

Editorializing 9/11

A News Discourse Analysis of the *Asahi Shinbun*, the *New Straits Times*, and the *New York Times*

By

Tan Chee Kuan and Tan Ban Chong

Shingetsu Electronic Journal of Japanese-Islamic Relations

Volume 1

March 2007

Abstract

This study analyzes interpretations of 9/11 in the editorials of the *Asahi Shinbun* (Japan), the *New Straits Times* (Malaysia) and the *New York Times* (U.S.) for a two-month period from September 12 to November 12, 2001. News discourse analysis methods are applied to examine textual structures for topics or themes beyond sentences within the editorials. This study seeks to analyze the overall characterization of 9/11, the contextualization (causes) of the event, and the perceived consequences and recommended response by the newspapers. The findings suggest that the newspapers have limited news frames in their contextualization of 9/11, with the differences in their arguments reflecting their respective country's national interests, and to a certain extent, the cultural values of their society. In the aftermath of 9/11, terrorism has become more of an imminent peril than a theoretical one for many people around the world. The news media may report on people being terrorized by a wide range of events, but it is the limited framing of such events in the news that runs the risk of stoking public fears.

Tan Chee Kuan is an editorial staff member at the Kuala Lumpur Bureau of the *Nihon Keizai Shinbun*.

Tan Ban Chong is a teaching assistant at the Department of Japanese Studies, National University of Singapore.

Introduction

On September 11, 2001, the United States of America came under terrorist attack when two hijacked commercial airplanes crashed into New York's World Trade Center (WTC) and brought down the twin towers. In Washington, a third plane plunged into the Pentagon. Another crashed in Pittsburgh, apparently headed for either the White House or Capitol Hill. Three thousand perished, and several thousand others were wounded. The following day, U.S. President George W. Bush denounced the attacks as an "act of war"¹ against the U.S. The catastrophe received instant worldwide media coverage as raw images of the attacks were disseminated through televisions, radios, and print media. After the initial shock had subsided, a period of intense discussion and debate followed, especially in mainstream newspapers, as to what the attacks meant to the U.S. and to the international community. While there were some who regarded the attacks as an insensible act of war, there were also those who downplayed them as an international crime. The interpretation of 9/11 varied across newspapers, particularly from one country to another. In a show of patriotism, newspapers in the U.S. appeared to focus on the notion of war, and thus supported the U.S. government's call for retaliation. However, opinions differed in other societies, especially in countries with a Muslim majority, or even in countries with presumably close ties to the U.S. It is in the contextualization of 9/11 that newspapers of different countries or political color show the widest distribution of opinions. This study seeks to understand the explanations offered by the editorials in order to assess the saliency of their interpretations from the viewpoint of the news media. The guiding research questions are to look for themes used to characterize 9/11. These include (i) how 9/11 was defined and how the causes of the attacks were contextualized, and (ii) what the perceived consequences and proposed reactions to the attacks were. In the context of this study, such circumscribed clarification will reveal why certain newspapers chose to focus on the causes of the attacks rather than on the solutions to the problem.

Studies of Editorials

Since the editorial column is one of the limited sections within a newspaper that affords the editor space to self-consciously express opinions, it provides an insight into the interplay of editorial policy and public politics in response to the attacks. The editorials analyzed in this paper are said to reflect most of the main themes highlighted in other type of news media coverage, which the authors have categorized as imperialism, 'blowback' (or backlash to

¹ *New York Times*, September 12, 2001.

U.S. foreign policy), state decline, and the clash of civilizations. Taylor and Jasparo² loosely put these labels under the term “Islamism,” and adopt the following definition as to its meaning:

A hybrid and simplistic blend of Islamic fundamentalism that seeks to eradicate all other forms of Islam other than its own strict literal interpretation of the Koran. It comes packaged with a set of now well-known political grievances, often directed at U.S. foreign policy, and justifies violence as a means of purging nations of corruption, moral degradation, and spiritual torpor. (p.35)

In their study of sixty editorials in newspapers and magazines all over the world, Jonathan Taylor and Chris Jasparo found that editorials provide a good cross-section explanatory framework used to understand the 9/11 attacks. In another study of the *New York Times* editorial page after 9/11, Jack Lule discloses a notable omission on the issue of perpetrators in the editorial page.³ Lule’s study analyzed the editorials from the perspective of myth, and revealed how the *New York Times* drew from four crucial myths to portray the event: The End of the Innocence (everything has changed), The Victims (that we might have been), The Heroes (amid the horror), and The Foreboding Future (as horrible as it is to imagine). The study observed that the absence of the Enemy myth, which can be an important myth to rally support for retaliation, signifies the paper’s choice to avoid being confrontational. The focus was instead directed towards the suffering of the American people.

Newspapers published during a terrorist incident like 9/11 attacks can also act as propaganda for the establishment. In order to avoid being seen as sympathetic to the cause of terrorists or be used by them to send any detrimental message, news media are expected to be aware of their operative role in the terror syndrome, and to cooperate with law enforcement.⁴ In a study of the response to 9/11 by Singapore’s *Straits Times*, Norway’s *Afterposten*, *The New York Times* and the *International Herald Tribune*, Beate Josephi found that the propaganda function of the media in a country involved directly in a crisis—in this case, the U.S.—is more likely to occur.⁵ Furthermore, the result of the study also showed that geographic proximity plays a role in deciding how other countries respond to the attacks.

² Jonathan Taylor and Chris Jasparo, in Stanley D. Brunn, ed., “Editorials and Geopolitical Explanations for 11 September,” *11 September and Its Aftermath: The Geopolitics of Terror*, Frank Cass, 2004, pp. 217-52.

³ Jack Lule, “Myth and Terror on the Editorial Page: The *New York Times* Responds to 9/11,” *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 275-294.

⁴ James J. Onder (1999), as quoted in Pamala L. Griset and Sue Mahan, eds., *Terrorism in Perspective*, Sage Publications, 2003, p. 134.

⁵ Beate Josephi, “Media Terrorism or Culture of Peace: Reporting 9/11,” in S. Venkatraman, ed., *Media in a Terrorized World*, Eastern University Press, 2004, pp. 34-51.

It is said that with an increase in the distance between the country hit by the crisis and the country receiving news about the crisis, the more likely it is for the latter's news media to reflect on its own country's national interest in their news coverage. In this sense, editorials can be seen as ideological, limiting and channeling the interpretation of events, and legitimating the response of the authorities deliberately.

The fact that the influence of national culture can produce different interpretations of the same event is shown in various studies. For example, Frank Louis Rusciano analyzed how newspapers conceptualized world opinion towards the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11 by studying the content of ten international newspapers.⁶ The study found that diverse frames, rather than any clear consensus, were offered to interpret the attacks in different newspapers as to the meaning of 9/11. Similarly, Todd M. Schaefer examined the coverage of the 1998 U.S. Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania, as well as the 9/11 attacks. He concluded that journalists would search for a "local angle" in a context that relates to domestic perceptions, regardless of whether events happened at home or abroad. In addition, it was perceived that when an attack occurred at home, newspapers tended to focus more on the "criminal disaster" side of the story, such as rescue efforts, plight of the victims, and investigations of the act. On the contrary, when an attack occurred on foreign land, there would be greater emphasis on the causes and implications of the attacks. Accordingly, both the American and African newspapers were found to be "ethnocentric in putting their own concerns and structural frames first and not challenging what they already thought about the other."⁷ The national perspective revealed in a newspaper's editorials during a conflict can also reflect the display of sensitivity by a particular country vis-à-vis an allied country with which it shares strategic interests. In a study of six newspaper editorials in the conflict zone during the Gulf War in 1990 by Chrisco,⁸ editorials of newspapers in countries that were considered allies of the U.S. were explicitly less critical of the U.S. The study concluded that newspapers in Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which were all allied to the U.S., appeared to focus on demonizing the perpetrator, Saddam Husain, but refrained from discussing the issue of oil. In contrast, newspapers in non-U.S. allied countries like Syria, Iran, and Jordan openly criticized the U.S. for its interventionist policy and presumed aims of controlling oil in the region.

