

Writing the post-9/11 reality

A Poststructuralist Approach to the Power of Discourse

Frøy Thule Skøld

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Abstract

Narratives are essential in the construction and breeding of social reality. The 9/11 attacks generated highly threatening narratives and contradictory identities that ultimately resulted in an enduring 'war on terror'. Wars are not only physical; they are anticipated and accompanied by narratives and discourses, including language that identify enemies which ought to be fought. In order to understand enemies in a war, one needs to understand the rhetorical techniques used to create the identities of 'us' and 'them' within that context. Following 9/11, the Bush Administration managed to create a sense of war, (re)construct conflicting identities, and establish a notion of supreme emergency. My thesis aims to conceptualize the discursive construction of reality in the aftermath of 9/11, and it shall illustrate how the usage of language is always maneuvered to convey the objectives of the speaker in order to influence the audience. It reveals the way Bush strategically developed his threat narrative, that initially consisted of dissident terrorists, but evolved into an existential threat that included an 'axis of evil' possessing weapons of mass destruction. Bush's strategic and subjective concerns are quantified using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in which quotes are collected from official speeches given by the President from September 11, 2001, to January 29, 2002. Engaging with the poststructuralist line of thought, Fairclough's CDA thus provides an innovative framework of thought to assess the way in which Bush securitized constructed the war on terror as the only applicable response to the 9/11 attacks.

1. Introduction

On the early morning of September 11, 2001, an American Airlines airplane crashed into the World Trade Center's northern tower. Within half an hour with the collision of a second jet into the southern tower, it became evident that the United States had not experienced an accident. Further confirmed in the reach of an hour as two additional airplanes were hijacked, whereas one of them flew into the Pentagon and the other crashed in the fields of southern Pittsburg. The discursive path immediately after the September 11 attacks (9/11) began with silence, as a sudden lack of meaning and collapse of language occurred. However, the media and the Bush Administration quickly began to fill in the events with carefully chosen narratives that would ultimately imply great repercussions. Even though no state declared responsibility for the attacks, Bush assured and warned the nation about a lurking 'enemy' - an extremely 'threatening enemy' that embodied 'evil', an animalistic enemy that had allegedly incited to war. Thereupon, the Bush Administration decided to wage a new kind of war, a so-called 'War on Terror', that would eradicate all evil and act as a safeguard of freedom, liberty and

democracy. The war was launched in Afghanistan, the harbinger of the alleged universal enemy of appreciated Western values, in which bombing began in the name of the *Operation Enduring Freedom*. This is a highly abbreviated version of history, but a great deal had to occur in order for the Bush administration to justify their ‘counter-attacks’. Through carefully designed rhetorics, the act of terror ultimately became an act of war; Americans became students of prevalent geopolitics and Islam; an official and public discourse (re)constructed a national identity, and dissent was suppressed.

It is easy to believe that large-scale human tragedies such as 9/11 can be effortlessly grasped and interpreted, and that facts speak for themselves. However, the reality is often far more complex, and crises are never objective facts as they depend on the discursive constructions and preferred narration of them that will ultimately create meaning and assert importance and implications. One ought to establish the broader social, cultural and historical significance, as meanings and interpretations usually change over time and place. The events of 9/11 provides a suitable illustration of this process; although it was forthwith obvious what had occurred, it was considerably difficult to understand what these events conveyed or signified. Given the possible alternate rhetorical and political stances following the events of 9/11, it is striking and important to portray how the particular path taken; the construction of a state of war and the (re)construction of the enemy, was promoted through a certain strategic deployment of rhetoric and language. However, it is important to recognize that the war on terror discourse is vast and highly complex. Therefore, my thesis can only provide a brief survey of some of the central means by which the official language of the war on terror discourse aimed to normalize and institutionalize the Bush Administration’s construction of a ‘new reality’ with new enemies and dangers.

1.1 Research Question and Motivation

The ability of political figures to persuade and influence their audience has become one of the key elements that determine their power to operate policies and win the public consensus in an era of endless power struggles. One clearly ought to articulate proper discourses and narratives that indeed tap into the emotions and values of the public. Following the Presidential election of 2016 in the United States, I found it very interesting how an ambiguous political figure like Donald Trump managed to gain such large public support through his very controversial presidential campaign. At first glance, it seemed like his speaking style would do nothing but harm to his campaign. This assumption did however prove to be very fallacious. On the contrary, his almost pedestrian speeches probably accounted for his popularity among the less educated citizens who appreciate such

simplicity. This matter got me particularly interested in the power of language in politics, and I ultimately found myself looking at the speeches of Bush in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. I was astonished by his powerful, but simplistic rhetoric which in retrospect I will claim managed to win the public consensus of a ‘war on terror’. I articulate my research question in the following manner:

How was the ‘war on terror’ constructed by the Bush Administration as the only applicable response by the United States to the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to briefly present the contributions of a poststructuralist thought to the field of International Relations (IR) and Security Studies. Firstly, it particularly discusses the central concepts of Poststructuralism, namely identity, subjectivism, and power. Secondly, it presents the poststructuralist approach to security, and addresses the notion of *securitization*. I argue that this particular framework together with Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis presented in chapter 3, provide a sufficient framework for analyzing the ‘war on terror’ discourse constructed by the Bush administration following the attacks of 9/11.

