‘Making waves’: Textual analysis of representations of Islamic extremism in the British tabloid press

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a textual analysis of the rhetoric portrayed in newspaper articles printed by the British tabloid press in the weeks and months following the September 11th, 2001 attacks on the world trade centre. To further support the findings of Merskin (2004) I utilise Spillman and Spillman's (1997: cited in Merskin, 2004) model of enemy image construction to analyse several articles in order to identify particular discourses that serve the purpose of constructing individuals of Arab descent as the ‘other’. This analysis demonstrates the media’s reflection on an identifiable model of enemy image construction that continues to have important implications for Arab United Kingdom citizens and non-citizens. Furthermore, I argue that the British tabloid press’ construction of the ‘other’ is reinforced through conveying themes associating Western populations with notions of goodness and freedom whilst at the same time situating Eastern Arab individuals as evil. Furthermore, the theme of ‘justification’ for the war in Iraq will be shown to resonate throughout each article. Ultimately, I show that such rhetoric built upon stereotypical words and images is a device used to sway the lay public’s perception that the war in Iraq is morally justified.

KEY WORDS: RHETORIC  ENEMY IMAGE  TERRORISM  MEDIA  MORAL PANIC
Introduction.

“He who controls the media, controls the minds of the public”. (Noam Chomsky, 1993: as cited on www.chomsky.info)

The above quote has resonated throughout the course of this investigation as it underpins the increasing influence the media has on shaping public perceptions and constructing stereotypes – defined as “a widely shared and simplified evaluative image of a social group and its members” (Hogg and Vaughan, 2005, p 584). Such stereotypes serve as a normative practice exercising the power of ideology to construct particular individuals or groups as the ‘other’. Stanley Cohen was one of the first and most influential academics to look at this relationship between the media and the lay public, coining the term ‘moral panic’ and presenting a definition of the term through an investigation into the ‘mods and rockers’ conflict during the 1960’s. It was believed that conflict between the two groups was no different to evening brawls that had occurred between youths during the 1950’s however, the media and tabloid press used the ‘mods’ and ‘rockers’ so called ‘riots’ as a tool for convincing the public that there was at present, a problem with youth subcultures. In this respect, the ‘mods and rockers’ were made scapegoats and constructed as the ‘other’ through recurring themes of violence in the tabloid press. As articles relating to this apparent violence increased, public concern surrounding youth sub cultural groups became so prominent that members of parliament were placed under pressure to intensify measures to control hooliganism. Subsequently, the groups received further media coverage. This phenomenon was labelled as the deviancy amplification spiral (Cohen, 1972).

A ‘moral panic’ is a powerful weapon that can influence polity to formulate new social policies due to pressure from growing public concerns regarding a particular issue as is seen from the conflicts in the 1960’s. Cohen believes a moral panic will occur when an episode, condition or person (s) become defined as a threat to societal values. However, for a moral panic to emerge, the issue has to be presented by the mass media in a stereotypical and stylist fashion and repetitively utilize binary discourses, for example, ‘us’ vs. ‘them’, ‘good’ vs. ‘evil’ and ‘freedom’ vs. ‘oppression’. Such themes serve to marginalise the problematic group and place its members outside of ones own value system i.e. they become defined as the other and ‘unlike ourselves’. This oppressive and cruel tactic of the mass media to victimise a particular societal group often draws upon already existing stereotypes ultimately allowing such victimisation to appear almost logical. This mediated process has come to be known as enemy-image construction (Spillman and Spillman, 1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004).

Moral panics can be argued to be an integral part of society, despite many academics believing that moral panics are exceptional rather than a normal form of social interaction (Hier, 2008). Only by victimising one group of individuals can other individuals become a ‘collective conscience’ and become the ‘good’ against the ‘other’ (Durkheim, 1893: as cited in Burke, 2005). It is therefore not surprising that in every decade there is clear evidence of such a normative practice taking place where a group of ‘problematic’ individuals are made an example of in order to reinforce the dominant and ‘desirable’ ideology. In the 1960’s it was the mod’s and rockers, in the
1970's it was the 'black – mugger', the 1990's witnessed a panic develop around the rising trend in ecstasy consumption and now, from the year 2000 onwards terrorism and individuals of Arab descent have been constructed as the other and as a major threat to western societal values and norms. Articles relating to terrorism and the on going war in Iraq make their way into the media on a daily basis. The image of the 'other' – those individuals who constructed through themes of evil, violence and destruction are targeted by such articles and help fuel an ever growing stereotype associating Arab individuals with terrorist activities.

