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The Discourse of Terrorism and the Terrorism of Discourse

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .............................................................................. 2

Table of Contents .................................................................................. 3

Chapter One: An Introduction to the Narrative of 11 September ............. 4

Chapter Two: Discourse, Knowledge, and Power: A Postmodern Perspective ... 20

Chapter Three: The Discourse of Terrorism and the Terrorism of Discourse ..... 40

Chapter Four: Self, Religion, and Power ............................................. 72

Conclusion ............................................................................................. 91

Appendix ............................................................................................... 98

Bibliography .......................................................................................... 101
Chapter One

An Introduction to the Narrative of 11 September

The events of 11 September have forged profoundly diverse and unique global discourses. A hermetic narrative of that crucial date in American history has emerged in the West, however, casting George W. Bush as the heroic protagonist in the West and, necessarily, Osama Bin Laden, the evil antagonist. Religious values, political power and racism inform this narrative. This study examines the role of those elements in the rhetorical exchanges between Bush, bin Laden, the Media, and the American public and the subsequent relationships that have constructed the 11 September narrative and the production of knowledge of the Event.

The War on Terrorism represents a “new kind of war,” essentially a postmodern war “without borders” and “with an invisible enemy,” according to the President of the United States, George W. Bush. Another new war has evolved after the events of 11 September 2001: a war of rhetoric in which borders between good and evil are erased by the rupture. In spite of the infinite complexity of 9.11, Bush and bin Laden reduce it to binary opposites including dichotomous terms such as good/evil, duty/infidelity, and freedom/oppression in their profoundly political rhetoric to construct the Other as the “enemy” and to construct for themselves an identity as hero and possessor of Power. These parallel terms used by both men generate and perpetuate racism and prohibit any possibility of a convergence of cultural opposites. Perhaps not so ironically, these are terms that also construct
religious ideology: Justice for those offending authority, Duty to one's own, and definitive notions of Goodness and Truth.

A paradox emerges through the absolutist rhetoric of Bush and bin Laden, as they each pronounce to their followers that the Other is the "evil one" who must be eliminated. George Bush and Osama bin Laden use the same language to acquire and maintain power. The means and the goal are the same. The rhetoric produces the Other in order to reduce the Other. That reduction constructs a power hierarchy in which one man transcends the Other.

The ideologies demonstrated through Bush and bin Laden's rhetoric demonstrates a conflict with postmodern theory. America is postmodernally ambivalent. Culturally, it exercises diversity because America's immigrant profile requires it. Politically, however, America has one voice: Power from the Center. The American Center was constructed in the eighteenth century and continues to give ultimate voice and power to the (white, male, elitist) President. George W. Bush's responses to September 11 demonstrate centrist rhetoric and adherence to religious and racist narratives that conflict with the postmodern ideology of cultural diversity.

The postmodern condition exists in America's tolerance of cultural expression through the arts and, to some extent, in the classroom, but beyond its borders and within it regarding matters of "justice," security, and nationalism, the U.S. government practices a centrist ideology. In order to position itself at the top of the global hierarchy, upon which there is room for only one governing force, the
U.S. must centralize and unify its nation’s ideology and worldview. The U.S. government maintains the centrist, counter-postmodern position through its rhetoric, evident in political speeches, American media, and epistemology. The unifying, fundamentally racist and religious character of Bush’s rhetoric, the construction of conservative and liberal boundaries by the Media, and the suppression of revolutionary ideology in Western epistemology demonstrates the defiance of a truly postmodern condition.

The Event

September 11 is a text without words: it is the image of planes crashing into the two largest buildings on earth, people screaming in fear and jumping from one-hundredth story windows, and the two World Trade Center (WTC) towers crumbling to the ground in the middle of Manhattan on a sunny Tuesday morning. The human instincts of fear, flight, compassion, and grief occurred wordlessly.

Time magazine included in a photojournal of the WTC the following ironic quote by Minoru Yamasaki, chief architect of the towers, stated long before 11 September:

I feel this way about it. World trade means world peace and consequently the World Trade Center buildings in New York ... had a bigger purpose than just to provide room for tenants. The World Trade Center is a living symbol of man's dedication to world peace ... beyond the compelling need to make this a monument to world peace, the World Trade Center should, because of its importance, become a representation of man's belief in humanity, his need for
individual dignity, his beliefs in the cooperation of men, and through cooperation, his ability to find greatness.

Perhaps Yamasaki’s error was his belief that any one thing can consistently represent any concept. The World Trade Center represents the ultimate discord between the signifier and the signified and the relentless possibility of rupture. Since 9.11, the WTC has temporarily become a monument to grief, hatred, rage, and vengeance: anything but peace.

The post-9.11 rhetoric disseminated by politicians, bin Laden, and media pundits serves to construct a reality serving a specific agenda that addressed concept of justice, unity, duty, and “moral clarity.” The accounts given by people witnessing the event, however, produce a discourse reflecting a more deeply, tragically personal, dramatically individual truth disconnected from any centralizing political rhetoric. NYPD Detective R.P. Mendenhall, in an account stated for the 31 August 2003 New York Times, recalls

When we arrived back at the intersection [on 9.11], Detective deMello brought to my attention that large portions of aluminum chaff were being whipped around by the wind. Someone asked me a question, and as I turned to answer I heard Detective deMello scream, and as I turned a portion of the sheet metal had fallen and struck a man standing alongside the building and decapitated him. It was at this time that we noticed that people had begun jumping from the towers. Several of these people were on fire. We began a count,
but stopped at 14. This was repulsive and a wave of shame came over us because we couldn't help them.\footnote{See figure 1 in Appendix}

Aside from the stunning account of the fatal reality of 11 September, Mendenhall’s lamentation of helplessness illustrates the emasculating effect of 11 September. Emerging from this cultural quagmire is George W. Bush, toting “Wanted: Dead or Alive” rhetoric with guns drawn, prepared to recover a stunned America’s flailing sense of security and bravado.

The new, wordless text of the Event speaks profoundly of loss. The American public lost its innocence about its vulnerability and also struggles to compensate for the profound absence represented by WTC and America’s subsequent humiliation. The mighty icon of Capitalist Utopia is no longer impervious to assault. Its dubious Power has been challenged and mocked like a nine-year-old boy whose piss-wetted bedsheets have been hung out to dry for all to see. The WTC represents capitalism and that structure is now erased from the American narrative, representing a rupture and fallibility in that ideal. The WTC (as well as the Pentagon) represents the phallus; its erasure symbolizes castration and, further, a rape of America illustrated by the planes penetrating the capitalist and military icons.\footnote{See figure 2 in Appendix} Since the President represents America, the destruction of the WTC represents the castration of George Bush by an unlikely perpetrator, the most
profound Other: an outlaw Arab non-Christian with citizenry to no nation and with no title or government position.

The WTC represented a concept: the economic supremacy of America through its capitalist ideology. That ideology elicits infinite images for each individual who contemplates what it implies. A universal image of the WTC is therefore impossible because of the postmodern condition of infinitude of signification. As futile as it is to replace a lost phallus, The WTC is irreproducible.

George W. Bush

The attack on the WTC represents the impossible. Bush has attempted to explain the impossible as being a consequence of “evil.” Appeasing Americans by speaking to their sense of duty and nationalism and to their constructed values of right and wrong excused him from explicating the complex terms and issues surrounding the Event. Americans who challenged the President during this vulnerable and dangerous period in the immediate aftermath of 9.11 were branded sinfully unpatriotic. Bush, not considered to be the most skilled rhetorician in American politics, tired of the rhetoric rather quickly and, according to Bob Woodward in his account of the war in Afghanistan, Bush at War, “wanted to kill somebody” (53). In order to build a coalition, he had to construct an enemy and sell that product through a diaspora of hate language. The political aftermath of the attack has become a war of discourses between the U.S., representing the West and its endeavors in global positioning, and bin Laden, representing anti-Western sentiment worldwide.
The attacks of 9.11 occurred on George W. Bush's watch and he manipulated the foible through the power of rhetoric to emerge a hero and Saviour who destroys the "evildoers." September 11 signifies a political opportunity for Bush. He could have responded passively and commit political suicide, or he could have responded critically and intellectually and try the patience and sensibility of the nation demanding retaliation. He chose to react actively, aggressively, and assertively to become a hero rather than a victim.

Katrina vanden Heuval, editor of The Nation, quotes American social philosopher Eric Hoffer from his book, The True Believer, and references Bush in a Nation article suggesting that some politicians become fanatics about a cause in order to negotiate guilt or feelings of inadequacy: "It is the true believer's ability to shut his eyes and stop his ears to facts which in his own mind deserve never to be seen nor heard, which is the source of [Bush's] unequalled fortitude and consistency." Bush "closes his eyes and shuts his ears" to any facts or issues complicating his drive to intervene in the Middle East. Facing these issues would require two essential conditions: first, that Bush must thoroughly understand Middle East relations and policies, which are profoundly complex and historic, and secondly, that George Bush face his own racism. Such compromises also impede the forward momentum of hatred and "moral duty" that he rhetorically nurtured in Americans after 9.11.
The Presidency is a construction of an eighteenth century ideal forged by dissidents. That construction, informed by puritan ethics, has stood unchallenged largely due to the rhetorical efforts of lawmakers and politicians. Institutions of the State, upon whose laws its citizens are bound to adhere, are maintained by those peoples whose livelihoods depend on them. Those peoples’ jobs are to keep the Institution of government unchanged. Bush’s rhetoric on values, good and evil, and justice serves the government and the Presidency well in maintaining power and eighteenth century ideologies.

**Osama Bin Laden**

Bin Laden enters the global arena profoundly as an outsider. He enters the American stage set by 9.11 as the veritable anti-Christ. His goal is Power. In order to obtain power, he must dismantle the hierarchy established by American Power. He must deconstruct the “values” and ideologies of the West in order to change worldviews and develop support. Drawing on the general Arab loyalty to Islam, bin Laden has justified committing many acts of violence in order to effectively gain the attention of the world. His formula of violent acts and religious rhetoric has enabled him to be identified as arguably the most notorious rebels on earth, an immensely powerful identity.

By exercising profoundly religious and racist rhetoric, bin Laden has assembled the group Al Qaeda, united in their efforts to construct the Other defined

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3 The Puritans fled England and settled in America in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. It is important to note that the rhetoric in the Constitution of the United States reflects the Enlightenment movement. We still adhere to those tenets.
as "infidels" to Islam: all Westerners, Muslims not supportive of Al Queda’s endeavors to disrupt the global Power hierarchy, and Israelis. By reducing the Other to a greed-motivated immoral, arrogant, evil threat doomed to eternity in hell, bin Laden motivates his followers, relationally superior benefactors of an afterlife in Paradise, to politically destroy the Other and claim their rightful place in the Power hierarchy. The symbolic castration of George Bush on 9.11 was indeed an effective move toward that objective.

As Al Queda’s activities become more random, unpredictable, and undetectable and is operative in a virtual realm, could this be the beginning of the end of the nation-state with physical borders? If Al Queda becomes victorious and accumulates notable and effective power in the world without having a centrality, could this suggest that nation-states could become virtual rather than physical? Could this extend the postmodern condition to a new, virtual realm? A virtual state transcends space. The American tendency to dismiss Al Queda and groups that share its common goals (power) as being uncivilized and hateful of progress are woefully and dangerously misguided by political rhetoric. Bin Laden has employed brilliant strategic minds and cutting edge technological resources to redefine the institution of the State. By diversifying the ideology of State while tolerating nothing less than autonomy, racism, and ideology among his followers, bin Laden has deconstructed the American paradigm of practicing diversity and pluralism at home but totalitarianism (centrism) globally.

**Constructing the Text**
The discourse constructed by George Bush’s speeches immediately after the events of 11 September, Bin Laden’s fatwa and videotapes, and articles as well as other rhetoric from post-9.11 media sources composes the focus of my thesis and my primary text. These discourses have affectively altered the relationship between the Western and Arab worlds by broadening the gap already saturated with fear, mistrust, rage, and a deepened prejudice. The divisive effect is symptomatic of the centrist ideologies that reduce complexities to dichotomies. This study focuses on the rhetoric that compose these dichotomies.

My primary text is a heteroglossia of forms and genres. In order to read the comprehensive rhetoric generated from 9.11, one must not only examine, but also look past traditional, centrist political genres of public addresses and news reports and toward more abstract discourses offered in visual images and popular culture. Clifford Geertz breaks down the traditional categorization of texts and claims that language and tropes transform to suit the scholar’s purpose and needs. In his essay, “Blurred Genres: The Refiguration of Social Thought,” Geertz writes,

The properties connecting texts with one another, that put them, ontologically anyway, on the same level, are coming to seem as important in characterizing them as those dividing them, and rather than face an array of natural kinds, fixed types divided by sharp qualitative differences, we more and more see ourselves surrounded by a vast, almost continuous field of variously intended and diversely constructed works we can order only practically, relationally, and as
our purposes prompt us. It is not that we no longer have conventions of interpretation; we have more than ever, built—often enough jerry-built—to accommodate a situation at once fluid, plural, uncentered, and ineradically untidy” (Geertz: Adams 515).

The primary text I examine is a construction of threats, responses, declaration of war (jihad), executive orders, propaganda, addresses to the nation (politics), video messages, scholarly sources, and newspaper and magazine articles and images.