2.2 Poststructuralism in International Relations

The end of the Cold War prompted a great deal of frailty within the academic discipline of International Relations (IR), which revealed the inadequate explanatory power of rationalist-materialist IR theories. Poststructuralism emerged in the end of the 80s as a crucial challenge to the traditional paradigms, and has evolved from a lone dissident into an honourable approach to the understanding of our international system. Poststructuralism is an approach to IR that is heavily influenced by the work of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan and others. Less a new paradigm of IR theory, it better represents a critical attitude that closely explores and challenges the limits inflicted by traditional politics. It considers critique as a positive exercise that will ultimately extract the assumptions through which conventional and prevailing understandings come to be. It challenges the ‘common sense’ and ‘taken for granted’ assumptions about reality which many of the traditional IR theories have depended on. (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 206). Considering its extremely diverse literature it is problematic to provide a precise definition of the term Poststructuralism, however, there are some uniting tenets within poststructuralist thought concerning IR. This chapter will therefore not attempt to take a “scattergun” approach and subsume the

multiplicity of viewpoints within the field of poststructuralist thought, but rather focus on shared assumptions in order to better illuminate the fundamental concepts it presents.

Poststructuralism claims that the modern individual is a product of history and culture. It opposes the idea of a fixed 'human nature', as it claims that the individual human is a result of the operations of power. It hence questions the foundation that includes the category of 'man', as well as the very grounds upon which social and political structure is constructed. Ultimately, *identity*, *subjectivism*, and *power* stand as the key concepts for poststructuralism (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 207).

Poststructuralism claims that the notion of dualism are somewhat structuring the human experience. Particularly, it focuses on the interior/exterior binary in which the inside is considered as self, good and principal, while the outside is the other, dangerous and inferior. Derrida claimed that the outside is always crucial to the establishment of the inside; the irrational and insane is crucial to the establishment of what is to be rational and sane. Ultimately, the good and civilized society is constituted by the bad and barbaric. (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 207).

The former argument leads to the poststructuralist engagement in cultural studies, in which it opposes the idea of a given individual or collective identity. Rather, it considers identity as a social construct by a process of exclusion. Events, issues, and actors that are recognized throughout history are ultimately defined by a structure that is dependent upon the marginalization and exclusion of other identities and histories. This perception of practices of exclusion involves an alternative understanding of power. According to Foucault, power is everywhere and derives from everywhere (Foucault, 1998, p. 63). He did not recognize power as merely negative and repressive, but also as a necessary, productive force in society (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 207). The exercise of power, and our perception of subjectivity and identity, takes place within *discourse*. Discourse, as I shall further explain in chapter 3, refers to a particular set of representations and practices through which not only meanings, identities and social relations are established, but also through which political and ethical issues are enabled (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 207).

Scholars that work within the poststructuralist field of IR are skeptical of the possibility of encompassing theoretical explanations of world phenomena. They even go as far as claiming that theory itself is a form of practice (George and Campbell, 1990, p. 280). Poststructuralists suggest to not look for grand theories but to rather scrutinize how the world come to be understood and interpreted in certain ways at particular historical junctures. As an alternative to the traditional positivist theories of IR, poststructuralists claim that our discussions and perceptions of international politics highly depend upon abstraction, representation and interpretation. Poststructuralists hence

challenge the ontological foundations of positivism, and call into question what comes to be accepted as natural, self-evident or universal. They oppose any possibility of making value-neutral and objective claims independent of subjectivity (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 211). Considering the social world as a construct of an ongoing and dynamic process, they explore the interrelationship between power and representational practices that favor one truth over another, set one identity against another, and elevate one discourse over another (Campbell & Bleiker, 2016, p. 211).

2.3 The poststructuralist conceptualization of security

Poststructuralist writings on security focus largely on the relationship between security and the construction of national identity. Campbell claims that one should consider security politics as one of the most important practices through which states establish their identity. In his book *Writing Security*, Campbell argues that United States' foreign policy can be considered as a series of political practices which locate a notion of danger - a threat to individuality, freedom and civilization. According to Campbell, the identity of United States is essentially built upon an interior/exterior binary (Campbell, 1992).

