ABSTRACT

TERROR AND TRICKSTER

One of the ways in which rhetors stabilize the meaning of terrorism is through the vilification process. Two sets of artifacts were analyzed to explore the rhetorical mechanisms of and alternatives to radical vilification. The first set of artifacts demonstrates how Orthodox Terrorism Studies (OTS) scholars vilify and exclude Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS) scholars and their ideas. I argue OTS scholars perform rhetorical exclusion (Sanchez, Stuckey, & Morris, 1999) through naming, shifting the burden of proof, and strategic silence (Endres, 2009) to vilify CTS scholars. The second set of artifacts focuses on President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry’s rhetoric about ISIL from the first time they mentioned ISIL up to the execution of James Foley, a journalist. I analyze the speeches for vilification through rhetorical exclusion (naming and strategic silence), metaphors, and the Manichean dichotomy of Good vs. Evil. Finally, an alternative framework is offered to replace radical vilification. The alternative is the Trickster, an archetypal figure common to Native American and other indigenous discourse.

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TERROR AND TRICKSTER

by

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I dedicate this thesis to Rochelle who was my support throughout graduate school.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Mixed Feelings: A Reflection

It is hard for those of us who lived through September 11, 2001 (9/11) to forget those moments. In 2001, I was living in Greece. However, in September, I was visiting my family in Iran, my home country. I stood in the middle of our living room watching the news coverage. I was transfixed by the TV for 45 minutes. It looked like a movie. Then I heard the reports about people jumping out of the buildings to escape the fire. My palms were sweaty. A film of sweat covered my body. I recall thinking, “this is going to be big”; however, I could not fathom the scale of the impact that event would have on the world. I remember the candlelight vigils held the next night for the victims as we drove around in the city. The vast majority of Iranians, from people in the street to Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, condemned the terrorist attack. In the following months, as I traveled back to Greece and then to Italy, the political pundits, politicians, experts, and ordinary people repeatedly used the word “terrorism” without defining it. “Terrorism” became synonymous with 9/11, death, and barbaric Muslims living in caves. It seemed as though terrorism did not exist before 9/11. In October of that same year, the United States invaded Afghanistan in response to 9/11. I was excited. Finally, someone was going to take care of those cave-dwelling savages who perpetrated 9/11!

A couple of years passed. By that point, a day did not go by without someone talking about terrorism. However, the conversation surrounding Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi President, and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) intensified as United Nations (UN) inspectors visited Iraq repeatedly to determine if he had WMD. In February 2003, I was in Syria to apply for a visa to come to the United
States. I remember watching Colin Powell, Secretary of State for President George W. Bush, deliver his famous speech to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) asserting that Saddam Hussein had, and was actively producing, chemical and biological weapons. Powell also alleged that Hussein had assisted al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. Among other evidence, Powell showed satellite images of bunkers where Hussein stored the weapons, graphics of the sophisticated mobile production facilities, and video of jets spraying biological agents to support his case to the UNSC. For me, it was an open and shut case, especially because George Tenet, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), sat behind Colin Powell as he delivered the speech. I perceived Tenet’s presence as a stamp of approval from the CIA, the strongest intelligence agency in the world, on Powell’s evidence and analysis. Shortly after Powell’s speech, the United States attacked Iraq. I was even more excited this time. Most Iranians deeply disliked Saddam Hussein because of the antagonism between Persians, Iran’s largest ethnic group (Amanolahi, 2005), and Arabs, Iraq’s largest ethnic group (Middle East: Iraq, 2016), and because Hussein had invaded Iran in 1980, inciting a deadly and costly eight-year war between the two countries (Doucet, 2015). Finally, someone would take care of the genocidal dictator who had caused so much harm and pain to his neighbors! On March 19, 2003, the U.S. military operation began in Iraq (Torreon, 2015). I recall watching CNN as U.S. troops toppled Hussein’s statute in Baghdad’s Firdos square on April 9, 2003. Saddam Hussein had been dethroned. It was over, and Iraqis could now govern themselves.

Immediately after the U.S. invasion, however, a wave of insurgency emerged and plunged Iraq into a brutal civil war. The situation was not much better in Afghanistan. A question lingered in my mind. Why was the strongest
military in the world unable to defeat a bunch of crazy people with AK-47s? In the course of casually investigating this question, I came across stories about how ordinary people were becoming “terrorists.” I wondered, what would I do if U.S. forces dragged my father out of our house in the middle of the night and took him to Abu Ghraib prison for a year because someone in the neighborhood reported him as a terrorist? What would I do if U.S. forces bombed my sister into pieces while she picked okra in a field in Afghanistan? Would I join the insurgency or a terrorist organization to expel the foreign occupation from the country? The occupation that was supposed to help us better our lives? That is when I realized there is more to terrorism than a bunch of cave-dwelling barbaric ideologues blowing themselves up for 72 virgins. Ordinary people with legitimate concerns were also being classified as “terrorists.” And why don’t we listen to these concerns?

By the time my thinking reached this point, I was residing in the United States, and it was difficult for me to have robust conversations about terrorism with many of my friends. It was difficult for me to converse about the complexities of terrorism with anyone who had a relative or friend in the U.S. military in Iraq or Afghanistan. One way or another, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq had affected many people. On rare occasions when I would find people willing to engage, it was apparent that they held strong opinions about terrorism but they did not know much about the history or politics of the region. I cannot generalize my personal experience to the rest of the U.S. public, but I do not believe these experiences are idiosyncratic. My frustration grew, so I sought a venue to have difficult conversations. I found that artistic activities were much more conducive to difficult topics, so I began to enter spoken word competitions.

Mark was sitting in his house with his family.
He, his father, mother, and sister were watching TV, when masked men blew the door off its hinges. They stormed the house through the fringes. Mark’s dad reached for a gun to protect his family, but was shot in the head by the masked men repeatedly. Mark’s mom attacked the intruders helplessly, but was shot in the chest by one them viciously. Mark remembered those men by the mark that they wore on their chests.

20 years later, Mark was watching TV. He sees the same mark on someone’s chest and he sees nothing but blood, revenge, and gore, and he says: I’m going to fight all those bastards. He went and destroyed the force of Evil that killed his family and left him weakened. It sounds like a plot out of Hollywood, But what if… this was your childhood? I want to ask you to do something more. Something you may have never done before. Something that may make your heart sore. Rename that little boy Muhammad. Place his house in the suburbs of Baghdad. Replace the masked men with soldiers, and the mark they wore on their chest with a red, white, and blue patchwork. In movies, they call Mark a hero.
But, do we call Muhammed a hero?
No…
We have a specific name for Muhammad.
“Terrorist” is the name we call Muhammad. (see complete poem in Appendix)

Terrorism is a difficult subject to talk about. However, that difficulty does not mean that we do not talk about it. Politicians and scholars are always talking about terrorism. It is also important to analyze how we talk about terrorism.

This thesis explores the rhetorical mechanisms of and alternatives to vilification. I demonstrate that discourse about terrorism has vilified the terrorist to the point that, no matter the terrorist’s concerns, we (the non-terrorist Westerner) do not heed them and seek only to eradicate them. I argue that we should employ a different framework through which we can account for complexities of terrorism. In this chapter, first, I justify the study; second, I offer a background on the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) that demonstrates the complexities of terrorism; and finally, I preview the chapters to come.

Justification for the Study

Study of Exclusion of Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS)

Critical Security Studies (CSS) is a sub-field of the larger discipline of security studies. CSS is rooted in peace studies (Peoples & Vaughan-Williams, 2010). In the early 1980s, some peace studies scholars changed their focus from “‘negative peace’ (the absence of war) to ‘positive peace’,” (p. 18) which addressed the underlying causes of conflict. After the Cold War, the field of security studies significantly changed. Scholars introduced the postmodern
approach to security studies (see Ashley, 1984; Der Derian & Shapiro, 1989; Lapid, 1989; Shapiro, 1988). Wyn Jones (1999) and Ken Booth, collaborating as the “Welsh School,” introduced the critical theory that was developed by the Frankfurt School into the theory and practice of security (Kaltofen, 2013). CSS scholars critiqued the ontological and epistemological assumptions of traditional security studies and International Relations (IR). Naturally, scholars who approached security using a realist lens disagreed and dismissed the legitimacy of CSS. Walt (1991) argued that these approaches are “divorced from the real world” (p. 223). Halliday (1996) expressed concerns about introducing “relativism and subjectivism” (p. 325) into security studies if scholars were to study it using critical approaches. As Browning and McDonald (2013) point out, the larger security studies field’s attempts to exclude CSS were unsuccessful and, now, Critical Security Studies occupies a prominent place in the field. However, disagreements continue to exist “about the boundaries of this sub-discipline or indeed some of its central commitments” (Browning & McDonald, 2013, p. 236).

A similar trend is happening in the field of terrorism studies. In 2006, “inspired by the experience of Critical Security Studies” (p. 2), a group of scholars set out to introduce critical theory into terrorism studies (Jackson, Smyth, & Gunning, 2009). The founders of this sub-field within terrorism studies dubbed it Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS). However, the response from the larger field of terrorism studies was even more harsh and exclusionary than security studies’ response to CSS. Jackson et al. (2009) argued that the reaction was partly due to emotional responses to 9/11. The vilification of CTS warrants study to understand and prevent future exclusion in academic conversations in the interest of promoting academic pluralism.
Study of the Obama Administration’s Rhetoric about ISIL

How do we win the War on Terrorism? Why do terrorists hate “our” freedom? How do we eradicate terrorism? The discourse of radical vilification undergirds all of these queries. Discourse is a powerful tool. Shapiro (1992) defined discourse “a linguistic practice that puts into play sets of rules and procedures for the formation of objects, speakers, and thematics” (p. 108). In short, this understanding of discourse encompasses the early Christian Church’s construction of the ideology that depicted women as “witches” (Ben-Yehuda, 1980), Hitler’s portrayal of Jews as a “problem” (Ward, 2014), and early American colonists use of discourse to position the indigenous populations of the Americas as “barbaric savages” (Winkler, 2006). By extension, Native Americans were the first group that the U.S. government labeled “terrorist” (Winkler, 2006, p. 162). Rhetors have historically used a variety of discursive practices to vilify a range of groups (e.g., homosexuals, trans individuals, people with mental illness or disabilities, intellectuals, the sick, artists, Soviets, Mexicans, and immigrants); none ended well.

Naím (2010) explained that any time rhetors choose the phrase “war on …” to shore up support to “fight” social or political issues (e.g., War on Drugs, War on Poverty, War on Gangs), we should brace for bad policies to follow. The war metaphor is attractive because conventional wars were finite, often had a decisive winner, and allowed politicians free rein to allocate massive resources to the cause (Naím, 2010). However, we cannot win metaphorical wars on social issues; the Wars on Poverty and Drugs demonstrate their limits and futility. Brzezinski (2007), Professor of International Relations at Johns Hopkins University and a former National Security Advisor, said, referring to the War on Terrorism, “[t]he damage these three words have done – a classic self-inflicted wound – is infinitely
greater than any wild dreams entertained by the fanatical perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks when they were plotting against us in distant Afghan caves” (para. 2). He asserted that we cannot win the War on Terrorism because it “is not an enemy but a technique of warfare” (para. 2).

Sedgwick (2010) suggested that commonly used terms such as “radicalization” are very misleading because they homogenize different agendas and often mask the conflicting agendas and nuances that are associated with them. A widely accepted misconception by the U.S. public is that the driving force behind terrorism is ideology (i.e., religion) (Mueller & Stewart, 2012). However, terrorism often stems from geopolitical rather than ideological reasons. In other words, terrorism has much less to do with ideological motivations (i.e., hating freedom) than people’s “simmering, and more commonly boiling, outrage at U.S. foreign policy — the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in particular, and the country’s support for Israel in the Palestinian conflict” (Mueller & Stewart, 2012, p. 100). Too often, the U.S. government’s rhetorical treatment of terrorism foments fear and paranoia, which in turn results in heavy-handed policies and military action (Mueller & Stewart, 2012). Consequently, those actions become the driving force behind future acts of terrorism. Therefore, the terrorism label, as Zulaika (2009) has argued, is often self-fulfilling prophecy.

I also do not think anyone can eradicate terrorism. Just as a cat cannot catch its shadow, no matter how hard it tries, domination cannot eradicate resistance. As Baudrillard (2003) put it,

Terrorism, like virus, is everywhere. Immersed globally, terrorism, like the shadow of any system of domination, is ready everywhere to emerge as a double agent. There is no boundary to define it; it is in the very core of this culture that fights it - and the visible schism (and hatred) that opposes, on a
global level, the exploited and the underdeveloped against the Western world, is secretly linked to the internal fracture of the dominant system. The latter can face any visible antagonism. But with terrorism – and its viral structure –, as if every domination apparatus were creating its own antibody, the chemistry of its own disappearance; against this almost automatic reversal of its own puissance, the system is powerless. And terrorism is the shockwave of this silent reversal. (pp. 10-11)

Baudrillard suggested that as long as domination persists, terrorism will as well. Not only the oppressed commit terrorism but oppressors (e.g., governments) also commit terrorism (Jackson et al., 2009). Therefore, terrorism is inherent to oppression, from both sides. Eliminating terrorism would entail eliminating oppression.

Pilecki, Muro, Hammack, and Clemons (2014) argued that Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama vilified terrorists “by framing terrorist violence as both morally condemnable and apolitical” (p. 290), therefore denying terrorists legitimacy as a political group. They also demonstrated that even though President Obama renounced Bush’s counterterrorism measures (e.g., torture), he used rhetoric similar to Bush to vilify and exclude terrorists. Pilecki et al. analyzed speeches up through President Obama’s address on May 23, 2013, so their analysis does not include discourse surrounding ISIL. They recommend that future research include discourse authored by more U.S. administration officials. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in this thesis, ISIL differs from al Qaeda in important ways that transform the rhetoric.
ISIL’s Inception and Growth

Exploring the complex and unique geopolitics of the Middle East is outside the purview of this project. However, a brief survey of ISIL’s history allows the reader to better understand the complexities of the situation and demonstrate how President Barack Obama and Secretary John Kerry simplify the complex context of the situation. A brief explanation of any political situation in the Middle East is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve due to the interconnectedness of political situations and actors in the region. Furthermore, experts disagree slightly about the chain of events that led to the creation and growth of ISIL. I take great care to offer a description of the group balancing this range of analysis.

The acronym “ISIL” has been a household name in the United States since the summer of 2014, but the origins of this group are largely unknown, or ignored, by the U.S. public (McClam, 2014). This ignorance extends beyond the general public. Stein (2006) studied whether those involved in counterterrorism and defense policy are familiar with the complex cultural and religious realities informing Middle Eastern conflicts. One of the questions that Stein asked counterterrorism officials and members of Congress was, “Do you know the difference between a Sunni and a Shiite?” (para. 1). Stein concluded that “most American officials [he has] interviewed don’t have a clue” (para. 5). Willie Hulon, chief of the FBI’s national security branch, responded to Stein’s question by indicating that Iran and Hezbollah are Sunnis (Stein, 2006). Representative Terry Everett, the vice chairperson of the House Intelligence Subcommittee responded, “one’s in one location, another’s in another location. No, to be honest with you, I don’t know. I thought it was differences in their religion, different families or something” (Stein, 2006, para. 14). Representative Jo Ann Davis, head
of a House intelligence subcommittee charged with overseeing the CIA’s performance and analyzing information answered:

Do I? You know, I should. It’s a difference in their fundamental religious beliefs. The Sunni are more radical than the Shia or vice versa. But I think it’s the Sunnis who’re more radical than the Shia. Al Qaeda is the one that’s most radical, so I think they’re Sunni. I may be wrong, but I think that’s right. (Stein, 2006, para. 17)

Those charged with the responsibility to make policy relating to action in the region were not able to answer a simple question. This leads me to believe that the possibility of the public knowing much about ISIL, which is much more complex than just the two sects of Islam, is grim.

Understanding the geopolitics of the Middle East requires a basic understanding of Islam and its factions. Shiite and Sunni are the two primary factions of Islam. Disagreement ensued between Muslims about the successor of the Prophet Mohammed after his death in 632 CE (Fakhry, 2004). Sunnis believe that Muslims as a community should select the successor. The Shiites, however, contend that the Prophet Mohammed chose his successor (i.e., Ali) who was his relative before he died and, therefore, the successors must be related to the Prophet. This disagreement has created a rift in the Muslim community for over a thousand years.

Sunnis comprise about “80-90 percent” of the Muslim population in the world, and Shiites are about “10-15 percent” (Chehab, 2007, p. 14). Some Muslim countries have both a majority Sunni population and Sunni leaders (e.g., Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates). Similarly, some countries have both a majority Shiite population and Shiite government (e.g., Iran and present Iraq). On the other hand, some Muslim countries have a majority Shiite population but are
governed by Sunni leaders (e.g., Bahrain and Kuwait) and vice versa (e.g., Syria) (Chehab, 2007). Both Shiite and Sunni Muslims subdivide further into smaller sub-sects.

Salafism is a sub-sect of Sunnism (Fakhry, 2004). Salafism in its traditional form is an ultraconservative and fundamentalist reform movement in Islam. Salafism contends Islam has deviated from its origins and been contaminated by modernity. Salafists advocate for a strict adherence to the original form of Islam, thereby returning to the moral practices of the Prophet Mohamad. In this sense, Salafism is similar to Christian fundamentalism and biblical literalism. However, until recently, Salafists held pragmatic political positions in existing governmental authorities. In the mid-1990s, some Salafists started to go back to its ultraconservative form and advocate for “Jihad.” ISIL’s core beliefs come from the Salafi sub-sect of Sunnism.

