

MA Major Research Paper

The Search for Bin Laden:  
Post 9/11 Terrorism and the Representation of the Other in Mainstream American  
Television Media

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## INTRODUCTION

The modern experience cuts across all traditional boundaries of geography, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and ideology, as exemplified by the events of September 11, 2001. Marshall Berman describes the modern age as “a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish,” invoking fear, uncertainty, and struggle (15). These are some of the feelings invoked in the United States and other parts of the world by the attacks of September 11, when the world superpower came under attack and became a victim of violence. This maelstrom was further fueled by popular discourse following September 11: movies and television shows with themes of “Islamic terrorism” became a popular trend, and discussions around Islam and the Middle East took centre stage in the news.

The media are crucial to our worldview, thus, this paper will demonstrate how American television news media was used to present and define an enemy immediately following the events of September 11. Furthermore, this paper will problematize the stereotypes associated with the enemy, and bring into the forefront the reasons for and consequences of establishing and maintaining an enemy “Other,” specifically questionable political actions by US President George W. Bush and his administration. As the violent events of one day became showcased in the media, this facilitated the implementation of restrictive and pervasive laws and legislation, which were part of a larger initiative by the Bush administration to incite fear and apprehension surrounding a new enemy.

For example, immediately following the attacks of September 11, Bush declared a national emergency and implemented Executive Order 13224 on September 23, 2001.

This Order issued a list of people and groups that are defined as “terrorists” or “terrorist organizations.” However, each entity listed in the Order is a Middle Eastern organization or individual, thus implying that “terrorism” is associated solely with the Middle East and its people, culture and ideology (“Executive Order 13224 of September 23, 2001”). Also, after the attacks of September 11, the US government developed a National Strategy for Combating Terrorism in February 2003. Bush proceeded to launch a “War on Terror,” described by his administration as a “battle of arms and a battle of ideas” (“National Strategy for Combating Terrorism”). The overview of America’s National Strategy for Combating Terrorism is very limited in scope; it aims to destroy the Al-Qaeda network and to find and bring to justice those who planned and executed the attacks of September 11. Alongside this very specific goal is the extremely broad aim to confront radical ideology that inspires people to join or support “terrorist movements” (“National Strategy for Combating Terrorism”). These are some examples of the political changes introduced as a result of the September 11 attacks, reinforcing the notion that “terrorism” is a fact, and associated with Muslims and/or the Middle East.

## THESIS

In this paper, I will use Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism to argue that American television news media instigated a moral panic post-September 11 by communicating a new polarized enemy – or an “Other,” in the form of a Muslim “terrorist” who stand opposed to the West. This moral panic was facilitated and utilized by the Bush administration to support a political agenda. The paper is divided into two sections: In Section One, I will describe the methods and signifiers used in communications media, specifically American broadcast television news reports, to

establish, present and communicate the Other. I am seeking to elucidate what guidelines or criteria define an Other, and the means used to demonize and dehumanize the Other. The presentation of the demonized Other is very important, as it has facilitated and justified devastating political actions by the United States during the Bush era, such as the War on Terror. Section Two of this paper consists of an analysis of the reasons for “Othering” and the results thereof; I analyze how “Othering” has been used to facilitate a particular political agenda.

## **SECTION ONE**

### **ORIENTALISM**

The presentation of the enemy will be analyzed largely using Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism: This paper argues that the media and the Bush administration portrayed the attacks of September 11 in an Orientalist manner. According to Edward Said, Orientalism is a “Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient,” by making statements about it, authoring views of it, describing explaining and teaching it, and settling and ruling over it as will be demonstrated in the media analysis section of this paper (3). The “Orient” is a term used to describe what is commonly known as the Middle East, and according to Said, “the Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences” (1).

However, “Orientalism has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world,” as the inhabitants of the Orient are known as the “Other” – the enemy, who is the polar opposite of the Self (Said 12). At the core of traditional Orientalist perspective is a well-organized sense that people “over there” (the Other) are not like “us” (the Self) and

don't appreciate "our" values (Said xx). The non-Western Other is that which is "disavowed," the "over there" to the Western Self's "here;" an existential threat, while simultaneously inferior and disposable (Nayak and Malone 262). Oriental cultures of which irrational violence is believed to be a strong part, are "Other," whereas the familiar, the rational, the West is understood as the "Self." Thus, the Other is demonized, mystified, and considered to be backwards, barbaric, primitive, dangerous, undeveloped and inferior, while the Self is the polar opposite: rational, developed, good, normal, enlightened, progressive, right, and superior, as will be demonstrated in the media analysis section of this paper (Nayak 46). As such, the idea of the Orient has helped to define the West, and its contrasting image, idea, personality, and experience: the two entities thus support and reflect each other (Said 5). However, neither the term Orient (or for that matter, the idea of "them" over "there") nor the concept of the West (or "us" over "here") has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort; somehow people are falsely unified under umbrella terms such as the "West" or "Islam," and given collective identities for groups of people who are actually quite diverse (Said xvii).

This paper will demonstrate how popular American discourse surrounding September 11 in mainstream broadcast news reports was fuelled by a certain type of Orientalism: American Orientalism. This term refers to a particular and specific form of Orientalism intended to produce the concept of "America," which consists of ideas such as "God-given destiny" to guide the world according to the mainstream American political, social and economic worldview. This perspective holds that America has a mission to provide order to the world, and justifies conquering and occupying territories (Nayak and Malone 254). The qualities associated with America are liberty,

constitutionalism, law, democracy, individualism and secularism (Nayak and Malone 260). Thus, American Orientalism is a style of thought about the distinctions between the “West” and the “East” that gives grounding to the foundational narrative of “America” while enabling a particular demonization of “Oriental” peoples and cultures (Nayak and Malone 253). I am using Orientalist theory to examine how and why a Middle Eastern, Muslim Other has come to become the polar opposite enemy of the West, from the perspective of American mainstream broadcast television news outlets.

## PROBLEM TERMS

For the purposes of this paper, the term “West” refers to the culture, attitudes and values that are normally associated with the United States, while “Islam” refers largely to those of Middle Eastern countries (Crockatt 127). However, it should be noted that I am defining these terms very loosely, as it is difficult, if not impossible, to set definitions for terms such as these. Terms such as “West” reflect unnatural categories that we have created, and the idea of a coherent Western civilization is fictitious; there does not exist a monolithic, hermetically sealed “West” that stands against the rest of the world (Nayak and Malone 254). This paper will also present “terrorism” to the reader as a problematic and contested concept, and summarize how the meaning of term itself has changed and evolved up to the present age. An overarching, indefinable concept, terrorism “resides in the eye of the beholder,” as “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter” (Burgess, “Terrorism: The Problems of Definition”). Alongside “terrorism” there are other contested and indefinable terms relevant to this discussion, and this will be elaborated in a section about the media’s role in our understanding of terms, concepts, ideology and the world as a whole.

## NEWS, IDEOLOGY AND TERRORISM TODAY

The word “terrorism” is heard frequently in the media; however, although it is common terminology, the word “terrorism” is often misused and misunderstood, as there is no established, agreed-upon definition for this controversial word, and the concept of “terrorism” has evolved and changed over time.

### History of Terrorism

The root of the word “terrorism” is “terror,” which is defined as an intense, sharp, overmastering fear, or an instance of fear or anxiety (“Terrorism”). The word terror comes from the 14<sup>th</sup> century French word “terreur,” which means “great fear” (“Terror”).

