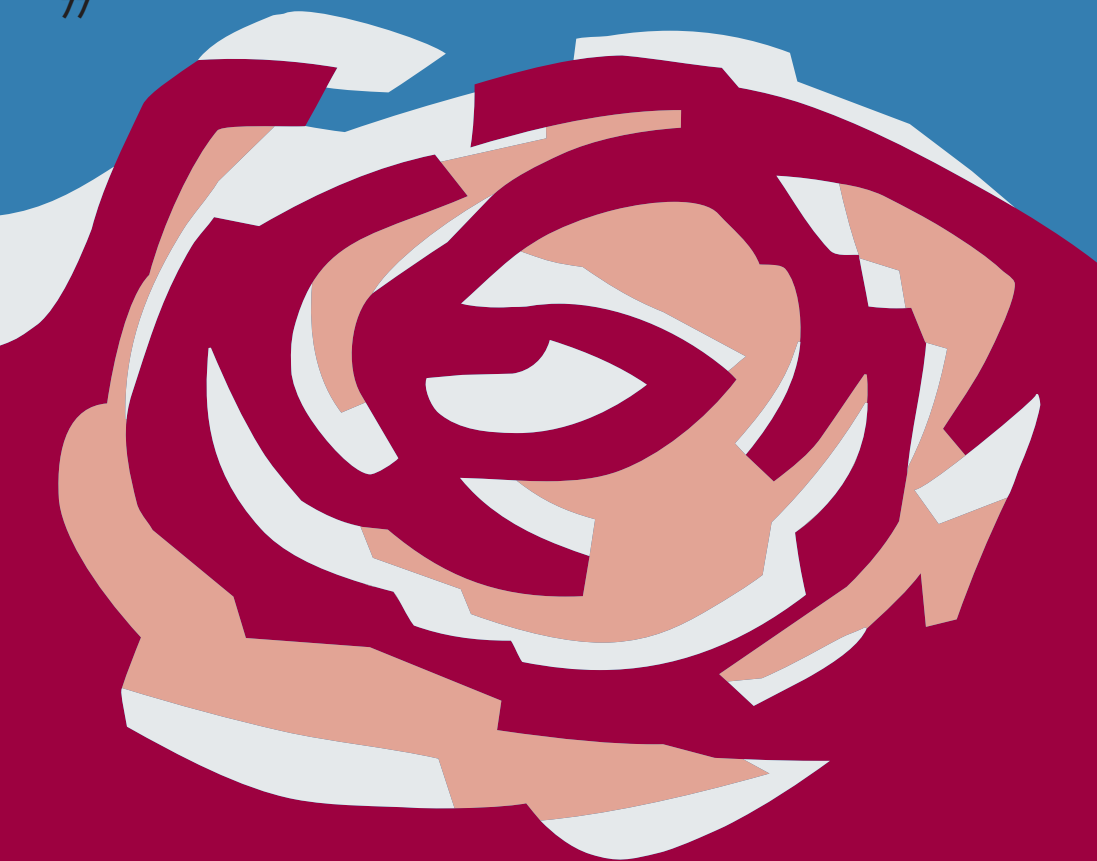


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Words of Crisis as Words of Power

*The Jeremiad in American
presidential speeches*

MARTA NEÜFF



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Volume 77

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by Marta Neüff

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The jeremiad in American presidential speeches

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Humboldt University of Berlin

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Table of contents

Acknowledgements	VII
List of tables	IX
List of figures	XI
CHAPTER 1	
Introduction	1
CHAPTER 2	
The rhetorical presidency, presidential crisis rhetoric, and the American jeremiad	17
2.1 The rhetorical presidency	17
2.1.1 Presidential power to persuade	17
2.1.2 Traditional and modern presidency	19
2.2 Presidential crisis rhetoric	22
2.2.1 Presidential crisis rhetoric as a genre	25
2.2.2 Narrating crisis: Metaphors, myths, and intertextuality	29
2.2.3 Metaphor and crisis: How do metaphors function?	31
2.2.4 Othering	35
2.3 The American jeremiad	36
2.3.1 The American jeremiad: America's first distinct genre	38
2.3.2 Biblical vs. American jeremiad: The mythology of mission	40
2.3.3 The myth of American exceptionalism as root of the civil-religious jeremiad	42
2.3.4 Civil religion and presidential rhetoric in times of crisis	46
2.3.5 How do jeremiads function? Constructing a narrative between hope and fear	47
2.3.6 Conclusions and working definitions: Modern jeremiads and jeremiadic speech	49
CHAPTER 3	
Crisis rhetoric and the tradition of the jeremiad in 21st century U.S. American presidential speechmaking: Analysis of President George W. Bush's and President Barack Obama's speeches	53
3.1 9/11 as new American jeremiad?: Analysis of President George W. Bush's speeches following the September 11 terrorist attacks	53

3.1.1	Contextualization of the events	53
3.1.2	Analysis of George W. Bush's speeches following the September 11 attacks	67
3.1.3	Conclusions on President George W. Bush's post 9/11 crisis rhetoric	170
3.2	Presidential speeches in times of environmental disaster: Analysis of President George W. Bush's and Barack Obama's environmental crisis speeches	175
3.2.1	Contextualization of the events	175
3.2.2	Analysis of President George W. Bush's speeches on Hurricane Katrina	186
3.2.3	Analysis of President Barack Obama's speeches on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico	217
3.2.4	Comparisons of and conclusions on President Bush's and President Obama's environmental crisis rhetoric	258
3.3	Framing the global economic downturn: Analysis of President G. W. Bush's and B. Obama's speeches on the financial crisis	261
3.3.1	Contextualization of the events	262
3.3.2	Analysis of President George W. Bush's speeches on the financial and economic crisis	274
3.3.3	Analysis of President Barack Obama's speeches on the financial and economic crisis	297
3.3.4	Comparisons and conclusions on President Bush's and President Obama's economic crisis rhetoric	322

CHAPTER 4

Comparisons, conclusions, and implications	327
Bibliography	339
Appendix	375
Index	399

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List of tables

Table 1	President Bush's post 9/11 speeches: Word count and D.A.L. pleasantness score	60
Table 2	President Bush's and President Obama's speeches on environmental crisis: Word count and D.A.L. pleasantness scores	180
Table 3	President Bush's and President Obama's speeches on the economic downturn: Word count and D.A.L. pleasantness scores	268

List of figures

Figure 1	“Understanding Crisis Exploitation” (’t Hart & Tindall 2009:25)	23
Figure 2	Word cloud for President Bush’s Address to the Nation, September 11, 2001	75
Figure 3	Word cloud for President Bush’s Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, September 14, 2001	96
Figure 4	Word cloud for President Bush’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress following the 9/11 Attacks, September 20, 2001	103
Figure 5	Word cloud for President Bush’s Presidential Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001	130
Figure 6	Word cloud for President Bush’s State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002	134
Figure 7	Word cloud for President Bush’s Presidential Address to the Nation, March 19, 2003	160
Figure 8	Word cloud for President Bush’s Speech on Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts, August 31, 2005	193
Figure 9	Word cloud for President Bush’s Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina, September 15, 2005	208
Figure 10	Word cloud for President Obama’s Remarks on the Oil Spill, May 2, 2010	222
Figure 11	Word cloud for President Obama’s Remarks after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, May 28, 2010	229
Figure 12	Word cloud for President Obama’s Remarks to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, June 15, 2010	257
Figure 13	Word cloud for President Bush’s Address on the Economy, September 19, 2008	284
Figure 14	Word cloud for President Bush’s Primetime Address to the Nation, September 24, 2008	286
Figure 15	Word cloud for President Obama’s First Weekly Address to the Nation, January 24, 2009	299
Figure 16	Word cloud for President Obama’s Push for a Stimulus Speech, February 9, 2009	301
Figure 17	Word cloud for President Obama’s Weekly Address to the Nation, February 14, 2009	314
Figure 18	Word cloud for President Obama’s Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, February 17, 2009	315

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Words have the critical power of shaping realities. They are not simply neutral tools of depicting the world, but embodiments of perspectives. Putting lexical items in order, orators, consciously or not, influence their audience's perception of their message. To become effective tools of persuasion, words need to fit the purpose of the speaker and correspond to the listener's value-system and perception of reality; after all, rhetoric always functions within a culture (Lakoff 2009a). However, the influence of words does not solely depend on what is said. It is also important who says it and who listens. In the United States, the modern presidency is a place for rhetorical leadership. Since the twentieth century, presidents have increasingly used the prestige of the office and especially the bully pulpit to rhetorically persuade the public. Through their speeches, they can exercise significant influence, which goes beyond their constitutional competencies (Neustadt 1990:29–50). Therefore, Neustadt describes the power of the presidency as “the power to persuade” (1990:29). Particularly in times of crisis, Americans turn to their leaders for discourse (Bostdorff & O'Rourke 1997:343–362). Presidents are expected to react and address the nation; their oratory needs to fulfill an informative function, make sense of the events, and initiate the problem-solving process (Kiewe 1994; 't Hart, Tindall & Brown 2009). Crises thus offer an increased opportunity for presidential rhetorical leadership. Consequently, it might be in the interest of the administration not only to react to critical events but also to rhetorically create or perpetuate the notion of crisis in order to initiate change and push forward legislation.

The tradition of American crisis rhetoric goes back to the early days of Puritan settlement in North America. In the seventeenth century, English Protestants who sought to purify the Church of England brought the biblical form of the jeremiad to the colonies. A prominent example of Puritan rhetoric lamenting decline is Winthrop's 1630 sermon “A Model of Christian Charity.” The Governor delivered his jeremiadic speech while still on board the *Arbella* on his way to the Massachusetts Bay, which prompted Jendrysik to argue that “America was in decline before there even was America” (Jendrysik 2007). However, there is a crucial difference between the classical jeremiad and its American version. While the American jeremiad continues to bemoan alleged moral decay, it simultaneously celebrates a sense of national mission – metaphorically represented in Winthrop's concept

of a “city upon a hill.” It became a favorite tool to Puritan leaders, who used it as a means of social control that directed parishioners’ actions towards particular ends (Bercovitch 1975: 154). The American jeremiad helped them interpret calamities and colonial hardships by tying them to the alleged moral flaws within the communities. But even after the Puritan experiment had failed, the jeremiad continued to thrive, as Bercovitch remarks in his seminal work *The American Jeremiad*. The scholar traces the persistence of the form beyond the “errand into the wilderness,” showing that it reappears in all forms of literature throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1978: 24). The genre evolved over time; adapting to new circumstances it became more secular and encompassed a variety of media. Nonetheless, it continued to fulfill a nation-affirming and nation-binding function, crucial for the multicultural and multiethnic “imagined community” of Americans (ibid.: 28). A look at contemporary American popular culture shows that the discourse of decline and mission remains alive and well. Brinkley claims that we live in “an era of best-selling jeremiads on both sides of the political divide” (2006: 10). The vast popularity of films like Roland Emmerich’s *The Day After Tomorrow* and best-selling books like Al Gore’s *An Inconvenient Truth* or Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkin’s *Left Behind* novel series supports this point.

Crisis narratives remain crucial tools in political communication. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, American presidents used crisis framings, among others, to talk about the September 11 attacks, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the housing bubble, and the economic recession. While in no way denying the graveness of the mentioned events and their tragic impact on the individual and collective level, I argue that the presidential rhetoric around them influenced their public perception as crises. This study aims to illuminate the characteristics of modern presidential crisis rhetoric in the United States. To that purpose, I examine the verbal responses of George W. Bush and Barack Obama to the most pressing issues of their terms in office. I discuss in how far the Presidents promote or exploit feelings of crisis in order to push forward their policy solutions. Furthermore, I analyze how they rhetorically frame the events to build up their crisis narratives. The argument presented is that elements of Puritan-derived rhetoric, and specifically the tradition of the jeremiad, although taken out of their original context and modified to suit a modern multiethnic society, can still be detected in contemporary political communication. I argue that jeremiadic aspects in political speeches continue to rhetorically function as means for interpreting America’s past and unifying the audience around a shared vision of the country’s future. My study aims to contribute to a more complete understanding of presidential crisis rhetoric, showing how it simultaneously reflects on and shapes U.S. culture.

Theoretical frameworks and contribution to presidential discourse studies

This monograph is situated within the research concerned with the concept of the rhetorical presidency. It contributes to the study of presidential crisis rhetoric by providing a book-length analysis of contemporary speeches with special regard to their jeremiadic characteristics. Although several works have examined policy discourse and crisis construction (Hodges & Nilep 2007; Hodges 2011; Dunmire 2011), none have focused on the persistent influence of the American jeremiad on contemporary presidential crisis rhetoric. One aspect discussed so far are the “modern American Jeremiahs” in literature and popular culture (Jendrysik 2007). Other publications have shown how American presidents can use moral and religious appeals to enhance their political leadership and strengthen authority (cf., e.g., Shogan 2006; Stuckey; Beasley 2011). Different disciplines have shaped our understanding of rhetorical power: while political scientists have analysed the impact of speeches on polity from a historical perspective (Ellis 1999; Tulis 1987; Laracey 2002), linguists introduced empirical methods, which minimize selection bias (Chilton 2004; Wodak & Meyer 2001; Cap 2008b), as well as cognitive approaches to the relationship between language and politics (Lakoff & Johnson 1980; Lakoff & Wehling 2012; Wodak 2009). Meanwhile, scholars of rhetoric and communication have investigated how the framing of presidential messages impacts the audience (cf., e.g., Zarefsky 2008; ‘T Hart & Tindal 2009). Recent models developed by cognitive linguists and employed in the study of political discourse include Deictic Space Theory (Chilton 2004), Text World Theory (cf., e.g., Werth 1999; Gavins 2007; Kaal et al. 2014) and Proximization Theory (Cap 2006, 2008b, 2013, 2017). This volume attempts to build upon those contributions that have placed political discourse under the critical lens from an interdisciplinary perspective (Dunmire 2011; Cap 2013, 2017; Austerlühl 2014) and complements existing literature by offering an attempt to define presidential crisis rhetoric as a genre that has its roots in Puritan rhetorical traditions. Following Roderick P. Hart’s (2002) call for more holistic approach to presidential communication, my study entails aspects from cultural studies, communication studies, comparative literary studies, but also rhetoric, linguistics, and cognitive science. Adding to the syntax and lexical analysis, I use a sociolinguistic approach, analyzing the language in use and draw on critical theory. I undertake a semiotic as well as a hermeneutic analysis of texts and combine qualitative and quantitative methods, as the multilayered nature of presidential rhetoric calls for interdisciplinarity.

The data selection for this study consists of 21 presidential addresses from the first decade of the twenty-first century. In a review for CNN, Julian Zelizer, professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University, describes the decade as

“a time period defined by terrorism, crisis, and uncertainty” and concludes: “The exuberance of the 1990s, with its strong economic growth and the sense of American military omnipotence, came to an end” (2009). In fact, through the events following the comparatively stable presidency of Bill Clinton – 9/11, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, ecological disasters, the economic and financial recession – crisis rhetoric seems to have reentered American political discourse with renewed force in the new millennium. But what exactly defines presidential crisis addresses? To answer this question my project takes a closer look at speeches, which cover a variety of topics – from national security concerns over environmental issues to economic problems – and were delivered by both, a Republican and a Democratic President. The mentioned diversity allows testing to what extent crisis rhetoric shows specific characteristics that cross partisan lines and are independent of the nature of a crisis. The chosen speeches are major addresses, defined as public statements that drew wide audiences and were usually delivered during prime time. Additionally, I compare the addresses to a selection of traditional American jeremiads and memorable crisis speeches by American leaders, delivered on occasions that resemble the discussed scenarios. While it is beyond the scope of this project to offer an in-depth analysis of the role the American jeremiad played in presidential rhetoric throughout the centuries, it remains an interesting research agenda for further studies. For now, my original dataset allows making claims on the generic features of contemporary presidential crisis rhetoric. The focus on presidential addresses has to do with the central role of presidency in the political system of the United States (as I explain in greater detail in Chapter 2.1). I also briefly relate to the delivery, staging, and media framing of the speeches in order to provide a more complete picture of their persuasive effect on audiences. Finally, my decision for a comparative study of Bush’s and Obama’s speeches was prompted by the fact that, following George W. Bush’s election as 43 President, much academic attention has been granted to his use of religious rhetoric (cf., e.g., Bostdorff 2003, 2011; Roof 2009; Chapp 2012). But do his crisis addresses also show an unusually high amount of (civil-)religious appeals? Or does his successor use them equally often on similar occasions? I want to test in how far the Presidents employ religious language for the purpose of persuasion. If both, despite different personal convictions and despite the fact that they represent opposing sides of political spectrum, use rhetorical techniques that have their roots in Puritan traditions, it would support my argument that jeremiadic elements constitute a generic feature of presidential crisis rhetoric.

Following Bitzer’s (1968) thesis that rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation and assuming Werth linguistic definition of discourse as “a combination of text and its relevant context” (1999: 47), I consider it necessary to provide a historical account of the critical events, which triggered rhetorical responses

from the Presidents and to relate to their audience, the moments of delivery of the speeches, as well as specific constraints (Bitzer 1968:1–14). The immediate context of a situation is important as it can yield different conceptual representation or “text worlds,” which Werth describes as “deictic space[s], defined initially by the discourse itself, and specifically by the deictic and referential elements in it” (1999:51). In his definition, linguistic choices are the cue for text world construction and triggering. Taking into account that the use of language in political discourse “is closely connected to political principles underlying discourse in the place where it is produced” (Filardo-Llamas 2014:212), I will consider the relationship between ideology and political practice, assuming Van Dijk’s definition of ideology as “the basis of the social representations shared by members of a group” (1998:8).

The analysis refers to the classical Aristotelian division into persuasive appeals through *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* as well as the ancient philosopher’s theories on the three branches of rhetoric: *epideictic*, *deliberative*, and *forensic* (cf. Aristotle 1975). However, I also draw on modern rhetorical studies. Specifically, the findings in the field of New Rhetoric, like the interplay between text and context (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969) as well as the relationship between language and ideology (Burke 1969), are of crucial importance to my argument. The analysis includes elements from the traditions of rhetorical criticism (Kuyper 2009) and Critical Discourse Theory (CDA), generally defined by Fairclough and Wodak as a set of methods to the study of language “as a form of ‘social practice’” (1997:258). Moreover, I undertake a Foucauldian discourse analysis, exposing power relations as expressed through language (Foucault 1995). When it comes to scholars of presidential crisis rhetoric whose findings have been more than inspiring for the development of my thesis, Theodore O. Windt’s (1986) definition of the genre, James Ceaser, Glen Thurow, and Jeffrey Tulis’ (1981) concept of the “rhetorical presidency,” as well as Amos Kiewe’s (1994) theories on the constructed nature of crisis need to be mentioned.

In order to dismantle the way the Presidents gradually build up their narratives, I undertake a critical reading of the chosen texts with regard to content, purpose, form, and structure. A closer look at the oratory on the lexical and semantic levels as well as a search for linguistic cues, recurring motifs, strategies, styles, and stylistic devices provides further insight into the characteristics of presidential crisis framings. Following Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) theory on the central role of metaphors in human thinking, I identify and deconstruct dominant conceptual metaphors. In line with the cognitive linguists’ findings, I argue that Bush and Obama use metaphors to explain complex phenomena but also to polarize and justify their stand in terms of cultural, religious, or civil-religious values. Moreover, I pay special attention to references to myths, as they constitute crucial

elements of presidential storytelling. Following Roof, I see myths as the means by which nations affirm their identities and frame their rationale for political action (2009:286–301). Popular myths in American culture derive partly from Christian or biblical tradition and partly from civil-religious discourse; especially the national myths of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny as well as the related concept of the American Dream are crucial for the American self-understanding and will therefore be discussed in greater depth.

In their studies, Beasley (2011) and Stuckey (2011) establish a link between American self-images and presidential discourse. Drawing on their findings, I discuss in how far Bush's and Obama's crisis speeches serve as instruments of cultural inclusion and exclusion and how they reflect on and reaffirm allegedly shared values. In this context, I am specifically interested in the role of intertextuality. Presidents borrow from great speeches of their predecessors as well as texts like the Bible or the Constitution on a regular basis. As Austermühl remarks, presidential speeches "are both linked to each other as well as to other significant cultural texts" (2014:20). Similarly to Austermühl's work, this book contributes to the academic discussion of the role quotations and references to other texts in presidential speeches play in the (re-)construction of national identities. However, while in *The Great American Scaffold* the scholar analyzes the various forms and functions of intertextual references found in inaugural addresses and State of the Union messages from 1789 to 2008 as well as a selection of foreign policy and security addresses (Austermühl 2014), the focus here lies on jeremiadic elements in twenty-first-century presidential address and the question in how intertextuality can help presidents in the rhetorical promotion of crisis policies. To show the Puritan-derived nature of some of the characteristic of presidential crisis rhetoric, I refer to Bercovitch's (1978) and Miller's (1953) milestone studies of Puritan culture. Specifically, I trace the function of the jeremiad from its classic to its modern form and discuss in how far jeremiadic elements continue to influence presidential crisis rhetoric. I look for similarities and differences with regard to the mentioned categories of analysis, using relevant passages from the Bible as well as classical Puritan sermons as a basis for comparison (Winthrop 1639; Edwards 1741; Mather 1673).

Another strategy of uniting audiences around the notion of a constructed "us," is the identification of the allegedly different Other. In my discussion of the processes of Othering in the crisis rhetoric of the Presidents, I refer to Edward Said's (1979) fundamental work in this field as well as the theories of Michel Foucault on the close connection between Othering and power relations (1980). To show how personal deixis contributes to promoting group identification as insiders and outsiders, I draw on Paul Chilton's (2004) Deictic/Discourse Space Theory (DST). Like Werth in his Text World Theory (1999), Chilton stresses that language should be understood in spatial terms and argues that linguistic elements reflect a distal

relationship to the speaker. DST is based on the premise that “[s]ocial (and political) relationships are lexicalised, and conceptualised, in terms of space metaphors” (2004: 57); it maps discourse referents and propositions onto a three-axis model with the speaker at center where the axes intersect. The axes represent space, time and modality. Particularly relevant in the context of this study is Chilton’s (2004) book *Analysing Political Discourse* in which he applies DST to post 9/11 discourse on the example of speeches by George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden. I am interested in the way spatial representations are used by the President to create the notion of imminent threat from a distant enemy and thus legitimize military actions. Therefore, I will equally incorporate elements of Piotr Cap’s Proximity framework, “a discursive strategy of presenting physically and temporally distant events and states of affairs (including “distant,” i.e. adversarial, ideological mind-sets) as directly, increasingly and negatively consequential to the speaker and her addressee” (Cap 2013:3). This recent cognitive-pragmatic model of crisis and threat construction, which puts focus on legitimization strategies, will be used to show how the Presidents employed lexico-grammatical tools to establish dichotomies between Self and Other. Crucial studies in this research area include Piotr Cap’s (2008b, 2013) analysis of presidential speeches concerning anti-terrorist policies, Patricia Dunmire’s (2011) book in which she takes a closer look at proximity patterns in the 2002 National Security Strategy and how they were followed in speeches enacting the doctrine, as well as Christopher Hart’s (2014; Hart & Cap 2014) publications on spatial cognition and identity construction.

While qualitative analysis is at the heart of this book, empirical methods serve as a basis for a discussion of the speeches from a wider perspective.

Quantitative data: Word clouds, Dictionary of Affect in Language, lists of conceptual metaphors, proximity framework

For the descriptive part of this book I employ computerized language analysis. Word clouds, generated with the help of the website wordle.net, help to visualize the word frequency in given presidential speeches. The clouds are digital images, which prominently display the words that appear most frequently in a given text. Thus, they indicate on first sight which words were often repeated by the Presidents. I assume that they consequently can also point to core themes and motifs in some addresses. However, the graphics need to be used cautiously, since they have clear limitations. They do not provide information on the specific context of speeches. Adjectives, nouns, and verbs are separated from each other and therefore, it is not possible to unambiguously deduce the speaker’s intent. For example, if the most prominent term in a word cloud is “taxes,” it is impossible to determine

if the author of the text criticizes or praises taxation. Moreover, pronouns and conjunctions are not counted. Rhetorical analysis and critical discourse analysis fill in on these knowledge gaps. Word clouds for speeches of less than 300 words are not included, as the size of the sample is too small and thus statistically insignificant.

Moreover, I use Prof. Cynthia Whissell's Dictionary of Affect in Language (D.A.L.), which quantifies the connotations and associations of words.¹ The D.A.L. grew out of a tradition of lexical-emotional research and was conducted with the help of volunteers ($n > 100$) who rated chosen samples of words. The revised version used here, contains 8,742 most commonly used words, which covers 90% of words in most language samples. The process of rating them involved over 200,000 individual judgments in three categories: pleasantness (from unpleasant to pleasant), activation (from passive to active), and imagery (how easy it is to form a mental picture for a given word) (Whissell 2009: 1–13). The analysis will refer to the pleasantness category in order to gain a more complete understanding of the emotional influence of crisis speeches on audiences. Based on Whissell's findings, I assume that a high number of words with a high degree of pleasantness subconsciously has a comforting effect on audiences, while a high number of words with a low degree of pleasantness irritates and triggers disagreeable feelings. I use the acquired data to compare in how far modern presidential crisis speeches resemble jeremiads in the way they balance fear and hope.² According to the D.A.L., scores for pleasantness (ee) range from 1 (unpleasant) to 3 (pleasant). The score 2, stands for "in between," however, the respondents were advised to avoid this middle score, unless sure the word belonged there (Whissell 2009). Interestingly, the dictionary also came up with the result that function words like prepositions, conjunctions, negations, and pronouns, are also emotionally distinct. For example, the words "your" or "not" show significantly smaller scores for pleasantness than "my" or "if." On the subconscious level, all words have an emotional effect on the audience, which the D.A.L. allows to quantify. The mean score for pleasantness (m), which constitutes the average value for all words in the dictionary is $m = 1.84$. My computerized version of the D.A.L. shows the words in order of their frequency and lists their individual scores in the tested category.³ It also scores the speeches

1. It was kindly placed at my disposal by courtesy of Prof. C. Whissell from Laurentian University.

2. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter 2.3.5, the jeremiad can only successfully function when it appropriately balances dichotomies like praise and blame, fear and hope, the pleasant and unpleasant.

3. Programmed by Florian Tatzky according to the needs of this project; can be obtained upon request.

as a whole, creating an average emotional valance rate for each text by adding the individual rates for the single words and dividing them by the total number of rated words in the text. This value can show a general tendency of the emotional valance of a text (Whissell 2009; Bestgen 1994: 21–36). In order to compare the D.A.L. emotional valance of modern presidential speeches to classical American jeremiads, I chose to concentrate on three famous and often-cited sermons, which are in many ways representative as they set the standards for other jeremiads (cf. Bercovitch 1978). The D.A.L. mean score for pleasantness (ee:m) for these sermons are the following:

Sermon	Author	ee:m
“A Model of Christian Charity”	John Winthrop	1.67
“Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God”	Jonathan Edwards	1.63
“The Day of Trouble Is Near”	Increase Mather	1.54

One limitation of the results is that not all words used in Puritan times are included in the Dictionary of Affect in Language, which contains commonly used words in modern English. Therefore, the data needs to be treated with caution and constitutes only one of multiple points of comparison between contemporary presidential addresses and Puritan jeremiads. The analysis will specifically refer to rhetorical elements which are reminiscent of the ones used in the sermons. Moreover, I will discuss passages in which the Presidents quote from these texts in greater depth. Another constraint that limits the performance of the D.A.L. is owed to the fact that names of people, places, or specific events do not appear on the word-list. As these words nonetheless play an important role for the emotional tone of a speech (especially if frequently repeated or used in a specific context), I address the issue separately when relevant.

Measuring the emotional valance of presidential crisis rhetoric is a highly complex task affected by many factors. As mentioned, the D.A.L. mean scores for the texts as a whole can point to general tendencies, but cannot provide further insight into the fluctuation of emotional appeals within a speech. Moreover, they do not offer any information on the context nor the mode of delivery of a presidential statement. Since these aspects clearly also influence the audience’s perception, they need to be addressed separately. When it comes to the pleasantness scores for individual words, I consider them a helpful tool for my discussion of the way the Presidents establish jeremiadic dichotomies. While the data cannot be used to unambiguously classify lexical items into the two categories, which I consider especially crucial for the functioning of the jeremiad – fear and hope – I follow the general rule that words with especially high (above 2.5) or low (below 1.5) degrees

of pleasantness can strengthen these feelings on the subconscious level. Thus, the D.A.L. provides additional empirical evidence for my analysis of the jeremiadic balance between the elements of hope and fear, which will be equally tested in my study of conceptual metaphors.

Following a close reading of the texts, I conducted lists of dominant conceptual metaphors and framings for all selected speeches, classifying them according to their linguistic content (source domain) and to what they describe (target domain).⁴ Here, I pay special attention to the dichotomies they help to establish, like good vs. evil or us vs. them, and which I consider crucial for the functioning of jeremiads (as I explain in greater detail in Chapter 2.3.5). I will test if the presidential framings of crises change over time: Do Bush and Obama drop certain metaphors in favor of others to interpret events and justify their policies? Lakoff argues that following the attacks on September 11 the Bush administration at first framed the events as a crime, using lexical items from this domain (Lakoff 2011). If the events were treated as a crime, the response would entail international crime-fighting techniques like the involvement of intelligence agencies, diplomacy, or international police cooperation. Soon, however, the “war on terror metaphor” was introduced, which eventually became instrumental in the justification of the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The linguist argues that the war metaphor was chosen for political reasons, as it defined war as “the only way to defend the nation” and allowed to label opponents as “unpatriotic” (Lakoff 2011: 1). Referring to Lakoff’s thesis, I will discuss if similar linguistic changes can be observed with regard to the chosen scenarios. Moreover, the analysis will examine the role of metaphors when it comes to the question of praise and blame. Which framings are employed to place responsibility for critical situations with certain groups while emphasizing the positive role of others in the problem solving processes? Which metaphors support the discursive practice of Othering? I am especially interested in framings that are connected to Puritan myths and ideas which characterize American jeremiads, like the concept of Manifest Destiny and exceptionalism, the notion of chosenness, or the interpretations of critical events as tests (cf. Chapter 2.3). At the beginning of each analytical subchapter, I will enumerate the dominant framings and present preliminary findings. Since a mere listing of figures of speech does not suffice to explain how they reflect on values and structure thought processes, I use a cognitive linguistic approach to deconstruct individual metaphorical concepts and framings in my further discussion of the speeches, drawing on Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) findings in this area.

4. My mode of classifying metaphors and lexical correspondences was highly influenced by George Lakoff’s “The Contemporary Theory of Metaphor” (Lakoff 1993).

The mentioned lists (including lexical correspondences) are added in the appendix. While it is beyond the scope of this project to discuss all metaphors in the selected crisis speeches, the lists point to dominant trends, which will be further tested in the analytical subchapters. The lists make no claim of being complete; some lexical correspondences fit into more than one domain; e.g. the lexeme “protect” can, among others, evoke the image of war, crime, or mythical battle, depending on the collocations and contexts in which they appear. The expression “protecting America” (Obama 2009b) generally triggers images of war, while the phrases “strengthen investor protections” (Bush 2008b) or “enforce laws and regulations protecting your money” (Bush 2008c) are more likely associated with a crime framing. Additionally, the verb “protect” can call into mind images of heroic gestures of helping the weak as presented in mythical battles, e.g. “protecting the health care they count on” (Obama 2009d). Consequently, some terms may appear in multiple categories. The qualitative analysis will exploit their respective functions in the specific contexts. Furthermore, the lists show whether or not the Democratic and the Republican President use similar metaphors, which go beyond party lines, to frame crises.

I will also take a look at the role the legitimization strategy of proximization plays in presidential crisis discourses (Cap 2008a, 2008b, 2013, 2017; Chilton 2004). Piotr Cap defines the concept as “a forced construal operation meant to evoke closeness of the external threat, to solicit legitimization of preventive measures” (Hart & Cap 2014: 191). Thus, it can be seen as a legitimization-enhancing mechanism. As Dunmire sums up “through proximization political actors legitimate their proposed actions and policies by representing particular events and social actors as directly affecting a given audience” (2011: 56). Cap (2008a) identifies three categories of proximization: spatial, temporal, and axiological. In my analysis, I refer to his model (a revised version of Chilton’s (2004) theory mentioned above) in which these three axes serve to illustrate relations among and between social actors and actions and events. On the special axis, “here” is at the deictic center of the discourse space and “there” at its remote end. Pronouns play a crucial role in the construction of the dichotomy between Self and Other. While “we,” “us,” and “our” are at the center of the spatial axis, “they,” “them,” “their” show at the opposite end and the Other at its periphery (Chilton 2004: 58). On the temporal axis, events appear as significant by being situated as close or distant from the deictic center (the “now” of the speech). Finally, the axiological aspect consists in the addressee’s “interpretation of alien ideological beliefs and values relative to the axiological background of the self, or the dominant ideology of the State” (Cap 2010: 6). Cap states that “the threat comes from the DS peripheral entities, referred to as ODCs (“outside-deictic-center”), which are conceptualized to be crossing the Space to invade the IDC (“inside-deictic-center”) entities, that

is the speaker and her addressee" (Cap 2013: 17).⁵ I will test in how far the spatial, temporal, and axiological axis is being involved in presidential crisis rhetoric, by looking for lexical items like temporal markers, pronouns, and adverbs of place as well as noun and verb phrases indicating axiology. The analysis refers to Cap's (2013) criteria for identifying lexical manifestations of axiological proximization. On the spatial axis, the markers are divided into six categories (Cap 2013: 105–123):

1. Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements of the deictic center of the DS (IDCs)
2. Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements outside the deictic center of the DS (ODCs)
3. Verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center
4. Verb phrases (VPs) of action construed as markers of impact of ODCs upon IDCs
5. Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of ODCs upon IDCs
6. Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs

The temporal proximization framework comprises the following five categories:

1. Noun phrases (NPs) involving indefinite descriptions construing ODC actual impact acts in alternative temporal frames
2. Discourse forms involving contrastive use of the simple past and the present perfect construing threatening future extending infinitely from a past instant
3. Noun phrases (NPs) involving nominalizations construing presupposition of conditions for ODC impact to arise anytime in the future
4. Verb phrases (VPs) involving modal auxiliaries construing conditions for ODC impact as existing continually between the now and the infinite future
5. Discourse forms involving parallel contrastive construals of oppositional and privileged futures extending from the now

Finally, the three markers of axiological proximization are:

5. For a more detailed description of proximization theory, consult Cap's work (2008a, 2008b, 2010, 2013).

1. Noun phrases (NPs) construed as IDC positive values or value sets (ideologies)
2. Noun phrases (NPs) construed as ODC negative values or value sets (ideologies)
3. Discourse forms involving linear arrangement of lexico-grammatical phrases construing materialization in the IDC space of the ODC negative ideologies

The purpose of my work is not to offer an in-depth proximization analysis of all 21 selected speeches. Rather, I see the model as a helpful methodological tool for my discussion of the ways the Presidents construct dichotomies, which I consider crucial for the functioning of the jeremiad. Proximization reveals how speakers conceptualize issues in terms of a clash between IDC and ODC entities in order to legitimizing their goals. Thus, it can shed light on the linguistic mechanisms that enforce good vs. evil frames and Othering dynamics. I will refer to aspects of the framework to discuss how the Presidents Bush and Obama construe particular spatial, temporal, and axiological relationships between “us” and “them” to promote the notion of crisis and advance political goals in different areas.

The proximization framework developed by Cap (2006, 2008b, 2010) was initially used to analyze post 9/11 anti-terrorist rhetoric. Cap (2013) and Dunmire (2011) conducted extensive studies on legitimization discourses around the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and I refer to their findings in length in Chapter 3.1. However, when it comes to presidential rhetoric in times of environmental and economical crisis, no comparable proximization analyses that could be similarly included in my discussion of the respective speeches in Chapters 3.2 and 3.3 exist. It needs to be noted that the still fairly recent model of proximization has also been applied in other research areas, including crisis construction and war rhetoric (Chovanec 2010), immigration discourse (Hart 2010) and political party representation (Cienki et al. 2010). Moreover, in *Language of Fear* (2017), Cap employs proximization theory in his study of pattern construction and fear generation in health, climate change, and technological discourses as well as the early rhetoric of Brexit. In the mentioned cases, the construal of threat through the opposition of Self and Other is more complex and subtle than in the “war on terror.” Nonetheless, the model offers insights into “the ways in which the discursive construction of closeness and remoteness can be manipulated in the public sphere and bound up with fear, security and conflict” (Cap 2017: xi), which points to its wide applicability. Based on the mentioned findings, I make tentative attempts to address in how far proximization patterns can also enrich our understanding of presidential crisis speeches on financial and environmental issues.

Mindful of the limitations of quantitative methods, I am nevertheless convinced that the word clouds, emotional valance scores, metaphor lists as well as

lexical markers of proximization can indicate dominant rhetorical trends and will thus constitute a useful basis for a qualitative analysis of the speeches.

Chapter overview

The book is structured as follows: Chapter 2 builds the theoretical foundation and analytical framework for my study of presidential crisis rhetoric. I describe the state of research in this field, refer to relevant literature, and identify hitherto neglected aspects. Since the concepts of the rhetorical presidency, crisis rhetoric, and the American jeremiad are central to this book, a separate subchapter is dedicated to each of them. I explain their significance within American studies and elaborate on my understanding and my use of these terms. Furthermore, I address the role of (civil-religious) myths and metaphors as crucial aspects of political crisis narratives.

In Chapter 3, I proceed with my analysis of contemporary presidential crisis rhetoric. As mentioned above, the chosen primary texts are speeches by President George W. Bush and President Barack H. Obama, in which they refer to pressing issues during their terms in office.⁶ I selected three major twenty-first-century crises, which concern very different aspects of public life. First, I concentrate on Bush's addresses following the attacks on September 11, 2001. In the second subchapter, I analyze presidential rhetoric regarding environmental disasters based on the examples of Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The third analytical subchapter focuses on Bush's and Obama's rhetorical responses to the financial and economic downturn, starting with the fall of Lehmann Brothers in September 2008 up until the signing of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. For reasons of clarity, each crisis is discussed in a separate subchapter. Factors like the number of presidential addresses delivered on the occasion of a given critical situation or the media coverage of the events affected my choice, as I explain in greater detail in the respective subchapters. To ensure comparability, the rhetorical analysis follows the same structure in all three subchapters (3.1–3.3). I start off with a contextualization of the events, taking into account the moment in history when they were delivered as well as the political situation of the time. In the next step, I present my selection of speeches and empirical data. Then, I move on to a qualitative analysis of the texts. I refer to the lengths of the speeches at the beginning of each subchapter, as the duration of a presidential statement is a

6. The transcripts of all speeches are all available on presidentialrhetoric.com and the White House website.

deliberative choice made by the speaker and affects audience's perception. Moreover, the reference to the number of words in a speech puts the number of discussed stylistic devices into proportion. Each subchapter ends with a discussion of the results and conclusions. To ensure reader-friendliness, I only use quotation marks but no additional in-text citation when quoting from addresses discussed in the respective subchapter. If two speeches are analyzed jointly in one subchapter, the dates appear in parentheses. Unless stated otherwise, all emphasis in quotations (in italics) are mine.

In my fourth and final chapter, I compare my findings from the three subchapters and draw conclusions. I point out differences and similarities in President George W. Bush's and President Barack Obama's crisis oratory in an attempt to characterize modern presidential crisis rhetoric as a distinct genre that has its roots in Puritan traditions.

The rhetorical presidency, presidential crisis rhetoric, and the American jeremiad

2.1 The rhetorical presidency

2.1.1 Presidential power to persuade

The U.S. Constitution stipulates that “the executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America” (Art. II, Section 1, Cl. 1.). Institutionally, the president is both the head of state and the head of government, as well as the military commander in chief and chief diplomat. Within the executive branch, he has broad constitutional powers to manage national affairs as well as the workings of the federal government and may issue executive orders to affect internal policies.⁷ Additionally, he can profit from the soft power associated with the office. This last power is not guaranteed by any specific legislation. However, it can allow the president to broaden his area of influence. Richard Neustadt refers to this phenomenon in his crucial work *Presidential Power*, declaring that “presidential power is the power to persuade” (1990:78). The scholar remarks that presidents can use their reputation, the prestige of the office, as well as rhetoric to exercise a significant influence (ibid.: 104).⁸ He suggests that leadership “involves exceeding the baseline role of national clerk” and since the means for doing so are not provided in the Constitution, presidents must find them through persuasion (ibid.: 100).

Since Neustadt’s classic study, numerous other scholars have explored the influence of presidential oratory. William Riker (1990), for example, goes further than Neustadt when he defines presidential leadership as the ability to articulate political situations in a way that forces opponents to submit. He calls this strategy of manipulation for the purpose of winning, regardless of the particular stakes, “heresthetics” (Riker 1990). According to Riker, it is a form of demagoguery that enables presidents to get what they want. Leroy Dorsey more generally defines rhetorical leadership as “leadership exerted through talk of persuasion” (2008:3, 11).

7. The U.S. Constitution uses the generic “he” to refer to the president.

8. Specifically, Neustadt refers to the power to bargain with Congress.

Martin Medhurst (1996) distinguishes the rhetorical presidency from mere presidential rhetoric in that the former refers only to going over the heads of Congress and other Washington decision makers whereas the latter is a much broader term, referring to all aspects of the president's use of language, regardless of its nature or audience. Following Weber, some scholars stress the importance of charisma; others claim that the president needs to have a vision (Ellis 1999). Most works link the means of influence to communication. If leadership is the ability to use language to win the public's support, then rhetoric is the means whereby a person influences another person or group to achieve certain aims. The idea that a politician can exert power through speech is certainly not new; it has been studied since ancient times, starting with Cicero and Aristotle. Today, different disciplines concentrate on specific aspects and there are as many definitions as there are scholars; however, they all draw on the findings of these philosophers. They share a common denominator, namely that rhetorical leadership is exerted through talk of persuasion. This persuasion is achieved through an effective text, which has to fit the given circumstances and be delivered in a believable manner by the speaker. The speech, the speaker, the listeners, and the occurring situation form a unity. A speech has to appeal to the audience on different levels, which Aristotle defines as *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* (Aristotle 1975).

Contemporary American presidents have teams of speechwriters working for them. Does that mean that presidential rhetoric is in fact not presidential anymore? Did professional speechwriting turn presidents into marionettes who merely repeat words? Medhurst vehemently disputes such claims in his article "Presidential Speechwriting: Ten Myths that Plague Modern Scholarship" (2003: 3–19). First, he shows that presidents since Washington have sought rhetorical advice; while their helpers might not always have been called speechwriters, the phenomenon of presidents asking for assistance with their speeches is certainly not new. Moreover, he states that in the vast majority of cases, presidents were at some point involved in the complex process of speechwriting. The scholar convincingly refutes the critique that the speeches do not represent the true beliefs and attitudes of presidents. He counters that presidents do not and, in fact, are not supposed to speak just for themselves but on behalf of their people. Their job is to "represent the view of the nation as refracted through the lenses of the party, ideology, political and economic constraints, and situational variables" (2003: 10). Agreeing with Medhurst, I see speeches as a defining feature of the presidency. Presidents chose their own writers, assistants, and advisors according to their personal preferences. In cooperation with their teams, they produce public speeches. Sometimes presidents provide the first draft for their addresses, which is then reworked by their staff. At other times, presidents themselves rewrite the notes prepared by their staff. In all cases, to be believable, the

message has to fit the speaker; the president has to be able to deliver the address in a convincing manner. I argue that once presidents make public statements, the words become their own. From then on, the public will hold them accountable for their messages and they will not be able to blame speechwriters for possible controversies (at least not openly).

2.1.2 Traditional and modern presidency

In terms of classifying divisions, within academia the distinction between the traditional presidency and the modern presidency is widely accepted. The prior term refers to the American presidency as envisioned by the Founding Fathers and especially shaped by the first President, George Washington. The institution defined itself in opposition to the models enacted by European monarchs; the president was meant to be a democratically elected representative bound to the amendments of the Constitution. The traditional view on presidency in the United States did not imply that presidential rhetoric should play an energetic role in public policy making. In fact, the Constitution only mentions that “he [the president] shall from time to time give to the Congress information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient” (Art. II, Section 3). There is no call to deliver addresses directed to the general public. In that early period presidents spoke to the public only on rare occasions. Washington gave 25 speeches during his time in the White House, which amounts to an average of three speeches per year. President Madison, the 4th American president (1809–1817), gave none (Goetsch 1993:12). This small number of public speeches can be first of all explained through the fact that the president was, above all, seen as the one who manages the government. Secondly, the limited means of communication in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did not technically enable him to reach wide audiences. In the nineteenth century, Tulis argues, presidents rarely used rhetoric to advance their agendas. The exceptions, like Abraham Lincoln, only prove the rule and received wide academic attention (Tulis 1987:65–66). This changed tremendously in the course of the twentieth century. While the total numbers of minor addresses, brief remarks, and exchanges held by Truman and Eisenhower amount to 421 and 343, Kennedy addressed the public on 1036 occasion and Carter on 918 occasions (Goetsch 1993:15). Clearly, to a large extent, the increase in public speeches held by presidents has to do with the spread of popular mass media, which prompted the shift in the perception of the presidency (cf., e.g., Cohen 1995; Ceaser et al. 1981). White argues that it was Jackson who settled the conviction that “the President was an immediate and direct representative of the people” and not merely the manager of the federal government (1954:23). Similarly, Zarefsky concludes that the job description of the

president changed from someone whose was expected to “lead the government,” to someone responsible for leading a people (2008: 20–39).

The term “rhetorical presidency” was first introduced by the political scientists Ceaser, Thurow, Tulis, and Bessette in their joined 1981 essay “The Rise of the Rhetorical Presidency.” In it, the authors describe the rhetorical presidency as a kind of institutionalized “popular or mass rhetoric,” which “serves as one of their principal tools in attempting to govern the nation” (Ceaser et al. 1981: 159–161). Moreover, they list three factors that led to the rise of the rhetorical presidency in the twentieth century: “a modern doctrine of presidential leadership,” the mass media, and modern presidential campaigns (ibid.). Others, like the communication studies scholar Laracey (2002), do not agree with the thesis that the rhetorical presidency is a modern construct; they argue that it has always been rhetorical. The fact that the U.S. Constitution does not require the president to hold an inaugural address, however already George Washington established this practice, supports their thesis. Medhurst in “Rhetorical Leadership and the Presidency: A Situational Taxonomy,” also maintains that point, stressing that rhetoric as the original form of leadership dates back to the first democracies in Ancient Greece (2007: 59–84). Taking into account the mentioned different perspectives, what mainly distinguishes the modern presidency from the traditional one is what Dorsey pointedly describes as the shift from an “administrator-based” to a “rhetoric-based-institution” (2008: 5). Nevertheless, there seems to be a widespread agreement among scholars, including those who argue that the presidency has always been rhetorical, that the twentieth century was a turning point for the rapid rise of the importance of rhetoric for the presidency.

Tulis (1987) further elaborates on this idea in his single-authored book *The Rhetorical Presidency*, where he explicitly contrasts the nineteenth-century constitutional presidency with a modern twentieth-century rhetorical presidency. Tulis declares, “popular or mass rhetoric has become a principle tool of presidential governance” (1987: 4). According to him, the main changes the “modern way” brought about were: firstly, less rhetoric was now addressed primarily to Congress and more to the people at large; secondly, more emphasis was placed upon oral speeches and less upon written messages; and thirdly, the above two changes would bring with them a change in structure of argument, towards an “inspirational” and a “policy stand” rhetoric (1987: 138). Thus, the new-way presidents stand apart as they speak with vision, advocate policy positions, and talk to the people instead of the Congress (cf. Teten 2007: 669–682). Tulis (1987) sees the origins of the modern presidency in the office terms of Roosevelt and Wilson. He argues that these two leaders guided the institution in a starkly different and more visible direction, chiefly through their public speeches. They combined formal and informal powers of the office to make a case directly to the American people (Tulis 1987: 138–140).

Henceforth, in academia, Wilson is often referred to as the founder of the modern rhetorical presidency, while Franklin D. Roosevelt is credited with the emergence of what Arthur Schlesinger (2004) called the “imperial presidency.” Franklin D. Roosevelt was the first one to use radio to reach more Americans than was ever before possible, thereby tremendously increasing the number of citizens who could directly hear their president (Bacharach 2006). However, it was not only the use of modern media that made him remembered as a great communicator, but also his rhetorical appeal. Hargroves claims that President Roosevelt’s success “came from his ability to assess his public audiences and the situation they found themselves in and to craft an appropriate message” (qtd. in Dorsey 2002: 8). President Wilson became known for his preference to engage in policy speeches rather than written addresses and letters to Congress. Interestingly, Wilson himself made a case for a more rhetorical presidency, arguing that the president should be the one voice able to articulate the national will, otherwise expressed in “the accidental and discordant notes that come from the voice of a mob” (1975: 42). To him, the president’s duty was to understand and express public sentiment in a way that unifies the nation. The president has “the ear of the nation,” Wilson explained, “and a great person may use such an advantage greatly” (Wilson qtd. in Bacharach 2006: 8–9). Andrews argues that, to Wilson, “it was clearly the president’s responsibility (...) to grasp the ‘meaning of America’ and to use the rhetorical power of the presidency to fix that meaning in the minds of an American community” (2002: 138). The president’s rhetorical leadership can be seen as a way of framing reality in a way that manages meaning. Milkis and Nelson, commenting on the importance of Wilson’s rhetorical presidency state that he “not only understood the popular aspirations of his day, but was able to translate them into words. In the course of doing so, he consciously defended and, by example, established the legitimacy of public rhetoric as a principal tool of presidential leadership” (1999: 129). The scholars furthermore stress the importance of the cultural context of a speech: the right words chosen for the right occasion and reflecting on the predominant value system constitute a powerful political tool, as they argue (*ibid.*: 130).

Although the judgments on the rhetorical presidency differ from democratizing to dangerous, there is an agreement that the importance of the Oval Office’s power of persuasion has been and remains on the rise. Most scholars agree that American presidents in the contemporary era are quite willing to go over the heads of Congress and attempt to mobilize the public as a routine means of governance. This willingness is now accepted as an integral part of the institution (Stuckey 2010: 38–52). The president is the single most recognizable politician of the country (Dennis 1976: 51). Through their status and command of attention alone, presidents to some degree influence policy any time they choose to open their mouths (Bacharach 2006). Hart writes: “Presidents are now extraordinarily

active players in the game of public opinion, and all of their public statements – even the most casual – are strategically designed to position the president for the next one in an endless series of moves and countermoves” (1987:2). And concludes: “Public speaking is no longer one of a president’s tools to get his work done – It is his job” (*ibid.*). Through their rhetoric, presidents have a great impact on the formation of the country’s political ideology. Stuckey pointedly remarks: “As an institution, the presidency is at the heart of American politics and of American political ideology” (2010: 48). On the basis of this theoretical framework, I further argue that the moral authority of the office allows presidents not only to reflect on America’s political value system, but also to ideologically shape the country through their speeches.

2.2 Presidential crisis rhetoric

The term crisis is popularly used to describe a dangerous social situation with regard to economics, the military, the environment, or politics. Often, it is triggered by an abrupt change of the status quo. If the impact of an emergency event affects not only a single individual (as is the case for personal crisis) but a substantial portion of the population, state and government leaders are expected to address and eventually resolve the problem. Especially in democratic systems, where the acquisition and the retention of power depend on public approval, political officeholders need to adapt their rhetoric accordingly. Cicero’s (1970) basic definition of rhetoric defines it as “speech designed to persuade.” This principle applies also in times of national despair: to assert their position, leaders must persuade audiences of their ability to end the critical situation. However, there is also a different approach to crisis. Numerous scholars view crises largely or even completely as rhetorical creations. Windt (1987: 125–134) argues that the president creates the crisis by announcing it, while Kiewe similarly states that crisis rhetoric “occurs when the president chooses to speak on an issue of critical dimension, whether to promote or minimize the perception of a crisis” (1994: xxiii). Taking yet another perspective on the constructed nature of crisis, ‘t Hart and Tindall point out that crises lie in the eyes of the beholder and define them as “events or developments widely perceived by members of relevant communities to constitute urgent threats to core community values and structures” (2009: 21–40). In their definition, they follow the classic Thomas theorem, a theory of sociology formulated by W. I. Thomas and D. S. Thomas in 1928, which states: “If men define their situations as real, they are real in their consequences” (1928: 571–572). Accordingly, it is always a subjective interpretation of a situation by the public that determines its impact. However, no set of events is likely to be perceived entirely uniformly by all

members of a community. Therefore, the model developed by 't Hart and Tindall distinguishes three types of frames, which people who are confronted with the same critical situation might adopt. Figure 1 offers a stylised representation of the constructed nature of crises.

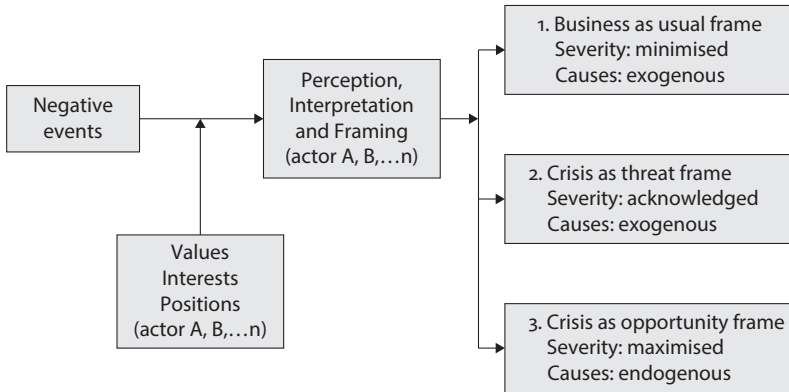


Figure 1. “Understanding Crisis Exploitation” (’t Hart & Tindall 2009: 25)

According to the model, negative events can be framed in three different ways, which take into account the values, interests, and positions of the actors, as well as their interpretations and perceptions. The first type is labelled “business-as-usual frame.” It implies denial that the critical situation in question represents more than yet another *unfortunate incident*. The frame plays down the critical development and does not call for political actions. The second type, “crisis as threat frame,” deems the events to bring about *critical threats* to the well-being of a certain group. It implies a predisposition to defend the agents (politicians) and tools (political policies) of the status quo against any criticism. The last type is called “crisis as opportunity frame.” Here, the events are seen as an *opportunity*, which will allow exposing and eliminating current deficiencies. The framing pinpoints blameworthy behaviour of political agents as well as their dysfunctional policies and calls for the removal of authorities or a substantial alteration of their means of action. In contemporary U.S. society, political leaders cannot simply put away problems that arise due to phenomena like environmental disasters as acts of God. Therefore, the question of blame and political responsibility becomes essential for the crises narratives of office holders, but also for the counter narratives of their opponents. Consequently, the third way of perceiving and framing the events has gained currency in modern times.

The fact that crises simultaneously constitute a threat and an opportunity for political leaders turns critical situations into a rewarding field of study. In

medicine, the word crisis is used to describe a turning point of an illness, particularly with regard to fevers (cf. Walton 1994). In history, crises also often constitute turning points. They are times during which profound changes in public policy as well as in the self-definition of nations can take place. For example, World War II, and more specifically America's involvement in it after the attack on Pearl Harbor, had a tremendous impact on the position of the United States in the world. Among others, Murphy (2015) convincingly puts forward the thesis that Roosevelt's rhetorical framing of the events changed the nation's political ideology from isolationism to interventionism.⁹ Bostdorff and O'Rourke (1997) maintain that during times of crisis Americans, since the twentieth century, have increasingly turned to their presidents for discourse. Consequently, the presidents' power to rhetorically initiate changes augments during critical events. Already in 1901, Woodrow Wilson remarked that historically, U.S. presidents gain rhetorical powers in the wake of social turmoil like e.g. during the Civil War, the closed frontier, the industrialization, or the urbanization (cf. Schulzke 2005: 262–285). He argues that times of crisis create openings for national leadership, as the “presidential ideal” can rhetorically mobilize public opinion and thereby govern more effectively. According to Wilson, public support facilitates government actions e.g. by pressuring members of Congress to cooperate. Rhetorical crisis leadership is thus a means that allows for an effective resolution of critical situations, by indirectly granting more power to a president in a democratic system. However, crises do not guarantee successful rhetorical leadership. Wilson's presidency is a case in point here. The former President was not able to mobilize Americans' support for his vision of a world safety net, the League of Nations, after World War I. Despite the critical nature of the war experience and Wilson's rhetoric around it, he failed to win approval in the U.S. The organization was eventually founded in 1920, but the U.S. never became a member (Hogan 2006).¹⁰ Certainly, multiple factors (including party divisions in Congress) determine whether or not policies win congressional approval. While presidents can fail to mobilize public support also during critical events, their speeches are nevertheless granted particular attention in such moments. Consequently, an increased opportunity for rhetorical leadership potentially exists. But how can presidents optimize the persuasive appeal of

9. I consider the use of term isolationism problematic, as it disregards the fact that while the U.S. largely refrained from political, economic, and military entanglements in Europe or Asia before WWII, it never ceased to expand economically and protect its interests in Central and South America.

10. The fact that the organization was founded can be interpreted as a success of Wilson's ideas and his rhetoric on the international level.

their crisis rhetoric? The first step to achieve persuasion is to assume a discourse that can seemingly solve the problems. However, presidents are not free to do as they please when discursively responding to a crisis; “precedent, tradition, and expediency” limit their rhetorical options, as Windt argues (1987: 126). Bostdorff and her colleagues add: “When presidents know they must speak about crises, often the first step that they or their speechwriters take is to look at what presidents have said in past, similar crisis situations” (Bostdorff et al. 2008: 358). Drawing on these findings, I further examine in how far George W. Bush and Barack Obama follow specific rules or rhetorical patterns in their crisis narratives and discuss their persuasive appeals.

Crisis can legitimize or delegitimize presidential power. In democratic societies, voters have the possibility of judging the way their leaders managed problems by casting their ballots in elections. If presidents succeed in presenting a crisis as a course of events not caused by their administration and additionally offer solutions, which find the public’s approval, they can gain legitimacy. However, if they fail, they will suffer a loss of legitimacy. As extraordinary situations allegedly justify extraordinary means, crises can also be tempting tools to achieve political goals. During moments in history which are perceived as difficult or frightening by large parts of the population, a trusted leader will be able to pass policies, which under non-critical circumstances would likely not have won public approval. Thus, it can be in the interest of the president to promote the notion of crisis. However, the line between promoted and genuine crises is often hard to draw, as Kiewe remarks (1994: xvii). Bostdorff discusses this difficulty in her paper on Reagan’s intervention in Grenada (1991: 737–750). She stresses that although the Grenada intervention had long been planned, its execution only days after hundreds of American soldiers had been killed in Lebanon turned an expected public opinion disaster into a political decision, which found wide support within the U.S. Additionally, the positive evaluation of the Reagan’s Grenada policies was helpful in stimulating public approval for more controversial administration policies in Nicaragua, as she concludes. While Reagan might not have been responsible for creating the critical events, he rhetorically exploited the notion of crisis for his political purposes. Following this line of argumentation and taking into account the multi-layered nature of crisis, I build up my analysis on the premise that tragic or difficult events do occur, but it is presidential rhetoric that carries the power to turn them into crises.

2.2.1 Presidential crisis rhetoric as a genre

What constitutes a rhetorical genre is not only the form (as stressed in the definitions used in literary theory), but also the context, the audience’s knowledge, and

the purpose or social implication of a speech (aspects considered by rhetorical theories) (Duff 1999). Bitzer's concept of a "rhetorical situation" is crucial to my thesis. The scholar defines it as:

[A] complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence. (Bitzer 1968: 3)

Following his ideas, I argue that times of crisis constitute unique rhetorical situations. In the U.S. American context, due the mentioned central role of the presidency, the president is expected to address a distressed public, offer solace, and suggest a way out of the tragic situation. Windt was the first one to define "international crisis rhetoric" as a genre (Windt 1986: 102–116). He further distinguished the following three features: First, presidents must publicly declare the situation a crisis and illustrate the need for decisive action. Second, after announcing an international crisis situation, the president must give a narration of the event. Third, the president asks for complete public support, simultaneously calling for unity (Windt 1987). Later, he also defined the genre of "domestic crisis rhetoric" and argued that it contains three arguments. First, "the president presents his policy as representing the public interest." Second, "to give legitimacy to his claim that his policy represents the public interest, the president claims that he is supported by the majority of people, whereas his opponents represent only a minority." And third, "the president attributes good or ethical motives to himself...and to the majority that supports him. Likewise, he attributes base or dastardly motives to his opponents" (Windt 1990: 46–47). Drawing on Windt's findings, Kiewe (1994) distinguishes crisis rhetoric from traditional presidential rhetoric because of the perception of urgency and the public expectation for strong presidential leadership and discourse. The scholar describes crisis rhetoric as "the discourse initiated by decision makers in an attempt to communicate to various constituents that a certain development is critical and to suggest a certain course of action to remedy the critical situation" (Kiewe 1994: xvii). Thus, he points to the informative function of crisis oratory and the fact that it simultaneously rhetorically initiates the problem-solving process. Similarly, 't Hart, Tindall, and Brown (2009) identify three crucial crisis leadership task domains: sense making, decision making, and meaning making. And Bostdorff and O'Rourke (1997) on their part maintain that crisis rhetoric constitutes an important component of the identification, explanation, and ultimately the resolution of a crisis.

When it comes to the purpose and implications of crisis speeches, a look at existing scholarship on the rhetorical approach to genre is helpful. Aristotle distinguishes three different genres of rhetoric: deliberative, forensic, and epideictic.

Deliberative rhetoric is meant to persuade the audience to take certain actions in the future. The forensic genre, a legal type of rhetoric, judges past events. And epideictic oratory is a praise-blame rhetoric used on ceremonial occasions (cf. Aristotle 1975). Drawing on the ancient philosopher's findings, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca in their seminal work *The New Rhetoric*, describe the function of epideictic as "uniting diverse elements by projecting a unified vision of community" (1969: 51). Dow convincingly argues that contemporary crisis rhetoric combines the epideictic purpose of promoting "communal understanding" with deliberative ends of striving for "policy approval" (1989: 294–310). Kuypers similarly states that when responding to a "perception of crisis already in place" leaders move into the realm of epideictic rhetoric in order to "provide communal understanding" but notes that their speeches also "have a deliberative edge" of justifying policies (2007: 5). In accordance with these views, Jamieson and Campbell acknowledge the fact that some speeches and texts show traits from different genres and therefore refer to them as "generic hybrids" (1982: 146–157). The scholars define genre as a "constellation of elements" and argue that the individual elements are under the influence of one another as well as outside elements (ibid.: 151). Like a constellation of stars, they move together and remain in a similar relation despite their ever-changing positions.

While the Aristotelian division remains crucial for the analysis of the rhetorical purposes of individual aspects of speeches, modern findings rightly question the usefulness of classifying political oratory into one of the three classical genres. Assuming that presidential crisis rhetoric constitutes a separate new genre, as defined by Windt, my analysis will illuminate the role of epideictic and deliberative elements in Bush's and Obama's speeches.

Media framing of crisis

In the media age, it cannot be denied that modern means of mass communication play a crucial role in framing critical events. Nünning argues that the media, similarly to presidents, have the power to create crises by reporting on them (2007: 48–71). The impact of speeches held by political authorities¹¹ during crises is highly dependent on the media's reporting on them and putting them into context. As Hart and his colleagues remark, to fully understand the way Americans react to crises and the rhetoric chosen by their leaders "one must also reckon with a nation's meaning-making factories – its educational infrastructure,

11. Clearly, the amount of attention granted to presidential speeches by the media and its audiences has to do with the status of the speaker and the potential impact of his/her decisions as head of state (cf. Chapter 2.1.1).

its mass media and popular culture, its city halls and legislatures – to explain its self-understanding” (Hart, Jarvis & Lim 2002: 418). The media can bring particular issues and problems to public attention by exposing them more prominently. Kuypers coined the term “agenda-extension” to describe a process where the news media go “beyond the strict reporting of events” and instead foster a particular understanding of issues (2009: 39). The media thus can be considered an active player when it comes to shaping public opinion.

Media and politics are codependent on each other. On the one hand, politicians need the modern means of mass communication to reach the public; no matter where a speech is held, virtually every American citizen can have access to it via television, radio, newspapers, or the Internet. On the other hand, the media rely on information from politics to fill the steadily growing airtime and number of newspaper pages. In their quest for a larger audience the media follow the tested premise bad news is good news: tragic moments capture public attention more than anything; shock, fear, and curiosity stop most media-consumers from switching the channel (Robinson 2007; Williams 2014). Altheide (2006) even speaks of “entertaining fear.” Therefore, times of crisis are also busy times for newsmakers. For a democracy, it is crucial that a system of check and balance between the media and politics remains intact. Media in democratic societies should not function as a mere screen for politicians to project their ideas. They are not passive spectator but actively shape the public’s perception on certain issues. People watch, read, and listen to the news not only to get access to political speeches, but because they expect journalists to check politicians’ words, to provide facts, comments, and background information. In the end, the audience should be able to form its own opinions based on the information derived from news channels. A problem occurs if the media start working in favor of the political agenda of the administration in power. Especially in times of war, governments have a large influence on the information flow and naturally they want the war to be presented in a most favorable way. With the media on their side they have a better chance of selling their policies. Here, the question arises in how far the media are being used and in how far they participate in the government’s war propaganda? Are arrangements made for the release of information? Do the media report objectively? These critical issues need to be kept in mind when talking about the perception of crisis by the public. As Taylor sums up, one can say that the line from a healthy to a corrupt system is crossed if “[t]he window becomes a mirror for the images generated by those controlling the information” (1992: 9).

Pious argues that during times of crisis the media tend to join in on the “united we stand” spirit through pro-presidential news coverage: “There is a strong bias toward favorable presidential coverage. During crises, presidents enjoy a ‘near-monopoly’ control over information, media access, and autonomy of decision

making” (1979: 6). However, critical events certainly do not guarantee favourable coverage for governments; leaders have to perform to obtain or preserve political clout. As ‘t Hart and Tindall (2009: 31) remark, presidents need to convince news-makers to pay attention to their particular crisis frame and, if possible, support it. In her study of the rhetorical presidency as it applies to television, Stuckey argues that the President acts as “the chief storyteller in the nation” (Stuckey 1991). Whether or not he succeeds at selling his story to the media and the public depends on a multiplicity of factors. Not only the message, but also his rhetorical performance and the framing of events play a crucial role. Additionally, in the media age, the factor that Weber (2009) describes as charisma has gained importance.

Taking into account that the media have a substantial impact on the public perception of events, I consider it necessary to briefly relate to the media framings of the respective crises. This approach will provide a more complete picture of the political climate at the time when the Presidents delivered their speeches.

2.2.2 Narrating crisis: Metaphors, myths, and intertextuality

Presidents use rhetoric to shape public perception of political issues. Ideally, their narratives will make sense of events in a way that supports their policies. Beasley argues that particularly during times of crises, presidents contextualize and interpret events through a system of national values in an attempt to guide public opinion (2010: 7–35). The constructed idea of national values is purposefully vague – politicians usually avoid getting specific on what exactly they mean by it; they leave room for their audience to fill in its own perceived common references in order to reach a wide public (Parry 2012). The system of values is reflected in cultural myths, metaphors, and historical texts, known to a majority of Americans. Presidents draw upon this repertoire of discursive elements in an attempt to tell their stories in a way that will involve, unite, and ultimately persuade their audience.

Intertextuality is a fixed ingredient of crisis rhetoric. Presidents borrow on a regular basis from their predecessors, hoping to add heightened authority to their own messages. They cite well-known political speeches, religious sermons, but also texts of great socio-political importance like the Constitution or the Declaration of Independence. As Austermtühl remarks, presidential speeches “are both linked to each other as well as to other significant cultural texts” (2014: 20). In my analysis of crisis speeches, I discuss what role these quotes play in the (re-)construction of national identities and the promotion of policies.

Myths are yet another element which plays a crucial role in presidential storytelling. Roof defines them as “the elementary, yet profound, stories giving meaning and purpose to the collective life of a people” and argues that “they evoke the imagination, so crucial to national self-understanding” (2009: 287). Myths function

largely on a subconscious level and are activated through ritual. Especially in times of threat, as Richard Hughes (2004) remarks, myths are easily turned into hardened realities taken to be literally true. When romanticized and presented one-sidedly, they can be dangerous covers for the selling of nationalistic or exclusive ideas. However, they can also be used to illustrate complex phenomena and unite the public (Atwater 2007: 121–129). The scholarly body of works on the (mis-)use of myths is extensive (cf., e.g., Bottici 2007; Whitt & Perlich 2014). I agree with Roof who writes “that some grasp of America’s national myths is essential to understanding not just the resurgence of nationalistic religious rhetoric but also the country’s domestic and foreign policy in this recent period” (2009:287). He sees myths as “the foundations upon which national ideologies take shape” since they “give direction and legitimacy to political action” (ibid.:287). Drawing of his findings, I define myths as the means by which nations affirm their identities and frame their rationale for political actions. My thesis is that presidents in their crisis speeches employ myths to interpret realities and influence the way their audience perceives events. Popular myths in American culture derive partly from Christian or biblical tradition and partly from civil-religious discourse. Especially the national myths of American exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny as well as the related concept of the American Dream are crucial for America’s self-understanding as a nation, as I discuss in greater depth in later sections of this chapter.¹² For the purposes of my thesis, I identify myths in presidential addresses and discuss their role in the construction of crisis narratives. Additionally, rhetors can make use of national symbols, like flags or the national anthem, which equally serve an identity-affirming function. Often, symbols implicitly refer to national myths, a shared history, or common beliefs (Conger 1991:41). Lakoff (2006) convincingly argues that the idea of freedom functions as a reoccurring symbol in American political speeches. Like myths, symbols direct thought processes and provide a valuable access into the value system of a society or culture. Therefore, I equally include them in my analysis of presidential crisis rhetoric.

Another device, which presidents can employ to frame crisis in a way that illustrates their political perspective is metaphor. To gain public approval for crisis policies, presidents need to inspire through their rhetoric and metaphors are tools that can help them achieve this goal. The following story of two stonemasons neatly illustrates the importance of metaphor for human thinking and the perception of issues. While they were working on the same project, the masons were asked what they were doing. The first one replied: “I am cutting stone.” The second: “I am building a great cathedral” (Conger 1991:41). The latter was able to describe

12. Cf. Chapter 2.3.3.

his work in a more far-reaching and meaningful way; work for him had thus a higher purpose. The story can easily be applied to two soldiers of whom the first one asked about his current work would answer: "I am dropping bombs." While the second would say: "I am fighting terrorism." The ability to see the big picture and to evaluate the personal input as part of an important common project, gives greater meaning to individual tasks. Consequently, it makes people more willing to make sacrifices in the name of an idea they believe in.

Metaphors play a crucial role in presidential crisis rhetoric and I will consequently grant them special attention in my analysis. Therefore, I now proceed with a brief overview of relevant scholarship in the field of metaphor studies, define my working definition of the term, and lay out how I intend to decode the function of metaphors in crisis narratives.

2.2.3 Metaphor and crisis: How do metaphors function?

Metaphors, from the Greek *metaphorá* "to transfer," are images that help us understand complex phenomena by transferring meaning. In *Poetics*, Aristotle gave the basis for the traditional view on metaphor, defining it as a linguistic phenomenon, which largely falls into the realm of poetic or figurative language. He puts metaphor above all other rhetorical means used by orators: "[T]he greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances (*Poetics*: XXII, 1457b/7). This "eye for resemblance" helps speakers to visualize complex phenomena through substitution. Modern theory on metaphor however, challenges this traditional definition, which sees metaphor merely as an ornament of speech. For Ricoeur, metaphor functions not only on the rhetorical, but also on the semantic and hermeneutic level. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, he argues "there is a linguistic productive imagination that generates and regenerates meaning through the power of metaphoricity to state things in new ways" (Ricoeur 1991: 463–481). For him, fresh metaphors, that is to say the metaphors that have not lost their meaning through frequent repetition, reveal new ways of understanding the world.¹³ The transgressive potential, or semantic impertinence of metaphor, is the creation of new meaning. Metaphors creatively transform language and testify to its active, productive power. Ricoeur claims that "[a]s a part of discourse, [metaphor] bears a part of the meaning that belongs to the entire statement" (1978: 157). Thus, it always has to be seen in context in order to be properly understood. It

13. In contrast to so-called fresh metaphors, dead metaphors lost the meaning of their original source through frequent repetition, e.g. "to run for office" or "to fall in love."

needs to be stressed that the substitution and interaction theories do not contradict each other: they are both grounded in the double character of the word.

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff and philosopher Marc Johnson revolutionized the view on metaphor with their work *Metaphors We Live By*, where they suggest that it is not only central to the way we speak, but also for our thoughts and actions: "our ordinary conceptual system in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (1980: 3). According to their definition, the term conceptual metaphor refers to "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Ricoeur 1978: 157). The scholars put forward the argument that humans are encountered with conceptual metaphors since early childhood and as a consequence also learn to understand them in connection to feelings and actions. They argue that the roots of metaphors are correlated to principles by which societies function. Accordingly, metaphors are specific for every culture and reflect dominant values and ideas. To fully grasp the complexity of the phenomenon of catching onto a metaphor it is helpful to compare it to the experience of catching onto a joke. In both cases, it is necessary that the recipient operates in the same realms of socio-cultural experience as the sender. The source domain (the conceptual domain from which characteristics are borrowed and attributed to the object referred to) must have the same connotations for both of them so that the transfer of meaning into the target domain (the conceptual domain to which characteristics are attributed) can be successfully understood. This implies that sender and recipient share or are aware of the cultural norms and values of the other. For example, in Anglo-Saxon culture "up" is good while "down" is bad. Thus, the phrase "the economy is in a ditch" indicates that the economy is in a bad state, as a ditch is a lower than the surrounding terrain (Ricoeur 1978: 17). Similarly, the sender and recipient of a metaphor need to be aware of the meaning colors have in society, e.g. in Anglo-Saxon culture black represents mourning and white represents purity, while in India white symbolizes mourning. To illustrate their theory, Lakoff and Johnson give the example of the conceptual metaphor Argument Is War.¹⁴ In everyday English the metaphor appears in a variety of expressions like: "Your claims are *indefensible*." "He *attacked every weak point* in my argument." "His criticisms were *right on target*" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 4).¹⁵ The scholars point out that we do not only use war rhetoric when talking about arguments, but that (in Western societies) we assume that an argument, like an armed conflict, can be won or lost: we verbally "attack" the person we are arguing with, and whom we see as our "opponent," as we

14. For reasons of clarity, I follow the popular capitalized spelling when referring to conceptual metaphors.

15. Italics in the original.

defend our position. In this example, “argument” constitutes the target while “war” functions as the source. Although argument and war are two different phenomena, “[arguments are] partially structured, understood, and talked about in terms of war” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 4). To further explain their view, they suggest imagining a culture in which Argument Is Dance. If argument is understood as a situation in which there are no losers and winners, it becomes a more harmonic exchange, as they argue. Lakoff and Johnson’s thesis is that socio-cultural experiences determine how people frame and perceive realities through conceptual metaphors. Drawing on their findings, I assume that the way presidents employ conceptual metaphors to frame crises is not only revealing of their worldview and value system, but also influences their audience’s perception of the events and political issues they refer to. I follow Lakoff and Johnson’s definition of a conceptual metaphor as an underlying association that is systematic in both language and thought and explains something new or abstract in terms of something familiar or concrete. Although the focus of my analysis is on metaphor, I also relate to metonymies and similes, which function in similar ways (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 36).

In their study, Thibodeau and Boroditsky (2011) offered groundbreaking empirical evidence for the influence of metaphors on public opinion. The researchers gave the participants of the experiment reports on crime in a city. These reports included statistics (assault and victim numbers) and texts in which crime was either presented through the conceptual metaphor Crime As Beast or Crime As Virus. When asked how crime should be addressed, the participants were more likely to support harsher laws and increased jailing of offenders when the information sources presented to them used the Crime As Beast metaphor. When they were given the Crime As Virus framing, they were more likely to suggest social reform. Which images do these metaphors trigger? A virus is an illness that needs to be treated. A sick person did not reach this state on purpose. While exceptions certainly exist (e.g. diseases related to smoking), the common association remains that the undesirable state was reached through no fault of one’s own. In any case, the focus lies on healing and stopping the virus from spreading rather than on fault. In contrast to this, a monster is something evil and other that causes damage and deserves punishment or at least needs to be locked up to prevent further harm. Interestingly, however, the participants did not recognize metaphors as influential in their decisions. Instead, they pointed to the allegedly more substantive (often numerical) information as the motivation for their problem-solving decision. Thibodeau and Boroditsky come to the conclusion that “the influence of the metaphorical framing is covert: people do not recognize metaphors as an influential aspect in their decisions” and remark that “the influence of metaphor (...) is strong: different metaphorical frames created differences in opinion as big or bigger than those between Democrats and Republicans” (2011: 10). Their study

shows that metaphors can shape the way people think of certain problems and influence the ways they want to solve them more substantially than party lines.

Especially in times of crisis, when realities can be harsh and hard to grasp in their complexity, politicians willingly turn to metaphor to explain problems and justify proposed solutions (Burkholder & Henry 2009: 100). Metaphors put special emphasis on specific aspects that speakers want to bring to their audience's special attention. They are shortcuts that subconsciously trigger emotions and judgments. However, the fact that they simplify realities also bears dangers. Charteris-Black sums up on the risks of metaphors as follows: "they provide a cognitive filter that colors the covert political intentions of the politician; metaphors therefore only reflect right thinking from the perspective of the particular social group who benefits from their arguments" (2009: 97–109). Presidents can employ metaphors to structure their audience's views on political issues in the way that presents their perspective as the only right one. That is why linguist Jacob Mey sees "[t]he inherent danger of metaphor (...) in the uncritical acceptance of a single-minded model of thinking and its continued, thoughtless recycling, leading to the adoption of one solution as the remedy to all evils" (2001: 305). The simplification implied in a metaphor can cause a polarization between right and wrong and presents the personal view of the speaker as the only possible solution to a problem; it leaves no room for compromise or discussion. Moreover, metaphors also bear the risk of hiding important facts. For examples with regard to issues relating to war, the (mis-)use of metaphor can be dangerous, as it conceals politically unpopular aspects of certain policies. Lakoff (2003) criticizes that the repeated calling of Saddam Hussein a "tyrant" by political leaders (which was additionally picked up by the media) has caused the public to forget the fact that many civilians have been killed during the military intervention. The metaphorical framing presented the war as a righteous battle against an evil tyrant, hiding that the population also suffered from the war actions.

Metaphors reflect on the system of values and ideas within which presidents (and any other rhetors) operate and which they seek to promote. Does that mean that a Democrat would use different metaphors than a Republican? In *Moral Politics* Lakoff puts forward the thesis that the division between the so called red states and the blue states is more than just a division between what is conservative and what is liberal; he claims that it is also a division into worldviews represented by metaphors (1996: iv). To illustrate his point, the scholar argues that if the conceptual metaphor of Nation As Family and Government As Parent is applied, the strict father model is at the center of the Conservative worldview, while Liberals subscribe to the nurturing parent model. My analysis will test whether the Republican and Democratic President do in fact use different metaphorical framings in their crisis narratives or if crisis call for a particular set of metaphors, which cross party lines.

There is a multitude of different types of metaphors from which presidents can choose to frame their crisis narratives (cf., e.g., Carver & Pikalo 2008). Among others, Lakoff (1991) discusses the conceptual metaphors *War Is Politics*, *Politics Is Business*, *Enemy As Demon Metaphor* (which arises from *The Fairy Tale of The Just War* framing), and *War Is Competitive Game* and explains how they were politically used to justify the First Gulf War. Moreover, the cognitive linguist points the crucial role of the *Nation/Country Is Person* metaphor in politics: personification can stimulate identification processes and generate more positive attitudes towards the concepts or entities that have “become human,” as he argues (Lakoff 2003). Next to personification, the related metaphorical process that Charteris-Black (2005: 15) calls “depersonalization” is also an important tool in political language. Depersonalization takes place when something human or animate is referred to through words or phrases that in other contexts would be applied to something inanimate. For example, when the expression “collateral damage” (an euphemism which would normally be viewed as referring to something inanimate) is used to describe the civilian or unintentional victims of bombings, it hides and belittles human losses and sufferings (Charteris-Black 2005: 15). Wodak and her colleagues argue that metaphors used by politicians play an important role in “the mental construction of nation” as they, on the one hand, imply in-group “equality and sameness” and, on the other hand, they stress out-group differences (Wodak et al. 2009: 44). They can support the rhetorical creation of a united “us” in opposition to an allegedly different “them.” In this sense, metaphors can also play a crucial role in the processes of Othering, meaning the construction of a supposedly different and lesser Other.

2.2.4 Othering

Edward Said (1979) popularized the term “Othering” in reference to Western misrepresentations of non-Western cultures, which were, among others, meant to justify colonialism. Similarly to Lakoff, Said puts forward the thesis that language causes us to see others and ourselves in certain ways that affect our thinking. The use of words such as “they” or “we,” transforms “them” into the Other. Foucault more broadly defines the process of Othering as an integral part of human nature, which is strongly connected to power relations. According to the philosopher, most people (meaning: a substantial proportion of the representatives of the dominant culture) like to consider themselves as the norm and take notice of the differences towards other people. Othering occurs when differences from the dominant culture within a society, in terms of race, political views, sexuality, religion etc. are presented as divergence from the norm and the people who show such divergences are considered weaker, less, or wrong. It is thus a form of power

acting through rhetoric, applied in order to achieve particular goals and to preserve domination (Foucault 1980: 146–165). The process of Othering is dependent on language that carries judgment and establishes divides, like e.g. the conceptual metaphors Morality Is Light and Immorality is Darkness (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 16). In Western cultures, “light” represents the good, safe, and comforting while “dark” stands for the evil, frightening, and dangerous (ibid.). The Bible often makes use of the binary oppositions up/down and light/dark as metaphors to establish dichotomies between good and evil. “Light” and “up” are frequently used to present holiness while “down” and “dark” illustrate sin and wickedness; e.g. heaven is above the earth while hell is below, God is lightness while Satan is darkness, the Babylonian exile is dark for the people of Jerusalem while redemption can be brought from the bright divine sky. As is reads in Jeremiah 13:16: “Light is a living force, the light of life, but darkness is dead, the shadow of death.”¹⁶ In my analysis of crisis speeches, I explore in how far the Presidents make use of Othering techniques to discredit opponents and/or advance their political goals. Next to metaphor analysis and an analysis of the use of person deixis I refer to Cap’s proximization framework (Cap 2008b, 2013; Chilton 2004) in order to dismantle Bush’s and Obama’s construction of particular spatial, temporal, and axiological relationships between “us” and “them.”

To conclude on the narrative elements in presidential crisis speeches, metaphors, myths, intertextuality, and processes of Othering share the common discourse function of persuasion and the expressive potential for cognitive and emotional engagement. They appeal to the audience’s emotions through conscious cognition and unconscious association with beliefs and values (Charteris-Black 2005). Therefore, I consider them central tools in presidential speeches and analyze how they are used in the framing of crises and the promotion of policies. I will specifically relate to the way the use of the mentioned narrative techniques parallels the tradition of the jeremiad, which I define as a core element of presidential crisis rhetoric.

2.3 The American jeremiad

The American jeremiad was born in an effort to impose metaphor upon reality. It was nourished by an imagination at once defiant of history and profoundly attuned to the historical forces that were shaping the community. And in this dual capacity it blossomed with every major crisis.

Sacvan Bercovitch, *The American Jeremiad* (Bercovitch 1978: 62)

16. All biblical quotes refer to King James Version of the Holy Bible.

The jeremiad is a term commonly applied to literary works, in which the author laments the state of society and its morals. The tone of the account is serious and contains a prophecy of society's imminent downfall as consequence of committed sins. The figure of speech frequently employed in these texts is the *cataplexis*, from the Greek for "awful menace," the threatening or prophesying of payback for ill doing. The biblical Jeremiah, to whom the jeremiad owes its name, was a master at this warning rhetoric. The Hebrew prophet, who lived in the seventh century B.C., foresaw the downfall of Israel and attributed it to the nation's abandonment of the Covenant with Yahweh. He denounced the religious and moral wrongdoing of his people and called on them to repent and reform in order for God to restore them to his favor. Jeremiah was one of many Israeli prophets, but only a few of them are present in the Old Testament. These so-called men of God could gain prominence and become involved in the public affairs of the nation – like Nathan, the adviser to King David. In fact, it was part of the "prophetic calling" to criticize the reigning and to strive to change their politics (Thompson 1980: 5). In the Book of Jeremiah, he foresees the downfall of the Kingdom of Judah, and in the Book of Lamentations, he bemoans the prophesized conquest after its occurrence.¹⁷

When discussing Jeremiah's works one has to be aware that they are not books in the modern sense, they can be rather described as collections of prophecies. Some are written in prose, others in poetry, partly they come from the prophet's feather, and partly, as widely agreed, they were completed by other authors. The principles of arrangement are the subject of numerous scholarly publications as the structure of the work is highly complex. Topics intertwine and reappear, messages are illustrated through poems (including war-poems) and parables. Among the most frequently used motifs are the Covenant between Yahweh and Israel and the cry for vengeance upon one's enemies (ps. 17:13–14; cf. Jer. 20:12). The prophet conveys the message that "persecutors should be brought to shame and filled with terror and the day of disaster should fall upon them and break them completely" (Thompson 1980: 426). Subsequently, it is announced, that the just punishment should come upon the guilty. The balance between fear (of falling from grace and being punished) and hope (of being saved and regaining God's blessing) is crucial for the functioning of the jeremiad; these two motifs alternately dominate the accounts: Chapters 1–25 deal with warning and judgment (however, some segments here are also concerned with hope, see e.g. 3:11–18; 6:14–15; 23:1–8), Chapters 30–33 pass on a message of hope, while 21:11–23:8 comprise oracles against the kings of Judah, and 23:9–40 contain oracles against the prophets. However, the

17. The titles of the books refer to King James Version of the Holy Bible.

passages on hope and fear are not strictly disconnected; even in the Book of Consultations, Chapters 30–33, words of doom can be found (32:28–35).

The classical jeremiad can be summarized as a lamentation of society's doom, which simultaneously is seen as just punishment. Jeremiadic speech blames and frightens its listeners, but it also calls them out of sin into a new and liberating beginning. Committed wrongdoings are explained as the causes of society's bad habits and missing morals. The denunciation of society's wickedness is coupled to a prophecy of its downfall. Nevertheless, Jeremiah makes it clear that the people of Judea hold their future in their own hands and can regain God's grace.

2.3.1 The American jeremiad: America's first distinct genre

In the seventeenth century, Puritans brought the biblical form of the jeremiad to North America. In 1630, while still aboard the *Arbella* on his way to the Massachusetts Bay Colony, John Winthrop lamented decline and called for reform in his famous sermon "A Model of Christian Charity." In analogy to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, (Mathew 5:14, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden.") the Governor presented his dooming vision of the state of society and emphasized the colonies' chance to build a new model community, "a city upon a hill" (Thompson 1980:111). In his acclaimed *American Jeremiad*, Sacvan Bercovitch (1978) comments on the influence of the books of Jeremiah on Puritan sermons and later on political speeches as well as literary works. Puritan preachers combined the rhetorical style of the biblical prophet with their religious beliefs and their personal, historical experiences as immigrants in the colonies. This strategy helped them interpret calamities and colonial hardships by tying them to alleged moral flaws within their communities. The jeremiad soon became a favorite tool to Puritan leaders, who used it as a means of "social control" that directed parishioners' actions towards particular ends (Bercovitch 1975: 154). In their preaching, ministers called for reform, identified sins, and threatened with terrors, which would occur, if people did not repent. The sermons gave practical guidelines on how to form a political community based on the Puritan morals. Religious and political life was highly intertwined. A good example hereof is the fact that the General Court of Massachusetts from 1634 till 1834 opened each year with an election sermon (Elliott 1975).¹⁸

As the settlers adapted to their new living conditions, so did their jeremiad. It was modified to incorporate new experience and suit the changing rhetorical needs of speakers. Perry Miller (1982), one of the most influential scholars of

18. With the exception of 1684–1691, when the sermons were stopped to protest the revocation of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's charter.

American Puritanism, remarks that the first generation of Puritan minister and scholars in North America, most notably John Winthrop, Thomas Hooker, John Cotton, Richard Mather, and John Davenport preached a still forming, more liberal version of the jeremiad up until the end of the 1640s. For the second generation (1660–1690), the jeremiad took a more distinct form and followed strict conventions, as he argues. A minister's reputation came to be based on his skillfulness at prognosticating disaster, which were to come upon people as just punishment for the downfall of their morals. Miller (1982) maintains that virtually all sermons from that period can be classified as American jeremiads; for him the term can be applied from the 1660s on. The second half of the seventeenth century was the period when the circulation of jeremiads in print was so rapidly increasing that they soon became the only domestic literary works sold (Miller 1982: 29). Therefore, Miller calls the jeremiad America's "first distinctive literary genre" (qtd. in Bercovitch 1978: 6). A milestone text, which set the standard for later jeremiads, is Samuel Danforth's "A Brief Recognition of New England Errand into the Wilderness" (Danforth 1670). The Covenant relationship between the colonies and God is at the center of the election sermon, which draws parallels between Puritan migration to the American wilderness and the Jewish Exodus experiences. Danforth reminds his audience that they are on an "errand into the wilderness," a mission to establish a purified model of Christianity, and criticizes that the colony has deviated from its original purpose (Danforth 1670). Other famous American jeremiads from this period include Increase Mather's "The Day of Trouble Is Near" (1673) and "A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New-England" (Mather 1673, 1676). In literature, the theme was first fully set by Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan poet, minister, and physician. Wigglesworth most well-known work, *The Day of Doom* (1662), which became a bestseller in the colonies, is a classical jeremiad, as already its title suggests. In his famous 1662 poem, "God's Controversy with New-England," he bewails the backslidings of the young generation (Wigglesworth 1662). This "versified jeremiad" was written on the occasion of a disastrous drought, which the author explains as God's punishment for the fading religious spirit among New England's youth (Wigglesworth 1662). Specifically, he criticizes their resistance towards the Half-Way Covenant from 1662.

This Covenant was a form of governing church memberships, which implied that second and third generations, and later immigrants, did not have the same conversion experiences as the first settlers and should therefore be treated as "half-members" (Mather 1673). Until they actually personally experienced conversion, choosing to be "born again," they were encouraged to participate in annual ceremonies of Covenant Renewal, rededicating themselves to the holy "errand" that brought their ancestors to New England (Elliott 1975: 163). Puritan preachers hoped that this plan would maintain some of the Church's fading influence in society and

that the half-members would see the benefits of full membership by being exposed to teachings and piety. In fact, in the beginning, it drew more people into churches and invigorated those already under Church discipline (Elliott 1975: 163). What characterizes the rhetoric of Covenant Renewal is the fact that it deemphasizes the sinfulness within the community. Rather than blaming all ills (like diseases or natural hazard) on moral decline among parishioners, the Covenant Renewal jeremiads in the second half of the seventeenth century attributed problems to external forces, like Britain, the Native population, or witches (Miller 1953). Thus, these reformed sermons demanded less self-reflection from ward members.

Life in the colonies was not spared from generational conflicts and as a result of subsequent youth rebellions, periods of religious reawakening and the loosening of religious standards were alternating. While the early eighteenth century is, in religious terms, characterized as a period when the role of Puritanism in public life was shrinking, the 1730s brought a turning point. Religious conservatives criticized the Half-Way Covenant as not engaging enough, prompting the emergence of the so-called First Great Awakening (Miller 1953). One of its most prominent representatives, Jonathan Edwards, emphasized on America's alleged mission and called for a return to God as well as a binding restoration of the Covenant (Miller 1953: 30).¹⁹ His depiction of life in the colonies and his beliefs on the concept of hell as a real place, as described in his 1741 sermon "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," provide an insight to Puritanism during this period. Bercovitch sees the sermon as representative of "the eighteenth-century jeremiad [which] established the typology of America's mission" (1978: 93). Even after the decline of Puritan New England, the jeremiad continued to thrive. Bercovitch traces the persistence of the form beyond the "errand into the wilderness," showing that it reappears in all forms of literature throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: from Thoreau's *Walden* to Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, from Whitman's *The Leaves of Grass* to Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (cf. Bercovitch 1978: 24). It managed to remain up to date by constantly reinventing itself. Perry Miller describes it as a literary type that adapts and appeals to subsequent generation and quotes Wystan Auden who remarks that "it makes sense of experiences which previously had been ignored" (1953: 31).

2.3.2 Biblical vs. American jeremiad: The mythology of mission

From the beginning, a sense of mission distinguished the American jeremiad from its prototype in the same way as it made its authors, the religious settlers, also distinct.

19. Interestingly, Edwards was Stoddard's (minister who introduced the Half-Covenant) grandson.

The promise of a better world was tied to the pressure of living up to one's moral ideals and to successfully form a model community that the world would look up to. Jendrysik argues that America has been "both the land of promise and the land of punishment. The standards of the mission of the nation are set so high that disappointment must follow" (Jendrysik 2007:2). The Puritans saw themselves as allegedly "chosen," and this privileged position brought about high responsibility. They were therefore doomed to failure, as they were naturally not spared from difficulties, catastrophes, and crises in the colonies. In a jeremiadic manner, the religious settlers first interpreted all problems as divine punishment for their sins. Eventually, Puritans revised the message of the jeremiad, minimizing the threat of divine retribution. They believed God's punishments were "*corrective* not destructive," and started interpreting calamities and crises as test rather than a sign of divine wrath (Bercovitch 1978:8).²⁰ In contrast to the European jeremiad, which constantly unleashed a torrent of guilt upon its audience, the American variation added the dimension of progress and the hope that public life could improve. Bercovitch remarks that the strong element of "deep, stubborn optimism" is what distinguishes the American jeremiad from its prototype (1978:8). It contains not only a threat, but also hope, as it offers a guide to the fulfillment of a destiny and an implicit promise of ultimate success. Miller (1953:31) adds that the New England version of the genre contrasts a sense of fear and uncertainty with an optimistic sense of purpose about the future. And Murphy puts emphasis on the fact that the American jeremiad attempts to rally colonists around a notion of "communal chosenness" (2008:36). In all its variations, the American jeremiad remains inseparable from the concept of the Covenant: while it laments the state of crisis, it does not refer to a crisis of confidence in principles – America remains destined and only minor changes and a mere *renewal* of the Covenant are called for – but rather infuses American culture with confidence in its own allegedly special destiny (Murphy 2009:128–156). In Bercovitch's words, it "join[s] lament and celebration in reaffirming America's mission" (1978:11).