In order to understand the genesis of ISIL, we need to consider the history of its leaders. The story begins in 1979, when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan (Weiner, 2008). Many young men from different countries traveled to Afghanistan and joined the rebel forces who opposed the Soviet invasion. These rebels called themselves the Mujahedeen. Among them were two important individuals: a well-educated young man from Saudi Arabia named Osama bin Laden and a street criminal from Jordan named Abu Mosab al Zarqawi (Hashim, 2014; Napoleoni, 2005). The political and religious views of these two men diverged, and they did not get along interpersonally, either. Eventually, bin Laden created al Qaeda and successfully ousted the Soviet Union with financial and military aid from the United States (Weiner, 2008). Al Zarqawi arrived in Afghanistan at the end of the Soviet invasion so he became a reporter for a religious publication. After the Soviet forces left Afghanistan in 1989, both men
left the country. Bin Laden went to Saudi Arabia and grew al Qaeda to fight the
U.S. military presence in Saudi Arabia, U.S. financial and military support for
Israel, and U.S. sanctions against Iraq. Al Zarqawi went to Jordan and founded his
own group, but the Jordanian government arrested him; shortly after, his followers
disbanded (Hashim, 2014; Napoleoni, 2005). Bin Laden and al Zarqawi each
returned to Afghanistan, in 1996 and 2000 respectively. During this time period,
the Taliban regime was governing Afghanistan. Bin Laden was a well-known
leader (of al Qaeda), but al Zarqawi was relatively unknown. Bin Laden planned
and carried out his attacks on 9/11 from his base in Afghanistan (National
Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). After the United States invaded
Afghanistan in retaliation for the 9/11 attacks, bin Laden fled to Pakistan and al
Zarqawi moved to western Iraq (Napoleoni, 2005). Al Zarqawi was still an
unknown operative for al Qaeda, but the invasion of Iraq by the United States
became an important turning point for him as he became the leader of al Qaeda in
Iraq.

Most experts agree that the creation of ISIL can be attributed to a
combination of factors (Hashim, 2014; King, Nolan, & Lopes, 2016; McClam,
2014; Smith & Hirsch, 2014). They all point out that the invasion of Iraq in 2003
by the U.S. coalition forces and their subsequent policies significantly contributed
to ISIL’s formation and its rise to power. After the invasion of Iraq and fall of
Hussein, the United States appointed the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) as
the transitional government of Iraq (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013). First, General
Jay Garner was appointed as the CPA leader, but the United States abruptly
replaced Garner with Paul Bremer on May 11, 2003. Bremer designed and
implemented two controversial policies that fueled the rise of insurgency in Iraq.
These two policies are famously known as CPA Order One and CPA Order Two.
These two orders provided the basis for what is collectively known as the de-Baathification process.

The Baath party was the primary party in Iraq under Hussein. “Baathism is a secular Arab nationalist political ideology” (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013, p. 3). Even though Baathism is a secular ideology, Hussein, who was a Sunni, stacked government appointments with Sunnis (a minority in Iraq), marginalizing the Shiite majority (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013). During his reign, Hussein persecuted and exiled Shiites for their oppositional views (Chehab, 2007). After the U.S. invasion of Iraq and Hussein’s fall from power, a struggle by the majority Shiites to gain political control ensued.

De-Baathification describes “a series of legal and administrative measures … to prevent the Baath Party from returning to power in Iraq” (Sissons & Al-Saiedi, 2013, p. 9). CPA Order One focused on “cleansing the civil service” (p. 10). This order aimed to remove Baath party leaders from their positions in the government. However, the order removed almost all members of the Baath party from any government jobs. All government employees (e.g., teachers, bureaucrats, doctors, etc.) were required to belong to the Baath party during Hussein’s reign. Many lower-ranking government employees became members of the Baath party to work but had no allegiance to the party’s central ideology. CPA Order Two was even more destructive; it aimed at “disbanding the military, security, and other organizations” (p. 11). The Iraqi military was the most powerful and organized institution under Hussein, so the military’s dismantlement translated to the dismissal of 400,000 people by the CPA in May 2003. The dismantlement of the military and other organizations, as well as de-Baathification, left thousands of trained, and, in some cases armed, Sunnis unemployed and on the streets. The impact of these two orders was profound and
immediate, particularly in the light of the insurgency that followed the U.S. occupation of Iraq. The lack of an organized force to fight the insurgency led to a stronger insurgency. Furthermore, those whom CPA orders laid off from the military found that the insurgency could utilize their expertise. The newly unemployed, angered by their diminished socioeconomic status in the new Iraq, joined the insurgency against the occupation — and al Zarqawi was there to capitalize on the opportunity (King et al., 2016).

Al Zarqawi’s group (al Qaeda in Iraq) became one of the most violent insurgent groups (Napoleoni, 2005). He often attacked the Shiite population, which led to a religious civil war in Iraq (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). In 2006, however, the Sunni tribal leaders, in exchange for financial incentives and political inclusion in Iraq’s future, defeated al Zarqawi. U.S. coalition forces later killed him in an airstrike. This blow left al Qaeda in Iraq defeated for a few years. At this point, the remaining al Qaeda forces, defeated and weak, were confined to the western deserts of Iraq.

In 2011, U.S. coalition forces left a largely stabilized Iraq. Immediately after the withdrawal, Nori al Malaki, the Iraqi president at the time, started a brutal crackdown on Sunnis in Iraq and implemented a set of discriminatory policies (King et al., 2016; Smith & Hirsch, 2014). The crackdown may have been a consequence of al Malaki’s fear of a Sunni uprising and return to a Sunni government. Al Malaki’s actions infuriated the Sunni tribal leaders who had helped the U.S. coalition forces defeat al Qaeda. Later the same year, al Malaki eliminated the remaining Sunni forces in the army and the police force, replacing them with Shiites.

In 2011, the Arab Spring led to widespread turmoil in the Middle East and Northern Africa (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). Syria was one of the countries that
experienced a populist uprising. The Syrian president, Bashar al Assad, cracked down on the protesters, who were mostly Sunnis, and propelled the country into a civil war. Assad’s government, which is Shiite, governs a predominantly Sunni populace. In 2012, Abu Baker al Baghdadi, the new leader of al Qaeda in Iraq, sent a few of his fighters into neighboring Syria to join the rebels, who were fighting Assad’s forces. The civil war in Syria created an opportunity for defeated al Qaeda forces to fight and to recruit new members. Their message gained a great deal of traction with dissident Sunnis in Syria; within a year, al Qaeda had thousands of supporters opposing and fighting the Assad regime.

The marginalization, detention, and killing of Sunnis in Iraq by al Malaki resulted in widespread demonstrations from December 2012 to December 2013 (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). The demonstrations occurred in majority Sunni populated cities and towns, such as Fallujah, Mosul, Tikrit, and Ramadi. Money flowed in from other Sunni countries to support and publicize the protests. The Shiite cities organized their own protests in support of al Malaki’s policies. It seemed his discrimination against and violence toward Sunnis made him popular with the Shiite majority, deepening a highly sectarian divide into a chasm. With significant support among the majority Shiites for al Malaki’s policies, he had no real incentive to recall or cease oppressive actions against the Sunnis.

Wealthy Sunni countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, etc.) started to provide funding to the Syrian rebels and opposition groups, among them al Qaeda forces (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). This boost allowed al Qaeda to grow, obtain territory, and eventually self-fund through extortions, bank robberies, control of transportation routes, and seizure of Syrian oil fields. Then, in a major military campaign, al Qaeda attacked a series of Iraqi prisons and freed many inmates. The release of these prisoners led to an increase in the ranks and popularity of ISIL. In
early 2013, a small number of al Qaeda’s signature flags appeared at protests in the city of Ramadi. Around the same time, a particular segment of al Qaeda started calling itself the “Islamic State in Iraq and al Sham” or ISIS, which later was changed to ISIL. The presence of al Qaeda’s flags was a boost for al Malaki because it allowed him to tell those who were advocating for better treatment of Sunnis, “We told you so. The Sunnis were extremists all along.”

In April 2013, the army opened fire on peaceful protesters and killed hundreds of Sunnis in the town of Hawija (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). If Iraq had been sitting atop a powder keg, this event lit the fuse. It was a tremendous opportunity for ISIL because, for a long time, they had been arguing that peaceful protests do not work and that armed resistance was needed. The killings provided fuel for ISIL’s argument. Many young Sunnis joined ISIL and engaged in armed resistance (King et al., 2016). Even if they did not agree with ISIL’s ideology, they saw ISIL as a force that could protect them from Shiite oppression (Barnard & Arango, 2015). The Sunni population demanded that Iraqi forces leave their cities, and once the Iraqi government granted that wish, ISIL took control of Ramadi and Fallujah very quickly. In June 6, 2014, ISIL set out to take over Mosul and the Iraqi army deserted the city completely, with minimal resistance, by June 10, 2014 (King et al., 2016).

The spoils of ISIL’s take-over of Mosul included large caches of military equipment that the U.S. had provided to the Iraqi army. With money from their economic activity, personnel from their prison raid and the desperate Sunni population, military supplies from Mosul, and organizational and military expertise from the Baathists who had been sidelined by de-Baathification efforts, ISIL quickly took over the cities of Qayyarah, al Shirqat, Hawijah, and Tikrit. On June 15, 2014, President Obama ordered U.S. forces to enter Iraq and assess the
capabilities of both ISIL and the Iraqi security forces (Garamone, 2014). On June 29, 2014, ISIL’s leaders declared a “Caliphate” and called on all Muslims to help them. Salafism obligates its followers to answer and support the Caliph’s call. A Caliphate is “an Islamic state representing the world’s Muslim faithful. It is an entity that recognizes no political borders” (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). Sayyid (2014) described the Caliphate as “a metaphor for the struggles between Muslim aspirations to reorder the postcolonial world and the investments in the continuation of the violent hierarchies of coloniality” (p. 15). ISIL believes in the Caliphate both metaphorically and literally. However, ISIL’s primary goal is to take over land and carve out territory, in violation of the colonial order of the West.

**Preview**

In Chapter 2, I first review the literature on terrorism discourse; second, I explain and justify my ontological and epistemological standpoint; third, I present the rhetorical strategies that rhetors use to vilify CTS scholars and ISIL; finally, I explain the method of analysis, identify my artifacts, and offer my justification for each. Chapter 3 explains how Orthodox Terrorism Studies (OTS) scholars rhetorically vilify and exclude CTS scholars and their ideas. I argue OTS scholars accomplish rhetorical exclusion (Sanchez, Stuckey, & Morris, 1999) through naming, shifting the burden of proof, and strategic silence (Endres, 2009). Chapter 4 focuses on President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry’s rhetoric about ISIL, from the first time they mentioned ISIL up to the execution of journalist James Foley. I argue the speeches vilify ISIL via rhetorical exclusion (naming and strategic silence), metaphors, and a Manichean framing of good versus evil. In Chapter 5, I consider an alternative framework, the Trickster, an
archetypal figure common to indigenous discourse. I argue that using the trickster’s framework to view terrorism allows for a more comprehensive and complex understanding of it.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL GROUNDING

In order to find the points of stasis in terrorism studies, I locate my research in previous work done by other scholars. First, I briefly review the existing literature in the field of terrorism studies. Second, I offer a theoretical grounding by summarizing the ontological and epistemological foundations of my argument and justifying the application of rhetoric to study terrorism. Third, I describe the multiple rhetorical devices examined in this project. Finally, I describe my rhetorical artifacts and the methods I utilize to study them.

Previous Research

The phenomenon of terrorism has been with humanity for a long time. The first documented accounts of terrorism point to Sicarii Zealots, who were a Jewish extremist organization active in the 1st century CE (Chaliand & Blin, 2007b). Almost 1700 years later, the French Revolution established, for the first time, an institutionalized state terror (Chaliand & Blin 2007a; Tilly, 2004). The revolutionaries referred to the period between 1793 and 1794 of the French Revolution as the “Reign of Terror” (Tilly, 2004, p. 9), a label still used by contemporary historians. The label “terror” refers to 17,000 legal and 23,000 illegal executions that the French revolutionary government carried out in the span of one year by utilizing the infamous guillotine and a slew of other methods. Between 1794 and 2001, many different events occurred that can be defined as terrorism. However, none is as significant to U.S. American audiences as the events on the morning of September 11, 2001 (9/11). The significance of this event to U.S. American audiences, as Richardson puts it, is “the fact it was such a new experience for the U.S.” (as cited in Blinder, 2015, para. 5). Never before,
foreign agents had attacked such symbols as prominent as the World Trade Center (WTC) and the Pentagon in the United States.

On 9/11, 19 members of al Qaeda hijacked four commercial airplanes (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, 2004). Two of these airplanes crashed into the North and South towers of the WTC complex, which led to their eventual collapse and the destruction of the entire complex and some surrounding buildings. The third airplane crashed into the west side of the Pentagon and the fourth airplane crashed into a field in Pennsylvania. 2996 people (including the attackers) died that day. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 set in motion the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. A coalition of forces led by the United States conducted these wars. These two wars led to conditions that, as described in Chapter 1, contributed to the rise of a group called variously the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and ash-Sham (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), or simply Islamic State (IS) (Tharoor, 2014). The official name of the group in Arabic is ad-Dawlah al Islāmiyah fil Irāq waš-Sḥām (DAIISH). The name or acronym changes depending on the news outlet or the government agency discussing it. In this project, I refer to the group as ISIL.

Few academics studied the topic of terrorism before the 1970s (Miller & Mills, 2009). Terrorism studies emerged in large part from counterinsurgency studies, which itself emerged in the 1950s and 1960s in response to decolonization and the emergence of the U.S. as a major imperial power. Counterinsurgency theory’s main concern and ideological commitment was, and still is, to support Western powers and offer ways in which these powers may counter insurgency; I explore the legacy of this theoretical genealogy in depth in Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Much of the early work exploring terrorism in the discipline of communication had to do with concerns about contagion and media legitimization
of terrorism. For example, Weimann (1978) recommended looking at terrorism through a theoretical framework of media-events. Weimann described how a terrorism event turns into a media-event, which leads to propagation of terrorist messages through “live broadcasting” (p. 25), “pre-planning” (p. 25), “high drama” (p. 26), “obligatory viewing” (p. 28), “personification of the event” (p. 28), and the “priestly role of the media” (p. 29). Similarly, Palmerton (1988) explored the role of media in reinforcing the terrorists’ strategy and media’s suggestion that military action would re-establish order.

Besides enormous geopolitical impacts, 9/11 led to an explosion of academic work about terrorism (Miller & Mills, 2009; Smyth, Gunning, Jackson, Kassimeris, & Robinson, 2008). Terrorism became “one of the fastest expanding areas of research in the Western academic world” (Jackson et al., 2009, p. i). Technical experts, government experts, and academics have explored terrorism through different methods, for different purposes, and in a variety of disciplines such as Political Science, International Relations, Sociology, anthropology, and History (Roberts, 2014). Researchers have examined the ways “terrorism” has been defined (Chomsky, 2011; Coady, 2004; Derrida, 2003; Fletcher, 2002; Honderich, 2003; Primoratz, 2004; Shanahan, 2010; Staun, 2010; Waldron, 2004; Wilkins, 1992).

One of the common characteristics in definitions of terrorism is its moral impermissibility. Shanahan (2010) uses a critical analysis to examine the common practice of defining terrorism and to reveal significant consequences to defining it as always morally impermissible. First, the rhetor precludes any “serious inquiry into the morality of specific acts labeled as terrorism” (Shanahan, 2010, p. 187) because terrorism is an extremely charged subject and often associated with undue violence. Second, the public (and governments) often assumes some acts, such as
military force by governments, are morally permissible and therefore automatically excluded from terrorism, despite their similarities to acts that are often categorized as such. Third, defining terrorism as necessarily morally impermissible or evil helps government to label any political violence in opposition to them as terrorism and then using any means to combat it. Shanahan proposes that the “morality of terrorism [is] a matter to be determined by the application of specific moral theories to particular cases, not by definitional fiat” (p. 174).

Staun (2010) used framing theory to offer a critical analysis of the process of naming and defining terrorism. Staun suggested that instead of trying to define the term “terrorism,” researchers should focus on describing those who define terrorism by examining how they frame terrorism, its threats, and understanding the conditions under which they define the term. Furthermore, Staun recommended that researchers ask with what communicative devices these actors are singled out as a threat and how that perceived threat is defined. Staun justified his recommendation by offering a Wittgensteinian analysis of “terrorism” as a language game that depicts the word as a flexible general term that changes over time. Therefore, instead of trying to pin down a meaning, researchers should try to define the phenomenon in a contextual manner by taking into consideration all the agents involved, as well as the context of the event. Besides the definition of terrorism, the perception of terrorism is also commonly contested in terrorism studies.

The discourse disseminated by mainstream media and government sources contributes significantly to the evolving public perception of terrorism (Altheide, 2009). These agents perpetuate a perceived victimhood that anyone could become the victim of terrorism by almost any method (e.g., airplane, anthrax or other
biological weapons, or dirty bombs) (Bennett, 2015). However, even accounting for 9/11, the likelihood of a terrorist attack on United States soil is so small that an American is more likely to die from influenza than a terrorist attack (Bloch-Elkon, 2011). Nevertheless, U.S. Americans perceive higher risks of terrorism than its statistical likelihood. This discrepancy shows the strong perceptual element surrounding the topic of terrorism. Bennett further explored fears of terrorism, examining how news coverage creates a perception that anyone could be a threat and a variety of weapons could be used to do so, including viruses, toxins, conventional explosives, and nuclear material. Bennett argued that an unlimited array of methods and actors amplifies a level of anxiety that makes the population desperate for security and safety.

The public often views news coverage as objective reporting about events (Bennett, 2005). This perception is not accurate, especially when it comes to news regarding terrorism. Altheide (2009) suggested that the government does not directly control how mass media outlets portray terrorism, but, rather, journalists’ efforts to establish a working relationship with their sources in the government affects their journalism, essentially sanctioning the political establishment’s claims. Years of such incestuous relationships between media and the government have institutionalized a pattern for aligning coverage of political events with governmental positions. Therefore, an analysis of government discourse about terrorism envelops an analysis of news media coverage because journalists frequently follow the government’s lead in generating discourse surrounding terrorism. This reinforcement of government positions is significant because, by and large, the public relies on the news media’s portrayal of terrorism to construct their perception of terrorism (Bennett, 2005). The coverage of the Iraq war in 2003 exemplifies the relationship between the news media and the government.
Altheide (2009) showed how journalists covering the Iraq war used fear appeals to promote the politics of fear. The politics of fear is a rhetor’s use of a public’s perception and belief about danger, threat, and risk in order to attain particular political outcomes (Altheide, 2003; Massumi, 1993). Altheide (2009) argued that such “politics of fear promotes attacking a target (e.g., crime, terrorism), anticipates further victimisation, curtails civil liberties, and stifles dissent as being unresponsive to citizen needs or even ‘unpatriotic’” (p. 68).