In recent years academia working in the arena of terrorism have begun to take note of this increasing usage of the media in terrorist attacks. As communication systems have become more advanced, such as the internet and live broadcasting, modern terrorists have become aware of new opportunities for producing maximum psychological impact via the latest means of mass communication (Weimann, 2005). For this reason, many scholars submit that terrorist organisations can be understood in terms of the theatrical requirements of a mass audience where the act its self is aimed at the people watching and not necessarily the victims in order to gain world wide attention for the purpose of political goals (Kellner, 2004). This has lead some scholars to label terrorism as a theatre with perpetrators paying much attention to script preparation, props, cast selection and 'stage management' (Weimann, 2005). Such analogy appears appropriate when one thinks about a particular attack in terms of the intended target audience. The attacks on the world trade centre on September 11th 2001 provide the ideal example of a perfectly choreographed theatrical production. The timing of the attacks allowed the majority of the world's population to view the scenes via live broadcasting, as well as cause maximum casualties in New York’s city centre due to it being one of the busiest times of the day. The world trade centre represented America’s wealth, power and importance to the global economy. An attack on such a landmark would not only inflict maximum damage, death and destruction but would generate mass publicity on a scale never seen before. More significantly, such a breach of the United States national security would create a sense of fear and insecurity for the American people and subsequently the Western world. It is this sense of fear that has been exacerbated by powers in the arena of politics and media to manipulate the minds of the public, for example, a Washington Post-ABC News poll found that 58% of individuals interviewed believed Islam has more violent followers than in any other religion. Furthermore, almost half of Americans, 46%, said they felt unfavourable attitudes and feelings towards Islam - compared with only 24% in January 2002. The Post quoted analysts as saying that the demonisation of Islam by politicians and the media during the past four years had “led to an erosion of tolerance” (www.Guardian.co.uk, 2006 [online]).

The 9/11 attacks were like no other event in the history of man-kind, viewed live by millions of people around the world, the images of that day were extremely potent, reaching an unprecedented number of individuals subsequently causing a sense of fear and increased levels of stress (Propper et al, 2007). However, perhaps more importantly the 9/11 attacks were significant due to the amount of highly mediated images of the attacks that were to appear in the press for weeks and months after the attacks had taken place. On a day to day basis, perceived threats, themes of violence and barbarism have aided the construction of the enemy as the ‘other’ leading to what many consider to be a ‘moral panic’. Such mediated images and articles have drawn upon stereotypical discourses that have already been
established in more than two decades of media portrayals of terrorists as Arab descendents in popular movies, cartoons and magazines (Merskin, 2004). Edward Said (1978) coined this construction of the ‘other’ as ‘orientalism’, referring to the tendency of Western culture to convey false and crude caricatures of the Islamic world presented in such a way as to make Eastern populations vulnerable to military aggression. Such Eurocentric attitudes are portrayed in the British tabloid press and have aided the construction of Western populations as the face of bravery and freedom whilst at the same time have constructed a face for terrorism – and it is Arab. Such manipulation and stereotyping has important implications as although such mediated articles are related to non-U.S. and U.K. citizens they can not help but include the millions of Arab individuals living in these countries, many of whom have been born and raised there. This stereotype is not only applied to Muslim and Arab individuals, but encompasses a wide variety of people and beliefs (Ghareeb, 1983; Hamada, 2001; Jackson, 1996; Shaheen, 1998, 2001; Suleiman, 1988, 1999; Terry, 1985: as cited in Merskin, 2004).