Probably the most striking development in the American jeremiad is its secularization. Processes of self-identification in the colonies were highly influenced not only by Puritan religion, but also the frontier experience, historical events like the War of Independence, and above all through immigration, which brought diversity. American jeremiads connect these profane, historic developments with religious motifs; as Murphy concludes: "what makes the American jeremiad American is its connection to a larger, sacred story tied intimately to the particularities of the nation's origins and development" (2008:10). Especially the concept of "errand," as the idea of a people on a special mission that has to live up to its self-assigned ideals,

20. Italics in the original.

“entails a fusion of secular and sacred history,” which characterizes the “Yankee” jeremiad (Murphy 2008:9). As Bercovitch writes:

The Yankee Jeremiahs took advantage of this movement from sacred to profane to shift the focus of figural authority. In effect, they incorporated Bible history into the American experience – they substituted a regional for a biblical past, consecrated the American present as a movement from promise to fulfillment, and translated fulfillment from its meaning within the closed system of sacred history into a metaphor of limitless secular improvement. (Bercovitch 1978:93–94)

The gradually secularized version of the American jeremiad was more inclusive than its Puritan predecessor. While it remained based on Judeo-Christian biblical traditions, it began to include historic experience, which more immigrants with different ethnic and religious backgrounds could relate to. The myth of American exceptionalism, the idea that Americans are a special nation, developed and gave the foundation to America’s civil religion. Due to the central role of these two related concepts – civil religion and exceptionalism – for the functioning of American jeremiads, I will now briefly refer to relevant literature in this field, taking into account the roots and implications of these ideas.

2.3.3 The myth of American exceptionalism as root of the civil-religious jeremiad

A 2010 Gallup poll found that 80 percent of Americans believe the United States “has a unique character because of its history and Constitution that sets it apart from other nations as the greatest in the world” (J. Jones 2010). While the survey does not specify on the effects of this conviction, it nevertheless reveals that the notion of exceptionalism remains crucial for American self-understanding. Numerous academic publications aim to illuminate the influence of the concept on public discourse in the United States. Among others, Deborah Madsen (1998) traces the persistence of the myth from colonial times to contemporary literature, pop culture, and politics. Edwards and Weiss (2011) argue that exceptionalism is a reoccurring theme in the rhetoric of U.S. presidents. According to McClay (2004), the myth gives insight not only into the resurgence of nationalistic and civil-religious political rhetoric but also the country’s domestic and foreign policy. The scholar points to exceptionalism as the root of America’s “missionary” interventionist foreign politics and argues: “It was only natural that inhabitants with such a strong sense of historical destiny would eventually come to see themselves and their nation as collective bearers of a world-historical mission” (McClay 2004: 4–19). Lipset (1996) describes exceptionalism as a “double-edged sword,” since it was not only instrumental in uniting the nation but was also used

to justify ideas like Manifest Destiny or policies like imperialism. An even more critical outlook on the concept is provided by Ignatieff (2005), who argues that it promotes “double standards” for example in the area of human right and “legal isolationism,” meaning the tendency of U.S. courts to ignore the jurisdiction of others. Appleby (1992) puts the focus on yet another problematic inherent feature of exceptionalist ideology as she remarks that it helped to exclude groups like the Native population, African Americans, or women from the allegedly true national discourse. There are numerous theoretical approaches to discussing the myth of exceptionalism and not all of them focus on its religious dimension; as Ceaser points out, there have been “different views influenced by different sources including (besides religion) various philosophical doctrines, applications of scientific theories, and reasoning based on political-historical analysis” (Ceaser 2012: 1). However, most scholars in their definitions refer to the Puritan origins of the concept. A look back in American history proves useful for a more complete understanding of the myth of exceptionalism.

Tocqueville, in his much acclaimed 1835 work *Democracy in America*, was the first one to mention the term “exceptionalism” to describe the United States (de Tocqueville 2003). He used it in reference to the uniqueness of the immigrant nation who founded the world’s first modern democracy. However, the idea of America as a unique and exceptional entity is older than the country itself and goes back to the early colonial times. The Puritans saw themselves as chosen, with a special relationship to God (Murphy 2008: 10). Winthrop summarizes the hopes, but also the high expectations set before the settlers in his often quoted “A Model of Christian Charity” sermon:

For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world. (Winthrop 1639)

The moral urge to be a model of a better society, judged by people on earth and God in heaven is at the heart of the speech. It underlines the nation’s sense of chosenness, the self-identification as a people on a mission for a better world. Bercovitch argues that “[t]he Winthrop variation (...) transmutes historical displacement into a new identity” (Bercovitch 1997: 23). He further remarks that Puritan leaders in their jeremiads depicted the colonies as a sort of New Israel (Bercovitch 1978: 98–99). Murphy elaborates on this topic and argues that the tendency to draw parallels between the new Americans and the ancient Israelites served to illustrate and add legitimacy to their idea of the nation’s allegedly exceptional character; it helped establish the myth of America’s origin as the new Promised Land and Americans as the new chosen

people (2008: 10). Bellah sees the deepest source of what he calls the country's "civil religion" precisely in this Puritan-derived founding myth of America as a New Israel (1967: 1–21). In 1967, the scholar coined the term "civil religion" in his influential article "Civil Religion in America," where he defines it as a "public religious dimension," which "is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals" and "exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches" (ibid.: 1–2). Bellah understands civil religion in America as a complex system of symbols and ideas that involves reading history in a way that seems to reveal "God's purposes." Among the sacred roots of civil religious belief he lists historical events like the American Revolution and the Civil War; "sacred" texts like the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, or Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; "sacred" places like the Lincoln Memorial, Arlington War Cemetery, or Bunker Hill and Gettysburg; "sacred" people or prophets above all the Founding Fathers and some former presidents (most notably Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln); "sacred" objects like the national flag; "sacred" days like Memorial Day or Independence Day; hymns like "God Bless America," and rituals e.g. prayers at public events such as inaugurations and the beginnings of sessions of Congress. Other well-known examples of the omnipresence of civil religion in American everyday life are the national motto "In God We Trust," which in 1956 replaced the previous secular *E Pluribus Unum* or the frequent appearance of the phrase "one nation, under God," e.g. on U.S. currency or the Pledge of Allegiance.

Although the concept of civil religion gained importance in the American academic context through Bellah, the idea is not new. It extends back at least to classical antiquity, to the local gods of Greece, the civil theology of Plato, and to the Romans' state cult, which made the emperor into an object of worship (McClay 2004: 4–19). The first one to use the expression "civil religion" was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Chapter 8, book 4 of *The Social Contract* the French philosopher describes what he regards as the moral and spiritual foundation essential for any modern society, a means of cementing the people's allegiances to their polity. He outlines the main dogmas of the civil religion: God's existence, life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance (Rousseau 1968). According to Rousseau, civil religion has served the purpose of unifying the state by proving a common "sacred authority" for its citizens. In his article, Bellah references Rousseau and assumes an argumentative approach that resembles the one of the philosopher. However, Bellah goes one step further than his predecessor claiming that "certain common elements of religious orientation," shared by the great majority of Americans, "have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American

life, including the political sphere” (1967: 4). Thus, civil religion does not only shape the sense of common morals within a society, but also formalizes and strengthens religious (or religiously derived) values by developing a political and legal system based on them. According to Bellah (1967), civil religion interprets American history and supports a unifying myth for the nation of different peoples and religions. It permits religion to play a fundamental role in shaping the moral vision of a country in a way that removes theological concerns from the public arena.

Bellah’s article sparked a controversial debate among American sociologists (cf., e.g., Gehrig 1981: 51–63; Hammond 1976: 169–182). Not all of his colleagues share his conviction that American civil religion can perform the religious functions of integration, legitimation, and prophecy. Many academics find civil religion to be a vague or artificial term and different disciplines stress different aspects in their definitions. Most notably, Richard Fenn disagrees with Bellah and argues that a modern, secular society does not rely on religion of any kind as its primary source of “taken for granted” legitimation, nor for social integration; according to him, efficient technical means of supplying basic human needs now play that role, which religion once played in pre-modern times (1977: 502–517). Another influential voice in the debate is the one raised by Coleman, who remarked on the complexity involved in defining the concept and demonstrated that, in the United States, civil religion is sufficiently advanced to be clearly differentiated from the political stances of the various religious groups represented nationwide (1970: 67–77). In fact, Bellah (1975) himself grew increasingly disillusioned with the concept and in his book, *The Broken Covenant*, concludes that it is nothing but “an empty and broken shell.” Nevertheless, his thesis remains a basis in the modern discussion on the American character.

For the purposes of my analysis of presidential crisis rhetoric, I follow Bellah’s interpretation of civil religion as “the religious dimension, found in the religious life of every people, through which it interprets its historical experience in light of transcendent reality” (1975: 3). Meanwhile, agreeing with Appleby (1992), I acknowledge the excluding power of national myths, like exceptionalism, which developed into a civil religion. Consequently, I look at their role in the processes of Othering in presidential speeches. Following Esch, I am convinced that “the most powerful legitimization effects in political discourse are achieved with a proximization strategy involving political myth” (2010: 364). In her work, Esch refers to Cap’s definition of axiological proximization, in which “events are construed as following from an unprecedented and growing ideological clash between [those inside the deictic center] and [those outside the deictic center]” (Cap 2005: 14) and argues that myths constitute an important mechanism of axiological proximization. Specifically, I relate to the way Bush employs the myth of American

exceptionalism and the myth of a clash of civilizations to make distant events and actors seem closer and thus more tangible and threatening to his audience.

I argue that a set of distinct values, myths, and symbols shared and understood by a political community, which is not tied to a specific confession, continues to provide an allegedly divine sanction for the political practices in the United States.²¹ I see civil religion as a sort of social glue, the least common denominator for America as a multiethnic and multi-religious society or, to cite Benedict Anderson (1983), “imagined community.”

2.3.4 Civil religion and presidential rhetoric in times of crisis

As Roderick Hart (1977) and others have shown, U.S. presidents routinely appeal to civil religion and reference divine power. This tendency seems to increase in times of crisis. Bellah remarks that “[a]t a moment of great social crisis like famine or war or at a time of momentous political transition, solemn religious symbolism – for example the inauguration of an American president – by reference to what does not change helps to make change tolerable” (Bellah 1965). Robert Ivie similarly argues that civil-religious discourse “achieves its fullest expression during moments of crisis” and explains that “civic piety offer[s] the people a sense of order in an otherwise turbulent world – hope for the future grounded on their understanding of the past, including America’s special Covenant with God” (1951: 11).

However, the way leaders use civil religion for persuasive purposes in critical situations can differ widely. Among other aspects, scholars distinguish between “priestly” and “prophetic” civil religion, following the basic typology introduced by Max Weber (Weber 1978; cf., e.g., Marty 1974: 145–146; Fairbanks 1981: 214–232). Gary Smith states that “[b]y presiding over the nation’s rituals and reaffirming its creeds, presidents have served as the prophets and priests of this civil religion. They have employed civil religion to unite Americans and to frame and win support for specific policies” (2008: 4). The scholar maintains that generally, presidents in their use of common faith rhetoric have operated more as priests than as prophets. That is to say, they used civil religion as a tool to rhetorically “offer God’s comfort and solace to people in the midst of tragedy and affliction” (Smith 2008: 4). Priestly presidential rhetoric promotes unity and provides comfort and hope by evoking civil religious symbols and motifs. However, leaders can employ the rhetoric of civil religion also in a “prophetic” way, which uses biblical themes to challenge citizens to change their attitudes and actions in alleged “relation to God’s will and standards” (Smith 2006: 424). Lincoln is often

21. I add “seemingly,” as the discussed national myths have their roots in Judeo-Christian tradition.

mentioned as an example of a leader who exercised this “prophetic” form of civil religious rhetoric, emphasizing on the idea of a country on a mission to promote his political agenda (Marty 1974: 147–149). One inherent danger in the use of prophetic civil religion in presidential crisis rhetoric, which I will keep in mind in my discussion of the speeches, is that it leaves no room for dissent, since the “prophet” implicitly claims to offer divine justification for his suggested policies. I am specifically interested in the way the Presidents make use of priestly and prophetic strands of civil religion to construct their narratives: I will test if George W. Bush and Barack Obama show a preference for one of the two modes of using civil religious discourse or if specific types of crisis invite particular framings.

2.3.5 How do jeremiads function? Constructing a narrative between hope and fear

Bercovitch defines the characteristics of the seventeenth-century American jeremiad as follows: “First, a precedent from Scripture that sets out the communal norms; then, a series of condemnations that detail the actual state of the community (...); and finally a prophetic vision that unveils the promises, announces the good things to come, and explains away the gap between fact and ideal” (1978: 16). David Howard-Pitney (1990) makes the general claim that virtually all jeremiads, also the modern secular ones in which biblical illusions are replaced by a set of civil religious values, consist of three structural elements, which are reminiscent of Bercovitch’s division. First, the jeremiad rearticulates God’s alleged *promise* to the Puritans; it identifies America as a special land and Americans as a chosen people. Second, it laments processes of *decline* and criticizes Americans for having failed to fulfill the terms of their special Covenant. The third component is *prophesy*; jeremiads predict that all hope is not lost and that America can get back on the right pass and fulfill their national mission (Howard-Pitney 1990). This book explores in how far these structural elements of the jeremiad play a role in modern presidential crisis speeches.

The functioning of jeremiads is built upon the dialectic tension between “hope in the Lord and fear of his wrath” (McKenna 2007: 41). In order to persuade their audiences, aspiring rhetorical Jeremiahs alternate between motifs of promise and despair. Bercovitch argues that it is this tension between the ideal and the real that motivates people to act:

[The jeremiad] posits a movement from promise to experience – from the ideal of community to the shortcomings of community life – and thence forward, with prophetic assurance, toward the resolution that incorporates (as it transforms) both the promise and the condemnation. (Bercovitch 1978: 16)

The scholar maintains that the warning of decline is meant to instill a sense of anxiety with the community and consequently to inspire self-improvement. Furthermore, he remarks that the idea of crisis became a source of strength for Puritan Jeremiahs who “fastened upon it, gloried it, even invented it if necessary,” as it allowed them to exercise social control (Bercovitch 1978:62). Crisis calls for improvement while the notion of chosenness stimulates processes of renewal and reform as it implies ultimate success. The mythology of Covenant functions as a source of hope: since it was allegedly God himself who sent America on its mission, the country under His guidance must also be capable of redeeming the promise. The optimistic American jeremiad interprets calamities and problems as tests, which reaffirm the country’s supposed special status. Thus, it finds hope even in despair.

Leaders acting as rhetorical Jeremiahs can apply fear to frighten audiences into accepting their suggested policies, which often require additional efforts or sacrifices. Already Aristotle remarked on the persuasive power of fear, stressing that it “makes people inclined to deliberation” (*Art of Rhetoric*: II.5, 1383b). To evoke fear, the rhetor has to identify a danger, pinpointing the subjects and objects of threat. According to Skrimshire, fear not only “represents a dialectical tool in distinguishing between virtue and vice” but it is also “indispensable to any political economy and sovereign rule” (2008: 17–18). However, an excessive use of fear appeals can paralyze the audience and thus interferes with processing of the recommended change in behavior. If decline or punishment is inevitable, there is no incentive to work towards improvement. Therefore, Jeremiahs must also offer enough hope to prevent despair. The American jeremiad is a warning rather than the announcement of unpreventable catastrophes; it implies that it is not too late to change and thereby avert a disaster. A successful jeremiad must offer a consoling vision; apart from frightening the audience with dooming prophecies, orators have to spread optimism for the future.

As I consider the skillful balance between fear and hope to be one of the key features of the jeremiad, I discuss in how far these two emotions play a role in the construction of presidential crisis narratives. On the linguistic level, I look for fear-arousing and hope-evoking vocabulary in George W. Bush’s and Barack Obama’s speeches. Here, the Dictionary of Affect in Language’s value of pleasantness attributed to single words serves as a helpful empirical tool. Additionally, I discuss in greater depth how the Presidents employ myths, metaphors, and rhetorical techniques like Othering to evoke emotions. Meanwhile, I point to dangers of emotional appeals, putting emphasis on the ways in which they can distort judgments. Specifically, I ask: Do the Presidents use fear “as a means to stifle dissent and to maintain the potentially repressive power of state” (Pfau 2007:216–237)? When does fear rhetoric move into the realm of propaganda? Which role

do emotions play in creating the image of the foreign as the evil? Can fear rhetoric prompt citizens to trade in civil liberties for the idea of greater safety? And finally, do the concept of chosenness and the related hope that America's special mission will ultimately lead to success give rise to nationalist and chauvinist ideas in presidential crisis rhetoric?

2.3.6 Conclusions and working definitions: Modern jeremiads and jeremiadic speech

Over the course of American history, the jeremiad evolved to suit the needs of subsequent generations of rhetorical Jeremiahs. In the New England colonies it gained popularity as a Puritan sermon. Later, it expanded to encompass a variety of ethos and media and became the form of poems, songs, novels, speeches, articles, and even movies (Jendrysik 2002: 361–383). Among others, Bob Dylan's lyrics (cf. Gilmour 2004; Stephanson 2010), Michael Moore's films, and the political commentary programs of Bill O'Reilly have been classified as modern jeremiads (Jendrysik 2006). Remarking on this persistent influence of the form on contemporary America culture, Brinkley claims that we live in "an era of best-selling jeremiads on both sides of the political divide" (Brinkley 2006: 10).

The American jeremiad has not only been crucial to the cultural life and the arts but also sustained its importance in social life and public matters. It reflects on and accompanies some of the most important political changes in U.S. history. Bercovitch (1978) depicts its role in the War of Independence and the Civil War. Wilson Jeremiah Moses' and David Howard-Pitney's studies show how African Americans adapted the jeremiad to criticize White Americans for sustaining a racial divide (Moses 1982; Howard-Pitney 1990). The African American jeremiad played a role in the abolitionist and emancipation movements, voiced among others by Frederick Douglass or Maria Miller Stewart, and later in the fight for Civil Rights, most prominently voiced by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr (Jasinski & Murphy 2009: 97–215). When it comes to social criticism of twentieth-century American elites and chiefly academia, Jendrysik sees Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* as "foundational work of the modern American jeremiad" (Jendrysik 2007: 37). Bloom (1988) combines a critique of modern America with familiar themes and motifs that reappear in American discourses since the early days of colonization (e.g. the notion of exceptionalism). Scholars have so far discussed the influence of the jeremiad on political rhetoric largely on the basis of individual famous speeches including Lincoln's (1861b) State of the Union Address (Tackach 2002: 125–147), Roosevelt's (1933a) First Inaugural Address (Smith & Smith 1994: 140–143), or Robert F. Kennedy's (1968) 'A Time of Shame and Sorrow' (Murphy 1990: 401–414, 420). Moreover, academic articles, which trace Puritan rhetorical traditions in presidential

speechmaking and therefore had a crucial influence on this book, include Ritter's discussion of the influence of the jeremiad tradition on presidential nomination acceptance addresses (1980: 153–171), Bostdorff's comparison of George W. Bush's 9/11 rhetoric to Puritan Covenant Renewal sermons (2003: 293–319), and Johannesen's reading of Ronald Reagan's economic discourse as a jeremiad (1986: 79–89). However, no systematic studies on the influence of the jeremiad tradition on the genre of presidential crisis rhetoric have been conducted so far.

My understanding of the American jeremiad is chiefly influenced by the milestone works of Bercovitch and Miller as well as the more recent findings of Murphy and Jendrysik (Bercovitch 1978; Miller 1953, 1958, 1967, 1982; Murphy 2008; Jendrysik 2007). Bercovitch notes that “[t]he American jeremiad was a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private, identify the shifting ‘signs of the times’ to certain traditional metaphors, themes, and symbols” (1978: xi). He broadly defines it as a “cultural phenomenon, embodying a symbiosis (not a dichotomy) – a fusion of social and literary traditions that opened into an interactive network of art, economy, value system, and public ritual” (ibid.: xii). On the basis of his framework, I see the jeremiad as broad generic term to describe rhetoric that merges supposedly divine history and worldly politics. I am convinced that the most striking developments, which significantly shaped the form and secured its survival in contemporary America, are the secularization of the jeremiad and a shift from internal to external social critique, which began with the Covenant Renewal. As Jendrysik remarks, the jeremiad “evolved from a call for repentance in the community to an attack upon those who are unworthy and outside the community” (2007: 11). I discuss in how far the Presidents use what I call *inbound* jeremiadic appeals to initiate repentance and changes within U.S. society, and in how far they rely on *outbound* elements, meaning the blaming of external forces, groups, or the Other for national decline in order to justify policies. Murphy further notes that the jeremiad, through its connection to the myth of American exceptionalism, “limits the scope of reform and the depth of social criticism” (1990: 402). In the end, even in times of crisis, Americans allegedly remain the “chosen people” and thus a mere renewal of their Covenant will secure their privileged status (Murphy 2008: 32–36). Following this line of argumentation, this book discusses in how far the Presidents Bush and Obama allude to America's allegedly exceptional destiny in order to frame their crisis policies as forms of renewal. Bercovitch maintains that “the jeremiad played an important role in the process both of nation-building and of national self-expression” (1978: xv). The argument put forward in this monograph is that jeremiadic elements continue to fulfill these roles in contemporary presidential crisis rhetoric.

With the term “jeremiad” I refer to the above-mentioned different traditions and developments that over the centuries coined the form. Furthermore, I

use the adjective “jeremiadic” with regard to specific elements, which I consider crucial for the functioning of the form. This distinction allows discussing the influence of individual aspects of the jeremiad on modern crisis speeches without per se categorizing them as part of a genre. Rhetorical purists may find it problematic to speak of contemporary political speeches as modern jeremiads, as e.g. Jendrysik (2007) does, since crucial differences between religious sermons and twenty-first-century presidential oratory evidently exist. Cautious of these differences, I nevertheless consider it worthy to discuss in how far the terminology and categorization remains applicable to American crisis rhetoric. I certainly do not claim that modern political crisis speeches can be directly equated to Puritan sermons. Rather, I want to test the influence of different Puritan-derived aspects on the analyzed texts. There is not one, true jeremiad. The strengths of the form lies precisely in its described adaptability. While the American jeremiad evolved during the course of history, it kept several core characteristics. To Ritter, “[t]he American jeremiad stands as a bridge between the past and the future” (1980: 164). I will look for jeremiadic elements in the chosen presidential crisis addresses in order to test if they continue to function as a means for interpreting America’s past and unifying the audience around a shared vision of the country’s future.

Crisis rhetoric and the tradition of the jeremiad in 21st century U.S. American presidential speechmaking

Analysis of President George W. Bush's and President Barack Obama's speeches

3.1 9/11 as new American jeremiad?: Analysis of President George W. Bush's speeches following the September 11 terrorist attacks

3.1.1 Contextualization of the events

On September 11, 2001, hijacked jetliners destroyed the Twin Towers and hit the Pentagon. Another plane, United Airlines flight 93, crashed in rural Shanksville, Pennsylvania. The intervention of passengers on board the plane hindered it from hitting other strategically important targets, as had been initially planned by the terrorists behind the scheme.²² These events and above all the U.S. government's response to them changed the face of the world. In many Western countries the expression "post 9/11 era" has come to general use, which underlines their persistent influence. Several polls and scholarly publications count the date among the most traumatic moments in the first decade of the twenty-first century (Pyszczynski, Solomon & Greenberg 2003: 93–113). Without doubt, the events of September 11, 2001, constituted a human tragedy as well as a politically critical situation. The use of violence by terrorist forces caused a tremendous amount of suffering, as it suddenly ended the lives of nearly 3,000 people ("9/11 Victims List" 2013).²³ Since the acts of terrorism took place on American soil and the majority of victims were U.S. citizens, the government had to respond. Due to the central role of the presidency in the American political system, George W. Bush's reaction to the

22. Its ultimate target is believed to have been the Capitol or the White House. Compare National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States (2004: 14).

23. Out of the 2,977 immediate victims 372 were non-US citizens.

acts of terror was granted special attention. The point in time when the President addressed the public (which some perceived as too late) as well as the words he chose became the subject of numerous debates and commentaries, which underscores the high importance attributed to his speeches.²⁴ The enormous public concern posed a great challenge, but also a great opportunity to the President. In early September 2001, the United States was in the midst of an economic recession and the President's popularity was on the fall.²⁵ According to Gallup, Bush's approval ratings lay slightly above 50 percent in early September 2001 (Gallup "Presidential Job Approval Center"). His political future depended on his handling of the tragedy. Choosing the words for his speeches, the President and his advisors were certainly aware that the appropriate framing of critical events or what Windt (1987) called the "rhetorical creation" of crisis could facilitate reaching political goals. In the following chapter, I will analyze how Bush attempted to rhetorically influence public perception of the events immediately after the attacks as well as during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. I will define characteristic elements of the President's post 9/11 speeches and discuss their specific functions and persuasive effects. As I am convinced that Puritan-derived rhetorical traditions influence the construction of presidential crisis narratives, I will look for jeremiadic traits in the chosen texts.

3.1.1.1 *Media, 9/11, and war*

Already minutes after the first plane hit the North Tower, a global audience could follow the coverage of the events via TV, Internet, or the radio and later also in newspapers and magazines. Douglas Kellner speaks of "perhaps the most dramatic media spectacle in history (...) whereby McLuhan's "global village" became a site of horror, death, and destruction" (2007: 123). Numerous publications discuss media representations of 9/11 and the role of newsmakers in the "war on terror" with its quickly ensuing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (Kellner 2003, 2005; Finnegan 2007; Nacos 2007). Many of them view the media's relationship to the Bush administration critically. Kellner outright accuses U.S. corporate broadcasters of complying with the administration's war agenda and calls them "instruments of propaganda (...) during spectacles of terrorism and war" (2004: 41).

Regardless of how individual critics assess the role of the media in the mentioned events, there is no doubt that the way modern means of communication

24. Among others, Bush's allegedly delayed reaction was popularly parodied in Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004).

25. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research, the 2001 recession began in March and ended in November (cf. NBER "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions").

presented the acts of terror and the mentioned wars influenced public perception. David Altheide's (2006) *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, examine how news reports about terrorism reflect terms and discourses associated with politics of fear. And the scholars Rampton and Stauber (2003) in their book *Weapons of Mass Deception* state that after 9/11 a regular "information war" began, with the purpose of winning public support for Bush's policies. In fact, the Bush administration took several measures and founded specific institutions to promote the planned wars. Among others, in 2002, the White House officials began working with a new group, the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq (CLI), which, as its mission statement reads, "was formed to promote regional peace, political freedom and international security by replacing the Saddam Hussein regime with a democratic government" (Committee for the Liberation of Iraq 2014). The organization and its members were aggressively promoting war as the only solution to a national security crisis. Moreover, the Office of Strategic Influence, a public relations company contracted by the CIA "to run propaganda campaigns against the dictatorship," was opened (James 2003). Additionally to sponsoring cultural exchanges and programs to train foreign journalists, the Freedom Promotion Act of 2002 set aside 135 million dollars for broadcasting pro-U.S. television programs into the Middle East (U.S. Congress: Freedom Promotion Act of 2002).²⁶ These actions show that the government was well aware it needed the media's support in order to win over the public. As Silberstein observes, the president's power of persuasion rests in his access to the media and the ability to shape reporting (2004: 3).

The media can bring particular issues and problems to public attention by exposing them more prominently. Journalists and reporters employ emotional appeals and sometimes drive the audience's perception and behavior into irrational directions. One example hereof is, as Rampton and Stauber mention, the disproportionate broadcasting of feel-good-moments by American TV channels in the early stages of the Iraq war (2003: 1). Fox, CNN, and CBS all repeatedly showed the toppling of a Saddam Hussein statue in front of a cheering Iraqi crowd, after U.S. tanks stormed Baghdad on April 9, 2003. What they did not show was that apart for approximately 200 people (partly U.S. Marines and media representatives) in front of the statue, the Firdos Square was nearly empty.²⁷ Giving iconic significance to the falling monument, the mentioned TV channels supported the government's rhetoric, which presented American troops as welcome liberators. The war also played a role in advertising: several companies used the invasion of Afghanistan

26. However, the Act did not pass Congress (cf. Congress homepage).

27. As revealed by a long-shot photo by Reuters (cf. O'Dwyer's RP Daily "Pentagon Gets PR Bulls-Eye" 2003).

and Iraq to sell their products, e.g. companies like Ford and Chrysler excessively used the words “safety” and “security” to sell their vehicles after 9/11, relying on the irrational fear appeal for marketing purposes (Rampton & Stauber 2003: 139). According to Rampton and Stauber, they were advised to do so by a psychiatrist and consultant to the automobile industry, who convinced them of the effectiveness of such an approach in times when “the homeland is at war” (2003: 139).

Terrorist acts rely on publicity and thus can only exist in the media age, where there is a mutual dependency between journalists who need to deliver news and extremist agents who need a stage to present their requests. Walter Laqueur describes this interdependence as follows: “the media are the terrorist’s best friends, ... the terrorists’ act by itself is nothing, publicity is all” (1976: 99–105). A problematic question here is, in how far the coverage serves the rhetorical needs of terrorism. Analysts have noted the importance of the media to terrorism’s impact and have especially discussed the problem of the media amplifying terrorist actions or the so-called “copycat” phenomenon (which encourages potential terrorists to use similar methods) as well as the possibility of excessive coverage teaching effective strategies (Palmerton 1988: 105–121). In accordance with the predominant opinion of numerous terrorism scholars, Palmerton claims that “terrorism is a rhetorical phenomenon” and describes it as “a communication strategy attempting to serve distinctly persuasive functions” (1988: 105–121). In this way, news coverage also functions as a platform for the terrorists. Through privileged access to media agents, the governing have the power to put terrorist acts into a context, to label the terrorists, and even to exploit the acts of terror (or the public’s fear of them) for their own political goals. If the images of the collapsing Twin Towers had not been transmitted all over the world, the impact of the terrorist attacks would certainly not have been the same. Therefore, I ask: Are there parallels between the way terrorists use the media and the way the governing use them? Did George W. Bush use the media as a stage to generate fear for political purposes in the aftermath of 9/11? While the scope of this book does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the role of the media in critical situations, I will keep in mind these questions and problems in my discussion of Bush’s post 9/11 speeches.

War rhetoric vs. war propaganda

In democratic systems, public support is essential for political leaders to legitimize their power. It gains further importance in times when governments want or need to pass unpopular policies. Citizens will only accept the exceptional and usually harsh measures proposed by their leaders in times of crises, if they are convinced of their absolute necessity. Especially the decision to go to war needs to be framed appropriately, as it demands substantial sacrifice from many citizens. In order to convince the public to risk their own lives (or the lives of their family

members, friends, or fellow citizens), leaders must present their cause as believable and worthy. Since fear is a crucial motor in human acting, the appeal to this basic instinct is a possible way of gaining wide support for difficult political decisions (cf., e.g., Pfau 2007). American presidents have often relied on the discourse of threat and danger to advance political agendas: the Red Scare during the Cold War, the Brown Scare of fascism, or threats which supposedly emanate from so called “rogue states” (Lake 1994)²⁸ are just a few widely discussed examples. But where does political rhetoric stop and propaganda start? In an often-cited interview from 1947, Hermann Göring, the Nazi military leader, commented on the relationship between war, the people and their leaders as follows:

Göring: [O]f course, the *people* don't want war. Why would some poor slob on a farm want to risk his life in a war when the best that he can get out of it is to come back to his farm in one piece. Naturally, the common people don't want war; neither in Russia nor in England nor in America, nor for that matter in Germany. That is understood. But, after all, it is the leaders of the country who determine the policy and it is always a simple matter to drag the people along, whether it is a democracy or a fascist dictatorship or a Parliament or a Communist dictatorship.

Göring claims that the decision to go to war in all kinds of political systems, may they be democratic or not, is always solely taken by the leaders. The average citizen has no interest to go to war. One immediately wants to respond, that there is a big difference between people going to war while under dictatorship or in a democracy. In the latter, citizens can influence the state of events through their vote; while in the former, they are completely subordinated to the dictators will, usually by force. However, the further development of the interview, in which the interviewer Gustave M. Gilbert also points out these differences, can make readers stumble:

Gilbert: There is one difference. In a democracy, the people have some say in the matter through their elected representatives, and in the United States only Congress can declare wars.

Göring: Oh, that is all well and good, but, voice or no voice, the people can always be brought to the bidding of the leaders. That is easy. All you have to do is tell them they are being attacked and denounce the pacifists for lack of patriotism and exposing the country to danger. It works the same way in any country.
(Gilbert 1947: 278–279)

The statement, made shortly after WWII by one the most powerful figures of the Nazi Party was surely meant to shock and provoke, disdaining the virtues of

28. American policy makers popularly used the controversial term since the 1980s.

democracy and downplaying the cruelties of dictatorship. One can certainly not equate the force applied by dictators, including threats to people's lives, the threat of torture or other punishments, with the rhetoric used by democratic leaders to get citizens' support for unpopular measures like war. However, it also shows that the rhetoric of fear bears the threat of manipulation. A crisis can be rhetorically created, presenting war as the only option. For that purpose leaders can apply a false dichotomy, claiming that military actions are the only right option. War is a terrible, undesirable state no person wants to be in. In a democracy, it can only be justified with self-defense or a higher cause. Thus, commanders in chief must exclude all other options as not sufficient – the war has to be perceived as inevitable.

A difference has to be made between systems in which citizens are rhetorically *persuaded* to support policies and systems in which people are *forced* to support them through the execution of physical power. Nonetheless, the methods of rhetorical persuasion should be regarded critically, as the misuse of what can be called war propaganda surely has corrosive effects on citizens' freedoms. Rampton and Stauber differentiate the "propaganda model" of communication from the democratic concept of communication as follows: while the latter concept is an "ongoing process of dialogue among diverse voices," the former model sees communication as a "set of techniques for indoctrinating a 'target audience'" (2003: 133–134). The authors argue that the propaganda approach becomes more attractive during wartime, when each side becomes preoccupied with manipulating and coercing the thinking of their enemy and/or domestic population. The informative function and the wellbeing of citizens do not play a role here. The purpose is to inject specific ideas into the minds of the target population. Rationality and critical thinking of the audience are regarded as obstacles to successful indoctrination. Therefore, propagandists try to bypass logos and appeal to their listeners on the emotional level. The appeal to fear is especially effective in stopping rational thinking as it hinders the functioning of prefrontal cortex and instead triggers basic survival instincts (Arnsten 2009: 410–422). Taking advantage of this effect, war propaganda frequently uses fear "as a means to stifle dissent and to maintain the potentially repressive power of state" (Pfau 2007: 216). In this way, fear appeal has nothing to do with a healthy democratic system. In my analysis of crisis speeches, I will also discuss if and in how far the Presidents move into the realm of propaganda.

Selection of speeches and empirical data

From the day of the attacks up until the U.S. declaration of war on Iraq, on March 19, 2003, President George W. Bush referred to the terrorist acts in 81 speeches.²⁹

29. Cf. the White House's archived homepage (The White House: G. W. Bush – Archived).

The large number of addresses devoted to the topic as well as the fact that the theme influenced presidential rhetoric over a long period of time, reflect on the impact the attacks had on U.S. politics. I am convinced that the terrorist acts and specifically the Bush government's response to them, like no other event, shaped the history of the United States in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Therefore, I devote one entire analytical chapter to President Bush's post 9/11 crisis rhetoric. I selected eight speeches, which I consider most relevant, since they directly refer to the attacks and connect them to political measures like the USA PATRIOT Act, the war in Afghanistan, and the war against Iraq. Furthermore, they drew large audiences and numerous critics count them among Bush's major addresses.

On September 11, 2001, President Bush held three public speeches. He made his first official statement concerning the attacks in Sarasota, Florida where he was paying a visit to the Emma Booker Elementary School when he first learned about the planes having crashed into the WTC.³⁰ The first plane hit the North Tower at 8:46 a.m., a second plane crashed into the South Tower at 9:03 a.m. Bush commented on the events in his Remarks at Emma Booker Elementary School at 9:30 a.m. EDT. The delay of approximately 45 minutes in the presidential response was a matter of wide debate and critique, popularly parodied in Michael Moore's film *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004). The President himself explained that after he heard of the first plane crash, he was not aware of the terrorist background of the events and additionally "wanted to project a sense of calm" in order not to scare the children (qtd. in Schnall 2011). Only after he learned about the second plane hitting the South Tower, the gravity of the situation became apparent to him, as he claimed. When President Bush addressed the public for the second time this day, at 1:04 p.m. from Barksdale, Louisiana (9/11 Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base), hijackers had already flown American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon (at 9:37 a.m.). A fourth flight, United Airlines Flight 93, crashed near Shanksville, Pennsylvania, southeast of Pittsburgh, at 10:03 a.m. The birth hour of what was later called the "Bush doctrine" however, was 8:30 p.m. In the evening of September 11, the President delivered his Address to the Nation from the Oval Office. In the following days, Bush addressed the public on regular basis. On September 14, he gave a speech at the National Cathedral (Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony) and on September 20, he delivered the Address to a Joint Session of Congress following 9/11 Attacks, in which he announced the start of a "global

30. Officially, Bush was informed about the attacks by his advisors while he was in the classroom. However, on the Internet one can find numerous comments suggesting that the President must have heard about the events already on his way to the school. Since there are no further proofs for that, I consider such statements conspiracy theories.

war on terror” (GWOT). Another benchmark speech is the Presidential Address to the Nation given on October 7, 2001, in which Bush declared war on Afghanistan. The 2002 State of the Union Address provides additional insight into the characteristics of the Bush’s crisis rhetoric four month after the attacks. The last text considered is Bush’s speech from March 19, 2003, in which he declared war on Iraq as part of the “war on terror.”

Table 1. President Bush’s post 9/11 speeches: Word count and D.A.L. pleasantness score

Orator		G. W. Bush						
Date	9/11/01 (9:30 a.m.)	9/11/01 (1:04 p.m.)	9/11/01 (8:30 p.m.)	9/14/01	9/20/01	10/7/01	1/29/02	3/19/03
Words total	165	224	593	945	3015	968	3860	518
ee mean	1.66	1.76	1.71	1.71	1.64	1.66	1.67	1.71

The eight analyzed post 9/11 speeches by President Georg W. Bush vary greatly with regard to their length. The shortest speech (Remarks at Emma Booker Elementary School, September 11, 2001) consists of 165 words, while the longest address (State of the Union Address 2002, January 29, 2002) is composed of 3860 words (see Table 1). It needs to be noted that both comparatively long State of the Union Addresses additionally cover topics, which are not directly related to the September 11 events. I will take these discrepancies into account in my analysis. The first and last analyzed speech lie one and a half years apart, which will allow showing how the President’s post 9/11 crisis rhetoric developed over a longer period time.

The above table equally illustrates that the mean scores for pleasantness of the eight speeches are very close to one another. The lowest score lies at 1.64 (Address to a Joint Session of Congress on September 20, 2001) while the highest score is at 1.76 (Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base on September 11). The deviation is small and all scores are only slightly below the standard mean of 1.84 (Whissell 2009). Furthermore, the scores remain in a similar range to the D.A.L. means for pleasantness in the chosen classical jeremiads, which lie between 1.54 and 1.67. The data can be read as proof for the steadily balanced proportion of fear and hope appeals (meaning: the number of words with exceptionally low and exceptionally high degrees of pleasantness balance each other out) in George W. Bush’s crisis speeches and thus a parallel to jeremiads. In my analysis, I will additionally refer to the degrees of pleasantness of single words, which are frequently repeated.

It is striking that in all word clouds the words “America/-n/-s” are very prominent.³¹ Since the variations of the word “America,” its plural form and the corresponding adjective, are displayed separately, their visibility is in a way spread out and thereby distorted. Nevertheless, they still dominate the illustrations, which points to their central role in the addresses. (E.g. in the presidential speech from March 19, 2003, the word “people” is displayed in the largest font. The term reappears seven times in the address, which consists of 518 words. Meanwhile, the words “America/-n/-s” appear six times throughout the speech. However, as they are counted separately by the program, the displays for the individual words in the cloud are consequently substantially smaller.) The prominence of vocabulary connected to the United States and reflecting on patriotism like “America” and “nation” is line with the patriotic surge, which typically dominates during crises. Especially commanders in chief have always benefited from nation-binding rhetoric in times of war (Schulzke 2005: 262–285). Furthermore, the term “world” is prominently displayed in the above clouds. It can be expected that President Bush repeatedly uses the term in order to point to the supposedly international dimension of the “war on terror” in an attempt to legitimize his administration’s foreign policy. In the Presidential Address to the Nation from October 7, 2001 the terms “military” and “Afghanistan” appear in largest font, foreshadowing that the President will announce war actions in this country. Frequently repeated words, which are especially visible in the word cloud, can be telling of the general tone, purpose, or context of a speech. In the case of the image generated for the Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, the setting and occasion are also partly reflected in the dispersion of words. It is the only cloud in which the terms “God” and “prayer” have such a prominent position. The speech was given at a memorial service at the National Cathedral and thus frequent and direct references to a divine power are more acceptable for a President to use than it would have been in the context of the other speeches.

When it comes to dominant conceptual metaphors and framings in George W. Bush’s post 9/11 crisis speeches, the following were identified:³²

- Terrorism Is Crime
- Terrorism Is War
- Terrorist Attack Is Test (from God/ History/ Manifest Destiny)

31. The images are displayed and discussed in the analytical subchapters of the respective speeches (see Figures 2–6).

32. The complete lists (including lexical correspondences) are added in the appendix.

- War Against Terrorism Is Mythical Battle (of ‘Good’ vs. ‘Evil’)/ Othering Blame-Frame
- Terrorists Are Inhuman Beings/Animals/Uncivilized (Othering Frames)

In his early 9/11 speeches Bush frames the attacks as a crime (against humanity) (cf. Lakoff 2001).³³ He repeatedly uses expressions (like e.g. “murder”) that map the source domain Crime onto the target domain Terrorism. Gradually, the Terrorism Is War metaphor enters the picture and eventually starts to dominate the addresses. I argue that this change progressively accompanies the introduction of “war on terror” policies; lexical items from the war domain prompt the audience on the subconscious level to think of the events in terms of war. Furthermore, Bush uses the conceptual metaphors Terrorists Are Inhuman Beings/Animals/Uncivilized as well as War Is Mythical Battle. Both framings function on the basis of a rhetoric of Othering. They serve as foundation to promote a polarizing world-view of “good” vs. “evil” and “us” vs. “them” and thereby legitimize war policies. Moreover, Bush presents the terrorist attacks as a test. The conceptual metaphor Terrorist Attack Is Test implicitly suggests that the critical events are a form of trial, either from God or history. This type of framing is typical for American jeremiads and I will discuss on a case-to-case basis in how far Bush makes use of Puritan-derived ideas and myths to strengthen his message.

Cap’s spatial-temporal-axiological proximization model lends itself to an analysis of Bush’s legitimization discourse following the September 11 attacks. In his 2013 book, the scholar applies his framework to a corpus of 402 speeches and remarks concerning anti-terrorist policies delivered by U.S. presidents from 2001–2010 (Cap 2013). He identifies and counts key lemmas, noun and verb phrases as well as lexico-grammatical relations and discourse patterns, arguing that a forced construal of external threats to the United States (along spatial, temporal and axiological lines) helps legitimize preemptive interventionist campaigns.³⁴ The data is divided into four temporal sub-frames, which are characterized by shifts in proximization strategies (Cap 2013: 104). The speeches analyzed here fall into the discourse Period One (September 11, 2001–October 31, 2003). The first two brief statements delivered by Bush immediately after the attacks are an exception: they are not part of Cap’s data corpus, which starts with the prime time address on the evening of Sept. 11, 2001. As they provide insight into the shifts in Bush’s rhetoric on the day of the attacks, I added them to my

33. On the basis of his findings, I discuss the framing in Chapter 3.1.2.1.

34. As mentioned in the introduction, Cap defines six categories of spatial proximization markers, five temporal markers and three axiological markers (Cap 2013). Cf. also pp. 12–13.

data corpus. Applying a simplified version of Cap's framework to the chosen eight speeches, the following key lexico-grammatical items of the spatial proximization can be identified:³⁵

- Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements of the deictic center of the DS (IDCs):

[“USA,” “United States,” “America”]; [“American people,” “Americans,” “our people/nation/country,” “world”]; [“our friends/allies”]
- Noun phrases (NPs) construed as elements outside the deictic center of the DS (ODCs):

[“Iraq,” “Saddam Hussein”]; [“Iraqi/outlaw regime”]; [“terrorists”]; [“enemies of freedom”]; [“terrorist organizations/network,” “Al-Qaeda”]; [“Islamic extremism/Jihad”]
- Verb phrases (VPs) of motion and directionality construed as markers of movement of ODCs towards the deictic center:

[arming with/plotted to develop/ seeking/ pursue/ sponsor the materials, technology, and expertise to make and deliver WMD]
- Verb phrases (VPs) of action construed as markers of impact of ODCs upon IDCs:

[“threaten/ attack *an IDC*”]
- Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of ODCs upon IDCs:

[“threat”]; [“danger”]
- Noun phrases (NPs) denoting abstract concepts construed as effects of impact of ODCs upon IDCs:

[“tragedy”]

35. For a detailed description of Cap's framework – including its limitations – cf. Cap 2013:105–121. The keyness frequency threshold remains at 0.1%. Since my data corpus is significantly smaller than Cap's (10,228 words in total), the raw numbers are proportionately smaller. This is a highly simplified version of the framework: instead of providing the percentage for each key item in the speeches, I merely list all items that exceed the mentioned threshold. In the analysis of the respective speeches, I then provide the exact number of repetitions and discuss them on an individual basis.

When it comes to markers of temporal proximization in the data sample, they include:

- Noun phrases (NPs) involving indefinite descriptions construing ODC actual impact acts in alternative temporal frames:

[Today/ on Tuesday/ September 11/ On September 11/ This day/ On a peaceful morning /This morning]

- Discourse forms involving contrastive use of the simple past and the present perfect construing threatening future extending infinitely from a past instant:

[What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning.]

[Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force.]

[Our war on terror is well begun, but it is only begun. This campaign may not be finished on our watch – yet it must be and it will be waged on our watch. We can't stop short. If we stop now – leaving terror camps intact and terror states unchecked – our sense of security would be false and temporary.]

- Noun phrases (NPs) involving nominalizations construing presupposition of conditions for ODC impact to arise anytime in the future:

[we must prevent the terrorists and regimes who seek chemical, biological or nuclear weapons from threatening the United States and the world.]

[Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction.]

[This country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror, this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world.]

[We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities.]

Finally, along axiological lines, IDC and ODC markers include:

- Noun phrases (NPs) construed as IDC positive values or value sets (ideologies):

[“freedom/liberty”]; [“peace”]; [“justice”]; [“progress”]; [“prosperity”]

- Noun phrases (NPs) construed as ODC negative values or value sets (ideologies):

[“radicalism”]; [“extremism”]; [“terrorism”]; [“outlaw regime”]

- Discourse forms involving linear arrangement of lexico-grammatical phrases construing materialization in the IDC space of the ODC negative ideologies:³⁶

[They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. They want to overthrow existing governments in many Muslim countries, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.] (20 Sept. 2001)

[Freedom and fear are at war.] (20 Sept. 2001)

[Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.] (20 Sept. 2001)

[we will demonstrate that the forces of terror cannot stop the momentum of freedom.] (29 Jan. 2002)

[Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom.] (29 Jan. 2002)

[Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade.] (29 Jan. 2002)

[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.] (29 Jan. 2002)

[They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States.] (29 Jan. 2002)

[America faces an enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality.] (19 March 2003)

[The people of the United States and our friends and allies will not live at the mercy of an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder.] (19 March 2003)

[American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger.] (19 March 2003)

Since the data sample is significantly smaller than the one used by Cap, it does not surprise that some categories of proximization markers do not play a role

36. I consider it useful to list entire sentences/passages, which contribute to construing a clash between IDC and ODC ideologies (instead of collecting them under more general categories), since the limited size of the data sample allows for this approach. All listed sentences/passages are discussed on an individual basis in the analysis of the respective speeches.

and thus do not appear in the above list. Nonetheless, it is still striking that key items of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization help establish dichotomies between Self and Other in the eight chosen speeches. The United States (and its allies) appears at the deictic center, while the terrorists (and eventually also their supporters) are outside of it. My discussion of the speeches explores how the definitions of enemies and allies evolved over time and which NPs construe these categories on the spatial line in the respective speeches. Moreover, I will address the way deixis reveals a strategy that positions an evil enemy as a threat to the U.S. and the world as well as the role of myths in processes of Othering. When it comes to proximization along axiological lines, I will pay a special attention to the role of myths in constructing an ideological clash between Self and Other. Following Esch (2010), I consider the myths of American Exceptionalism and civilization vs. barbarism especially important for Bush's legitimization discourse and consequently discuss them in greater detail. As Cap's analysis shows, different contexts require different proximization strategies and his Period One, which covers the speeches analyzed here, is dominated by spatial and temporal proximization. He characterizes it as follows: "Assuming the presence of a *clear, direct, tangible threat*, the rhetoric seeks an ultra-fast and unequivocal legitimization of, first, the retaliatory action in Afghanistan and, later, the preemptive war on Iraq" (Cap 2010: 13). My analysis addresses if and in how far the foci vary from speech to speech.

In the context of this chapter, Dunmire's (2011) discussion of how proximization in Bush's addresses serves to legitimize the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq is highly relevant. In her analysis of proximization patterns in the 2002 National Security Strategy, she claims that the goal of the document was to "redefine[] the notion of preemption" (Dunmire 2011: 56). The scholar makes use of Cap's STA framework to discuss how following 9/11 the government promoted the notion of an "imminent threat" with the purpose of "lowering the threshold for military action" (2011: 56). Her list of lexico-grammatical markers of the IDC-ODC ideological conflict illustrates how – on the linguistic level – apparently remote ideological dangers are transformed into tangible physical threats (ibid.: 71). Dunmire further argues that Bush's speeches delivered after the announcement of the National Security Strategy carry mostly spatio-temporal patterns – involving direct fear appeals – and points to their legitimizing function. It goes beyond the scope of the project to offer an equally exhaustive treatment of markers of proximization. Rather, I concentrate on the lexico-grammatical items that contribute to the jeremiadic, fear-arousing notion of imminent danger in the eight chosen speeches. To that purpose, I refer to the key nominal that Dunmire works with and which Cap considers one of the cornerstone lemmas enacting spatial and temporal proximization (Cap 2008, 2010a, b), namely: "threat." I am interested in the way the abstract "threat" assumes different forms and meanings as the post 9/11

presidential discourse evolves. Which threats emanate from whom and when? How is the notion of imminence to this abstract threat created on the temporal axis? Which actors aspire to have a direct, physical impact on U.S. and what values characterize and motivate them? To answer the last question, I explore which NPs are construed IDC positive values and ODC negative values along axiological lines in the respective speeches. Thus, my use of the mentioned aspects of the proximization model adds further insight into linguistic legitimization of interventionist policies and the accompanying processes of establishing jeremiadic dichotomies in the chosen presidential addresses.

3.1.2 Analysis of George W. Bush's speeches following the September 11 attacks

3.1.2.1 *G. W. Bush: Remarks at Emma E. Booker Elementary School on September 11, 2001, 9:30 a.m. and 9/11 Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base on September 11, 2001, 1:04 p.m.*

George W. Bush first commented on the attacks 45 minutes after the first plane hit the World Trade Center. He gave a brief statement at the Emma Booker Elementary School, where he was paying a visit when he was informed of the events. Video footage from the day (which circulates on the Internet) shows the President's puzzled face after White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card notified him that the second plane hit the North Tower. At that point, there could be no more speculations about an accident and the probability of a terrorist attack rose. For the next seven minutes, Bush nevertheless stayed in the classroom and only addressed the topic in the official press conference at 9:30 a.m., which was planned beforehand. The President's first 9/11 speech lasted 1:18 minutes and consists of 165 words. After the crash of Flight 93 became known and speculations said that its ultimate target was originally meant to have been the White House, Bush's security experts did not consider it safe for him to return to Washington.³⁷ Instead, the President was brought to the Air Force Base at Barksdale, Louisiana, from where he delivered his second speech that day at around 1:04 p.m. The second address was already longer; it lasted 2:11 minutes and consists of 609 words.

Bush as crisis manager in chief

President Bush opens his remarks from the Emma Booker School stating, "this is a difficult moment for America." He describes the event in factual terms: "Today, we've had a national tragedy. Two airplanes have crashed into the World Trade

37. At that point it was unclear, whether the target of Flight 93 was the White House or the Capitol.

Center in an *apparent* terrorist attack on our country". As the details of the situation are not clear yet, he remains careful and adds the adjective "apparent" before speaking of a terrorist attack. Then, he informs the public that he will be "going back to Washington after [his] remarks" to manage the situation. In this statement, the President already alludes to the role he will later assume more actively – the role of commander in chief. He announces that he will return to the capital to personally decide on the next steps and simultaneously informs the public about actions that he has already taken: "I have spoken to the Vice President, to the Governor of New York, to the Director of the FBI, and have ordered that the full resources of the federal government go to help the victims and their families." Grammatically, the President presents himself as an active agent. The use of the first personal pronoun and the active voice is meant to show that he has taken the lead. By that time, however, hijackers already have flown American Airlines Flight 77 into the Pentagon (at 9:37 a.m.) and shortly afterwards a fourth flight crashed near Shanksville (at 10:03 a.m.). Consequently, for security reasons, Bush's advisers did not allow for his immediate return to D.C. As Sandra Silberstein notes, the advisers found themselves in a dilemma: "On the one hand, the President had to be kept in a secure location. On the other hand, he needed to be rhetorically visible" (2004: 4). Therefore, the broadcasted address from the Air Force Base at Barksdale is crucial for the self-presentation of the President; it makes him immediately visible and audible to the nation. Although he is not in his Washington office at this critical moment, Bush shows that he can nevertheless assume his responsibilities as head of state and chief crisis manager. He makes a point in reassuring the American people that under his lead the administration controls the situation: "I want to reassure the American people that full – the full resources of the federal government are working to assist local authorities to save lives and to help the victims of these attacks." Furthermore, he remarks that he has given all necessary orders to his administration and the military to protect the country and its people: "I've been in regular contact with the Vice President, Secretary of Defense, the national security team, and my cabinet. We have taken all appropriate – appropriate security precautions to protect the American people." On the one hand, the President acknowledges the gravity of the situation and speaks of a "high alert status." On the other hand, the words "defend," "save," "security," "precautions," and "protect" (which appear nine times) put focus on the fact that safety is being restored. Bush does not reflect on potential mistakes in the safety system that allowed for the incidents to happen in the first place, nor does he mention possible causes for the attacks. Instead, he concentrates on the future and reassures the audience that no further attacks need to be feared, since he and his administration now supposedly have the situation under control.

Stigmatization of the enemy: Gender stereotypes and dehumanization

The President establishes an emotional dichotomy between those who “save lives and help” (IDC actors) and “those responsible for these cowardly acts” (ODC actors). While the words “save,” “live,” and “help” have very high pleasantness factors according to the D.A.L. and refer to acts of compassion and empathy, the phrase “cowardly acts” has a very low pleasantness factor and already implies judgment not only of the attacks but also of those who committed them. Bush’s usage of the word “coward” exemplifies how gendered language can work in war rhetoric. The President employs the term as a metaphor for the attacks and the attackers. Thereby, as Egan remarks, he “constructs a gendered discourse that foregrounds masculinity as a way to help understand 9/11 and as justification of the bombing in Afghanistan” (2002: 53–64). The term reinforces the enduring cultural narrative of patriarchy; a coward is less than a man, and thus is less worthy. He does not fight in an honorable manner but instead uses deceitful tricks when engaged in a dispute. He cheats because he is weaker and could not win otherwise. Consequently, he deserves punishment and needs to be put back into place by *real men*. Egan continues: “In essence the coward is the antithesis of the dominant ideology of masculinity in a patriarchal culture. (...) To be called a coward is to have one’s masculinity questioned” (ibid.: 54). By questioning the masculinity of his opponents, Bush constructs a polarizing perception of terrorism as battle between dishonorable cowards (ODC) and righteous heroes (IDC). American mainstream media largely perpetuated Bush’s cowardice narrative and made it extremely difficult to voice dissenting opinions without being stigmatized as unpatriotic. A prominent victim of the one-sided public debate of the time is Bill Maher. His talk show *Politically Incorrect* on ABC was cancelled after he said: “We have been cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That’s cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building – say what you want about it, it’s not cowardly” (Gerstein 2001). The rhetoric of the coward provided the foundation for the conceptual metaphor War on Terror Is Mythical Battle between two opposing sides – the good and the evil – and the rhetoric of Othering, which play an important role in the President’s later speeches.

In both addresses, Bush additionally uses metaphors from the hunting domain to describe what shall be done with those responsible for the attacks. From Emma Booker School he announces that everything necessary will be done “to hunt down and to find those folks who committed this act” and from the Barksdale Base he reassures his audience that “the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts.” Making use of the source domain of hunting, the President presents the enemies as animals and thereby dehumanizes them. Since hunted animals in many cases convey connotations of alleged evil, it is

supposedly eligible to chase and kill them as they pose a threat. In contrast to the dehumanized terrorists, the United States are personified, which stimulates identification processes. The country appears as an active agent, an allegedly righteous hunter who will “hunt down” the dangerous terrorists. Thus, conceptual metaphors strengthen the divide between the two sides.

Terrorist attacks as crime

In the speech from Emma Booker School, President Bush refers to the events as: “difficult moment for America,” “an apparent terrorist attack on our country,” “this act,” and “[t]errorism against our nation.” Then he describes the attacks as “a national tragedy,” as opposed to a local tragedy, and rhetorically turns them into a matter of every American’s concern. Later, from the military base at Barksdale, he claims that “[f]reedom itself was attacked (...) by a faceless coward” and speaks of “cowardly acts.” In both addresses, the President still presents the events as individual acts of terror and does not pinpoint a concrete enemy, yet. Lakoff (2001) argues that at this point the attacks the administration framed the events as a crime. In his essay, written five days after the attacks, he claims: “The initial framing was as a “crime” with “victims” and “perpetrators” to be “brought to justice” and “punished.” The crime frame entails law, courts, lawyers, trials, sentencing, appeals, and so on” (Lakoff 2001). In fact, Bush speaks of “victims” (twice in each speech), a term rather applied to those who were hurt or killed in a crime than in a war.³⁸ In his speech at the Emma Booker School, he also uses terminology from the crime domain when he says he has ordered the authorities to “conduct a full-scale investigation,” and speaks of those “who committed this act,” a collocation commonly used when referring to crime (to commit a crime). War is not mentioned, yet.

Unity and freedom

The first two public statements lie three hours apart. In this time, Bush, aboard Air Force One, not only had the chance to collect more information, but could also discuss with his advisers which measures should be taken and how he should present them to the public. It is thus not surprising that in the Barksdale address emotional appeals and rhetorical devices appear more frequently – the events are slowly put into context in a way that will prepare the public for the administration’s

38. It needs to be noted that the term “victims” can also be applied to those killed in a war. I follow Lakoff’s classification, according to which the noun is *rather* or more commonly used in the crime context, while the word “casualties” more frequently relates to those killed in a war (Lakoff 2001).

upcoming policies. First of all, typically of crisis rhetoric, the President attempts to rhetorically unite the nation. He does so by referring to what George Lakoff (2006) calls “America’s most important idea,” namely freedom. In his narrative, the term serves as a metaphor for America’s common values. Throughout the country’s history, American leaders evoked the idea of freedom: Puritans came to America in search of religious freedom, the American War of Independence was framed as a battle for political freedom, and Roosevelt called the U.S. to enter World War II in order to defend freedom (cf. Van Alstyne 2002). In presidential speeches, freedom often appears as America’s common higher good, something precious that is worth fighting for. Drawing on this tradition, Bush uses the idea to juxtapose right and wrong already in his first two sentences: “Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward. And freedom will be defended.” He claims that the terrorists attacked not only buildings in New York and Pennsylvania, but also the nation’s foundational principle. Following his logic, all American citizens were attacked and now need to unite in order to defend their supposedly shared values and way of life. In his first speech, Bush declares: “Terrorism against our nation will not stand.” According to the President, defending “freedom” will be a collective effort, which will demand individual sacrifice on behalf of the nation; the IDC marker (construed as IDC positive value) defines the axiological framework. Moreover, to further unite American citizens on the linguistic level, Bush frequently uses the personal pronoun “we” (seven times), its possessive form “our” (five times), and the terms “nation/-al” (four times) and “America/-n” (seven times) in both speeches; these markers of spatial proximization are construed as elements of the deictic center of the discourse space. In Barksdale, the President further stresses the common responsibility of U.S. citizens when he says: “I ask the American people to join me in saying a ‘thanks’ for all the folks who have been fighting hard to rescue our fellow citizens (...).” These “folks” have been acting on behalf of the entire nation, as he claims. That is also why the President now calls all Americans to collectively thank them in return.

Crisis as test

It is striking that Bush refers to the events as a test. From the military base in Barksdale, the President announces: “The resolve of our great nation is being *tested*, but make no mistake. We will show the world that we will pass this *test*.” Explaining difficult moments in history as a test is a typical characteristic of the American version of the jeremiad. Puritan ministers tended to describe the early ordeals of the settlers – including bad harvests, the spread of infectious diseases, or wars with the indigenous population – as tests of faith (Mather 1676; Miller 1953: 29). In Bush’s narrative, U.S. society can supposedly pass the test, if it follows his policies. So far, the audience can only guess who the author

of that test is. However, the analogy to biblical stories in which God tests the religious faith of his people is striking and therefore the assumption comes close that the President sees God as the testing entity. Especially since later on in the speech, Bush directly refers to Him when he prays: “May God bless the victims, their families, and America.” The President ends his second speech by rhetorically constructing a united nation under God when he says: “join me in saying a prayer for the victims and their families. God bless.” He leaves his audience with this plea for collective prayer and the image of one God. Thereby, he attempts to unite the nation through the appeal to the supposedly shared faith in a single deity.

Conclusions

President Bush’s first two short speeches on September 11, 2001, are primary informative and descriptive in style. The word use is mainly factual, although some emotional and metaphorical framings appear. While the enemy is not pinpointed yet, the terrorists are already collectivized and dehumanized with the help of conceptual metaphors. The acts of terror are framed as crime rather than war. The factual words are meant to calm down the public and show the President as a competent leader and a confident father of the nation figure, who will keep the country safe in the future. On the linguistic level, he uses many words with a high degree of pleasantness. Shortly after the attacks, which exposed the vulnerability of the country’s security system, the level of fear and insecurity within U.S. society was already very high (cf., e.g., Schmidt & Winters 2002). Therefore, the President’s main objective at this point in time was to inform, comfort, and unite his national audience. Markers of spatial proximization include IDC lexical items and phrases like “United States,” “America,” “American people,” “we/our,” “our country/nation,” and ODC elements like “those folks who committed this act,” “those responsible for these cowardly acts,” and “attack.” In the primetime address, less than twelve hours later that day, the tone would start changing.

3.1.2.2 *G. W. Bush: Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, Washington D. C., September 11, 8:30 p.m.*

On September 11, 2001, minutes after the attacks, news channels started showing images of planes hitting the Twin Towers. Over the course of the day, Americans have repeatedly seen the footage of the collapsing structures before they listened to President Bush’s speech that evening. Already these mere pictures, without additional explanations, subconsciously triggered different metaphors in the audience’s minds. Lakoff (2001) suggests that the “[b]uildings are metaphorically people. We see features – eyes, nose, and mouth – in their windows.” To

him, these well-known “people,” or the “nation’s shared old friends” that had been present in the lives of Americans for many years, were now attacked, symbolically “killed,” and disappeared from their sight. At the time of their completion in 1973, the Twin Towers were the highest buildings in the world. These prominent landmarks in Manhattan, to Lakoff as well as to many other Americans, were symbols of New York City or even the entire United States. The World Trade Center (a complex that consisted of all together seven buildings, the Twin Towers being just the most prominent ones) was home to the numerous influential economic and financial institutions and as such embodied the U.S.’ central role in the world’s capitalist system. For many Americans, critics and supporters alike, it symbolically stood for important aspects of the American way of life. It functioned as a means of self-identification and de-identification and was immediately tied to constructions of national identities. Wallenstein (2001) explains the metaphorical function of the Towers as follows: “They signaled unlimited aspirations; they signaled technological achievement; they signaled a beacon to the world.” Thus, the planes did not just hit buildings, but physical representations of the capitalist and market-driven aspects of the American Dream. As they fell and turned into massive amount of ash and smoke in the midst of NYC, they left behind typical apocalyptic images of destruction. It is striking that the coverage on the WTC dominated the media, while the broadcasting on the Pentagon only played a secondary role. The mass media concentrated on the destruction of the global financial center and presented the events as an attack on the country’s economic system. As Paul Smith recalls:

On 9/11 there was initially some media talk about how the twin towers might have been chosen for destruction because of their function as symbols of American capitalist power in the age of globalization. (...) The twin towers in New York then became the center of attention, perhaps because they were easier to parlay into symbols of generalized American values than the dark Pentagon (...).

(Smith 2004)

All these images, media comments, and connotations were present, deeply encoded in American citizens’ minds, when they watched the recordings of the attacks on the news. Consequently, the visual metaphors of a lifestyle under attack were already vivid in the minds of many Americans when they listened to the President’s Primetime Address from the Oval Office at 8:30 p.m. and influenced their perception of the speech. The address was transmitted via radio and TV in most countries of the world and was later printed in newspapers and made available on the Internet. It was primary directed towards the heterogeneous American public; over 80 million Americans listened to their President that evening (Balz & Woodward 2002). The address consists of 593 words and lasted four and a half minutes (4:24).

9/11 as attack on the American “we”

The President opens the speech stating that terrorists attacked not only “our fellow citizens,” but also “our way of life, our very freedom.” The first sentence already implies an interpretation of the events. Bush says that the attacks were not aimed at individuals or (financial/political) institutions, but at America’s value system and thus all its citizens. According to him, every American should feel as the target of the terrorist acts. He repeats the possessive pronoun “our” (referring to American citizens) three times in his first sentence, which brings in a further uniting effect on the linguistic level. Bush builds his argument on the premise that Americans are one nation, which shares a distinct “way of life” as well as distinct values. Again, he puts special emphasis on “freedom” and repeats the ideologically loaded marker of axiological proximization three times throughout the speech. Both expressions (“freedom” and “way of life”) function as synonyms for America and what it means to be American and thus support Bush’s nation-building narrative. The terrorists despise these national ideals and it was their hate towards the people who represent them that caused the extreme acts of violence, as he claims. The promoted concept of allegedly shared victimhood is intended to have a unifying effect on his domestic audience.

The President honors those who lost their lives during the attacks. He recalls that the victims were “secretaries, businessmen and women, military and federal workers. Moms and dads. Friends and neighbors.” The list turns the anonymous number of the dead into real people, with lives and families. In contrast to the terrorists, who appear as a homogenous mass and are collectively referred to as “they,” American citizens who died on 9/11 form a unit, but are nevertheless acknowledged as individuals. The President presents them as valuable members of society with respectable jobs (the professions he mentions are typical middle-class jobs) and implies that any American that is now listening to his speech could have been a victim of the terrorists. His words evoke sympathy and support identification processes. Bush suggests that the victims of the attacks were killed for American ideals. Consequently, as he argues, this loss must be the concern of American society as a whole.

Moreover, President Bush identifies himself as a member of the community – the allegedly united American “us.” He shows himself as an empathetic leader who supposedly understands and shares the feelings of his citizens when he announces that the images “of airplanes flying into buildings, fires burning, huge structures collapsing (...) have filled *us* with disbelief, terrible sadness and a quiet, unyielding anger.” On the linguistic level, the construction of unity is strengthened through the repetitive use of the words “us” (3 times), “our” (18), “we” (6 times), and “America/-n” (10 times). Americans and their country are at the deictic center of the speech. The respective word cloud

to help with local rescue efforts.” The use of numerous active verbs puts emphasis on the alleged competence of his administration while words like “team,” “help,” and “rescue” additionally trigger positive (according to the D.A.L., they show high scores for pleasantness) and uniting emotions. Bush draws an immediate response plan and names the first priorities, which include bringing “help to those who have been injured” and taking “every precaution to protect our citizens at home and around the world from further attacks.” As Boin and ‘t Hart argue, in extreme situation there tends to be an increased demand for presidential leadership: “people experience crises as episodes of threat and uncertainty, a grave predicament requiring urgent action” and therefore “[i]t is a natural inclination in such distress to look to leaders to ‘do something’” (2003: 544). The President’s narrative caters to this supposedly augmented need for actions.

In a patriarchal manner, the President presents himself as a father of the nation who will take care of things. He assures his audience that he will protect his metaphorical family – the country and its citizens. His chief goal is to make sure the country continues to work as it did before and “prevail[s] against [its] enemies.” Neither self-reflection on the causes nor change within American society is thus needed. That is why he tells his fellow citizens that the federal agencies, which had to be evacuated during the crisis, would reopen the following day. Assuring the public that things will return back to normal is a typical approach assumed by presidents immediately in critical situations. Similarly to Bush, in 1986, after the explosion of the space shuttle *Challenger*, Reagan announced that space flights would continue: “We’ll continue our quest in space. There will be more shuttle flights and more shuttle crews and, yes, more volunteers, more civilians, more teachers in space. Nothing ends here; our hopes and our journeys continue” (Reagan 1986). And after the Oklahoma City bombing, Clinton promised that “[j]ustice [would] prevail” (Clinton 1995). These words promote continuity, project calm, and aim at restoring a sense of safety.

From terrorism as crime to terrorism as war

The direct targets of the hijackers were buildings, which were of high political, financial and emotional importance to the country. Bush’s first step in putting the events into context is to show that, in fact, the buildings metaphorically stand for the whole country, its people, and its beliefs. To strengthen the metaphorical connection between buildings and his definition of American values, Bush simultaneously turns the imagery around: he defines the country’s ideals with the help of the construction domain. The President speaks of America’s “foundation” and assures his audience that while the steel of the WTC was shattered, “the steel of American resolve” remains unbent: “Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they cannot touch the foundation of America. These

acts shatter steel, but they cannot dent the steel of American resolve.” The acts of terrorism appear as a violent affront on the entire country and thus an act of *war*. To further support his interpretation of the events, Bush gradually substitutes the crime framing with the Terrorism Is War metaphor. He uses terms from the conceptual domain of war like “retreat,” “peace” (twice), “military” (twice), “enemies,” or “allies” and even directly mentions a “war against terrorism.” According to his narrative, the country was attacked and now needs to defend itself: “A great people has been moved to defend a great nation.” While America’s response to 9/11 has not been precisely defined yet, it already appears as a form of self-defense.

Besides conceptual metaphors, the President also makes use of historical analogies to support his war framing. Specifically, Bush establishes parallels to Roosevelt’s response to the Pearl Harbor attacks. George W. Bush describes the September 11 attacks as “deliberate and deadly” and bemoans that many lives were “suddenly” ended. These words, as Murphy convincingly argues, are likely meant to evoke President F. D. Roosevelt’s address to Congress following the bombing of Pearl Harbor (2003:607–632). The former President then announced: “Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was *suddenly* and *deliberately* attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan” (Roosevelt 1941b). The structure and wording of Bush’s and Roosevelt’s speeches show several similarities. Both are shorter than 600 words, give concrete descriptions of the attacks, speak of “defense” on the part of the U.S., and introduce an element of judgment: the Presidents pinpoint and blame their “enemies.”

It can be argued that similarities between the events exist. In both cases the attacks were committed on U.S. soil by people of non-American nationality.³⁹ Moreover, they were sudden and unannounced and cost the lives of many Americans. However, the situations and their contexts bear also crucial differences. The target in 1941, during WWII, was a U.S. military base and the attackers represented a country, while in 2001 the targets were U.S. financial and government buildings, the victims were largely civilians, and the kidnappers of the airplanes were religious fundamentalists who were not affiliated with any government. It is only through Bush’s rhetoric that the individual terrorists are transformed into representatives of a regime or an international network of terroristic organization, which allegedly needs to be fought collectively. Therefore, I argue that Bush purposely omits differences and implicitly establishes parallels between the Pearl Harbor and 9/11 in order to influence the audience on the subconscious level: the

39. This assertion is technically erroneous, as Hawaii was not a state at the time. Nevertheless, it was widely regarded as “home soil” (“Attack on Pearl Harbor” 2012).

rhetorical resemblance might remind his audience of the famous 1941 address and thus supports the war framing.

Bush's rhetoric of Othering

In times of crisis, especially during war, leaders often construct an enemy with the help of opposition (cf., e.g., Merskin 2004: 157–175). They present the opponent who supposedly *needs to be fought* as completely different from the constructed “us” and thus undeserving of any compassion. This rhetoric unites the nation not only around common values, but also against an outside, evil Other. Spillman and Spillman define enemy image construction as a “syndrome of deeply rooted perceptual evaluations” (1997: 51). Among its characteristic elements they see: blaming the enemy, identification of the enemy with evil (the enemy represents the negation of one's own value system), stereotyping and de-individualization, zero-sum thinking (what is good for the enemy is bad for us and vice versa), and refusal to show empathy (ibid.). Bush and Roosevelt both apply these strategies to different degrees in their war rhetoric.

In 1941, the Empire of Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. In that situation the attackers could be clearly identified and the President could refer to them directly. Roosevelt mentions “Japan” 15 times throughout his speech. He speaks of “the Japanese government,” “Japanese (naval/air/military) forces,” “the Japanese Empire,” “that nation,” “the Japanese.” Especially the last terms, which refer to the whole nation as attackers, are broad generalizations and de-individualize the opponent. The rhetoric added to the impression that all Japanese, including Japanese Americans, must be considered enemies. Consequently, it contributed to a negative perception of the members of this national community after the Pearl Harbor attacks. In his speech, Roosevelt describes the bombings as “onslaught,” “hostility,” “bombing,” “war,” “armed attack,” “surprise offensive,” “treachery,” “unprovoked and dastardly attack.” Aggressive, fear-arousing nouns are supported by emotionally charged adjectives like “deliberately,” “unprovoked,” “surprise or dastardly” and stress the ambush character of the event. In fact, in the United States the name Pearl Harbor still functions as colloquial synonym for surprise attack. Neither the background nor the context of the attacks is made clear. It is not mentioned that, as Conroy and Wray (1990) argue, a pre-emptive strike could also be seen as the only way for Japan to avoid U.S. interference in the Pacific. Typically of war rhetoric, Japanese soldiers who lost their lives are neither mentioned nor regretted – the casualties on the Other side only play a role in crisis speeches if the superiority of one's own troops is put forward. The President stresses that the supposedly evil enemy “sought to deceive the United States” and claims that, in the end, America will be victorious. In Roosevelt's speech, U.S. citizens appear as a unit as he assures: “the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory”

and “with the unbounding determination of our people, we will gain the inevitable triumph – so help us God.” Roosevelt claims that the country and his people are morally on the right side. Therefore, and with the help of God, the United States “will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make it very certain that this form of treachery shall never again endanger us,” as he claims. In Bush’s speech the polarization between the allegedly good Americans and supposedly evil terrorists is even more explicit. The President speaks of his citizens uniformly as “victims,” “the great people,” or “the brightest beacon for freedom,” in opposition to the attackers whom he calls “evil,” “the very worst of human nature,” “those who are behind these evil acts,” “terrorists,” and bluntly “enemies.” He constructs a thoroughly evil Other, which is different from “us” in every aspect; a rhetoric of Othering dominates his discourse.

More than 20 years after the original publication of his book *Orientalism*, Said argues that following 9/11, the rhetoric of the Bush administration and Western scholars helped justify the war in Iraq by promoting orientalist ideas about the “Arab mind” (2003). The simplistic view, which this rhetoric promoted, painted the Arab world and culture as uniformly backward, lacking democracy, and threatening in opposition to an enlightened West. In fact, in his speech, Bush consequently opposes the “guilty,” “evil,” and, as he implies, savage “enemy” with the supposedly unquestionably good and innocent Americans. He even directly speaks of “war” between the two sides. Bush further notes that “today, our nation saw evil” and that “the search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts.” Moreover, no empathy towards the suicide-attackers is shown, as Spillmann and Spillmann explain: “Consideration for anyone in the enemy group is repressed due to perceived threat and feelings of opposition” (1997: 50–51). The President presents the values and goals of the attackers and the attacked as incommensurable, which is exemplary of zero-sum thinking. Stereotyping and de-individualization of the attackers take place throughout the President’s statement. They appear as flat, uniform characters, whose only goal is to do harm: “these acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat.”

Religious Othering and post 9/11 Islamophobia

Although Othering is common in war rhetoric and takes place in Roosevelt’s Pearl Harbor speech as well as in Bush’s speech, there are major differences in the depiction of enemies by the two Presidents. I argue that these differences largely derive from the fact that Bush’s rhetoric of Othering is highly stylized in Christian terms. Following the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon, the President achieves a strong polarization between “us” and “them” with the help of religiously tainted constructions of goodness and evilness. In the Address to the Nation, he repetitively uses the word “evil,” which carries strong moral judgment, when referring to

the terrorists. The terminology stresses the guilt of the attackers in supposed opposition to the innocence of Americans. As Lazar and Lazar argue the “evilification” of the enemy, which is based on the religious dichotomy of good vs. evil, banishes the out-group from the moral order and thus is a prerequisite for justifying violent actions against its members (2004: 236). Moreover, the President directly quotes from the Bible. With the help of Psalm 23, the President shapes the meaning of 9/11 as a passage “through the valley of the shadow of death” in which God is on America’s side and thus the country does not have to “fear no evil.”⁴⁰ According to a Gallup poll, the percentage of U.S. Americans who consider religion an important factor in their lives has increased from 57 before the attack, to 64 shortly after (Jones 2003). The 9/11 events also led to a marked increase in regular church and synagogue attendance, from 41 to 47 percent (Jones 2003). Additionally, a rise in sales for books with Christian apocalyptic themes, like LaHaye’s and Jenkins’ *Left Behind* series, could be observed and, according to a 2001 TIME/CNN poll, 30 percent of Americans admitted to believe that the attacks were predicted in the Bible (Benjamin & Simon 2005). With 82 percent of U.S. Americans declaring to be Christians in 2001 according to Gallup (“Religion”), I argue that the President reacts to the supposed needs and expectations of a majority of his domestic audience by including religious rhetoric in his post 9/11 narrative. To increase the credibility of his message, Bush stresses his own religiosity. He mentions a higher power that he prays to and that will comfort those who mourn: “And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us (...).” Additionally, the President rhetorically assumes the role of a priest when he says: “Tonight I ask for your prayers.” He underlines his personal faith, for which prayer is crucial, and stylizes himself as a spiritual leader for the nation.

Scholars like Arthur argue that President Bush’s stigmatizing rhetoric, the general public discourses around the attacks, as well as the media’s reporting on the events contributed to increasingly negative perception of Muslims in the United States (Arthur 2011). In fact, Bush frequently equates “good” and “us” with Christianity, Christian Americans, and the “coalition of the willing,”⁴¹ while “evil” and “them” not only become synonyms to terrorism but also to Islam or Muslims in general. Although President Bush makes a point in distinguishing “Islamic extremism” from the “peaceful teachings of Islam” in several public statements (cf., e.g., Bush 2001k), he nevertheless uses the words “terror” and “Islam” as well as “terror”

40. “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.” (Book of Psalms, Psalm 23:4)

41. President Bush used the expression for the first time at the 2002 NATO Summit in Prague (Bush & Havel 2002).

and “Muslim” together in over 200 of his speeches and mentions “evil” together with “Muslim” and/or “Islam” in nearly 100 of his public addresses (Arthur 2011). Even though Bush repeatedly makes positive references to Islam, the fact that he labels Islamic terrorists as “evildoers,” Others, and religious fundamentalists, diminishes the isolates cases of positive representations of Islam as a whole. Dr. M. Hathout, an adviser at the Muslim Public Affairs Council, remarks: “Most of the time we [Muslims] [a]re mentioned, it’s sensationalized, ugly, or weird. And when a group is generalized, it becomes an object of fear” (qtd. in Merskin 2004: 170). Whether the generalization was intended or not, it certainly led to an association of terror and Islam, especially after the media rushed in and nourished stereotypical depictions equating Arabs with Muslims and Muslims with terrorists (cf. Prett Ewing 2008). Shortly after the attacks, American Muslims experienced increased discrimination even in terms of political policies. The USA PATRIOT Act is the most obvious example hereof. Although the law implied cuts to the liberty of all Americans, it affected Muslims more than others; Muslims (and those who looked middle-eastern) faced increased prejudice and harassment not only from the side of fellow citizens but also from officials (Maira 2008: 17). In this sense, Bush’s rhetoric and his administration’s post 9/11 policies contributed to the constructing of Muslims as suspect citizens.

The Bush doctrine

One of the most frequently cited sentences from Bush’s Address to the Nation on 9/11 is: “We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.” The statement expends the ominous “them” from a few individuals who were involved in the terrorist attacks to an only vaguely defined group of people or states. The danger lies in the imprecise wording and in the President’s resulting claim to judge who is part of the “them.” It alludes to the possibility of governmental involvement in the attacks. Key is that the discredited group can potentially be expanded according to political needs. Moreover, the fateful phrasing implicitly suggests that the United States has the right to preemptive war against all countries that in some – not precisely defined way – aid terrorist groups. It divides the world into two camps, the allegedly good on America’s side and the bad on the side of the terrorists, promoting a Manichean worldview. As Smith (2004) remarks, “one could only be either uncomplicatedly for or uncomplicatedly against America, even as it conducted illegal, immoral, and opportunistic war.” The argument gave the foundation to the moral dualism of post 9/11 polices. Therefore, I see the speech on the evening of September 11 as the birth hour of the so-called Bush doctrine.

The expression Bush doctrine is not without ambiguity. It is widely considered that it was the journalist Charles Krauthammer who introduced it. In his article

from February 2001, he employed the term to describe the Bush administration's withdrawals from the ABM treaty and the Kyoto Protocol (Krauthammer 2012). On September 17, 2002, the National Security Strategy of the United States was published. The document is frequently cited as the definitive statement of the doctrine (cf., e.g., "The Bush Doctrine" 2002; "Aftermath; The Bush Doctrine"). Although, as Zbigniew Brzezinski points out, there has never been a "single piece of paper" that would represent the concept (qtd. in Abramowitz 2008). The former security adviser to President Carter suggests that instead, several ideas collectively make up the Bush doctrine, including the endorsement of preventive war and the idea that there is such a thing as a "war on terror."

The "war on terror"

Having rhetorically divided the world into two camps, Bush mentions the "war against terrorism" for the first time. He immediately lends it a global dimension when he says: "America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world and we stand together to win the war against terrorism." Henceforth, the Bush administration as well as the media interchangeably applied the terms "war on terror," "global war on terror" (GWOT), the "war on terrorism," or (less frequently) "the crusade" in reference to varying post 9/11 policies. First, it was used to describe operations against al-Qaeda and militant Islamists. Then, it also included wars against states and regimes, as my analysis of the President's later speeches will show.

But why did Bush choose these exact three words? The rhetorical effect would have been different if he chose to call it e.g. a war for freedom or something other than war. The words "war" and "terror" are very strong and aggressive; they imply the use of force. According to the D.A.L., they have strikingly low levels of pleasantness (the D.A.L. score for the word "war" is 1.0 and for the word "terror" 1.4), meaning they are connected to negative feelings. The speaker can expect that these words will trigger a strong emotional response in his audience. Behavioral science has shown that emotional information is better remembered than neutral information (cf., e.g., Dolan 2002: 1191–1194). Consequently, Bush could expect that his "war on terror" would stir emotions not only the moment he used the phrase, but also in the future, as expressions with a high emotional valance are remembered longer than others.

Although a catchy phrase in itself, the "war on terror" is an empty signifier. It is lacking concrete meaning, as it does define neither geographic context nor an enemy. George Lakoff (2005) argues that there cannot literally be a war on terror, since terror is an abstract noun: "Terror cannot be destroyed by weapons or signing a peace treaty. A war on terror has no end." Herein also lies the danger of the phraseology: the fight can continue indefinitely, while the target (the chosen personification of "terror") can change, or rather, can be adjusted

at will. The one who leads the war decides who represents “terror.” After 9/11, it was Bush’s administration that defined the term. Through rhetoric, politicians can give a face to terrorism, which itself is not a subject. As Brzezinski (2007) pointedly remarks, terrorism is not an enemy but rather a “technique of warfare – political intimidation through the killing of unarmed non-combatants.” Those who try to assign concrete objectives to the “war on terror” often refer to the National Strategy for Combating Terrorism. The five main goals of the strategy are:

1. Defeat terrorists such as Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and destroy their organizations
 2. Identify, locate and destroy terrorists along with their organizations
 3. Deny sponsorship, support and sanctuary to terrorists
 4. Diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit
 5. Defend US citizens and interests at home and abroad
- (The White House 2012)

The agenda defined in the points above is very vague. However, disregarding the military goals it actually pursued, the “war on terror” became an idea, a powerful symbol in the minds of citizens. The expression triggered emotional responses and discussion and eventually developed a life of its own. Certainly not all the meaning it came to bear was intended or considered by President Bush when he introduced the term. Brzezinski suggests that the three words “created a culture of fear in America” and further explains:

The Bush administration’s elevation of these three words into a national mantra since the horrific events of 9/11 has had a pernicious impact on American democracy, on America’s psyche and on U.S. standing in the world. Using this phrase has actually undermined our ability to effectively confront the real challenges we face from fanatics who may use terrorism against us.

(Brzezinski 2007)

The political scientist underlines the destructive power of Bush’s “war on terror” discourse, which, as he claims, in the long run, caused more harm to the United States than the 9/11 attacks. The angst-induced rhetoric prevented a rational approach to the actual safety crisis, thus harming the nation not only on the emotional level, but also on the political one. The government frequently applied agitating and threatening oratory to justify extreme measures and policies. Rationally speaking, the political actions the U.S. undertook after 9/11 did not reflect strategic thinking nor did they offer solutions to the national safety crisis. I consider it highly problematic to argue that the USA PATRIOT Act or the war in Iraq made America safer from terrorism. Meanwhile, it appears reasonable to question whether the severe restrictions of civil liberties and the military involvement

abroad would have been as willingly accepted by the public if the rhetoric of the time did not entirely operate in the realm of fear.

A rhetoric of fear and hope

The presidential narrative is build up on the dialectic tension between hope and fear. On the linguistic level, he uses many words with a very low degree of pleasantness; most prominently: “attack” (six times), “terror/-ist/-ism” (five times), “evil” (four times). Phrases like: “[America] came under *attack* in a series of *deliberate and deadly terrorist acts*” or: “These *acts of mass murder* were intended to *frighten* our nation into *chaos* and *retreat*” are exemplary of Bush’s fear-inducing rhetoric. When it comes to forced construals along spatial lines: Next to the above mentioned NPs construed as elements inside and outside the deictic center, VP of action construed as markers of impact of ODCs upon IDCs play a dominant role. Entities outside the discourse space (ODC) – the “terrorists” – are moving towards the deictic center and “threatening” or “attacking” IDC actors – the “United States” and its “citizens.” And along axiological lines, IDC values (like “freedom,” “peace,” and “justice”) stand in direct opposition to the “evil” acts of “terror/terrorism” (ODC).

By calling the terrorists “evil” (“Thousands of lives were suddenly ended by evil, despicable acts of terror.”), Bush not only conveys personal judgment but lays the foundation for his administration’s post 9/11 discourse. The moral value of the word is built on the division between guilt and innocence. Evil is feared and condemned, but does not necessarily need to be understood nor discussed. Rediehs states that “[b]y employing the term ‘evil,’ social institutions generate fear to manipulate people’s attitudes and behaviors” (Rediehs 2002). When Bush calls terrorism “evil,” he leaves no room for discussion on its causes and roots. His opinion, expressed with the help of the strong term, becomes the supposedly only right and acceptable view on the attacks. The President presents evil as an inherent moral trait, which conditions evil actions. To him, *it simply exists*. Bush’s point of view stands in contrast to the representations of evil in other crisis speeches by American presidents. For example, in his speech after the Oklahoma City bombing, Bill Clinton stated that: “One thing we owe those who have sacrificed is the duty to purge ourselves of the dark forces which gave rise to this evil” (Clinton 1995). He thereby left open the possibility that specific individual circumstances or conditions within society, like poverty, ignorance, or economic insecurity, may lead good people to perform bad or evil deeds. However, this difference can be partly attributed to the fact that the bombing in 1995 was a domestic act of terror, committed by an American citizen and not someone from outside the country.

Next to the fear of “evil” terrorists and their possible further “evil” deeds from which citizens need to be protected (“Our first priority is to [...] protect our citizens

at home and around the world from further attacks”), the notion of hope plays an important role in the primetime address. The numerous sentences with positively connoted words with a high degree of pleasantness are meant to comfort, unite, and inspire the audience. Bush refers to the “resolve for *justice* and *peace*” that allegedly unites all Americans to whom he refers as a “great people” and “great nation.” Alluding to the supposedly special character of the nation and its values, Bush implicitly evokes the myths of American exceptionalism. He claims that “America was targeted for attack because we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world.” In a jeremiadic manner, the President makes sense of the events, presenting them as a form of trial, in which the country has been called to defend its ideals. Nonetheless – and typically of the American version of the jeremiad – he looks into the future full of confidence, since, as he claims, Americans will “go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.” The events appear as yet another trial in the country’s history from which the nation will come out victorious: “America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time.” The attacks are metaphorically framed as a mythical battle between the allegedly righteous U.S. and evil terrorist – a fight, which bears the promise of ultimate success for America. Murphy criticizes that the resonant tone in which Bush announces to “bring [America’s] enemies to justice” and the supposed resolve for “peace” are mutually exclusive – a peaceful solution is incompatible with Bush’s interpretation of the events as an attack by the guilty terrorists on the innocent United States (2003: 611). Bush’s awkward balancing-act between demonizing the enemy and calling for peace reflects on the fact that logic is over-run by pathos at this point.

To strengthen his message that America is the embodiment of everything good and just, Bush makes use of the light metaphor. He calls the country “the *brightest* beacon for freedom and opportunity” and assures his audience that “no one will keep that *light* from *shining*.” The usefulness and the danger of this device lie in the way it visualizes contrasting concepts. In Western culture, the light dark dichotomy traditionally represents the opposing forces of good vs. evil; a division that has its roots in Christian theology as, according to the Book of Genesis 1:4, “God separated the light from the darkness.” It thus carries a strong moralistic judgment and does not leave room for compromise. Throughout the country’s history, American leaders willingly evoked the metaphor in their public addresses to support varying messages. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his acclaimed ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, contrasts the “*dark* and desolate valley of segregation” with the “*sunlit* path of racial justice” and speaks of a “joyous *daybreak* to end the long *night* of their captivity” (King 1963) in order to advance Civil Rights. Reagan famously added the telling word “*shining*” (Reagan 1989) to Winthrop’s “city upon a hill” in order to reinvent America’s historical notion of itself as chosen and exceptional

in opposition to the “totalitarian darkness” (Reagan 1983) of the Soviet Union during the Cold War era. Employing the adjectives “brightest” and “shining,” Bush, consciously or not, triggers concrete images and emotions in the minds of his American audience. These associations are connected to the biblical roots of the light metaphor as well as its repeated use by leading political figures. In the President’s 9/11 narrative, the light represents the pure and innocent, and thus the “shining” or enlightened country must be on the right side and needs to be defended against the darkness spread by the attackers. The President’s discourse locates all “evil” clearly outside the United States. America, as the home of “freedom,” appears as supposedly morally superior.

Dark and light, fear and hope, good and evil, are juxtaposed throughout the speech. Bush establishes these dichotomies to sharpen the line between the attackers and the attacked, the allegedly innocent and the guilty. He employs a mixture of praise and blame oratory to fulfill the need for “communal understanding,” which Dow defines as a typical characteristic of epideictic rhetoric (1989: 294–310). First and foremost, Bush makes sense of the events and unites the nation. Murphy (1990) affirms that “epideictic rhetoric was initially the appropriate choice. Bush felt the need to define the meaning of 9/11 and we felt the need to understand this horrific event.” Although he does not strive for concrete policy approval yet, his speech sets a certain tone and frame. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyceta, epideictic speeches are characterized by the fact that they do not mention specific actions; however, they are preparing the audience for what is still to come (1969: 49–52). On the evening of September 11, Bush tries to gain public support with the help of pathos: he evokes feelings of sympathy and sorrow for the victims, unites the nation against a threat emanating from the supposedly evil enemy, and promises America’s ultimate success. The immediate ceremonial function of his speech already sets the stage for more distant argumentative purposes. The audience is put into a certain frame of mind. Now, deliberative rhetoric – the rhetoric meant to persuade the audience to take specific actions – can follow. In this way, epideictic oratory focuses on the speaker’s long-term intentions.

Consumerism as patriotic duty

President Bush makes a point in announcing that the country’s financial institutions “remain strong, and the American economy will be open for business as well.” His narrative presents capitalism and consumerism as inherent parts of American culture, which the terrorists attacked by flying planes into the WTC. Consequently, it will add to their defeat if the economy returns to normal as soon as possible, as he claims. Later, Bush will explicitly present consumerisms as a sort of patriotic duty in the “war on terror.” On December 20, 2006 he bluntly states:

"I encourage you all to go shopping more" (Bush 2006b).⁴² Following Paul Smith (2004), I see in Bush's post 9/11 call for consumerism a reflection of the U.S. "deep devotion to a capitalist fundamentalism." Smith further describes America as "a society completely devoted to the upkeep of its means of consumption and means of production, and thus deeply dependent upon the class effects of that system and ideologically dependent upon ancient authorities, which remain tutelary and furnish the ethical life of the culture" (ibid.). He argues that it is "to these kinds of fundamentalism that America appealed after 9/11, by way of phrases such as 'our values,' 'who we are,' 'the American way of life,' and so on; or when Mayor Giuliani and others explicitly promoted consumption as a way of showing support for America" (ibid.). Bush's rhetoric promotes the idea that the attacks were an affront on capitalism and its freedoms and that thus consumerism should be seen as a form of counter-terrorism. Conveniently, the encouragement of consumption does not require major sacrifices from American citizens nor does it call for self-reflection. Rather, it reconfirms a certain lifestyle and places all guilt and responsibility for the crisis outside the community. To those who accept it, Bush's narrative offers an easy way to prove their patriotism. With regards to its lack of self-critique, the President's rhetoric resembles the rhetoric of Covenant Renewal leaders, who wanted to attract Puritan youth to their congregations. Similarly to Bush, they offered a facilitated way to redemption by condemning external evils rather than concentrating on the congregants' individual sins.

