9/11 AND THE MYTH OF NATIONAL UNITY

Giang Chau Nguyen Dien

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
August 2012

Committee:
Dr. Andrew Schocket, Advisor
Dr. Lara Lengel.
ABSTRACT

Andrew Schocket, Advisor

The thesis explores the notion of national unity propagated on the media post-9/11 and argues that unity is a constructed myth that works to maintain the grand narrative of the American past and American values. The study answers three major questions: 1) how was national unity post-9/11 constructed by the media?, 2) how was this constructed unity built into the memory of 9/11?, and 3) in what way is national unity post-9/11 a myth?

To answer these questions, the thesis examined the press coverage and television news broadcasts of 9/11 commemoration along the theme of commemoration and unity. The period of examination is from August to September in 2010 and 2011. Five major newspapers were chosen, shortlisted from the ten most circulated newspapers, and the model of “generative” and “derivative” media: USA Today, The New York Times, The Washington Post, The New York Daily News, and the New York Post. Also, four major television news channels were selected, which are ABC, CBS, MSNBC and Fox News.

Then, in-depth interviews with Muslim Americans were conducted to discover what they actually thought about unity. Six participants were recruited. The interviews were done face-to-face and via phone. Each interview did not last longer than thirty minutes. Answers of the respondents were important to the construction of national unity as myth.

Investigation of the press coverage and the news broadcasts showed that national unity was constructed as an “issue” of long-lasting influence, or as a discourse and an
unquestionable norm. Incidents that might challenge unity were presented as temporary “events” of little importance, or as deviations of little implications. With this habitual exposure to unity, the readers/viewers were customized to think of unity as a legacy of 9/11. However, national unity can be argued to be a myth as it did not reflect the complete reality. Interviews with Muslim Americans showed that they did not think of unity as a norm, but rather, as an exception. Hence, the study argues that the construction of myth helps explain the concept of consent and hegemony that works to maintain the status quo.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my special thanks to Dr. Andrew Schocket for his guidance and consultancy during the time the thesis was being hatched. I am deeply grateful for his patience to guide me through all the difficulties I had when trying to narrow the focus of the thesis. Also, I am thankful for his devoted engagement during the time the thesis was being written. I cannot thank him enough for all the time he spent on reading and discussing in detail every chapter with me, and for all the encouragements he gave that helped me complete the thesis successfully.

I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Lara Lengel for her devotion and support. I thank her for spending a lot of time on the thesis. I appreciate a lot the way she encouraged me, talked to me, and helped me out of the confusions at the beginning stage of the thesis.

My special thanks also go to the Imam at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo, who spent time talking to me and sharing with me his thoughts and memories of 9/11. Also, I would like to thank the American Muslims who set aside their time to talk to me. I appreciate the way they were enthusiastic and passionate about the topic and were willing to share with me stories of their lives.

I would like to especially thank my fiancé, Le Dinh Tien for his constant support and encouragement during the time I study at Bowling Green. I cannot thank him enough for the late nights he spent proofreading my papers, discussing academic topics with me, challenging me and helping me get through the assigned materials. I would like to thank him for his great support, for inspiring me, for helping me through the difficulties of
getting adapted to the new cultural and academic environment. I thank him for keeping me accompanied, and for being there all the time.

I would like to express my gratitude to my family, especially my mother, whose constant support and encouragement helped me through all the obstacles I had during the two years studying and during the process of writing the thesis.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my friends for their help. I am indebted to my friend, Nguyen Tuan An, and especially his wife, Tran Thi Huong, for helping me settle down since I first came, for taking care of me, helping me through a lot of emotional difficulties and for their great companionship during the last two years. I am also indebted to my cohort, Megan Thomassen who has always been caring to me. I thank her for introducing me to her friend, Marne Austin who helped with my very first participant. And I would like to thank Marne Austin for her kind-hearted and her help during the time I was seeking participants for the study.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

When I first came to the United States in 2010, I noticed how different cultural/ethnic groups cluster together and only interact when they have to. I remember thinking that unity seemed to pale in the face of conflicts in the American society. I remember wondering how the notion of ‘a nation’ works in a culture of ‘multi-ness,’ which leads to, first and foremost, conflicts rather than unity. The way I perceived it was that the society was absolutely not a melting pot and was not even a salad bowl, but rather a patched up piece of quilt, in which the connection between the color-blocks are weak enough. What bugged me was how to actually figure out the ‘united’ part of the States of America, to figure out how diversity works toward unity.

A year later came the tenth anniversary of 9/11 and the notion of unity was brought back to me. September 11th 2001 was possibly the most terrible day in the history of United States. Within more than hour, four airplanes, aiming towards symbolic buildings in the States, crashed, claiming nearly 3,000 lives. At 8:46 am, an airplane crashed into the north tower of The World Trade Center in New York. Fifteen minutes later, a second plane hit the south tower. At 9:37 am, a third airplane slammed into the side of the Pentagon building – the U.S. Department of Defense's headquarters -- in Washington, D.C. And at 10:03 am, the fourth plane, which was reported later to aim at either the White House or the U.S Capitol, crashed into a field in Southern Pennsylvania. The event left U.S citizens with memory of horror and changed the political landscapes of the country. Through commemorative activities, the government and the media presented national unity as the main legacy of 9/11, overlooking any conflicts that may arise.
It is no doubt that 9/11 presented the American citizens the most dramatic trauma in history. Even what happened at Pearl Harbor is totally different. Noam Chomsky, in his book, *9/11*, says that bringing up a Pearl Harbor analogy is misleading. I agree with him that “[o]n December 7, 1941, military bases in two U.S colonies were attacked – not the national territory, which was never threatened”, and that “[t]he U.S preferred to call Hawaii a “territory” but it was in effect a colony.”¹ The Americans were totally unprepared for this attack on the U.S mainland, hence were, for the first time, at the mercy of the terrorists. The event apparently linked all American citizens on the same front, and yet put Muslim Americans in a very vulnerable position of the “enemy within.”

Within the context of this trauma, one may wonder what national unity actually means and how it is manifested. On the one hand, the government and the media advocate the idea of unity. The news is filled with the spirit of unity, of how the legacy of 9/11 is the truly United States of America. On the tenth anniversary, Obama talked about how “nothing can break the will of the truly United States of America,” and how “we took a painful blow and emerged stronger,” how “these past ten years underscore the bond between all Americans,” and how “the determination to move forward as one people will be the legacy of 9/11.”²

On the other hand, there is a particular group singled out. After the attack, the idea of an “immigrant-based conception of American identity” is shaken because “this tradition is challenged by new concerns about immigration and a possible ‘enemy within.’”³ AOL News reported that an anti-Islam mood was strong on the ninth anniversary:

“Shortly after the memorial service for victims killed there, a man from North Carolina burned pages of the Quran, and another protester from Pennsylvania tore out pages of the Islamic holy
book and coaxed the anti-mosque protesters to buy it as ‘toilet paper.’”

Grady James, a reporter thought that “far too many Americans still haven't grasped that ‘terrorists’ and ‘Muslims’ are not the same thing.” The fact the terrorist happened to be Muslims put the Muslim community in America into focus. Regardless of how much the state and the press talk about unity, it can be argued that a sense of distrust and divisiveness is challenging this notion of unity. One American citizen, whose husband died in the attack, spoke on National Public Radio on the ninth anniversary that “a sense of national unity after the attacks was short-lived,” that “[n]ine years after the attack […] she hears only outrage, fear and mistrust when Americans discuss September 11,” and that “Ground Zero has become a symbol of grief and anger.” A year later, forty-seven percent of Americans agreed with this woman, that a sense of national unity provoked right after 9/11 no longer existed. One can argue that forty-seven percent of Americans is less than half, thus the number does not represent the “majority” of Americans. However, forty-seven percent is still a big enough number to challenge the idea of “national unity.” How can the nation be called “united” when nearly half of its citizens do not feel “united” to each other, or when a certain group is identified by others as ‘them’, not ‘us’?

In this light, the thesis will explore the ninth and tenth anniversary of 9/11 with an attempt to answer the following questions:

1) How was national unity post-9/11 constructed by the media?

2) How was the constructed unity built into the memory of 9/11?

3) In what way is national unity post-9/11 a myth?
In the period of time examined in the thesis, from August to September in 2010 and August to September in 2011, the media, both the newspapers and the television news, constructed unity as a discourse, and as a norm. Instances of disunity were presented as temporary events that did not, in any way, threaten the dominant discourse of unity. Also, though the media actually presented the signs of disunity, it did not call into question how these signs may challenge the dominant discourse of unity. In other words, instances of unity were glorified, hence drawing a great deal of attention from the readers or viewers while those of disunity were presented in a way that would draw minimal attention. In this way, the readers/viewers were habitually exposed to the message of unity, which got reinforced and built into the memory of the people as a legacy of 9/11. Seen as temporary events, instances of disunity were detached from the memory of 9/11. However, while national unity is seen as a reality by the media, it can only be seen as a constructed myth because it is the result of a one-sided interpretation of a historical event, thus not reflecting the complete ‘reality.’ Interviews with Muslim Americans demonstrated this idea very clearly as they considered disunity as more feasible. That said, they did not mean that disunity is a norm, they just proposed the idea that unity cannot be the norm like what the media propagated. To fully support this argument, I will first discuss the central theoretical concepts used throughout the thesis.

CONSTRUCTING THEORETICAL CONCEPTS

National Unity

Umut Ozkirimli asks a very critical question regarding nationalism, that is, whether nationalism is about culture or politics.7 There are two opposite views on this matter. Primordialism tends to value culture over politics as a core of nationalism. Primordialism
conceptualizes nationalism on the ground of common descent that evolved out of a pre-existing state of ethnicity, hence creating an emotional bondage; and also on the ground of territory and language. Modernism, on the other hand, tends to place a greater significance to the political element of nationalism. This school emphasizes the construction of modern states and economies with their ideological systems as the fundamental formation of nationhood.

Ozkirimli argues that culture and politics are both the core elements of nationalism, as nationalism “involves the ‘culturalization of politics’ and the ‘politicization of culture.’” However, one may wonder how the process of ‘culturalization of politics’ may work in America when there is not one unique ‘culture’ to act as the foundation for the ‘culturalization.’ In fact, one may see more of the process of ‘politicization of culture’ when, as previously mentioned, the common ‘culture’ here is actually the system of ideology only. So while generally nationalism should be perceived as “arising out of the interactions of ethnicity-making and state-making processes,” American nationalism, in particular, is best described by the state-making process and the ‘politicization of culture.’

This idea of ‘politicization of culture’ is very well presented in Walter G. Muelder’s article, “National Unity and National Ethic,” when he argues that unity is built on the American ethos. For Muelder, this idea of unity and bonding goes back to Gunnar Myrdal’s conceptualization of the “American creed.” In An American Dilemma, Myrdal states that “[t]here is evidently a strong unity in this nation and a basic homogeneity and stability in its valuations.” This unity is manifested in the “explicitly expressed system of general ideals in reference to human interrelations. This system may be called the American creed; its proportions constitute a group of principles which ‘ought’ to rule.” It revolves around the faith in democracy, “where democracy expressed an affirmation of an unlimited right of personality to
develop a social order for its own realization.”

Thus, Muelder interprets the “American creed” in an ethical sense. He proposes that “[s]logans of solidarity are freighted with ethical valuations reflecting the social ideals of the people. […] They constitute what has been called the American creed and make up the ethical voice of the Nation in its heroic moments.”

While national unity in America can be best described by the common ideologies that form the “American Creed,” it cannot be maintained without what Benedict Anderson calls the “print media,” which helps to evoke the consciousness of national unity in the people. As 9/11 happened in New York, Los Angelinos can never feel about it the way New Yorkers do. Sandra Silberstein suggests that the media has transformed New York into America, that the Twin Towers, a symbol of New York, are transformed into “the symbol of “The Attack on America,” and “the “innocent civilians” attacked as presumptive Americans were New Yorkers.” In a way, the media creates what Daniel Lerner calls “empathy,” which is the ability to imagine oneself in different circumstances. This empathy, together with the rise of “print capitalism,” creates what Benedict Anderson conceptualizes as “imagined communities.” Anderson states that in ancient times, classical communities were unified through their sacred language. Later on, national consciousness arose with the birth of the “print-capitalism” which creates “an imagined community among a specific assemblage of fellow-readers.” He suggests that there arises a tie between members of a community, who have never seen each other before. Thus “communities are distinguished […] by the style in which they are imagined.” He emphasizes the role of the “print capitalism” in the creation of a national consciousness. For him, via print and paper, people are connected to their fellow-readers and form “in their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.”
Official/Vernacular and Public Memory

According to John Bodnar, official memory is shaped by public bodies who are the “defenders of the nation-state” and are concerned about “foster[ing] national unity and patriotism.” This kind of memory advocates the national identity thus stresses the benign narrative of American past. The official memory that shapes the memory of the whole nation is, firstly, formed in the classroom contexts in which historical textbooks are taught. These textbooks are designed to build a common identity in a multi-cultural society, and to instill patriotism in the young generations. To do this is 1) to present America as “superior to other nations” and present dark chapters of the past as “short pauses or detours in the continuous flowering of freedom, capitalism, and opportunity”, or 2) to present an objective look at the past. The first act involves an “appropriation” that demonstrates an “operation of power” in shaping collective memory. The second act requires an objective perspective of the past that can never be achieved. In fact, the fear of “fragmenting American history,” the fear of failing to instill in the multicultural population a sense of national identity and a sense of pride about the country prevents historical textbooks from including ‘the dark side’ that give recognition to the historically disadvantaged as well as to the elites, to the oppressed as well as the oppressors.” The result is a forming of a mainstream memory that shapes a whole nation’s public memory.

Outside the classroom, this shaped memory is reinforced through commemorative activities, which, again, glorify American past. Commemorations are celebrated in a way that can tackle the fear of “societal dissolution and unregulated political behavior” caused by “the existence of social contradictions, alternative views, and indifference.” These commemorations are shaped by what political leaders think is necessary and compulsory to create a national identity and national pride. Through these commemorative activities, the historical memory that
is taught in classrooms is validated. That is why the commemoration of the Vietnam War, a contested chapter of American past, deals with the “ideal language of patriotism rather than the real language of grief and sorrow.”

Vernacular memory is formed by ordinary people who “represen[t] an array of specialized interests.” An example of this is the memory of African American and Native Americans about the past. A survey done by Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen reveals that African Americans and Indians adhere to a counter-narrative of the past. According to this interview, memory of these two groups is shaped mainly by family members, from whom the young generation learns a memory that is different from what they are taught at school. Black Americans learn more about their heritage at home because at school, according to a respondent to the study, “nothing was taught about the slaves or the black man other than we were slaves.” Indian have their own “Indian historiography chronology” and “set themselves apart not only in the people, places and events […] but even more in the way they talked about them.” In sum, the “our” version of memory of these oppressed group challenge the mainstream memory and reshape the official memory within a fraction of community.

In this way, memory can be seen to be shaped by two primary agencies: the powerful and powerless groups. Thus memory can be divided into mainstream memory and what I would call “sub-memory.” These two forms intertwine and each version of the past can be “used either to legitimize present political and social arrangements or to supply a standpoint from which [this version] may be criticized or resisted.” Cubitt notes that “conflict and contestation, and the use of power by some groups against others, are endemic features of most collective experiences.” This contestation demonstrates how official memory shapes public memory, which is, then reshaped by vernacular memory.
In the case of 9/11, the question to ask is to what extent the official memory is challenged and reshaped by the vernacular memory. Bodnar says that “[p]ublic memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions.” In other words, public memory is a compromise between official memory, shaped by the authority, and vernacular memory, shaped by the ordinary people. Yet, compromise does not mean that each version of memory contributes equally to the construction of public memory. Bodnar likens public memory to a “cognitive device to mediate competing interpretations and privilege some explanations over others.” In this case, national unity has become the ‘privileged explanation’ of the legacy of 9/11. It would be incorrect to say that the idea is absolutely not contested because “conflict and contestation, and the use of power by some groups against others, are endemic features of most collective experiences.” However, the notion of national unity can be seen as not “officially” contested, understood in the sense that contestation of this notion is not as well represented in public arena. As a consequent, the people are much more immersed in the official version of 9/11 memory in which national unity is seen as a legacy. In this version of memory, the civilians who died in the attack were “readily identified with a national cause, victims of an attack on America and on democracy itself.” Thus, the nation is seen as united on the same front, defending the values of the “American Creed.”

Myth

According to Roland Barthes, myth is a “second order semiological system.” Basically, in the first order, the relationship between the signifier (sound or mark) and the signified (concept) forms a sign. And “myth acts on [these] already existent signs,” transforming these signs into new signifiers of new concepts (signified). Graham Allen explains this second order system very well with an example of a photograph that shows a crowd waiting to pass by the
coffin of Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, who died on March 30, 2002. He says that in the first order, the signifier is the “photographic image of crowds,” the signified is “the crowds that waited to see the Queen Mother lying in state.” The combination of the signifier and the signified forms the sign, which is the media coverage of the event, namely “large crowds have queued for hours to see the Queen Mother lying in state.” Myth uses this sign and transforms it into a signifier for a new signified: “the unified British public or nation or the British people’s love of (acceptance of) the monarchy.” The same analysis can be applied to an image in the tenth anniversary of 9/11, that is, the image of numerous American flags on the tenth anniversary. There are photographic images of people bringing flags to the memorial place (the signifier), there is an actual crowd of people who brought flags to the place (the signified), there is the media coverage of that image (the sign), and there is a transformation of that sign into a sign of patriotism (myth). Yet the question is whether the media creates that myth or simply just reports an already created myth. I do not think Barthes explores this kind of question in his discussion of myth. Rather, he explores myths in its existence rather than explore how it comes to exist the way it is, to begin with. With the way the media relies on “information provided by government, business and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power,” myths can be argued to originate from the authority, not from the media.