The rhetoric present within mediated articles aims to construct and consolidate an enemy image that is Arab and is conjured up to aid the maintenance of political power, for example, the western ‘war on terror’ is greatly dependent on public support (Merskin, 2004). To further the support for such attempts to construct a an enemy image being present within the media, investigations into the relationship between the media, public support and leadership have shown that in times of crisis individuals become distressed, anxious and ‘charisma hungry’ i.e. people want a leader who is willing to repair the damaged identity of the culture and with regards to 9/11 – a leader who is willing to retaliate against the enemy and in doing so bring back the sense of security and protection that was taken from the population. In this respect, it is vital that individuals have a concrete idea of who the enemy is (Bass 1990: as cited in Bligh, 2004) – cue the mass-mediated hysteria.

The present investigation builds upon the work of Merskin (2004) whom applied the characteristics of enemy image construction (Spillman and Spillman, 1997: as cited in Merskin 2004) to five presidential speeches made by George W. Bush speaking with regards to the perpetrators of the attacks on the world trade centre in order to trace chronologically the construction of the Arab individual as the ‘other’. Through invoking the enemy image construction characteristics of Spillman and Spillman's model as well as highlighting how the media utilises themes of good versus evil and justification with regards to the war in Iraq, the present investigation provided support for Merskin (2004) through showing that the British tabloid press, like Bush, aim to construct an enemy image relating to individuals of Arab descent via inclusion of stereotypical words, images and opposing binaries. Crucially, this Manichean discourse of good and evil fits into popular culture resulting in a negative evaluation of the ‘other’ that is perceived as ‘logical’ and is further reinforced by the persuasive rhetoric of Western political leaders (Kellner, 2004).

Method

An interpretive textual analysis was used to analyse three articles selected from the British tabloid press, specifically the Daily Mirror and the Sun. Articles were selected based upon the potency of the discourse they portrayed as this provided insight into
the means by which an enemy image is constructed within the media (Spillman and Spillman, 1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004).

Articles were acquired via two means. Firstly, using the microfilm device available at the central library of Manchester city centre, articles printed in the Daily Mirror between the dates of September 18\textsuperscript{th} 2001 and September 25\textsuperscript{th} 2001 that related to the attacks on the world trade centre were read by the author and selected based upon the potency of the rhetoric expressed in the article, for example, the degree to which the article expressed themes of ‘justification’ and the ‘good versus evil’ dichotomy. This was achieved through producing a list of key terms to search for during the reading (see appendix 4) in order to narrow down the number of articles that were relevant to the analysis. Such key terms included enemy, freedom and evil etc.

Initially twenty articles were deemed sufficiently relevant for analysis however, after a “long preliminary soak of the material” (Hall, 1975: as cited in Merskin, 2004, p. 166) it was decided by the author to base the present investigation on two of the most rhetorical articles due to the fact that such articles provided a significant degree of rich data allowing insight into the process of enemy image construction. Furthermore, the online newspaper archive ‘Lexis Library’ was utilised through admission on behalf of the Manchester Metropolitan University. Collection of the data from Lexis Library required selecting a search criteria (see appendix 5) and browsing through relevant stored articles i.e. those relating to the attacks on the world trade centre from the popular newspaper ‘the Sun’.

The search criteria took the form of combinations of ‘trigger words’ i.e. words that would trigger associations and produce relevant stored articles. A similar method was used by Clement and Foster (2008) who used the trigger term “Schizo” to search for articles relating to schizophrenia. In this instance, a staggering 1396 articles were produced. Such a vast number of results would have hindered the present investigation due to time constraints, therefore it was decided by the author to construct a much more specific search criteria. A preliminary test of the search process showed that through using a combination of trigger words such as “attack” and “New York” (see appendix 6) the results listed were reduced. Eighteen articles were deemed relevant enough to warrant analysis i.e. expressed significant rhetoric relating to the 9/11 attacks however, one article was selected due to the high degree of rhetoric it portrayed allowing a significant insight into the process of enemy image construction. Quality was selected over quantity.