“Terrorism” is not a phenomenon that has emerged recently, as it has actually been practiced for thousands of years, in its various forms: The earliest known examples of “terrorism” were Jewish groups who were active during the Roman occupation of the first century. However, “terrorism” has also had a long secular history, beginning with the French Revolution: The word “terrorism” was initially used in 1798, when the French word “terrorisme” first referred to the Reign of Terror in France (“Terror”). During this period, the French state “terrorized” its citizens in order to maintain stability during a period of upheaval. In this context, however, the word “terrorism” had a positive connotation, as French revolutionary leader Maximilien Robespierre stated that, “terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, severe, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is...a general principle of democracy applied to our country’s most urgent needs” (Burgess, “A Brief History of Terrorism”). This example demonstrates that in this context, “terrorism” was perceived by the French as a positive initiative, necessary to serve justice, and exemplary of a democracy – quite contrary to its connotations today.

In contrast, during the years between the World Wars, the term “terrorism” was used to negatively describe the totalitarian regimes in Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Stalinist Russia, hence, “terrorism” referred to the restrictive political actions of governments of the day. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of “terrorism” revolved around ethnic, religious and ideological issues. For example, the Palestinian Liberation Organization, the Basque ETA, the Provisional Irish Republican Army and the Italian Red Brigades are some examples of what have been considered terrorist organizations in second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Burgess, “A Brief History of Terrorism”). Today, the term “terrorism” is often used to refer to the events of September 11, 2001, when members of the group Al-Qaeda hijacked airplanes to destroy buildings and kill people in the United States. Despite the long history of various forms of “terrorism” as demonstrated in the brief history of the term above, today in the post-September 11 world, “terrorism” is largely associated with Middle Eastern and/or Muslim actors who are involved in suicide missions to make a statement of religious, ideological or political motivation. Thus, the term “terrorism” should be used sparingly and cautiously, as it is culturally and historically specific, and perceived, defined and used differently within various contexts.

These examples demonstrate how the concept of “terrorism” has changed drastically over time, ranging from religious to secular, committed by actors ranging from states to independent parties, and motivated by various reasons. Thus, the actors and actions associated with “terrorism” have changed over the years, and despite the fact that it is a commonly used and well-known concept, the international community still does not appear to have a solid definition for the word “terrorism.” Even the United Nations



has not been able to define what “terrorism” is, despite the fact that it has been on the international agenda since 1934 (UN Action to Counter Terrorism). In conclusion, currently there is no mutual understanding of the meaning of “terrorism,” but there is a consensus of the negative connotation associated with the word, in the context that it is used today (Burgess, “Terrorism: The Problems of Definition”).

### Media Use of the Word “Terrorism”

News agencies have their own guidelines around how to use this term, which demonstrates the failure of the media to report on such issues “objectively,” as subjectivity is an inherent part of the media industry. For example, the British Broadcasting Corporation has strict rules about when it is and is not appropriate to refer to a person as a “terrorist.” The BBC guidelines state that the term should be avoided, and replaced with more specific words such as bomber, attacker, gunman, kidnapper, insurgent or militant. According to the BBC, these alternatives should be exercised because “terrorism is a difficult and emotive subject with significant political overtones” and the BBC strives to maintain its reputation for standards of accuracy and impartiality (“Guidance: Terrorism, Use of Language When Reporting”). Worldwide news agency Reuters, among others, follows similar guidelines (Maguire). However, there is no official industry standard, since many news organizations, such as the Canadian Press, the Associated Press and the *New York Times* have no policy in place to restrict the use of the word “terrorist,” and the CBC only uses this term when it is attributed (Shewchuk).

Thus, while the word “terrorism” is not officially banned, it is preferably avoided in order to allow the audience to make its own judgments instead of being provided with labels. This practice demonstrates that a news agency exercises the option of practicing

responsible journalism by avoiding terms that are ambiguous. However, when terms such as “terrorist” are used by mainstream media, they act as signifiers supportive of a larger framework or ideology.

## Ideology

Ideologies are a vague and broad set, chain, or collection of meanings that are articulated through mainstream media, education, law, arts and culture, among other various facets. However, because of their vague and broad nature, ideologies are manipulated into contexts that appear natural, but are actually carefully planned and executed. For example, elite powers, such as the US state, instill fear and loathing within the Western psyche (or the Self) regarding the Other abroad and within, ensuring that “selected ideologies, meanings, images, and narratives of the Other are seen to be popular expressions of the general public, despite actually being elitist goals of national interest” (Nayak 43). The media are especially important in this equation because they are “transmitters of society’s cultural standards, myths, values, roles, and images” and are expected to reflect society (Henry and Tator 254). However, the mainstream media are largely owned by the socio-economic elite, and thus reinforce their respective ideologies. The media portray issues in a particular manner, because of a naturalized hegemonic process through which a common field of meanings is established and maintained. This includes the definitions, theoretical paradigms, agendas, and frames within which we learn to think as a society. Hegemony ensures that words, ideas and issues are framed in such a manner that we “naturally” think about them as such (Karim 5).

The media are a powerful force; they have the cultural authority to construct perceptions of the world, and opinions, perspectives and ideologies embedded during

socialization are reinforced by the media throughout our lives. While the media in a democratic society are expected to remain objective by presenting a variety of perspectives, this is almost impossible when mainstream media outlets are largely owned by the socio-economic elite or the state (Karim 6). However, this is difficult to detect because “on the surface it appears as though consumers have more selection (such as television channels, newspapers, etc.) than in the recent past, [but] in reality we are faced with fewer real choices and a narrower perspective because of increasingly oligopolistic ownership patterns and the concomitant horizontal and vertical integration across media” (Muzzatti 132). As a result, we discover the narrow range of perspectives that are disseminated, especially in today’s age of conglomeration, where various media outlets exist to create an illusion of diversity, but are actually part of one large empire (Skinner and Gasher 52).

## Framing

It is impossible for the media to be completely objective, as journalism is a human enterprise full of judgments about what is and what is not important, based on various factors, such as organizational pressures, rituals and practices, conventions, and ideologies; hence, journalism is a cultural artifact, and should be viewed contextually as a symbol of society in the time and place in which it is produced (Winch 285).

Media framing is an important element to consider: Framing has emerged as a theoretical concept from agenda-setting, and is described as selecting and highlighting some facets of events and issues, making connections among them, and promoting a particular interpretation, evaluation and/or solution (Butler 823). Framing includes how the subject would be approached by the audience, and the acceptable range of terms,

connections and interpretations (Harmon and Muenchen 13). Even images that may appear transparent and objective (such as the news reports described in the media analysis section of this paper) are framed, and thus carry a purpose and perspective (Butler 824).

Media framing becomes more important during a crisis. Although appearing objective and unbiased, American media outlets consistently support American foreign policy decisions at least in initial stages, and do not challenge the assumptions behind those decisions (Harmon and Muenchen 14). The problem may be that journalists rely heavily on administration sources, and pass along predominantly pro-war framing words as a result (Harmon and Muenchen 17). Furthermore, during a time of crisis journalists tend to “see the world through a nationalistic and patriotic lens” and act as “champions of the nation, its leaders, and its institutions” (Winch 296). Diverging viewpoints and questions are rarely heard during periods of national emergency, as pressures arise towards conformity, and there is lack of analysis, as will be demonstrated in the media analysis below (Winch 296).