⁶ Frank Louis Rusciano, "Framing World Opinion in the Elite Press," in Pippa Norris; Montague Kern; and Marion Just, eds., *Framing Terrorism*, Routledge, 2003, pp. 159-79.

⁷ Todd M. Schaefer, "Framing the U.S. Embassy Bombings and 9/11 Attacks in African and U.S. Newspapers," in Pippa Norris; Montague Kern; and Marion Just, eds., *Framing Terrorism*, Routledge, 2003, p.110.

⁸ Carrie Chrisco, *Reactions to the Persian Gulf War: Editorials in the Conflict Zone*, University Press of America, 1995, pp. 118-9.

Methodology

Data Selection

This study will attempt to analyze the different interpretations of 9/11 in the major news media of three different countries with dissimilar cultures, political traditions, and different if not contradictory national interests. Specifically, it will examine the editorials of the *Asahi Shinbun*, the *New Straits Times*, and the *New York Times*, which are leading newspapers of Japan, Malaysia, and the U.S. A total of 196 editorials (*Asahi Shinbun* -- 53, *New Straits Times* -- 30, *New York Times* -- 113) over a two-month period starting from September 12, 2001 were chosen for analysis. While arbitrary, it is assumed that this period is sufficient to garner how 9/11 was being interpreted by the newspapers. Newspapers were chosen for this study as they are easily available and consistent in their coverage of news on a daily basis. They provide a common format, especially the editorial column, which offers serious news analysis and commentaries that may not be available in other news media such as television.

The countries were selected due to the differences in their national and journalistic culture. It is said that the cultural traditions of both the society within which the journalist operates and their own professional practice, can lead to potentially different presentations of reality,⁹ and that the media arguably reflects these values.¹⁰ Japanese cultural values have been described by some scholars like Chie Nakane¹¹ and Takeo Doi¹² using the “group” model (*shudan shakai*), where people are presumed to act within the framework of a group hierarchy and where individual interest is subordinated to group consensus. Although such characterization of the Japanese people is highly contested, the behavioral pattern centering on one’s attachment to a group is still generally observable in Japanese society. Conversely, American cultural values place importance on individual rights, freedom, democracy, and capitalism. Malaysian culture is generally a complex composition of the traits of its multiethnic groups which consists of Malay, Chinese, Indian, and other indigenous people, all of which have very different religious and traditional customs. Thus, the practice of religious sensitivity and respect for one another’s culture are commonly echoed in the Malaysian media. In addition, since Islam is the official religion of the country and the majority Malay community, Islamic traits and practices are widely observed in

⁹ Todd M. Schaefer, p. 96.

¹⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, Norton, New York, 1996.

¹¹ Chie Nakane, *Japanese Society*, University of California Press, 1972.

¹² Takeo Doi, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1973.

Malaysia.

In addition, the countries chosen have very different national interests. Japan regards its bilateral relation with the U.S., especially the Japan-U.S. security alliance, as the axis of its diplomatic relations, while it remains committed to forging a closer relationship with other countries.¹³ In the context of the renewed focus on the threat of terrorism highlighted by 9/11, Japan has resolved to work closer with countries in the Persian Gulf, which it relies on for over eighty percent of its oil resources, to realize peace and stability in the region.¹⁴ In contrast, Malaysia's relations with the U.S. are mainly focused on bilateral trade and at the same time, being a Muslim country, it is critical of U.S. foreign policy in the Islamic world. Meanwhile, the U.S., being the country attacked, would presumably place 9/11 as their core issue for immediate action.

Framework for Interpretation

The analysis will focus on these issues: The characterization of 9/11; the contextualization (causes or reasons) of the event; and the perceived consequences and recommended response. The methodology applied in this study is based on Teun van Dijk's news discourse analysis method in which textual structures are examined for topics or themes beyond sentences within a news article.¹⁵ The method analyzes the thematic structure within the text of news, but ignores syntactic, semantic, stylistic or rhetorical features of sentences. Such a method is limited to the analysis of news in the daily press, and does not pertain to the analysis of TV or radio news.

A theme or topic of a discourse refers to the most important information summarized out of an utterance. Thus, the thematic structure of a news discourse refers to the overall organization of a topic of the news. As it is the formal representation of the content of a text, it characterizes a part of the meaning of a text. Thematic structures are examined with the purpose of discovering themes and sub-themes discussed within the editorials. The process involves the semantic theory by which paragraphs within the editorials are examined to establish the macrostructures. The thematic structure also indicates the information in the text that is most important. In the analysis that follows, quotations taken from the editorials will be cited in the sequence of month, date and headline. Citations of the *Asahi Shinbun* in

¹³ <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/other/bluebook/2003/chap1.pdf>, "Overview: The International Situation and Japanese Diplomacy in 2002," p.5. Accessed on May 20, 2004.

¹⁴ Ibid., Regional Diplomacy; The Middle East.

¹⁵ Teun A. van Dijk, *News as Discourse*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, 1988.

the study have been translated by the authors.

Analysis of Editorials

(i) Definition and Causes of 9/11

Characterizing 9/11

In defining 9/11, the *Asahi Shinbun* focused on the criminality aspect of terrorism, a theme that emerged most strongly in editorials published soon after the attacks, and that would resonate throughout the next two months. In an editorial on September 12 headlined “A Challenge to the World,” the *Asahi Shinbun* wrote, “Regardless of which criminal organization (that did it), it is definite that the target was America. However, terrorism is beyond America. It is a challenge to the world and the achievements of modern civilization.” Such an assertion is understandable, considering Japan’s standing as the second largest economy in the world, and its strategic alliance with the U.S., where the latter provides security through its military bases in Japan. Reflecting the threat of terrorism, in the same editorial, the *Asahi Shinbun* warned that “9/11 also poses as a challenge to our values. Japan needs to be cautious where U.S. bases are located.” Another editorial on September 14 (The Future Doesn’t Look Good) further cautioned that “[Since] a superpower country was the target of an unimaginable attack, Japan can be no exception.” Legally, “terrorism is unforgivable because it is an atrocious crime which tramples on the rule of law” (September 24, No Success without Cooperation). The *Asahi Shinbun* also depicted the alleged perpetrator Usama bin Ladin as a criminal, or *hanninzo*, and referred to terrorist groups as “organized criminals” (September 13, Don’t Fall Into a Trap). Such a framing of terrorists as organized criminals subject to the jurisdiction of criminal law explicitly excludes the involvement of the military in solving the problem.

Like the *Asahi Shinbun*, the *New Straits Times* dwelt on the criminality theme as well, but with an emphasis on the roots of the problem. The *New Straits Times* argued that the coordinated attacks on America were “crimes that have to be dealt with by the whole world and resolved at the roots” (September 16, Our Battle Together). It insisted that it was a crime of the oppressed as “we must realize that terrorism cannot exist in a vacuum. It arises from a cesspool of hatred and enmity among people who are desperate and believe their struggle to be just” (September 13, A Dastardly Act). On the issue of who the perpetrator was, the

New Straits Times cast doubt on the credibility of Usama bin Ladin as the main culprit. "The U.S. must be certain of the targets it intends to pursue, and the judgment of Usama bin Ladin's guilt, or anyone else for that matter, should be based on hard evidence rather than on circumstantial evidence" (September 23, Act Justly).