The four articles were read several times in order for the author to familiarise themselves with the material and gain a feel for the overall rhetoric portrayed i.e. to gain a sense for the purpose of the article and to view the article subjectively, as any member of the audience would. A closer reading of the articles allowed identification of particular rhetorical phrases or quotes that adhered to the characteristics of enemy image construction outlined by Spillman and Spillman (1997, as cited in Merskin, 2004). These are:

- **Negative Anticipation.** Acts of the enemy in the past, present or future become associated to the destruction of ones own group.
• **Putting Blame on the Enemy.** Any negative conditions one's own group is experiencing becomes the result of the enemy. The enemy becomes the source of all stress and negativity.

• **Identification With Evil.** The values of the enemy represent the opposite and negation of one's own value system and the enemy is intent on destroying the dominant value system as well. The enemy embodies the opposite of that which we are and strive for; the enemy wishes to destroy our most important values therefore we must destroy the enemy.

• **Zero-Sum Thinking.** What is good for the enemy is bad for us and vice versa.

• **Stereotyping and De-Individualization.** Anyone who belongs to the enemy group is ipso facto our enemy.

• **Refusal to Show Empathy.** Consideration for anyone in the enemy group is reduced due to a feeling of perceived threat. There is nothing in common with the enemy and no way to alter this perception.

(Spillman and Spillman, 1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004).

Phrases within the articles that reflected any of the above characteristics were selected, discussed and analytically interpreted in order to understand the reasons underlying the inclusion of such phrases. Furthermore, discourse that reflected themes of i) justification for the war in Iraq ii) freedom versus oppression and iii) good versus evil were also selected and discussed in order to show such underlying themes reinforce the construction of the enemy image.

**Analysis.**

**Article: “Take Me Seriously”, The Mirror, 18/09/01. (See Appendix 1).**

In this article, the underlying theme is that of Western power and superiority as well as justifying military retaliation as a force of goodness against the evil ‘enemy’. Here numerous quotes from Bush are selected and included in order to increase the propagandist properties of the article and furthermore to state a very clear message that anyone who is not with America and the United Kingdom is ipso facto the enemy. Such a direct message pulls together Spillman and Spillman’s (1997) characteristics of enemy construction such as zero-sum thinking and stereotyping and de-individualisation.

The next of Bush’s quotes invokes Animalistic stereotypical Jungian shadow imagery by describing the enemy as “someone who thinks they can hit and hide in a cave somewhere”. Such a quote is used to summon the image of a dark, evil, stereotypical and ominous threat (Merskin, 2004) used as justification for the war as a battle between the forces of good and evil and to construct the other as culturally and morally ‘unlike ourselves’- allowing individuals to elicit negative feelings towards the ‘other’ more easily (Said, 1978).
The article includes a lengthy quote from Bush, included in the article as it pulls together the majority of Spillman and Spillman’s characteristics of enemy image construction (1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004) In these remarks the enemy image is fully consolidated. Bush (As cited in The Mirror, 18th Sept 2001, P2) states:

‘We are going to find those evildoers, those barbaric people who attacked our country and we’re going to hold them accountable. And we’re going to hold the people who house them accountable. We will win the war and there will be costs. This is a fight for freedom. This is a different type of enemy than we’re used to. It’s an enemy that likes to hide and burrow in and their network is extensive. There’s no rules. It’s barbaric behaviour. They slit throats of women on aeroplanes in order to achieve an objective that is beyond comprehension’.