## ORIGINAL RESEARCH

In order to examine the concept of “terrorism” in mainstream US television news media, I conducted original research based on National Broadcasting Company (NBC) television news reports, ranging from September 11, 2001 to December 31, 2001. I studied the reports in the months immediately following the attacks of September 11 in order to learn what associations were made in mainstream American broadcast television news media between the violent events of September 11 and the people and culture of the Middle East, and Islam. I chose to study the NBC television news reports because

television is one the most pervasive agents of socialization, and NBC is categorized as one of the top broadcasters in the United States in terms of household reach. As of 2007, eight media conglomerates (Bertelsmann, CBS, Disney, General Electric, News Corp, Time Warner, Viacom and Vivendi) together own more than 90% of the US domestic market in all major media including television and radio, newspaper, book and magazine publishing, Internet access, film studios, and music labels (Muzzatti 132). Owned by General Electric, NBC reaches the highest number of households in the United States: approximately 99% in total – more than the other major American television networks. For example, American Broadcasting Company (ABC), Cable News network (CNN), and FOX reach approximately 97%, 82% and 77% of American households, respectively (Ahlberg).

I accessed NBC television news reports from September 11, 2001 to December 31, 2001 using an online database called the Vanderbilt Television News Archive. I narrowed down the reports by using the search term “Osama bin Laden,” which yielded 105 results for the period specified, and compiled notes based on my observations of various factors, including, but not limited to: language and tone; visual images such as photos, video footage and graphics; and choice of subject and content. My descriptions and analysis of the reports are based on a compilation of notes from all reports, and not limited to a specific report unless indicated.

### Focus on Bin Laden

The NBC broadcast television news reports are highly focused on one single figure: Osama bin Laden, who quickly becomes the face of “terrorism” (or primary association with “terrorism”), based on detailed descriptions of his qualities (both

positive and negative), ongoing speculations regarding his whereabouts, and video footage that is largely limited to shots of bin Laden.

Bin Laden is specifically highlighted as an individual, as demonstrated in a commentary in a report on October 1 that includes speculation about how *he* will respond if attacked, whether or not *he* will launch a chemical or biological attack, claims that *he* was experimenting with chemical weapons and tried to obtain lots of uranium, open speculation about whether *he* is dead or alive, and detailed commentary and analysis of minor changes in his physical appearance, such as the fact that he appears “thinner, weaker, tired” and his left arm is not moving at all, on December 26. However, while the viewer becomes quite familiar with bin Laden, the same cannot be said for any other friend or colleague of bin Laden’s. Surely, the attacks of September 11 were not the work of one single man, yet the focus of the post-September 11 political current was largely bin Laden. Some of his colleagues are presented to viewers, but not highlighted and intimately described as bin Laden himself.

The reports are very specific about bin Laden, and allow viewers to learn a great deal about this one man. For example, in a report on September 11, viewers learn that he is a millionaire Saudi businessman, of Yemeni origin, and believed to be in exile in Afghanistan. While he is quite wealthy, the Saudi born man has been “disowned” and ordered to leave the country by the Saudi government. Alongside video footage, there are superfluous physical descriptions of bin Laden, for example, describing him as tall and thin on September 11, thus maintaining close focus on this individual. Throughout the slew of reports, viewers are always presented with the same limited perspective of him, never as a father or husband, or wealthy, upper-class man, but rather an extremist

guerrilla fighter, who dons rags and sleeps in caves. This limited and negative perspective can be attributed to the idea that is easier for people to hate enemies who are not understood as complete individual human beings, (for example, as well-rounded people with families and loved ones), thus explaining the lack of insight into the rest of bin Laden's life (Winch 290).

### Why Focus on Bin Laden

Since the viewer becomes intimately familiar with the image of bin Laden, he is demonized as the face of "terrorism." For example, an image of bin Laden's face is presented along with quotes about Islam and the current tensions in a report on September 24, thus attributing the attacks and words to him only. As a result, the viewer's idea of "terrorism" becomes deeply embedded with the image of this one sole, single man: When the viewer thinks of "terrorism," bin Laden is the frame of reference, or reference point. Since "terrorism" is a broad and vague concept, it must be attributed to something or someone concrete. Thus, bin Laden is shown as the "face of terrorism," because this focuses fear and loathing on an individual enemy, making it easier and more likely for people to hate the Other (Winch 293). After September 11, the media framed "terrorism" as bin Laden by focusing on him in reports, and then demonizing him as per the descriptions below (Harmon and Muenchen 12).

### How Bin Laden is Demonized

#### *Anti-freedom*

Immediately following the September 11 attacks, broadcast news reports identify and demonize the Other – specifically "powerful and terrible enemies" (on September

12), who “hate America” (on November 16). There are certain characteristics associated with the enemy: For example, the Other is anti-“freedom,” and as Bush says in an NBC report on September 11, “our freedom was attacked by a faceless coward,” and on October 6, even British Prime Minister Tony Blair claims there is a “battle between the free and democratic world and terrorism,” creating an instant binary divide between the West, which supposedly supports and fights for “freedom,” and the Other, who is accused of wanting to take freedom away from the West. The issue of freedom polarizes both sides, however, it remains unclear what exactly the word “freedom” stands for or how freedom itself was attacked during or as a result of the events of September 11.

### *Tribal*

The Other is further downgraded when described as tribal, backward, and barbaric. Bush is broadcast on September 16 saying that “people who hit and run, who hide in caves... we will get them out” and the hunt for bin Laden is described as a “commando style manhunt” against a “savage and ruthless enemy” on September 21. This type of language is generally accompanied by video footage of men in tribal garb aiming and shooting rifles, dusty villages, faceless elders walking on hills, run-down tanks, and bin Laden intertwined in and among these scenes, mostly showing off weaponry or preaching into a microphone. The video footage is almost always of an outdoor area, associating the Other with nature, as primitive and barbaric beings who are close to nature.

### *Religious and irrational*

The enemy is also portrayed as religious, and thus irrational. Reporters and commentators ask, “How does one get like this? So full of hate, ready to massacre so



many and die in the process” and these words are accompanied by video footage of men shooting rifles into air, described as “blood boiling” on September 12. The Other is further portrayed as militant and irrational, when linked to religion and religious “fundamentalism” on November 11. The Other is described as feeling “anger” and “a sense of hopelessness,” and these feelings are combined with a “deep religious belief that heaven awaits,” as reported on September 12. Thus, the Other follows a cult-like belief and acts irrationally to achieve martyrdom. Video footage of men marching with masks and guns, passionately yelling religious phrases such as “Allah Huackbar” show how young men are “recruited” in mosques, with the irrational, cult-like belief that they have “the approval of God,” as also reported on September 12.

### *Evil*

On September 11, among other days, reports are filled with commentary describing bin Laden as a “guerrilla leader” who is linked to numerous terrorist attacks, thus painting a picture of a violent, cruel and heartless man who is capable of mass murder. Furthermore, bin Laden is named a “pariah” (meaning social outcast) on October 6, and an “evil-doer” on September 16. Bush is quoted as stating, “we are fighting evil” on November 16 and “evil needs to be stomped out” on September 18, creating an association between bin Laden and evil. The concept of evil is vague, broad and undefined, allowing viewers to perceive bin Laden based on their own standards of “evil.” Finally, on December 10, Bush is quoted as saying, “bin Laden has no conscience or soul; he represents the worst of civilization,” summing up the negative associations created with bin Laden.