While both the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *New Straits Times* attempted to cushion the impact of 9/11 by reducing the attacks from "terrorism" to "crime," the *New York Times* expanded it to a "war." Its editorial on the terrorist attacks was more of a reflection of the official stance of the U.S. government, which perceived the attacks on 9/11 as an act of war. In order to establish the case for the sacrifice and suffering that had been and would be endured by the American people, it urged the nation to come to terms with the attacks. An editorial on September 12 (*An Unfathomable Attack*) proclaimed that things were no longer the same as before; 9/11 "is one of those moments in which history splits, and we define the world as *before* and *after*." It is an occasion where "civilians who suddenly found their country at war and themselves under attack managed to frame some memory of life as it once was... We look back at sunrise yesterday through pillars of smoke and dust, down streets snowed under with the atomized debris of the skyline, and we understand that everything has changed" (Ibid). The newspaper consoled a nation in grief and pleaded for solidarity while urging the nation to be united, and to garner the necessary courage to live on (September 13, *The Necessary Courage*). Americans were called to return to normalcy, albeit one that was different from a week ago: "Americans now live in a state of war against an irrational, vengeful and elusive enemy. And if we are to win, we will have to become used to the idea that we are in this for the long haul. Coming to terms with the new reality, winning this war, will require discipline, stamina and sacrifice" (September 16, *In for the Long Haul*). The *New York Times* appealed to Americans to be more committed than they were during World War Two, to be prepared for more casualties than the Vietnam War, and to be more resilient in the face of a war longer than the one fought in the Persian Gulf and the Balkans (Ibid).

In summary, the war on terrorism was seen by the *New York Times* as America's "right to strike back against its assailants, wherever they may be" (September 22, *Calibrating the Use of Force*). It considered it in a larger context as "the eradication or at least the containment of terrorism," and saw such a task as America's moral responsibility because "our shared mission, to eradicate terrorism, is a noble one. The rewards for victory would be immense -- a safer world and a planetary commitment to cooperation and tolerance" (September 16, *In for the Long Haul*). However, the *Asahi Shinbun* regarded the U.S.'s fight against the assailants of 9/11 as "revenge" or "an eye for an eye," and the *New Straits Times*

called it “a reprisal for the loss of American lives.” This kind of sharply divided understanding of the issue underlies each newspaper’s perception of the roots of the problem and subsequently the consequences and the recommendations to resolve terrorism.

Causes

In identifying the roots of terrorism in the 9/11 attacks, both the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *New Straits Times* looked into *what*, as opposed to the *New York Times*’ *who* causes terrorism. One similar point made by the Japanese and Malaysian newspapers is the backlash from American foreign policy. The *Asahi Shinbun* noted that the U.S.’s policy in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict was perceived by the Arab and the Muslim world as reflecting a double standard, and as such, had given the terrorists an excuse to justify their actions. Specifically, it pointed out the fact that Israel had been occupying the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967, despite a U.N. resolution ordering it to retreat. The U.S.’s inaction in this regard had fuelled dissatisfaction in the Arab world, something which had been enhanced by the Bush Administration’s attempt to force a resolution on the Taliban to handover Usama bin Ladin. Deriding the U.S. for keeping its eyes closed to the plight of the Palestinians, the newspaper wrote, “The scenes of destruction carried out by Israeli soldiers and Palestinians overcome by grief have been aired throughout the year. In the eyes of many people, Israel appeared solely as the oppressor. The U.S., which has kept silent all the while, has been viewed with contempt” (October 18, Let It Not Be an Excuse). It further argued in the same editorial that President Bush should honor the existence of Palestine as a state as it could “cool down the hotbed of terrorism” in the region.

In the *New Straits Times*’ first editorial published on the terrorist attacks in America, the newspaper immediately pointed out that, “It is obvious that the perpetrators believed they were the victims of U.S. policies and actions and they were settling a blood debt” (September 13, A Dastardly Act). One editorial argued that, “In the psyche of most Muslims...the victims represented in the violent rage of the terrorist as victims of U.S. fundamentalism whose military, strategic and economic power have caused them untold misery” (October 2, We Can Play A Big Role). More directly, the newspaper stated that the “U.S. foreign policy of being Israel’s staunchest supporter and protector” (October 7, Moment Of Truth) is partly to blame for the escalating Palestine-Israel conflict. In fact, the *New Straits Times* was the only newspaper that directly confronted Israel, a country that Malaysia has no diplomatic relations with, for the “atrocities” inflicted upon the Palestinians. Israel’s hostility was perceived as not only leading to the rise of terrorism, but also as an

obstacle in the battle against terrorism. The *New Strait Times* wrote, "Israel's partial re-occupation of six Palestinian towns and its intransigence has scuttled U.S. efforts to calm the uprising and allow it to wage its anti-terror campaign in Afghanistan with solid Arab backing" (October 25, U.S. Must Be Even Handed). It stressed that by removing the root causes, "especially the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people... the anger and hatred among Muslims against the U.S." (October 22, New Era in Malaysia-U.S. Ties) would be reduced dramatically. The editorial recognized the creation of a separate Palestinian state, and urged the U.S. to follow suit (Ibid). It was also bold enough to suggest that the Palestinian uprising against the Israelis should be regarded as a struggle for self-determination rather than construed as terrorism (October 5, Know Our Enemy).

On the contrary, the *New York Times* viewed Palestine as part of the problem of terrorism. When Palestinian gunmen killed Israel's tourism minister, the newspaper called it a "disturbing escalation of Palestinian terrorism against Israeli democracy" (October 19, New Bloodshed in the Middle East). It also implied that the Palestinian authority had been sheltering terrorist groups that are opposed to the Oslo peace agreement. Against Palestinian violence, Israel was portrayed as reacting righteously. Any military action launched by Israel in Palestinian-controlled areas was considered as a result of the "provocation" by the Palestinians and the failure of the Palestinian authority to curb terrorism. The *New York Times* stated that, "No one expected Israel to stand by passively..." and that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon "was correct" to demand that the Palestinian Authority live up to its obligation under the Oslo agreement (October 26, New Battles On The West Bank). The escalating Palestinian-Israeli violence was the only problem to the American newspaper, since it affected the efforts made by the U.S. to hold together a coalition of nations against Usama bin Ladin and his terrorist networks (Ibid).

Another theme of the 9/11 attacks was the dissatisfaction with globalization, found in all three newspapers. The *Asahi Shinbun* reckoned that there was a possibility that those who felt left out by the changes wrought by globalization had directed their discontent at the U.S., which was the only superpower that emerged from the Cold War (September 12, A Global Challenge). In the same regard, the *New Straits Times* also drew attention to the plight of the "stranded minorities, the dispossessed and the impoverished majority" (October 5, Know Our Enemy). Its editorial argued, "For all their barbarity, terrorist acts are a sigh of the oppressed" (October 16, Don't Slam the Door). The *New York Times'* editorial too, acknowledged that the roots of terrorism lay in economic and political problems in many parts of the world. Concurring with the *Asahi Shinbun*, its editorial wrote that the end of the

Cold War had brought about a resurgence of ethnic hatred that was often stifled by the superpower conflicts. Furthermore, distaste for Western civilization and cultural values had fuelled terrorism (September 12, *The National Defense*). However, such acknowledgements on the part of the *New York Times* appeared rather general and vague, as the cause of the terrorism of 9/11 was attributed primarily to Usama bin Ladin.

