

American Orientalism, Religion and the 2003 War on Iraq

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the central role of religion has played in the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, especially when examined through the prism of Orientalism's nexus with war. Drawing on postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis, the paper shows that religion has been at the core of the Orientalist discourses and practices that have been used to justify and mobilize for the 2003 intervention. Second, it proves that religion, both as a 'sincere' driver and propaganda tool, has been an important factor in the attainment of the political and popular consensus about the war within the United States and with 'willing' allies. And last, it reveals how the religion of the 'Other' was used to cast any resistance of Iraqis to the invasion as arising from exclusively religious/cultural motivations, in contradistinction to the secular/rational Americans who wage war for purely political ends.

KEYWORDS: Religion, War, Orientalism, Iraq, Global War on Terror, Resistance.

1 INTRODUCTION

Few scholars have tried to establish a convergence between the seemingly inconsistent motives for invading Iraq in 2003. For instance, radical philosopher Slavoj Žižek (2004) identifies three main reasons behind the war: democracy, US hegemony and oil; which reasons he respectively ascribes to the realms of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real [1]. However, he stops short of explaining how such conflicting reasons are reconciled rhetorically and psychologically, especially at the collective level. Reading the motivations advanced by Žižek through the prism of Orientalism¹ shows them to be actually interconnected. In order for the US to maintain and reinforce its hegemony (the Symbolic) and the privileges attached to its hyper-power status, it needs to control the oil rich Middle-East (the Real), a strategic territory "swimming in oil" according to Paul Wolfowitz's slip of the tongue.² Yet, since the US cannot overtly lay claim to another country's resources, as in old colonial times, it had to sublimate this desire, unconsciously, and rationalize this drive, consciously, for what Edward Said calls "accumulation and acquisition" [2]. It did so through a benevolence narrative about spreading democracy to oriental lands and liberating their inhabitants from their despotic rulers (the Imaginary). Such claims to virtue and philanthropy are clearly grounded in the foundational myth of American Exceptionalism, in addition to the legacy of broader Western ideas of "mission civilisatrice" and "white man's burden." It is an "Imaginary" dimension indeed because it has to do with neoconservative fantasies of initiating a democratic wave in the Middle East through military violence [3]. However, in Žižek's triptych, for all its intents and purposes, there is the notable absence of a fourth realm, that of the "metaphysical" which relates to religion, as it will be demonstrated hereafter. Hence, one may infer a certain reluctance on the part of Slavoj Žižek, as a radical thinker, to

¹ Edward Said expounded Orientalism along three different but interdependent definitions: an academic discipline, a style of thought and a corporate institution interested in 'managing' the Orient/East [2].

² This was Wolfowitz's reply when asked to explain why the US targeted Iraq and not North Korea, both of which were accused of having WMDs [39].

explore the avenue of religion and the collusion between the neoconservatives and the New Christian Right agenda in US politics.

In this regard, Žižek reasoning is in clear contrast to the approaches of several other scholars. For instance, Michael Mann, while underlining oil as “a more important motive, though within the context of the traditional strategic goal of asserting U.S. control over the region,” is keen to point to the “defense of Israel as a significant motive among some neoconservatives and the religious right (with the bonus of an electoral payoff from America’s Jews)” [4]. Jeffrey Haynes, in the same vein, highlights the way in which the policy that led to the invasion of Iraq was “informed by the fusion of two mutually reinforcing sets of ideas: religious ones emanating from the New Christian Right (NCR) ³ and secular concerns of influential neoconservatives (‘neocons’)” [5].

In fact, beyond the constellation of special interests forming the so-called “military-industrial-ideological complex” [6], there are clearly other notable reasons for the invasion of Iraq which relate directly to religion. Drawing on postcolonial theory and critical discourse analysis, this paper purports to demonstrate that religion has been at the core of the Orientalist discourses and practices that have been used to justify and mobilize for the 2003 intervention. Second, it proves that religion as both a ‘sincere’ driver and propaganda tool has been an important factor in the attainment of the political and popular consensus about the war within the United States and with ‘willing’ allies. Lastly, it explicates the way religion was utilized in a reverse way to disparage all resisting Iraqis as animated by purely religious and apolitical drives, in contradistinction to secular/rational Americans who wage war for political ends.