## *Kill bin Laden*

A report on September 17 directly quotes Bush saying that bin Laden is being sought out so that he can be brought to justice by being killed, implying that bin Laden is not worthy of any sort of rehabilitation or punishment, and simply does not deserve to live. The fact that bin Laden should simply be killed is repeated in reports on September 17, October 3, November 15 and December 17. Bin Laden is portrayed as a legitimate target, as reporters and commentators debate the assassination policy on December 17 and determine that rules do not apply to “terrorists;” thus, bin Laden should rightfully be killed. Even Bush weighs in, “I don’t care dead or alive, either way,” on December 17. There is some debate about whether bin Laden should be captured or killed in this report, but these are the only two choices presented to viewers, dehumanizing bin Laden and leaving no room for debate about how to otherwise proceed in this situation.

By dehumanizing the Other, this established that the Other is worthy of subordination (Egan 149). Dehumanization is an especially important technique to ensure a nation’s support for war and make tolerable the suffering it inflicts upon those perceived as the “enemy” (Ellis 99). In order to create such a profile of the Other, there has to be a certain level of ignorance about the enemy in question, as there was ignorance among Americans about Afghanistan, the Middle East and Islam, based on the selected and biased information presented to them in news reports during this period. This ignorance is exploited to construct an image of the threat at hand (Ellis 101).

## Evil Genius

However, all commentary and description of bin Laden is not necessarily negative, and there are many positive characteristics attributed to bin Laden. For

example, he is described in several reports as a “mastermind” – an incredible intelligent man who is capable of high achievements. On September 11, for example, Ken Allard, International Terrorism expert describes the “sophistication” of the day’s attacks as “elaborately planned, flawlessly executed, and audaciously conceived.” In the same report, NBC news commentator Andrea Mitchell says the attacks required a “great deal of coordination, money, expertise, global terror network” – all unique to bin Laden. He is portrayed as a clever man, as he has demonstrated the “level of logistics required to carry out these attacks,” according to NBC correspondent Hoda Kotb on September 11.

Reporters and experts speculate about what type of coordination was needed to carry out the September 11 attacks, and come to the conclusion that this was achieved due to the fact that bin Laden was well positioned, and practiced excellent communications and good planning. On September 11, Ken Allard, International Terrorism expert, says: “it is amazing that they understand weather, which was perfect, crystal clear,” commenting on bin Laden’s understanding of various factors, including New York weather, when planning the September 11 attacks. In the same report, Skip Brandon, FBI counterterrorism chief, asks “was bin Laden responsible?” and answers his own question with “yes” – he has the capability and organization to do so, implying that bin Laden should not be underestimated, as he is powerful and capable.

As demonstrated in the NBC reports described, bin Laden was portrayed as clever and intelligent to have successfully penetrated American defenses. Thus, bin Laden was constructed as an “evil genius archetype” with near mythic abilities, knowledge and power. Meanwhile, equally plausible depictions of bin Laden as insane, idiotic or lucky were practically non-existent, thus constructing bin Laden as a worthy adversary for a

superpower such as the United States (Winch 285). One must build up the public reputation of an adversary by depicting them as brilliant, clever, cunning and intellectual, as bin Laden was, in order to explain their own defeat and failure (Winch 293). Simply put, “mythical villains are not called stupid or lucky, because there can be no valor or honor fighting and unworthy opponent” (Winch 290).

Based on the descriptions above, the content of the NBC reports regarding the hunt for bin Laden have demonstrated an Orientalist perspective: The presentation of the Other generally involves criminalization, as the Other is portrayed as intentionally violent, clever and scheming, as bin Laden was portrayed in the reports described here (Lazar and Lazar 231). Overall, the Other is described using negative terms and painted as a sinister enemy, and simultaneously depicted as a coward and savage (Lazar and Lazar 235). However, it is equally important to explore the physical images (such as video footage and graphics) and language in the reports in order to understand the various elements that contribute to creating the image of the Other.

### Video Footage

In general, the video footage of bin Laden is candid and up-close. In the video footage shown, bin Laden has a long beard, with his head covered in a scarf or turban, and is usually seen wearing traditional Afghan or Arabic clothing, appearing tribal, backward, and old-fashioned. Camera movements are unsteady and zoom into his face, showing an extreme close-up shot of bin Laden usually while he is preaching or smiling eerily, presenting him as mysterious, dangerous, and fearful, almost like the villain in a horror film. Most of the video footage of bin Laden portrays him engaging in the same few activities: either preaching in Arabic into a microphone (allowing the reader to

speculate about what he could be preaching, and to whom), and walking in dusty deserts, mountainous villages and dark caves (contributing to the stereotype that he is barbaric because he lives in a tribal, forbidding country).

Overall, reports and video footage of bin Laden are generally edited to be intertwined with footage of mountains, dusty war scenes, stray boys in villages, Afghans wearing traditional garb, and men shooting rifles and fighting. Since these images are embedded into reports and footage of bin Laden, there is an association created between bin Laden and traits portrayed such as primitive, tribal, rural, chaotic, dirty, etc.

Certain video footage of bin Laden is repeatedly broadcast until the images are entrenched into the viewer's mind. For example, there is an old video of bin Laden in his youth, draped in white garb, in a dusty desert-like location, surrounded by Middle Eastern men. He is crouched down, and aims a rifle, shooting it. His location, purpose and target are unknown, allowing the viewers to draw their own conclusions about who he could be shooting, and why. This video footage presents bin Laden in a combat role, and it is interesting to note that there is no contrary or balanced footage of bin Laden to represent his money, private planes, grand family and other sources of power – which are plentiful, but rarely, if ever viewed by the public in mainstream American television media outlets such as NBC news reports.

## Afghanistan

The enemy is shown to be bred largely in the Middle East, in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan which are symbolic of a faraway exotic land, almost interchangeable. However, this analysis will focus specifically on Afghanistan, which is

the primary search location for bin Laden and focus on the news reports during the period of September 11 to December 31, 2001.

In terms of geography, Afghanistan is detailed on September 16 and October 6 as “landlocked,” with “high mountains and narrow passes” and described as a “remote and forbidding part of the world,” with “difficult landscape.” “Unconquered for years,” Afghanistan is described “a land of extremes – ferociously hot and brutally cold” with “tricky treacherous terrain” on October 6 and December 14, respectively. Furthermore, Afghanistan is characterized on December 5 as a “sinister” and “forbidden place” on September 16. It is a “radical country of concern,” ruled by the Taliban and home to bin Laden, who has moved to “hideouts deep inside Afghanistan.” The mountains of Afghanistan are described on September 23 as “dotted with caves and hidden footpaths, ideal for people on the run” like bin Laden. These representations of Afghanistan are essentially negative, and establish the country as a dark, sinister, forbidding place, which houses extremists and criminals on the run. Even the natural geography of the land is characterized, invoking fear and hatred, and garnering support for a war against the country and its inhabitants.

One physical characteristic of Afghanistan that is often highlighted is the caves. In fact, there is an entire segment of NBC broadcast news on October 23 dedicated to the “hiding holes” of Afghanistan, complete with video footage of the insides of caves, where one can see how complex the “ancient underground mazes” are. This segment also contains countless dark pictures of rocks and caves, attributing nature, primitivism and tribalism to Afghanistan.