By reporting the politics behind the military action in the Middle East, the Media has been the strongest purveyor of the construction of a Bush identity as well as the construction of the Middle East as the Other. The powerfully political media both influences and reflects public opinion. Because the media reflects and directs what society thinks, it also serves to perpetuate cultural and societal norms. Bush and bin Laden rely on those norms to persuade the greatest number of people in order to gain greater political power. The media began responding to the Event instantly and constantly, and its role in 9.11 challenged journalistic responsibility to fairness, accuracy, and diplomacy. In the initial post-9.11 climate in which politicians dared not speak against Bush, the media maintained a pro-Bush, anti-terrorist, pro-campaign bias lest it lose its wildly nationalistic audience, 92% of which blindly favored whatever the government was proposing to do. Though the support of military intervention compromised the mainstream news’ liberal bias, it adapted well to the conservative challenge. Support for Bush and “the campaign” was overwhelming.
The Media eventually assumed a hopelessly schizophrenic bias post-9.11 for or against military intervention in response to 9.11. Liberal publications like The Nation and The Los Angeles Times asserted the futility of military endeavors citing the lack of defined goals, while more conservative voices like those on Fox News and in The Washington Post or The New American supported the popular stand to “even the score” between America and Al Queda, good versus evil. Through all the rhetoric, The New York Times successfully straddled the fence by reporting Al Queda's grievances and even assuming a sympathetic tone, but advocating military intervention in most opinion pieces.

Many publications became conduits for political partisanship. Republicans, under Bush’s lead, clearly emerged from 9.11 as the dominant party in America, and Democrats have been scrambling to find their identity since the Event.

Media reporting of 9.11 demonstrates the humanistic propensity for reducing complexities to dichotomies: reports divided reactions to the Event in terms of left or right, liberal or conservative. Each speech and article I read relating to 9.11 states a fixed position, either politically liberal or conservative. The commitment to positioning necessarily implies that someone holding the opposing view must be wrong.

This media centrisms is frightening. I hope a different view may emerge from the fact that these two political constructions—the left and the right—are accepting the position that issues are complex and ideals are illusions, making it
impossible to view complex problems through a specific lens. I hope that ideas are fanning outward from the center rather than gravitating toward it.

Ideology regarding the political future of the Middle East has blurred the lines between left and right in America. When asked about liberal scholars Noam Chomsky and Edward Said, Kanaan Makaya, Iraqi dissident and Professor of Middle Eastern Studies at Brandeis University, in an interview with Bill Moyers for KPBS (3-18-03: NOW tv), suggested that the left and right are changing sides because the radicals on the left support the traditional political practices of countries like Saudi Arabia who still oppress women and mass produce hatred for the West and train its citizens to exercise violent acts against the West. Makiya posits, on the other hand, that conservative leaders currently have a more liberal view, a grander imagination, of the politics in these nations. Post-colonialist ideologies must not invariably be associated with loss and humiliation: that stoicism denies the postmodern view of infinite interpretation and solution to problems. The dichotomies of Left and Right, like good and evil, are illegitimate concepts in a postmodern world.

The political liberal left, represented in the media with no great shortage, acknowledges the enormity of the challenge in achieving resolution peacefully but sets the table at which the various points of view may possibly intersect. Some authors of such invitations include Stanley Fish, Naom Chomsky, Tom Friedman⁴,

⁴ Though not considered liberal, I believe his arguments for broadening American understanding of the Arab psyche is a truly postmodern, liberal ideal.
and Edward Said. Soon after 9.11, Fish wrote an article for the NYT in which he attempts to define (and defend) the postmodern application to the Event. He writes,

Postmodernism maintains only that there can be no independent standard for determining which of many rival interpretations of an event is the true one. The only thing postmodern thought argues against is the hope of justifying our response to the attacks in universal terms that would be persuasive to everyone, including our enemies. Invoking the abstract notions of justice and truth to support our cause wouldn't be effective anyway because our adversaries use the same language.

Informing Americans about the Middle East, a topic about which most people were essentially ignorant, was integral to reporting on 9.11. Americans needed a definition of the Middle East and a profile of the Arab culture in order to formulate an opinion about what actions to take after 9.11. The responsibility of defining the Arab world, its culture, and its politics rested on the shoulders of news reporters, all of whom have their own biases about the Middle East. A universal definition (Americans need definition) of Arabs emerged as a culture that is uncivilized, fervently and irrationally committed to Islam, and invariably opposed to the American ideals of tolerance (quite ironic) and freedom. No definition for the term "freedom" was ever provided.

Arab newspapers contributed to the narrative of 9.11, also. The Western interpretation of these reports demonstrates racism disguised with a Western brand
of logic. The term “binladenism,” a neologism coined by Tom Friedman, op/ed columnist for the New York Times, refers to the Arabic media manipulation of interactions between the West and the Middle East that identifies the U.S. as imperialists and infidels and Arabs as victims. Friedman has illustrated the Western view of fundamentalist Islam in the Middle East. Desperate poverty, Friedman argues, drives Arab men to the madrassas and organizations like Al Queda that provide an option to their dreadfully limited lives. In these institutions, Arabs learn to hate the U.S. The term is problematic because it implies that the accusations are invariably without justification. As an example of binladenism, Friedman cites an Egyptian newspaper article in which America is accused of poisoning humanitarian food supply to Afghanistan (“Fighting bin Ladenism”). Manipulation of events and narrative in an infinitely complex web of issues and power relations seems quite easy when fear, hatred, violence, and an uncertain future provide context for journalists.

Many academics proclaim this to be a postmodern era. Art and literature express infinite textual interpretation, but government, though claiming to exercise diversity and pluralism, still operates in a puritan and romantic ideology of fixed notions of right and wrong, of guilt and innocent, of poor and wealthy, success and failure as exemplified by class, income, and academic grading, and racial and gender superiority. And while the U.S. government still philosophizes with eighteenth century tenets, in western terms, bin Laden shares his philosophical framework with thinkers from the Middle Ages.
The narrative of 9.11 constructed by Bush and bin Laden’s rhetoric is merely a version of what occurred. September 11 represents a convex of misunderstood, misinterpreted, and contradictory discourses. My study focuses on these competing narratives. Chapter One establishes the theoretical foundation for the arbitrary Truth of 9.11. Chapters Two and Three examine the ironic parallels between the language used by Bush and bin Laden and how that language constructs a narrative of the Event and defines the role that each man plays in that narrative. To read 9.11 through the simplistic rhetoric of two men profoundly motivated by power, one parroting seventh century proselytizing and the other spouting John Wayne-like clichés, is a mistake with global consequences. The rhetoric-laden “pep-talks” with which Bush pacifies and appeases fearful and arguably naïve Americans diverts them from the complex issues relative to the economic and political ramifications of September 11 in both America and the Middle East as well as throughout the world. And the fantastic narrative Osama bin Laden perpetuates cannot elevate the Arab world from its impoverished and severely oppressive conditions.
Chapter Two

Discourse, Knowledge, and Power: A Postmodern Perspective

The parallax of language and knowledge is control and power. Bush's rhetoric represents his effort to control the narrative of 9.11 and thus create the knowledge of it. His representation of the Event places him at the top of the hierarchy of Power. Any representation, however, post-structuralists argue, is fundamentally untrue and infinitely subject to the perspective of the interpreter.

Postmodernism suggests a change in perspective. The term signifies plurality, diversity, decenteredness, tolerance and acceptance. Postmodernism defies definition because of its fundamentally subversive nature. It explodes from no discernable source. The center is decenteredness. It is political and antipolitical. It is decidedly undecided. It is Godless. In a discussion of Jacques Derrida in Postmodernism and Post-Structuralism, Madan Sarup writes:

Western philosophy assumes there is an essence...or truth which acts as the foundation of all our beliefs; hence there seems to be a disposition, a longing, for a 'transcendental signifier' which would directly relate, correspond, to a secure, stable 'transcendental signified'. Examples...include Idea, Matter, the World Spirit, God, etc. Each of these concepts acts as the foundation of a system of thought and forms an axis around which all other signs circulate (Sarup 37).
Derrida argues that the ‘transcendental signifier’ cannot exist because of the impossibility of presence ("now" cannot be defined through language). In terms of language, each sign depends solely on another preceding sign and that sign depends on its preceding sign, etc. The sign, thus, is not determined by or originated from any transcendental, fixed, a priori notion or entity. Without a transcendental signifier, absolutes do not exist and the "center" of any thing constantly changes.

In addition to denying the existence of the transcendental signifier, postmodernism refuses the historical grand narrative. Narratives—popular stories or myths—define important parameters for a given society. They establish criteria for right and wrong and for what is acceptable and what is not. Francois Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge challenges the narratives of the type informing rhetoric:

Narratives, as we have seen, determine criteria of competence and/or illustrate how they are to be applied. They thus define what has the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they themselves are a part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do (23).

The historical narrative functions to compensate people's fear of realizing inconsistencies, incongruence, and the unexplainable in history.

As the "metanarrative" loses its relevance in society and technological knowledge gains power, the role of knowledge in society changes. Lyotard illustrates knowledge in a capitalist society as being measured in terms of what is
stored in computers. This knowledge becomes a commodity and an instrument of power, in which different governments compete for information. Lyotard proposes that society denies itself pleasure and creativity by making political and universal its essential elements.

The exercise of postmodern theory may be evident in the humanities and perhaps in the social sciences, but the postmodern view is not the case in matters of government. Stanley Fish, in a 15 October 2001 article for the NYT, defines and comments on the postmodern condition in the context of 9/11:

Postmodernism maintains only that there can be no independent standard for determining which of many rival interpretations of an event is the true one. The only thing postmodern thought argues against is the hope of justifying our response to the attacks in universal terms that would be persuasive to everyone, including our enemies. Invoking the abstract notions of justice and truth to support our cause wouldn’t be effective anyway because our adversaries lay claim to the same language.

Fish acknowledges the futility of resorting to universal concepts of freedom, evil, etc. because those terms only have meaning contextually. Bin Laden and Bush both contextualize the terms differently to serve their political agendas.

**Knowledge**

In a postmodern era, the way we know what we know is challenged. French epistemology states that culture constructs knowledge; Social constructionists claim
that language constructs knowledge; Foucault theorizes that power relations
construct knowledge. What concerns Foucault is the use of knowledge. This is not
to say that facts are invalid or that there exists “false knowledge.” In reference to
Foucault’s concern with power and knowledge, Colin Gordon writes in the
introduction to *Michel Foucault: Power*.

> We need to avoid the twin seductions of paranoia and universal
> suspicion... and the compulsive quest for foundational certainties and
> guarantees... both of which serve to impede or dispense us from the
> rational and responsible work of careful and specific investigation
> (xix).

Bush responded to 11 September on the basis of “paranoia and suspicion” that the
Other, constructed by a manipulation of “facts as well as social, cultural, and
political differences, is attempting to disrupt the power hierarchy on top of which
sits the United States. The need to maintain the hierarchy supercedes the “careful
and specific” analysis of the facts.

Foucault’s work questions the power hierarchies implied and established in
institutions such as the state, medicine, prisons, and education. He argues that the
primary factor in the construction and perpetuation (continuation) of an institution is
maintenance of the power hierarchy. When examining Bush’s and bin Laden’s
rhetoric, according to Foucault, one must inquire who or what precisely stand to
gain or maintain a desired position of power. Foucault argues that power
hierarchies are maintained through language that teaches, molds conduct, corrects, and instills forms of self-awareness and identities of the subjects (Faubion xix).

Bush illustrated the means by which he planned to establish dominance over the “enemy” in a 14 September meeting with his advisors. These means are all power constructs of governance: “What was decided was that this war will be fought on many fronts, including the intelligence side, the financial side, the diplomatic side, as well as the military side. What was decided is that we’re going to hit them with all we’ve got in a smart way” (Woodward 73). Without these essential systems of power—intelligence (spying and surveillance), structures of the economy, diplomacy (persuasion, manipulation, deal-making, propaganda), and the ultimate arm of discipline, the military—war would be inconceivable. Furthermore, by colonization, Bush intended to establish dominance in Afganistan through the institutions that are constructs of power and must exist to maintain and acquire greater power: Power begets power.

In The Order of Things, Foucault suggests that universal discourse “traverses the whole field of knowledge,” and that a hierarchy of knowledge exists that follows rules of necessity. He refers to Destutt deTracy in asserting that Man…tends towards the…most pressing result. He thinks first of his needs, then of his pleasures. He occupies himself with agriculture, with medicine, with war, with practical politics, them with poetry and the arts, before turning his thoughts to philosophy; and when he turns back upon himself and begins to reflect, he prescribes rules for
his judgment, which is logic, for his discourse, which is grammar, for
his desires, which is ethics. He then believes himself to have reached
the summit of theory...

Foucault concludes by asserting that "all these operations have a 'common source'
and that 'this sole center of all truths is knowledge of his intellectual faculties" (85).
This knowing, Foucault argues, cannot be possible without a fixed system of signs
which can only be constructed arbitrarily by wo/man. Knowledge is therefore
without origin and is not transcendentally fixed. Laws, rules, and values, all
constructed through language and construed from the knowledge acquired within
the confines of any given culture and society, are also, therefore, arbitrary.

Meaning

Post-structural thought, the theory informing postmodernism, challenges
previous theories of meaning that assume any one meaning can exist for any given
text. It calls for decentering, that is to say resisting the propensity for reducing any
concept to an absolute, fixed meaning. Bush and bin Laden rely on a static signified
for signifiers like "freedom," "justice," "terrorism," and "evil." Furthermore, post-
structuralists claim the subject brings all significance to the text: the "meaning"
differs from individual to individual because of what the individual bring to the text.
The extension of this theory in the social world is acceptance and celebration of
diversity and of all of who and what is included in the margins of society by virtue
of the fact that the margins defy the mainstream.
Freidrich Neitzsche promoted two ideas that influence post-structural theory: that man’s most noble quest was that of self-perfection and that there is no Truth, no Absolute. It is Neitzsche’s challenge of an Absolute that inspired the post-structuralists to examine our value systems. If all of language is a metaphor, Neitzsche argues all of written law is no more real than fiction. All values must be challenged as well, and this is what Derrida attempts to do through deconstruction.

Derrida challenges the notion of centrisms. In his essay “Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” Derrida defines the center in structuralist terms and offers a new hermeneutic by “decentering” the text, that is, acknowledging that the center is in constant flux and that substitutions of the center constantly occur:

[S]tructure—or rather the structurality of structure—although it has always been at work, has always been neutralized or reduced, and this by giving it a center or...a fixed origin. The function of this center was not only to orient, balance, and organize the structure—one cannot in fact conceive of an unorganized structure—but above all to make sure that the organizing principle of the structure would limit what we might call the play of the structure. (Derrida 278).