It is argued from the poststructuralist position, most precisely by Ole Wæver and Barry Buzan, that security is a discursive and political practice. Wæver and Buzan argue that the articulation of security, what they call *securitization*, is an essential manner of security action. They perceive security as a *speech act* that is able to influence the decision-making process related to security concerns (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 26). To avoid any confusion of terms, I shall accompany the term 'speech act' to 'discourse' in this particular thesis, since a speech act operates in quite the same manner as a discursive act in the process of persuading an audience. Throughout the analysis in chapter 4, I hence use the term discourse when referring to Bush's various speech acts. Securitization is defined as "the claim that something is held to pose a threat to a valued referent object that is so existential that it is legitimate to move the issue beyond the established games of normal politics to deal with it by exceptional, i.e. security, methods" (Stritzel, 2007, p. 360). Put another way, once there is a threat present or looming that will severely affect the society, a higher authority, such as the government, ought to do everything in its power in order to eradicate it. This puts the present authority in a considerably strong position to handle the perceived threat in whatever way it considers as convenient.

Their securitization theory includes three vital components: the securitizing actor as the one who carries out the speech act (discourse), the referent object which is severely threatened, and the audience which ought to be convinced of the threat (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 21-26). However, the level of success in a speech act depends on the very features of these components.

Firstly, the securitizing actor requires social capital and he/she ought to be in a position of authority for utmost results (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 33). Secondly, the discourse needs to include strategic rhetorical moves and narratives in order to prove that there is an existing security threat that requires extreme measures. Essentially, the actor ought to utilize the power of language. Thirdly, the actor needs the support of the audience in order to securitize the threat. The audience could be the general public of a state or even the international body if the threat comes to be perceived as international (Buzan, Wæver & Wilde, 1998, p. 27). Ultimately, the acceptance of an audience will hence rely considerably on the location in which the securitizing actor performs his/her speech act. Essentially, poststructuralists consider securitization not simply as a process at the level of individual conscience, but rather as a social or inter-subjective phenomenon.

The securitization that took place in the United States shortly after the attacks on September 11, 2001 is widely accepted as a proper example of what the securitization theory of Buzan and Wæver suggests (Buzan, 2006, p. 1102). A number of emergency actions were enacted and legitimized in the following months. The implemented USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act) included measures to restrict civil liberties, additional surveillance, strengthened border controls and widely increased authority for intelligence agencies. It also allowed for preventive detention, which enabled the United States to arrest suspects of terrorism. The establishment of Department of Homeland Security is also directly related to the events of 9/11, as it constituted an important component of the Bush administration's institutionalization of the 'War on Terror' campaign (Buzan, 2006, p. 1103). It is however the securitizing moves - discourses - that arguably enabled and legitimized the above mentioned emergency measures, and will be the focus point of this thesis.

While the approach of Buzan and Wæver intuitively appears to lay out a promising framework in order to understand the way in which violence and war is legitimized, it does not catch the entire process of justification. The construction of a just war is a considerably complex process that includes much broader societal ramifications than what these authors seem to imply. Their model of securitization appears somewhat like a stylized ideal-type that is significantly more complex in practice (Wilhelmsen, 2017, p. 1-2). Nevertheless, the approach offers a framework of guidance and provides an initial kickoff to which additional theory can be adopted for more comprehensive explanations. Together with Fairclough's discourse analysis, the poststructuralist approach to security serves as a useful tool to investigate the way in which 'war on terror' seemed like the only appropriate response to the attacks of September 11, 2001.

3. Methodological framework

3.1 Introduction

This chapter shall present Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a method developed by Norman Fairclough, including a clarification of the term *discourse* that will be repeatedly used throughout this thesis. It will discuss the procedure of collecting the empirical material used in this thesis, and subsequently recognize particular challenges that I met in in the process.

3.2 Critical Discourse Analysis of Fairclough

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is first and foremost associated with the work of Norman Fairclough, and it builds its main arguments on the premises of Poststructuralism outlined in the previous chapter. CDA serves as an adequate method in the process of investigating and answering my research question. This particular method seeks to understand the relationship between discourses and historical, social and political contexts. It stimulates theories of power and ideology while at the same time engages in the dialectical link between structure and power. Essentially, the method tries to disclose how discourses successfully alter social processes and structures in manners that render power relations. It hence aims to illustrate the ways in which society and inequality are expressed, presented and reproduced through text and talk, particularly in terms of power abuse by dominant elites and institutions (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 445).