Conclusions

In comparison with his first two speeches, the President uses more emotional appeals. He offers the audience his personal interpretation of the events by narrating a story of good vs. evil. Conceptual metaphors and references to the nation's history help him establish the divide between "us" and "them" and frame the terrorist attacks as a war rather than a crime. A rhetoric of Othering supports his black and white worldview. He not only stresses his role as the nation's commander in chief, but also assumes the role of its rhetorical priest or self-appointed spiritual leader, as he evokes (civil-)religious imagery and national myths. Bush refers to his personal faith, and quotes directly from the Bible. The speech falls predominantly into the realm of epideictic rhetoric. Chiefly, the President concentrates on sense making and uniting. He mentions a "war on terrorism" for the first time – the Bush doctrine is born.

42. Similarly, on September 27, 2001, he encourages his audience: "Get down to Disney World in Florida. Take your families and enjoy life, the way we want it to be enjoyed" (Bush 2001l). Here, enjoyment, fun, and frivolity are suggested as alternatives to mourning and panic.

3.1.2.3 *G. W. Bush: Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, National Cathedral, September 14, 2001*

Two days after the hijacked airplanes hit the WTC and the Pentagon, on September 13, 2001, President George W. Bush proclaimed September 14, 2001, as a National Day of Prayer and Remembrance for the Victims of the Terrorist Attacks. On that day, a ceremony during which the President gave a speech was held at the National Cathedral. The Cathedral, like no other building, embodies the complicated relationship between church and state in the United States. In 1791, President George Washington commissioned the French-born American artist and architect Pierre L'Enfant to plan the new national capital, the City of Washington. While designing the layout of the streets, L'Enfant left a space for "a great church for national purposes" (*Washington National Cathedral* 2013). Although the Cathedral was later erected at a different site (on Mount Saint Alban), the planning process shows that the idea of a national church is as old as the federal capital of the country. The project took concrete shape in 1893, when Congress passed a charter allowing the Protestant Episcopal Cathedral Foundation of the District of Columbia to establish a cathedral. Evidently, Congress did not believe that a national cathedral would contradict the First Amendment, which prohibits a congressional "establishment of religion." Today, the Cathedral's website stresses its inclusive spirit: "The Cathedral is a spiritual resource for our nation: a great and beautiful edifice in the city of Washington, an indispensable ministry for people of all faiths and perspectives, and a sacred place for our country in times of celebration, crisis, and sorrow." It aspires to be the church of all people while being a nationally sanctioned Christian church. The Cathedral Church of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, which is its full name, belongs to the Episcopal Church and serves as a seat for two bishops of this denomination. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that it is deeply linked to American history. The Cathedral's Dean, Rev. Nathan D. Baxter in 2001 explained that "[w]hat makes it national to many is that within the Cathedrals' art and craft is presented the broad expanse of our national life" while George H. W. Bush mentioned at the dedication ceremony in 1990 that it was "not just a church [but] a house of prayer for a nation, built on the rock of religious faith, a nation we celebrate as 'one nation under God'" (qtd. in Silberstein 2004: 41). Silberstein calls the Cathedral a "national symbolic site" meaning "a location where government, religion, culture, and the military coalesce, sometimes in uneasy contradiction" (ibid.: 40). It is the natural setting for an event like the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. The building, like the holiday, embodies the sacred and secular myths that America was found upon. Bellah claims that America legitimates itself with the contradictory dynamic of civil religion, which links the country and its citizens to a biblical tradition, and the moral and political

philosophies of the Enlightenment (cf. Bellah 1967). Bush was surely aware of these special dynamics when he prepared his address for the prayer service. The presidential Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony lasted 8:11 minutes and consists of 945 words.

Healing and uniting

The event was perfectly staged in national aesthetics and televised to maximize the uniting effect. National symbols like the U.S. flag were prominently exposed, the military was present, and high rank state officials like Hillary Clinton or the former Presidents George Bush, Sr. and Bill Clinton participated in the service. TV-channels switched from shots of the church's architecture to close ups of politicians, from soldiers' uniforms to crucifixes, showing a mix of religious practice and secular state power. On that stage, Bush almost naturally came to assume the role of pastor in chief; speaking to and for the nation to express the common sorrow, spread hope, and heal. As Leon Panetta, the White House chief of staff for President Clinton, once said: "Part of being the president is being the nation's chaplain" (qtd. in Silberstein 2004: 39).

In a priestly manner, Bush opens his remarks announcing: "We are here in the middle hour of our grief. So many have suffered so great a loss, and today we express our nation's sorrow. We come before God to pray for the missing and the dead, and for those who loved them." The President unites the audience around the shared notion of grief and the purpose of common worship. Moreover, he puts emphasis on what he describes as the special importance of prayers stating that: "*There are prayers* that help us last through the day or endure the night. *There are prayers* of friends and strangers that give us strength for the journey, and *there are prayers* that yield our will to a will greater than our own." The use of anaphora⁴³ puts emphasis on his claim that praying offers hope in a time of sorrow. The themes of solace and unity remain central throughout the service. Bush uses a high amount of hope-evoking words; the address has the highest D.A.L. mean for pleasantness out of all analyzed speeches. On the linguistic level, the uniting effect is additionally strengthened through the use of the personal pronoun "we" (21 times) and its possessive form "our" (23 times).

From priestly to prophetic rhetoric

However, Bush not only rhetorically performs the role of a priest. He also adds prophetic elements to his narrative, putting the attacks into context with the help of (civil-) religious motifs and national myths. The President explains that "*God's*

43. Throughout the book, I refer to anaphora as a rhetoric device.

signs are not always the ones we look for” and that “[w]e learn in tragedy that *His purposes* are not always our own.” He interprets the events as an example of God’s mysterious ways and thereby assigns religious meaning to losses, showing them as part of a bigger plan. The words are reminiscent of Jeremiah 29:11, where it reads: “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” Since the “world He created is of moral design,” as Bush claims, everything must have a purpose. In a jeremiadic manner, the President alludes to the country’s allegedly exceptional destiny and presents the attacks as a test; he speaks of “a trial” and refers to Americans’ “purpose as a nation.” Throughout the speech, President Bush puts special emphasis on the alleged Covenant between America and God. He assures his audience that nothing “can separate us from God’s love” and asks “almighty God to watch over our nation and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come.” The idea of Covenant adds an element of hope to the crisis discourse. The President suggests that, under God’s guidance, the American nation will find its way into a brighter future. He assures his audience that “goodness, remembrance, and love” will prevail, since they have “no end,” while “tragedy and hatred are only for a time.” Thus, God appears a central actor in the history of the nation, its past, present, and future, while Bush is the self-proclaimed prophet.

Moreover, the President introduces an element of judgment to his interpretation of the attacks, a motif which Pierard and Lindner (1988) define as a characteristic of the prophetic presidency. The terrorists appear as personifications of “stealth and deceit and murder” while the attacks are presented as a “war” waged against an allegedly “peaceful” nation. (“War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This Nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger.”) However, as the President announces, the “evil” deeds will not go unpunished: America will assume its “responsibility to history” and will “rid the world of evil.” Just as he did in his Address to the Nation, Bush presents the terrorists as the evil Other. Suggesting that it is the country’s mission to bring them to justice, the President evokes the myth of America’s exceptional role in history. Thus, Bush prophetically applies (civil-) religious appeals and myths to set the stage for his planned “war on terror” policies.

Religion and war

The churchly setting does not hinder the President from introducing the topic of war. On the contrary, Bush uses it to combine religious and military aspects in his sermon-like address. Wrapped in a biblical context, the theme of war reappears throughout the speech. Bush describes the attacks as a “[w]ar” that “has been waged against” America by people who left behind apocalyptic images of “fire and ashes,” which are reminiscent of biblical descriptions of hell. Simultaneously, he

warns his “enemies” that the American nation is now “fierce” as it has been “stirred to anger.” The mentioned fierceness alludes to the military actions that the Senate and Congress approved in the previous days. Prior to the speech, the President has already authorized the Pentagon to call up 50,000 members of the National Guard and Reserve while the Senate and House both passed a \$40 billion emergency aid bill in quick succession to help in the aftermath of the terror attacks. Moreover, Congress passed a resolution authorizing the President to “use all necessary and appropriate force” in response to the attacks (U.S. Congress 2001). Clearly, Bush’s open call for vengeance contradicts the Christian doctrine of turning the other cheek (Matthew 5:38–5:42), which demands a nonviolent response to those who offend us. Nonetheless, the President wraps his call to arms in a religious context; he presents it as a mission to “rid the world of evil” and thereby gives it supposed divine justification. His message to the audience is: God is on America’s side; He is not neutral. Bush suggests the country’s moral superiority and gives the impression that God not only supports his Manichean division into good and evil, but also his policies. The approach is not new; the speech fits into a long history of political texts in which presidents referred to the belief of America’s providential role in foreign affairs (cf., e.g., Domke & Coe 2010; Burgess 1990).⁴⁴

The fact that the service closes with the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” is exemplary of the way religious and military identities are combined in American political discourse. The song, written by the American abolitionist writer Julia Ward Howe in 1862, links the biblical judgment of the wicked at the end of time with the American Civil War. The secession era constituted a strain to the national consciousness; however, America recovered and came out of it a stronger, more united, and free country, as Howe’s text suggests. The hymn has a clearly Christian religious content. It directly mentions the coming of Jesus, warns of God’s wrath, which will be directed against those who worship false deities, and reports on His triumph over His enemies. Already the opening stanza underlines the message of divine sponsorship:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored,
He hath loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword,
His truth is marching on. (Ward Howe 1917:453).

The lyrics support the President’s implicit message that God will fight on America’s side to restore justice. Additionally, just like Bush’s speech, the song subscribes an important role to freedom. The chorus sings: “As He died to make men holy, let

44. It needs to be noted that the God on our side imagery is older than the America presidency itself. Cf. *The Song of Roland* from ca. 1100.

us die to make men free.” Freedom appears as the highest good on earth, which is worthy of every sacrifice. In the presidential address, the terroristic acts are framed as an attack on “freedom,” which America has been “called” to “defend.” In this way, the musical accompaniment at the end of service neatly completes the discursive act of divine sanction for a supposedly holy “war on terror.” The choice of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” was certainly also affected by its popularity: it is a familiar patriotic song, sung e.g. in schools on the 4th of July, and thus known to many Americans.

In the last paragraph, the President cites from the Epistle to the Romans 8:38–8:39, assuring the audience that “neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth can separate us from God’s love.” In this passage, the Apostle Paul explains that salvation is offered to the people through the gospel of Christ, who redeems all those who accept his sacrifice for their sins. In Bush’s interpretation of the 9/11 events, these chosen people are American citizens who stood by God and now have Him on their side in a war that already started. Therefore, I argue that the President uses religious rhetoric in an instrumental manner, in an attempt to mobilize public support for his politics. As the President plays on his audience’s religious convictions to push a military cause, he ironically mimics the language of Osama bin Laden’s call for holy war against the United States (Lincoln 2003). In other words, Bush rhetorically adapts to the discourse and language of his opponents, when he lends the war a religious dimension.

Religion, America, and Bush

The mentioned religious aesthetics of the speech, its text as well as its staging, could not be appealing to atheists. Already the presidential proclamation of the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance has faced some accusations of encouraging an uncomfortable mingling of Church and State and being too narrowly focused in practice on Christianity (cf., e.g., Parker 2001). However, these critical voices among Americans constituted a clear minority. According to a 2012 Pew Research Center survey, atheists make up only ca. 2,4 percent of the U.S. adult population (Lipka 2013).

Some atheists can be assumed to have taken offence. Others might have shrugged off references to God, since Christianity is pervasively present in the U.S. public life. In any case, the chosen convention did not cause wide uproar nor did it not come as a surprise. It stands in line with what American audiences of presidential speeches are historically used to. Bush continued the civil religious tradition practiced by former presidents in times of national despair, a tradition that Americans recognize and that reflects on the civil-religious history of the country and its character.

The occasion and setting seem to make religious references uncontroversial for a large part of Bush's American audience; no major voices of dissent or objection appear in mainstream media after the speech. David O'Connell argues that religion and spirituality are beneficial to the majority of people who have experienced a collective trauma, like the one of the 9/11 terrorist attacks (O'Connell 2012: 46). Moreover, Gallup polls show that in times of crisis, many people, especially Christians and Jews, turn to faith to find comfort (Jones 2003). The God referred to by Bush is a higher being that, according to a Gallup poll, over 90 percent of Americans believe in (Newport 2011). While the people participating in and watching the service belong to different religious groups, an overwhelming majority of them shares the belief in one divine spirit. Thus, references to Him can have a uniting effect.

Although American presidents throughout history routinely appealed to (civil) religion and referenced divine power as rhetorical prophets and priests (Roof 2009: 286–301), Bush more readily than others conflates his personal faith with his role as president, which caused critics like *Newsweek* journalist Howard Finemann to argue:

[T]his president – this presidency – is the most resolutely 'faith-based' in modern times, an enterprise founded, supported and guided by trust in the temporal and spiritual power of God... [T]he Bush administration is dedicated to the idea that there is an answer to societal problems here and to terrorism abroad; give everyone, everywhere, the freedom to find God, too. (Fineman et al. 2003)

The quote captures the widespread belief that Bush's religious perspective not only guides his policies but also defines his understanding of religion as a central means to political and social change. To become the people's spiritual leader a president needs to appeal to his audience through ethos and pathos. However, the persuasive appeal through character can only be achieved if the message fits the speaker; the audience needs to believe in the sincerity of the orator. Even before 9/11, President Bush publicly spoke about his faith and his conversion experience from alcoholic to born-again Christian (Black, Koopman & Ryden 2004: 88). When he continued to include Christian missionary elements in his speeches following the attacks, not even his political opponents questioned the President's religiousness, which shows that the ethos of a true believer suits him. In this sense, his persuasive appeal through personal character was successful.

National unity

President Bush frames the terrorist acts as an attack on the American nation. On the linguistic level, the frequent repetition of the words "nation/-al" (eleven times) and "America/-n" (eight times) supports his point. The nation is an abstract and complex concept. The term refers not only to a group that shares a common territory and government but also to people who share a common culture, ethnicity, language,

descent, or history. Benedict Anderson (1983) defines a nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.” An imagined community is different from an actual community as the members of the former cannot all personally meet and interact with each other – they are simply too many. However, they are nevertheless connected as they hold a mental picture of the group they are part of and which shares common characteristics. As Anderson puts it, a nation “is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (1983:224). To strengthen the ties within imagined communities and thereby make it easier to govern them, presidents often refer to the common history of a people, using it as a binding factor. This approach can also be found in Bush’s address.

On the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance, George W. Bush quotes from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s First Inaugural Address as he announces: “Today, we feel what Franklin Roosevelt called, ‘the warm courage of national unity.’” The former President held his famous speech on March 4, 1933, during the Great Depression (Roosevelt 1933a).⁴⁵ It was a time of economic hardship for the United States, a time that required sacrifices from many Americans, and a historical period that shaped the face of the country. Bush could assume that mentioning the recession of the 1930s would trigger images of that crisis in the minds of his national audience. While the evaluations of Roosevelt’s New Deal policies are manifold, the Great Depression eventually ended and the country prevailed. Drawing a parallel between 1933 and 2001, Bush suggests that America yet again finds itself in a critical situation. However, if citizens unite, this new challenge will equally be overcome. In 1933, FDR called all citizens, “old and young alike,” to combine their strength in the common recovery effort (Roosevelt 1933a). In 2001, Bush calls for unity and civic engagement in the face of a terrorist attack. Although Roosevelt had to manage an economic crisis while Bush’s administration had to face a national security crisis, the rhetorical approaches are very similar. Both Presidents were presumably aware that it is easier to pass difficult policies, if the wellbeing of the country appears as the higher good at stake – something more important than individual comforts and privileges. To strengthen the uniting effect of his words, Bush additionally wraps “the warm courage of national unity” into a civil-religious context. He assures his audience that “[t]his unity is of every faith and every background” and that it even extends beyond partisan borders, which in times of crisis have to give way to national solidarity:

45. The original text reads: “We face the arduous days that lie before us in the warm courage of national unity; with the clear consciousness of seeking old and precious moral values; with the clean satisfaction that comes from the stern performance of duty by old and young alike.”

This has joined together political parties and both houses of Congress. It is evident in services of prayer and candlelight vigils and American flags, which are displayed in pride and waved in defiance. Our unity is a kinship of grief and a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies.

Rhetorically, Bush has an easier task uniting his citizens than Roosevelt, since he can present the terrorists as a common out-group “enemy.” Creating a polarizing divide between “us” and “them” with the help of lexico-grammatical carriers of proximization like “deliberative and massive cruelty” and “stealth and deceit and murder” on one side and “peace,” “bravery,” or “honesty” on the other. The President unites Americans in opposition to the Other, calling citizens “to prevail against our enemies” in “unity against terror.” The attackers appear as “enemies” of the united “us” of all Americans (“our enemies”) and their terror allegedly threatens the entire nation. Bush announces: “War has been waged against us by stealth and deceit and murder. This nation is peaceful, but fierce when stirred to anger. This conflict was begun on the timing and terms of others; it will end in a way and at an hour of our choosing.” Thus, translated into proximization parameters, the out-group entities cross the DS towards its center, which prompts the in-group entities to react. According to the President, the display of American flags already demonstrates “a steadfast resolve to prevail against our enemies” and the readiness to collectively defend the country.

Additionally, Bush claims that the unity extends even beyond American borders: “[T]his unity against terror is now extending across the world.” The term “world” reappears six times throughout the speech adding emphasis to his point. In fact, the world followed the events via modern means of mass communication and many leaders as well as powerful media channels expressed solidarity with the American nation. *Le Monde* published the famous headline “We Are All Americans,” a band outside the Buckingham Palace played “The Star-Spangled Banner,” and the NATO for the first time in its history invoked Article 5 of the Washington Charter, calling its members to treat 9/11 as an armed attack on them all (Colombani 2001). The images of these supportive acts were transmitted by the media and gave additional credibility to Bush’s assurances of the global dimension of the “war on terror,” which he framed as a war in defense of supposedly Western values.

The American character

In Bush’s narrative the 9/11 events appear a test in which America showed its true “national character.” The President states that “it is said that adversity introduces us to ourselves” and claims that “[t]his is true of a nation as well.” In a manner reminiscent of Puritan jeremiads, he refers to the attacks as a “trial” through which Americans “have been reminded and *the world has seen* that our fellow Americans are generous and kind, resourceful and brave.” Bush

The victims of the attacks are acknowledged as individuals. Bush reminds his audience that they were not just abstract numbers in a statistic, but real people

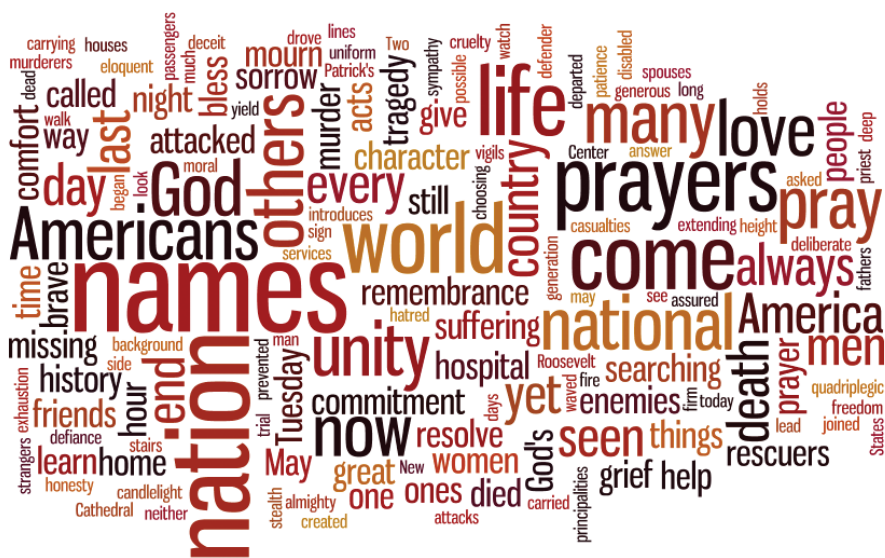


Figure 3. Word cloud for President Bush's Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, September 14, 2001

with “names” (in the respective word cloud the word appears in the largest font), lives, and stories, who were suddenly torn from this world:

They are the names of men and women who began their day at a desk or in an airport, busy with life. They are the names of people who faced death and in their last moments called home to say, “Be brave,” and, “I love you.”

They are the names of passengers who defied their murderers and prevented the murder of others on the ground. They are the names of men and women who wore the uniform of the United States and died at their posts. They are the names of rescuers, the ones whom death found running up the stairs and into the fires to help others.

The dramaturgy, which he builds up through the use of anaphora, helps to create a narrative of bravery and martyrdom around those who lost their lives helping others. On the emotional level, the examples are meant to establish bonds of affection between the audience and the victims. Bush assures the families and dependents of the victims: “you are not alone.”

Metaphors and war

In the speech at the National Day of Prayer, the crime framing, which was prominent in Bush’s statements immediately following the attacks, is largely replaced by the Terrorism Is War metaphor. Bush still speaks of “victims” (once) and “murderer/-s” (three times). Otherwise however, metaphors from the source domain of war dominate his oratory. Among others, the President uses the words “enemies” (twice) to describe the attackers; he speaks of “casualties” and the “missing and the dead” in a “conflict” and even directly calls the attacks a “war.”

Mral argues that conceptual metaphors can serve as “instructions for dealing with the reality and the threat” (Mral 2004: 9). They interpret and categorize events and define one clear answer and the allegedly one-and-only right, patriotic political stand. In order to ideologically frame the terrorist attacks, Bush makes use of the conceptual metaphor War Against Terrorism Is Mythical Battle. There is the allegedly selfless hero, America as “freedom’s home and defender,” and there are the villain-terrorists, the “enemies of human freedom,” who need to be brought to justice. In this battle, individual American citizens heroically fight the evildoers in order to save and protect others (“passengers who defied their murderers and prevented the murder of others on the ground”). As Sandra Fadda sums up, “the villain-terrorists were confronted by the hero-passengers to save the innocent victims on the ground. In the target domain, then, war is presented as necessary in order to restore the moral order and freedom” (Fadda 2014: 921–931). The mythical battle framing simultaneously also promises American success, since the “good” will always prevail.

Bush's freedom

Throughout American history, from the fight for independence to the abolition of slavery, the idea of freedom acted as a progressive force. Franklin D. Roosevelt on January 6, 1941, in his State of the Union Address, famously defined four freedoms: freedom of speech and religion and freedom from want and fear (Roosevelt 1941a). They were then incorporated into the Atlantic Charter, taking human rights to the next level. Since the term is highly abstract, its exact meaning often derives from context. In Bush's post 9/11 narrative, "America's most important idea" comes to play a new role (Lakoff 2006). I argue that the President redefines the term for his political purposes. He assigns new meaning to the idea, by interpreting the September 11 attacks through what Burke (1968) calls a "terministic screen" of American exceptionalism.

A terministic screen is the sum of terms through which people perceive the world. The way speakers describe phenomena directs attention away from some interpretations toward others and thereby changes the way the audience perceives the object of discussion. There is no way to avoid screens. As Burke sums up: "We must use terministic screens, since we can't say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another" (Burke 1968). Bush uses the lens of exceptionalism to make sense of the events and advance his policies, presenting them as adequate in the light of America's supposedly special role. He revives and adapts the Puritan-derived narrative in order to rhetorically create a reality in which Americans are yet again a chosen people. According to Burke, one way to transcend social and political differences is to "move from a plane of ideology to the plane of myth" (1947: 195–205). Bush asserts the audience that Americans are historically destined to build and protect a world order based on freedom, justice, and democracy. Already on September 11 Bush refers to the United States as the "brightest beacon for freedom" and on September 14 he calls it "freedom's home and defender." He assumes a historical line of argumentation to advertise America's supposed responsibility to protect freedom. The President reminds his audience that the idea of freedom was among the country's founding principles; principles that prior generations fought for and which now need to be protected: "the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time." Bush's rhetoric turns the "war on terror" into America's new frontier. The parallel makes voices of dissent difficult as it equates being a real American with living the myth of exceptionalism and presents the war as a new mission – abandoning the new frontier would accordingly be un-American and unpatriotic. Therefore, I consider Bush's rhetoric only seemingly uniting; it merely unites those who embrace his idea of America as a country on a righteous mission and excludes all those with different convictions.

The President perpetuates the fear of further attacks when he tells his audience that the terrorists continue to endanger “human freedom” in the world. He interprets the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon as affronts against America as “the home and defender” of the idea. The terrorist attacks, as he suggests, constitute just the beginning of a war between two worldviews – a war in which America might become the target of further acts of violence if it does not stop the Other. On the metaphorical level, the United States become yet again a “city upon a hill,” which now needs to protect the ideals it was found upon. However, while prior leaders often used the idea of freedom as a driving force for progress and reform, Bush introduces the motif to preserve the status quo or even, as his later proposed policies will show, to justify cuts in civil liberties. George Lakoff argues that the political Right “discovered” the word freedom for itself and attempts to “redefine the very idea” in order to advertise conservative values (2006: 5). According to this view, Bush uses freedom in his war rhetoric as central weapon in the fight against terror. Showing America’s core values as endangered is the first step to justify war as the only option. Additionally, he stresses “the commitment of our fathers.” For a substantial part of the audience, the Greatest Generation that fought against Germany in WWII immediately comes to mind here. The words “calling of our time” establish a direct parallel between former evils, specifically the World War II crimes against humanity, and the crimes of the terrorists. They imply that the heirs of the old war heroes now have the responsibility to assume the fight against the new evil of terrorism. The President suggests that if the “enemies” are not stopped now, the sacrifices of the generations before, to which Americans owe their freedoms, would all have been in vain. By changing the public discourse around the idea, Bush changes the connections in his audience’s cognitive systems equating the “war on terror” with a fight for freedom.⁴⁶

The Bullhorn moment

After the service at the National Cathedral, President Bush visited ground zero, where he addressed firefighters and rescue workers. The short statement he gave there is a great example of nation-constructing rhetoric after 9/11. Although not a previously prepared speech like the other discussed texts (it implies spontaneous interaction with the audience), the famous bullhorn moment considerably added

46. Bush is not the first leader to claim freedom for the political Right. Among others, Conservatives framed the war in Vietnam as a war for freedom. Nonetheless, Lakoff’s (2006) point that American conservatism appeals to a notion of freedom rooted in strict father morality remains valid. Following Lakoff, I see the conservative approach as a “hijacking” process with regard to an idea, which has been traditionally based on progressive values of nurturance and empathy (nurturant parent model).

to a shift in public perception of Bush as orator. Standing atop the rubble of the WTC, the President embraced Bob Beckwith, a retired firefighter, and addressed the gathering via a megaphone: "Thank you all. I want you all to know –" Here, he was interrupted by the crowd, which shouted: "Can't hear you." The President spontaneously replied that he "can't talk any louder," which caused widespread laughter. He then continued:

I want you all to know that America today – that America today is on bended knee in prayer for the people whose lives were lost here, for workers who work here, for the families who mourn. This nation stands with the good people of New York City, and New Jersey and Connecticut, as we mourn the losses of thousands of our citizens. (Bush 2001e)

Bush told the first responders at the scene that they were in the country's prayers. His words were meant to unite the nation around the idea of shared victimhood. The President assured his audience that the immediate victims of the attacks and their dependents, "the good people of New York City, and New Jersey and Connecticut," were not alone and that America collectively mourned the loss of "our citizens". These declarations of solidarity were meant to strengthen the bonds between citizens, presenting the events as a matter of every American's concern. However, the crowd interrupted him once again with the words: "Can't hear you." This time, Bush memorably replied through the bullhorn: "I can hear you. The rest of the world hears you. And the people who knocked down these buildings will hear all of us soon." Loud cheers and applause followed these words. Then, the audience chanted with one voice: "USA! USA!" On the wave of this patriotic upheaval, Bush closed his remarks at ground zero saying: "The nation sends its love and compassion to everybody who is here. Thank you for your hard work. Thank you for making the nation proud." He assumed the role of the leader and the voice of the nation, thanking the gathered crowd of helpers for what he depicted as a patriotic service. At the end, the President added "may God bless America," while the applause and the "USA" cheers continued.

The short address is often described as a turning point in Bush's perception as a rhetorical leader (Gregg 2003: 143–148). Before 9/11 the President's abilities as orator were more often subject to satire than praise.⁴⁷ However, on September 14, on ground zero, he hit the right tone. All the different necessary puzzle pieces added up to a successful staging of the moment. Bush was personally present at the heart of destruction. He demonstrated closeness to

47. E.g.: "Rarely is the question asked: is our children learning?" (Bush 2000)

his fellow citizens when he embraced a firefighter, standing in the middle of the crowd and wearing rather informal attire. Furthermore, his spontaneous response showed that he is able to inspire and unite the nation as its chief in a time of crisis. Again, he constructed the unity in opposition to an allegedly evil Other that needs to be brought to justice: “the people who knocked down these buildings.” Soon hereafter, the expression “bullhorn moment” entered the American *Urban Dictionary*, where it is defined as “a turning point in one’s popularity and perceived effectiveness” (“Bullhorn Moment” 2013). In this way, Bush, with the help of rhetoric, was able to turn crisis into opportunity, gaining legitimacy as a leader.

Conclusions

In his speech on September 14, the President rhetorically assumes the role of the nation’s priest; he uses emotional appeals, civil religion, and myths in an attempt to unite and comfort his audience. Mourning, prayer, and biblical references are crucial ingredients to Bush’s sermon-like address, which has a ceremonial character and falls into the realm of epideictic rhetoric. Considering the occasion (National Day of Prayer and Remembrance) and the setting (National Cathedral), the speech fits the given socio-cultural context. However, Bush also includes prophetic element in his post 9/11 narrative. The theme of judgment becomes central as the President rhetorically divides the world in two camps: the allegedly righteous Americans and the villain-terrorist. In a jeremiadic manner, the President makes sense of the attacks and assigns meaning to losses by metaphorically framing them as a test. He evokes the myth of American exceptionalism to implicitly promote the notion of alleged divine support for the country’s new mission of “rid[ding] the world of evil.” The President carefully balances between hope and fear. With the help of a rhetoric of Othering he pinpoints and blames an allegedly “evil” enemy and perpetuates the fear of further attacks. Simultaneously, he praises Americans’ response to the acts of terror and defines a “national character.” The President starts to metaphorically frame the events as a war or mythical battle and implies that America will come out of it victoriously. Moreover, Bush’s rhetoric locates all evil and guilt outside of the U.S. Thereby, his narrative frees those who accept it from the burden of self-reflection; it offers an easy path to absolution in a manner which is reminiscent of Covenant Renewal jeremiads.

Although the speech focuses on the past events, the framing permits Bush to hint at challenges that are still to come – chiefly the war that his administration was then already preparing. Murphy fittingly concludes that Bush’s rhetoric on that day “shapes the world that provides the backdrop of values and beliefs, heroes and villains, triumphs and tragedies against which and through which deliberative

and forensic judgments are made in a ceaseless swirl of discourse" (2003:610). While President Bush does not violate the occasion with direct policy arguments, he already indirectly opens the way for a line of argumentation that will unveil his war policies as the only right and patriotic solutions. The speech prepares the audience for deliberative rhetoric, which will soon follow.

3.1.2.4 *G. W. Bush: Address to a Joint Session of Congress following the 9/11 attacks, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001*

Nine days after the suicide aircraft attacks, President Bush addressed the Joint Session of Congress and delivered his up until that point longest speech on the 9/11 events. In it, he puts the acts of terrorism into context, identifies the perpetrators of the attacks, and defines the foundation for his foreign policy response. The speech was transmitted during primetime hours; it lasted 36 minutes and consists of 3015 words. President Bush and his advisors had more than one week to prepare and develop a strategy and to decide on the mode of communicating their suggested policies to the public. The President certainly knew that the eyes and ears of his fellow citizens and people all over the world would be upon him that evening – to a degree that was unimaginable in Winthrop's era. In the age of mass communication, in a world that has turned into McLuhan's (2002) "global village," no word could be accidental. In fact, in the U.S., the address turned out to be the "most-watched presidential speech on record" with 82.1 million viewers and ranking only second to the Super Bowl among all television ratings up until the year 2001 (Cook 2002:237–239).

Coalition building

In his speech, the President had to fulfill the expectations of multiple audiences. He was not only directly addressing the members of Congress but also a wide, heterogeneous American public as well as an international audience. Bush was seeking the support of all these groups for his planned policies.

First, the President "thank[s] the Congress for its leadership at such an important time" and states that "[a]ll of America was touched on the evening of the tragedy to see Republicans and Democrats joined together on the steps of this Capitol, singing 'God Bless America.'" The situation demands that partisan divides are put aside for the sake of a greater, common duty of jointly serving their country, as he suggests. Bush specifically praises the congressional actions that were taken so far: "you acted, by delivering \$40 billion to rebuild our communities and meet the needs of our military." The President implies that the American public expects cooperation from its elected representatives and thereby increases the pressure for bipartisan compromise. Moreover, like presidents before him, Bush addresses

We will not forget South Korean children gathering to pray outside our embassy in Seoul, or the prayers of sympathy offered at a mosque in Cairo. We will not forget moments of silence and days of mourning in Australia and Africa and Latin America. Nor will we forget the citizens of 80 other nations who died with our own: dozens of Pakistanis; more than 130 Israelis; more than 250 citizens of India; men and women from El Salvador, Iran, Mexico, and Japan; and hundreds of British citizens.

By mentioning displays of sympathy in different countries and commemorating foreign nationals who died in the terrorist attacks, Bush lends an international dimension to the events. The President attempts to build a global coalition for his “war on terror” and therefore announces: “We ask every nation to join us.” Furthermore, Bush wants “to speak (...) directly to Muslims,” assuring them that he makes a clear distinction between “our many Muslim friends” and the terrorists. The President stresses that the “teachings [of Islam] are good and peaceful” and adds that “the terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself.” However, by stating: “We respect your faith,” he suggests that Islam is not part of the American “we” – it is *your* and not *our* faith – and thus alienates Muslim Americans.

Bush establishes a clear divide between America’s “friends” and “allies” on one side, and “enemies” on the other. The President also makes a point in directly addressing the latter, announcing: “The United States of America makes the following demands on the Taliban: Deliver to United States authorities all the leaders of al-Qaeda who hide in your land.” However, probably the most memorable sentence from that evening remains: “Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.” The words quintessentially capture the uncompromising nature of Bush’s ideological divide. With his claim the President establishes a black and white worldview and leaves no room for neutrality.

The “strong” state of the union – A patriotic narrative

George W. Bush starts of his address declaring: “In the normal course of events, Presidents come to this chamber to report on the state of the Union. Tonight, no such report is needed. It has already been delivered by the American people.” According to the President, the response of U.S. citizens to the terrorist attacks is revealing of the state of the country. Bush mentions “the endurance of rescuers, working past exhaustion (...), the lighting of candles, the giving of blood, the saying of prayers” as well as the “decency of a loving and giving people who have made the grief of strangers their own.” To him, these acts of help and solidarity define the character of the American people.

The President specifically stresses that he sees the “strong” state of the Union in “the courage of passengers, who rushed terrorists to save others on the ground.”

Bush singles out Todd Beamer, who was a passenger aboard United Airlines flight 93 and tried to reclaim the aircraft from the hijackers. He makes a point in personally welcoming the man's widow, Lisa Beamer, who came to Washington for the speech. In the presidential narrative, the Beamer family symbolically represents the fate of many Americans who lost their lives in effect of the attacks as well as their dependents. The personal story facilitates an emotional connection between the victims and the domestic audience. Moreover, it creates a narrative of heroism around the events: the deeds of Todd Beamer serve to epitomize the meaning of selfless, patriotic service. At the end of his speech, Bush offers another example of what he presents as the heroism of the American people. He shows a police shield that belonged to George Howard and recalls that the man "died at the World Trade Center trying to save others." The President received the shield from the officer's mother and announces that he will now carry it as a "reminder of lives that ended, and a task that does not end." On the one hand, the shield represents the grief of American families who lost relatives. On the other hand, the example of Mr. Howard also demonstrates the readiness of public servants, in this case a police officer, to defend their country even at the risk of losing their lives. However, Bush not only assigns the hero status to these two men; by praising Americans' response to the attacks and announcing that "Our nation – this generation – will lift a dark threat of violence from our people and our future" he additionally extends the hero status to the entire nation.

Through his encouraging words on the allegedly "strong" state of the Union, the President rhetorically spreads hope in a time of despair. On the linguistic level, he supports his message through the use of hope-evoking vocabulary with a high degree of pleasantness like "support," "together," or "victories." Additionally, the President strengthens his patriotic narrative by mentioning national symbols (like "the unfurling of flags"), civic sacrifices, and (civil-)religious myths.

The myth of American exceptionalism and Bush's "mission"

Like in his prior addresses, Bush interprets 9/11 through the verbal perspective (Burke's terministic screen) of American exceptionalism. Drawing on the Puritan idea of the country's special role, the presidential narrative implies that Americans are destined to build and protect a world order based on freedom, justice, and democracy. These three values appear in connection to one another throughout the speech (Bush uses the word "justice" five times and mentions characteristics of a democratic system like a "democratically elected government"). However, "freedom" is what it boils down to in the end, all other values are incorporated in the term and cannot exist without it. Bush repeats the word 13 times throughout his address and applies the idea as an overarching frame of reference. According to the President, the terrorists attacked "freedom" itself and America is now "called

to defend [it].” As Lakoff argues, “repetition of language has the power to change brains” (2006: 10). If a word is associated over and over again with certain themes, its meaning can get redefined in the audience’s minds. New collocations are born and unconsciously influence the way people think. Bush’s rhetoric implicitly connects God to freedom and juxtaposes these motifs with “fear” and “cruelty” in order to lend the war against terrorism supposedly divine justification: “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.” Since America has God on its side, it can rest “assured of the rightness of [its] cause, and confident of the victories to come,” as the President suggests. Referring to the country’s allegedly special role he claims that “[a]s long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror; this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world.” Bush gives the events a missionary dimension as he announces: “In our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment.” The civil-religious framing lends meaning to the 9/11 events: America appears as a country on a mission that has to fight and defend its ideals. The President interprets the terrorist attacks as a form of trial, which reconfirms the country’s allegedly exceptional role and thereby implicitly heralds ultimate success.

Bush’s tone is confident and the outcome, America’s victory and the “defeat” of the terrorists, is never put into question. Although, as Bostdorff argues, wartime leaders must speak confidently if they want to maintain public support, Bush’s rhetoric often, as in this case, “went beyond simple confidence to outright certitude” (Bostdorff 2003: 307). The President introduces the theme of predestination, a favorite of Puritan leaders, when he assures his audience that it is already determined that the country will “win this war.” Bormann argues that Puritans were “sustained through a progression of defeats by the beacon of inevitable victory” (Bormann 2001: 50). As they believed that their cause was not only right but also divinely predestined to succeed, Puritans were more determined and willing to follow their leaders even under difficult circumstances. In a similar way, the notion of predestination supports Bush’s post 9/11 discourse: it can be considered more likely that citizens will support a war, accepting its hardships and dangers, if they believe that the effort will ultimately lead to success.

The missionary approach to American foreign policy is not uncommon in presidential rhetoric. Similarly, Roosevelt used the romantic notion of American exceptionalism and its inherent sense of mission to convince his people to enter World War II. In his 1941 State of the Union Address, he argues that, since the earliest colonial times, America wanted to reform the world: “Since the beginning of our American history, we have been engaged in change – in a perpetual peaceful revolution” (Roosevelt 1941a). However, although he claims that America’s role in change has up until that time been “peaceful” (a highly problematic statement

considering the country's colonial history as well as later military engagements), he simultaneously stresses that the political situation of the time allegedly demands engagement that goes beyond the passive role-model character of a "city upon a hill." Roosevelt also rhetorically connects freedom to God in order to show that American military involvement in WWII would be, in fact, a further fight for freedom, which supposedly stands in line with the country's history and its ideals. He speaks of "support" for those who fought to protect "human rights," which he equates with "freedom." Additionally, he uses religious rhetoric to spread hope of ultimate success; he claims that America's faith in freedom was placed "under the guidance of God" and that therefore the fight must result in victory: "This nation has placed its (...) faith in freedom under the guidance of God. (...) Our support goes to those who struggle to gain those rights or keep them. (...) To that high concept there can be no end save victory" (Roosevelt 1941a). In this way, both Presidents corrupt the idea of America as "a city upon a hill" in order to gain support for their supposedly missionary military actions.

Defining the enemy: The evil Other

The speech follows a call and response pattern, which adds a familiar, conversational tone and engages the audience on the emotional level. Bush presents himself as an empathetic leader, suggesting that he understands what is going on in the minds of his citizens. He claims to know: "Americans have many questions tonight. Americans are asking: Who attacked our country?" The first step to start a war is to define an enemy. That is also the approach taken by President Bush; he pinpoints al-Qaeda as the responsible party behind the attacks: "The evidence we have gathered all points to a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations known as al-Qaeda." However, Bush's definition of the enemy remains purposefully broad. It includes a whole terrorist network and its supporters: "Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists, and every government that supports them." The frequent repetition of the pronouns "they" (25 times) and "their" (17 times) leaves room for interpretation whether the President means the attackers, terrorists, or maybe Islamists. This vagueness will later on allow the President to expand the category "enemy" according to his political needs. Bush makes clear that no distinction will be made between the terrorists and those who harbor or support them. ("From this day forward, any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.") Thereby, he rationalizes the military, political, legal, and ideological struggle against not only organizations but also entire countries. The President rhetorically creates a war that is neither limited to a specific territory nor bound by time: "Our 'war on terror' begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped and defeated."

The second question concerns the reasons for the attacks: “Americans are asking, why do they *hate* us?” The specific wording already frames the events in terms of ideology and thereby implicitly prepares the listeners for Bush’s suggested answer. Likely, the more obvious question on the minds of many American citizens might have been “why did someone attack us?” However, by introducing the motif of hate, Bush puts into focus an emotional and thereby irrational aspect. The cruel attackers, blinded by hate, had no other purpose than destruction and the infliction of pain, as he implies. Hence, there is no chance of reconciliation or mutual understanding as the strong negative feelings on the side of the Other allegedly make communication impossible. By asking the question, Bush a priori presents the attacks as an ideologically driven hate crime. The word “hate” appears three times throughout the speech. The President claims: “They *hate* what they see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. (...) They *hate* our freedom”. Moreover, the pronoun “us” carries the generalized claim that all Americans, and not just certain American policies or aspects of public life, are the object of the mentioned “hate” of the terrorists. The rhetorical framing presents the attacks as part of a global ideological battle over values. The out-group (terrorists and those who support them) attacked and continues to threaten the in-group (Americans and their allies) which bears disastrous consequences for the entire world. To further illustrate his point Bush adds: “Al-Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world – and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.” The mafia analogy puts focus on the organized character of the Islamist group around Osama bin Laden. Additionally, it perpetuates the fear of further attacks as it implies that the terrorists will not stop until they reach their alleged goal of “remaking the world.” In the presidential narrative, the worldview represented by the Islamists and the one represented by America appears as incompatible in all respects.

To further discredit the enemy, Bush employs the term “evil” (twice). As I discuss in my analysis of the Address to the Nation from September 11, the word “evil” carries a moral judgment. By calling the terrorists and terrorism evil, Bush cuts the discussion on its causes and roots, as evil, though feared and condemned, does not need to be understood. The President says of the terrorist that, after being “trained the tactics of terror [,][t]hey are sent back to their homes or sent to *hide* in countries around the world to *plot evil* and *destruction*”. The verb “to plot” in itself carries a negative connotation. It is used as synonym for making secret plans or planning an ambush. Nothing good is ever plotted. Used in collocation with the nouns “evil” and “destruction” (both have low degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L.), it leaves the audience with a thoroughly negative picture of the attackers. Furthermore, the use of the word “hide” implicitly suggests that the “evil” terrorists themselves as well as their surroundings are well aware of the

guilty nature of their deeds and therefore they keep out of sight and conceal their plans. Bostdorff convincingly sums up that “Bush depict[s] evil as a cause rather than an effect, a stance crucial to the appeal of his discourse for U.S. citizens, as well as for understanding his foreign policy predilection for unilateral and pre-emptive action” (2003: 294). In the President’s narrative, the allegedly evil character of the external enemy is at the root of the 9/11 crisis. The framing serves to legitimize the “war against terrorism” as a mission with the ultimate goal of eliminating evil.

Bush also uses the word “evil” in reference to the – according to him – only supposedly religious motivation of the attackers: “those who commit *evil* in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah”. The President emphasizes that “committing evil” cannot be in line with the religion of Islam. Thereby, he negates the religious justification of 9/11 as righteous Jihad that the terrorists use in their narratives. As the attacks were, to Bush, an act of “evil,” consequently they can have nothing to do with religion. Ironically however, Bush’s narrative of a supposedly righteous “war on terror” uses God and religious concepts of evil in a similar way that al-Qaeda leaders legitimize Jihad. Therefore, Noam Chomsky suggests that “in both cases [the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. attack on Afghanistan] the crimes are considered right and just, even noble, within the doctrinal framework of the perpetrators; and in fact are justified in almost the same words” (Chomsky 2002: 145). Both, bin Laden’s Jihad narratives as well as Bush’s “war on terror” discourse, show fundamentalist traits and promote polarizing, one-dimensional worldviews. The religious doctrine of a spiritual battle leaves no room for compromise. Therefore, I consider Bush’s dividing rhetoric of “evil” as highly problematic and, in fact, undemocratic and argue that it promotes a zero-sum-thinking, which falls into the realm of wartime propaganda.

War as *fait accompli* and Bush’s call for renewal

In Bush’s narrative the state of war appears as a given fact. The President asks: “*How will we fight and win this war?*”. The question already implies an interpretation of the events. According to Bush, the U.S. already *is* at war. By hijacking the airplanes the terrorists allegedly started a war that America is now only *reacting* to. Consequently, the President only needs to decide on “how” to fight it, which he does in the following sentence: “We will direct every resource at our command – every means of diplomacy, every tool of intelligence, every instrument of law enforcement, every financial influence, and every necessary weapon of war – to the disruption and to the *defeat* of the global terror network”. The rhetorical structure of the address allows Bush to inconspicuously steer the speech in a direction that justifies military actions. By depicting the war as *fait accompli*, he attempts to persuade his audience on the level of logos, claiming that it is only natural that America will now use all available means to defend itself.

Moreover, the President asks: “What is expected of us?” His answer is meant to reassure the American people that they have done nothing wrong and should go on with their lives. The fact that they are allegedly on the right side (“the rightness of our cause”) makes self-reflection redundant and leaves the fault solely on the side of the Others. Therefore, Americans should continue living as they did before the attacks: “I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. (...) I ask you to uphold the values of America, and remember why so many have come here. We are in a fight for our principles, and our first responsibility is to live by them.” Bush presents the conflict between the terrorists and the U.S. as one of values and principles; the terrorist allegedly attacked an American lifestyle. Consequently, he maintains that the best way to oppose the threats of terrorism is to “uphold the values of America.” I see Bush’s rhetoric as a sort of modern, civil-religious call to renew the Covenant. The course of action the President advocates, including donations, the sanctification of consumption (“I ask your continued participation and confidence in the American economy”), and prayers, does not call for substantial sacrifices. Rather, it confirms the American way of life, or Bush’s idea of it, as the right path. Similarly to the rhetoric of Covenant Renewal, the President’s crisis narrative in a way facilitates the way to absolution for believers or followers. I argue that Bush chooses a rhetorical approach that is reminiscent of reformed seventeenth-century jeremiads, since it helps him to confirm a positive self-image of America and does not call for radical change within society. Thereby, it also confirms his political course and thus presents him as a capable leader.

A clash of civilizations

As discussed in the previous chapters, the President’s post 9/11 rhetoric is characterized by the discursive practice of Othering. He gradually introduces the polarizing divide with the help of metaphors, generalizations, and the excessive use of pronouns such as “we/us/our” versus “they/them/their.” However, in the speech to the Joint Session of Congress, a new aspect in Bush’s construction of the Other enters the scene. The President depicts the attacks in a Huntington-like manner as a “clash of civilizations.” His simplistic picture of two worlds, the supposedly civilized vs. the uncivilized, shows many parallels to the “clash” between “Islam” and “the West” that Samuel P. Huntington (2011) predicted would be an inevitable part of the post-Cold War world. In his highly problematic work *The Clash of Civilizations*, the author claims that Western civilization is Christian, has the common experiences of European history, is economically better off than the East, and will get increasingly involved in a common European economy and the consolidation of democratic political systems. In contrast to that, he depicts the East as Orthodox or Muslim, historically belonging to the Ottoman or Tsarist empires, and only modestly affected by development in Europe and the Western world. Therefore, he

concludes, the East also seems much “less likely to develop stable democratic political systems” (Huntington 2011:47). I agree with Edward Said (1998) who notes that Huntington’s polarizing division ignores the dynamic interdependency and interaction of cultures. The “clash of civilizations” thesis implies that each world is “self-enclosed;” it artificially structures civilizations and promotes the notion that each race has a special “destiny and psychology.” Said criticizes the theory as an example of an “imagined geography,” where the presentation of the world in a dividing way legitimates interventionist politics (1998:7). Notwithstanding the flaws of Huntington’s argument, I am convinced that it constitutes a “[p]art of the theoretical underpinning” for U.S. policy-makers’ “distinction between ‘civilized nations’ and ‘rogue’ states,” as Kepel convincingly remarks (Kepel 2004: 61–62).

President Bush draws an impenetrable “civilizational line” between two worlds, the terrorists and those who support them on the one side and America and its allies on the other side. He presents a disordered reality in order to trigger a war-time status in the minds of his audience. Nevertheless, it needs to be noted that the President specifically stresses that the “war on terror” is not a war against Islam:

The terrorists practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics, a fringe movement that perverts the peaceful teachings of Islam. (...)

[Islam] is practiced freely by many millions of Americans, and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. (...) The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends.

The statement stands in line with U.S. foreign policy. It was not the country’s strategic interest to pinpoint the whole Muslim world as an enemy. After all, Bush attempted to win over American Muslims and Muslim countries all over the world for his policies.⁴⁹ Therefore, he paints a picture in which America is at war not with a “barbarian of Islam” but rather a “barbarian of the terrorist” (Salter 2003). In order to establish a binary system and separate the allegedly good from the evil, Bush chooses the category of civilization rather than religion. And with “civilization” Bush means certain democratic values, as he explains: “This is civilization’s fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.”

The President’s post 9/11 narrative implies that by joining America’s “war on terror,” states could prove to be “civilized.” If a country chooses not to support U.S.

49. However, intentionally or not, at other points his rhetoric often connected terrorism to Islam (cf. Chapter 3.1.3.2, section *Religious Othering and post 9/11 Islamophobia*), adding to a negative perception of Muslims among Americans who accepted Bush’s narrative.

counterterrorist policies, Bush's rhetoric interprets it as a sign of barbarity and alliance with the allegedly evil Other. The President thus portrays a worldview, which highly resembles Huntington's third argument on clash, the "real" global "clash" between civilization and barbarism: "On a worldwide basis Civilization seems in many respects to be yielding to barbarism, generating the image of an unprecedented phenomenon, a global Dark Ages ... In the greater clash, the global '*real* clash' [is] between Civilization and barbarism" (Huntington 2011: 321). Similarly to Huntington's thesis, Bush's rhetoric does not explicitly refer to a concrete political goal, at least not yet. However, it "institutes a regime of danger" which will be used to justify military actions (Salter 2003). Bush makes use of the myth in an attempt to trigger in his audience a fear of the Other. This fear should be so powerful as to lead his listeners into an unquestionable acceptance of his proposed measures that will supposedly offer protection from danger (here: the "war on terror" as protection from terrorism.) Referring to Cap's work on axiological proximization in the post 9/11 discourse, Esch adds that "[s]ome of the most powerful legitimization effects in political discourse are achieved with a proximization strategy involving political myth" (2010: 364). As she pointedly sums up, references to the myth of a clash of civilizations "served to legitimize policies in the 'war on terror' through a proximization strategy that portrays the current situation as a function of an 'unprecedented and growing ideological clash' between those inside the deictic center (Americans, the 'west') and those outside the deictic center (Saddam Hussein, terrorists, the 'Islamic world')" (Esch 2010: 364).

The fear of the barbaric other

The President puts special emphasis on the notion of "threat," – one of the key lemmas enacting spatial and temporal proximization (Cap 2008, 2010a, b, 2017) – which allegedly emanates from the side of the enemy. His narrative includes detailed, frightening descriptions of the attackers and their goals. Bush warns his audience of "al-Qaeda's vision for the world," which he sees exemplified in Afghanistan, where "people have been brutalized; many are starving and many have fled. Women are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough." According to Bush, terrorists "kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life." Additionally, the President uses numerous fear-arousing words like "murder" (four times), "threat," "danger," or "terror," strengthening the element of fear on the linguistic level. He dehumanizes the enemy by using metaphors from the animal/hunting and vegetation domains when referring to the terrorists: "We will starve terrorists of funding, turn them one against another, drive them from place to place, until there is no refuge or no rest." The image he draws calls into

mind the hunting of animals. Moreover, Bush announces that “the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows.” He describes terrorism as a plant or rather a weed that needs to be destroyed. The verb form “grows” refers to the assumption that “ideologies of anger and hatred have a tenancy to grow and expand if nothing is done to prevent them from being enacted” and thus supports the communication of “the proximity of threat to free states like the U.S. is (...) within the axiological dimension” (Cap 2008b: 7). While the “enemy” in Bush’s rhetoric is an uncivilized and even inhumane Other, the USA appears as a human entity. The President gives the country human attributes when he claims “the United States of America is determined and strong.” The personification allows the audience to feel a greater identification and a more positive attitude towards the object that has “become” human (Lakoff 2003).

It is noteworthy that Bush uses the words “uncivilized” and “barbaric” with regard to the terrorists on several occasions. He speaks of “those barbaric people who attacked our country” (Bush 2001j) and “barbaric criminals” (Bush 2011m). According to the President, “[t]he civilized world is rallying to America’s side” (Bush 2001d) and together they need to fight and win “a war against barbaric behavior,” (Bush 2001g) which is “a new kind of war, a struggle against barbarians” (Bush 2001f). The devaluation of barbarism is a common technique used by political leaders to excerpt cultural, political, economic, or military domination over Others (Llorente 2002). Rhetors strive to persuade their audience that the behavior of their enemies, the alleged barbarians, is uncontrollably guided by cruel instincts or evil disposition. Often, in their oratory, they draw parallels to infamous barbarians of past centuries. Llorente argues that the Bush administration’s 9/11 discourse aims to present twenty-first-century terrorism as a continuation of the legendary “brutes” like Genghis Khan:

From the moment that Powell and Bush categorized the perpetrators of the attacks as “barbarians,” the enemies of “America’s new war” were directly linked with the legends of other enemies whose existence predates the United States itself, and with the image of menacing nomadic armies coming on horseback to conquer fifth or fourteenth century Europe. Within this discourse, the men who attacked the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon are the postmodern Attila or Genghis Khan, using their flying horses to devastate the symbols – one economic, the other military – that are the basis for the current civilized world.

(Llorente 2002: 41)

In the presidential narrative, the attackers appear as modern savages and consequently the proclaimed “war on terror” appears as the continuation of an eternal struggle between the supposedly civil and the savage. The division affirms very

black and white identities and thereby also helps the President unite the American nation in opposition to an Other that is excluded from it. The polarizing nature of the discourse prompted Kellner to charge Bush for betraying a “hatred of language,” which is rather reminiscent of propaganda (Kellner 2014). In fact, the constructed dichotomy between civilization and barbarism leaves no room for democratic dialog.

According to Said, the “Western persona” only exists in contrast to an “oriental Other” (Said 1979). Bush, like other political leaders, creates and manipulates national identities in opposition to an outside Other. As Connolly remarks “[t]here is no identity without difference” (Connolly 1995:9); identities are relational constructs and the construction process involves a degree of Othering. In Bush’s post 9/11 speeches, this degree is especially high. It is visible in the President’s attempt to rhetorically construct a united American “us” and a united international “us.” While the atmosphere immediately after the attacks was – for many Americans – one of shock and grief and these shared feelings already had a unifying effect on the nation, the President’s constructed “us” is not intended to include everyone: within the U.S. it only unites those who accept the patriarchal, conservative narrative of absolute good and absolute evil (represented through the battle between “civilized” and “barbaric”) and excludes all those with different convictions – this is the *internal* dimension of Bush’s Othering rhetoric. The *external* dimension concerns those who do not support his “war on terror” – Bush tries to put the stigma of supporting terrorism on them. The use of simple dichotomies ignores the multidimensionality of identity and fails to recognize the interconnectedness and complexity of peoples and societies, (social and religious) systems and ideas. It also highlights the importance of pathos for political policies, especially with regard to issues of security. Logos plays only a secondary role; the moralistic tone dominates the rhetoric and leaves no room for rational discussions. From the conservative perspective represented by Bush, there can only be one right side and no alternatives. The “war on terror” in his discourse metaphorically appears as an epic battle or a civilizing mission in which “[c]ivilized people around the world denounce the evildoers who devised and executed these terrible attacks” (U.S. President 2001, Proclamation 7462) and in which America plays the lead role.

Historical framing

In order to frame the war in the context of American history, Bush applies World War II analogies, similarly to the way he did in his speech on September 14. The President equates the acts of al-Qaeda and other terrorists with war actions of U.S. enemies of the past. He mentions “one Sunday in 1941,” a phrase that alludes to the Pearl Harbor attacks, and directly compares the current “enemy” to the Nazis:

They are the heirs of all the murderous ideologies of the 20th century. By sacrificing human life to serve their radical visions, by abandoning every value except the will to power, they follow in the path of fascism and Nazism and totalitarianism. And they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends, in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies.

According to Gallup, in the "collective memory" of most Americans World War II is remembered as a "good war" for the United States (Newport 2004). The country was attacked without a prior warning. The Empire of Japan, the "evil" enemy in the rhetoric of that time, was in an alliance with Germany. By entering WWII, the United States helped to end Hitler's politics of genocide and returned home victoriously. History, which is always written by the victors, has proven that Roosevelt made the right decision in prompting his citizens to get involved in a war fought on a different continent.⁵⁰ Americans still remember the sacrifices and achievement of the so-called Greatest Generation. The analogy thus encourages Bush's audience to perceive the "war on terror" as an allegedly righteous war. As Martin and Wodak point out, "[t]he history of nations, of people, of groups is not a given fact but is constantly discursively constructed anew" (Martin & Wodak 2003: 8). Politicians in their public speeches frequently interpret the past to claim the right to shape the future through their policies. The President redefines the lessons of the 1940s in order to meet subversive ends and ultimately gain support for his "war on terror," which in a jeremiadic manner appears as a new "national challenge." As he concludes: "Some speak of an age of terror. I know there are struggles ahead, and dangers to face. But this country will define our times, not be defined by them. As long as the United States of America is determined and strong, this will not be an age of terror, this will be an age of liberty, here and across the world." His portrayal of the events as a crucial and "defin[-ing]" moment in history is exemplary of temporal proximization. As Cap argues, the strategy allows presenting the situation as of "central importance to the addressee," it brings the events closer and thus facilitates the political legitimization process (Cap 2005: 14). Implicitly, Americans are prompted to act now (in line with the President's suggestions) in order to actively and positively "define" their times and not to let terrorists decide over their fate. Moreover, the term "murderous ideologies" establishes an ideological frame: it defines the (alleged) essence of the functioning of the "Taliban

50. It is not the point of this book to elaborate on the U.S.'s various motivations to enter WWII. While I am aware of the complexity of the issue, I use the statistics to show how, for large parts of U.S. population, the war continues to function as an example par excellence of a black and white battle between good and evil.

regime” and “Islamic extremism” in general in opposition to the U.S. ideology of “democracy” and “freedom.”⁵¹

How successful the President’s rhetorical framing was (including the history frame) is reflected by the fact that opponents of Bush’s way of interpreting the attacks, like Susan Sontag, had to face harsh criticism. Sontag’s contribution to “The Talk of the Town” in the September 24 issue of the *New Yorker*, in which she criticized the responses of political leaders and the mass media to 9/11 and called for self-reflection among Americans, caused tremendous uproar (Sontag 2001). American public figures and the media accused her of being unpatriotic and even attacked her for supporting terrorism. People from the political Right, but also moderate representatives of the media, condemned her as a “traitor” and “America-hater” (Talbot 2001). An article in the centrist *New Republic* began by asking: “What do Osama bin Laden, Saddam Hussein, and Susan Sontag have in common” (Kaplan 2001)? Paraphrased, the answer was that they all want to destroy the U.S. Like other prominent figures who publicly opposed the presidential discourse around the attacks (Noam Chomsky is another example), she was demonized by the part of American population that accepted Bush’s framing of 9/11 without questioning it.

In parts, the wide support for Bush and his policies after the attacks can be subscribed to what Mueller calls the “rally round the flag phenomenon,” a tendency for increased public approval of presidents in times of crisis (Mueller 1973). However, as I argue, Bush’s rhetorical framing, including historical analogies, jeremiadic elements, and the claim on America’s “most important idea,” certainly contributed to the unprecedented 39 percent increase in popularity (Chapman & Reiter 2004). A survey conducted jointly by CNN/Gallup/USA Today proves that the Address to a Joint Session of Congress was well received by the domestic public: 87 percent of respondents felt the speech was “excellent” or “good,” and 78 percent felt it “clearly explained U.S. military goals (cf. Zarefsky 2004: 136–155). Moreover, a Gallup poll revealed that the President’s job approval rating rose from a modest 51 percent before the attacks to 90 percent on September 21, one day after the Speech to a Joint Session of Congress – an all-time high in the history of Gallup polls, which started in the 1930s (Moore 2001). Neither Democrats nor other oppositional voices succeeded in building up an equally powerful narrative as the one offered by George W. Bush.

51. Compare Cap’s discussion of the term “ideologies of murder” and its axiological implication in Bush’s speech at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington D.C. on Feb. 26, 2003 (Cap 2010:6–8).

Conclusions

When it comes to major themes and motifs, the Address to a Joint Session of Congress builds on the Address to the Nation from September 11 and the Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance. Unity and patriotism, freedom, and American exceptionalism dominate the narrative. Civil-religious elements help Bush present the attacks as a war between good and evil. Myth, metaphors, and historical analogies strengthen the polarizing divide between “us” and “them” and outline a vision for a strong American leadership in the world. The rhetoric shows several jeremiadic elements, like the framing of crisis as a test, and especially resembles Covenant Renewal rhetoric by placing all blame outside of U.S. society. Furthermore, the President draws from and reinterprets the pre-existing notions of the American community and its myth of collective identification in order to promote social cohesion. However, this unity is not absolute, nor does it intend to be. The rhetoric unites only those who embrace the Bush administration’s worldview without questioning it while it simultaneously demonizes all Others. Specifically, the presidential narrative strives to bifurcate the world into a simplistic binary system with the help of the category of civilization. The process of Othering has political motivations; the supposed clash serves as a blueprint for his foreign policy.

President Bush’s discourse largely fulfills the epideictic needs posed by the 9/11 attacks: it explains the events, creates and promotes a sense of national community, and demonstrates strong leadership. Moreover, the narrative introduces and advances an ideological fundament for the political measures planned by his administration (like the USA PATRIOT Act and military actions abroad). The speech provides a cathartic release to those who accept Bush’s narrative: it seemingly unambiguously explains the 9/11 events and shows in which supposedly morally justified direction America should be heading.

3.1.2.5 *G. W. Bush: Presidential Address to the Nation, Treaty Room, White House, Washington D.C., October 7, 2001*

In his speech on September 20, 2001, President Bush identified Osama bin Laden as the main suspect in the 9/11 attacks and, among others, demanded of Afghan authorities to deliver him and all other al-Qaeda leaders in Afghanistan to the United States. The regime then denied any involvement in the attacks and publicly condemned them. It confirmed that the fugitive al-Qaeda leader was living in Afghanistan. However, before taking any further actions, it asked for evidence of his alleged involvement in 9/11. The Taliban leader Mullah Mohammed Omar argued that the Bush administration was blaming bin Laden for the events as a pretext for removing the Taliban from power and signaled that his side was open to talks (*Telegraph* 2001). The White House spokesman, Ari Fleischer, responded

to the negotiation offer as follows: “The President’s message to the Taliban is very simple – it’s time for action, not negotiations” (Fleischer qtd. in CNN “White House Rejects Clerics’ Recommendation” 2001). On October 2, Bush himself rejected any further discussions, saying: “There is no timetable for the Taliban, just like there are no negotiations” (Bush qtd. in BBC “The US Refuses to Negotiate with the Taliban” 2013). While it is indeed hard to imagine what such negotiations might have entailed, the finality of his words suggests that the U.S. was not seriously interested in preventing an escalation of the conflict. The above-quoted statements shows that the two governments were not on equal terms, as Bush’s demands were one-sided and nonnegotiable. The President equates the terrorists who committed the attacks with the Afghan government, holding the regime responsible without providing concrete proof of a direct affiliation. This framing supported the legitimization process around the war: Since, as Bush claims, “[n]one of [his] demands were met,” on October 6, the President informed congressional leaders about a planned attack on Afghanistan, which was to start the following day.⁵² Thus, the failure of the other side to meet his “demands,” was used to further justify his policies.⁵³ On October 7, Bush delivered his Presidential Address to the Nation from the Treaty Room of the White House in which he informs the public about the taken war actions in Afghanistan. The speech consists of 968 words and lasted 6:30 minutes.

“Crusades” for “infinite justice” and “freedom” – Bush’s war as a “mission”
On October 7, 2001, U.S. American and British troops launched their first military operations in Afghanistan following the September 11 attacks: warplanes and cruise missiles struck at al-Qaeda bases and Taliban military installations near several key cities, including Kabul and Kandahar. Later that day, Bush delivered a speech from the Treaty Room of the White House in which he informs the public about the taken actions:

More than two weeks ago, I gave Taliban leaders a series of clear and specific demands: Close terrorist training camps. Hand over leaders of the al-Qaeda network, and return all foreign nationals, including American citizens unjustly detained in our country. None of these demands were met. And now, the Taliban will *pay a price*.

52. The legislation Authorization for Use of Military Force Against Terrorists, passed by Congress on Sept. 14, 2001, and signed by both, President Bush and Congress, authorized the use of U.S. Armed Forces against those responsible for the 9/11 attacks.

53. It is not the intent of this book to discuss in how far the military intervention in Afghanistan was justified (from a security perspective) or which alternatives scenarios existed. Rather, I want to illustrate how Bush’s rhetorical framing of the events supported governmental policies.

Right in the beginning of his address, the President indirectly passes on the responsibility for the military intervention to Taliban leaders, who, according to him, left the U.S. no other option, since they did not meet his demands. Bush announces that the “price” they now have to “pay” is called “Operation Enduring Freedom” – the U.S.’ official name for the War in Afghanistan (Rumsfeld 2001).⁵⁴ He uses the Christian imagery of paying for one’s sins with regard to the terrorists and their deeds. The wording implies that forgiveness will not simply be granted to them. The terrorists, through their attacks, took away something from the American people and thereby committed sins, as he implicitly suggests. Now, they are not willing to voluntarily repent and “pay” off their alleged moral debt and therefore the U.S. needs to intervene in order to restore “justice.” The President’s rhetoric of justice and punishment bears resemblance to Jonathan Edwards’ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” sermon, in which the leading voice of the First Great Awakening preached that sinners deserve punishment and that it is God’s will that “divine justice” is brought upon them:

They *deserve* to be cast into hell; so that *divine justice* never stands in the way, it makes no objection against God’s using his power at any moment to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary, *justice* calls aloud for an *infinite punishment of their sins*. *Divine justice* says of the tree that brings forth such grapes of Sodom, ‘Cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground?’ Luke 13:7. The sword of *divine justice* is every moment brandished over their heads, and it is nothing but the hand of arbitrary mercy, and God’s mere will, that holds it back. (Edwards 1741)

However, in contrast to Edwards’ sermon, in which the minister only speaks of “divine justice” in connection to *God’s* execution of it, Bush announces that the *United States* will make the terrorists “pay” for their deeds. The President claims that his administration will stop evil by fighting back: “By destroying camps and disrupting communications, we will make it more difficult for the terror network to train new recruits and coordinate their evil plans.” In Bush’s narrative, America is metaphorically holding the “sword of divine justice” which Edwards’ refers to. Consequently, it supposedly has divine justification for a military intervention against the alleged sinners. According to the President, it is his country’s responsibility to judge the attackers in order to restore peace, preserve freedoms, and prevent further evils. Tellingly, Bush calls the events a “mission,” which the U.S. did not choose to be sent on, but which it will fulfil: “We did not ask for this mission, but we will fulfil it.” The statement bears the implication that Bush sees

54. The campaign was initially called “Operation Infinite Justice.” The name was changed, as D. Rumsfeld explains, because in Islamic faith, the finality that “infinite justice” implies is considered something provided only by God. The implied presumptuousness was ill perceived by parts of Bush’s audience and led to the renaming, as Rumsfeld claims.

himself as a missionary called by God to fulfil His will. The rhetoric resembles the style of the biblical Jeremiah. Like other prophets of the *Old Testament*, Jeremiah presents himself as a spokesman of Yahweh. He laments the futility of refusing to speak in God's name: "Then I said; I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (Jeremiah 20:9). Jeremiah and Bush both claim that they became tools in the hands of God not out of their free will, but because they were chosen. For them, there was no other way than to obey this higher power. Although the President's words are clearly subtler than the ones used by the biblical prophet, they nevertheless still bear adapted characteristics of the classical rhetoric of lamentations. One crucial difference between Bush speeches and classical jeremiads however, is that rather than showing the events as just punishments for society's sins, Bush adopts the specifically Puritan American version of the genre and interprets the events as a test.

By calling the "the war on terror" an unasked-for "mission," Bush suggests that his country was chosen to "rid the world" (Bush 2001d) of terrorism. While the President does not directly refer to God as the author of this special assignment, the way he frames his political objectives in Christian terms carries the implication of a divine call. Certainly, Bush's public image as a true believer and born-again Christian also promoted a religious reading of his speeches. At different points throughout his career the President publicly commented on the impact of his personal religious convictions on his political decisions. For example during an interview with Bob Woodward the President was asked if he seeks his father's advice on Iraq and replied: "You know, he is the wrong father to appeal to in terms of strength. There is a higher father that I appeal to" (Fineman 2004). The quote suggests that it was God, the *heavenly father*, who helped President Bush with his political decisions.

According to a poll conducted among U.S. citizens, more than 50 percent of respondents said that they "like Bush's moral clarity and see this as a sign of good leadership" (Black 2004: 12). On the other hand, almost three of ten respondents criticized the President for talking too much about religion (Black 2004: 12). European audiences were largely critical of the President's style. As Rubert Cornwell observes:

Mr. Bush's Christian fervour only confirms suspicions that the looming war with Iraq is indeed a 'crusade' against Muslims, exactly as Osama bin Laden suggests. (...) A European leader who spoke in such terms would be laughed off the stage. An American one who speaks this way only increases the fear that the simplicities of faith, and a habit of seeing a hideously complicated world in a black-and-white, good or evil fashion, are a recipe for disaster. (Cornwell 2003)

In Europe the line between religion and state, the private and the public, tends to be clearer and stricter than in the U.S. That is why Bush's rhetoric makes many Europeans at least "uneasy" (Black 2004: 4–5). Especially Bush's remarks from the South Lawn of the White House, which he gave after a press conference on September 16, caused uproar from a wide international public, including European press representatives and Muslim audiences. Bush then announced:

We need to go back to work tomorrow and we will. But we need to be alert to the fact that these *evil-doers* still exist. We haven't seen this kind of *barbarism* in a long period of time. No one could have conceivably imagined suicide bombers burrowing into our society and then emerging all in the same day to fly their aircraft – fly U.S. aircraft into buildings full of innocent people – and show no remorse. This is a new kind of – a new kind of *evil*. And we understand. And the American people are beginning to understand. *This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while.* (Bush 2001i)

To Bush, the terrorists are "evil-doers" representing "barbarism" and "a new kind of evil." To stop them the "innocent people," "the American people" must unite in a "war on terror," which he describes as a "crusade." The word "crusade" is used as synonym for several things in modern U.S. American English and therefore does not automatically trigger a mental analogy to the religious conflicts in the Middle Ages in which Christian Europe fought against the Muslim world. The word might have gone unnoticed by many had Bush simply used it to replace the word "war." However, in the context of the cited paragraph the rhetorical set-up encourages a religious reading, as the President depicts the conflict as a struggle between good and evil and specifically mentions "barbarism" that "we haven't seen [...] in a long period of time." In the U.S., the criticism around his word choice was limited to single voices from the left side of the political spectrum. In Europe, however, many felt alarmed as it "raised fears that the terrorist attacks could spark a 'clash of civilizations' between Christians and Muslims, sowing fresh winds of hatred and mistrust" (Ford 2001). The analogy is not only false, as the modern Western world (and the United States in itself) is not monolithically Christian and, more importantly, terrorists should not be equated with Muslims. It is also dangerous, as it could easily deteriorate into racial incitement. Moreover, since Bush was seeking allies for the "war on terror" all over the world, also in Muslim countries, the figure of speech does not help his cause of forming a wide, multinational "coalition of the willing" (Bush & Havel 2002).

Although the President might have intended to use the term "crusade" as a generic description of the campaign (maybe Bush was recalling Dwight D. Eisenhower's D-Day speech, in which the General used the word in a military sense: on June 6, 1944 he called the invasion of Europe by Allied troops a "great crusade")

(Eisenhower 1944), the court of public opinion made the connection to Christian crusades. The criticism did not go unnoticed – the President never again used the word “crusade” in a public speech. In the address on October 7, Bush chooses subtler religious and civil-religious appeals, promoting war policies through a narrative in which “freedom” wins over “fear,” in order to reach a wider national and international audience.

The U.S. as alleged liberator – Responsibility to Protect

In his Presidential Address to the Nation from October 7, Bush presents the U.S. as liberator to Afghanistan, a protector of women and children, as well as an advocate of human rights and chiefly freedom. He announces that “the oppressed people of Afghanistan will know the generosity of America and our allies. As we strike military targets, we will also drop food, medicine and supplies to the starving and suffering men and women and children of Afghanistan.” The wording puts focus on the supposedly disastrous situation for the civilian population. Simultaneously, the President promises help and “generosity.” Interestingly, in his video statement released on the same day (but prerecorded), Osama bin Laden chooses a similar rhetorical approach to frame his interpretation of the events. He glorifies the terrorists as “those [who] have stood in defense of their weak children, their brothers and sisters in Palestine” and stylizes al-Qaida as defender of the weak when he claims: “A million innocent children are dying at this time as we speak, killed in Iraq without any guilt.”⁵⁵ The resemblance between bin Laden’s and Bush’s speeches is striking: both attempt to justify the use force (in the form of terrorist acts or military interventions) as necessary means to protect suffering people. The President stylizes the U.S. as a righteous global sheriff who was left with no other choice but to interfere, or rather to fight back, in order to stop the ongoing injustice. In both cases, all guilt is placed with the enemy.

The President’s claim that the military actions were “carefully targeted” is important, as it suggests that British and American troops directed their attacks solely towards the Taleban and their military bases, which are at the root of the current crisis, and remained cautious in order to minimize civilian casualties among the people of Afghanistan. Bush makes a point in emphasising that “[t]he United States of America is a friend to the Afghan people.” Thereby, he suggests that the intervention, in fact, should be seen as a friendly help to the oppressed citizens of the country. The troops supposedly only entered Afghanistan in order to liberate those tyrannized by al-Qaeda. At different occasions Bush especially

55. The translated transcript of Bin Laden’s speech was published in the New York Times on October 3, 2001 (“Translated Text of Bin Laden Broadcast”).

emphasizes that women and children suffer under the regime. For example in a speech on November 8, he claims that “the terrorists do not believe women should be educated, or should have health care, or should leave their homes” (Bush 2001o). Scholars in the field of Islamic Studies often criticize Bush’s imposing and distorted representations of women in Muslim countries. Among others, Smeeta Mishra argues that Muslim women are superficially portrayed as victims in need of Western liberation for political purposes (Mishra 2007). She notes that the topic is often dominated by a discussion around the veil and that liberation is sometimes “defined narrowly as the exercise of individual choice in the purchase and use of consumer goods such as nail polish, lipsticks and high-heeled shoes” and concludes that “[t]he dominant images of both Muslim men and women serve[] the same purpose: They establish[] the need to intervene to rescue the women and control the men” (Mishra 2007). Leila Ahmed further remarks that Western male imperialists who were often known in their own countries for their “intransigent opposition to feminism” hypocritically led “the attack abroad against the ‘degradation’ of women in Muslim societies” (Ahmed 1992: 160–161). For her, the rhetoric of conservative leaders like Bush uses a constructed position of women in Muslim societies “as proof of the inferiority of Islam and the justification of their efforts to undermine Muslim religion and society” (Ahmed 1992: 160–161).⁵⁶ In agreement with the criticism, I further argue that President Bush stylizes the United States as custodian of human rights and democracy, assuming the right to protect the allegedly weak, in order to legitimize war. The approach is highly problematic since, when the “privileged” construct the consciousness of the “underprivileged,” the epistemic violence hides under the advancement of help and activism, and “the subaltern woman will be as mute as ever” (Spivak 1988: 271–310).

In the tradition of American exceptionalism, which can be traced back to the first Puritan settlers, Bush claims the moral high ground for the U.S., elevating it above other countries. Davis and Lynn Jones see exceptionalism as the heart of the “persistent moralism prevalent in American foreign policy” (Davis & Lynn-Jones 1987: 20–21). The concept of a “city upon a hill,” a model society others should look up to, was gradually sharpened and misused for foreign policy purposes by U.S. American leaders and, as I argue, remains a crucial ingredients to crisis rhetoric. At the end of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson famously announced: “America had the infinite privilege of fulfilling her destiny and saving the world” (Wilson qtd. in Jewett & Lawrence 2004: 4). The quote refers to U.S. military involvement in Europe, which the former President presents as an example of fulfilling the country’s mission. Under the Bush government, an adapted concept of

56. The article specifically relates to debates around the veil.

exceptionalism served to promote an even more extreme, one-dimensional, and chauvinist narrative of the U.S.' alleged moral superiority. The political Right used it to mobilize a national and also international audience for U.S. war politics, which it sold as an altruistic mission – a foreign policy which was supposedly more virtuous and selfless than the one practiced by other countries. I see it as highly problematic that the promoters of American missionary rhetoric appointed themselves as omnipotent judges, claiming the absolute right to decide who needs to be saved and by what means. Since the preemptive intervention in Afghanistan did not respect the sovereignty of the nation, scholars like Harvey see it as an example of America's "new imperialism" (2005).⁵⁷ In line with his reading, I argue that Bush's speech is a reflection of a modern U.S. American imperialist approach, wrapped into an adapted (civil-)religious missionary rhetoric, in an attempt to gain support from the world community or at least the Western world for his politics.

The global dimension of the "war on terror"

One of the main objective of Bush's address on October 7, was to present the supposedly global dimension of the crisis to a national and international audience. Not only does the President use the word "world" 19 times, he also enumerates countries that supported the U.S. following the attacks: "We are joined in this operation by our staunch friend, Great Britain. Other close friends, including Canada, Australia, Germany and France, have pledged forces as the operation unfolds." As the number of IDC entities rises, so does the potential impact of an ODC invasion. Bush repeatedly refers to values, which the IDC entities allegedly share, and which now appear endangered like "peace" and "freedom." The President was seeking support from an international community for the planned strikes on Afghanistan. Therefore, he stresses the "humanitarian" aspects of the military intervention. Additionally, he presents the military actions as absolute necessity in order to prevent further attacks and preserve freedom. In fact, shortly after the attacks many countries announced their solidarity with the U.S. An early sign hereof was the fact that NATO invoked Article 5 of the Atlantic Charter for the first time in the organization's history. The Article says that an armed attack on one of its member-states shall be considered an attack on all its members and it further reads:

57. It needs to be mentioned that some political commentators do not agree with the classification of the U.S. invasion in Afghanistan as preemptive war. Since the country was then under Taliban rule, it played a role in the 9/11 attacks by supporting the terrorists network, they argue. The U.S. invasion should therefore be seen as reaction in a war started by the terrorists or simply as a defensive war.

[I]f such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 1949)

Already before Bush's speech, on October 4, NATO determined that the attacks were indeed eligible under the terms of the North Atlantic Treaty and that thus military actions could be interpreted as justified in terms of international law. Although this view is widely popular (the U.S. government and numerous Western countries share this interpretation and Western media tend to propagate this view) it also has its opponents. The dispute has to do with the fact that the suicide attackers were neither from Afghanistan nor did they act as representatives of the country's government – Afghanistan did not attack the U.S. Therefore, experts in the field of international law, like Marjorie Cohn, argue that the attacks were "criminal acts" committed by terrorists and not "military attacks" and that thus military actions were never justified in terms of international law (Cohn 2008). While the scope of this book does not allow for an in-depth discussion of the compliance of U.S. war actions with international law, I am interested in the way Bush rhetorically stresses the alleged eligibility and international support for his military campaign to lend to the "war on terror" a global dimension.

Operation Enduring Freedom was first launched by U.S. and British forces and later joined by Russia, France, Australia, Canada, Poland, Germany, and other mainly Western countries. Bush directly refers to this multinational support when he says: "More than 40 countries in the Middle East, Africa, Europe and across Asia have granted air transit or landing rights. Many more have shared intelligence. We are supported by the collective will of the world." The expression "collective will of the world" is highly problematic. Although many countries throughout the world, as enumerated by Bush, expressed their solidarity with the victims of 9/11 and condemned terrorism, not all of them approved of his suggested policies. The U.N. Security Council unanimously adapted Resolution 1368 in which it "unequivocally condemned those acts, and expressed its deepest sympathy and condolences to the victims and their families and to the people and Government of the United States." The document further states that "Council members departed from tradition and stood to unanimously adopt resolution 1368 (2001), by which they expressed the Council's readiness to take all necessary steps to respond to the attacks of 11 September and to combat all forms of terrorism in accordance with its Charter responsibilities" (United Nations, Department of Public Information 2001). The expression "all necessary steps" is vague and does not specify, which actions in the end find the approval of the Council members. This lack of precision allows

the U.S. President to over-interpret the declarations of solidarity and speak of a “collective will.” It is remarkable that the President delivered the televised speech at 1 p.m. EDT that day, just 30 minutes after the first bombs and cruise missiles hit Afghanistan. The fact that he promptly informs the public reflects on the urge to stress the supposed transparency of the military actions. Bush claims that the target-orientated and precise steps the military was then taking (he states: “[The] mission is defined. The objectives are clear.”) have not only been approved by the international community, but are also transparent and can seemingly be continuously monitored by everyone. The message is: in contrast to the terrorists, the U.S. has nothing to hide as it is morally on the right side. In this sense, Bush’s rhetorical approach is grounded in John Winthrop’s “city upon a hill” concept, according to which the eyes of all people are upon the United States.

Even the setting of the speech, the Treaty Room of the White House, is meant to support the stylization of the United States as global peacekeeper.⁵⁸ Bush does not neglect to mention the symbolism of the venue, which he calls “a place where American presidents have worked for peace.” He implies that his declaration of war on Afghanistan stands in line with the supposedly peaceful tradition of former presidents who have worked from that room. This “terministic screen” of a historical analogy is intended to remind the American audience of previous U.S. missions that were started in the name of peace (Burke 1968:44–62). Just like presidents before him, Bush utilizes the familiar contradiction, that people wage wars to achieve peace, in order to present military actions as difficult but necessary means to “defend not only our precious freedoms, but also the freedom of people everywhere.” Similarly, John F. Kennedy in his Cuban missile crisis speech from October 22, 1962 assured Americans: “Our policy has been one of patience and restraint, as befits a *peaceful* and powerful nation which leads a worldwide alliance. (...) But now further action is *required*, and it is under way” (Kennedy 1962). The self-characterization as a peaceful nation *forced* to use military means for a just cause, in Bush’s speech as well as in Kennedy’s speech, is supported by the idealistic insistence on self-sacrifice in American foreign policy. While Kennedy speaks of “[m]any months of sacrifice and self-discipline [that] lie ahead” (Kennedy 1962), Bush claims that “[s]ince September 11, an entire generation of young Americans has gained new understanding of the value of freedom and its cost and duty and its sacrifice.” Hauerwas argues that in the American context “the understanding of war as sacrifices (...) was forged in the American Civil War and continues to shape how Americans morally comprehend war today. (...) For America

58. Among others, in 1898, the peace treaty with Spain, which ended the Spanish-American War, was signed in this room. Cf. website of the White House Museum (“Treaty Room”).

war is necessary for our moral well-being" (2012: 220–232). In Bush speech, the self-sacrifice is quintessentially represented in "a letter from a fourth grade girl with a father in the military," which read: "As much as I don't want my dad to fight (...) I'm willing to give him to you." The President praises that "[t]his young girl knows what America is all about" and implicitly urges others to follow her example and put the good of the country before their own. Throughout American history, presidents used the historical myth of the country's supposed special responsibility and its chosenness (the concept of exceptionalism) to prepare the public for the alleged necessity of the sacrifice of war. Following this tradition, Bush utilizes historical allusions in his rhetorical attempt to legitimize a preemptive strike and to put forward the belief that war is not only indispensable but also just and selfless.

By emphasizing that Americans are a "peaceful nation" left with no other choice but war ("We're a peaceful nation. Yet, as we have learned, so suddenly and so tragically, there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror."), Bush implies that other nations are *not* peaceful. Supposedly, peace is neither in their nature nor is it a state they strive for – in contrast to the U.S., which he presents as the home of freedom and peace. It is a claim that lays the foundation to Bush's divisive rhetoric of evil "them" against righteous "us." The President expands the polarization to all nations of the world when he says: "Every nation has a choice to make. In this conflict, there is no neutral ground. If any government sponsors the outlaws and killers of innocence, they have become outlaws and murderers themselves. And they will take that lonely path at their own peril." It was an essential part of Bush's discourse at that time to assert that there is no neutral side in this conflict, as Chilton remarks (Chilton 2004: 159). In his analysis of the presidential speech from October 7, the scholar illustrates how entities are positioned on the axes of space, time, and modality and argues that "in this type of speech by a political leader it is crucial to establish who is 'us' and who is 'them.'" Further, Chilton compares deictic polarization in Bush's speech to a text issued by bin Laden on the same day. Interestingly, he comes to the conclusion that – despite unquestionably differences – "there is a striking parallel" in the sense that both leaders "represent a world space – which is a geographical, geopolitical, cultural and moral space – split into two" and adds that "in some respects the two conceptualisations are mirror images of one another" (Chilton 2004: 172). Bin Laden saw no common ground between Western "hypocrites" and the supposed martyrs or "forefront of Islam" ("Translated Text of Bin Laden Broadcast"). Similarly, President Bush presents the situation as a false dichotomy in which there are no other choices: governments must either support the "war against terrorism" or, if they chose to "sponsor[] the outlaws and killers," they themselves become as guilty as the terrorists. The U.S. has already chosen a side, as Bush suggests, and now the rest of the world needs to position itself: "The United States of America is an enemy of those

who aid terrorists and of the barbaric criminals who profane a great religion by committing murder in its name.” Bush thus urges his national and international audience to pick a side and indirectly declares war on all those who do not share this worldview.

The evil barbarians: Religion and Othering

The President strengthens the divide between good and evil and suppresses any possible empathy for the Other side when he describes the attackers as “barbaric criminals.”⁵⁹ Additionally, he dehumanizes the enemy with the help of the Terrorists Are Animals Metaphor when he says: “the terrorists may burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places.” Caves are often inhabited by animals and just like them the terrorists “burrow into caves,” as Bush suggests. Moreover, the President mentions the terrorists’ “hiding places.” The fact that they need to hide implies that the terrorists know someone is looking for them or is coming to get them. In Bush’s narrative, the terrorists hide as they know that U.S. troops and their allies are searching for them to bring them to justice for their wrongdoings: “Our military action is also designed to clear the way for sustained, comprehensive and relentless operations to drive them out and bring them to justice.” In the post 9/11 period, the President frequently employs language that depicts the enemy as inhuman, e.g. he calls the terrorists “parasites” (Bush 2002a) and, in reference to al-Qaeda’s network of caves in Afghanistan, he announces that terrorists “find holes to get into,” claims that they hide “on mountaintops and in caves” (2002a) and assures his audience that U.S. forces “will smoke them out of their holes” (2001g).

The simplistic divide might have been appealing to a part of Bush’s U.S. American audience because it offered a clear interpretation of the 9/11 events and suggested seemingly concrete solutions. In times of crisis, simplistic pictures can help leaders make sense of complex phenomena and thereby spread a sense of security. Due to the heightened degree of fear of further attacks and the natural human urge to restore a feeling of safety, many citizens accepted the polarising rhetoric more willingly than they would have done under non-critical circumstances. Bush’s narrative frees all those who accepted it from moral doubts. The President admitted that he consciously and purposefully employed a “language of right and wrong,” and spoke of “bipolar conceptualisations” (Collet & Najem 2005):

Some worry that it is somehow undiplomatic or impolite to speak the language of right and wrong. I disagree. Different circumstances require different methods, but not different moralities. Moral truth is the same in every culture, in every time, and in every place. Targeting innocent civilians for murder is always and

59. I discuss the implications of the term “barbarism” in greater detail in Chapter 3.1.3.4.

everywhere wrong. Brutality against women is always and everywhere wrong. 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. By confronting evil and lawless regimes, we do not create a problem, we reveal a problem. And we will lead the world in opposing it. (Bush 2002b)

In the above statement, Bush suggests that his post 9/11 rhetoric suits his own moral convictions. The President stresses his personal belief in universal values and through this lens of right vs. wrong interprets the terrorist attacks as the beginning of a global battle between good and evil. He attempts to legitimize his negative portrayals of the Other by saying that he is simply calling “evil by its name.” The rhetoric is reminiscent of the Cold War period. Then, President Reagan’s belief in America’s alleged moral superiority gave the foundation to his ideological offensive against the USSR. To illustrate his point, Reagan asked the rhetorical question: “How do you compromise between good and evil? ... How do you compromise with men who say ... there is no God?” (Reagan qtd. in Rock 2001: 27) The statement suggests that no negotiation between the two sides, the U.S. and the USSR, is possible as there is no common ground between them. Esch argues that the Cold War discourse was largely an exercise in axiological proximization; it “was conveyed as a battle of good against evil (Reagan’s “evil empire”), with the God-fearing United States confronting the Godless Communists” (2010: 369). Similarly, Bush employs religiously tainted rhetoric to express value in a way that positions the “evil” Islamic Other outside the deictic center and claim the moral high ground as well as God’s support for the “good” America. Consequently, there is no room for compromise.

Fear and hope: Necessity of war and ultimate victory

Aristotle defines fear as “a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination [*phantasia*] of a future destructive or painful evil” and notes that it “makes people inclined to deliberation” (*The ‘Art’ of Rhetoric* II.5.1-14.). The negative emotion and the urge to fight it hinder clear judgments. A heightened degree of anxiety can help control an audience on the emotional level. It is a basic human instinct to first restore a feeling of safety before satisfying other needs. In his speech, Bush directly addresses and simultaneously perpetuates feelings of anxiety when he says “I know many Americans feel fear today” or when he speaks of “today’s new threat.” He then promises an end to the alleged safety-crisis, claiming that he will restore national security by launching a war. The actual means through which Bush wants to accomplish his goal might have been secondary to a part of his American audience at that time of heightened anxiety. A study by Landau et al. proved that reminding people of their mortality increased support for Bush and his counterterrorism policies (2004: 1136–1150). In the

President's narrative, fear-appeals play an important role. It is suggested that the terrorists will do further damage if the U.S. in cooperation with its allies does not stop them. The President states that *only* war can eliminate the prevailing imminent "threat." Bush becomes concrete with regard to the next steps he intends to take. He announces that the first "battle" of the "war on terror" needs to start in Afghanistan, as it is the place where the Taliban supposedly have their "base." He claims "there can be no peace in a world of sudden terror." The lives of innocent people, in the United States as well as in Afghanistan and the rest of the world, remain endangered, as the President suggests. Military actions appear as the last resort to reach the ultimate objective of "pursu[ing] peace": "In the face of today's new threat, the *only way* to pursue peace is to pursue those who *threaten* it."



Figure 5. Word cloud for President Bush's Presidential Address to the Nation, October 7, 2001

“Military” is also the most prominent item in the cloud, as Bush repeats it 10 times (see Figure 5). On the linguistic level, the President further supports his message that an intervention is indeed indispensable by using words with low degrees of pleasantness. Forms of the lexeme “terror” (“terror/-ism/-ists”) – the key ODC item – appear nine times and the words “fear” and “threat” are repeated twice and prompt feelings of discomfort on the subconscious level.