The insights derived recently from the study of the nexus between Orientalism and war will help cast a new light on the under-investigated dimension of religion in the 2003 War on Iraq. Indeed, the article argues that Orientalism as “the broad cultural context within which practices of Western expansion and intervention into the non-European world take place” [7] has time and again been pressed into service to create representations of the self as righteous/secular, despite the pervasive Christian pathos in the runup to the war, and of the enemy other as evil/fanatical; thus, making it easier for the United States to justify and rationalize their military invasion of Iraq.

2 ON THE CENTRALITY OF RELIGION TO AMERICAN ORIENTALISM AND WAR MAKING IN THE MIDDLE-EAST

At least in the case of the 2003 war on Iraq, ‘Religious’ is yet another adjective that may be hyphenated to the military-Industrial complex. The reason is the significant role religion has played throughout the “faith-based presidency” [8] of George W. Bush, especially when it is closely examined in relation to Orientalism and the Global war on Terror (GWOt). Robert Ivie is another scholar who has identified such imbrications of religion with other multifarious interests without properly naming the complex:

The Bush administration united the Republican Party around three extremist constituencies: “the religious right, big business and the neoconservative worldview.”... Although he [Bush] remained true to big business interests and neoconservative ideologues while overseeing a revolution in U.S. priorities at home and abroad, Bush’s radical persuasion was most distinctly messianic [9] (emphasis added).

Ivie draws attention here to the relevance of the religious dimension to any discussion of the motivations for the Iraq War. Jonathan P. Herzog, for his part, does not shy from unambiguously naming “The Spiritual-Industrial Complex” [10]; thus, overstating the religious dimension over even the Military one. Herzog actually traces back the origins of this complex to the Cold War, following what he calls the sacralization of the American society during this era, ⁴ and which was according to him an important condition for Cold War victory [10]. Herzog uses sacralization, in this context, to refer to “a breakdown of differentiation between sacred and secular and the suffusion of basic societal functions with religious symbols and beliefs” [10]. He also stresses the deliberate “re-endowment of religion with perceived political, social, economic, or intellectual value on the societal level” [10].

However, Herzog’s ‘sacralization’ is also relevant to the war and Orientalism nexus, as far as the mobilization of religion in the service of belligerent and martial designs is concerned. In fact, during the cold war, sacralization served similarly

³ The New Christian Right or NCR has been a significant domestic political lobby group since the 1980, it comprises several strands of conservative, predominantly Protestant, Christian belief, and can be divided into fundamentalist, evangelical and Pentecostalist strands [5].

⁴ Jonathan P. Herzog contends that the adoption of the National Day of Prayer in 1952 and of the National Motto ‘In God We Trust’ in 1956 constituted milestones of the sacralization phenomenon [10].

orientalist/othering designs as during the Bush junior era. During most of the second half of the 20th Century, USSR was viewed as irremediably oriental, the antithesis to Western civilization [11] and the incarnation of Oriental despotism [12]. In that context, the perception of Communism as a “rival religious system of belief” impacted Cold War political rhetoric which translated into policy decisions [10]. Similarly to the cold war era, after 9/11, the rhetoric of the holy war has been powerfully summoned and embraced by the Bush presidency against the perceived Oriental despotism of Afghanistan and Iraq and its “Islamofascist” [13] system of beliefs. It is clearly reiterated in Bush’s 2005 second inaugural address, “From the day of our Founding, we have proclaimed that every man and woman on this earth has rights, and dignity, and matchless value, because they bear the image of the Maker of Heaven and Earth.” [14]