Highly influenced by Foucault, Fairclough considers language as a kind of social practice (Fairclough, 1995, p. 20) “Discourse refers to the whole process of social interaction of which a text is just a part” (Fairclough, 1989, p. 24). He insists that critical analysts should not exclusively focus on texts, but also examine the interrelationships among texts, their production processes, and their social and cultural context. Based on these assumptions, he provides a three-dimensional framework in which he distinguishes between text, discursive practice and social practice (Fairclough, 1992, p. 78-96). Discourse is hence a unification of these dimensions, in which text is placed at the bottom as a result of discursive practice. The discursive practice which includes the process of production and interpretation relies on the context, namely the social practice (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 449).

Corresponding to the three levels of discourse, he provides a Three-Dimensional Model of CDA including the steps of description, interpretation and explanation. In the descriptive stage, one ought to explore the linguistic features of the text, including vocabulary, grammar and textual structures (Fairclough, 1992, p. 235). In the stage of interpretation, the relationship between the discourse and its production and consumption ought to be interpreted. Discourse should be considered as not only as a

text but also as a discursive practice at this point, which implies that one should emphasize additional factors such as speech act and intertextuality. According to Fairclough, the concept of intertextuality refers to a condition in which all communicative events draw on historical events. (Fairclough, 1992, p. 232). These elements will connect the text to its context. Finally, the stage of explanation is related to the historical, social and cultural context of discourse. In this stage, one aims to reveal the obscure information of power, ideology and language within both an institutional and a societal context (Fairclough, 1992, p. 237). Factors like ideology or power are considered in order to adequately explain the relationship between the production and consumption of texts and their social and cultural context. This part of analysis ought to reveal critical questions such as: What are the political and social effects of discourse? How does specific language construct, fortify and challenge power relations in our society? (Fairclough, 1992, p. 237).

It is nevertheless important to point out that a critical discourse analysis is not independently sufficient when analyzing wider social practices, and it is hence necessary to utilize additional social and cultural theories in order to work out a comprehensive analytical result. Therefore, the utilization of the poststructuralism thought considerably enhance the competence of CDA. Simultaneously, the various approaches provide a convenient framework for analysing the post-9/11 discourse by the Bush administration.

3.3 Overview of Empirical Material

My empirical material consists of ten speeches by President George W. Bush, starting from his initial speech following the attacks of 9/11 on September 11th, 2001, and up to his State of the Union Address on January, 2002. Resting on my already formulated research question, the empirical material was collected selectively, depending on their relevance for my analysis. Hence, one has to recognize that the speeches chosen are the ones I personally found the most significant and suitable in view of my research. It is also necessary to indicate that I have evaluated the data in terms of their sources, reliability and context (Grønmo, 2004, p. 190). At the official White House webpage (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/>), all of Bush's speeches are accessible.

Throughout my analysis, I aimed to follow Fairclough Three-Dimensional Model; description (text analysis), interpretation (discursive analysis) and explanation (social analysis). The starting point of my analysis was to detect underlying patterns in the material, following Fairclough's step of text analysis. I began by carefully studying the collected data, both the textualized and the original versions of his speeches, in order to eventually categorize the data into different discourses. The categorization developed through the process of coding the content, namely to discover a number of

key words that can portray and distinguish larger sections of the speeches (Grønmo, 2004, p. 246). The discursive categories are hence connected through overlapping essences discovered in the speeches. Table 1 presents the prevailing discourses of 9/11 including their significant features. These were in the explanatory stage of my analysis placed in the light of a wider social context in which the speeches were produced. It is however important to mention that even though I strove to remain objective and open to unforeseen findings, as I initially wanted themes to emerge solely out of the empirical material, I recognize that my research question, presumptions and preparatory readings considerably influenced my research findings. Thus I acknowledge that the particular themes that emerged from my analysis, did so partially from anticipations. Ultimately, I found and established three central discourses in Bush's speeches: one of fear, one of conflicting identities, and one of threat and danger. I argue that each one of these discourses considerably contributed in the process of making 'war on terror' the only applicable response to the 9/11 attacks.

Table 1 : Principal discourses and their key features

Principal discourses	Key features
Discourse of war	'act of terror' versus 'act of war', 'either-with-us-or-with-the-terrorists'
Discourse of conflicting identities	'us' and 'them', 'good' and 'evil', 'barbarism' and 'civilization', 'heroes' and 'cowards'.
Discourse of threat and danger	'threat to our way of life', 'axis of evil', supreme emergency.

4. Analysis of the Empirical Material

4.1 Introduction and clarification of analysis

In this chapter I reveal the findings of my research according to the three central discourses outlined in the previous chapter: Bush's discourse of war, a discourse of conflicting identities, and securitization of the terrorist threat. Vocabulary that I found significant are written in a cursive font, in the exception of direct quotations, in which they are written in a bold font. With the guidance of Poststructuralism and Fairclough's CDA, I will conclude that people's knowledge of 9/11 as predominantly influenced by Bush's discourse. Powerful political elites, like the President himself, have privileged access to public discourse as they dominate and control the production and selection of information, and also the way in which this information ought to be interpreted.

