in a series of articles under Living with 9/11 (2011b), explored the legacy of 9/11 in small-town America, including the toll of over 6000 US dead in subsequent wars (2011e).

To illustrate the unevenness of these burdens, Pilkington used examples of the experience of Native Americans in a Navajo reservation, whose representation in the US armed forces, driven by a lack of local jobs, was twice the national average. These human cases lent the story the bite of authenticity—for example, the testimony of a mother, Judye Sinclair-Liczel, with sons in the military:

You wake up each morning and wonder where your child is, is he OK, is he in danger or not in danger? You worry, you rip your hair out, and you cry. It doesn’t get easier.

(Sinclair-Liczel cited in Pilkington 2011e)

Other articles in the series covered the experience of a police officer, a widow, a family, a therapist, a charity worker (who for months, ‘went to work in her dead brother’s clothes’) and a child, Eamon Stewart:

For days, [the eleven-year-old] refused to accept his father was dead. Then one morning, his mother came into his bedroom and said: “We have to give up, it’s over”.

[Stewart reflected:] “I cried. I just remember crying and my mum hugging me. Then a friend came in and asked me what I’d like to do more than anything. I said I wanted to play soccer, so that’s what we did …”
This coverage of ordinary individuals continued an honourable tradition initiated in the aftermath of 9/11 by the New York Times and others, in which coverage of death and bereavement was expanded ‘beyond the famous and celebrated to include every person confirmed dead whose family wanted an obituary’ (Carey 2002, p. 75). The trend was even marked in the tabloid newspapers, which for a period seriously engaged with the tragic aspects of human interest (Bird 2002).

**Memorial**

The 10 years after 9/11 had seen fierce debate about the physical memorial to the dead and the design of the buildings that would replace the Twin Towers. This aspect was covered extensively in all the papers studied. It was accompanied by a number of stories that employed a rhetoric of boosterism, celebrating the alleged revival of the city. This tendency was especially notable in a number of British business stories in The Times and the Daily Telegraph, which used the anniversary in narratives of renewed capitalist vitality growing out of disaster. ‘Manhattan is booming again’ was the headline on a Telegraph story presenting the revival of the Cantor Group of companies—which lost 658 of its 960 employees—as a symbol of city-wide recovery (Quinn 2011). Indicators of revival were claimed to include a doubling of residents living in the downtown area, the completion of 12 high-rises and a further 15 being built (Quinn 2011).

Much coverage was devoted to the design of the World Trade Center replacement. Described in The Times as ‘the world’s most awaited building’ (Teeman 2011a), ‘rising from the footprints of the fallen’ (Teeman 2011c) but evaluated as wanting:

> … is this the great, mould-breaking skyscraper that people were hoping for? No. It’s a very good building that is better than average, but it’s been blunted by intense political and financial pressures.

(Teeman 2011b)

In the Guardian, Ed Pilkington (2011c) grappled with the ‘fusion of commemoration and rebirth’ represented by the memorial and the new skyscraper complex with an efflorescence of sentimental metaphor. The lost towers were like the ‘missing milk teeth in a child’s smile’, the new structure rose crowned by a ‘roof sprouting cranes like the leaves of a young plant’, while at night ‘its construction lights twinkle like a brooch from Tiffany’ (Pilkington 2011c). A gross conflict between the commercial revival of New York, with the city as a symbol of resurgent capitalism, and the urge to memorialise, was mitigated by the physical separation of stories in distinct compartments in the papers. The same newspapers that celebrated the continuing dynamic of capitalism could also be found publishing sensitive explorations of the physical and human details of the memorial at ‘ground zero’.

Memorials involve the invention of rituals and the creation of a tradition within which they are reiterated. Narratives of the UK remembrance service at the memorial
garden near the US embassy in Grosvenor Square, London, illustrated this, although transmigrated into the form of a photo opportunity—for example, in *The Times*:

In what has become a poignant tradition on every anniversary, the bereaved relatives read out the names of the 67 British victims of the attacks and laid a white rose for each of them.

(Bannerman 2011)

Against this, inappropriate memorials were deprecated in small news stories and columns—for example, the marketing of ‘9/11 memorial wine’, a commemorative chardonnay from a vintner in Long Island (Pavia 2011).

‘What does the 9/11 Memorial brand next? Soap? Hot dogs? Dog food?’ wrote FDNY EMS, the author of a website that claims to represent the views of emergency service workers in New York.

(Pavia 2011)

In a similar vein, but with a royal-bashing spin, US publishers were reported by the *Mail on Sunday* (2011) to have rejected a children’s book by Sarah Ferguson:

The Duchess of York, 51, sent publishers an outline of the 32-page book, *The Little Pear Tree*, last month. She told them she intended to present a copy to President Barack Obama at the opening of the Ground Zero Museum in New York in September. But a source said: ‘The Duchess got her people to contact at least three publishers but none showed any interest because the Americans regard works of fiction about 9/11 as insulting.