Woods (2011) showed how framing affects perceptions of terrorism. People’s perceptions of the terrorist threat depend, in part, on framing. Study subjects who were exposed to “radical Islamic” and “nuclear” frames perceived greater terrorist threats than those who were exposed to the “homegrown extremism” and “conventional weapons” frames. Two frames in particular — radical Islam and nuclear weapons — can elevate public perceptions of the terrorist threat. Religious affiliation, weapons employed, and the terrorist’s level of rationality, as perceived by the public, can additionally influence how the public is inclined to respond to terrorism.

Kennedy, Pronin, and Butsch (2006) studied how subjects’ perception of the terrorist affects their response latitude. Participants were exposed to material that either indicated that terrorists make their decisions according to a “rational analysis of the facts” or “social influence, conformity, and emotional reactions” (p. 386). The authors concluded that there is a direct relationship between participants’ perception of terrorists as rational and advocating for diplomatic solution. However, there is an inverse relationship between that perception and advocating for militaristic solutions.

The existing literature indicates that an audience’s perception of terrorism shapes their understanding of, and responses to, terrorism. Such analyses can be
enriched by attending to the rhetorical qualities of communication about terrorism. Communication has a constitutive capacity that can create, solidify, or alter human perceptions of reality. Different perceptions about terrorism emerge from communicative phenomena, which reinforce the importance of analyzing such discourse in order to illuminate the basis of these perceptions. In the following section, I explain the connection among reality, communication, and rhetoric.

Rhetoric, Ontology, and Epistemology

Justifying a rhetorical lens for the analysis of terrorism discourse requires an explanation of what reality is and how we come to know it. Philosophers have struggled with these questions for 2400 years (Whitson & Poulakos, 1993). Rhetors’ ontological and epistemological frameworks dictate beliefs about what and how phenomena exist in the world and how researchers come to know about those things. Moreover, ontology and epistemology are interdependent (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For example, if inquirers were to conceptualize how they could know about something, they would need to first specify (or at least assume) the nature of reality that they want to know about. Conversely, without a concept of knowing, inquirers cannot study the nature of reality. This section explains ontology and epistemology to justify the study of the phenomenon of terrorism through a rhetorical lens.

Paradigms

The inquirer’s paradigmatic orientation establishes ontology and epistemology. As Guba and Lincoln (1994) have indicated, “paradigms define for inquirers what it is they are about, and what falls within and outside the limits of legitimate inquiry” (p. 108; italics in original). There are multiple ontological positions, but I limit my explanation to two (realism and social constructionism). I
start with realism, which is prominent in the “hard” sciences (e.g., physics and chemistry), as well as social sciences. Furthermore, scholars of Orthodox Terrorism Studies (OTS), one of the approaches to terrorism studies, heavily rely on realism in their knowledge production. This point is important in Chapter 3, where I explore vilification in terrorism studies discourse.

Realism. There are two different positions in realism. On the one hand, there is the view common in the natural sciences. According to realists, “the social world external to individual cognition is a real world made up of hard, tangible and relatively immutable structures” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 4). For example, realists believe that the notion of democracy exists as something real outside of the human mind. Realists would say that humans discovered democracy because it was already out there waiting to be found. Based on this view, reality exists outside of the human mind; therefore, knowing becomes independent of reality. The inquirer in this worldview can only observe reality and cannot affect it. For realists, communication is an obstruction to knowing because humans cannot completely communicate what is perceived by their senses. Therefore, communication can never be complete and any attempt by humans to transfer knowledge through communication is incomplete, as they can never fully communicate truth or reality.

On the other hand is the positivist terrorism studies scholar, who is confident that objective knowledge of the world can be gleaned through human inquiry because people can accurately and transparently perceive knowledge of things. For this realist position, rhetoric is problematic because knowledge and reality are self-explanatory. Because reality exists objectively and statically, transparent and accurate communication is possible. Therefore, the inquirer’s
function is only to observe and describe the already existing reality as clearly as possible. Furthermore, if rhetoric is defined as the art of persuasion, then using rhetoric and attempting to persuade is obscuring reality. This group believes that transparent and accurate communication is possible and that rhetoric is the deceptive substitute to real communication. For them, knowledge does not require persuasion, and people need to purge rhetoric from the communication of knowledge. That is the reason realists try their best to separate the bias of the researcher from their results.

Social constructionism. Social constructionists believe that “social reality is not a fact or set of facts existing prior to human activity; it is created through human interaction. We create our social world through our words and other symbols, and through our behaviors” (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1992, p. 133). Social constructionists believe that language and communication are of utmost importance because outside of those two phenomena, there is no social reality. However, they do not deny the existence of tangible objects such as stones and tables. They contend that our labels for those objects and human behavior toward them have real impacts. For example, if an entire civilization believes, through communication practices and narratives, that the Earth is a flat surface with an edge, that civilization will avoid sailing near what they perceive as the edge of the Earth. That does not make the Earth flat; however, for all intents and purposes, the Earth is treated by that civilization as flat because they believe it to be so. Social constructionists view social reality as an intersubjective construction created through communicative interaction. These intersubjective realities are then reified because people treat the social constructions of their world as if they were objective realities. Communication is an inherent and important part of
social reality because social reality would not exist in the absence of communication. According to social constructionism, the world is constructed through naming, describing, and explaining (Berger & Luckman, 1967). In other words, the world is socially constructed through discourse (Gergen, 1985). According to this perspective, through discourse, relationships are literally talked into existence (Charland, 1987) or made real through the use of language (Bourdieu, 1996).

**Rhetoric and Social Constructionism**

The link between social constructionist ontology and rhetoric can be a strong one. The definition of rhetoric differs depending upon a scholar’s ontological and epistemological views. Biesecker’s (1989) definition of rhetoric best serves the purpose of this project. Biesecker viewed rhetoric as “a logic of articulation” rather than “a logic of influence” (p. 126). Biesecker (1989) rejected the stability of the subject’s identity and instead says a “rhetorical event may be seen as an incident that produces and reproduces the identities of subjects and constructs and reconstructs linkages between them” (p. 126). Therefore, rhetoric is “the articulation of provisional identities and the construction of contingent relations that obtain between them” (p. 126). In other words, rhetoric temporarily stabilizes meanings, and, by extension, subjects. Following Biesecker (1992), a critical rhetorical approach “is not, as we have heretofore thought, one of ‘changing what’s in people’s heads.’ Instead, it is about turning the grid of intelligibility that organizes the present” (p. 361; cf. McKerrow, 1989).

Foucault’s (1972) explanation of the linguistic process in constructing meaning further demonstrates the importance of analyzing the rhetoric of social and political phenomenon (e.g., terrorism). Foucault had observed in the writing
of historical analyses a frequent desire “to establish those … series that enable us to circumscribe the ‘locus’ of an event, the limit to its fluidity and the condition of its emergence” (p. 230). Foucault’s argument was not limited to the work of historians per se, but rather the tendency to describe history in terms of stable, knowable events because of our inherent anxiety about the prospect that historical reality is merely interpretation. Although the interpretive quality of historical writing has been acknowledged in some quarters, Chapter 5 demonstrates the continued relevance of Foucault’s observation to contemporary discourses about terrorism, as language operates, with or without conscious intent, to fix meaning and take away complexity and context. For humans to make sense of the world, as Biesecker (1992) argued, rhetoric creates a grid of intelligibility that organizes this chaos. Rhetoric can stabilize fluid meanings for terrorism and constitute its reality. Therefore, by analyzing rhetorical artifacts about terrorism through a rhetorical lens, it is possible to identify the strategies that fix terrorism’s meanings.

As Jackson (2005) identified, the war on terrorism consists of two strategies: “institutional practices” and a “discursive project” (p. 147). Institutional practices such as military, political, and diplomatic efforts simultaneously work in concert with discursive practice, which is “a special political language of counterterrorism with its own assumptions, symbolic systems, rhetorical modes and tropes, metaphors, narratives and meanings, and its own exclusive forms of knowledge” (p. 147). Jackson (2005) argued that discursive practice legitimizes and normalizes institutional practices. Discourse, whether institutional or discursive, is not neutral and is always interested (Biesecker, 1992; Foucault, 1972; Jackson 2005). Therefore, it is important to explore the biases and interests embedded in the discourse that construct the perceived reality of a phenomenon like terrorism.
Since discourse about terrorism is often produced by governments, terrorism “discourses act as constructions of meaning that contribute to the production, reproduction, and transformation of relations of domination in society” (Jackson, 2005, p. 147; also see McKerrow, 1989). As Jackson (2005) identified, this process becomes toxic when

[t]he language of the “war on terrorism” is not a neutral or objective reflection of policy debates and the realities of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Rather, it is a very carefully and deliberately constructed—but ultimately, artificial—discourse that was specifically designed to make the war seem reasonable, responsible, and “good,” as well as to silence any forms of knowledge or counter-argument that would challenge the exercise of state power. (p. 148)

This toxic view of the problem of terrorism has been ineffective because it constructs political, historical, and contextual amnesia through dominant discourse about terrorism that fixes its meaning in an ahistorical context. Ignorance about the context and history of terrorism, the different natures and causes of it, and the possible motivations and goals of those who commit it, damages the chance of finding effective ways to find long-term solvency for the problem. Furthermore, the status-quo construction of terrorism and counter-terrorism carries the danger of making international terrorism worse by recreating the same violent cycles. Furthermore, the discursive practice of countering terrorism may result in the delegitimizing of dissent and limiting of the rhetorical space available for political conversation (Jackson, 2005).

The epistemic problems identified by the rhetorical perspective described above necessitate a theoretical rupture from the current understanding and conceptualization of terrorism. The fluidity and complexity of terrorism (see
Chapters 3 and 4) contradicts a static understanding of it. As a constructionist, I do not promise a more “objectively accurate” vision of terrorism. However, I provide a perspective that encourages more attention to context and ideology. I hope allowing a more robust and nuanced understanding of terrorism might enable better policy responses in the future. Given the role of rhetoric in establishing the meaning of terrorism and the nature of its threatening aspect, it becomes necessary to explore the primary rhetorical tactic through which that reality is constructed.

Vilification

A common theme in terrorism discourse is vilification (Ivie, 2007). Rhetors use many tropes and strategies to construct and stabilize meaning in terrorism discourse and achieve vilification. I limit my analysis in Chapters 3 and 4 to the three strategies that publicly and academically prominent terrorism discourse relies on to stabilize and fix the meaning of terrorism: rhetorical exclusion, Manicheanism, and metaphors.

Rhetorical Exclusion

Historically, excluding one’s opponents from conversation by killing or physically harming them has been an effective strategy for kings, authoritarian regimes, and even democratic governments to eliminate their problems, at least temporarily (e.g., French revolutionaries). However, exclusion does not always happen through physical force. Sanchez et al. (1999) coined the phrase “rhetorical exclusion,” which refers to a “strategy used by members of the prevailing power structure to conceal any antidemocratic consequences of its action” (p. 28). Those in power use rhetorical exclusion to eliminate debate without using forceful and heavy-handed actions. Kelly (2007) explained that through rhetorical exclusion, an institution can “mobilize definitions, images, and other symbolic activities to
diffuse challenges to its legitimacy” (p. 3). Endres (2009, p. 8) identifies “naming practices”, “shifting the burden of proof”, and “strategic silence” as three methods that are used to achieve rhetorical exclusion.

Naming. As Butler (1993) argued, “naming is at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm” (p. 8). Endres (2009) demonstrates this point through the example of Yucca Mountain nuclear waste site hearings. The United States refused to engage in government-to-government negotiations with Native American nations and relegated indigenous concerns to public hearings, therefore failing to recognize them as sovereign nations. This act of naming, though inexplicit, rhetorically excluded the voice of American Indian nations as governments and relegated them to a citizenry role. Changing American Indian nations’ status from government to citizen enabled national security interests to trump other arguments because national security is often perceived as more important than citizen’s rights.

Shifting the Burden of Proof. In argumentation theory, the burden of proof lies with the agent who wants to change the status quo (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009). For example, if I want to change current drug policies, I would have to prove that my proposed solution is more effective than the current policies. Endres (2009) explained that in the case of Yucca Mountain, the government shifted the burden of proof to the opponents by making the site an issue of national security and expecting the opponents to “prove that their concerns outweigh the national interest as defined by the federal government” (p. 52). Furthermore, the government shifted the burden of proof again when its deliberation process required “the public to prove that the science behind Yucca Mountain is flawed” (p. 51). These strategies shifted the burden to the American Indian nations to
prove why the Yucca Mountain plan was a bad idea, instead of requiring the U.S. government to prove the viability of the site.

**Strategic silence.** Strategic silence is deliberately ignoring, not responding, or refusing to discuss a particular issue related to the groups who do not have power (Endres, 2009). Endres further explained, “Strategic silence acts as a form of rhetorical exclusion when silence is used by a group with power over another group as a way to exclude their voices or arguments” (p. 52). In the case of the Yucca Mountain hearings, the United States used strategic silence to “exclude American Indian arguments regarding treaty rights and the necessity of government-to-government consultation” (p. 53). These issues of treaty rights were raised, but the U.S. government chose not to respond to them. In addition to these three ways that rhetors can achieve rhetorical exclusion, vilification can be achieved using Manicheanism.

**Manicheanism**

Deliovsky and Kitossa (2013) defined Manicheanism as “a moral and symbolic framework that constructs the world as polarized by forces of good and evil, represented in the oppositions between lightness and darkness and between black and white” (p. 160). Invoking the notion of evil has long been a prominent feature of U.S. foreign policy, and it came to its height during George W. Bush’s presidency. After 9/11, Bush used the word “evil” liberally and openly by vowing to eradicate it from the world, and later declared Iraq, Iran, and North Korea part of an “axis of evil” (Wright, 2004). Through the post-9/11 War on Terror, the familiar dualistic doctrine of the Cold War with its “good guys” and “Evil empire” was recreated in a new context and form (Hadar, 2007). The new context was terrorism and the new form was the struggle between forces of “light” and “dark.”
Black (2001) noted that these “all-inclusive categories of in-groups (friends) and out-groups (enemies), beliefs and disbeliefs, and situations to be accepted or rejected in toto” (p. 134) constructs a binary of us versus them. That binary undergirds heavy-handed actions taken against these so-called enemies without considering the important underlying issues surrounding terrorism (Tilley, 2005). Furthermore, as Black correctly identified, this binary simplifies any situation, which in turn results in “simplistic and readily identifiable cause and effect relations, ignoring multiple causality of events” (p. 134).

The singularity of evil does not allow for any compromise with, or distinction among, those who are labeled evil (Wright, 2004). For example, labeling the enemy as evil means that the only reasonable action is to eradicate them. Zoroastrianism, an ancient Persian religion, introduced the notion of duality by merging eschatological monotheism and cosmogonic dualism (Boyd & Donald, 1979). This dualism later evolved and morphed to the cultural and conceptual understanding of evil. Our current understanding of evil is rooted in Judeo-Christian religious ideology and reinforced by cultural narratives, like movies, that portray a “Manichaean view of a cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil” (Wright, 2004, p. 34). Furthermore, anytime evil is invoked by a rhetor, it is always either explicitly or implicitly juxtaposed to good. For example, President George W. Bush (2001) created a dichotomy with his rhetoric when he famously declared, “[e]ither you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” (para. 30). If the terrorists are evil and those with “us” are good, then anything done by those on the good side of the dichotomy is prima facie good. Unfortunately, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence’s report of the CIA’s detention and interrogation program contradicts that presumption by showing how the CIA tortured detainees (S. Rep. No. 113-288, 2014). The CIA’s torture program shows how a Manichean
dichotomy allows the “good” side to justify terrible deeds. The dichotomy in the narrative, when applied to the struggle between the United States and the evil enemy portrayed in government rhetoric, justifies an all-in strategy that damages the democratic foundations of the United States, especially because the war against terrorism is simultaneously portrayed by the government as an ongoing struggle (Ivie & Giner, 2007), which then amplifies the harm to the democratic foundations because it suspends democratic principles (e.g., freedom, privacy, equal treatment, appropriate punishment, freedom of speech, etc.) indefinitely to achieve security through extraordinary means. Ignoring the complex context of terrorism prevents an effective and appropriate policy response. Exclusive reliance on military tactics demonstrates to terrorist sympathizers the validity of terrorists’ characterization of the U.S. as an imperialistic hegemon.

Referring to an agent as evil has three consequences. First, as Lazar and Lazar (2004) argued, using evil as a metaphor vilifies the other based on a frame of moral absolutism. Using a moral absolute necessitates destruction of the enemy because, in the struggle between good and evil, evil’s destruction is permitted, even supported (Jackson, 2005; Lazar & Lazar 2004). As Boyle (2014) put it, “condemning the black-clad, masked militants as purely ‘evil’ is seductive, for it conveys a moral clarity and separates ourselves and our tactics from the enemy and theirs” (para. 4). However, the perceived moral clarity that emerges from the absolutist frame of good versus evil prevents those who function within it from truly understanding or even engaging with the other side.