In his works, “Myth Today”, Barthes considers myth as a type of speech, a system of communication, and a mode of signification. So “myth is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message.” In this way, “everything can be myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse,” which, as he notes later, is historically shaped. So basically, he says that myth is a way of communication, of interpretation of an event and this kind of interpretation is historically oriented, or shaped by discourse. That is why some objects
become a “mythical speech” in just a specific period of time and then disappear while others take the status. Also, in this light, everything can become myth because “the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions,” that is, there is no law that prohibits the way meanings of things are appropriated in the society. Barthes’ example is that a tree is objectively perceived by everyone as a tree, but no longer just a tree when expressed by Minou Drouet, that is, after it is “adapted to a type of social usage.” So, in a way, Minou Drouet provided a ‘discourse’ to the tree and communicated it in a symbolic, thus mythical way. Drouet provided a personal interpretation of the tree, and created a myth of his own use. In this light, there can be different mythological ways to communicate a phenomenon, depending on individual interpretations of an image or an event. Hence, in a society, there cannot be only one myth born out of a historical event. The question is how only one myth is made popular or prevalent while others are subdued.

Barthes does not address the question, but just writes that “myth is a type of speech chosen by history,” and that “myth lends itself to history in two ways: by its form, which is only relatively motivated; and by its concept, the nature of which is historical.” In this way, a national crisis like that of 9/11 provides an ideal historical discourse that gives birth to myth. The myth of national bonding can easily be evoked in the time when America as a whole becomes the victim of terrorism. However, it can be argued that myth is not merely a product born out of historical discourses. There can be many mythical interpretations of a phenomenon within a particular historical discourse. The question is what decides which interpretations prevail and become a dominant content of myth. In other words, in the process of “decoding” historical events, how certain meanings become dominant?

Stuart Hall conceptualizes the notion of “preferred meaning” shaped by the dominant-hegemonic position of decoding. He argues that while decoding is an action of “subjective
capacity,” that is, interpretations are different from individual to individual, the group in power can actually attempt for a “fixed” meaning, which involves a process of naturalization of codes. Hence, myth can be understood as a kind of misunderstanding derived from a limitation of individualized interpretations. Andrew J.M. Sykes also notes that “[a] myth takes the form of a story that embodies certain ideas and at the same time offers a justification of those ideas.”

That the media relies heavily on “authority” for its newsworthiness suggests that the content of myth, or in other words, the ideas that need to be justified, is formulated by the group in power. In this ways, myths work to “sustain a dominant political ideology.” In the case of 9/11, the state decides the hegemonic communication of the meaning of the crisis. So, in a way, dominant/hegemonic myths are born out of historical discourses and also out of the state’s will.

However, the complication here is that “myths are not simply delusions, tricks play upon us by those in position of power.” When he discusses a photograph of Paris-Match showing a black man in a French military uniform saluting the French flag, Allen says that while “[t]he cover-image of Paris-Match suggests an ideology [of the French empire without race discrimination], it is also simple a photograph of a real soldier.” For him, there should be a more complicated model “to explain how something can at one and the same time be literally itself and the medium through which ideology propagates itself.” So, there is a fact that the tragedy left American devastated, with feeling of fear and insecurity and with the need to define “us” against “them.” And the problem is how to read deeper into these facts and transform it into myth. Semiotically, most things can be read literally by itself, i.e. denotatively, or connotatively as an ideological medium. And while there might be one way to read one thing denotatively, there is more than one way to read it connotatively and why a certain connotative interpretation prevails and how it does are the issues to be considered. Therefore, while myths are not simply
delusions created by the authority, they can be seen as results of the authority taking advantage of historical discourse to distract the people from other possible interpretations. So basically, post-9/11 unity is not absolutely a delusion, rather it is the “unilateral” conception born out of the combination of the historical discourse and authoritative intervention.

METHODOLOGY

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis is the main method used in chapter 1 and 2 to analyze news articles and television news broadcasts. The question asked is “how far is it possible to pin down the meaning of any text, whether it be the meaning as intended by the producers of texts or the meaning as it is ‘read’ and understood by consumers/recipient of texts?” To obtain a certain level of objectivity, I followed the first three steps in content analysis proposed by Anders Hansen and Simon Cottle, et al., which are 1) definition of research problem, 2) selection media samples, and 3) defining analytical categories.

Definition of Research Problem

The purpose of the first two chapters is to find out how the notion of national unity is depicted or incorporated into the coverage of the commemoration. Analysis of the media texts can bring into light how the media presents the idea of unity as an indispensable part of the official memory of 9/11.

Selection of Media Samples

The first methodological question for the first chapter is which newspapers to examine so that the study bears some level of generality. Although the print media is important in that it “work[s] to provide a more comprehensive news story,” it does not mean that any newspapers
can bear the same news value. There are two criteria in my selections of newspapers. First, the newspapers should be widely read by the mass. Determining what constitutes “the mass” is a challenging task to many scholars. Webster and Phalen suggest that to be a mass, the audience “must be of sufficient size that individual cases (e.g., the viewer, the family, the social network) recede the importance and the dynamic of a larger entity emerges.” In fact, this suggestion is still very elusive. However, it helps narrow down the millions of newspapers to the largest ones in terms of circulation, with a hope that such large circulation somehow indicates a big enough size of the audience. I, thus, narrowed down the newspapers selections to the ten most circulated newspapers in the United States, which - according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation - are 1) *The Wall Street Journal*, 2) *USA Today*, 3) *The New York Times*, 4) *New York Daily News*, 5) *Los Angeles Times*, 6) *San Jose Mercury News*, 7) *New York Post*, 8) *The Washington Post*, 9) *Chicago Tribune*, and 10) *Dallas Morning News*.

The second criterion is that the newspapers chosen should be “generative media” instead of “derivative media.” According to Doris A. Graber, the “generative media” are the elite press, normally locating in the northeastern area, which “produces or generates the news that the “derivative media” then adopt and disseminate throughout the United States.” In other words, there is a group of newspapers that actually frames the news that the people read every day. This group is composed of big papers with not only a large circulation but also a huge influence. Lasorsa and Reese also point out that the reason for this phenomenon is the “herd mentality” of mainstream media, which urges them to “look to each other for guidance.” Since the elite press is responsible for framing the major news that will be spread throughout the country, narrowing the choice to the elite press among the most circulated newspapers will help to avoid repetition, yet maintain the generality of the study.
There is no account on what the elite press should be. However, in many literatures, it is assumed that *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* seem to be regarded as the “generative media.” The thing to note is whether the papers can be considered “generative” or not depends also on the nature of the events themselves. For example, in the case of 9/11 event, *The Wall Street Journal*, as a paper that focuses on the finance and economics section, would be more “derivative” than “generative” in its coverage of 9/11. On the contrary, *The New York Times* will be the main “generative” press here. *The New York Times* is “the newspaper of record for all institutional elites.” Also, many studies have considered the paper as having great influence, not only on readers, but also on the politicians as well. In addition, *The New York Times* serves as a agenda setting source for many other newspapers as “[n]ational desk editors, regional and local newspaper editors, television network news assignment editors, and news service reporters will start their work day by reading the *New York Times*, the newspaper of record in the United States. Such reliance on the *New York Times* “sets an agenda of news coverage for most of America.”

Based on the idea of “generative” versus “derivative” I narrowed my list of newspapers down to: 1) *USA Today*, 2) *The New York Times*, and 3) *The Washington Post*. Also, based on the fact that 9/11 happened in New York, I chose two more New York newspapers in the list of ten most circulated papers, *The New York Daily News* and the *New York Post*. So, there are five newspapers of focus in this study. The question now is whether the narrow geography of the selected newspapers (as all of them are located in the northeastern area) will diminish the value of the finding. W. James Potter suggests that “[d]ifferences by geography are […] becoming less important to news values.” He argues that the same news formulas run across the countries. Also, with the model of “generative” and “derivative” media, there seems to be little difference
in the coverage of the event as long as the fact that the “derivative” ones follow the major
“generative” media’s lead is considered.

There are three reasons to narrow down the focus of the coverage to August and
September in 2010 and in 2011. First, I chose the 9th anniversary to see how the press covered
the idea of national unity throughout the debate over the construction of an Islamic Center near
Ground Zero and whether this coverage would go against or go along with the theme of national
unity. The Islamic Community Center project, called Park51, sparked a controversy because it
was just two blocks away from Ground Zero where many victims of 9/11 were buried. A wave of
protest was spurred as many people considered the construction of the Center insensitive to the
feelings of the victims’ families. However, supporters of the project proposed that the Center
would provide a way for people to learn more about Islam.

Second, by exploring the coverage of the 10th anniversary, which is also the latest
anniversary, I can find out what still remains and has been condensed after 10 years of the
trauma. Lastly, I narrowed the search down to August and September because these are the two
months of the year when 9/11 will be the focus of the news. Readers would pay more attention to
the 9/11 coverage during these two months as the commemoration date was coming. On the
contrary, in other months of the year, news and debates about issues concerning 9/11 were just
flashes that, like other flash-news, did not leave a long impression on readers.

In the second chapter, I used the same time frame, i.e. August and September 2010 and
2011, to examine the media coverage of 9/11 anniversary and of the mosque issues on major
television channels, such as ABC, CBS, MSNBC and Fox News. While the elite press examined
offered comprehensive and in-depth news coverage, the television news has the advantage of
being “pervasive and profound.” Doris A. Graber considers television as the primary source of
news for an average Americans.\textsuperscript{77} This advantage of television will hardly be challenged in the age of media when cable and satellite television is penetrating American culture.\textsuperscript{78} Also, Elisabeth Noelle-Neuman proposes that the mass-communicated messages are powerful because of its ubiquity, its consonance, i.e. the way it seems to reflect the real world, and its cumulation, which is “the repetition of similar messages over an extended period of time.”\textsuperscript{79} Thus, exploring the way broadcast news cover the notion of unity post 9/11 complements the discussion of the press coverage in chapter 1.

\textit{Defining Analytical Categories}

There are many ways to categorize analytical criteria. For example, analytical criteria can be categorized according to “‘medium,’ ‘date,’ ‘position within the medium,’ ‘size/length/duration’ of item, or ‘type/genre.’”\textsuperscript{80} In this thesis, the analytical criterion is categorized along the subjects/themes/issues dimension.\textsuperscript{81} The two themes examined are unity and commemoration. To search for news articles in the selected newspapers, I used Lexis-Nexis. The possible key words were: 9/11 commemoration, Ground Zero, World Trade Center. However, I found out that using the key words 9/11 would provide me with the most thorough list of articles concerning the event. Then I scanned through the articles from August 1 to September 30 each year, excluding articles about books/films on 9/11 or art/sport activities to commemorate the event, focusing particularly on articles that deal with unity or disunity in the discourse of commemoration. In this way, I was able to narrow down the search to around 25 news articles in the 5 papers to analyze.

In the second chapter, I used both Google News and the search engine on the website of each channel to search for the relevant coverage. While a lot of news articles could be found with the key word unity and 9/11, the same key words did not bear any result in broadcast media
search. So I divided the search into two main search themes: the anniversary and the issue of the Islamic Center, hoping to find instances of how the notion of unity/disunity is handled. Hence, the key words used were: 10th anniversary of 9/11, 9th anniversary of 9/11, 9/11 and mosque.

Ethnography

In chapter 3, I employed ethnographic methodology to find out about the real experiences of Muslim Americans within the context of unity/disunity post-9/11. Ethnography is a way to portray the “diversity in an increasingly homogeneous world.”82 John Van Maanen proposes that ethnography is a way to learn how different individuals or groups “understand, accommodate, and resist a presumably shared order.”83 This idea of diversity actually refers to a diverse yet equalized groups’ opinions and experiences and hence ethnography is a way to learn about the differences and the variations. However, ethnography is not simply a way to comprehend the diversity but a way to discover the secret lives of the subaltern, and discover the voices that have been silenced. In other words, ethnography is not just a way to learn about the differences or the variations, but also the deviations.

In fact, it is true that “we have grown used to ways of organizing things that ignore voice, that assume voice does not matter.”84 Nick Couldry calls this “the crisis of voice.”85 In a society in which there is no equal relationship between groups, there is no equality of voice, or rather, no equality of representation. In other words, the grand narrative of the elite is more privileged and is constructed as a reality, while in fact “there are ‘realities’ more so than there is a ‘reality.’”86 Thus, ethnography is a way to bring into the dominant discourse the existence of the subaltern voices and the existence of the other realities. However, as Couldry states, “having voice is never enough.”87 Voice needs to matter as well.88 Thus it is not the matter of whether the subaltern can
speak, but the matter of whether they are heard. Hence, ethnography is a way to challenge the dominant voice by rendering the subaltern voice heard, by representing the underrepresented groups. In this way, ethnography refutes Gayatri Spivak’s idea that the subaltern cannot speak as speaking should involve being heard.

For Spivak, speaking without being heard is not speaking. Therefore, “those who act and struggle mute, [are] opposed to those who act and speak.” Spivak thinks that “[t]here is no such thing as “class instinct” at work here.” Also, because the subaltern subject should be considered heterogeneous, the common instinct or intuition of a “common cause, national destiny, and collective history” cannot be easily achieved. Hence, “[f]or the “true” subaltern group, whose identity is its difference, there is no un-representable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself; [therefore] the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation.”

Joseph Femia seems to think that the subaltern cannot speak either. He reasons that because of a lack of education, the subaltern is unable to “use abstract symbols, or think clearly and systematically.” Also, all the institutions that shape their perception are the tools of the ruling group to propagate dominant ideology. In this way, even if the subaltern is discontent, “they are unable to even locate the source of their discontent, still less remedy it.”

Though the subaltern is not a homogeneous group, there can still be common patterns in the way they formulate their opinions or in the way they experience the dominant discourse. Writing ethnography is to find a storyline, to “create – out of the raw materials of lived experience, imagination, and reading and talking with others – some pattern in that storyline that is symbolically rich and significant for an intended audience.” Thus, ethnography is a way to prove that the subaltern can speak and they can be heard. In this way, ethnography renders voice as a value, thus “discriminat[es] against frameworks of social economic and political
organization that deny or undermine voice.”96 It helps to answer the question of who has the right to speak for a culture and entitled to represent it.97 That said, it does not mean that only the subaltern can represent a culture. As “all representations are partial, partisan, and problematic,” ethnography helps to construct a fuller and more complete reality.98

In this thesis, I used ethnographic interview to gain insights into the experience of Muslim Americans post-9/11. As “seeing, listening, touching are the primary sources of information about the world,” ethnographic interviewing is an approach to information, as well to the different stories and realities.99 Robert S. Weiss states that interviewing is one of the best ways to learn about people’s experiences and how they interpret their experiences.100 It is a way to learn about things we have not been able to experience. Interviewing is not just a question-answer session between the interviewer and the interviewees. It is a “continuous exchange of multilayered messages being differentially perceived.”101 In this process, the interviewee “is not an object, but a subject with agency, history, and his or her own idiosyncratic command of a story,” hence each interview is “a window to individual subjectivity and collective belonging.”102 The ethnography interview encompasses three forms: oral history, personal narrative and topical interview.103 I formulated the questionnaire that asked the informants to recount a historical moment reflected in an individual’s life (oral history), to recall past experience or viewpoint of an event (personal narrative) and to state opinions on an issue (topical interview).104 I used the Patton model to formulate different types of questions: background questions, experience questions, opinion or value questions, and feeling questions.105

Through the interviews, I learnt about the real experiences of Muslim Americans and compare those to what the media and the government have been trying to advocate. Six participants, aged at least 18 were recruited for the study. All interviews lasted no longer than 30
minutes and were recorded. After the interview sessions, the conversations were transcribed and saved in my password protected computer. Participants' identities are not disclosed in this study. I used pseudonyms to quote their interview answers. The data will be kept until the end of August 2012, when it will be destroyed to maintain confidentiality.

I was introduced to the first two participants by a friend of a friend. She wrote a thesis about Muslim converts and she gave me two contacts. One of them refused to participate but introduced me to another person who participated. Then, after each interview, I asked the respondent to introduce me to their friends. The first participants introduced me to two of her friends both of whom actually participated in the study. Only two participants were interviewed face to face. One of them was my classmate so I talked to her after class and gave her all the documents and arranged a date and time to meet on campus. The other was the Imam at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo. I met him when I accompanied a friend to the Center after the prayer session.

The other three participants were interviewed by phone. To get to the participants on the phone, I first sent the recruitment script to their emails. When they responded, confirming their participation, I asked for their home address so that I could send them the recruitment script, the questionnaire, the consent letter together with a stamped enveloped for them to send the consent letter back to me. After I received the signed consent letters, I arranged a convenient time and date to call them.