(ii) Consequences and the Proposed Reactions

In this regard, the *Asahi Shinbun* took up a “victimization of Islam” theme. It highlighted the plight of Muslims in America who were assaulted in the aftermath of 9/11. An editorial on September 15 (*Avoid a Clash of Civilizations*) wrote, “A majority of the one billion Muslims worldwide are peaceful people. We should not let the fight against terrorism escalate into a clash of civilizations.” It noted that poverty and helplessness in Muslim countries was what lay beneath the terrorists’ aim to “set up Islam against the West in a clash of civilizations” (October 8, *Help the Refugees*). Furthermore, the newspaper warned that terrorists would capitalize on the issue of refugees that surfaced as a result of the U.S.-led bombings in Afghanistan to advance their violent acts. By setting up the terrorists as culprits, the Japanese newspaper obviously wanted to avoid upsetting the U.S. as well as the Islamic world. This leads to another aspect of the problem of Muslims brought up by the *Asahi Shinbun*, namely, helplessness. Although the problem was traced to a failure to catch up with globalization as mentioned earlier, the editorial implied that it was the incapability of Muslim societies that had led to the malaise confronting them. The editorial’s general assessment of Muslim society is that they are comprised of different ethnicities and tribes, and are unstable not only because of poverty, but also because of the lack of commonalities apart from their faith. They have failed in terms of economic development, and have to depend on richer countries like the U.S. and Japan for foreign aid. Some of them can only send their children to religious schools, which offer free food and shelter, but some of these schools turn them into Taliban-like extremists (October 10, *Pakistan, An Ambiguous Country in Agony*). The widespread anti-U.S. sentiment, or *hanbeikanjo*, only served to show that their society was in denial, and 9/11 only reinforced the fear of non-Muslims towards them. Consequently, the *Asahi Shinbun* cautioned that Muslims should not be agitated, as they were an indispensable part of the U.S.-led anti-terrorism campaign. One editorial explained, “If errant bombings and civilian casualties continue to rise, an intensified anti-American demonstration will be unavoidable, and this will result in political instability in Pakistan and other Islamic countries” (Ibid). In addition, it suggested that aid should be given to Muslim countries to help them eradicate poverty, and to ensure that children in these places receive

proper education. The October 19 editorial (In Search of Coexistence and Co-Prosperity) suggested, "Tackling poverty problems head on and improving living standards are the main measures in stamping out terrorism... and could lead to the progress of democracy in many Asian countries."

The stereotyping of Muslims as presented by the *Asahi Shinbun* was not necessarily true, as far as the *New Straits Times* was concerned. 9/11 provided its editorial with an opportunity to present another facet of Muslim society to challenge the misconceptions about Muslim countries like Malaysia. Its editorials attempted to project Malaysia as a moderate Muslim country that did not promote extremism. One editorial wrote, "The Government has always been an advocate of moderation... We have a consistent record in deploring violence in any form since independence... We fought with fervour the threat of the Communist insurgency in the early years... The Al-Ma'unah incident¹⁶ and the recent problem posed by militants¹⁷ are examples of us getting to the root cause and nipping the menace in the bud" (September 26, They Are Lies). When Malaysia was implicated in the anthrax scare by a letter sent from Malaysia, the *New Strait Times* declared, "The U.S. must not infantilize nations supporting anti-terrorism efforts such as Malaysia... Prejudices are major obstacles to information-sharing, a disservice to the shared goal of extinguishing global terrorism. Don't slam the door on your friends" (October 16, Don't Slam the Door). When Malaysians visiting the U.S. were subjected to strict immigration restrictions by Washington, along with other Muslim countries, one editorial argued, "Even before the 9/11 attacks on the U.S., Malaysia has on its own taken strong measures to stamp out terrorist activities" (November 12, Why Malaysia as Well?). The *New Straits Times'* defensive manner was not only confined to correcting the misconceptions of Malaysia, but also to the equating of terrorism with Islam, and of Muslim societies as being backward, unstable, and powerless.

The *New Straits Times* also brought up the problem of discrimination faced by Muslims in the wake of 9/11. However, the editorial's arguments were different from those of the *Asahi Shinbun*. Instead of accusing the terrorists as pitting themselves against Muslims, the *New Straits Times* pointed the finger at the "West." The newspaper pointed out, "It is unfortunate that the attacks on America and the concomitant reactions in the West have led to the victimization of Islam and the recrudescence of hatreds against the Muslims. A deep

¹⁶ Refers to an outlawed Islamic group which tried to overthrow the government via armed struggle in 2000.

¹⁷ Refers to the Islamic militant group called *Kumpulan Militan Malaysia* whose members have allegedly undergone military training in Afghanistan. Its members -- some from the opposition party Pas -- have been imprisoned under the Internal Security Act since 2001.

concern is the misconception of terrorism as an irreducible violence of a borderless polity based on exclusionary religious absolutism, Islam” (October 7, Moment of Truth). The editorial blamed such prejudice on “Western liberal discourse that constructs the idea of a rabidly fundamental Islam—a tangible antagonist stance that allows the Westerners to subsequently assert their superior liberal qualities over the others” (September 16, Our Battle Together). The *New Straits Times* deplored such discourses for demonizing Islam and demeaning Muslims in the post-9/11 world order. It went on to quote examples of work by Western intellectuals such as Samuel Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations*, which declared Islam to be a “source of global instability” (October 17, Reclaim the True Jihad), and Salman Rushdie for implying that Islamic countries were governed by a theocracy (November 19, So, It Isn’t About Islam). Even the renowned writer V.S. Naipaul, who won the Nobel Prize in 2001, was not spared. One editorial sarcastically asked, “Where would the likes of V.S. Naipaul be if they had no dark nations to agitate their sensibilities? What would their political relevance be if they do not satisfy the basic urge of erstwhile missionaries to preach the message of moral superiority to those of low GNP?” (October 15, Nothing But Chicanery).

In the *New York Times*, one of the repercussions of the attacks highlighted by its editorials was that the threat of terrorism in America had become more real and prolonged. The attacks had changed American “perception of the malevolence and determination of today’s terrorist... their desire for mass casualties and their deep-seated hatred of Americans leave little doubt that they would even escalate to even more dreadful weapons if they could” (September 26, The Specter of Biological Terror). The editorial reasoned that it was almost impossible to distinguish terrorists from ordinary people (September 12, An Unfathomable Attack). Amid the government’s declared war on terrorism, Americans were asked to prepare themselves for changes in their daily life, and to brace themselves for a “period of considerable inconvenience” (September 16, In for the Long Haul) in air travel, loss of jobs, and the possibility of increasing casualties from further terror attacks as well as military assaults carried out in other countries. The discovery of anthrax spores in New York a month after the 9/11 attacks further crystallized this fear. The newspaper described the threat as having “heightened concern in a nation that was already jittery and waiting for the next terrorist act to occur” (October 13, Anthrax in New York). The editorial then went on to dispel the people’s anxiety by explaining the nature of anthrax, how it spread, and available treatments. It reassured people by noting that “it makes little sense” (Ibid) to panic and stockpile antibiotics as the authority was well prepared to deal with an outbreak. However, the editorial of the *New York Times* also wrote about the frustration of the U.S. turning into “a land of paradox” (October 31, Life in a Time of Terror) where Americans are told to go about

their normal life amid the increasing threat of terrorism without the necessary information to deal with it. A number of contrasting statements made by public officials on the anthrax fear seemed to worsen the situation. Another editorial rebuked, "The nation has been raised to a new level of anxiety on the basis of statements made by senators who are not experts on bio-terrorism and unnamed officials whose expertise is not clear" (October 18, New Anthrax Fear).