Second, rather than describing the actions of the designated agent, characterizing one as evil becomes an ontological marker. An ontological marker, as Hymes (1972) explained, is “a necessary primary term in that it postulates the basis of description as a social, rather than a linguistic entity” (p. 54). Employing
evil as an ontological marker means the evil agent has a natural, inherent evil quality. In other words, the label terrorism is no longer descriptive; the once descriptive nature of terrorism now characterizes the natural or inherent essence of the agent. As Jackson (2005) elaborated, “the character of the terrorists precedes their actions: the terrorists did what they did because it is in their nature to do so” (pp. 153-154). This logic leads to the inevitable conclusion that the only way to deal with those who are naturally bad is to destroy them because the evil-born will always be evil. Evil is incapable of reform and must be annihilated because the evilness is an inherent part of the agent labeled evil. This begs the question: who is responsible for destroying evil?

Third, good and evil are juxtaposed to each other. Once evil is identified, the adversary of evil becomes good because, in a dichotomized view, only two possible positions exist for an agent (i.e., good or evil). This also works in reverse. Once an agent is constructed as good, the narrative of good versus evil necessitates that either no disagreement exists with that agent or anyone who disagrees with the good must be on the side of evil. Furthermore, in the dichotomized view of good versus evil, it is good’s responsibility to annihilate evil, because evil cannot be expected to destroy itself. The dichotomized logic is replicated in other binaries, such as Us/Them and Civilization/Barbarism (Bhati, 2009). I use these analogous pairs to analyze my artifacts in Chapter 4.

Metaphors

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) indicated that “the essence of the metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (p. 5). In other words, a metaphors is a device that allows rhetors to project the known onto the unknown (Charteris-Black, 2004), “a device for seeing something in terms of
some-thing else” (Burke, 1941, p. 421). Rhetors’ use of metaphors allows the audience to apply their familiarity with the known to understand the unknown. Metaphors are powerful devices because they play a constitutive role for the unknown (Kress, 1989). Burke (1941) emphasized metaphors’ “role in the discovery and description of ‘the truth’” (p. 421) rather than their figurative role as mere embellishment. Metaphors are constitutive because they take certain characteristics, perspectives, and familiar conditions from the known concept or object and discursively construct the essence of the unknown. Therefore, “metaphors embody the constructivist [sic] principle in their very logic of operation” (Hulsse & Spencer, 2008, p. 578). Richards (1936) observed two parts of a metaphor: tenor and vehicle. Tenor is the concept that a rhetor is attempting to illuminate and vehicle is the known subject whose characteristics the rhetor uses to constitute the tenor. Richards (1936) indicated that “the co-presence of the vehicle and tenor results in a meaning (to be clearly distinguished from the tenor) which is not attainable without their interaction” (p. 100). For example, “terrorism is a cancer” is a metaphor. The tenor is terrorism and the vehicle is cancer. The rhetor can describe, illuminate, and constitute terrorism in terms of what the audience knows about cancer. Some of the metaphorical vehicles commonly associated with the tenor terrorism are: “savage,” “barbarian,” medical terms such as “cancer,” and terms about war (see Bhatia, 2009; Ivie, 2005; Kruglanski, Crenshaw, Post, & Victoroff, 2007; Lule, 2004; Naím, 2010; Oppermann & Spencer, 2013; Sarbin, 2003; Steuter & Wills, 2008; Zhang, 2007).

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, U.S. Americans could not make sense of the events. Who would have done such a thing? Why would they want to hurt innocent civilians who were just going to work? Carey’s (2001) attempt to put this feeling into words demonstrates the confusion and chaos:
The last week is a great blur with no divisions between night and day. Time is broken. The events of the first day bleed into the next and all the powerful emotions and disturbing sights are now so hard to put in proper sequence. (para. 1)

The “void of meaning” (Campbell, 2001 p. 2) created a condition in which commentators tried to forge meaning by arranging the messages into a coherent narrative. However, as Campbell argued, the nature of the event was such that the “struggle for meaning is something we cannot and perhaps should not easily or quickly resolve” (p. 1). Yet the void did not last long. Immediately after the attacks, the Bush administration offered a framework through which the semiotic chaos could be ordered. President George W. Bush provided powerful metaphors (e.g., religious, conflict, and civilization metaphors) to order the uncertainty and unify a largely stunned public (Bhatia, 2009; Campbell, 2001; Fitzsimmons, 2010; Jackson 2005; Lazar & Lazar, 2004; Sarbin, 2003).

Method and Artifacts

Foss (2009) described generative criticism as generating “units of analysis or an explanation from your artifact rather than from previously developed formal methods of criticism” (p. 411). Generative criticism enables the critic to focus attention on what emerges as the most significant aspects of an artifact, based upon their “intensity and frequency” (Foss, 2009, p. 389). Rather than limiting oneself to a particular methodological schema, the critic analyzes the text closely and generates schema to organize the discovered insights (Foss, 2009). At this point, the critic can develop an initial research question or two, although they can be altered after additional, in-detail analysis of the artifact is completed. Researching current literature on the developing schema helps the critic to find
material with which to enrich the explanatory schema. Last, the critic determines the best way to frame the study so that it answers the research question(s) and contributes to disciplinary conversations.

In an effort to advance existing knowledge about the vilification of terrorism, I used generative criticism to analyze the conditions, situations, and strategies of vilification in academic and political discourse about terrorism. This study consisted of three stages. In the first stage, I identified and collected two sets of artifacts. In the second stage, I analyzed each artifact. Finally, I synthesized the information in order to answer the research questions.

First, I identified and collected two sets of artifacts. The first set of artifacts emerged from a special issue of the journal, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, titled “The Intellectuals and Terror: A Fatal Attraction” (Rimon & Schleifer, 2013). I selected the introduction by the editors and three of the articles in this special issue because they typify contemporary academic discussions about terrorism. The three articles are entitled “Righteous Political Violence and Contemporary Western Intellectuals” (Hollander, 2013), “The Liberal Left Opt for Terror” (Geifman, 2013), and “From Useful Idiot to Useful Infidel: Meditations on the Folly of 21st-Century ‘Intellectuals’” (Landes, 2013). The second set of artifacts includes four speeches by President Barack Obama and one speech by Secretary of State John Kerry. I chose these speeches because they are the few first times that U.S. administration officials acknowledged ISIL, therefore setting the tone for public perception of ISIL.

In the second stage of analysis, I examined each artifact. According to Foss (2009), the first part of generative analysis involves discovering the central features of the artifact. I identified each artifact’s central features, which included
various techniques of vilification such as rhetorical exclusion, Manicheanism, and metaphors.

In the third stage of the study, I formulated an explanatory schema for vilification in order to answer the two research questions. First, how and to what extent does the academic discourse of Orthodox Terrorism Studies (OTS) vilify alternative lines of research into terrorism (e.g., Critical Terrorism Studies), and what are the implications of this vilification? Second, how and to what extent does the discourse of President Obama and Secretary Kerry about ISIL vilify terrorism and terrorists, and what are the implications of this vilification? In order to answer the first research question, I analyze the rhetoric of academic discourse of OTS in Chapter 3. I then move to analyze Obama and Kerry’s rhetoric in chapter 4 in order to answer the second research question.
CHAPTER 3: VILIFICATION AND RHETORICAL EXCLUSION IN TERRORISM STUDIES

The most valuable scholarly possession is the idea, because academic work is mostly intellectual work and therefore the idea becomes capital for scholars. The highly valued process of retention, tenure, and promotion partly depends on producing ideas in the form of publications (Suppa & Zirkel, 1983). Because of the importance of ideas in the academic world, excluding a scholar’s voice from a discussion is one of the most offensive things one can do to that scholar. However, the insult for scholars is much worse when that exclusion occurs without refuting their claims and arguments. That illegitimate exclusion is exactly what has been happening in terrorism studies. Unsurprisingly, terrorism is a charged topic and its study comes with many challenges (e.g., legal action, travel bans) in addition to those shared with other fields of research. The emergence of ISIL, terrorist attacks in Paris, shootings in San Bernardino, and bombings in Brussels have brought terrorism to the center of the attention for many citizens and politicians. Terrorism scholars divide into two broad schools: Orthodox Terrorism Studies (OTS) and Critical Terrorism Studies (CTS). Throughout this chapter, I argue that at least some OTS scholars vilify and rhetorically exclude CTS scholars from conversations about terrorism, which takes away from pluralism of terrorism studies as a field and entrenches assumptions about power and legitimacy in the realm of politics and terrorism. I develop this argument by first briefly summarizing the theory of rhetorical exclusion that was explained in Chapter 2. Second, I outline the tension between OTS and CTS in the field of terrorism studies. Finally, I analyze three articles published in a major scholarly journal in terrorism studies to demonstrate the vilification and rhetorical exclusion of CTS scholars from the scholarly conversation.
Tension in Terrorism Studies

The discrepancies between OTS and CTS’s ideological grounding have made CTS a controversial area for those who study terrorism. In 2013, the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence*, a leading publication in the field of terrorism studies, published a special issue entitled “The Intellectuals and Terror: A Fatal Attraction.” I selected three of the articles in this special issue because they feature contemporary discussions about terrorism studies. The three articles are “Righteous Political Violence and Contemporary Western Intellectuals” (Hollander, 2013), “The Liberal Left Opt for Terror” (Geifman, 2013), and “From Useful Idiot to Useful Infidel: Meditations on the Folly of 21st-Century ‘Intellectuals’” (Landes, 2013). Hopkins (2014) analyzed the same articles and pointed out some of the problems with documentation and argumentation in these papers. I will expand on Hopkins’s work by demonstrating how the authors rhetorically exclude critical studies of terrorism through naming, shifting the burden of proof, and strategic silence.

In early 2006, as a response to OTS’s ideological biases, several scholars founded CTS when they formed a group interested in “Critical Studies on Terrorism” to provide a research venue for critically oriented terrorism scholars (Jackson et al., 2009). CTS scholars agree that OTS has focused on a very limited range of subjects, examined state terror inadequately, and overestimated the effectiveness of counter-terrorism efforts by nation-states (Jackson, 2008). In particular, they contend, OTS has a political bias due to relying heavily on untested and secondary evidence that comes primarily from the United States government or foreign governmental sources. Furthermore, CTS scholars observe that OTS has reproduced the claims of Western powers and defended their policies and actions by providing ideological and intellectual legitimatization.
CTS scholars offer an alternative way to study terrorism. CTS scholars advocate for a “skeptical and critical attitude towards the assumed knowledge and approach typical of orthodox terrorism studies” (English, 2009, p. 376). CTS scholars suggest that terrorism should be studied using different and varying perspectives. They propose considering the subjectivity of the so-called terrorist by direct engagement and using that interaction as the primary source for research (Breen Smyth, 2007; Gunning 2007; Jackson 2007), exploring state terror more carefully (English, 2009; Jackson et al., 2009), and focusing on the emancipatory potential of scholarship and promoting self-reflexive research (McDonald, 2007). Furthermore, CTS scholars question the ethical primacy of the state by privileging the security and wellness of human beings instead of a state’s interests. English (2009) concluded that CTS calls for three changes to the study of terrorism: for terrorism to be understood more closely in relation to the wider social processes of which it forms a part, for a greater emphasis on the acquisition of primary data, and for a recognition that much of what is asserted by orthodox scholars is open to debate and contestation. (p. 377)

As with any critical scholarship, CTS’s commitment is to emancipation, but that is emancipation for everyone, from all forms of oppression and violence (English, 2009; McDonald, 2007).

McDonald (2007) stated that “emancipation as a process of freeing up space for dialogue and deliberation – the diffusion of power to ‘speak’ security – enables a focus on crucial questions, experiences and practices neglected in dominant accounts of security and terrorism” (p. 253). There are real dangers in taking an emancipatory stand in terrorism studies. For example, President George W. Bush used the emancipation of Afghan women from the Taliban to justify intervening in Afghanistan (Ayotte & Husain, 2005). As McDonald (2007)
correctly identified, scholars should be wary of “contributing to the possibility of its [emancipation’s] invocation and ‘use’ as intellectual ballast for violent crusades involving the ‘enforcement’ of freedom” (p. 258). McDonald indicated that a reflexive commitment to research is necessary for ethical and fruitful emancipatory research. As Eagleton-Pierce (2011) explained, reflexivity in research means “to actively ‘turn or bend back,’ to take account of the self in relation to other subjects and objects” (p. 806). Reflexivity obligates the researcher to understand and take into account his or her positionality in reference to what is studied. Furthermore, English (2007) cautioned that CTS scholars should use reflexivity to “avoid the danger of merely swinging the research pendulum away from one set of myopic biases towards another set” (p. 381). A reflexive approach to the study of terrorism aids the emancipatory goal of CTS. By bifurcating the broader field of terrorism studies into CTS and OTS, and criticizing OTS, I may seem to be sacrificing one of the important tenets of CTS and critical scholarship: inclusivity and plurality. On the contrary, I think OTS is an important part of terrorism research, but I disagree with Hollander (2013), Geifman (2013), and Landes (2013) that OTS scholarship should monopolize the discussion. I also agree with Hopkins (2014) that these authors misrepresent CTS as a field of study. The authors’ attack on the critical paradigm of terrorism studies hinders the knowledge production and in-depth analysis needed to understand and analyze the phenomenon of terrorism.

**Vilification through Rhetorical Exclusion**

Rhetorical exclusion facilitates vilification. As discussed in Chapter 2, agents in power positions use rhetorical exclusion to foreclose debate on issues and conceal their undemocratic actions. Endres (2009) detailed three rhetorical
techniques that allow for rhetorical exclusion. First, naming practices enable the rhetor to set boundaries and define which agents are legitimate participants, which in turn delimits “Truth” by dictating who can offer opinions about what topics and in what contexts (see also Foucault, 1984). Second, shifting the burden of proof fallaciously moves the burden of proof from the person making the argument to the person negating the argument (Endres, 2009). Finally, strategic silence delegitimizes the opposition’s argument when a rhetor refuses to respond. In this section, I demonstrate how each of the three articles in the special issue of Terrorism and Political Violence vilifies CTS using these techniques of rhetorical exclusion to varying degrees.

Naming

In this section, I will offer an example of naming from each article.

Geifman (2013) declared that her article is an examination of “the leftist liberals’ position” (p. 550) on different instances of terrorism. She continues to use the phrase “leftist liberals” throughout their paper. Geifman did not define liberal or leftist liberal at any point in the paper. However, she generalizes all liberals by stating, “the universality of the leftist stance with regard to terror strikes the eye” (p. 550). Geifman did not offer any justification or evidence to support this claim. The broad generalization that Geifman used overlooks the complexities of the political spectrum. She uses a flawed analogy between the Russian liberal of the early 20th century and other liberals to argue that all liberals or leftist liberals are supporters of terrorism. There are differences among liberals from the same timeframe in one country, let alone two different countries with substantially different forms of government at different times in history. The word “liberal” has been a derogatory label since the political discourse of the mid-20th century, and
many Americans still understand the label as a pejorative one (Lukacs, 2004). Conservative pundits and politicians have used the label “liberal” in opposition to individual freedom, capitalism, and patriotism (Nevins, 2010). Aziz (2014) puts it best when he say conservatives transformed the label of liberal “from a philosophy of freedom and social mobility into a bureaucracy-loving, freedom-depriving, taxation-and-entitlement ideology of largesse” (para. 3). Similarly, Geifman (2013) framed those who they refer to as “liberals” as unpatriotic and anti-freedom. This naming process associates anyone who is labeled “liberal” as an agent of the enemy or one who does not have the best intentions in mind. Geifman associated a pejorative label to those who they criticize, but Hollander (2013) used the normally positive label of “intellectual” that is already associated with a population and transforms it into a negative label.

Hollander (2013) attempted to link “intellectuals” to supporters of terrorism. Hollander said that the focus of defining intellectuals should be “on their distinctive preoccupations, mindset, or aspirations, rather than on their education or formal qualifications” (p. 519). Hollander used this definitional guideline to limit intellectuals to those who ask for change from the status quo. He indicates “moralizing is the major preoccupation of intellectuals and the source of their sense of identity and self-esteem. These moralizing impulses lead them to the role of the social critic” (p. 519). Then Hollander argued that intellectuals implicitly justify, moralize, ignore, and excuse terrorism. Hollander’s definition limits his criticism to critical scholars who ask for change in the status quo without directly referring to the critical paradigm, therefore effectively excluding critical scholars from conversations about terrorism.

Landes (2013) referred to Western intellectuals and particularly critical scholars as “useful idiots” (p. 621). Landes went on to expand on this claim by
declaring that they are “dupes” (p. 623), which assumes that critical scholars are tricked into their beliefs rather than coming to those conclusions through logical and rigorous thinking. Landes called critical scholars “irrational” (p. 622). Labeling one as “irrational” means that the individual comes to his or her conclusions through means other than reason. Reason is often the identifying characteristic of any scholar; therefore, those scholars who bear the label of “irrational” are marginalized in scholarly communities. Furthermore, the label of irrational is a negation of the rationality of a person and is a characteristic of those who are psychologically disturbed.

Landes (2013) described critical scholars as “the result of a suicidal marriage of pre-modern sadism … with post-modern masochism” (p. 626). Sadism is deriving pleasure from subjecting someone else to pain and masochism is receiving pleasure from being subjected to pain (Coleman, 2008). The American Psychiatric Association (2013) categorizes sadism and masochism as sexual and psychological disorders. Furthermore, both practices are socially stigmatized (Wright, 2006). Therefore, Landes’s use of these two labels to describe critical scholars categorizes them as psychologically disturbed outcasts. Landes’s use of “self-degrading” (p. 627) attributes a masochistic attitude to critical scholars that further links them to the stigmatized perception of masochism as a mental illness. Landes’s label of “self-castrated, atheist” (p. 631) is the most telling because it combines multiple references. First, the unnecessarily visceral metaphor of self-castration combines both sadism and masochism in one swat. The label assumes that the individual doing the self-castration likes to cause pain and at the same time enjoys the sensation of pain, hence inflicting pain on oneself, including them in both the sadist and masochist categories. Second, Landes excluded women as critical terrorism scholars because only males can perform
self-castration (physical rather than chemical). Castration in women requires an invasive surgical procedure called oophorectomy and it is almost impossible for the individual to perform this surgery on herself. Therefore, Landes assumed either women cannot be and are not critical terrorism scholars, or implies that every person has male testicles that they can potentially remove. In the latter example, Landes gave male characteristics to all other genders and rhetorically excluding them from critical terrorism scholarship. Third, he tagged on the atheist label to the self-castrated. Atheists are a marginalized community in the United States and around the world (Hughes, 2013; Pew Research, 2014). Landes’s association of critical scholars with one of the most stigmatized religious groups in the perception of U. S. Americans shows that he is trying to negatively impact readers’ perception of them. Furthermore, Landes did not use the label of atheist to advance his argument. He is using the label as an ad hominem attack.