Bin Laden is associated with Afghanistan, which is portrayed in these reports as a land of sexism, religious fundamentalism, dusty deserts and unknown lands. While the people are portrayed as tribal and chaotic, the land is considered uncivilized; on November 11, it is described as an unchartered frontier, a “no-man’s land” filled with war and heavy fighting, lacking order, governance and development. The ruling Taliban become the center of attention and reports of their inhumane actions are filled with grainy footage of cruel men committing crimes against humanity, without providing positive counter-images of Afghan life. As a result, there are negative associations with bin Laden, based on his connection to Afghanistan in these reports.

Based on collective footage from the reports, the Afghan people, amongst whom bin Laden is hiding, appear tribal and backward, as they are shown as living in dusty, rural villages, filled with crowds of stray little boys and bearded men wearing traditional clothing and turbans. The Afghans appear to live in chaos – they are presented as loud people, yelling and hovering in big crowds, and usually carrying rifles. Complementary to the shots of men with rifles, expert Michael O’Hanlon from the Brookings Institution is broadcast on November 19 claiming that: “Afghanistan will not be at peace, be a democracy or have a progressive government, or soon develop financially because their trade is warfare,” furthering the stereotype that the Other is violent and barbaric.

This report is highly problematic: By stating that the Afghans’ trade is warfare, it implies that the Other is inherently flawed mentally and psychologically, and operates in a stagnant and backward culture that is the result of this flawed mental configuration (Tuastad 591). For example, people such as Afghans supposedly lack the psychological readiness or cultural qualities that are needed to be members of a democratic society and

they are simply unable to detach from their traditional culture, implying that they are doomed as a people (Tuastad 592). Furthermore, the argument is that Middle Eastern people and/or Muslims are violent because Western enlightenment has not penetrated these cultures, and only when these people attain a certain economic, educational and cultural standard will they be able to act civilly (Tuastad 593). This type of racist discourse produces powerful images of a non-civilized Other, and thus legitimizes military, economic and/or political sanctions by the West such as the War on Terror (Tuastad 597).

As we perceive the Other today, it is the Middle Eastern and/or Muslim figure that threatens Western civility and requires subjugation. Political violence is perceived as a resurgence of tribalism and cultural backwardness among these non-civilized groups, and such violence is feared because it is irrational and cannot be resolved by means of diplomacy or conciliation (Tuastad 596). Thus, the only way to ensure safety of the Self is to modernize or develop the Other, injecting rationale and civility into an otherwise primitive culture, as per the War on Terror.

The stereotypes of a non-civilized Other are further demonstrated by reports on November 14. This report states that the ruling Taliban brutally beat and kill innocent people, and there is fighting amongst Afghan ethnic groups, thus implying that there is no order in the country. The vision of the Other as incapable of rebuilding their society or becoming civilized or modern without external intervention is prevalent (Cloud 293). Afghanistan is presented as uncivilized, and in need of a Western authority such as the United States to control and help them. Afghanistan appears to be in need of outside help because it is described on September 25, for example, as “a country on the run;” in other



words, there is a serious humanitarian crisis as Afghans are refugees and lacking food, medicine and other forms of aid. Afghanistan described on October 1 as a country “in desperate need” and needs an “increase in aid,” and Afghans are described as hopeless, poor, angry and helpless, running out of food and medicine. Thus, the idea of the “white man’s burden” is a core belief in the opposition between rational Western societies and helpless Others who require rescue and surveillance, as they do not know what is “good for them” (Said 37).

The Other is oftentimes infantilized, meaning that it is presented as vulnerable, helpless, backward and in need of help from the superior, in an almost childlike fashion. The Other may be pitied and worthy of providing with aid, because infantilization may take shape in victimizing the Other by pointing out problems within the Other society. However, this actually places blame on the Other culture rather than acknowledging the role that the Self, and international power relations, foreign policy, globalization, capitalism or a variety of other forces play (Nayak 48). Thus, as the process of infantilization reveals, “depending on the type of identity it wants to assert, the US state decides when to hate, save or ignore Other men and women” (Nayak 51). In the case of Iraq, for example, the Bush administration defined the country as an enemy when seeking out weapons of mass destruction. Later, the invasion of Iraq was portrayed as a humanitarian mission to “save” the Iraqi people by giving them freedom and democracy by ousting Saddam Hussein and his regime.

The sole fact that American news media tell the story of Afghanistan demonstrates how the media practice Orientalism: In *Orientalism*, Said argues that the West has maintained power and domination over the Orient through the telling and

retelling of its distorted and subjective history (8). By taking ownership over Afghan history (or even simply describing the country in these reports), the West (in this case represented by mainstream media such as NBC) practices domination over Afghanistan: the West is able to actively select which portions of the story to tell, and how to do so, along with the language, tone and images carefully selected to complement this story.

### Westerners

The image of the Westerners is shockingly different than that of the enemy, demonstrating how Orientalist discourse has less to do with the Orient and the Other than it does with the Self and the creation of the concept and identity of the Self (Nayak and Malone 254). By establishing the Other, the identity of the Self is defined more easily and clearly, and portrays that which the Self is not.

Most, if not all, Western reporters, experts, and commentators are white. White is considered to be the normal race, against which all other races deviate (Hall). While it is contingent and fluid, whiteness has an ascribed ethnicity attached to it (Shaw 865). A person is deemed racially or ethnically white when they meet the physical requirements such as skin tones ranging from pink to beige, and white features, including the shape of the nose, eyes and lips, the colour and type of hair, and even body shape (Dyer, 1997, 42).

Yet whiteness is more than a race: The white position is a “strategy of authority rather than an authentic or essential identity” (Guess 653). Whiteness represents a sociological category that assigns unspoken privilege and power, and whites maintain privilege through the characterization of their actions as normal (Reitman 267). While white people’s claim to power is the claim to represent all of humanity, raced people

cannot do that – they can only speak for their own race. As a result, the position of being “just” human is the most powerful a person or group may hold (Dyer, 1997, 2).

Therefore, the white reporters, experts, and commentators are perceived as authoritative figures in the reports described above.

Whiteness is “an invisible perspective, a dominant and normative category against which difference is determined” (Garner 259). Whiteness can be described as a malevolent absence, an invisible perspective, emptiness, or denial (Dyer, 2000, 733). White is both a colour and simultaneously not a colour, and that which is colourless cannot be seen. For instance, a sheet of white paper is considered to be blank (Dyer, 1997, 45). It is important to note that whiteness has a quality of invisibility on one hand, yet it simultaneously has a very distinct content, since an absence or invisibility is not necessarily synonymous with “lack of substance.” Thus, “whiteness is a filled, rather than empty category” (Garner 259).

The Western reporters, experts and commentators are also kempt, groomed and well-dressed, often donning business attire such as suits. The reporters’ and commentators’ legitimacy is furthered by the fact that they are all identified and captioned, verbally introduced, and standing at attention, clearly posed and prepared to speak on camera. They generally have solemn, serious, grim looks on their faces, and thus appear as authority figures. The reporters’ and commentators’ backgrounds are quiet and clean, and often filled with symbols of legitimacy, such as academics (containing bookcases), development and technology (containing computers, journalists, news rooms, tall office buildings), and government and democratic institutions (containing the White House, parliament buildings, congress buildings, and the American flag). These

backgrounds imply that the reporters and commentators are intelligent, education, developed, legitimate and part of the first world.