THESIS ARRANGEMENT

In light of the theoretical and the methodological considerations discussed, the thesis is divided into three major chapters. Chapter 2 examines how the major newspapers tackle the idea
of national unity in the discourse of 9/11 and how this idea becomes part of the package of the official memory about 9/11. I argue that the idea of national unity is presented as an important component of 9/11 memory in the coverage. It has become an indispensable part of the official memory of 9/11. And regardless of the hot debates over the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero in 2010, the idea of national unity is still advocated by the print media.

Chapter 3 analyzes the television news to find out the similarities or differences in the way the notion of unity is presented. The broadcast media actually favors the official version of 9/11 memory. In this version, the notion of national unity is provoked and embedded into the memory of the 9/11 regardless of any signs of disunity. Disunity is either avoided or presented as a temporary event. Both tactics work to maintain the dominance of national unity. Also, by conditioning viewers to the ritual of commemoration, the media actually help to “unite” the people together because the core element of the commemorating ritual is to “establish as well as confirm individual’s coherence and bonded-ness with other.”106 Being habitually exposed to this pattern of commemorating, viewers will easily adopt the official version of memory and incorporate it into their personal views about the legacy of 9/11.

Chapter 4 presents interviews with Muslim Americans to discover what they think of national unity in the context of their personal experiences after the event. In fact, interviewees viewed national unity as more like an exception than a norm. Most of the interviewees lived in nice neighborhoods where Muslims are concentrated so they did not receive much discrimination from their communities. However, they did not think their experiences should be taken as proofs of a united nation. For them, the notion of national unity does not actually reflect what actually happens. In this light, national unity is a myth that works to maintain status quo.
The ideals of the “American Creed” are the glues that hold the Americans together. The unity that arises out of these ideals is the unity based on the pride and love American ideologies that establish the American cultural values. 9/11 presents a historical discourse in which these ideologies are easily evoked to gather American on the same front. With the help of the media, the pain and the horror inflicted upon New York City is felt across the country. In this way, the Americans are seen to gather on the side of justice as opposed to the injustice side of the terrorists. The annual commemoration activities are designed to foster this sense of unity and instill it into the public memory of 9/11. Public memory of 9/11 is more influenced by the official version rather than the vernacular version. Disunity is made absence in the dominant discourse and signs of disunity are marginalized. The act of favoring a particular way of decoding a historical event and marginalizing others renders national unity a myth. National unity is a myth because it does not reflect the complete reality of the nation post 9/11. In this way, constructing myth is the way hegemony works to maintain the status quo. In the subsequent chapters, I will demonstrate these ideas in greater details.
CHAPTER 2: THE PRESS AND THE ‘UNITED’ STATES OF AMERICA

This chapter examines how the major newspapers tackled the idea of national unity in the discourse of 9/11 and how this idea has become part of the package of the official memory about 9/11. First, it will be shown that the language of patriotism is widely evoked as condition for the formation of national unity, then how the print media actually dealt with instances of unity is presented, through analysis of coverage of the 9th and 10th anniversary. Regardless of the hot debates over the construction of a mosque near Ground Zero in 2010, the idea of national unity was still advocated by the print media. The examination of five major newspapers in the States, from August to September of 2010 and 2011, shows that the press has been trying to promote the sense of national unity as part of the public memory of 9/11. The papers instilled the sense of unity in the people by presenting national unity as an “issue” of importance that receives repetitive coverage, whereas signs of disunity are presented as an “event,” a temporary matter of less importance that does not threaten the growth of national unity. In this way, unity has become an indispensable part of the official memory of 9/11.

PATRIOTISM AND UNITY

As mentioned in the previous chapter, national unity in the discourse 9/11 is evoked based on the shared cultural ideologies that shape what Gunnar Myrdal calls the “American Creed.” The set of shared ideologies is what unite the people, especially in times of war when the distinction between “we” versus “them” is usually called for. In times of crisis, national unity arises as “a natural accompaniment of patriotic zeal.”¹ This unity is what set “us” against “them.” In this binary, “them” means very much “enemies of American ideals”, or “liberty’s opponents.”² For example, at the beginning of the nation, “them” was the Britain, which
embodied “tyranny, aristocracy, oppression”; or at the end of the nineteenth century, “them” was Europe, which represented backwardness, “feudalism, monarchy, and imperialism.” In the Second World War, “them” was Hitler and his regime which embodied “racism, anti-democracy, hatred for personal rights, subjugation of religious and cultural liberty, suppression of free labor, of militarism – in short, of all totalitarian threats to individuality and common humanity.”

Samuel P. Huntington calls this “creedal identity.”

The trauma of 9/11 represents exactly the same opportunity to create a new them-versus-us rhetoric. On September 11th 2002, one year after the attack, an article in the New York Post stated that “America sometimes brings the enmity of the world on itself” because America is a beacon of freedom, of intellectual and moral enlightenment, of hope in a world dark with despotism. The kleptocrats and moral midgets who run too much of it simply can't abide the comparison. They can't clean up their own acts, so they seek to extinguish America's.

The terrorists represent what America is not. In this case, “despicable acts” and ‘mass murder’ are contrasted with ‘the brightest beacon of freedom,’ justice, and peace.” ‘We’ are unified because ‘we’ all believe and have faith in those values, and those who are against those values are against ‘us,’ hence the slogan “United We Stand,” “as though the American people were gathered symbolically on the ruins of the World Trade Center to face the world by ostensibly speaking in one voice.” Thus, “national unity” can be considered as a “social bonding” that “involve[s] a direct sense of community membership based on loyalty to civilization,” or a mutual common-sense sentiment that is attached to the cultural values of America. I call this “common-sense” because, as Michael Billig points out, “our membership of our nation is
affirmed daily, through symbols and rhetoric so routine that we do not consciously notice them.”

It is worth to note that the “loyalty” to the American values of democracy, equality and freedom is very often presented as patriotic sentiments. Thus the notion of ‘we’ incorporates the love and support of those values. In this way, national unity is not only established on the ground of common ideology, but also on the ground of patriotism. In the month leading to the anniversary of 9/11 and in the month of the tenth anniversary, The New York Times called on the nation to “[r]etrieve [t]he [c]ompassion [t]hat [s]urged [a]fter 9/11.” This compassion was demonstrated in others article as the love for the country and the solidarity among the people. The New York Times showed how, in remembrance of the trauma, “there was a strong feeling of patriotism and a desire to show the flag,” and how “we were all in support of our president” as well as “congress and all our elected leaders” who “worked together for the good of our country.” USA Today posted readers’ opinions which talked about how “our nation has become more patriotic since the 9/11 attacks” and how “I love my country with a passion I have never known before.”

It was very visible how “the symbolic language of patriotism is central to public memory in the United States,” and how the press had worked alongside with the state to “stimulate loyalty to large political structures.” The importance of patriotism in this discourse lies in the fact that it brings people of the country together. By provoking patriotism in people, the idea of unity can come more naturally, as people are brought together “through their contrast with a shared enemy.” Remembering 9/11 on its 10th anniversary also means remembering how the U.S. people were united on that day, how they were more tolerant towards each other, how “Muslims weren't lynched, and neither were dissenters, and that was something of which we can
all be proud.”\textsuperscript{16} The \textit{New York Post} talked about how the tenth anniversary showed “how tough we are as a people and how far we have come since our darkest hour.”\textsuperscript{17}

Through the opinions posted on the papers, it is noted that not only the press but also the people actually participate in this patriotic discourse. This is the way people identify themselves as Americans, with the same good ideologies and the same “loyalty to civilization.” In fact, it is questionable that patriotism post 9/11 was revived in \textit{all} Americans. However, with the help of the media in general, and the press in particular, the sentiment is spread and felt nationally like what Benedict Anderson describes in the formation of an “imagined community.” Sabina Mihelj also supports this idea, proposing that the identity-building efforts of national events cannot be successful without the support of mass communication.\textsuperscript{18} She further points out that the participation of the audience, both the audience present at a national event and the audience following the event through the media, is always taken by the media as “national.”\textsuperscript{19} In this way, the nation is metamorphosed in the form of the audience. Thus, by presenting the voiced patriotism of a certain number of readers, the press somehow takes it that these readers represent the nation as a whole, sending the message of unity to its readers.

The role of the authority or the officials is important here because for the most part, the media rely on “information provided by government, business, and ‘experts’ funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power.”\textsuperscript{20} These officials, whom John Bodnar calls “public bodies,” are the “defenders of the nation-state,” and are concerned about “fostering national unity and patriotism.”\textsuperscript{21} Thus, the concern and interest of the state are very much imbued in the message that the press presents. According to Sigal, almost “four-fifths of \textit{The New York Times} and \textit{The Washington Post} news emanates from official sources,” and these sources are often given “favorable treatment.”\textsuperscript{22} In the discourse of 9/11, the concern of the
officials was not only to evoke patriotism but to use patriotism as a common ground to unite the people.

On the 9th anniversary, regardless of existing racial conflict, the same message was presented when Obama talked about how “we summoned a sense of unity and common purpose.” On the 10th anniversary of 9/11, President Obama stressed that “we will come together as a nation,” and that “we were united, and the outpouring of generosity and compassion reminded us that in times of challenge, we American move forward as one people.”

Silberstein calls this “nation-building rhetoric,” which was used very often in the press coverage of the 9th and 10th anniversary. This rhetoric was established on the ground of “convergence by divergence” in which the most inhumane acts are contrasted with the best American characters.

Here the “nation-building rhetoric” cannot be established without the help of the media, which helps to “incorporat[e] [...] the masses into the nation.”

**UNITY VERSUS DISUNITY**

The Ninth Anniversary

What was special about the ninth anniversary of 9/11 was the debate over the construction of an Islamic Cultural Center near Ground Zero. The debate divided Americans a great deal and raised racial and religious conflicts. During the month leading to the ninth anniversary, an atmosphere of divisiveness lingered, haunting the anniversary as well as the notion of unity advocated by the government and the media. However, the press dealt with this challenge in a very indirect way. That does not mean that the press was trying to avoid the issue. It did acknowledge the current conflict. However, the press presented it as just another social issue of the nation. In this light, the conflict, even though acknowledged, did not pose any
challenge or question to the unity of the nation at all. It became just another problem to solve and the press tried its best to call on people not to get themselves into the bait of disunity from ‘the enemies.’

An article from the *USA Today* treated signs of disunity presented by the debate over the Islamic Center as a node in history that did not really threaten the spirit of national unity. The article acknowledged that “we lost [...] our compassion for each other, and we became blinded by racial and religious stereotypes.” Yet, it did not in any way challenge the proposed idea of unity. The question asked was “[h]ow can we call ourselves good Americans and hate those who did nothing but believe in a different faith?”28 The implication was that there are “good” and “bad” Americans. “Good” Americans would not let religious difference divide them. “Bad” Americans do. So the message implied was that a number of “bad” Americans did not and could not represent other “good” Americans” who actually represent the nation. Thus, “good” Americans are united. Actually, an article from *The Washington Post* confirmed that “the controversy does not represent a significant new shift in attitudes,” and that attitudes may be mixed and may have grown towards a negative tendency, “but there's no sign of an upswing in anti-Muslim fervor.”29 The question was whether a non-existence of anti-Muslim fervor automatically entails an undivided nation. That is hardly the case as Chapter 4 will demonstrate. However, the press seemed to equate the absence of an anti-Muslim sentiment with the safety of an undivided nation.

In another article, *USA Today* mentioned that even though recent headlines “reflect[ed] tension over Muslims’ place in America,” FBI statistics showed that “hate crimes against Muslims remain relatively rare.”30 This can be very misleading because doubt and hatred against Muslims do not necessarily translate into hate crimes. There may be few crimes against
Muslims; however, that does not mean that the distrust does not exist and Americans are united. Signs of distrust actually started from the governmental officials themselves when 52 percent of Muslim Americans felt targeted by the government in the terrorist surveillance and 43 percent of them reported harassment. And as Chapter 3 will show, Muslim Americans, though not experiencing any dramatic hate crimes, still got small signs of discrimination like stares and slight comments and hence, felt targeted and alienated. Yet, by showing that hate crimes against Muslims are rare, the message sent is that the negative sentiment about Muslims does not represent a divided America because at the core, Americans are, in general, still united.

The debate over the construction of an Islamic center and mosque near Ground Zero in 2010 did not seem to make the press go back and question whether the idea of national unity should continue to be promoted as part of the legacy of 9/11. Instead, national unity was transformed into a discourse that was used to evoke the notion of tolerance and unity. The New York Times reported that the goal of the center is “to bring Muslims and non-Muslims together,” which was a worthwhile goal. Thus, “this mosque can serve as a constant reminder of tolerance and peace in the shadow of what happened that day.” In this way, the press called on the people to build “a nation that's hospitable to people of all religious and nonreligious backgrounds,” and expressed a hope that “we have not become so divided that even the uniting power of Ground Zero will prove unable to bring us together.”

In a few articles that actually discussed the conflict over the construction of the mosque, the press just reported the issue and refrained from commenting on it. One example is an article from the New York Post, which reported rallies in downtown Manhattan without any comment. Yet, the articles did not forget to mention that “3,000 pro-mosque demonstrators outnumbered the mosque opponents by about 500,” a proof of how the hatred sentiment did not represent a
dominant or national feeling. Two other articles by the New York Post treated the conflict in the same way, i.e. reporting without commenting: “WTC Site Gears for Solemn Hush - & Then Noisy Protest”, and “NYPD ‘Army’ for Protest.” In each of the articles, the first half were dedicated to reporting the protests and the second half to the 9/11 commemoration program. By doing this, the paper distracted readers’ attention, and at the same time devalued the importance of the protests by presenting it as just flash news.

The short-term effect of this “avoiding” tactic is that doubts are not brought into attention. Mihelj notes that even though the audience may not be totally convinced of what the press says, doubts do not usually appear or become visible “unless the media are explicitly looking to delegitimize the event.” The long-term effect is that doubts about unity are erased in the memory package of 9/11. With time, whenever people think of 9/11, the first notion that would come to their mind is that of patriotism and unity. In this way, the “propaganda model” can be said to be successful in creating an illusion of unity in the people.

Eugene F. Shaw differentiates between “issues” and “events.” “Issue” is defined as a “matte[r] of concerning involving repetitive news coverage of related happenings that fit together under one umbrella term” while “event” is regarded as “discrete, finite happenings that are limited geographically and temporally.” In other words, “issues” are what matters and “events” are short-lived thus do no in anyway influence the longevity of “issues.” In this light, national unity can be seen as an issue, while disunity is reported as an event only. Thus, disunity is presented as a background on which national unity can rise, rather than an issue of its own. In the month leading to the anniversary and the month of the anniversary, the press framed the news in such a way that presents national unity as the dominant narrative, which reflects the dominant ideology of the country. This framing becomes a ritual in which audience are conditioned to
attach the memory of 9/11 with the idea of unity. Potter calls this phenomenon “audience conditioning” as the audience is immersed in “habitual exposure patterns.” This “habitual exposure pattern” may in fact transform national unity into part of the public memory of 9/11, regardless of whatever happens.

The Tenth Anniversary

In the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the heated debate over the Islamic Center in 2010 still lingered and once again, the debate was treated as a remembered “event” rather than an “issue” of its own. It is true that “doubts do not normally become visible unless the media are explicitly looking to delegitimize the event.” In the context of the anniversary, the press did not work to “delegitimize” the ritual but rather to advocate it. Hence any signs of doubt were treated in the most superficial way.

On September 12th 2011, USA Today ran the headline “Politicians in the USA Must Display Their Christian Credentials, and For Many, Islam Is Still The Sworn Enemy.” This article stated that after the attack, “hate crimes against Muslims and Arabs (and people who could be confused for either) jumped more than fourfold from 2000 through 2001.” Yet, this article did not question all national unity. Instead, it noted that such incidents were “the isolated activities of individual bigots” and how “as a group,” Americans were not at war with Muslims. Again, the notion of “good” versus “bad” Americans was displayed. Bad Americans were considered the minority, the “isolated” group, hence did not represent the majority of good Americans who would not let the attack divide the nation. Thus these negative incidents should prompt “us” to make more commitment towards. In another article on the USA Today, again the conflict was stated as a temporal challenge to be overcome:
Unlike the unity and the "Americanism" that lasted for decades after Pearl Harbor, sadly 10 years after 9/11 our nation is severely divided by extreme partisanship, political intransigence (especially on fiscal and social issues) and by lingering prejudice against certain groups.\textsuperscript{44}

That article concluded that as “we have made progress in protecting our nation against attacks from without, on this 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary, we can commit to strengthening our nation from within.”\textsuperscript{45}

\textit{The New York Times} tackled the conflict in much the same way. According to its articles, the hatred against Muslims did not represent the “disunity” of the nation; rather, it was just another negative incident that “we” had to overcome. So, the possibility of a disunited or fragmented nation escaped the readers’ attention. Instead, instances of how there were many people working towards the solidarity among Americans were glorified and depicted as a model representative of what the Americans were doing in general. The paper ran a story about a Methodist minister’s wife in Syracuse, Mrs. Wiggin, who invited Muslim women she did not know over for coffee. The article mentioned how Syracuse communities, like many other communities in the States, did not escape the so-called “Islamophobia.” The attack has instilled in the people “distrust and hostility towards Muslims.” And this is the furthest the article went. The later part focused mainly on how “American Christians and Jews reached out to better understand Islam, […] and [how] Muslims also reached out, newly conscious of their insularity, aware of the suspicions of their neighbors, determined that the ambassadors of Islam should not be the terrorists.” \textsuperscript{46}
Another example of how the press tried to focus more on unity than disunity can be found in *The Washington Post*. The article, “Seeking to Build Unity After the Ruin of 9/11,” demonstrated how Muslims died in the attack too and how religious leaders attempted to "educate their flocks about what Islam is and is not." This article told the story of how people were trying to end discrimination and promote mutual understanding:

"As our nation commemorates the 10th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, we stand together as religious leaders from diverse traditions to urge our fellow Americans to recommit to the inspiring spirit of unity and cooperation that we as a people embraced in the weeks after the tragedy."