4.2 Discourse of war

When analyzing the Bush rhetoric in the wake of 9/11, one sees a terrorist incident that came to merit a full-out U.S. military response together with a remarkable coalition of allies (Silberstein, 2002: 2). As mentioned, the immediate hours following the attacks endured some rhetorical ambiguity concerning what exactly the United States had witnessed. Nevertheless, the momentary chaotic comprehension throughout the United States was quickly rehabilitated by a specific and definite interpretation of 9/11 delivered by the United States Executive Branch. Even though the prevailing narrative that took place might have seemed to be the only explicable, the discursive path of President Bush, as I shall try to disclose, was not completely straightforward or inevitable.

In his initial remark following the crashes of two airplanes into both Twin Towers, President Bush described the tragic situation as "a difficult moment for America" (Bush, 2001a), while also announcing: "Today we've had a **national tragedy**. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade Center in an **apparent terrorist attack** on our country" (Bush, 2001a). Notably, Bush describes the attacks as a 'national' tragedy, rather than a global tragedy. The United States was hence not at war at this very moment, as Americans had allegedly witnessed 'acts of mass murder' and 'despicable acts of terror' (Bush, 2001a). 9/11 was therefore initially discursively constructed by the words of 'tragedy', 'calamity', 'loss', and 'horror'. However, the morning after the attacks, the terrorist attacks were reborn as an 'act of war' by Bush in a televised speech to his nation: "The deliberate and deadly attacks which were carried out yesterday against our country were more than acts of terror, they were **acts of war**". Even more powerful rhetoric was used in his address to the nation on September 20th: "On September the 11th, **enemies of freedom** committed an **act of war** against our country. Americans have known wars -but for the past 136 years, they have been wars on foreign oil, except

for one **Sunday in 1941**. Americans have known the casualties of war -- but not at the center of a great city on a peaceful morning.” (Bush, 2001g). Directly related to this narrative, Bush portrayed the victims in a particular discursive move as ‘combat casualties’ rather than simply victims of terrorism. These strategic rhetorical actions seems crucial in order to place counterterrorism in a logical ‘war’ narrative, in which a military response became not only justified, but also viewed as the only convenient response.

Under the State of the Union Address in 2002, Bush strategically framed the war within a global narrative, and he quickly put the nations of the world on notice: “**Every nation**, in every single 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 United States as a **hostile regime**.” (Bush, 2002a). As a vigorous and absolutist statement, it refers to all nations of the world, taking for granted that they will take a standpoint. In addition, it aggressively warns nations that if they do not choose ‘us’, they will automatically be considered by the United States as ‘hostile’ regimes. The ultimatum is repeated in my empirical material: “Any government that rejects this principle, trying to pick and choose its **terrorist friends**, will know the **consequences**” (Bush, 2002a). His ultimatum also condemned any kind of neutrality: “There can be **no neutrality** between **justice** and **cruelty**, between the **innocent** and the **guilty**. We are in a conflict between **good** and **evil**, and **America will call evil by its name**” (Bush, 2002a). At this moment, the ‘war on terror’ was extensively spelled out, giving little or no room for neutrality or alternative discourses. Nations could either choose to be part of the ‘civilized world’, or on the side of the terrorists.

4.3 Discourse of conflicting identities

Drawing from a poststructuralist thought, the representation of the aftermath of 9/11 would simply not be uttered if the creation and reinforcement of identities were left out of the equation. The attacks caused great ambiguity to the American society’s perception of their own identity. Consequently, a dominant discursive narrative was created by the Bush Administration, aimed to reestablish the American identity, through the exclusion and inclusion of specific chosen particulars. Subsequently, the freedom-devoted allies of America were characterized quite differently to those allegedly threatening the very cornerstone of American culture and society. By using such distinctively evil and dark language, the Bush Administration managed to turn the vengeance into a battle between allegedly good and evil forces. The following paragraphs divulge the discursive actions of President Bush that reinforced the constructed dualism between ‘us and ‘them’ which drew from a series of binary oppositions such as good/evil, civilized/barbarians and heroes/cowards. I argue that this fierce

distinction between *us* and *them* is to some extent the very fundament of the construction of the ‘war on terror’.