Next to fear-appeals, the element of hope is crucial for the functioning of Bush's narrative. The attractiveness of the President's crisis discourse lies in its inherent optimism, a typical characteristic of American jeremiads. The President offers a seemingly clear way out of the crisis as he promises to "rid the world of evil" (Bush 2001d) through the "war on terror." Bush's rhetoric of a righteous war that will lead to America's ultimate victory functions on two levels: the concrete level of political policies and the abstract level of religion and myths. One part of this war are military actions, which he first announces on October 7: "This military action is

a part of our campaign against terrorism, another front in a war that has already been joined through diplomacy, intelligence, the freezing of financial assets and the arrests of known terrorists by law enforcement agents in 38 countries.” Unsurprisingly, Bush never puts into question the success of his proposed actions nor the appropriateness of their use as means of fighting global terrorism. The tone with which he presents his policies is confident and the instructions he gives to his military are clear and reassuring: “To all the men and women in our military, every sailor, every soldier, every airman, every Coast Guardsman, every Marine, I say this: Your mission is defined. The objectives are clear. Your goal is just. You have my full confidence, and you will have every tool you need to carry out your duty.” Bush presents himself as a strong commander in chief with a clear vision who is nevertheless aware of the sacrifices he is asking of his people: “[S]acrifices are being made by members of our armed forces who now defend us so far from home, and by their proud and worried families.” And: “We ask a lot of those who wear our uniform. We ask them to leave their loved ones, to travel great distances, to risk injury, even to be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice of their lives. (...) They represent the best of our country, and we are grateful.” He honours the women and men in the U.S. military and assures them that they are fighting for a “just” cause: “Your mission is defined. The objectives are clear. Your goal is *just*”. The last sentence resonates the widely known fourth verse of the national anthem – “Then conquer we must/ When our cause it is just/And this be our motto/In God is our trust” – and can be read as an additional appeal to patriotism. The President claims that the decision to go to war was not an easy one: “A commander in chief sends America’s sons and daughters into battle in a foreign land only after the greatest care and a lot of prayer.” He suggests that his faith helped him with the decision. Full of confidence, he announces that, in the end, the U.S. will win this fight: “we will win this conflict,” “we will fulfil it,” “it will take time to achieve our goals,” “We will not waver, we will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail. Peace and freedom will prevail.” Bush spreads hope claiming that a military victory of the U.S. is certain. In general, the approach is not atypical of presidents leading a nation into war. However, the missionary element – as I discuss above, the President suggests divine help for his “mission” – plays a particularly prominent role.

At least with regard to the public approval for the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, the presidential address, which combined Puritan tradition with warfare rhetoric, hit the right tone. According to a Gallup poll from November 2001, 89 percent of respondents supported the military actions in the region (Newport 2001). Certainly, multiple factors, which cannot be derived from the mentioned polling data, affected American citizens’ stands towards the Bush administration’s policies. Nonetheless, such overwhelming support for the war in its early stages would not have been possible without the President’s successful framing of the events.

Conclusions

In his speech on October 7, 2001, President Bush switches from epideictic rhetoric, which has so far dominated his post 9/11 oratory, to deliberative rhetoric and offers a first direct policy response to the attacks. He presents military actions in Afghanistan as the only way to end the alleged security crisis. The implicit promise of the restoration of safety aims at generating support for his war policies. Still, the rhetorical framing of the events remains the same as in the speeches discussed above. First and foremost, the President cleverly balances between hope and fear. On the one hand, he assures his audience that his capable government will restore safety and implicitly suggests divine support for his “mission.” On the other hand, he frightens his listeners when he stresses that an imminent threat to their lives from the side of the terrorists remains vivid and can only be averted through war. His proposed military actions appear as consequent and necessary next step in the “war on terror.” The speech is exemplary of what Lakoff calls the “strict father model” (Lakoff 1996): Bush assumes the posture of a strong and confident leader who reassures his frightened audience that he will protect them. The President turns to the form of the American jeremiad not only to explain the violence endured (interpreting the events as a test), but also to justify the violence he plans to inflict (the military actions in Afghanistan). While he certainly adapts the Puritan-derived elements of his speech, like the religiously tainted blame-rhetoric or the use of specific metaphors and myths, to modern realities, their jeremiadic nature remains visible.

3.1.2.6 *G. W. Bush: State of the Union Address, U.S. Congress, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002*

On January 29, 2002, four months after the 9/11 attacks, President George W. Bush delivered a State of the Union Address in front of the Joined Session of Congress. Nearly 51.8 million Americans or about 35.6 million households followed the 52:30 minutes long speech on TV. They represented 33.6 percent of the households with televisions, and 49 percent of all viewers at the time of the President’s speech (Murse 2013). Out of all of Bush’s State of the Union Addresses, this was the one that drew the largest television audiences. With 3860 words, it is by far the longest out of the seven analyzed presidential addresses. The speech covers a variety of topics, including health care and jobs. However, for the sake of my argument, I concentrate on the aspects that directly or indirectly relate to the September 11 terrorist attacks and the crisis constructed around them. At the moment when Bush was holding the speech, his approval ratings among U.S. Americans were at a high 84 percent (Gallup 2013). Hence, the speech chiefly aimed at maintaining the high level of support. Typically of State of the Union Addresses, it does not introduce new policies but rather serves to confirm the course of actions taken by the administration.

Bush's vision of America's post 9/11 identity

The major themes of the speech are the prevention of future terrorist attacks and the mending of the domestic economy. Already in the first paragraph, the President enumerates what he considers to be the main challenges for the U.S.: "our nation is at war, our economy is in recession, and the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers." He juxtaposes these troubling perspectives with a positive evaluation of the state of the nation: "Yet the state of our Union has never been stronger." Bush not only shows his government's supposed effectiveness in handling crises, but also attempts to (re-)define a modern American identity through his personal vision of contemporary post 9/11 America. The President formulates the thesis that following the terrorist attacks the U.S. rediscovered and showed its true character: "[I]t was as if our entire country looked into a mirror and saw our better selves. We were reminded that we are citizens, with obligations to each other, to our country, and to history." In his narrative, the events constitute a turning point for America. Like in his prior speeches, Bush interprets 9/11 through the Puritan derived myth of American exceptionalism. He claims that the attacks reminded U.S. citizens of the country's founding ideals and turned them into their "better selves." Thereby, Bush also gives meaning to the losses and sufferings of many Americans: in his discourse they are part of a new test for America as the allegedly chosen nation, which throughout its history was called to fulfill missionary roles and serve as a model society. Slotkin argues that national myths like American exceptionalism serve the purpose of "conceal[ing] the reality of painful or perplexing historical situations and to provide illusory but emotionally satisfying solutions for real problems" (1996: 561). In Bush's rhetoric, the myth in fact has a political function: it helps the President to tell a story, which seemingly makes sense of the traumatic events, unites the nation, and legitimizes a war. By interpreting 9/11 through the prism of American exceptionalism, Bush actually offers his audience a *distorting* mirror. The critical, complex, and emotionally loaded situation is filtered in a way that, in the end, leaves the audience with a set of familiar, yet one-dimensional images. Certain aspects are emphasized and put into focus, while others remain hidden or neglected. Drawing on Puritan rhetorical traditions the President reinforces a cultural narrative that promotes a positive self-image of the nation. For U.S. citizens, the vision that Bush offers is potentially seductive, as it presents America and its citizens as being on the right side of history. Similarly to Puritan leaders who used exceptionalism to claim absolute moral authority over Native Peoples and their land, Bush claims that America's special role and the resulting responsibility justify a military intervention in Afghanistan.

Additionally, the President's rhetoric encourages group identification and constructs a shared national identity. Van Dijk defines "group identity" as "mental representation of social (self) as a collection of group membership, and the

identification processes that are connected to such group membership representation" (1998: 121). Bush's concept of nationhood merges public and personal experience. On the linguistic level, uniting vocabulary, which dominates the speech, supports this process. The words "America/-n" are repeated 15 times and consequently dominate the word cloud (see Figure 6).



Figure 6. Word cloud for President Bush's State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002

Additionally, the pronouns “we” and “our” are used 75 and 79 times respectively. Bush also employs the terms “nation” and “country” 11 times each, the word “citizens” nine times, “united” six times, and “together” five times.

As Ahmed observes, the slide from private to national, from “I” to “we” involves “both adherence (sticking to the nation) as well as coherence (sticking together)” (2004: 111). The nation’s shared experience, its history and myths serve Bush as a sort of social glue. These symbolic structures help forge collective values and define individuals’ conceptions about their role in society and in the world (Prizel 1998). Consequently, they provide a psychological frame of reference also in politics. As Ignatieff (1998) puts it, “[n]ational identity is not fixed or stable: it is a continuing exercise in the fabrication of illusion and the elaboration of convenient fables about who ‘we’ are.” His definition draws on the findings of Benedict Anderson who describes national identity as an “ongoing process” (1983: 129). In line with this view, I argue that, in his State of the Union Address, President Bush constructs a popular or collective memory in which 9/11 appears as a new call on America to fulfill its special destiny. He thus not only reflects upon and reinforces chosen notions of an American identity, but also shapes a new definition of what it

supposedly means to be American in the twenty-first century. The speech divides time into the period before and after September 11. According to Bush, the attacks constitute a tragedy but also a “unique moment of opportunity – a moment we must seize to change our culture.” He claims that after 9/11, America showed its true face and re-embraced Puritan derived values and goals “larger than self”:

For too long our culture has said, “If it feels good, do it.” Now America is embracing a new ethic and a new creed: “Let’s roll.” In the sacrifice of soldiers, the fierce brotherhood of firefighters, and the bravery and generosity of ordinary citizens, we have glimpsed what a new culture of responsibility could look like. We want to be a nation that serves goals larger than self. We’ve been offered a unique opportunity, and we must not let this moment pass.

Bush suggests that following the terrorist acts a new American identity has been born. The initial confusion, shock, and fear the attacks caused among many U.S. citizens (“We last met in an hour of shock and suffering.”) were promptly followed by “bravery and generosity,” as he claims. The notion of community, in which citizens embrace “a new ethic” and serve “goals larger than self” is at the center of this paragraph. The credo “Let’s roll” refers to the last recorded words of a passenger on United Airlines flight 93 who attempted to reclaim the aircraft from the hijackers and whom Bush stylizes as a hero in his 2001 Address to a Joint Session of Congress.⁶⁰ Implicitly, the President claims that after the attacks America allegedly proved to be a selfless model society. In the presidential framing of the events, this development constitutes a return to the country’s Puritan-derived foundational ideals.

Renewal

The call to return to old values and the concept of renewal are quintessentially American. Throughout the country’s history, leaders framed moments of crisis as times of opportunity for the U.S. to get back on the right track. Soltysik Monnet observes that American wars, from the War of Independence to the Civil War, World Wars I and II, as well as the Gulf Wars, functioned as occasions for a new start on a shared sense of national identity and common purpose (cf. Soltysik Monnet 2012:3).⁶¹ If politicians frame critical events appropriately, they can use

60. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.4.

61. “Most historians agree that American national self-understanding changed significantly during the Civil War. One concrete example of this transformation is the shift in usage from the plural to the singular in relation to the United States, as in ‘The United States is a republic’ as opposed to ‘The United States are a republic.’ This shift is generally dated to around 1861, which is to say, the beginning of the Civil War, and helped American conceptualize the entity or cause they were fighting for (on the Union side, that is)” (Soltysik Monnet 2012:3).

them as ultimate motivators, which will help them present crisis policies as a sort of chance for positive change and rebirth. Probably the most famous American speech which links war to a discourse of national renewal is Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address from 1863. In it, with the help of civil-religious rhetoric, the former President defines the meaning and purpose of the war cemetery as a national institution. Soltysik Monnet states that "[i]n doing so, he articulated one of the most enigmatic paradoxes of national identity: namely, that it is strengthened by the lives that are lost in its name" (Soltysik Monnet 2012: 3). This line of argumentation has biblical roots. In the Old and New Testament, blood sacrifice functions as binding motor between God and his people (Abraham shows willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac; Jesus dies for the sins of all people), but also within religious and national communities. Early Puritan rhetoric already linked the Christian martyrology with nation-formation. John Winthrop attempted to convince the settler that:

[W]e must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. (Winthrop 1639: 111)

According to the Puritan leader, members of society should unite in their love of God and must be willing to make sacrifices for one another. Later on, American presidents picked up on the idea and continued to interpret U.S. history as a kind of history of collective sacrifice. In the case of the above mentioned Gettysburg Address, the sacrifices of the dead soldiers were presumably meant to evoke in the minds of the survivors the idea of what Lincoln calls a "new birth of freedom" in the sense of a revival of America's most important founding idea:

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us... that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion...that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain...that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom...and that government of the people...by the people...for the people...shall not perish from the earth. (Lincoln 1863)

The President calls the living to "dedicate" themselves to the cause of American nationhood. His rhetoric of national renewal based on mass death makes sense of losses, presenting them as sacrifice for a just cause and instigates a sense of unity and collective purpose within the nation. Bush assumes a very similar approach

when he claims: "I assure you and all who have lost a loved one that our cause is just, and our country will never forget the debt we owe [...] all who gave their lives for freedom." And: "History has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight." In his narrative, the 9/11 victims literally sacrificed their lives to America's most important national ideal (even if unintentionally), namely freedom. Consequently, the survivors are united in their collective debt towards the deceased and must learn from this lesson. They share the responsibility to live up to the patriotic values that the victims allegedly died for and to continue to protect them.

Through his speech, the President puts a claim on the rhetoric of values and sacrifices, of exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, which has a long tradition in American Presidential speechmaking. By applying these familiar codes, the President demonstrates that he understands the country's history and follows its traditions. Hence, he must also have the only right vision for the country's future. Bush's claim on patriotic rhetoric and history eliminates the room for possible voices of dissent. The parallels to the speech of one of the greatest American Presidents can be assumed to have helped his cause. Bush indirectly assures his audience that he is acting on historical precedent: just like the secession threatened America's unity and its values (as Lincoln argued), Islamic terrorism now attempts to violate the country's freedoms and its fundamental Constitutional values (as Bush suggests). It can be assumed that the applied rhetorical code of values and myths is known to most Americans (as it appears in virtually all presidential speeches) and that the parallels to a much admired President, consciously or subconsciously, helped move large parts of Bush's audience in favor of his war policies.

Bush's outbound jeremiad

Presidents typically employ patriotic rhetoric in times of war and Bush is no exception here. However, there is a crucial difference between patriotism, which puts the love for one's country into focus, and nationalism, which is rooted in the assumption that one's country/people is better than others. Especially when it comes to Bush's discrediting rhetoric towards opponents, I argue that his post 9/11 rhetoric bears traits of chauvinism and nationalism, which tend to appear more frequently in the rhetoric of the political Right. The President, for instance, uniformly presents the terrorists and their allies as evil enemies who are morally inferior to American citizens. On January 29, 2002, Bush describes the terrorists as follows: "Our enemies send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed." Americans, by contrast "stand for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of our founding. We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life," as the

President suggests. In his speech, the United States embodies goodness and hope while standing in direct opposition to evil and fearsome terrorists. I call this type of rhetoric an *outbound* jeremiad, in which all blame is put on an outside Other. With regard to this aspect, Bush's rhetoric resembles reformed Puritan jeremiads, in which ministers blamed colonial hardships on, among others, Britain, Native Americans, or witches. They thus shifted away the focus from the sins of parishioners, which appeared as core reason for all types of crisis in traditionally *inbound* jeremiads, in an attempt to unite believers by creating a common enemy. Another parallel to Puritan rhetoric lies in the way Bush presents 9/11 as a "test" or "opportunity." The President claims that the country showed its true character after the attacks, finding its way back to its roots and true values: "During these last few months, I've been humbled and privileged to see the true character of this country in a time of testing." And: "[W]e have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace." Lincoln, in his Gettysburg Address, similarly presented the Civil War as a test when he said: "Now we are engaged in a great civil war...testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated...can long endure" (Lincoln 1863).

The narrative of passing a test, in all of the mentioned speeches, functions as a synonym for bringing justice and lasting peace. However, while Puritan ministers mainly concentrated on their own communities (merely aspiring to be a passive role model to others) and Lincoln addressed American citizens, President Bush directly refers to America's supposed role as protector of the weak and an advocate for peace and freedom *around the world*:

America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.

America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.

These characterizations serve to justify the invasion in Afghanistan as a just war for a noble cause – a war supposedly led by a selfless and brave people on a quest for a better world, a war from which, in the end, the entire world community is supposed to profit. Bush's expectations of the country's role go beyond Winthrop's vision of America as passive moral example: the President intends to export its allegedly righteous values also abroad, if necessary with the help of military power. Furthermore, Bush stresses the universality of the values his country is, as he claims, trying to defend: "America will lead by defending

liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere.”⁶² Again, the geopolitical territory where IDC values allegedly apply is extended to the entire world, the values are thus constructed as universal (Cap 2013: 84). Moreover, just like Puritan leaders before him, Bush assures that the actions taken by his administration were *the only* morally right options. The frequent use of the word “must” (Bush employs this verb 19 times throughout the speech) on the linguistic level supports the message that America had no other choice but to invade Afghanistan.

Bush’s cautiously self-reflective rhetoric – Traits of an inbound jeremiad

Interestingly, Bush also brings up and comments on the stereotype of the United States as a materialistic country, claiming that terrorists saw America as “weak and materialistic,” a country “that [...] would splinter in fear and selfishness.” However, as he concludes, “[t]hey were as wrong as they are evil.” Bush assures his audience that after 9/11, Americans “began to think less of the goods we can accumulate, and more about the good we can do.” It is the only passage in his post 9/11 speeches that, to a certain extent, *critically* reflects on materialism. At other points, Bush encourages his audience to consume more in order to help the economy, presenting consumption not as a selfish deed, but rather a patriotic duty.⁶³ In contrast to that, the President now claims that Americans are chiefly thinking of the “good [they] can do” and not the goods they would like to accumulate for themselves. It is a statement that is reminiscent of Puritan ideology, which was centered around the importance of community. The appeal to a shared sense of responsibility was frequently employed by American Presidents in times of crisis, most famously by John F. Kennedy who announced: “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country (Kennedy 1961a).” President Bush even gives his national audience concrete examples on how to engage and serve the community with his calls for actions: “My call tonight is for every American to commit at least two years – 4,000 hours over the rest of your lifetime – to the service of your neighbors and your nation. (...) If you aren’t sure how to help, I’ve got a good place to start. To sustain and extend the best that has emerged in America, I invite you to join the new USA Freedom Corps.”

Bush introduces here what I call a cautiously self-reflective approach in order to implement his adapted jeremiad not only abroad, but also within the country.

62. The approach is not new. Among others, President Wilson similarly justified America’s entrance into World War I to isolationists.

63. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.2, section *Consumerism as patriotic duty*.

The USA PATRIOT Act, which he signed into law on October 26, 2001, required substantial sacrifices also from U.S. citizens, especially with regard to personal freedoms. Bush now attempts to heighten the support for all of his domestic policies by selling them as supposed patriotic sacrifices, which are of absolute necessity for an allegedly higher good – the country's safety. In his narrative, Americans need to unite, leaving the partisan divide between red and blue states behind, in order to jointly protect America. I consider it especially dangerous that President Bush attempts to extend the rally around the flag phenomenon to domestic issues in order to increase the power of his office, even in areas which are not directly related to the "war on terror." He announces: "I ask you to join me on these important domestic issues in the same spirit of cooperation we've applied to our war against terrorism." And repeats his point one more time: "September the 11th brought out the best in America, and the best in this Congress. And I join the American people in applauding your unity and resolve. Now Americans deserve to have *this same spirit directed toward addressing problems here at home*." The President suggests that ending the allegedly critical state of affairs with regards to foreign policy as well as domestic issues will require of citizens (including politicians) to put an end to the partisan divide: "as we act to win the war, protect our people, and create jobs in America, we must act, first and foremost, not as Republicans, not as Democrats, but as Americans." His argument goes beyond the typical presidential call for unity, as it limits the space for public debate: the President is not looking for a possible consensus between the two sides on any of the mentioned topics but rather calls all citizens to unconditionally support his policies and thereby allegedly prove their patriotism. The way he directs the call for change towards his own community parallels the oratory of Puritan preachers, who called for reform within their parishes. While the parallel has its limitations, since Puritan sermons were largely directed towards the speakers' communities and Bush's criticism is largely directed towards outsiders, the post 9/11 presidential discourse nonetheless (at least partly) includes *inbound* jeremiadic elements.

On the domestic level, Bush advocates more state control and discipline within the country as the only way out of the supposed security crisis. He suggests that insufficient state control led to the critical events in the first place. Consequently, the President announces a reform of homeland security, which, as he promises, will make America "not only stronger, but, in many ways, better." The President states that his administration "will improve intelligence collection and sharing, expand patrols at our borders, strengthen the security of air travel, and use technology to track the arrivals and departures of visitors to the United States." The presented necessity of these measures is built on the premise that the threat

continues and that terrorists will attempt to enter the country to launch further attacks. The President does not discuss the cuts in civil liberties that these changes imply – they are merely presented as the necessary price which American citizens need to pay in order to restore safety. The narrative promotes a questionable trade-off between liberty and security. It would have been extremely difficult to pass such far-reaching policies if large parts of Bush's domestic audience had not had subscribed to his security crisis narrative: fear-infused *inbound* jeremiadic elements in his rhetoric helped the President to perpetuate the notion of imminent threat and legitimize his administration's invasion of privacy.

“Unprecedented danger”

Already at the beginning of speech, the President underlines how critical the current circumstances allegedly are: “As we gather *tonight*, our nation is at war, our economy is in recession, and the civilized world faces *unprecedented dangers*.” The word “tonight” and the present verb form “faces” put emphasis on the fact that the threat is located within the present moment. However, the temporal proximization landscape covers also another timeframe: the danger of further attacks extends into the future. Bush argues that terrorists are presently “arming to threaten the peace of the world” and warns his audience that “[t]ime and distance from the events of September the 11th will not make us safer unless we act on its lessons.” Consequently, the administration's priorities are “to do everything possible to protect our citizens and strengthen our nation against the ongoing threat of another attack” and “to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction,” as he repeats at multiple times throughout the speech using similar wording.

In Bush's narrative, the extraordinariness of his proposed measures and the urgency to act are legitimized by what he describes as the “unprecedented” nature of the event. Similarly, Roosevelt in 1940 claimed: “*Never before* since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has our American civilization been *in such danger as now*” (Roosevelt 1940). Through his rhetoric, the former President gradually prepared Americans for an involvement in WWII, even before the Pearl Harbor attacks. Both leaders construct a discourse of supposedly unparalleled dangers to advance novel and difficult policies. In Roosevelt's case this meant the end of the era of “American isolationism” (cf. Murphy 2015); in Bush's case, the redefinition of preemptive war as necessary security policy. President Bush's mentioned claim that the threat posed by terrorism is a persisting one and that the danger is far from being over (he announces that “our war against terror is only beginning” and warns his audience that “tens of thousands of trained terrorists are still at large”), perpetuates the fear of further attacks in order to legitimize war policies.

Sentences like “[t]hey could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States” or “[s]o long as training camps operate, so long as nations harbor terrorists, freedom is still at risk” are exemplary of the way the President presents the terrorists as capable of negatively affecting the future of the U.S. and the world. As Dunmire illustrates in her proximization analysis of post 9/11 discourse, this promoted notion of imminent danger allows justifying preemptive war strategies: With the help of lexico-grammatical markers of the IDC-ODC ideological conflict, apparently remote ideological dangers are transformed into tangible physical threats (Dunmire 2011: 56–71). On the linguistic level, Bush strengthens the fear appeal through the repetitive use of numerous words with an extremely low degree of pleasantness: The words “attack/-s” appear five times, “enemy/-ies” six times, “danger/-s/-ous” eight times, “terrorist/-s/-ism” 36 times, “war” 12 times, and “weapons” eleven times. The D.A.L. mean for pleasantness is at a low 1.67. Additionally, the conceptual metaphor Terrorism Is War dominates the picture. President Bush uses lexical correspondences associated with this frame sixteen times throughout the speech. Not only does he explicitly announce “we will win this war” and the “nation is at war” and repeats the word “war” twelve times, he also uses the words “military” (four times), “enemies” (four times), “troops,” “freed a country,” “Armed Forces/ country’s armed forces,” “battlefield,” “soldiers,” “regimes,” “weapons of mass destruction” (two times), “bombs,” “missiles,” “allies” (eight times), and “protect the homeland.” The claim that ODC actors continue to threaten IDC entities, lays the foundation for Bush’s further call for action at home and abroad: “We are protected from attack only by vigorous action abroad, and increased vigilance at home.”

The President not only presents the military actions abroad (*outbound* jeremiad) but also the increased security measures within the country (USA PATRIOT Act – *inbound* jeremiad) as absolutely necessary in order to protect the U.S. and its citizens. In his narrative, Americans indirectly appear as needy of guidance – in a patriarchal manner Bush implies that the nation, frightened by the attacks, *expects* heightened national security measures as a seemingly natural response to the current crisis. I see the USA PATRIOT Act and its rhetorical framing as the Bush administration’s version of controlling “unruly” bodies. In a Foucauldian sense, the leadership manipulates and remolds citizens “through strict regiment of disciplinary acts” in order for them to become productive “docile bodies” (Foucault 1995: 136). The President describes in which areas he intends to improve safety standard:

My budget nearly doubles funding for a sustained strategy of homeland security, focused on four key areas: bioterrorism, emergency response, airport and border security, and improved intelligence. We will develop vaccines to fight anthrax and other deadly diseases. We’ll increase funding to help states and communities

train and equip our heroic police and firefighters. We will improve intelligence collection and sharing, expand patrols at our borders, strengthen the security of air travel, and use technology to track the arrivals and departures of visitors to the United States.

Through the described measures the government increases control and surveillance of citizens, gains more knowledge and consequently also more power. Bush rhetorically and socially constructs fear for the purpose of additional power exertion – the rhetoric of fear thus serves as power acting rhetoric. Typical of crisis communication, the President does not ask whether citizens are willing to accept the proposed enhanced surveillance procedures for the sake of increased security. Instead, he simply presents it as a matter of course, leading the country by speaking for the government and thus fulfilling the periodic need for strong leadership (Pious 1979:6).

It is noteworthy that he never questions if, in a globalized world, something like absolute or even nearly absolute protection from terrorism can be achieved. Conveniently, his chosen approach frees Bush from the necessity of undertaking a deeper analysis on the causes and roots of terrorist acts against the United States. Simultaneously, the statement is meant to justify and generate support for increased military spending. Later on in his speech, Bush adds: “Our first priority must always be the security of our nation, and that will be reflected in the budget I send to Congress.” And: “Whatever it costs to defend our country, we will pay.” Again, the one-dimensional way of presenting increased military spending as the only way to heighten the safety of the nation makes voices of dissent difficult, since opponents can be easily accused of jeopardizing national security.

Additionally, national media supported the administration’s fear rhetoric. Altheide argues that they promoted a sense of insecurity among U.S. citizens and shows that post 9/11 coverage propagated the belief that the government *had to* take extensive measures to adequately protect Americans (Altheide 2006). The media created a climate in which the fear of a supposed “imminent” threat of another attack shaped and justified political action (Labrecque 2012). Although there were some voices of dissent like that of *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd who wrote: “It’s bad enough that the terrorists are using fear as a device. Does the Bush administration have to do the same thing? The Islamic enemy strums on our nerves to hurt our economy and get power. The American president strums on our nerves to help his popularity and retain power” (Dowd 2002). Mainstream U.S. American media in the early stages of the “war on terror” failed to live up to Said’s mandate to be wary of hidden motivations of authority and speak truth to power (Said qtd. in Rose 2000:38) instead they further promoted Bush’s jeremiadic fear discourse.

Bush's Manichean style

Bush's post 9/11 rhetoric is strongly marked by a moral dualism, which is typical of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic literature. In the President's simplistic narrative, supposedly moral acting requires a clear, uncompromising cut between "good" and "evil." From an axiological perspective, the ballet between the two sides is outlined by a dichotomy in identifying the opponents: the U.S. and their allies (IDC) on one side and the terrorists and their supporters (ODC) on the other side. The evil Other rejects and threatens the core values of the Self (like "peace" and "democracy") and in itself represents "terror" and "oppression" (Cap 2008, 2010a, b). Thus, military actions are in a way glorified as moral agency, since they allegedly serve the right cause.

Bush employs rhetoric of fear and hope in a way reminiscent of Manichean tactic, constantly reminding citizens of the enemy's alleged cruelty, which stands in stark contrast to America's supposed righteousness. The President metaphorically frames the war with the help of the source domain of the mythical battle. He depicts the events as an epic struggle between good and evil, in which innocent and heroic Americans and their allies fight the villain terrorists: "Together with friends and allies from Europe to Asia, and Africa to Latin America, we will demonstrate that the *forces of terror* cannot stop the *momentum of freedom*." In the target domain, war then appears as necessary means in order to restore the moral order and freedom. On the one hand, Bush uses numerous lexical correspondences that convey goodness with regard to the U.S. and its actions. He announces that America will "rid the world of thousands of terrorists" and will "overcome evil with greater good," he speaks of "honor," "heroic" actions, and "heroes." On the other hand, he frequently uses vocabulary and expressions projecting evilness with regard to the terrorists and their deeds. Bush claims that the terrorists are "as wrong as they are evil" and that they "embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed." He mentions "brutal oppression" and states that the terrorists, who represent "a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world," are dangerous as they "threaten the peace of the world." Ultimately, Bush directly juxtaposed the two sides in the quintessential sentence: "Freedom and fear are at war." Like in a mythical battle, there is only one right and one wrong: there is a selfless hero (America) and sinister villain (the terrorists), there are victims (the Iraqi people, American citizens, the whole supposedly endangered Western world) and there is a crime (the 9/11 attacks, the violation of freedoms and human rights in Iraq). The narrative justifies going to war with the help of what Lakoff calls a "rescue scenario" (Lakoff 1991). If the audience accepts the narrative it has no choice – the only morally right option is for the hero to fight the villain and rescue the victims. On the linguistic level, Bush additionally supports the Manichean divide through the repeated use of emotionally loaded words.

Among others, the President uses the words “attack/-s/-ed” (five times) and calls the “enemy” (twice) “evil” (five times).

Moral absolutism

Moralizing rhetoric needs to fit the ethos of the speaker. As discussed in previous chapters, Bush’s religious appeals were successful with large audiences not least because they were in line with the President’s personal conversion story: Bush repeatedly referred to his faith as a born-again Christian to frame events. However, moral rhetoric stems also from political context. My argument is that critical political circumstances lead to an increase of jeremiadic language in presidential addresses. The above mentioned Manichean divide between good and evil in Bush’s post 9/11 speeches was supported by (civil-)religious rhetoric from which it drew supposed moral legitimization. The 2002 State on the Union Address includes numerous examples of moral absolutism. Bush claims of the country and its people:

I know we can overcome evil with greater good. And we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace. (...)

America will lead by defending liberty and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere. (...)

America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity (...)

America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.

These sentences are exemplary of what Darsey calls an “inflexible posture of righteousness” which, as he explains, has its roots in Puritan tradition, American civil religion, and American exceptionalism (1997: 22). The expression matches Bush’s post 9/11 discourse, since the President makes sweeping assumptions not only about shared American beliefs and values and their supposed universality, but also presents his ideology as superior to others. His words reflect on and promote a chauvinist, conservative worldview. Numerous media embraced this myths-driven and religiously-patriotic narrative, which conflated Bush’s policies with America’s supposed destiny and, by rhetorical associations, also implicitly equaled them with God’s will. However, some critical voices could also be heard. Among others, the author Jim Wallis (2003) criticized the administration’s moral hubris stating that “America’s foreign policy is more than pre-emptive, it is theologically

presumptuous; not only unilateral, but dangerously messianic; not just arrogant, but bordering on the idolatrous and blasphemous.”⁶⁴

The dichotomy between good and evil plays an important role in religion and ethics. Especially Christian tradition is marked by a language of spiritual warfare in which the good will prevail while evil needs to be condemned and will ultimately be overcome. Bush frames the 9/11 events as a continuation of this eternal battle. Thereby, he tries to gain public approval for his war policies with the help of emotion rather than logic. The use of Christian rhetoric puts the focus on beliefs and feelings instead of knowledge and political calculus. Those who accept the President's narrative and want to be morally on the right side must, as he suggests, consequently support the “war on terror.” Bush places violence in an seemingly acceptable historical and moral framework when he claims “[h]istory has called America and our allies to action, and it is both our responsibility and our privilege to fight freedom's fight.” For Bush, like for the biblical prophets, history is the “ultimate elevator of God's moral plan” (Daschke & Kille 2010: 156–181) – in the end, the good must and will prevail. This stand is already present in Bush's 2001 State of the Union Address, where he states of the terrorists that “they will follow that path all the way, to where it ends: in history's unmarked grave of discarded lies” (Bush 2001k). In 2002, he further speaks of a “decisive decade in the history of liberty” and claims that Americans have “been called to a unique role in human events. Rarely has the world faced a choice more clear or consequential.” The rhetoric is reminiscent of prophetic evangelicalism, in which times of crisis are times of trial: if a chosen people follows God's call, evil can be overcome and justice and peace will prevail. The President claims:

Those of us who have lived through these challenging times have been changed by them. We've come to know truths that we will never question: evil is real, and it must be opposed. Beyond all differences of race or creed, we are one country, mourning together and facing danger together. Deep in the American character, there is honor, and it is stronger than cynicism. And many have discovered again that even in tragedy – especially in tragedy – God is near.

As Daschke sums up, Bush assumes a prophetic role tied into Old Testament scripture: “as the moral leader of a righteous nation that is confronted with a clearly defined battle between Good and Evil” (Daschke & Kille 2010: 159). The two sides are directly juxtaposed throughout the speech. Bush describes the terrorists as “enemies” of America and claims that they “send other people's children on missions of suicide and murder.” In his narrative, they function as personifications

64. Note that J. Wallis' article (2003) appeared two years after 9/11. Immediately after the attacks, critical voices remained rare.

of evil: "They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed." In contrast to that, the United States, according to Bush, "stand[s] for a different choice, made long ago, on the day of [the country's] founding." The President further assures his audience of the righteousness of his country and its policies: "We affirm it again today. We choose freedom and the dignity of every life."

The religious dualism of Christianity is not in perfect balance since, in the end, God will inevitably destroy the devil. It thus contains a strong element of hope and the prospect of ultimate victory of the righteous (at least for all believers). When Bush frames the "war on terror" in a narrative marked by Christian dualism, he can consequently not only claim to be on the right path but also be sure of a triumphant outcome. He employs a rhetoric of hope and encouragement to give moral uplift to the American public – he lists successes, which, according to him, the nation has achieved in the past months:

In four short months, our nation has comforted the victims, begun to rebuild New York and the Pentagon, rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan's terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and freed a country from brutal oppression.

His rhetoric makes sense of the hardships and sacrifices Americans had to face at home and abroad, as it explains that they serve a worthy cause and will therefore not be in vain. The President implies that since the good will always prevail, the country's efforts in the "war on terror" must lead to ultimate victory. Bush assumes a prophetic tone when he assures his audience: "I know we can overcome evil with greater good. And we have a great opportunity during this time of war to lead the world toward the values that will bring lasting peace." Similarly to Christian prophets who also preached that good will eventually overcome evil, Bush confidently announces that America is "winning the war on terror." With the help of civil-religious imagery his words offer solace to those who accept the polarizing narrative: "Steadfast in our purpose, we now press on. We have known freedom's price. We have shown freedom's power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom's victory. Thank you all. May God bless." The idea of freedom serves as a civil-religious metaphor for justice and peace, the good and Godly in the world.

The demonic evil Other

A further function of the language of evil in political speechmaking is to make the enemy look monstrous or demonic. Lakoff (1991) suggests that the metaphorical framing of the Enemy As Demon "arises as a consequence of the fact that we understand what a just war is in terms of the fairy tale," in which the good and the bad oppose each other in a simplistic way. The rhetorical technique can be

found in the war addresses of numerous former American presidents, who willingly attribute demonic characteristics to their opponents – a process that Gunn calls “demonic anthropomorphism” (2004: 1–23). President Reagan’s Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida, on March 8, 1983, in which he labels the Soviet Union an “evil empire,” neatly exemplify this trend. In Reagan’s speech, communism appears as a demon, which threatens the U.S. The President warns his citizens that they should not “ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an evil empire” because that would mean to “remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil” (Reagan 1983). The Soviet Union, to him, is a dangerous “totalitarian power” and “the focus of evil in the modern world,” which threatens all that America stands for. However, as he assures his audience, Americans will not give in to “evil”: “we will never compromise our principles and standards. We will never give away our freedom. We will never abandon our belief in God. And we will never stop searching for a genuine peace” (Reagan 1983). Reagan interprets the Cold War as a clash between Christian morality and a supposed lack of values of the communist regime. The chauvinist stand implies the assumption of American/Christian moral superiority and its duty and privilege to supposedly enlighten Others and save them from “darkness.” The light metaphor strengthens the moralizing polarization as, in Western cultures, good and evil are traditionally metaphorically linked to light and darkness.

Similarly, in Bush’s 2002 State of the Union Address, the terrorists are purely “evil” and their complete Otherness discourages any sympathy. The President uses vocabulary and metaphorical frames that show the terrorists as less than human. He claims that “[t]housands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes, are now spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning.” The metaphor of a “ticking time bomb” depersonifies the terrorists and underlines the ambush character of the 9/11 attacks, which happened “without warning.” Moreover, Bush speaks of “parasites” who hide “on mountaintops and in caves,” an enemy that “operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities.” Like demons that hide in human bodies and need to be hoaxed out through exorcism, terrorists also hide and need to be found, “smoked out of their holes” (Bush 2001h), fought and eliminated. This fear-arousing description is emblematic for what Richard Hofstadter (1964) called “the paranoid style in American politics” – a style that attempts to arouse the fear of hidden or invisible forces conspiring to take over the body/the country in order to justify the use of violence against them. The demonization of the enemy may have helped to relieve parts of the President’s audience from potential feelings of guilt over U.S. military engagement.

The demon was also a prominent figure in Puritan rhetoric. Among others, Cotton Mather tried to persuade his audience that Satan was present and active in every-day life. In *Memorable Providence, Relating to Witchcraft and Possessions*, the minister describes how “evil spirits” take possession of people and harm or threaten others (Mather 1689). His writing, as well as similar accounts from that time, led to an increased fear of demons, which were blamed for all evils, and triggered the persecution of witchcraft. Ultimately, this episode in American history became known as a time of false accusations and hysteria. The demonization of the Other, that went hand in hand with a stigmatization of Muslims after 9/11, could, with regard to some aspects, be compared to the demonization and persecution of witchcraft quintessentially represented in the Salem witch trials. In late seventeenth-century Massachusetts, women, men, and children were put on trial based on the denunciations of teenage girls from their village, who accused them of witchcraft. They were ostracized as demonic, evil Others. It was a time during which the state sanctioned individuals, imprisoned and executed them, solely on the base of accusations. The ultimate aim of the trials was to eliminate individuals with heretical views – or, in the words of Puritan leaders, to get rid of the evil that was supposedly poisoning and threatening society. In practice, heresy included any form of political criticism, personal behavior that was considered eccentric, or even mere criticism of the witch-hunt. Everyone who did not comply with society’s rules could easily be eliminated – nonconformists became demons or demonic Others. In a way, the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act also justified a sort of witch-hunt on Muslims as suspect citizens in the United States. Ahmed (2004: 75) argues that in the post-9/11 era those who appeared “Middle Eastern, Arab, or Muslim” became “could be terrorists.” She criticizes the contradictions in public discourse, in which “[u]tterances like ‘this is not a war on Islam’ [George W. Bush] coexist with descriptions such as ‘Islamic terrorists’” and thereby subconsciously strengthens the connection between the two (ibid.: 76). The words establish a causal relationship that then feeds existing stereotypes. In how far this fear of the could-be-terrorist affected the mobility of people who “might look Muslim” became evident to everyone who boarded an international flight after the terrorist attacks on the WTC (Ahmed 2004: 76). Moreover, similarly to the trials in Salem, which were meant to keep up an illusion of a rule of law, the USA PATRIOT Act gave supposed legal legitimization to the cuts of civil liberties that effected the demonized group of suspect citizens more than others.

“Axis of evil”

Ironically, the “war on terror” (a war without concrete objectives) was fought against an “axis of evil” – a fictional coalition. In his 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush introduces the expression for the first time, referring to states

that allegedly harbor or help terrorists.⁶⁵ Specifically, the President mentions Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. Bush describes North Korea as “a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.” Iran is accused of being a state that “aggressively pursues these weapons [of mass destruction] and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people’s hope for freedom.” However, the harshest critique falls on Iraq, which Bush describes as follows:

Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax and nerve gas and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens, leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections, then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.

The President claims that the three countries are developing weapons of mass destruction and warns: “states like these and their terrorist allies constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” The axis was later expanded by the future United States U.N. Ambassador John R. Bolton, who in his speech on May 6, 2002, added three more countries: Syria, Libya, and Cuba. The criteria for inclusion in this group were: “state sponsors of terrorism that are pursuing or who have the potential to pursue weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or have the capability to do so in violation of their treaty obligations” (Bolton 2002). One of the dangers inherent to Bush’s “axis of evil” concept is that it introduces a guilty by association policy, which is only vaguely defined and can be manipulated according to political needs. The “axis” includes not only terrorists, but also “nations [that] harbor terrorists.” These alleged collaborators, according to the President, equally endanger national and international security (e.g. “[t]hey could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred.”) Consequently, they need to be stopped: “America and our allies must not, and will not, allow it.” Seeking international support for the “war on terror,” Bush claims that the “axis of evil” must be fought by a “coalition” (he repeats the word four times). The term not only lends an international dimension to the fight but also helps to rhetorically divide the world into two camps: allegedly righteous America and its allies on one side, and supposedly evil supporters of terrorism on the other.

65. The expression replaced the term “rogue states,” which American policy makers popularly used since the 1980s (cf., e.g., Lake 1994).

The expression triggered harsh criticism from commentators and political authorities. Among others, the linguistic objection was raised that the use of the word “axis” is inappropriate in this context. Unlike the Axis powers during WWII, the three countries mentioned by Bush did not coordinate public policy nor form an alliance. In addition, Iran and Iraq can hardly be seen as close allies, as they fought each other in a long war in the 1980s, while under basically the same leadership as the one in power in 2002. The parallels between North Korea, an isolated communist regime with no ties to al-Qaeda, and the two Middle Eastern countries are not quite obvious either (Applebaum-Sikorska 2002). Sure, in all three cases one can speak of repressive regimes when applying Western standards on civil liberties. However, no special common political characteristics can be found nor does cooperation between these countries take place, which leaves the grouping without any actual foundation. Especially, since the Bush administration’s main claim – that the states of the “axis of evil” were seeking weapons of mass destruction and state sponsoring terrorism – could not be proved. In the case of Iraq, it was in fact disproved. On September 30, 2004, the Iraq Study Group, a Senate-appointed committee of investigations, released the Duelfer Report on Iraq’s purported WMD programs and on December 6, 2006, the final ISG Report was made public. Both documents state that Iraq was not working on the development of weapons of mass destruction in the period in question, confirming that Saddam Hussein abandoned the program after the Persian Gulf War in 1991.⁶⁶ In 2006, Bush additionally admitted during a press conference that Iraq had nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, as it had no ties to al-Qaeda (Bush 2006a). Thus, the information used by the Bush administration to justify the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq (alleged weapons of mass destruction and terror ties) has been proven false. Nevertheless, disregarding the lack of factual evidence behind the accusations in Bush’s post 9/11 speeches, the phrase “axis of evil” and the term WMD were willingly picked up and frequently repeated by the media. I argue that the terminology supports the construction of a frame through which the public perceives political realities, including the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq; it stigmatizes countries to justify military actions against them.

Liberation from tyranny

With regard to its proclamation against tyranny and the call for liberation of the oppressed, the 2002 State of the Union Address shows parallels to the Book

66. However, the report states that Saddam wanted to cheat on sanctions imposed by the United Nations and retain the capability to resume production of weapons of mass destruction at some time in the future.

of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 34:17 reads: “Therefore thus saith the LORD: Ye have not hearkened unto Me, in proclaiming liberty, everyone to his brother and every man to his neighbor. Behold, I proclaim a ‘liberty’ for you, saith the LORD, to the sword, to the pestilence, and to the famine.” According to the Old Testament, the rulers of Jerusalem swore in God’s name to liberate their Hebrew slaves, however, they did not keep their word. As a consequence, God decides to end their tyranny freeing the captives and bringing the oppressors to justice. Bush also promises to end the tyrannical rule of the Taliban in Afghanistan. He announces that “America will lead by defending *liberty* and justice because they are right and true and unchanging for all people everywhere” and claims that “[i]n a single instant, we realized that this will be a decisive decade in the history of *liberty*, that we’ve been called to a unique role in human events.” Additionally, the President lists alleged successes on the liberation front claiming that America “rallied a great coalition, captured, arrested, and rid the world of thousands of terrorists, destroyed Afghanistan’s terrorist training camps, saved a people from starvation, and *freed a country from brutal oppression*.” Kittredge remarks that the word “liberation,” which plays a prominent role in Bush’s discourse, “has theological resonance. The word for ‘making free’ in the New Testament is synonymous with the word for ‘salvation’” (Kittredge 2008: 55–66). In the President’s “war on terror” narrative, God does not act personally as savior but rather gives his divine support to his allegedly chosen people (Americans) called to fulfill His mission. Through the implied rhetorical analogies to prophetic texts, Bush indirectly suggests that it is the army of his “coalition” against terrorism that is now holding the mentioned “sword” (Jeremiah 34:17) of divine justice and is using it as a supposedly necessary and justified means of liberating the helpless and protecting freedom: “freedom is at risk. And America and our allies must not, and will not, allow it.” The biblical parallel to the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery (known as the Exodus) is a powerful tool since, as Kille remarks:

[It] is perhaps the single most important paradigm of restored freedom and justice in the world, having been transformed into a metaphor of spiritual release in Christianity, the guiding principle for settling a new continent among Puritans in the New World, and part of the self-understanding of those leading the democratic experiment known as the United States onto the world stage. (Daschke & Kille 2010: 156–181)

A large part of Bush’s domestic audience can be assumed to have been familiar with Christian liberation narratives of freedom and justice or America’s Puritan-derived founding myths, which are closely connected to it. Consequently, they were, consciously or unconsciously, influenced on the emotional level by Bush’s

missionary rhetoric of liberation. Since the end of tyrants simultaneously signals new birth of freedom for oppressed peoples (according to the Bible), violence must be seen as the necessary means to reaching superior goals of liberation and freedom. Bush in this sense draws supposed moral legitimization for his policies when he declares in an almost prophetic way that justice and righteousness must and will be brought to the suffering people of Afghanistan. In his narrative, the defeat of the tyrants (here the Taliban) will once again signal a new birth of freedom for the oppressed population and ultimately contribute to securing global peace. The President suggests that America, founded as a country with a special divine call, is obliged and privileged to fulfill this unquestionably righteous mission not only at home but also abroad. He announces that “America needs citizens to extend the compassion of our country to every part of the world.” And claims that “[America] seek[s] a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror.”

To avoid accusations of using military power overseas solely in the interest of his own country (or – even worse – for the sake of fulfilling U.S. hegemonic aspiration), the President stresses the allegedly international dimension of the war, which, as he claims, even erases “old rivalries.” Bush assures “America is working with Russia and China and India, in ways we have never before, to achieve peace and prosperity,” as freedom and liberation of the oppressed are higher common goals that supposedly united the countries. While he claims that “[Americans] have no intention of imposing [their] culture,” he simultaneously puts into focus the alleged universality of the values that the coalition is supposedly fighting to protect – namely, the “non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law; limits on the power of the state; respect for women; private property; free speech; equal justice; and religious tolerance.” These demands remain conveniently vague (especially the term “respect for women” does not specify if gender equality is in fact the final goal or if lower standards on the emancipation front would also satisfy the allies) and leave unclear how to measure if and when “liberation” was or will be achieved. Consequently, the “fight for liberty,” like the “war on terror,” can be infinitely extended according to political needs. Furthermore, Bush claims to have the support of the Afghan people, who supposedly wanted to be “liberated” through U.S. intervention. Although a large part of the country’s population undoubtedly suffered under the rule of the Taliban, bombings were certainly not the means that a majority of civilians would consider to be in their best interest. Bush’s rhetorical framing presents the U.S. military intervention in a solely altruistic manner. The President announces “[o]ur progress is a tribute to the spirit of the Afghan people” and leaves out other motivations. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss in detail whether the reasons for war might have been connected to safety issues, hegemonic aspirations, economic interest, or oil. Rather, my argument is that Bush (mis-)uses the jeremiadic rhetoric and its moral implications to

confirm and push forward policies in a similar way to Puritan ministers, who also employed the form as a means of socio-political control.

The President also makes the effort to present Afghanistan and the United States as equal partners, announcing that the two countries “are now allies against terror.” He stresses: “We’ll be partners in rebuilding that country.” The statement diminishes the tremendous influence the U.S. had on transformation process in Afghanistan – in fact, it largely dictated the rules for the assignment of a new a government. It is also noteworthy that in his 2002 State of the Union Address, the President directly welcomes the “distinguished interim leader of a *liberated* Afghanistan: Chairman Hamid Karzai”, whose presence serves to demonstrate the friendly relationships between the new leaderships of the now “liberated” country and the U.S. However, in terms of democratic legitimization the new government remained questionable, as none of the representatives was elected, which stands in stark contrast to Bush’s call of spreading democracy. These facts are omitted in the President’s address, as they fit neither the narrative nor its persuasive function. The speech ends on a (supposedly) optimistic note; the President presents his “liberation” policies as consequent continuation of America’s founding convictions, for which the country has stood up in the past, and promises a victorious outcome: “We have known freedom’s price. We have shown freedom’s power. And in this great conflict, my fellow Americans, we will see freedom’s victory.”

Conclusions

In the 2002 State of the Union Address, the President attempts to rhetorically confirm the alleged righteousness of his policies. Putting special emphasis on U.S. military engagement abroad and the supposedly persistent threat to national security, Bush diverts his audience’s attention away from other homemade problems. Simultaneously, he perpetuates and partly *creates* the notion of crisis in order to present military actions abroad (*outbound* jeremiad) but also the increased security measures within the country (*inbound* jeremiad) as vital for the safety of the U.S. and its citizens. He employs a rhetoric of fear to exercise social control and legitimize cuts to civil liberties. With regard to major themes and motifs, the address exemplifies the crisis oratory of the so-called Bush doctrine. The President employs Puritan-derived myths and a religiously tainted liberation narrative to frame the intervention in Afghanistan as morally justified. He stresses the alleged global dimension of the “war on terror” as he divides the world into two camps: the U.S.-led and allegedly good “coalition” (IDC) and the “axis of evil” (ODC) which supposedly supports terrorism. The latter term, which includes all those who “harbor” terrorists, allows the President to expand his definition of the “enemy” according to political needs. Bush largely relies on emotional appeals;

he balances between fear and hope and employs patriotic rhetoric (which partly moves into the realm of propaganda). Moreover, a rhetoric of Othering, historical analogies, and distinct metaphors support the President's vision of the future and his definition of a post 9/11 American identity. Bush's speech serves the epideictic purpose of uniting the audience around allegedly common values and lays the ideological foundation for his administration's next step in terms of foreign policy – the military intervention in Iraq.

3.1.2.7 *G. W. Bush: Presidential Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., March 19, 2003*

On March 19, 2003, the U.S. military and its allies launched a surprise air strike on the Presidential Palace in Baghdad, without a prior formal declaration of war. The next day, March 20, the invasion of the country by coalition forces (U.S., U.K., Australia, and Poland), also known as the first phase of the Iraq War or Operation Iraqi Freedom, began. Already the naming caused discussions within the U.S. administration and reflects on the importance of words in times of crisis. During the planning process all activities in Iraq were conducted under the codename Operation Iraqi Liberation. However, as the acronym reads OIL, the administration decided to change the name (The White House 2003), afraid that it might be considered a Freudian slip, revealing America's true interest in the region. President Bush informed the national and international public of the ongoing military actions in a brief televised speech, which he gave from the Oval Office on the same day. The address lasted 4:05 minutes and consists of 518 words.

The President opens his speech with the words: "My fellow citizens, at this hour, American and coalition forces are in the early stages of military operations to disarm Iraq, to free its people and to defend the world from grave danger." His direct addressees are the American people ("my fellow citizens") whom Bush simultaneously informs of the initiated actions and attempts to persuade to support his policies. However, the implied audience also includes the international public, which, as the White House was well aware of, also closely followed the events. Already the above-quoted first sentence signals the two alleged main objectives of the military operation and key themes of the speech, namely security and humanitarian aspects.

It needs to be noted that at the point of the speech the initial shock that the country experienced right after the 9/11 attacks was over. Skeptical voices, challenging the President's policies, became louder. Bush could not rely on the rally around the flag phenomenon in the same way as in September 2001. Consequently, the framing of the events became all the more important. Bush needed a persuasive narrative that would present Iraq as an imminent threat to the U.S. and the world. The following discussion concentrates on jeremiadic techniques

(including strong fear appeals and references to myths) used to rhetorically justify the expansion of the “war on terror.”

Preemption as defense

First of all, Bush stresses the necessity of eliminating the “threat” that Iraq supposedly poses to global peace. He claims that the coalition needs to “disarm” Iraq in order to “defend the word from grave danger.” He speaks of an “outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder.” Already in the weeks prior to the invasion, the Bush administration put forward the claim that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and was willing to use them as chief argument for a preemptive strike. The 2002 National Security Strategy of the United States of America states that, especially after the 9/11 events, the possession and production of such weapons, must be judged in terms of international law as “imminent threat” and justifies a preemptive war. In her analysis of the document, Dunmire (2011) illustrates how proximization serves to legitimate the policy of preemption. Her detailed study lists linguistic markers of spatial, temporal, and axiological proximization, revealing a strategy “that positions an overlexicalized enemy as encroaching on the U.S. and other free nations in ways that will end in a devastating clash” (Dunmire 2011: 67). Thus, proximization supports a narrative in which the threatening potential of the enemy endangers the ideology of the deictic center as well as the future of the world. Consequently, it helps to present proactive counteractions as moral obligation and logical necessity.

However, the administration’s use of the preemption argument was not without ambiguity. Colin S. Gray, former adviser on President Reagan’s Committee on Arms Control and Disarmament and author of numerous publications in the field of defense policy, criticizes the Bush administration’s misuse of the term. According to the scholar, “[p]reemption refers to the first use of military force when an enemy attack already is underway or, at the least, is very credibly imminent” (Gray 2007: 11). It is thus a form of self-defense. Furthermore, he distinguishes “preemption” from “prevention” and “preventive wars” observing that the “preventor has a choice” to start a war, as the threat is not as imminent, while the “preemptor” is merely reacting out of necessity (*ibid.*: 13). Therefore, he classifies the war policies of the Bush doctrine as preventive rather than preemptive. The line between the two terms is admittedly blurry and the question whether or not war is ever justified is equally problematic and has been subject to a heated scholarly debate (*cf.*, e.g., Delahunty & Yoo 2009: 843–864). Following Gray’s definition of preemptive war, which I consider most convincing, I argue that the Bush administration falsely used the concept in order to project the idea of an urgent imminent threat and thereby justify the military actions in Iraq as a form of self-defense. This strategy is also visible in Bush’s speech on March 19, 2003, where he claims that the U.S.

military is “striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein’s ability to wage war” and is “serving in our common defense.”

Disregarding the complex question of whether or not the Iraq War was compliant with international law, I argue that President Bush in his post 9/11 speeches continuously worked to gradually expand a general feeling of crisis in order to eventually include Iraq, which had no connection to the attacks, as an opponent in the “war on terror.” Already in the 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush characterizes Iraq as a regime that “has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade” (Bush 2002a). On March 19, 2003, he claims that the U.S. needs to immediately react through military intervention abroad in order to prevent further terrorist acts on American soil. The President clearly alludes to scenes in American cities after the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon when he announces: “We will meet that threat now, with our Army, Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard and Marines, so that we do not have to meet it later with armies of fire fighters and police and doctors on the streets of our cities.” With the help of 9/11 imagery, the President thus connects the justification of a preemptive war on Iraq to the fear of supposedly existing further imminent threats to national security. Although the odds of dying during a terrorist attack in the U.S. remain statistically extremely low (Zulaika & Douglass 1996:6), Bush’s rhetoric perpetuated this fear.⁶⁷ On the linguistic level, he uses words that strengthen the persuasive impact of the anxiety-arousing appeal as they have very low degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L. and are located outside the deictic center (like “danger” (twice), “enemy/-ies” (twice), “threaten/-s” (three times), or “war” (twice)). Moreover, the President frequently repeats the words “weapons of mass destruction” and “weapons of mass murder;” among others, four times in the 2002 State of the Union Address, four times in the Speech to the UN General Assembly on September 12, 2002,⁶⁸ and seven times in his Remarks on the Iraqi Threat at the Cincinnati Museum Center, Ohio, October 7, 2002 (Bush 2002c, d). His administration picked up on this word use and the media also largely joined in. However, in the end, no factual proof for the existence of such weapons in Iraq could be given, as the Iraq Study Group Report states. The exaggerated danger and the arbitrary focus on WMD are reminiscent of war propaganda; Bush focuses on fear appeals to perpetuate feelings of crisis in order to bypass logos with pathos and inculcate his audience with the help of the above-mentioned imagery, (false) parallels to 9/11, and specific word use. Therefore, the scholars Rampton and Stauber

67. According to Gallup, in March 2003, 38 percent of Americans were “very” or “somewhat” worried to become victims of terrorist acts (Gallup “Terrorism in the United States” 2014).

68. Three times “weapons of mass destruction,” one time “weapons of mass murder.”

fittingly call the President's "war on terror" speeches "weapons of mass deception" (2003: 134).

The global dimension of the Iraq war

Ivie and Giner speak of a "recurring jeremiad of national insecurity," referring to the central role of a supposed domestic safety crisis in American political speech-making (Ivie & Giner 2009: 279–301). They use the term jeremiad to describe the discourses of fear that "transform ordinary risk into perceived danger as a cultural condition of achieving a reassuring sense of community" (ibid.: 280). While I find their description especially fitting with regard to Bush's Iraq speeches, which rhetorically *create* a crisis, I additionally argue that the President attempts to perpetuate feelings of insecurity also on the *international* level. In his speech on March 19, Bush specifically stresses that the intervention is of vital interest to the stability of the region as well as to world peace.⁶⁹ In order to underline the apparent global scope of the threat, Bush speaks of the need to "defend the world from grave danger," mentions "the dangers to our country and the world," and describes an "outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder." Thereby, he presents war as necessary means of restoring what he describes as a peaceful world order. Additionally, he claims international support for the war when he mentions the "coalition forces" (three times), speaks of "our friends and allies," and announces that "[m]ore than 35 countries are giving crucial support. Every nation in this coalition has chosen to bear the duty and share the honor of serving in our common defense." This international dimension is crucial for his war discourse, as it allegedly shows that the U.S. is not acting alone as a self-appointed global sheriff or acting to fulfill hegemonic ambitions, but has a broad multinational mandate to protect, "bring freedom to others," and ultimately even "defend the world."

Missionary and humanitarian rhetoric

Next to the mentioned "jeremiad of national insecurity" (Ivie & Giner 2009: 280) as well as the rhetoric of *international* insecurity and the corresponding politics of fear, Bush also employs a combination of missionary and humanitarian rhetoric to legitimize the military intervention as a supposed liberation campaign. Costenbader et al. have shown that as the date of the invasion came closer, President Bush increasingly used humanitarian rhetoric when making public statements relating

69. While I consider Bush's concept of a peaceful world order highly simplistic, the point of my argument is to show how he rhetorically extends the supposed terrorist threat to an international dimension and not to define what he actually means by "defending the world."

to Iraq (Costenbader et al. 2012).⁷⁰ This gradual rhetorical build-up suggests that the war legitimization discourse was carefully planned. On March 19, 2003, the President directly states that the goal of the invasion of Iraq is “to free its people.” Thereby, he assumes a line of argumentation similar to the one used in the case of Afghanistan. Although the background as well as the roots and causes of the wars strongly differ, Bush’s “war on terror” narrative attempts to paint them with the same brush. The connection is misleading, as no ties between the 9/11 attacks, al-Qaeda and Hussein’s regime could be found. However, the President profits from the false parallel as it allows him to depict the Iraq War as logical continuation of his anti-terrorism campaign, allegedly meant to restore national security after the attacks, to “free the world of terrorism,” and to selflessly “liberate” the oppressed.

The humanitarian rhetoric also serves to confirm and reinvent America’s self-image of a country on a mission, which has its roots in the founding days of the “city upon a hill.” Žižek argues that the United States’ sense of itself as a nation is closely connected to the view of its foreign policy as a beneficent gift to others. He claims that “Americans have historically seen their role in the world in altruistic terms. ‘We just try to be good,’ they say, ‘to help others, to bring peace and prosperity’ (...)” (Žižek 2004). In fact, the early Puritan settlers already attempted to justify violence towards the Native population with the excuse of bringing them the gift of a supposedly superior religion. Bush, as president of a multi-religious twenty-first-century democracy, clearly cannot legitimize war through the idea of Christianization anymore. However, he continues to use civil-religious elements of the traditional mission narrative. Although he replaces Christianity by what he describes as American values (chiefly freedom and democracy), the ever-present idea of America’s special Covenant with God, in the end, indirectly connects these ideas to religion.⁷¹ The United States appears as a selfless global sheriff, destined to spread liberty around the world. In this way, Bush’s jeremiadic crisis oratory functions as nation-affirming rhetoric. It unites the nation around the reinvented historical myth of a country on a mission and simultaneously serves the deliberative function of supporting the President’s call for a humanitarian intervention. As Esche argues, “mythical discourse affects political practice by imbuing language with power, shaping what people consider to be legitimate, and driving the determination to act” (2010: 357–391). Under non-war circumstances (and, in general, all circumstances that are not constructed and perceived as critical)

70. “Use of humanitarian interests in the president’s rhetoric increased from a mean of 4.6% of total strategic rhetoric [from Sept. 19th 2001 to Feb. 9th 2003] to 19.4% of total strategic rhetoric in the month before the U.S. invasion of Iraq.”

71. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.3, section *Bush’s freedom*.

such mythological framings tend to be seen more critically by national audiences. However, in times of crisis, as Hughes (2004) points out, myths are easily turned into hardened realities taken to be literally true, as they offer a feeling of belonging and communal security to distressed citizens who accept the narrative.

Every liberator needs someone to liberate. In Bush's narrative, the people of Iraq are assigned the role of regime victims in need of liberation. The word cloud (Figure 7) illustrates that "people" are at the center of the speech.



Figure 7. Word cloud for President Bush's Presidential Address to the Nation, March 19, 2003

The President uses the word seven times in total; five times with regard to Iraqis and twice with regard to Americans. He announces that the goal of the intervention lies in "helping Iraqis achieve a united, stable and free country." Therefore, a clear division between the Iraqi regime and the country's citizens is necessary to advance his argument. The President claims that Saddam Hussein wanted to "use innocent men, women and children as shields for his own military" and calls this "a final atrocity against his [Saddam Hussein's] people." The absolute divide is artificial as it disregards the fact that parts of the Iraqi population supported Hussein's rule. Nonetheless, it is crucial for Bush's attempt to justify the war with the help of the responsibility to protect (R2P) doctrine. R2P is a norm (it is not a formal law) according to which states are responsible to prevent mass atrocities against their population. If they fail to do so, the UN Security Council, as last resort, can opt for a military intervention. The term is not precisely defined and therefore, just like the terms "war on terror" or "humanitarian intervention," can be stretched according to political needs. Although the Iraqi people never asked to be liberated by American troops and the UN did not give a mandate for an intervention, Bush presents military involvement as a gesture of compassion and help. He stresses

that the U.S. “come to Iraq with respect for its citizens, for their great civilization and for the religious faiths they practice.” Moreover, he claims that his country has no other interests in Iraq than to protect and empower its people: “We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.” Since the protection of civilians is put forward as a major priority, Bush consequently assures his audience that no efforts will be spared to minimize casualties. He speaks of a “concentrated campaign” in which “coalition forces will make every effort to spare innocent civilians from harm.” Specifically, he promises that the strikes will be directed at “selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein’s ability to wage war.” The word “targets” downplays human casualties, which the military strikes will cause, by presenting war in highly abstract terms. In the end, he additionally includes a prayer for the “protection of the innocent.” The narrative creates a fictitious vision of a clean war, in which the evil (Saddam Hussein, WMD, terrorism) will be eliminated and a moral order will be restored. The depiction is dangerous, as a clear-cut division between innocent civilians and the regime is, in reality, not possible. It lays the foundation for the later discourse of *collateral damage*, through which the Bush administration implicitly presented war casualties as inevitable price for an allegedly greater good.

Of tyrants and heroes – The demonization of Saddam Hussein

In order to further advance his supposedly humanitarian war agenda, Bush demonizes Saddam Hussein. In his narrative, the Iraqi President appears as an “enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality.” The evilness of his “outlaw regime that threatens the peace” supposedly justifies all necessary means to eliminate it – including military involvement. It is not the objective of this book to discuss in how far the Iraqi leader was in fact guilty of war crimes and dictator-like rule and thus deserving of such depictions. Rather, I want to show that Bush’s rhetoric described him in a stereotypical and biblically mystified manner as a personification of evil, turning Saddam Hussein into one of the most recognizable faces of the infamous “axis of evil.” Similarly to the stylization of the Taliban as Old Testament tyrants, which I discuss in my analysis of the 2002 State of the Union Address, Bush now characterizes the leader as a ruthless despot. Consequently, the Iraqi people can only be free after his fall, since no compromise is possible with evil. Only the supposedly justified removal of the tyrant can bring rebirth to the oppressed – yet again another parallel to the biblical liberation of the Jewish people from slavery, which the President also employed in previous speeches. The demonic portrait of Saddam Hussein binds the Iraq agenda into the “war on terror” as a continuous battle between good and evil. His stereotypical characterization fits into the black and white depiction of the war as irreconcilable conflict. The polarization implies that the end (the allegedly greater purpose of “rid[ing] the world of

evil”) justifies all means, including the violent ending of Saddam Hussein’s rule by the coalition forces. Already during a press conference on October 11, 2001, Bush said of the Iraqi leader: “There’s no question that the leader of Iraq is an evil man (Bush 2001n).” As he moves his argument away from rational (meaning: away from a factual discussion of the connection between Iraq and 9/11 and the country’s possession of WMD) towards a faith-infused jeremiad (meaning: presenting Saddam Hussein as a personification of evil that needs to be fought), those who oppose it become infidels and involuntary supporters of the enemy.

On one side, Bush’s story features the mentioned demonic tyrant. On the other side, there is the hero in the form of the “coalition forces.” These “35 countries,” according to the President, have “chosen to bear the duty and share the honor of serving in our common defense.” He claims that “the peace of a troubled world and the hopes of an oppressed people now depend [on the coalition forces].” Bush’s rhetoric exemplifies what Burke calls “our tendency to conceive the ‘perfect’ enemy” in opposition to ultimate conceptions of goodness (1968: 16). To further illustrate this simplistic divide, the President once again makes use of the conceptual metaphor of the mythical battle. He speaks of the “honor” and the “honorable (...) spirit” of those “serving” to “defend” their “loved ones” and their “country” but also to “defend the world from grave danger” and “defend our freedom.” He mentions “skill and bravery” and the willingness to “sacrifice.” All of these are attributes, which are typical of classical heroes. And in opposition to the hero stands the villain. In Bush’s tale it is an “enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality.” The President describes “an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder” and mentions a cruel “final atrocity” of the “enemy” who mistreats “innocent men, women, and children.” An open, unbiased dialog or compromises is virtually impossible in this polarizing scheme in which Bush stylizes Hussein as the incarnation of bad ethos.

“Just” war narratives: *Fait accompli*, lesser evil, and victimhood

Bush nips the discussion on possible non-military solutions to the Iraq crisis in the bud, as he presents the war as a *fait accompli*. He announces: “Now that conflict has come, the only way to limit its duration is to apply decisive force.” Thus, the President legitimizes military actions by presenting them as consequent next step in an already ongoing process, similarly to the way he framed the intervention in Afghanistan.⁷² The passive structure “has come” denies any American involvement in advancing the conflict, while the Terrorism as War metaphor additionally helps Bush to rhetorically establish the supposed reality of war. Expressions from

72. Cf. chapter 3.1.3.4, section *War as fait accompli and Bush’s call for renewal*.

the conceptual domain of war dominate the short address. Bush mentions the “military” (five times), he speaks of “enemies” and “allies,” “Armed Forces,” the “army/-ies” and “civilian/-s” (twice). He announces that the purpose of American involvement in Iraq is “to remove a threat and restore control” and does not refrain from using the word “war” twice. The Terrorism Is Crime metaphor of the early post 9/11 speeches is now long gone.

Furthermore, Bush presents the intervention as a lesser evil. While he shows himself aware of the hardships of military combat (“A campaign on the harsh terrain of a nation as large as California could be longer and more difficult than some predict.”), he nevertheless makes the point that it is in the vital interest of Americans to “meet that threat now (...) so that we do not have to meet it later (...)” In this, his rhetoric resembles crisis speeches of former U.S. presidents like John F. Kennedy, who in the wake of the Cuban missile crisis claimed that “[the American] nation is opposed to war” and spoke of a “difficult and dangerous effort” but simultaneously warned his domestic audience that “the greatest danger of all would be to do nothing” (Kennedy 1962).

Ivie (1980) convincingly argues that just wars can only be fought reluctantly, meaning that only the righteousness of the cause and the insufficiency of all other means can justify this otherwise condemnable measure. Therefore, leaders must show themselves aware of the abject nature of military combat and present it as a last resort. If they want to create the impression that their wars are just and thereby also free themselves of war-guilt, their actions must carry the allure of sacrifice. Following this rule, Bush claims that “[the American] nation enters this conflict reluctantly” in an attempt to legitimize military actions by employing what Kenneth Burke calls the victimage ritual” (Burke 1970). No one likes to feel guilty and war-guilt, like any other guilt (or maybe especially), needs redemption. One way to achieve atonement goes through the process of victimage. Burke differentiates two basic types of victimage: mortification and scapegoating (Burke 1970: 248). The former implies that humans look into themselves and take responsibility for a given crisis, while in the latter variation an external source is blamed for all ills. Bush’s narrative fits the second description as it victimizes U.S. citizens and presents war as necessary and just form of self-defense. Thereby, it frees the President and his followers from war-guilt by blaming the Other. His rhetoric is thus representative of Burke’s scapegoating-victimage process. Americans collectively appear as unprovoked victims of the 9/11 attacks, who will now altruistically “bear the duty and share the honor of serving in our common defense,” while the threat of potential further victimhood, which supposedly emanates from Iraq, legitimizes the expansion of the “war on terror.” In this sense, the President uses not only actual but also *potential* victimage to present U.S. military actions as a necessary means of preserving national security and global peace.

Identity constructions: In- and out-group Othering and the angel-devil melodrama

Scholars like David Campbell (1998) have shown that discourses of danger and foreign threat have been instrumental in (re-)constructing American identity/-ies for changing foreign policy purposes. Campbell goes so far as to claim that securing U.S. conceptions of itself as a nation is equivalent to identifying danger: “just as the source of danger has never been fixed, neither has the identity that it was said to threaten” (1993: 41). American society, as a heterogeneous collective, does not have one fixed identity. Self-definitions change over time and are strongly influenced by factors like interactions with other nations but also presidential discourse.⁷³ Depending on policy priorities, the rhetorical creation of new outside threats by political leaders can function as convenient social superglue. In his Iraq address, Bush attempts to rhetorically unite the nation against an outside evil, just as he did in the above-discussed earlier post 9/11 speeches. The phenomenon described by Burke (1969) as “unification by a foe shared in common,” appears yet again. The feared and hated Other, previously “the terrorists,” “those who support them,” or “Osama bin Laden,” now has the face of Saddam Hussein (Rediehs 2002). Bush’s divisive language of “us” vs. “them” has a crucial effect on creating a supposedly united national identity and public consensus in America’s multiethnic and multicultural society. Drawing on the finding of Schlesinger who describes national identity as a specific form of collective identity that is simultaneously “one of inclusion that provides a boundary around ‘us’ and one of exclusion that distinguishes ‘us’ from ‘them’” (1991: 297–308), Smith and Smith call this aspect of nation-building rhetoric “convergence by divergence” (1994: 79). American citizens are united through their contrast with the shared enemy – at least those who accept Bush’s polarizing narrative in which fear or hate of the Other functions as smallest common denominator. I see the danger in these rhetorically established boundaries in the fact that they promote a hierarchy in which the “us” necessarily appears above the “them.” Furthermore, Othering only seemingly unites all Americans; in reality, it only unites those who unconditionally accept Bush’s false dichotomy.

To strengthen the divide between the two sides, Bush adds the religious dimension to his discourse, interpreting the military intervention as yet another battle

73. Identity perceptions of individual American citizens certainly vary depending on factors like ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation etc. However, I argue that presidents, as leaders of nations, in their speeches attempt to reach the widest possible public by appealing to a collective “national identity,” which I understand as the smallest common denominator when it comes to self-definition processes.

in the eternal war between the opposing forces of good and evil. Phillip Wander calls this moralistic approach to presenting foreign policy “prophetic dualism” (Wander 1984:339–361); a worldview which defines politics within the context of a specific set of moral beliefs. In Bush’s Iraq narrative, it asserts America’s supposedly God-given superiority over the allegedly evil foe. Windt argues that the international crisis genre always hinges on a “melodrama” of “good versus evil” (1987:95). Based on the example of Cold War rhetoric of American presidents, in which the “Free World” stood in supposed opposition to the “Communist World,” the scholar further elaborates on his thesis:

[T]o intensify the either-or/devil-angel nature of the New Situation created by the enemy, each President reminded the public that this incident was only one in the continual battle between the Free World and the Communist World (...) one in which ideological angels do mortal and moral combat with ideological devils. Melodrama. Each drew upon the language and assumptions permeating the anti-communist ideology of the public. (Windt 1987:95)

In his speech, Bush replaces communists with terrorists (or more specifically: Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi regime), but the labeling of opponents as evil and completely different from “us” (Americans and their allies) continues to serve the deliberative function of justifying policies. In both cases, no compromise can be reached with an allegedly devilish enemy. According to Windt, presidents chose to redefining crisis as episodes in a melodrama, since this technique allows them to present policies as a test of national character (1987:96). In fact, President Bush metaphorically frames the war on Iraq as a test on America as he proclaims: “My fellow citizens (...) We will pass through this time of peril and carry on the work of peace.” The crisis-as-test narrative is typical of the American version of the jeremiad – it is more optimistic and pro-active than the traditional form, which interpreted crisis as God’s just and inevitable punishment for community’s downfall. The American version of the jeremiad in a way lightens the dooming vision of crisis through its inherent optimism – the test is also a privilege of the chosen nation, which ultimately can and will pass it.

Hope rhetoric and American exceptionalism

In the case of both post 9/11 wars, Afghanistan as well as Iraq, Bush’s speeches present his country’s foreign policy as an extension of America’s exceptionalism doctrine and the related notion of chosenness, which have been crucial ingredients in American self-identification processes over the centuries. Nations, as “imagined communities,” need myths, symbols and shared narratives to create ties between individual citizens (Anderson 1983). The concepts of chosenness and exceptionalism have, through their permanent repetition in American public

culture, become deeply encoded in the minds of millions, especially Christian American citizens. Therefore, consciously or not, their rhetorical (mis-)use necessarily had an effect on the understanding of Bush's mission narrative by national audiences.

In his speech on March 19, 2003, the President frames the war on Iraq not only as a military "mission abroad," but also a spiritual and humanitarian one. He claims the right and responsibility for the U.S. to intervene in order to "defend the world from grave danger," even beyond American society and far outside the borders of the original "city upon a hill." Thereby, he not only reaffirms the Puritan-derived notion of exceptionalism, but also reinvents and extends the country's conception of its chosen role as supposed liberator of "enslaved"⁷⁴ peoples. The war in Iraq becomes the new errand into the wilderness; the frame helps the President legitimize American foreign policy as more than mere national interest. Rather, in his narrative, the intervention appears as a morally justified global mission against an enemy "who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality." Using the traditional myth of American exceptionalism, Bush thus creates the image of the U.S. as supposedly divinely sponsored protector of the world's moral order. Again, the "proximization strategy involving political myth" (Esch 2010: 364), here the myth of American exceptionalism, plays a crucial role in the policy legitimization process. It contributes to the forced construal of a growing ODC-IDC ideological conflict, which will lead to a physical clash if no counteractions are undertaken.

Especially during times of foreign policy crisis, allegedly missionary responsibilities play a central role in political speechmaking (Davis & Lynn-Jones 1987: 26). In his Inaugural Address, on January 20, 1961, at the height of the Cold War, Kennedy vowed to "pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty" (Kennedy 1961a). Roosevelt even directly called for divine intervention when he declared war on Japan on the day following Pearl Harbor: "The American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory. [sic!] (...) we will gain the inevitable triumph – so help us God" (Roosevelt 1941b). Bush follows this tradition when he promises to "make every effort," optimistically assures his audience that "the dangers to our country and the world will be overcome," and ends his Iraq speech with the words: "May God bless our country and all who defend her." Furthermore, he mentions prayer twice: "I know that the families of

74. "America is a friend to the people of Iraq. Our demands are directed only at the regime that enslaves them and threatens us" (Bush 2002d).

our military are *praying* that all those who serve will return safely and soon. Millions of Americans are *praying* with you for the safety of your loved ones and for the protection of the innocent.” Thereby, the President puts into focus the religiosity of “millions of American,” indirectly referring to the country’s alleged special Covenant with God.

The myth of American exceptionalism as well as the notion of divine sponsorships, add elements of hope and optimism to Bush’s crisis discourse. They confirm America’s supposedly right path and guarantee that the country must in the end succeed; in the case of the Iraq speech that means winning the war. Bush’s Iraq narrative, in a jeremiadic manner, “join[s] lament and celebration in reaffirming America’s mission” (Bercovitch 1978: 11). While it laments the state of Iraqi society and presents a dooming vision of a world threatened by terrorism, it nevertheless ends with an optimistic vision of a supposedly better future, in which Bush’s chosen America frees the world of terrorism and spreads its values. The President presents the intervention as a logical next step in the country’s divine mission rather than a revolutionary, new policy. On the linguistic level, the frequent repetition of the modal verb “will” (x16) conveys certitude. Bush sends out the message that he not only knows exactly which actions must be taken, but also promises a victorious outcome for the United States. He pointedly sums up his vision of a better future in the last sentences of the speech:

And I assure you, this will not be a campaign of half measures, and we will accept no outcome but victory. My fellow citizens, the dangers to our country and the world will be overcome. We will pass through this time of peril and carry on the work of peace. We will defend our freedom. We will bring freedom to others and we will prevail.

The President builds his ethos by presenting himself as a strong leader, who can “assure” his citizens, knows which actions need to be taken, and takes on responsibility by giving out clear orders. (“On my orders coalition forces have begun striking selected targets of military importance to undermine Saddam Hussein’s ability to wage war.”) Moreover, Bush’s frequent repetition of the pronoun “we” stresses the supposedly communal nature of the effort and (falsely) implies that a consensus between all Americans to act together and follow their President exists. He claims that his policies will be instrumental in shaping the future for the better and suggests that only those who join him can become actors on the right side of history. The one-dimensional discourse makes voices of dissent extremely difficult. Additionally, the anaphora “we will” puts emphasis on the element of confidence. Almost like the biblical prophets, the President claims to know the future

and thereby necessarily also redefines the meaning of preemptive war: America supposedly *must* act *now*, otherwise further attacks *will* happen. War is thus a necessity rather than a choice. Moreover, it is a course worth pursuing since America is supposedly predestined to “carry out the work of peace” and will, in the end, succeed, as Bush assures his audience.

Predestination is not a new motive in political speeches. It was already a favorite rhetorical tool for Puritan leaders who used it as a form of socio-political control in their speeches. An audience that believes that the cause presented by their leader is not only righteous but also destined to succeed, will be more willing to make sacrifices and withstand even difficult circumstances. The hardships of life in the new colonies could be more easily endured by early settlers if they believed their bumpy path would eventually lead them to salvation. Similarly, Bush’s claim of the divinely predetermined outcome of events is meant to have a reassuring effect on his domestic audience but also to gain him support for the upcoming, harsh war policies including military actions abroad as well as cuts to civil liberties within the country.

What I consider especially problematic about Bush’s use of American exceptionalist rhetoric in post 9/11 speeches is the fact that it elevates one nation above others. As Bercovitch sums it up, “the chosenness of the chosen people implies their antagonism of the *goyim*, the profane ‘nations of the earth’” (Bercovitch 1978:178).⁷⁵ It is inherent in the nature of the concept to advance divisive practices, also with regard to foreign policy. In this sense, Bush’s rhetoric of American exceptionalism does not help finding diplomatic conflict solutions, as it neither leaves room for a dialog on eye level nor allows for compromise. It is rather a tool for creating or deepening crisis in the minds of audiences.

Bush’s construction of the Iraq crisis – A modern outbound jeremiad
 Bush’s vision of a world in which evil forces (here: terrorism, WMD, Saddam Hussein) threaten global peace resembles biblical end of times rhetoric. 9/11 appears as the beginning of the end, with terrorists supposedly attempting to overthrow the dominant world-order. The devastating state of Iraqi society, as Bush describes it, allegedly foreshadows which dreadful future awaits all other nations if terrorists and tyrants are not stopped. The President prophesies the upcoming downfall of Western civilization similarly to the way Jeremiah prophesied the downfall of the Kingdom of Judah. However, while the biblical prophet called his people to repent, “O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How

75. *Goyim* derives from the Hebrew word for nation – “goy.” The term *shabos goy* is used in Yiddish for non-Jewish people. Here, it is construed as a linguistic referent for Otherness.

long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?” (Jeremiah 4:14), in order to be saved, Bush suggests military counter-actions on a different continent to eliminate the threat. Conspicuously, the President at no point criticizes nor blames American citizens. Instead, his jeremiadic vision refers to the circumstances under which the Iraqi population found itself – suffering under the cruel rule of an unwanted tyrant, as he claims. With regard to its focal point, Bush’s jeremiadic crisis rhetoric is *outbound*, as it campaigns for change in a society more than 7,000 miles away. In contrast to early Puritan minister who called parishioners to repent in times of hardships, President Bush sees no fault or cause for self-reflection within America. In fact, he is so convinced of his country’s righteousness that he wants to export the supposedly superior value system also to Iraq: “We will bring freedom to others.” As Domke (2004) remarks, Bush’s discourse is marked by an evangelist-like promotion of democracy and freedom as universally desired norms. Nevertheless, the President remains careful and yet again underlines that the U.S. has no hegemonic ambitions in the region but merely (re-)acts out of humanitarian reasons: “We have no ambition in Iraq, except to remove a threat and restore control of that country to its own people.” In blaming the crisis (the security threat and the supposed necessity of war) on a scapegoat outside of his own community, the President’s oratory resembles the reformed Puritan jeremiads (rather than early Puritan jeremiads), in which an evil Other (e.g. Native Americans or witches) and not the sins of parishioners allegedly threatened the communal well-being and consequently needed to be fought. Clearly, the element of social critique directed towards the speaker’s own community, a crucial ingredient to classical jeremiads which relied on a skillful balance between guilt and redemption, is hardly present in Bush’s Iraq speech. Still, the President, in a way, calls his people to reform and change their behavior – he wants Americans (Americans, not Iraqis are the main addressees of his speech) to “bear the duty” and to get involved in a military campaign. The alleged objective of this action is to *reform another society*, to liberate its “enslaved people,” but also to prevent the downfall of Western society and the further spread of the “tyrannical” rule of terrorists. Therefore, I call the described aspect of Bush’s crisis rhetoric an adapted, *outbound* jeremiad.

Conclusions

President Bush’s post 9/11 crisis rhetoric successfully expands the “war on terror” to Iraq, a country that had no connection to the 2001 attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon. The speech on March 19, 2003, serves the epideictic function of portraying Hussein’s regime as a threat to global security and the deliberative function of legitimizing the alleged necessity of preemptive war. Gallup polls prove how successful it was in generating support for Bush’s policies: on March 14–15, 2003 presidential approval ratings were at 58 percent and

by March 22–23, shortly after the speech and the invasion, they had risen to 71 percent (Newport 2003). I see the appeal of the narrative in its skillful framing through crisis oratory. Although, major differences between classical jeremiads and Bush's crisis rhetoric certainly exist, some jeremiadic elements, adapted to the political realities of the twenty-first century, are central to the President's war discourse.

Bush's narrative includes an apocalyptic vision of a world in decline, in which an evil enemy supposedly threatens global peace. Additionally to biblical analogies, the President draws parallels to previous American wars in order to present the alleged righteousness of his cause. The interpretation of U.S. history through the myth of American exceptionalism helps him present war as a consequent continuation of the country's allegedly divine call. In this modern civil-religious version of jeremiadic crisis rhetoric, Bush's mission, as practiced through his foreign policy, implies bringing freedom and peace to Others. Fear functions as a central motivator and the anxiety effect on the audience is strengthened through appropriate word use, metaphorical structures, and processes of Othering. However, the element of hope is just as strong. Typically of presidential oratory in times of military combat, Bush builds the ethos of strong leadership to reassure his audience. But he exceeds many of his predecessors with regard to pathos and religiosity in his war rhetoric, when he promises an allegedly predestined and divinely sponsored, victorious outcome. Similarly to Puritan jeremiads, Bush frames the critical events as a test. This rhetorical strategy not only lightens his fear-arousing vision of a post 9/11 world threatened by terrorists (since, in the end, America will pass the test and "free" the world from terrorism, as the President claims), but also facilitates blaming external forces for any hardships, conveniently freeing Americans from self-reflection. Furthermore, the President's prophetic dualism interprets the events with the help of the dialectical tension between good and evil. The rhetoric of eternal moral struggle allows him to expand the "war on terror" according to political needs and to *create* a new security crisis while making the articulation of dissent difficult and thus, sustaining his authority.

3.1.3 Conclusions on President George W. Bush's post 9/11 crisis rhetoric

Characteristics of Bush's post 9/11 crisis rhetoric

The analysis of Bush's seven major post 9/11 addresses, from the day of the attacks to the beginning of the war in Iraq, shows that the President's crisis oratory is marked by distinct characteristics and, with regard to several aspects, remains influenced by the tradition of the jeremiad. These characteristics include:

- Apocalyptic end-time rhetoric: a parallel to the biblical jeremiad (lamentation of the present/ notion of decline, evocation of the past, and call for renewal)
- Emphasis on the alleged uniqueness of the events
- Depiction of crisis as test rather than punishment (a parallel to Puritan jeremiads)
- Careful balance between fear and hope: inherent feature of all jeremiads (advanced through word-use and distinct metaphors)
- Fear generating rhetoric/ anxiety as a motor for action: inherent feature of all jeremiads
- Strong element of hope, ever-present vision of a better future: parallel to the optimistic American jeremiad
- Establishment of a polarizing dichotomy between good and evil (moralistic rhetoric and strong judgment)
- Use of national and civil-religious myths, chiefly exceptionalism, the notion of chosenness, America's Covenant with God, and Manifest Destiny
- Appeal to supposed American values or Western tradition
- Use of distinct metaphors to frame/create crisis narratives
- Processes of Othering
- Uniting, nation-building rhetoric
- Religious and civil-religious rhetoric
- Sermon-like priestly and prophetic elements (e.g. prophetic dualism)
- Presidential ethos – discourse of strong leadership
- Dominance of pathos over logos
- Intertextuality (citing former presidents, historical crisis speeches, biblical passages)
- Rhetorical steps to establishing crisis: going public/informing, sense making, identifying a course of actions, meaning making

The evolution of Bush's crisis rhetoric

My analysis of eight speeches by George W. Bush points to a gradual shift in the presidential oratory following September 11. From speech to speech, Bush expands his crisis discourse. The first brief statements largely serve an informative function and their tone remains factual. Soon however, Bush starts to include more emotional appeals and interprets the events through a set of allegedly American values as well as the country's founding myths. Already on the evening of the attacks, the President uses the term "evil" in reference to the attackers. From that moment on, the rhetoric of Othering becomes an integral part of his crisis speeches. On September 20, the President establishes an alienating dichotomy between "those who are with us" and "those who are against us" and in his 2002

State of the Union Address, he bluntly speaks of an “axis of evil.” Eventually, the rhetorical buildup leads to the transformation of “terrorist acts” into a “war on terror;” the initial framing of the events as a crime is replaced by the conceptual metaphor Terrorism Is War.

First, the President constructs the events as a “national tragedy” and thereby presents them as a matter of every American citizen’s concern. He declares the situation to be “critical” and “unprecedented” and calls for decisive actions. Then, in a jeremiadic manner, he establishes an allegedly clear divide between good and evil, which he supports through the use of conceptual metaphors and an overly Manichean style. His simplistic narrative seemingly makes sense of the events, presenting them as a form of “trial,” which reconfirms America’s allegedly exceptional role. Prophetic elements, which entail a strong moral polarization and implicitly point to the country’s supposed Covenant with God, are particularly conspicuous. The narrative attempts to unite Bush’s audience around his vision of the world. The President defines and claims American values (above all freedom) for the political Right and leaves no room for dissent. However, Bush’s rhetoric is only seemingly uniting as it merely includes those who embrace his worldview while it demonizes all Others. His interpretation of the 9/11 events reconfirms crucial aspects of a mainstream American lifestyle (including consumerism) and, in a manner reminiscent of the American jeremiad, merely calls for “renewal.” Thereby, it frees those who accept it from the burden of self-reflection, as it casts the blame on the “enemy.” To strengthen his message Bush further employs historical analogies as well as specific vocabulary, chiefly relying on the myth of American exceptionalism and the related notion of America as a country on a “mission.” Moreover, the President attempts to gain international support, adding a global dimension to the fight against terror. On the empirical level, the findings within the proximization framework offer additional evidence for the discursive construction of fear as key element of Bush’s policy legitimization discourse and further insight into the mechanisms behind setting up the dichotomy between Self and Other. As Cap (2013) has shown, the discourse of the timeframe covered in this work is dominated by spatial and temporal proximization. The analysis further reveals that axiological proximization often appears in connection to myths, especially in the last one of the analyzed addresses in which Bush announces the start of the war in Iraq.

Having established an ideological foundation, Bush identifies a course of action and provides meaning to the events. The President turns to the form of the American jeremiad not only to explain the violence endured (interpreting the 9/11 events as a test), but also to justify the violence he plans to inflict (the military actions in Afghanistan and later in Iraq). He frames the “war on terror” with the help of civil-religious concepts as an American patriotic duty and the country’s

new frontier. His policies appear as the only way to end a security crisis. Additionally, the President implicitly presents war as a way of executing supposedly divine justice and promises ultimate success. The rhetoric around the PATRIOT Act exemplifies how Bush perpetuates the fear of further terrorist attacks in order to execute greater social control also within the country; it thus bears traits of an inbound jeremiad. The discourse around Iraq illustrates how the President's crisis oratory successfully expanded "the war on terror" to a country that had no connection to the attacks. With the help of biblical framings and a moralizing jeremiadic rhetoric Bush's rhetoric aims to justify presenting America as a nation chosen to fight and win a global battle against "evil." As it adapts well-known national myths to new circumstances, explaining the incomprehensible through the prism of the familiar, his rhetoric also contributes to the process of shaping new American identities.

Gallup polls show that Bush's presidential approval ratings surged following the 9/11 events (*Gallup* 2013).⁷⁶ Aware of the limitations of polling data and the multiplicity of factors, which alter citizens' opinions (including the rally around the flag syndrome, typical for times of war), I nonetheless argue that this unprecedented level of support could not have been reached without Bush's persuasive crisis framing, which includes jeremiadic elements. The change in perception of the presidency supports the claim that crises can hold opportunities for political leadership. The President was able to pass far-reaching policies at home as well as abroad by linking them to the terrorist attacks. If large parts of the American public had not had subscribed to Bush's security crisis discourse, his policies would have faced more vehement opposition.

With regard to the classification of Bush's post 9/11 crisis speeches in terms of Aristotelian genre divisions, numerous scholars, like Murphy, argue that the President's discourse relied on topics of praise and blame rather than argumentation (Murphy 2003:620). Therefore, they view it as participating in the epideictic genre, designed as a non-argumentative attempt to unite Americans and identify enemies. Others, most notably Kellner, characterize the President's rhetoric as advocacy and policy-driven, note its overt tendency toward implicit policy advocacy, and thus view it as belonging to the deliberative genre (Kellner 2007:622–645). They put into focus Bush's heavy reliance on scare tactics and intimidating language as argumentative means of influencing public opinion. My analysis shows that the President's oratory serves both, epideictic and deliberative functions. Therefore, following Jamieson and Campbell (1982), I see

76. I refer to the time period of the analyzed speeches: from September 11, 2001 to March 19, 2003 (cf. Gallup "Presidential Job Approval Center").

it as a “generic hybrid” that, as Dow remarks, combines the epideictic purpose of promoting “communal understanding” with deliberative ends of striving for “policy approval” (1989:294). While the ceremonial or praise-and-blame function is predominant in the President’s early speeches, gradually the future-orientated deliberative function gains in importance. The change in focus between the respective speeches accompanies the changing political needs of the President. The acknowledgement of the double nature of Bush’s post 9/11 crisis rhetoric allows for a better understanding of its functioning, its multi-layered structure, and its purpose as a whole.

George W. Bush’s post 9/11 crisis discourse – Adapting and continuing jeremiadic traditions

My analysis points to several differences between President Bush’s crisis rhetoric and the form of the jeremiad. Traditionally, Puritan leaders used sermons to direct social critique towards their communities. In contrast to that, Bush’s social critique is predominantly outbound. The shift from internal to external focus already began with the Covenant Renewal jeremiads and, in a way, the President continues the reformed jeremiadic trend of blaming outside “evils” for problems and hardships. However, at some points, the rhetoric of Othering dominates his narrative to a degree that – as Rampton and Stauber (2003) remark – is reminiscent of war propaganda, as it focuses on fear appeals in a misleading manner and bypasses logos with pathos in order to promote policies. Another difference is that Puritans used clearly Christian religious appeals for persuasive purposes while the President combines religious and civil-religious rhetoric as well as a vague appeal to Western tradition or American values to justify the alleged righteousness of his crisis policies. This change is understandable, as the country and its citizens are more ethnically and religiously diverse than it has been the case in the seventeenth century. Civil religion and supposed shared values serve as nation affirming motors, which are crucial for a multicultural “imagined community” like America. Nevertheless, many civil-religious motifs have their roots in Puritan traditions. Secularization is a development that over the centuries shaped the form of the American jeremiad. Therefore, I argue that a further integration of civil motifs in Bush’s crisis discourse does not constitute a break with jeremiadic traditions, but rather an adaptation of the form to modern realities.