Although Edward Said describes modern Orientalism as essentially and necessarily secular, emphasizing its scientific and rational aspects [15], there are several elements which point to the markedly religious character of the American strand of Orientalism. In fact, beyond the mutual imbrication of religion, culture, knowledge and power as categories in Orientalism [16], there are prominent religious tributaries to American Orientalism particularly within the myth of American Exceptionalism. In fact, Meghana V. Nayak and Christopher Malone go as far as to qualify American Exceptionalism as a “particular and specific form of Orientalism intended to produce [construct] ‘America’” [17]. They conversely define American Orientalism as “a style of thought that gets grounding through American Exceptionalism” [17]. Religion is also central to American Orientalism in the sense that, as Joan Hoff claims, the idea of a “divinely sanctioned national greatness” is at “the heart of American cultural identity as a nation” [18]. All these elements add up within the broader context of the European heritage, where the relation with the Middle-East continues, especially in the context of conflict, to be screened through inherited images, tropes and stereotypes dating back to the era of the crusades [19]. Such enduring legacies, which form part of what Brahim Kalin calls the “roots of misconceptions,” [19] have deeply marked Euro-American perceptions of the region to this day.

Lucy Pick, pointing to the forceful eruption of such Medieval categories in American Orientalizing discourses, especially during George W. Bush’s tenures, argues that “Orientalism at the highest levels of American policy has been, above all, religious” [15]. This is especially the case since the events of 9/11 pitted the United States against an opponent that “seemed tailor-made for the resurrection of holy war” [10]. It is apparent in the way George W. Bush repeatedly articulated his Christian beliefs in his speeches and acts. He consistently used expressions with religious connotation as when he described his coming wars in the Middle-East as a “crusade.” Or when he singled out his oriental enemies in the language of evil and other biblical references such as “We fight to protect the innocent, so that the lawless and merciless will not inherit the earth” [55]. Bush, in this 2002 Anniversary Speech of September 11, was referring to the bible’s verse “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5: 5). He was thereby making a shrewd combination of Orientalist and religious classificatory schemes to achieve what Annita Lazar and Michelle Lazar call the “hyper-signification of the Other as a multi-dimensional outcast” through “Orientalization” and “evilification” [20]. Bush’s invocations of figures of evil, biblical references and themes were so recurrent that James P. McDaniel described this pattern as theo-politics, whereby the “repertoire of characterization evoked to judge actions and to publicly justify strategic responses stems from an enormously elastic employment of an equally slim version of the Christian lexicon” [21].

One recurrent religious trope in particular, that of Good vs. Evil, largely illustrates the relevance and widespread use of such religious language in the leadup to the 2003 war on Iraq. Taking advantage of the “abundant visual imagery” of Saddam’s cult of personality, the US pro-war propaganda capitalized on the trope of oriental despotism to entertain what Tomanic-Trivundza calls the metaphorical discourse of personalized good and evil [22]. This stratagem allowed the Bush Administration to frame its justification for the coming invasion also in terms of “the eternal struggle between good and evil” [22]. In the same vein, Meghana Nayak and Christopher Malone argue that Bush deployed Orientalist tropes in his speeches to distinguish between “good” and “evil, so as to arrogate the right to state who shall be “saved” [17]. In fact, soon after 9/11, Georges W. Bush was straightforward in professing his Manichean view of the world on the ‘National Day of Prayer and Remembrance’ when he claimed that “our responsibility to history is already clear; to answer these attacks and rid the world of evil.”⁵ Through this remark, he represented all the wars to be waged under the GWOt, including Iraq, not as arising out of vested interests but rather as a confrontation between good and evil. Moreover, Bush’s Manichean worldview of a cosmic battle of good and evil is so pronounced and reasserted that philosopher Peter Singer dubbed him The President of Good and Evil [23]. This is further corroborated by the fact that Paul Wolfowitz, former US Deputy Secretary of Defense, emphasized in an interview to the Magazine Vanity Fair that “Bush saw himself in an epochal struggle against evil and wanted to reorder the Middle East,” a

⁵ <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010914-2.html>

statement which reflect the Protestant fundamentalism embraced by Bush and others in his administration who saw the world in simplistic good versus evil terms” [24].