Solutions

All three newspapers in their respective editorials proposed that terrorism be resolved through international cooperation. However, the difference that set them apart within this theme was their individual arguments, which seemed to be based on their respective country's national interests and cultural values. The *Asahi Shinbun* insisted on non-military measures, as it was concerned that Japan, as a close ally of the U.S., may be pressured to participate in an armed campaign to fight terrorism. Such a move was also against the newspaper's stance, as it would mean a violation of Japan's pacifist constitution denouncing war as a means to settle international disputes. Instead, its editorials argued that the 9/11 attacks should be regarded as a crime to be confronted collectively by the international community. One editorial reasoned, "International terrorist organizations seem to have strengthened their networks and militarized. In order to deal with the widespread international terrorist crimes, there is no better way than for countries to establish close-knitted cooperation" (September 14, Resolve It through International Cooperation). It suggested that a world summit be convened to resolve the problem (Ibid). In addition, other non-military measures that made the best out of Japan's foreign policy strengths, such as giving aid to refugees, and cutting off illegal transactions involving terrorist funds, should be looked at (September 18, Get Rid of the Gulf War Syndrome). It insisted that the U.N. be given a mandate, as it was the only organization "capable of putting together different views of the international community and enforcing mandatory actions" (September 20, Security Council Should Hold Intensive Debate) to deal with 9/11. The newspaper also laid out the condition that Japan's support for the U.S.-led coalition be confined to "what is allowed under the constitution," (September 26, Dispatch of the Self-Defense Forces—A Risky Feeling) and that the U.S. had to "explain elaborately to the international community, specifying where and to what extent military action will be exercised" (Ibid). Even so, it was still adamant that Japan's role under the coalition be "very little" (October 9, Inevitable, If It's a Restricted Attack), in response to the passing of a new law by the government to allow the dispatch of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to Afghanistan. The editorial maintained that

the dispatch should be within the boundaries of the constitution, which restricted the SDF to non-combat duties (Ibid). Finally, the newspaper cautioned that Japan should not make itself an enemy of Muslim countries, which supplied Japan with more than eighty percent of its oil imports.

The *New Straits Times* was concerned about the “psychological divide” between the moderate and conservative within Islam, which was a leading cause of extremism that had become much of a problem in Muslim countries like Malaysia, as it was to the rest of the world. The editorial echoed the Malaysian government’s sentiment in addressing the issue of terrorism from the perspective of Muslims. It opined that the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), an inter-governmental organization of fifty six Muslim countries, should play a major role. The call came at a time when Malaysia, a non-Arab Muslim country, had been elected to host the OIC summit in 2003. The *New Straits Times* made full use of 9/11 to publicize Malaysia’s standing among the Muslim countries, as by hosting the OIC, Malaysia would also assume the chairmanship of the organization until the next summit. The newspaper was, not surprisingly, opposed to the military action carried out by the U.S., which its editorial perceived as imperialistic and unilateral (September 16, Our Battle Together). It reminded the U.S. that the support of the international community for a call by the U.S. to eliminate terrorism should not be seen as “unequivocal support for an unapologetic and implacable demonstration of American might and muscle” (September 23, Act Justly) to justify war on others. This was because, the editorial warned, “violence begets violence,” and would result in a surge of anti-Americanism among Muslims, and cause the possible isolation of Muslim countries at a time when their active involvement was most necessary (September 16, Our Battle Together).

The *New York Times*’ approach was the exploration of all means, including military operations, to bring the perpetrators to justice so as to appease domestic outcries as well as to reaffirm America’s moral responsibility as a superpower. Thus, while the *Asahi Shinbun*, for example, insisted on neutrality in reporting about the ongoing operation against terrorism, the *New York Times* asserted just the opposite. Its editorial proposed the use of the American media to counter anti-American sentiment and the radical views broadcast by Al Jazeera. Commenting on the Voice of America (VOA), a U.S. government funded radio program broadcast in fifty three languages worldwide, the editorial stated that VOA was a “credible alternative source of news for Muslims” and “for many people the only available counter to their governments’ propaganda” (October 10, Censorship in Pashto and Arabic). Al Jazeera was alleged to be a radical medium which “slants its news with a vicious

anti-Israel and anti-America bias and if it becomes so ideological that it is not interested in non-radical views, then the West can start its own Arabic satellite channel" (Ibid). The *New York Times* reiterated that to be effective, the operation against terrorism should be an extensive combination of military action, economic sanctions, diplomacy, intelligence, and united international support. The editorial suggests that a "concerted and sustained pressure" (September 15, War Without Illusion) might possibly change the behavior of countries that sponsored terrorist activities. More importantly, the *New York Times* argued that the involvement of these countries would avoid creating an impression that the U.S. was waging a war against Islam. The editorial cautioned that "Washington must guard against the perception abroad that the war against terrorism is simply another form of American arrogance or even the enforced expansion of globalization to nations that already resent the spread of Western culture and commerce" (September 21, Calibrating the Use Of Force).

On the issue of the escalating Palestine-Israel conflict, the *New York Times* regarded the dispute as an "obstacle" which affected the credibility of the U.S.-led coalition forces. The October 5 editorial (Diplomatic Balance in the Mideast) wrote, "With bloodshed between Israelis and Palestinians now seen as an obstacle to enlisting Arab states in an antiterrorism coalition... the Bush administration must be careful that... it does not tilt unfairly toward the Palestinians simply to facilitate its coalition-building." The newspaper considered any military action carried out by the Israelis to be due to the provocation of "Palestinian terrorism" (October 19, New Bloodshed in the Middle East) and the lack of commitment by the Palestinian authority to solve the problem. Unlike the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *New Straits Times*, the *New York Times* did not consider Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and armed response against the Palestinians as the cause of terrorism, and the issue of recognizing a Palestinian statehood did not surface.

Domestic Issues

Through their editorials, newspapers also sought to give priority to domestic concerns that had arisen due to 9/11. The worry over an imminent global recession following the attacks in America allowed the *Asahi Shinbun* to expose the weakness in the Japanese economy. Reasoning that the Japanese economy was already weak even before the attacks, its editorial urged the government to improve Japan's financial system by tackling the declining stock market, non-performing loans (NPL), and deficit, and that terrorism should not be used as an excuse for the country's economic maladies (September 13, Avoid Chaos in the

International Economy). In addition, it also cautioned that if military action began in Afghanistan, economic instability would affect not only the financial market, but also the food and oil imports of Japan (September 17, *World Economy on the Edge*). In the *Asahi Shinbun's* view, Japan as a prominent economic player should mitigate the impact of terrorism on the world economy, i.e., the terrorism-inflicted slump or *tero fukyo* (September 22, *Resolving NPL Is Also an International Contribution*). Another domestic issue addressed by the *Asahi Shinbun's* editorial was the plight of Okinawa's economy. The threat of an impending terrorist attack in Japan had caused the prefecture's tourism industry, one of its three main revenues apart from the military bases and public works, to suffer badly. The situation worsened with media reports spreading rumors that the U.S.'s military facilities on the island were being targeted. The editorial noted that "terrorism had exposed the harsh reality of the island, which was surrounded by military bases" (November 5, *Okinawa and Terrorism*). The sympathetic attention given to the Okinawan issue is understandable as the newspaper is known for its pacifist stance.

The participation of Muslims in the fight against terrorism was deemed crucial by the *New Straits Times* because it has acknowledged a division in Islam between the moderate and the conservative that contributed to the problem of violence. "Fervent ideologists have misconstrued the religion to advance their political agenda," the editorial explained (October 2, *We Can Play a Bigger Role*). 9/11 was a menace to the more progressive Muslim majority as it gave the religion a bad name, instigated prejudice from non-Muslims, and distorted the cause of the oppressed (September 23, *Act Justly*). Thus, Muslims themselves had a role to play in the fight against terrorism. First, it called for the supervision of religious schools "since militant Islam is at the core of the curriculum" (September 19, *Greater Vigilance Needed*). Second, in order to curb the activities of hardliners, it recommended that strict pre-emptive laws such as the use of Internal Security Act (ISA) practiced in Malaysia should be maintained (October 1, *De-Link the Extremists*). Third, it pushed for the greater involvement of Muslim countries in the U.S.-led coalition so as to close the gap between Islam and the West.

As for the *New York Times*, its focus was to blame the poor coordination among the thirteen different intelligence agencies for failing to prevent the 9/11 attacks (November 4, *The Spy Puzzle*), and suggested a fundamental reassessment of U.S. intelligence and defense activities. Specifically, in order to respond to the threat of 9/11-like low tech attacks, it called for the U.S. military to move beyond training for conventional warfare, and to opt for much bolder changes; U.S. forces should replace expensive weapons with more practical

armaments: lightweight, fast-moving armor for the army, long-range bombers and unmanned aircraft that could be used for striking enemy targets as well as reconnaissance for the air force; and smaller, cheaper arsenal ships with the ability to engage in long-term warfare for the navy (September 30, Remaking the Military). The U.S. government's proposal for new federal regulations to oversee airport security was also welcomed (October 15, Making It Safer to Fly), and it further urged the government to enhance the inspection of incoming foreign visitors and those already in the country (October 5, Terrorism and Immigration).