Between language and reality (Being) there is a space that Derrida refers to as “play” in which all possible meaning exists:

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1 Human Sciences is a term created by Foucault to define the disciplines that “fix” cultural norms. Examples are philosophy, sociology, psychiatry, and psychology.
This field [of infinite meaning between words and that which it attempts to express] is in effect that of play, that is to say, a field of infinite substitutions...[T]here is something missing from [this field]: a center which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions (Adams 1123).

This is not to say that an individual can make no sense of what is within this play, it is to say that this “field” is different for every living being. Derrida claims all texts embody infinite meaning: the play allows this. So, essentially, Derrida states that while a center exists, it differs from individual to individual. Furthermore, the center is in constant flux. This “decentering” through constant deferral and differing of meaning through speech (one cannot express an idea the moment it is conceived; once that idea is formulated through language, the original idea has already disappeared, or has been erased) accounts for post-structurals’ refusal of presence. Derrida argues that the center (of any concept) eliminates the possibility that any other concept can substitute it. This notion correlates to language and its characteristic of deferral. The point is always erased by the act of stating it; the point, therefore, can never really be identified (Adams 9). Derrida names the concept for the unifying, centering, non-present entity as the transcendental signifier, which may be interpreted as God, the solution to problems that cannot be solved: the duex ex machina. The conflict between post-structural thought and Bush and bin Laden’s rhetoric can be identified, therefore, through the existence and function of God.
Derrida's concern for the subjectivity of meaning, thought, and speech translates into the self-reflexive character of postmodern art and literature. It accounts for the deliberate ambiguity in his own writing. He writes, "[T]hought must become alien to itself in order to be pronounced and to appear" (Derrida 303). Derrida shares his realization with Foucault that speech is only performed after the thought that motivated it disappears, thus becoming objective and incapable of expressing immediate ideas. Foucault observes, for example, that in expressing the beauty of a red rose, the feeling the speaker had upon that very first moment of comprehending the beauty of the rose is gone by the time the speaker speaks of it. He claims that our thoughts and perceptions do not unfold in a linear fashion, but speech, the expression of these, does unfold linearly:

Language cannot represent thought, instantly, in its totality; it is bound to arrange it, part by part, in a linear order...[I]t replaces the simultaneous comparison of parts...with an order whose degrees must be traversed one after the other. It is in this strict sense that language is an analysis of thought: not a simple patterning, but a profound establishment of order in space (Foucault 82).

The word alone means nothing. It depends on its context within a statement.

Derrida claims that "The notion of a structure lacking any center represents the unthinkable itself" (Adams 83). Adhering to this structure regarding the WTC denies the possibility that multitudinous, even infinite, significations of the Event
exists, thus eliminating a diverse possibility of solutions to the conflicts emerging from it. The immediate reduction of the Event to “us versus them” demonstrates the essentially structuralist, absolutist, rationalist ideology practiced in American government.

A socio-political application of post-structuralism suits the emerging globalization of contemporary culture. Post-structuralism claims the inevitable and inescapable fragmentation of existence, and yet individuals maintain the autonomy and integrity to contribute to a functional society. The integration of different cultures becomes, then, workable and representative of a greater reality.

In *Blindness and Insight*, Paul De Man states, “In the act of anthropological intersubjective interpretation, a fundamental discrepancy always prevents the observer from coinciding fully with the consciousness he is observing. The same discrepancy exists in everyday language, in the impossibility of making the actual expression coincide with what has to be expressed, of making the actual sign coincide with what it signifies. It is the distinctive privilege of language to be able to hide meaning behind a misleading sign as when we hide rage or hatred behind a smile” (11). How do we negotiate this observation with Bush’s response? His primitive expression that “We gonna git ‘em” quaintly transcends the phenomena of which deMan speaks, therefore perhaps reflecting more closely that reality that social constructivists claim does not exist.

Considering this inability to establish meaning, the consistent reduction by the government of concepts relating to 9.11—revenge, God, the dichotomies of
good/evil and us/them—to something centered cuts off other views that may well provide insights that may contribute to alternative, peaceable, workable solutions.

In the same respect that earlier post-Vietnam postmodernists acculturated the “evils” of capitalism and transgressed that self-reflexive criticism consistent with its theory that capitalism is the root of evil, postmodernists today must acculturate the events of 9.11 in a self-reflexive manner to deconstruct othering and religious extremism. This self-reflection is not to discount the tragedy of 9.11. September 11 will always remain an extrinsic reality representing unexplainable violence, injustice, lunacy, and obscenity. It should not be a symbol for revenge or further perpetuation of violence.

The information that this movement suggests provides the same degree of paradox and irony that the works employ in their creation: our human condition is undeniably steeped in tradition, yet we have developed the tools of communication and cultural incentives with which to discover infinite means to change society. The implications in literature extend to new uses of “the word” as it relates to the signified and to new theories about “centeredness,” “self,” and the ways in which literature will reflect the evolving diverse American culture.

The concept is finite; the context is infinite. The ideas that individuals construct in response to any stimulus, abstract or definite, are concepts whose boundaries exist according to the limitations of the individual’s experiences, etc. The context, however, is infinite, because the stimulus has its own history and experience.
11 September is now outside the system of differences that are evolving from it. It is, according to Derrida, decentered. The domain and the interplay of the discourse is thus extended ad infinitum. Derrida, in “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” refers to “the event,” a moment of rupture, as follows:

This moment was that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse—provided we can agree on this word—that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified [God, e.g.] extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum.

It can be deduced then, in Derridean terms, that the discourse of 9.11 exists only to recapture the void left by the rupture of the Event itself, and the discourse can never fulfill its goal. The discourse, including especially the ideals constructed by the political rhetoric, is a futile attempt to define the indefinable.

Loss

Jacques Lacan theorizes in “Function and field of speech and language” that language is a process of loss and desire to recover what has been lost. He argues that humans experience loss in early stages of life (girls realize their lack of a penis, boys realize the loss of their mother to their father) and from that stage forward,
desire to recover their loss motivates action. He also argues that humans are “split” into the “I,” that element of self that acts in the world, and the I, the unconscious self whose existence we cannot realize. He relates these inconsistencies to language. Humans are always trying to express meaning, but because meaning (signifieds) exists in the unconscious, we can only, through a string of signifiers dependent on each other and only metaphorically related to the signified, construct order artificially…symbolically\(^2\). Each signifier relates to one preceding it (language unfolds linearly), and because each signifier supposes the loss of the preceding one, we are in a constant state of desire to recover that loss and establish meaning and order (which can never really be achieved). Terry Eagleton, in discussing Lacan, writes, “Language is ‘empty’ because it is just an endless process of difference and absence…One signifier implies another…\textit{ad infinitum}” (145).

The loss of the WTC parallels the post-structural theory of loss. If the WTC represents an element of the capitalist narrative—a symbolic center for international trade with the US in the position of prominent power—its loss demands, according to Lacan’s theory of symbolic order, a structural, orderly need for recovery and substitution in the narrative. Eagleton writes, “[The] narrative is a source of consolation: lost objects are a cause of anxiety to us, symbolizing deep, unconscious losses (of birth, the faeces, the mother), and it is always pleasurable to find them put

\(^2\) Lacan defines the symbolic order as the “pre-given structure of social and sexual roles and relations which make up the family and society” (Eagleton 145).
securely back in place" (161). It is this loss that drives narratives and their inherent dependence on substitution forward.

The trace of the WTC now survives as an ambiguous symbol, but a symbol of exactly what? Because there is no clear definition for "evil" and "terrorism," the WTC cannot represent the "evils" of "terrorism." The WTC represents, perhaps, in political and historic terms, America's vulnerability and complexity, especially in its relation with and to other nations.

Othering

The theory of relativism—everything is defined by what it is not or to what it relates—extends from language to social and political constructs: A word or sentence has meaning only within context; ideologies are defined by their opposition; societies and their cultures are defined by whom and what they do not include. The question, of course, is who or what defines these contexts. The answer, argue post-structuralists, is groups of people constructing the language and culture. Groups vying for a position at the top of the power hierarchy define "other." The compulsion to eliminate and exclude seems innate. Postmodernism attempts to disrupt that propensity, but in the post-9.11 world climate, acceptance and tolerance is denied permission through large scale efforts put forth by governmental actions such as the passage of the Patriot Act, otherwise referred to as the Anti-Terrorism Act. The proponents of the campaign against terrorism argue that tolerance in the context of 9.11 is impossible because it is immoral, a concept constructed by the proponents themselves.
Significantly, Bush does not name bin Laden in any of the post-9.11 rhetoric. To isolate bin Laden and then capture him would nullify further aggression against the "enemy." He would have to construct a far broader enemy than one single individual. During a 17 September meeting with the National Security Council, Bush laid out the terms for constructing a broad enemy: "The secretary of state should issue an ultimatum against the Taliban today warning them to turn over bin Laden and his al Qaeda or they will suffer the consequences...Let's hit them hard. We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want other countries like Syria and Iran to change their views." First, he must construct the Other, and after the Other has been disempowered, they would have to conform to the order of U.S. ideology.

Edward Said analyzes othering through the Western construction of the "Orient" in his book, Orientalism. Said argues that the West, in order to establish itself in a position of dominance, gives the "orient" its identity. What is not western, including the Arab world, becomes Other. The West perpetuates this deliberate process through the cultural arteries of television, film, and literature. Said writes,

[The Orient] is...the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilization and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other (1)...[A] very large mass of writers...have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate
theories...social descriptions and political accounts concerning the
Orient, its people, customs, "mind," destiny, and so on"...Orientalism
[is]...a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having
authority over the Orient...European culture was able to manage—even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily,
ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-
Enlightenment period...European culture gained its strength and
identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate
and even underground self (3).

The Middle East can be included in Said’s Orient. Indeed, the Orient is a metaphor
for all Other because it represents the construction of other to position the source
hierarchically superior in the relation of power. Said argues that one cannot exist
without the other, and one constructs the antithesis of itself in the other. The
construction of the Other is not only conceptual; it is spatial, temporal, and
historical:

Men make their own history...what they can know is what they have
made, and extend it to geography: as both geographical and cultural
entities—to say nothing of historical entities—such as locales,
regions, geographical sectors as “Orient” and “Occidental” are man-
made. Therefore, as much as the West itself, the Orient is an idea
that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary
that have given it reality and presence in and for the West. The two
geographical entities thus support and to an extent reflect each other... There were—and are—cultures and nations whose location is in the East, and their lives, histories, and customs have a brute reality obviously greater than anything that could be said about them in the West (5).

Said further argues that the Other allows itself to be constructed, thus positioning itself in such a way as allowing itself to be dominated:

The relationship between the Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony... The Orient was Orientalized not only because it was discovered to be “Oriental” in all those ways considered commonplace by an average nineteenth-century European, but also because it could be—that is, submitted to being—made Oriental” (6)

In preparing the nation for the invasion of Afghanistan, Bush often defines bin Laden’s followers and the people of Afghanistan as “uncivilized.” This construction opens the doors for the U.S. to westernize them after it “liberates” them. Our assistance to the Afghanis is a gesture of asserting domination. The effort supports globalization and western power. On the issue of investment in the Other, Said writes,

Orientalism is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which... there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made
Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness, just as that same investment multiplied—indeed, made truly productive—the statements proliferating out from Orientalism into the general culture. [T]he influence of ideas, of institutions, and of other person’s works not through domination but by...consent. In a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on [a] flexible positional superiority, which pits the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand... The scholar... and the soldier was in, or thought about, the Orient because he could be there... with very little resistance on the Orient’s part” (7).

The U.S. creates a picture of the Middle East that serves its own capitalist and cultural purposes. It feeds it, supports it financially, and assists in reforming its governments (though it will not admit to doing so), thus demonstrating U.S. power to create it in a new Orientalist manner. The Afghans and other Arab nations may allow this to happen without realizing it.

Stanley Fish cites Said in reference to Othering the new enemy, the “terrorist”:

“...[W]hat Said has called ‘false universals’ should be rejected: they stand in the way of useful thinking. How many times we have heard the new mantras: ‘We have seen the face of evil’; ‘these are irrational
madmen’; ‘we are at war against international terrorism.’... We have not seen the face of evil; we have seen the face of an enemy with a full roster of grievances, goals and strategies. If we reduce that enemy to ‘evil,’ we conjure up a shape-shifting demon, a wildcard moral anarchist beyond our comprehension and therefore beyond the reach of any counterstrategies.”

Bin Laden likewise constructs a picture of America, which I will term “Americanism.” In an interview with Peter Arnett, he claims,

We have declared jihad on the US government, because [it] is unjust, criminal, and tyrannical. It has committed acts that are extremely unjust, hideous and criminal whether directly or through its support of the Isreali occupation of...Palestine...The mention of the US reminds us before everything else of those innocent children who were dismembered, their heads and arms cut off...This US government abandoned even humanitarian feelings by these hideous crimes. It transgressed all bounds and behaved in a way not witnessed before by any power or any imperialist power in the world” (CNN).

By using rhetoric referencing tyranny, justice, and violence (especially against children), bin Laden manipulates the narrative that informs the Arab world about the U.S. America becomes the evil enemy against which Arabs who identify themselves with their country must defend themselves and seek to dominate. The
power relation with America places bin Laden and those who share his anti-Western ideology in the vulnerable, wearying position of relentless defense against U.S. efforts to annex the Middle East.

Othering enables perpetuation and maintenance of power hierarchies. This action prohibits the praxis of essential multi-culturalism. By creating knowledge about the Other. As Bush demonstrated in his rhetoric referencing the “terrorists” and bin Laden referencing Americans, the diaspora of prejudices and profiles influence whole groups and nations to reinforce boundaries between themselves and the rest of the world.