George W. Bush is not a Puritan minister but the President of a multiethnic and multi-religious twenty-first-century democracy. Consequently, his speeches are not jeremiads in the strict sense of sermons. Nonetheless, his post 9/11 crisis rhetoric shows characteristics, which have their roots in Puritan rhetorical traditions, as indicated in the above list. In a jeremiadic manner, the President connects the critical events to “a larger, sacred story tied intimately to the particularities of the

nation's origins and development" (Murphy 2008: 10). These parallels are revealing of American self-identification processes.

How does the jeremiad help the President in establishing his crisis narrative? As the discussion illustrates, the polarizing narrative of good vs. evil implies strong moral judgment and makes voices of dissent or counter narratives very difficult. Thereby, it sustains Bush's authority. Moreover, the interpretation of critical events as a test, in a manner which is reminiscent of Puritan sermons, works as a motor for actions, as it bears the promise of ultimate success. The notion of exceptionalism, inherent to jeremiads, limits the depths of social criticism: Since Americans are supposedly chosen, no major changes are necessary – a mere renewal of the Covenant with God and a return to core values will suffice to end a given crisis, may it be real or imaginary. Thus, the jeremiad is an instrument for social stability rather than revolution and consequently an appropriate rhetorical tool for a president who wants to stay in power and confirm his authority. I see the jeremiad as an ideal vassal for war rhetoric, as it allows the rhetor to reconcile seeming contradictions like the moral legacy of Puritan New England and the violence of military interventions. In the following chapter, I analyze President Bush's and President Obama's rhetoric regarding environmental issues and discuss in how far they also use jeremiadic elements as helpful tools of persuasion.

3.2 Presidential speeches in times of environmental disaster: Analysis of President George W. Bush's and Barack Obama's environmental crisis speeches

As we are all aware, disasters are very political events.

James Lee Witt, FEMA Director (Witt qtd. in Sobel & Leeson 2006: 55–73)

3.2.1 Contextualization of the events

This chapter analyzes President George W. Bush's and President Barack Obama's verbal responses to selected ecological crises on American territory during their terms in office. Out of the numerous examples, it concentrates on Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. These environmental disasters had strong direct and indirect effects on the lives of many Americans as well as a long-lasting impact on the country's environmental landscape. The media prominently covered the events, scientists remarked on their graveness, and online rankings on numerous websites count them among the worst ecological catastrophes in twenty-first-century U.S. The data choice has also been influenced by the fact that

the 2005 hurricane was classified by President Bush as a “natural disaster,” while President Obama presented the oil spill in 2010 as manmade. Thus, they represent two different kinds of framings, as the analysis will address. Many other ecological crises, like droughts, earthquakes, fires, or epidemics were left out due to the limited scope of this book. Nonetheless, the verbal responses of U.S. presidents to them constitute interesting sources for further research on modern crisis rhetoric.

It is out of question that Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico caused disruptions in the lives of many people (including U.S. citizens as well as documented and undocumented immigrants), affected the functioning of government entities, and had a negative impact on the economy. Discussing in how far the two Presidents use crisis language to advance certain environmental positions and policies or to gain popularity with voters, I do not want to downplay the destructive nature of the events nor the degree of human suffering they caused. Rather, I want to show how the rhetorical framings of disasters function in the American context. As Kiewe and other contemporary communication theorists have shown, crises always have a constructed dimension (Kiewe 1994: xvii).⁷⁷ I am especially interested in how presidential rhetoric around disruptive events can turn them into crises. Environmental disasters can be viewed as specific kinds of crises since, as Seeger et al. suggest, they are “non-organizationally based events generated by natural or mass technological forces” (Seeger et al. 1998: 231–275). Nonetheless, the social constructionist perspective, adopted by the majority of contemporary communication studies theorists, defines all disasters “by their common *effects* more than by their specific *causes*” (Barber et al. 2007: 99–120) and thus allows for a joined discussion of natural, technological, financial, and terrorist events, since all these different type of crises show common characteristics when it comes to the influence of framings on their societal impact. As Lakoff argues, the right framing or “the right language” is “absolutely necessary for communicating ‘the real crisis’” (Lakoff 2010: 70–81). Certainly, the attention granted by a president to a particular issue, independently of its nature, influences its public perception. In the case of environmental disasters, like in the case of any other disruptive event to the status quo, democratic leaders can react in several different ways. If a disaster affects a group of citizens with little political power or concerns a topic that has no strong lobby within society, leaders can choose to largely ignore it or only give minimal attention to the event and those affected. Another possible approach is for a leader to show empathy with those who suffer, uniting the nation over a common cause (similarly to the rally around the flag effect during military conflicts), and to promise policy concessions. This

77. Cf. also Chapter 2.2.

scenario is probable if the critical ecological events affect groups of people who have influence over the leader's tenure in office or if the events can be linked to a political agenda. And last but not least, leaders can respond negatively, assigning blame for the environmental disaster to political opponents, lower officials, or an outside Other. The different approaches can also intertwine or change over time as a crisis develops and public concern with a certain issue either increases or decreases. The analysis will specifically address how the Presidents Bush and Obama chose to frame Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill. The purpose of this chapter is to point out characteristics of presidential crisis oratory in times of ecological disasters. How do Bush and Obama use language to appeal to their audiences on the levels of ethos, pathos, and logos? I will discuss in how far certain national myths, symbols, and metaphors, as well as what I call jeremiadic traditions continue to influence the genre. For that purpose, I will compare the chosen addresses to other speeches on environmental disasters by former U.S. presidents as well as to Puritan texts. Furthermore, I will compare the addresses of the Democratic and the Republican President to one another and test if they show common characteristics, which cross partisan lines and simultaneously reflect on and shape the country's self-perceptions, or if they rather represent competing discourses.

3.2.1.1 *Environmental jeremiads in the United States*

The omnipresence of environmental apocalypse in twenty-first-century North American popular culture, throughout different genres, is striking. Margaret Atwood's dystopian trilogy *MaddAddam*, Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road*, Roland Emmerich's blockbuster *The Day After Tomorrow*, or Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth: The Crisis of Global Warming* are just a few prominent examples. The latter has gone through ten printings, was made into an Academy Award-winning documentary film, and shows that apocalyptic motifs, in this case especially with regards to global warming, are also employed by contemporary American political figures. In recognition of his commitment to preserving the environment, Gore was the co-recipient of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize. The *New York Times* called him a "modern Jeremiah" (Broder 2008), while Jendrysik asserted that Gore's environmental rhetoric, his call for reform as the allegedly only way to avoid a global ecological and economic cataclysm, even resembles a "classical jeremiad," as fear appeals and criticism are directed chiefly towards the speaker's own society (what I call *inbound* jeremiadic appeals) (Jendrysik 2007: 10).

The use of the term jeremiad in environmental contexts is not new. Already in the 1970s, American media and academia used similar phrasings to characterize the emerging modern ecological movement. The concerns of the early activists

included issues like air and water pollution, the problem of waste disposal, nuclear fallout, or pesticide poisoning and led to the integration of these topics into mainstream public discourses and political debate within the United States. Especially Rachel Carson's 1962 environmental science book *Silent Spring* (2002), labeled by the New York Times as a "jeremiad against pesticides" (Griswold 2012), brought environmental concerns to the attention of a wide American public. Furthermore, in an article entitled "Clash of Gloomy Prophets," TIME magazine described another leading figure of the movement, the charismatic biologist Barry Commoner, and the ecologists around him as "new Jeremiahs" and additionally referred to Commoner as the "Paul Revere of ecology" (1971:56–57). In his book *Barry Commoner and the Science of Survival: The Remaking of American Environmentalism*, Michael Egan traces the development of environmentalist discourses in the United States and also directly calls the rhetoric of the 1970s movement a "new jeremiad" (Egan 2009: 99–103). He argues that in publicly lamenting environmental decline, Commoner and his supporters were very consciously adopting the powerful rhetoric of the jeremiad in order to strengthen the urgency of their message. The scholar convincingly depicts how activists raised alarm on environmental issues, trying to initiate a sort of spiritual reform within America. With the help of a rhetorical form, which has a long tradition in the country's history, they called on U.S. society to refocus its principles around a more ecologically sustainable mode of life. In fact, the apocalyptic style of American ecologists of the time bears resemblance to the biblical rhetoric of lamentation. Like the ancient prophet, who warned of the downfall of the Kingdom of Judah, the ecologists warned of the ongoing destruction of earth's ability to sustain life. In a way, both lamented the human fall from grace (as a consequence of breaking the Covenant with God – in the case of the prophet – or nature – in the case of the ecologists) and depicted the human condition and attempts at redemption as almost hopeless. However, while the biblical jeremiad's message foreshadowed largely despair, the rhetoric of the environmental movement included a glimmer of hope, meant as a motivation to act. Like eighteenth-century Puritan leaders with their Covenant Renewal rhetoric during the Great Awakening, Commoner and the other "new Jeremiahs" aimed to lead their audience into a state of fear, but then again redeemed them through the element of hope. In their narrative, life on earth could still be saved if people changed their lifestyles. Richard Ellis (1993) notes that the rhetoric of many activist groups refers to both, "impending catastrophe and future redemption." These two elements can also be found in Al Gore's "politicized environmental jeremiad," with which the former Vice President warns of the ongoing destruction of earth and simultaneously guilt-trips people into behavioral change, motivating his audience to act by offering a vision of a brighter future (Rosteck & Frentz 2009: 3).

The longstanding tradition of apocalyptic and jeremiadic rhetoric in American environmental discourses has been the topic of numerous scholarly publications. Rosteck and Frentz argue that, as a rhetorical genre, the jeremiad has left its mark on environmental discourse, especially in the use of evocative strategies to persuade people to act in certain ways by “means of apocalyptic predictions designed to mobilize emotions” (2009: 3). Ellis hears the “echoes of the American jeremiad” in the rhetoric of many environmental activists, while Opie and Elliot in their work on the rhetorical character of American ecological debates note that the genre “prefigures most environmental discourses” (Ellis 1993: 171; Opie & Elliot 1996: 9–10). Taking into account their findings, I will test in how far the Presidents Bush and Obama continue these traditions in order to frame ecological disasters and fulfill political needs. Do both Presidents employ what Killingworth and Palmer (2012) call “ecospeak,” a special kind of language used to discuss environmental issues? Do their speeches show similar patterns of politicized environmental rhetoric and how do they function in the context of American ecological crisis discourses?

Selection of speeches and empirical data

The selected speeches are President George W. Bush’s and President Barack H. Obama’s immediate responses to the chosen environmental crises of their terms in office. First, I will analyze President George W. Bush’s three most complete addresses, which directly refer to the critical events: his Remarks from the Rose Garden delivered on August 31, the Weekly Radio Address from September 3, 2005, and the Presidential Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina from New Orleans, Louisiana, delivered on September 15, 2005. I will also relate to brief comments and remarks the President made in the wake of the storm in order to give a more complete characterization of his crisis oratory and show how it contributed to the framing of the events. Then, I will move on to President Obama’s three most complete addresses relating to the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The White House website lists 42 speeches, remarks, and statements by President Barack Obama, which were tagged with the keywords “Deepwater BP Oil Spill” during the time period from the explosion on April 20, 2010 up until the leak was plugged on July 15, 2010. While the environmental crisis was not completely resolved by mid July 2010 (the relieve well was only completed on September 19, 2010, and cleanup efforts continued for many more months), I consider the mentioned period as the core time span of the crisis, as oil was permanently flowing into the ocean over the course of these 87 days. I chose to consider three speeches, which almost exclusively concentrate on the issue in question and received wide media coverage. First, the Remarks by the President on the Oil Spill delivered on May 2, 2010 in Venice, Louisiana. Second, the Remarks by the President after a

Briefing on BP Oil Spill, from the U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, delivered on May 28, 2010. And third, the Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, from June 15, 2010. The texts are relevant, as they directly refer to the events and partly introduce new policies in reaction to the crises.

Table 2. President Bush’s and President Obama’s speeches on environmental crisis: Word count and D.A.L. pleasantness scores

Orator		G. W. Bush				B. Obama	
Date	8/31/05	9/3/05	9/15/05	5/2/10	5/28/10	6/15/10	
Words total	1145	773	3323	1194	2347	2698	
ee mean	1.61	1.65	1.71	1.65	1.65	1.66	

The six analyzed addresses vary greatly with regard to their lengths (see Table 2). The shortest speech (Bush’s Weekly Radio Address from September 3, 2005) consists of 773 words, while the longest address (Bush’s Address to the Nation from September 15, 2005) is composed of 3323 words. I will take these discrepancies into consideration. Bush’s speech from August 31, 2005 and Obama’s speech from May 2, 2010 are the first rhetorical responses of the Presidents to the critical issues in question. These two texts are composed of a similar amount of words (the difference lies by 49 words, which amounts to around 4 percent) while the later speeches show significant deviations in that respect. When it comes to the time elapsed between the first and last analyzed presidential response to each of the crises, it amounts to sixteen days for Bush’s addresses and around six weeks for Obama. Thus, in both cases the time span is relatively short; it remains limited to the core periods of the crises, and consequently allows for a good comparison of rhetorical developments from speech to speech during an ongoing critical situation.

When it comes to the D.A.L. means for pleasantness of the chosen speeches, it is striking that, in both cases, the three addresses by Bush as well as the three addresses by Obama, the value progressively goes up from speech to speech. I read this development as a rhetorical reaction to persisting public displeasure with a state of events: the Presidents attempt to soothe feelings and calm emotions by employing more hopeful vocabulary. The values for the three Obama speeches are closer to one another than the values for the three Bush speeches, which suggests a stronger change in the rhetoric of the latter. The mean value is in all cases between 1.61 (for Bush’s Remarks from the Rose Garden on August 31, 2005) and 1.71 (for Bush’s Address to the Nation from September 15, 2010). All values are slightly

below the standard mean of 1.84 (Whissell 2009). Furthermore, the scores remain in a similar range to the D.A.L. means for pleasantness in the chosen classical jeremiads.⁷⁸ The data can be read as proof for the steadily balanced proportion of fear and hope appeals in the crisis speeches and thus a parallel to jeremiads. In my discussion of the speeches I will also take into account the individual D.A.L. values of frequently repeated words.

Based on the word clouds for the respective speeches, I make the following preliminary assumptions.⁷⁹ In President Bush's first address on Katrina, the most prominent word is "help." Shortly after the hurricane struck the Gulf Coast, helping the "affected" "citizens" (these two words are also among the most visible ones in the word cloud) was certainly a priority. Additionally, the quantitative findings suggest that the President puts into focus the role of "local" "officials," by frequently mentioning them. The further analysis addresses in how far Bush places responsibility for the crisis with local officials in order to divert attention from the failures of the federal government. In the second speech, the word "America" is highly prominent. This might point to an attempt to frame the events as a national crisis. It does not seem far-fetched that Bush would stress the importance of "Louisiana" and "New Orleans" (the words appear in large font) for the entire country. Furthermore, words from the military domain like "troops," "efforts," "relief," or "forces" play an important role, which lets the assumption come close that the President is framing the events as a war. In Bush's last speech, "people" are at the center. Thus, the focus presumably lies on the human dimension of the crisis, which affected "many" people, who now consequently need "help." Other prominent words like "region," the "Gulf," and specifically "New Orleans" refer to the geographical epicenter of the critical events, from where the speech was delivered. Moreover, the "work" related to the recovery as well as the role of the "government" appear as central points.

The word cloud for President Obama's first remarks relating to the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oilrig prominently displays the nouns "Gulf," "damage," "people" as well as the verbs "stop" and "going." On the one hand, it is likely that the speech serves a descriptive function: it indicates the location of the accident ("Gulf"), its consequences ("damage"), and especially emphasizes the human dimension of the critical situation ("people"). On the other hand, the word choice points to the fact that the President defines the crisis as ongoing; he concentrates

78. Cf. Chapter 3.1.2.

79. The images are displayed and discussed in the analytical subchapters of the respective speeches.

on what the administration “want[s]” and what it is “going” to do. Furthermore, the efforts to “stop” the leak appear as a priority. Already in his first speech relating to the events, Obama repeatedly speaks of a “crisis” and by frequently employing the adjective “American” lends national importance to the issue. In the President’s second remarks on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, the word “going” is by far the most prominent one in the word cloud. The repetition of the verb form points to the future and adds a proactive dimension to the speech: The President concentrates on what the next steps should be, supporting his message through the repeated use of “want” and “make.” Additionally, the term “everybody” indicates that the events do not concern only individuals, but are in fact a matter of national concern. Obama’s last and longest speech most prominently features the word “oil.” Judging from the other words, which appear as the largest in the respective word cloud (including “energy,” “clean,” “drilling,” and “industry”), I assume that the President is using the incident in the “Gulf” (second most prominent term) and specifically damage caused by the “oil” “spill” in order to push through energy policy reforms. These first assumptions will be tested in the qualitative discussion.

Major metaphorical framings and lexical correspondences, which appear in the chosen environmental crisis speeches, are the following:

- Environmental Disaster Is War
- Environmental Disaster Is Crime
- Environmental Disaster Is Illness
- Environmental Disaster Is Test (from God/ History/ Manifest Destiny)
- Environmental Disaster Is Mythical Battle (of ‘Good’ vs. ‘Evil’)
- The Othering Blame-Frame

In all of the chosen speeches the Presidents use lexical correspondences from the metaphorical domain of war. The framing appears eight times in Bush’s first remarks on Hurricane Katrina, eight times in his radio broadcast, and 12 times in his speech from New Orleans on September 15, 2005. Obama uses it four times in his first remarks, eight times in his speech on May 28, 2010, and again four times in his Address to the Nation. In both cases, the highest ratio (metaphorical correspondences from the war domain per one hundred words) can be found in the second speech, thus no progression can be derived from the data (the conceptual metaphor does not steadily appear more or less frequently over time). The conceptual metaphor Environmental Disaster Is War presents the events as national crises. It suggests that the occurred problems need to be fought under the strong leadership of a capable commander in chief, implicitly calling for unity. I argue that the Presidents use this rhetorical technique in an attempt to boost support for their presidencies through the rally round the

flag phenomenon, which is typical for times of military combat. Moreover, the conceptual metaphor Environmental Disaster Is Test plays a prominent role. By applying it, the Presidents suggest that the occurred events are a form of trial, either from God or history, and an integral part of America's alleged Manifest Destiny. For Obama, the framing becomes more prominent as the crisis continues and the presidential narrative grows more elaborate: while it appears merely once in the speech from the U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle, Louisiana, it can be found eight times in his last address from June 15, 2010. In the case of Bush's rhetorical response to Katrina, the concept of the environmental disaster as a test remains steadily present on the linguistic level, with respectively four, six, and ten appearances (in chronological order). It seems likely that the Presidents choose this conceptual metaphor as it seemingly makes sense of the events and unites the nation behind the idea of a common mission, thus serving crucial functions of crisis rhetoric (Boin & 't Hart 2003: 544–553). Other reappearing framings include Environmental Disaster Is Illness (that can be treated and cured) or Crime (which needs to be punished).

So far, Cap's spatial-temporal-axiological proximization model has not been applied to presidential speeches on Hurricane Katrina and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. However, in his 2017 publication, *Language of Fear*, the scholar discusses proximization strategies in contemporary environmental discourse on the example of speeches by NATO leaders and the former California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger. While his analysis focuses on climate change discourse, it sheds light on the way threat construction constitutes a prerequisite for legitimization of environmental policies. With regard to this aspect, the findings are also useful for the study of Obama's speeches following the oil spill in which he uses fear-appeals to open the way for environmental reforms.

Especially in the context of the last analyzed address from June 15, 2010, Obama proximizes the threat, which allegedly arises from the countries dependence on oil, as a call for action. He emphasizes the probability of further accidents on oil rigs as he claims that "no matter how much we improve our regulation of the industry, drilling for oil these days entails greater risk." Obama sees the root of the problem in "America's century-long addiction to fossil fuels" (ODC). Moreover, he identifies ODC entities that in the past blocked any progress in that direction including the "oil industry/companies/lobbyists" and "BP" but also "regulators" like the "Minerals Management Service" agency (undermined by "corruption") and other government actors. While BP is identified as the chief, directly-responsible party for the accident, the "lack of political courage and candor" of the latter group not only contributed to this "catastrophe" but also led to the reality that the U.S. is falling behind in the clean energy sector. ("Countries like China are investing in clean energy jobs

and industries that should be right here in America.”). The interest and values of mentioned ODC actors stand in opposition to those of average American citizens. The ‘real self’ entities include: the direct victims of the explosion and their dependents (“eleven workers [who] lost their lives,” “the families (...) who lost their loved ones”), people in the region affected by long-term implications of the spill (“men and women who call this region home,” “shrimpers and fishermen,” “owners of shops and hotels,” “workers and business owners who have been harmed”) and ultimately all Americans negatively affected by the environmental implications of the spill as well as the country’s dependency on oil (“citizens,” “America/-n/-s”). Thus, according to the narrative, a small group with special interests opposes the vast majority. Obama stresses that the threat extends into the future. This does not only entail the possibility of further accidents. The negative effects of the country’s oil dependency on the different sectors of public life actually grow with time. Temporal proximization is enacted through claims like the following: “we can’t afford not to change how we produce and use energy – because the long-term costs to our economy, our national security, and our environment are far greater.” The imminence of the cause is communicated through the repetition of the word “now” in combination with descriptions of the present devastation: “The tragedy unfolding on our coast is the most painful and powerful reminder yet that the time to embrace a clean energy future is now. Now is the moment for this generation to embark on a national mission to unleash America’s innovation and seize control of our own destiny.” When it comes to the role of proximization along axiological lines, it can be observed that American values “are conceptualized as elements of historical legacy triggering public mobilization” (Cap 2017: 52). The following passage is exemplary of how references to historic events as well as the myth of American exceptionalism are meant to motivate the public to support Obama’s policies:

The one answer I will not settle for is the idea that this challenge is somehow too big and too difficult to meet. You know, the same thing was said about our ability to produce enough planes and tanks in World War II. The same thing was said about our ability to harness the science and technology to land a man safely on the surface of the moon. And yet, time and again, we have refused to settle for the paltry limits of conventional wisdom. Instead, what has defined us as a nation since our founding is the capacity to shape our destiny – our determination to fight for the America we want for our children. (Obama 2010g)

In the case of Bush’s Katrina speeches, threat construction does not play the same role for policy legitimization. The framing of the events is quite a different one. The President assigns blame to a “natural disaster”, “hurricane/Katrina”, “storm”,

“whims of/ nature” (ODC). As he calls Katrina a “blind and random tragedy” and states that “we’ve all been humbled by the awesome powers of Mother Nature,” Bush frames the threat as external and out of his administrations control, omitting that a lack of preparation and mismanagement turned an environmental event into a human catastrophe. Since virtually everyone could be affected by a hurricane now or in the future, IDC entities include agencies involved in the rescue efforts, “people in the affected regions,” “victims,” “survivors,” but also “American/-n/-s,” “citizen,” “nation,” “people,” and “folks.”

A hurricane is a very different evil Other than the enemy entities discussed in previous speeches. A weather phenomenon is not accountable for the damage it causes, it is often hard to predict and impossible to prevent. It has been claimed in literature on threat communication (Cap 2017) and construction of future in political discourse (Dunmire 2011), that intangibility of the villain often makes the threat bigger. Consequently, political speakers could purposely construe the antagonistic Other in vague rather than explicit terms in order to build up a persuasive aura of fear and thereby legitimize strong leadership and preventive measures. However, this does not seem to be the purpose of Bush’s speeches. The President concentrates on mitigating the damage (“rescue efforts” and “rebuilding” are focal points of the speeches) and consolidating the public. In light of future hurricanes, he wants to be better prepared “to avoid a repeat of what we have seen,” but the suggested changes are not far-reaching. Certainly, it would have been possible to e.g. establish a link between global warming and the frequency and intensity of hurricanes and thereby extend the threat into the future in order to introduce new policies, as Obama does. However, at this point, fear does not function as a motivator for action and as a means of expanding presidential powers as it did following 9/11. Nonetheless, the intangibility and extend of the crisis as well as the framing of the hurricane as something that allegedly could not be prevented are crucial for Bush’s narrative as they play a role in diverting attention from administrative failures.

Like in Obama’s speech, axiological proximization is enacted with the help of myths and historical references. The concept of American exceptionalism lays the foundation for Bush’s framing of the crisis as a “trial.” Americans are rhetorically united around the notion of a shared errand:

These trials have also reminded us that we are often stronger than we know – with the help of grace and one another. They remind us of a hope beyond all pain and death – a God who welcomes the lost to a house not made with hands. And they remind us that we are tied together in this life, in this nation – and that the despair of any touches us all. (Bush 2005h)

Here, the focus is put on American values as shared legacy:

We are the heirs of men and women who lived through those first terrible winters at Jamestown and Plymouth who rebuilt Chicago after a great fire, and San Francisco after a great earthquake who reclaimed the prairie from the dust bowl of the 1930s. Every time, the people of this land have come back from fire, flood, and storm to build anew – and to build better than what we had before. Americans have never left our destiny to the whims of nature – and we will not start now. (Bush 2005h)

A “positive’ proximization of home values” (Cap 2017:52) – including “generosity,” “courage,” “kindness,” “compassion,” and “resolve” – serves to mobilize the public to jointly oppose the negative impact of the weather phenomenon that endangers them.

In both cases, Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill in the Gulf, the construal of threat and the eventual clash between ODC and IDC are more complex than in the “war on terror” discourse. The analysis will provide further insight into processes of Othering and crisis construction in Bush’s and Obama’s speeches. It will take into consideration the very different nature of the events, which does not always call for direct comparisons.

3.2.2 Analysis of President George W. Bush’s speeches on Hurricane Katrina

On August 23, 2005, a tropical depression formed over the southeastern Bahamas. On the following day, meteorologists upgraded the scale of the event to a tropical storm status and named it Katrina. The storm continued to move towards Florida and strengthened into a hurricane before making its first landfall between Hallandale Beach and North Miami Beach on the morning of August 25. It then struck New Orleans, Louisiana and the surroundings and made its third and final landfall along the coastline of Long Beach, Mississippi on August 29. The strength and extent of the hurricane’s wind field resulted in a maximum storm surge of more than 30 feet, which is one of the highest ever measured by the National Hurricane Center in the United States. While Katrina caused severe destruction all along the Gulf Coast, from central Florida to Texas, New Orleans was hit particularly hard, partly due to its low elevation, which ranges from five feet below to 15 feet above sea level. After the coastal flood broke the levees, 80 percent of the city was under water. Taking into account the hurricane’s devastating effects, FEMA classified Katrina as “the single most catastrophic natural disaster in U.S. history” (Federal Emergency Management Agency 2006). The agency’s report on the effects of the tropical cyclone states that at least 1,833 people lost their lives as a consequence of the storm, the vast majority of them (1,577 dead) in Louisiana. Furthermore, over one million people in the Gulf region were displaced as consequence of the storm and the total estimate damage amounts to \$108 billion. The National Hurricane

Center speaks of “the costliest and one of the five deadliest hurricanes to ever strike the United States” (Knabb 2005).⁸⁰ At the request of the U.S. government, the name Katrina was officially removed from the World Meteorological Organization’s naming lists and will thus never again be used for a North Atlantic hurricane.

3.2.2.1 *G. W. Bush: President outlines Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, Rose Garden, White House, August 31, 2005*

When meteorologists predicted that Hurricane Katrina would hit the Gulf Coast, President Bush was on a month-long vacation on his ranch in Crawford, Texas. After being informed about the situation, he declared a state of emergency in selected regions of Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi on August 27. However, even after the hurricane struck New Orleans with devastating effect, Bush decided to stay on the ranch, a fact that has been widely criticized by the media. Only on August 30, one day earlier than planned, he returned from his summer vacation and on August 31 he flew over the affected region on board Air Force One. After the 35-minute flight, the President met with his task force on hurricane response and then addressed journalists in the Rose Garden of the White House, describing the situation and briefly outlining a rescue plan. The speech consists of 1145 words and lasted 9:33 minutes.

The media framing – Two sides of a coin

Right after Katrina’s landfall, the media started to report on the events and exposed failures in the rescue and relief efforts. Coverage included stories on the National Guard failing to bring supplies such as food and water, or police failing to control looting and lawlessness. Images of miles over miles of devastated landscapes, thousands of flooded houses, and people left homeless gave the audience an idea of the enormity of the damage. Certainly, the news shaped the audience’s understandings of the events. The *Sun Herald* and the *Times-Picayune* received the Pulitzer price; the former “for its valorous and comprehensive coverage of Hurricane Katrina” and the latter “for its heroic, multi-faceted coverage of Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath” (*Pulitzer Prizes* 2014). On the positive side, the media brought the events to public attention and denounced government failures in helping those affected. However, their framing was in many ways problematic as it reinforced racial stereotypes. Although post-hurricane news coverage was generally sympathetic towards the victims, it also included well-publicized instances of

80. However, it was not the deadliest hurricane. In 1900, a Category 4 storm made landfall in Galveston, Texas and killed more than 8000 people, making it the deadliest natural disaster ever to strike the United States (Blake 2011: 5).

crime and looting, in which African-Americans were frequently typecast as criminals (Sommers et al. 2006: 1–17). Especially the photographic coverage propagated negative stereotypes about Blacks while depicting Whites in positions of power e.g. in the role of rescue workers or police forces (Kahle, Yu & Whitside 2007: 75–89). A general problem with disaster coverage is that it puts emphasis on the events as an independent entity rather than looking for the sociological, cultural, ethical, historical, and educational roots of certain risks. Katrina provided an opportunity for the media to “look at how it relates to the country’s racial divisions” (Gray 2006), but did journalists succeed in starting a public debate on the bigger picture behind the disaster? In fact numerous, mostly White reporters not only explicitly noticed that the people trapped under difficult circumstances in New Orleans were mostly Black, which was visible in the on-site coverage, but also started asking targeted questions about why this disaster fell so hard on one side of the race line. However, simplistic disaster frames like “emerging heroes and victim helplessness, responsibility and conflict,” which the media employed to quickly explain the events and convey an allegedly meaningful story, failed to adequately accommodate the complexity of the issues and promoted clichés (Quarantelli 1996: 1–6; cf. also Liu 2009). The effects of Katrina coverage on race and class debates in America are arguable and complex. Nonetheless, the issues raised by news outlets as well as the critique voiced by numerous journalists, certainly did not leave the government cold. While it remains open to speculations whether or not Bush would have framed Katrina as a national crisis if shocking images of the devastation had not been as omnipresent, it is undeniable that the media are the public’s primary source of information about risks and therefore their framing of disasters is especially important to emergency managers, including presidents. Acknowledging the power of modern means of mass communication in twenty-first-century United States, I argue that Katrina coverage, which exposed government failures in handling the crisis, prompted Bush to repeatedly address the public and thus to finally grant the issue special attention.

The environmental disasters as a presidential affair

Already in the first paragraph of the address, President Bush rhetorically presents himself as a capable crisis manager. He stresses that he is informed about the state of events along the Gulf Coast and that, under his lead, “local” (the word appears nine times) and state officials are now working together to deal with the critical situation: “I’ve just received an update from Secretary Chertoff and other Cabinet Secretaries involved on the latest developments in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.” And later: “They [FEMA and the United States Coast Guard] are working alongside local officials, local assets.” The fact that a U.S. president addresses the public on the occasion of an environmental disaster is a fairly

recent phenomenon, it only emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. This new tradition in presidential rhetoric was influenced by the enactment of the Disaster Relief Act of 1950, which provided the president with the authority to declare a disaster. Before 1950, it was left in the hands of local and state authorities to deal with environmental challenges in their regions. Presidents were not expected to address these issues.⁸¹ The Disaster Relief Act laid down the legislative framework for federal emergency response, changing the role of the government from distant observer to policy maker. Consequently, the expectation of a political and rhetorical response by the president also changed. Dwight Eisenhower was the first president to craft a systematic rhetorical response to an environmental disaster when the hurricanes Connie and Diane struck the Northeast in 1955. In the following years it became customary for presidents to give declarations and deliver speeches on the occasion of cataclysms. In 1996 alone, there were 72 major presidential disaster declarations (Platt 1999: 23). However, there have always been more declarations than speeches, as presidents *choose* which issues they will grant particular attention. Additionally, the emergence of mass media contributed to the fact that wide audiences became aware of ecological incidents across the country. Americans could now follow events via different news channels, were directly exposed to disaster images,⁸² and would certainly also judge political leaders by their responses to critical situations. As McClure sums up:

The Relief Act coupled with the advent of television and its ability to bring disasters into living rooms across the nation (...) contributed to the necessity of the president to be responsive to the visual spectacles of disaster that directly affected the sympathies of the public. (McClure 2011: 1–15)

When President Bush delivered his address from the Rose Garden on August 31, 2005, he was thus following a rhetorical tradition and acting to fulfill expectations associated with the power of his office. It was already day three of the hurricane and the media have been reporting on Katrina's devastating effects and mismanagement in handling the crisis. In his first public statement on the events, Bush presents himself as a responsible leader who has remained up to date on the details of the catastrophe and has right away given appropriate instructions to mitigate its devastating effects. He stresses that he has personally witnessed the scale of the

81. One exception, which proves the rule, is President Roosevelt's Dust Bowl Speech from 1936. The fact that he addressed the nation in a fireside radio broadcast can be explained with the profound social and economic impact droughts and dust storms had on the depression-torn country in the 1930s.

82. Katrina was the first hurricane to hit the United States which received continuous 24/7 TV coverage (Dynes & Rodriguez 2007: 24–36).

damage: "As we flew here today, I also asked the pilot to fly over the Gulf Coast region so I could see firsthand the scope and magnitude of the devastation." Furthermore, he enumerates the actions he has already taken:

I've called the Cabinet together. (...) I have directed Secretary of Homeland Security Mike Chertoff to chair a Cabinet-level task force to coordinate all our assistance from Washington. (...) I've instructed them to work closely with state and local officials, as well as with the private sector, to ensure that we're helping, not hindering, recovery efforts.

On the linguistic level, the personal pronoun "I" appears a high 17 times, in most cases in combination with strong, active verbs in the past tense like "directed" or "instructed," which emphasizes Bush's leading role. I see this framing as an attempt to prevent accusations that the federal administration acted too late. How effective this attempt was is debatable. One day after the speech the *New York Times* harshly criticized Bush's address in an article entitled "Waiting for a Leader," writing: "In what seems to be a ritual in this administration, the president appeared a day later than he was needed" (*New York Times* 2005).

Handling an "unprecedented" disaster

The President acknowledges the seriousness of the situation when he announces: "We are dealing with one of the worst natural disasters in our nation's history." Additionally, he claims that: "The challenges that we face on the ground are *unprecedented*." The qualification of an event as unique and especially difficult can be helpful for a political leader in a time of crisis, as it implicitly also excuses any possible mistakes and failures of the administration: allegedly, there are no similar, prior cases from which one could have learned. Bush goes on to describe the devastation in greater detail: "The vast majority of New Orleans, Louisiana is under water. Tens of thousands of homes and businesses are beyond repair. A lot of the Mississippi Gulf Coast has been completely destroyed." The President vows massive relief operations and outlines three major priorities in the recovery efforts.

First of all, the government's priority is to "save lives," as he assures. Bush refers to the evacuation operations and specifically thanks the city of Houston for offering shelter to those who at first found refuge in the New Orleans Superdome. He does not mention the difficult conditions in the Superdome, which was not equipped to serve as a shelter. Not only was it unclear whether the structure could offer sufficient protection from wind and rain (in fact, the hurricane shredded parts of the roof), but it was also understaffed and undersupplied and thus unable to appropriately accommodate evacuees. The President does not name possible planning mistakes, which might have led to a situation in which 15,000 to 20,000 people were stuck in a stadium with no showers, overflowing toilets, and no air-conditioning.

He omits the fact that there was not enough food, water, or medication provided. He neither comments on the reports of crime and violence, nor does he refer to the delays in the evacuation of the Superdome. Bush only finds words of praise for the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He mentions the agency's active role in managing the crisis: "FEMA has deployed more than 25 urban search and rescue teams with more than a thousand personnel to help save as many lives as possible." Moreover, the President puts into focus the supposed effectiveness of rescue actions, which were taken so far: "The Coast Guard has rescued nearly 2,000 people to date." In Bush's narrative, the "disaster" seemingly just happened and now the administration is doing its best to deal with the situation they were left in, allegedly through no fault of their own.

The second priority mentioned in the speech is "to sustain lives by ensuring adequate food, water, shelter and medical supplies for survivors and dedicated citizens – dislocated citizens."⁸³ Like the first priority, this action point can be classified as a short-time relief effort; it addresses the most pressing threats to life and health of the inhabitants in the affected region. The President enumerates supplies and equipment that were being moved to the "hardest hit areas":

The Department of Transportation has provided more than 400 trucks to move 1,000 truckloads containing 5.4 million Meals Ready to Eat – or MREs, 13.4 million liters of water, 10,400 tarps, 3.4 million pounds of ice, 144 generators, 20 containers of pre-positioned disaster supplies, 135,000 blankets and 11,000 cots. And we're just starting.

The list includes many large and hard-to-picture numbers, which makes the tone of his speech factual and arid. The *New York Times* concluded that the President "read an address of a quality more appropriate for an Arbor Day celebration: a long laundry list of pounds of ice, generators and blankets delivered to the stricken Gulf Coast" (*New York Times* 2005). The speech did not reflect on the personal tragedies of thousands of people who suffered from the effects of Hurricane Katrina and it did not offer long-term solutions for the "more than 78,000 people now in shelters." While the third priority Bush mentions is "executing a comprehensive recovery effort," the President remains very vague on details. Since this imprecise part comes right after the very detailed description of supplies, the sharp contrast in style becomes even more apparent:

We're also developing a comprehensive plan to immediately help displaced citizens. This will include housing and education and health care and other

83. At first, Bush mistakenly spoke of "dedicated citizens" and then corrected himself right away. This was one of several reading mistakes, which disrupted the flow of the speech.

essential needs. I've directed the folks in my Cabinet to work with local folks, local officials, to develop a comprehensive strategy to rebuild the communities affected. And there's going to be a lot of rebuilding done.

While he mentions areas in which help needs to be provided, like housing, education, and health care, Bush also admits that a "comprehensive strategy" still needs to be developed. On parts of his audience, his words leave the impression that the President does not have a clear vision for the future of the region. Especially the last sentence of the cited paragraph sounds like an empty phrase. At a later point, Bush additionally repeats that "[t]here's a lot of work we're going to have to do," remaining equally enigmatic on the *what* and *how*. Only when it comes to repairing the damaged infrastructure, he becomes more concrete: "repairing the infrastructure, of course, is going to be a key priority" and further: "We're focusing on restoring power and lines of communication that have been knocked out during the storm. We'll be repairing major roads and bridges and other essential means of transportation as quickly as possible." The factual passages dealing with infrastructural problems are longer than those related to human suffering.

In terms of metaphorical framings, the recovery action plan appears as a battle plan. Throughout the speech, Bush uses lexical references from the war domain like "efforts in the field," "task force," "conducting search and rescue missions," "dislocated citizens" (twice), "found refuge," "armies of compassion," or "the country stands with you." Thus, the effects of the hurricane implicitly appear as an enemy, which can be fought and eventually overcome. Indirectly, the framing supports the message that the crisis was brought upon the country by outside forces.

Oil, help, and hope

The President gives special attention to the oil and gas shortage caused by the hurricane. He announces that "[a] lot of crude production has been shut down because of the storm." In fact, Katrina swept through the oil and gas fields in the Gulf of Mexico where about 20 percent of the country's energy was being produced. Gasoline prices went up 50 percent overnight and experts spoke of the first oil shock of the twenty-first century. Certainly, the energy crisis concerned the whole country and Bush was quick to announce measures to counteract it: "I instructed Secretary Bodman to work with refiners, people who need crude oil, to alleviate any shortage through loans. The Environmental Protection Agency has granted a nationwide waiver for fuel blends to make more gasoline and diesel fuel available throughout the country." While he expected that "[t]his will help take some pressure off of gas price" he simultaneously made clear that "citizens must understand this storm has disrupted the capacity to make gasoline and distribute gasoline." The next day, in a speech from the Oval Office, he was even more explicit, saying: "Steps we're taking will help address the problem of availability,

compassion, it does not tie the two sides, helpers and victims, together. Later, at the end of the speech, he once more employs pathos in an attempt to spread courage among those directly affected by the hurricane: “Right now the days seem awfully dark *for those affected* – I *understand* that. But I’m *confident* that, with time, *you* can get *your life* back in order”. However, while the President assures his audience that he “understand[s]” their problems and fears and shows himself “confident” that brighter days will come, the words “you” and “your” do not project solidarity with those who suffered from the hurricane and need to rebuild their lives. In the end, these are “[their]” lives and “[their]” problems. The use of the informal term “folks” (five times), which presents the victims as ordinary people in a difficult situation that everyone can identify and sympathize with, does not make up for the otherwise divisive use of pronouns.

The speech ends on a hopeful note. Although Bush admits that the crisis will not be over very soon (“The folks on the Gulf Coast are going to need the help of this country for a long time.”), he also optimistically assures his audience that Americans will eventually overcome it. (“But there’s no doubt in my mind we’re going to succeed.”) On the one hand, the President appears cheerfully supportive in light of a natural disaster, in which he does not identify any man-made component, yet. On the other hand, the disaster is framed as a test. After passing it, the country will become stronger, as the President argues: “This is going to be a difficult road. (...) But I’m confident that, with time, you can get your life back in order, new communities will flourish, the great city of New Orleans will be back on its feet, and America will be a stronger place for it.” The notion of hardships as tests is a central element in American jeremiads. Puritans, like Samuel Danforth, made use of the literary form, preaching that if the colonists were plagued with “earthquakes, dreadful thunders and lightnings, fearful burnings” (Danforth 1968: 74), then the people must recall the true meaning of the word *errand*. Bush’s words, in a subtle and implicit manner, follow that tradition. Additionally, the last paragraph of the address ends on a religious note, as the President connects the country and its people to God: “The country stands with you. We’ll do all in our power to help you. May God bless you.”

Conclusions

President Bush delivered his first public address on Hurricane Katrina three days after its landing. Before the speech, the President saw parts of the devastation during a flight over the affected region. The informative, factual tone projects calm and control of the situation. Bush rhetorically presents himself as a capable crisis manager who remained up to date and reacted immediately to the new challenges. He frames the events as a “natural disaster,” which happened through no fault of the government, and does not mention the lack of preparation, which might have led

to the problems in the first place. The speech is low on pathos and, untypically for a crisis speech, the use of pronouns is rather divisive than uniting. It does not convincingly present a vision for the future of the region. Admittedly, the address was delivered at an early stage of the crisis and Bush concentrated on short-term relief and rescue actions, announcing that a long-term strategy is still being developed. The descriptive nature of the address corresponds to the point in time of its delivery, when the scope of the disaster was still under evaluation and solutions were being worked out. However, this does not explain other rhetorical weaknesses of the address: numbers are used in an unconvincing manner and empty generalizations appear repeatedly. Additionally, reading mistakes and a weak emphasis disrupt the flow and make it hard to follow. Therefore, the critique voiced in the *New York Times* article “Waiting for a Leader”, does not appear unfounded:

George W. Bush gave one of the worst speeches of his life yesterday, especially given the level of national distress and the need for words of consolation and wisdom. (...) He advised the public that anybody who wanted to help should send cash, grinned, and promised that everything would work out in the end.
(*New York Times* 2005)

3.2.2.2 G. W. Bush: *Weekly Radio Address: Katrina's aftermath, Cabinet Room, White House, September 3, 2005*

On September 2, 2005, President Bush visited the Gulf Coast for the first time since Hurricane Katrina struck the region. During his stay, he met with federal and local officials, including FEMA Director Mike Brown, the Governors of Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and the Mayor of New Orleans. He was briefed on the latest developments and discussed strategies for the recovery. Moreover, the President toured Biloxi, Mississippi to look at the damage first hand and meet with storm victims as well as rescue teams. The following day, in lieu of his weekly radio-broadcast, Bush delivered a speech on the federal response to areas devastated by Katrina. The speech consists of 773 words and lasted 5:39 minutes. The broadcast offered a chance for Bush to defend himself and his administration against accusations of incompetence, which had been rapidly multiplying in the past days.

Disaster update from the crisis manger in chief

First of all, Bush informs his public about the situation in the hurricane-struck areas, as he witnessed it during his visit on the day before the speech. “Yesterday, I saw the aftermath of one of the largest natural disasters ever to strike America.” The words do not only acknowledge the seriousness of the events, but also present Bush as a concerned and up to date leader who personally checked on the state of affair in the crisis-affected region. The President mentions that “[a] vast

coastline of towns and communities are flattened; one of our great cities is submerged.” He adds that the “[t]he human costs are incalculable.” Already these first sentences refer to three different dimension of the disaster: its environmental, economical, and human aspects. The first step a crisis manger has to take is to determine the scope of the problem and its impact (Roberts 2005). In fact, the President starts his address by assessing the damage. Then, he goes on to describe the ongoing relief actions:

Right now there are more than 21,000 National Guard troops operating in Louisiana and Mississippi, and more are on the way. More than 13,000 of these troops are in Louisiana. The main priority is to restore and maintain law and order and assist in recovery and evacuation efforts. In addition to these National Guard forces, the Department of Defense has deployed more than 4,000 active duty forces to assist in search and recovery and provide logistical and medical support.

He paints the picture of a critical situation under control. The numbers additionally illustrate the large scale of the relief efforts supervised by the government. The President also mentions first successes in mitigating the effects of the storm, assuring his audience that “[h]our by hour, the situation on the ground is improving.”

In terms of structure, Bush’s speech from September 3, 2005, shows numerous parallels to President Roosevelt’s 1936 Dust Bowl address. FDR delivered his famous fireside chat during one of the country’s worst environmental disasters, the so-called Dirty Thirties, a period of severe dust storms and drought, which greatly damaged the ecology and agriculture in the prairies; it starts off with the following words:

My friends, I have been on a journey of husbandry. I went primarily to see at first hand conditions in the drought states; to see how effectively Federal and local authorities are taking care of pressing problems of relief and also how they are to work together to defend the people of this country against the effects of future droughts. (Roosevelt 1936)

Just like Bush, Roosevelt stresses that he personally traveled the region and saw “first hand” the “devastation in nine states” (Roosevelt 1936). And similarly to the mentioned Katrina speech, the Dust Bowl address also puts focus on the relief efforts implemented by the government as well as the allegedly effective cooperation between federal and local authorities. Moreover, both Presidents verbally express empathy with those who suffered from the impact of the environmental disasters. Roosevelt recalls:

I talked with families who had lost their wheat crop, lost their corn crop, lost their livestock, lost the water in their well, lost their garden and come through to the end of the summer without one dollar of cash resources, facing a winter without feed or food – facing a planting season without seed to put in the ground. (Roosevelt 1936)

While Bush mentions: “Biloxi, I met Bronwynne Bassier and her sister, Kim. Bronwynne told me that the only earthly possessions she has left were the clothes on her back.” In both cases, the personal encounters with immediate victims of the catastrophes play a role. The stories give a face to the tragedies, illustrating through practical examples how the lives of many people in the crisis-affected regions were suddenly changed. The narratives present the Presidents as compassionate leaders and additionally promote empathy and solidarity with the victims among their audiences.

However, there is a crucial difference between the two rhetorical framings. In contrast to Roosevelt’s address, which merely bemoans the state of events and promises help, Bush’s address also includes some subtle self-criticism. Six days after the hurricane struck the Gulf Coast, the President admits that mistakes have been made in handling the crisis. He recognizes that “many of our citizens simply are not getting the help they need, especially in New Orleans.” Moreover, Bush describes that the current state of affairs, in which not everyone in the affected region is getting the required help, as “unacceptable.” However, these recognitions of failures are always coupled with excuses, blame of others, as well as a simultaneous praise of government efforts and achievements. Bush uses the scale of the event as an excuse for problems in handling the disaster: “the magnitude of responding to a crisis over a disaster area that is larger than the size of Great Britain has created tremendous problems.” Meanwhile, he stresses the “best efforts” of the rescue helpers, implicitly suggesting that all damage was caused by a higher power and that human efforts can only partly mitigate the immense harm. Additionally, the President places the blame with local authorities; it is their “capabilities” that have been “strained,” as he argues. Bush recalls that he has “discussed these problems at length” with the Governors of the affected states and that “[e]ach state will have its own set of challenges and issues to solve.” He sums up the general consensus after his meetings in the region as follows: “Yet all of us agree that more can be done to improve our ability to restore order and deliver relief in a timely and effective manner.” Thus, the President admits to the fact that much still needs to be optimized. His narrative presents further federal engagement as the solution to the problems. Bush assures his audience of his commitment to the task and promises that “the Federal Government will do its part.” However, at no point does he mention that the crisis might have been caused in the first place because the government did not “do its part,” as it did not arrange for an appropriate preparation of the region prior to the announced hurricane. Another point, which exposes the limits of Bush’s already half-hearted self-criticism in handling the crisis, is his framing of the event as a “natural disaster,” in the sense of a random and tragic occurrence, which seemingly happened through no fault of the government.

A not-so “natural” disaster

In all three of the analyzed Katrina speeches President Bush uses the term “natural disaster” with regard to the events. The adjective “natural” implies that a phenomenon simply exists in nature and was not made or caused by mankind. The noun “disaster,” which has a very low degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L., characterizes something as a catastrophe, an occurrence which causes widespread destruction and distress. However, in contrast to words like “crime,” “act of terror,” or “failure,” it does not point to a guilty party. The President uses the term five times throughout the speech on August 31, three times on September 3, and seven times of September 15. On September 3, he additionally speaks of “adversities,” a word that stresses the unfavorable or unfortunate nature of the circumstances. The choice of vocabulary implies that no one has control over the way events like Hurricane Katrina happen. The framing omits the fact that a lack of preparation and mismanagement turned an environmental event into a human catastrophe. It is convenient for the parties responsible for ensuring the safety of citizens like FEMA, as it diverts blame from them. Calling something “natural” makes questions of why and how things evolved in a certain way obsolete. Bush further perpetuates the idea of a crisis which has its roots beyond government control when he claims that “we’ve all been humbled by the awesome powers of Mother Nature” (September 3) or calls Katrina a “blind and random tragedy,” which was allegedly brought about by the “whims of nature” (September 15). Consequently, as supposedly no one can be held directly responsible, there are no calls for retribution or promises of justice. The approach stands in stark contrast to contemporary trends in academia, where disasters are defined as consequences of inappropriately managed risks, thus pointing to their unnatural, human-made dimension (Quarantelli 1998: 146–159). Hurricanes in general cannot be prevented and their occurrence predates manmade global warming. While stopping global warming might reduce the frequency of record-breaking weather events, as some scientists argue, it would not eliminate them completely.⁸⁴ Moreover, weather forecasting in general continues to have short-range effectiveness, which does not always allow for a timely warning of affected individuals and responsible authorities. Nonetheless, the negative effects of hurricanes on human life could largely be limited through effective planning, preparation, and appropriate crisis management. Therefore, Bush’s word choice is problematic and could even be seen as manipulative.

84. Some scientists as well as political figures, most prominently Al Gore, link hurricanes to manmade global warming. President Obama was the first President to establish that link in a public speech (Obama 2014).

Katrina and racial inequality

Katrina's unnatural dimension becomes especially apparent in the way it affected certain groups of people more than others. As Gallup polls show, African Americans and people with low income were disproportionately likely to become victims (Moore 2005). It is a fact that New Orleans was hit particularly hard by the storm. According to the U.S. Bureau of Census, 68 percent of the city's population was African American (compared to 12.2 percent for the U.S.) and 23 percent of all individuals in the city were living below poverty (compared to 13.1 percent for the entire country) (U.S. Census Bureau 2005). The proportion of Blacks and poor people among those who lost their lives in effect of the hurricane as well as among the trapped survivors was much higher than of other groups. In the wake of these events, racial and class inequalities, which still persist in twenty-first-century United States, reentered public discourses with renewed force. Soon after its first landfall, Katrina became a metaphor for the state of race relations in America and exposed an ideological divide. While several media channels and public figures raised accusations of outright racism in the government's response, others vehemently denied that race played any role at all (Henkel et al. 2006: 99–124). Among others the disastrous effects of the storm on higher education in the city (including Loyola and Tulane, both mostly White private universities) point to severe socio-political problems in the region as well a tremendous lack of preparation and bad crisis management in general (AAUP Report 2007).

Soon after Katrina hit the Gulf Coast the voices of critique with regard to administrative efforts to mitigate the damage were too loud to be ignored by those in charge. Among others, rapper Kanye West publicly condemned the President's hurricane response in a live-broadcasted benefit concert for the victims, in which he stated: "George Bush doesn't care about Black people" (West qtd. in *BBC News* "Rap Star Attacks Bush at Benefit" 2005). On September 7, the Democratic National Committee Chairman Howard Dean more subtly stated that Americans have to face the "ugly truth" that race and class played a significant role in who lived and who died when Katrina swept across the Gulf Coast. Additionally, he claimed that "lots of people perished" because the Bush administration lacked "vision" in handling the disaster (Dean qtd. in "Dean: U.S. Must Face 'Ugly Truth' about Katrina"). The First Lady directly responded to the charges that racism slowed down aid by calling them "disgusting" and assured that "President Bush cares about everyone in our country, and I know that." However, she also admitted: "I do think – and we all saw this – was [sic] that poor people were more vulnerable. They live in poor neighborhoods; their neighborhoods were the ones that were more likely to flood, as we saw in New Orleans" (L. Bush qtd. in *CNN.com* "First Lady: Charges that Racism Slowed Aid 'Disgusting'" 2005). The most senior black member of Bush's cabinet, Condoleezza Rice, was equally quick to dispute claims

of racial discrimination while visiting a hurricane relief center outside of Mobile, Alabama, where she made clear: "I don't believe for a minute anybody allowed people to suffer because they are African Americans. I just don't believe it for a minute" (Daily 2005). The scope of this book does not allow for a deeper analysis of the complex aspects of race and class issues in the United States exposed by the hurricane. However, I am interested in the question if and how Bush rhetorically reacted to the accusations of allegedly acting too late and too little, because mostly poor African-Americans were affected by the disaster. Did his word choice contest or (consciously or not) support these claims?

In the speech on September 3, Bush does not directly touch upon race and class issues. However, he does acknowledge inequalities among disaster victims when he stresses that "*especially* in New Orleans," "many of our citizens simply are not getting the help they need." Thus, he shows himself aware that the city with a statistically high number of poor and African American inhabitants was struck particularly hard by the hurricane and that its population is now lacking help more than people in other regions. Otherwise, throughout the address, Bush predominantly focuses on motifs of unity and solidarity. He speaks of "*our* fellow citizens along the gulf coast" and assures the public that "[i]n America, *we* do not abandon *our* fellow citizens in their hour of need." Moreover, the President stresses that "[*a*]ll Americans can be certain *our Nation* has the character, the resources, and the resolve to overcome this disaster." Towards the end of the speech, he additionally uses anaphora to underline that overcoming the disaster will be a communal effort:

We will comfort and care for the victims. *We will* restore the towns and neighborhoods that have been lost in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama. *We will* rebuild the great city of New Orleans. And *we will* once again show the world that the worst adversities bring out the best in America.

His words present the crisis as a national problem that concerns all Americans rather than a minority issue. On the rhetorical level, the personal pronouns "we" and "our" show collective concern and responsibility. Solidarity is also reflected in Bush's praise for the commitment of rescue workers who under these "difficult circumstances" have been "performing heroically" and "working around the clock, risking their own lives to save the lives of others," as he claims. In terms of metaphorical framings, the disaster once again appears as a war, which underlines the graveness of the situation for the entire country and thus implicitly unites the audience around a common mission. Military words like "troops" (four times), "active duty forces" (twice), or "victims," phrases like "forces will be on the ground and operating under the direct command of General Russ Honore" or the mentioning of "towns and neighborhoods that have been lost" metaphorically suggest that the whole nation is fighting together against the effects of the hurricane.

Moreover, on September 12, during his third visit to hurricane-struck New Orleans, Bush indirectly addresses the accusations of racism in the disaster response declaring: "The storm didn't discriminate and neither will the recovery effort" (Yardle & Newman 2005). He thus suggests that all Americans are in the same boat: everyone could have become the victim of the hurricane and the government would have equally helped all those affected. This line of argumentation is again based on the assumption that the disaster happened "naturally" and that the destruction it caused was in any case inevitable. It disregards the fact the government did not sufficiently prepare the region for the upcoming storm although meteorologists warned in advance about the scale of the event. Among others, the fact that the levees broke cannot be put away as a sign of bad luck of the population of the region. Purposely or not, authorities disregarded the warnings about unsafe levees. On September 1, in a broadcast of ABC's "Good Morning America," Bush still argued: "I don't think anybody anticipated the breach of the levees" that protected New Orleans from flooding (Bush qtd. in Warrick 2006). Diane Sawyer, the host of the show, did not challenge the President's claim, despite numerous, repeated warnings by government officials, experts and the media that a major hurricane could cause levee breaches resulting in catastrophic flooding. So while the storm itself certainly did not discriminate, one could accuse authorities of discriminating a certain part of the population by neglecting crisis preparations in the New Orleans region. Another aspect of the crisis, which can be attributed to human failure, are the belated and badly organized evacuation efforts. The people who found shelter in the superdome, largely poor African Americans, were stuck in the stadium for days without sufficient supplies. In his speech on September 3, Bush does not mention that factors like poverty, minority status, gender, disability, or age certainly did have an influence on the degree to which people were affected by the hurricane. The President's narrative of an allegedly nondiscriminatory "natural" catastrophe omits that the government has the responsibility to prepare for extreme weather events in order to prevent them from turning into disasters for the inhabitants of the affected regions.

Federal involvement and hope

While Bush admits that there have been "problems" in handling the crisis ("many of our citizens simply are not getting the help they need, especially in New Orleans" or "There's still a lot of difficult work ahead."), he nevertheless remains optimistic when it comes to the future of the region ("We will restore the towns and neighborhoods that have been lost in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama.") and presents further federal involvement as the solution to all complications. From his position as the President of the United States, he declares the matter a government "priority" (the word appears twice). Implicitly, he

suggests that local authorities failed to deal with the hurricane by themselves, which led to the disaster, and now his administration needs to take over. Bush announces that the “Federal Government will do its part,” monitoring and supporting the relief efforts until “the job is done.” He further elaborates: “Where our response is not working, we’ll make it right. Where our response is working, we will duplicate it.” Moreover, the President specifically addresses security issues and shows himself aware of the fact that crime rates rose in the immediate aftermaths of Katrina. Metaphorically assuming the role of a hero or sheriff, always fighting to protect the weak, Bush announces: “We will not let criminals prey on the vulnerable” and promises to “restore and maintain law and order.” His words suggest a clear commitment to solving the crisis and rhetorically attempt to reassure his domestic audience, which for the past days had been largely exposed to media images and reports on violence and mismanagement in the hurricane struck areas and particularly New Orleans. On the linguistic level, the verb “will,” which appears a high 14 times throughout the short speech, is used to convey the message that Bush has a clear vision for the future. Supposedly, he knows exactly what needs to be done to end the critical state of affairs and is implementing and planning the appropriate steps, as formulations like “These forces *will* be on the ground...” or “We *will* rebuild the great city of New Orleans” indicate. Furthermore, the active verb “working,” which appears four times, puts emphasis on the ongoing relief efforts (“[The relief workers have] been working around the clock...”).

The motif of hope recurs throughout the speech. While Bush acknowledges difficulties and problems, he simultaneously assures the audience that “[h]our by hour, the situation on the ground is improving.” In his narrative, hope (in the sense of a way out of the crisis) is clearly connected to federal aid: “Yet the enormity of the task requires more resources and more troops.” At no point does he mention that the crisis might be owed to inadequate or belated government actions. Instead, the President proactively announces the next steps, which, as he argues, will lead to an effective recovery: “Today I ordered the Department of Defense to deploy additional active duty forces to the region.” And: “Yesterday I also signed a \$10.5 billion emergency aid package to fund our ongoing relief efforts.” Bush thanks Congress “for their quick, bipartisan action” and presents the mentioned financial aid as a “downpayment” for a “sustained Federal commitment to our fellow citizens along the Gulf Coast.” Furthermore, he assures that the government “will not allow bureaucracy to get in the way of saving lives.” The speech emanates a can-do attitude, promising future engagement in the region. However, it does not present a coherent long-term strategy for the recovery of the Gulf Coast. Instead, it concentrates on short-term goals: “Our priorities are clear: We will complete the evacuation as quickly and safely as possible.”

Katrina in Iraq's shadow

In the public discussion of federal engagement in the Gulf following Katrina, the scale of destruction associated with the hurricane was often linked to the war in Iraq. During a press conference with the President in Biloxi, Mississippi, on September 2, a reporter picked up the issue declaring: "One of the things you hear is people saying a lot of resources are being devoted to Iraq, now this country needs them. And they're frustrated about that" (qtd. in Bush 2005d). He thus confronted the President with accusations that federal resources, in the sense of financial means as well as reservists who are usually activated during disaster relief, are lacking at home because they are being used overseas. Specifically, he asked: "What do you say to the people who say, there's too much money being spent on Iraq and it's time to bring them home?" Bush immediately countered that he "completely disagree[s]" and added: "We've got a job to defend this country and the war on terror, and we've got a job to bring aid and comfort to the people of the Gulf Coast, and we'll do both. We've got plenty of resources to do both." He stresses that the country is well equipped to handle both critical situations and further elaborates on this idea while recalling that he has been asked about the capacities of National Guard troops before:

Somebody questioned me the other day about – do we have enough National Guard troops? Of course we do. These governors have got compacts with other states. If they need to call upon another state, the state will send Guard troops. And the people have just got to know, we've got what it takes to do more than one thing, and we'll secure our country from the terrorists, and we'll help rebuild this part of the world. (Bush 2005d)

On the psychological level, the question reflects on the fact that the shadow of Iraq loomed over Katrina. However, in neither of the analyzed Katrina speeches does Bush address the issue by himself. On September 3, he speaks of additional troops that are being commissioned but does not comment on speculations that reservists might be missing due to American military engagement in the Middle East. Only in late September, in a speech before the Republican Jewish Coalition, the President changes his strategy and directly links the issues of terrorism, Iraq, and the hurricane on the rhetorical level. He then suggests that America's "enemies" were pleased to see the devastation caused by the hurricane, linking the country's natural and human challenges (Sanger 2005):

I've been thinking a lot about how America has responded [to Katrina], and it's clear to me that Americans value human life, and value every person as important. And that stands in stark contrast, by the way, to the terrorists we have to deal with. You see, we look at the destruction caused by Katrina, and our hearts break. They're the kind of people who look at Katrina and wish they had caused it. We're in a war against these people. It's a war on terror. (Bush 2005i)

The comment can be read as an attempt by President Bush to once again win the allegedly moral high ground and profit from the rally around the flag phenomenon, which brought him unprecedentedly high approval ratings after the 9/11 attacks. However, the connection between the two issues seems very constructed and apparently did not convince the American public; Gallup polls (“Presidential Approval Ratings”) show declining approval for the government’s handling of both Iraq and Hurricane Katrina at the time of the address.

Emotions and myths in times of crisis

Bush sends out a message of solidarity with the hurricane victims as he announces: “We have a responsibility to our brothers and sisters all along the Gulf Coast.” Metaphorically, he thus depicts the nation as a caring family. Furthermore, the President shows himself understanding and empathetic towards those who suffered in the aftermaths of the storm, when he declares: “I know that those of you who have been hit hard by Katrina are suffering. Many are angry and desperate for help.” It is an attempt to persuade the audience through the use of pathos. Bush additionally strengthens a sense of community among Americans as he assures: “In America, we do not abandon our fellow citizens in their hour of need.” In his narrative, Americans appear as a united nation that will face the challenges together: “All Americans can be certain our Nation has the character, the resources, and the resolve to overcome this disaster.” The events are implicitly framed as yet another test that the nation will pass. Although “[t]he tasks before us are enormous,” as Bush claims, “so is the heart of America” and therefore “[Americans] will once again show the world that the worst adversities bring out the best in America.” The President admits that in the midst of a crisis “it’s hard to imagine a bright future” however, he remains hopeful because “when you talk to the proud folks in the area, you see a spirit that cannot be broken.” This unbroken faith in a better future, which Bush claims to see among the hurricane victims, is an idea that already helped early Puritan settlers master multiple challenges, like droughts or rough winters, which their preachers also framed as allegedly divine tests. Similarly to religious leaders in New England, Bush implies that if citizens continue to show an unbroken faith, God will help them overcome all adversities. The President ends his speech on a religious note praying: “May God bless you, and may God *continue to bless* our country” (Domke & Coe 2007:61–70). He thus not only claims that God has in the past already blessed America, but also implicitly suggests that if He will continue to do so, Americans will overcome the crisis with His help.

Conclusions

In his first speech from the hurricane-struck Gulf Coast, the President gives an update on the newest developments and promises further federal support. Bush

acknowledges the seriousness of the situation and admits problems in the relief efforts. Pathos plays a more prominent role than in his first speech. Stories of victims and rescue workers add a human dimension to the disaster and promote feelings of solidarity. The recovery appears as a national affair and a communal effort. Additionally, the use of personal pronouns as well as the metaphorical and mythical framings strengthen the uniting effect. Bush presents himself as a capable and empathetic leader who knows how to end the crisis. The element of hope for a better future dominates the narrative.

The nationally broadcasted address offered a chance for the President to respond to media's accusation that the government was acting too slow and too little in the aftermath of Katrina. And in fact, Bush rhetorically picked up this critique and turned it around, blaming higher powers and local officials for all problems. While his speech also includes some subtle self-criticism, this seems half-hearted as it is always coupled with the blame of others. On the rhetorical level, several aspects of the address appear convincing and appropriate for the occasion, like e.g. the use of uniting rhetoric or pathos. However, for some, Bush's speech came too late. The President traveled to the region most affected by Katrina only days after the hurricane's landfall and therefore his declared concern might not have seemed very genuine to parts of his audience. In his memoir *Decision Points*, Bush seems to support this reasoning as he writes that his initial mistake on Katrina was failing to communicate his concern for the storm's victims. He concludes: "once the public impression was formed, I couldn't change it" (Bush 2010:318).

3.2.2.3 *G. W. Bush: Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 15, 2005*

On September 11, George W. Bush arrived for his first ground visit of hurricane-ravaged New Orleans. The President toured the city that had been most heavily damaged by Katrina in an open-top lorry. During a three-hour inspection, he visited the eighteenth-century French Quarter, which had largely been spared by the storm, as well as some of the areas of heaviest flooding. During his third stay in the region, the President also attended several briefings with local officials and was among others informed that thousands of people had stayed in the city despite a mandatory evacuation order. In the evening of September 15, 17 days after the hurricane struck New Orleans displacing over a million people, President Bush delivered a primetime Address to the Nation from Jackson Square in the French Quarter. The speech consists of 3323 words and lasted 22:15 minutes. In it, Bush largely concentrates on the question of rebuilding after Katrina in an attempt to revive confidence in both, the relief efforts and his presidency. It is the President's longest and most complete rhetorical response to the events.

Rebuilding New Orleans – A message of hope and healing in a time of crisis

Already the setting of the speech is symbolic; standing on the lawn of St. Louis Cathedral in the French Quarter of New Orleans Bush sends out a religiously tainted message of hope and healing. Right in the beginning, the President stresses the fact that he is addressing the nation from the epicenter of the crisis: “I am speaking to you from the city of New Orleans – nearly empty, still partly under water.” His words underline the fact that he is personally on site monitoring the situation, which remains critical from the time on the hurricane has left its mark on the region. However, the view of the lawn and the Cathedral is neat and peaceful, as this area has been largely spared from destruction. Neither victims nor reporters appear around the President who proceeds to speak in a calm manner. This staging sets out a mood of alleged post-storm tranquility. Certainly, the emotional effect would have been quite different if Bush addressed the public e.g. from the devastated area around the Superdome or a crowded emergency shelter. The scenery diverts attention from the fact that although the hurricane passed, structural problems, which turned a weather occurrence into a crisis, still remain. The alleged “empt[iness]” leaves room for a fresh start and in fact, as Bush claims, the city is already “waiting for life and hope to return.” Just as he promised that “we will rebuild New York City” (Bush 2001k) following 9/11, the President now declares that “this great city will rise again.”

The President adopts a conciliatory tone and paints the vision of a bright future for the region. His words are meant to convey unity and boost the morale of people in the Gulf: “You need to know that our whole Nation cares about you – and in the journey ahead you are not alone.” He puts focus on his government’s accomplishments in the aftermaths of the storm, claiming that the rescue efforts are “largely finished” and among others specifies that “[i]n nearly all of Mississippi, electric power has been restored” and “[a]ll major gasoline pipelines are now in operation.” The cleanup operation is referred to via many terms which, by definition, imply highly defined chronological “steps” (twice) like “plan” (six times) or “process” (twice). These words carry a subconsciously reassuring effect as “they are analytically construed as having a beginning, a series of stages, and – most importantly – an end” (Bonnefille 2013: 34–55). Thus, even on the linguistic level the reassuring message is passed on that the recovery is an ongoing process, which will eventually be completed. Additionally, Bush, in the name of “the American people,” promises that: “[t]hroughout the area hit by the hurricane, *we will* do what *it takes*, *we will* stay as long as *it takes* to help citizens rebuild their communities and their lives.” The diacope puts emphasis on the President’s commitment to help the region until it is fully recovered. The repetition of the affirmative amplifies the message that resources and time allegedly have no limitations and that Bush “will” make sure to end the crisis. Then, the President goes into greater detail and outlines three major commitments for recovery along the Gulf Coast. First of all, he mentions the commitment “to meet the immediate needs of those who had to

flee their homes and leave all their possessions behind.” Secondly, he promises that the government will “help the citizens of the Gulf Coast to overcome this disaster, put their lives back together, and rebuild their communities.” And thirdly, he announces that “when communities are rebuilt, they must be even better and stronger than before the storm.” With regard to his action plan for the future of the region, President Bush shows himself more specific than in his prior speeches and goes into greater detail. For example, he mentions that the government’s “goal is to get people out of shelters by the middle of October,” thus setting a concrete deadline. Moreover, he refers to the relief funds: “I have asked for, and the Congress has provided, more than 60 billion dollars.” And proposes “the creation of Worker Recovery Accounts to help those evacuees who need extra help finding work.” In contrast to the earlier public statements following the hurricane, the address thus focuses on long-term goals, offering concrete policy suggestions.

Throughout the speech the President juxtaposes images of destruction and death with depictions of compassion and kindness. He recalls “the bodies of the dead lying uncovered and untended in the street” and simultaneously stresses that “[t]hese days of sorrow and outrage have also been marked by acts of courage and kindness that make all Americans proud.” This jeremiadic technique of balancing hope and fear, evil and kindness, was also crucial in his post 9/11 rhetoric. On the evening of the attacks, Bush announced from the Oval Office: “Today, our nation saw evil (...) and we responded with the best of America, with the daring of our rescue workers, with the caring for strangers and neighbours who came to give blood and help in any way they could” (Bush 2001k).⁸⁵ The message which his narrative then conveyed was that ultimately evil, death, and destruction could be overcome through unity and compassion. The motif of solidarity and the prevailing power of the good remain crucial also in the President’s post Katrina narrative. Bush rhetorically creates empathy with the hurricane victims when he mentions their sufferings: “We have also witnessed the kind of desperation no citizen of this great and generous Nation should ever have to know – fellow Americans calling out for food and water, vulnerable people left at the mercy of criminals who had no mercy.” The descriptions of hardships and misfortunes are soon followed by numerous examples of selfless, compassionate deeds that lend a human face to the crisis:

Religious congregations and families have welcomed strangers as brothers and sisters and neighbors. In the community of Chalmette, when two men tried to break into a home, the owner invited them to stay – and took in 15 other people who had no place to go. At Tulane Hospital for Children, doctors and nurses didn’t eat for days so patients could have food, and eventually carried the patients on their backs up eight flights of stairs to helicopters.

85. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.4.

Bush's narrative puts focus on positive developments in the aftermath of the storm, namely the individual acts of solidarity. Additionally, the allegedly persisting hope among the victims themselves is represented through the story of "Steve Scott of the Biloxi Fire Department." According to the President, Steve, who was conducting a house-to-house search for survivors together with his colleagues, told him: "I lost my house and I lost my cars, but I still got my family ... and *I still got my spirit*". Steve's spirit, which motivates him to go on and help others despite his own losses, metaphorically stands for the unbroken spirit of America (the word appears three times). The message is: although the country has been hurt by the disaster, it will nevertheless prevail, as it stands united. By talking about the fate of individuals from the Gulf region, Bush shows himself as a compassionate leader who understands the concerns and problems of his people and does not shy away from personal encounters. He frequently employs words with a high degree of pleasantness like "help" (sixteen times), "hope" (twice), or "courage" (twice). Out of all analyzed environmental crisis speeches, the address on September 15 has the highest degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L. (1.70). The emotional valance of the words, on the subconscious level, soothes the audience, which has been exposed to media images of destruction, death, and violence for the past days. The word that appears most prominently in the respective word cloud is "people" (nineteen times), (see Figure 9).

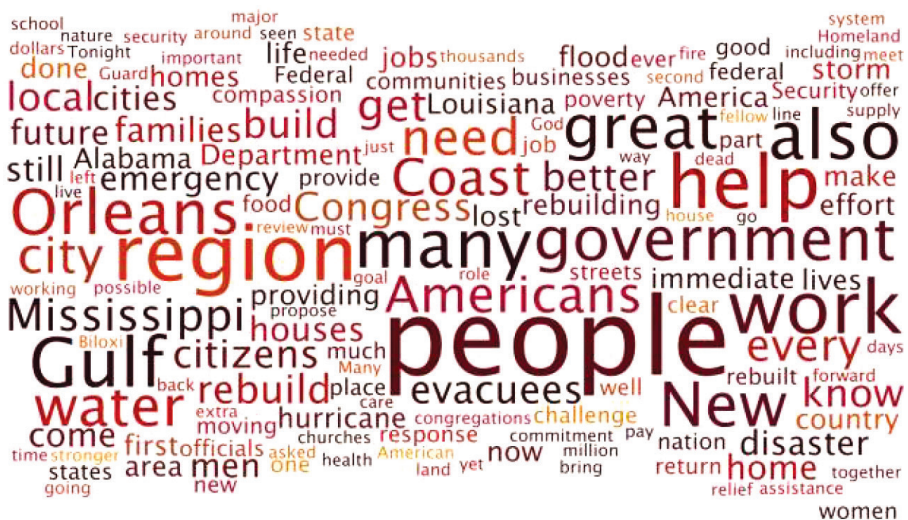


Figure 9. Word cloud for President Bush's Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina, September 15, 2005

“People” are at the center of the speech; not only the tragic fate of mentioned victims, but also their united power to recover and heal after a tragedy. The President attempts to appeal to his audience on the level of pathos. He rhetorically unites the nation around his suggested recovery efforts and makes sense of a tragedy, thus fulfilling important functions of presidential crisis rhetoric (Murphy 1990).

Managing an “unprecedented” disaster: Mother nature vs. human nature

In order to stress how exceptionally difficult the situation allegedly is, Bush talks of an “unprecedented crisis” and emphasizes that Katrina “was not a normal hurricane – and the normal disaster relief system was not equal to it.” The framing implicitly excuses government failures in handling the situation; as the response was equally “unprecedented,” problems seem almost inevitable. The scale of the damage is one of the speech’s focal points. The President bemoans that “[e]astward from Lake Pontchartrain, across the Mississippi Coast, to Alabama and into Florida, millions of lives were changed in a day *by a cruel and wasteful storm*” and does not mention human failures. Claiming that the scale of Katrina was unheard-of is certainly problematic. Of course there have been hurricanes of great magnitude in the United States before. (The deadliest hurricane in the country’s history occurred in Galveston, Texas, in 1900. However, as the events could not yet be covered by TV or other forms of mass media, the images of desolation and destruction did not reach the international community with the speed and intensity of the Katrina coverage.) Every storm differs and, with regard to its impact, to a certain degree remains unique. However, I argue that in the year 2005, in a region where hurricanes occur frequently, and especially taking into account that meteorologists warned of the event, the scope of the crisis (its human and economic dimension) cannot be talked away solely through the unusual strength of a weather condition. On the one hand, the President frames the disaster as a “whim of nature” that no one can be blamed for and that will be overcome. (“Americans have never left our destiny to the whims of nature – and we will not start now.”) On the other hand, Bush partly acknowledges administrative failures and assumes responsibility for the crisis when he announces: “I as President am responsible for the problem, and for the solution.” He directs some criticism towards his administration, admitting that “the system, at every level of government, was not well coordinated, and was overwhelmed in the first few days.” At this point in time, criticism over the government’s handling of the crisis (specifically with regard to mismanagement and lack of preparation in the relief effort the aftermath of the hurricane) was so widespread that the President had no choice but to address administrative

failures directly.⁸⁶ Through his partly self-critical rhetoric Bush demonstrates that he is not detached from reality. He presents himself as a conscious leader, who is aware of undeniable problems and is working on solving them.

Interestingly, the President then goes on to draw a direct parallel to the 9/11 events: "Four years after the frightening experience of September 11th, Americans have every right to expect a more effective response in a time of emergency." Thereby, he presents the events as a matter of national concern and not merely a regional weather-related problem. It seems likely that Bush chooses to create a rhetorical connection between the two crises aiming to regain the high approval ratings, which he enjoyed after the terrorist attacks. By recalling memories of the time when hijacked planes flew into the WTC and the Pentagon, the President can expect to subconsciously boost feelings of solidarity among parts of his domestic audience (at least among the large number of his supporters from the post 9/11 period). In his narrative, the U.S. appears as a country that was once again "attacked" by an outside force, allegedly through no fault of its own. However, it will recover from this crisis, just like it did after the events in September 2001, as the President suggests. Similarly to his early post 9/11 oratory, Bush's rhetoric around Katrina is suffused with lexical framings from the military domain, indirectly strengthening the parallel between the two events. The President speaks of "victims" and "displaced persons/people" (twice), he mentions "the bodies of the dead lying uncovered and untended in the street" and a "search for survivors." Additionally, he uses expressions like "engaged in the mission" or "a time of terror threats and weapons of mass destruction" and words like "armies" and "national security priority." He refers to the "Department of Homeland Security," the "United States military, the National Guard, Homeland Security," as well as the "armed forces." And most poignantly the President announces that: "Our cities must have clear and up-to-date plans for responding to natural disasters, disease outbreaks, or terrorist attack for evacuating large numbers of people in an emergency." As the recovery efforts metaphorically appear as a war, the narrative implicitly suggests that overcoming the crisis calls for measures, which are crucial in military conflicts, like national unity and strong leadership, and which Bush allegedly can provide.

The President not only admits that problems have occurred, but consequently also announces appropriate corrective actions: "So I have ordered every Cabinet secretary to participate in a comprehensive review of the government response

86. Among others, CNN critically reported on the relief efforts (CNN.com "Leadership vacuum stymied aid offers" 2005).

to the hurricane.” Bush’s speech optimistically concentrates on the “future” (the word appears six times), promising that “[t]his government will learn the lessons of Hurricane Katrina.” Specifically, the President declares that the administration is “going to review every action and make necessary changes, so that we are better prepared for any challenge of nature, or act of evil men, that could threaten our people” and remarks that “communities will need to move decisively (...) in order to avoid a repeat of what we have seen.” Indirectly, the announced review of the response also refers to changes within FEMA. Shortly after the hurricane made landfall, on September 3, Bush famously expressed his support for the agency’s chief, Michael D. Brown, saying: “Brownie, you are doing a heck of a good job” (Bush 2005e). By that time, images depicting destruction and death circulated the media. Therefore, the statement caused wide uproar and eventually entered U.S. American slang as an ironic comment on government incompetence. When presenting his biography in 2010, Bush explained that he was trying to give Brown a “morale boost” and “never imagined those words would become an infamous entry in the political lexicon” (Holland 2010). As public displeasure with Brown’s performance rose, he eventually resigned from his post on September 12, three days before Bush’s Address to the Nation. At first, Coast Guard Vice Admiral Thad Allen replaced him in his duties. And on September 13, Bush chose David Paulison, the director of FEMA’s preparedness division, as new interim director. Although Bush never ceased to publicly support Brown and the FEMA director voluntarily resigned, the change in leadership in the most important agency responsible for the recovery also heralded a general change in managing the crisis. It is in line with the speech’s strong message of hope for a better future: problems have been acknowledged and the necessary steps have been taken, as Bush suggests.

American myths and religious rhetoric

In order to make sense of the events, send out a message of hope, and ultimately restore trust in his presidency, Bush employs a rhetoric which is interspersed with American myths and (civil-)religious elements. He starts of his speech remarking that “in the aftermath [of the storm], [Americans] have seen fellow citizens (...) *looking for meaning* in a tragedy that seems so blind and random”. Thereby, the President puts a focus on the question why the disaster occurred. In times of crisis, many religious people look for answers and find comfort in their faith. A possible way to frame a critical event religiously is to interpret it as an allegedly divine test. Bush partly adopts this approach as he presents the hurricane as yet another “trial,” which will ultimately bring the nation closer together. Referring to past catalytic events in country’s history, he concludes:

These trials have also reminded us that we are often stronger than we know – with the help of grace and one another. They remind us of a hope beyond all pain and death – a God who welcomes the lost to a house not made with hands. And they remind us that we are tied together in this life, in this nation – and that the despair of any touches us all.

In Bush's narrative, God appears as a source of hope. While his "trials" might be difficult, they can be overcome "with the help of grace." Allegedly, even past tragedies, as shared experience, had a positive function on processes of nation-formation. Times of peril prompted actions of solidarity among citizens, "tied people together," and thereby formed and defined America, as Bush suggests. Ultimately, the President mentions God's promise of an afterlife. He paints the picture of a benevolent "God who welcomes the lost to a house not made with hands." As this interpretation only offers redemption to believers from the Judeo-Christian tradition, Bush's constructed "us" certainly does not include all Americans.⁸⁷

However, the public discourse around Katrina also had another religious dimension. Some public figures from the politically conservative scene and the Christian Right framed the events as a sort of divine retribution. In a classically Puritan way they presented the disaster as God's punishment for America's sins. Their *inbound* jeremiads called people to repent and reform. New Orleans City Council President Oliver Thomas shortly after the hurricane proclaimed: "Maybe God's going to cleanse us" (*LifeSiteNews.com* 2005). The son of the famous evangelist Billy Graham, Reverend Franklin Graham, was even more explicit. As CNN reported, he depicted New Orleans as a city of sin, which provoked the storm: "There's been Satanic worship in New Orleans. There's been sexual perversion. God is going to use that storm to bring a revival. God has a plan. God has a purpose" (qtd. in *CNN.com* "Graham: 'I Would Never Say This is God's Judgment'" 2005). President Bush in his Katrina rhetoric refrains from such judgments, which would not be appropriate for a President. Instead, he assumes a lighter, hopeful version of religious rhetoric, which is reminiscent of Covenant Renewal jeremiads and does not call for any major changes within society. The President assures his audience that America will pass this "trial" and become a better, more united society for it. The approach is convenient for the administration, as "trials," may they come from "God" or "nature," (Bush declares that "nature is an awesome force" and, in the future, wants to be "prepared for any challenge of nature") do not arise

87. According to Gallup, in 2001, 82 percent of U.S. Americans declared to be Christian ("Religion"). I argue that Bush reacts to the supposed needs and expectations of a majority of his domestic audience by including religious rhetoric, just as he did following 9/11, even though it does not appeal to/ is not inclusive of all Americans.

from misguided public policies. In contrast to representatives of the Christian Right, Bush does not present the disaster as a form of God's punishment, since thereby he would necessarily also admit that something within American society is going wrong and needs to change.

According to an ABC News/*Washington Post* poll, 23 percent of American adults thought Hurricane Katrina was "a deliberate act of God" (Dolliver 2005). Bush's rhetoric implicitly supports this conviction, thus catering to a certain part of the population. But why do biblical interpretations continue to be so prominent in American political culture? The country's founding myth of a special Manifest Destiny and the spirit of self-reliance, which over the centuries blended into what is now called America's civil religion, still shape self-perceptions of Americans as a nation. The inherently American notion of chosenness continues to be an important part of the nation's self-identification.⁸⁸ While it evolved over the centuries as Bercovitch's (1978) and Miller's (1953) milestone studies of Puritan culture demonstrate, it remains a vital element of public discourses three and a half centuries after the first settlers brought it to North America.

Over the decades, Presidents routinely referred to allegedly distinct national traits when their citizens had to endure times of crisis. Among others, in 1936, President Roosevelt in his speech on the drought and the Dust Bowl mentions "self-reliance" and "courage" as American characteristics that help the country "carr[y] on through desperate days":

Yet I would not have you think for a single minute that there is permanent disaster in these drought regions, or that the picture I saw meant depopulating these areas. No cracked earth, no blistering sun, no burning wind, no grasshoppers, are a permanent match for the indomitable American farmers and stockmen and their wives and children who *have carried on through desperate days, and inspire us with their self-reliance, their tenacity and their courage* (Roosevelt 1936)

Roosevelt's words spread hope by assuring that the crisis will be overcome thanks to brave individuals who prevail. Similarly, Bush after Katrina speaks of "a core of strength that survives all hurt" and "a powerful American determination to clear the ruins and build better than before." To illustrate this idea, the President recalls a personal story of "one resident of this city [New Orleans] who lost his home" and when he "was asked by a reporter if he would relocate, he responded, "Naw, I will rebuild – but *I'll build higher*." Bush's narrative presents the determination to grow by taking on challenges as an allegedly core American characteristic, which goes back to the country's founding days:

88. Cf. Chapter 2.3.2 and 2.3.3.

We are the heirs of men and women who lived through those first terrible winters at Jamestown and Plymouth, who rebuilt Chicago after a great fire, and San Francisco after a great earthquake, who reclaimed the prairie from the dust bowl of the 1930s. Every time, the people of this land have come back from fire, flood, and storm to build anew – and to *build better than what we had before*.

Bush establishes a connection between the nation's past, present, and future, suggesting that the country's history has from its beginnings been shaped by crises. He claims that overcoming times of peril has made and will continue to make the country "better" (the word appears seven times). Consequently, when presenting his "vision of the future" he assures that "we will not just rebuild, we will build higher and better." The words are reminiscent of Bush's rhetoric following 9/11, when he announced that, in dealing with the attacks, the country will become "not only stronger, but, in many ways, better" (Bush 2002a). The nation-building narrative after Katrina is additionally supported through the frequent repetition of words like "America" (seventeen times) and different forms of the lexeme "nation" (nine times). As religious elements intertwine with national myths, expressions like "the journey ahead," "destiny," "a core of strength that survives all hurt a faith in God no storm can take away," "engaged in the mission," "learn the lessons," or "prepared for any challenge of nature," help the President to metaphorically frame the disaster as a test from "God" or "nature," implicitly suggesting that it is part of and a continuation of America's special Manifest Destiny.

Moreover, by explicitly mentioning "God" (three times), Bush presents himself as a man of faith and appeals to the public through the ethos of an allegedly true believer, just as he did in prior crisis speeches.⁸⁹ The President attempts to turn the tragedy into a positive moment; solidarity and patriotism become core themes as he tries to unite the nation assuring the hurricane victims: "You need to know that our whole Nation cares about you – and in the journey ahead you are not alone." Additionally, he shows himself understanding of people's suffering when he states: "I know that when you sit on the steps of a porch where a home once stood or sleep on a cot in a crowded shelter it is hard to imagine a bright future. But that future will come." The compassionate expressions of his "deepest sympathy" are always connected to the uplifting promise of a better future – a strategy meant to bolster the President's image.

89. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.3, section *Religion, America, and Bush*.

Inequalities in America

In his address to the nation on September 15, the President explicitly addresses structural problems and persisting social inequalities in the Gulf Coast region; a topic that he refrained from in his prior speeches on Katrina. The comment is short but pinpoints a core problem, namely that “deep, persistent poverty in this [Gulf Coast] region (...) has roots in a history of racial discrimination.” Alluding to the American Dream of equal chances and upward mobility, Bush indirectly admits that racism “cut[s] off generations from the opportunity of America.” Again, he remains solution-oriented as he announces: “We have a duty to confront this poverty with bold action. So let us restore all that we have cherished from yesterday, and let us rise above the legacy of inequality.” The President suggests that rebuilding the region should include efforts for more racial equality. Among others, he mentions that “when the streets are rebuilt, there should be many new businesses, including *minority-owned* businesses, along those streets.” In Bush’s narrative, “it is entrepreneurship that helps break the cycle of poverty.” Therefore, he recommends to “immediate incentives for job-creating investment (...) and loan guarantees for small businesses, including *minority-owned enterprises*.” The proposed actions are solely economic in nature. At no point does the President call for a national debate on the roots and causes of persisting inequalities; he does not refer to problems in the educational system nor does he suggest any social programs. Thus, he neither directly acknowledges government responsibility for these problems nor does he promise government involvement in order to solve them. Therefore, his comments might have appeared not thought-through or not self-reflexive enough and half-hearted to parts of his audience.

I read Bush’s comments as a rhetorical response to the widespread accusations of racism in the recovery efforts. Bush implicitly admits the undeniable, namely that the hurricane put on display the glaring inequities of race and class in the United States. However, while he admits that certain segments of the population were put at great risk, he does not per se mention racism as a problem that needs to be fought. His speech does not introduce any new antidiscrimination policies nor does it herald any major changes when it comes to dealing with racial inequalities in America. In this sense, the hurricane and the political rhetoric around it does not serve as a catalyst for social change. It does not seem far-fetched to argue that Bush’s oratory does not contest the status quo when it comes to the rights of minorities in the U.S., since he has no political interest to do so. The critical events occupied presidential speeches only for a limited period of time; it seems telling that in the 2006 State of the Union Address not a single word on Katrina is included. The hurricane was not exploited to introduce far-reaching policies in a way that e.g. the 9/11 events were.

Conclusions

Bush's address is an attempt to heal and unite the nation and indirectly also bolster his image as crisis manager. Making use of religiously tainted oratory, the President spreads hope for a complete and lasting recovery of the hurricane struck region. He interprets the events with the help of American myths in a way that diverts attention from government failures and metaphorically connects the country's past to its future. In his narrative, supposedly divine "trials" or "nature" and not misguided policies are responsible for Katrina's disastrous impact. Motifs of solidarity and patriotism play a central role. The hopeful framing is meant to turn the tragedy into a positive moment. On the lexical level, Bush uses words with a high degree of pleasantness, adding a subconsciously soothing effect to the speech. The address is high on pathos and predominantly falls into the realm of epideictic rhetoric.

While Bush admits failures in the preparation and recovery efforts, he simultaneously stresses the allegedly "unprecedented" nature of the events as well as their graveness (parallels to the 9/11 attacks help him to frame the events as a serious national crisis) in order to justify any shortcomings. By the point in time when he delivered the speech, Bush could no longer deny the numerous problems, which have been widely exposed by the media. Therefore, he adopts a proactive strategy and focuses on the future. The President promises to fix the problems, however he does not question the system itself. The speech neither calls for major social changes nor are the events used as a point of departure for a national debate on race and class inequality in America. While the President shortly mentions racial discrimination, he does not specify solutions that could help end the unequal exposure to risks and unequal access to resources. Instead, he presents increased government involvement as the way out of the crisis and only introduces small, symbolic changes. Consequently, parts of Bush's audience might have perceived the included self-criticism as half-hearted.

When it comes to the public perception of Bush's performance in the aftermaths of Katrina, polls show that criticism over the government's handling of the crisis was widespread (*Gallup* 2010). As discussed in the analysis of his speech on September 15, the President rhetorically reacts to the critique: he stresses the graveness of the situation and admits shortcomings, also on the side of the administration. Nonetheless, the speech could not stop the downward spiral of his falling popularity. According to Gallup, shortly before the speech (from September 12–15), 45 percent of respondents approved of the way Bush was handling his presidency while 45 percent disapproved. Shortly after the speech (September 16–18), the stats were even less favorable of the President with 40 percent approving and 58 percent disapproving of his performance (*Gallup* 2010). These numbers must be handled with caution, not least because other factors, like Bush's Iraq policies, which many

Americans disapproved of, certainly also influenced the outcome of the polls. Moreover, the approval ratings were already very low before Katrina, which shows that the dissatisfaction with the President's performance related to more than one issues. I argue that in his address on September 15, Bush convincingly employed many crisis rhetoric strategies. However, maybe he acted too late, was not self-reflective enough, and did not announce enough far-reaching corrective actions and therefore no improvement is reflected in the polls. 't Hart et al. convincingly conclude that "the Katrina crisis was the final nail in Bush's reputation as an effective crisis manager. The administration lost control of the crisis narrative from day one, and never managed to regain it" ('t Hart, Tindall & Brown 2009: 18). In fact, it was the media, not the administration, that brought the crisis to public attention and largely shaped its perception. Thus, while Bush's Address to the Nation included rhetorically convincing elements, it could not make up for the fact that the President took too long to find the right words – he *reacted* to reduce the harm done but failed to actively *shape* the discourse to *lead* the nation out of the crisis.

3.2.3 Analysis of President Barack Obama's speeches on the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico

Background of the events

On April 20, 2010, a gas release and a subsequent explosion occurred on BP's Deepwater Horizon oilrig, anchored 40 miles off the coast of Louisiana. The accident killed eleven workers and injured 17 others. The explosion ruptured the oil well that it was currently digging and spewed millions of gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico before the leak could be capped on July 15, 2010, making it by far the world's largest accidental offshore spill into marine waters (Robertson & Krauss 2010).