Whiteness is distinguished from Others because “it is constructed through a denial of identity rather than its explicit portrayal” (Reitman 279). While whiteness represents civilization, technology and force (as symbolized by the visual elements in the background of the white NBC reporters), it is contrasted with Otherness, which is associated with nature, savagery, primitiveness and weakness (Garner 261). White identity defines itself in opposition to inferior Others; racism, then, becomes “the maintenance of white identity” (Guess 668). An Other identity is “a means of asserting one’s own cultural distinctiveness, while simultaneously distancing oneself from the mainstream” (Ajrouch and Amaney 873). The Other encompasses all that the Self is not, and thus held in lower esteem (Ajrouch and Amaney 860). Inherent within Orientalism is the assumption that only a Western power can be civilized and serve as a global hegemon. The Other is inferior in every way, justifying Western imperialism, and action such as the War on Terror (Nayak and Malone 263).

#### President Bush

Similar images are presented when portraying Bush. For example, he is shown at press conferences and ceremonies, making speeches and raising flags, wearing a well-tailored suit and surrounded by uniformed agents, in reports on September 23 and September 30. These images are ceremonial and traditional, and Bush does not appear in an aggressive, combat or even casual role – he is professional; authoritative yet friendly.

These reports further demonstrate how the images of Westerners are directly juxtaposed with those of the enemy, who are presented in unknown remote locations,

unprepared for the camera (based on their casual everyday dress, and activities performed such as walking through hills). Furthermore, it is interesting to note that bin Laden is never legitimized by being given a caption as the Western speakers are.

The juxtaposition between the West and the Other becomes clearly defined when reports explicitly refer to each group individually. For example, on September 20, Bush is broadcast as infamously stating: “either you are with us or you are with the terrorists,” instantly establishing a binary and polarizing the West (“us”) and the enemy (“the terrorists”). Furthermore, this suggests that anti-Americanism is connected to “terrorism” (Kivimaki 65). Other commentators say “we have taken all security precautions to protect the American people and we will do whatever is necessary to protect America and Americans.” This wording establishes Americans as a homogenous group, and implies that there is a rift between two groups: Americans and non-Americans (i.e., the enemy). Also, the phrase “attack on America” is popular in NBC broadcast news reports, and implies America is a single, homogenous entity. There is no indication that there is diversity and a variety of opinions, thoughts and ideas in America, instead, the reports create an illusion that all of America stands for the same values and principles, which were attacked by the enemy.

## Graphics

The images produced for the news reports communicate the same messages as the items presented in the reports. For example, on September 20, there is an image of a “wanted” poster with the picture and name of bin Laden. Other graphics used to introduce news reports throughout the selected period include images of bin Laden accompanied by short, powerful phrases such as: “Be prepared,” “No way out?,”

“Surrender?,” “Caves by cave,” “Learning to hate,” “War zone,” “America Strikes Back,” “Manhunt,” “Most Wanted,” “A Time to Kill?,” “Dead or Alive?,” and “War on Terror.” These are short, catchy phrases that do not require much thought or analysis by the viewer. Generally, these phrases indicate a simultaneous sense of fear and American patriotism, while establishing an enemy who is wanted, hunted and to be killed.

## Language

Alongside images, it is also important to analyze verbal language used in the NBC broadcast news reports. For example, language is used in the following reports to create an illusion of the Old West in the search for bin Laden. First, the search for bin Laden is explicitly labeled a “hunt,” and referred to as a “manhunt” in almost all reports. It should be noted that the reports throughout the period that this research was conducted are titled a “hunt” and “manhunt” for bin Laden. Further, on September 17, Bush is broadcast as comparing the search for bin Laden with a cowboys-and-Indians and/or Old West manhunt: “they used to put out in the Old West a wanted poster, wanted dead or alive...” and likens this to the search for bin Laden. Bush goes on to say: “they like to hit and they like to hideout [but] we are going to smoke them out.” The Old West imagery goes so far as to broadcast a graphic of a “wanted” poster with the picture and name of bin Laden. This is significant because the Old West is representative of conquering an unknown, uncivilized land, and controlling unchartered territory, filled with Others. In the current era, this no-man’s land is Afghanistan.

Furthermore, bin Laden is called America’s “public enemy number one” on October 9, and “the world’s most wanted man” on November 15, thus defining the world according to the US agenda. What is most striking is the use of casual language and slang

in these reports. NBC reporters and US government officials alike use phrases such as “root out,” “hunt him down,” “on the prowl,” “heading for the hills,” and “their days are numbered,” demonstrating how the language of war is dehumanizing (Said xxvii). In various reports, Bush says “the noose is beginning to narrow,” “we are going to smoke them out of their holes” and “the net is getting tighter.” On September 11, Bush says: “make no mistake, the USA will hunt down and punish those responsible for the cowardly acts” and another commentator states that “revenge is a dish best eaten cold.” On November 19, Donald Rumsfeld claims there are a “large number of people crawling through tunnels and caves looking for the bad folks” and says “my hope is they will be killed or taken prisoner.” Bin Laden is described on September 18 as a “tough nut to crack,” and on September 20, authorities say “it is impossible to make deal with these people; [we] must blow them out of caves.” Even a firefighter is broadcast on September 11 as saying “kill the bastards that did this” – especially rude and inappropriate words that should not be heard on television. These descriptions of bin Laden demonstrate the inferiority of the other, and thus superiority of the Self: “The Other is that through which the Self is represented as privileged and superior, with the Other being devalued, feared, and reviled” (Nayak and Malone 256).

These descriptions of the NBC reports show how an Other was created out of bin Laden and Afghanistan, and how the hunt for bin Laden established a binary between the Other and the Western Self.

## MORAL PANIC

A chain reaction followed September 11: “terrorism” according to mainstream US media proceeded to take the form of Muslim radicals fighting against the United States

and what the media defined as “western values” such as freedom, as demonstrated in the media analysis above (Ponomarev 91). Furthermore, the media became saturated with reports about Islam and the Middle East in the aftermath of September 11, contributing to a moral panic.

A moral panic refers to the exaggerated reactions of the media, the public, and agents of social control (such as government), to a perceived threat, followed by serious and long-lasting repercussions such as changes in legal or social policy (Muzzatti and Rothe 329). In order to create a moral panic there must exist an Other (otherwise known as the threat, or the embodiment of evil), agents of social control (law and rule enforcement groups that are expected to detect, apprehend, and punish the Other), and media – which are collectively referred to as “the single most influential actor in the orchestration and promulgation of a moral panic,” as the media serve to inflate the seriousness of an incident, making it appear more heinous and frequent than it actually is (Muzzatti and Rothe 329).

The first step of the post-September 11 moral panic, defining the threat, consisted of identifying “terrorists” who are anti-American because they do not share traditional American values such as freedom. In order to identify the actors, or the embodiment of evil, the media worked to demonize bin Laden as the face of terror as demonstrated in the media analysis above (Muzzatti and Rothe 332). Therefore, in creating a moral panic during the immediate post-September 11 period, according to the media analysis above, “Arabs, Muslims and various constructed categories of Others turned into something to be feared and hated, not-quite-humans whose suffering must have been brought onto themselves, and thus is not really important” (Nayak 51). The next step, taking action,



was a call to war by the Bush administration (Muzzatti and Rothe 339). Thus, it was not simply mainstream US media that instigated the moral panic and creation of the enemy “Other” – the Bush administration played an important role in generating a moral panic post-September 11. Although the media and government may appear to be two different sources of information, the media actively quotes government sources and learns and reports information that originates from official government documents, as demonstrated in the Original Research section (Muzzatti and Rothe 333).