In this way, the paper was acting in accordance with President Obama when he called on the US people to “reclaim post-9/11 unity,” to remember that “our differences pale beside what unites us and that when we choose to move forward together, as one American family, the United States doesn't just endure, we can emerge from our tests and trials stronger than before.”

So, the press’s tactic was to acknowledge the conflict but to not critically discuss its threat to deconstruct national unity. Rather the media choose to view the conflict as a small deviation from the common norm and call on the people to work harder towards a “United” State of America. The morale disseminated is that “[a] strong society does not overreact or abandon its core values in the process of defeating an act of terrorism,” so that “[t]en years later, we are still one.” Looking through all the news articles in 2011, one can see how the signs of disunity in the past were largely buried under the notion of national unity. “Reunited We Stand” was presented as a norm and as a standard value to be attached to the memory of 9/11. Whenever
disunity was mentioned, it is viewed as a node of temporal event in the development of the collective memory of 9/11.

Another tactic that the press employed to deal with the challenge of national unity is to talk about another kind of disunity, i.e. political disunity. In fact, in democratic society, it is questionable whether political unity should be promoted. With the two-party system in America, political disunity is more of a norm. This disunity, due to its frequent manifestation, did not pose any challenge or refutation to the unity of the nation based on the shared values of the “American Creed.” Instead of talking about how the nation has become more divided after the attack, how the ideal of the “American Creed” is not strong enough to hold people together, to erase doubt and hatred towards a religious group, the press chose to deal with the idea of disunity in light of a political norm. “That 9/11 Unity is a World Away” discussed the “divide that separate the parties.”\textsuperscript{51} \textit{The Washington Post} suggested that “National Unity Becomes a Distant Memory” and yet the unity here means very much political unity, as “there was a brief time in the weeks after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, when congressional leaders of the two parties regarded one another not only as trustworthy allies but also as indispensable partners.”\textsuperscript{52} This article also emphasizes that "[n]ational unity doesn't translate necessarily into political unity." As political unity is largely impossible, the absence of which will not in any way jeopardize the ideal of national unity. Thus, the idea of “national unity” still remains prevalent and unchallenged.

Examination of the 9\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} anniversary showed that the controversy of the Islamic Center in the 9\textsuperscript{th} anniversary did not challenge the concept of national unity at all. Although many informants interviewed for this study felt that the debate was really an attack on the religion and they did feel being alienated after 9/11, the press did not actually bring to the focus
how the debate would influence national unity. One of the informants, Emily, said that “I feel like my religion was being hijacked.” Another respondent, Emma, told me that she felt like the location of the Islamic Center “has a lot of feelings attached towards the religion” which, for her, is not reasonable because the religion should not be blamed for actions of a group of people who happened to be Muslims. Voices like these were not made visible on the papers. Instead, instances of unity were brought into the attention, even in the context in which unity was very questionable. What remains after the controversy is the reinforcement of unity in the 10th anniversary. The next part will show how unity is built into public memory of 9/11.

UNITY AND PUBLIC MEMORY

Bodnar writes that “[p]ublic memory emerges from the intersection of official and vernacular cultural expressions.” In other words, public memory is a compromise between official memory, shaped by the authority, and vernacular memory, shaped by the ordinary people. Yet, compromise does not mean that each version of memory contributes equally to the construction of public memory. Bodnar likens public memory to a “cognitive device to mediate competing interpretations and privilege some explanations over others.” In this case, national unity has become the “privilege explanations” of the legacy of 9/11. It would be incorrect to say that the idea is absolutely not contested because obviously, “conflict and contestation, and the use of power by some groups against others, are endemic features of most collective experiences.” However, the notion of national unity is not “officially” contested, understood in the sense that contestation to this notion is not as well represented in public arena. As a consequent, the people are much more immersed in the official version of 9/11 memory in which national unity is seen as a legacy. In this version of memory, the civilians who died in the attack
were “readily identified with a national cause, victims of an attack on America and on
democracy itself.”\textsuperscript{56} Thus, the nation is seen as united on the same front, defending the values of
the “American Creed.”

The press in particular and the media in general played a very important role in shaping
this public memory of 9/11. The power of the media lies in its ubiquity and the way it is
saturated into the lives of the people.\textsuperscript{57} In this way, the media have become “not only in the chief
purveyor of contemporary ideas and values but also the most influential framers of what we now
know or thinking about the past.”\textsuperscript{58} As a consequence, according to Barbie Zelizer, the memory
of the past is the media’s chosen memory of it and “media’s memories have in turn becomes
American’s own.”\textsuperscript{59} In this way, the media creates what Alison Landsberg calls “prosthetic”
memory. It is “prosthetic” because it is not the product of lived social experience but an
experience produced by mass-mediated presentations.\textsuperscript{60} While Landsberg argues that
“[p]rosthetic memories are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the
interface of individual and collective experience,” I would prefer to call the legacy of 9/11 the
collective version of “prosthetic memory.”\textsuperscript{61} 9/11 presents a case in which individual experiences
coincide very much with collective experience. Most New Yorkers’ personal experience of the
event would match with the nation’s experience as presented on the media. And with the media’s
power in creating the “imagined community,” people in other areas would feel the same way.
Different people may have different interpretations of the event and its memory; however, it
should be reminded that “what an individual tends to think is memorable about the past is to a
great extent what the social milieu designates it to be.”\textsuperscript{62} Thus, the prosthetic memory of 9/11,
created by the media, would be more collective than personal.
From the way that the press shapes the construction of 9/11 legacy around the notion of national unity and from the way that the press presents the current disunity as a temporal event, it can be seen that the idea of the “United” States of America is what will be kept to remember while other challenges to that idea will soon be forgotten. Misztal argues that “[i]n order to ensure national cohesion there is a need to forget events that represent a threat to unity.” Anderson also supports Misztal’s statement by proposing how national memories, constructed by selective forgetting, “constitute one of the most important mechanisms by which a nation constructs a collective identity or become an “imagined community.” Cubitt also acknowledges that “historical narrative is based on selection – that in retaining some things, it represses others” and that the “shaping of the way the past is represented is likely […] to be influenced by the operations of power.” One way to do this is to view disunity as a temporal event, rather than an issue. The power of the state plays the key role in determining what to be remembered and what to be forgotten. This indicates that the power of official memory overwhelm that of vernacular memory in the construction of public memory of 9/11. Hence, together with the press, the state conditions its people into a habitual pattern of exposure, which would gradually tune them into what they will remember.

In this chapter, I have argued that unity is built on the ground of patriotism, on the ground of love for the country and its ideals. Also, I have demonstrated that unity is also presented as an “issue” that promises a long-lasting imprint on the memory of 9/11. Disunity is presented by the press as impossible in the sense that it is just a temporary “event” that does not reflect the reality of the country and also in the sense that it just involves ‘bad’ Americans. In the next chapter, I will examine whether the broadcast media deals with this notion of national unity in the same way as the print media does.
CHAPTER 3: THE TELEVISION NEWS BROADCAST AND NATIONAL UNITY

Chapter 1 has demonstrated how the idea of national unity is presented and reinforced in the major newspapers, making the idea part of the legacy of 9/11 and transforming it into the dominant narrative of 9/11 memory. This chapter will explore whether the same pattern can be detected in broadcast media. First, how the broadcast news covered the 9th and 10th anniversary of 9/11 will be examined. Then, how the issue of the mosque was covered will also be explored. There are two findings that the chapter will discuss. First, television news did not explicitly mention or elaborate on the idea of unity like the press does. However, this does not mean that the concept of unity is totally absent in the way memory of 9/11 was presented. It was embedded in the images and discussions featured. Also, as television news featured a lot of speeches of the officials, i.e. the presidents and the New York City mayor, the message of unity was naturally embedded in the memory of 9/11. Second, television news, like the press, treated the debate over the construction of the mosque as an even rather than an issue. Hence, the idea of unity remained intact in the heat of the mosque controversy.

THE COMMEMORATIONS

The repetitive theme of the annual commemoration of 9/11 has been to remember 2,982 people, including 343 firefighters and 60 police officers from New York City and the Port Authority, who died in the attack, and to share the loss of their families. The broadcast news were filled with stories of lost ones, of survivors, of the generation of children whose parents were lost, of the unhealed pains left, of the strength of the nation and that of the people to move on. MSNBC calls this the “ritual of remembrance.” Days before the 10th anniversary, MSNBC showed hundreds of construction workers having a moment of silence under a giant flag hung
over the construction of the new World Trade Center. The next broadcast gave a close-up into the work of the people who helped to preserve the memory of 9/11 as they worked to preserve the steel debris from Ground Zero and distribute them across the country. Five years ago, a hangar at JFK airport was filled with the debris. Now it is nearly empty as all of what remained has been distributed all over the country. Therefore, “no matter where you live, a piece of 9/11 is nearby.” The last broadcast featured stories of former students from Florida's Emma E. Booker Elementary school where President Bush was first informed of the attacks, and of how they remembered ten years later.

This theme of remembrance, honor, grief, healing, and hope pervade the commemoration of 9/11. The tenth anniversary in 2011 was more special than previous ones because of the completion a public memorial, where bodies of 40 percent of the victims were buried in the attack. The memorial pools that mark the footprint of the Twin Towers became a special public place for personal mourning. Thus, the commemorative ceremony at Ground Zero was an indispensable part in the coverage of the media on the tenth anniversary when families of the victims came to the place, kissed, touched and edged names of their loved ones on papers, and put flowers and flags on the names.

ABC News featured this event very closely in its broadcast. In the newscast, “President Obama, Bush Honor 9/11 side by side,” ABC News showed how the anniversary atmosphere pervaded every events in New York, how the commemorative ceremonies were held, how “some wounds never heal,” how families of the victims kissed on the names of their loved ones, and left flowers and flags on the names, and how children who lost their parents expressed their feelings at the moment. In the next newscast, “9/11: America Remembers,” touching photos of mourners were presented. Footage of the day the planes hit the two towers was replayed and then images
of 10 years later were presented to show the resilience of the people and the nation. The commemorative ceremony at Ground Zero was reviewed and the ceremony at Shanksville was presented as well. The channel also demonstrated the “Portrait of Grief,” a series of brief biographies of 9/11 victims, as a way to “memorialize the nobility or everyday lives,” a way to show how “they were us.” The last newscast, “9/11: The Survivors” depicted the voices of survivors, their feelings and how they remembered the event.

CBS News portrayed the theme of the tenth anniversary in very much the same way. The ceremony at Ground Zero was the focus. The place, which was “once seen as unimaginable horror,” “was transformed into a place of solemn remembrance and healing” with bell tolling, silence moments and name readings. The broadcast also showed the commemorative activities in Shanksville where Flight 93 crashed, which is now marked with a boulder and flowers left by mourners, as well as those at the Pentagon, where “each of the 184 victims was remembered with a bench and a small reflecting pool.” President Obama was featured honoring those who died in Afghanistan and Iraq in Arlington cemetery. Apart from the grief, an important message was presented as well: the message of strength, optimism, and hope. Interviews with New Yorkers were presented to show how the people are moving on, regardless of the pain. Along with this theme of hope is the story of the emergency landing into the Hudson River of flight US Airways 1549 in 2009. All 155 passengers and crews were alive. This story represented a “triumph” as opposed to the terror that happened a decade ago, showing that “America needed a win,” and that the “miracle on the Hudson” was a “cure” for the fear and insecurity attached with 9/11.
UNITY AS A DISCOURSE

In the discourse of the commemoration, it seems like the notion of national unity is absent in the narratives of MSNBC, ABC and CBS. However, a closer look at this repetitive representation of 9/11 commemoration reveals otherwise. First of all, the message of unity was expressed in the way New York was metamorphosed into America. The commemoration of 9/11 was presented as not just a New York’s event but a national event. The twin towers were not just a New York landscape, but a symbol for the American values. One of the interviewees on MSNBC said that the remnants of the towers remnants “reflect who we are and what we live for.” Thus the people were portrayed as united because they shared the same values that were attacked. In this discourse, America was depicted as a nation mourning for its loss, and as a nation healing and emerging stronger. Schudson proposes that the media regarded the audience as “part of a large national family that had suffered a grievous blow.” He also notes that the trauma prompted journalists to “invoke a generalized “we” and to take for granted shared values.” ABC News suggested that “they [the families of the victims] wept and the nation did as well,” showing how the event “happened in New York but it was felt across the country.” By transforming New York into the nation, the television news broadcast reminded the American people of how they all felt on 9/11, and of how they came together as a nation. To represent the idea of “one nation,” steel remains of the two towers were distributed all across the country so that “no matter where you live, a piece of 9/11 is nearby.” People involving in the whole process of preserving and distributing these remains said that “[i]t happened in New York but it was felt across the country. [And] all those pieces can help hold us together.” Hence, what is being remembered is that “at the end of the day, we’re all Americans. We’ll never forget and this country can never be broken,” and that “9/11 united all of us as a nation.”
In this discourse, Americans were grouped together under one national feeling of loss, and of attachment to the nation and to each other. The media presented the notion of “we” as if there were no deviations from this national sentiment of attachment and unity. In this way, deviations, if exist, were not given a chance to gather attention. There are people who have never been to New York, thus could not feel about the event the way New Yorkers did. And the media has exploited fully its power to create “imagined community” to call for the nation to be united. In this way, the unity evoked can be argued to be an “imagined” one only. People may not actually feeling united, but they are trained to think that they are. In other words, as they are habitually exposed to the discourse of unity, any doubt about this sentiment is evanescent. The moment doubts about unity emerge, they are immediately suppressed by the repetitive dominant narrative on the media. This is how the spiral of silence works. When one narrative dominates the public sphere, others will be rendered invisible and adherents to the deviant narratives tend to keep their opinions to themselves for fear of being isolated or separated from the people around them. This creates an ideal environment for the dominant narrative to thrive. Consequently, people are immersed in a discourse in which there are no deviants from what the media advocates.  

One of the interviewees for this study pointed out that when the event happened, she did not feel it was a big deal. She said she had never been to New York before so she could not fully grasp the meaning of the event. Now when she recalled the moment, she felt ashamed for she did not “realize the effects it was having on all these people, these people dying.” She remembered having to join the patriotic sentiment at schools with all the singing and the I-am-proud-to-be-Americans notions, which she now said to be “ridiculous.” Thus, for her, there is no unity as propagated by the media. This view differentiates her from the dominant discourse.
However, views like these were not presented. In a way this interviewee is rendered silent. She might not fear of being isolated from the rest, yet she did not have any “public sphere” to voice herself to see if there are any other similar thoughts. Consequently, “deviants” are separated from each other, thinking that there would be no one who would share the same viewpoints.

Second, the notion of unity as a discourse was embedded in symbols of patriotism, which were prevalent on television. The strength of the broadcast news as compared to newspapers is the display of images. While the press has to send most of its messages via language, broadcast news can send the message through the way that it displays or focuses on particular images. In this discourse of unity, the image of the flag received a lot of focus and close-up capture. Flags were seen everywhere and were depicted with high frequency on broadcast news. There has hardly been a presentation of the commemoration ceremony without a lot of close-ups of the flags or with the flags in view. After the attacks, “the four major television networks, ABC, CBS, NBC, and FOX, restyled their network logos, usually visible as transparent fixtures and the bottom corner of the screen, to resemble the stars and stripes pattern, some adding red, white and blue coloring.”