Bush’s good/evil trope is deeply embedded in the intersection between American Orientalism and American Exceptionalism. It proceeds from what William Spanos describes as a “perennial exceptionalist representation of the complexities of the world as a Manichaeian struggle between the forces of good and evil” [25]. Such representation, according to Spanos, “has marked the rhetoric of an assertive foreign policy since Reagan’s designation of the demised Soviet Union as the “Empire of Evil” [25]. Furthermore, the Myth of American Exceptionalism intertwining with a revived American Orientalism unleashed what James McDaniel calls a rhetoric of nationalistic grandeur where “political conflicts become ‘moralized’ and ‘theologized’ on the grand scale of the struggle between Good and Evil” [21]. The recurrent use of the Good vs. Evil Orientalist trope fulfills also the primary function of ennobling the rhetorical posture of its utterers, i.e., to justify “the authority of those in control of the discourse through demonstrations of moral superiority” [26].

Under the effect of the exacerbated religious fervor marking what McDaniel calls the post 9/11 “theo-political” juncture [21], the good/evil binary discourse simplified complexities and projected a black-and-white image of the world [27]. It resonated well with a general public that hungered for revenge against a designated culprits for the 9/11 attacks. Bush’s rhetoric reinvented the cartography of evil by situating it in the Middle-East, with Iraq being its epicenter -- and a key component of the “axis of evil.” In addition, Bush and his neocons advisors and ideologues used evil to exaggerate beyond reason the threat allegedly posed by Iraq to the United States. They went as far as to claim that “the United States was in danger of total destruction – holocaust,” in the words of Richard Perle and David Frum - two influential neocons in the Bush administration, in their frenetic book *An End to Evil* [28]. In the same vein, Donald Rumsfeld warned that “against evil, the risks of inaction are greater than the risks of action,” and therefore, war was the prudent course to follow [3].

3 RELIGION AS A ‘SINCERE’ MOTIVATOR AND A POWERFUL MOBILIZER

Christianity as a constitutive part of Orientalism [29] has been relevant to the Iraq war in two different ways. First, as a ‘sincere’ motivating factor, and second, as a rhetorical stratagem used to harness support for the war in, as per Jonathan Herzog’s terms, “the world’s foremost Christian republic” [10]. As far as the first level is concerned, Paul Vallely observes that Christian faith had been a crucial element in Bush’s every day running of the presidency:

The President reads his Bible every morning. He worships at the services led by military chaplains at his country retreat in Camp David, or at impromptu services put together by White House staffers on the presidential plane, Air Force One, or wherever he and his entourage find themselves. Prayer is a constant. The president prays often on the phone with a minister in Texas who is one of his spiritual advisers. Cabinet meetings often begin with a prayer. “I pray all the time,” he once told Fox News [30].

Following this description, George Bush appears as a devout Christian or even, as Richard Jackson contends, “a fundamentalist Christian president” [31]. In *Bush at War*, Bob Woodward observes that the President who vowed to “rid the world of evil” was casting “his vision and that of the country in the grand vision of God’s master plan” [32]. As such, Bush’s religious Zeal may be adduced as one of the plausible reasons behind the invasion, which is considered as a ‘classic war of choice’ [33], not a war of necessity. Even before his election, the born-again Christian Bush had already a premonition of his “divine mission” as he claimed: “I feel like God wants me to run for President. I can’t explain it, but I sense my country is going to need me. Something is going to happen... I know it won’t be easy on me or my family, but God wants me to do it” [17]. This claim chimes well with his comment on the eve of the Iraq invasion, that he had consulted a “higher Father” than Bush Senior, which corroborates the idea that George Bush acted out of what he perceived to be his “providential mission” and “Manifest Duty [/destiny] ” [17]. His Administration’s strategic moves in foreign policy after 9/11 seem congruent with his internalized role as “God’s agent,” in America’s struggle against the designated “evildoers” [34]. More to the point, Bush has reportedly boasted that “God told me to end the Tyranny in Iraq” [35]. He also claimed, as reported by The Israeli newspaper Haaretz in June 2003, that “God told me to strike at al-Qaeda and I struck them, and then he instructed me to strike at Saddam, which I did, and now I am determined to solve the problem in the Middle-East” [36].