Here the characteristic of ‘identification with evil’ is blatantly obvious – labelling the other as ‘evildoers’ and ‘barbaric’. The decision to include Bush’s indirect warning to those that ‘house’ the enemy reflects a refusal to show empathy and invokes the enemy image characteristic of stereotyping and de-individualisation. Themes of good against evil are evident in the remarks that the war is a fight for freedom – situating the West in a heroic struggle against the oppressive nature of the enemy possibly to elicit a sense of sympathy towards our leaders and military, and certainly to elicit a sense of pride from the lay public. Notions of an enemy that we are “not used to” is used to exacerbate the fear of the unknown and broaden the gap between ‘our culture’ and theirs. Describing the enemy as ‘lawless’ and ‘barbaric’ again reinforces the animalistic stereotyping and de-individualization nature of this rhetoric. The admission that such an enemy “slit the throats of women” is a crude stereotype as well as an unfounded accusation used to shock and remind readers of the brutal nature of the ‘other’ and again identify the enemies values and ideology as evil in nature, as opposite to ones own value system. The repetitive reinforcement of this good against evil dichotomy is used to justify an equally brutal military retaliation by framing it as ‘crusade’ in the name of freedom. Finally on this particular quote, the rhetoric is emphasised by the heavy usage of personal pronouns such as ‘we’ ‘we’re’ ‘our’ and ‘them’ ‘they’ reinforcing the ancient dichotomy of us versus them, aiding the construction of the enemy as the ‘other’ and producing ‘group think’ (Janis, 1972) i.e. the uncritical acceptance of a majority view.

Moving on from the inclusion of Bush’s remarks, the article further incorporates the use of statistics to reinforce the theme of justification for the war. The article cites statistics revealing that 85% of Americans and “most Britons” support retaliatory strikes against Osama. It would seem that the reason for the inclusion of such details is to reinforce the sense of unity and possibly the alliance between the Western nations as a force against the ‘other’ utilising the ‘us versus them’ dichotomy. The inclusion of such statistics here can also be seen as a form of ideology – attempting to produce the ‘norm’ of the patriotic individual in order to elicit further public support.

Article: “Love Is Enough”, The Mirror, 21/09/01. (See Appendix 2).

In this fairly brief article sentimental values of Love and goodness are expressed through the principle dichotomy of the article which is ‘love versus hate’. Ultimately this is utilised in this article to justify the war in Iraq i.e. to ‘rid’ the world of evil. The eye-catching bold title reads “Love Is Enough” quoted by Tony Blair in his speech
addressing the relatives and friends of those killed in the world trade centre attacks. Such a headline directly invokes notions of goodness, affection and love and relates this to the Western population and its leaders as a direct opposite to the evil image constructed for the ‘enemy’. Despite the very sensitive nature of this particular article many attempts to create the love versus hate dichotomy are evident as is the construction of the discourse to frame the Western people as the “good” against the “other”. Firstly, the quote “Operation infinite Justice has been mobilised to crush prime suspect Osama bin Laden and his empire of terror” sets the tone for the article describing the decision to go to war as morally correct in the name of justice situating Western forces as the ‘good’ against the evil Osama and anyone associated in his “empire of terror” – evidence of stereotyping and de-individualisation, a characteristic of enemy image construction. Furthermore the word ‘crush’ has been chosen to emphasise Western power and superiority.

The article then quotes comments made by George W. Bush urging the American people to be “vigilant” and “patient” while America strike the first ‘blow’. He then goes on to describe that this is a battle between “freedom and fear, and freedom will prevail”. The word ‘vigilant’ has important implications as this maintains the feeling of threat amongst the American people towards Arab individuals. Psychologically this important as Bass (1990: as cited in Bligh, 2004) has shown that in times of crisis the lay public become anxious and look towards a leader who is willing to retaliate and repair the sense of security and protection that has been lost. Thus, asking individuals to be “vigilant” maintains the sense of threat, a tactic used to conjure up public support for the war. The inclusion of the plea to Americans to remain ‘patient’ assumes that all citizens support military retaliation further emphasising the notion of unity. The “battle between freedom and fear” directly relates to the good versus evil dichotomy present within the majority of mediated articles relating to the world trade centre attacks and as a characteristic of enemy image construction identifies the enemy with evil. This quote has been incorporated in to this article to situate America and the United Kingdom as beacons of freedom, justifying the preceding invasion of Iraq and constructing individuals of Arab descent as the ‘other’. Here the usage of the dichotomy of freedom versus fear represents the enemy as negating ones own value system embodying the opposite to the sense of freedom that Western nations strive for. Furthermore in relation to the war in Iraq, the article highlights how Bush is going to discuss the “on-going nature of this campaign” here the construct of negative anticipation is evident i.e. acts of the enemy past, present or future become associated with the destruction of ones own group, further reinforcing the perceived need for military retaliation.