Discussion

The methods of characterizing the 9/11 attacks by the *Asahi Shinbun*, the *New Straits Times*, and the *New York Times* correspond to what has been described in previous studies on media coverage of terrorism: only limited frames have been relied upon to depict violent acts. In fact, there is a tendency by the news media to oversimplify and resort to stereotyping due to overzealous reporting and limited public attention to the issue. In the aftermath of 9/11, news media around the world rushed to report on factual information as well as to interpret the attacks. One of the more common news frames presented is the question of defining what terrorism is, and what its root causes are. Also, news media tried to map out the possible repercussions of the attacks on the home country, as well as on the world's economic and political order. At the same time, solutions to the problem are explored from many different angles circumscribed by the national interest of their home country and other structural guidelines, such as organizational policy. In essence, by organizing complex news topics around distinctive arguments and themes while concurrently downplaying others, journalists help to shape an issue's deeper meanings and implications for the public.¹⁸ Even though the events of 9/11 were extraordinary, the reporting was shaped by frames that have long been in place to cover violence, terrorism and Islam. The focus was on the immediate reaction rather than the broader causes of the attacks or the existence of structural violence in global society.¹⁹ "Operating within a particular ideological system (be it free market, socialist, or Islamic), mass media workers consciously or unconsciously produce integration propaganda that serves the overall interest of elites."²⁰

¹⁸ Dhavan V. Shah; Mark D. Watts; David Domke; and David Fan, "News Framing and Cueing of Issue Regimes: Explaining Clinton's Approval in Spite of Scandal," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol.66, No. 3, p. 343.

¹⁹ Karim H. Karim, "Making Sense of the Islamic Peril," in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism after September 11*, Routledge, 2002, p.102.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

As mentioned earlier, interpretations of 9/11 by the three newspapers mirror some of the findings of the earlier study by Taylor and Jasparo,²¹ which classified the explanations of 9/11 by news media into imperialism, blowback, state decline, and the clash of civilizations. Framing of international news such as terrorism involves definition, shared norms, themes and meanings.²² Analysis of the editorials of the three newspapers reveals similarities and differences in their arguments. Both the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *New Straits Times* share more parallels in their themes in characterizing 9/11 than they do with the *New York Times*. Although both editorials have similar arguments, the *New Straits Times* showed more animosity towards the U.S. as compared to the *Asahi Shinbun*, which expressed a level of moderation in its criticism of the U.S. as well as of Muslim countries. In interpreting 9/11, both the Japanese and Malaysian newspapers regarded it as a crime to be dealt with globally. Both condemned the deplorable act of terrorism, but refuted the notion of war as put forth by the U.S. While the *Asahi Shinbun* framed it in a universal theme by calling it a crime towards modern civilization, the *New Straits Times* called it the crime of the oppressed. On the other hand, 9/11 was simply a war to the *New York Times*, echoing the official tone of the U.S. government. The *New York Times'* editorials focused more on the issue of the perpetrators rather than the "global" and "structural" causes of the "war."

One of the more common explanations for 9/11 were the ideas associated with imperialism, with the *New Straits Times* editorials being the most assertive among the three newspapers analyzed in expressing such a discourse. It perceived 9/11 as a symbolic expression of anger against U.S. hegemony by people who had been exploited and forced to resort to violence to draw attention to their cause. The U.S. was targeted by these people simply because it was seen as a representative of the "West," which dictated global issues in a one-sided way that marginalizes the majority of non-Western countries. 9/11, according to the Malaysian newspaper, was also driven by resentment over the U.S.'s policy in the Palestine-Israel conflict. In the imperialism discourse, the U.S., as the representative of the West, was seen as the contributor, rather than as the victim of terrorism. Coming from a country with a Muslim majority, as far as the *New Straits Times* was concerned, U.S. support for an Israeli government that had dispossessed Palestinians of their property and dignity cast doubt on America's commitment to international justice. Hence, the U.S.'s use of force to deal with terrorism had allowed the Malaysian newspaper to substantiate its imperialism discourse: that "The U.S. should not act with imperial high-handedness in its crusade to end terrorism and to punish the states that sponsor terrorists" (September 16, Our Battle

²¹ Taylor and Jasparo, "Editorials and Geopolitical Explanations for 11 September."

²² Dhavan V. Shah, Mark D. Watts, David Domke and David Fan, p.340.

Together).

The discussions on imperialism were also observed in the *Asahi Shinbun*, although its criticism towards the “West” or America was not as sharp as that of the Malaysian newspaper. In reference to the U.S.’s position on the Palestine-Israel conflict, it simply cautioned that America’s support for the Israelis would only exaggerate the hatred among Muslims in West Asia and in other countries, but did not contemplate further on the morality of the issue. It focused on the widening gap between the poor and the rich as a result of globalization without attributing the cause to any particular country. Likewise, the *New York Times* did not deny that the roots of terrorism could lie in the disparity of income between the developed and developing countries. However, it did not hold America or any Western country directly responsible for creating such a gap, but instead acknowledged that it was the general distaste of Western civilization and cultural values that fuelled terrorism. This vague submission of disproportion was mentioned only in two minor paragraphs in the first editorial after the attacks, out of the 113 editorials analyzed over the two-month period.

Overall, the imperialism explanation was overshadowed by the theory of blowback, which was the focus of the *New York Times* on the backlash against U.S. foreign policies that created terrorists like Usama bin Ladin. In the *New York Times*’ editorials, the 9/11 terrorist act was masterminded by Usama bin Ladin, who opposed the stationing of American troops in his native Saudi Arabia during and after the Gulf War as a breach of his religious belief. Similarly, the newspaper also criticized the two American allies, namely, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, for the spread of terrorist networks in Afghanistan and in West Asia. The support and commitment pledged by Washington to the ruling monarch in Riyadh has instead led to the revival of Islamic fundamentalism in the kingdom in recent years. The fundamentalist forces regard such a relationship with contempt, as they are unable to accept the protection rendered by the U.S. to the Al Saud royal family, which is viewed as corrupt. Pakistan’s previous regime under Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, who had the support of the U.S., was accused of funding the freedom fighters in Afghanistan against an invasion by the Soviets, which led to the formation of the Taliban. In the context of 9/11, the *New York Times* claimed that terrorism was the inadvertent result of past American policies in West and Central Asia. Even so, the *New York Times*’ focus was on the ‘product’ of the policies, and not on the action of the political masters in Washington. The question of covert interventions carried out by Washington in other countries that produced the like of Usama bin Ladin never made it into the editorials analyzed.

The blowback discourse in the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *New Straits Times* did not come out as strongly as it had in the *New York Times*. The *Asahi Shinbun* briefly mentioned Usama bin Ladin's involvement in fighting against the Soviets in Afghanistan, and his contempt for the U.S.'s military bases in Saudi Arabia. All three newspapers were worried that the U.S.-led military action in Afghanistan would lead to a backlash of further chaos and anti-American sentiment in Muslim majority countries. While the Malaysian newspaper expressed concern for the sufferings of its Muslim brethren and the spread of extremism among the country's hardliners, the Japanese newspaper showed more anxiety towards the repercussions of the war on its frail economy.