## **SECTION TWO**

Thus far, this paper has demonstrated that the media (in this case, NBC – the largest broadcast television news network in the United States based on household reach) have engaged in generating a moral panic after September 11 by creating an Other out of bin Laden, who is the face of “terrorism.” Bin Laden is considered a threat, because he represents the opposite of the Western Self, as per the theory of Orientalism. The media, however, are not the only actors that utilized an Orientalist perspective to generate a moral panic post-September 11. The US government actively engaged in Othering, as demonstrated by the quotes and comments by government officials broadcast in the media. The creation of a moral panic results in high levels of panic and fear and misguided public consciousness, facilitating the development of legislation creating negative social ramifications, which will be described in this paper (Muzzatti and Rothe 327). This paper will argue that the Bush administration engaged in Othering because of the benefits of having an Other present, which include easily implementing controversial and/or questionable laws and legislation, legitimizing its presence post-Cold War, and gaining access to the land and resources of the Middle East by sending troops to the

region. Thus, the presentation of the Other is very important, as it has facilitated and justified devastating political action as described below.

## POLITICAL GOALS

### Internal Changes

One example of a controversial and/or questionable piece of legislation implemented post-September 11 includes the “Uniting and Strengthening American by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism” Act – in short, the Patriot Act. This Act facilitates military tribunals, expedited deportation and detention of non-US citizens who reside in the United States as immigrants and visa-holders. Furthermore, the Patriot Act allows for US citizens to be classified as an enemy combatant and/or be stripped of their American citizenship – a highly questionable and devastating potential outcome (Muzzatti and Rothe 344). Finally, the Patriot Act allows for the US government to suspend basic civil liberties. Thus, this Act enables the US government to maintain strict internal control over the United States – a feat that may not have been easily accomplished had the country not appeared to be in a time of “crisis” based on the threat of an enemy Other. Feelings such as anxiety, fear and panic are conducive to the overregulation of society without opposition as dissent is minimal (Muzzatti and Rothe 344). By creating an external threat through the use of communications media, the Bush administration maintained a strong hold on the country internally with the general consent of the public, who were kept in fear and constantly under possible attack.

## War on Terror

By creating an Other for the West, this facilitated the Bush administration's other changes in policy, such as launching a War on Terror, which allowed the USA to invade countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan by force. Thus, the events of September 11, as horrific as they were, may have provided the administration with the excuse to act on its "simmering geo-political agenda," which includes the War on Terror (Muzzatti and Rothe 345). While my research focus is the hunt for bin Laden and includes analysis of media reports on Afghanistan, it should be noted that a similar process of Othering was applied to Saddam Hussein and Iraq. Thus, the War on Terror was not limited to seeking bin Laden and invading Afghanistan, but also includes the war in Iraq. This section will also refer to the invasion Iraq (as part of the War on Terror) in order to demonstrate how Othering facilitated the War on Terror in its entirety. While the NBC reports analyzed in this paper refer to Afghanistan, the country can be used as a floating signifier, to refer to Other countries, largely in the Middle East, which are populated by Others.

By communicating an enemy Other, the Bush administration demonstrated that the United States is under attack and must ensure the continuation of its power. Whenever the state comes under threat, such as the supposed threat of "terrorism," governments set about establishing new laws and bureaucratic structures, such as the US Department of Homeland Security (Karim vii). It should be noted, however, that since "terrorism" is a contested term, it was conveniently applied in this situation without acknowledging other "terrorists." For example, there are active cases of extreme violence in countries such as Sri Lanka, Spain and Ireland that may be referred to as "terrorism," but this was not acknowledged in the Bush administration's War on Terror (Karim viii).

Depending on the way the Other is described, the public feels anger and fear at the threat of uncivilized terrorists, and/or paternalistic concern and sympathy for the helpless victims of the enemy regime (Cloud 290). The War on Terror has been presented as both: Since the Other is an inhuman coward, evil, tribal, backward, militant and irrational, it is reported by NBC on September 20 that it is “impossible to make deal with these people,” and one “must blow them out of their caves.” This allows for justification of invading a foreign land and killing the enemy, in order to hunt down one man, and thus launch a War on Terror. Later, the War on Terror was presented as an important step in ensuring that suppressed, ignorant Others in Iraq and Afghanistan are granted access to capitalist markets, a democratic regime, human rights and individual liberties (Egan 142). Thus, mainstream media depicted the story as such: It is up to the United States to bear “the white man’s burden” by spreading civilization to inferior Others, such as Afghans who are described as “in desperate need” (Egan 142). Justifications for the War on Terror often involve representations of the enemy as savage, barbaric, backward and pre-modern, as described in the Original Research section. These images of an oppressed and inferior civilization and descriptions of the Other as victims of a cruel regime warrant an “intervention” based on humanitarian grounds (Cloud 286). Either way, the existence of an Other was necessary to justify and explain launching the War on Terror.

In order for the War on Terror to be executed with support from the American public, the American people should be under the impression that an “Other,” in this case, a “terrorist” enemy exists, and this idea is planted and maintained through the television news media’s consistent use of signifiers such as the words “terrorist” and “terrorism.” This would be problematic, however, if these terms were less ambiguous or broad, and

had established definitions, as the concept would either be inapplicable to the events of September 11, or applied to the actions of the US government itself, in its execution of the War on Terror.

## Oil

The War on Terror was propagated by exploiting the politics of fear and Othering after 9/11 and employing the excuse known by some as “weapons of mass deception” (Hinnebusch 211). It can be argued that those in the Bush administration who advocated a war in Iraq before 9/11 used it as an opportunity to mobilize support for an unrelated, unjustifiable war, in order to gain further access to the Middle East for their own pursuits (Hinnebusch 220). For example, waging a war in Iraq would serve the needs of “dominant capital,” which was economically crucial by 2003 (Hinnebusch 223). The economic boom of the 1990s had been exhausted by 2000 and Americans faced a crisis of overproduction and deflation. The military-industrial-complex benefits greatly from wars, as jobs, profits, certain company shares and the economy in general are boosted, and by occupying, destroying, and rebuilding Iraq, this would ensure high profits for companies such as Halliburton (Hinnebusch 212). Further, given that Iraq is potentially a major source of capital through its oil reserves, the United States may have been motivated to gain access to this valuable resource.

Creating an Other facilitated the launch of the War on Terror, which granted the United States access to the oil-rich Middle East region. Historically, there has been a close connection between the oil market and Middle East politics, and the pursuit of oil has long constituted US military action in the Persian Gulf region (Claes 48). Iraq has the second largest oil reserves in the world, after Saudi Arabia: there are 80 known fields,

and of those, only 17 of which have begun to be developed. It is possible that, should its western deserts be explored further, Iraq's reserves may match those of Saudi Arabia (Juhasz 31). The fear is that the United States may be facing a dwindling oil supply, thus, it is not a coincidence that a country that consumes a quarter of the world's oil militarily pursues the country that holds the world's second largest oil reserve (Claes 48). Prior to the Iraq War, US oil import dependence was rising in a tight oil market, with global production at a high, thus forcing US oil vulnerability to rise. Iraq appeared as a simple solution to these problems; it holds the world's second largest reserves and very low production costs (Hinnebusch 221).