Notions of unity, affection, goodness and strength are then demonstrated through Tony Blair’s claim that “the bond between our countries, for so long so strong, is even stronger now” reinforcing themes of good versus evil. This contrasts to the image constructed for the enemy as an “empire of terror” in the first passage. Here the enemy is constructed as the opposite to that of America and the United Kingdom as being weak and evil. These contrasting positive characteristics of the West are then reinforced by the articles submission that Blair “personally” chose a touching passage from Thornton Wilder’s classic novel – The bridge of San Luis Rey. Here Blair is constructed as a compassionate and caring leader in contrast to Osama – the evil leader of the empire of terror. This ‘double edged knife’ not only adds to the negative construction of the enemy image but by influencing people to believe in Blair’s ‘good nature’, it is believed that his choice to initiate a war against the enemy
must be justified and in the name of the battle between good against evil – the ‘peoples leader versus the evil tyrant’.

Further on in the passage, Blair’s visit to ground zero is described in such a way as to maintain the good-evil and love-hate dichotomies conveyed in this article as well as reinforce the public’s perceived threat of the ‘other’. The article details Blair’s visit into the “heart of Manhattan” in a “bullet proof convoy”. Firstly, inclusion of the bullet proof convoy is unnecessary as this is the prime means of travel for a premiere in the majority of cases. Inclusion of this detail is to reinforce the sense of threat and anxiety, much in the same way as the inclusion of Bush’s call to be ‘vigilant’ in order to reinforce the racist stereotypes that terrorists are rife within the Arabic race and could be ‘hiding’ anywhere, further justifying the perceived need for military retaliation. Furthermore, the metaphor of the ‘heart’ of Manhattan fits in nicely with the ‘Western-love’ theme of the article and once again reinforcing the good versus evil theme of the text.

Crucially for the enemy image construction and justification for the war in Iraq, the article quotes Bush in saying that “we have no option but to act”. This is clear evidence of negative anticipation. In this sense, such a quote detracts the responsibility away from Western leaders, specifically George W. Bush and Tony Blair, for the possibility of killing thousands of Iraqi civilians and British troops. This quote is aimed to convince readers that the war is a ‘must’ in order to rid the world of evil and prevent further acts of violence. Through inclusion of this quote, the article identifies the ‘other’ with evil and attempts to convince readers that the war is morally correct, in the name of freedom and ultimately places blame for the war upon the enemy, despite the fact that military retaliation was not forced upon America and the United Kingdom – a choice was made despite many nations calling for a calm and diplomatic response to the 9/11 attacks.

Finally, surrounding the potent headline that ‘Love is enough’ are pictures of Osama bin Laden dressed in typical Arab attire linked to notions of terror. The contrast is obvious and thus sought’s to construct the evil enemy image as being Arabic whilst associating Western nations with notions of freedom. This mediated tactic sought’s to construct a face for terrorism – and it is Arab (Merskin, 2004). This Western identification with Arab individuals as the ‘other’ has long been portrayed in Western culture, for example, historically Arab individuals have frequently been portrayed as villains in popular Western movies, for example, Lawrence of Arabia (Said, 1978).

Article: “The Real Threat To World Peace”, The Sun, 21/11/03 (see Appendix 3).

