The Rhetorical Analysis Of George W. Bush Iraq Speeches

President Bush proclaims a clear and unequivocal frame from the beginning on – good versus bad, America versus the terrorists. This narrative spans across the entire Address to the Joint Session, beginning with the assessment that “enemies of freedom” (Bush Session 66) were responsible for the attacks and that the US is called to “defend freedom” (Bush Session 65). The accumulation of Bush’s discourse of an America who fights for freedom and justice can be found in the closing paragraph of his speech on September 20th: “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war […]” (Session 73). Here the antagonizing position of good and bad is explicitly named for the first time. The direct comparison of components, which I would argue can be categorized as objectively good and bad, forcefully and impressively establishes America as the morally superior nation. This is possible as Western societies create categories based on binary terms (Staszak 44). The positive is placed against the negative, an automatic opposition is formed and the ‘self versus other’ polarity is easily deducible (Staszak 44). America cares about fighting for freedom and seeking justice, as numerously mentioned in the speech, whereas fear and cruelty are attributed to the terrorists via the linguistic juxtaposition.

While the first speech hints at a possible war, content and language-wise (cf. Bush Session), the second speech four months later affirms that a war is now happening, a war which is said to be about the battle between the civilisation and barbarians: “Our nation is at war […] and the civilised world faces unprecedented dangers” (Bush State 103). Bush does not describe the enemy as barbaric, but by stating that the civilized world faces unprecedented dangers and the circumstance that America has been attacked, met with the possibility of further attacks, associates America as part of the civilized world. The in-group, America, defines itself by designating the Other, the terrorists, elevating itself to a higher position and giving itself an identity (Staszak 43) and the Other is only given an identity via the civilized self, implying superiority and inferiority (Okolie 2). Bush paints a picture of America in a socially higher position as the uncivilised, barbaric rest. Bush furthermore establishes that the “[…]union has never been stronger “ (State 103), marking the US as powerful even if they fight a war or maybe precisely because they are fighting this war to regain its’ past ultimate power position. The nation moved from a passively grieving country to being actively engaged in combat, thereby constructing the subject “USA” as a secure, authoritative force, who is not in victim role anymore.

In terms of naming subjects who personify the discourse of ‘bad’, Bush offers numerous names. He names al Qaeda (Session 66) and “[i]ts leader – a person named Osama bin Laden […]” (Session 67), generally referring to them as terrorists or radicalists multiple times in the speech (cf. Bush Session). Through the twofold identification, Bush recognized a faceless group and an explicit face as the subjects in question. I would argue that giving terrorism no face, except for bin Laden, signifies giving it no identity and thereby constructing an Other via difference (Hall Introduction 4-5) and the absence of identity (Staszak 43). The Other is only there because it signifies what ‘we’ are not (Hall Introduction 4-5). They are “enemies of freedom, imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere, practice a fringe of Islamic extremism” (Bush Session 66), “trained in tactics of terror, plot evil and destruction” (Bush Session 67) and “kill […] to disrupt and end way of life “ (Bush Session 68). The focus of the first

speech is heavily centred on the terrorist subject, which has to be defeated, describing in detail what the terrorist organizations do, how they operate and why they must be stopped (cf. Bush Session). There is however also a second subject who is in focus but not in the foreground: the nation America. America is described as still in shock and filled with grief but nevertheless is “determined and strong” (Bush Session 72) and ready to fight for an “age of liberty, here and across the world” (Bush Session 72) as they believe in “pluralism, tolerance and freedom” (Bush Session 70), mirroring the image of a people with a collective vision and loyalty to one another as well as the nation (Piereson 15).

The State of the Union Address in 2002 now sees America as the main subject, who has now begun to process the damage and casualties suffered. The US is now an active subject working to regain and fights for peace and liberty. The terrorist organizations are still acknowledged as the enemy to battle but during this speech, Bush’s transcendent objective is America and how it will reclaim its’ strength (cf. Bush State). Bush affirms that “[he] will not wait on events, while dangers gather. [He] will not stand by, as peril draws closer and closer” (Bush State 106). Here, Bush describes himself as an active subject, a positive and determined force, who constitutes himself as a civilian and fellow American and in his role as president. In a post 9/11 America, the need for security and safety was immense and the office of President enabled Bush to act as the epitome of a unifying character, as president, commander-in-chief, head of state and fellow American (Bass 2) and a powerful anchor for the American people. This anchor-function furthermore has the feeling of representing an ideal of what each citizen should do - to not just passively wait around but actively doing something in order to restore and protect the homeland, reflecting back at the American virtues and values, such as the self-help concept, future and work orientation (Kohls 4-5). It seems like an implicit call for action – “if I can do it, everyone can”. He broadens this argument by adding the US this demand: “The United States of America will not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most destructive weapons” (Bush State 106). The general assertion that the US will not allow foreign forces to threaten the nation alludes to a feeling of shared national identity, which describes the solidarity of a community, based on the conviction of a shared destiny (Trautsch 291): we, the United States, unity and community, stand together, strong and powerful. From this unified notion of America comes the self-confidence, which is much needed at this time of crisis and establishes America as a force to be reckoned with.