(Pavia 2011)

**Threats**

A major theme in the months running up to the 9/11 anniversary was the threat of renewed attacks, particularly following the killing of Osama bin Laden in May 2011. This was subsumed into coverage of what were alleged to be continuing threats, principally from al Qaeda, despite substantial doubts as to the continuing existence of it as an organisation (Curtis 2004; Beckett 2004; Burke 2011). British papers ratcheted up the threats by extensively reporting unnamed US ‘sources’. In May the *Daily Telegraph* reported that computer files seized from bin Laden’s house indicated that al Qaeda had been planning a ‘spectacular’ attack on US trains on the anniversary (Swaine & Gardham 2011). Michael Evans (2011) in *The Times*, writing in August, quoted ‘counter-terrorist and defence officials’ to claim that a ‘new brand of al Qaeda’ in Iraq was ‘showing a surprising ability to regenerate leadership’ and estimated to have up to 1000 members, including bombmakers and propagandists.

Leadership is the key to al-Qaeda’s ability to be dangerous … Al Qaeda now has its fourth No 3 (third-ranking) operational commander, the previous three having been killed by CIA drones.
Eliminating bin Laden did indeed appear to have enhanced the possibility of revenge or inaugural attacks, with The Times reporting a ‘heightened expectation that the new terror leader [allegedly bin Laden’s ‘long-serving deputy, Ayman al-Zawahiri’] will seek to mark his accession with a major attack, perhaps on the tenth anniversary’ (Haynes 2011). Jon Swaine in the Telegraph claimed a direct British involvement:

The Daily Telegraph learnt that MI5 has been advising New York authorities on security. It is understood that the Security Service officials have given briefings on their experience of dealing with IRA vehicle bombs in London.

By September, on the eve of the anniversary, all newspapers reported heightened security measures in New York: ‘tightened inexorably’ according to The Times (2011a) in a city on ‘terror alert’ (Pilkington & MacAskill 2011)—a ‘fortress’ (Leonard 2011b). The alleged cause was ‘three al-Qaeda terrorists … on the loose suspected of plotting a 9/11 anniversary outrage’ (Leonard 2011a), mainly claimed to be a vehicle-based bomb. The Guardian detailed some of the ‘heightened security … clearly visible’ on the city streets, and grabbed again at British involvement:

A Scottish choir formed by the Lothian & Borders and Tayside police choirs went ahead with an impromptu performance in [Times] Square but cancelled its plans to sing on the subway. “We are here to show Scotland’s compassion for those who lost their lives on 9/11, we don’t want to upset anyone,” said the musical director.

Lessons

A limited attempt was made to analyse the historical significance of 9/11—‘The day that changed the world’, ‘this sacred day’ (Starkey 2011). In The Times, Emma Duncan (2011) argued that a date could qualify as historically significant in two ways:

It can be an inflection point in a shift that was already under way, as the fall of Constantinople was to the collapse of Byzantine power and the rise of the Ottomans. It can itself cause change, as the French revolution spawned revolt elsewhere.

According to Duncan, 9/11 was neither—not a shift in power but ‘rather, a howl of frustration from a people whom modernity was passing by’ (Duncan 2011).

The notion that the attacks represented an assault on modernity and by extension on a rational world order was commonplace, alongside an almost complete lack of attention to the original al Qaeda demands (Hussain 2011). British newspapers, however, devoted extensive coverage to the human cost of the wars (Daily Mail 2011).
Newspapers carried interviews or reports of interviews with former Prime Minister Tony Blair, for example in the *Daily Mail* (Walters 2011). Questioned about his support for the so-called ‘war on terror’ the *Mail* reported Blair ‘to be showing signs of strain’ with his eyes ‘baggy and tired’ and denying any knowledge about British collusion in torture and extraordinary rendition (Walters 2011). However, the day before Blair appeared, Prime Minister David Cameron, interviewed for the Qatar-based broadcaster Al Jazeera, reportedly agreed that ‘Britain’s previously spotless reputation on torture had become “blurred” during the last decade’ (Cameron 2011), a statement that completely ignored a vein of post-war scandal about the use of torture running from campaigns in Kenya, Cyprus and Aden to Northern Ireland (Tulloch 2005; and see, for example, on Kenya, Elkins [2005] and Anderson [2005]).

Reacting to *The Times*’ Blair interview, and in the tradition of English political invective, the *Daily Telegraph* subjected the former prime minister to a satirical philippic by Matthew Norman (2011), under the heading ‘A man who proves God has a sense of humour. One day we will be able to look back on Tony Blair as one of the great global comedy figures’.