Hopkins (2014) pointed out in the analysis of this paper that these labels demean critical scholars, but I argue that the problem goes further. Pryal (2010) argued that, in contemporary society, those who are deemed psychiatrically disabled are not trusted to judge and therefore suffer from rhetorical exclusion. This is not a new rhetorical phenomenon. The Soviet Union relied on this tactic to delegitimize opposition and dissidents, who were often diagnosed with “sluggish schizophrenia” (van Voren, 2010, p. 33), incarcerated, and heavily medicated with anti-psychotic drugs. Other governments, such as Romania, Cuba, the Netherlands, and the People’s Republic of China also used mental illness systematically to jail dissidents and deter future uprisings (van Voren, 2010). In another example, for years, public and medical professionals used casual labels and actual diagnoses of “hysteria” to repress women by deeming women who
failed to perform their societal expectations (e.g., duties as wives) or had strong emotions to be mentally ill (Foucault, 2001, p. 132).

These two rhetorical practices (naming liberals and intellectuals as supporters of terrorism, and naming these intellectuals as psychologically disturbed) attempt to deny legitimacy to critiques of particular approaches to counter-terrorism, attempting to censure and suppress those critical voices (see Endres, 2009). This denial and consequent exclusion is exacerbated when academics are the targets because their most important assets are their ideas and the literal and figurative voice used to disseminate them. The journal privileges, via the editors, authors, and references, a particularly biased view toward OTS, which perpetuates the assumptions and power structures (i.e., the state) that often occupy the conversation about terrorism (Hopkins, 2014). Therefore, this special issue serves as propaganda, favoring status quo state interests’ view of terrorism. Given this context, claiming that an intellectual supports terrorism is an extremely serious charge because it can affect an academic’s professional success (e.g., tenure, promotion, or funding) or lead to prosecution.

The overall naming in these three articles associates critical intellectuals as supporters of terrorism. Kennedy et al. (2006) discovered that participants who perceive terrorists as ideological were more likely to endorse militaristic strategies and less likely to endorse diplomatic strategies to deal with terrorism. By association, those who are labeled as supporters of terrorism will face real consequences. Miller and Miller (2011) offered an example in the case of Rod Thornton, a terrorism researcher and former lecturer at the University of Nottingham. This case demonstrates the difficulties faced by intellectuals who study terrorism using a critical lens. In 2011, Thornton submitted a paper to an academic conference. The paper criticized the censorship of books about
terrorism in British universities. The University of Nottingham’s administration framed Thornton as a terrorist sympathizer and suspended him—a move criticized by more than 60 scholars. Some websites took down his writings and publishers refused to publish his work. He later left the University of Nottingham when he was denied tenure. This is not an isolated event but a sobering example of the real consequences that accompany accusing a scholar of supporting terrorism (see also Bird & Brandt, 2002; Callaghan, 2012).

**Shifting the Burden of Proof**

I offer two reasons why the burden of proof must be taken seriously in the case of assumptions and arguments made in these three articles. First, supporting terrorism has serious legal consequences. For example, in 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court made a decision about a case that pit freedom of speech against national security (Liptak, 2010). In a 6 to 3 decision, the Supreme Court determined “[t]he material-support law bars not only contributions of cash, weapons and other tangible aid but also ‘training,’ ‘personnel’ ‘service’ and ‘expert advice or assistance’” (Liptak, 2010, para. 7). The decision was a devastating blow to many human rights organizations that used peaceful means to end conflicts (Liptak, 2010). These organizations gave assistance in the form of legal training to some of the groups the U.S. government deems terrorist (e.g., Turkish fighters) to pursue their goals and voice their concerns through international diplomatic avenues rather than military action. The new law considers their training as expert advice and, therefore, support for terrorism. The definition can be easily extended to scholars who are perceived as aiding terrorism. All the authors in the three articles label scholars who critically study terrorism as terrorist supporters. I argue that those who make such a charge must apply it very carefully, with sufficient
evidence and with sound reasoning, because of the legal and professional ramifications associated with that label. Argumentation theory lays the burden of proof on the party that makes the claim. Therefore, the burden of proof in the argument about “supporting terrorism” falls on the authors of the article who make the accusations. As I will demonstrate in this section, the authors do not offer sufficient evidence to prove their case of support for terrorism. The lack of evidence shifts the burden of proof to the critical scholars accused in the three articles to offer evidence and defend themselves against the charge of supporting terrorism.

Second, the burden of proof consists of an evidentiary burden (Tapper, 2010). Tapper defined the evidentiary burden as

the obligation to show, if called upon to do so, that there is sufficient evidence to raise an issue as to the existence or non-existence of a fact in issue, due regard being had to the standard of proof demanded of the party under such obligation. (p. 132)

Most definitions of the burden of proof assume that the opposition has the chance to ask for or “call upon” sufficient evidence. Unfortunately, in scholarly publications, such a chance does not exist prior to publication so the task falls upon the editor to uphold such evidentiary standards. However, if the editor fails to enforce such standards and the article is published, the burden unfairly shifts to opposition to show that either there was not enough evidence to make the claim or that the evidence is flawed.

All three authors shift the burden of proof to whomever they criticize by offering minimal or no evidence to support their arguments and knowledge claims. A good argument is always backed by sufficient evidence. This is such an important criterion in academia that professional organizations produce style
manuals to guide authors in how to engage with others’ research when backing up claims with evidence. All three authors are professors at prominent universities. Therefore, I presume they understand the importance of offering evidence and reasoning to support claims. However, as Hopkins (2014) uncovered, there is a substantial lack of support and, in some cases, inaccurate information in these articles.

The number of sources an author cites in a given article is not the best method to judge the article’s credibility. However, the quality of those sources, in terms of recency, relevance, and rigor is a more apt criterion than a simple count. Of Landes’s (2013) 38 citations, seven refer to his own blog, which is only made up of opinion pieces with no citation or documentation. Landes also used Wikipedia (endnote 25) and his own blog (endnotes 4, 7, 10, 16, and 38) as references. Eight of Landes’s other citations are editorial or opinion websites; two are repeated twice each, four are popular press books without bibliographies, and three of the endnotes are his comments rather than sources. The limited number of external or quality citations is a problem because Landes makes ungrounded claims with significant potential consequences.

Landes (2013) opened his article by offering a historical explanation of the phrase, “useful idiots” (p. 621). He indicates (without any citation) that Lenin referred to Western intellectuals who supported Communism as “useful idiots” because the intellectuals’ support allowed Lenin to promote Communism while the intellectuals provided deceptive cover among western audiences. The phrase “useful idiots” features in the thesis and title of Landes’s article; he claimed that so-called “liberal intellectuals” (p. 621) are still playing this covering role. However, there is no evidence that Lenin ever made that statement (Boller & George, 1989; Safire, 1987). Nevertheless, as Safire argued, the phrase is
common among hard-right historians and anti-Communists who use it to disparage anyone they deem insufficiently anti-Communist. Landes went on to assert that “Observers today speak of ‘useful idiots,’ using the same term to describe liberal intellectuals who enjoy freedom and prosperity, yet undermine both, by giving moral and material support to revolutionary movements” (p. 621), but he fails to name or cite the “observers” to whom he attributes this claim. Furthermore, throughout the article, Landes did not offer any evidence or analysis of what this “material support” looks like or who the specific “liberal intellectuals” are who provide such support.

Hopkins’s (2014) investigation into these articles uncovered that Landes’s problematic use of evidence and his lack of engagement with the nuanced positions of the organizations he criticizes indicate that he “either ignores or is unaware of evidence that directly contradicts his argument” (p. 7). Landes (2013) also cited his blog to advance the claim that the death of Mohammed al Dura, a Palestinian boy shot by Israeli soldiers, was staged. The story hearkens back to September 2000, when the channel France 2 broadcast footage of Mohammed al Dura’s death (Associated Press, 2013). The footage showed Mohammed and his father crouching behind a short wall as bullets hit the wall above them. A bullet hit and killed Mohammed. In 2004, Philippe Karsenty alleged that the footage was not real and that no evidence existed to prove that the boy had died. France 2 sued Karsenty for defamation and won the case, as well as the subsequent appeals. Karsenty’s final appeal failed in 2013. Little to no evidence supports Landes’s (2013) argument about the footage being staged.

Landes (2013) is not the only one who shifted the burden of proof by offering unsubstantiated knowledge claims. Geifman (2013) cited the book, *Terror and Liberalism*, by Berman (2003) to support her claim that
“Martyrs, not murderers,” chanted participants of the 2002 anti-globalization march in Washington, DC, using the rally to declare solidarity with the Palestinian terrorists. This message typified a hundred other events in the U.S., and many more in Europe, Latin America, and other places. (p. 553)

Berman did make such claims in his book. However, the book, a popular non-fiction publication, does not cite any sources or include a bibliography. Furthermore, to my knowledge, no other source, scholarly or news, refers to such a chant during the event. However, Berman appears to repurpose a phrase from Shaker El-Sayed of the Muslim American Society saying, “‘I want to say to Mr. Bush that the Palestinian children are martyrs, not murderers!’” (as cited in Ahmed, 2002, para. 13). This comment referred to Palestinian children being killed by the Israeli Defense Forces, not suicide bombers or “Palestinian terrorists,” as both Berman and Geifman claimed. Furthermore, the claim that this is a typical message, heard in other places, lacks substantiation as well. Unfortunately, once an article or claim is published, as is the case with Berman and Geifman, the burden to find the origin and validity of the claim shifts from the claimant to those who disagree.

Geifman (2013) offered Antonio Negri as an example of the intellectuals who support terrorism and murder. Geifman said Negri was “indicted for murdering Italy’s former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1978 and of being a spiritual force behind terrorists in the Red Brigades” (p. 554). Geifman also decried Foucault and other intellectuals for declaring that Negri was a political prisoner whose only crime was being a thinker. Geifman cited a defunct website as evidence for these claims. However, Portelli (1985) thoroughly analyzed the evidence in the case brought against Negri and concluded that the prosecutors
“simply assumed that, since the actual killers were loosely connected with
[Negri’s] political work, he must be responsible for everything they did” (p. 26).
The perpetrators simply admired Negri’s argument; that was enough to indict him
in court. It seems that declaring Negri a political prisoner is appropriate.

Many of the other arguments in this special issue are not backed up by
evidence. When the authors do provide evidence, it is often poorly used. They
heavily use opinion pieces, as their reliance on Paul Berman’s (2003) Terror and
Liberalism demonstrates. Berman’s book, with few citations or sources, is
primarily an opinion piece. This book, like the other opinion essays cited by these
three articles, is not an academic source, yet, as Hopkins (2014) pointed out, the
conclusions of these articles are published in a respected scholarly journal, which
allows others to cite them as credible sources to support their future arguments.
As a result, the incestuous academic process will continue and will unfairly
characterize critical studies of terrorism.

Strategic Silence

Besides its ethical implications, ignoring important evidence that an author
of a scholarly journal should take into consideration is a form of strategic silence.
Landes offers little evidence for his arguments and Hollander offers secondary
sources. All these acts are forms of strategic silence because the authors detract
from the arguments they criticize rather than responding to them. For example,
Hollander (2013) claimed that those who criticize the U.S. government contribute
to support for terrorism. This claim is unsubstantiated because Hollander does not
offer any evidence, nor does he offer an analytical argument to arrive at that
conclusion. Furthermore, even if the criticism were to contribute to support for
political violence, it should not be banned or even condemned except if it meets
the *Brandenburg v Ohio* (1969) standard of inciting violent action. Absent a clear causal relationship between criticizing the U.S. government and inciting violent action, the *Brandenburg v Ohio* (1969) protects criticizing the U.S. government under the first amendment. This is important because the ability to criticize the government and free speech are foundational democratic values. Hollander’s argument sets the society on a dangerous slippery slope that could lead to persecution of academics, as happened to Antonio Negri.

Hollander (2013) also implied that the intellectuals who claim that Israel or the United States has caused suffering and injustice support terrorism by creating a reason for the terrorists’ action. As Hopkins (2014) correctly argued, Hollander conflates a critic’s identification of causality or motivation with apology and endorsement. Hollander’s reasoning would amount to blaming a prosecutor for identifying a perpetrator’s motive when arguing for a conviction. Hollander problematically equates explanations with excuses.

Furthermore, Landes (2013) argued that any Jew who supports accusing Israel of war crimes suffers from psychological problems by calling them “self-degrading Jew[s]” (p. 627). Landes failed to provide any evidence or explanation for this argument. The closest Landes came to any evidence is where he says “Jews who criticise Israel sharply” are committing “self-degradation” (p. 631). Landes did not refute or even discuss any of the arguments these “self-degrading Jews” offer for their position, instead categorically accusing them of self-hate while relying on his own assertion as proof. Furthermore, the idea of Jewish self-hatred has been criticized as a silencing mechanism in political discussion (Lerman, 2008). All these examples demonstrate how the authors avoid mentioning and rebutting the arguments by the people they criticize. Therefore,
these authors stay strategically silent on CTS scholars’ arguments and rhetorically exclude them.

**Implications**

All three articles (Geifman, 2013; Hollander, 2013; Landes, 2013) used naming, shifting the burden of proof, and strategic silence to rhetorically exclude CTS scholars from the academic conversation about terrorism. Naming is the most widely used method of rhetorical exclusion in these articles. Furthermore, the authors rhetorically shift the burden of proof from themselves to CTS scholars by not offering robust warrants or evidence for their arguments. The shift in the burden may also occur because all of these articles are published in a credible journal that readers are likely to trust. In the special edition, the editors have not confirmed the information or the sources in the articles. Perhaps the biggest problem, however, is strategic silence about the core arguments offered by the intellectuals who are criticized. As demonstrated above, all three articles fail to engage the arguments advanced by CTS scholars.

Beyond excluding certain populations or voices from the conversation, rhetorical exclusion has an additional implication. Scholarly work should strive to include and respond to all the arguments that are directed toward it. If one’s argument is robust and can withstand criticism, then it should be easy to respond. However, if one’s argument cannot withstand criticism, then the scholar should modify or discard the argument. Therefore, the authors of these articles should either defend their positions with substantiated arguments or retract their arguments. These authors’ rhetorical exclusion of the CTS standpoint is harmful, unethical, and leads to flimsy scholarship. Furthermore, this exclusion recreates the same knowledge that has been used to interpret and understand terrorism for
the past several decades; this approach has not worked. New ways of looking at terrorism might allow us to negotiate better the complexities of this phenomenon.
CHAPTER 4: VILIFICATION IN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT’S RHETORIC ON ISIL

The artifacts analyzed in this chapter are four speeches by President Barack Obama (2014a; 2014b; 2014c; 2014d) and one speech by Secretary of State John Kerry (2014). The speeches start from the first time that President Obama (2014a) addressed the issues with the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIL) and end with the statement Obama issued after the execution of James Foley, a journalist, by ISIL. Secretary John Kerry’s (2014) first mention of ISIL came after the execution of James Foley; therefore, that speech is also included in my analysis. These are significant artifacts because they are the first few times that the United States administration publicly acknowledged ISIL. These initial instances of rhetorical dissemination play an important role in framing the U.S. American public’s perception of ISIL. As discussed in Chapter 2, the media often follows the government’s lead when it comes to issues of foreign policy (Altheide, 2009). In this chapter, I argue that the United States administration, particularly President Obama and Secretary John Kerry, vilify ISIL through their rhetorical positioning of the group. I will explore this vilification process first by exploring the instances of rhetorical exclusion of ISIL. Second, I discuss the different metaphors that Obama and Kerry use to frame the discourse about ISIL. Finally, I explore the rhetors’ reliance upon a Manichean dichotomy in these speeches.

**Rhetorical Exclusion of ISIL**

President Obama’s initial tone in relation to ISIL and “terrorism” was surprisingly different from those of previous U.S. administrations. President Obama (2014a) clearly identified two issues involved in dealing with ISIL. He recognized that ISIL “is not solely or even primarily a military challenge” (para.
4), but rather a political challenge. In the past, the U.S. administration has never recognized the primacy of political dimensions of terrorism. President George W. Bush (2001), for example, depicted terrorism as purely an ideological issue by framing it as an act of “evil” (p. 57). Furthermore, he discounted the unique political dimensions that were involved in this phenomenon. For example, President George W. Bush was unaware of the sects of Islam (i.e., Shiite and Sunni) immediately prior to the 2003 war in Iraq (two years after the invasion of Afghanistan) and it was only after the fall of Saddam Hussein that people in his circle explained the difference to him (Galbraith, 2006). Furthermore, as Storm (2014), a former Danish jihadist, explained, President George W. Bush’s use of the phrase “either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists” pushed him and others to support al Qaeda because it did not leave a neutral ground for people who did not agree with either side. Storm goes on to say that Bush’s reference to the War on Terrorism as a “crusade” framed it as a war on Islam rather than terrorism. President Obama (2014a), however, was adamant that ISIL was not a problem that can be resolved with military action alone. Obama indicated that political inclusion of Sunni Muslims and other minorities is important in dealing with ISIL. His assessment was based on an awareness of the complexities of the political situation in Iraq and Syria outlined in Chapter 1.