The characteristics of enemy image construction (Spillman and Spillman, 1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004) are extremely rife in this article, possibly due to the fact that the following article was printed some two years after the world trade centre attacks, at which point the stereotypical enemy image was well and truly established. Furthermore, as with the previous articles the theme/dichotomy of good versus evil is heavily drawn upon as a means of justification for the war in Iraq. Firstly, the article briefly describes an anti-war demonstration held by Britons in London and quotes thechant “Stop Bush”. The article then questions this demonstration and asks “why aren’t the protesters shouting Stop bin Laden”? In this line alone negative anticipation is clearly demonstrated as is the characteristic of putting blame on the enemy i.e. the
enemy becomes the source of all stress and negativity as for example, the author refuses to acknowledge the point of the demonstration. The accusatory remark towards the protesters as having “anti-American prejudice” reflects the notion in previous articles that you are either ‘with us or against us’, ‘us or them’. This is done as to construct an enemy image effectively there has to be no ‘grey areas’, there has to be nothing in common with the enemy and there has to be a refusal to show empathy (Spillman and Spillman, 1997). The article addresses the notion that “the threat to world peace comes not from the United States or Britain. It comes from cold-blooded killers like Osama bin Laden”. This narrow minded quote highlights the hypocrisy present within the British tabloid press and again underpins the theme of justification for the war. The decision of the United States and Britain to declare war on Iraq and Saddam Hussein was not a necessity, but a decision that went against calls for a ‘diplomatic and cautious response’ from countries such as Russia, Saudi Arabia and to an extent the United Nations (Dunmire, 2009).

The article produces a long list of attacks al- Qa’ida are held responsible for, such as bombings in Jakarta, Bombay and Saudi Arabia. Readers are then reminded that all these attacks came long before the Iraq war – a decision taken to legitimize the war and a tactic that clearly fits in line with the characteristic of negative anticipation. The enemy is then de-humanised by declaring that they didn’t care if their victims were fellow citizens, the Red Cross or American aid workers. This identification with evil is only ascribed to the enemy, despite the hypocrisy of the Iraq war in killing hundreds of Iraqi civilians and British troops. The article praises the United Kingdom for allowing freedom of speech and then describes the labour MP George Galloway having the right to free speech despite him being “Saddams Lickspit Toady”. Apart from the animalistic and vulgar imagery, this quote is important as it highlights the enemy image characteristics of zero-sum thinking and stereotyping and de-individualisation. To construct an enemy image effectively there can be nothing in common with the ‘other’, hence George Galloway being constructed as being part of that ‘other’ group. In a sense, he is perceived as a ‘weak link’ in the unity against the ‘other’.

The article ends with the quote “And we should direct our anger against the terrorists, not the good guys”. This quote heavily draws upon the theme of good versus evil, identifying the ‘other’ as opposite to ourselves and justifying the war by situating Western forces as the good against the evil, ultimately belittling the protesters cause. The enemy here is ‘scapegoated’ and becomes the source of all stress and negativity – evidence for the use of the characteristic of ‘putting blame on the enemy’.

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to analyse the discourse portrayed in the British tabloid press in order to see if particular words, phrases or quotes fit with the enemy image construction model proposed by Spillman and Spillman (1997). Analysis revealed that particular constructs of the model were persistently utilised more so than others (stereotyping and de-individualisation, zero-sum thinking and identification with evil). Along with stereotypical words and images that reiterated historical notions of the Arab as the ‘other’, the articles analysed served to construct
the enemy image as Arabic whilst at the same time construct the Western nations of the United States of America and the United Kingdom as the face of freedom and goodness. Furthermore, analysis revealed that recurring themes within the text played a key role in reinforcing the constructs of enemy image outlined by Spillman and Spillman (1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004). Themes regarding the Justification for the war in Iraq, Good versus Evil and Freedom versus Oppression were identified on several occasions within each article, ultimately utilised to frame the war in Iraq as i) justified as absolute necessary to oppress the evil of the ‘other’ group and ii) morally correct in the name of freedom. In this way, the mediated Propaganda of the British tabloid press served as a powerful hegemonic tool used to conjour up public support and justification for the war in Iraq, ultimately carried out as a means for Britain and the United States to maintain global supremacy (Dunmire, 2009).

Articles such as those analysed in this investigation construct the Arab image as that of terrorism and through stereotypical and animalistic rhetoric reduce many Eastern populations into a single dark image leading to disastrous implications for Arab and Muslim individuals living within Britain, as well as the United States (Merskin, 2004). The present investigation not only provided support for the findings of Merskin (2004) whom showed how the political rhetoric of George W. Bush was used to construct an Arab enemy image and legitimise the Iraq War, the present investigation has taken the findings one step further and has demonstrated the shrude attempts of the media to influence public opinion towards the ‘other’. Without such mediated rhetoric, support for Western governments, specifically those of the United Kingdom and the United States, would be minimal. In this sense, the British tabloid press has been utilised by the British government as a tool for political gain in order to align the public opinion with that of our trans-Atlantic allies.