However, Bush who was “very much into the apocalyptic and messianic thinking of militant Christian evangelicals” [8] acted within the framework of an administration that was clearly under the ideological influence of his neoconservative staff and their notorious acquaintances with Christian fundamentalists circles [37]. Bush’s Presidency, probably because of the religious factor, can be said to have witnessed an “unprecedented convergence in positions of supreme power in Washington of right-wing and (in some cases Christian fundamentalist) zealots and neoconservative American Jews” [38]. Raymond Hinnebusch sees this network of Zionists and Christian fundamentalists as decisive and based on “identity movements,” with “a messianic agenda operating within the domain of peace and war” [39]. The war against Iraq, in this sense, represented somewhat a

crucial chapter in the project of securing US global hegemony while fulfilling the religion-based aspirations of the Christian Zionist lobby. The latter fervently supported the state of Israel and vociferously opposed the idea of a Palestinian state, on the theological grounds that “until Israel is intact Christ cannot return to earth for the Second Coming” [30]. It is no coincidence that prominent Christian fundamentalist leaders, known also as televangelists, such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, Jimmy Swaggart and Franklin Graham have been staunch supporter of the war on Iraq.⁶ Robertson and Falwell had suggested on several occasion that the war on terrorism had religious dimensions [40]. And the four leading evangelicals issued, a few days before the invasion, a statement urging Americans to pray and fast for peace, and they insisted that a war against Iraq was morally justified [8]. Their help in mobilizing Christian support was driven by the perceived outcome of the war in favor of Israel which coincides with their eschatology and premillennial theology about the “Second Coming of Christ” [41].

With the instrumental help of Christian leaders, the recurrent use of religiously charged language, allowed the Bush Administration to tap into “the deep well-spring of American religiosity” [31] as a way of solidifying support for the war. Bush’s famous use of the expression “axis of evil” in his January 2002 State of the Union Address was a well calculated move, as his speech writer David Frum admitted, meant to secure popular support from conservative audiences in the “Bible Belt” [42]. Similarly, the Administration’s construction of the GWoT, including the War on Iraq, as a traditional just war was also destined to suggest that it was “given God’s blessing” [31]. The Christian concept of “Just War” was invoked since the 2001 war on Afghanistan which was initially dubbed “Operation Infinite Justice,” before changing it into “Enduring Freedom.” The move was made in order to assuage the reservations of key “Muslim allies” who considered “Infinite Justice” to be the exclusive attribute of God [43]. The initial appellation was presumably an attempt to symbolically suggest a transference to the US President, like a pope from the times of the crusades, of powers that rest with God. The rhetoric of Just War enlisted the rationalizing help of authoritative academics such as Michael Walzer, with a view to place the invaders on the higher moral and religious ground. It aimed to normalize the orientalist bias about the righteousness of the self and the decadent character of the Oriental other. It served as well to justify the use of overwhelmingly disproportionate force against a Middle-Eastern country enfeebled by two wars (the 8 years Iran-Iraq War and the first Gulf War) and twelve years of embargo.

Whether Bush’s religious references were sincere or self-serving, they not only resonated well with the American People, but they also formed a common denominator with his Western partners of the so-called “Coalition of the Willing.” The March 16, 2003 Summit of Bush, Blair and Aznar in the Azores appeared as a contemporary version of the Council of Clermont convened to fight modern days Saracens. This impression was reinforced by subsequent facts, as the Spanish troops who were slated to deploy to Iraq were issued with a distinctive badge representing the Moor Slayer’s red cross (Santiago Matamoros in Spanish). This very cross is a religiously charged symbol which had been the emblem of the Medieval Reconquista that purged Spain of its “Morisco” population [44]. Similarly, besides the fact that the mutual Christian faith was a bonding factor for Bush and Tony Blair [30], the latter never made a secret of his religious beliefs being essential to his decision to join Bush’s war. Blair explicitly acknowledged, a posteriori, on the Parkinson TV show in March 2006 that his decision to go to war on Iraq was based on faith, God and conscience: “... if you believe in God, it’s made by God as well.” Bush’s appeal to religion however did not resonate well with the French pronouncedly secular president Jacques Chirac. In a top-secret phone call to Chirac, George W. Bush appealed to their “common faith” (Christianity) and told him: “Gog and Magog [the Bible’s satanic agents of the Apocalypse] are at work in the Middle East... The biblical prophecies are being fulfilled... This confrontation is willed by God, who wants to use this conflict to erase his people’s enemies before a New Age begins” [45]. In reaction to this episode, which was revealed later in 2009, Chirac said that he was “boggled by Bush’s call, and ‘wondered how someone could be so superficial and fanatical in their beliefs’” [45].