This shows how important the flag has been to transform a New York event into a national event. The previous chapter has demonstrated how unity can be established on the ground of patriotism which is symbolized by the flag. After 9/11, flags were seen everywhere, which, according to Dana Heller, is a sign of “patriotic unity.” The flag is what transformed the victims into patriots and heroes even though it is questionable that the victims would think of themselves as patriots or heroes, and “[i]t is certainly doubtful to the point of implausibility to suggest that anything as rarified as patriotism was in the minds of those dying during the events of 9/11.” The flags turned the mourning of a personal loss into a mourning of a national loss. Thus it became a norm that the pain was a national pain and memory was a national one. By
transmitting the pervasiveness of the flag symbol, the broadcast news conveyed the message of unity as, to borrow Antonio Gramsci’s term, “common sense.” And by emphasis on the image of the flags in the commemoration, the media showed how 9/11 has united the nation, while this may not be the case, as presented in Chapter 4

Third, the frequent appearance of the authorities and their speeches on television helped to reinforce unity as a discourse. Recurrent displays of authorities’ speeches helped to spread the idea of unity without the media having to directly talking about it. In his speech at the Pentagon, reflecting the courage of Flight 77, Vice President Biden talked about the “American instinct” to respond to the crisis, to volunteer into wars to defend the country, about patriotism, about courage, and about “the true legacy of 9/11,” which is a mightier spirit, and a thicker bond that unites the people. Obama’s speech at Zero Ground was featured or quoted on most channels. The newscast on ABC News presented part of his speech, in which he talked about how “nothing can break the will of the truly United States of America,” and how “we took a painful blow and emerged stronger,” how “these past ten years underscore the bond between all Americans,” and how “the determination to move forward as one people will be the legacy of 9/11.” In this ‘united moment,’ the broadcast featured Present Obama and former Present Bush and their wives walking side by side around the memorial. There is no better way to signify the ‘solidary’ and ‘bonding’ than this image. CBS also showed this image and considered it a sign of solidarity.

In a way, the media conveyed the message that the solidarity of the officials or authorities represents the solidarity of the nation. Amy Reynolds and Brooke Barnette found the same pattern when exploring CNN verbal and visual framing of 9/11. They regard the idea of unity presented on CNN as narrow because the channel created a perception that the entire country could be seen to unified as the government leaders from the two dominant parties were unified.
In the coverage of 9/11 commemoration, the image of the two presidents walking side by side was shown in most channels. Thus, without having to talk about unity, by displaying the solidarity of the two presidents, the message of unity was sent. If the society “depends not just on memory, but on the capacity to communicate it,” then the way that media communicates the memory of 9/11 has a great potential to construct the collective memory of the event. That does not mean that personal memory and interpersonal communication of memory was disregarded. However, with the ubiquity of the media and the way it “conditions” viewers to “habitual exposure,” the idea of unity will be gradually instilled in the memory of the people.

So far the chapter has demonstrated how the broadcast news conveys the message of unity in the context of the 10th anniversary. It has also shown how the theme of the anniversary serves as a background on which the notion of unity can be developed and how unity was embedded in the way the anniversary was depicted. While the press outwardly called on the people to unite, the broadcast news did not. Instead, the latter tended to treat unity as already embedded in the memory of 9/11, the memory that has been replayed every year with authorities’ speeches of strength and solidarity, with the pains felt across the country, with the flags everywhere and with the sense of patriotism. In the broadcast news, unity has been seen as an unquestioned norm, especially in the context of commemoration. Thus, while the press actually discussed unity, advocated for unity in the heat of disunity, and treated any sign of disunity as a deviation from a supposed norm, the broadcast news treats unity as the air that the people breathe. We all know it is there and we will always be reminded that it is there.
THE ‘MOSQUE DEBATE’ AND DISUNITY?

In 2010, the construction of an Islamic Center near Ground Zero ignited a heated debate, as well as a strong division among Americans. The Islamic Community Center project, called Park51, created a controversy because it was just two blocks away from Ground Zero where many victims of 9/11 were buried. Opponents of the project thought it was insensitive to the feelings of the victims’ families. Supporters believed the Center would bring people together by making them learn and understand more about Islam. The controversy obviously posed a challenge to the notion of national unity. The previous chapter has indicated how unity is constructed on the concept of the “American Creed” which represents American values of freedom and democracy. The fact that many people opposed to the construction of the mosque demonstrated that in fact the idea of unity is not a common-sense everyday norm but was more a temporary sentiments that was evoked in times of trauma. As seen in Chapter 1, the press did not present the challenge to unity in this way. Rather, the notion remained intact and signs of disunity were presented an “event” rather than an “issue.” The following section examines the 9th anniversary in the context of the controversy over the construction of the Islam Cultural Center near Ground Zero. In this light, the section focuses on how the broadcast news would talk about the controversy, and whether the newscasts considered this debate as a challenge to the notion of national unity.

The 9th anniversary of 9/11 went through the well-known rituals of bells tolling, names readings, and authorities’ speeches. On that day, New York City mayor, Michael Bloomberg talked about the pains and the solidarity. CBS featured Obama’s remembrance activities and his speeches, in which he asked the people to be more tolerant and live true to the spirit of American values. MSNBC also quoted officials’ sayings about the anniversary. Former First
Lady Laura Bush stated that “[o]n this day, Americans have no divisions.” Obama talked about how we will not “hunker down behind walls of suspicion and mistrust.” New York Archbishop Timothy Dolan said that “[w]e must never allow September 11th to become a time for protest and division.” Others mentioned how ‘we’ should hold on to the American values of freedom, equality, and tolerance, all of which constitute the “American greatness.” Senator Robert Menendez called the people to commit to the spirit of unity that was evoked right after the event. In sum, the theme of the 9th anniversary reinforced the ritual of remembrance as well as the theme of strength, unity, hope and patriotism.

Yet, in 2010, however much the officials wanted the people to be more united, the reality was totally different. The coverage of the 9th anniversary seemed to pale in the face of the debate over the mosque construction. Contradictorily, in no case doubts about national unity were brought up. The debate was a sign of divisiveness among Americans as the opponent group of Park51 presented quite a jaundiced attitude towards Islam and Muslims. Even though the news broadcasts assumed that the debate was not an attack to the religion, the controversy could not be said to have nothing to do with religion either. There are three ways in which the broadcast news portrayed the controversy without jeopardizing the construction of unity.

The first tactic was to create in viewers an illusion that they are given a lot of information while in fact they were not informed of any important issue at all. Although the channels featured a lot of debates and opinions about the debate, they did not try to put forward any particular interpretation of the debate, nor did they dig deeper into the meaning to the debate. Newscasts from ABC, CBS, MSNBC and Fox News showed that the media did not try to suppress the debate but rather gave it considerable focus; however, the debates and conversations featured on the channels examined were merely describing-but-not-commenting way. There was
no actual voice of the media about the influence of this issue on the propagated concept of unity at all. Opinions from both sides were reported and comments were few and far between. So even in a time of divisiveness, the viewers were given a load of information without being actually informed about any important thing. All that was given to them was the occurrences of a newsworthy event without any particular meanings attached. Viewers were let to interpret what the debate meant to them; however, it is doubtful that without exposure to the concept of disunity, viewers would interpret the debate as a challenge to what the media has been advocating. The focus was put on whether the Islamic Center should be built near Ground Zero, which had nothing to do with how “we,” Americans” are united. By avoiding bringing up the topic, the media was actually successfully in rendering the concept of disunity invisible.

On CBS News, opposite views were presented and no indication on how this issue would influence or threaten national unity. Supporters believed that the Islamic Center would help people to “know what Islam is about” and would “attract[t] a lot of people who don’t understand Islam.” Opponents believed that the mosque would intensify the pain of the victims’ families. Opponents believed that the mosque would intensify the pain of the victims’ families.33 In one of the newscasts, ABC reported that critics considered the location of the mosque as “a slap in the face to those killed on 9/11” and yet supporters were saying that preventing the mosque from being built was tantamount to “allowing this way of hatred to take over the country.”34 ABC also showed that not all families of 9/11 victims were opposed to the construction of the mosque. In contrast, among families of the victims were supporters of the mosque. Donna Marsh O’Connor, who lost her daughter on 9/11, stated that the time was a test of whether America was a place to flee for safety from religious prosecution and that “we should not be fighting this particular battle.”35 In the same way, not all Muslim were supportive of the
project. In an interview with ABC News, Dr. Zuhdi Jasser said that the mosque was a “political structure” that would “cast a shadow on Ground Zero.”

Why would the location of the mosque be a “slap in the face to those killed on 9/11”? If the people were united like the media was advocating, they should know that Muslims and terrorists are not the same; hence a construction of a place of worship would not pose an insult to the victims at all. The important thing is while 67% said yes to developers’ right to build it near Ground Zero, 71% said no to Ground Zero mosque. Why is it so? Does this mean that seventy-one percent of Americans actually have a certain prejudice, distrust or a jaundiced attitude towards Muslims and Islam after 9/11? If this is so, how can the nation are said to be more united after the event? Also, on most media broadcast, the term ‘mosque’ came up much more frequently than the term ‘Islamic Center.’ It was not just a mosque as the media simplified, which is where the debate got heated. In fact, if the media wanted to disseminate the notion of unity, it should have used the term ‘Islamic Center’ more frequently. The Center means more than just a mosque. It would be a place for people to know more about Islam, to wipe away any prejudice or hatred about Islam after 9/11, to unite the people together. In this way, the media could have taken the supporting side to be consistent with the dominant discourse of unity that it created.

In fact, no sides were taken by the media. And the debate was simply detached from the discourse of unity. The voice that actually expressed a clear stand was from that of the officials. Regarding the issue, Obama expressed his support for the Islam Center. He said that "[a]s a citizen and as president, I believe that Muslims have the right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. […] That includes the right to build a place of worship and a community center on private property in lower Manhattan, in accordance with local laws and
ordinances,” and that “[t]his is America, and our commitment to religious freedom must be unshakeable.” Mayor Bloomberg expressed the same opinion when he said that “we would be untrue to the best part of ourselves and who we are as New Yorkers and Americans if we said no to a mosque in Lower Manhattan.” Here the officials were once again very consistent and determined in holding on to the dominant discourse of unity while the media seemed to be more ambiguous about it stance. Would this mean that the state power had to control over the media in this case? The answer would be no. Even though the media presented viewpoints from two sides of the debate, it did not deconstruct the unity discourse at all.

It should be noted that “the most effective aspect of hegemony is found in the suppression of alternate views through the establishment of parameters which define what is legitimate, reasonable, sane, practical, good, true, and beautiful.” So the fact that the media presented the debate in the most objective way was not a breach of the “parameters” in the sense that the regardless of the debate, the dominant narrative remains intact, which is the “legitimate, reasonable, sane, practical, good, true, and beautiful” thing to preserve. Thus, though the government may not reserve the absolute power to control the content of the media like Daniel A. Berkowitzt proposes, it plays an important role in deciding what is the meta-narrative that cannot be breached.

As the media does not want to break its “relationship to a structural ‘center,’” the media is seen to play quite a passive role in the way it constructs the messages. In this light, the media cannot be ideologically separated from the state. It was influenced by the governmental control of information and even misinformation. The consequence is that the media “tell[s] the public what the government wants them to hear.” It can be seen as a tool to maintain status quo, performing its manipulation function. The question to ask at this point is whether the media can
be ideologically autonomous at all. It can. However, in times of national crisis like that of 9/11, the media “are more likely to act as the voice of the state,” the consequence of which is that “the information provided to citizens becomes constrained, thus reflecting a limited range of political viewpoints.”

In the aftermath of 9/11, journalists became “official messengers” of the state as they “came to believe their job was to report what government officials said or believed.”

This seems to be case in the way broadcast news dealt with the mosque issue. While there were many debated presented on broadcast news, creating a sense that the media was greatly engaging in the issue, the reality suggested otherwise as the media appeared to be disengaging in its coverage of the debate. For the most part, the television channels examined were reporting different opinions, including those of government officials without attaching to those opinions any further implications that might challenge the dominant discourse. These channels were very cautious in commenting on the issue and in exploring its implications to the notion of national unity that has been strongly fostered by the authorities and the media itself.

The second tactic to avoid mentioning disunity was by shifting the focus of the debate. Among the channels examined, Fox News was said to be “merciless in its criticism of the ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ as commentators of the channel regarded the mosque as “dangerous, radical, [and] insensitive” to the victims’ family.” Thus, Fox-News presented an opposing viewpoint to that of the state. Can Fox News be seen as a deviation from the norm, as an anti-state channel, as a channel that actually performs the gate-keeping function of the media? I would not answer yes to this question. The way Fox News presented its stand was not that different from other news channel in that the two stands on the issue was equally presented.

Some opponents believed that the Islamic center “will be turned into a terrorist training ground for Muslim militants bent on overthrowing the U.S. government” whiles supporters proposed
that the center “has nothing to do with religion” and advocated for religious freedom and rejected the “crude stereotypes meant to frighten and divide us.” However, a closer look at the way Fox News covered the debate showed that it expressed its stand in the issue based on its opposition of the location of the mosque, not of the mosque itself or Muslims or Islam. In this way, Fox News actually simplified the issue that could possibly link to racism and disunity into an issue of location.

In its featured broadcast, Fox News’ commentator expressed his bias very clearly and appeared to be aggressive towards Mr. Nihad Awad, Council on American-Islamic Relations when he asked “why here” or “what about the sensitivity to the families? What about the location? […] New York City is a big place, man. Why here?” Regarding this issue of location, Fox News seemed to advocate the idea that the mosque was not simply a mosque near Ground Zero but a Ground Zero mosque because although it was not at Ground Zero, it was actually within Ground Zero area. Fox News presented a map of body parts and remains found after 9/11 to refute the Imam’s statement that nobody’s bodies was near the proposed site of the mosque. The map showed that the proposed site of the mosque was within the sacred ground where bodies of 9/11 victims were buried. And Ground Zero meant the whole area, not just the footprint of the two towers, which was why “the majority of Americans to have a problem with the location.” Jim Riches, a retired FDNY Deputy Chief, who lost his son in 9/11, in an interview with Fox News, stated that how the mosque was not fair to his family. He said it was not about religious freedom but about the location. To support his argument, Fox News presented a poll which showed that only 30% of the people thought it was appropriate to build a mosque and Islamic Center near Ground Zero while 64% thought it was wrong.
Unlike ABC, CBS or MSNBC, all of which presented two sides of the debate in a neutral way, Fox News, with its focus on the location of the mosque only, seemed to favor the opposing side and presented opposing views with greater intensity. By simplifying the mosque issue to location, Fox News was able to take sides without obviously challenging the notion of unity that was embedded in the commemoration of 9/11. In fact, ABC and CBS also presented polls on the mosque issue but the two channels did not actually comment on this and its implications at all. In one of its video, ABC News presented different opinions on the issue and chose to comment on Obama’s support of the mosque instead of on the issue itself. The newscasts also presented the polls which showed 64% of the people disapprove of a mosque near Ground Zero and yet 60% people believed in the Muslims’ right to build a mosque near Ground Zero. CBS also presented its own polls with 71% said no to Ground Zero mosque and 67% said yes to developers’ right to build it near Ground Zero. However, these two channels did not take side in the issue like the way Fox News did. So while ABC, CBS and MSNBC avoided touching on the signs of disunity by refraining from commenting on the mosque controversy, Fox News avoided to comment on disunity by simplifying the focus of the debate over the mosque into a debate over the location. By doing this, Fox News sent a clear message that the controversy was not about Muslim; it was not about Islam; it was not about Americans’ intolerance; it was not about disunity. The debate was about the location. So, on the one hand, the concept of unity was presented and reinforced every year through the ritual of commemoration; on the other hand, the notion of disunity was totally absent from the broadcast news regardless of any challenge that existed.

The third way to deal with the mosque debate was to treat it as an “event” rather than an “issue.” In 2011, the debate was not mentioned any more. Fox News, the channel that actually took side against the location, now just reported that the Center was open with a more positive
tone.55 The article reported the positive feelings of the visitors at the exhibit and quoted original supporters of the project, saying that they wished previous opponents could see the exhibition at the Center. The only regret from the side of the developers was that they had not involve families of 9/11 victims into the project and they were fixing that mistake at the time being. After one year, the hot debate was reduced to a report on the opening of the Islamic Center. The focus now was shifted to the debate over Michael Bloomberg’s decision to ban members of the clergy to attend the 10th anniversary. In fact, this decision could have revived the mosque controversy in the 10th anniversary. Yet that did not happen. Instead, the broadcast news, in its opposition to Mayor Bloomberg’s decision, turned the decision into context in which solidarity was provoked when people were encouraged to pray for protest and for unity.56

Another reason for the debate over Ground Zero mosque to fade away in 2011 is that it was employed in 2010 as a campaign issue. Lisa Miller, religious editor at Newsweek, stated on ABC News that the debate actually “started out as local real estate story and there are all components of a good political issue.”57 And, Obama’s involvement in the debate made it a national issue. CBS noted that “ Republics promis[ed] to make it a campaign issue in this fall’s midterm elections.”58 In fact, the emergence of the debate in the time of election did give it a central, yet temporary, focus in 2010. In 2011, this focus was shifted, rendering the debate over the mosque a temporary event, rather than an issue. Frank Durham regards the media’s “shifting position within the context of events” as part of the “media ritual.”59 This chapter has shown that the media did not actually shift position but shift the focus in the context of events to preserve the meta-narrative of the legacy of 9/11.

However, this shifted focus does not mean that people will forget all about the debate because the artifact of the debate, i.e. the Islamic Center, will be something that reminds people
of what happened. However, memories of the debate will not in any way make people question the notion of national unity as the media molds their “opinion visibility” and “frame the perceptual limits around which [their] opinions take shape.” In the “opinion visibility” of the debate, there was no sign of the implications of the mosque controversy to the notion of national unity. And yet, in the “opinion visibility” of 9/11 commemoration, national unity was referred to with high frequency and repetition. In this way, the notion of national unity remains unchallenged and becomes an indispensable part of the collective memory of 9/11.