The terrorists were immediately characterized as “faceless cowards” by Bush (Bush, 2001b). In his address to the nation on the evening of September 11th, President Bush introduced what would become an essential feature of his rhetoric, namely introducing an evil enemy that the American society allegedly was facing. Bush considerably solidified the enemy, using the word evil as many as four times during his speech (Bush, 2001c). He then stated: “Today, our nation saw **evil**, the very **worst of human nature**,” (Bush, 2001c). In his remarks to the national security team, Bush clearly presented a quite animalistic image of the enemy when warning that : “The American people need to know that we're facing a **different enemy** than we have ever faced. This enemy **hides in shadows**, and has **no regard for human life**. This is an enemy who **preys on innocent** and **unsuspecting** people, runs for cover. But it won't be able to run for cover forever. This is an **enemy that tries to hide**” (Bush, 2001d). Allegedly, the American people were facing a faceless and barbaric enemy with no moral features. I presume that this identification of the terrorists had a great effect in the process of legitimizing and justifying a war against them. By portraying the barbaric, violent enemies that are tremendously dangerous, yet removing their faces, the Bush administration created an optimal environment for the American public to accept measures of counter-violence. Nevertheless, as will be further discussed in section 4.4, Bush ultimately framed the enemies within a wider narrative. Bush did not only warn against evil terrorists, but also about an ‘axis of evil’ consisting of rogue regimes threatening the civilized world. Bush announced in a speech to the nation: “They hate what we see right here in this chamber - a **democratically** elected government. Their leaders are **self-appointed**. They **hate** our **freedom of religion**, our **freedom of speech**, our **freedom to vote** and assemble and disagree with each other”(Bush, 2002a).

Along with the evil terrorists, the Bush administration also began to introduce the concept of an ‘Ordinary Decent Citizen’ (Shepherd, 2006, p. 21). Yet, this ordinary decent citizen was characterized as anything but ordinary. “The strength of the nation is founded in the character and dedication and courage of everyday citizens,” Bush announced in a speech on September 17, 2001 (Bush, 2001f). He went on to emphasize the goodness of the American people in his speech at the Prayer and Remembrance Day service: “In this trial, we have been reminded, and the world has seen, that our fellow Americans are **generous** and **kind**, **resourceful** and **brave**. We see our **national character** in rescuers working past exhaustion; in long lines of blood donors; in thousands of citizens who have asked to work and serve in any way possible. And we have seen our national character in **eloquent acts of sacrifice**. [...] In these acts, and in many others, Americans showed a deep **commitment to**

one another, and an **abiding love for our country**. Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called the warm courage of **national unity**. (Bush, 2001e). The Bush administration was evidently trying to instill a notion of American heroism into the National psyche (Shepherd, 2006: 22). After the attacks, he specified that the country had “responded with the **best of America** -- with the **daring** of our rescue workers, with the **caring for strangers and neighbors** who came to give blood and help in any way they could.” (Bush, 2001c). Bush managed to consolidate the average American citizen with a notion of heroism, in which stood in complete contrast to the enemies the country was facing. Bush repeatedly reinforced the greatness of America, emphasizing the country’s true nature: “America was targeted for attack because we’re the **brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity** in the world.” (Bush, 2001c).

In retrospect, it seemed beyond the understanding of the American people that anything the United States did could be nothing but noble, righteous, and helpful. Through the repeated proclamation of conflicting narratives, the terrorists’ cowardice became perceived as a clear opposite to the true nature of American heroism. Bush precisely declared to the public what was attacked and threatened: not necessarily individual buildings and lives but rather the American society as a whole. Bush constructed a new world of extremely demarcated characters, in which the terrorist were inherently cruel, evil and barbarous, and the Americans were brave and heroic. While the terrorists hide and run, the Americans stand united. Framed this particular way, the Bush administration signaled that the threat cannot be controlled, managed or deterred. The only way to triumph the threat of terrorism was essentially to eradicate it. Evil cannot be bargained with, arrested or interdicted. As the enemy inherently hated the United States’ fundamental values and way of life, any existence of it would indicate a threat American citizens. War seemed to be the only logical action that followed from the discourse of Bush following the attacks on 9/11.

4.4 Discourse of threat and danger

One can find various examples of how Bush sought to implement a sense of danger and threat into the American society. The presentation of Bush’s terrorist threat discourse naturally draws my attention to securitization theory, as the terrorist threat can be considered as a typical example of securitization. The language used by Bush following the attacks of 9/11 was evidently constructed in order to generate a maximum sense of threats and fears. It is hence crucial to analyze the discourse of threat in order to fully comprehend how ‘war on terror’ turned out as the only legitimate response to the attacks.