The tenets of post-structural theory poignant to 11 September are those referring to meaning and knowledge. Essentially, post-structuralists argue that all meaning is subjective, thus infinite and irrelevant to community, and that knowledge is acquired and constructed through institutions of power. The paradox of these tenets prohibits post-structural praxis. While knowledge is anchored to narrative, meaning is not. So, while knowledge narratives construct the laws that bind a nation, there is no meaning to those laws or the order they produce. The U.S. response to “bring justice” to the perpetrators of 9.11 evolves from a hermeneutic, post-structuralists argue, without meaning.
Chapter Three
The Discourse of Terrorism and the Terrorism of Discourse

Rhetoric is the par excellence the region of the Scramble, of insult and injury, bickering, squabbling, malice and the lie, cloaked malice and the subsidized lie”

-Kenneth Burke (R of M 18).

The rhetoric disseminated by Bush and bin Laden defined terrorism in terms that served their respective political agendas. In this chapter, I analyze Bush’s rhetoric of “othering” that prepared the nation for “the campaign” in Afghanistan and bin Laden’s rhetoric of jihad, justifying violence against the “infidels.” The analyses demonstrate rhetorical and ideological parallels between Bush and bin Laden including an illustration of the deliberate construction of the Other in order to reduce that constructed Other. Demonstrated as well is the centrism of mainstream perspectives of 9.11, manipulated by political rhetoric and the media that draws the public to a particular agenda, a fixed point in the discourse that implies, for example, that one side is good and the other, evil. The postmodern perspective that allows the Event to be considered from infinite points of view is thus disallowed from evolving. For as many people who consider the events of 9.11, there as many interpretations of the Event. To reduce 9.11, therefore, to issues driven by “good/evil” or “friend/enemy” is denying the postmodern perspective.

This section examines rhetorical points of intersection between the two discourses in terms like evil, oppression, freedom, and God. The first section of this chapter examines the critical terms used by Bush that shape the 9.11 narrative
enabling him to manipulate the public opinion, knowledge, and interpretation of the Event. In the following section, after a brief biography and a discussion of Osama bin Laden, I analyze the elements of his rhetoric that construct and distinguish him as a radical and a vital threat to the West. Americans’ knowledge and opinions of and about 9.11, bin Laden, and what and whom he represents filters through value systems that have been constructed largely by those who inadvertently stand to gain political power from adherents to those values. Those value systems are reinforced through the cultural institutions identified by the media—the television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and the internet. The construction of bin Laden as “Other” relationally perpetuates Bush’s image as good, moral, and heroic.

George W. Bush, Centrism, and the Production and Reduction of Other

New contexts for familiar terms have changed the use and meaning for them, supporting the tentative relationship between the signified and signifier. These terms relate often to values that, since constructed through language, are relative and can be deconstructed. I will present the term in bold print and “define” it, both in terms relative to bin Laden and to Bush, through the media and government, in the context 9.11 has constructed for the term.

On 7 October 2001, George W. Bush sent American troops into Afghanistan to “rout out terror.” According to his 9 October “Letter to Congress on American Response to Terrorism,” “we are responding to the brutal September 11 attacks on our territory, our citizens, and our way of life, and to the continuing threat of terrorist attacks against the United States and our friends and allies.” Bush assumes
the motivation for the attack was to assault land, Americans, and "our way of life," a term left undefined.

"The Campaign" against Afghanistan in response to the 9.11 attacks is indeed a postmodern war with no clear center, though Bush rhetorically accomplishes a construction of sides. Bush must construct this conflict because, as a sign defines itself in relation to another sign, likewise one (race, ethnicity, group if individuals) defines the self (itself) in relation to the Other. The following quotes are from Bush’s 20 September 2001 Address to a Joint Session of Congress and the American People. They establish the Other and thus construct an enemy who must be confronted. Bush states,

Our response involves more than instant retaliation and isolated strikes. Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any we have ever seen...[W]e will pursue nations that provide aid or safe haven to terrorism. Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists. From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the US as a hostile regime.

Bush constructs in this passage the dichotomy of us versus them and coerces through bullying the support of the world to take sides in this reduction. He is constructing the Other. Furthermore, the President’s goal to “end terrorism” cannot be achieved because that “end” in the postmodern world cannot exist.
In another illustration of centrality and subsequent marginalization of Other, Bush states:

[T]his is not... just America’s fight. And what is at stake is not just America’s freedom, This is the world’s fight, This is civilization’s fight, This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom...An attack on one is an attack on all...The civilized world is rallying to America’s side.

The us versus them is now more clearly defined, indeed reduced even further, to civilization versus the uncivilized. The implication is that the Others, who practice Islam and operate their mission from Afghanistan, are uncivilized. Yet the dichotomy becomes confused when Bush states a few lines later: “No one should be singled out for unfair treatment...because of their ethnic[ity]...or religious faith.”

Who then is he singling out? Non-Arab, non-Muslims? The issues are far too complex to reduce. At least Bin Laden explicitly identifies his enemy: the infidels.

The pretense of racial tolerance after 9.11 contrasts sharply with the definition of the “war” waged against “terrorism.” That the “war” itself is postmodern is demonstrated in the following quote. Bush, in his 15 September 2001 Radio Address acknowledges that “[t]his is a conflict without battlefields or beachheads, a conflict with opponents who believe they are invisible.” Yes, indeed there is no clear enemy, only an enormous problem that has yet to be solved, in a significant way, analytically and intellectually. Bush continues, however, to qualify his observation by stating, “Yet, [terrorists] are mistaken. They will be exposed,
and they will discover what others in the past have learned: Those who make war against the United States have chosen their own destruction.” He further reduces this infinitely complex matter to the following: “We are planning a broad and sustained campaign to secure our country and eradicate the evil of terrorism...Americans of every faith and background are committed to this goal.”

Political rhetoric, like religion, serves largely to unify a nation in order to more strongly empower the power structures in that nation. Bush comments later in his Radio Address, “A terrorist attack designed to tear us apart has instead bound us together as a nation.” Nowhere in his Address did he state specific plans for the “campaign.” Often he uses empty rhetoric serving to rally popular support for military intervention. That Bush wanted to keep secret the details of his plan for war in Afghanistan—the reasons for the secrecy is a matter for another study; Gore Vidal theorizes convincingly in his book Dreaming War: Blood for Oil and the Bush-Cheney Junta that acquiring a stronghold on the region’s oil had been pre-planned—is evident in the following quote from Woodward’s Bush at War: “Bush stressed the unconventional aspects or the war—the role of law enforcement, of intelligence sharing, of disrupting the terrorists’ financial network, the role of the CIA and the overriding imperative that much of the war be invisible” (96).

Shrouding this secrecy with political rhetoric that constructed a narrative of hate and inevitable vulnerability duped the nation and the nation still overwhelmingly backed the President, a stunning testimony to the power of invoking fear in a nation to unify it.
While maintaining the level of fear in Americans to strengthen their “resolve” in supporting the President’s mission in the Middle East, Bush carefully positioned himself as the Knower and Seer of All Things and Truths regarding bin Laden’s motives. Bush analyzes Bin Laden’s motives relatively eloquently in the 20 September 2001 Address to Congress and the American People:

We are not deceived by their pretenses to piety. We have seen their kind before. They are the heirs to all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions—by abandoning every value except the will to power—they follow in the path of fascism, and Nazism, and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies.

Though Bush rightfully acknowledges bin Laden’s rhetorical “pretenses,” I challenge Bush’s choice of the term “lies” because the ideologies of the Nazis and fascists were the truth, as it was constructed for them by the leaders seeking immense power, for those believers. “Discarded ideologies,” though less dramatic, is more accurate. I might also interject a reference to America’s “discarded lies” regarding slavery and conflicts between white settlers and Native Indians.

The following section isolates fundamentally pivotal terms exercised in George Bush’s post-9.11 rhetoric. It is followed by a discussion of Osama bin Laden and his rhetoric including the same terms used by Bush in order to elicit the same responses from his listeners and to extrapolate the same political results.
Duty and History

The following excerpts from Bush’s Address to the Nation 29 January 2002 exemplify the signifier “duty” and “history”: “History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom’s fight” (S of the U 29 Jan). A potent strategy in unifying a nation to market a war is to call upon its sense of duty. To not agree with this war would be unpatriotic. Disrupting the historic narrative with dissent from duty is expatriation. Duty requires that a follower support the leader’s agenda in order for that follower to be validated by that leader. Why must the follower be validated? To keep the leader in his position of power! The leader will never invite the follower to rebel or differ in ideology. Neither Bush nor bin Laden benefit from manipulating his audience into thinking independently; he controls his audience with rhetoric that includes concepts of “duty” to a communal (his own) goal.

Justice

The nation demanded justice for the perpetrators of 11 September. Bush had to integrate that concept into his rhetoric if he was to turn this tragedy into a political advantage. Serving justice allowed him to become a hero. Bush stated in a public statement 12 September:

The...Armed Forces have delivered a message...clear to every enemy of the United States: Even 7000 miles away, across oceans and continents, on mountaintops and in caves—you will not escape the justice of this nation.
Further, Bush states, “America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.” Bush blatantly positions America in a dominant role and proclaims our stoicism all in the name of, once again, freedom and “justice.”

Perhaps responding to charges of imperialism, Bush states: “No nation owns these aspirations [after he just stated that America will “lead”], and no nation is exempt from them [from what?]. We have no intention of imposing our culture. [Ahh...acknowledgement of our little problem!] BUT [we all knew that was coming] America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity [pairing the rhetoric “non-negotiable demands” with the abstract term “human dignity” frightens me]: the rule of law; limits on the power of state; respect for women [whatever that means; why do I think he interprets this as opening their car door for them on a date?]; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance. [All only to the extent that that long leash allows.]

Erin McCarthy, in the post-9-11 text Collateral Language, defines justice as two types, retributive and frontier, both of which are demonstrated extensively in Bush’s rhetoric. Both types require violent means of exercise. A third type, she posits, is restorative justice, which “requires us to focus on the victims, but also widens the scope to include the offender.” This type of justice forces the victim to avoid the convenient dichotomies of good vs. evil and to “humanize” the enemy, a rhetorical effort perhaps impossible for the current administration.

Values and Sacrifice for Nation:
In the wake of the rupture of the Event, America scrambles to construct a new world vision. Bush calls for “a new culture of responsibility...We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self.” Bush guides this mission with a call for the sacrifice of the individual for the sake of the whole. The mission of the whole may be surmised in the following global vision:

This time of adversity offers a unique moment of opportunity—a moment we must seize to change our culture. Through the gathering momentum of millions of acts of service and decency and kindness, I know we can overcome evil with greater good. And we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace.

**Oppression**

The next example includes the signified oppression:

No people on earth yearn to be oppressed, or aspire to servitude, or eagerly waits for the midnight knock of the secret police....If anyone doubts this, let them look at Afghanistan, where the Islamic “street” greeted the fall of tyranny with song and celebration.”

Bush interprets U.S. as saviors from oppression and bin Laden regards it as the oppressor.

**Parasites: Othering**

The next example demonstrates the use of an insect metaphor to construct the Other. By comparing the Other to a bug, Bush dehumanizes him/her. The
reference to land and spatiality in the same example illustrates another parallel: "We must eliminate the terrorist parasites. These enemies view the entire world as a battlefield, and we must pursue them wherever they are" and "[They] are spread throughout the world like ticking timebombs..." The imagery of bugs infesting a space illustrates the construction of other as smaller and infectious. The reference to space occurs in the following comparison. It includes the idea of chasing the enemy and occupying space. Furthermore, the word "justice" signifies the validation of destroying the enemy.

Freedom

This signifier, like duty, justice, evil, etc. demonstrates that context defines a term. I have just used the word term. Kenneth Burke refers to terminal screens that indicate an end to the extent to which an idea or word can function (LASA 17). The term freedom irradiates densely and over a profoundly complex web of frequencies. Unquestionably, freedom in the United States relative to, say, life under Taliban rule, signifies far less oppression, injustice, and intolerance. Though Americans experience a far greater degree of freedom than many other countries in the world, the point illustrated by asking exactly what freedom in America means is that freedom is absolutely relative and subjective.

Bush discusses how free trade and free markets are "proving their power to lift lives" in China and Russia. And then, "[T]he forces of terror cannot stop the momentum of freedom." Bush equates freedom with capitalism and free trade. He
positions himself in the global market by propagating the idea that globalization equates to freedom.

**Enduring Freedom**

“Enduring Freedom” is the moniker selected to identify the campaign in Afghanistan. Susan Boxer bemuses the term in a 13 October 2001 article, “Operation Slick Moniker: Military Name Game”: “Enduring Freedom presented...troubling ambiguities: Is “enduring” supposed to be taken as an adjective, like long-lasting? Or as a present participle, as in “How long are we going to be enduring this freedom?” Though I believe the answer to Boxer’s question is obvious, she offers the reader the Freudian nature of the term. She continues,

There is plenty of room for drama. But the fashion now, [Lt. Col. Gregory Sieminski, author of “The Art of Naming Operations] writes, is “to make the names sound like mission statements by using a verb-noun sequence: Promote Liberty, Restore Hope, Uphold Democracy...” They are boring, unmemorable names.

The futility of assigning a signifier to the concept of law-sanctioned murder of poverty-stricken Afghanis desperately seeking a stable government and trying to simply survive reflects through the laissez-faire approach to the task. The term reflects the “success” for the West; it says nothing of the effect on the Other. Boxer continues,
Despite the monotonous trend, names are more important than they have ever been. With the “shrinking scale of military action,” Colonel Semienski writes, the nickname of an operation may well become the name for the whole war and its rationale. Maybe that is the problem...

The nouns in the name of the operation [...] were no problem: freedom and justice. It was the adjectives that presented the problems. The name had to please so many different kinds of people that every adjective seemed fraught with offensive overtones. “It is a virtue in times of peril,” Ms. Lakoff said, “to find words without meaning.”