Such mediated tactics to construct the ‘other’ through the use of reinforcing stereotypes victimises particular groups and sought’s to create ‘moral panics’ (Cohen, 1972). This process is damaging as it fuels negative feelings towards the perceived ‘other’ eliciting negative feelings from both ‘sides’ i.e. ultimately promoting ethnic tension (Schildkraut, 2002). This vicious cycle must be broken through altering the publics perception of what is portrayed in the media. The present investigation and studies quoted within this article aim to make this possible. Psychological theory can aid the problem of constructionism in the media through the circulation of research that highlights the damaging effects of such articles; for example, it has been discovered that sensationalist stories elicit psychological maladjustment in vulnerable audiences. (Stevens, 2003: as cited in Michael J, S., 2005).

The present study may have benefited from a more systematic and rigorous approach to data analysis, for example, Thibault’s framework of critical intertextual analysis (1991: as cited in Dunmire, 2009) may have provided a ‘deeper interpretative understanding’ of the discourse located within the articles, producing intertextual connections between the multiple texts. Thus the present investigation and its findings can be further built upon in order to systematically break down and develop a deeper understanding of the rhetoric portrayed within such mediated articles. However, what has been achieved in the present investigation fully support the aim of the investigation which was to provide evidence indicating that the British tabloid press reflect an enemy image construction model that serves to justify the actions of Western political leaders. Such findings are a direct parallel to the findings
of Merskin (2004). This is of no surprise given the fact that the United States and the United Kingdom are such strong allies.

However, whilst the enemy image construction model (Spillman and Spillman, 1997: as cited in Merskin, 2004) has proven to be useful for the present investigation as, for example, it has allowed insight into the construction of an enemy image in propagandist articles such as those referenced in this article, the relationship between the media and the lay public is still in need of a more comprehensive understanding. It is unlikely that public opinion is simply swayed by the top-down process of enemy image construction within the media. The relationship with the lay public is perhaps much more dyadic than what is described here as individuals are not simply passive. It is likely that themes conveyed in mediated articles such as those of ‘justification’ for the war in Iraq also require a bottom-up process – an interaction between the public and the media whereby power or influence shifts between the two. As Stanley Cohen (1972) describes in the deviancy amplification spiral, increasing public concern leads to an increase in propagandist articles. What can be seen here is a ‘looping effect’ (Hacking, 1999) whereby the media and lay public influence one another. It may be the case that as with ‘ethno orientalism’ (Roth-Senneff, 2007) whereby marginalised ethnic groups come to consolidate their perceived negative labels as part of their own identities, the lay public, with regards to their feelings and attitudes towards the other, have come to believe in the negative evaluations and images portrayed in the media – to unite and support military retaliation against the ‘other’ has become part of many individuals identity as this is how such individuals think they should feel – a self fulfilling prophecy? If this is the case, there is much more research needed if we are to fully understand the process of enemy image construction in the media.

I propose that future research looks towards the publics subjective experience of the discourse portrayed in the media and the ways in which individuals may alter their identities in light of such discourse. Enemy image construction should therefore encompass the changing and dyadic relationship between the media and the public. There is a further influence upon such discourse that if utilised correctly could aid the development of a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between mediated discourse and the public, I am referring here to the subjective experience of the author and that of the researcher. I do not deny that my own interests and emotional investments in this research have given way to a specific and unique understanding of the discourse that may not ‘sit well’ with others however, it is these differences in individual perception that make up the matrix of understandings and interpretations between the author of the article, the researcher and the lay public. Perhaps to truly understand this relationship between the media and the public, knowledge should be derived from the subjectivity and personal standpoints of the author, the researcher and the reader rather than from either viewpoint alone. Ultimately, this will allow us all to gain greater self knowledge.

References.


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