In summary, the United States makes use of conflicts such as the War on Terror to suit its own interests and pursue its imperialist agenda (Gawlikowski 36). Even if the United States invaded Iraq with genuine concerns, despite the fact that there is no shortage of countries in the world that could use a regime upheaval, it coincidentally has decided to target the one that sits atop the world's second largest oil reserves (Hinnebusch 212).

### Superpower

The United States has set its sights not only on Iraqi oil, but also on a regime in the Middle East that is more conducive to its interests (Claes 53). This would ensure secure oil supplies, lower prices, and a peaceful Middle East, as the war and regime change would diminish Iraq's capacity to wage war (Claes 55). Furthermore, it would place the United States in a position to continue to be the dominant force in the Middle East region, to pursue its own interests as well as those of its allies such as Israel (Juhasz 30).

By invading Iraq and Afghanistan, the United States sent a global message about the strength of its forces in order to dissuade potential adversaries from pursuing aggression against the great superpower (Egan 148). By waging war in the Middle East, the world would witness the power and success of the American military fighting the new enemy, and this would also give the United States an opportunity to establish permanent military bases in the Persian Gulf region. This approach ensures dominance and control over the region, and allows for continued support of Israel (Hinnebusch 22). Thus, the Bush administration devised a strategy that would justify the maintenance of American world leadership and ensure its hegemony and continued role as a world superpower (Gardels).

#### Post-Cold War Other

The post-September 11 period is not the first or only time that the US stood again an enemy, or Other. It should be noted that for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the United States had been pitted against the Soviet Union as a military and ideological enemy, giving the United States a *raison d'être*. During the post-World War II period, communist Eastern Europe was the ideological and military Other to the American democratic Self (Karim 3). This has become especially important in the post-Cold War world, because “as long as the United States had been responsible for containing the Soviet Union, it had a clearly defined role and undisputed clout in international politics. With the dissolution of the Soviet threat, however, a crisis of identity emerged,” and America needed a new “Other” against which to define itself (Lazar and Lazar 225). As a result, when the Cold War ended, the United States needed a new enemy to establish the American identity against its opponent. At the end of the Cold War, there were no more opportunities for the United

States to appear as heroes, and the loss of a close and important enemy is vital, because when the Other disappears the Self loses part of its identity (Winch 290).

Thus, when the attacks on the World Trade Center occurred on September 11, 2001, a new global order emerged post-Cold War, where Islam has replaced Soviet communism as the enemy of the West (Elnur 62). In the post-Cold War world, despite the death of the Soviet Union, the world has been polarized again – this time, the US moral order stands vis-à-vis the “threat of terror” (Lazar and Lazar 226). This threat is articulated through “outcasting”: the process by which individuals and/or groups are systemically labeled outcasts, based on the dichotomization of Self and Other (Lazar and Lazar 227). As a result of establishing a new Other, this enabled Bush to strengthen his faltering credibility and to implement the long-standing right wing agenda, such as the laws and legislation outlined above, and the War on Terror (Muzzatti and Rothe 347).

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have suggested that mainstream US media failed to take into account various historical, political and economic factors, and instead framed September 11 and the conflicts that ensued subsequently from an Orientalist perspective. The media explained September 11 and the War on Terror as conflicts within the framework of culture, and proposed that Western civilization was being threatened by the Islamic, Middle Eastern Other (Abrahamian 531). In the media reports that I described in Section One, issues such as the lack of democracy, educational shortcomings, population increases, economic stagnation, underdevelopment and the status of women were all connected with religion and culture (Abrahamian 533). The media oversimplified issues in a way that made it easier for journalists and audiences to understand, and “real”



politics, such as the topic of foreign policy and issues concerning oil were left out of the discussion as journalists resorted to religious and cultural explanations instead (Abrahamian 537). By blaming religion and cultures, the media oversimplified issues and ignored important details of historical international relations. Instead of asking : “why do they hate our foreign policy?” and coming to a well-found understanding of the political and historical context within which September 11 occurred, journalists asked “why do they hate us?,” closing the possibility of discussion the attack with reason (Winch 296).

There are countless reasons for those involved in the September 11 attacks to disapprove of US foreign policy: Some examples of US intervention in the internal affairs of other countries can be found in Egypt, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, Afghanistan and Turkey. A Western presence in Islamic countries is imposed in a variety of ways, including direct military occupation (such as the case of present-day Iraq), military bases and advisors (as can be found in Afghanistan), the financial markets (through transnational corporations), and exportation of American cultural products, including media (Hosseini-Zadeh 10). Western policies also tend to sustain dictatorial regimes and unjust leaders who forgo the rights of their own people to support foreign powers instead. In the Middle East, it must be noted that the United States supported Saddam Hussein for years, despite his brutal rule and even when using chemical weapons during the Iran-Iraq War (Hinnebusch 210). Furthermore, the United States also sponsored Al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, and the Taliban in the face of the Soviet threat in Afghanistan (Hinnebusch 219).

Thus, the creation of an enemy Other in the mainstream media does not take into account various historical, political and economic factors, but instead creates a very

simply dichotomy of “Islamic,” “radical” Other versus “rational,” “Western” Self. Furthermore, due to its use of strategic communications, the Bush administration has managed to keep complex issues off the national debate and dismissed political issues as an age-old rivalry with the Other (Hosseini-Zadeh 8). The media plays a crucial role in ensuring American hegemony, and the Bush administration was prepared to fight a battle of ideas through “routine manipulation and spin – the basic tools of propaganda” (Hiebert 245). The Bush administration’s response to September 11 has been characterized as Orientalist, as Bush distinguished between “good” and “evil” in media broadcasts, and acted to “save” the people of the Middle East by controlling their lands (Nayak and Malone 257). The media is especially important in today’s non-traditional conflicts, because “war is fought not just with bullets and rifles and tanks, but with influence tactics and words” (Hiebert 249). Hence, the media was used by the US government to justify the War on Terror without revealing its ulterior motives or referencing its tumultuous past with the opposing nation.

In summary, a technique was employed where the Middle East, or the Islamic world, was framed as a person – specifically Osama bin Laden, to justify war against the enemy. Bin Laden was demonized and constructed as an Other who needed to be immediately ousted, as he was accused of supporting terrorist networks and plotting to destroy the West. As a result, bin Laden became larger than life; he became a clever, cunning villain who was impossible to locate and capable of great things (Winch 288).

While the mainstream media in the United States broadcast messages about the manhunt for the Other, it rarely, if ever, analyzed relevant historical, political and economic issues, and freely used contentious terminology, such as the word “terrorist.”

Since the mainstream broadcast television media failed to provide adequate and balanced analysis for issues it was reporting, viewers were led to fall into a moral panic after September 11. The mainstream media failed in its role to act as an unbiased watchdog, and educate and inform the public, because it did not deliberate over and analyze issues, and instead generated a moral panic by creating an Other out of one man – bin Laden – who is the face of “terrorism,” thus facilitating devastating political actions by the Bush administration with the cooperation of a fearful, submissive, ignorant public. In the case of news reports, journalists are actively engaged in a decision-making process, whereby they choose the issues to emphasize, what to include and what to omit (Winch 286). This includes the decision to use words such as “terrorist.” Defining and determining the appropriate use of terms such as “terrorism” prove that it is a relative and not definitive concept, and media outlets actively decide when and how to refer to people and events as “terrorists” and “terrorism,” respectively. Thus, the use of the term can be used in television news reports with the intention and/or consequence of supporting or furthering a political agenda that is based on the idea of an enemy “Other,” such as that of the Bush administration’s War on Terror.

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