Success

The definition of “success” had been implied by Bush to mean eliminating terrorism, a proposal doomed for failure since the concept of terrorism applies to virtually every imperialist endeavor in history. Still “success” had been assigned to every demolition of a camp, tunnel, building, or village often occupied by innocent Afghans. In a March 19, 2002 NYT article, “Afghan Battle Declared Over and Successful,” Dexter Filkins reports,

The commander of American forces in the region said today that military operations in Afghanistan's Shah-i-Kot valley...“[were] an unqualified and absolute success”...General Franks came to this former Soviet air base and promised more assaults against the
Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters until they were wiped from the
country. He declined to say when and where the strikes would take
place but left little doubt that plans were in the works..."These
operations are going to continue," said General Franks, adding that
future operations could be as large as this one was.

The token battles were won; the "war" was left unmentioned.

Moral Clarity

This term illustrates the centrist, structuralist point of view in the 9.11
rhetoric. I have discussed at length the impossibility of claiming moral ground. To
extend the word "moral" to "moral clarity" assumes first that morality is a defined
entity that can belong to someone and secondly that this arbitrary notion can direct
further defined action. In a 23 April 2002 article in The Nation, "A Desperate--and
Disingenuous--Search for "Moral Clarity," David Corn argue,

Moral clarity, as hurled by conservatives and Democratic hawks, is
an attractive-sounding but disingenuous concept. It is an attempt to
bully the president, to deny complexities, and to turn the Middle East
conflict into a comic-book face-off that offers only one policy option:
all-out war.

In reductionist terms, the right claims it is a moral duty to send military
troops to achieve victory over terrorism. The problem is that the right has not
defined terrorism beyond anything simply serving our political interests nor does it
have any clear idea just where to send those troops. The left admits that something
needs to be done to prevent further events like 9.11, but while it is busy theorizing, Al Queda is bidding on nuclear warheads. The two sides are demonstrating my point that reductionism in any terms—left and right, for example—does nothing more than, by its very nature, create conflict for which no resolution exists.

**Evil**

Bush announced in his proclamation of the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Victims of the Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001: “Civilized people around the world denounce the evildoers who devised and executed these terrible attacks. Justice demands that those who helped or harbored the terrorists be punished – and punished severely. The enormity of their evil demands it. We will use all the resources of the United States and our cooperating friends and allies to pursue those responsible for this evil, until justice is done.”

Could it be possible that a political rhetoric could be created without adjectives or deliberate emotional appeal? What would be left would be simply a report of action. The language of politics is a construct that aims to control, manipulate, and dominate. Its goal is power.

Laura Rediehs sums up the battle of Good vs. Evil in the Bush rhetoric: “[A]lthough both sides in the Great Cosmic Battle employ similar techniques—violence that includes the killing of innocent civilians—our doing this is justified because they are evil” (Collins 72).

**Axis of Evil**
In the 29 Jan State of the Nation Address, George Bush identified Iran, North Korea, and Iraq as the three powers posing the greatest danger to the United States. He states,

Our...goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens. Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an elected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom. Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror...States like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world...[T]he price of indifference would be catastrophic.”

Besides the obvious metaphor of the “axis” referring to a fixed point, Bush’s warning of indifference against his constructed “axis of evil” demonstrates the resort to thinking in terms of binaries: indifference vs. action. The postmodern view suggests that between those poles lies infinite options to violent military action, Bush’s implied course of action.

Nicholas Kristoff in the 26 February 2002 article “Devils and Evil Axes” invites a more profound analysis from the right of the US relation with North Korea, indeed indicating the possibility for an erasure of the “evil” status from US
perspective. He notes, "'Evil' shadowed President Bush during his swing through Asia last week. He was vehemently denounced ('a moral leper' who leads the "empire of the devil"), even as the White House was backing off and effectively downgrading the Axis of Evil to an Alliance of the Naughty." Kristoff concludes, "Right now, our approach of isolating North Korea simply provides Kim Jong Il with a foreign scapegoat — bolstering a noxious regime and increasing the risk of a catastrophic war. And ultimately that is far more risky than loose talk about evil axes."

Not only does the term "axes of evil" imply that these three countries with vast differences, cultural and political, have a commonality, an axes, upon which America can construct a reason to continue its "campaign," but it also suggests that the commonality between them is the ever-faithful, fear-inducing, people-uniting, morally-clarifying concept of evil.

Bush's rhetoric is nothing if not insulting to an educated mass. At the risk of dubbing the 9.11 rhetoric as trivial and absurd, I would like to cite a Los Angeles Times article, "When Words Fail: The Stilted Language of Tragedy," by Geoffrey Nunberg. Nunberg validates Bush's use of what Nunberg refers to as 19th century language in the post-9.11 rhetoric because

in the wake of the attacks...official America needs something else: language that would reassert control of a world that had gotten terrifyingly out of hand. A high Victorian indignation serves that
purpose well and envokes the more certainties of a simpler age when
the line between civilization and barbarism is clearly drawn in
powerful nations brooked neither insult nor injury from lesser breeds
without the law. This may be the first war of the 21st century, as
President Bush has said. But its rhetoric will be taken from the 19th.

What is Nunberg talking about?? A few poorly chosen, “indignant” words from the
archives of the vast and diverse English language can hardly right the egregious
wrongs committed on 11 September and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan. If
Nunberg suggests that there may be comfort in cliché, like leaning up against
granny’s apron in the kitchen, I may be able to get some notion of his argument, but
to suggest that liberal and unchallenged use of terms like “evil” and “moral” is
going to put the complex reality of 9.11 into some sensible perspective is nothing
short of pitifully naïve. Bush’s choice of Victorian tone and language demonstrates
an effort to reverse the progressive worldviews Americans have constructed in a
postmodern era.

Nunberg’s perspective reflects the anxious scramble toward order following
the rupture of 9.11. According to Kenneth Burke, who asserts that wo/men
instinctively gravitate toward order, the Aristotelean concept of entelechy is the
“notion that each being aims at the perfection natural to its kind,” and this insatiable
propensity for order compels humans through life. Burke defines Man as “the
symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal inventor of the negative
(or moralized by the negative) separated by his natural condition by instruments of
his own making goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order) and rotten with perfection. "The principle of perfection," Burke writes, "is central to the nature of language," as people constantly search for the perfect signifier (LASA 16). Burke cites Freud from Beyond the Pleasure Principle: "Freud explicitly calls upon us 'to abandon our belief that in man there dwells an impulse toward perfection, which has brought him to his present heights of intellectual prowess and sublimation'" (LASA 17). The centralizing rhetoric exercised by both Bush and bin Laden that calls for unification of people for a specific political cause profoundly demonstrates the fundamental political goal for a mythical perfect society, void of dissent and void of "evil" and the Other.

**Bin Laden's Centralizing Speech and Production and Reduction of Other**

In order for bin Laden to develop support and subsequent power, he needed to construct a platform upon which he could hold an authoritarian position. From this platform, constructed by religion and racism, he subjected his followers by persuading them that they were doing the work of Allah, which included destroying the "infidels." Like Bush, bin Laden made full use of the Media to deliver his messages.

When the attacks occurred on 11 September, it was politically essential for Bush to determine who perpetrated such a shockingly bold crime that challenged the power of the United States. The F.B.I. immediately blamed Usama bin Laden, leader of the international Islamic front, Al Queda. Bush first publicly addressed the question of bin Laden's involvement in a 13 September 2001 press conference
following a public phone conversation with New York Mayor Rudy Guiliani. The President was asked by a reporter if he was confident that Usama bin Laden was behind the attacks to which Bush replied simply, “We are.”

Biography of Osama bin Laden

Before 11 September 2001, bin Laden and his associates were already being sought by the US on charges in connection of international terrorism, including the 1998 bombing of American embassies in Africa, the 1993 World Trade Center bomb, the 1996 killing of nineteen US soldiers in Saudi Arabia, and the 2000 Attack on USS Cole in Yemen.

Bin Laden, an “immensely wealthy and private man,” is associated with Al Queda, an international Islamic front supported by Saudi, Egyptian and other groups. His power is founded on a personal fortune earned by his family’s construction business in Saudi Arabia. Terrorism experts say Bin Laden has been using his millions to fund attacks against the US.

Bin Laden left Saudi Arabia in 1979 to fight against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. While in Afghanistan, he founded the Maktab al-Khidimat (MAK), which “recruited fighters from around the world and imported equipment to aid the Afghan resistance against the Soviet army. Egyptians, Lebanese, Turks and others--numbering thousands in Bin Laden’s estimate--joined their Afghan Muslim brothers in the struggle against an ideology that spurned religion. After the Soviet

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1 The question was actually phrased, “How confident are you that OBL is behind the attacks?”
2 From BBC source: “Who Is Osama bin Laden?”
withdrawal, the ‘Arab Afghans’, as Bin Laden’s faction came to be called, turned their fire against the US and its allies in the Middle East.”

Ironically, the Afghan jihad was “backed with American dollars and had the blessing of the governments of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.” He received security training from the CIA itself, according to Middle Eastern analyst Hazhir Teimourian.

Bin Laden returned to Saudi Arabia to work in the family construction business, but was expelled in 1991 because of his anti-government activities there. He spent the next five years in Sudan until “US pressure prompted the Sudanese Government to expel him.” Bin Laden then returned to Afghanistan, where he remained in hiding.

While in Afghanistan, he has called for a jihad against the US and for the killing of Americans and Jews. Analysts say Bin Laden’s organization may operate in over forty countries - in Europe and North America, as well as in the Middle East and Asia.

The few outsiders who have met Bin Laden describe him as modest and shy. He rarely gives interviews. He is believed to be in his 40s, and to have at least three wives. Professor Emmanuel Sivan, a scholar on modern Islam from Hebrew University in Jerusalem, describes bin Laden as a “playboy from a very rich family,” who uses an extremist form of Islam to ideologically attack the United States and “outrage Muslim and inspire them to overthrow their governments and build an Islamic state.”
The Issues

In a 10 November 2001 transcript of an interview with Hamid Mir, editor of Ausef released to the press, bin Laden states, “America and its allies are massacring us in Palestine, Chechenya, Kashmir and Iraq.” Bin Laden expresses these grievances as justification for the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon, which he characterizes as “American icons of military and economic powers.” Peter Arnett spoke to CNN 5 December 2001 in reference to the Mir interview. In his comments, he summarized, “He [bin Laden] spent one hour spelling out his dream of changing the Arab world and his first action would be to expel all American troops and business and cultural influences. And then he would transform the Arab world into what Afghanistan was then becoming under the Taliban, which was a very primitive Islamic society.” Whether Arnett has overly simplified bin Laden’s intentions or has accurately reflected bin Laden’s plans for acquiring power and credibility as a world leader, the postmodern perspective requires the U.S. as well as bin Laden and the factions he represents to view these complex issues—expulsion of American troops from the Middle East and the establishment of a new ideological and hegemonic “Arab World”—from many perspectives and to establish a new discourse that satisfies both sides. That discursive base may supplant the current political rhetoric with the language necessary to construct solutions to further problems. Unless that rhetoric of illusions and power politics can be identified and dismissed, a new discourse cannot emerge. The following discussion defines the
issues that must be addressed in untangling the web of conflicts between the Middle East and the U.S.

Oil

In all the political rhetoric and media coverage of 9.11, the issue of oil is the elephant in the room that political rhetoric and media pundits choose to ignore. Gore Vidal has identified that elephant in no uncertain terms in his book, *Dreaming War: Blood for Oil and the Cheney-Bush Junta*. Reports of an oil pipeline built through Afghanistan have raised speculation about Bush’s motives there. About bin Laden and Bush’s “campaign” Vidal posits: “Osama has been portrayed accurately, it would seem, as an Islamic zealot. In order to bring this evildoer to justice (dead or alive) Afghanistan, the object of the exercise, was made safe not only for democracy, but for Union Oil of California, whose proposed pipeline...had been abandoned under the Taliban’s regime” (20).

Thus, a valid element of the 9.11 narrative is George Bush’s involvement with oil. He began working in the oil industry as a young man when his father arranged for him to paint rigs. He then worked at selling equipment used in the oil industry and finally started his own business. His questionable practices involving Enron-like stock transactions have been noted liberally by the left and quieted by the right. In an article in which Bush’s foreign policy in the Middle East was challenged because of alleged big business interests in Middle East oil, Martin Indyk, director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution and former assistant secretary of state for Near East affairs and
ambassador to Israel in the Clinton administration, states in an interview with Find Source!, “in the Middle East our vital interests in oil and Israel intersect with the war on terrorism. It is a region seething with anger toward the United States. Our credibility is essential to our effectiveness there. But the administration’s lack of coherence, and the widening gap between its rhetoric and its actions, are casting doubt on that credibility.”

In a 1997 interview with Peter Arnatt, bin Laden states, “These are the [American] troops who left their country and their families and came here with all arrogance to steal our oil and disgrace us, and attack our religion.” The term “disgrace” suggests a conflict that transcends pragmatism: pride and machismo motivate bin Laden as well.

Bin Laden’s family made their fortune from land that produces vast quantities of oil. It is reasonable to understand why he, as representative of defenders of Arab oil resources, would respond vehemently to challenges to those resources. The way in which he exercises that defense demands analysis. Examination of his rhetoric as a means of gathering support for this anti-Western campaign is essential to that analysis.