The language used by the Bush administration following the attacks of September 11, 2001 was evidently constructed in order to generate maximum fear. As if the new world of new enemies was not enough to spread fear across the nation, Bush started to explain how these same terrorists were indeed very sophisticated, formidable and resourceful killers. Even though these constructions do not correspond well with their simultaneous image, there would be no advantage for the Bush administration to affirm that terrorists are usually very ordinary and incompetent. Bush suggested in one of his speeches that “our enemies are **resourceful**, and they are **incredibly ruthless**” (Bush, 2001i). Constructing such competent enemies imposes a significant level of fear that only extraordinary efforts will defeat. Bush also announced: “There are **thousands** of these **terrorists** in **more than 60 countries**” (Bush, 2001g). At that time, this must have sounded dreadful from the perspective of any American citizen, given the massive destruction only 19 hijackers were able to bring upon the country.

As a discursive move, the prevalent terrorist threat became coupled with a threat of ‘weapons of mass destruction’ and the ‘rogue’ states that allegedly would provide them to the terrorists. The threat was suddenly turned into a combination of rogue regimes, weapons of mass destructions and terrorists. This dangerous trinity poses considerably elevated dangers, in which the terrorists are no longer a specific number of dissidents spread across the globe, but rather evil and resourceful forces backed up the rogue states that stand for nothing but the opposite of American values. Bush introduced the narrative ‘axis of evil’, which described the governments that allegedly sponsored terrorism and sought weapons of mass destruction. This narrative was presented in Bush’s State of Union address January 29, 2002, in which he specifically referred to the countries of Iraq, Iran and North Korea: “States like these, and their **terrorist allies**, constitute an **axis of evil**, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. **They could provide these arms to terrorists**, giving them the means to **match their hatred.**” (Bush, 2002a). Bush here established an alliance between the terrorists and particular regimes in a way that come across as natural. Ultimately, the old narrative of threat that consisted of solely evil terrorists was abandoned and turned into one of considerably larger threats consisting of an ‘axis of evil’ that threatened civilization with the ‘world’s most destructive weapons’ (Bush, 2002a). In retrospect, this remarkable narrative produced by the Bush administration served as a tool to further encourage and legitimize their actions against any regime that identified with the ‘axis of evil’. Consolidating terrorists and rogue states as a unitary threat offered tremendous potential for the United States’ executives, in which I shall discuss more detailed in the section of Discussion.

Another feature of the 'war on terror' narrative is the notion of severe threat that was implemented by Bush: "Today our fellow citizens, our **way of life**, our very **freedom** came under attack" (Bush, 2001c). This was essentially a securitization act by Bush, that ultimately generated a state of emergency much accepted by the public in the immediate aftermath of the attacks. As discussed, the notion of supreme emergency indicates a situation in which usual politics are temporary suspended and the checks and balances on the exercise of power can be renounced. Under the circumstances of supreme emergency, a state is granted the rights to take whatever measures considered necessary for its survival. This can even include measures such as preemptive warfare, the halt of constitutional rights, preventive detention (Jackson, 2005, p. 99). In constructing these conditions after 9/11, Bush was ultimately granted tremendous power and freedom of action. Perhaps the most striking rhetorical act that solidified a sense of threat can be found in President Bush's Press Conference on October 11th, 2001. In the process of a short speech and a brief Q & A with the press, Bush utilized the word 'threat' in diverse forms 20 times, including remarks of the words 'danger' and 'weapons of mass destruction' (Bush, 2001h). He simply constructed an almost indisputable sense of supreme emergency within the American society, in which the citizens were inundated with unprecedented threats and dangers. Allegedly, the American 'way of life' was threatened by ruthless terrorists, backed up by a dangerous 'Axis of Evil' that possessed weapons of mass destruction. In retrospect, it seemed nothing but reasonable to call for an urgent response to this particular threat, no matter what measures were needed.

4.5 Discussion - framing the discourses within a wider narrative

From a poststructuralist viewpoint, one ought to challenge what was considered the very 'nature' of the 9/11 attacks. In hindsight, the attacks on 9/11 were not acts of war before they were discursively given this meaning by Bush. If presented as extreme acts of terrorism and indiscriminate assaults on innocent civilians, one could have seen a considerably different narrative evolve in the aftermath of the attacks. Instead of hearing about an act of war, one could have heard of 'the crime of the century'. This alternative narrative would have consisted of a crime, the criminals who perpetrated it and the subsequent international law-enforcement campaign that ought to be launched in order to find those responsible. Nevertheless, through the power of language, Bush managed to construct a natural and indisputable narrative of war, that turned out to have far-reaching implication for the world as a whole.