Bush’s markedly religious perception of himself and his country have certainly influenced his perception of the situations and realities. Even more, his religious worldview somewhat rubbed off on several key departments of his Administration. For instance, Gregory Thielmann, Director of the US State Department’s bureau of intelligence until his retirement in 2002, remarked that “ [the Bush] administration has had a faith-based intelligence attitude” [46]. Even within the Pentagon, a military institution whose members are normally bound by the duty to exercise discretion and restraint, Lieutenant General William Boykin, deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence and war-fighting support, frequently made incendiary declarations at Sunday-morning evangelical revivals, in full military uniform. He described the war on Iraq as a fight with Satan and insisted that his God was bigger than the Muslim God, that his God “was a real God” and the Muslim’s “was an idol” [40]. He also claimed that “George Bush was not elected by a majority of the voters in the US...He was appointed by God” [30]. More to the

⁶ A few days before the invasion, the four leading evangelicals issued a statement urging Americans to pray and fast for peace, and they insisted that a war against Iraq was morally justified [8].

point, he had publicly outlined his conviction about the US military and its role in Iraq: "We in the Army of God, in the House of God, the Kingdom of God have been raised for such a time as this" [30]. Instead of removing General Boykin from his position, the Bush administration endorsed him as a good soldier, "an officer that has an outstanding record" [9]. It emerged later that General Boykin's religious fervor was essential to the fulfillment of his mission since he was at the heart of a secret operation, on Donald Rumsfeld's orders, to extend the "stress and duress" interrogation techniques applied to Al-Qaeda suspects at Guantánamo Bay to the Iraqis detained inside the Abu Ghraib prison [30]. Even Donald Rumsfeld himself, as Secretary of Defense, used to attach warlike Bible verses to Iraq war reports he hand-delivered to Bush, one of which read "Put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground" [45].

Again, in relation to Pentagon, notoriously Islamophobe Reverend Franklin Graham, who is famous for giving the invocation at Bush's inauguration and for calling Islam "a very evil and wicked religion" was invited to conduct the services of the Pentagon Good Friday to military personnel [47]. The same reverend, with obvious ulterior motives, vowed to send Christian relief workers from the Samaritan's Purse, the relief agency he headed, into Iraq once the war ended "to help thousands of suffering families in the name of Jesus Christ" [47]. All these attitudes happening within an environment saturated with officially sanctioned messianic rhetoric were but extensions of Bush's use of religious arguments to justify his policies regarding Afghanistan and Iraq.

4 THE RELIGION OF THE OTHER AS THE 'MALIGN' DRIVER

As far as the nexus of Orientalism and war is concerned, the religious dimension is also relevant and significant in terms of enemy representations. It is so in the sense that it reveals the constructed character of the contrast established between the American self-image and the projected image of the Middle-Eastern other singled out as the enemy in the GWoT. There is in fact a pervasive orientalist doxa in American public discourse about the Orient/Middle-East as over religious, fanatical and benighted. This representation is made in contradistinction with the United-States which, despite ubiquitous Christian symbols and references in public life, is foregrounded as secular, rational and disenchanting in the Weberian sense.⁷ And yet, the contention that religion is far from being vestigial to the American society can be readily supported by "countless polls revealing the breadth of American religiosity" and the fact that "religious influence and expressions are enduring elements of American heritage --an inextricable part of the American way of life" [10], with the word evangelical "everywhere in print, television, and cultural conversation" [10].