3.2.3.1 *B. Obama: Remarks by President on the oil spill, Venice, Louisiana, May 2, 2010*

On May 2, 2010, President Obama visited the Gulf Coast area for the first time after the accident on the Deepwater Horizon drilling rig, getting an on-site impression of the events. After inspecting forces arrayed against the oil gusher, Obama took a helicopter ride over marshlands and estuaries along the coast, but high winds prevented the craft from flying over the ocean to the oil slick, which then already covered an area of 30 miles. The President then addressed the media from the coast guard station in Venice, Louisiana. His remarks lasted 7:24 minutes and consist of 1194 words. Standing in the rain, wearing a black outdoor parka, Obama spoke calmly and resolutely. He was present at the epicenter of the disaster, demonstrated closeness with citizens in the region, and staged himself as a capable crisis manager. He underlines that the federal government "from day one" was

at the forefront of the “relentless response.” In his speech, the President first of all briefly addresses the attempted car bombing, which took place on New York’s Times Square the same morning. However, as the issue of the averted terrorist attack does not relate to the environmental crisis in the Gulf, I will not discuss these parts of the presidential statement.

Changing facts and informative speech

Since the explosion on April 20, new details were released on a daily basis. Between the speeches from May 2 and May 28, the estimates on the damage caused by the oil spill varied widely. Shortly after the Deepwater Horizon rig sank, BP claimed that a mere 1,000 barrels of oil per day (BPD) was leaking into the ocean. On May 14, the government corrected the number to 5,000. The *New York Times*, quoting several experts in the field, criticized the officials for making hasty guesses and using unreliable methods for their measurements (Gillis 2010). Meanwhile, BP claimed that there was no reliable way to measure the spill. On May 27, three teams using three different methods announced that they estimated the leak was more likely to be between 12,000 and 19,000 BPD and on June 10 the same team doubled its estimates to somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 (Wagner & Machnowski 2014). A week later, Energy Secretary and Nobel Prize laureate Steven Chu used pressure readings and high-resolution video to correct the numbers to 60,000 BPD, announcing that “it is important to realize that the numbers can change” (qtd. in Gillis 2010). These differences in the estimated scale of the incident are reflected in the President’s remarks. Obama’s speeches update the public on the government’s efforts to stop the leak, the cleanup actions, and the support for the region and people most affected by the environmental disaster, presenting the administration as capable agent on its way to end the crisis.

The speech delivered on 2 May is rather short and informative in style. Obama reports on his meeting with Admiral Allen, the Incident Commander of the spill, and his team who “gave [him] an update on [the] efforts to stop the BP oil spill and mitigate the damage.” Through his presence in the region the President emphasizes that the “disaster” (he uses the word four times throughout the speech) is a priority for the federal government and puts into focus the importance of “coordinating between local, state, and federal officials.” Obama lends the environmental “crisis” (the word appears five times) a national dimension when he promises that “as President of the United States” he is going to “spare no effort to respond to this crisis for as long as it continues.” He informs his audience about the “search-and-rescue efforts to evacuate 115 people” from the platform right after the explosion, mentions the eleven missing workers, and reveals details on the spill and

its movement. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the crisis is not over yet as “the oil [...] is still leaking,” causing serious damage. Simultaneously, the President promises that the government will do everything to stop the gushing oil. The main priority at the moment of the speech is to mitigate (the word appears twice) the damage, as he stresses. Two themes, the information on the damage already caused and the efforts to minimize further pollution, thus dominate the address. While the President stresses the graveness of the situation, he simultaneously assures that his government is working to solve the crisis.

Obama as crisis manager

Obama presents himself as a strong, capable leader and active crisis manager. He assures his audience that “the federal government has launched and coordinated an all-hands-on-deck, relentless response to this crisis from day one.” On the linguistic level, the President strengthens his message through the use of active verbs like “coordinate/-ing/-ed” (five times), “leading,” “launched,” “investigate/-ed” (twice), “identified,” “dispatched,” “ensure” (twice), or “working” (twice). Moreover, he uses adjectives that emphasize the promptness of the taken actions, like “immediately” (twice): “we *immediately* and intensely investigated by remotely operated vehicles the entire 5,000 feet of pipe that’s on the floor of the ocean.” And: “We *immediately* set up command center operations here in the Gulf.” After Hurricane Katrina, Bush was accused of not having reacted fast enough. Obama makes sure to stress that the federal government responded appropriately to the disaster right away: “we’ve made preparations from day one to stage equipment for a worse-case scenario” and “from day one we have prepared and planned for the worst.” Not only does he mention actions taken “already” (twice), but he also cautiously reports on first successes, like the investigation of the “entire 5,000 feet of pipe that’s on the floor of the ocean” in effect of which “three leaks were identified.” Chiefly, Obama concentrates on finding a solution to the problem. He informs the public that “the most advanced technology available is being used to try and stop a leak” and that the government is “using every resource available to stop the oil from coming ashore and mitigating the damage it could cause.” He mentions the special “command center” established to effectively manage the crisis and reports that “much of the discussion [...] at the center was focused on if [...] and when [the responsible authorities] have to deal with these mitigation efforts.” The President further stresses the alleged effective cooperation between federal and local authorities pointing out that his responsible staff is “working closely with the Gulf states and local communities.” Also in the future, solving this crisis will remain his priority and he assures the American public that “as President of the United States”

he is “going to spare no effort to respond to this crisis for as long as it continues.” The modal auxiliary “will” is used four times to communicate plans for the future. Obama puts special emphasis on the graveness of the situation when he announces that “our focus now is on a fully coordinated, relentless response effort to stop the leak and prevent more damage to the Gulf.” Consequently, he also promise that the government “will spare no resource to clean up whatever damage is caused.” The words are meant to reassure the people affected by the crisis that they will not be forgotten. At the end of the speech, Obama directly speaks of “a commitment” which he is making “as President of the United States” and adds that “everybody who works for the federal government feels the exact same way.” These final words again mark the crisis as a national affair and show the President as a committed crisis manager in chief.

A “potentially unprecedented” disaster

Obama calls the leak “unique and unprecedented.” In this, he resembles other presidents who described crises they had to face as something extraordinary. For example, after 9/11 Bush (2002a) spoke of “unprecedented dangers” while Roosevelt in 1940 claimed: “Never before since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has our American civilization been in such danger as now” (Roosevelt 1940). Obama stresses how difficult the occurred situation is and suggests that it will have an unknown but substantial impact on the environment and the people in the region. This rhetorical approach can be useful for leaders in difficult times, as the chosen adjectives also imply that it is especially difficult to manage a given a situation. Allegedly, nothing comparable has ever occurred. Consequently, it implicitly glorifies any possible successes of the crisis manager and simultaneously excuses any possible failure. However, President Obama is still very careful in his evaluation of the effects of the explosion and the leak. He uses the words “potentially” and “could” (five times) when characterizing the spill and its possible repercussions. The crisis is not over, the damage is ongoing, and its final outcome is unclear: “The oil that is still leaking from the well *could* seriously damage the economy and the environment of our Gulf states and it *could* extend for a long time. It *could* jeopardize the livelihoods of thousands of Americans who call this place home.” Obama gives the speech at an early stage of the crisis. At this point, he still presents the spill chiefly as an imminent, individual environmental problem and not a milestone incident that would call for major changes in legislation or long-term policy reforms. Nevertheless, he gives the affair substantial attention by traveling to the region for the first time since the explosion and finally directly addressing the matter in a public speech.

Prior to the remarks on May 2, the President only briefly mentioned the accident on April 29. In his speech honoring the National Teacher of the Year, he

identified BP as the responsible party and mentioned the “national significance” of the incident (Obama 2010b). Before, some voices from the White House had downplayed the spill. For example, on April 23, the Department of Homeland Security stated the incident “poses a negligible risk to regional oil supply markets and will not cause significant national economic impacts” (Goldenberg 2010) and White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs minimized the nature of the incident, announcing, “I doubt this is the first accident that has happened and I doubt it will be the last” (Goldenberg 2010). On his speech from Venice, Louisiana, Obama clearly presents the matter differently. Despite the serious factual tone however, he does not refrain from including short jokes in both of his speeches. On April 29, he tells his audience which is made up of teachers: “I am sure there may be a few science teachers here who have been following this issue closely with their classes, and if you guys have any suggestions, please let us know” (Obama 2010b). According to the official White House transcript, laughter follows. And on May 2, standing in the rain with no umbrella while delivering his speech, Obama jokes: “By the way, I just want to point out, I was told there was drizzling out here – [laughter] – is this Louisiana drizzle right here?” The comment is equally followed by laughter, as the official transcript and YouTube videos of the speech show. The inclusion of humor is rather untypical in crisis speeches and unimaginable in e.g. Bush’s early post 9/11 rhetoric. Certainly, these jokes do not reflect the graveness of the issue in question and might have been interpreted also as a lack of compassion. On the other hand, they establish a connection between the audience and the speaker and furthermore indicate that the situation is not solely hopeless and that there are still reasons to laugh. Similarly, shortly after Hurricane Katrina, President Bush admitted that there is “a lot of rebuilding to do” but simultaneously joked: “Out of the rubbles of Trent Lott’s house – he’s lost his entire house – there’s going to be a fantastic house. And I’m looking forward to sitting on the porch. (Laughter.)” (Bush 2005e). A few days later, in his Remarks on Hurricane Recovery Efforts, which he delivered from Louisiana, he said: “I believe that the great city of New Orleans will rise again and be a greater city of New Orleans. (Applause.) I believe the town where I used to come from, Houston, Texas, to enjoy myself – occasionally too much – (laughter) – will be that very same town, that it will be a better place to come to” (Bush 2005f). The media did not pick up these examples of rhetorical humor in crisis speeches and no publications on the topic can be found. Nevertheless, these sentences certainly had an effect on the overall perception of the speeches and lightened their general tone.

Hope und unity

While the President is firm in listing the environmental “dangers” (the word appears six times) of the “crisis” (six times), his speech still emanates confidence.

Obama reassures his citizens when he says, “every American affected by this spill should know this: Your government will do whatever it takes, for as long as it takes, to stop this crisis.” He sends out a strong message of hope, claiming that skillful management will lead to an end of the critical situation. He concentrates on future-orientated actions that the government is “going” (seven times) to take. His word use supports the message of confidence and hope; the verb “stop” appears seven times in direct reference to the leak or the crisis as a whole and the lexeme “hope” are employed twice.

The region and its people are at the center of the speech. The respective word cloud shows the prominence of the word “Gulf” (eight times).



Figure 10. Word cloud for President Obama's Remarks on the Oil Spill, May 2, 2010

Furthermore, Obama mentions “people” seven times, with regard to “American/-s” (seven times) but also with regard to the people of the Gulf region, those who “call this place home.” The President again shows the crisis as a national issue when he mentions shared efforts of Americans to mitigate its effects: “I want to thank the thousands of Americans who’ve been working around the clock to stop this crisis. (...) They are doing everything in their power to (...) help our fellow citizens.” On the linguistic level, the message of unity is supported by the frequent use of the pronouns “we” (14) and “our” (ten). The words also construct and appeal to a shared social identity of Americans and position Obama with the “us” of the victims of the spill against the “them” of the responsible party (BP). Moreover, the President demonstrates closeness to the people who suffered in effect of the spill when he expresses hope “to have the opportunity to speak with some of the individuals who are directly affected by the disaster.” Not only does he express

empathy by addressing fears and frustration (“I’ve heard already that people are, understandably, frustrated and frightened”) but he also shows himself aware of the history of the region, where natural disasters have already more than once affected the lives of local inhabitant (“the people of this region have been through worse disasters than anybody should have to bear”). Obama specifically addresses “the families of the 11 workers who have not yet – who have not been found.” Two weeks after the explosion, it was clear that the eleven missing men did not survive the accident. Saying that his “thoughts and prayers” are with the relations of the victims, Obama makes his only direct (civil-)religious reference in this speech. The phrasing is not untypical of American presidents, who used it in times of national tragedy or to moan the loss of citizens (Shribman 1994).⁹⁰ For example, F. D. Roosevelt mentioned “thoughts and prayers” in his D-Day speech on June 6, 1944. It implies a belief in a higher power but does not refer to a specific religion and is thus exemplary of American civil religion in political speechmaking. Furthermore, the commemoration of the dead also unites the nation over a shared loss. The eleven workers, all U.S. citizens, came from eleven different towns and in a way personify the fact that the *entire country* has been wronged by those who caused the explosion on the oilrig. As Dow argues, even when “the majority of the audience is not personally involved, they still feel a sense of confusion, a need to understand the meaning of the event for the nation as a whole and to know how the nation will proceed” (Dow 1989: 297). Hence, the eulogy serves the epideictic function of “assign[ing] meaning to that event” (ibid.). Obama’s narrative dissociates the responsibility for the disaster from his government and depicts the deceased U.S. citizens as innocent victims of the wrongdoing of Others. Consequently, the President of the U.S. now needs to make sure that the appropriate parties will be held accountable for the losses and that further damage to the country will be kept at a minimum.

Moreover, President Obama’s speech links nature with the region’s economy, when he says: “This is also the heartbeat of the region’s economic life.” Thereby, he shows that he understands the economic implications of the crisis for many citizens and additionally promises “to do everything in our power to protect our natural resources, compensate those who have been harmed, rebuild what has been damaged, and help this region persevere *like it has done so many times before*.” In a way, the last part of the sentence again relativizes his prior claim on the “unprecedented” nature of the event. As he refers to disasters, which occurred in the past

90. President George W. Bush in his post 9/11 speeches frequently used the word “prayer.” However, not in combination with the word “thoughts.” Cf. also Chapter 3.1.3.2.

and have been eventually overcome, he spreads hope for the future. After all, the American people have already mastered similar challenges and can succeed again.

The question of blame and responsibility

In his speech, Obama places the responsibility for the accident on BP's side when he says "Let me be clear: BP is responsible for this leak." Consequently, he also declares that the British operator of the oilrig "will be paying the bill." However, the President does not specify on the modalities of financial compensation that British Petroleum should provide. While he lists stopping the leak and cleaning the Gulf as major priorities, it remains unclear which role the government will play in these efforts and which actions the oil company will be ordered to take. The President uses the words "BP oil spill" with regard to the accident, a phrasing that was quickly picked up by his administration and multiplied by the media. Already in his speech on April 29, he speaks of "the recent BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico" and stresses that "BP is ultimately responsible for funding the cost of response and cleanup operations" (Obama 2010b). Then, in the discussed speech on May 2, Obama mentions BP twice. And in his remarks at a press conference dedicated to the topic on May 27, he refers to British Petroleum seven times, among other saying that: "As far as I'm concerned, BP is responsible for this horrific disaster, and we will hold them fully accountable on behalf of the United States as well as the people and communities victimized by this tragedy" (Obama 2010e). Some British newspapers accused the U.S. government of scapegoating British Petroleum for the accident and, unjustly, making their country pay for the disaster – financially and politically (D. Jones 2010). The question of blame is a complex one. The National Commission on the BP Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill and Offshore Drilling in its 2011 Report to the President entitled "Deep Water: The Gulf Oil Disaster and the Future of Offshore Drilling," concludes that the companies Transocean (the rig operator) and Halliburton (the well contractor) were also partly responsible for the disaster. Nonetheless, the President's pinpointing of BP in his speeches certainly contributed to the fact that the company was most associated with causing the damage.

While the U.S. government in Obama's speech appears as free of any guilt, the President nevertheless shows himself aware of the graveness of the situation. Therefore, as the leader of the country, he takes on the responsibility of handling the crisis: "that's why the federal government has launched and coordinated an all-hands-on-deck, relentless response to this crisis from day one. After the explosion on the drilling rig, it began with an aggressive search-and-rescue effort to evacuate 115 people, including three badly injured." The promptness of actions taken by the national government has to do with the fact that the accident took place in federal waters. Accordingly, Washington and not the state of Louisiana was in charge. (In contrast to that, e.g. during Hurricane Katrina, first of all local authorities were

in charge before the federal government assumed responsibility.) Obama, thus naturally assumes the role of chief crisis manager and assures that “as President of the United States, I’m going to spare no effort to respond to this crisis for as long as it continues.” At the moment of the speech, the clean up of the damage appears as his priority: “our focus now is on a fully coordinated, relentless response effort to stop the leak and prevent more damage to the Gulf.” He promises not to rest until the leak is stopped and “the people of this region are able to go back to their lives and their livelihoods.” Additionally, Obama points out that later on “there will be time to fully investigate what happened on that rig and hold responsible parties accountable.”

Conclusions

In his remarks from May 2, President Obama concentrates on the efforts to plug the leak in the well and to clean up the Gulf region. He delivers his speech from the epicenter of the disaster, the coast guard station in Venice, Louisiana. Thereby, he shows that the federal government is taking the crisis seriously and lends it national importance. The tone is factual, pathos does not play a significant role, and the speech serves primarily an informative function. The President chooses his words carefully in order to simultaneously emphasize that the scale of the event still remains unclear and that his government is already decisively reacting to present challenges. He sticks to concrete facts, largely evading metaphorical, mythical, or civil-religious framings. While he clearly identifies BP as responsible party for the accident on the oilrig and the subsequent spill, the question of blame is not at the center of this speech. He appeals to a (rhetorically constructed) sense of American national identity to strengthen feelings of solidarity with the victims. Meanwhile, he shows himself as part of this American “us,” demonstrating closeness with his fellow citizens. The speech shows subtle parallels to environmental apocalyptic narratives (Obama’s description of a sudden disturbance in the allegedly harmonious relationship between nature and men). Furthermore, the element of optimism is very strong. The President confidently sends out the message that the American people will master this crisis, like they have mastered other environmental catastrophes in the past.

3.2.3.2 *B. Obama: Remarks by the President after briefing on BP oil spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010*

Three and a half weeks after his above-discussed first remarks dedicated to the oil spill, Obama made another trip to the region affected by the environmental catastrophe. On May 28, 2010, he toured the beach in LaFourche together with the Parish President Charlotte Randolph and attended a briefing with Admiral Thad Allen, National Incident Commander in charge of the response, in Grand Isle, Louisiana.

All in all, the President spent about three hours in the region. His speech, which he delivered outside the U.S. Coast Guard Station, lasted 14:08 and consists of 2347 words. As the President spoke of the efforts of the Coast Guard to stop the leak and mitigate the damage to the beaches, high-ranking local officials, including the Governors of Louisiana, Florida, and Alabama, surrounded him. The staging supports his message that he will not let the people in the region alone in this time of crisis and that his administration is treating the oil spill as their “highest priority.”

The media

According to the Pew Research Center, the media cover most disasters as so-called one week wonders, in the sense that the events generate major attention in the immediate aftermath of their occurrence and then quickly drop out of the headlines (“100 Days – Eight Things”). As this is a well-known phenomenon, on May 28, Obama promises that the government’s engagement in the region will exceed the media’s interest: “The cameras at some point may leave; the media may get tired of the story; but we will not.” Strengthening his point through the use of anaphora, he promises those effected by the disaster: “You will not be abandoned. You will not be left behind.” However, in contrast to conventional coverage of catastrophes, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill turned out to be a “slow-motion disaster,” meaning that the media attention span was significantly longer than usual: “From April 20 through July 28, the Gulf spill overwhelmed every other story in the mainstream media. It accounted for 22 percent of the news hole, almost twice as much coverage as the No. 2 story, the economy at 12 percent” (“100 Days – Disaster Story”). U.S. American and international news channels and papers propagated images of the devastation and discussed human, environmental, and economic aspects of the accident. The high interest was certainly partly owed to the fact that the accident on the oilrig was unprecedented in U.S. history when it comes to its environmental impact. Furthermore, the crisis continued past the day of the actual explosion – it took several weeks before the leak could be plugged; it was permanently sealed only on September 19, 2010. The leading storylines included activities in the Gulf – the cleanup and containment efforts as well as the impact of the disaster (47 percent of the overall coverage), the role of BP (27 percent of the coverage), and the response and actions of the Obama administration (17 percent) (“100 Days – Eight Things”).

Updates from the crisis manager in chief

Similarly to his first speech from Venice, Obama’s remarks start with an “update” (he uses the word three times) on the “latest efforts to stop the leak, mitigate the damage to the great beaches of the Gulf Coast.” Specifically, the President mentions “the latest information on both the efforts to plug the well,” which he received

during his meeting with General Allen. A focus is put on the “arrangements and coordination that’s being made with respect to mitigating this damage.” Obama again stresses that local and federal officials are working together on solving the crisis. Furthermore, the President emphasizes that he is personally supervising the situation stating that he had “the chance to visit with [...] a beach like Port Fourchon” which gave him “a sense of what extraordinary efforts are being made at the local level, but also the damage that we’re already starting to see as a consequence of this spill.” He describes the counteractions taken to mitigate the damage in greater detail than in his prior speech. Not only measures meant to bring immediate relief are mentioned, but also a long-term strategy for the region. The “immediately” taken short-term actions include “deploying more boom, cleaning more beaches, performing more monitoring of wildlife and impact to this ecosystem.” The President also promises to take care of “damage that we’re already starting to see as a consequence of this spill.” He stresses that the “catastrophe [is] still evolving” and that the region will “face a long-term recovery and restoration effort.” Simultaneously, he announces that his government will “*help* the people of this region return to their lives and their livelihoods as soon as possible” and “*help* Americans whose livelihoods have been upended by this spill.” To strengthen his reassuring message, he repeats the word “help” ten times throughout the speech. The government metaphorically appears as a noble, selfless hero who makes “every decision (...) based on a single criterion – what’s going to best protect and make whole the people and the ecosystems of the Gulf.” Moreover, Obama shows himself aware of the long-term implications of the event, which might worry American citizens when he says: “Parents are worried about the implications for their children’s health.” Furthermore, he puts the focus on the “economic impact” of the spill and specifically mentions “fishermen who are trying to figure out where the next paycheck is going to come from, how are they going to pay a mortgage or a note on their boat.” The President is quick to offer concrete solutions and aid to those in “economic distress.” As he reports that “the Small Business Administration has stepped in to help businesses by approving loans, but also as important, allowing many to defer existing loan payments,” he presents himself as a capable crisis manager, aware of the problems faced by businesses and their direct effects on the lives of people in the region. At several points, he refers all those in need of information or specific aid to the government website: “Gulf Coast residents should know that we’ve gathered all pertinent information regarding available assistance and the federal response in one place at whitehouse.gov.” Thereby, Obama puts into focus the government’s efforts to make help accessible to all, easy to find, clear, and transparent. Furthermore, the President makes a point in saying that he is personally available to “every leader who is here” (meaning the local authorities gathered around him) in case of any problems:

I said this to every leader who is here: If something is not going right down here, then they need to talk to Thad Allen. And if they're not getting satisfaction from Thad Allen, then they can talk to me. There's nobody here who can't get in touch with me directly if there is an idea, a suggestion, or a logjam that needs to be dealt with.

However, as he only mentions leaders and not regular citizens, the comment could have been also perceived as elitist or as lacking of empathy for the average victim of the accident.

The speech sends out the message that stopping the leak remains the top priority. Variations of the verb "stop" appear nine times. Among others, Obama promises to work on the problem "every day until the leak has stopped." He announces that the government authorized BP to try the "highly complex top kill procedure" in order to seal off the leaking Deepwater Horizon well. However, since the effectiveness of this approach is not guaranteed, as the President admits, he also assures his audience that his team will find another solution if the procedure does not work:

If [the top kill approach] is successful, it would obviously be welcome news. If it's not, a team of some of the world's top scientists, engineers and experts, led by our Energy Secretary and Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Chu, has for some time being – has for some time been exploring any and all reasonable contingency plans.

Obama's words project calm and security, as he shows himself prepared for all eventualities. In a factual manner, he mentions scientists, like Mr. Chu, on whose expertise he relies. He uses details and numbers to illustrate the immense scale of the cleanup efforts:

We've activated about 1,400 members of the National Guard across four states. Nearly 1,400 vessels are aiding in the containment and cleanup effort. And we deployed more than 3 million feet of hard and sorbent boom, including an additional 100,000 just yesterday for these parishes in Louisiana that face the greatest threat.

Furthermore, the use of strong active verbs supports the message of a strong leadership with a clear vision: "To *ensure* that *we're fully prepared* for that, and in accordance with input from folks down here, *I've directed* Secretary Napolitano and Admiral Allen to triple the manpower in places where oil has hit the shore or is within 24 hours of impact." The respective word cloud illustrates the prominence of words like "going," "make," "response," which on the linguistic level support Obama's image creation process as decisive manager with a plan for the future.⁹¹

91. Additionally, the word "will" is repeated 15 times throughout the speech. However, it is not taken into account by *Wordle*.

times, just as it occupies the people in the region and in fact the entire country. He claims that it is the last thing he thinks about before going to bed and the first thing he thinks about when he gets up in the morning, stressing that stopping the leaking oil remains his top priority.

While he demonstrates decisiveness, Obama does not promise easy solutions to the crisis: "There are not going to be silver bullets or a lot of perfect answers for some of the challenges that we face." The President does not claim to be omnipotent. Instead, he remains open to advice and help: "And what I told the parish president, what I told the Governor, is that if there is an idea that can be shown to work, then we should move forward on it, and they deserve quick answers." He encourages a democratic dialog and an open debate on possibilities of ending the crisis. This approach is rather untypical of presidential crisis rhetoric. Historically, U.S. presidents tended to try to increase the power of the office by claiming to be the only one to know the way out of the crisis (Pious 1979:6).⁹² Obama's openness towards new "ideas that can be shown to work" has directly to do with the scale of the event, which was astonishing even to experts like Coast Guard Officer Cory Mendenhall who bluntly stated: "It's kind of overwhelming" (Bryner 2010). The President admits that "it's going to be a difficult time, and obviously the folks down here are going to be feeling the brunt of it" but nevertheless promises that the government is "going to make sure that we're doing everything we can to get this solved as quickly as possible." To justify the long process of stopping the leak and mitigating the damage Obama increasingly puts into focus the "unprecedented" nature of the event.

Framing a supposedly unique event

At several points throughout the speech, the President refers to the supposed uniqueness of the crisis. He states that "America has never experienced an event like this before" and speaks of "the largest spill in American history." He informs his audience that the already taken counteractions are allegedly equally unprecedented: "this has already been the largest cleanup effort in U.S. history." Again, he supports his words with detailed descriptions and numbers:

On the day this disaster began, even as we launched a search and rescue effort for workers on the drilling rig, we were already staging equipment in the event of a larger-scale spill. By the time we discovered the third breach, a week after the Deepwater Horizon platform sank, we had already stationed more than 70 vessels and hundreds of thousands of feet of protective boom on site. Today, there are more than 20,000 people in the region working around the clock to contain and clean up this spill.

92. Cf. Chapter 3.1.

This “already historic response,” according to the President, reflects positively on the government, which was quick to implement extraordinary measures to at least mitigate the damage. At the same time, Obama stresses that the catastrophe is “still evolving” and it is unknown when the leak can be sealed: “we’re still within the window where we don’t yet know the outcome of the highly complex top kill procedure.” Every further day, on which hectoliters of oil leak into the ocean, increases the damage. Thus, the final outcome of the crisis remains unclear. In any case, already at the time of the speech, the effects on the environment and the people in the Gulf were devastating and the President therefore announces: “we face a long-term recovery and restoration effort.” On the linguistic level, the repetitive use of the word “disaster” (six times) with regard to the events further reflects on the graveness of the situation.

Framing the incident as unprecedented, Obama indirectly glorifies any current or future success in mitigating the damage. At the same times, he excuses any possible failures in his crisis management. If he succeeds at stopping the leak and reducing the negative effects of the disaster, his glory will be even greater and the government will profit from the appraisal of their skillful management. If he fails, it will remain unknown if any other person could have done a better job, as nothing comparable has allegedly ever happened before. Furthermore, unprecedented events also seemingly legitimize extraordinary measures – if the public accepts Obama’s rhetoric of an extraordinary occurrence, it will be more willing to accept even difficult policies to end the crisis and prevent similar events in the future. In this sense, the speech serves the epideictic purpose of preparing the audience for further deliberative rhetoric.

Blame and responsibility

Obama explicitly states that “this [the explosion on the platform and the oil spill] is a manmade catastrophe.” He thus points to human failure as the cause of the event. Like in his prior speeches, the President explicitly places the blame with BP: “As I’ve said before, BP is the responsible party for this disaster.” Consequently, the President also sees the company in the financial responsibility to come up for the damage: “And we’ve told BP that we expect them to pay for that, too.” The government’s role, as Obama presents it, lies also in the identification of those responsible for the accident and the supervision of reimbursement procedures: “We have ordered BP to pay economic injury claims, and we will make sure they deliver.” The focus on the question of blame is stronger than it was in earlier presidential remarks on the oil spill. The President explains in greater detail the short-term as well as the long-term responsibilities of those who caused the crisis. Not only does he state of BP that “they’re legally responsible for stopping the leak” but he additionally also mentions that “they’re financially responsible for the enormous

damage that they've created." Additionally, he stresses his administration's role in the process of restoring justice when he announces: "*Justice* will be done for those whose lives have been upended by this disaster, for the families of those whose lives have been lost – that is a solemn pledge that I am making." Metaphorically, the accident is framed as a *crime* of which BP is guilty. The charges include the death of eleven workers on the oilrig (among others, BP was charged with manslaughter and eventually pleaded guilty in the case) as well as environmental and economic damage to the region. Now, Obama promises, the government is "going to hold them [BP] accountable, along with any other party responsible for the initial explosion and loss of life on that platform." These "other part[ies]," next to BP, include the rig operator Transocean and contractor Halliburton, as a government report states (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management 2011). The President thus presents himself as a judge and an arm of justice in a crime scene.

Next to placing blame on the side of BP, the President himself also takes on responsibility for handling the crisis. Already on May 27, one day before his second trip to the Gulf Coast, Obama stated during a press conference: "[M]y job is to get this fixed. And in case anybody wonders – in any of your reporting, in case you were wondering who's responsible, I take responsibility" (Obama 2010e). He picks up on these words in his remarks from Grand Isle saying: "But as I said yesterday, and as I repeated in the meeting that we just left, I ultimately take responsibility for solving this crisis." The accident took place in federal waters and the scale of the damage as well as the public concerns with the issue let Obama to eventually frame the event as a national crisis. Consequently, he, as President of the U.S., needs to handle the crisis, as he argues: "I'm the President and the buck stops with me." During the aforementioned press conference on May 27, a journalist accused the government of reacting too slowly in the face of the disaster, which prompted the following response from Obama: "The day that the rig collapsed and fell to the bottom of the ocean, I had my team in the Oval Office that first day. Those who think that we were either slow on our response or lacked urgency don't know the facts. This has been our highest priority since this crisis occurred" (Obama qtd. in Condon 2010). In fact, the government immediately sent help to the region and launched a federal investigation on the causes of the explosion (cf., e.g., Avry 2010). Furthermore, on April 29, Louisiana declared a state of emergency due to the threat to the state's natural resources and on April 30, the federal government announced that no drilling would be allowed in new areas until the cause of the Deepwater Horizon accident was established. However, the President did not travel to the region up until two weeks after the explosion, nor did he deliver any major addresses in the first weeks after the spill. Some media, like the *New York Times*, additionally criticized his lack of emotion in handling the crisis (Dowd 2010). These factors might have contributed to a raising public displeasure with

Obama's handling of the disaster ("Poll: 70% Say BP Handling Oil Spill Badly"). Likely, the critical voices prompted the President to undertake a second trip to the region and deliver a speech in which he explicitly stresses his personal commitment to the cause and the urgency with which his government was allegedly taking care of the issue: "But as President of the United States, I'm going to spare no effort to respond to this crisis for as long as it continues. And we will spare no resource to clean up whatever damage is caused."

The speech is an act of balance. The President assigns blame for the oil spill to BP while simultaneously assuming responsibility for handling the aftermath of the disaster. Chiefly however, the President's words convey a proactive approach to fixing an ongoing problem: "And while there will be time to fully investigate what happened on that rig and hold responsible parties accountable, our focus now is on a fully coordinated, relentless response effort to stop the leak and prevent more damage to the Gulf." Obama stresses that the priority lies in stopping the oil in order to minimize the scale of destruction. Later, there will be time to "investigate" (again a verb often used in collocation with crime) and call the responsible parties accountable for their actions, as he claims.

Solidarity

The American people are at the center of the speech. While Obama mentions the oil spill's implications for the "ecosystem" (twice) and the "beaches" (seven times), it is always in connection with the impact of the environmental damage on "America/-n/-s" (six), "people" (eight) and their "life/lives/livelihoods" (seven) or "community/-ies" (seven). For example, the President suggests that "one of the powerful ways that *you* [American citizens] *can help* the Gulf right now is to visit the *communities* and the *beaches* off of the coast. Except for three *beaches* here in Louisiana, all of the Gulf's *beaches* at this moment are open, they are safe and they are clean." He encourages citizens to support the economy of the region by traveling. A decline in tourism would have severe repercussions on the lives of those who support themselves through this commercial sector. Obama shows himself aware of the economic implications of the spill and their effects on citizens' lives. Additionally, in August, the President spent his family vacation in the region, swimming in the ocean with his daughter to prove that it is clean and safe, after his wife Michelle Obama had publicly urged U.S. holidaymakers to support the Gulf by visiting (Luscombe 2010). This call for consumption out of national solidarity is reminiscent of Bush's call for consumerism as a sort of patriotic duty after 9/11. The fact that both Presidents, a Republican and a Democrat, encourage citizens to keep spending money during a crisis reflects not only on the importance of the economy for America as country, but also for American citizens, who are united through their codependence in consumer society.

Furthermore, Obama reflects on the acts of solidarity displayed by American citizens after the explosion and the oil spill saying:

And I want to thank everybody in this region who's rolled up their sleeves and pitched in to help – from the National Guard putting their experience to the task, to the local officials and every citizen who loves this area and calls it home, every American who's traveled to the region to lend a hand.

Next to thanking everyone so far involved in the cleanup efforts, the President encourages further civil engagement saying: “If any American is looking for ways to volunteer and help, then we’ve put links to that information on our website, as well – that’s whitehouse.gov.” Thereby, he stresses that the recovery will be a communal effort and also points to the government’s leading role in bringing the nation together by coordinating the joined efforts. On the linguistic level, Obama unites the national audience through the frequent use of the pronouns “we” (55 times) and “our” (eleven). He establishes a divide between the constructed collected body of American citizens, who suffer from the effects of the incident and attempt to mitigate it, and the guilty “them,” the company BP, responsible for the disaster: “*they*’re legally responsible for stopping the leak and *they*’re financially responsible for the enormous damage that *they*’ve created.” Furthermore, the President positions himself as a member of the American community. He implies that he “understand[s] the feelings of frustration and anger” some people in the Gulf region likely felt after the spill. Similarly, already on May 14, he sympathized with citizens’ displeasure about BP’s handling of the oil spill claiming that he has “first-hand [seen] the anger and frustration felt by our neighbors in the Gulf. And let me tell you, it is an anger and frustration that I share as President” (Obama 2010d). He becomes a part of his constructed “us” – someone that potential voters in turn can identify with, a leader who understands and shares their feelings.

The common history of the people in the region serves as an additional binding factor. Obama refers to previous “bad times” in the Gulf, alluding to Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath. He mentions a “fair share of trials and tragedy” that the people in the region had to face:

I know there have been times where you’ve wondered if you were being asked to face them alone. I am here to tell you that you’re not alone. (...) We’re going to keep at this every day until the leak has stopped, until this coastline is clean, and your communities are made whole again.

He promises that, in contrast to previous times, people in the Gulf are not going to be left alone with their problems. With his presence at the epicenter of the disaster he wants to emphasize that the federal government is taking the communal effort of solving the crisis seriously and will not abandon its citizens.

With the help of empirical methods, Mathew Hope (2011) was able to show that the oil spill was chiefly communicated as a social issue as opposed to a natural one. The researcher tested statements by Obama and the BP CEOs as well as articles from the *New York Times* to expose the dominance of a “social primary framework” (Hope 2011). I argue that this framing subconsciously prepared the audience for Obama’s later call for an energy reform, which I will discuss based on the example of his speech from June 15. While in the case of a natural disaster the government’s role boils down to minimizing the damage, a social problem within a democratic society requires deeper reforms. The government is responsible for fixing issues within society by suggesting effective policies if it does not want to lose the support of voters. The rhetorical focus on the effects of the crisis on American citizens thus already foreshadows the deliberative function of Obama’s later speeches.

Metaphors, myths, and the audience

It is striking that Obama throughout the speech uses metaphors from the military domain, like the expression “silver bullets.” He calls the spill an “*assault* on our shores, on our people, on the regional economy, and on communities” and an “injury” and refers to the cleanup efforts as a “mission.” Furthermore, the President promises to “defend” and “protect” the ecosystem and the people of the region and announces that “justice will be done” and that no one will be “left behind.” The war-like rhetorical embedment is also supported by the fact that Obama appoints the Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allan as “National Incident Commander” in charge of response efforts to the spill. He presents the spill as something that can be actively fought and opposed, just like a potential enemy can be stopped through a military campaign. The President announces “to triple the *manpower* in places where oil has *hit* the shore or is within 24 hours of *impact*.” I consider the framing problematic, as a war always requires an enemy. Obama’s narrative becomes sharper and more aggressive, as it indirectly ascribes the role of the enemy to BP. Since the event appears as a crime or an attack and not merely an unintentional, fatal accident, it suggests that the oil company was acting in bad faiths and needs to be brought to justice. While the technique can be useful in diverting attention and shifting blame for the crisis away from the government, it does not create a fruitful climate for solving problems and in fact led to some diplomatic tensions between the United States and the United Kingdom (Sánchez Mugica 2011).

It is noteworthy that Obama refers to the cleanup effort as “our mission.” The word triggers different associations. On the one hand, it is a military term that describes specific operations and consequently emphasizes the gravity of the situation. The metaphorical framing of the cleanup as a military mission continues as Obama lays out individual steps and objectives. On the other hand, it calls to mind the religiously tainted idea of American Exceptionalism. The notion of America

as a country on a mission is an inherent part of the nation's founding myth. In the seventeenth century, it united the new immigrants around a shared vision of a better future and continues to function as a sort of social glue in modern public discourses. By alluding to this myth, Obama implicitly strengthens the solidarity among those who accept the narrative. He announces:

Now, our *mission* remains the same as it has since this disaster began, since the day I visited Louisiana nearly four weeks ago: We want to stop the leak; we want to contain and clean up the oil; and we want to help the people of this region return to their lives and their livelihoods as soon as possible.

The term "mission" adds greater weight to the cleanup efforts, implying that they serve an important, higher cause. It is optimistic as its connotation to the myth of American exceptionalism carries the promise of ultimate success. Obama's message concentrates on the restoration of the status from before the crisis. It implies that prior to the spill, the people lived happily and in harmony with the environment, confirming the righteousness of their lifestyle (he does not put into question offshore drilling and the country's energy policy). The President thus does not call for a revolution, but merely wants to restore the good status from before the crisis or, as the Puritans would say, the steady mission lies in renewing the Covenant, which was disrupted through the actions of a guilty Other.

The narrative is more figurative and elaborate than has been the case in Obama's previous oil spill speeches. The President uses more emotional appeals and especially his tone towards BP becomes sharper. The change in rhetoric might have been a direct response to the critique expressed by the national media, which questioned the U.S. government's competency and sense of urgency in dealing with the crisis. Political commentators from the political Right even referred to the oil spill as President Obama's Katrina, in reference to the criticism that surrounded President George W. Bush's response following the devastating hurricane that swept through New Orleans in 2005 (Rove 2010). While mainstream media picked up the catchy phrase, they nevertheless largely distanced themselves from such comparisons (Hornick 2010).

The public's disapproval of the President's crisis management was also reflected in opinion polls. According to a Pew Research Center survey, conducted from May 6–9, 2010, only 38 percent of the respondents said they approved of Obama's handling of the oil leak while 36 percent said they disapproved ("Oil Spill Seen as Ecological Disaster"). However, BP got significantly worse ratings, with 63 percent of those surveyed describing their response as "only fair/poor." The numbers need to be handled carefully, as the President's overall job approval ratings from before and after the explosion vary only slightly (Newport 2010b). American citizens who approved of the President before the crisis largely continue to do so.

However, Obama's crisis management did not convince those who opposed his presidency prior to the oil spill; he was not able to profit from the rally around the flag phenomenon in the way Bush did after 9/11.

Conclusions

While Obama's speech from his second visit to the Gulf region after the explosion on the oilrig continues to serve an informative function, new motifs start to enter the picture. The President not only speaks of short-term actions, like stopping the leak and cleaning the shores, but also lays out a long-term strategy to help the region and mitigate the negative impact on the people and the environment. Thereby, he acknowledges the seriousness of the situation, which he calls the government's "highest priority," and elevates it to the level of a national crisis. Obama combines fear appeals, which stress the graveness of the "disaster," with hope and optimism, as he promises that the government will solve the problem. His speech shows subtle traits of Puritan mission narratives. Myths, metaphors, and the frequent use of appropriate personal pronouns have a uniting effect on the national audience and bolster social identity. Obama puts emphasis on the fact that the crisis is a national problem that the country will face together. Next to updating his audience on the cleanup efforts, the President focuses blame on BP in a more explicit manner than he did in his previous speech. He uses lexical framings from the military domain to strengthen the divide between the supposedly guilty company and the innocent people of the region who now suffer. On the metaphorical level, the spill appears as something that can be fought and opposed and not merely a higher power. Hence, the event is framed as a threat or a social problem that can be solved as opposed to a natural disaster that no one can be blamed for. Furthermore, Obama now frequently expresses emotions to demonstrate empathy with the people and to show his dissatisfaction with the cleanup progress. I argue that the change in tone can be seen as a response to the described media critique, the call for more empathy, as well as the epideictic need to explain tragic events. Obama's narrative makes sense of the events by placing the blame with the Other and praising his government's response. The speech clearly demonstrates the administration's strong commitment to the cause and depicts the President as a decisive and confident crisis manager. Obama not only demonstrates control of the situation but also directly takes on responsibility for handling the disaster, which strengthens his position as a leader. The message to the public is: the federal government is – and from the beginning was – in charge. The words stand in opposition to some media voices, which accused the government of not doing enough. The speech falls into the realm of epideictic oratory; it sets the tone and prepares the audience for deliberative speeches, which will soon follow.

3.2.3.3 *B. Obama: Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP oil spill, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., June 15, 2010*

Eight weeks after the explosion on the BP oilrig platform, on June 15, 2010, President Barack Obama delivered a nationally broadcasted address. It lasted 17 minutes and consists of 2698 words. The speech followed the President's two-day trip to three Gulf states, which were affected by the spill. During his fourth visit to the region, Obama surveyed the cleanup and oil containment efforts in Pensacola, Florida, together with Coast Guard Admiral Thad Allen. Furthermore, he traveled through Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama, the directions of the spilling oil drift. Ahead of his departure, government officials informed the public that the President would address the nation in a primetime address upon his return.

In his first speech from the Oval Office, the President touched on human, environmental, and economic aspects of the accident on the BP-operated Macondo Prospect.⁹³ The setting is symbolic, as American presidents since Harry S. Trumann traditionally chose to address the public from behind the famous presidential desk in times of national disaster (Calmes 2013).⁹⁴ Prominent examples include Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1957 address in which he announced to send troops to Little Rock to enforce school desegregation, John F. Kennedy's 1962 speech on the Cuban Missile Crisis, Ronald Reagan's remarks following the Space Shuttle Challenger disaster in 1986, or George W. Bush's Address to the Nation on the evening of September 11, 2001. Thus, already Obama's choice of setting reflects on the graveness of the issue in question. In his speech on June 15, 2010, the President updates the public on the efforts to stop the leak, stresses the long-term implications of the spill, and implicitly also promotes an ecological agenda.

Response to a deepening crisis

After 45 days of gushing oil, the devastating impact of the spill on the environment became more and more apparent; U.S. media prominently reported on the events and the effects of the accident became a matter of high public concern. On June 15, government scientists once more revised the estimated amount of oil flowing from the spill; from 35,000 to 60,000 barrels a day. Several commentators compared the environmental impacts to the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, which up until then was considered the most devastating disaster in the United States

93. Up until this point, the President preferred other setting for his speeches from the White House. Mostly, he delivered his statements standing in front of the doorway to the East Room.

94. President Harry S. Truman delivered the first Oval Office Address to the nation. In it, he urged Americans to conserve food to aid postwar Europe.

(Gill et al. 2010).⁹⁵ The public interest in the events was very high, with 87 percent of Americans following news of the oil spill closely, Gallup ranked it among the top ten most closely followed news stories since 1991 (Morales 2010). Thus, Obama must have been aware that his first complete speech on the environmental disaster would draw wide attention. The speech was all the more important as critique has been voiced with regard to the President's response to the crisis in the past weeks. According to a USA Today/ Gallup poll from June 11–13 (before the speech), the majority of Americans (71 percent) said Obama has not been tough enough in his dealings with BP (Newport 2010a). The pressure on the government grew proportionally to the size of the spill. The risk of potential losses in the upcoming midterm elections, which were just months away, was certainly on the administration's mind when the presidential trip to the Gulf and the Address to the Nation were being prepared.

Obama's narrative: Capable leadership in times of "unprecedented" crisis
Throughout the speech, Obama puts the focus on the allegedly unprecedented nature of the events and the government's supposedly effective handling of the crisis. Already in the opening paragraph, the President underlines the grave situation in which the country allegedly finds itself:

As we speak, our nation faces a multitude of *challenges*. At home, our top priority is to recover and rebuild from a recession that has touched the lives of nearly every American. Abroad, our brave men and women in uniform are taking the fight to al-Qaeda wherever it exists. And tonight, I've returned from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with you about the *battle* we're waging against an oil spill that is *assaulting our shores and our citizens*.

In a jeremiadic way, he thus laments the current, desolate state of affairs. According to the President, the major "challenges" of the time are the economic recession, the war against al-Qaeda, and the oil spill. By mentioning the three issues one right after the other he puts them on the same level. Indirectly, he thereby also establishes a connection between an ecological disaster and war, which he further strengthens through the use of vocabulary from the military domain. Obama speaks of a "battle" against the oil spill that is "assaulting our shores and our citizens." The war framing implies that the oil spill, or those who are responsible for it, can and should be fought and eventually will be defeated.

95. Interestingly, George H. W. Bush did not travel the affected region; he did not deliver a presidential address (there is thus no speech to compare) nor did he present the crisis as a presidential priority. Nevertheless, the media did not focus blame for the catastrophe on him, as many did with the Obama administration after the BP oil spill.

While he acknowledges problems the country is facing, Obama simultaneously praises his government's reaction to the crisis. He describes the situation as extremely difficult and incomparable to any prior disasters, "there has never been a leak this size at this depth." Consequently, according to the presidential narrative, it is only natural that such an immense crisis "has tested the limits of human technology" and is taking some time to be solved. Obama uses a simile from the illness domain to put into focus the long-term implications of the crisis, which still continues: "[U]nlike an earthquake or a hurricane, it's not a single event that does its damage in a matter of minutes or days. The millions of gallons of oil that have spilled into the Gulf of Mexico are more like an *epidemic*, one that we will be fighting for months and even years." The spill is thus compared to a rapidly spreading infectious disease, which already caused some irreversible damage and whose effects can now only be mitigated. Still, the President assures the public that he immediately implemented appropriate counteractions to reduce the damage as far as possible: "just after the rig sank, I assembled a team of our nation's best scientists and engineers to tackle this challenge – a team led by Dr. Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and our nation's Secretary of Energy." Obama adds legitimacy to his adopted strategy stressing that he advised experts from science, academia, and the industry to come up with the best solution: "Scientists at our national labs and experts from academia and other oil companies have also provided ideas and advice." Furthermore, the President stresses that the cleanup efforts are "led by Admiral Thad Allen, who has almost 40 years of experience responding to disasters." Thereby, he presents himself as a capable crisis manager who admits that he does not have all the answers, but knows how to profit from available resources and delegate tasks. Not acting alone, he assumes a democratic approach to resolving difficult situations and additionally shares the responsibility with others involved in the cleanup efforts: "I'm happy to look at other ideas and approaches from either party." His words imply that no one could have solved the crisis in a faster way than his administration is doing it at that moment. No one presented better solutions although, as he points out, he always was and remains open to suggestions. Obama also lists first positive results, which his strategy brought about: "As a result of these efforts, we've directed BP to mobilize additional equipment and technology. And in the coming weeks and days, these efforts should capture up to 90 percent of the oil leaking out of the well." While he acknowledges that the problem of the leaking oil has not yet been solved, he confidently announces that a final solution will soon be reached as planned: "This is until the company finishes drilling a relief well later in the summer that's expected to stop the leak completely." After the speech, the President additionally responded to reporter's questions. The first journalist asked: "Mr. President, how confident are you that it will be – that the leak will be plugged soon?" Obama replied: "All I can say is that

we've got the best minds working on it and we're going to keep on at it until we get it plugged." Again, he does not say that the problem will be solved immediately but rather stresses the collective efforts of "the best minds" and promises that the work will be continued until the leak is plugged. The answer is emblematic for the style of the speech: Obama takes on executive responsibility of the disaster manager in chief and concentrates on the strategy of solving the crisis.

The "battle plan"

The President uses the speech to lay out a "battle plan," which consists of three parts. First of all, Obama mentions what his administration is "doing to clean up the oil." Secondly, he concentrates on the efforts "to help our neighbors in the Gulf." And thirdly, he elaborates on what is being done "to make sure that a catastrophe like this never happens again."

With regard to the cleanup, Obama stresses that already "from the very beginning of this crisis, the federal government has been in charge of the largest environmental cleanup effort in our nation's history." He elaborates on the scale of the operation in which "nearly 30,000 personnel" and "[t]housands of ships and other vessels" participated. The President announces that he has "authorized the deployment of over 17,000 National Guard members along the coast" and urges "the governors in the affected states to activate these troops as soon as possible." Furthermore, he talks about specific measures and their first successes: "millions of gallons of oil have already been removed from the water through burning, skimming and other collection methods. Over five and a half million feet of boom has been laid across the water to block and absorb the approaching oil." The use of the passive voice adds a scientific, allegedly objective tone to the narrative (Bonnefille 2013: 34–55). Additionally, Obama does not spare technical details to put into focus the supposedly unique nature of the crisis, which consequently demands tailored solutions: "We've approved the construction of new barrier islands in Louisiana to try to stop the oil before it reaches the shore, and we're working with Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida to implement creative approaches to their unique coastlines." Like in his prior speeches, the President promises that the government will "offer whatever additional resources and assistance our coastal states may need," confirming the spill as a top priority and promising that "[i]f there are problems in the operation, we will fix them."

Nevertheless, Obama also acknowledges that "despite our best efforts" the oil has caused damage to the "coastline and its wildlife." Therefore, the second part of his plan includes a strategy for "the recovery and restoration of the Gulf Coast." He mentions the negative impact of the environmental disaster on the lives of people in the region, like shrimpers and fishermen and hoteliers, and announces the establishment of a state-controlled compensation fund. Additionally to these

short-term relief actions, the President speaks of the need for “a long-term plan to restore the unique beauty and bounty of this region.” He recalls that the Gulf suffered from multiple disasters prior to the spill, like the hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and was never fully able to recover. This time, he promises, everything will be different. Obama makes a personal commitment to extend help beyond the “crisis of the moment” and announces that he has already appointed “Ray Mabus, the Secretary of the Navy [...] to develop a long-term Gulf Coast Restoration Plan as soon as possible.” He stresses that Mabus is “a former governor of Mississippi and a son of the Gulf Coast” and thus presents him as especially suited for the task.

The third part of the presidential “battle plan” is a call for reform of the country’s energy policy. The issue is at the center of the speech. Obama questions U.S. dependence on oil and gas, presenting it as the root of the accident and a potential source of further environmental disasters. He announces that change is necessary “to ensure that a disaster like this does not happen again.” The following day, former Vice President Al Gore picked up and perpetuated the presidential message. In a statement delivered in his function as Chairman of the Alliance for Climate Protection, Gore complimented Obama on his speech and agreed that, in fact, “the only way to prevent this type of tragedy from happening again is to fundamentally change how we power our economy” (Gore 2010). Moreover, U.S. media widely reported on the fact that the speech was intended to urge actions on a clean energy bill.

In order to fully understand the context and impact of Obama’s Oval Office Address, it remains important to remember that early on in his term, the President highlighted offshore drilling as a crucial component of the country’s energy policy. Shortly before the spill, on March 31, 2010, he announced a plan for exploitation of offshore oil reserves (cf. Obama 2010a). Greenpeace then referred to the President’s actions as “a decision to endanger our coastal ecosystems with the risk of catastrophic oil spills” (*Greenpeace USA Blog* 2010). According to the *New York Times*, since taking office, the Obama administration approved 346 oil-drilling plans without securing permits required by law from the federal agency that assesses environmental impacts (Urbina 2010). Obama, who must have been well aware of the widespread critique of his drilling legislation, explains in his address that he only “approved a proposal to consider new, limited offshore drilling under the assurance that it would be absolutely safe.” In the next sentence, he admits that evidently something went wrong: “That obviously was not the case in the Deepwater Horizon rig, and I want *to know why*. The American people deserve *to know why*. The families I met with last week who lost their loved ones in the explosion – these families deserve *to know why*.” The epiphora lends emphasis to the question on the causes of the accident and the phrasing additionally connects the President, the families of the victims, and the American people in their allegedly shared efforts to and prevent further disasters. However, Obama does not question

his administrative decisions but rather concentrates on the question “why?” He is thus looking for flaws in the implementation of his decisions, which he continues to present as accurate. Proactively, he elaborates on concrete actions, which he has already undertaken to find out how the accident could have happened: “And so I’ve established a National Commission to understand the causes of this disaster and offer recommendations on what additional safety and environmental standards we need to put in place.” The recommendation of the Commission is intended to serve as a blue print for new regulations, as he implies. For now however, the only specific measure he announces is “a six-month moratorium on deepwater drilling.” While Obama shows himself aware of the problems such a moratorium causes in terms of jobs, “I know this creates difficulty for the people who work on these rigs,” he simultaneously insists that it is absolutely necessary for the sake of a higher good: “but for the sake of their safety, and for the sake of the entire region, we need to know the facts before we allow deepwater drilling to continue.” Again, he does not present himself as omnipotent but rather relies on the expertise of specialists of whom he expects to do their “work thoroughly and impartially.” He admits that, in the past, mistakes have been made, specifically criticizing corruption in the Minerals Management Service, “the agency in charge of regulating drilling and issuing permits.” Above all, he blames past administrations for the fact that “[o]ver the last decade, this agency has become emblematic of a failed philosophy that views all regulation with hostility,” a system in which “[o]il companies showered regulators with gifts and favors, and were essentially allowed to conduct their own safety inspections and write their own regulations.” Obama claims that the staff that he appointed after coming into office was, from the beginning, working on correcting the corrupt system. He admits that these efforts were moving too slowly since the problem turned out to be much deeper than expected. Therefore, he now decided to put “Michael Bromwich, who was a tough federal prosecutor and Inspector General” in charge of the agency in order “to build an organization that acts as the oil industry’s *watchdog* – not its partner.” The metaphor of a watchdog illustrates the planned tougher and more aggressive course of actions towards the oil industry. When it comes to proximization strategies, the axiological element comes into play. As the above quotes illustrate, negative values like “corruption” are assigned to the “oil industry” as well as its “lobbyists” but also some political actors who appear as the responsible parties for the “catastrophe” and its devastating “impact.” Theses ODCs stand in opposition to ordinary Americans, who are constructed as the ‘real’ entity that now suffers from their (in-)actions (Cap 2017: 42).

Obama presents his call for clean energy as a consequent “lessons” from the spill. The following paragraph is quintessential for the way he frames his changing approach to oil:

So one of the lessons we've learned from this spill is that we need better regulations, better safety standards, and better enforcement when it comes to offshore drilling. But a larger lesson is that no matter how much we improve our regulation of the industry, drilling for oil these days entails greater risk. After all, oil is a finite resource. We consume more than 20 percent of the world's oil, but have less than 2 percent of the world's oil reserves. And that's part of the reason oil companies are drilling a mile beneath the surface of the ocean – because we're running out of places to drill on land and in shallow water.

The President explicitly states that the deeper problem behind the spill lies in America's dependence on oil. While he remains vague on how to achieve a change towards clean energy, he paints the picture of oil as a threat to national security. He criticizes former administrations' "lack of political courage and candor" to meet the challenge earlier, implying that it led to the present catastrophe. The time to act is "now" (the word appears ten times), as Obama insists, using the spill as the symbolic straw that broke the camel's back: "The tragedy unfolding on our coast is the most painful and powerful reminder yet that the time to embrace a clean energy future is *now*." He warns that America is falling behind countries like China who "are investing in clean energy jobs and industries that should be right here in America." His message implies that the change away from oil and gas will, in the long run, also be economically profitable. It will free America from its dependence on foreign resources ("Each day, we send nearly \$1 billion of our wealth to foreign countries for their oil.") and it will create new jobs at home. The President calls the dependence on fossil fuels "America's century-long addiction." The word "addiction" has negative connotations; it is often used in collocation with drugs. Those who are addicted lose control over their lives, as they are permanently acting to appease their craving. Addiction leads to obsession and is ultimately unhealthy for body and soul. As he frames the events with the help of the conceptual metaphor Fossil Fuel Dependence is Addiction, the President implies that America's dependence on oil and gas destroys the land (e.g. negative environmental effects of drilling, emission leads to high ozone pollution etc.) and has a negative impact on government decisions and policies (e.g. the cooperation with countries which violate human rights, as defined by the United Nations Declaration).

On one hand, Obama's call for reform is directed towards a general American public.⁹⁶ He directly addresses "the nation" already in the first paragraph of his speech: "As we speak, *our nation* faces a multitude of challenges. (...) I've returned

96. As I discuss in my previous chapters, the American public is a highly heterogeneous group and the expression "general American public" is thus problematic or at least refers to a construct. I want to stress that the President attempts to reach as many citizens as possible through the use of terms like "our nation," "our country," or "we".

from a trip to the Gulf Coast to speak with *you* about the battle we're waging against an oil spill that is assaulting *our shores and our citizens*." The President appeals to the emotions of people who have been watching pictures of devastated beaches, polluted water, and dying animals in the past weeks. These images triggered fear and concern in the minds of many U.S. citizens (cf., e.g., Farrell 2014: 482–506). Obama's speech perpetuates the anxiety of further environmental disasters, suggesting that the "threat" will persist as long as the country continues to rely on oil and gas as the main energy resources. On the other hand, the call for reform is directed toward members of Congress, who can play the role of "mediators of change," fulfilling a deliberative function in society (Bitzer 1968: 7). Both, the House of Representatives and the Senate, had opposed some of Obama's proposed climate change and energy legislation, like cutting carbon solution. In his Oval Office Address, the President uses the accident to pressure politicians to accept his suggested changes towards a cleaner energy future, implying that whoever refuses to act now, will be responsible for any further disasters in the future. Clearly, both audiences, the wide American public and the members of Congress, are strongly connected to each other. If Obama succeeds at convincing the masses to follow his call for an energy reform, Republicans will be less keen on openly opposing appropriate changes in the legislation process, since that might cost them votes in the next elections. And if he succeeds at winning over a majority in the House of Representatives and the Senate, he will have the necessary votes to pass new laws. Furthermore, a bipartisan support would, in the long run, make it easier to win over the majority of citizens. In order to convince skeptics in both groups, the President directly addresses some concerns, showing that he is well aware of problems that might accompany the transition: "Now, there are costs associated with this transition. And there are some who believe that we can't afford those costs right now." At the same time, he argues that the change is nonetheless necessary: "I say we can't afford not to change how we produce and use energy – because the long-term costs to our economy, our national security, and our environment are far greater." While the topic and context differ, some parallels can be drawn to the proximization discourse of anti-terrorism (Cap 2017: 44). Obama constructs the reliance on oil as a clear and tangible threat. The oil spill demonstrated the vulnerability of IDC entities. The threat – emanating from outside the deictic center – continues and if no counteractions are taken immediately (in the form of reforms), the consequences could be even more devastating. As the dangers for the U.S. (and the world, since the impact of environmental catastrophes is in many cases global) extend into the future, "now" is the appropriate time to act preventively.

The President connects the environmental dimension of clean energy to security issues and the economy, thereby adding political importance to the

topic. Not changing anything will produce way greater costs in the mentioned areas, as he argues. Obama paints a positive vision of “a new future that will benefit all of us.” He promises that “[a]s [America] recover[s] from this recession, the transition to clean energy has the potential to grow our economy and create millions of jobs.” Meanwhile, he warns his national audience that this will only happen “if we accelerate that transition.” Moreover, the President assures his citizens that the transition is realistically manageable and, in fact, has already begun. Specifically, he mentions that, as a candidate for office, he “laid out a set of principles that would move our country towards energy independence” and that “[l]ast year, the House of Representatives acted on these principles by passing a strong and comprehensive energy and climate bill – a bill that finally makes clean energy the profitable kind of energy for America’s businesses.” Thus, Obama’s words do not announce a revolutionary change in policies; the President seemingly only urges the American public and the members of Congress to continue the good work and to speed up transformation processes towards a cleaner energy sector.

In a typically jeremiadic way, he presents his call as a mere continuation and intensification of prior efforts, a consequent next step in the country’s “national mission.” As discussed in previous chapters, the jeremiad is an instrument for social stability rather than revolution. Consequently, it is the appropriate rhetorical tool for leaders who want to stay in power and confirm their authority. Obama’s speech confirms him as a capable leader, also in a time of crisis. I argue that he exploits the disaster to push his environmental cause. The President claims to have taken the right political actions in the past and assures his audience that he has a clear vision for the future, which will help to end the ongoing crisis. To gain legitimacy for his leadership, he needs to present the critical situation as not caused by his administration. To that end, Obama focuses blame for the accident on BP in a way stronger manner than he did in his prior speeches.

The blame game: BP as the guilty other

In his speech, the President displays increasing anger over BP’s handling of the oil spill. He lets his audience know that he has taken decisive actions towards the company, which he identifies as the responsible party for the accident. Obama announces that his administration has “directed BP to mobilize additional equipment and technology.” The verb “to direct” projects strong leadership; it shows that the President is the one in charge of telling BP what to do. Furthermore, Obama stresses that his government “will make BP *pay* for the damage their company has caused” and that “BP will *pay* for the impact this spill has had on the region.” The verb “pay” appears twice, in reference to the company’s financial responsibilities. The President is very explicit in assigning blame to BP. Not only does he

hold the company accountable for the cleanup of the Gulf of Mexico, but also calls for the restoration of the region's economy and a reimbursement for those mostly affected. The reimbursement plan, as he announces, will start with the establishment of a special fund:

Tomorrow, I will meet with the chairman of BP and inform him that he is to set aside whatever resources are required to compensate the workers and business owners who have been *harmed* as a result of his company's *recklessness*. And this fund will not be controlled by BP.

The word "recklessness" is a direct attack on the company's dividend policy and implies that greed let to the fatal accident, while the verb "harm" subtly implies deliberation and victimizes workers and business owners in the region. The words thus introduce a polarization process between the allegedly guilty and innocent.

While he did not escape criticism, President Obama fared better than the chief executive of BP. According to opinion polls conducted by the Pew Research Center, the main critique directed towards the President in the weeks following the explosion on the oil platform concerned his perceived lack of vigor when dealing with BP ("BP Fared Worse than Obama White House"). A vast majority of U.S. citizens wished for a more decisive course when it came to holding the company accountable for the damage. Thousands participated in dozens of protests at BP gas stations and other locations and protested against the company via social media, e.g. the Facebook page "Boycott BP" had over 688,500 "likes" by June 22, 2010 (Wheaton 2010). In the media narrative about the oil spill, BP and its CEO Tony Hayward were largely portrayed as the villains of the story. In an article for the *New Yorker*, journalist Raffi Khatchadourian convincingly describes oil spills as emotional events "saturated in blame and political confusion – and opportunity" (2011). He further claims that "[t]here is a sense that they are not accidents but accidents waiting to happen, and thus acts of greed. As a result, oil-soaked birds and fish come to symbolize a reviled industry's heedless behavior (ibid)." Following his line of argumentation, many citizens might have presumably perceived the fatal explosion and its aftermaths as effects of human greed and failure. This in turn caused anger and the urge to identify the responsible party and prevent further damage in the future. In the case of an accidental explosion on an American oilrig, either federal regulations or the operator were likely to be blamed. The way Obama increases the pressure on BP in his Oval Office Address can be read as a response to his domestic audience's supposed expectations. Further, the approach protects his administration from blame. The language is more poignant than in his prior speeches. With the help of numerous lexical references from the war domain he paints the oil spill rather as a military battle than an environmental disaster. He describes the disaster as a "battle we're waging against an oil spill that

is assaulting our shores and our citizens.” The word “fight/-ing” appears four times and the word “battle” twice. Words like “siege,” “latest blow,” or “troops” lend a tough, military-like tone to the address.

The press in the United Kingdom strongly criticized what it described as Obama’s “anti-British rhetoric” (Neil 2010). The fact that the President in several statements referred to the company as “British Petroleum,” a name that was changed into BP more than ten years earlier, after the merger with America’s Amoco, caused a wide uproar. Some yellow press reporters concluded that Obama wanted to present the spill as caused by “evil foreigners,” if only to hide his own administration’s inadequate response to the crisis (Neil 2010). The *Financial Times* urged the President to “stop treating BP as a hostile and alien entity” (“US Must Hit Reset Button with BP”). In order not to jeopardize U.K.–U.S. relations, Obama backed up in his rhetoric after the criticism. In his speech on June 15, he uniformly refers to the company as BP. Furthermore, the President personally assured Prime Minister Cameron that his BP criticism was not about nationality (“BP Criticism Not about Nationality”). Although the processes of Othering in Obama’s oratory are not as explicit as in Bush’s post 9/11 war rhetoric, the fact that they were widely commented on reflects on their importance. It can be assumed that they had an effect on the audience’s perception of the company’s role in the disaster.

Constructing social identity

The President distances himself from BP, which he presents as the guilty Other. He focuses the blame for the accident as well as all mistakes and problems in the cleanup efforts on “them” (BP and the oil industry) in order to show that his administration did not cause this crisis but also to strengthen the solidarity within the United States. In several ways, Obama positions himself as part of the social group affected by the spill – the immediate victims in the Gulf Coast region and more broadly the American nation. The personal pronoun “we” appears 60 times throughout the speech, which on the linguistic level promotes feelings of unity among U.S. citizens who allegedly are all affected by the crisis. Furthermore, the President stresses the solidarity among Americans who are helping each other in these difficult times: “These servicemen and women are ready to *help* stop the oil from coming ashore, they’re ready to *help* clean the beaches, train response workers, or even *help* with processing claims.” Positively connoted words with a high degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L., like “help” or “together,” strengthen the message. Additionally, the words “nation” (seven times), “people” (seven times), “national” (five times), and “citizens” (twice) put into focus the public dimension of the crisis as well as its human aspects. Kiewe pointedly defines crisis as “a term that is ostensibly dramatic and that, by its very definition, is used to unite people around a plot and a narrative” (1998:81). Typically

of crisis rhetoric, President Obama bolsters feelings of unity and appeals to constructions of a shared American social identity in opposition to a guilty Other (Ahmed 2004: 111).⁹⁷ The cleanup, the recovery, and the necessary transition to clean energy will be a communal effort of all Americans, as the President suggests:

Each of us has a part to play in a new future that will benefit *all of us*. As we *recover* from this recession, the transition to clean energy has the potential to grow our economy and create millions of jobs – but only if we accelerate that transition. (...) And only if *we rally together and act as one nation* – workers and entrepreneurs; scientists and citizens; the public and private sectors.

Obama stresses the role of the individual in ending the crisis and lists different social groups who need to act together, as he claims. Moreover, he refers to different members of his team like “Dr. Steven Chu, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and our nation’s Secretary of Energy,” “Admiral Thad Allen, who has almost 40 years of experience responding to disasters,” or “Ray Mabus, the Secretary of the Navy.” Thereby, he lends a face or rather several faces to the allegedly communal American cleanup efforts, which facilitates identification processes. In contrast to that, BP does not appear as an active agent in mitigating the damage but rather as an abstract, uniform mass, which continues making mistakes and needs to be supervised by the administration. When the President refers to the company, he assigns them a passive role in the cleanup. He announces that his government has “directed BP to mobilize additional equipment” and that he “will meet with the chairman of BP and inform him” what he has to do. Additionally, Obama mentions that the “[compensation] fund will not be controlled by BP” and promises that “[w]e will make BP pay for the damage.” All these sentences imply a lack of initiative and competence on the side of the company, which cannot be trusted after having caused the accident. The active agent in this narrative is the Obama administration, which needs to supervise all actions and which is supported in its tasks by U.S. citizens.

Additionally, the President puts the focus on the supposedly harmonious, Garden of Eden like relationships between nature and men, which was now distorted by the actions of an outsider: “[F]or generations, men and women who call this region home have made their living from the water. That living is now in jeopardy. I’ve talked to shrimpers and fishermen who don’t know how they’re going to support their families this year.” He implies that it was the “recklessness” of BP, which jeopardized these lifestyles. Obama shows himself close to his citizens when he recalls that he met with “[t]he families [...] who lost their loved ones” and had

97. As Ahmed observes, the slide from private to national, from “I” to “we,” involves “both adherence (sticking to the nation) as well as coherence (sticking together)” (Ahmed 2004: 111).

personal conversations with people in the region. He thus positively differentiates his belonging to the in-group of the American nation from that of the out-group of BP. The President's words suggest that he understands the feelings of the people in the region: "The sadness and the anger they feel is not just about the money they've lost. It's about a wrenching anxiety that their way of life may be lost." In his crisis narrative, Americans in the Gulf do not only feel "sadness and [...] anger" because of the material losses they suffered, but also because their "way of life" is being threatened. Obama's words add a patriotic element to the problem. The spill is not only "assaulting our shores" but also "our citizens" and "their way of life," as he claims. The speech thus carries an implicit call to unite and collectively protect an American lifestyle that is allegedly being threatened by the Other. To project the seriousness of the situation, the President uses fear-arousing words, which have a very low degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L., like "damage" (four times) or "disaster" (three times). In an apocalyptic way, he announces that "an entire way of life [is] being threatened by a menacing cloud of black crude." He uses and rhetorically promotes the fear of further damage to nature and people in order to promote change. Specifically, he argues that an energy reform is necessary "to ensure that a disaster like this does not happen again." The disaster is again largely interpreted in social terms and the suffering of American citizens is at the center of the speech.

Civil religious rhetoric and community renewal

Furthermore, the President appeals to his audience on the emotional level, showing compassion for the people most affected by the spill. He refers to the long-standing traditions of the Gulf in an attempt to unite citizens around visions of a shared past. Denise Bostdorff argues that presidents "often turn to the resources of memoria or shared recollections of the past" in order "to explain an event, renew community, and demonstrate leadership" (2011:296–323). When troubling events occur, "epideictic rhetors may be especially tempted to draw on collective memories as a way of uniting an audience that is highly fragmented both demographically and attitudinally" (ibid.: 305). In fact, Obama recalls prior crisis, which people in the region experienced ("And the region still hasn't recovered from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.") and thus engages his domestic audience in collective remembering. He goes even further back in history and describes ceremonies that were brought "to America long ago by fishing immigrants from Europe." Specifically, he refers to a ritual called the "Blessing of the Fleet," which the region's fishermen participate in at the beginning of the shrimp season. Obama elaborates on the routine: "[T]oday it's a celebration where clergy from different religions gather to say a prayer for the safety and success of the men and women who will soon head out to sea – some for weeks at a time." Catholic

European settlers introduced this tradition to the Mississippi Gulf Coast. A blessing from the local priest was meant to ensure a safe and bountiful season to the local fishing communities. Today, most famously Darien and Brunswick (Georgia), Jacksonville (Florida), and Biloxi (Mississippi) organize large-scale festivals to celebrate the occasion, attracting many tourists to the region. It remains an important community celebration, as most longtime natives of the region have deep ties to the seafood industry. While they may no longer work in the business, the ceremony gives the participants a chance to celebrate the profession that brought their ancestors to the Gulf Coast. As Obama remarks: “The ceremony goes on in good times and in bad. It took place after Katrina, and it took place a few weeks ago – at the beginning of the most difficult season these fishermen have ever faced.” Even at the moment of the ongoing crisis, the longstanding tradition is still continued, as the President emphasizes:

And still, they came and they prayed. For as a priest and former fisherman once said of the tradition, “The blessing is not that God has promised to remove all obstacles and dangers. The blessing is that He is with us always,” a blessing that’s granted “even in the midst of the storm.”

In the past as today, “in good times and in bad,” the blessing ceremony reflected and continues to reflect on the shared, religiously derived values within the community, as Obama suggests. Additionally, the President attempts to give courage to the people of the region, recalling that times of crisis have been overcome in the past:

The oil spill is not the last crisis America will face. This nation has known hard times before and we will surely know them again. What sees us through – what has always seen us through – is our strength, our resilience, and our unyielding *faith* that something better awaits if we summon the courage to reach for it. Tonight we *pray* for that courage. We *pray* for the people of the Gulf. And we *pray* that a hand may guide us through the storm toward a brighter day.

The reference to “hard times” in the past endorses the credibility of his vision of the future. Obama’s words include a promise that better times will come: If Americans unite, they will be able to face these new challenges just as they did in the past. He assures his audience that “[e]ach of us has a part to play in a new future that will benefit all of us.” The President spreads hope with the help of religiously loaded rhetoric. The word “faith” appears three times, “pray/-er/-ed” five times, and “God” three times. Obama also mentions “clergy of different religions,” however, he does not stress, as he did e.g. in his Inaugural Address (2009a), that his speech is also directed to atheists. The announced change in energy policy is framed as a “national mission.” Crisis functions as a “reminder” and a “challenge” (five times) from which “lessons” (twice) can be learned. The

missionary framing gives meaning to the difficult crisis – it functions as a motor for renewal and change:

The tragedy unfolding on our coast is the most painful and powerful reminder yet that the time to embrace a clean energy future is now. Now is the moment for this generation to embark on a *national mission* to unleash America's innovation and seize control of our own *destiny*.

The President suggests that the country received a warning and needs to act “now” in order to “seize control” of its implied Manifest Destiny. Furthermore, Obama compares the nation to a fishing boat and concludes his speech with a prayer: “We pray that a hand may guide us through the storm towards a brighter day.” The words acknowledge human helplessness in the face of obstacles and dangers. They are well suited for situations in which humans have limited control of their future – like fisherman on small boats depending on the alleged mercy of the ocean. But is the analogy appropriate for an oilrig accident? Through the use of the storm metaphor, Obama annihilates the distinctions between natural and unnatural disasters and thus downplays human responsibility for the crisis. The wording is reminiscent of Bush's characterization of post-Katrina damage to the Gulf as a “natural disaster,” which also minimized the element of human responsibility for the devastation. It supposedly offers an excuse to the government for not having stopped the leak yet, as it implies that solving the crisis lies also in God's hands.

While Obama's speech concentrates on the future and presents possible ways of mastering problems, it attempts to draw legitimization from the past. The President uses American history to show the oil spill crisis as yet another challenge that the country needs to face. He establishes direct parallels to historical events which were presented as impossible before they actually happened, in order to show that this new difficult crisis will also be solved:

The one answer I will not settle for is the idea that this challenge is somehow too big and too difficult to meet. You know, the same thing was said about our ability to produce enough planes and tanks in World War II. The same thing was said about our ability to harness the science and technology to land a man safely on the surface of the moon.

His words reflect on a self-image of America as a special, accomplished country and rhetorically define Obama's version of a national character. Above all, he stresses the determination and the capacity to shape the country's “destiny” – core elements to the myth of American exceptionalism:

And yet, time and again, we have refused to settle for the paltry limits of conventional wisdom. Instead, what has defined us as a nation since our founding is the capacity to shape our destiny – our determination to fight for the

America we want for our children. Even if we're unsure exactly what that looks like. Even if we don't yet know precisely how we're going to get there. We know we'll get there.

Faith and resilience appear as essential components of the national character; Obama states: "It's a *faith in the future* that sustains us as a people. It is that same *faith* that sustains our neighbors in the Gulf right now." He constructs a shared heritage through civil-religious rhetoric and national myth in order to unite his domestic audience around a vision of a shared (reinvented) identity and a shared better future. Condit argues that "community renews its conception of itself and of what is good by explaining what it has previously held to be good and by working through the relationships of those past values and beliefs to new situations" (Condit 1985:289). She sees the role of epideictic speakers in helping "discover what the event means to the community, and what the community will come to be in the face of the new event" (ibid.:289). In fact, in Obama's narrative around the Deepwater Horizon oilrig catastrophe, his suggested change towards a cleaner energy policy appears as a consequent next step in fulfilling the country's allegedly exceptional destiny.

To conclude on the President's use of religious rhetoric in his Remarks to the Nation, it is striking that Christian vocabulary as well as religious allusions and myths play a more prominent role than in his discussed prior oil spill speeches or, as a matter of fact, in most other political speeches delivered by the President. Looking for conventional rhetoric of religion in Obama's remarks, Nathan Crick came to the conclusion that most can be found in his autobiographical accounts (2012:1–15). In *The Audacity of Hope*, the President recalls how he came to join Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ and specifically mentions his conversion experience: "I felt God's spirit beckoning me. I submitted myself to His will, and dedicated myself to discovering His truth" (Obama 2008:208). During the 2008 Presidential campaign, Obama's personal faith and his association with the controversial Rev. Wright were widely debated, which reflects on the importance of religion in contemporary American political life. Nevertheless, in contrast to most other American presidents, Obama has largely refrained from integrating language traditionally categorized as religious into his rhetorical ethos (Crick 2012:1–15).⁹⁸ With regard to this aspect, the Oval Office speech marks a change in style.

98. This does not mean that Obama did not use civil religious appeals in his prior speeches e.g. during the presidential campaign. However, these appeals were not as explicitly connected to Christian faiths as in the case of other American presidents (Crick 2012).

The deliberative function of the speech – An ecological jeremiad?

The ultimate deliberative function of Obama's first Oval Office Speech lies in promoting energy reform in the United States. The President puts into focus or maybe even *exaggerates* or *constructs* the grave nature of the crisis calling it "the worst environmental disaster America has ever faced" and stressing that "no matter how much we improve our regulation of the industry, drilling for oil these days entails greater risk" in order to spread fear and present substantial and difficult policy changes as the only way out. Scholars who are critical of what they describe as an "ecological apocalypse," accuse certain environmental texts of purposefully exaggerating to the point of alarmism in order to push a cause (cf., e.g., Bailey 1993; Simon 1995: 19–23). In fact, the rhetorical technique of exaggeration can fulfill a persuasive function. As Killingsworth and Palmer convincingly argue, if the "predicted devastation is extreme in the apocalyptic narrative, then the change in consciousness of political agenda are commended by the narrator is correspondingly extreme or radical" (1996: 41). Accordingly, it can be helpful for the President to present the threat as imminent in order to introduce substantial, demanding changes in policy.

It was a major imperative for the President, as leader of a heterogeneous democratic country, to "frame [his] positions in ways that would be meaningful for audience members with different interests and needs" (Makau & Marty 2001: 165–745). To unite his diverse audience around a common cause, Obama uses the nation's shared experience, its history, and national myths as a sort of social glue. These symbolic structures help him rhetorically construct collective values and redefine conceptions of the citizen's role in U.S. society in a way that suits his policies. I argue that Obama's narrative of an ecological crisis influences the permanently "ongoing process" of shaping national identities (Anderson 1983: 129), conveniently presenting clean energy technology as a quintessentially American development. Obama stresses the individual citizen's role in promoting and supporting the change ("Each of us has a part to play in a new future that will benefit all of us."), which will not only end the ongoing crisis but ultimately also lead to the country's greater self-sufficiency ("move our country towards energy independence") and economic success ("the transition to clean energy has the potential to grow our economy and create millions of jobs."). The focus of the speech is on the economic aspects of the transition; Obama points out that while it is associated with costs it will, in the long run, be also profitable for individuals, businesses, and the entire country. The address does not call for an extreme change in lifestyle; it fits into a broader discourse of ecological modernization. Obama does not question the consumption of energy per se but only criticizes specific modes of its production, which he considers dangerous. Again, the President does not call for a revolution but merely for reform. It is a plea to "accelerate"

the ongoing process of change towards “a clean energy future.” On a side note, he also stresses the importance of energy-efficiency: “people are going back to work installing energy-efficient windows, and small businesses are making solar panels. Consumers are buying more efficient cars and trucks, and families are making their homes more energy-efficient.” While the words praise the efforts for more efficiency, they simultaneously implicitly criticize those who do not participate in them. Admittedly, this critique is very subtle compared to the one encapsulated in classical, inbound Puritan jeremiads. Nonetheless, the speech also includes a call for a change within American society; it is jeremiadic in the way it urges people to repent before it is too late. While Obama blames an outside force, BP, for the explosion, he also looks at the roots of the problem and sees American society in the responsibility to change its energy policy in order to prevent further catastrophes. Furthermore, the call for a restoration of the allegedly harmonious relationship with the environment, “a long-term plan to *restore* the unique beauty and bounty of this region,” is reminiscent of Covenant Renewal rhetoric, in which Puritan ministers called parishioners to go back to the idealized version the Covenant allegedly had in the past.

On the linguistic level, the President’s use of terms like “plan” (five times) or “process” supports a sense of continuity in his policies (Bonnefille 2013:42).⁹⁹ He claims to have a clear vision for the future of the country, which he is allegedly implementing step by step in order to not only solve the current crisis but also to prevent future ones. In contrast to numerous Republican politicians who in their rhetoric embraced offshore drilling as a sort of new American frontier, Obama publicly emphasized that he never joined in on the slogan “drill, baby, drill,”¹⁰⁰ pointing to the limits to offshore expansionism (qtd. in “Obama Oil Spill Commission’s Final Report” 2011). From the Oval Office, he announces first actions, in form of a drilling moratorium, but mainly focuses on long-term

99. With regard to this aspect, Obama’s word use is similar to the one in Bush’s Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina from Sept. 15, 2005.

100. The slogan “Drill, baby, drill!” was first used at the 2008 Republican National Convention by Michael Steele, a former Maryland Lieutenant Governor, and was then frequently picked up by Republicans during the 2008 presidential campaign. E.g. during the vice presidential debate Joe Biden, referring to the energy crisis and McCain’s 20 votes against funding solar and wind energy, stated that the Republican candidate thinks “the only answer is drill, drill, drill. Drill we must, but it will take 10 years for one drop of oil to come out of any of the wells that are going to be drilled.” Palin then famously responded: “The chant is ‘drill, baby, drill.’ And that’s what we hear all across this country in our rallies because people are so hungry for those domestic sources of energy to be tapped into” (“Full Vice Presidential Debate”).

implications and goals. The President only vaguely outlines in which direction the country should go, leaving room for debate: “All of these approaches have merit, and deserve a fair hearing in the months ahead.” While he shows openness with regard to the *modus operandi*, Obama optimistically assures his audience that Americans will collectively shape the “America we want for our children. Even if we’re unsure exactly what that looks like. Even if we don’t yet know precisely how we’re going to get there. We know we’ll get there.” The element of fear of (past, present, and future) crises is outbalanced by hope and faith with regard to the nation’s alleged special “destiny”:

The oil spill is not the last crisis America will face. This nation has known hard times before and we will surely know them again. What sees us through – what has always seen us through – is our strength, our resilience, and our *unyielding faith that something better awaits us if we summon the courage to reach for it*.

Obama ends the speech with words of prayer, asking for courage and guidance to face times of trial: “Tonight, we pray for that courage. We pray for the people of the Gulf. And we pray that a hand may guide us through the storm towards a brighter day.” Furthermore, typically of U.S. presidents, he adds the civil-religious phrase: “Thank you, God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.”¹⁰¹

Conclusions

It is not the objective of this book to discuss in how far the rhetorically suggested changes towards a cleaner energy future were, in the end, implemented by the Obama administration. Rather, the analysis aims to illustrate in how far the crisis framing of events was used to promote new policies amongst an American audience while drawing on and redefining conceptions of America.

To a high degree, the speech remains sober and factual; Obama informs and explains. The respective word cloud shows that the most prominent words are nouns, which directly relate to the disaster like “oil” or “Gulf.”

101. For more on the expression “God bless you” in presidential rhetoric cf. Domke & Coe 2007: 61–70.

perpetuates feelings of anxiety and simultaneously spreads hope for a better future in order to push his energy reform. In contrast to his prior speeches, which predominantly fall into the realm of epideictic rhetoric, he now combines epideictic and deliberative ends. First, he rhetorically unites citizens around the vision of a better future. Then, he draws a general outline for an energy reform and motivates citizens to act. Although he remains scarce on concrete policy suggestions (with the exception of the drilling moratorium), Obama's ecospeak suggests that the President's vision for America's energy future will include far-reaching policy changes, especially when it comes to the country's reliance on oil and gas.

3.2.4 Comparisons of and conclusions on President Bush's and President Obama's environmental crisis rhetoric

Chronological evolution of Bush's and Obama's environmental crisis speeches All analyzed speech took place at a time of ongoing critical situations. As the events developed, so did the Presidents' rhetoric. The speeches show a gradual change in focus and framing. My earlier evaluation, made on the basis of my empirical findings, remains valid: the first remarks of the Presidents are, as expected, largely informative and descriptive in nature. Since they were delivered at early stages of the crises, their main purpose is to brief the public, identify the extent of the damage, and demonstrate that the leadership is aware of the situation and responding to it. The second speeches were held immediately after a visit to the affected region (Bush) or directly from the epicenter of the crisis (Obama). In both cases, the personal presence of the leadership is used to stress their active engagement, lending priority to the issues in question. At this point, the crises are defined as national issues, the Presidents give more detailed descriptions of ongoing and planned relief actions, and pathos comes to play a more prominent role as they express sympathy with the victims. Myths and metaphors enter the picture: Bush and Obama both attempt to unite the nation, presenting the critical situations as new tests in the country's allegedly exceptional history. The speeches fulfill the epideictic function of making sense of the events. The third and last complete addresses are the longest and most complex ones. Once again the Presidents empathetically refer to the losses of those affected, this time illustrating the happenings with concrete examples and personal stories. Additionally, Obama and Bush provide assurances of federal support in the relief and rescue efforts. They both partly admit to failures and assume responsibility (as discussed above, this development can be read as a reaction to the growing public displeasure with their crisis management), but nevertheless continue to largely blame others (nature, local official, or BP). The Presidents attempt to turn the tragedies into positive, uniting moments. They praise the efforts of the local communities, volunteers, and charities and

call for solidarity. Thus, the rhetorical developments of the Presidents show many similarities. Progressively, the speeches of each President become more and more future-oriented, hopeful, and metaphorical.

However, the evolution of the presidential crisis narratives also shows several differences. While Bush in all his speeches concentrates on renewal and rebuilding, Obama additionally uses the momentum and specifically the fear of further accidents to gradually open the way for environmental policies. Especially Obama's last speech serves a deliberative function, which in Bush's addresses is not as explicit. Moreover, the Republican President, from his first remarks on, presents the events as a "natural disaster."¹⁰² Over time, he additionally includes criticism of local and partly also government actors. Obama's speeches show a different development: with each trip to the region the President grows more critical of BP's response and eventually rhetorically channels the increasing anger among the American public.

Characteristics of Bush's and Obama's environmental crisis oratory

The critical events around Hurricane Katrina and the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico had peculiar triggers, they happened in unique contexts, and vary with regard to their effects. Consequently, their rhetorical framings show differences related to the specific nature of each crisis. Nonetheless, the comparison of Bush's and Obama's environmental addresses which relate to the events reveals numerous parallels. The Republican and the Democratic President both include the following elements in their rhetoric:

- Emphasis on the alleged uniqueness of the events
- Depictions of nature as awesome power (its life-giving as well as its destructive force)
- Apocalyptic imagery and end-time rhetoric (a parallel to the biblical jeremiad: lamentation of the present/ notion of decline, evocation of the past, and call for renewal)
- Depiction of crisis as test rather than punishment (a parallel to Puritan jeremiads)
- Careful balance between fear and hope (inherent feature of jeremiads; advanced through word-use and distinct metaphors)

102. The differences in framing arise partly from the different nature of the events. The "natural disaster" scenario is hard to imagine for an explosion on an oilrig while at least the occurrence of hurricanes can be seen as natural. The point of the comparison here is to illustrate the shifts in the assignment of blame as the crises developed.

- Strong element of hope, ever-present vision of a better future (parallel to the optimistic American jeremiad)
- Use of national and civil-religious myths, chiefly exceptionalism, the notion of chosenness, America's Covenant with God, and Manifest Destiny
- Definition of and appeal to supposedly American values/ a national character
- Use of distinct metaphors to frame/create crisis narrative
- Uniting, nation-building rhetoric
- Religious and civil-religious rhetoric
- Sermon-like priestly and prophetic elements
- Presidential ethos – discourse of strong leadership
- Dominance of pathos over logos
- Intertextuality (citing former presidents, historical crisis speeches, biblical passages)
- Rhetorical steps to establishing crisis: going public/informing, sense making, identifying a course of actions, meaning making

As discussed, these similarities cross partisan lines and have a long tradition in American presidential oratory.

When it comes to major differences in the rhetoric around Katrina and the oil spill in the Gulf, the elements of blame, threat construction, and legitimization stand out. While Obama holds BP directly accountable for the accident, the villain in Bush's narrative is a "natural disaster" for which allegedly no one can be held accountable.¹⁰³ Partly, these differences arise from the different nature of the events. Nonetheless, they open the way for contrasting modes of constructing threats and subsequent legitimization processes. Obama's rhetoric implicitly follows the deliberative purpose of advocating a broader political reform (even though he jeremiadically presents his policies as merely a consequent next step in America's historical development). The President's framing of the events has a socio-political dimension, which is meant to promote policy changes towards a cleaner energy. He rhetorically extends the threats arising from the country's dependence on oil into the future and uses the apocalyptic scenery of the critical moment to support his ecospeak and add urgency to the issue. In contrast to that, Bush's rhetoric largely concentrates on minimizing the damage caused by the hurricane and returning to the status from before the crisis. While the President partly acknowledges structural problems, he nevertheless largely supports

103. As discussed, this is a false framing as it leaves out the fact that preparation and effective crisis management can mitigate the impact of hurricanes on humans.

dominant power structures. Racial and class inequalities are mentioned only briefly and merely minor changes to a system, which in itself appears as functioning, are proposed. Bush neither calls for major social reform nor does he pursue an ecological agenda. Rather, similarly to Convent Renewal jeremiads, he aims to promote social stability through epideictic, uniting rhetoric. It thus remains important to keep in mind that the described framings around the questions of guilt as well as proposed crisis solutions are *deliberate rhetorical choices*, which followed political purposes and in the end influenced public perception of the critical issues.

Environmental crisis rhetoric – A modern apocalypse?

While the analyzed political speeches are evidently not classical apocalyptic, biblical texts, or Puritan sermons, all of them show several characteristics, which have their roots in the tradition of the jeremiad. The Presidents use elements of the rhetorical form in order to frame and explain critical events. They employ apocalyptic imagery, the balance between hope and fear, national myths, and (civil-)religion in order to give meaning to chaotic times. Largely, both Presidents call for renewal and not for substantial reform. In this, their rhetoric resembles the rhetoric of American Covenant Renewal. I describe this technique as an *outbound* jeremiad, as it looks for the causes of a given crisis outside of the own community. Obama additionally perpetuates images of doom in order to allegedly avert further doom (preventing future accidents through energy reform). He includes a critique of a lifestyle in his rhetoric and thus carefully introduces *inbound* jeremiadic elements. All the mentioned devices – consciously or not – are well familiar to American audiences, as they reappear in presidential speeches throughout the nation's history. Consequently, the rhetoric projects a sense of continuity. Therefore, I argue that in modern environmental crisis narratives, adapted jeremiadic features continue to function rhetorically as means for interpreting America's past and unifying the audience around presidential visions of the country's future. In the following chapter, I will test in how far these claims also apply to presidential discourse around economic issues.

3.3 Framing the global economic downturn: Analysis of President G. W. Bush's and B. Obama's speeches on the financial crisis

It's a crisis if everybody calls it a crisis.

Morgan Downey, Managing Director at LaSalle Global Fund Services Europe, 2007

(qtd. in "Focus on the Financial Crisis" 2011)

3.3.1 Contextualization of the events

In 2007, the U.S. housing market crashed after BNP Paribas announced that it was ceasing activity in three hedge funds that specialized in mortgage debt. At this point, it became clear that many circulating derivatives were worth significantly less than what they were traded for. While no one knew how great the actual financial exposure of individual banks was, the trust was gone and consequently major financial institutions stopped doing business with one another. One year later, in 2008, Lehman Brothers collapsed. The bankruptcy of the fourth-largest investment bank was a shock for the markets and the Dow Jones rapidly went down; up to that point it had been assumed that governments would always step in to save banks that were allegedly crucial for the global financial system and thus too big to fail. Fearing a domino effect, Western governments injected capital into their banks to prevent further bankruptcies. These taxpayer-financed bailout actions prevented the collapse of large financial institutions but international stock markets still dropped. Leading economists consider these events to be the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s. The crisis led to a downturn in economic activity in the years 2008–2012 and was classified by the IMF as the worst global recession since World War II (“What’s a Global Recession?”). It contributed to the European sovereign debt crisis, which continues to unfold. While the exact costs and overall effects of the recession on U.S. economy remain difficult to measure, experts widely agree that it caused substantial losses in economic output and financial wealth. The crisis not only led to a decline in consumption but also brought about psychological consequences and skill atrophy from extended unemployment. It left no sector of economic and social life untouched and triggered insecurity and a fear of the future among many Americans. Analysts poignantly describe the dimension of damaged public trust as “the unquantifiable costs of national trauma” (Atkinson & Luttrell 2013). Thus, while times of economic hardships certainly have a different impact on society than environmental disasters or terrorist attacks and comparisons are in many ways difficult (e.g. the imminent death toll cannot be directly quantified and compared) (Morris 2013)¹⁰⁴, wide parts of the population can equally perceive them as critical moments. Just like during other crises, the core values and vital systems appear as being under threat, a high level of insecurity can be observed, and a perceived urgency to act seems omnipresent.