Unfortunately, Obama’s (2014d) tone changed as time passed. By August 20, 2014, he relinquished the political dimension altogether and focused only on the military response. I speculate that ISIL’s graphic executions and pressure from the public and political parties in the United States were the primary culprits behind this rhetorical shift. However, even his early speeches about ISIL were not completely devoid of vilification. From the beginning, President Obama used naming and strategic silence to rhetorically exclude ISIL.
Naming

ISIL has been an active organization using that particular name since March 2013 (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). However, the first time the U.S. administration mentioned the name of the group publically was on June 13, 2014, three days after ISIL took over the Iraqi city of Mosul. President Obama (2014a) recognized ISIL, stating, “[o]ver the last several days, we’ve seen significant gains made by ISIL, a terrorist organization that operates in both Iraq and in Syria” (para. 2). This introduction of ISIL set the tone for public recognition of the organization and framed its identity as a “terrorist organization.” He could have used a multitude of other words or phrases (e.g., militia, rebels, resistance, etc.). However, Obama’s selection of the word “terrorist” framed the discourse that surrounds the group. Once a credible rhetor in foreign policy issues (e.g., President Obama) labels a group, it is difficult to change that frame for the public. “Terrorist” is such a strong and monolithic label that the public automatically deems those who are associated with it as evil. The evil nature associated with terrorism inhibits critical thinking about the complexity of such security threats, such as their historical, political, and cultural basis. Furthermore, President Obama’s use of the word “terrorist” homogenizes all terrorism, as he does not explain why he categorizes ISIL as a “terrorist organization.” There are many important differences between ISIL and the U.S. American public’s common perception of a “terrorist organization.” For example, as discussed in Chapter 1, ISIL is a territorial organization, which is very different from al Qaeda’s goals (Wood, 2015). Winkler (2006) argued <terrorism> functions as the “the most emotive, pejorative” (p. 1) ideological word for the U.S. public. Winkler borrowed McGee’s (1980) concept of “ideograph” to argue that using the term <terrorism> invokes an entire ideology that elicits a specific response. For example, labeling
an act as “terrorism” makes military involvement more warranted in the eyes of the U.S. government and public and the search for alternative responses less likely (Zenko, 2010). The U.S. drone strikes and targeted killing policy in Somalia, Pakistan, and Yemen are indicative of the rush to a military solution (Masters, 2013).

President Obama (2014a) also argued that ISIL “poses a danger to Iraq and its people. And given the nature of these terrorists, it could pose a threat eventually to American interests as well” (para. 2). President Obama follows the initial introduction of ISIL with the phrase “nature of the terrorist” to indicate that ISIL could be a threat to the United States’ interests. This statement introduces two issues. First, President Obama’s statement assumes terrorists have an essential “nature.” Obama’s naming implies that terrorists’ “nature” threatens U.S. interests. President Obama does not offer any explanation or justification for his statement. Second, Obama’s reference to terrorists’ “nature” allows for further vilification. Identifying a “nature” allows him and other rhetors to construct and promote ontological markers for terrorism. Ontological markers are certain characteristic terms that are turned into the natural or inherent essence of the agent (Hymes, 1972). If terrorists have a particular and identifiable nature, then this nature functions as an empty vessel for the rhetor to fill with any description (e.g. evil). The creation of that empty vessel lays the foundation for rhetors to ontologize certain characteristics for terrorism. Third, Obama’s vague description of ISIL situates the group in a hierarchy that places those “terrorists” who threaten U.S. interest at the top of the War on Terror priority list. This prioritization leads to disproportionate actions by the United States to mitigate the perceived threat.

This labeling of ISIL is not only a form of naming but goes further to dehumanize the group. The prioritization of U.S. interests over lives in general
shows that the U.S. is not acting as the beacon of human rights in the world its leaders portray it to be (American Civil liberties Union, 2006). The way in which the U.S. accounts for fatalities in the context of the War on Terror highlights the process of dehumanizing the “less important” victims of terrorism in official U.S. discourse. Often, the U.S. government and the news media report the fatalities of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan with only U.S. American lives lost. Rarely do reports mention the casualties on the other side of the conflict (i.e., “terrorists”). The dehumanization by the U.S. government is even worse when it comes to keeping track of civilian deaths. The U.S. government does not maintain an accurate count of the civilian deaths in either Afghanistan or Iraq (Rampton & Stauber, 2006). In a famous statement in 2002, General Tommy Frank, the Commander of U.S. forces, declared, “we don’t do body counts” (as cited in Broder, 2003, para. 5). The “unofficial” policy of not counting civilian deaths has persisted through the Iraq war (Rampton & Stauber, 2006). The U.S. government’s disinterest in “counting” certain bodies proves the prioritization of lives, implying that the only lives and deaths that matter are those of U.S. Americans. This prioritization is parallel to what Herman and Chomsky (1988) call “worthy” versus “unworthy” victims (p. 37). They argued, “[a] propaganda system will consistently portray people abused in enemy states as worthy victims, whereas those treated with equal or greater severity by its own government or clients will be unworthy” (p. 37). This perception allows the public and intellectuals to treat the victims differently, even if on an unconscious level. President Obama also prioritizes the lives of U.S. Americans over others multiple times during his speeches about ISIL. For example, President Obama (2014a) stated, “American troops have made extraordinary sacrifices to give Iraqis an opportunity to claim their own future” (para. 4). In all of the speeches analyzed
here, Obama refers to the sacrifices of the U.S. American troops and the U.S. aid in allowing Iraqis to determine their future. However, he never mentions sacrifices made by Iraqis in a conflict imposed on them by the United States. The Iraq Body Count (2016) estimates the civilian casualties of the Iraq war between 2003 and the end of 2013 to be about 134,000. The number of Iraqi civilian casualties is far higher than the 4,497 U.S. American soldiers who died between 2003 and 2016 in Iraq (U.S. Department of Defense, 2016), but President Obama does not mention them in these speeches. Beyond the civilian lives lost, millions of people have been displaced and injured because of these two conflicts.

**Strategic Silence**

President Obama used strategic silence to vilify ISIL in relation to the execution of James Foley, which contributed to the use of military force against the group (Endres, 2009). The events that led to the execution of James Foley contextualize President Obama’s strategic silence on ISIL’s message. In August 2014, ISIL moved to northern Iraq, which is the Kurdish territory (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). Once ISIL set its sight on Erbil, Kurdistan’s capitol, the United States feared its economic interests were in danger. The United States has a particularly close relationship with Kurdistan because of its energy reserves; Western energy companies have invested around a billion dollars in Erbil (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). On August 7, 2014, President Obama (2014c), in a live address to the nation, indicated that “[t]o stop the advance on Erbil, I’ve directed our military to take targeted strikes against ISIL terrorist convoys should they move toward the city” (para. 3). However, Obama framed the military action as one with humanitarian intent by stating, “America … called for action to address this humanitarian crisis” (para. 7). Referring to a group of Yazidi civilians taking
shelter on a mountain near Erbil, Obama stated, “at the request of the Iraqi government, we’ve begun operations to help save Iraqi civilians” (para. 4). However, the Iraqi government had asked multiple times for help from the United States to combat ISIL to no avail (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). In fact, al Malaki, the Iraqi Prime Minister at the time, had traveled to the United States to ask President Obama for military assistance, which Obama refused to provide. The threat to civilians also does not appear to have been the reason for U.S. military action because ISIL had killed and displaced many people, communities, and minorities for over a year before this incident (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). This was the first time that ISIL had threatened U.S. economic interests, however.

On August 8, 2014, one day after Obama’s speech, the United States began an air campaign against ISIL positions that lasted until August 18 (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). ISIL suffered heavy casualties and retreated. On August 19, ISIL responded to the bombings by releasing a video of the beheading of James Wright Foley, a U.S. journalist, whom ISIL had abducted in Syria. On August 12, four days after the United States bombing of ISIL positions near Erbil (and a week before the public posting of the video), James Foley’s family received an email from ISIL (Global Post, 2014). The email clearly outlined the reasons for ISIL’s execution of Foley. The email begins, “We have left you [the United States] alone since your disgraceful defeat in Iraq. We did not interfere in your country or attack your citizens while they were safe in their homes despite our capability to do so” (as cited in Global Post, 2014). In fact, ISIL was focused exclusively on its territorial ambitions inside Iraq and Syria prior to the United States’ bombardment of their positions near Erbil (Smith & Hirsch, 2014). ISIL (as cited in Global Post, 2014) goes on to offer their reasons for Foley’s execution:
You were given many chances to negotiate the release of your people via cash transactions as other governments have accepted. We have also offered prisoner exchanges to free the Muslims currently in your detention like our sister Dr. Afia Sidiqqi, however you proved very quickly to us that this is NOT what you are interested in. You have no motivation to deal with the Muslims except with the language of force…. Now you return to bomb the Muslims of Iraq once again, this time resorting to Arial [sic] attacks and “proxy armies”…You do not spare our weak, elderly, women or children so we will NOT spare yours! You and your citizens will pay the price of your bombings! The first of which being the blood of the American citizen, James Foley! He will be executed as a DIRECT result of your transgressions towards us!

A week later, ISIL published the video of Foley’s execution.

James Foley’s death prompted two speeches. On August 20, President Obama (2014d) declared, “[o]ne thing we can all agree on is that a group like ISIL has no place in the 21st century” (para. 9). Secretary Kerry (2014) also condemned Foley’s execution, stating, “[t]here is evil in this world, and we all have come face to face with it once again. Ugly, savage, inexplicable, nihilistic, and valueless evil” (para. 4). However, neither Obama nor Kerry indicated the reason ISIL offered for the execution. Obama and Kerry portrayed Foley’s execution as a random act of violence. Connelly (2012) argues that the U.S. government’s silence or redaction on justifications of its actions prevents public discussion and does not allow the audience to make judgments based on the evidence. The audience is more likely to rely on ideographs (e.g., terrorist, evil) to assess the situation when the government presents incomplete evidence. The strategic silence of President Obama and Secretary Kerry on the reasons that ISIL
had provided for executing Foley is an example of how silence features in the vilification of ISIL by rhetorical exclusion.

I do not agree with, support, advocate for, or condone James Foley’s execution. I do believe that ISIL’s execution of James Foley was wrong and deplorable. However, in the pursuit of reducing violence, the motives for violent actions are important. Obama and Kerry’s speeches about Foley’s execution by ISIL did not indicate any reason for the act. Their strategic silence made the vilification of ISIL easier — even inevitable. After all, who would kill another human for no reason? The elision and suppression of the symbolic meaning behind ISIL’s execution of Foley portrays it as a gratuitous act of violence rather than a contingent one. It is much easier to vilify someone if he or she committed a violent act without reason and, depending on the severity of the violence, the rhetor may label the perpetrator of gratuitous violence as evil. For example, we label serial killers as evil human beings because in addition to killing many people, often their violence against their victims is gratuitous. Foley’s execution, however, was not a random act of violence.

Metaphors

Cancer

Medical metaphors are common in political discourse (Hellín García, 2010). However, “cancer” is a popular metaphorical vehicle when it comes to the tenor of U.S. foreign policy (Ivie, 1987). President Obama (2014d) referred to ISIL as a “cancer” (para. 9). President Obama’s use of “cancer” as a vehicle for the tenor of terrorism has four major implications for the U.S. public’s perception of ISIL.
First, it assumes that terrorism will destroy the society where it resides, just as cancer, left untreated, will kill the body. Therefore, as cancer often requires treatment by a medical professional, a counter-terrorism professional needs to eliminate terrorism. This comparison sets the stage for action. Furthermore, acting is not enough. The label of “cancer” creates an urgency to act because cancer can kill the body quickly. Therefore, the counter-terrorism professional must act quickly to prevent the “cancer” of terrorism from spreading to other parts of society. Just as cancer must be eradicated to ensure the patient’s health and prevent malignant cells from returning, terrorism must be eradicated from the society in whole. The annihilation of terrorism in whole is necessary because if any persists, the remnants can propagate and return, just like cancer recurs in a patient who was previously treated and thought to be cured.

Second, the veil of scientific language used to talk about terrorism disguises Obama’s attempt to demonize the terrorist. Obama’s use of medical language provides his discourse with a veneer of scientific credibility. By “scientizing” terrorism, the disease metaphor seems to avoid the charge of demonization. In reality, it merely frames what is for some the less credible good versus evil polarization in the guise of medical discourse.

Third, cancer treatment often involves the use of drastic methods to eliminate malignant cells. Chemotherapy and radiation therapy kill both cancerous cells and healthy cells. Obama’s use of “cancer” to refer to terrorism sets the stage for and implies the inevitability of civilian deaths in the War on Terror. In other words, civilian deaths subtly become part of the message, such that when the public is later confronted by the fact of civilian deaths, the latent (even if unconscious) element of “cancer” makes the “collateral damage” of civilian deaths more palatable. This comparison thus justifies civilian casualties in
the War on Terror. Furthermore, it allows for a margin of error that may be acceptable in the medical field but, once transferred to a sociopolitical issue such as terrorism, can be disastrous. For example, depending on the location of cancer in the human body, killing 1,000,000 healthy cells in the course of cancer treatment may not be of significant concern; however, killing even one innocent civilian is ethically and politically problematic in the context of terrorism. Beyond devaluing human lives, civilian deaths are an effective recruiting tool for terrorist organizations (Abbas, 2013).

Fourth, because of the lack of a clear cause for cancer in many cases, using “cancer” to refer to terrorism confirms that terrorism is a random act of violence without reason. A rhetor’s description of terrorism as an act without cause allows for vilification of the terrorist, which justifies the eradication of the terrorist through military action. The label of “cancer” obscures the complex political and social conditions that foster terrorism. Obama’s simplification of the complex problem of terrorism via the cancer metaphor stabilizes the meaning of terrorism and constructs its reality as an absolute Truth. Metaphors function not just as ornamentation but also as arguments that the world should be seen in a particular way (Burke, 1941). When the audience accepts the metaphorical description, they are effectively accepting that the world is in fact the way that the rhetor described it metaphorically. Therefore, Obama’s simplified description of complex socio-political problem of terrorism calls for simple responses such as military action. The Obama administration also used metaphoric vehicles of “savage” and “barbaric” to demonize ISIL.
Barbaric and Savage

Although these vehicles function slightly differently from one another, Obama and Kerry use them both in a dichotomous relationship with the “civilized” self. Therefore, in analyzing these vehicles, I consider them together and offer explicit differentiation when needed.

On August 20, 2014, Secretary Kerry (2014) referred to ISIL as a “savage” (para. 4) organization. There are two similar, but separate, implications when a rhetor (especially a Western rhetor) uses this vehicle to refer to a non-Western group or population. The imperial powers have viewed “non-Western peoples as being racially inferior” (Herbst, 2014, p. 92). This inferiority was used to justify colonization and oppression in the form of the “‘white man’s burden’ to civilize the ‘savages’ or ‘backward natives’” (p. 92). The rhetorical use of “savage” assumes a population that did not “progress” with the rest of the world and the “white man’s burden” obligates him to save the “savage.” However, as Razack (2003) explains, “[t]he natives are bound to be ungrateful and are unlikely to stop their savagery unless met with brute force” (p. 208). Furthermore, “savage” is associated with “irrationality, represented as coercive, and configured for aggression” (Ivie, 2005, p. 59). Therefore, the colonial or imperial groups justified the use of force for the savage’s own good and for the sake of the progressing civilization. Turner (1983) argued, “the existence of an area of free land” (p. 55) and “the meeting point of savagery and civilization” (p. 56) creates the conditions for “Americans” as a subject position to come into being. The “savage” versus “civil” discourse is an inherent part of the frontier myth (Jones, 2011), and the frontier myth is the foundation of American identity (Turner, 1983). Therefore, the “savage” versus “civilized” invokes a strong response in U.S. American audiences.
The discourse surrounding savagery intertwines with the United States’ political language and cultural memory, which is used routinely to dismiss dissent and rally the nation in line with the rhetor’s perspective and against anything else (Ivie, 2005). For example, in 1864 President Polk declared war on Mexico in a dispute over Texas by referring to Mexicans as people who have a violent temper and can be unstable. Furthermore, President Reagan’s lexicon to describe the Vietcong “ranged from terms of natural menace, such as fire, flood, disease, tides and storms, to the language of dangerous animals and predators, such as snakes and wolves” (Ivie, 2005). The labeling of “savage” Others allows U.S. political actors to stifle any potential alternative view that may be necessary to assess a particular situation. These alternative include, but are not limited to, the point of view of the enemy (i.e., terrorists), other countries in the region and around the world, and critics. As Ivie (2005) explained, the discourse of savagery is a silencing method in the face of democratic dissent. When a rhetor uses the “savage” versus “civilized” discourse, he or she indicates to the audience three things. First, the savage is not reasonable; therefore, the savage’s reasoning process and views are not valid. Second, the savage is going to lash out against the civilized attempts to civilize it. Three, civilizing the savage is both good for the savage and the civilized society. The culmination of these assertions negates any attempt by dissidents to argue for alternative perspectives. Furthermore, as Ivie (1980) argues, the discourse of savagery both justifies war and mobilizes the public by “calling up a cluster of rhetorical forms which themselves stimulate the nation's belief in its cultural superiority as the foremost proponent of civilization” (p. 292).

President Obama and Secretary Kerry also used the word “barbaric” as a metaphorical vehicle, which is often used interchangeably with “savage.” In his
initial two speeches about ISIL, President Obama (2014a; 2014b) did not use the vehicle of “barbaric” to refer to ISIL. However, in his third speech on August 7, when Obama (2014c) authorized the bombing of ISIL positions, he said, referring to ISIL, “these terrorists have been especially barbaric towards religious minorities” (para. 4). Secretary Kerry (2014) also referred to ISIL by declaring that they are an “insult to the peaceful religion they violate every day with their barbarity” (para. 4). As Herbst (2003) argued, “barbarian is often a demonization, not meant to describe others so much as to signal our moral power and cultural (and often racial) superiority in contrast to their backwardness” (p. 26). Obama and Kerry’s use of the word signals to the audience that ISIL is morally inferior to “us” and the group’s concerns are not legitimate.