This pervasive representation translates, in times of war, into a tendency to single out the religious dimension of the war as toxic/malign when it is associated with the "Other." It is a tendency that has been brought under scrutiny thanks to the newly coined concept of Military Orientalism concept which "identifies a linkage between Western military strategies in the non-European world and constructions of Western identities" [57]. This concept addresses inter alia the separation between the Western and the Oriental when it comes to the reason why each party wages war. While Westerners pride themselves on waging war as an instrument in the service of politics, in accordance with the famous Clausewitzian dictum that "war is the continuation of politics by other means," they relegate the Easterners' motivation for war, or any other form of armed violence, to its primordial form, that is to religion and other cultural self-expression [48]. By so doing, they clearly strip their oriental enemies of any political agency and thereby of humanity, given Aristotle's definition of humans as "political Animals." This implies that Orientals are incapable of having political qualms and that their grievances are as simply manifestations of unintelligible religious, cultural or irrational gesticulations. Thus, while war in the Western realm is conceptualized as instrumental in the service of politics, as per the definition of Clausewitz, Iraqis' warring reactions, on the wake of the invasion, were portrayed as being waged for other reasons than the pursuit of definite political ends, like ejecting the invaders. To this end, Islamic culture, religion and the Arab mind were assigned great explanatory powers when it came to interpreting the armed struggle of the Iraqis, once they did not live up to the American invaders expectations of welcoming them "with flowers and sweets" [49]. Thus, after the bulk of the Iraqi military ceased the fighting following the entry of American troops into Baghdad, "the forces confronting the coalition consisted primarily of Fedayeen" who were described as "a fanatical but poorly trained militia directly answerable to Saddam's son Uday" [50]. It is, however, not clear in which sense the adjective "fanatical" for the Fedayeen was used as the religious overtones do obviously not apply to Uday, depicted in Western media as a notoriously secular and debauched individual. Still, it is clear this depiction was all in keeping with the "classic orientalist image" of "insurgents defined [exclusively] by their religious fanaticism" [51]. More broadly, the American Military wholeheartedly

⁷ The concept of disenchantment was borrowed from Friedrich Schiller by Max Weber to describe the character of modernized, bureaucratic, secularized Western society.

embraced what Derek Gregory terms as the “Cultural Turn in the War on Terror” [52]. By virtue of this Turn, they came to construe the Islamic culture of Oriental Iraqis, not political motivations, as an “omnipotent force that determines every act of violent behavior” [53]. The Turn’s objective as stated by Montgomery McFate, its leading civilian scholar and engineer, was “to confront an enemy so deeply moored in history and theology” [54].

5 CONCLUSION

In many aspects, the war on Iraq illustrates the way the Bush Administration marshalled religion for the attainment of the political consensus about the 2003 “war of choice”, both domestically and internationally. The “faith-based” Administration also made willful use of religious references to galvanize the American public and rally its “willing” allies, in its effort to implement its belligerent foreign policy. As part of its Orientalist outlook, it interwove through particular linguistic choices of religion, ideology, and myths, so as to stir within the public opinion emotions of fright, hatred and self-righteousness vis-à-vis the Iraqis. Its rhetorical strategies for the war revolved around a host of orientalist religious binaries, medieval imageries and biblical allusions. It also used the religion of the “other” to outrightly dismiss Iraqis’ resistive actions. When resistance materialized, it was immediately downplayed as primordially motivated by purely metaphysical and cultural impetuses instead of political or patriotic drives, thus placing resistance beyond the realm of reason and intelligibility.

All things considered, contrary to Orientalist conceptions, religion as a powerful motivator and mobilizer does not reside exclusively with the non-Western other when it comes to waging war, as the 2003 War on Iraq has clearly demonstrated. Conversely, awareness of the relevance of the religious factor for both Western militaries and Oriental ‘insurgents’ in warfare is susceptible of restoring the latter protagonist to the “political sphere” and to human society at large, for the benefit of a balanced security approach to “insurgency” and conflict resolution in general.

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