One also ought to challenge the accuracy of Bush's threat narrative. The narrative presented United States as facing an existential threat from terrorist and an 'axis of evil' in which called for immediate measures in order to secure its own survival. It immediately exploited the notion of supreme

emergency, which placed the Bush administration in a strong position to act whatever way desired. The narrative hence consisted of a logical balance between the level of threat faced and the emergency measures required to deal with it. Nevertheless, the narrative was indeed very misleading. Relatively speaking, transnational terrorism as a cause of premature death is far down on the list, behind such things as unsafe drinking-water, antibiotic-resistant bacterias, traffic accidents, tobacco, allergic reactions, and obesity (Nye, 2011, p. 290). Ultimately, the Bush administration on numerous occasions exaggerated or downright contrived conclusions from intelligence in its public statements, repeatedly misleading the public in terms of threat perceptions (Heide, 2013, p. 289). In his article, Buzan discusses how Washington experienced a significant threat deficit following the end of the Cold War that called for a replacement for the Soviet Union as the enemy of attraction for United States foreign policy. The identity of United States that had relied much upon its antagonist started to appear ambiguous, and their legitimacy as a unipolar actor was constantly weakening. However, the attacks of 9/11 brought this post-Cold War period to a sudden end. It ultimately enabled the United States to rebuild their identity on the grounds of difference to the terrorists as well as the 'axis of evil'. United States was able to continue to declare their interests as the universal principles that every 'good' and 'civilized' country ought to recognize (Buzan, 2006, p. 1101-1103).

A significant aspect of the discourse encircling September 11, 2001 is the way in which the attacks were discursively attached to a number of popular meta-narratives. For instance, Bush defined America's new threat in reference to 1941 and the beginning of its involvement in World War II. The present 'good war' myth of World War II inherent in the American society made the attacks instantly coherent to the public (Jackson, 2010, p. 220). Perhaps the most important aspect of this discursive recalling of history, was to re-contextualize the events in a narrative of war, which in turn allow for a military response. This context can be linked to the recurring myth in American foreign policy, namely the notion of American exceptionalism. The exceptionalism myth has ultimately constructed a situation in which American values are considered synonymous with 'universal values', and the United States can thus operate as a legitimate, noble and heroic defender of these values around the world. As a nation chosen by God as a unique force of good that ought to expand its values of democracy and freedom around the world, Bush were in the uppermost position to legitimize his interventionist policies (Barnett, 2016, p. 8). Hence, when embedding the 'war on terror' discourse into the political myth of American exceptionalism which reflects practically untouchable, patriotic and cherished values, it is not astonishing that counter-narratives seemed almost disloyal. Standing as the President of the United States, it is nothing but reasonable to claim that Bush was indeed a highly authorized spokesman.

Also, considering the spatial context of 9/11, it can be argued that the discourses of Bush more easily tapped into and reflected the American culture than it would have done in other countries around the world. It should be noted that Bush is considered by many as the most evangelical leader in recent times (Lindsay, 2007, p. 25). His utilization of Christian imagery served as a unifying force in the time of crisis within the United States essentially because the American population is indeed considerably religious. The religious features of the ‘war on terror’ narrative was apparent in Bush’s citation of Old Testament Psalm 23 on the evening of September 11th: “Even though I walk through the valley of she shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me” (Bush, 2001c). This particular passage is one of Bush’s many references to the Bible in the aftermath of 9/11, by which he used to clearly signify a sense of unity of the nation. His language did easily reach out to the American society, as many citizens were most likely familiar with the christian imagery he delivered. In a country with a low level of religiosity, this type of religious discourse would perhaps not have affected the audience at all.

5. Conclusion

In the end of my introductory chapter to this thesis I presented my research question as: *How was the ‘war on terror’ constructed by the Bush Administration as the only applicable response by the United States to the terrorist attacks on September 11th, 2001?*

The thesis argues that the logical response to the ‘war on terror’ was carefully constructed by the Bush administration through the development of rhetorically powerful narratives. It has emphasized that the discursive choices within these narratives have played a significant role in the legitimization of various security measures that were designed in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. The narratives of Bush included a set of binary oppositions such as good/evil, civilized/barbarous, and heroes/cowards, in order to deliver a simplistic representation of the post 9/11 reality and to establish conflicting identities. Bush strategically drew from historical, cultural and religious narratives which successfully affected the American society, and indeed served to restrain dissent both domestically and internationally. I argue that this allowed the Bush administration to securitize the existential threat of an alleged terror network that ultimately called for both extreme security and military measures.

Picking up on poststructuralist thoughts, I want to add that crisis like 9/11 are not objective facts, but rather they depend on particular discursive constructions in order to contain meaning, significance and implication. Throughout my research, I have tried to disclose the particular narratives, the meanings, the contradictions, and thereby illuminate the way in which they found - or did not find - their way

into the American reality and policies. First and foremost, this thesis have identified the power of language in international politics.

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