President Bush expresses a strong dedication to his office and his people when he states “[i] will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people” (Bush Session 73) in the first speech. A striking point here is the use of ‘I’ instead of ‘we’, with two possible reading position arising from this linguistic choice. The first possibility involves the reading of ‘he as the president speaks for the nation’. He suggests an implicit ‘we’ by speaking for and about himself and hopes that other people will do as he does. This works as he is an authority and power figure, he is the President. Bush here acts as a symbolic elite, a leader of the dominant and powerful group, who is in the privileged position of having direct access to the formation and the following exertion of a certain political discourse, enacting an exclusive social power (Van Dijk 470). As the president also stands for the office itself, ‘I’ also represents political institutions. WEITER AUSFÜHREN (FOUCAULT POWER) He furthermore relies on the mass phenomenon of social mobility and draws a circle from ‘I as President and citizen’ to ‘we as the people of America’. Through the legislative authority of the presidential office, Bush was endowed with the power to speak on behalf of the nation, constructing a specific judgement of the attacks, which subsequently “[…] evolved into a large and powerful

political and social narrative […]" (Jackson 2009 26).

In the Address to the Joint Session, Bush asserts that the US will "[…] rally the world to this cause [i.e. lift the dark threat of violence] by our efforts, by our courage. We will not tire, we will not falter, and we will not fail" (72). Declaring that they will not stop until evil is defeated, acting according to the American values of having personal control over your environment and self-help to achieve a goal (Kohls 2,4) aims to encourage the nation to keep fighting until victory is there. Bush makes use of the creedal nationalism found in the US. Creedal nationalism expresses an ideology, which focuses on the most important values and ideals within a society and politics (Smith 18). Within this paradigm of "creedal nationalism", national affiliation is based on the endorsement of those values and ideals instead of a shared language or ethnic characteristics (Smith 14). The more President Bush repeats this narrative of having trust in the universal national values, the more it becomes general knowledge and acquires more power, as knowledge always expresses a mode of power (Hall Representation 48-49). This statement gains even more impact, as Bush called upon the American people to "[…] uphold the values of America […]" (Session 70) just a few paragraphs before. There is no need to explicitly mention what these values, that are so desperately needed now, are. Each American has internalised these values and as the nation shares the "[…] sheer unanimity of belief in these guiding national principles" (Lieven 50) which found its beginning in the Declaration of Independence which reads that "[…] unalienable Rights, […] among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness […]" (1) are central to each person. Bush alludes to these universal principles as a successful "[…] idea of a nation binds citizens into a common enterprise" (Piereson 13).

In the second speech, President Bush delivers a major narrative shaping element as part of the fifth step in Hall's discourse analysis model: "The man [sic] and women of our Armed Forces have delivered a message now clear to every enemy of the United States: Even 7,000 miles away, across oceans and continents, on mountaintops and in caves – you will not escape the justice of this nation" (103-104), signifying a practice for dealing with the enemy. Bush uses a very strong and emotional word, without actually saying anything with it: justice. The notion of justice is left remarkably vague, with no hint at what 'justice' entails. Assuming that 'justice' was formulated consciously and deliberately ambiguous, a wide scope of interpretational range of what 'justice' entails, is opened up. It allows for an all-encompassing interpretation of justice, where it does not matter if justice will be done in the own country or in another one –the firm belief that justice will be done is given, without any space for doubt. With the attacks signifying a disruption and change in the then-dominant behavioural sense in American security and self-content (Landy 3). The by then known "[…] combination of economism, symbolic activity and personal diplomacy were obviously inadequate for coping with 9/11" (Landy 3). Landy postulates, "[n]o American president would have relied on them" (3). Bush defines America as a nation that epitomizes justice in itself or as the bringer of justice, arrogating absolute authority worldwide, ignoring the world opinion and preferences of important European allies, compromising an undiplomatic act (Landy 4). This opens up an area where the assumption of embodying lawfulness acts as a justification for every institution and every person, nationally as well as internationally, to put action into force in order to bring known or suspected enemies to justice. The US hurt in its' national pride as a pacifier in past conflicts and wants redemption, presumably with every means possible and imaginable. Even though the vagueness of the intricacies of the notion of 'justice' is preserved since the first speech, the second makes it clear how and where justice will be done. It sees enemies on a global scale.