Neiger, et al., consider collective memory as “a version of the past, selected to be remembered by a given community (or more precisely by particular agents in it).” These agents will shape collective memory in three ways: 1) they determine what to be remembered and what is not, 2) they shape how the past is recalled, and 3) they also shape the degree of emotion attached to the memory. The media is obviously one of the agents that shape collective memory of 9/11. While it seems to provide a space for different agents to contribute to the shaping of the collective of 9/11, it actually favors the official version of 9/11 memory. In this version, the notion of national unity is provoked and embedded into the memory of the 9/11 regardless of any signs of disunity. Disunity is either avoided or presented as a temporary event. Both tactics work to maintain the dominance of national unity. Also, by conditioning viewers to the ritual of commemoration, the media actually help to “unite” the people together because the core element of the commemorating ritual is to “establish as well as confirm individual’s coherence and bonded-ness with other.” Being habitually exposed to this pattern of commemorating, viewers will easily adopt the official version of memory and incorporate it into their personal views about the legacy of 9/11.
This chapter has argued that there is no difference in the way the television news broadcasts and the press dealt with the notion of national unity. The television news broadcast treated national unity as a discourse, which could not be challenged. News channels chose to report the instances of disunity, but not to comment on them. For example, in the case of the mosque debate, the news channels reported the debate without digging into its meanings. Also, they avoided to touch upon the notion of disunity that might have arisen out of the debate. And like the print press, television news broadcast treated instances of disunity as “events” rather than “issues.” Hence the dominant discourse of unity remains intact. Viewers, repetitively exposed to the unity message and constantly immersed in the unity discourse, are more likely to attach unity with 9/11 memory.
CHAPTER 4: THE MYTH OF NATIONAL UNITY

The previous chapters have shown how the media was trying to keep to the benign narrative of national unity intact by presenting unity as a norm and a remembered legacy while occurrences of disunity were presented as deviations of little significance. However, interviews with Muslim Americans revealed that the group is being disunited from the nation. Thus, while the media was trying to make unity a norm, the interviewees seemed to attach unity with more like an exception. In this light, the chapter argues that national unity is only a myth that works to glorify the American ideals. First, it will be demonstrated how the mediated memories of 9/11 actually missed out the vernacular version of the Muslim Americans who feel they are being disunited from the nation after 9/11. Unity as a legacy is a result of a one-sided interpretation of a historical event, thus does not reflect the reality at all. That said, it does not mean that the media has been trying to put forward a lie or propaganda; rather it means that the whole situation of media-fact-versus-real-fact renders national unity a myth.

INVISIBLE MEMORIES

After 9/11, aside from the official memories of unity, there was the vernacular memory of disunity, which was not included in the dominant discourse. The memories of Muslim Americans after 9/11 presented a totally different picture, a picture of hatred and harassment. The previous chapters showed that the media held on to the argument that as anti-Muslim sentiments and hate crimes against Muslims did not grew rampant, the nation could be seen to be united. Any aberration from this supposed norm of unity was seen as rare incidents that only ‘bad’ Americans would be involved in. In fact, while Muslim Americans were not dramatically or physically harassed as a group, they were not treated as part of the nation either. Lori Peek has
found in her study that Muslim Americans “believed that their religious identity would disqualify them from membership in the community of sufferers.”¹ One of the participants in her study stated: “You always have that threat of being the target. You can get looks”² The first interviewee I talked to, Emily, a Bio-engineering student at University of Toledo, mentioned the same thing about the look. Although she said she was lucky to live in a diverse neighborhood where people were more understanding and open-minded, and yet she said she still got the uncomfortable looks from other people as well as bad things spoken to them from time to time.

And definitely it was not just the look. Right after 9/11, Muslim Americans, to their amazement were labeled as the “enemy within.” Another participant, Maggie, a third year student, told me that her family did not realize how much it would impact them, as Muslims, after 9/11 happened and “how bad things would become later on.” I found this interesting because as a matter of fact, they defined themselves as Americans and they obviously did not expect to feel as ‘the Other.’ Yet, it turned out that after 9/11, they experienced fear, insecurity and a feeling of being unwelcomed, all of which other Americans did not have experienced. Somehow, 9/11 wiped away the American-ness of Muslim Americans. Rachel, a freshman Biology student at University of Toledo told me:

The Muslim population is definitely alienated, definitely scared and confused. Certainly they didn’t know why they were targeted in this whole issue […] but I think that blame was carried over to any Muslims.

This idea of blame reminds me of a talk to another respondent, Lisa. Lisa is a junior at the University of Michigan – Ann Arbor. She is studying International Relations, focusing on Middle East and North Africa Studies. She is also the Chair of the Muslim Student Association
at the University of Michigan. Lisa told me that when she was in the 9th grade, she was once asked “what do you think of 9/11?” as if “I might have felt okay about it or might have supported it.” She told me that at that time, she had a feeling that people expected responses from her, which made her really uncomfortable. She said people expected her either to stand up and publicly condemn what happened or to show that she shared some responsibility. Thing became better when she grew up, going to college and realizing that she should not be held responsible for what happened, that “I should not stand on the platform every year apologizing for something I didn’t do.”

Being blamed for the attacked, Muslim Americans were targeted and victimized. A participant in Lori Peek’s study revealed that “[t]hat day, people didn’t even wait for investigations to take place; people didn’t even wait to hear more on the news. It was just hours after the attack, and there were people behind my back that spit on me, people who said. “We’re going to kill them all; we are going to kill them all.” Recalling that day, Lisa, who was a 4th grader at a small private Islamic school, told me that there was a middle-aged man shouting from outside the school things like “go back to your country!” Also, numerous Muslims were harassed and intimidated as they used public transportation after 9/11.

Peek also found out that a number of Muslims actually kept themselves at home for days or weeks after 9/11 for fear of their safety. The same thing happened with two of my informants, Emily and Lisa. When Emily recalled the memory of the day ten years ago, she remembered it was a day before her birthday, she remembered that “we didn’t go out to get groceries or anything for like a month.” And her father did not allow anyone in the family to go anywhere except when they had to. When I asked why she thought her father did so, she said it was just a cautious measures her father took. She did not wear a headscarf but her mother did so
people glared and “for the first couple of weeks, we’d better not to get out so we wouldn’t get to
troubles.” For Lisa, she told me she and her dad used to take a walk every Sunday morning and
they stopped doing that for several months or even a year after 9/11 happened. And she did not
understand why her parents were terrified about such a normal thing as taking a walk outside
because they were living in a diverse community where there was a sizable Muslim community
or Arab community.

Lisa’s question is actually a very important question here. Why would Emily’s father be
afraid of “the troubles”? Why would Lisa have to stop taking a walk outside for such a long
time? Why suddenly Muslim Americans had to worry about their safety while other American
citizens wouldn’t have to? It was not unity when suddenly a particular group was seen as a
possible threat and a potential enemy. It was not unity when doubts against Muslims created this
invisible barrier between them and the rest of American citizens. Amidst all the fear, insecurity
and uncertainty that Muslim Americans had to experience, it was doubtful that they actually
perceived the nation as being more united after the event. Therefore, though, like the media has
flaunted, there were no hate crimes against Muslims nor was there an anti-Muslim sentiment,
unity was not guaranteed. It was not unity when a certain religious group had to take measures
to protect themselves as if they were the outsiders.

Weeks after 9/11, Muslim Americans tried to keep their profile low to reduce their
vulnerability. Peek noted that those who were most vulnerable to discrimination were those
who were readily identifiable as Muslims. This means that to be identifiable as a Muslim is
tantamount to being identifiable as a possible threat, hence discrimination. So, to escape
discrimination is to refuse oneself of part of their identity. Maggie told me that she did not recall
being treated differently by her neighbors after 9/11 because she did not wear a headscarf at that
time and people did not know she was a Muslim. What is interesting is that she was the only one in the four participants who confirmed with me over and over that she did not actually have any bad experience after 9/11 and yet she said it was because she did not wear a headscarf. In this way, she appeared as a non-Muslim, thus a ‘real’ American.

Muslim women’s headscarves made them visible as the enemy within. Rachel recalled how the neighbors told her mom who was wearing a headscarf at the time:

Being a Muslim, my mom wears a headscarf. And our neighbors were telling her “Oh my God, she needs to take it off.” I remember that happening. You know, after 9/11, Muslims became demonized in the United States, and as a 3rd grader, I remember people were being like “Oh my God, you need to take that off.”

She also mentioned how she was living in an area “where Muslims are concentrated. People around you are used to exposure of Muslims and have been accustomed to it and they understand that not all Muslims are terrorists.” Hence when she talked about how the neighbor told her mother to take that off, I was thinking they said so out of good intention, in the sense that she may be safe in the neighborhood but an extra caution may be to take the hijab off, just in case.

What troubles me when thinking about this is if her neighbors saw her as an American like all other Americans in the area, why would they think that hiding away her Muslim identity was the best safety policy? Somehow, this thinking separated Muslim Americans and Americans. Things became clearer when Rachel added: “I think with time, the bias has been overcome. But if you speak to my mom, I’m sure she would say otherwise because she experienced 9/11 and at the moment it was really bad. I remember my mom saying that when 9/11 happened, it was really, really bad for Muslims in general.”
Her statement showed that even in a good neighborhood, Muslims were not considered real Americans at the time. Hence, even in a supposedly friendly, nice residential area where people are more open-minded, a Muslim was still advised to hide her Muslim identity. It seemed like after 9/11, American identity and Muslim identity are not compatible. To resolve this incompatibility, one has to either hide their Muslim identity or accept being treated as the ‘enemy within.’ By saying the bias has been overcome, Rachel acknowledged that there was this prejudice against Muslims after 9/11 happened, which actually detached easily-identifiable Muslims like her mother from the nation as a whole. And so if asked, it would be doubtful that Rachel’s mother would feel ‘united’ with the nation after 9/11.

Peek revealed the same conflict between the Muslim and the American identity. She found out that “[n]early three-fourths of the women who covered reported that their parents told them to wear the hijab in a “less Muslim way” […] or they insisted that their daughters quit wearing the headscarf altogether.”

Rachel also mentioned an incident when one of her neighbors was showing her mother how to put the hijab on, “with like a baseball cap so that you wouldn’t look like you’re Muslim, you know what I mean?” The lady was trying to restyle the headscarf so that “so you’re still covering your hair and all that; it’s just you don’t look Muslim.”

These incidents suggest that there was a dichotomy of being a Muslim and being an American. The two identities, somehow, could not be combined and remained an either-or dilemma. During another interview with Emma, a Master student of Cross-cultural and International Education at Bowling Green State University, told me that “[y]ou know, you can’t be Muslim, you can’t be American and combine and have that hybridized identity of Muslim American. It’s very difficult mainly because of how other people react to it because other people don’t want to see that, because it’s just too complicated, I feel, to understand.” It is obvious from
the interviews that people did not want to see the hybridized identity. People wanted to see an either-or, either an American or a Muslim, either us or them. And so, if a Muslim American chose to be ‘us,’ they was required to camouflage their Muslim identity.

One might argue that right after 9/11, there was certainly a lot of confusion, causing a certain number of people to inflict prejudice on Muslims; and that did not mean that the nation as a whole was disunited. In fact, Rachel actually mentioned about how “9/11 was a catastrophic event, very emotionally charged; a lot of people got angry; a lot of people got upset. So it was in such a situation, people aren’t using their logic anymore.” However, even years after the event, when people are supposed to collect themselves and start to reconsider the prejudice against Muslims, Muslims American still experienced the feeling of ‘otherness.’ For example, one year after 9/11, while Lisa was resumed her weekly walk in the park near her house with her father, a guy riding a bicycle in the opposite direction, just came to the side and “spit on the grass in front of us, you know, really loud.” She said she and her dad did not say anything and tried to ignore that she was really angry and confused “as to why that was okay.” Then she emphasized that she did look Muslim because she was wearing a headscarf and that the incident was an eye-opener to her.

Another example is found in my interview with Rachel. Rachel actually could not explain why she received racist comments in a debate competition 10 years after 9/11. She told me she joined a debate team in her senior year at high school, which was just a year before, about religious tolerance. And it was the semi-final and she got “the most racist ever” score sheet from one of the judges, which included comments like “the hijab you’re wearing, take that off!” and “racist hateful comments were all over the page.” And “she gave me the last place in the semi-final round, and because other judges present in the room gave me such high scores, I still get
into the final round.” She said she was shocked because she wouldn’t expect that in such an environment and she was talking about religious tolerance. She recalled that even though she still won the debate, the incident had changed her thinking as she said “it occurred last year so it was almost 9 years, 10 years after 9/11 occurred. That means people still group Muslims as terrorists.”

Charles E. Fritz outlined three phases of development that community experiences after a disaster. The first phase develops when people start sharing their experiences and feelings regarding the event. In the second phase, the integrative phase, group solidarity starts to occur due to a strong sense of mutual sufferings. The last phase marks a disintegration when group members return to everyday life and as well as more self-oriented behaviors. In this way, unity is just a phase in the healing process of a community. In fact, it does not represent the inherent unity of the community as a whole. Also, it can be seen that while the second phase is marked with solidarity, it is not always the case. With stories of discrimination after 9/11, other religious and ethnic groups could be said to be more united as they were all, at that time, against Islam and Muslims. In this way, one group was singled out and was not united to the nation. In fact, Peek has commented that the idea of the American Creed, the belief in democracy, justice, freedom and equality, that was said to unite American together, does not actually exist as there has always been a gap between this ideal and “actual institutional practice.” Thus, after 9/11, Peek observed that Muslim Americans “were forced to respond to 9/11 as outsiders rather than as mutually affected survivors.”

With incidents like these, one may wonder how Muslim Americans would ever return to their ‘normal’ life when they were considered Americans. Rachel remembered when she decided to give that speech, her parents were scared. They asked her “are you kidding us? You’re not
gonna go say that.” And that was 10 years after the event. The fear still went on and the feeling of being ‘profiled’ still went on. This shows that many Muslims have not felt they have returned to their normal life of being an American yet. 9/11 has changed their lives in the sense that they do not feel they are included in the nation as a whole, like what Rachel told me.

If you walk to anywhere in general, like the airport or a groceries store that’s not in your local area, you’ll generally get a lot of look, you know what I mean? People are not being very friendly. You can kind of tell that they’re a little edgy around you. Because, I mean, I wear a headscarf so people stare at me and I am instantly labeled as a Muslim, like it’s recognizable.

I came upon a very interesting case with one of my interviewees, Emma, who converted to Islam in 2007. She did a Bachelor Degree in Music Education and she has got her Master Degree in Cross-Cultural and International Education. In between undergrad and grad school, she taught music at a high-school level in England, where she converted. She was still a Catholic when 9/11 happened, and she was in high school. She told me “there was definitely still that us-versus-them going on in my head in high school, like “why do these people hate us?,” like I didn’t have that hatred towards how it happened.” She identified herself as the dominant group, white, Catholic American and as ‘us.’ I guess at that time, she would just have had a very vague idea of who the enemy was. However, unlike American Muslims, at the time she was still sure that she was ‘us’, not ‘them.’ She did not have to worry about her safety and about her identity.

Things turned around when she converted in 2007 in England and when she came back after that wearing a hijab. She had been representing this dominant image of America before 2007, a white Catholic American and after 2007, she suddenly became ‘the Other’ and people
treated her differently. Again, the hijab was an obvious indication that she was a Muslim, that she could not possibly be an American. Wearing the hijab, she told me she “felt how people were looking at me and how I was being treated differently, in the airport even, when I came back, you know, looked at differently, seen as a suspicious.” For her, it was a strange feeling because she still strongly identified herself as an American, as ‘us,’ like she did when she was in high school when 9/11 happened. And yet, with the hijab, she was being treated as a traitor, as “them.” She told me she was made to feel like she had gone to the other side because of all the prejudiced treatment that the hijab brought to her.

Unlike other informants I talked to, who lived in areas where there are more Muslims, Emma lived in a very small town, rendering her Muslim much more visible. She said as far as she knew, she was the only Muslim in that town and “definitely the only one who wear hijab.” And she felt like she was being treated as a traitor not just because of the way people looked at her, but also because of how people talked behind her back. She had kids come up to her and commented on her ‘hat’ and the kids’ parents just ushered them away, saying “don’t talk to people like that.” When they said “people like that”, they meant very much that “people not like us.” And in this way, they separated their neighbor, Emma from their neighbor, Emma the Muslim. The noted thing about Emma’s case is that she received bad treatments not only from her neighbors but from her own family as well. She said

My mother kicked me out of the house […] because I was wearing the hijab, and all the attention it was bringing to our home. And since it was just a small town, you know, she was scared that there were going to be threats against our family because of me
converting, and hate crimes or something like that was going to happen. And so she wanted me to take the hijab off desperately.

Emma felt hurt being rejected not only by her family and the people in her home town, but by the society as a whole when she was refused a teaching job in Texas and Florida because she refused to take the hijab off. She said “they actually told me that the families of the community would not accept me and that the children would not be able to relate to me, which was really offending.” Why wouldn’t the families of the community accept her? She was just an American like any of them. She just had a different religious faith, which should not be a problem in a country built on freedom, equality and democracy. Where is the unity that was said to be built on these ideals?