**Israeli occupation**

Bin Laden, like many Arabs and some Israelis, profoundly resents Israeli occupation of the disputed Palestinian land and further resents American support of Israel. Many Arabs share bin Laden’s grievances, but most do not support the activities associated with bin Laden.
American Presence in the Middle East

Bin Laden, in the 7 Oct 01 transcript to the videotaped warning to America and to Muslims not supporting his cause, further demonstrates the extremists’ resistance to compromise, analysis, and intelligent resolution to the Israeli conflict and with US occupation in the Middle East. By marginalizing himself and his followers through his rhetoric and radical activities, bin Laden others mainstream Muslims who do not believe in extremist doctrines that order the murder of “infidels.” Bin Laden thus positions himself as a more defined leader. Though his position reduces the breadth of his following, he acquires greater strength and deeper devotion from the zealots he recruits. Isolating extremists from other Muslims, he states,

[The Muslim nation’s] sons are being killed, its blood is being shed, its holy placisre being attacked, and it is not being ruled according tp what God has decreed. Despite this, nobody cares...One million Iraqi children have died thus far in Iraq although they did nothing wrong. Despite this, we heard no denunciation by anyone in the world or a fatwa by the rulers’ ulema.

He continues to accuse Muslims not only of ignoring their “duty” to respond to the charges stated, but also of being hypocrites, supporting the US: “But if the sword falls on the US after 80 years, hypocrisy raises its head lamenting the death of these killers who tampered with the blood, honour, and holy places of the Muslims.”

Included in his accusations are the “hypocrites” (Muslims) and the “infidels”
(Americans and Jews): “[T]he entire world [is] divided into two regions – one of faith where there is no hypocrisy and another of infidelity…” Bush stated the same idea when he warned potential allies that they were either “with us or against us.”

The cause to “bring infidels to justice” grants bin Laden the “right” to wage jihad against nearly every citizen of the world and to demonstrate his strength as well as to demand the attention of the world. Bin Laden certainly defined the previously obscure term “jihad” and strengthened its significance in worldly political discourse.

Besides othering Muslims and Americans in his resolve, bin Laden accuses Americans of being terrorists. The problematic of defining terrorism (or any other concept) in any absolute terms demonstrates the impossibility through language of solving a dilemma reduced to binaries like terrorism versus the free world or good versus evil. Bin Laden states, “[The US] came out in arrogance with their men and horses and instigated even those countries that belong to Islam against us…They came out to fight Islam in the name of terrorism.” He then threats, “Neither the US nor he who lives in the US will enjoy security before we can see it as a reality in Palestine and before all the infidel armies leave the land of Mohammed.” Couched in bin Laden’s rhetoric and propaganda are the real issues: security for Palestinians in their own nation and retreat of American presence in the Middle East. Bin Laden’s denunciation of Western power and his threat of violent confrontation dares to decenter the West as the power center of the world evacuating a space perhaps for multiple powers, including factions represented by bin Laden, to fill.
In the 1997 interview with Arnett, bin Laden again relates the US with terrorism:

[T]he collapse of the Soviet Union...made to US more haughty and arrogant and it has started to look at itself like the Master of this world and established what it calls the new world order...The US today...has set a double standard, calling whoever goes against its injustice a terrorist.

In this quote, the United States is identified with terrorism and, contextually, in bin Laden’s worldview, this statement is true and valid, thereby deconstructing the Western definition of terrorism.

Bin Laden further attempts to decenter firmly positioned institutions of world power in denouncing the United Nations. In the Text of the bin Laden Statement Broadcast on Al-Jazeera 3 November 2001, bin Laden makes reference to the immutable disposition of the UN and declares his denial of and separation from it. He refers to the UN’s refusal to recognize his grievances, but also implies the State’s general immobility and resistance to progress. He states, “The UN is a tool of crime. We (Muslims) are being slaughtered every day and it does not move.”

His isolation and rejection from and the center of power necessarily motivates him to recreate the rules and construct a new center of power. That new center defies physical definition and, instead, operates virtually through electronic and covert communication.
Bin Laden’s rhetoric includes the goal of establishing a position of power that challenges America’s global position. He constructs his discourse, unsurprisingly, within a thick framework of religious references. But the core message, like the message in Bush’s rhetoric, is fundamentally political: control and unite the people by constructing a narrative from the conflicts that establish the self as leader, hero, saviour.

**Duty and History**

Like Bush’s rhetoric, Bin Laden’s fatwa against the United States, referenced in a 23 February 1998 article in the Los Angeles Times, exemplifies the signifier “duty” and “history”. He states, “Ulema have throughout Islamic history unanimously agreed that the jihad is an individual duty if the enemy destroys the Muslim countries.” Both men claim the “duty” and “responsibility” to “fight freedom’s fight” or, for Bin Laden, to declare jihad. Bush refers to “history” as the source for his call to action, while bin Laden draws upon the “ulema,” or religious leaders. He additionally, like Bush calls on “history” in his call for jihad.

**Insect and Other**

The next example demonstrates the use of an insect metaphor to construct the Other. The reference to land and spatiality illustrates another parallel:

Bin Laden: The Arabian Peninsula has never—since God made it flat, created its desert, and encircled it with seas—been stormed by any forces like the crusader armies spreading in it like locusts, rating its riches and wiping out its plantations.
Bin Laden: The ruling to kill...Americans is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country...in order for their armies to move out of all the lands of Islam...This is in accordance with the words of Almighty God, and fight the pagans...until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God.

Both men threaten to chase the enemy: “their armies [will] move out,” and “you will not escape.” Both fight in the name of “justice.”

Oppression

Regarding the U.S. “campaign” in Afghanistan, bin Laden accuses the U.S. of being “…the oppressive despotic tyrannical country against the weak who have just emerged from a massive war waged by the Soviet Union.” In a 1997 interview with Peter Arnett, this same message is echoed: “the U.S. is unjust, criminal, and tyrannical. It has committed acts that are unjust, hideous…” This rhetoric assigns the U.S. a fixed and immutable identity as “tyrants” that the Arab world must consider as an enemy who must be expelled and/or eliminated. Though the U.S. has committed “unjust acts” in the Middle East, when that constructed identity of the Other is firmly entrenched in the Arab narrative, few alternatives to violent rupture of that destructive discourse exists.

Success

In contrast to Tommy Frank’s definition of success quoted earlier, the following are quotes from the 13 December 2001 transcript of a videotape released
by the press of Osama bin Laden and an “unidentified Shaykh.” The quotes demonstrate a different, opposing context/signified for the term “success”:

Bin Laden: We calculated in advance the number of casualties from the enemy, who would be killed based on the position of the tower. We calculated that the floors... would be three or four floors... This is all I hoped for... They [a newcast] announced that another plane hit the World Trade Center. The brothers who heard the news were overjoyed.

Shaykh: (Quoting the Qur’an) “Fight them, Allah will torture them, with your hands, he will torture them. He will deceive them and give you victory”... No doubt it is a clear victory.

The same words define violently opposing realities: signifiers like “success” slide across an infinite spectrum of signifieds and stop at no precise point. Neither bin Laden or Franks can claim “success” as their own. Fighting for it is futile.

Infidels

In order to justify the killing of innocent people for the purpose of establishing an identity as Leader and Unifier in the name of religion, bin Laden refers to his victims as infidels or non-believers (in the Qur’an)

Unity

Bin Laden quotes the Qur’an in his “fatwa” against America: “And know that God cometh between a man and his heart, and that it is He to whom ye shall be gathered” (LA Times 8/24/98). Bin Laden has positioned himself not between his
followers--desperately poor young men with no hope for the future--and their hearts, but between those desperate young men and their survival in the world. Fear and survival have united them.

The parallel between Bush and bin Laden’s rhetoric demonstrates the consistent use of language, specifically the universality of certain terms in political rhetoric, to unify masses for the purpose of supporting Power to an individual. That rhetoric serves to reduce the other and render the masses subservient.

The Rhetoric of Evil

Much rhetoric has been generated using the word “evil” since 9/11. Neitzsche claims and Derrida affirms that words like “evil” cannot be defined because values denoted by good or bad are constructed through language, which is arbitrary. Bush signifies bin Laden and Al Queda as evil; Bin Laden signifies America as evil. The signified changes each time a different speaker uses the term. In the Nation article, “Religion and the War Against Evil,” Harvey Cox examines the role religion plays in the question of what to do about “evil.” He does not refute the existence of evil, but brings up a provocative dialectic. He cites Andrew Delbanco, author of the 1995 book, The Death of Satan: How Americans Have Lost the Sense of Evil: “I believe our culture is now in crisis,” Delbanco writes, “because evil remains an inescapable experience for all of us, while we no longer have a symbolic language for describing it.” The inability to signify the concept of evil may be more a problem of definition rather than morality, especially if one considers the impossibility of defining “morality.” Regarding the question of how
Americans might find our moral bearings, Cox cites Susan Sontag from her book, *Illness As Metaphor*: “[W]e have a sense of evil but no longer the religious or philosophical language to talk intelligently about evil.” The subjects entwined in the events and situations characterized by violence and hatred have such complex histories, that any clear, hermetic definition for evil or good is impossible. The dominant culture in American has exercised “evil” in its treatment of Indians, blacks, Japanese during WWII, etc. Cox comments, “I am quite sure...that President Bush’s response to this symbolic vacuum—namely that we are now waging war against evil, and that one day it will be a clear victory—will not satisfy people for very long.” In substituting the term “evil” for a clear definition of his stand regarding the Middle East, Bush uses the term like a fig leaf to hide his assumptions of race and religion. Cox supports the postmodernism view by stating, “I am convinced that when religious traditions and their critics—either ideologies or other religions—interacted with each other openly, remarkable insights often emerged.”

**Conclusion**

The “Campaign” illustrates the barbaric and uncivilized ritual of war. It is unconscionable to vituperate a group for murdering in order to draw attention to a cause and then murder to punish them. Yes, this is a reduction of the variety I criticize as the basis of my argument. The narrative of stopping senseless murder with government-sanctioned murder desperately warrants disruption beginning with

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3 Refer back to Lacan and the notion that people always desire to substitute their losses.
redefining the terms in war rhetoric and ending perhaps by eliminating the language of othering from our discourse with the Middle East.

The United States is what it is on the basis of difference: it is powerful in relation to nations that are not. "Saussure points out that identities come about only as a result of difference" (Eagleton 144). If the United States constructs the enemy as the "terrorist," bin Laden constructs The U.S. as the "infidel." These constructs are signifiers, however, for complex identities with infinite meaning. Constructing the Other is a useless, futile endeavor considering the subjectivity of defining "America" or all which bin Laden represents.

Americans have dismissed bin Laden and all that he represents as "evil," "extremist," irrational, insane, and have declared him "the enemy of freedom." Americans have made an inadequate effort to understand the issues and power struggles underlying bin Laden’s rhetoric and activities because little information is disseminated about the cause of the Event in relation to the effects of it. This discourse reflects American naivety and blind faith in systems beyond "normalcy." The media figures—talk show hosts, etc.—who reduce the issues to opinions that establish a clear and staunch stand serve to fill the information and analytic void present in the very preoccupied American mind. Politicians and media reinforce the absolutist ideals and stands transcended by the infinitely complex political, social, cultural and humanist issues that bin Laden and all he symbolizes dumped onto the site of the WTC.
Chapter Four

Self, Religion, and Power:

Who Comes Closest to Being Like God, The Ultimate Unifier and Hero?

Political rhetoric often manipulates religious grand narratives for political gain. Bush and bin Laden’s rhetoric relating to 11 September aptly demonstrates this strategy. George Bush, a born-again Christian, liberally peppers his speeches with references to God, in spite of the decree that there exists a separation of church and state. With a tone and with diction falling somewhere between that of Martin Luther King Jr. and Forrest Gump, Bush delivers the following words to the California Business Association 17 October 2001. They illustrate Bush’s own brand of fundamentalism:

We are fighting for the security of our people, for the success of our ideals, and for stability in large parts of the world. We fight evil people who are distorting and betraying a great religion to justify their murder. Our cause is just. We will not tire. We will not falter. And my fellow Americans, we will not fail...[The terrorists] are hearing from a tolerant nation...that respects Islam...They are hearing from a prayerful nation...that prays to an almighty God for protection and peace.”

Bush’s practice of including such frequent references to God challenges the separation of church and state and unifies people whose values are molded by religious rhetoric under his power and self-identified moral authority. In the context
of 9.11, many Americans' fear and uncertainty exacerbated their vulnerability; thus they vigorously sought and welcomed the moral and religious guidance and security recognized by the politician Bush.

Religion in America is complex; in addition to accommodating diverse and perhaps conflicting beliefs, one could argue that money equates to God in America. Like religion, it serves to unify; it is what Derrida would define as a transcendental signifier. Money is tangible and measurable; you are what you are worth. Like religion, an American's commitment to fiscal responsibility demonstrates her/his ethical standards. America is a big, global business. That zealotry extends to the individual and unifies the nation in its duty to financial responsibility. Capitalism and religion indeed share fundamental tenets.

The United States represents money and might. To many Americans, these achievements are products of democracy. To many Middle Easterners, the same achievements exemplify domination, isolationism, arrogance, and greed. Many Arabs (and Americans) believe America has achieved its status in the world by taking advantage of the Middle East, especially regarding the oil trade. Besides the oil issue, Arabs greatly resent America because of its presence in the Middle East, especially in Saudi Arabia where the holy Muslim cities of Medina and Mecca are located. Additionally, Arabs view American sanctions imposed on Iraq as anti-humanitarian. Lastly, many Arab countries regard America's alliance with Israel as a symbol of non-support.
America has positioned itself as leader in a globalizing world economy. America sells its culture en masse, largely through the Media, and includes religion in the package to uphold the idea of a transcendent Power. Furthermore, including religion as part of American “persona” softens the American image of being purely materialistic. When Bush addressed students at Tsinghua University in his February 2002 visit to China (Website, 2-26-02), he frequently blurred the lines between church and state in order to “sell” America. Bush stated the following:

People [in America] take responsibility for helping others, without being told, motivated by their good hearts and often by faith.

America is a nation guided by faith [my ital.]. Someone once called us a ‘nation with the soul of a church.’ This may interest you—95% of Americans say they believe in God and I’m one of them. When I met President Jiang Zemin...I had the honor of sharing with him how faith changed my life and how faith contributes to the life of my country. Faith points to a moral law beyond man’s law [my ital.] and calls us to duties higher than material gain...[F]aith gives us a moral core and teaches us to hold ourselves to high standards, to love and serve others, and to live responsible lives.”