Furthermore, both rhetors contrast the position of the “barbaric” and “savage” Them with the “civilized” Us. President Obama (2014d) indicated that ISIL may claim out of expediency that they are at war with the United States or the West, but the fact is they terrorize their neighbors and offer them nothing but an endless slavery to their empty vision, and the collapse of any definition of civilized behavior. (para. 5)

Here, President Obama not only invokes the barbaric/civilized dichotomy, but further signals that ISIL endangers the non-Western others around them. President Obama (2014d) goes on to say, “we will continue to confront this hateful terrorism, and replace it with a sense of hope and civility” (para. 10). He offers to swap the barbarity and savagery with civility that “we” can provide through “replacing” them. However, “replacing” often means eradicating; the “barbaric” Other does not understand “civilized” reason and resists change.
The “barbaric” and “savage” sit opposite the “civilized” in a dichotomized discourse that produces an illusory representation of terrorism (e.g., Arab or Middle Eastern terrorists, terrorists wanting to end the world, irrational terrorists, etc.) for the audience (Bhatia, 2009). Furthermore, a rhetor’s use of “barbaric” and “savage” in the context of terrorism transforms the “ordinary deviant into a frightening, ‘foreign,’ barbaric beast” (Porras, 1994, p. 121) that requires the “civilized” to take extraordinary measures. This dichotomy thus has three implications.

First, ordinary law and law enforcement become ineffective in the face of the “barbarian” because laws are for the “civilized.” Therefore, the “civilized” must take extra-judicial measures, adjust laws, or develop unique regulations for the “barbaric” terrorist to deal adequately with the problem. For example, the George W. Bush administration and CIA labeled such extra-judicial action “enhanced interrogation techniques” (Yoo, 2003). The discourse of the “barbaric” and “savage” terrorist versus the “civilized” West typified George W. Bush’s foreign policy discourse (Kellner, 2007). In 2002, shortly after the 9/11 attacks and the initiation of the War on Terror, the Bush administration produced a series of documents, now famously known as “torture memos,” to manipulate the definition of torture and declare immunity for the administration and interrogators who ordered and used these techniques (Yoo, 2003). The memos indicated that the Geneva Convention was not applicable to those whom the United State detained in Afghanistan. The new definition of torture allowed CIA interrogators to deprive prisoners of food, water, sleep, and wound treatment; expose them to extreme cold temperatures, sensory overload and deprivation; subject them to nudity, cold showers, waterboarding, stress positions, total isolation, threat of rape and murder of their family members, and unnecessary rectal rehydration or
feeding to extract confessions and information from them (S. Rep. No. 113-288, 2014). The justification for these techniques was rooted in the George W. Bush administration’s discourse about the appropriate tools needed to deal with terrorism. For example, Yoo (2003), Deputy Assistant Attorney General and the author of the torture memos, in justification for revoking the Eighth Amendment rights of the detainees writes, “[j]ust as prison officials are given deference in their response to rioting inmates or prison discipline, so too must the Executive be given discretion in its decision to respond to the grave threat to national security posed by the current conflict” (p. 61). The decision to employ these techniques demonstrates the consequences of dichotomizing the “savage” and “barbaric” with “civilized” and justifying the use of extraordinary measures to defeat the Other.

Second, the metaphor polarizes the struggle further into “us” versus “them” discourse; by labeling terrorism as savage and barbaric, President Obama and Secretary Kerry position the United States as civilized by contrast. The barbaric monster’s desire for the destruction of the civilized then makes for a virtual struggle between the poles of the dichotomy; as a Manichean dichotomy often cast in the language of good versus evil, the poles are always in an existential struggle. Therefore, in order to survive the “barbaric” terrorist Other’s measures to destroy the “civilized” Us, we must eradicate Them first (Porras, 1994). Failure to destroy the “other” in this context will result in our own destruction. I do not suggest that the actions of ISIL are not brutal; however, demonizing the other reduces the chances of compromise and political solutions, fostering a military response in an area of the world where military action by the U.S. has historically failed to help the local population or even produce sustainable or desirable results sought by the United States (Weiner, 2008).
Third, this metaphor has a double-edged function. As Engels (2010) argues, it helps unify and firm up the identity of the U.S. public, as it did during the revolutionary period. On the other hand, it “corrupt[s] democracy by turning it towards the creation and preservation of dangerously unstable homogeneities of friend and enemy, Whig and Tory, revolutionary and criminal” (p. 62). The binary creation of self and enemy suspends democracy and paves the way for extraordinary action against the “other.”

**Hero/Villain**

President Obama (2014a) also used the hero narrative to talk about the United States and its soldiers in the context of Iraq. Obama elevates U.S. soldiers to the position of a hero. For example, in his first speech about ISIL, he states, “American troops have made extraordinary sacrifices to give Iraqis an opportunity to claim their own future” (para. 4). He went on to expand the goodwill offered to Iraqis by declaring, “our troops and the American people and the American taxpayers made huge investments and sacrifices in order to give Iraqis the opportunity to chart a better course, a better destiny” (2014a, para. 14). President Obama rhetorically positioned the United States as a hero. As Mitchell (2014) argued, heroic narratives are common in the War on Terror. Positioning the United States in the role of brave hero requires the construction of a counterpart. In this conflict, ISIL becomes the cowardly villain. Secretary Kerry (2014) demonstrated this construction when, in reference to Foley’s death, he said, “He was brave and bold, and no masked coward can ever steal the legacy of this courageous American” (para. 1).

There are multiple instances of this duality in Obama’s speech. For example, he argues, “while we’re there we’re keeping a lid on things, and after
enormous sacrifices by us, as soon as we’re not there, suddenly people end up acting in ways that are not conducive to the long-term stability and prosperity of the country” (2014a, para. 24). This is an important declaration because President Obama justified the need for the U.S. to serve as a hero. Just as in melodramas and fairy tales, the hero is the only one who can free the helpless victim from the grasp of the evil villain. Obama’s depiction of the United States’ role in Iraq infantilizes the Iraqis’ struggle and simplifies the complex cultural, social, political, and religious intricacies of the problem discussed in Chapter 1.

A variation of the heroic story features humanitarianism. U.S. politicians often package their wars as humanitarian efforts. For example, George W. Bush presented the war in Afghanistan partly as a humanitarian effort to free Afghan women from the burqa that the tyrannical Taliban regime imposed on them (Ayotte & Husain, 2005). Similarly, President Obama (2014c) framed the attack on ISIL as a humanitarian effort to save the Yazidis from an impending genocide. He stated, “we’ve begun operations to help save Iraqi civilians stranded on the mountain” (Obama, 2014c, para. 4). Like the hero narrative, humanitarian stories necessitate a victim to save and a villain to destroy. After the rhetor invokes this story, those who are capable of help are expected to act. As President Obama (2014c) argued, “when many thousands of innocent civilians are faced with the danger of being wiped out … we will take action. That is our responsibility as Americans. That’s a hallmark of American leadership. That’s who we are” (para. 15). President Obama (2014c) places the “barbaric” and “savage” terrorist Other in opposition to a “civilized” self. A hero cannot exist without the construction of a villain and a victim, and all of those constructions are inherently dichotomous.
Manichean Dichotomy

Black (2001) contended that Manicheanism is a framework that constructs the world in a binary opposition where the poles are in a constant struggle against one another. Two major Manichean dichotomies represent these poles: Us versus Them and Good versus Evil. Labeling enemies as evil impedes our judgment and prevents us from giving serious thought and consideration to the other agent’s point of view (Dawes, 2014). The rhetoric used by Obama (2014c) in this speech to describe ISIL positioned the organization as evil without any direct reference to that term. Obama described the United States’ role in the world: “America has made the world a more secure and prosperous place. And our leadership is necessary to underwrite the global security and prosperity,” Obama said, adding, “we strive to stay true to the fundamental values – the desire to live with basic freedom and dignity – …[t]hat’s why people all over the world look to the United States of America to lead” (para. 12). President Obama’s juxtaposition between ISIL and the United States called forth the classic Manichean roles of good (the United States) and evil (ISIL). This polarity is problematic because the audience perceives the United States as always being right because of the position that it occupies in the dichotomy (the good). Furthermore, the perception of ISIL as evil permanently relegates anything related to it as wrong and useless because of its designation as evil. This dichotomized representation further necessitates a fight between good and evil. This popular frame, instilled by our cultural narratives (Bhatia, 2009), coupled with the characterization of ISIL by President Obama facilitates the radical vilification of the enemy.

Secretary John Kerry’s (2014) statement also employed the good versus evil Manichean frame. He stated, “[t]here is evil in this world, and we all have come face to face with it once again. Ugly, savage, inexplicable, nihilistic, and
valueless evil. ISIL is the face of that evil” (para. 4). Kerry’s statement is much more explicit than those of President Obama in relegating ISIL to the evil side of the Manichean dichotomy. Kerry also positions the United States as good by calling ISIL “evil” and referencing the “face to face” confrontation between “we” and “that evil.” He concludes that “[t]he world must know that the United States of America will never back down in the face of such evil. ISIL and the wickedness it represents must be destroyed” (para. 5). Yet again, Secretary Kerry invokes the Manichean frame of good versus evil. Furthermore, he implies that the only course of action is for good (the United States) to destroy evil (ISIL). This framing forecloses any possibility for compromise. In the case of ISIL, foreclosing compromise is dangerous; ISIL enjoys support among the Sunni population in Iraq (Chomsky, 2015; Khan, 2015; The National Consortium, 2015). Their support may not be an endorsement of the ideology and actions of ISIL. Rather, the Sunni support for ISIL comes from their limited choices. Sunnis either have to live in other areas of Iraq and face repression by the Shiite government or live under ISIL. Many Sunnis choose to reside in the ISIL-controlled territory because of the threat of violence and repression in other areas of Iraq (King et al., 2016). However, this nuance often does not matter to observers as they interpret Sunnis’ choice to live in ISIL territory as total support for the group (Cockburn, 2015). Because President Obama and Secretary Kerry have relegated ISIL to the position of evil, anyone Sunnis may be considered evil by association.

The view of “evil by association” has been very prominent in the United States’ War on Terror. U.S. military drone operators use the equivocating phrase, “double tap,” when they refer to an unthinkable procedure. This practice demonstrates the power of the Manichean frame to demonize an individual (or group) to the point that even their associates, regardless of background or intent,
are automatically relegated to the evil side of the dichotomy. They use the phrase “double tap” to indicate a second bombing of a target to kill any people who come to help those injured by the first strike (McKelvey, 2013). The U.S. administration deems this practice both effective and legal when most of the world deems this practice a war crime. The second strike targets people not because they are known terrorists or are identified as such, but because they associate with terrorists through their offer of help. However, in the context of ISIL, the United States cannot kill the entire Sunni population that chooses to live in the ISIL-controlled territory. Or can it? Eliminating the possibility for diplomatic solutions through the good/evil dichotomy and demonizing framing sets the ground for unfortunate comments such as one made by Senator Ted Cruz during his 2016 campaign for the Republican Party’s presidential nomination.

Senator Cruz, a graduate of Harvard Law School, said that if elected President of the United States, he will “carpet bomb” (para. 1) ISIL and see whether “sand can glow in the dark” (as cited in Neal, 2016, para. 1). Carpet bombing or saturation bombing is a “bombardment that treats a number of clearly separated and distinct military objectives located within a city as a single military target” (Samuels, 2006, p. 106). Article 51 of the Geneva Protocol I prohibits carpet bombing because it is by definition an indiscriminate attack on a geographical area composed of both military and civilian populations (Neal, 2016; Samuels, 2006). The antagonism against ISIL is so strong that Senator Cruz is willing to kill civilians indiscriminately to eradicate the evil. Senator Cruz’s speech demonstrates the dangerous trajectory that the good/evil dichotomy sets for the United States.

Manichean dichotomies have historically benefited extremists. For years, groups like al Qaeda claimed that they were in a struggle against the West and that
the United States intended to take control of holy lands of Muslims. When President Bush called for a “crusade” against “radical Islam,” his Manichean rhetoric in conjunction with Iraq’s occupation validated al Qaeda’s claims, which led to an increase in financial support and recruitment that boosted the organization for almost ten years (Boyle, 2014).

On the other hand, once an agent is framed as good, that agent’s actions are characterized as positive and permissible. After all, the good cannot commit bad acts; therefore, all of the good’s actions to combat evil are justified. The good has to win, and any tactic or strategy used by the forces of good to oppose the forces of evil is warranted by the Manichean framework. Conversely, anything evil does is defined as bad. First, the frame of good versus evil makes self-reflection impossible for the agent who is constructed as good within the dichotomy because, based on the dichotomy, there is no place for good to make a mistake or do wrong. Therefore, there is no need for self-reflection. Furthermore, this frame creates an all-out war between good and evil, which justifies the good to do anything to win the war. Since this initial justification exists, there is no need for reflection. Second, the dichotomy enables dehumanization of the Evil agent. Dehumanization, in turn, allows the dehumanizer to eliminate basic human rights and protection claims by blaming the dehumanized (Steuter & Wills, 2008). Once the dehumanizer does not see the dehumanized as a person with rights that must be respected, it is very easy to treat them horribly without any guilt. For example, the process of dehumanizing the Japanese during World War II by using animal imagery (e.g., monkey, bat, and rat). As Steuter and Wills argued, [t]hese images did their work effectively, removing a sense of Japanese humanity so that it became possible to coldly calculate which Japanese cities would be most advantageous to bomb: should it be the city with the
most intellectuals (Kyoto) or the city surrounded by hills which would
make the bomb have the greatest effect (Hiroshima)? (p. 48)

Therefore, dehumanization is the intermediate step between vilification and
annihilation.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 1, the United States is partially responsible
for the creation and expansion of ISIL. However, in a Manichean dichotomy, if
the rhetor designates an individual or group as evil, that individual or group is the
only entity who carries blame. Relegating ISIL to the position of evil lets the
United States forgo self-reflection about its own mistakes and missteps. This lack
of reflexivity permeates U.S. foreign policy. The United States actively denies
any wrongdoing, in any situation, even when evidence to the contrary is
particularly strong. The history of U.S. foreign policy demonstrates the U.S.
wrongdoing very clearly.

Lack of self-reflection by the United States allowed for the continuation of
policies that led to disastrous regime changes in Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954,
Congo in 1960, the Dominican Republic in 1961, South Vietnam in 1963, Brazil
in 1964, Chile in 1973, and Iraq in 2003 (Weiner, 2008). Most of these regime
changes were the result of Cold War ideology, which demonized Communism and
the Soviet Union, thereby defining any regime that remotely resembled
Communism as evil and therefore eligible for destruction. For example, the 1979
Islamic revolution in Iran was a popular uprising against the Shah’s policies
(Dehghan & Norton-Taylor, 2013). The Iranian revolution allowed the current
Islamic Republic regime to come to power. This regime has oppressed the Iranian
people and restricted much of their freedom via a brutal crackdown on any dissent.
Many Iranians and experts believe the Iranian revolution is a result of the United
States’ interventionist policies and actions in the Middle East (e.g., De Bellaigue,
2012; Kinzer, 2003). Shah’s father was crowned the king of Iran after a CIA-backed coup d’état in 1953 that overthrew Mossadegh, the democratically elected Prime minister. The main motive behind the United States’ coup d’état was Mossadegh’s proposal for nationalizing the oil industry in Iran, which would have regulated the industry and increased the cost of oil. For over two decades after the U.S. American backed coup d’état, the Pahlavi family stayed in power and managed the country through autocracy. Even though the United States’ role in overthrowing Mossadegh became clear after the CIA declassified documents related to the 1953 event, the U.S. government has never admitted any wrongdoing, nor has it ever reflected on the consequences of those actions.

Finally, months of demonizing rhetoric by the U.S. administration resulted in an overt strategy to eradicate the vilified ISIL. On September 3, 2014, President Obama (2014e) unveiled his strategy to deal with ISIL. In a press conference in Estonia, Obama declared, “[o]ur objective is … to degrade and destroy ISIL so that it’s no longer a threat not just to Iraq but also the region and to the United States” (para. 41). This statement by the President confirmed the administration’s Manichean framing of good and evil by indicating that the only way to deal with evil is to destroy it. The U.S. administration’s rhetorical exclusion of ISIL through naming and strategic silence, as well as demonizing metaphors and Manichean dichotomous frames, created a condition conducive to military action. However, there might be an alternative way to counter the enemy. The alternative framework that the Trickster offers may be a way out of the self-fulfilling prophecy of terrorism.
CHAPTER 5: THE TRICKSTER

As discussed in Chapter 2, Foucault (1972) argued that the linguistic process is fundamental in constructing the meaning of social and political phenomena. Furthermore Foucault indicates that historical narratives often serve as a final commentary on the nature of the world. This function of historical narratives reflects a static understanding of socio-political phenomena, which contradicts the fluidity and complexity of terrorism. As I described in Chapters 3 and 4, vilification is one of the ways in which rhetors crystalize the meaning of terrorism. Furthermore, rhetors vilify, among other strategies, through rhetorical exclusion, use of metaphors, and promotion of a Manichean dichotomy. I believe that simply telling rhetors “don’t vilify” will not achieve the desired outcome. As evidenced by my analysis of President Obama’s rhetoric about ISIL, much of the vilification process is shrouded in cultural metaphors difficult to avoid absent an alternative theoretical framework changing the underlying conception of terrorism and its discourse. Understanding terrorism, therefore, requires a theoretical rupture from the current conceptualization of terrorism. In this final chapter, I propose the trickster framework as an alternative route for rhetors when thinking and communicating about terrorism. First, I introduce the trickster framework through the trickster figure. Second, I demonstrate how the trickster framework resists a static meaning in the context of terrorism and allows the audience to interpret terrorism more productively.