All of these unfair treatments made Emma feel she was not part of the group. She said that “At the time, when I converted, I still felt like an American.” Somehow, identifying herself as an American was not just enough. She had to prove that she was a real American which required her to take the hijab off. In another study by Jen’nan Ghazal Read, the author found out that while Christian Arab Americans can use their Christian identity to connect themselves to the mainstream American and distance themselves from 9/11 and from the “Other” identity, Muslim Arab Americans cannot maintain the ‘us’ status “because of their religious and ethnic out-group statuses.” This identification of in-group and out-group status signifies that unity is just an ideal that has not been reached yet.

It is obvious that these memories have been marginalized and rendered invisible, and unity remains a legacy despite the fact that less than a year after 9/11, 63 percent of Americans said in a poll that they were more fearful of Muslims rather than sympathetic for them. In their surveys, Brigitte L. Nacos and Oscar Torres-Reyna, revealed that while people tended to give
political correct answers regarding questions about negative versus positive options concerning Muslim Americans, the majority, when asked more specific questions, presented a less sympathetic and even prejudicial attitudes towards Muslims and Islam.\(^{14}\) Why the fear? If the majority of Americans identified Muslim Americans as “us,” then the fear should not have existed. This overwhelming fear of Muslims denotes that the majority Americans did not consider Muslim Americans as part of the nation, but rather attached them to “the enemy,” hence rendered them “the Other.” The consequences of this might not be the rise of hate crimes or any dramatic anti-Muslims sentiments, but an invisible isolation that actually ripped Muslim Americans off their American identity. Hence, unity, while provoked on anniversaries and presented as a legacy, is actually very ephemeral. It is very superficial to take unity evoked on one day or several hours on the anniversary as representative of the unity of American people.

UNITY AS A NORM OR AS AN EXCEPTION?

In previous chapters, I have shown that the media present unity as a norm and as a discourse while incidents of disunity are presented as rare deviations from the norm. However, during the talks to the interviewees, I noticed that they seemed to talk about unity as more of an exception than a norm. I noticed that whenever they told me about how they were not treated differently from their neighbors, they always mentioned they were lucky because they lived in nice neighborhoods. For example, Emily, when asked why she thought her father did not allow the family to go out except when needed, she said “No one would harass us but he was just concerned and think about our safety.” Then, she added “It wasn’t like an environment that was predominantly white and I stood out because I know people in smaller towns where there wasn’t
much diversity, they get hit more. With that kind of thing like that, it impacted them more.”

Later, she mentioned the idea again:

In regards to me, since we live here in Toledo, it’s a pretty diverse community so I would say it’s not that bad. Even we would have a couple of people say bad things to us, glared, like personally, but it’s not as bad as other towns, other cities. [...] I would say I was more fortunate than other people, like a lot of people in the South, in small towns where it’s predominantly, like you know, like conservative.

She said she was more fortunate than other people because she did not stand out as a Muslim in her community. For me, when she mentioned the idea of being ‘fortunate,’ I had a sense that she was telling me what she was experiencing would not be taken as a representative of the reality. If it was the media reporting the story, they would have held on to the fact that since the person told she was not harassed, the nation as a whole is not divided, and incidents like this are most representative of the solidarity of the nation. However, the point to note is why she kept on saying she was lucky, emphasizing that the neighborhood and the school she went to was very open-minded, hence the nice treatment towards her and her family. When I talked to her, I had a feeling that she was trying to explain for the ‘special treatment’ she received from the neighborhood as she kept on say that over and over again. Then I started to think, maybe in the Muslims community, she and her family have heard so many stories of discrimination and harassment that they figured they needed to take measures to protect themselves and at the same time were thankful that bad things did not happen to them. She thought she was lucky because she only got some glares and slight comments, but not anything dramatic.
From what I remembered, everything was fine, like no one treated us badly, no one targeted us than maybe glares, some critical words, like slight comments. But nothing was, like, someone would confront us, or someone would push us or anything aggressive.

After telling me about her ‘luck,’ she told me stories of her friends who got picked out at the airport and in one story, the girl was wearing a headscarf and she was asked to open her laptop. Also she talked about racial profiling and the likes. All of these things created an impression that for her, several glares and slight comments did not mean too much as they could not be compared to what other people were experiencing. Hence, receiving only stares and slight comments was the best of luck already and it was because she was living in a nice neighborhood. She seemed to tell me that after 9/11, Muslims people generally received much more severe discrimination than that. I guess that was the reason why she did not answer yes when asked if she thought the nation has become more united. I think if she wholeheartedly believed that what she experienced, i.e. glares and slight comments, was representative of what Muslims would experience in general, she would have been more readily to give a positive answer to the question.

In fact, she was reluctant and she said the case of unity or disunity was a split. She argued that there were people who would learn more about Muslims after 9/11 and “we are more united in that sense.” On the other side, there were people who were conservative and targeted Muslims and “that disunited us.” She said “we are united on the anniversary” when people hold hands and when went out and expressed patriotism. “But on other days, when other incidents happen, people forget things, you know … It’s confusing but I think the majority of people are
quite understanding. It’s just those who live in really small towns who don’t know any better.”

Her comments were interesting to me because they made me feel she was not sure which was the norm, the fact that people are understanding or that people are conservative. The contradiction is that while she said most people are more understanding, she did not seem to be convinced that the fact indicated that Americans are more united than disunited. She made me think that for her, while disunity might not be the norm, unity is not the norm either.

Rachel commented the same thing about her neighborhood. She mentioned how she has been living in an area where Muslims are concentrated and while it might be bad when 9/11 happened, like her mother told her, she thought things were not that bad later on. For her, now “maybe it is not terrible” though “[y]ou can kind of feel some people are uncomfortable.” Later, she emphasized this idea again when she said “like I said, I live in a good area. Most people are familiar with Muslims. I don’t have that much exposure to animosity but in other areas, people definitely do.” Again, she made me feel that she was more fortunate than many other people because after telling how she did not experienced bias, she told stories to prove that her case was different and that there really is animosity out there. She told me there was a charity organization “where people donate money to, to send to the Middle East for people who are struck by natural disaster, poor people, people who are not in very good circumstances,” which got shut down in the neighborhood because it was thought to associate with terrorism. She said:

And this is like a local charity, like I knew the people, my parents knew the people, like “that person used to go to the mosque.”

[…]And only recently did they release the news that there was no terrorist involvement, like there was nothing to do with terrorism in this organization, they were just trying to help people.
Thus, during the conversation, I had a feeling that she focused more on incidents like this and she was trying to tell me that Muslim Americans have had a tough time since 9/11 and her case was not representative at all. I would not say she thought that prejudice, suspicion and discrimination were the norm. Rather, I am arguing that she definitely did not think the otherwise, i.e. the understanding and solidarity, was the norm either. In fact, when she told me that she did not feel united after 9/11, I think she seemed to treat bad experiences of Muslims as something that would be more likely to happen. And those bad incidents that she heard of or experienced did not make her feel like a part of the nation but feeling alienated. She said

And the Muslim community, after 9/11, was on the defensive mode because people were attacking them and they had to prove themselves low, like we’re not all terrorists. As a Muslim community, I think we were on defensive mode.

Thus, for her, 9/11 did unite ‘most’ Americans, doesn’t necessarily include Muslims. She said there were actually signs of unity when people “embraced each other”; however it was just most of the nation as the Muslim community was, somehow, not included in that notion of the nation. Instead, “[t]he Muslim population is definitely alienated, definitely scared and confused.” Thus she personally did not feel united at all because obviously “people are not treating us well,” and “people are not liking us.” So it seemed like no matter how lucky she was to live in a nice neighborhood, where she and her family was safe after 9/11, the feeling of being not belonging was still there. The safety that she experienced was not enough to make her feel like she was just an American citizen like all other Americans. Instead, she said she felt “victimized” but she grew accustomed to it, to the fact that she cannot be just like any other Americans. She was a Muslim, which was very often labeled as a possible threat to be cautious of. And yet, getting accustomed
to it does not mean accepting it. I remembered how furious she was when she talked about the comments she received for her speech on religious tolerance and how disappointed she sounded when she said she grew accustomed to it, like there was nothing she could do to make people think that she was an American.

The last persons I talked to, Maggie and Lisa, did not experience any hatred or discrimination right after 9/11 or years later. Lisa told me “I think thanks for the privilege of living in a good neighborhood where, you know, I didn’t have to experience anything. But you know, stepping outside of it was really an eye-opener.” And she told me about the incident with the bicycle guy who spitted right in front of them. With this troubling incident, with the question her friend asked her in high school, and with the feeling of being blamed for what happened, Lisa did not feel the nation has become more united. In fact, she thought while it might be more united right after the event, it has become more fragmented now. In this way, being in a nice neighborhood where she did not experience discrimination was not enough for Lisa to feel that the nation has become more united. She said she was proud to be an American and she did not feel less attached to the country after what happened, but it did not mean that she did not feel targeted and intimidated.

Maggie told me that her family, though worried, did not have to take measures to protect themselves, and that she very rarely experience hatred looks or glares. She just had some people coming up to her and asking why she was wearing the headscarf and she thought it was because people were curious. Again, she made me think that her nice neighborhood is not representative of what is happening out there. She said she was very thankful because “I know [bad experiences] happened to people and I’ve heard stories.” She said she had a friend who moved to the South and had to face racist comments and received really bad looks. And then she again
emphasized “Like I said, I live here up North and people are more open-minded.” It is very interesting when again, the participant was reluctant giving a definite answer to the question whether the nation is united after 9/11. She said “I wouldn’t say no, but I wouldn’t say yes either.” She argued that there would be people who would learn more about Islam after 9/11, which would make people more united. Also, there would be people who would form prejudice and would label Muslim, which may render the people disunited. But then, when I asked why she was giving such an answer when actually her personal experience post 9/11 was really good, she said it was because “9/11 instilled fear in people.” She felt that as a whole Muslims are not welcomed. She said:

I haven’t had bad experiences, but in the back of my mind, I’m like
“because I’m Muslim, I’m always afraid, I guess.” […] Thank God
I haven’t experienced much and I wouldn’t want to experience
racism. But it’s not like I’m safe.

This made me curious because despite all that she told me about how she has been being safe, she actually acknowledged that she did not feel safe. Again, I had a feeling that she was telling me her case was an exception rather than a norm. And while she definitely did not try to say that harassment was a norm, she actually thought that it was more widespread than otherwise. Thus, no matter how normal her life was after 9/11, being a Muslim in America after 9/11 was not a normal existence anymore. The feeling of being rejected, suspected and of being “on a defensive modes” definitely does not make one feel as part of the nation at all.

Of all the participants, Emma was the only one who lived in a small town and had to experience quite drastic discrimination being a Muslim. She did not say that her bad experience was a norm but she did say patriotism and unity was like a propaganda to her. She recalled in her
recent flight at Philadelphia airport, and it was close to 9/11 anniversary, she heard patriotic music playing, which was “seeping into everyone.”

But honestly, I don’t think I’m alone in thinking this. I think there are a lot of people that feel this way because the dominant discourse is in the media and the dominant discourse is in, you know, all that national coverage where the money is basically. That was being heard. I think there’re plenty of people that feel the same was as I do.

In other words, she was saying there are people who might not feel about patriotism and unity the way the media has been trying to make them think. But their opinions are swallowed by the dominant discourse. She also said that when presented with a common enemy, “it’s easy to have that illusion of unity.” But because the nation is too diverse, “there cannot be a common enemy that causes unity.” She also mentioned that “And I don’t really feel like…even though the cornerstone of what’s supposed to be valued is freedom, equality, and all of these abstract terms that can mean anything to anyone, you know, I don’t feel that we enact that…” So, for her, the nation cannot in any way be seen as united. It can be considered united on paper, on the ideology of the American Creed, but in reality, that does not happen.

So, Emma definitely did not feel united after all the treatments she received being a Muslim. Yet, she did not feel less attached to the nation either. She just suggested that she did not perceive national unity as happening. She was totally aware that the people are being split up regardless of the fact that they are all Americans. She told me she took the hijab off eventually. And I guess she eventually had to take measures to stay away from troubles and to enjoy the freedom of identifying oneself as a Muslim Americans without being targeted. She
strongly identified herself as a Muslim Americans and yet she does not look like a Muslim. I guess she did not actually figure out yet how to compromise the two identities publicly. For her, to appear as a Muslim and an American is a tough existence. And as long as this conflict is not sorted out, I doubt if Emma would think the nation is more united.

The interview with the Imam at the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo is the best way to sum up this section. He told me he was visiting a family when 9/11 happened and he immediately went back to the Islamic Center in Toledo. Since then, he said he started to work with TV stations, newspapers, interviews, public relations, etc., to denounce and condemn the violence and “teach people that was not what Islam is about.” His statement showed how Islam and Muslims were immediately targeted after 9/11 and he was trying his best not to let people attach Muslims with the ‘enemy within.” It seemed to me that he had a tough time doing that because right after 9/11, bad incidents happened. He said that

People talked about Islam in a very bad way. Even some people shouted at our windows at the Mosque here. There were bad messages, bad articles, and attacks against Islam. Some Muslims are fired, are discriminated against.

I remembered seeing his face gloomed when he talked about those incidents and how he dealt with the media and public relations. During the conversation, he kept telling me that Muslim Americans cannot be held responsible for what happened. Then, he was explaining over and over again to me that “we [Muslims] affirmed our commitment to the community, to our good citizens and no one can doubt our good citizenship because of some abnormal people.” It was interesting to see how he felt the need to explain to me that Muslim Americans were not the enemy. He told me that Muslim Americans “tried to be more understanding, more steadfast,
more patient” in reaction to the backlash post 9/11, that they helped built the communities, and showed sympathies for the victims.

The conversation became more intriguing when he told me that the nation has become more united after 9/11. He did not explain the unity in terms of what the American people has done so far to make him, a Muslim, feel that the whole nation is united. Rather, he explained unity in the sense of what the Muslim communities has done to become part of the nation. He said the Islamic Center celebrated anniversaries of 9/11, when people came in, sat together and talked about Islam. Later, he did not organize the activity anymore because he thought that it would not be good to just focus on the past, and that people should work for future.

After interviewing the Imam, I went home wondering about the way that he talked about unity. I do not think that national unity is real at all, even though the Imam said he thought the nation has become more united. It was not unity when a certain group had to make ‘double effort’ to prove to the whole nation that members of the group are good citizens. It was not unity when Muslim Americans had to public condemn the act as though they might have sympathized with it. It was not unity when they had to repeatedly tell people that Islam is not responsible for 9/11. It was not unity when Muslims had to choose not to react against the backlash, to choose to be tolerant towards discriminations just to prove that they are American citizens, which they already are.

UNITY AS A MYTH

National unity is a myth because from the stance of Muslims American, unity is not a believable reality. While the media is trying to construct it as a reality, a norm and to build it as a discourse, Muslim Americans still question the validity of the concept. For them, even though
they might not have experience any drastic discrimination, they still feel dubious about this whole idea of unity, because the feeling of being rejected and unwelcomed is overwhelming. I am not saying unity is a myth because it is not real since obviously there should be instances that would signify the solidarity of the people. Rather, it is a myth because of the incorrect generalization made out of historical events.

Myth, defined by Roland Barthes, is a mode of signification born out of a historical discourse. In other words, myth is a way of communication or interpretation of a historical event. 9/11 obviously presented an ideal historical discourse for the myth of national unity as it transformed America as a whole into the victim of terrorism, and as the common enemy seemed to be clearly defined. In this discourse, the people came together to share the loss and to construct the nation again and that can be decoded as ‘unity.’ However, unity is only a myth because also in this discourse, there are instances of disunity too. After 9/11, Muslim Americans are transformed from “us” to “them.” The linkage between Muslims and terrorists still wrecks the minds of the people, thus, according to one of my interviewees, Americans are still afraid of Muslims. And this can be decoded as ‘disunity.’ Thus, within a historical discourse, everything can become myth because “the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions.” Hence, national unity is a myth formed out of a misinterpretation of historical discourse or a lack of more decoding varieties of events.

In fact, it is more convenient to construct this ideal unity. Daniel Berkowitz proposes that choosing a narrative that resonates with American culture and its values is always more advisable than choosing a narrative that goes against the cultural values. This is why other voices are not heard and other drastic examples of disunity are made trivial. And this is why unity is only a myth, in the sense that it does not really reflect the reality. In fact, Jack Lule
suggested that myth is not unreality, nor is it a false belief. He considers myth as “archetypal stories that play crucial social roles.” In other words, it seems like he defines myth in a very folklore way as he looks at myth in its “archetypal figures and forms” and “exemplary models.” With these exemplary models, myth work to maintain the status quo, or to “defend[d] the dominant social order as “[i]t upholds the “social charter” of a group. It protects and proclaims core values and central beliefs. […] bend[s] and shape[s] individuals to the prevailing beliefs and ideals of a particular society.”