Bush’s rhetoric missionizing young Chinese (largely non-Christian) minds smacks of unification through religiosity. The inference that a citizen is unable to uphold “high standards” (whatever that means) and love as well as living responsible lives without religious affiliation demonstrates the centrist ideal dependent on a
transcendental signifier, in which an illusory Power exists. Bush rhetorically draws his identity and authority from this impossible source of power.

Bush suffered politically from 9.11 because the attacks happened on his watch. Bush rushed to assert his relative political power through speeches including excessive reference to God. The media, responding to public fear and its urgent need for a sense of security, contributed to the construction of Rudy Guiliani (doing what anyone would have done in his position) and George W. Bush as Saviours of the American public from the “Evil Ones.” 24 September 2001 Time Magazine published a cover photo depicting a grinning Bush standing atop the dreary, ominous multi-ton heap of debris and dead bodies at the site ironically dubbed Ground Zero as if nothing was there. Was it given that title to diminish the unimaginable reality that the charred and obliterated body parts of thousands of innocent victims of American foreign policy was piled there in a macabre, horrifying spectacular mountain? In the Time photo, Bush points an American flag toward the cloud-swirled blue heavens as burly white male rescue workers, shrunken by the camera angle, look lovingly and vulnerably toward their heroic leader. And the American public gushed with pride and patriotism, blissfully ignorant about the issues leading up to the attacks, knowing only that Evil Ones who hate America attacked our freedom.

What Bush did not say after the events of 11 September was arguably as significant as what he did say. He would not discuss the sources of information nor

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1 Figure 3 in Appendix
and details leading to bin Laden’s involvement in 11 September. On 12 September, Bush declared, “This will be a monumental struggle of good and evil.” Bush compensated for the secrecy shrouding the government’s plans for retaliation with a call for the blind faith in God and the government that “good will prevail,” and the nation piously and obediently indulged. As if to seal the covert mission against evil with God’s blessing, Bush quoted from the Bible in an 11 September Address to the nation: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.”

Religion fills a psychological need. It fills an antagonistic intellectual void in which unanswerable questions may be answered. According to Sigmund Freud in Civilization and Its Discontents,

[One who fends off suffering] regards reality as the sole enemy and as the source of all suffering, with which it is impossible to live, so that one must break up all relations with it if one is to be in any way happy...[O]ne can try to recreate the world, to build up in its stead another world in which its most unbearable features are eliminated and are replaced by others that are in conformity with one’s own wishes. But whoever, in desperate defiance, sets out upon this path to happiness will as a rule attain nothing [my ital.]. Reality is too strong for him. He becomes a madman, who for the most part finds no one to help him in carrying through his delusion. It is asserted,

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2 Psalm 23
however, that each one of us behaves in some one respect like a paranoid, corrects some aspect of the world which is unbearable to him by the construction of a wish and introduces this illusion into reality” (32).

Bush and the other high officials regularly addressing the nation on the War have been creating a moral and ethical illusion of good versus evil, of the War as a defense of freedom, and of the bombing in Afghanistan as being what is best for the Afghanis and therefore humanitarian. The unthinkable possibility the U.S. is unable to face is the challenge to its Power and the possibility that there may be no immediate and clear solution to the enormously complex issues illuminated by the events of 9.11. By deferring solutions to religion, duty, and fate, Bush not only provides hope and some semblance of closure to the tragedy of 9.11, but also constructs a moral identity associated with God and a demonic identity for bin Laden. Freud further writes, 

[T]his attempt to procure a certainty of happiness and a protection against suffering through a delusional remoulding of reality is made by a considerable number of people in common. The religions of mankind must be classed among the mass-delusions of this kind...The man who sees his pursuit of happiness come to nothing in later years can still find consolation in the yield of pleasure of chronic intoxication; or he can embark on the desperate attempt at rebellion seen in a psychosis. Religion restricts this play of choice
and adaptation, since it imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner—which presupposes an intimidation of the intelligence, at this price, by forcibly fixing them on a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them onto a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis (36).

Christianity developed to fill a socio-political need as well. Alexis De Tocqueville observed in the nineteenth century in America that “Christian sects are infinitely diversified and perpetually modified; but Christianity itself is an established and irresistible fact, which no one undertakes either to attack or to defend” (Speigel 126). Then, as now, the U.S. was a country of immigrants, and religion was a critical institution that served to unify ethnic communities. De Tocqueville further proports, “In the United States religion is mingled with ... all the feelings of patriotism, whence it derives a peculiar force” (126). The secularization of religion has enabled it to become an element of Americana. In a radio address on Thanksgiving Day, Bush stated: “[W]e’re thankful to God...Offering thanks in the midst of tragedy is an American tradition...” A religious identity serves to unify and strengthen the solidarity between Americans. Bush has drawn on that solidarity in order to be able to appeal to “one nation under God” much in the same way that Bin Laden unites his followers under Allah.
Bush's Proclamation for a day of Prayer further demonstrates his effort to unite Americans through religion. He states, "Scripture says, 'Blessed are those who mourn for they shall be comforted'...[I]n the face of all this evil, we remain strong and united, 'one nation under God.'" Bush did not miss the opportunity to integrate political rhetoric in this prayer-speech. In Bush's 14 September speech at the National Cathedral commemorating the victims of 9.11, he reinforces the construction of the Other as he associates "this evil" with the "enemy": "Today we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of national unity, a kinship of grief and a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies." Using a religious platform to unify Americans against the "enemy" allows a psychological association with Bush and manifest destiny. Referring to the 14 September speech, Bob Woodward in his book, Bush on War, writes, "The president was casting his mission and that of the country in the grand vision of God's master plan" (67).

Bush rhetoric asserts U.S. world dominance, for example, by referencing its military might in the name of justice. Ellen Willis, in an article for the 17 December 2001 issue of The Nation, argues that this patriarchal positioning—the punishing father doing only what is best—is precisely the target of bin Laden's violence. She argues that most Americans "resist the idea" that 9.11 represents "the struggle of democratic secularism, religious tolerance, individual freedom and feminism against authoritarian patriarchal religion, culture and morality." She posits, "[W]hy do the great world religions all have brutal fundamentalist fringes that transduce their professional moral principles for the sake of power? The contradiction mirrors the
conditions of the patriarchal culture with which these religions are intertwined—a culture that mandates the repression of desire and the control of women in the name of law and order, but which is nonetheless permeated with violence, from rape to war.” Willis poses a Freudian argument by questioning, “Is this simply proof of innate evil, original sin, or is it rather that repression gives rise to hidden rage, which constantly seeks an outlet in sanctioned violence—the punishment of wayward children, women, enemies of the state? And of course there can be no violence more sanctioned than holy war.” Through this lens, Willis suggests bin Laden acted in the attacks of 9.11 out of repressed anger stemming from subservience to a patriarchy. This parallels Lacan’s theory that men strive to castrate their fathers and possess the phallus. In these terms, it can be suggested that the WTC is a rape of the patriarch in order to obtain the (patriarchal) power for the self. Indeed, Willis argues,

Islamic totalitarianism...is at bottom a violent defensive reaction against the liberal values of the Enlightenment...If exposure to forbidden freedoms aroused in bin Laden and his confederates unconscious rage at their own repression, what better way to ward off the devil than to redirect that rage against it? And if the World Trade Center represented global capitalism—the engine of American might and economic inequality, but also of modernity itself, of all that is solid melting into the air—wasn’t there yet another, more primal brand of symbolism embodied in those twin phalluses? Within one
spectacular act, the highjackers could annihilate both the symbol of
temptation and its real source—their own selves.

In America, Willis writes, "the legacy of patriarchalism still weighs on us: Our
institutions resist change and our psyches remain more conservative than the actual
conditions of our lives." Willis's offers solution through rejecting religious
centrism: "A serious, long range strategy against Islamic fundamentalist terrorism
must entail open and empathetic opposition to theocracy." She concludes, "[T]o
recognize that the enemy is fundamentalism itself—not "evil" anti-American
fundamentalists...—is also to make a statement about American cultural
politics...There is...a tendency of the left and center to appease the [Christian] right
and downplay the culture war than make an uncompromising defense of freedom,
feminism, and the separation of church and state."

Bin Laden uses Islam to validate disempowering America as the capitalist
hub of the world. Relating the two signifiers money and religion, he states in his
fatwa against America:

[T]he words of Almighty God 'And why should ye not fight in the
cause of God and of those who, being weak, are ill-treated...[R]escue
us from this town, whose people are oppressors; and raise for us from
thee one who will help!'...We—with God's help—call on every
Muslim...to comply with God's order to kill the Americans and
plunder their money...We call on Muslim[s]...to launch the raid on
Satan’s U.S. troops and the devil’s supporters allying to them, and to
displace those who are behind them so that they may learn a lesson.

In a NYT article, “Yes, This is about Islam,” Salman Rushdie comments,
“For a vast number of ‘believing’ Muslim men, ‘Islam’ stands, in a jumbled, half-
examined way, not only for the fear of God—the fear more than love, one
suspects—but also for a cluster of customs, opinions and prejudices…and a more
particularized loathing (and fear)...that their own immediate surroundings could be
taken over—‘Westoxicated’—by the liberal Western style of life.” Rushdie
acknowledges the constructed barrier between the two cultures. The identities of
one culture and its values exist only in relation to the Other. One needs the Other to
exist and must therefore maintain the conflict.

Bin Laden constructs his identity as hero by emulating Mohammed and
perpetuating the grand narrative Mohammed established. To understand bin
Laden’s commitment to Islam, a synopsis of the Mohammed’s influence on the
development of Islam is essential. The tenets of Islam are rooted in mercantilism
(capitalism!) and the desire for power through the acquisition of a substantial
number of devout followers. The following is adapted from Buckler’s *A History of
World Societies:

“In 610, Muhammad, a merchant from Mecca (now Saudi Arabia), claimed
to begin having visions from God in which God, or Allah, commanded him to

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3 Rushdie was issued a fatwa for his book *Satanic Verses*, which challenged fundamental Muslim
beliefs.
preach the messages being revealed to him. He was about forty years old. He
developed a following, some of whom haphazardly recorded these messages. These
notes were transcribed after Muhammad’s death and published as the Qur’an.
Muslims believe Allah is all powerful and submission to Him is required. They
believe Muhammed was the last of the prophets after Moses, Abraham, and Jesus.
Islam’s staunch monotheism implied the end of paganism.

“Before Muhammad’s visions, Arabs were a tribal, polytheistic people.
Bedouins were nomads who grazed sheep and goats. Hejazis, who lived in Yemen,
Mecca, and Yathrib (later called Medina), were traders and farmers. Their caravans
traversed routes connecting their regions to Egypt, Persia, and Syria. Muhammed,
raised as a poor orphan, stated that the merchants of Mecca led luxurious lives due
to their wealth from trade.

“The Bedouins and Hejazis respected each other’s tribal customs. Their
religion involved animism and pilgrimages to sacred shrines often located at fairs
and markets. They believed in no afterlife. Customs also included tribal solidarity,
proud and swift revenge when warranted, and courage in public and avoidance of
shame. Before the profound restrictions Islam placed on women, it is believed that
Arab women acquired wealth and their property was protected by law.”

Mohammed was aware of a political opportunity through a social need in
Arab society. According to Paul N. Seigel in the book, The Meek and the Militant,
“By the time of Mohammed, tribal society had begun to disintegrate, with a
nomadic nobility having been established” (Seigel 171). Individual states vied for
power. At the same time, Mecca had been established after the fall of the Persian and Byzantine empires as a trading center. The influx of wealth into Mecca brought about fundamental social, political, and cultural changes. Mohammed, a moderately prosperous trader, incorporated business into his ideology. Siegel cites the Qu’ran:

The mutual relations between God and man are of a strictly commercial nature. Allah is the ideal merchant...the pattern of honest dealing...The unbeliever has sold the divine truth for a paltry price, and is bankrupt...” (172).

Mohammed, after establishing a strong religious following, led Arabs to control Mecca and Medina, accumulating immense power and wealth. Mohammed put to death all non-believers, which essentially yielded him no enemies. Followers may have feigned belief to avoid death. The Inquisition conducted its activities in a like manner. Bush warns the world: “whoever isn’t with us is against us.” Though he is not overtly othering on the basis of religion, he performs the same rhetoric as was exercised by Mohammed and The Inquisition. The implication of Bush’s statement is, “if you are not with us, you will fall in the path of our military violence.”

The narrative of Mohammed shares common themes and implications with the history of Jesus. Jesus’ birth coincided with a tumultuous era for Jews and Romans. The Roman Empire claimed Judaea under its rule and Jews deeply resented the intrusion. The Romans taxed the Jews into poverty and badly mistreated them. The Jews, deeply religious people, proclaimed the coming of a
Messiah to deliver them from the Romans, and prophets abounded (McKay 199). Jesus, a strong and deeply charismatic leader, developed a small but dedicated following. Jesus’ promise of a “kingdom” greater than Rome fascinated Jews, but they were offended by disciples who referred to Jesus as God’s son because their beliefs about God were rooted over thousands of years (PBS).

About the year 33 AD, Jesus traveled to Jerusalem for Passover. The New Testament Gospel of John records Jesus' reaction what he witnessed:

> In the temple, he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and money changers seated for business. Making a whip from cords, he drove them all out of the temple. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those selling the doves he said, "Take these things out of here! Do not make my father's house a marketplace!"

According to the PBS documentary "The Roman Empire," “[Jesus’] outburst not only enraged religious leaders, but also threatened to disrupt the precarious political stability imposed by Rome. Jesus was arrested on a charge of treason and political subversion.” He was later crucified, a common form of execution for condemned criminals. The decision to execute Jesus eventually contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire and has continued to influence cultures, laws, and societies. The Romans, themselves in search of a unifying religion that satisfied a deeper emotional need that the state religion and the pagan and Hellenic gods could not, were ready for the message the Christians preached: that the Roman leaders put to
death their hero and God. As Karen King explains, “The Romans understood political subversion when they heard it.”