The blowback explanation can sometimes overlap with the imperialism explanation. For instance, one can argue that the escalating violence between the Palestinians and Israelis was also the unintended result of U.S. foreign policy. However, what may seem to be unintended on the U.S. side may not appear to be so from the Malaysian and Japanese newspapers' point of view. As revealed in the *New Straits Times*' editorials, the U.S. has all along had the intention to side with the Israelis in denying the Palestinians their independence, while the *Asahi Shinbun* tried to warn the U.S. of the consequences if the matter was not solved amicably.

Another geopolitical explanation for the portrayal of 9/11 is the state decline theory. According to Taylor and Jaspardo, state decline refers to weak and failing states, plagued by corruption and a lack of strong legal institutions, that are unable to provide economic opportunities and services for their citizens, thereby creating environments suitable for terrorists to operate in.²³ Such a description is most obvious in both the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *New York Times*' arguments. In particular, the *Asahi Shinbun*, which advocates non-military actions to wipe out terrorism, stressed poverty and the inability of Muslim societies to modernize. These societies should be assisted and not be agitated with further military assaults. The newspaper also cautioned that Japan would make itself an adversary of Muslim countries should it participate in the U.S.-led coalition. The *New York Times*, on the other hand, was wary of the result of the military operation in Afghanistan on public opinion in Muslim societies. It painted a very grim picture of their societies, where political leadership is fragile and economic foundations are weak, where poverty plagues their overpopulated lands, and where religious zealotry is a constant threat to the ruling regimes. For instance, it warned that Pakistan, with its population of 142 million, posed a risk to the U.S. if fundamentalist groups within the country took control of the government. In contrast,

²³ Ibid., p.232.

not much was mentioned about the state decline issue in the *New Straits Times*. As a newspaper representing a Muslim majority country, such an issue was absent from its editorials. Instead, it propagated another image of a Muslim society; one that embraces modernity and is moderate in its practice of Islam. The Malaysian newspaper not only distanced itself from the extremists within the religion, but it attributed the bad publicity of Islam to religious fundamentalists. It was reluctant to link the decadence in some Muslim governments with the revival of fundamentalism, which partly mirrored the stand of its own Muslim majority government, and a society that is in self-denial. Instead, they focused on encouraging anti-Americanism sentiment as a “smoke screen” to deflect attention from the many failings of their government. Anti-Americanism is a useful tool for radical rulers, revolutionary movements, and even moderate regimes to build domestic support and pursue regional goals with no significant cost.²⁴ “Instead of responding to demands for democracy, human rights, higher living standards, less corruption or new leadership, rulers blame America for their own societies’ ills and refocus popular anger against it.”

Islamism

Islamism was widely discussed in the *New Straits Times*. The newspaper has particularly expressed displeasure at the application of the word Islam in describing the terrorists. Instead, it went to great lengths to explain the “psychological divide” within the religion, and tried to reclaim Islam from its association with such negative perceptions: “The point is violent ideas, images and acts are not the monopoly of any religion. History proves that all the major religion traditions have served as a resource, albeit via misinterpretation of violent actors. Should Timothy McVeigh’s quasi Christian beliefs and Usama bin Ladin’s faith be blamed or their psychotic abuse of religious moves and symbols?” (October 17, Reclaim the True Jihad)

In the *New York Times*, Islamism was conveniently employed to explain the ideology behind Usama bin Ladin, Al-Qaida, the Taliban or anyone for that matter within Muslim societies who advocated violence against America. Comparatively, the *Asahi Shinbun* did not go to great lengths in its discussion on Islamism, although it did acknowledge it to be a contributing factor to terrorism. Overall, the Japanese newspaper’s main concern was the eradication of poverty in Muslim societies as a way to contain violence. The reason for the *Asahi Shinbun*’s sketchy discussion of this issue is probably due to Japanese society’s lack

²⁴ Barry Rubin, “The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 6, Nov/Dec 2002, , p. 76.

of interest in Islam and Muslim societies. Furthermore, academic studies of Islam and West Asia in Japan only developed during the 1960s as a result of the country's trade with Muslim countries, and especially because of its growing dependence on oil from the Gulf.²⁵

Finally, the use of Samuel Huntington's clash of civilizations concept to interpret the 9/11 attacks is present in all the three newspapers analyzed. The clash of civilizations theory depicts Western and Islamic civilizations in an unavoidable clash based on major differences in culture and belief. However, all three newspapers refuted such a claim, and reiterated that the U.S. should make efforts to ensure that the war against terrorism does not escalate into a clash between the West and Islam. The *New Straits Times* blamed such a discourse for furthering the hostility against Islam when the problem of terrorism was not about Islam itself. The *Asahi Shinbun's* editorials warned that any attack on Muslims would allow terrorists to draw attention to the clash of civilizations theory, and consequently justify their acts of violence. Thus, it said that all parties should refrain from using violence as a solution to terrorism, lest the Huntington theory became a reality. The *New York Times* emphasized as well that, while the U.S. has to ensure that justice is met, the Bush Administration also needs to thoroughly explain to the international community that terrorism is the target, and not Islam.

Conclusion and Future Research

Terrorism has become a real threat rather than a theoretical one for many in the world. The news media may report on people being terrorized by a wide range of events, but it is the limited framing of the events in the news that could inspire public fears. As exemplified by the editorials of the *Asahi Shinbun*, the *New Straits Times*, and the *New York Times*, the editorial framings of 9/11 were limited and oversimplified by a few geopolitical explanations. Similar themes are found in the meaning, cause, consequences, and solutions proposed for terrorism in all three newspapers. However, what sets them apart are the respective arguments found within the themes driven by the newspapers' policies, and differences in the national interest and cultural values of their societies. The imperialism explanations come out ambiguously in the *New York Times*, avoiding any direct association with America. In the *Asahi Shinbun*, the explanations fall largely on the effect of imperialism rather than on the more immediate causes, while the *New Straits Times* highlights both. Reporting on 9/11,

²⁵ Kunio Katakura, "Japan's Policy on Islam: Rethinking the Dialogue Approach," *Gaiko Forum*, Summer 2002, p. 31.

the *Asahi Shinbun* tried hard not to appear as pro-U.S., even though it was held back by the practice of self-restraint in coverage pertaining to certain issues like U.S.-Japan relations and interest in Islam as a religion. In choosing not to dwell on the role of Islamism in the spread of terrorism, it also tried to avoid antagonizing Muslim countries. Such a “middle way” approach generally reflected the stance adopted by other news organizations in Japan, as well as that of the Japanese government. In the case of the *New Straits Times*, it took it in its stride to speak for Muslims. However, its criticism of the U.S. for the proliferation of terrorism overshadowed the criticism of the forces within Islamic countries that contribute to terrorism. Its moderate voice of Islam is, however, less convincing when explaining divisions in Islam. There is little mention of the causes and implications of Islamic revivalism, nor is there any attempt made to understand the West.

The respective presentations of 9/11 made by the three newspapers analyzed here do not necessarily represent the view of the news media of Japan, Malaysia and the U.S. A different picture is likely to emerge if the study is extended to cover more newspapers or other news media like TV news, Internet news, and weekly magazines. The *Yomiuri Shinbun* and the *Sankei Shinbun*, which are two of the more conservative mainstream newspapers in Japan, would probably give a different portrayal of the attacks. So would the Malaysian opposition Islamic party newspaper *Harakah*, or the American’s online news site *The Nation*, which is reputedly liberal. There is a possibility that these newspapers use different types of framing in their editorials. Such an exercise would probably result in a diversification of themes and explanations. Nonetheless, it is hoped that this study contributes to the understanding of media framing and how such framing is influenced by the national interest and cultural values of the country in which the particular media operates.

References

Ahmad, Aijaz, "Contextualizing Conflict: The U.S. War on Terrorism," in Daya Kishan Thussu and Des Freedman, eds., *War and the Media: Reporting Conflict 24/7*, Sage Publications, 2003, pp. 15-27.