The Trickster

The trickster defies boundaries. Radin (1972), a prominent trickster scholar, defines the trickster as “at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator...[who] knows neither good nor evil yet ... is responsible for
both” (p. xxiii). Radin’s amorphous definition shows how difficult it is to constrain the trickster within the confines of a stable definition. Gruber (2008) agrees that the trickster “defies categorization and analysis, shape shifts to eclipse her/himself from academic view, and disrupts all attempts at (academic) definition” (p. 95). Abrahams (1968) explained a definitive description of the trickster eludes because “Trickster is the most paradoxical of all characters in Western narratives…. At various times he[/she] is clown, fool, jokester, initiate, culture hero, even ogre” (pp. 170-171). Uijl (2010) observes that the trickster “continues to play his tricks on us, always evasive, always crossing our conceptual boundaries of definition in which we try to confine him” (p.73). The trickster anticipates; “whatever we do, he [sic] is always one step ahead of us” (Uijl, 2010, p. 73). This evasion has led many scholars to describe the trickster by its liminal characteristics rather than offering a precise definition. However, the trickster manages to defy those characteristics at times.

The trickster lives in cultural narratives; therefore, the best way to understand him/her/it is to read famous trickster stories. One of these stories, “The Tiger and the Shadow,” originates from Malaya (Skeat, 1901):

There was a saltlick in the jungle to which all the beasts of the forest resorted, but they were greatly afraid by reason of an old tiger which killed one of them every day. At length, therefore, Plando the mouse-deer said to the tiger, “Why not permit me to bring you a beast every day, to save you from hunting for your food?” The tiger consented, and Plando went off to make arrangement with the beasts. But he could not persuade any of them to go, and after three days he set off, taking nobody with him but Kuwis the smallest of the flying squirrels. On their arrival Plando said to the tiger, “I could not bring you any of the other beasts because the way was blocked by
a fat old tiger with a flying squirrel sitting astride its muzzle.” On hearing this the tiger exclaimed, “Let us go and find it and drive it away.” The three therefore set out, the flying squirrel perched upon the tiger’s muzzle and the mouse-deer sitting astride upon its hind quarters. On reaching the river, the mouse-deer pointed to the tiger’s likeness in the water and exclaimed, “Look there! That is the fat old tiger that I saw.” On hearing this, the tiger sprang into the river to attack his own shadow [reflection], and was drowned immediately. (pp. 28-29)

In this story, Plando, the trickster, breaks the rule of the jungle set by nature and the tiger. He is in a paradoxical position. He is the hero but also the fool because he tried to be the instrument for the tiger’s reign. Plando is also an outsider that tries to occupy a liminal position as the weak confidant of the tiger. Plando, the trickster, is not powerful because he is a small animal in the jungle at the bottom of food chain. As I discuss later in this chapter, these characteristics are useful in other contexts, including terrorism discourse.

The trickster is an important figure in Native American culture because “it allows [them] to create a particular kind of world in which the Judeo-Christian concern with good and evil and order and disorder is replaced with the more Native concern for balance and harmony” (King, 1990, p. xiii). As Dorsey (2002) argues, trickster discourse renders “traditional concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’ … more ambiguous, making the major characters representing those states more accessible for viewers who likewise negotiate such conflicts in their lives” (p. 450).

Trickster figures are not exclusive to Native American culture. Every known human culture has one or more trickster figures (Ashliman, 2004). The ancient Greeks had the god Hermes (Hyde, 2010); Turks, Armenians, Assyrians,
Kurds, and Iranians share a trickster figure named Hodja Nasreddin (Bynum, 1989). Hodja Nasreddin appears in other cultures (e.g., Malta, Sicily, Italy, Greece, Iraq, Serbia, and Croatia) with different names. Black slaves in the U.S. had Br’er Rabbit and Aunt Nancy the spider as trickster figures (Abrahams, 1968); Some African tricksters include Ananse, Eshu, and Legba (Hynes & Doty, 1997); Judeo-Christian cultures have tricksters such as Saint Peter, Solomon, and Herschel (Miller, 2011); figures from some East Asian cultures include the Japanese Susa-no-o, the Chinese Sun Wuk’ung, and the Tibetan Agu Tampa (Hynes & Doty, 1997). These are only a small sample of the trickster figures from around the world.

Three primary characteristics typify the trickster figure in its various forms. First, the trickster is known for breaking from formulas and testing boundaries (Grădinaru, 2012); through the process of boundary transgression, the trickster promotes the re-examination of existing conditions by showing that “any particular ordering of experience may be arbitrary and subjective” (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975, p. 184). Therefore, trickster stories create a liminal space and allow the audience to transgress social, cultural, and even legal constraints. As Abraham (1968) puts it, the trickster’s actions are “performed with the idea of giving freedom to personal action in the face of group restrictions” (p. 170).

Second, the trickster often occupies a paradoxical position (Abrahams, 1968; Gruber, 2008). Tricksters are both cultural heroes and fools because their exploits fall outside societal norms but their pranks simultaneously benefit society (Gruber, 2008). The trickster functions as a release valve for society (Abrahams, 1968; Ashliman, 2004). The trickster behaves as members of the society would if there were no societal constraints on them. The members of the society live vicariously through the trickster tales; otherwise, societal pressure would lead
them to destroy themselves and society. The actions and tricks the trickster hatches for others can backfire and negatively affect him/her/it (Abrahams, 1968; Gruber, 2008). The trickster is an amoral character (Abrahams, 1968). The trickster is indifferent toward social values but his/her/its actions occur in a moral context. The trickster’s actions must be condemned at the same time that they are admired because although the trickster does what others would do if there were no societal constraints, his/her/its actions are “extremely aggressive, destructive, and forbidden” (Abrahams, 1968, p. 172); the trickster is thus an agent of mystification and chaos.

Third, the trickster is often an outsider, underdog, or oppressed figure, whereas the trickster’s victim occupies a position of power (Ashliman, 2004). Hyde (2010) argues societies and people in power feel threatened by the trickster and often respond by labeling the trickster a “psychopath” (p. 158) in order to marginalize and exclude it/him/her.

Scholars have utilized the trickster as a theoretical framework to study many topics and artifacts. Uijl (2010) employs the trickster to study the Rustam’s role in *Shahnama*, an epic poem by the Persian poet Firdausi. Firdausi portrays Rustam as a hero overcoming different challenges. However, at the end of the story, Rustam kills his son who thinks of him as a villain because Rustam sometimes defies the king and only follows the king’s orders when he sees fit. Rustam’s tales have been popular young adult stories that demonstrate the valuable role of transgression from societal rules (Uijl, 2010). Dorsey’s (2002) analysis of *The X-Files* reveals how viewing the world through the trickster’s lens offers a better alternative to “traditional concepts of ‘good’ and ‘evil’” by rendering them “ambiguous, making… those states more accessible for … [those] who likewise negotiate such conflicts in their lives” (p. 450). Garrison (2009)
offered the trickster as a framework for teachers to address the diverse classroom population. Garrison demonstrated how the trickster can aid in understanding the identity construction of a classroom with a majority immigrant or immigrant-descent population. Garrison explained that perceiving student’s identity as an either/or will leave many of them feeling excluded because self-identity is a complex phenomenon. However, a trickster framework from the teacher will afford the teacher a more complex understanding of student because some students consider themselves as Mexican, some as American, and others as Mexican American, giving each part of their identity a different priority. Frentz (2008) explained how he uses trickster strategies to survive his treacherous academic life. Frentz found the trickster to be a compelling framework that guides him through difficult events such as the death of his partner. The trickster allowed Frentz to break from simple interpretations of events and allow complexities to guide him. Through the trickster, Frentz relinquished a search for a unified self and accepts the contradictions of his personal and professional life. I join this robust conversation by using the trickster framework to propose an alternative for viewing terrorism that moves away from the Manichean framework currently in use by the government and some Orthodox Terrorism Studies scholars.

The Trickster in Action

Rhetors achieve static meaning by vilifying through rhetorical exclusion, metaphors, and Manichean dichotomy. However, the trickster framework can shatter the static meaning set by these strategies and introduce ambiguity of meaning into terrorism discourse.
Rhetorical Exclusion

Rhetorical exclusion is one way in which rhetors vilify. The trickster framework, by contrast, demands for the inclusion of all voices because the trickster is inherently an outsider and resides in liminal spaces. Therefore, if the rhetor employs the trickster framework, he/she will be required to look from the outside at the problem. It is less likely for a rhetor who employs the trickster framework to rhetorically exclude others because the trickster sees value in transgression.

For example, if OTS scholars employ a trickster framework, they are less likely to exclude CTS scholars because they would value the transgression and liminal space offered by CTS scholars. CTS scholars transgress multiple boundaries that terrorism scholars deem important. CTS scholars favor a broader focus on all aspects of terror, including state terror, due to historical roots and funding sources (English, 2009; Jackson et al., 2009). OTS’s roots limit its topics to ways in which Western powers can combat terrorists (Miller & Mills, 2009). Furthermore, the majority of funding for terrorism research comes from governments that want better tools for dealing with terrorists (Jackson et al., 2009). This source of funding introduces the risk of biased and circular research that only re-affirms governments’ positions. As a result, most terrorism studies scholars concern themselves primarily with the ways in which governments can fight terrorism. Furthermore, they define and label “terrorism” and “terrorist” in line with governments’ views. However, CTS rejects the assumption that terrorists are only non-state actors and violates the boundary in the larger discussion about terrorism. CTS scholars make the reader re-evaluate the standard set by the field of terrorism studies regarding who is a terrorist, how one comes to be labeled as terrorist, and who determines the criteria.
A trickster framework would also aid the U.S. administration in avoiding rhetorical exclusion of ISIL. If the U.S. administration employs the trickster framework, they would value the transgression that ISIL or terrorism in general offers. ISIL transgresses from the conventional modes of politics and therefore it should be included as a political movement. ISIL’s concerns should not be excluded; however, its actions must be condemned. One of the concerns that ISIL claimed to be addressing was protection of the Sunnis in Iraq. That is a legitimate concern that should not be excluded simply because ISIL is advocating for it. However, ISIL’s execution other Iraqis to achieve this goal is a place for condemnation.

Metaphors

Metaphors such as cancer, barbarian, or savage also stabilize meaning and simplify complexities. The trickster framework, however, evades simplicity. It is inherently complex because it is against any form of crystallization of meaning. The trickster’s paradoxical characteristic breaks the simplicity of meaning imposed on terrorism through metaphors.

In the case of terrorism studies, a trickster framework can illuminate the inherent complexities that exist in the underlying causes of terrorism. It can also demonstrate the need for approaches other than OTS to the study of terrorism. Furthermore, looking at ISIL through a trickster framework would require exposure of all of the complexities that accompany the group, as I explained in Chapter 1. Therefore, the rhetor may realize that the task of understanding these intricacies becomes difficult for the audience if he/she employs metaphors that simplify these conditions.
Manichean Dichotomy

The trickster’s propensity to violate boundaries is its most important characteristic (Grădinaru, 2012). However, rule-breakers and the trickster differ. Breaking rules and boundary transgression alone do not benefit society; rather, the trickster promotes critical self-reflection, for its audience or victims, about the practices and rules of a particular society (Babcock-Abrahams, 1975). The trickster achieves that end through the process of rule-breaking and boundary transgression. Once the members of society see the arbitrariness of a standard they have set, the trickster has created a possibility or opened a space for reflection. One of those arbitrary standards is the Manichean dichotomy.

Manichean dichotomies stabilize the meaning of terrorism by creating polar opposites (e.g., good/evil and us/them). The trickster can break this up because for him/her/it there is no static place such as good or evil. The trickster is liminal and a shape-shifter. Therefore, one who is good can also be evil and vice-versa. As Gruber (2008) explains, the trickster is a paradoxical figure. The trickster is both beneficial and destructive to the society where it resides. Therefore, the trickster does not fit in any Manichean category. The Manichean framework pits the polar positions against each other; hence, one cannot be in both poles. The trickster, however, occupies a liminal space for self-reflection to better the society.

For example, CTS scholars have benefited the field of terrorism studies by raising very important questions. CTS scholars introduced new methodological approaches to the study of terrorism (English, 2009). They also expanded the range of subjects that terrorism scholars can study, which now includes states as perpetrators of terror. Their work questions the viability and effectiveness of counter-terrorism efforts by states.
Another example of the transgression from a Manichean dichotomy is ISIL. ISIL’s campaign to carve out territory in Iraq and Syria has been bloody and vicious. They have killed people and caused many to flee their homes in fear of persecution or death. ISIL’s executions and punishments are extremely graphic. These have backfired and ISIL is heavily under fire by the United States, European countries, and other countries in the region. However, the trickster framework would also allow us to see that they provide security for many Iraqis persecuted by the Iraqi government. Furthermore, as I demonstrate in my description of ISIL’s road to power, they have shown Western powers that interference in a region with such a complex geopolitical and religious make-up is dangerous. Western powers treat international relations as a game they can plan and control. This perception may be true to some extent, but some scenarios the Western powers cannot control, which causes resentment from those who have to cope with consequences. The United States in particular has fomented regime change around the world throughout 20th and 21st century, but these policies have often come back to haunt the empire. ISIL and terrorism in general has become a feedback loop that demonstrates the dangers of regime change policies and political interventionism around the world.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, OTS scholars have used the label of “psychopath” and other rhetorical strategies to vilify and exclude CTS scholars from the conversation. OTS scholars’ framing of CTS scholars as psychologically disturbed positions CTS scholars as outsiders. Furthermore, OTS scholars’ financial ties to governments and legitimization of governments’ counter-terrorism agenda, in addition to the sheer number of OTS scholars, places them in a position of power in the field of terrorism. CTS scholars criticize the OTS scholars’ research agendas, methods, and narrow focus (with evidence rather than ad
hominem attacks, as we see from OTS scholars), which indicates that CTS scholars are the outsiders criticizing those in a position of power in the field of terrorism. Similarly, I demonstrated in Chapter 4 that Obama and Kerry’s rhetoric positions ISIL in an “us” versus “them” dichotomy, using a Manichean frame, which relegates ISIL to an outsider position. The rise of ISIL to power illustrates the problems with interventionist regime change and military action led by the United States. ISIL demonstrates the complicated and sensitive issues inherent to the issue of terrorism.

If politicians, scholars, and the public relinquish the Manichean mindset about terrorism and instead look at terrorists using a trickster frame, “we” can learn much from what “they” have to say. This is not to say we should not condemn terrorist acts, but we should recognize our historical role in perpetuating, promoting, and taking part in terrorism.
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APPENDIX
Mark was sitting in his house with his family.
He, his father, mother, and sister were watching TV,
when masked men blew the door off its hinges.
They stormed the house through the fringes.
Mark’s dad reached for a gun to protect his family,
but was shot in the head by the masked men repeatedly.
Mark’s mom attacked the intruders helplessly,
but was shot in the chest by one them viciously.
Mark remembered those men
by the mark that they wore on their chests.
20 years later, Mark was watching TV.
He sees the same mark on someone’s chest and he sees
nothing but blood, revenge, and gore, and he says:
I’m going to fight all those bastards.
He went and destroyed the force of Evil
that killed his family and left him weakened.
It sounds like a plot out of Hollywood,
But what if… this was your childhood?
I want to ask you to do something more.
Something you may have never done before.
Something that may make your heart sore.
Rename that little boy Muhammad.
Place his house in the suburbs of Baghdad.
Replace the masked men with soldiers,
and the mark they wore on their chest
with a red, white, and blue patchwork.
In movies, they call Mark a hero.
But, do we call Muhammed a hero?
No…
We have a specific name for Muhammad.
“Terrorist” is the name we call Muhammad.
Wait, Wait… don’t get me wrong.
I’m not justifying violence at all.
I want to look at “terrorism” through a different lens.
An angle that has been rarely discussed in this sense.
Terror isn’t some sort of over-blown fantasy
of 72 virgins in heaven and cups of mead.
It’s not easy for someone to decide
to push a button and blow himself into parts.
Let’s do a perspective-taking exercise,
and put ourselves in the shoes of the “other” ones.
What would you do if your mom
was lying in a pool of blood that is warm?
Dad, unrecognizable by bullet holes.
You, not knowing what just happened to your folks.
Or what would you do
if you were the masked man,
who’s been told these barbarian backwards
are out to get us like savage bastards?
You are doing a sweeping mission in Baghdad,
trying to rid the city of bad guys.
When you go into a building and see
a man reaching for his AK with zeal.
It’s life and death for you at that point,
since these people want your head on a pole.
You burst your M4 Carbine and scream
at a woman approaching with steam.
Hatred leaping out of her eyes
like a mama bear protecting her cubs.
You know if she reaches your heart,
she’ll rip it out and feed it to you alive.
All you have to do in this hell,
in a moment of terrifying affair,
is to aim and shoot like you were taught
to protect yourself and the rest of the guys.
I know…
it’s hard to decide
what’s right and wrong.
But look at what we care about.
Cars, Apple, American Idols, UGGs,
and the latest movie in the cinemas.
We put them on our walls and
Look at them like our Gods
as if they are the only way to reach the sublime.
We care about materialistic nonsense,
more than the people who live in toxic substance,
left behind by our conquest for dominance,
remnants of our technological advancements.
We can’t live without iPhones and iPods, neither does a flapping fish on asphalt without water, and that’s the result of our addiction to device and design. But you heard these things a bunch of times from poets, philosophers, and intellectuals like Chomsky who goes on and on about America and its democratic flaws. But we don’t listen. It’s been told a bunch of times and now we are desensitized like any other demise. It’s been told and witnessed, sold as a business, dealt with as a sickness, forgotten like Atlantis, and politicized like our elementary school textbooks. But our imperialist conquests for capitalistic intents have consequences that are real and intense. I have another story to tell, about why they, beard-wearing, rag-headed, sand niggers want us dead. And listen… Because if we want this trend to end, the killings to stop and the violence suspend, we need to know why it started, the real reason for the rotten
relationship that’s been chartered.
The reason is rooted in history.
In the early 20th century
oil was discovered in the East.
and the mighty powers of the West
sucked the oil out of the ground like a hungry insect
and guarded their interest with military intent.
After World War I,
France and Britain went on
to split the Ottoman Empire without
any regard for the people at all.
After the World Wars, the Queen announced
that her forces would leave the east of the Suez Canal
but someone had to step in and take the reins.
God forbid… those ignorant camel jockeys run their own affairs.
So the United States was gracious enough
to pick up the tab for the rest of us.
Fresno State

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