The narratives of Mohammed and Jesus developed during times of critical social and political turmoil, much like the post-9.11 period in American history and the current unrest in the Middle East involving tyranny and an irresolute Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During these tentative eras, people tend to look for a central figure to represent a solution to the problems. Great heroes in history, especially ones who have “spoken to/through” God and who can assure peace, salvation, and empowerment, provide Bush and bin Laden a format to emulate and the inherent fear element that draws and maintains followers.

**Bin Laden’s Visions and dreams**

Bin Laden speaks of myths, visions, and dreams. His commitment to Islam and the emulation of Muhammed qualifies his leadership in the fundamentalist movement. Muhammed is identified by his visions and his ability to develop a strong enough following to ultimately acquire control over countries in the East and West. I shall include a more detailed account of these endeavors later. Bin Laden’s rhetoric also includes grand imagery of tragic events: dismemberment, mutilated children. This contrasts Bush’s reason, realism, and stoicism. The understanding, beyond political gesturing, of each other’s culture would advance communication and peace between these two different men whose ideology of time, property, God, love, loyalty, government, order, and citizenship are in two different abstract realms.
Bin Laden and senior Al Qaeda leader Ayman Zawahri, who accompanies him on the videotape released by the press 10 December 2001, make frequent references to visions and dreams. The corollation to Muhammed’s visions seems apparent. Speaking of Abu-Al-Hasan Al-Masri, an associate who appeared on Al-Jazeera addressing Americans, bin Laden states, “He told me a year ago: ‘I saw in a dream, we were playing a soccer game against the Americans...’ He said we defeated them.” An unidentified man off camera states: “Abd Al Rahman Al-Gharmi) said he saw a vision...a plane crashed into a building.” And, as the transcript quotes, the Shaykh, who is the man with whom bin Laden is speaking mostly states in reference to Al-Gharmi’s dreams and visions: “He told me, ‘I saw a vision, I was in a plane, long and wide...I saw people who left for jihad...and they found themselves in New York.” The frequent references to dreams and visions suggest the dependence on supernatural sources for answers and solutions. The dreams and visions of which bin Laden speaks correlate with Muhammed’s. Shaykh refers specifically to the desire to emulate Mohammed (and assume the same power) in a statement regarding America and its allies in Afghanistan: “...they surrounded us like the days...in the days of the prophet Muhammad. Exactly like what’s happening right now...Finally said...like the old days, such as Abu Bakr and Othman⁴ and Ali and others.” The Shaykh’s statements exemplify fundamentalist Islamic ideology: they are reconstructing Muhammed, visions and all, in order to repeat his successes.

⁴ The references are great Muslim leaders from the era following Muhammed
Change Needed

The human propensity for constructing an enemy in order to defeat it applies to both the U.S. and to the Middle East. Some scholars believe the answer to the schism between the Middle East and the West lies in the willingness of Muslims to alter their worldview. A NYT article, “As Rabbis Face Facts, Bible Tales Are Wilting,” argues for Muslims to reform the Qur’an. Not only have notable scholars challenge the roots and standard interpretation of the text, the article states, but also,

[I]t is agreed by scholars that much of what is known about Islam is derived from texts written 130 and 300 years after Muhammad’s death. Prof. Patricia Crone and Prof. Michael Cook suggest in their book Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World, that Muhammed was perceived by non-Muslim Arabs in the seventh century not as a prophet, but as a preacher in the Old Testament tradition, exclaiming the coming of a Messiah.

Andrew Rippin, an Islamicist at the University of Vicoria in British Columbia, asserts that Muslims one thousand years ago interpreted the Qur’an metaphorically rather than literally and that “It was only in more recent centuries that there was a need for limiting interpretation” (Stille). The “need” is to unify followers for political means to acquire power.

The Arab media has printed articles reporting the need for change. The following letter written by a Pakistani writer and businessman appeared in a Pakistani daily publication, The Nation. Though it recognizes the benefit of a
broader worldview in the Middle East, it reflects a Western-influenced "internalized racism" that may be counter-productive in achieving independence from the U.S. psychological stronghold (Rallin):

We Muslims cannot keep blaming the West for all our ills...The embarrassment of wretchedness among us is beyond repair. It is not just the poverty, the illiteracy and the absence of any commonly accepted social contract that define our sense of wretchedness; it is rather the increasing awareness among us that we have failed as a civil society by not confronting the historical, political, and social demons within us...Without a reformation in the practice of Islam that makes it move forward and not backward, there is no hope for us Muslims anywhere. We have reduced Islam to the organized hypocrisy of state-sponsored mullahism. For more than a thousand years Islam has stood still because the mullahs, who became de facto clergy instead of genuine scholars, closed the door on 'ijtehad' [reinterpreting Islam in light of modernity] and no one came forward with an evolving application of the message of the Holy Quran. All that the mullahs tell you today is how to go back a millennium. We have not been able to evolve a dynamic practice to bring Islam to the people in the language in their own specific era...Oxford and Cambridge were the 'madrasas' of Christendom in the 13th century. Look where they are today—among the leading institutions of
education in the world. Where are our institutions of learning?

(“Breaking the Circle”)

This letter illustrates the Middle Eastern paradox: many Arabs are willing to confront the fundamental social problems—poverty, joblessness, gender inequality—but some of those progressives have been Westernized and seek solutions conducive to the Western imperialist agenda rather than a solution asserting an independent power center. Additionally, the type of change essential in the Middle East that would contribute to a postmodern condition requires non-violent communication with the West and with each other. Fierce adherence to nebulous laws established through religious institution will not advance the essential discourse that may ultimately promote peace and a shared world power.

The role of faith in American society plays a similar role for Muslims: it unifies and it placates a society by explaining the seemingly inexplicable. It provides the center, the transcendental signified. As Bush constructs his identity as hero and savior through his rhetoric, Bin Laden masterfully manipulates the grand narrative of Islam to justify jihad and construct an identity simulating Mohammed: prophet, leader, hero, God’s (Allah’s) warrior. The teleological focus of the rhetorical endeavor is Power.
Conclusion

The postmodern worldview may claim credit for the proclaimed celebration of diversity and the establishment of multi-culturalism in American society. In fact, however, the globalization of American economic ideology serves to make the world America's vast colony. The US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, coated in good will and "safety for America" has demonstrated the government's fundamental intent: the Americanization of the Middle East through construction of institutions serving U.S. government and business interests. Bush sells the colonialist package to the American public with rhetoric that includes ideals realized through terms like duty, morality, and justice. His narrative of the Event—the Arab evil ones have attacked our freedom—reinforces the hatred and justification for taking what does not belong to the United States. My argument proposes a transcendence of dull, blind and unquestioning trust in a government bent on its own self-serving preservation, according to eighteenth century criteria, and a globalist, capitalist ideology and agendas. The government is not the Center—the people are.

It is true that the United States is the new family on the global block. Our history spans a fraction of that of Arab, European, and Eastern countries'. The United States, like any powerful political nation, is not infallible. The events of 9.11 demonstrated the vulnerability and naivete of the American people. Americans became disoriented as members of a global community because we did not know the neighbors who exploded on to our city streets on 11 September 2001. We were shocked, terrified, panicked, paralyzed, and vengeful.
The irony of 9.11 illustrates the contradiction between multi-culturalism and post-colonialism (Yuan). Post-colonialism refers to transforming a colonized group from subjects into the objectified Other. The colonizers then deconstruct the group’s traditions and culture and reconstructs a new one designed to maintain the power hierarchy. Bush and bin Laden’s rhetoric demonstrates the language employed to accomplish such a purpose. Bush’s platforms for exercising this rhetoric are televised speeches, newspapers, magazine articles: the Media. His rhetorical strategy includes appeal to the pathos and ethos of Americans by contextualizing the events of 9.11 in faith, tragedy, and revenge. The effect has been a psychological and emotional unification of the nation against the enemy in the name of God. American culture and society cannot help but be altered. Bin Laden’s pragmatics—media, religion, and racism--are quite the same.

Multi-culturalism, in contrast to post-colonialism, implies the recognition, tolerance, and acceptance of various cultural practices and ideologies within a society. While the rhetoric of 9.11 persuades Americans to other Arabs and “any nation aiding terrorists,” which is an extensive list, American society continues its struggle to integrate into its complex culture and society its citizens from around the world.

While American politicians support a multi-cultural, diverse culture within its borders, it practices measures toward a controlled, globalized centrality worldwide. The motivation for supporting diversity in the US, in Foucauldian
terms, is its power relation: the power of the elite center is maintained through the
votes of those ethnic communities controlled and manipulated by political rhetoric
vowing to support them and their interests, thus keeping those groups dependent and
subservient. On the other hand, the American global effort thwarts and intervenes
militarily with nations whose sovereign interests threaten US power. That effort
includes constructing the Other as the Evil Enemy. The opposing theories, thus,
simultaneously serve the powerful interests of maintaining the power controlled by
the American centrist government.

The multi-cultural/post-colonial paradox extends further. September 11
brought into the spotlight The Arab: a vague, unrecognized group that most
Americans ignored and dismissed. Arabs, the generic misnomer used by most
Americans for any one whose geographic ethnic roots extended from Lebanon to
India, now became an interesting dichotomy: liberals extolled their presence in
America; conservatives condemned it. The radical extension of multi-cultural
America collided with a renewed geno-centrism that included white America at the
center and a tolerance of standard minorities, now relieved, perhaps, by the shift in
animosity toward a new victim of racism. Arabs, a profoundly politically under-
represented group, generally resided in the shadows of American society, but now
became the focus of frantic attention. The result: a reinforced, steadfast, bulletproof
construction of the Arabic Other. The Bush administration now had a clear, well-
defined enemy to defeat and render subservient.
The world is a Theatre of the Absurd: The center is no longer discernible and people must frantically construct a substitute for the God that once defined all moral principle. But there is no substitute for a concept for which there is no signifier. The America that I experience—the home-owning, money-making, child-raising America—has substituted the spiritual center with a blind routine established by greed and financial responsibility and bounded by rules and laws created by a government that replaces God. Martin Esslin in The Theatre of the Absurd writes,

In expressing the tragic sense of loss at the disappearance of ultimate certainties, the Theatre of the Absurd, by the strange paradox, is also a symptom of what probably comes nearest to being a genuinely religious quest in our age: an effort, however timid and tentative, to sing to laugh, to weep—and to growl—if not in praise of God (whose name, in Adamovad's phrase, has for so long been degraded by usage that it has lost its meaning), at least in search of a dimension of the Ineffable; an effort to make man aware of the ultimate realities of his condition, to instill in him again the lost sense of cosmic wonder and primeval anguish, to shock him out of an existence that has become trite, mechanical, complacent, and deprived of the dignity that comes of awareness. For God is dead, above all, to the masses who live from day to day and have lost all contact with the basic facts—and mysteries—of the human condition with which, in former times, they were kept in touch through the living ritual of their
religion, which made them parts of a living community and not just atoms in an atomized society (Esslin 351).

Like the fragmented self, several parts construct a country. The mind serves to make sense of the self, and the government serves the same function for the country. Politics is the organism that bridges the gap between the government and the public. That organism, like all forms of communication, transforms constantly. The acceptance of this postmodern notion can serve to make sense of the role of politics in a democracy.

September 11 changed the realities of religion, tolerance, politics, heroism, mortality, war, America, and the Middle East. Because it changed the people of the world, it changed reality. The continued study of the nature and pathology of those changes is imperative. A rupture as significant as 9.11, as tragic as it was for America, offers a valuable opportunity to learn how to reconstruct the world to eliminate the possibility of another similarly violent and hateful event.

Critics of the ideas and proposals I have constructed will undoubtedly charge me with being a leftist, liberal, bleeding heart more concerned for the welfare of the “enemy” than for America. My proposal to broaden worldviews is not only directed at Americans but, perhaps more critically, to those groups motivated by religious extremism and/or control over factions seeking selfhood (Israel-Palestine). It is evident that Arabs must work toward a more complete understanding of the West. The biases produced by Arab media and through religious zealotry must be
deconstructed in order to normalize the dangerous anti-American, racist reality being constructed in the Middle East.

I am not suggesting that America validate the violence of 9.11. On the contrary, it is the violence itself at the core of my argument: If humans can construct a reason for war and murder, we most certainly should be able to construct a reason against it.

September 11 requires a revised postmodern definition of multiculturalism. America must rethink its values if those values must be upheld through war and assertion of political power. Yes, much work needs to be done in order to understand the minds of Islamic zealots bent on the destruction of America and the proliferation of its own power. The institution of religion must be deconstructed so that its tenets can cease directing the dangerous course of militarism and imperialist endeavors disguised as humanitarianism. The institution of the State needs to be reconstructed so that all of its power can be distributed equally among the people. And finally, the institution of education must train citizens to recognize when the true impetus of political rhetoric is to serve select individuals at the apex of the hierarchy of power to maintain and propel that position.

If the post 9.11 political rhetoric constructs the epistemological discourse of the Event, it will likely be viewed as a victory for democracy and a defeat for terrorism. What will not be factored in, perhaps, in American history books, are the messier issues of political identity and positioning. The Arab perspective will likely be addressed in positive terms, citing the economic and social benefits of
Westernization of the region. Less likely are accounts of the violent and humiliating effects of defeat, occupation and imperialism.
Figure 1. Desperation, hopelessness, and suicide instantly changed these people’s reality.
Figure 2. The image of the Rape was taken off the air soon after 11 September. The image is a violent reminder of America's (and its government's) vulnerability.
Figure 3. Bush represents America, and America, represented by the flag pointing to heaven, is being cheered and uplifted atop the crushed icon of capitalism and disintegrated bodies. The attacks occurred during Bush's term in office, yet he emerges, through images such as these, heroic.
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