How should presidents rhetorically react to times of turmoil as the ones described above? Following the assumption that economics is to a high degree

104. Although several studies linked the recession to higher suicide rates (Morris 2013).

reigned by psychology, the mere use of the terms crisis or recession can generate self-fulfilling prophecies. Could it thus be argued that by employing this terminology the Presidents Bush and Obama actually triggered a recession? As I discuss in the introduction, announcing a crisis is always a judgment call and a presidential declaration certainly adds to the perceived graveness of the situation. However, considering the situation on the global markets and taking into account that the media reported on the issue, the Presidents would have risked appearing as out of touch if they did not verbally acknowledge the critical state of events. Experts urged the government to act immediately; most prominently Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke reportedly warned government officials: "If we don't do this, we may not have an economy on Monday" (qtd. in Nocera 2008). As insecurity with regard to the future spreads, presidents must address the issue in question directly in order not to lose credibility with voters. Nonetheless, their role does not come down to simply reacting and describing. The way Bush and Obama rhetorically framed the critical events certainly shaped their public perception. Did the Presidents make sense of the happenings and attempt to boost morals through hope rhetoric or did they rather rhetorically perpetuate and exploit the notion of crisis to push far-reaching policies?

In 1959, Kennedy famously remarked: "When written in Chinese, the word 'crisis' is composed of two characters. One represents danger and the other represents opportunity" (Kennedy 1959). While linguists have long disproved this claim, it remains revealing of Western perceptions of crises as two-sided coins (Mair 2009). Typically, American presidents, hemmed by political constraints, have only limited influence over the domestic economy. Historical exceptions are presidents whose terms in office are associated with crises, like Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933 or Ronald Reagan in 1981. Their decisions were not only crucial to the recovery, but they also had a chance to shape the new economies that emerged. In 2008, Obama's chief of staff, Rahm Emanuel, alluded to the possibilities opened up by the financial crisis as follows: "Never allow a crisis to go to waste. They are opportunities to do big things" (qtd. in Zeleny 2008). His words refer to the fact that times of perceived high uncertainty offer increased opportunities for strong presidential leadership, which can shape the future of the country. If a given situation is seen as threatening by a majority of citizens, they will more willingly accept far-reaching changes, which in times of alleged security could not have been as easily implemented by those in power. Therefore, I will also discuss in how far the Presidents Bush and Obama address and appeal to fears associated with the recession.

One crucial aspect, which sets the period of economic downturn apart from crises analyzed in previous chapters, is the change in administration, which took place as the critical events developed. When the turmoil on the financial markets began, Bush's presidency was coming to its end. During his last months in office,

he introduced measure to address the subprime mortgage crisis, most notably the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) signed on October 3, 2008, which would continue to influence the course of events beyond his term. At the same time, Senators McCain and Obama were campaigning to become his successors. Both took up the topic in their speeches since it became apparent that the winner of the next presidential election would likely inherit an economic recession. Lehman Brothers collapsed a mere seven weeks before the Democratic candidate won the majority of the electoral votes. When Obama took office in January 2009, the crisis affected major pillars of the U.S. economy and comparisons to the Great Depression were not uncommon. *The Economist* summed up on the state of affairs as follows:

Not since 1933 had an American president taken the oath of office in an economic climate as grim as it was when Barack Obama put his left hand on the Bible in January 2009. The banking system was near collapse, two big car manufacturers were sliding towards bankruptcy; and employment, the housing market and output were spiralling down. ("Barack Obama's Economic Record")

To counteract the mentioned downward spiral, the President, among others, passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which included \$787 billion of tax cuts and spending. While it is not the purpose of this book to clarify who, in fact, is to blame for the recession or whose policies were most effective in fighting the economic downturn, I want to explore how the Presidents rhetorically approached the question of responsibility. The fact that a change in leadership took place during a time of crisis added a new dimension to the presidential discourse, especially with regard to the question *whose* crisis it actually became. I am especially interested in how far Bush's and Obama's framings differ and in how far both Presidents draw on the same American rhetorical traditions and possibly perpetuate the notion of crisis in order to contextualize the events and gain support for their proposed policies. Additionally, as in the first two analytical chapters, I will discuss whether or not Puritan-derived rhetorical traditions continue to shape economic discourses in the United States.

Audience and media

In their addresses, Bush and Obama have to mediate between different audiences. When it comes to their domestic audience, the largest group encompasses American taxpayers, and chiefly the middle class, who will in fact pay for most of the announced policies. Another audience consists of banks, traders, and investors, who face great risks but are also at the root of the crisis. A third specific target group at which the Presidents direct their words is the U.S. Congress; both, Bush and Obama, aim at bipartisan support for their legislative proposals. Since the presidents' power to initiate change in the legal sense is limited, rhetorical persuasion,

reinforced through the power of the office, is a crucial tool for them to appeal to Congress and the people. Moreover, an international audience, concerned about the movements on the globalized markets, plays a role. In their speeches, Bush and Obama address these different audiences as mediators of interests. This plurality will be taken into account in the further analysis of their speeches.

Bostdorff and O'Rourke argue that a president in the twenty-first century could encounter difficulties in generating public support through rhetoric due to the multitude of opinion-forming media, which are widely accessible in the United States (1997:345). Print media, television, radio, as well as the Internet may challenge or contradict the explanations the president offers. Leadership cannot control the excess to information in the same way as it used to in the past. Numerous publications focus on the role of the media during the financial crisis, especially with regard to the impact of reporting on the financial markets. Others focus on Obama's skillful use of modern media. While I cannot elaborate on the topic in greater detail, I will briefly relate to the media channels through which the Presidents attempted to reach a wide public with their crisis rhetoric, as they certainly had an influence on the perception of the speeches. My focus lies on the way that Bush and Obama rhetorically respond to the economic situation: How do they react to new information and how do they put the events into context and create meaning?

3.3.1.1 *Puritans and the economy*

In his socio-economic study, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber (1992) brings forward the thesis that Protestant or Puritan work ethic was a driving force behind the emergence of modern capitalism. He argues that this economic system was able to thrive in regions where Protestant and particularly Calvinist ideas were predominant, like Northern Europe or colonial North America. To illustrate his thesis Weber quotes the ethical writings of one of America's Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin:

Remember, that time is money. He that can earn ten shillings a day by his labor, and goes abroad, or sits idle, one half of that day, though he spends but sixpence during his diversion or idleness, ought not to reckon that the only expense; he has really spent, rather thrown away, five shillings, besides.

Remember, that credit is money. If a man lets his money lie in my hands after it is due, he gives me interest, or so much as I can make of it during that time. This amounts to a considerable sum where a man has good and large credit, and makes good use of it.

Remember, that money is of the prolific, generating nature. Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on. Five shillings turned is six,

turned again it is seven and three pence, and so on, till it becomes a hundred pounds. The more there is of it, the more it produces every turning, so that the profits rise quicker and quicker. He that kills a breeding sow, destroys all her offspring to the thousandth generation. He that murders a crown, destroys all that it might have produced, even scores of pounds. (Weber 1992: 14)

In Franklin's narrative, it was God himself who revealed to him the usefulness of saving as a virtue. Therefore, the statesman advised his contemporaries: "If you would be wealthy, think of saving as well as getting (...). What maintains one vice would bring up two children" (Franklin 1836: 92–103). Weber reads these words not as a mere philosophy of greed, but rather a moralistic lesson, according to which a hardworking and thrifty people would be of value to the community as well as to God. In fact, American Puritans linked material wealth with God's favor and believed that hard work was the way to please Him. While, according to the Puritan doctrine of predestination, God had already chosen who would go to heaven, material wealth on earth was read as a sign of blessing and alleged chosenness. Keng pointedly remarks that "[t]he work ethic of Puritans was the belief that hard work was an honor to God which would lead to a prosperous reward" (2009: 148–159). The interpretation of financial circumstances as a product of God's will appears already in Winthrop's sermon "A Model of Christian Charity," which lists reasons for why "some must be rich, some poor" (1639: 101). This early American jeremiad illustrates what might seem like a paradox, namely that worldly activities such as the acquisition of money can serve spiritual ends. Winthrop defines self-improvement, also in terms of financial status, as a manifestation of God's will. While excessive wealth leads parishioners away from God and toward the sin of pride, as the Governor argues, wealth itself is not a bad thing. It can reflect the glory of God and it should be maintained to help one's family, he claims. Moreover, Winthrop expands the role of wealth to its potential use for the good of the religious state: "the Lord looks that when He is pleased to call for His right in any thing we have, our own interest we have must stand aside till His turn be served" (ibid.: 102). He concludes, that one must share one's wealth with others, "[t]here is a time when a Christian must sell all and give to the poor, as they did in the Apostles' times," even if they cannot repay their debt (the importance of "giving, lending and forgiving [of a debt]" (ibid.: 102)).

As discussed in the introduction, Miller and Bercovitch, in their seminal works, trace the persistence of Puritan-derived ideas in American literature and culture up until the twentieth century. Over the centuries, the mentioned religious beliefs and myths, including Protestant work ethic and the idea of chosenness, shaped the country's self-definitions of national character(s), also with regard to perceptions of economic matters. Among others, they constitute the ideological foundation behind Thoreau's declaration of self-reliance as the economic model

of the only true American as well as Horatio Alger's rags to riches stories and the concept of the American Dream. On the following pages, I will evaluate if and in how far these early ideas and myths on money and the economy continue to play a role in modern presidential framings of economic hardships. As discussed in previous chapters, elements of the American jeremiad offered a conceptual framework to talk about critical moments in history for numerous American leaders (from Puritan ministers to authors, intellectuals, and contemporary politicians). The last analytical chapter, which deals with President Bush's and President Obama's rhetorical framings of an economic downturn, discusses whether the two Presidents equally employ adapted but nevertheless jeremiadic patterns or if their crisis oratory shows other distinct characteristics.

Selection of speeches and empirical data

The analysis of President Bush's and President Obama's rhetorical responses to the economic crisis is limited to their major addresses dedicated to the topic. First, I will jointly discuss Bush's speeches delivered shortly after Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy: his brief televised Statement on the Economy from September 18, 2008, and the Address on the Economy, delivered on September 19, 2008, from the Rose Garden. To provide a more complete picture of Bush's crisis framing through oratory, I will also refer to other speeches and statements in which the President relates to the topic, like the Radio Address from September 20, 2008 (which will not be separately analyzed in greater detail, since it largely repeats themes and motifs from the two previous speeches) as well as the Joint Press Conference with President Uribe of the Republic of Colombia from the same day, in which Bush, among others, responded to a reporter's question concerning the economic situation. I will then proceed to analyze his Primetime Address to the Nation, from September 24, 2008, in which the President elaborates on the crisis in greater detail in order to generate support for his bailout plan. In the end, I will discuss if and how the presidential rhetoric developed from speech to speech.

The statements delivered by Bush fall into the last months of his presidency. At the time, the economic crisis also became a topic in the presidential campaign. When Obama took office in early 2009, he immediately rhetorically picked up on the issue, referring to it in his first public statements. I will start off my analysis of President Obama's economic crisis rhetoric with a joint evaluation of his First Weekly Address to the Nation from January 24, 2009 and the Primetime Press Conference: Push for Stimulus, from February 9, 2009. Additionally, I will refer to relevant passages from Obama's First Inaugural Address and his other Weekly Addresses from January and February in order to provide a better overview on

the general tone of his early crisis framing. Then, I will continue with his Weekly Address to the Nation from February 14, 2009 and the Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act from Denver, Colorado on February 17, 2009. These two statements were delivered shortly after the President's suggested economic legislation won the necessary congressional approval. As with Bush's speeches, it will also be tested if and in how far Obama's crisis rhetoric shows a linear progression. The final comparison of the crisis oratory employed by both Presidents will discuss similarities and differences and test in how far the change in administration also brought about a change in the rhetorical framing of the economic situation.

Table 3. President Bush's and President Obama's speeches on the economic downturn: Word count and D.A.L. pleasantness scores

Orator		G. W. Bush				B. Obama	
Date	9/18/08	9/19/08	9/24/08	1/24/09	2/09/09	2/14/09	2/17/09
Words total	259	1274	1963	807	1249	782	2493
ee mean	1.65	1.61	1.65	1.67	1.68	1.67	1.66

The analyzed addresses vary significantly with regard to their lengths (see Table 3). The shortest speech (Bush's Statement on the Economy from September 18, 2005) consists of a mere 259 words, while the longest address (Obama's Primetime Address to the Nation from February 17, 2009) is composed of 2493 words. The total corpus of analyzed texts consists of seven speeches. Thereof, Bush delivered three and Obama four. The total number of words used by the Presidents amounts to 3496 in Bush's case and 5331 for Obama. The difference amounts to 1835 words; in total, Obama speeches contain 34 percent more words than the addresses of his predecessor. (However, long passages of the Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act from February 19, 2009, due to the nature of the occasion, are dedicated to listing names and thanking those who worked on and supported the bill.) These discrepancies will be taken into consideration in the evaluation of empirical findings.

Bush's speech from September 18 and Obama's speech from January 24 constitute the first rhetorical responses of the Presidents to the critical issue in question. Over time, Bush's speeches progressively turn longer. Obama's two shorter speeches are weekly addresses (January 24 and February 14) – their format presupposes briefness and they merely differ in length by 25 words. As in Bush's case, Obama's longest address is his Primetime Address to the Nation. When it comes to the time span between the addresses, six days lie in between Bush's first and last

speech. The time span between Obama's speeches amounts to 24 days altogether, and eight days between the second and fourth address. The speeches analyzed jointly do not lie apart by more than eight days. In both cases, the time elapsed between the speeches is comparatively short and consequently allows for a good comparison of rhetorical developments from speech to speech.

When it comes to the D.A.L. means for pleasantness of the chosen speeches, it is striking that the values for all of Obama's addresses are higher than for those by Bush. The highest mean lies at 1.68 for Obama's Primetime Press Conference: Push for Stimulus, from February 9, 2009 and the lowest at 1.61 for Bush's Address on the Economy from September 19, 2008. No linear progression can be observed from speech to speech – the values go up and down. All scores remain within a relatively narrow range. All values are only slightly below the standard mean of 1.84 and remain in the same range as the D.A.L. means for pleasantness for the chosen classical jeremiads. The data can be read as proof for the steadily balanced proportion of fear and hope appeals in the crisis speeches and thus a parallel to jeremiads. In my analysis, I will look at the use of single fear-arousing and hope-evoking terms (words with exceptionally high or low degrees of pleasantness). Moreover, it will be taken into account that Bush was at the end of his presidency while Obama just assumed office when delivering the speeches.

A look at the word clouds for the chosen texts offers the following insights on the word use of the two Presidents. In the image for President Bush's first public statement on the economic downturn (President Bush Discusses Economy from September 18, 2008) the most prominent terms are "financial" and "markets." One day later, in his Address on the Economy from September 19, the President most frequently employs the words "financial" and "system," shortly followed by "government" and "markets." The visualization suggests that the focus lies on the financial rather than the economic implications of the events: the "markets" are experiencing some problems and therefore the "government" is getting involved. The word "crisis" does not appear, however, the word "challenges" is prominently visible in the first cloud. In Bush's Primetime Address to the Nation, "financial" remains the word displayed in largest font. While the visibility of the nouns "banks," "money," "system," and "businesses" suggests that the financial aspects of the critical events remain a major focal point, the repetitive use of the terms "Americans" and "economy" lets the assumption come close that the President now gives more attention to the broader, national dimension of the events.

The word cloud for Obama's First Weekly Address to the Nation from January 24, most prominently features the terms "energy," "million," "Americans," "work," "health," and "new." No single word is significantly larger than all others, which suggests that a multitude of topics is being converged. It foreshadows that Obama will focus on change and reform ("new," "work"), especially in

the fields of “energy” and “health.” I assume that the prominence of the words “million” and “Americans” points to the fact that Obama frames the events as an issue that concerns the whole nation. In his later statement, the Primetime Press Conference from February 9, the President most frequently employs the noun “jobs.” The word appears in significantly larger font than all others in the respective cloud, which suggests that preserving and creating employment opportunities will be the focus of his “plan” (second largest term in the word cloud). The repetitive use of the words “America” and “economy” again points to the allegedly national dimension of the crisis. In his Weekly Address to the Nation from February 14, Obama frequently makes use of the terms “time,” “must,” and “need.” Consequently, I assume that the President puts focus on the supposed urgency to act; “Americans” allegedly have to start “work[ing]” right away in order to “help” their country’s “economy” on its road to “recovery.” Since no single word is significantly larger than the others, I suspect that Obama elaborates on multiple aspects of his “plan.” On February 17, in his Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, he puts focus on “energy,” “investment,” “work,” and “health,” judging by the prominence of these words in the respective cloud. Again, “America” and “Americans” are repetitively mentioned, suggesting a focus on the motif of national unity. The word “crisis” appears in all word clouds for Obama’s speeches on the economy, however, in comparatively small font. These preliminary findings will be further tested in the qualitative discussion.

Major metaphorical framings and lexical correspondences, which appear in the chosen financial and economic crisis speeches, are the following:

- Economic Crisis Is Illness
- Economic Crisis Is War
- Economic Crisis Is Test (from God/ History/ Manifest Destiny)
- Recovery From Economic Crisis Is Journey
- Economic Crisis Is Mythical Battle (of ‘Good’ vs. ‘Evil’)/ Othering Blame-Frame

Both Presidents make use of the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Illness in all of their speeches. However, Obama frames the events as an illness more than twice as often as his predecessor (36 times in total, as opposed to Bush’s 16). Bush, on his part, frames the events with the help of the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Crime more than twice as often as Obama. Even taking into account the aforementioned discrepancy in the number of speeches and words used by each of the Presidents, the difference is striking and points to a clear rhetorical preference. An illness calls for cure and treatment, while crime is generally associated

with a call for punishment and justice.¹⁰⁵ I will further analyze how and in which contexts the Presidents employ these metaphors and in how far they contribute to their general framings of the events. Based on these preliminary findings, I assume that Obama's tone will be more conciliatory than the one assumed by Bush.

Moreover, both Presidents employ lexical correspondences from the domain of war. The conceptual metaphor appears by far most frequently in Bush's Prime-time Address to the Nation from September 24, 2008, in which he attempts to win support for TARP. The metaphor puts into focus the gravity of the situation as well as the need for actions and furthermore rhetorically unites the nation around an allegedly common cause. Another prominent framing in all of the speeches is that of Crisis Is Test. On the linguistic level, the Presidents implicitly suggest that the critical events are a form of trial, either from God or history, and an integral part of America's allegedly special Manifest Destiny. As the speeches turn longer, the narratives around the concept of trial become more elaborate. The conceptual metaphor allegedly makes sense of the events, it is uplifting as it offers hope for a better future, and it unites the nation behind the idea of shared mission. To separate those who supposedly can solve the crisis from those who allegedly caused it, both Presidents employ the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Mythical Battle. Furthermore, elements of a rhetoric of blame and Othering appear in their speeches. These concepts partly overlap and cannot be as clearly distinguished as in the previous chapters. Therefore, I list the appropriate metaphorical correspondences under one category (Economic Crisis Is Mythical Battle/ Othering Blame-Frame) and will discuss them on a case-to-case in my analysis. In the case of the economic downturn it is harder for the President to pinpoint and blame a guilty party or metaphorical enemy than in the case of e.g. an outside attack. The crisis constitutes an internally-grown problem (which does not contradict the fact that it certainly also has a global dimension); multiple associated entities and factors play a role. To illustrate the complexity of the crisis and explain that the recovery will constitute a long-term process, both Presidents additionally use lexical correspondences from the metaphorical domains of journey and construction.

It has been mentioned that the spatial-temporal-axiological proximization model has not been applied to presidential speeches on economic recessions and financial turmoil, yet. In how far could the framework and Cap's (2017) findings on proximization strategies in anti-terrorist, health, environmental, technological, and climate change discourses enrich our understanding of linguistic mechanisms behind fear and threat in Bush's and Obama's speeches on the recession?

105. Cf. Chapter 2.2.3.

The chosen data bears similarities to the speeches to which the model has been applied. First, it also falls into the category of state political discourse as well as public discourse. Second, both Presidents introduce new, far-reaching policies (Bush: the bailout plan, Obama: the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act) and aim for public approval. Third, both use fear appeals to create imminence. As such, the model appears relevant.

When it comes to the deictic center in Bush's speeches, it is occupied by "America/-n/-s" as well as the "financial system/market" and the "economy." The out-group is not precisely defined. In general, it is the "recession" that threatens the IDC entities. Bush speaks of "fraud and manipulation in the market" and "illegal financial transactions" and identifies certain "investors [who] driv[e] down particular stocks for their own personal gain." Thus, certain parts of the market or its malfunctions appear as the cause of the crisis. While the threat is rather intangible, its consequences are presented as devastating for virtually everyone in America. Therefore, the "economy," the "markets," the "taxpayers" and their "money" need "protection" (VPs including the lemma "protect" and an IDC entity that allegedly needs it appear five times). The potential impact of ODCs upon IDCs (underlined through the verb "threaten") is expressed in the following two sentences:

This week the Federal Reserve acted to prevent the disorderly failure of the insurance company AIG, a development that could have caused a severe disruption in our financial markets and *threatened* other sectors of the economy. [T]he Federal Reserve would be authorized to take a closer look at the operations of companies across the financial spectrum and ensure that their practices do not *threaten* overall financial stability.

Bush claims that "our entire economy is in danger" (NP denoting abstract concepts construed as anticipations of impact of the out-group on the in-group). He speaks of "challenges" (eleven times) and "problems" (nine time) that could turn into a full-blown crisis if no countermeasure are introduced, and thus calls the public to endorse his bailout plan. In the President's narrative, the threat extends into the future. ("As a result, we must act now to protect our nation's economic health from serious risk.") Sentences including the modal auxiliaries "would" and "could" play a prominent role in the construction of a threatening vision of the future in the bailout speech:

The government's top economic experts warn that without immediate action by Congress, America *could* slip into a financial panic, and a distressing scenario *would* unfold:

More banks *could* fail, including some in your community. The stock market *would* drop even more, which *would* reduce the value of your retirement account. The value of your home *could* plummet. Foreclosures *would* rise dramatically. And if

you own a business or a farm, you *would* find it harder and more expensive to get credit. More businesses *would* close their doors, and millions of Americans *could* lose their jobs. Even if you have good credit history, it *would* be more difficult for you to get the loans you need to buy a car or send your children to college. And ultimately, our country *could* experience a long and painful recession.

The forced construal of “now” as the time to act pre-emptively is crucial for Bush policy legitimization discourse. (“There will be ample opportunity to debate the origins of this problem. *Now* is the time to solve it.”) On the axiological axis, ODC markers include “instability,” “panic,” “distress” and IDC markers include “security” and “strength.” Moreover, axiological proximization is enacted through references and allusions to defining events in the nation’s history as well as myths. The analysis will address them on an individual basis, putting special emphasis on their jeremiadic components (e.g. “we’ve overcome tough challenges before – and we will overcome this one” or “times of trial”). In Obama’s speeches, “America/-n/-s,” “working Americans/families,” and the “economy” mark the deictic center and are being endangered by the “economic crisis/down-turn.” The economy is an umbrella term that incorporates the “banking system,” “trade,” and “business” as well as the “job market.” The “health” and “education” systems are also closely connected to it. In all these areas, “losses” (the words “lost,” “lose,” “losing,” “loss” appears 15 times in reference to the negative effects of ODCs encroaching on IDC entities and values) have been experienced, are being experienced, and will continue if unstopped. With regard to the banking system, “unscrupulous speculators” are also part of the out-group responsible for “problems” and “challenges.” ODC value sets are not precisely defined (with the exception of the adjective “unscrupulous” used to describe some investors), but it is stressed at multiple points that the effects of ODCs moving towards IDCs would include “poverty” and “unemployment.” The crisis appears as an internal threat and Obama’s suggested remedy – the ARRA – entails reforms that will allegedly protect the IDCs and their values/ideologies, including “prosperity,” “progress,” “discipline” but also “growth.” The focus thus lies on the IDC values that need to be “protected,” as the threat extends into the future. On the temporal axis, the imminence of the threat calls for quick action. (“[I]f we do not act boldly and swiftly, a bad situation could become dramatically worse.”) The modal auxiliaries “could” and “would” help paint alternative, fear-arousing visions of the future:

[I]f nothing is done, the unemployment rate *could* reach double digits. Our economy *could* fall \$1 trillion short of its full capacity, which translates into more than \$12,000 in lost income for a family of four. And we *could* lose a generation of potential, as more young Americans are forced to forgo college dreams or the chance to train for the jobs of the future.

As in Bush's speeches, axiological proximization is also enacted through references to national myths and historic events ("test," "American Dream," "the long history of America's noble endeavor"), which will be addressed individually.

While threat construction in financial and economic discourse is more complex than in anti-terrorist policy speeches, proximization can still provide insight on the linguistic elements behind legitimization processes and thus invites systematic and broader studies.

The above findings will be taken into account in the further discussion of the characteristics of presidential crisis rhetoric and their jeremiadic traits. Also, the analysis will refer to the rhetorical development from speech to speech, including the different foci.

3.3.2 Analysis of President George W. Bush's speeches on the financial and economic crisis

3.3.2.1 *G. W. Bush: President Bush discusses economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008 and Address on the economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008*

On September 15, 2008, Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy. Up until today, the case remains the largest bankruptcy filing in U.S. history. The next day, markets plummeted; the Dow Jones industrial Average dropped by a high 499 points, closing at 10,917. In response to the turmoil on the financial markets, President Bush delivered a brief statement from the Oval Office Colonnade, on Thursday, September 18. His first public remarks solely dedicated to the economic downturn consist of 259 words. In the two-minute-long statement, the President remains vague on details and puts focus on government efforts to remedy the crisis. Stressing the urgency of the situation, Bush mentions that he has canceled a planned trip to the states of Florida and Alabama in order to meet with his economic advisers.

On the morning of Friday, September 19, 2008, George W. Bush once more addressed the public from the Rose Garden of the White House. Gathered around him were "Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, and SEC Chairman Chris Cox," whom Bush thanks for their presence in the very beginning of the speech. The address is significantly longer than his first remarks; it consists of 1,274 words and lasted 9:15 minutes. The President now goes into greater detail and lays out a government plan to bail out Wall Street.

Informing and managing

In his first two public addresses on the market turmoil, Bush communicates that he recognizes the gravity of the situation and announces government response. He begins the brief press conference on September 18 with the words: "The American

people are concerned about the situation in our financial markets and our economy, and I share their concerns.” By going public and petitioning for support to resolve an issue that he recognizes as a critical, the President fulfills the first feature of rhetorically promoting a crisis (cf. Bostdorff & O’Rourke 1997). To further indicate true exigency, Bush adds that he has cancelled his travel plans in order to “stay in Washington” and “continue to closely monitor the situation in our financial markets and consult with my economic advisers.” Moreover, he elaborates on what the government has done so far: “In recent weeks, the federal government *has taken extraordinary measures* to address the challenges confronting our financial markets.” The past form dominates the discourse, indicating that the administration has long been aware of the problems and has acted immediately to prevent further damage. Specifically, Bush refers to the fact that the Treasury has “taken control of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (...) to help promote market stability and to ensure they can continue to play a role in helping our housing market recover.” In fact, on September 7, the Treasury provided a \$100 billion line of credit for both companies in return for control of them. The agencies suffered severe losses from exposure to the collapsing subprime mortgage market and the goal of the government loan was to prevent them from slipping into bankruptcy. While Bush projects urgency and mentions the taken actions (the word appears ten times), showing himself as capable crisis manager, he remains vague with regard to the future. He merely states that his “administration is focused on meeting these challenges” and assures that “[t]he American people can be sure [the government] will continue to act to strengthen and stabilize our financial markets.” However, he does not offer any concrete policy prescriptions.

One day later, in Bush’s longer speech on September 19, the discourse becomes more elaborate. The President starts off by briefly explaining the roots of the economic downturn, pointing to “[p]roblems that originated in the credit markets – and first showed up in the area of subprime mortgages – have spread throughout our financial system.” Simultaneously, he stresses that “[t]here will be ample opportunity to debate the origins of this problem” and that “[n]ow is the time to solve it.” The President thus proactively concentrates on solving the crisis and emphasizes that “we *must act now* to protect our nation’s economic health from serious risk.” The approach is convenient for the administration in power as it diverts attention from its possible shortcoming, which might have led to the critical situation in the first place.¹⁰⁶ Bush recalls that his administration has already

106. It cannot be discussed at this point in how far Bush’s “A Home of Your Own Campaign” or similar programs from the Clinton era might have contributed to the financial crisis. Bush himself does not elaborate on this.

acted decisively in the past weeks, repeating examples, which he already mentioned in his address on the day before: “The Federal Reserve also *acted to prevent* the disorderly liquidation of the insurance company AIG. And in coordination with central banks around the world, the Fed has injected much-needed liquidity into our financial system.” He mentions possible negative developments that were allegedly prevented through capable decisions of the leadership. The narrative suggests that the situation would have been way worse if the government had not reacted as it did: “To avoid severe disruptions in the financial markets and to support home financing, we took action to address the situation at Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac.” Allegedly capable decisions are juxtaposed with critical developments, which supposedly have no connection to government actions. Bush also admits that “more action is needed” and concludes that it is necessary to “address the root cause behind much of the instability in our markets – the mortgage assets that have lost value during the housing decline and are now restricting the flow of credit.” Above all, he stresses the “urgent need for Congress to pass legislation approving the federal government’s purchase of illiquid assets, such as troubled mortgages, from banks and other financial institutions.” Moreover, he also refers to the need for long-term actions:

[W]hen we get past the immediate challenges, my administration looks forward to working with Congress on measures to bring greater long-term transparency and reliability to the financial system – including those in the regulatory blueprint submitted by Secretary Paulson earlier this year.

Bush rhetorically creates an image of himself as capable chief executive who cooperates with Congress and relies on the expertise of his advisors to manage an allegedly critical situation and restore reliability to the financial markets. While he promises government involvement, the President remains vague on details with regard to the bailout plan. Due to the early stage of the critical situation, concrete costs and numbers are absent from the speech.

“A pivotal moment for America’s economy”

On September 18, President Bush speaks of “the American people[’s]” and his own “concerns” (variations of the word appear twice) with regard to “the situation in our financial markets and our economy.” He presents the new developments as “challenges” (three times), which “threaten” the economy. Simultaneously, he mentions “extraordinary measures,” which the government has taken in order to counteract these negative trends. In his speech on September 19, Bush becomes even more explicit in stressing the graveness of the situation and the allegedly corresponding uniqueness of proposed measures. Right after greeting the public and the economic experts who joined him, Bush opens his speech declaring: “This is

a pivotal moment for America's economy."¹⁰⁷ In his address on September 19, the President from the very beginning underlines the supposedly vital nature of the occurred situation for the entire country. He speaks of "difficult times" as well as "problem/-s" (four times) in the "financial system" and mentions "risk/-s" (five times) for the "nation's economic health." The focus lies on the scale of the critical events, their alleged implication on the lives of all Americans ("the precarious state of today's financial markets – and their vital importance to the daily lives of the American people") and consequently also the supposed imminent political urgency to act ("we must act now"). This constitutes a stark contrast to his prior framing of the economic downturn. Before, the President refrained from such clear words and rather tended to downplay the problems (Donato 2009: 47–49).¹⁰⁸ However, by September Bush could no longer deny serious implications without losing credibility and appearing out of touch with reality. In his speech from the Rose Garden, he goes as far as calling the situation "unprecedented" and declares that "America's economy is facing *unprecedented* challenges, and we are responding with *unprecedented* action." This statement is problematic since throughout U.S. history several severe recessions occurred.

According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), a recession is "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales" (cf. NBER "The NBER's Business Cycle Dating Procedure"). The organization's website lists 47 recessions in the United States since 1790, including the Panic of 1873 and the Long Depression, which lasted from 1873–1896 and is the longest period of economic contraction recognized by the NBER. Moreover, the Great Depression following the 1929 stock market crash, which lasted from 1929 until 1941, also had a deep, negative impact on the country's economy. And so did the 1980s recession, caused by the Iranian oil crisis. While all these mentioned times of economic hardships admittedly differ in terms of context, causes, political framings, and specific effects (as all crises, they were also products of their times) all of them had a significant, negative impact on the lives of many Americans. Following the widely accepted theory of economic business cycles, recessions and depressions as well as expansions and booms are reoccurring phenomena in globalized market

107. He repeats the phrasing in his radio address the following day (cf. Bush 2008d).

108. For example, in a speech he delivered to the Economic Club of New York on March 14, 2008, at the New York Hilton, four days after Bear Stearns liquidity troubles began, Bush merely spoke of a "rough time" for the economy and assured that America has a "resilient economy." He did not call for government involvement then (Bush 2008a).

economies and thus not per se unusual. Surely, in 2008, the downward trend was accelerating stronger than at other times and experts warned of possibly devastating long-term effects for the country's economy. However, this does not contradict my thesis that Bush's framing of the event as "unprecedented" prompted a sense of crisis and, as I argue, had the underlying political purpose of generating support for allegedly equally "unprecedented" far-reaching policies. In fact, on September 19, 2008, the President announces:

Secretary Paulson, Chairman Bernanke, and Chairman Cox have briefed leaders on Capitol Hill on the *urgent need for Congress to pass legislation approving the federal government's purchase of illiquid assets*, such as troubled mortgages, from banks and other financial institutions.

Bush invokes experts from the field of economics in order to present the government-financed bailout as unambiguously necessary. He puts focus on the fact that the proposed recovery plan finds the support of "congressional leaders of both parties" who equally spoke out to "confront this situation head on," as the President recalls. Thereby, Bush not only lends additional legitimacy to the suggested policies but also shares the responsibility for any possible problems they might entail with his mentioned advisors and supporters. On September 18, he additionally lends a global dimension to the crisis when he says: "Last night, the Federal Reserve, *in coordination with central banks around the world*, took a substantial step to provide additional liquidity to the U.S. financial system." The President makes sure to present these actions as a last resort, invoked solely to end a difficult situation, and not a means of overthrowing an economic order: "Our system of free enterprise rests on the conviction that the federal government should interfere in the marketplace only when necessary." This outspoken commitment to free market economy is essential for Bush to keep up a credible ethos. As a Republican calling for more government involvement in the financial sector he risks appearing inconsistent with his party's major ideological prerogatives. Therefore, he makes sure to clarify this matter. First, on September 18, he declares that "[t]hese actions are necessary and they're important." Then, even more explicitly, on September 19, he claims that "[g]iven the precarious state of today's financial markets (...) *government intervention is not only warranted, it is essential*." Bush's narrative confirms the alleged righteousness of the existing system and only draws attention to the supposed necessity of corrective actions, which would straighten out the shortcomings that led to the critical situation. I see the speech as a sort of economic rhetoric of Puritan Covenant Renewal, since it calls for corrections rather than substantial reform. The events appear as new "challenges" that need to be met. In Bush's renewal narrative, the government simply wants markets to "recover;" the goal is to "restore" the economic situation from before the critical events and merely to "update [the rules on

the financial markets] to meet the realities of today's global financial system." The speeches do not include a call for actual reform.

Moreover, Bush refers to the psychological component of economic crises. On September 19, he argues that "America's financial system is intricate and complex. But behind all the technical terminology and statistics is a critical human factor – *confidence*." Economists and psychologists often remark on the influence of trust on market developments. Building upon this common assumption, the President sums up: "Confidence in our financial system and in its institutions is essential to the smooth operation of our economy." He then goes on to acknowledge that "recently that confidence has been shaken." To counteract these negative developments, Bush promises to "improve investor confidence" and "help promote market stability" (in his speech on September 18). In total, the word "confidence" appears seven times in the two addresses. From the Rose Garden the President explicitly announces: "Investors should know that the United States government is taking action to restore confidence in America's financial markets so they can thrive again." Again, the framing of the situation as a crisis of confidence rather than substance promotes the idea that the system itself is, in fact, intact and does not require reform – a restoration of trust will allegedly suffice, as Bush suggests.

In American presidential rhetoric on the economy, it is not atypical to declare a given situation as "unprecedented" to legitimize unconventional legislation processes. Among others, in 1933, Franklin D. Roosevelt proclaimed:

And it is to be hoped that the normal balance of executive and legislative authority may be wholly adequate to meet *the unprecedented task before us*. But it may be that an *unprecedented demand and need for undelayed action may call for temporary departure from that normal balance of public procedure*. I am prepared under my constitutional duty to recommend the measures that a stricken nation in the midst of a stricken world may require. These measures, or such other measures as the Congress may build out of its experience and wisdom, I shall seek, within my constitutional authority, to bring to speedy adoption.

(Roosevelt 1933a)

The above quotes illustrate that both Presidents, Roosevelt and Bush, employ similar wording to put focus on the supposed unique nature of events and thereby justify a "temporary departure" (ibid.) from regular procedures. Bush additionally admits that his proposed "measures will require us to put a significant amount of taxpayer dollars on the line" and that "[t]his action does entail risk." These somber prospects are promptly followed by the hopeful assertion: "But we expect that this money will eventually be paid back." Moreover, Bush warns that not acting would be by far more expensive and riskier:

And the risk of not acting would be far higher. Further stress on our financial markets would cause massive job losses, devastate retirement accounts, and further erode housing values, as well as dry up loans for new homes and cars and college tuitions. These are risks that America cannot afford to take.

The President balances between costs and concerns and a hopeful outlook on the future. On the one hand, he points to the limitations and risks of the proposed measures. On the other hand, he presents his policies as the best available option, which will likely lead to improvement. (“[T]his decisive government action is needed to preserve America’s financial system and sustain America’s overall economy.”) On the linguistic level, the frequent use of the pronouns “us” and “we” underlines once again that the economic decisions were taken collectively. The repetition of the word “will” implicitly gives the optimistic impression that the government “will” in fact solve the occurred problems: “This is a decisive step that *will* address underlying problems in our financial system. It *will* help take pressure off the balance sheets of banks and other financial institutions. It *will* allow them to resume lending and get our financial system moving again.” However, words like “believe,” “expect,” or “eventually” suggest that Bush himself is unsure whether his plan will bring about the expected remedy: “We *believe* that this decisive government action is needed to preserve America’s financial system and sustain America’s overall economy.” This verbally projected uncertainty additionally underlines the gravity of the situation. However, the word “crisis” itself does not appear, yet.

Uniting words, metaphors, and motifs

On the linguistic level, Bush’s rhetoric projects unity through the repetitive use of the words “America/-n/-s/s’” (seventeen times in total in the two speeches). The President speaks of the “American economy” and “our economy” to stress that the critical situation allegedly concerns all Americans. The address does not make a distinction between those who might profit from the situation and those who might experience financial losses. Bush underlines the allegedly “vital importance [of financial markets] to the daily lives of the American people” and does not specify on the inequality problem inherent to market driven economies. In his narrative, America’s economic system appears strong; an alleged role model for other consumer societies. The ongoing crisis is only a short disruption of a success story, as Bush suggests:

In the long run, Americans have good reason to be confident in our economic strength. America has the most talented, productive, and entrepreneurial workers in the world. This country is the best place in the world to invest and do business. Consumers around the world continue to seek out American products, as evidenced by record-high exports.

The President praises the supposedly globally admired and strived-for efficiency of the country's economic order. Additionally, Bush positions himself as part of the group of "American people" and optimistically announces that problems will be overcome if Americans confront them together: "We will weather this challenge too, and we must do so together."

When it comes to national myths and metaphorical framings in Bush's narrative it is striking that the economic downturn appears as a test. The President speaks of "challenge/-s" (nine times in total). On September 19, he presents the events as yet another trial in the nation's history: "In our nation's history, there have been moments that require us to come together across party lines to address major challenges. This is such a moment." His words suggest that the economic downturn, like prior hardships, can be overcome if the American people work together, leaving behind partisanship. Consequently, Bush announces that "he will work with Democrats and Republicans alike to steer our economy through these difficult times and get back to the path of long-term growth." The focus on bipartisan efforts is especially noteworthy as the speech was delivered in the midst of a presidential election campaign, which is a time period of particularly strong division between the political Left and Right. Bush's crisis rhetoric implicitly draws on the national myth of Manifest Destiny. American audiences are largely accustomed to this code as, since the country's founding days, it persists in political speech-making and American popular culture. Consciously or not, the implicitly claimed common ground of shared history has a uniting effect on many U.S. Americans (Bostdorff 1994: 185).¹⁰⁹ Additionally, the President compares the financial turmoil to past crises of the twenty-first century:

We've seen that resilience over the past eight years. Since 2001, our economy has faced a recession, the bursting of the dot-com bubble, major corporate scandals, an unprecedented attack on our homeland, a global war on terror, a series of devastating natural disasters. Our economy has weathered every one of these challenges, and still managed to grow.

As he recalls events like the 9/11 terrorist attacks or "natural disasters," Bush elevates the economic turmoil to the level of a national crisis. According to the presidential narrative, all the mentioned difficult times were eventually overcome by Americans as they unitedly confronted them under his leadership in the past years. These visions of the past add legitimization to his optimistic outlook on the

109. Simultaneously, the mythology around Manifest Destiny also excludes and discriminates against groups like the Native population (cf. Chapter 2.3). I consider the use of the code a conscious rhetorical choice on the part of the speaker. The calculated risk amounts to reaching a mainstream audience while excluding certain minority groups.

future. Moreover, by recalling times of his high approval, like the early stages of the “war on terror,” Bush likely also attempts to reactivate the rally around the flag phenomenon to boost support for his presidency.

The mentioned concept of “growth” (variations of the word appear twice) functions in Bush’s discourse as parameter for success. This imperative to capitalist economies remains unquestioned, which again underlines that the President does not put into question the prevalent financial order (Binswanger 2009:707–727). Another metaphorical framing, which supports the alleged righteousness of free market economy, is that of Crisis Is Illness. Bush promises to “protect our nation’s economic health from serious risk.” (September 19) The state of illness is an abnormal, negative condition, which affects parts of an organism typically causing malfunctions. When an illness is overcome, the organism returns to health and generally continues to function as it did before. In Bush’s narrative, the economic organism is supposedly still “health[y]” but needs protection from the danger of falling ill. To “strengthen” its “resilience” the government, as the metaphorical doctor, is allegedly preemptively introducing “vital” measures. The metaphorical illness is the turmoil on the financial markets, which threatens to “spread” and negatively affect the otherwise supposedly good health of the economy.

Lexical correspondences from the source domain of crime help the President contextualize the events. On September 18, Bush informs his audience that “the Security [sic] and Exchange Commission took action to strengthen investor protections and step up its enforcement actions against *illegal* market manipulation.”¹¹⁰ And on September 19, he decisively adds: “Anyone engaging in *illegal* financial transactions will be caught and *persecuted*.” Thus, the problems on the markets appear as results of criminal activities. And who is responsible for the crime? Bush gives some insight into his version on the question of guilt in his speech from the Rose Garden, in which he announces: “The SEC is also requiring certain investors to disclose their short selling, and has launched rigorous enforcement actions to detect fraud and manipulation in the market.” Fraud, manipulation, and the short selling actions of a few “investors” are the root of the problem, which, according to Bush, has a criminal nature. However, the accusations remain vague and do not pinpoint a concrete responsible party or an alleged enemy, as was the case after 9/11. The President suggests that financial and economic turmoil can be prevented and solved through stricter law enforcement, which will “protect” Americans’ money: “In this difficult time, I know many Americans are wondering about the security of their finances. Every American should know that the federal

110. The proper name of the agency is U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission.

government continues to enforce laws and regulations protecting your money.” Thus, he advocates more state involvement.

To describe Bush’s proposed actions, the media frequently applied the term “bailout,” which soon started to dominate the public discourse. Drawing on Lakoff’s theories on conceptual metaphors, linguist Hans-Jörg Schmid convincingly argues that the word influences public perception of government-financed subsidies for financial institutions (qtd. in Schramm & Wüstenhagen 2012). The colloquial expression refers to the act of depositing money that allows someone to get out of jail while waiting for trial. On the metaphorical level, a criminalization of those in need of financial help takes place. The implied judgment suggests that those in need of a bailout brought the situation upon themselves, likely through lawless behavior. Now, someone else (the taxpayer) needs to step in to help them out. In contrast to that, the German metaphorical expression used to describe the rescue fund for euro countries which experience financial problems, “Euro-Rettungsschirm” (literally: euro rescue umbrella), bears positive connotations of protecting someone who, through no fault of his or her own, got into a difficult situation (a metaphorical rainstorm) (Schramm & Wüstenhagen 2012).¹¹¹ The German linguist does not take into account the wide use of the expression in the bankruptcy context due to which many native speakers of English might not even consider the criminal/judicial source of the term (to bail someone out of jail). Nonetheless, his point regarding the negative connotation remains valid as “bailout” implies that governmental aid is not earned. While the President himself does not use the term, most newspaper headlines referring to his addresses make use of the expression to sum up their main objectives. On Prof. Medhurst’s website presidentialrhetoric.com the speech from September 19 appears under the title “The Economy & The Bailout: Primetime Address to the Nation.” The omnipresence of the word “bailout” after Bush’s speeches (cf., e.g., Herszenhorn 2008) reflects on the fact that the term simultaneously echoes and influences the perception of the President’s financial policies.

Conclusions

In his two speeches delivered shortly after the fall of Lehman Brothers, Bush relates to the situation on the financial markets. The President concentrates on informing

111. The German word “Schirm” can also be used – however, less commonly – in reference to a sunshade or a parachute. The former offers protection from the sun while the latter slows down the falling motion of people or objects and thereby prevents collision altogether or reduces its force. In any case, the German version bears rather positive connotations.

the public about ongoing developments and planned government actions. In the address from September 18, the words “financial,” “markets,” and “challenges” are repeated several times. The words used most frequently in the address from September 19 are “financial,” “system,” “government,” and “markets,” as displayed in the world cloud (see Figure 13).



Figure 13. Word cloud for President Bush's Address on the Economy, September 19, 2008

The President shows himself aware of occurred problems, mentions counteractions that were already taken by the government to improve the allegedly critical situation, and promises further involvement. Although Bush announces upcoming policies and for the first time officially mentions a bailout plan, he does not lay out a long-term strategy at this point. The speeches intend to bolster his image as a capable leader while communicating an urgent need for actions. In his first speech, he concentrates on the problems on the financial markets. In the second address, which is five times longer than his first statement, he further stresses the gravity of the situation for the entire economy and offers a more elaborate narrative. Certainly, the length of the second remarks conditions their more detailed nature. However, the length is also a deliberative choice made by the speaker. It reflects on the fact that the President considers it necessary to give the matter further attention. Nonetheless, in both cases, Bush's rhetoric creates the impression that the administration has the situation under control. Uniting rhetoric presents the problems as a national concern of all Americans in an attempt to rally support for the administration. Additionally, conceptual metaphors implicitly suggest that recovery and not substantial reform is needed. While the word crisis itself does not appear, the speeches constitute the first step to a crisis framing, as they identify an allegedly critical situation and call for counteractions.

3.3.2.2 *G. W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D. C., September 24, 2008*

On Saturday, September 20, 2008, Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson introduced the Trouble Asset Relief Program also known as the Paulson Plan. On the same day (during a news conference at the White House following a meeting with President Álvaro Uribe of Colombia) President Bush, in response to a reporter's question regarding the plan, briefly stated: "This is a big package, because it was a big problem" (Bush 2008e). However, he did not go into further details. Over the weekend, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke publicly presented the program, which called for the U.S. government to purchase distressed assets from financial institutions. Later, on Tuesday and Wednesday, Paulson and Bernanke jointly elaborated on the proposal before congressional committees. There, they had to face deeply skeptical lawmakers, including members of the Republican Party. Congress was split over the costly enterprise, which intended to use taxpayers' money to bail out financial institutions. One of Bush's senior administration officials reportedly said that the President had been contemplating to address the public for several weeks: "This is a bullet you only fire once," he argued (qtd. in *CNN.com* "Bush: Bailout Plan Necessary" 2008). Bush was waiting for the appropriate moment. On September 24, he decided that the situation had reached a critical stage and that he would deliver a primetime address. As the senior official summed up: "We have reached a point in the process where we just have to get action" (ibid.). After meeting with Democratic Senator Barack Obama and Republican Senator John McCain, the President gave a speech from the White House East Room. His rhetorical attempt to convince Congress as well as the American people to support his administration's plan consists of 1963 words and lasted 12:49 minutes.

"A serious financial crisis"

In the morning of September 24, 2008, White House spokeswoman Dana Perino announced: "Everyone will tune in tonight [for the presidential Primetime Address] because we are facing *a once in a century crisis* in our financial markets" (Dombey et al. 2008). Her words foreshadowed the tone of Bush's upcoming speech. By that time, several important banks and financial institutions experienced major difficulties or collapse, among others Bear Sterns had liquidity problems and was acquired by JPMorgan Chase while Lehmann Brothers had filed for bankruptcy. Consequently, financial experts as well as the media were concerned about the future of America's financial sector and the country's economy. Denying the critical nature of the events was no longer a credible option for the President (Donato 2009: 49). In fact, Bush opens his remarks by acknowledging the seriousness of the situation, as he announces: "This is an *extraordinary*

period for America's economy." The statement resembles the opening of his speech on September 19, when he similarly declared: "This is a *pivotal* moment for America's economy." 35 seconds into his Primetime Address he finds even stronger words and states: "We're in the midst of a *serious financial crisis*." While the term "crisis" did not appear in his prior speeches on the economy, the President now uses it twice. Thereby, he attests the grave nature of the situation and rhetorically lends it special importance. Additionally, the negative impact of the events is put into focus through the repetitive use of terms, which have a low degree of pleasantness according to the D.A.L., like e.g. "serious" (four times) or "problem/-s" (five times). Bush speaks of a "*risk* posed by these troubled assets," recalls that "[m]ajor financial institutions have teetered on the edge of *collapse*," and warns that the country's "entire economy is in *danger*." The President refers to emotions, which, according to him, Americans have experienced in the past week: "Over the past few weeks, many Americans have felt anxiety about their finances and their future." By claiming that he "understand[s] their worry and their frustration," Bush shows empathy and presents himself as a compassionate leader, appealing to his audience on the level of pathos. The events appear as something fear arousing that concerns "many Americans." Since the problem allegedly affects a significant part of the country's population, as the President argues, it gains a national dimension. The frequent repetition of words like "country" (four times), "America/-n/-s/'s" (21 times, prominently visible in the respective word cloud; see Figure 15), or "our" (20 times) additionally strengthens the uniting effect of Bush's oratory.



Figure 14. Word cloud for President Bush's Primetime Address to the Nation, September 24, 2008

Moreover, the President elaborates on specific developments, which he considers frightening: “We’ve seen triple-digit swings in the stock market. Major financial

institutions have teetered on the edge of collapse, and some have failed. As uncertainty has grown, many banks have restricted lending.” The quote alludes to the psychological component, the “uncertainty” on the markets and the lost “confident/-ce” (four times), which lead to the “instability.” (This aspect can also be found in Bush’s prior addresses, as discussed above.) The President concludes that in light of these developments “[c]redit markets have frozen” and “families and businesses have found it harder to borrow money.” Again, he refers to practical implications of the crisis on the lives of many Americans and additionally extends the threat to the future: “More businesses would close their doors, and millions of Americans could lose their jobs.” His words communicate an urgency to act in order to prevent further damage. Bush’s rhetoric is characterized by a word use and emotional appeals which present the events as a threat to an allegedly collective good. Furthermore, Bush’s serious tone promotes the idea that the dangers are imminent.

The bailout plan as lesser evil

The main objective of the Primetime Address on September 24 is to promote the bailout package, which the government presented in the past days. After communicating the seriousness of the problems as well as the urgency to act, Bush explains his plan to get the economy back on track:

In close consultation with Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke, and SEC Chairman Chris Cox, I announced a plan on Friday. First, the plan is big enough to solve a serious problem. Under our proposal, the federal government would put up to \$700 billion taxpayer dollars on the line to purchase troubled assets that are clogging the financial system. In the short term, this will free up banks to resume the flow of credit to American families and businesses.

The President mentions top government officials in the fields of economics and finance to show that his proposal is the result of cooperative efforts by experts. Thereby, he adds legitimacy to suggested solutions. Furthermore, he informs his audience that the total costs will amount “up to \$700 billion taxpayer dollars” and simultaneously assures that “this will help our economy grow.” Bush calls for a quick, bipartisan agreement, urging Congress to act: “The government’s top economic experts warn that without immediate action by Congress, America could slip into a financial panic, and a distressing scenario would unfold.” He shows his own ability to engage in a dialog with both sides when he recalls: “I’ve invited Senators McCain and Obama to join congressional leaders of both parties at the White House tomorrow to help speed our discussions toward a bipartisan bill.” The presidential narrative points to the necessity of finding a compromise in order

to prevent the crisis from escalating. Thereby, Bush makes it harder for politicians to oppose the bill without losing their credibility with voters – he presents himself as allegedly willing to compromise for the sake of saving the country's economy (according to him, this can only be achieved through a bailout package) and complements all those who currently cooperate on finding a solution:

I appreciate the work of leaders from both parties in both houses of Congress to address this problem and to make improvements to the proposal my administration sent to them. There is a spirit of cooperation between Democrats and Republicans, and between Congress and this administration.

All those who do not cooperate risk driving the country into a deep recession, as he implies. While he shows himself aware of controversies regarding the bill ("I know that an economic rescue package will present a tough vote for many members of Congress. It is difficult to pass a bill that commits so much of the taxpayers' hard-earned money." And: "I also understand the frustration of responsible Americans who pay their mortgages on time, file their tax returns every April 15th, and are reluctant to pay the cost of excesses on Wall Street."), he nonetheless insists on its necessity ("But given the situation we are facing, not passing a bill now would cost these Americans much more later."). The plan appears as a sort of lesser evil. To reach a broad audience and show that the crisis does not solely concern Wall Street, Bush implicitly addresses a broader fear: he suggests that if financial institutions stop lending money, an economic recession might occur and in that case all U.S. citizens would be affected. Bush paints a frightening picture of the country's economic future if the rescue package is not implemented. He mentions specific effects, which a deepening of the crisis could have on the every-day lives of many Americans:

More banks could fail, including some in *your community*. The stock market would drop even more, which would reduce the value of *your retirement account*. The value of *your home* could plummet. Foreclosures would rise dramatically. And *if you own a business or a farm*, you would find it harder and more expensive to get credit. More businesses would close their doors, and *millions of Americans could lose their jobs*. Even if you have good credit history, it would be more difficult for you to get the loans *you need to buy a car or send your children to college*.

In his narrative, the potential threat is not merely an abstract one; through concrete examples it gains a personal dimension. After all it is "your community," "your retirement account," "your home," and the "loans you need to buy a car or send your children to college" that is allegedly being threatened. Bush finishes the paragraph by again bringing the crisis back to a national level when he says: "And ultimately, our country could experience a long and painful recession." He thus implies that all Americans are in the same boat, that economic entities depend

on each other (he speaks of a “domino effect”), and that it is therefore supposedly in everybody’s best interest to find a compromise on the rescue plan and thereby solve the critical situation.

Bush frames the rescue plan as a tough choice, which he as a leader had to make: “I faced a choice: To step in with *dramatic government action*, or to stand back and allow the *irresponsible actions of some to undermine the financial security of all*.” The President establishes a dichotomy between the, as he admits, “dramatic” but supposedly effective government proposal and a deepening crisis, which would hurt “all.” He presents himself as a decisive leader who is willing to assume responsibility and take on this difficult and maybe unpopular choice for the sake of an allegedly greater good of saving the country’s economy. The statement is built upon a false dichotomy, as it suggests that a state-sponsored rescue package is the only way to save the country, leaving no room for other options. In this sense, the speech is reminiscent of Bush’s post 9/11 rhetoric in which he, in a Manichean manner, juxtaposed good and evil to present the military intervention in Afghanistan as the allegedly only right response to the terrorist attacks.¹¹² Now, the President promotes the bailout by contrasting positive government actions (represented by active verbs like “reduce” or “supply”) with negative and frightening developments (like “risk,” “troubled assets,” or collapse): “So I’ve proposed that the federal government *reduce the risk posed by these troubled assets*, and *supply urgently-needed money* so banks and other financial institutions can *avoid collapse and resume lending*.” In the end however, optimism outweighs the element of fear. With 1.65 points, the D.A.L. mean value for pleasantness is higher than in Bush’s prior speeches. On the linguistic level, the frequent use of the modal verb “will” projects certitude (14 times). It largely appears in connection with a hopeful outlook on the future of the country after implementing the suggested plan: “It [the rescue package] *will* help American consumers and businesses get credit to meet their daily needs and create jobs. And it *will* help send a signal to markets around the world that America’s financial system is back on track.” While the verb forms “would” and “could” are also employed numerous times (17 and 9 respectively), they mostly refer to negative developments in case of a lack of consensus on the rescue bill e.g.: “America *could* slip into a financial panic, and a distressing scenario *would* unfold.” Thus, while the positive outcome after the implementation of the package appears as something allegedly certain, the possibility of an economic downward spiral in case of political inaction is grammatically framed as a hypothesis – the verb use supports the idea that the hopeful scenario is more probable. Additionally, Bush frames the package as a

112. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.2.

“rescue effort” (the term appears four times), which carries the positive connotation of helping someone in need (the word “help” also appears four times). As I discuss in my analysis of his prior addresses, the President continues to avoid the negatively connoted word “bailout.”

“How did we reach this point?": A capitalism-affirming narrative

To discuss the roots of the problems and its implications Bush employs a question and answer pattern. First, he claims that many Americans are currently asking themselves “[h]ow did we reach this point in our economy? How will the solution I’ve proposed work? And what does this mean for your financial future?” Bush shows that he understands these concerns and, as President, takes on the responsibility of responding to them: “These are good questions, and they deserve clear answers.” He begins by explaining how America’s “economy [could] reach this point” and paints a positive picture of the United States “as an attractive and secure place to do business.” The country’s business-enhancing environment led to the fact that “for more than a decade, a massive amount of money flowed into the United States from investors abroad,” as Bush argues. Americans profited as it became easier to get loans to “borrow money for cars and homes and college tuition” or “to start new businesses and create jobs.” Like in his prior speeches, the President thus praises free market economy as a basis for prosperity. In his narrative, thanks to the credit system, many citizens could economically succeed. However, then something went wrong. As Bush explains:

Unfortunately, there were also some serious negative consequences, particularly in the housing market. Easy credit – combined with the faulty assumption that home values would continue to rise – led to excesses and bad decisions. Many mortgage lenders approved loans for borrowers without carefully examining their ability to pay. Many borrowers took out loans larger than they could afford, assuming that they could sell or refinance their homes at a higher price later on.

The President names “excesses and bad decision” as causes of the financial downturn. According to him, dubious choices made by individuals, like mortgage lenders who did not thoroughly examine borrowers’ credit ability, brought about “serious negative consequences” to an allegedly functioning system. Bush makes sure to emphasize that he is “a strong believer in free enterprise” and admits that his “natural instinct is to oppose government intervention.” He believes that “companies that make bad decisions should be allowed to go out of business.” Consequently, he assures his audience that “[u]nder normal circumstances, [he] would have followed this course.” However, he simultaneously makes clear that “these are not normal circumstances.” Since [t]he market is not functioning properly. There’s been a widespread loss of confidence. And major sectors of America’s

financial system are at risk of shutting down.” Therefore, he proposes a governmental rescue package to restore this confidence and prevent further damage on the American economy. The solution appears as difficult but necessary. While the President admits that it will cost a significant amount of money, he also optimistically assures that eventually the economy will “get back on track” and “that much, if not all, of the tax dollars [the government] invest[s] will be paid back.” Towards the end of the speech, Bush devotes an entire paragraph to praise capitalism as an imperfect but still “the best” available economic system:

In the long run, Americans have good reason to be confident in our economic strength. Despite corrections in the marketplace and instances of abuse, *democratic capitalism is the best system ever devised*. It has unleashed the talents and the productivity, and entrepreneurial spirit of our citizens. It has made this country the best place in the world to invest and do business. And it gives our economy the flexibility and resilience to absorb shocks, adjust, and bounce back.

Again, losers of free market capitalism and the system’s inherent inequalities do not play a role in the narrative. After all, the President’s goal is not to overthrow the economic order. Rather, he wants to strengthen it by correcting flaws and eventually also adapting it to modern realities: “Once this crisis is resolved, there will be time to update our financial regulatory structures. Our 21st century global economy remains regulated largely by outdated [sic] 20th century laws.” In this context, it strikes me as especially hypocritical that Bush praises his government for having “acted to prevent major investors from intentionally driving down stocks for their own personal gain.” What else if not “personal gain” drives investors to place their money on the financial markets? Does the individual desire to reach financial prosperity not constitute the basis for capitalism?

To explain the critical situation, the President uses simple words and a familiar tone. For example, he explains: “See, in today’s mortgage industry, home loans are often packaged together, and converted into financial products called ‘mortgage-backed securities.’” While I perceived his tone as patronizing, a clear and easy to follow structure is not atypical in American presidential rhetoric in times of economic turmoil. In the way that it makes sense of a complex phenomenon, Bush’s rhetoric resembles Roosevelt’s First Fireside Chat from March 12, 1933. Roosevelt also begins his address on the banking crisis by showing empathy with the public’s concerns: “I know that many people are worrying about State banks that are not members of the Federal Reserve System.” Furthermore, he similarly uses basic vocabulary to explain the background of the events:

I want to tell you what has been done in the last few days, why it was done, and what the *next steps* are going to be. (...) First of all, let me state the simple fact that when you deposit money in a bank, the bank does not put the money into a safe

deposit vault. It invests your money in many different forms of credit – in bonds, in commercial paper, in mortgages and in many other kinds of loans.

(Roosevelt 1933b)

By adapting a calm tone, clear structure, and using simple words, Bush's crisis rhetoric follows the oratory tradition of his predecessors in similar situations and fulfills the function of explaining a crisis to the public. To visualize the recovery efforts as an ongoing long-term process, Bush, like Roosevelt, makes use of the conceptual metaphor *Recovery From Economic Crisis Is Journey* and speaks of "steps" (twice) that must be taken to get the economy "back on track."

Who is to blame?

Apportioning blame is an integral part of contemporary politics in times of crisis. As discussed in previous chapters, following 9/11 Bush made excessive use of techniques of Othering in order to unite the nation against an external enemy. However, in times of domestic crisis, it becomes more difficult to establish a clear divide between an allegedly innocent "us" and a guilty "them." Among others, Bostdorff and O'Rourke (1997) maintain that there is hesitancy among leaders to alienate an internal group. After all, politicians in democratic societies need the support and the votes of their citizens. I argue that this hesitancy becomes stronger the higher the socio-political status of a given group: clearly, minorities and parts of the population that are politically underrepresented and do not have a strong lobby are more likely to be scapegoated than those from the dominant culture. Nevertheless, while it is more difficult for politicians to place blame with allegedly powerful groups, it is not impossible. For example, President Roosevelt in his First Inaugural Address at the height of the Great Depression effectively criticizes the "practices of the unscrupulous money changers." In his narrative, "the rulers of the exchange of mankind's goods have failed." He blames "their own stubbornness and their own incompetence" for the financial crisis. The businessmen of Wall Street, as a "generation of self-seekers" that has "no vision," thus come to play the role of the guilty enemy (Roosevelt 1933a). Bush also speaks of "excesses on Wall Street" and "the irresponsible actions of some" that "undermine the financial security of all." However, his accusations remain less concrete. In his speech, he names several, complex aspects that led to problems on the markets like e.g. the fact that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were able to "borrow enormous sums of money, fuel the market for questionable investments, and put our financial system at risk" since they "were chartered by Congress" and therefore "many [falsely] believed they were guaranteed by the federal government." His narrative is characterized by a more abstract placement of guilt with a "lack of confidence" in the system. Bush not only mentions the fault of "mortgage lenders" but also refers to "many

borrowers” who “took out loans larger than they could afford.” While one might argue that the picture Bush paints of the crisis is less simplistic than the one presented by Roosevelt, he fails to clearly identify a responsible party or enemy and thus, according to Windt’s definition of the functions of crisis rhetoric, does not provide a proper explanation to the critical situation (Windt 1986). Bush’s narrative is less powerful, since it remains unclear who exactly is to blame.

Myths, metaphors, and deliberative discourse

The Primetime Address on September 24, 2008, serves largely the informative function of presenting the bailout plan. To that purpose, the President repeatedly makes use of nouns that directly refer to the nature of the crisis like “financial” (23 times), “money” (13 times), “economy” (eleven times), or “banks” (ten times). The respective word cloud prominently displays these terms, which point to the main topics.¹¹³ Nevertheless, metaphors and myths, which help framing the events, also appear. The President constructs a nation-affirming narrative with the help of the American Dream and the notion of exceptionalism. He praises the United States credit system as a vehicle for upward mobility since it “allowed more families to borrow money for cars and homes and college tuition” and “more entrepreneurs to get loans to start new businesses and create jobs,” as he argues. The country appears as a place where people “can work hard, develop their talents, and realize their *dreams*.” Along these lines, Bush presents himself as protector of the working class and middle class: “The primary steps – purpose of the steps I have outlined tonight is to safeguard the financial security of American workers and families and small businesses.” In his narrative, “American workers” and “small businesses” are the good ones; they build the foundation of the country’s economy and need to be protected. Bush suggests that his plan has the ultimate goal of helping Main Street not Wall Street – the costly bailout is allegedly necessary not to help bankers but rather to prevent a recession that would deeply hurt most Americans. He presents the government as the “good” hero, “protecting” and attempting to “rescue” those in need, a framing that evokes images of a mythical battle. However, the metaphor remains weak, since the hero is missing his counterpart – the villain. While Bush mentions “the irresponsible actions of *some* to undermine the financial security of all” the guilty party whose “excesses and bad decisions” allegedly “threaten overall financial stability” remains relatively anonymous.

Additionally, the President optimistically assures his audience that the United States will pass this “test,” which he interprets as yet another “moment or great challenge” or “trial” in the country’s history:

113. Cf. p. 286.

Yet *history has shown* that in *times of real trial*, elected officials rise to the occasion. And together, we will show the world once again what kind of country America is – a nation that tackles problems head on, where leaders come together to *meet great tests*.

Following an American rhetorical tradition that goes back to Puritan times of the Great Awakening, the crisis thus appears as a “test.” Bush implies that the nation was chosen to prove its allegedly special destiny by “ris[ing] to the occasion” of the crisis. Drawing on past experience, he optimistically assures his audience: “But we’ve overcome tough challenges before – and we will overcome this one.” The shared myth of exceptionalism unites many Americans.¹¹⁴ The implicit reference to the Winthropian concept of the United States as a city upon a hill, that is supposed to serve as a role model for the global community (“we will show the world”), is meant to unite Bush’s diverse audience around the notion of shared history. First of all, Bush addresses “Americans” calling them to come “together” as “a nation that tackles problems head on.” Secondly, Bush speaks to the members of Congress, mentioning “leaders” who “come together to meet great tests,” in an attempt to win the necessary support for TARP. Moreover, the President strengthens the uniting effect by referring to the country’s multicultural character as its defining characteristic. In his narrative, America appears as a place where “people of every background” come together. He ends his speech with the phrase “May God bless you.” It is the only time in Bush’s discussed economic addresses that God is mentioned directly. Apart from this one exception, the President prefers to use more subtle civil-religious allusions like the allegedly missionary character of facing times of crisis.

The conceptual metaphor Crisis Is Illness is not as present as in Bush’s prior speeches. Bush merely uses the words “panic” and “shocks” in reference to the turmoil on the financial markets. However, the Crisis Is Crime metaphor continues to prevail. The President mentions “laws” and “abuse” and promises to “enforce laws and regulations protecting your money” and to guarantee that “taxpayers are protected.” Thereby, he promotes the idea that the system itself is healthy and functioning (“the best system ever devised”) and that merely certain allegedly criminal activities need to be stopped in order to restore economic stability. Moreover, lexical correspondences from the source domain of war, like the expression “incur serious losses” or “remove the risk” appear, stressing the supposed gravity of the situation. All in all, however, conceptual metaphors are less prominent than in the prior addresses. Rather, Bush concentrates on concretely assessing dangers and laying out the plan in clear words. Ultimately, the metaphors and myths in Bush’s

114. For more on the ability of the myth to unite as well as to exclude cf. Chapter 2.3.3.

narrative serve the function of making sense of the events, identifying and framing a course of actions chosen by the government, and persuading his audience to rally in support for it.

Conclusions

In his Primetime Address, Bush lays out the details of his bailout plan to the nation. In an attempt to convince the public to accept the costly measures, the President stresses the gravity of the situation, directly calling it a “crisis” for the first time. The federal involvement appears as a difficult but necessary step that will eventually lead to an economic recovery. The narrative confirms the alleged righteousness of the capitalist system, which, according to Bush, merely needs corrections. The President frames the problems with the help of the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Crime however, he does not pinpoint a concrete enemy. Generally, the tone of the address remains hopeful; numerous terms with a high degree of pleasantness paint an optimistic view of the future. Bush’s narrative unites the nation around common American myths; it is a nation-affirming discourse in which the rescue package appears as a consequent next step. The speech on September 24 bears some similarities to his earlier addresses. All texts are largely informative in style but nevertheless employ jeremiadic elements (like the framing of the events as a “test”) to propagate renewal and not reform. The President bolsters his image as an allegedly capable leader who is willing to cooperate with the other side and calls for bipartisan compromise in order to solve the problems. However, while on September 18 and 19 Bush concentrates on stressing the gravity of the situation and simultaneously praising past government actions, he remains vague on details with regard to what needs to be done. Therefore, I argue that the two earlier speeches largely serve epideictic purposes and prepare the audience for the Primetime Address, which has the deliberative function of winning public approval for the then proposed plan. The early speeches make sense of the events; the later speech announces a decision and provides a meaning-attributing narrative. In this way, the future-oriented and concrete announcement of the bailout appears as a consequent next step in Bush’s rhetorical crisis framing (‘t Hart, Tindall & Brown 2009:474).¹¹⁵

According to a USA Today/Gallup poll conducted shortly after the Primetime Address, on September 26–27, just 27 percent of Americans approved of the President Bush’s job performance (Jones 2008). While most Americans reportedly favored some kind of congressional action addressing the crisis, merely a low 28

115. Bush’s rhetoric is thus characterized by what P. ‘t Hart et al. (2009) describe as the three crucial crisis leadership task domains: sense making, decision making, and meaning making.

percent of Americans approved and 68 percent disapproved of Bush's response; only a small minority favored passing a bill similar to the administration's original proposal (Newport 2008). The speech announcing the bailout showed little effect on the polls. On September 21–22, the President's approval was at its lowest point, with as little as 25 percent of the population approving of his performance. After the Primetime Address, he gained a mere 2 percent (Jones 2008). When it comes to the effects on the markets, at first, the presidential announcement that the government would buy toxic assets succeeded at restoring investors' confidence and the Dow Jones industrial average surged 363 points (cf. *CNN.com* "Bush announces \$250B bailout" 2008). However, the recovery was short-lived. Already a few days later, the financial markets reacted negatively to a report showing that 159,000 jobs were lost in September and the Dow Jones fell again (Herszenhorn 2008).

The low support for Bush's presidency can partly be explained with the increasingly negative perception of the economic conditions. Numerous studies remarked on correlations between governmental approval and economic indicators (Shapiro & Conforto 1980; Stingler 1973). Nonetheless, e.g. Roosevelt managed to keep up high approval and get reelected while the Great Depression persisted. His New Deal was regarded as the right approach by a vast majority of the public (Allen 2010). While it is difficult to compare the two crises and certainly rhetoric is only one of many factors that influence Americans' view of their presidents, I nonetheless argue that Roosevelt managed to win over his contemporaries partly through a skillful framing of critical events. Bush equally had the chance of bolstering his image through the use of appropriate words, however, as polls prove, he did not succeed. Political circumstances were clearly not in his favor: At the time of the economic downturn, Bush was serving his last term in office and was considered a lame duck president with no majority in Congress. As the financial crisis threatened to turn into a serious economic recession, Bush faced the risk of going down in history as a president under whose rule the country slipped into a major crisis (like e.g. President Hoover who was made responsible for the Great Recession (Murphy 2010)¹¹⁶). Surely, the President acted also to save his legacy. Bush was aware that to pass the bill, which he saw as the best way to counteract the negative trend, he would need the support of the Democrats in Congress. Consequently, parts of his speech are devoted to unifying both parties in the name of an allegedly higher good – the country's economic future. His rhetorical attempts to generate bipartisan support however, at least in the beginning, proved unsuccessful. On Monday, September 29, the House of Representatives voted to reject the bailout

116. While some scholars, like Murphy (2010), dispute the righteousness of this claim, it still prevails in public discourses and academia.

plan. Stock markets reacted violently with the Dow Jones industrial average going down over 700 points. Nevertheless, Bush went on campaigning for the program with the help of the Senators Obama and McCain. Especially Obama's support was crucial in generating more votes among the Democrats. Among others, Representative Donna F. Edwards, a Maryland Democrat who first voted against the bailout, said conversations with the presidential nominee persuaded her to switch her vote. Similarly, several members of Black Caucus reportedly changed their mind and decided to endorse the President's proposal after talking to Barack Obama (Miller & Lengell 2008). On Friday, October 3, the vote was repeated and the House of Representative now gave its approval to a slightly modified version of the rescue package, which Bush signed into law the same day. Shortly after the vote, stocks did in fact rise. However, already in the evening of the same day, they sank again, as investors remained nervous about a global credit squeeze and the weak economy. No one knew what the long-term effects of the bailout would be. Shortly before Bush was to leave office, a CBS News/*New York Times* poll showed his final approval rating at 22 percent, which made him one of the most unpopular departing presidents since Gallup began asking about presidential approval more than 70 years ago (CBS News 2009).

3.3.3 Analysis of President Barack Obama's speeches on the financial and economic crisis

3.3.3.1 *B. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009 and Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009*

On November 4, 2008, Barack H. Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States. The Democratic candidate won both the popular vote, with 66,882,230 to 58,343,671, and the electoral college, with an overwhelming 365 electoral votes to his Republican opponent's John McCain's 173. Congress certified the outcome on January 8, 2009. The *New York Times* wrote:

Mr. Obama's election amounted to a national catharsis – a repudiation of a historically unpopular Republican president and his economic and foreign policies, and an embrace of Mr. Obama's call for a change in the direction and the tone of the country. But it was just as much a strikingly symbolic moment in the evolution of the nation's fraught racial history, a breakthrough that would have seemed unthinkable just two years ago. (Nagurney 2008)

The majority of American voters was tired of Republican policies from the Bush era, including the "war on terror," and embraced Obama's message of change, around which the Democratic candidate centered his campaign. At the time he assumed

office, the newly elected President enjoyed approval ratings of 67 percent, which is the second highest approval rating for a President right after assuming office since World War II, according to Gallup (Gallup 2015). Similarly to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Obama entered his first term during a time of economic recession. Casting their ballot for the Senator from Illinois, Americans showed they also trusted him to get the economy back on track – the economy was not the only but certainly one of the major themes of the presidential campaign. His predecessor already rhetorically acknowledged a state of crisis, framed the events, and introduced first policies, as I discuss in the previous chapters. The situation, however, remained critical. When Obama took over the job in 2009, markets remained in turmoil, unemployment rates were rising, and the term recession dominated the media; the financial crisis had turned into an economic one. The fact that he inherited the crisis constituted a challenge but also a window of opportunity, since a nation torn by difficulties is also more willing to accept changes than in times of economic prosperity. During the presidential campaign, Obama publicly endorsed the bail-out plan suggested by Bush in October 2008 (Obama 2008). Then, as President, he treated the issue with great urgency from the very beginning. Already three days after his inauguration, Obama delivered his first presidential address devoted to the economy. His First Weekly Address to the Nation, from January 24, lasted 4:50 minutes and consists of 807 words. Two weeks later, on February 9, the President once more elaborated on economic issues in his report, which he gave right before a primetime press conference. His Push for a Stimulus speech consists of 1249 words and lasted 7:40, before he went on to take reporters' questions. In both early speeches Obama refers to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) as his suggested policy to improve the situation. On the following pages, I will analyze in how far his framing of economic difficulties differs from the one chosen by his predecessor and define characteristics of his crisis rhetoric.

Defining crisis

From the beginning, President Obama defines the economic situation as critical. Referring to the problems, he does not challenge but rather continues the crisis discourse started by his predecessor. His first weekly address opens with the words: "We begin this year and this Administration in the midst of an *unprecedented crisis* that calls for *unprecedented action*." The phrasing is reminiscent of the one deployed by the Presidents Bush and Roosevelt who equally described the economic hardships of their times as "unprecedented," advocating for "unprecedented" policies.¹¹⁷ Obama refers to the alarmingly high unemployment rates and

117. Cf. Chapter 3.1.3.6, section "*Unprecedented danger*."

defines priorities in which the government needs to invest to stop the downward economic trend. These priorities include “energy” and “health” care (the words are repeated several times and consequently appear in the word cloud, see Figure 15) as well as infrastructure and education.

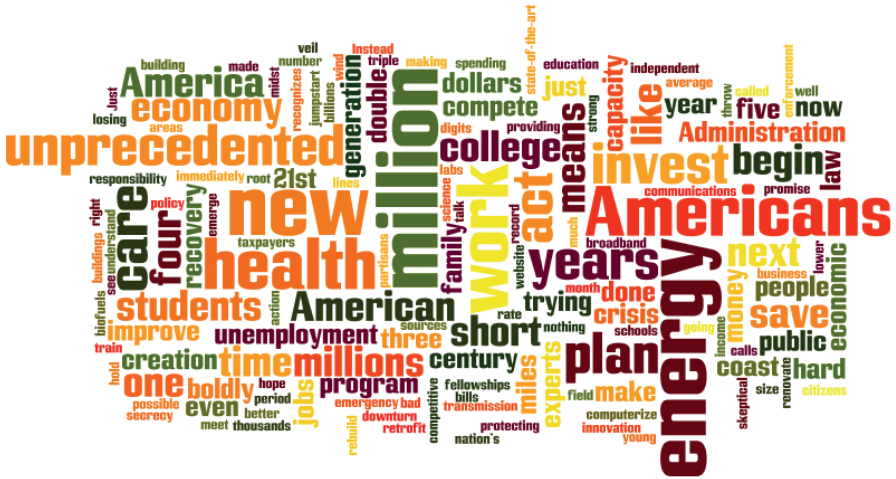


Figure 15. Word cloud for President Obama's First Weekly Address to the Nation, January 24, 2009

Obama uses the term “crisis” twice on January 24 and four times on February 9. The President’s language projects a sense of urgency. In his earlier speech, he starts of his account with a detailed description of the difficult situation on the job market: “Just this week, we saw more people file for unemployment than at any time in the last twenty-six years, and experts agree that if nothing is done, the unemployment rate could reach double digits.” He warns his audience that “if we do not act boldly and swiftly, a bad situation could become dramatically worse” and paints a dark scenario for the future:

Our economy could fall \$1 trillion short of its full capacity, which translates into more than \$12,000 in lost income for a family of four. And we could lose a generation of potential, as more young Americans are forced to forgo college dreams or the chance to train for the jobs of the future.

Similarly, on February 9, he begins his speech stating that “we need to put this recovery plan in motion as soon as possible” in order to prevent further damage. He recalls his “trip to Elkhart, Indiana,” which he took earlier that day, and informs his audience that it is “a place that has lost jobs faster than anywhere else in America.” The town in which the “unemployment rate went from 4.7 percent

to 15.3 percent” within one year serves to illustrate the seriousness of the situation as it foreshadows what could happen to the entire country if the crisis is not stopped. To clear up any remaining doubts concerning the critical state of affairs he concludes: “if there’s anyone out there who still doesn’t believe this constitutes a full-blown crisis, I suggest speaking to one of the millions of Americans whose lives have been turned upside down because they don’t know where their next paycheck is coming from.” Obama’s narrative shows the concrete implications that the economic downturn carries for individual Americans and thereby, it personalizes the crisis. To further illustrate the state of the national economy, the President makes use of the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Illness. The country appears as a person that was infected by a virus and fell sick. He talks of measures that are “necessary to keep us strong” (January 24) and explains that since the “private sector [was] so *weakened* by this recession, the federal government is the only entity left with the resources to *jolt our economy back into life*.” (February 9). The plan appears as a cure for the “pain felt by millions of Americans.” (February 9) As Obama promises, it will provide all that “America needs most right now.” (February 9) Lakoff (2009) convincingly argues that many politicians metaphorically connect the economy to the human body. Movements like rising and falling as well as conditions like depression, weakness, or strength can thereby be characterized in a personal way. Since humans’ most basic frame of reference are their bodies, with their movements and pains, projecting these onto the economy has a powerful cognitive and persuasive impact of explaining a given, often complicated state of affairs. Among others, President Roosevelt’s rhetoric during the Great Depression was filled with metaphors from the health and sickness domain. In his Fireside Chat on the banking crisis, he talked of “panic prices,” mentioned a “program of rehabilitation of our banking facilities,” and “banks which on first examination by the Treasury have already been found to be all right.” FDR promised to “take care” of things and to ensure that the country “will not have another epidemic of bank failures” (Roosevelt 1933b). As Houck notes, “Roosevelt (...) talked frequently of the nation’s enfeebled economic health and, in the process, elevated himself to the role of national healer” (Houck 2001). In Obama’s suggested healing process for the nation, the “federal government” appears as the metaphorical doctor that will lead the patient to “recovery” (four times on January 24 and twice on February 9). The perceived fatal state of economic affairs goes hand in hand with an urgency to act; as any other sickness, it needs treatment. On January 24, the President finds clear words to advocate the “need” (the lexeme appears four times in the remarks from February 9) to immediately implement appropriate policies: “doing little or nothing at all will result in ever – even greater deficits, even greater job loss, even greater loss of income and even greater loss of confidence.” Obama warns that “those are deficits that could turn a crisis into a catastrophe” – the metaphorical

virus could potentially spread. Simultaneously, he takes charge of the situation announcing: “I refuse to let that happen” (February 9) and offers metaphorical medicine in form of the ARRA.

The plan

Obama counters the described problems with his commitment to solve them through a legislative program. In both his early speeches, the President directly refers to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. On January 24, he explains that he has proposed the plan in order to “*immediately* jumpstart job creation as well as long-term economic growth” and on February 9, he again stresses that “the single most important part of this Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Plan is the fact that it will save or create up to 4 million jobs, because that’s what America *needs most right now*.” “Jobs” appear as the overall central and imminent concern and the respective word cloud illustrates the prominence of the term (see Figure 17).



Figure 16. Word cloud for President Obama's Push for a Stimulus Speech, February 9, 2009

Additionally, the President also mentions specific priorities and areas of investment. He announces that the program “will invest in our most important priorities like energy and education; health care and a new infrastructure.” (January 24) One week later, he again stresses that investment is needed in areas “like health care, energy,

education and infrastructure.” (February 9) Additionally, the Act will include federal tax incentives as well as an expansion of unemployment benefits, as Obama explains. Thus, the speeches set a clear political agenda. The President promotes the ARRA as a necessary tool to economic recovery. Work on the bill already started before Obama officially took office, which shows that he treats the issue as a priority and wants to work out a recovery plan as soon as possible. Top aides to the then President-Elect held multiple meetings with Democratic congressional committee leaders and their staffs who drafted a preliminary version. On January 10, 2009, the administration of the President-Elect released a report, which analyses the impact of the considered recovery packages on the job markets. Now, it was Obama’s task to promote the ARRA among the American public as well as with Congress, which was scheduled to vote on the bill in the following weeks. To that purpose, the President in his speeches stresses the bipartisan efforts behind the project: “I am pleased to say that both parties in Congress are already hard at work on this plan.” (January 24) He recalls that the current version has been the effect of compromise on both sides: “[I]t has been stripped of the projects members of both parties found most objectionable.” (February 9) He “thank[s] the members of Congress who’ve worked so hard to move this plan forward” (January 24) and simultaneously encourages all members of both parties “to act without delay in the coming week to resolve their differences and pass this plan.” (January 24). Obama concludes that he “hope[s] to sign it into law in less than a month.” (February 9) As the plan appears as a necessary step in the recovery effort, anyone delaying or blocking it supposedly also puts the economic future of the country at risk.

Interestingly, even before the ARRA is signed into law, Obama points to the limitations of the plan. He cautiously announces that “[n]o one policy or program will solve the challenges we face right now, nor will this crisis recede in a short period of time.” (January 24) Offering an outspoken commitment to free market capitalism he stresses that “[i]t is absolutely true that we can’t depend on government alone to create jobs or economic growth. That is and must be the role of the private sector.” However, as Bush did before him, he declares that in “this particular moment, with the private sector so weakened by this recession” government intervention is necessary since:

[T]he federal government is the only entity left with the resources to jolt our economy back into life. It is only government that can break the vicious cycle where lost jobs lead to people spending less money, which leads to even more layoffs. And breaking that cycle is exactly what the plan that’s moving through Congress is designed to do.

Notably, as a Democrat, Obama explains and justifies his call for more government involvement with less difficulty than his Republican predecessor, since the

approach in general does not contradict party lines to the same extent (although the financial scope of the plan certainly is extraordinary). The Stimulus Act is a classic example of Keynesian economic – the notion that the government should spend more money at times of economic crisis in order to boost recovery. Obama presents it as the necessary and right step to deal with the problems. However, he does not devote the matter as much attention as Bush, who extensively commented on the merits of free market economy and presented TARP as an exceptional departure from these principals, as I discuss in the previous chapter.

The President admits that the plan does not constitute a quick solution to all problems: “there’s so much work to be done. That’s why this is not just a short-term program to boost employment. (...) No one policy or program will solve the challenges we face right now, nor will this crisis recede in a short period of time.” (January 24) He concludes that despite all its advantages “the plan’s not perfect” and in a sobering manner adds: “No plan is.” (February 9) While Obama notes that the outcome remains uncertain, he nonetheless stresses the necessity of the bill: “I can’t tell you for sure that everything in this plan will work exactly as we hope, but I can tell you with complete confidence that a failure to act will only deepen this crisis, as well as the pain felt by millions of Americans.” Again, the crisis does not remain a dry set of stats; its human aspects like immediate effect on the lives of many U.S. citizens are equally put into focus. The President implies that those who hinder necessary reforms will carry the responsibility for a deepening crisis and consequently also the human “pain” that goes along with it. Thereby, he makes it harder for critics to oppose the economic stimulus.

Moreover, Obama attempts to connect with his audience by putting emphasis on the alleged transparency of his actions and communication processes. Already during his campaign, he defined openness as part of his political agenda in supposed contrast to his predecessor’s “reputation for secrecy” (Coglianese 2009: 529–544). Later, during the transition period, he regularly used the Internet to reach the public via video messages. After taking office, Obama, among others, established a policy of releasing a video every Saturday morning video, available on whitehouse.gov and YouTube. The format of regular presidential addresses directed towards the public is not new. F. D. Roosevelt introduced the practice of delivering so called fireside chats and between 1933 and 1944 he directly addressed U.S. citizens via the radio 30 times (Buhite & Levy 1992). In 1982, Ronald Reagan started delivering a radio broadcast on a regular basis every Saturday. Obama followed this tradition and additionally, making use of the means of modern mass communication of his time, started providing his addresses online in both audio and video forms in order to reach a broader audience. The popular and highly accessible medium YouTube generated a renewed, wide interest in the format: more than 600,000 YouTube-viewers watched the first weekly address one

day after its release (Rutenberg & Nagourney 2009). Another step towards more transparency was made with the presidential announcement not to sign any non-emergency bill without giving the American public an opportunity to review and comment on the White House website for five days (Obama & Biden 2008). In the context of the Recovery Act, Obama also committed to informing the public via a new website, *recovery.gov*, designed specifically for that purpose. In both early speeches on the recovery plan, he directly refers to his commitment to transparency in order to convince skeptics to support his program. The President promises that his administration:

[W]ill include unprecedented measures that will allow the American people to hold my Administration accountable for these results. (...) Instead of politicians doling out money behind a veil of secrecy, decisions about where we invest will be *made public*, and informed by independent experts whenever possible. We'll launch an unprecedented effort to root out waste, inefficiency, and unnecessary spending in our government and every American will be able to see how and where we spend taxpayer dollars by going to *a new website called recovery.gov*.
(January 24)

On February 9, he stresses once more that the plan “contains an unprecedented level of transparency and accountability, so that *every American will be able to go online and see* where and how we’re spending every dime.” The emphasis on an allegedly strengthened public participation in the making and execution of laws (through easy and direct access to information) is ultimately designed to add value to the democratic legitimacy of the plan.

Blaming and unifying

According to Windt’s crisis rhetoric framework, a rhetor must relate to the causes of a crisis and assign blame for its occurrence, in order to properly explain the event to his public (1986: 102). Already during the presidential race, Obama was very explicit and strongly focused blame for the economic downturn on Wall Street as well as governmental mismanagement. In his Senate Floor Speech in Support of Bush’s Bailout Bill, he adopts a clear standpoint and criticized: “the fact that we’re even here voting on a plan to rescue our economy from the *greed* and irresponsibility of Wall Street and some in Washington is an outrage” (Obama 2008). His words imply a moral judgment. The mention of greed, one of the seven deadly sins, suggests that bankers and investors are, in fact, sinners who brought the country into a difficult situation through their immoral behavior. This religiously tainted argument subtly echoes early Puritan rhetoric, in which ministers explained colonial hardships with the sins of parishioners. In his Inaugural Address, the President again picks up this jeremiadic image, explaining the weakened economy as “a consequence of *greed* and irresponsibility on the part of some” (Obama 2009). However, in the second

part of his sentence, he relativizes his argument by additionally blaming Americans' "*collective failure* to make hard choices and prepare the nation for a new age" (ibid.). In a Puritan manner, Obama thus implies that the entire community is being punished as it collectively failed to adapt and react appropriately to new challenges – among others, it allegedly did not elect the right leaders, who could have prevented the crisis by implementing necessary policies. In the two early speeches on January 24 and February 9, the President focuses more explicitly on the shortcomings of the previous government and makes sure to stress that his administration "inherited" the crisis from his predecessor: "We begin this year and this Administration in the midst of an unprecedented crisis." (January 24) "My administration inherited a deficit of over \$1 trillion, but because we also inherited the most profound economic emergency since the Great Depression." (February 9) He goes into further detail in his critique of policies from the Bush-era stating:

But as we've learned very clearly and conclusively *over the last eight years*, tax cuts alone can't solve all of our economic problems – especially tax cuts that are targeted to the wealthiest few Americans. We have tried that strategy, time and time again. And it's only helped *lead us to the crisis we face right now*.

(February 9)

Obama claims to have learned from the alleged mistakes of his predecessor, which, according to him, led to the critical situation.¹¹⁸ Additionally, he mentions Hurricane Katrina, calling into mind the widely perceived mismanagement of the Bush administration, which contributed to turning a storm into a crisis.¹¹⁹ The parallel implicitly discredits the Republican administration's crisis prevention and crisis management skills. To distance himself from what he presents as his predecessor's shortcoming, Obama announces that his Recovery Act will include "repairing our dangerously deficient dams and levees, so that we don't face another Katrina." (February 9) Moreover, he proposes a different course of actions in several other areas that according to him need improvement in order to prevent a deepening crisis:

And that's why we have come together, around a plan that combines hundreds of billions in tax cuts for the middle class with *direct investment in areas like health care, energy, education and infrastructure, investments that will save jobs*, create new jobs and new businesses and help our economy grow again, now and in the future.

(February 9)

118. This central legitimization strategy could not be derived from the proximization model, which points to its limitations.

119. Cf. Chapters 3.2.3.1–3.2.3.3.

The President creates the image of himself as a farsighted leader who will help the economy grow “now and in the future” through his harmonized approach. The statement implies that the previous government neglected these tasks, as it did not come up in time with a coherent long-term strategy, and thereby contributed to the current problems.

While the President assigns blame for the critical situation to others and thereby frees his own administration of any responsibility, his overall tone is conciliatory. Unifying language serves to present the recovery as a joined effort. On January 24, Obama employs the pronoun “we” 22 times and furthermore speaks of “our problems,” “our economy,” and “our children” (the word “our” appears six times altogether). On February 9, “we” appears 18 times and “our” a high 15 times, six times alone in combination with the term “economy.” On the linguistic level, the message is passed on that the crisis concerns the entire country and its people (variations of “America/-n/-s” can be found 12 times on January 24 and 13 times on February 9). Consequently, Americans have to “come together” and “work together” for the sake of a better “future.” (February 9)

Change, optimism, and the jeremiad

Obama’s early rhetoric offers an optimistic outlook on the future of the country. In his first weekly address, the President uses the word “will” eleven times, suggesting that the positive outcome of his proposed policies is certain. Additionally, the calm and clear voice with which he delivered the speech, projects confidence. At the same time, Obama shows himself as a man of actions who has a different vision of the country than his predecessor and will pursue it with the help of “new” (the word appears six times) practices and policies, like “new infrastructure,” a “new economy,” or a “new website.” He announces that he has “proposed an American Recovery and Reinvestment Plan to *immediately jump-start job creation as well as long-term economic growth.*” The President defines his four leading economic issues for the future. First, clean energy: “To accelerate the creation of a clean energy economy, we will double our capacity to generate alternative sources of energy like wind, solar, and biofuels over the next three years.” Second, health care: “To lower health care cost, cut medical errors, and improve care, we’ll computerize the nation’s health record in five years, saving billions of dollars in health care costs and countless lives.” Third, education: “To ensure our children can compete and succeed in this new economy, we’ll renovate and modernize 10,000 schools, building state-of-the-art classrooms, libraries, and labs to improve learning for over five million students.” And fourth, infrastructure: “we will rebuild and retrofit America to meet the demands of the 21st century. That means repairing and modernizing thousands of miles of America’s roadways and providing new mass transit options for millions of

Americans.” Lakoff convincingly argues that Obama’s economic program is also a moral one. According to the scholar, the President chooses his priorities “because they are at the heart of government’s moral mission of protection and empowerment, and correspondingly, they are what is needed to act on empathy, social and personal responsibility, and making the future better” (Lakoff 2009b). Lakoff further explains that the economic crisis also constitutes an opportunity for Obama, as “it *requires* him to spend hundreds of billions of dollars on the right things to do” (ibid.).

The President uses crisis rhetoric for the deliberative purposes of pushing progressive reform in the mentioned areas of his interest, which otherwise would have been difficult to pass. His approach is in line with Windt’s (1986) model of crisis rhetoric, which suggests that a speaker must often transcend to a higher moral principle to reach the public. While Obama admits that the situation is difficult and that the road to recovery will not be easy, he simultaneously assures that it is a path worth pursuing since the suggested reforms are allegedly the right thing to do (morally and historically) and will, in the end, lead to recovery. In his First Weekly Address, Obama implies that the country’s future and the concept of the American Dream are endangered. According to his narrative, a whole generation faces the threat of being denied opportunities, which supposedly define America. The President warns his domestic audience that they “could lose a generation of potential, as more young Americans are forced to forgo college dreams or the chance to train for the jobs of the future.” However, he does not elaborate who exactly might be particularly exposed to greater risks due to the difficult economic situation; Obama does not refer to inequalities, which determined the lives of many Americans even before the crisis. As he intends to rhetorically unite the nation around a common goal, he does not emphasize on existing divides but rather frames the events as “challenges” for the entire nation and demands immediate actions from all citizens:

But if we act now and act boldly; if we start rewarding hard work and responsibility once more; if we act as citizens and not partisans and begin again the work of remaking America, then I have faith that we will emerge from this trying time even stronger and more prosperous than we were before.