A week earlier, the *Telegraph*’s political columnist Mary Riddell had also savaged the former prime minister. The 9/11 events had transformed him from ‘leader to messiah’ with his role in the Iraq and Afghan wars as ‘the British impresario of these conflicts, [who] went to war five times in six years’ and ‘one of the most bellicose world leaders of modern times’ with results ‘traced in blood from Baghdad to Kabul’ (Riddell 2011).

The *Telegraph*’s major contribution to the ‘lessons’ theme was a reflective feature by its former editor, Charles Moore. He identified the pressures on the British polity as wide-ranging:

>The great institutions of the nation have been strained. The intelligence services have been accused of compromising truth and bowing to political pressure. The domestic civil service and the police have made a series of mistakes about how to treat with Muslims and which ones to treat with ... Even the Armed Forces, though rightly praised for courage, have not been seen as very successful ...  

(Moore 2011)

Less significant was coverage of human rights abuses directly linked to 10th anniversary coverage, although the *Guardian* ran significant stories about the latest revelations regarding the rendition program operated by the CIA, with the assistance of European and Middle Eastern states. Headlined ‘How US firms turned CIA torture flights into profits’ (Cobain & Quinn 2011) the story reported the revelations of a court case in upstate New York:

>As the 10th anniversary to 9/11 approaches, the mass of invoices, receipts, contracts and email correspondence—submitted as evidence … provides a unique glimpse into a world in which the ‘war on terror’ became just another charter opportunity for American businesses.
Apart from the growth of the surveillance state, another legacy was alleged to be the growth of private security industry that, according to the *Daily Telegraph* business section, now employed around 500,000 people and was worth £6 billion to the British economy (Marshall 2011).

A decade on, global terrorism has changed the way governments protect their citizens ... Those who choose to work within this industry can expect to build a career in a dynamic area that seems to have bypassed the recession ...

(Marshall 2011)

**Conclusion**

The world changed on 9/11: so goes the insistent, melodramatic cliché, which stops short of telling us just how, in what ways, and primarily for whom ...

(Mishra 2011)

A broad consensus was notable in the mainstream British coverage, whether from right or left of centre. Conventions of respect were observed for the continuing public mourning processes in the US. The issue of ‘9/11 fatigue’ was seldom directly addressed, although it was registered obliquely, and noticeable in the business coverage. In salience, layout and packaging, 9/11 was still presented as a day that changed history when ‘two aircraft ... crashed also on to the consciousness of the 21st century’ (Campbell-Johnson 2011). But longer analytical features cast doubt on the ‘melodramatic cliché’ as ahistorical, and what was stressed, particularly in the *Guardian* and the *Daily Telegraph*, was the human cost of pursuing two lengthy wars.

Much was of course made of direct British involvement, where it could be established or manufactured. The death of 67 Britons was stressed as the UK’s stake in the coverage and, in a sense, its ticket of admission to the memorial process that was happening in New York and Washington. Given the scale of casualties suffered in the UK over the preceding 40 years, as a result of the conflict in Northern Ireland, and other unrelated disasters, this might be seen as extraordinary. Total casualties in the ‘The Troubles’ between 1969 and 2001 are put at 3529 in an authoritative study by the University of Ulster (Sutton 2002). On a different scale, but compressed into one day, one might cite the 93 Liverpool football fans crushed on 15 April 1989 at a football stadium in Sheffield (BBC 2008). Apart from British ‘me-tooism’, the quantity of coverage was directly attributable to one factor: the acceptance by the political class of the transcendent need to maintain an alliance with the US, which, by proxy, sustained British illusions as a great power, separate from Europe, in an ‘Anglosphere’, guaranteeing the nation’s security and its continuing access to nuclear weapons.

Where the issue of the historical causes of 9/11 was explored, the principal reason was defined as an assault on the raison d’etre of Western society. In a flashback to 2001, *The Times* (2011b) phrased it: ‘the dramatic and dreadful crime committed on
9/11 was intended to halt progress and defeat modernity. No attention was paid to bin Laden’s demands for the end of US support for Israel and the removal of US forces from proximity to Islamic holy places (Representative Press 2006), or to the possibility that the ‘war on terror’ might be decently buried by a systematic attempt to address the principal and longstanding areas of grievance.

A note on further research

This study has sketched impressionistically some of the main themes of anniversary coverage. A more tightly focused empirical study using frame theory might usefully explore significant shifts in coverage during the ten-year period. A readership study, with close attention to the mass popular press, would also throw light on the continuing level of reader interest in the US coverage and shifts in perceptions of the ‘special relationship’ among the mass audience. An intriguing question, too extensive to explore here, is the precise relationship between the online incarnations of the national newspapers, which have developed hugely in the years since 9/11, and the editorial line pursued in the print versions. Finally, the intriguing question of how conventional taboos operate in reporting memorial and remembrance events, and the associated issues involving journalists’ ethics, would be a rewarding subject of study.

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