Bantimaroudis, Philemon and Ban, Hyun, "Covering the Crisis in Somalia: Framing Choice by the *New York Times* and the *Manchester Guardian*," in Stephen D. Reese; Oscar H. Gandy, Jr.; and August E. Grant, eds., *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003, pp. 175-184.

Barranco, Deborah A. and Shyles, Leonard, "Arab vs. Israeli News Coverage in the *New York Times*, 1976 and 1984," in L. John Martin and Ray Eldon Hiebert, eds., *Current Issues in International Communication*, New York, Longman, 1990, pp. 162-67.

Chrisco, Carrie, *Reactions to the Persian Gulf War: Editorials in the Conflict Zone*, University Press of America, Lanham, 1995.

Cooper-Chen, Anne, *Mass Communication in Japan*, Iowa State University Press, 1997.

Dijk, Teun A. van, "Analyzing Racism through Discourse Analysis," in John H. Stanfield II and Rutledge M. Dennis, eds., *Race and Ethnicity in Research Methods*, Sage Publications, 1993, pp. 92-134.

Dijk, Teun A. van, *News as Discourse*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, 1988.

Doi, Takeo, *The Anatomy of Dependence*, Kodansha International, Tokyo, 1973.

Douglas, George H., *The Golden Age of the Newspaper*, Greenwood Press, London, 1999.

Far Eastern Economic Review, "The Struggle for Islam," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, December 11, 2003.

Feldman, Ofer, "Political Reality and Editorial Cartoons in Japan: How the National Dailies Illustrate the Japanese Prime Minister," *Journalism And Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 3, Autumn 1995, pp. 571-580.

Freeman, Laurie Anne, *Closing the Shop: Information Cartels and Japan's Mass Media*, Princeton University Press, 2000.

Gans, Herbert J., *Deciding What's News: A Study of CBS Evening News, NBC Nightly News, Newsweek, and Time*, Pantheon Books, 1979.

Griset, Pamala L. and Mahan, Sue, eds., *Terrorism in Perspective*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, 2003.

The Guardian, "Anti-Americanism Has Taken the World by Storm," *The Guardian*, February 6, 2002.

Hongo, Yoshinori, *Shimbun ga Abunai* (Newspapers are Threatened), Bunshu Shinsho, Tokyo, 2000.

Hamilton, Walter, "The Warmth of the Herd," in Louise Williams and Roland Rich, eds., *Losing Control: Freedom of the Press in Asia*, Asia Pacific Press, Australian National University, 2000, pp. 93-114.

Herman, Edward S., *The Myth of the Liberal Media*, Peter Lang, New York, 1999.

Hynds, Ernest C., "Changes in Editorials: A Study of Three Newspapers, 1955-85," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol.7, No. 2, Summer 1990, pp. 302-12.

Iyengar, Shanto, *Is Anyone Responsible?: How Television Frames Political Issues*, University of Chicago, 1991.

Joseph, Beate, "Media Terrorism or Culture of Peace: Reporting 9/11", in S. Venkatraman, ed., *Media in a Terrorized World*, Eastern University Press, 2004, pp. 34-51.

Karim, Karim H., "Making Sense of the Islamic Peril," in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism after September 11*, Routledge, 2002, pp. 101-116.

Katakura, Kunio, "Japan's Policy on Islam: Rethinking the Dialogue Approach," *Gaiko Forum*, Summer 2002.

Komori, Yoshihisa; Izawa, Motohiko; and Inagaki, Takeshi, *Asahi Shimbun no Dai-kenkyu* (A Thorough Analysis of the *Asahi Shinbun*), Fushosha Publishing, Tokyo, 2002.

Kusano, Atsushi, *Nihon no Ronso* (Japan's Controversies), Toyo Keizai Shinbun Publishing, Tokyo, 1995.

Lipset, Seymour Martin, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*, Norton, New York, 1996.

Lule, Jack, "Myth and Terror on the Editorial Page: The *New York Times* Responds to 9/11," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 79, No. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 275-294.

Maezawa, Takeshi, *Nihon Janarizumu no Kensho* (Review of Journalism in Japan), Sanseido, Tokyo, 1997.

Mahmood, Mandani, "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 104, No. 3, pp. 766-775.

McCombs, Maxwell E., "Explorers and Surveyors: Expanding Strategies for Agenda-Setting Research," *Journalism Quarterly*, Vol. 69, 1992, p. 815.

McCombs, Maxwell E. and Shaw, Donald, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," in Howard Tumber, ed., *News: A Reader*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 320-28.

Nakane, Chie, *Japanese Society*, University of California Press, 1972.

Pharr, Susan and Krauss, Ellis S., eds., *Media and Politics in Japan*, University of Hawaii Press, 1996.

Rubin, Barry, "The Real Roots of Arab Anti-Americanism," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 81, No. 6, Nov/Dec 2002, pp. 73-98

Rusciano, Frank Louis, "Framing World Opinion in the Elite Press," in Pippa Norris; Montague Kern; and Marion Just, eds., *Framing Terrorism*, Routledge, 2003, pp. 159-82.

Sasaki, Yoshiaki, *Nihonjin ga Shiranakatta Isuramu-kyo* (Islam, the Religion that Japanese Did Not Understand), Seishun Shuppansha, Tokyo, 2001.

Schaefer, Todd M., "Framing the U.S. Embassy Bombings and 9/11 Attacks In African and U.S. Newspapers," in Pippa Norris; Montague Kern; and Marion Just, eds., *Framing Terrorism*, Routledge, 2003, pp. 93-112.

Schudson, Michael, *The Sociology of News*, W. W. Norton, 2003.

Schudson, Michael, "What's Unusual about Covering Politics as Usual?," in Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, eds., *Journalism After 9/11*, Routledge, 2002, pp. 36-47.

Shah, Dhavan V.; Watts, Mark D.; Domke, David; and Fan, David, "News Framing and Cueing of Issue Regimes; Explaining Clinton's Approval in Spite of Scandal," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 339-70.

Shaheen, Jack G., *Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People*, Olive Branch Press, New York, 2001.

Silberstein, Sandra, *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11*, Routledge, 2002.

Stone, Deborah (1989), as quoted in Thomas A. Birkland, *After Disaster: Agenda-Setting, Public Policy and Focusing Events*, Georgetown University Press, 1997, pp. 10-11.

The Straits Times, "Arabs Slam Washington's TV Channel," *The Straits Times*, February 14, 2003.

The Straits Times, "Can the Saudis Keep Up Anti-terror Crackdown?," *The Straits Times*, November 15, 2003.

The Straits Times, "Clash of Civilizations? No, It's Pure Evil," *The Straits Times*, July 16, 2004.

Tankard, James, as quoted in Stephen D. Reese; Oscar H. Gandy, Jr.; and August E. Grant, eds., *Framing Public Life*, LEA, 2001, p. 10.

Taylor, Jonathan and Jasparo, Chris, "Editorials and Geopolitical Explanations for 11 September," in Stanley D. Brunn, ed., *11 September and Its Aftermath: The Geopolitics of Terror*, Frank Cass, 2004, pp. 217-52.

Today, "A Jihad to Save Jihad," *Today*, July 16, 2004.

Vaughan, Caroline, "A Comparative Discourse Analysis of Editorials on the Lebanon 1982 Crisis," in Christina Schaffner and Anita Wenden, eds., *Language and Peace*, Dartmouth, 1995, pp. 61-73.

Wolferen, Karel Van, *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, Tuttle, Tokyo, 1993.

Wong, Kean, "In the Grip of the Government," in Louise Williams and Roland Rich, eds., *Losing Control: Freedom of the Press in Asia*, Asia Pacific Press, Australian National University, 2000, pp. 125-6.

Zelizer, Barbie; Park, David; and Gudelunas, David, "How Bias Shapes the News: Challenging *The New York Times*' Status as a Newspaper of Record on the Middle East," *Journalism*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2002, pp. 283-307.