His call for change is connected to the promise of success. This “trying time” appears as yet another test in the nation’s history. Obama talks about “remaking America” and “rewarding hard work and responsibility once more” and thus, in a jeremiadic way, calls for renewal and a return to values upon which the country was allegedly founded. His claim that the nation will emerge “even stronger and more prosperous than (...) before” is intended to spread hope but also to give meaning to the hardships and sufferings related to the crisis. In the Push for Stimulus speech, he additionally refers to the myth of American exceptionalism

in order to make sense of the events. Obama announces: "We find ourselves in a rare moment where the citizens of our country and all countries are watching and waiting for us to lead." With his reference to Winthrop's city upon a hill the President alludes to the country's self-proclaimed missionary role. He suggests that the global community is awaiting America's lead. The economic problems appear as a challenge that America "did not ask for." However, since the country was allegedly chosen to face the crisis, it must solve it for the sake of a better future: "It's a responsibility that this generation did not ask for, but one that we must accept for the future of our children and our grandchildren." On February 9, Obama again makes use of the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Test several times. He describes the events as a "test" and speaks of the "winter of our hardships" as well as of "economic challenges." In his narrative, America will pass this test, as the plan will lead to recovery; it is that "greater purpose" which is worth "set[ing] aside smaller differences." Moreover, he even uses the word "duty," implying that it is allegedly America's special destiny to confront the economic challenges through appropriate legislation: "it is our *duty* as leaders and citizens to stay – *stay true to that purpose* in the weeks and months ahead." In both speeches, Obama assures his audience of his personal conviction that the efforts will not be in vain: "I have *faith* that we will emerge from this trying time even stronger and more prosperous than we were before." (January 24) "I have full *faith* and confidence that we can do it." (February 9) His rhetoric of "faith" subconsciously strengthens the civil religious image of a country on a mission. His policies appear as a consequent next step in the nation's history. The scholar Willie Harrell describes Obama's campaign speeches as "economic jeremiads," since, as he argues, the Democratic candidate urged atonement to initiate change (2011: 299–324). As the analysis demonstrates, his presidential rhetoric equally shows jeremiadic elements. Obama rhetorically unites Americans in the common cause of allegedly fulfilling the nation's democratic mission of securing prosperity. To that purpose he metaphorically calls his people to restore the Covenant by adopting the suggested recovery plan, which allegedly will get the economy back on track. Obama's optimistic jeremiad of change and hope is partly *inbound* in the sense of being directed towards his own community. After all, the President calls for self-corrections when he promises: "We'll launch an unprecedented effort to root out waste, inefficiency, and unnecessary spending in our government." (January 24)

Conclusions

In line with his campaign message of change, Obama rhetorically promotes "new" policies in the economic sector right after assuming office. In his two early major public addresses on the recession, his First Weekly Address to the Nation from January 24, 2009 and the Push for a Stimulus Primetime Press Conference on

February 9, 2009, he advocates the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. From the beginning, the President stresses that his government “inherited” the economic “crisis” and announces that solving it will require a different course of action than the one chosen by his predecessor. Obama establishes his policies in supposed contrast to those of the previous administration with special emphasis on transparency and political participation of the public. While he clearly assigns blame for the problems to the Bush administration and Wall Street, he nevertheless takes on a conciliatory tone of national unity. His use of pronouns and national myths as well as allusions to a shared history, strengthen the uniting effect. Obama illustrates the gravity of the situation not only through numbers, but also with the help of personal stories as well as the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Illness, which put the human dimension of the recession into focus, in an attempt to persuade through pathos. To prevent further damage, the President calls for immediate actions and presents the ARRA as a necessary step in solving the crisis. While he admits that the road to recovery will not be easy, he optimistically assures his audience that it will ultimately lead to success. To strengthen his hopeful message, Obama implicitly makes use of the concept of American exceptionalism and employs jeremiadic elements like the framing of hardships as “tests.”

Both early speeches serve the deliberative function of promoting the Stimulus Act not only among the American public but also among members of Congress, who were scheduled to vote on the bill in the following days. To gain the support of his diverse audience, the President refers to the allegedly common goal of restoring economic stability and calls for bipartisan compromise. He implicitly presents his policies as a return to core American values; a mere “recovery” adapted to new circumstances rather than a substantial reform. This does not contradict the fact that the bill in fact heralds far-reaching changes in areas that Obama specifies (like e.g. energy efficiency). On the contrary, Obama’s use of crisis rhetoric pervaded by jeremiadic elements allows him to present his (in many ways innovative) plan as a consequent continuation of American political traditions. The President merely breaks with his predecessor’s legacy, which according to his narrative led to the crisis, but not with the founding ideas of the nation, which have played an important role in American public discourses ever since colonial times. The familiarity of the employed rhetorical elements allegedly acts as guarantor for the supposed righteousness and ultimate success of his policies.

3.3.3.2 *B. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009 and Remarks upon signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009*

On January 28, 2009, the House of Representatives passed the ARRA by a 244–188 vote, with all but 11 Democrats voting for the bill and 177 Republicans voting

against it (one Republican abstained). Two weeks later, on February 10, the Senate also voted for the bill with 61–37 (one Senator did not vote). All the Democrats were in favor while all but three Republicans opposed it. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act thus reached the necessary majority in both Houses and President Obama was scheduled to sign it into law on February 17. At the time, Democrats dominated the 111th U.S. Congress. Therefore, Obama was in a decidedly different situation than Bush while promoting the TARP. While both Presidents called for bipartisan support for their policies, Obama was able to pass his Stimulus Act despite strong opposition on the side of the Republicans, since his own Party held the necessary majority in both chambers.

In his Weekly Address following the vote, on February 14, the President showed himself pleased with the results; he spoke of “an ambitious plan at a time we badly need it” and promised to “turn this crisis into opportunity.” The speech lasted 4:47 minutes and consists of 782 words. Three days later, Obama delivered a speech in Denver, Colorado right before signing the bill. His remarks lasted 15:43 minutes and consist of 2493 words. Vice President Joe Biden was standing next to Obama while the President heralded what he optimistically described as “the beginning of the end.”

The ARRA as “the beginning of the end”

The presidential Weekly Address from February 14 is solely devoted to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which won congressional approval a few days earlier. Obama calls the consensus on the plan “a major milestone on our road to recovery” and a “historic step,” optimistically announcing that Congress has “delivered real and tangible progress for the American people.” While his remarks before the signing of the bill in Denver are significantly longer, the tone and message show many parallels to the broadcast. On February 17, the President similarly declares that “we have begun the essential work of keeping the American Dream alive in our time” and that “today does mark the beginning of the end.” Using words that are reminiscent of his earlier mentioned remarks, he refers to the Stimulus Act as “the most sweeping economic recovery package in our history” and promises it will bring “real and lasting change for generations to come.” Simultaneously, in both speeches, he stresses the persisting seriousness of the situation. The persuasive appeal of the oratory is built on the juxtapositions of an allegedly fatal state of affairs and the promise of a better future. The President employs the word “crisis” three times in each of the addresses. (Additionally, the term “critical” appears five times on February 17.) He describes the effects of the recession on the lives of individual Americans: “Families losing the homes that were their stake in the American Dream. Folks who have given up trying to get ahead, and given in to the stark reality of just trying to get by.” (February 14) Moreover, he mentions the difficult fiscal situation (“[o]ur debt has doubled,” February 14) and uses the

conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is War to add graveness to his message (“to *battle* 21st century problems,” February 17). Obama points to the limitations of the plan; he admits that the Stimulus “won’t be the end of what we do to turn our economy around” since “the problems that led us into this crisis are deep and widespread.” (February 14) Furthermore, the President soberly remarks: “Now, I don’t want to pretend that today marks the end of our economic problems. Nor does it constitute all of what we’re going to have to do to turn our economy around.” He admits that “[n]one of this will be easy” and concludes that “this legislation represents only the first part of the broad strategy we need to address our economic crisis.” (February 17) However, while he stresses that the country is facing a “challenging agenda,” he, at the same time, assures the public that it is an agenda that “we can and will achieve.” (February 14) Both his addresses carry a strong message of hope. To illustrate his optimistic message of progress and recovery as ongoing but sometimes difficult process, Obama makes use of the conceptual metaphor Recovery From Economic Crisis Is Journey. He calls the plan “a major milestone on our road to recovery” (February 14) and claims that “[t]he road to recovery will not be straight” and that “there may be some *slippage along the way*,” but nevertheless expresses his full “confidence that we will *leave this struggling economy behind us, and come out on the other side*, more prosperous as a people.” (February 17) Just like on a journey, America will come closer to its metaphorical travel destination – the economic recovery – step by step. While the road there will sometimes be difficult, it will eventually lead to the desired destination and the travel experience itself will be enriching and formative for the nation, as the President suggests. The journey imagery helps the President to make sense of the events by connecting present and past hardships. It implies that the economic difficulties of the time are not in vain; they appear as part of the country’s supposed “mission” (February 17) and, like prior problems, these “challenges” (the lexeme appears three times in the speech on February 14 and one on February 17) will also be overcome. The President thus uses American “history” (the lexeme appears once on February 14 and four times on February 17) and the country’s founding myths to present his plan as the consequent next step on America’s path. On February 17, Obama assures his domestic audience that if they endorse the ARRA, it will eventually “get [their] economy moving again” and the country “will make progress.” However, he also makes clear that the road to progress will “demand courage and discipline.” The term “discipline,” which Weber (1992) defines as one of the key factors that led to the economic success of the Puritans, appears in both addresses. Obama implies that a lack of this virtue led to the problems in the first place and announces that the plan will “begin to restore the discipline these challenging times demand.” (February 14) This process is not supposed to be easy “for our American story is not – and has never been – about things coming easy,” as he claims. In this way, the recovery appears also as an alleged test for the country. In the last paragraph of his

speech, the President then goes on to explain in greater detail what the “American story” is all about, according to him:

It's about rising to the moment when the moment is hard, and converting crisis into opportunity, and seeing to it that we emerge from whatever trials we face stronger than we were before. It's about rejecting the notion that our fate is somehow written for us, and instead laying claim to a destiny of our own making. That's what earlier generations of Americans have done, that's what we owe our children, that's what we are doing today. (February 17)

The anaphoric repetition of “it's about” puts emphasis on the supposed special importance of the moment of economic crisis, as this “trial” will supposedly make the country “stronger” and will allow it to reclaim its “destiny.” In this sense, the crisis becomes also an “opportunity.” Already on February 14, Obama makes a similar point, declaring in an almost prophetic manner: “America, we will prove equal to this task. It will take time, and it will take effort, but working together, *we will turn this crisis into opportunity and emerge from our painful present into a brighter future.*” In the presidential narrative, the “tasks” (five times on February 14) are admittedly challenging, but have the allegedly positive effect of prompting Americans to do “the work America needs done” (February 14) or “the critical work that must be done” (February 17) and, in the end, will allow the country to “leave this struggling economy behind (...), and come out on the other side, more prosperous as a people.” (February 17) In his Weekly Address, he recalls: “President Kennedy spoke in another time of uncertainty. ‘Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men. Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks.’”¹²⁰ By quoting the former President, Obama assumes a civil-religious, priestly tone and again refers back to the country's shared history, making the point that Americans have already faced and overcome difficult times before. He engages his domestic audience in collective remembering and encourages his listeners to prevail, become “stronger,” and “work[] together.” (February 14) The rhetoric encompasses a call for return to allegedly quintessentially American virtues and founding ideas, like the “American Dream” (the concept is mentioned in both speeches), which the country was supposedly about to lose due to the economic downturn, but the ARRA has “begun the essential work of keeping the American Dream alive in our time.” (February 17) The President promises that the Stimulus Act will “reward responsibility” and presents it as a first step in

120. In fact, J. F. Kennedy was quoting his “fellow Bostonian, the Reverend Phillips Brooks.” The exact quote reads: “Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men! Do not pray for tasks equal to your powers. Pray for powers equal to your tasks” (Kennedy 1963).

keeping his elections promise of giving “every American the chance to make of their lives what they will; to see their children climb higher than they did.” (February 17) Moreover, he connects the concept of upward mobility through education to “God,” as he promises that “a new \$2,500 annual tax credit (...) [will] make college affordable for 7 million students – helping more of our sons and daughters aim higher, reach further, fulfill their God-given potential.” It is the only time that God is directly mentioned in the analyzed economic speeches by Obama. As discussed, the President prefers to use more subtle civil-religious appeals to unite Americans on a subconscious level.

In consideration of the above, I argue that Obama’s narrative turns the apocalyptic phrase “beginning of the end” (February 17) around and fills it with new, hopeful meaning: crisis becomes opportunity as myths and metaphors lend an allegedly historically-grounded, missionary dimension to the recovery plan.

From blame to change

The President decisively denounces “unscrupulous speculators” for “undermining our economy.” In his narrative, they appear as villains and stand in opposition to the “responsible homeowners” at risk of foreclosure, whom Obama wants to help. (February 14) Moreover, in both addresses, Obama makes clear that his administration “inherited” the economic crisis from its predecessor. On February 14, he announces: “Our debt has doubled over the past eight years, and we’ve inherited a trillion-dollar deficit – which we must add to in the short term in order to jumpstart our sick economy.” Three days later, the President similarly declares that “we will need to do everything in the short term to get our economy moving again, while at the same time recognizing that we have inherited a trillion-dollar deficit.” (February 17) The statements divert any responsibility for the problems from the Democratic Party, which only recently took over power. Obama unambiguously places blame with the Bush administration and Wall Street as he explains that solving the critical situation “will demand a new sense of responsibility that’s been missing from Wall Street all the way to Washington.” (February 17) He criticizes the “culture where we ignore problems until they become full-blown crises instead of recognizing that the only way to build a thriving economy is to set and enforce firm rules of the road” (February 17), implying that his predecessor fostered this lackadaisical attitude and thereby led the country into recession. Obama concludes that “Washington hasn’t set a very good example in recent years” and therefore calls for change: “And with so much on the line, it’s time to begin doing things differently.” (February 14) Consequently, he establishes his authority as a capable leader in supposed contrast to Bush. To strengthen the divide, Obama makes use of the conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Mythical Battle. On February 17, he assures that his plan “rewards responsibility” and will lift “two million Americans from

poverty,” stylizing his administration as a sort of Robin Hood who will “help poor and working Americans.” Like in a fairy tale or a mythical battle, doing the right thing will require “courage and discipline,” but it will eventually lead to a happy end as Americans will become “more prosperous as a people,” as the President promises.

Moreover, like in his earlier speeches, Obama again puts focus on the elements of accountability and transparency. He stresses that the recovery plan will be financed with taxpayers' money and tells the U.S. public: "Ultimately, this is your money, and you deserve to know where it's going and how it's spent." (February 14) Therefore, he promises to "spend these precious dollars with unprecedented accountability, responsibility, and transparency" (February 14) and announces that he has assigned "a team of managers to ensure that the precious dollars we've invested are being spent wisely and well." (February 17) In both speeches, he again refers the public to the website recovery.gov, where everyone can trace back how the money is being spent.

The President refers to the ARRA as “[his]” bill; he uses the words “*my economic recovery plan*.” (February 14) Thereby, he simultaneously takes credit and assumes responsibility for the policies it encompasses. The rhetorical choice emanates presidential leadership skill and confidence with regard to the righteousness of the decision. Obama’s speech concentrates on the future; he announces that since Congress has approved the Act, his administration can from now on implement the necessary steps to bring forward the recovery: “we’ll begin making the immediate investments necessary to put people back to work doing the work America needs done.” (February 14) The President creates the image of himself as a decisive leader who is responding to the challenges quickly and competently. To project a clear vision he repeatedly uses strong verbs like “work” and “must,” which are prominently displayed in the respective word clouds.



Figure 17. Word cloud for President Obama's Weekly Address to the Nation, February 14, 2009

The anaphora as a rhetorical device (the repetition of “because we know” at the beginning of every subsequent paragraph), puts focus on the fact that the administration is supposedly aware of the most pressing problems. Obama lists structural challenges, which, as he stress, did not occur overnight. He claims that the current difficulties have their roots in expensive health care, poor education, as well as dependence on foreign energy sources. He implies that the previous administration did not meet these tasks; it spent money inefficiently and thereby piled up more debt. In his later Address to a Joint Session of Congress, on February 2009, he is even more explicit and declares:

The fact is, our economy did not fall into decline overnight. Nor did all of our problems begin when the housing market collapsed or the stock market sank. We have known for decades that our survival depends on finding new sources of energy. Yet we import more oil today than ever before. (Obama 2009f)

Since such far-reaching issues cannot be resolved overnight either, as he argues, the President calls for a long-term strategy. He announces that the plan will “lay a new foundation for our lasting economic growth and prosperity” (February 14) and that Americans “need to begin restoring fiscal discipline and taming [their] exploding deficits *over the long term*.” (February 17) The overarching goal that all suggested measure have in common is to create more “jobs” (the word appears ten times in both speeches together).

Throughout the addresses, the notion of renewal is omnipresent. The main premise of the plan is to achieve “recovery” (three times on February 14, eight times on February 17). The President announces that his “proposal for the federal budget (...) will begin to *restore* the discipline these challenging times demand.” (February 14) The conceptual metaphor Economic Crisis Is Illness advances the idea that the economy, like a patient, has only temporarily fallen sick (“our sick economy” February 14). While the present condition is “painful” (February 14), the illness can be treated. Obama, as the metaphorical doctor in chief, offers medicine in form of the Stimulus Act, which will “*stem the spread* of foreclosures” (February 17) and eventually heal the patient and “keep[] the American Dream alive.” (February 17) Moreover, supporting the call for renewal, the economy is also metaphorically framed as a building under construction; it needs to be “*set (...) on a firmer foundation, paving the way* to long-term growth and prosperity” (February 17), as Obama suggests. Lexical correspondences from the construction-site source domain illustrate that recovery efforts are ongoing but long-term processes. In his weekly address, he mentions and “[t]he *work of repairing our crumbling roads and bridges, and our dangerously deficient dams and levees*” and in his remarks from Denver, he adds:

[W]e *are remaking* the American landscape with the largest new investment in our nation's infrastructure since Eisenhower built an Interstate Highway System in the 1950s.

Because of this investment, nearly 400,000 men and women will go to work rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, repairing our faulty dams and levees.

We *will build on the work* that's being done in places like Boulder – a community that's on its – that's on pace to be the world's first Smart Grid city.

(February 17)

The active verbs appear in their present progressive and the simple future forms, indicating that the government *is already implementing* actions and that these measures (allegedly certainly) *will lead* to an amelioration of the economic realities. At the same time, Obama acknowledges the need for modernization. He praises the plan as it will allegedly enable “[t]he work of *modernizing* our health care system, saving billions of dollars and countless lives; and *upgrading* classrooms, libraries, and labs in our children's schools across America” (February 14) and “*lay a new foundation* for our lasting economic growth and prosperity” (February 17) Especially when it comes to greener and more efficient energy, the focus lies on innovation. The President highlights the importance of “the work of building wind turbines and solar panels and the smart grid necessary to transport the clean energy they create; and laying broadband internet lines to connect rural homes, schools, and businesses to the information superhighway.” (February 14) Like early Puritan jeremiads, Obama's rhetoric encompasses an inbound call for change. The President criticizes deficiencies within American society and, among other, bemoans “problems like climate change” and criticizes that “we can't power America's future on energy that's controlled by foreign dictators.” (February 17) After pointing to regrettable conditions, he assures his audience that his plan will initiate the necessary procedures: “[t]he investment we're making today will *create a newer, smarter electric grid* that will allow for broader use of alternative energy.” (February 17) But even as it endorses innovation, Obama's rhetoric encompasses the country's past by applying a sweeping analogy:

[T]his recovery act represents the biggest increase in basic research funding in the long history of America's noble endeavor to better understand our world. And just as President Kennedy sparked an explosion of innovation when he set America's sights on the moon, I hope this investment will ignite our imagination once more, spurring new discoveries and breakthroughs in science, in medicine, in energy, to make our economy stronger and our nation more secure and our planet safer for our children.

The President compares the increase in research funding guaranteed by the Recovery Act to the resources granted to NASA for the purposes of space missions.

Specifically, Obama refers to John F. Kennedy's Speech before a Special Joint Session of Congress, from May 25, 1961, in which the former President announced the goal of sending an American to the Moon before the end of the decade (Kennedy 1961b). He does not mention the fact this decision was prompted by the Cold War climate of the era. At the time, the United States wanted to overtake the Soviet Union in the space race. Instead, Obama alludes to the symbolic, breakthrough moment of the Moon landing itself. To many Americans, the success of the Apollo 11 mission continues to be inspiring, as it symbolically represent a moment in history when the United States were widely seen as a global leader in many fields. By evoking that image, Obama frames the ARRA research funding as yet another milestone "in the long history of America's noble endeavor to better understand our world." The President expresses his hope that the plan will prompt innovations, which will not only "make [the American] economy stronger" but which will also have the ambitious goal of making the "nation more secure and our planet safer for our children." Connecting the past to the future, he adds a missionary element to the Stimulus Act.

Additionally, Obama stresses that regulations in the financial sector need to be redefined: "For our plan to succeed, we must *stabilize, repair, and reform* our banking system, and get credit flowing again to families and businesses. We must *write and enforce new rules* of the road, to stop unscrupulous speculators from undermining our economy ever again." (February 14) And: "[W]e need to begin *restoring fiscal discipline* and taming our exploding deficits over the long term. (February 17) The term "new" appears three times in his broadcasted address and nine times in the speech before the signing of the bill. However, according to the presidential narrative, the new seemingly does not contradict the old. Rather, it appears as an allegedly necessary development, an adaptation of traditional ways to modern circumstances. The prefix "re-" (conveying the sense of going back or doing something again) appears numerous times throughout both addresses to indicate that the suggested changes, in fact, only herald renewal. Therefore, I argue that in the way it endorses change by calling for a return to traditional values, Obama's rhetoric resembles the Puritan rhetoric and specifically Covenant Renewal jeremiads.

Unity and bipartisanism

Due to the occasion, the upcoming ceremonial signing of the ARRA, Obama extends his thanks to all those involved in the process of preparing the bill. On February 14, he says: "I want to thank the Members of Congress who came together in common purpose to make it happen. Because they did, I will sign this legislation into law shortly." And on February 17, he devotes six paragraphs to naming government officials, including several Governors, "the best Vice President that we've

had in a long time – Joe Biden,” and the Chairman of the Finance Committee Max Baucus, whose personal engagement “helped shepherd this process through in record time,” as the President claims. Above all, Obama stresses that the law is “the product of broad consultation” and specifically mentions support from politicians, government leaders, as well as “business leaders, unions, public interest groups.” The plan appears as a compromise between different groups of interest, which implicitly strengthens its legitimacy; its necessity seems undeniable if such different actors feel the need to come together to work it out: “It’s a rare thing in Washington for people with such diverse and different viewpoints to come together and support the same bill.” On the linguistic level, Obama uses a high amount of personal pronouns; “we” appears 19 times in the broadcasted address and 59 times in the speech from Denver. The difficult situation is framed as “our economic crisis” (twice on February 17). The possessive form “our” can be found 17 times on February 14, and 34 times on February 17, indicating that the problems allegedly affect the whole country and its people (the terms “America/-n/-s” appear eight and 29 times respectively). Consequently, they must be solved by “working together” (February 14), as the President claims. (In total, the word “together” appears five times in the two addresses.) Obama expresses gratitude for the alleged bipartisan cooperation, thanking “Democrats and Republicans” as well as “all the committee chairs and members of Congress.” (February 17) He implies that they put aside differences for the sake of a greater, common duty of jointly serving their country. The President claims that “[t]he American people were looking to them for leadership, and that’s what they [the committee and chairs members of Congress] provided.” (February 17) In a presidential manner, he thanks all of them “on behalf of our nation” for their “outstanding job.” (February 17) Already during his campaign, Obama talked about ending the divide between red and blue states in order to work together for the good of the one, shared United States of America – a message he now repeats.

However, the harmonious picture he paints does not correspond to political realities. The ARRA never gained bipartisan support; in fact, almost all Republican Senators and members of the House of Representative voted against the bill. Just like Roosevelt, President Obama strongly benefited from the Democratic majority in Congress; both Presidents were able to pass their far-reaching economic crisis policies (the New Deal and the ARRA) thanks to their parties’ dominant positions in the upper and lower houses (cf. Allswang 1978). Nevertheless, despite the actual missing bipartisan support for his plan, Obama continues to rhetorically present himself as a President who unites Democrats and Republicans by allegedly cooperating with both sides and working out compromises in the best interest of the entire country. He assures the American public that his administration’s plan will allegedly “*help* folks who’ve lost their jobs through no fault of their own

by *providing* the unemployment benefits they need and *protecting* the health care they count on.” (February 14) The verbs “help,” “protect,” and “provide” project a presidential sense of responsibility for ending the difficult situation that many U.S. citizens found themselves in. The emphasis on unity strengthens Obama credibility as a speaker; he maintains his ethos, which he built up during his campaign and which contributed to his success (Plouffe 2009). He shows himself as an empathetic leader, recalling personal encounters with those most hurt by the economic downturn: “This week, I spent some time with Americans across the country who are hurting because of our economic crisis. People closing the businesses they scrimped and saved to start.” (February 14) Obama appeals to his audience through pathos, rhetorically evoking sympathy for Americans in need, and simultaneously assures that the plan will bring about the required help. His optimistic outlook on the future of the country is strengthened through the use of words with a high degree of pleasantness (the D.A.L. means lie at 1.67 for February 14 and 1.66 for February 17) and again unites the audience around the promise of shared success. Despite the gravity of the situation, the President lightens the mood by including humor. Among others, before signing the ARRA on February 17 in Denver, he cheerfully advises the officials gathered around him: “You guys can sit down, too.” Moreover, he playfully announces: “It is great to be back in Denver. I was here last summer – we had a good time.” The statements are followed by laughter from the audience. This rhetorical move creates the impression that times cannot be solely desperate if the President can still joke around. It also creates a bond between the audience and the speaker, as both sides need to understand and participate in the humorous act for it to function. Additionally, it reflects on Obama’s rhetorical gift to engage his audience, his exceptional charisma as a speaker, which was widely remarked upon by the media as well as academia.

Conclusions

At the point in time when Obama delivered the analyzed addresses, the ARRA had already won congressional approval. Although the bill did not have the support of the Republican Party, the President stresses the bipartisan efforts on the legislation. The speech constitutes a continuation of his campaign rhetoric in which he united the nation around the notions of change and hope. Obama presents himself as a President of all Americans who is allegedly taking the necessary steps to guarantee a better future for the entire country. Nevertheless, he explains the crisis by clearly placing blame with the previous administration and speculators.

The President continues to speak of a “crisis” but optimistically presents the recovery plan as “the beginning of the end” (February 17). He stresses the gravity of the situation, defines priorities, and specifies on areas of investment. The

announced course of actions appears as tough but necessary. Obama promises that it will ultimately make the country stronger and thereby gives meaning to the hardships experienced by many Americans. While he skillfully balances fear and hope in order to win public approval for his plan, the motif of hope dominates the picture. The D.A.L. mean for pleasantness is higher than in his previous speeches. Priestly, civil-religious rhetoric lends an allegedly historically-grounded, missionary dimension to the recovery plan; in the presidential narrative crisis becomes opportunity. The President uses myths and metaphors to connect past to present and engage the audience in collective remembering. Jeremiadic elements help him frame his planned policies not as revolutionary changes but rather as a return to old standards adapted to modern realities. He claims not to challenge the system, but merely to implement improvements that are allegedly necessary to end the critical situation. I argue that the President exploits the notion of crisis to push for reforms that go deeper than a short-term economic stimulus. While the ARRA includes interference in substantial and broad fields, from education and health-care to infrastructure and clean energy, Obama suggests that his legislation in fact constitutes a historically consistent and quintessentially American response. However, if circumstances were framed and perceived as non-critical, the public certainly would have been less willing to accept and support reforms, especially if they go along with costs and sacrifices. Since the recovery will take time, as the President himself admits, he needs the public's approval and cooperation to carry out his plan and thus his rhetoric aims at generating lasting public support that goes beyond the signing of the bill.

In how far was the President's crisis framing successful? Like Roosevelt, Obama entered office at a time of economic downturn. Both Presidents promised change and implemented far-reaching policies during their first weeks in office. While one might argue that Roosevelt was able to pass the New Deal and Obama the ARRA due to the majority their parties held in Congress, fact is that both programs also enjoyed high public approval at the time when they were introduced. A Gallup poll conducted on February 10, just before the Recovery Act passed both Houses, showed a 59 percent support for the new stimulus law. A *Washington Post/ABC News* poll conducted shortly after the plan became law, from February 19 to 22, showed a similar approval rate of 64 percent for the plan (Newport 2009). When it comes to the general perception of Obama's presidency, Gallup found that the President enjoyed approval ratings of 62 to 64 percent during the time period when the two analyzed addresses were delivered (the polls were conducted from February 9 to 22). These numbers are only slightly lower than right after he assumed office (from January 21 to 25 the approval lay by 67 percent). Obama's approval rating for his first 100 days in office shows an average of 63 percent; it is the fourth highest rating measured by Gallup for this specific, early

period of presidential terms (Jones 2009). Certainly, multiple factors, not only crisis rhetoric, influence presidential approval ratings. However, considering the above-mentioned importance of economic issues at the time when the polls were conducted, I argue that these positive results, to a certain degree, also indicate that the President's crisis framing was successful. To be clear, it is neither the aim of my analysis to evaluate in how far Obama's Keynesian stimulus policies in the end contributed to a recovery or brought lasting reform, nor to speculate if he will go down in history as a capable crisis manager. Rather, I want to show the characteristics of the President's economic crisis rhetoric, expose its functioning in the American context, and compare how it relates to the framing of the events chosen by his predecessor.

3.3.4 Comparisons and conclusions on President Bush's and President Obama's economic crisis rhetoric

Comparisons of Bush's and Obama's economic crisis rhetoric

As my analysis reveals, Bush's rhetoric on the financial and economic crisis gradually developed from an acknowledgement of turmoil on the financial markets to a call for support for his economic policies. The speeches display a steady shift in focus and framing. The President's first two addresses are largely informative and descriptive in nature and project the image of a situation under control. Bush praises his own administration while blaming "illegal" activities of some "investors" for problems however, fails to clearly identify a guilty party or the root of the problem, which weakens his argument. In his later Address to the Nation from September 24, 2008, epideictic elements are overshadowed by deliberative rhetoric. Bush's speech pursues the clear objective of convincing Congress and the American public to support his bailout plan (TARP). Additionally, the narrative confirms the alleged righteousness of the capitalist system. The tone of the address remains hopeful. On the linguistic level, words with a high degree of pleasantness paint an optimistic view of the future. I see Bush's economic crisis speeches as meaning-attributing narratives, which advocate the rescue package with the help of nation-affirming discourse.

The analysis of President Obama's speeches on the economic downturn exposes a different rhetorical development. Obama took over office in midst of a recession as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research (cf. NBER "US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions"). While he continued the rhetoric of "crisis" initiated by Bush, Obama simultaneously incorporated his campaign rhetoric of change into the discourse and used the situation to push his own, new policies in the economic sector. His two early major public addresses on the recession, his First Weekly Address to the Nation from January 24, 2009, and the

Push for a Stimulus Primetime Press Conference on February 9, 2009, delivered already a few days after his inauguration, have the deliberative purpose of promoting the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act among the American public and the members of Congress. Obama focuses on the allegedly “inherited” nature of the crisis, thus clearly assigning blame to his predecessor. Furthermore, he identifies “speculators” as the guilty party and consequently calls for new rules on Wall Street. The two later speeches, were both delivered after the ARRA won congressional approval. These circumstances determine parts of their celebratory nature. In a uniting manner, Obama presents himself as a President of all Americans who is allegedly taking the necessary steps to guarantee a better future for the entire country. While he admits that the road to recovery will not be easy, he optimistically presents the recovery plan as “the beginning of the end.” (February 17) The speeches remain future-oriented; Obama defines priorities, and specifies on areas of investment. Priestly, civil-religious rhetoric lends an allegedly historically-grounded, missionary dimension to the recovery plan; in the presidential narrative crisis becomes opportunity. Thus, the President starts off with deliberative rhetoric and then incorporates ceremonial, epideictic elements in the later speeches.

A further comparison of Bush’s and Obama’s economic crisis rhetoric points to several similarities. The Presidents stress the alleged gravity of the situation and frame the events as critical. Especially their primetime addresses primarily serve the deliberative function of gaining approval for their policies. Furthermore, both employ myths, metaphors, and historical analogies to make sense of the events and unite the public around the notion of an allegedly shared destiny. To gain the support of their diverse audiences, the Presidents refer to the supposedly higher common cause of restoring economic stability and call for bipartisan compromise. In similar ways, Bush and Obama implicitly present their policies as a return to core American values; conceptual metaphors and jeremiadic elements suggest that renewal and not substantial reform is needed. Both create the image of themselves as strong but empathetic leaders and attempt to appeal to their audience chiefly through ethos and pathos.

Nonetheless, several differences can be observed. First of all, Bush takes some time before he starts speaking of an economic recession while Obama assumes the crisis framing right away. This difference certainly has to do with the fact that the economic situation changed over time; especially the negative impact of the economic downturn on the job market became a central theme after reports showed growing unemployment rates and the media picked up on the topic (cf. Herszenhorn 2008). However, this does not change the fact Bush could have assumed a crisis framing earlier on: according to the National Bureau of Economic Research (2015), the recession began already in December 2007 (cf. NBER

“US Business Cycle Expansions and Contractions”). The argument presented is it that he deliberative chose not to rhetorically address the critical situation for a long time, in order not to grant it additional public attention. It does not seem far-fetched to argue that the President had hoped to pass the problem to his successor before the situation escalated. For Bush as an outgoing President, the financial and economic downturn constituted yet another issue that negatively affected his approval polls and threatened his legacy. Therefore, he only addressed the topic when he could no longer ignore it; when chief economists publicly called for a federal response, Bush had to assert his credibility as a leader. Obama, however, already referred to the critical situation during his presidential campaign in order to support his message that change is necessary. After he came into office, he further stressed the allegedly inherited nature of the crisis in an attempt to politically capitalize on the claim and push reforms that go deeper than a short-term economic stimulus. The President’s economic rhetoric, similarly to traditional jeremiads, urges atonement to initiate change; Obama perpetuates the fears of the moment to open the way for new policies in broad fields like education, health-care, infrastructure, and energy. Meanwhile, the President implies that his legislation merely calls for renewal and thus constitutes a historically consistent and quintessentially American response. In his speeches, he rhetorically transforms crisis into opportunity: Obama presents the launching of the ARRA as an allegedly new beginning that will make the country stronger. Another difference in framing has to do with the fact that Obama aims at generating long-lasting support for his presidency (also in view of the next presidential elections). Since the recovery will take time, as the President admits, he needs the public’s support to extend beyond the signing of the bill. To that purpose, the ceremonial speeches, celebrating the congressional approval for the ARRA, combine epideictic with future-oriented deliberative elements.

In the end, Bush’s TARP as well as the Obama’s ARRA both won the necessary majority in Congress. While multiple factors contribute to the passing of bills, presidential rhetoric also has an impact on the success of the legislative processes. In that respect, the addresses succeeded at fulfilling their deliberative functions. The data concerning the presidential approval remains difficult to compare. When it comes to the support for Bush’s presidency at the end of his second term, several aspects, including the high public disapproval of the war in Iraq, conditioned his low popularity (Jones 2008). Gallup polls show that when Obama assumed office, he enjoyed exceptional high approval ratings, as the majority of voters was tired of Republican rule and embraced his message of change. Mindful of these limitations, I nevertheless read the poll data as a proof that Bush’s crisis framing could not stop the negative trend, while Obama’s rhetoric on the economic downturn did not weaken his strong position.

Characteristic of Bush's and Obama's economic crisis rhetoric

Despite the mentioned differences in context and framing, Bush's and Obama's speeches on the economic downturn show the following, common characteristics:

- Emphasis on the alleged uniqueness and gravity of the events and sense of urgency
- Depiction of crisis as test rather than punishment (a parallel to Puritan jeremiads)
- Careful balance between fear and hope (inherent feature of jeremiads; advanced through word-use and distinct metaphors)
- Strong element of hope, ever-present vision of a better future (parallel to the optimistic American jeremiad)
- Use of national and civil-religious myths, chiefly exceptionalism, the notion of chosenness, America's Covenant with God, and Manifest Destiny
- Apocalyptic imagery (a parallel to the biblical jeremiad: lamentation of the present/ notion of decline, evocation of the past, and call for renewal)
- Definition of and appeal to supposedly American values/ a national character
- Uniting, nation-building rhetoric
- Religious and civil-religious rhetoric
- Sermon-like priestly and prophetic elements
- Presidential ethos – discourse of strong leadership
- Dominance of pathos over logos
- Intertextuality (citing former presidents, historical crisis speeches, biblical passages)
- Capitalism affirming narrative: call for renewal rather than reform (parallel to rhetoric of Covenant Renewal)
- Rhetorical steps to establishing crisis: going public/informing; sense making; identifying a course of actions; meaning making

The dominance of the listed similarities in the analyzed addresses as well as the fact that they cross partisan lines supports my thesis that presidential crisis rhetoric shows specific characteristics. Many of these traits have a long tradition in American presidential speechmaking and several of them can be traced back to Puritan sermons. In my analysis, I refrain from labeling Bush's and Obama's speeches as economic jeremiads, since they reveal also common characteristics, which have no connection to the biblical genre and with regard to several aspect differ from American jeremiads. Nonetheless, the presence of jeremiadic elements, adapted to contemporary contexts and circumstances, is striking. Both Presidents refer to the past in order to explain present economic hardships and claim the alleged right to shape America's future. They construct and perpetuate the notion of crisis, invoking historical concepts of American identities as well as national myths and metaphors, in order to win support for their respective political purposes.

Comparisons, conclusions, and implications

Crises constitute rhetorical situations, which call for a special kind of discourse from U.S. presidents. At the same time, a specific kind of discourse has the power to define a rhetorical situation which constitutes a crisis. However, in choosing their words, heads of state are not entirely free to act as they please. Precedence, tradition, but also political circumstances determine their framing of critical events. To persuade their audience, presidents need to reconcile these constraints with their political goals. Crisis rhetoric constitutes a tempting tool for leaderships, as it can help to further legitimize and even increase power. The promotion or creation of crisis can thus serve political interests. However, if presidents fail to address critical circumstances in a timely and adequate manner or if their narratives do not convince the public, they can also lose authority. It is certain that the success of presidential crisis management depends on a multiplicity of factors, including political circumstances as well as rhetorical and media framing. Nonetheless, crises are defining moments not only for the presidency but often also in the history of a country. The perceived or constructed exigency to act opens possibilities for implementing change and can stimulate communal understanding. Presidential crisis rhetoric has the power of shaping the future by interpreting present problems through a system of past experience, values, and ideas.

My analysis of contemporary presidential crisis rhetoric shows that the speeches share a set of common characteristics, which are independent of the nature of the critical issues and the party affiliation of the speaker. George W. Bush and Barack Obama are remarkably consistent in the way they frame their ecological, economical, and national security crises narratives. This resemblance supports the argument that crisis discourse calls for a unique kind of rhetoric; what is said and how it is said is determined by a set of culturally specific rules. Indeed, many of the typical traits of American presidential crisis speeches have their roots in Puritan rhetorical traditions and specifically in the form of the jeremiad.

Differences in presidential crisis framings

Before elaborating on the common traits of crisis speeches, differences between the respective crises and the styles of the two Presidents shall be acknowledged. With regard to Bush's post 9/11 speeches, it is striking that the Other is more concretely

defined than in his addresses around environmental or financial crises, where it is constructed in vague terms. Bush's rhetoric concerning Hurricane Katrina largely concentrates on the destructive power of nature, thus minimizing accountability. In his rhetoric around the financial and economic downturn he is equally hesitant to pinpoint a guilty party. In Obama's crises narratives around the explosion on the Deepwater Horizon oilrig in the Gulf of Mexico and the financial and economic downturn, the "enemy" is not as present as in the "war on terror" context; however, the President nevertheless identifies allegedly guilty entities. In the case of the oil spill, Obama places blame with BP, and in the case of the economic recession, he sees speculators and the policies of his predecessor at the root of the problem. Another difference between the rhetoric of the two Presidents concerning environmental issues is the fact that following Hurricane Katrina, Bush concentrates on renewal and rebuilding while Obama, after the oil spill in the Gulf, additionally uses the momentum and specifically the fear of further accidents to open the way for environmental policies. Thus, Obama's rhetoric has the deliberative function of initiating change, while Bush largely concentrates on restoring the status from before the crisis. In the case of the financial and economic crisis, the most striking difference in the respective presidential narratives is that Bush, at first, attempts to downplay the scope of the problems while Obama assumes the crisis framing right away and uses the critical moment to advocate broader political reform. Bush only gradually switches to a deliberative form of crisis discourse in order to generate support for his bailout policies. In contrast to that, Obama starts off with deliberative speech and only gradually incorporates epideictic elements. Out of all analyzed addresses by Bush, only those following the September 11 attacks rhetorically establish and perpetuate the notion of crisis almost right away with the deliberative purpose of implementing far-reaching political and legislative changes.

The described differences in the presidential crisis framings largely derive from political circumstances, into which the contextualization of the events gives further insight. The dominance of Othering techniques in Bush's post 9/11 speeches can be partly attributed to the fact that it is easier in the case of an outside attack and war actions to pinpoint and blame an allegedly guilty party than in the case of natural hazards or a crisis in which a multiplicity of domestic actors are involved. Following Katrina, Bush framed the events as a "natural disaster" and was hesitant to place blame with local and federal officials, as all critique would have simultaneously shed a negative light on his leadership. However, while it might be more difficult to rhetorically create an enemy in crises narratives around an environmental event like the oil spill or a complex problem like the economic downturn, it is still possible as Obama's verbal responses to these issues demonstrate. When it comes to differences in the presidential framings of financial and economic

issues, they surely have been influenced by the fact that the situation changed over time. Moreover, Bush was at the end of his second term while Obama only just assumed office. For Bush, the financial and economic downturn constituted yet another issue that negatively affected his approval polls and threatened his legacy. Therefore, he only addressed the topic when he could no longer ignore it. Obama, however, already referred to the critical situation during his presidential campaign in order to support his message for change. After he came into office, he further stressed the allegedly inherited nature of the crisis in an attempt to politically capitalize on the claim and push reforms.

A look at polling data shows that effects of crisis on policy approval and approval for the presidency can be manifold. Nonetheless, the president's power to rhetorically initiate changes augments during events that are perceived as critical. The differences in framing point to the fact that presidents *choose* which issues to address. By speaking publicly about problems, they automatically grant them particular attention. However, in the choice of topics they are not entirely free to act as they please; the media can also direct public attention towards certain events, prompting presidents to react accordingly. The rhetorical creation or the perpetuation of the notion of crisis can serve a political agenda. The examples show that the Presidents Bush and Obama specifically exploit those critical situations, which offer possibilities for linking to their political goals. Moreover, a gradual development could also be observed *within* the respective crisis narratives; the Presidents constantly adapt their speeches to the rhetorical and political needs of the moment. These observations reflect on the complex nature of crisis discourse. Presidents can influence the course of the events through their crisis rhetoric. However, what they say and how they say it is not entirely left to them: the media, the political situation, but also rhetorical traditions influence the way crises are framed.

Characteristics of contemporary presidential crisis rhetoric

Despite the mentioned differences in presidential crisis framings, which I largely attribute to context and circumstances, it is striking that the speeches share a set of common characteristics. According to my comparison of the findings from all three analytical chapters, the following features define contemporary crisis speeches of U.S. American presidents:

- Emphasis on the alleged uniqueness of the events
- Apocalyptic end-time rhetoric: a parallel to jeremiads (lamentation of the present/ notion of decline, evocation of the past, and call for renewal)
- Depiction of crisis as test rather than punishment: a parallel to Puritan jeremiads

- Careful balance between fear and hope: inherent feature of jeremiads (advanced through word-use and distinct metaphors)
- Fear generating rhetoric, anxiety as a motor for action: inherent feature of all jeremiads
- Strong element of hope, ever-present vision of a better future and ultimate success: parallel to the American jeremiad
- Establishment of a polarizing dichotomy between good and evil (moralistic rhetoric and strong judgment)
- Use of national and civil-religious myths, chiefly exceptionalism, the notion of chosenness, America's Covenant with God, and Manifest Destiny
- Appeal to supposed American values, Western tradition, or national character
- Use of distinct metaphors to frame/create crisis narratives
- Processes of Othering
- Outbound critique: placing blame outside of the community: parallel to Covenant Renewal jeremiads
- Uniting, nation-building rhetoric
- Religious and civil-religious rhetoric
- Sermon-like priestly and prophetic elements
- Presidential ethos – discourse of strong leadership
- Dominance of pathos over logos
- Intertextuality (citing former presidents, historical speeches, biblical passages)
- Call for renewal rather than reform (parallel to Puritan jeremiad, especially its Covenant Renewal version)
- Rhetorical steps to establishing crisis: going public/informing, sense making, identifying a course of actions, meaning making

The Democratic and the Republican President, to a great extent, use the same stylistic devices and rhetorical techniques in their multiple crisis framings. Moreover, while the order and proportion of deliberative and epideictic elements might alternate, their narratives follow a similar structure: First, the Presidents inform the public that a critical situation occurred and declare an urgency to act, then they make sense of the events, and finally they identify a course of action and provide meaning. This suggests the conclusion that the specific format of crisis speeches limits what presidents' say not only in terms of word use but also when it comes to composition. Windt was the first one to define "international crisis rhetoric" and later also "domestic crisis rhetoric" as specific genres (1990: 46; 1987: 91–100). He argues that in the U.S. American context, "precedent, tradition, and expediency" reduce the president's rhetorical options (1987: 92). Drawing on his framework, I was able to further specify these constraints and formulate the above detailed list of common characteristics. As my analysis includes different types of crisis

speeches, which refer to domestic as well as foreign policy issues, I make the generalized claim that presidential crisis speeches constitute a special kind of discourse. While elements like Othering and patriotic appeals are more pronounced during times of international crisis like war (cf. Chapter 3.1), they nevertheless also shape presidential narratives on critical events within the country (Chapters 3.2 and 3.3). The distinction between domestic and international crisis may have partially outgrown its usefulness in an increasingly globalized world, where allegedly national issues often also have a global dimension. Aware of the fact that their words as well as the effects of their policies cross borders, presidents not only address a national but also an international audience. However, the most remarkable finding is that many of the mentioned characteristics of presidential crisis rhetoric – as indicated – have their roots in Puritan rhetorical traditions.

Presidential crisis rhetoric is indirectly also defined by the vast amount of public attention it receives. In times of insecurity, citizens tend to look to their leaders for discourse. Consequently, crises provide the opportunity to increase presidential powers through rhetorical persuasion. The awareness of this potential can be assumed to influence the President's choice of words and thus the genre. The question in how far this element contributes to differences between legitimization discourses in general and presidential crisis speeches invites further comparative studies in this area. While overlaps with regard to several characteristics exist, it is a defining feature of presidential crisis rhetoric that it includes jeremiadic elements not only in speeches which primarily follow the deliberative purpose of legitimizing concrete policies, but also in those in which epideictic elements (like uniting and consolidating the public) dominate.

Presidential crisis rhetoric and the jeremiad tradition

It might seem surprising that Bush, a President known for his religiosity, and Obama, whose religious convictions were the subject of unfounded speculations and attacks during the presidential race, both use an equally high amount of religiously-derived rhetorical elements, as my analysis of their speeches and the above list indicate. This resemblance reflects the fact that American presidential crisis rhetoric remains governed by the rhetorical tradition of the jeremiad. In *The American Jeremiad*, Bercovitch demonstrates the continuity of the form through the development of American culture and literature up until the nineteenth century and describes it as “a ritual designed to join social criticism to spiritual renewal, public to private, identity the shifting “signs of the times” to certain traditional metaphors, themes, and symbols” (1978: xi). On the basis of his framework, I was able to show that the “public ritual” of the jeremiad continues to influence presidential crisis speeches (ibid.: xii). The persistence of the form in twenty-first-century American public discourse supports Perry Miller's claim that the jeremiad

is a literary type that adapts and appeals to subsequent generation (1953: 31). Certainly, contemporary presidential speeches are not Puritan sermons; the jeremiad as a “cultural phenomenon” adjusted to the realities of a multi-religious and multi-ethnic country and the rhetorical needs of its democratic presidents (Bercovitch 1978: xii). However, several core jeremiadic features still play a crucial role in the construction of presidential crisis narratives.

When it comes to composition, the three structural elements, which Howard-Pitney (1990) defines as characteristic of the jeremiad (promise, decline, and prophecy), support the rhetorical buildup of presidential crisis discourse. Both, Bush and Obama, present Americans as an allegedly chosen people. They lament decline, point to problems, and criticize wrongdoings. Finally, both Presidents spread hope through their visions of a better future. While not all three elements are equally present in every one of the speeches (especially the early addresses tend to be short and serve largely an informative function with little room for assigning meaning to the events), my analysis shows that they contributed to the processes of narrating crisis in all discussed cases. Bercovitch maintains that American Jeremiahs simultaneously lament a declension and celebrate a national dream (1978: 180). In this way, the Presidents in fact turn into rhetorical Jeremiahs: they bemoan the allegedly critical state of affairs and refer to the country’s supposedly exceptional role in order to unite their national audience around the optimistic promise of a better future. First, they build up their narratives with the help of the inherently jeremiadic tension between ideal and the real. Then, they explain away this gap through their prophetic visions of America’s past and future. As Bush and Obama (implicitly and explicitly) use biblical themes to challenge citizens to change their attitudes and actions in alleged “relation to God’s will and standards” (Smith 2006: 424), they rhetorically assume the role of “prophets of civil religion” (Smith 2008: 4). Simultaneously, they also operate as “priests”: the Presidents promote unity and provide comfort by evoking civil-religious symbols and motifs. While Bush and Obama combine priestly and prophetic appeals in all analyzed crisis narratives, the prophetic elements are especially conspicuous in Bush’s post 9/11 discourse. Following the terrorist attacks, the President leaves no room for dissent and implicitly presents his policies as a way of executing supposedly divine justice. Prophetic rhetoric entails a strong moral polarization and thus it is a convenient tool for rhetors who aim to present their own worldview as the only valid one, for example in order to justify war.

The dialectic tension between fear and hope is as central to the presidential crisis narratives as it is to American jeremiads. Bush and Obama not only attempt to motivate their audience to act by painting dooming visions, but also promise that the situation can and eventually will improve. They use particular words and rhetorical techniques in order to balance the two emotions and influence the

audience also on the subconscious level. The jeremiadic “deep, stubborn optimism” of their visions is crucial for their crisis discourse, as it works as an incentive to act (Bercovitch 1978:6, 55). Thereby, the Presidents optimistically assure that public efforts will not be in vain. On the one hand, apocalyptic imagery underlines the alleged gravity of the problems. On the other hand, the ideas of chosenness and errand raise hopes for a positive outcome.

Moreover, my analysis reveals that the Presidents in all mentioned cases frame the critical events as a form of test. In this, their narratives resemble Puritan jeremiads. In contrast to its biblical predecessor, the American version of the genre interprets calamities as tests rather than divine wrath. Bercovitch remarks that while Puritans saw all problems as God’s punishments, they believed these acts were “*corrective* not destructive,” thereby minimizing the threat of divine retribution (1978:8).¹²¹ Both Presidents make use of conceptual metaphors, which establish parallels between environmental, economic, or national security issues and a testing situation. Only in a few cases, God is explicitly mentioned as the author of these tests. Often however, alleged divine involvement is implied. Through civil religious motifs and references to history and tradition, Bush and Obama evoke the myth of American exceptionalism and promote the idea of America as a country on a mission. Such a jeremiadic interpretation of critical events optimistically “turn[s] threat into celebration,” as it confirms the alleged chosenness of the country (*ibid.*). Additionally, it can have a soothing effect, as it lends meaning to loss and suffering of those directly affected by critical events. The allusions to the concept of America as a special country that is being tested are clearly not as explicit as in Puritan sermons; however, even in their civil religious form, they remain connected to the beliefs of the early settlers.

This book confirms that the idea of America’s alleged Covenant implicitly continues to influence political crisis rhetoric in the way that Presidents frame policy reforms as forms of renewal. While prompting citizens to endorse the USA PATRIOT Act, to support bailout programs, or to initiate energy reform, Obama and Bush simultaneously also call for a return to the religious and secular founding ideals of the country, disregardful of the fact whether or not their policies in reality comply with these ideals. On the metaphorical level, they reinvent the idea of restoring the Covenant with the help of secular terms (like e.g. values, character, identity). Nonetheless, the argument remains rooted in Judeo-Christian traditions, and specifically the idea of a chosen people. The implicit premise of an allegedly broken Covenant, manifested in the state of crisis, serves as foundation to the social critique embedded in Bush’s and Obama’s rhetoric. However, while the Presidents

121. Italics in the original.

suggest changes, they (naturally) never question the righteousness of their own rule nor the system itself. Murphy notes that the jeremiad, through its connection to the myth of American exceptionalism, “limits the scope of reform and the depth of social criticism” (1990:402). The myth implies that since Americans are allegedly chosen, they merely need to renew their commitment to avert crisis. Thus, the jeremiad is a rhetorical form that projects continuity. Even when it endorses new policies, it frames them as historically consistent responses. While Bush suggests a bailout program, he unsurprisingly never questions the system itself – quite the contrary, he even emphasizes his commitment to free market economy. While Obama’s response to the oil spill includes an energy reform, the President invokes the nation’s shared experience to redefine its identity in a way that conveniently presents clean energy technology as a quintessentially American development. Even war is framed as a continuation of the “errand” in Bush’s post 9/11 rhetoric. Bercovitch describes the jeremiad as “vehicle of cultural continuity” (1978:61). The form can be used to promote social stability and in this function it remains a convenient tool for Presidents, since it can help them not only to preserve but also to inconspicuously enhance their power in times of crisis.

Ever since Puritan times, the American jeremiad has gradually experienced secularization and a shift from internal to external social critique. The jeremiadic elements in presidential crisis speeches seem to comply with this trend. Early Puritan ministers employed jeremiads to denounce the colonists for their wickedness and initiate repentance within the community. In contrast to that, the two Presidents in their addresses largely blame the Other (including foreigners or nature) for the critical state of affairs. In this *outbound* focus, their rhetoric resembles seventeenth century Covenant Renewal jeremiads, which deemphasized the sinfulness within the community and instead attributed problems to external forces, like Britain, the native population, or witches (Miller 1953:29). Nevertheless, Obama’s and Bush’s narratives cautiously also include *inbound* elements. It does not surprise that the rhetoric of twenty-first-century United States Presidents is more secular than that of Puritan ministers. References to God and the Bible were in many, but not all, cases replaced by allegedly shared values and civil religious documents. However, as my discussion of metaphors and myths revealed, beyond the secularized surface, presidential crisis rhetoric remains strongly influenced by Puritan ideas.

The jeremiad secured its presence in American political discourse by adapting to new realities and rhetorical needs. It remains a tempting tool for political leaders for several reasons. First of all, the jeremiadic code – consciously or not – is familiar to a wide American audience. After all, it is “America’s first distinctive literary genre” and influences various different aspects of public life (Bercovitch 1978:6). The jeremiad promotes a group feeling among those who embrace its message. It is a vehicle of civil religion and functions as a form of social glue or

instrument of cohesion.¹²² Moreover, the jeremiad is a great device for rhetorically establishing crisis: since the exceptionalist promise upon which it was built can never be reached, there will always be a discrepancy between the status quo and the ideal. At the same time, it can optimistically turn crisis into opportunity and enhance the power of the rhetorical Jeremiah. I see the main potential of the jeremiad in its capacity to interpret problems in a way that unites audiences around myths of a shared past and a vision of a better future. The evolvement of the form and its present use in presidential crisis rhetoric are revealing of American self-definitions. Therefore, discussion of jeremiadic elements and their Puritan roots in Bush's and Obama's crisis speeches allows for a more complete understanding of their nature and function.

Conclusions and implications

Crises do not simply happen, they are complex processes. Presidential rhetoric can contribute to their creation or promotion. The way presidents address the nation, the words they chose and the narratives they built up, can have a great impact on the way critical events are perceived. The multilayered nature of presidential crisis rhetoric confirms the usefulness of my interdisciplinary approach. The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods makes it possible to illuminate different aspects of the speeches and, thereby, allows for a more complete understanding of their functioning. Factors like the socio-political situation, the makeup of the audience, or the mode of communication influence public speechmaking. Hence, the contextualization of the addresses constitutes a crucial first step for the analysis. The selected speeches differ significantly when it comes to the nature of the problems they address. Moreover, some were delivered by a Democratic President, the others by a Republican. This diversity substantiates the results as it allows for their wider generalization.

As discussed in the introduction, the employed empirical methods clearly have their limitation. Nonetheless, the word clouds turned out to be useful tools when it comes to the visualization of the word frequency in presidential speeches and in some cases they pointed on first sight to the main themes of the addresses. The D.A.L. value for pleasantness also proved to be a helpful tool in my discussion of the emotional valance of speeches and specifically their jeremiadic balance of hope and fear. My lists of conceptual metaphors identified dominant framings of the critical events and heralded when a progressive shift would take place (e.g. from framing events as a crime to depicting them as a war). The proximisation

122. As discussed in Chapter 2.3.3, it also excludes certain groups from the alleged national discourse.

framework provided insights on the linguistic elements of threat construction and policy legitimization. All in all, the quantitative findings constitute a good point of departure for the further qualitative discussions of the speeches. However, only a close reading of the individual texts, with a special emphasis of the role of myths, metaphors, and intertextuality, allowed dissecting how the Presidents construct their crisis narratives. A look at Aristotelian genre theory was helpful in identifying epideictic and deliberative elements in the speeches and thus gave further insight into their rhetorical purposes. With the help of critical discourse and rhetorical analysis I was able to conduct a list of common characteristics of crisis speeches and draw the conclusion that the form remains influenced by Puritan traditions. Bercovitch's framework was particularly helpful for tracing the jeremiadic elements of contemporary U.S. American presidential crisis rhetoric.

Crises offer an increased potential for presidential rhetorical leadership (Bostdorff & O'Rourke 1997). They can constitute turning points in a country's history. If presidents manage to rhetorically tie critical events or developments to political priorities, their power to initiate changes and reforms can increase. However, crises do not guarantee rhetorical success. If the president is perceived as having contributed to the problems and his proposed solutions do not find public approval, the government can suffer a loss of legitimacy. But what determines if presidents will be able to persuade their audience? The question remains hard to answer. Throughout this book, I refer to opinion polls on presidential approval before and after the respective speeches (chiefly conducted by Gallup). I treat this data with caution, as a variety of factors influence such ratings. One tendency that can be observed is that presidential crisis rhetoric has a more positive impact on presidential approval when it clearly identifies an enemy and when the presidential framing of the events corresponds with the media framing. Additionally, there seems to be an increased demand for uniting rhetoric; nation-binding appeals motivate audiences to act in accord with the speaker's intentions. However, there are still very few studies that systematically analyze the impact of political addresses. Presidential rhetoric is important because the public grants it a high level of attention. Further studies should include more audience research in order to enable a better understanding of the complex processes of persuasion. This book is limited to a selection of crises speeches from the first decade of the twenty-first century. It would also be interesting to extend the study and conduct systematical analyses on Obama's rhetorical responses to the Boston marathon bombing, the threat of Ebola, the killing of Michael Brown and the protests in Ferguson, school shootings, the war in Ukraine, the threat posed by ISIS, the war in Syria, as well as the increasing migration of refugees from African countries and many other current issues, which are publicly framed as being critical.

Crisis communication continues to play an important role in American public life. Contemporary U.S. presidents use crisis speeches to provide their audience with a sense of purpose and direction. In many ways, their rhetoric still embodies the American Puritan experience. With the help of national myths, presidents attempt to unite the nation in a common cause. Metaphors and intertextuality serve to illustrate the supposed righteousness of their policies. Presidential definitions of an allegedly American character still strongly rely on Puritan conceptions of the nation's special role in history. However, historical myths are rewritten to suit new realities and political purposes. The jeremiadic elements in the meaning-attributing crisis narratives are secularized to suit a diversified audience. At a time when U.S. society is deeply divided between red states and blue states, jeremiadic crisis rhetoric is a tempting political tool, since it reaffirms the country's supposed mission and unites the nation around an optimistic vision of the future. Presidential crisis rhetoric is thus not a mere ornament but a primary force that drives the American imagination. As a specific kind of discourse, it is a valuable source of information on U.S. society and political culture; the study of its characteristics allows for a better understanding of America's self-definitions. Decoding crisis narratives can make audiences more conscious and discerning of their functions, as it reveals that presidential words matter.

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Appendix

Conceptual metaphors/ framings and lexical correspondences

3.1 9/11 as New American Jeremiad?: Analysis of President George W. Bush's speeches following the September 11 terrorist attacks

Terrorism Is Crime

Remarks at Emma Booker Elementary School, Sarasota, Florida, September 11, 2001.

1. victims (x2)
2. conduct a full-scale investigation
3. who committed this act

9/11 Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, September 11, 2001.

1. cowardly acts
2. victims (x2)
3. punish

Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., September 11, 2001.

1. acts of mass murder
2. the search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts
3. law enforcement communities
4. to find those responsible and bring them to justice
5. to conduct a full-scale investigation
6. the terrorists who committed these acts
7. victims

Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, National Cathedral, Washington D.C., September 14, 2001.

1. murderers
2. prevented the murder
3. victims

Address to a Joint Session of Congress following 9/11 Attacks, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001.

1. murder/-ers/-rous (x4)
2. victims (x2)

Presidential Address to the Nation, Treaty Room, White House, Washington D.C., October 7, 2001.

1. murder/-ers (x2)
2. bring them to justice
3. outlaw/-s (x2)

State of the Union Address 2002, U.S. Congress, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002.

1. murder (x3)
2. victims

Presidential Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, March 19, 2003.

1. murder

Terrorism Is War

9/11 Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, September 11, 2001.

1. military

Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., September 11, 2001.

1. retreat
2. peace (x2)
3. war against terrorism
4. military (x2)
5. enemies
6. allies

Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, National Cathedral, Washington D.C., September 14, 2001.

1. casualties
2. uniform of the United States
3. died at their posts
4. the missing and the dead
5. wounds (as a people)

6. conflict
7. enemies (x2)
8. war

Address to a Joint Session of Congress following 9/11 Attacks, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001.

1. civilians (x2)
2. military (x4)
3. casualties
4. enemy/ies (x5)
5. Armed Forces
6. battle
7. tactics (of terror)
8. war (x12)

Presidential Address to the Nation, Treaty Room, White House, Washington D.C., October 7, 2001.

1. we will win this conflict
2. military (x10)
3. battle (x3)
4. campaign against terrorism
5. front/s (x2)
6. enemies
7. armed forces
8. allies
9. war

State of the Union Address 2002, U.S. Congress, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002.

1. we will win this war
2. nation is at war
3. military (x4)
4. enemies (x4)
5. troops
6. freed a country
7. Armed Forces/ country's armed forces
8. battlefield
9. soldiers
10. regimes
11. weapons of mass destruction (2x)

12. bombs
13. allies (x8)
14. war (x12)
15. protect the homeland
16. missiles

Presidential Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, March 19, 2003.

1. military (x5)
2. enemies
3. Armed Forces
4. civilian/civilians (x2)
5. to remove a threat and restore control
6. allies
7. regime
8. war (x2)
9. Army/armies

Terrorist Attack Is Test (from God/ History/ Manifest Destiny)

9/11 Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, September 11, 2001.

1. test

Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, National Cathedral, Washington D.C., September 14, 2001.

1. In this trial, we have been reminded and the world has seen that our fellow Americans are generous and kind, resourceful and brave.
2. our responsibility to history
3. our purpose as a nation
4. the commitment of our fathers is now the calling of our time
5. God's signs are not always the ones we look for

State of the Union Address 2002, U.S. Congress, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002.

1. testing
2. privilege to fight freedom's fight
3. History has called America and our allies to action
4. we've been called to a unique role in human events

Address to a Joint Session of Congress following 9/11 Attacks, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001.

1. We face new and sudden national challenges

2. And in our grief and anger we have found our mission and our moment
3. Tonight we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom.

Presidential Address to the Nation, Treaty Room, White House, Washington D.C., October 7, 2001

1. meeting a series of challenges with determination and will and purpose
2. We did not ask for this mission, but we will fulfill it.
3. Your mission is defined. The objectives are clear.

Presidential Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, March 19, 2003.

1. We will pass through this time of peril

War Against Terrorism Is Mythical Battle (of 'Good' vs. 'Evil')/ Othering Blame-Frame

Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., September 11, 2001.

'Good':

1. great people
2. brightest beacon for freedom
3. all that is good and just in our world

'Evil':

1. the very worst of human nature
2. evil acts
3. those who are behind these evil acts

Speech at the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance Ceremony, National Cathedral, Washington D.C., September 14, 2001.

'Good':

1. rid the world of evil
2. freedom's home and defender'
3. (be-)love(-d) (x6)
4. Goodness
5. America is a nation full of good fortune
6. Its teachings are good and peaceful

'Evil':

1. enemies of human freedom
2. stealth and deceit and murder

Address to a Joint Session of Congress following 9/11 Attacks, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001.

‘Good’:

1. honored
2. good (x1)

‘Evil’:

1. plot evil and destruction
2. hate (x3)

Presidential Address to the Nation, Treaty Room, White House, Washington D.C., October 7, 2001.

‘Good’:

1. loved

‘Evil’:

1. evil plans
2. pay a price
3. the barbaric criminals

State of the Union Address 2002, U.S. Congress, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002.

‘Good’:

1. rid the world of thousands of terrorists
2. overcome evil with greater good
3. honor
4. good (x14)
5. love(d) (x3)
6. heroic/heroes (x2)

‘Evil’:

1. axis of evil
2. as wrong as they are evil
3. They embrace tyranny and death as a cause and a creed
4. brutal oppression
5. threaten the peace of the world
6. a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world

Presidential Address to the Nation, Oval Office, White House, March 19, 2003.

‘Good’:

1. honor (x2)
2. loved
3. free its people and to defend the world from grave danger
4. skill and bravery
5. We will defend our freedom

‘Evil’:

1. enemy who has no regard for conventions of war or rules of morality
2. an outlaw regime that threatens the peace with weapons of mass murder
3. a final atrocity against his people.

Terrorists Are Inhuman Beings/Animals/Uncivilized (Othering Frames)

Remarks at Emma Booker Elementary School, Sarasota, Florida, September 11, 2001.

1. to hunt and to find

9/11 Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, Louisiana, September 11, 2001.

1. Freedom itself was attacked (...) by a faceless coward
2. the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible for these cowardly acts

Address to a Joint Session of Congress following 9/11 Attacks, Washington D.C., September 20, 2001.

1. This is civilization’s fight.
2. The civilized world is rallying to America’s side.

Presidential Address to the Nation, Treaty Room, White House, Washington D.C., October 7, 2001.

1. burrow deeper into caves and other entrenched hiding places

State of the Union Address 2002, U.S. Congress, Washington D.C., January 29, 2002.

1. parasites
2. on mountaintops and in caves
3. operates in remote jungles and deserts, and hides in the centers of large cities

3.2 Presidential speeches in times of environmental disaster: Analysis of President George W. Bush's and Barack Obama's Environmental Crisis Speeches

Environmental Disaster Is Crime

George W. Bush: Weekly Radio Address: Katrina's Aftermath, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 3, 2005.

1. victims
2. restore and maintain law
3. criminals

George W. Bush: Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 15, 2005.

1. Congress is preparing an investigation
2. victims (x2)

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President on the Oil Spill, Venice, Louisiana, May 2, 2010.

1. investigated
2. fully investigate
3. justice

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010.

1. justice
2. ordered BP to pay economic injury claims, and we will make sure they deliver
3. they're legally responsible
4. hold them accountable
5. pay (x2)

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., June 15, 2010.

1. pay for (x2)

Environmental Disaster Is War

George W. Bush: President Outlines Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts, Rose Garden, White House, August 31, 2005.

1. efforts in the field
2. directed Secretary of Homeland Security Mike Chertoff to chair a Cabinet-level task force
3. The United States Coast Guard is conducting search and rescue missions
4. dislocated citizens (x2)
5. found refuge
6. armies of compassion
7. country stands with you
8. sustain lives

George W. Bush: Weekly Radio Address: Katrina's Aftermath, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 3, 2005.

1. troops (x4)
2. active duty forces (x2)
3. National Guard forces
4. Department of Defense (x2)
5. Marine Expeditionary Force
6. forces will be on the ground and operating under the direct command of General Russ Honore
7. towns and neighborhoods that have been lost

George W. Bush: Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 15, 2005.

1. victims
2. displaced persons/ people (x2)
3. the bodies of the dead lying uncovered and untended in the street
4. search for survivors
5. engaged in the mission
6. armies
7. a time of terror threats and weapons of mass destruction
8. national security priority
9. Department of Homeland Security
10. plans for responding to natural disasters, disease outbreaks, or terrorist attack
11. United States military
12. the National Guard
13. Homeland Security,
14. Armed forces
15. Protecting a city

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President on the Oil Spill, Venice, Louisiana, May 2, 2010.

1. Secretaries of the Interior and Homeland Security
2. on this front
3. brave man and women of our military
4. Admiral Allen, the Incident Commander

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010.

1. mission
2. assault
3. defend
4. justice will be done
5. silver bullets
6. protect
7. left behind
8. National Incident Commander

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., June 15, 2010.

1. battle
2. assaulting our shores and our citizens
3. battle plan
4. siege

Environmental Disaster Is Illness

G. W. Bush: President Outlines Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts, Rose Garden, White House, August 31, 2005.

1. the hospital ship USNS Comfort to help provide medical care
2. ensuring adequate food, water, shelter and medical supplies for survivors
3. recovery (x6)

George W. Bush: Weekly Radio Address: Katrina's Aftermath, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 3, 2005.

1. recover

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010.

1. recover

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., June 15, 2010.

1. epidemic
2. resilience
3. recover (x5)

Environmental Disaster Is Test (from God/ History/ Manifest Destiny)

G. W. Bush: President Outlines Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts, Rose Garden, White House, August 31, 2005.

1. a difficult road
2. challenges
3. we're going to succeed
4. America will be a stronger place for it.

George W. Bush: Weekly Radio Address: Katrina's Aftermath, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 3, 2005.

1. The tasks before us are enormous, but so is the heart of America.
2. In America, we do not abandon our fellow citizens in their hour of need.
3. We've all been humbled by the awesome powers of Mother Nature
4. it's hard to imagine a bright future. But when you talk to the
5. proud folks in the area, you see a spirit that cannot be broken
6. our Nation has the character, the resources, and the resolve to overcome this disaster
7. And we will once again show the world that the worst adversities bring out the best in America.
8. challenges

George W. Bush: Address to the Nation on Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Louisiana, September 15, 2005.

1. a core of strength that survives all hurt "a faith in God no storm can take away "and a powerful American determination to clear the ruins and build better than before.
2. the journey ahead
3. engaged in the mission
4. learn the lessons
5. prepared for any challenge of nature
6. These trials have also reminded us that we are often stronger than we know
7. destiny

8. vision (x2)
9. hard to imagine a bright future. But that future will come
10. challenge (x3)

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010.

1. challenges

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., June 15, 2010.

1. challenge/-s (x5)
2. tested the limits
3. in our nation's history
4. lesson/-s (x2)
5. vision
6. The blessing is not that God has promised to remove all obstacles and dangers. The blessing is that He is with us always
7. our unyielding faith that something better awaits us if we summon the courage to reach for it
8. a hand may guide us through the storm towards a brighter day

Environmental Disaster Is Mythical Battle (of 'Good' vs. 'Evil')

George W. Bush: Weekly Radio Address: Katrina's Aftermath, Cabinet Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 3, 2005.

1. We will not let criminals prey on the vulnerable, and we will not allow bureaucracy to get in the way of saving lives.

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President on the Oil Spill, Venice, Louisiana, May 2, 2010.

1. we're going to do everything in our power to protect our natural resources, compensate those who have been harmed, rebuild what has been damaged, and help this region persevere.

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010.

1. Every decision we make is based on a single criterion – what's going to best protect and make whole the people and the ecosystems of the Gulf

The Othering Blame-Frame

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President on the Oil Spill, Venice, Louisiana, May 2, 2010.

1. BP is responsible for the spill
2. our efforts to stop the BP oil spill and mitigate the damage

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President after Briefing on BP Oil Spill, U.S. Coast Guard Station Grande Isle Grande Isle, Louisiana, May 28, 2010.

1. we expect them [BP] to pay for that
2. BP is the responsible party for this disaster

Barack H. Obama: Remarks by the President to the Nation on the BP Oil Spill, Oval Office, White House, Washington D.C., June 15, 2010.

1. We will make BP pay for the damage their company has caused
2. BP will pay for the impact

3.3 Framing the global economic downturn: Analysis of President G. W. Bush's and B. Obama's speeches on the financial crisis

Economic Crisis Is Crime

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

1. strengthen investor protections
2. enforcement actions
3. illegal market manipulation

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

1. detect fraud and manipulation
2. engaging in illegal financial transactions
3. caught and persecuted
4. security of their finances
5. enforce laws and regulations protecting your money

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

1. laws
2. abuse

3. enforce laws and regulations
4. protected/-ing (x2)

Barack H. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009.

1. law enforcement

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

1. write and enforce new rules
2. to stop unscrupulous speculators from undermining our economy
3. law

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

1. set and enforce firm rules
2. law

Economic Crisis Is War

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

1. protections

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

1. security
2. protecting

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

1. rescue
2. protected/-ing (x2)
3. secure/-ity/-ities (x11)
4. incur serious losses
5. remove the risk

Barack H. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009.

1. protecting America
2. protect

Barack H. Obama: Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009.

1. targeted
2. strategy

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

1. protecting

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

1. to battle 21st century problems

Economic Crisis Is Illness

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

1. strengthen (x2)
2. stabilize

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

1. spread/-ing (x2)
2. protect our nation's economic health from serious risk
3. precarious state
4. vital (x2)
5. injected
6. strength
7. resilience

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

1. examining
2. painful
3. panic
4. strength

Barack H. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009.

1. necessary to keep us strong
2. nation's health record

3. health care (x3)
4. health insurance
5. recovery (x4)
6. saving (...) countless lives

Barack H. Obama: Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009.

1. weakened by this recession
2. to jolt our economy back into life
3. continue their health care coverage
4. pain
5. recovery (x2)
6. save (...) countless lives

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

1. hurting
2. healthy
3. health care (x2)
4. saving (...) countless lives
5. sick

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

1. keeping (...) alive
2. stem the spread
3. health care (x3)
4. medical records
5. medical errors
6. cost thousands of lives each year
7. commitment to wellness
8. setting foot in the doctor's office
9. preventable diseases
10. prevention

Economic Crisis Is Test (from God/ History/ Manifest Destiny)

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

1. challenges (x3)

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

1. challenge/-s (x6)
2. in our nation's history

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

1. overcome challenge/-s (x2)
2. times of real trial
3. history has shown
4. rise to the occasion
5. show the world once again what kind of country America is – a nation that tackles problems head on
6. meet great tests

Barack H. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009.

1. challenges we face right now
2. emerge from this trying time even stronger and more prosperous than we were before

Barack H. Obama: Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009.

1. challenges that we face
2. a rare moment where the citizens of our country and all countries are watching and waiting for us to lead
3. It's a responsibility that this generation did not ask for, but one that we must accept for the future of our children and our grandchildren.
4. the test facing the United States of America in this winter of our hardship, and it is our duty as leaders and citizens to stay – stay true to that purpose

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

1. their stake in the American Dream
2. these challenging times
3. another time of uncertainty
4. America, we will prove equal to this task. It will take time, and it will take effort, but working together, we will turn this crisis into opportunity and emerge from our painful present into a brighter future.

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

1. challenge
2. pursuing their critical mission
3. in the long history of America's noble endeavor to better understand our world
4. we will leave this struggling economy behind us, and come out on the other side, more prosperous as a people
5. For our American story is not – and has never been – about things coming easy. It's about rising to the moment when the moment is hard, and converting crisis into opportunity, and seeing to it that we emerge from whatever trials we face stronger than we were before. It's about rejecting the notion that our fate is somehow written for us, and instead laying claim to a destiny of our own making. That's what earlier generations of Americans have done, that's what we owe our children, that's what we are doing today.

Recovery From Economic Crisis Is Journey

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

1. travel

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

1. taking steps
2. to the path of long-term growth

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

1. back on track
2. steps (x2)

Barack H. Obama: Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009.

1. in motion
2. a trip
3. get our economy moving
4. back on track

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

1. a major milestone on our road to recovery

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

1. to get our economy moving again
2. the road to recovery will not be straight
3. slippage along the way
4. we will leave this struggling economy behind us, and come out on the other side

Economic Crisis Is Building/Construction Sight

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

1. stabilize

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

1. erosions
2. instability

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

1. teetered on the edge of collapse
2. avoid collapse
3. boom in home construction
4. faced imminent collapse

Barack H. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009.

1. re-/build/-ing (x3)
2. renovate and modernize
3. rebuild and retrofit America
4. repairing and modernizing

Barack H. Obama: Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009.

1. rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges
2. repairing our dangerously deficient dams and levees
3. building the wind turbines and solar panels

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

1. lay a new foundation
2. the work of building wind turbines and solar panels and the smart grid necessary to transport the clean energy they create; and laying broadband internet lines to connect rural homes, schools, and businesses to the information superhighway
3. The work of repairing our crumbling roads and bridges, and our dangerously deficient dams and levees

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

1. set our economy on a firmer foundation
2. paving the way to long-term growth and prosperity
3. we can't build our economic future on the transportation and information networks of the past
4. we are remaking the American landscape with the largest new investment in our nation's infrastructure since Eisenhower built an Interstate Highway System in the 1950s
5. rebuilding our crumbling roads and bridges, repairing our faulty dams and levees, bringing critical broadband connections to businesses and homes in nearly every community in America, upgrading mass transit, building high-speed rail lines that will improve travel and commerce throughout our nation
6. build on the work

Economic Crisis Is Mythical Battle (of 'Good' vs. 'Evil')/ Othering Blame-Frame

George W. Bush: President Bush Discusses Economy, Oval Colonnade, White House, Washington, D.C., September 18, 2008.

'Good/hero':

1. strengthen (...) protections

'Evil/guilty/villain':

1. threatened
2. manipulation

George W. Bush: Address on the Economy, Rose Garden, White House, Washington, D.C., September 19, 2008.

‘Good/hero’:

1. protect/-ing (x2)
2. good (x4)
3. strength

‘Evil/guilty/villain’:

1. anyone engaging in illegal financial transactions will be caught
2. intentionally driving down particular stocks for their own personal gain
3. fraud and manipulation

George W. Bush: Primetime Address to the Nation, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., September 24, 2008.

‘Good/hero’:

1. protect/-ing (x2)
2. good (x5)
3. great (x2)
4. rescue (x4)
5. help (x4)
6. the best system ever devised
7. best place in the world to invest
8. good reason to be confident in our economic strength

‘Evil/guilty/villain’:

1. threaten overall financial stability
2. intentionally driving down stocks for their own personal gain
3. excesses and bad decisions
4. the irresponsible actions of some to undermine the financial security of all

Barack H. Obama: First Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., January 24, 2009.

‘Good/hero’:

1. protect/-ing (x2)
2. help

‘Evil/guilty/villain’:

1. politicians doling out money behind a veil of secrecy
2. waste, inefficiency, and unnecessary spending

Barack H. Obama: Push for a Stimulus: Primetime Press Conference, East Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 9, 2009.

‘Good/hero’:

1. in service of a greater purpose
2. help/-ed (x3)
3. provide (...) tax credit to folks who are struggling

‘Evil/guilty/villain’:

1. vicious cycle
2. inherited the most profound economic emergency
3. doing little or nothing at all will result in ever – even greater deficits, even greater job loss, even greater loss of income and even greater loss of confidence
4. turn a crisis into a catastrophe

Barack H. Obama: Weekly Address to the Nation, Briefing Room, White House, Washington D.C., February 14, 2009.

‘Good/hero’:

1. And we’ll help folks who’ve lost their jobs through no fault of their own by providing the unemployment benefits they need and protecting the health care they count on.

‘Evil/guilty/villain’:

1. Washington hasn’t set a very good example in recent years
2. unscrupulous speculators (...) undermining our economy

Barack H. Obama: Remarks Upon Signing the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Denver, Colorado, February 17, 2009.

‘Good/hero’:

1. rewards responsibility
2. lifting two million Americans from poverty
3. help poor and working Americans
4. putting money in the pockets (...) of hardworking families in America
5. will demand courage and discipline
6. the critical work that must be done
7. more prosperous as a people
8. rising to the moment when the moment is hard
9. laying claim to a destiny of our own making
10. help/-ed/-ing (x4)
11. make our economy stronger and our nation more secure and our planet safer for our children

‘Evil/guilty/villain’:

1. sense of responsibility that’s been missing from Wall Street
2. all the way to Washington
3. spiraling health care costs are crushing families and businesses alike
4. the duplication and waste that costs billions of health care dollars, and medical errors that cost thousands of lives each year
5. the culture where we ignore problems until they become full-blown crises

Index

A

- Afghanistan 112, 117–119, 122,
124–126, 151–154
- al-Qaeda 107–109, 112, 117–118,
151
- American
 - Dream 73, 293, 307, 310, 312
 - Jeremiad 1–4, 38–42, 47–51,
174, 331–332
see also biblical jeremiad
see also ecological
jeremiad
see also environmental
jeremiad
see also inbound jeremiad
see also outbound
jeremiad
- American Recovery and
Reinvestment Act
(ARRA) 264, 309–312,
318–312, 323–324
- Anderson, Benedict 94, 134, 165
- anxiety 129, 170–171, 258
see also fear
- apocalypse/apocalyptic 170–
171, 177–179, 254, 259–261
see also ecological
apocalypse
see also environmental
apocalypse
see also modern apocalypse
- Aristotle 18, 26–27, 31, 129
- axis of evil 149–151

B

- baileout 283, 287–290, 293,
295–298
- barbarian 111–113, 128
- battle 69, 97, 144–146, 164–165,
241–242
- Beasley, Vanessa 6, 29
- Bellah, Robert 44–46, 88–89
- Bercovitch, Sacvan 2, 38–43,
47–50, 167–168, 331–334
- Bible/biblical 36, 42, 80, 86,
90–91, 152, 161, 169

- biblical jeremiad 40, 178
- bin Laden, Osama 108–109,
116–117, 122, 127
- Bostdorff, Denise 24–26, 109,
250, 265
- BP 183, 217–218, 221–222,
224–226, 231–240, 246–250,
257–260
- bullhorn moment 99, 101
- Burke, Kenneth 98, 162–164
- Bush doctrine 81–82, 154
- C
 - Cap, Piotr 11–13, 62–63, 65–66,
115–116, 183–186
 - charisma 18, 29, 320
 - Chilton, Paul 6–7, 11, 127
 - chosenness 43, 48–49, 165, 168,
266, 333
 - Christian 79–80, 85, 91–93,
119–122, 144–148, 212–213
martyrology 136
 - church 39–40, 80, 88–89, 92
 - city upon a hill 38, 43, 85, 96,
123, 294, 308
 - civil religion 42, 44–47, 88, 174,
223, 332
see also priestly civil religion
see also prophetic civil
religion
 - clash of civilizations 110–112, 121
 - climate change 13, 183, 245,
271, 317
 - Committee for the Liberation
of Iraq (CLI) 55
 - conceptual metaphor 32–35,
61–62, 97, 142, 182–183,
270–271, 283, 294–295, 300,
308–311, 316
 - Covenant
 - Renewal 39–40, 50, 110, 261,
333–334
 - with God 46, 159, 172, 178, 330
 - crisis
 - as opportunity 23
 - as threat 23

- communication 143, 337
- critical discourse analysis
(CDA) 5, 8
- crusade 118, 120–122

D

- decline 1–2, 47–48, 170, 277, 332
- Deepwater Horizon 217–218,
224, 228, 230, 232, 242
- dehumanization/
dehumanize 69–70, 112, 128
see also depersonification
- deictic
 - center 11–12, 45, 63, 84,
156–157, 272–273
 - space 3, 5
- deliberative
 - discourse 293
 - function 254, 295, 309,
322–324
 - purpose 260, 307, 323, 331
 - rhetoric 26–27, 173, 322,
322–323
- demon 35, 147–149
demonization 148–149, 161
- depersonalification 35
- dichotomy 7–11, 13, 36, 66, 80,
86, 114, 144, 289
see also false dichotomy
- Dictionary of Affect in
Language (D.A.L.) 7–10, 60,
180–181, 268–269, 335
- disaster as a test 214
see also ecological disaster
see also environmental
disaster
see also natural disaster
- divine 41, 46–47, 91–93,
152–153, 166–167, 170, 211–212
- justice 119
- justification 47, 91, 106
- punishment 41
- test 204
- Dow, Bonnie 27, 86, 174, 223
- Dunmire, Patricia 11, 13, 66,
142, 156

E

Edwards, Jonathan 9, 40, 119
 elections 25, 239, 245, 297,
 313, 324
 emotion 129, 146, 232
 emotional appeal 9, 48,
 55, 154
 emotional valance 9, 82, 208
 Enduring Freedom 119, 125
 ecological
 apocalypse 254
 disaster 177–179
 jeremiad 254
 enemy 107–109, 111–115,
 147–148, 161–162, 164–166
 environmental
 apocalypse 177
 disaster 175–177
 jeremiad 178
 errand 39–41, 166, 185, 194,
 333–334
 evil 78–81, 84–87, 107–109,
 119–121, 128–130, 144–151,
 164–165
 see also axis of evil
 evilification 80
 exceptionalism 42–43, 98,
 105–106, 123–124, 133,
 165–168, 333–334

F

false dichotomy 58, 127, 164
 fear 47–49, 55–58, 66, 84, 112,
 143–144, 250
 see also anxiety
 Federal Emergency
 Management Agency
 (FEMA) 175, 186, 188, 191,
 195, 198, 211
 financial crisis 261–263, 265,
 275, 285–286, 292, 296, 298,
 387
 Foucault, Michael 5–6, 35–36,
 142
 framing 3–4, 10, 21, 23–24,
 33–34, 62, 230–231, 267–268,
 271, 322–323, 328–329
 see also media framing
 see also metaphorical
 framing
 see also threat frame
 freedom 70–71, 74, 91–93,
 97–99, 105–108, 136–139,
 152–154

G

genre 25–27, 38–39, 41, 173, 179,
 333–334
 good vs. evil 10, 13, 80, 85, 175
 Great Awakening 40, 119, 178
 group identification 6, 133
 see also in-group/out-group
 ground zero 99–100
 Gulf of Mexico 182–183, 217,
 224, 226, 240, 247

H

hero 97, 105, 144, 161–162
 hope 46–49, 84–86, 89–90,
 129–132, 165, 192, 201–202,
 205–208
 Hurricane Katrina 186–187,
 195, 198, 208
 Hussein, Saddam 34, 116, 151,
 159–162

I

identity 114, 133–136, 164,
 248–249
 imagined community 46, 94, 174
 inbound jeremiad 139, 142,
 154, 173
 see also outbound jeremiad
 in-group/out-group 35, 164
 intertextuality 6, 29, 336–337
 Iraq 54–56, 150–151, 155–170,
 203–204

J

Jendrysik, Stephan 1, 3, 41,
 49–51, 177
 Jeremiah 36–38, 90, 120, 152,
 168–169, 177
 Jihad 109
 Johnson, Mark 5, 10, 32–33, 36

K

Kennedy, John F. 126, 139, 163,
 166, 263, 317–318
 Kiewe, Amos 5, 22, 25–26,
 176, 248
 King, Martin Luther Jr. 49, 85

L

Lakoff, George 5, 10, 32–36,
 70–73, 98–99, 147, 307
 legitimization discourse/
 strategies 7, 13, 66, 273
 Lehmann Brothers 14, 285

lexical correspondences 10–11,
 182, 270–271, 375
 liberation 123, 151–154
 Lincoln, Abraham 136–138

M

Manichean
 style 144
 divide 144–145
 Manifest Destiny 43, 183,
 213–214, 252
 Mather, Cotton 149
 Mather, Increase 9, 39
 Medhurst, Martin 18, 20, 283
 media 27–29, 54–56, 116,
 187–189, 263–265
 media framing 27, 29, 187
 see also news
 metaphor 10, 30–36, 61–62,
 97, 182–183, 270–271, 283,
 293–294, 300, 311
 see also conceptual metaphor
 metaphorical framing 33,
 281–282
 Miller, Perry 38–41, 50, 331
 mission/missionary 39–43,
 47–49, 105–106, 118–120,
 131–132, 158–159, 166–167,
 235–236, 251–252, 308
 see also errand
 see also exceptionalism
 Model of Christian Charity 1,
 9, 38, 43, 96, 266
 modern presidency 1, 19–20
 moral absolutism 145
 Murphy, Andrew 41–43,
 49–50, 85–86, 101, 334
 Muslim 80–81, 104, 110–111,
 120–121, 123, 149
 myth 29–30, 42–46, 66, 105,
 133, 159–160, 166–167, 211,
 235–236, 293–294
 mythical battle 11, 62,
 144, 162

N

National Day of Prayer 88–89
 national unity 93, 95
 natural disaster 194, 198, 252
 Neustadt, Richard 1, 17
 New Orleans 199–202,
 205–206
 news 28, 55–56, 72–73,
 187–189, 226

O

- oil spill 182–183, 217–218,
224–226, 233–239, 245–247
- Other/Othering 35–36, 62,
66, 78–79, 107–108, 112–114,
128–129, 147–149, 164, 248
- outbound jeremiad 137–138,
142, 154, 168–169, 261
see also inbound jeremiad

P

- partisan divide 102, 140
- PATRIOT Act 140, 149
- patriotic duty 86, 139, 172, 233
- peace 85, 95, 126–127, 130
- Perelman, Chaïm 27, 86
- persuasion 17–18, 25, 55, 58, 331
- pleasantness 8–10, 60, 69,
180–181, 268–269
- preemption 66, 156
- preemptive 66, 141–142,
156, 168
- priestly
 - civil religion 46–47
 - rhetoric 89
- propaganda 54–58, 114, 174
model 58
- prophet 38, 120, 168
see also Jeremiah
- prophetic religion 46–47
see also priestly civil
religion
- prophetic dualism 165
- prophetic rhetoric 89
see also priestly rhetoric
- protestant ethic 265
- proximization 7, 11–14, 62–66,
112, 141–142, 156, 183–186,
273–274
- Puritan 1–4, 6, 38–44, 48–51,
135–136, 138–140, 174–175,
265–267, 333–337

Push for Stimulus 267, 269, 307

R

- racism 199, 201, 215
- Reagan, Ronald 76, 85–86, 129,
148, 156, 303
- recession 262–264, 277, 296,
298, 300, 308–310, 322–323
- religion 90, 92–93, 128
see also civil religion
- renewal 135–136, 250
see also Covenant Renewal
- Responsibility to Protect
(R2P) 122, 160
- rhetorical
 - leadership 18, 20–21, 24
 - presidency 20–21
- Roosevelt, Franklin D. 21,
77–79, 94–95, 106–107, 141,
213, 279, 291–293, 296, 300, 321

S

- Said, Edward 35, 79, 111
- September 11 (9/11) 53,
59–60, 62, 67, 81
- Sontag, Susan 116
- Stuckey, Mary 6, 21–22, 29
- Superdome 190–191

T

- Taliban 104, 117–119
- 't Hart, Paul 22–23, 29
- terministic screen 98, 126
- terrorism 56, 76–77
 - terrorist attacks 53, 56, 62,
76–68, 70, 99, 129, 132–133,
157
 - terrorists 56, 74, 81, 83–86,
90, 95, 97, 99, 103–115,
121–128, 146–150
- test 71–72, 138
see also trial

- threat frame 23, 185
- Tindall, Karen 22–23, 29
- trial 62, 85, 185, 211–212, 271,
293–294
- Tulis, Jeffrey 5, 19–20

U

- unity 70, 93–95, 221–222, 318
see also national unity
see also imagined
community

V

- victimage/victimhood 162–163
- villain 97, 101, 144, 162, 185,
247, 260, 293, 313, 394–397
see also enemy

W

- Wall Street 288, 292–293, 304,
323
- war on terror 10, 60–62,
82–83, 109, 111–115, 120–121,
124–125
- weapons of mass
destruction(WMD)
150–151, 156–157
- Weber, Max 265–266
- Whissell, Cynthia 8–9
- Windt, Theodor 25–27, 165,
304, 330
- Winthrop, John 1, 38, 43, 96,
266
- Wodak, Ruth 5, 35, 115
- word cloud x111, 7–8, 61
- World Trade Center
(WTC) 59, 73, 76
see also ground zero

Z

- Zarefsky, David 19, 116
- Žižek, Slavoj 159

The volume explores crisis rhetoric in contemporary U.S. American presidential speechmaking. Rhetorical leadership constitutes an inherent feature of the modern presidency. Particularly during times of critical events, the president is expected to react and address the nation. However, the power of the office also allows him or her to direct attention to particular topics and thus rhetorically create or exploit the notion of crisis. This monograph examines the verbal responses of George W. Bush and Barack Obama to pressing issues during their terms in office. Assuming an interdisciplinary approach, it illuminates the characteristics of modern crisis rhetoric. The aim of the book is to show that elements of Puritan rhetoric, and specifically the tradition of the jeremiad, although taken out of their original context and modified to suit a modern multiethnic society, can still be detected in contemporary political communication. It will be of interest to students and scholars of presidential rhetoric, political communication, sociolinguistics and cultural studies.

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