In the case of 9/11, unity is an exemplary model, or an archetypal story. Incidences that hold on to this model are seen as representative to support the model. Incidences that contradict the model are seen as exception that, surprisingly, does not refute the model. Let’s not forget Barthes’ idea that “myth is a type of speech defined by its intention [which was] made absent by its literal sense.” Whose intention is this? In this case, it would be the intention of the dominant group to propagate the idea that “unity of purpose and unity of effort are the way we will defeat this enemy and make America safer for our children and grandchildren.” That is why in a large-scale survey by Benjamin Goldsmith, Yusaku Horiuchi, and Takashi Inouchi, conducted from November 7 to December 27, 2001 on more than 60,000 individuals from sixty-three country, about U.S military action in Afghanistan demonstrates that 88 percent of American agree on the war in Afghanistan. That is why two million Americans have gone to war since 9/11, which shows that

“America has been defended not by conscripts, but by citizens who choose to serve – young people who signed up straight out of school; guardsmen and reservists; workers and business-people; immigrants and fourth-generation soldiers. They are men and
women who left behind lives of comfort for two, three, four, or five tours of duty.”

That is why Vice President spoke of “9/11 generation of warriors,” the generation that “ranks among the greatest our nation has ever produced.” Such a myth of ‘unity’ is experienced as ‘innocent speech’ “not because its intentions are hidden – if they were hidden, they could not be efficacious – but because its intentions are naturalized” in this case, by the media, in the sense unity is being transformed into a ‘common-sense.’

The role of the media is significant here. The media not only disseminates the myth, but also naturalizes it, making it a ‘statement of fact,’ the foundation of which is common-sense. I have proved that the media has transformed the myth into common-sense. Barthes says that “myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; [that] myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflection.” In this case, the myth of a national unity strengthened by the attack is a biased inflection, manipulated by the group in power. This reminds me of an article written by Alastair Davidson, in which he analyses Stuart Hall’s uses of Gramsci’s concept of ‘common sense,’ “The Uses and Abuses of Gramsci.” In his analysis of Thatcherism, Hall demonstrates the important role of ‘common sense’ to persuade and appeal to the mass and hegemony arises as a result of a formulation of new form of ‘common sense.’ ‘Common sense’ in Hall’s use acts as a kind of hegemonic project, which is “designed to end molecularly differences between any pre-existing antagonists.” And what is happening with national unity is exactly the same process, the process of turning a myth into ‘common sense’ and making it appear as ‘good sense.’

Edward Herman, in his book, The Myth of the Liberal Media, says that “the mainstream media serve the state by accepting the assumptions and frameworks of state policy, transmitting vast amounts of state propaganda, and confining criticism to matters of tactics while excluding
criticism of premises and intentions.” In the case of 9/11, the media plays the main role in disseminating and reinforcing the myth of national unity. In this way, the media has been used as an effective tool in a hegemonic project, a project of the state to capture civil society. This is how myth receives its unified signification in the society. The special historical discourse of 9/11 makes it easier for the state to elicit consent from the people and the mass media plays a significant role in transforming myths into common-sense and thus maintain the people’s consent. This is how hegemony is exercised. Antonio Gramsci wrote that

The ‘normal’ exercise of hegemony on the now classical terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterized by the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally without force predominating excessively over consent. Indeed, the attempt is always made to ensure that force will appear to be based on the consent of the majority.

In other words, social power does not simply manifest through domination, but rather through creating and maintaining consent from the people. In analyzing Antonio Gramsci’s concepts of hegemony, Steve Jones “[i]n order to maintain its authority, a ruling power must be sufficiently flexible to respond to new circumstances and to the changing wishes of those it rules.” Here, it can be seen that how flexible the state is in managing the crisis and formulating this myth of unity to gain support for the foreign policies. In this way, the state has steered the people’s sentiments towards its preferred policy, like the Afghanistan War.

The myth of national unity, of ‘unity of effort and unity of purpose’ is a means of justification for the prolonging of the Afghanistan War. In a way, the state promotes a kind of hegemonic mythical interpretation of the crisis so as the mass would support the state’s policies
and obey its control. This makes one wonder if Barthes’ reliance on historical discourse for the creation of myth is totally valid. It is true that as a product of historical discourse, myth can appear and disappear after a specific period of time. However, here, with the involvement of the state’s will, a mythical speech will remain as long as it still helps the state to take control of its civil society and maintain its hegemony. So even if the time changes and the group in power does not change and if maintaining a certain mythical speech still provides an advantage, that myth will continue to be widely disseminated across historical discourses and will continue to be depicted as ‘common-sense.’ Thus, national unity is a myth because it is a ‘preferred reading’ of 9/11 discourse that works to maintain the status quo.
CHAPTER 5: MYTH AND HEGEMONY

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that national unity, constructed as the legacy of 9/11 is just a myth because it misses out many other memories of Muslim Americans, which pose a great contradiction to the concept. I analyzed the print media as well as the broadcast media to show how instances of unity are presented as representative to the solidarity of the nation as a whole while those of disunity are seen as deviants and as trivial occurrences that do not any significant meaning. In fact, from the interviews with Muslim Americans, I found out that they are very dubious about this concept of unity. In some cases, even though the persons did not actually experience any harassment or any dramatic discrimination, they still thought that their cases were not representative at all of Muslim experiences post-9/11. In cases when the persons encountered unfair treatment, they obviously did not feel united to the nation even though they strongly identified themselves as Americans. In other words, it seems like for Muslim Americans, national unity does not reflect their personal experiences and memories of 9/11 at all.

In this last chapter, I will attempt to construct a relation between myth and hegemony. As I mentioned in previous chapters, it is not enough to see myth as being born out of a historical discourse. I have argued that out of the discourse of 9/11 there are at least two contradictory myths that were born: the myth of unity and that of disunity. However, only the first one is propagated and is presented as a norm while the latter is silenced and is seen as rare deviants that are not in any way indicative of the nature of the nation as a whole. This shows myth is actually constructed to maintain the status quo. And I will argue that the concept of myth helps one to better understand the concept of hegemony as it clarifies how power can be upheld. As hegemony is constructed out of consent, it would become very unstable if consent is not given.
Myth creates a situation which makes it harder to people to dissent. For example, while Muslim Americans may experience isolation after 9/11, the myth of national unity makes it harder to them to give a definite no answer when asked whether they think the nation has become more united. They might think otherwise but they would be less willing opposed to the unity discourse because as a myth, unity becomes elusive and escapes criticism.

In order to do this, I will outline the concept of hegemony and its key constituent, i.e. consent. Then I will argue that as there is no ideal or voluntary consent, but forced consent, the construction of hegemony does not differ from that of domination. In this way, Gramsci’s hegemony can be likened to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe’s concept of authoritarian practice of hegemony. From there, I will try to argue that Gramsci’s conceptualization of hegemony based on consent is no long applicable to contemporary U.S society. My point is that it is time to move to a post-hegemony age when consent can be transformed to compromise. However, I also point out that compromise is not ideal either, and I propose a different way to look at hegemony in modern society, a “mythological” practice of hegemony based on the construction of myth.

According to Robert Bocock, the concept of hegemony originated in the 1880s by the Russian Marxists. The notion referred to “the hegemonic leadership the proletariat, and its political representatives, should give in an alliance of other groups, including some bourgeoisie critics, peasants and intellectuals who were seeking an end to the Tsarist police state.” So, in a way, hegemony was first used to refer to the potential power of the proletariat in their attempt to overthrow the state. Or rather, this potentiality is forced out of the proletariat by the “impotence” of the bourgeoisie in performing its “struggle for political liberty.” From this original reference to the inefficiency of the bourgeoisie, Gramsci re-conceptualizes the term and transforms its
meaning into the success of the bourgeoisie in organizing the capitalist societies. This organization is based on ‘intellectual and moral leadership,’ the purpose of which is to create a mass consent in the society. In a way, Gramsci gives back the bourgeoisie its potency in constructing the way it secures and maintains power through coercion and consent (i.e. hegemony). For Gramsci, hegemony is not rulership that is based only on domination or coercion but also on a high level of consent.

The concept consent plays a crucial role in Gramsci’s conceptualization of ‘moral’ leadership, thus in his construction of hegemony. The idea is that as long as the people agree to the system, then rulership can escape being called ‘domination.’ Consequently, the ‘morality’ is gained by making people believe that the state is representing their interests and demands. The questions to ask are what a ‘moral’ leadership is, to what extent rulership should be moral, and how to decide whether a regime of ruling is moral or not. The answer to these questions seem depend very much on to what extent the people consent, or rather, are made to consent. Is there actual consent in the society? How can consent be defined? In fact, it is interesting to see how the interviewees for the thesis were struggling with consent or dissent towards the concept of unity. Of the four participants, one said outright that unity is an illusion. The other three was struggling in the sense that while they did not think unity is the reality, they would not say it was an illusion either. They just leaned towards proving that nicer treatments towards Muslims are not representative of what has been going on. So would answers like this be considered consent, the fact that they did not say yes, but they did not say no either?

Joseph V. Femia, in trying to figure out Gramsci’s concept of consent, has proposed four types of political and social conforming behavior that can connect to the idea of consent. The first type of conforming is “conformity through coercion or fear of sanction.” The second type
of conforming is the subconscious/habitual conform. The third type reflects “some degree of *conscious attachment* to, or *agreement* with, certain core elements of the society.” The last type is “pragmatic acceptance” in which conformity becomes a “necessary condition of success in achieving one’s own goals, among them, a pursuit of wealth, material security, power, prestige social acceptance, [etc.].” These four types of conformity can represent a continuum of consent.

On one extreme, it can flow from a profound sense of obligation,

from whole sale internalization of dominant values and definitions;

on the other, from their very partial assimilation, from an uneasy feeling that the status quo, while shamefully iniquitous, is nevertheless the only viable form of society.

Which type of conformity might be the consent that Gramsci means? It seems like Gramsci’s notion of coercion by the state as part of the hegemonic process shapes the first type of conformity. This means that Gramsci acknowledges the fact that part of consent is formulated by force. This force might be visible like outward domination/suppression of ideology or invisible like the impregnation of the bourgeoisie ideology into the “aspirations, beliefs, needs, [etc.]” of the mass, the “suppression of alternative views,” leading to the mass’s unawareness of alternative values or interpretations. This is how the “ruling ideas” are transformed into common-sense and how this transformation is a way to instill the subconscious/habitual consent in the mass. The last type of consent is inherent in the capitalist system, in which the people are made to believe they *have to* play by the rule of the capitalist for their well-being. In sum, it can be seen that “the multitude” is trapped in a system that forces consent out of them, one way or another. Somehow, Gramsci does not try to conceptualize an actual consent in hegemony but rather just a semblance of consent so as the chance for the resilient silence to explode is
minimized. Hence, Sallach proposes that “the hegemonic process does not create valued consensus” but rather, a manipulated consensus, or to use Femia’s words, artificial consent or passive consent.¹²

This concept of artificial consent is interesting as it describes exactly what I encountered during the interviews. Most of the participants seemed to be very reluctant to the question whether the nation has become united. They obviously did not dissent in the interview. Nor did they consent. However, their dissent was suppressed by the dominant discourse. The voices of Muslim Americans are not heard and represented. In this way, their voices are very much rendered silence. The dominant discourse actually speaks for them and it speaks only what helps to maintain its dominance. In a way, it is consent in the sense that the subaltern let the power structure build up the discourse even if they disagree with the discourse. Thus the consent is actually very artificial. For Gramsci, “the contemporary liberal assumption that a people without the opportunity to expression opposition or dissent cannot truly be said to consent would seem most curious.”¹³ So, this means that if the subaltern dissent is rendered mute, consent can be assumed. With consent forced and manipulated, Gramsci’s hegemony can be considered, to use Laclau and Mouffe’s term, an authoritarian practice of hegemony.

In fact, this semblance of consent is enough to maintain the power. The question is how this artificial consent is constructed? Femia states that Gramsci believes for consent to happen, the people must, in some way, be actually convinced that the dominant group is representing the interest of the multitude as a whole.¹⁴ So does this mean hegemony is no more like a subtle domination, a propaganda that lures the people to believe in the state’s power and authority, to believe that they are well-represented and well-heard? It is definitely not the case because the interviews demonstrated how the people are not easily convinced by what the media feeds to
them. It is the construction of myth that makes artificial consent possible. While myth, as a way to interpret a historical event, does not reflect reality, it is not a fabrication either. Hence, it is really hard to refute a myth. In a way myth can be likened to the ‘ruling ideas’ that are made into the norm or a common sense to elicit consent from the people as the ruling class, with “privileged access to ideological institution,” can strengthen its “structural position” by transforming the ‘ruling ideas’ into common-sense, thus generates consent among the mass.\(^{15}\)

So far, I have argued that myth provides a better explanation to the construction of hegemony based on consent. In the following part, I will argue that myth also provides a better explanation to the construction of post-hegemony based on compromised. Post-hegemony argues that holding on too much to the concept of consent may not be the best way to deal with the existing power structure. It should be noted that in Gramsci’s time, though subaltern cannot speak, they can still form what Gramsci called “contradictory common-sense.” This concept “recognizes “the original thought” of the subaltern groups, even when they are subordinated to a ruling bloc.”\(^{16}\) This idea negates Stuart Hall’s idea that there is just one kind of common-sense at a time, which leads to his suggestion that counter-hegemonic projects involve raising a new counter-hegemonic common-sense, or going back to the old one that “evoke[s] the tradition of struggle for rights and democracy.”\(^{17}\) For Gramsci, there are obviously at least two types of common-senses. So it is not necessarily that the subaltern is so ignorant that they do not know the “ruling ideas” are being imposed on them. Yet, consent can still be assumed because the subaltern, though can speak in the sense of capability, but cannot speak in the sense of the realization of the action.

Thus in Gramsci’s time, the subaltern is rendered ‘impotent’ not because they are not capable, but because they do not have the tool to voice their “contradictory common-sense.”
Now, the internet and technology has become a tool to spread these “contradictory common-sense.” Thus it is obviously time to move to a post-hegemonic age. Scott Lash reasons that the concept of hegemony is not a timeless concept, that is, it is only valuable and has truth-value within a certain epoch. For him, that epoch is coming to a close and “power now, instead, is largely post-hegemonic.” 18 Basically, his argument is that the epoch now is the time of technology and the virtual, which is totally different from the time when Gramsci coined the concept. For Lash, hegemony refers to only one type of power: the power of a group over another group. 19 Post–hegemony sees power as “force, energy and potential” that “comes to act from below [and] no longer stays outside that which it ‘effects.’” 20 He thinks that the “dualism of the hegemonic order” has disappeared 21 because “the notion of hegemony had a great deal to do with social class.” Post-hegemony deals less with class and “is more oriented to art, to science and technology.” 23 He concludes that “the post-hegemonic order is not just an era of ubiquitous computing and ubiquitous media, [and that] it also bequeaths to us ubiquitous politics.” 24

While Gramsci beholds the idea that the “society [is] comprised of a small but dominant center and a large body of ‘emarginati’ – marginalized people at society’s periphery who are never allowed to penetrate the traditional power structure,” Lash seems to refuse the idea that there is a center of hegemony formed by a particular group in power. 25 Also he refuses to think of hegemony as a top-down influence. For him, it is time to think of hegemony as having multiple forces and a dialectic way of influence. The way he talks about how the “iconic of hegemonic power is collapsed into […] the profane banality of the everyday” and about how “post-hegemony “is more oriented to art, to science and technology” 26 indicates that Lash wants to turn back into the original usage of hegemony, attaching it to the hegemonic potential of the subaltern. It is true that with today’s technology, especially with the internet, the subaltern can
not only speak but also makes itself heard. In this case, the development of technology helps reverse the direction of influence of hegemony. Now the people can post comments and reactions to state’s policies through the internet and major media corporations do give them a lot of space to speak. With the rise of sub-cultures, and of opposed readings of dominant ideologies, the political landscapes of the present time has changed and Gramsci’s conception of hegemony does not meet the demand of this change.

Would consent be a problem in post-hegemonic age? Or rather, is post-hegemony is built on consent like hegemony is? If it is, then is the ambiguity of consent is still a threat to power? I would answer no to these questions. In fact, with the help of technology, non-consent is so widespread that it does not pose so big a threat as it used to be assumed to. Thus, the appearance or disappearance of consent does not make too much a difference in the maintenance of power. In other words, as non-consent becomes a common-sense, consent actually becomes just another variance in a diversity of the subaltern’s voices, losing its determining role in the maintenance of power. Post-hegemony is gained not so much by obtaining consent but by compromising these voices and creating ideological unity within the society. In fact, with the help of the internet, the subaltern’s discontent can be seen as the guideline for state’s policies. That said, it does not mean that the state will shape its policies based solely on these voiced discontent. It just means that at least, with all the different voices posted, it would be easier for the state to consider and compromise these voices and create a certain unity within the society.

Jonathan Joseph also agrees on this idea of compromising. He argues that “[h]egemony’s role is to forge a political and consensual unity and direction out of […] differentiation.” In other words, it is now time to think of a compromise between the hegemonic power of the elite and of the subaltern as well. It is time to think of hegemony as “help[ing] secure the cohesion of
system by organizing the relations between different structures and practices.”

28 Joseph suggests that viewing hegemony as “concerned with the plans and actions of social agents, groups and individuals”, i.e. as “a purely agential process” is not sufficient. 29 He argues for a more structuralist sense of hegemony, “in that it intersects with the process by which social structures are reproduced or transformed.” (38) In this era, hegemony needs to be put in the context of, to use Baudrillard’s word, “hyper-reality.” In this world, “[p]ower itself has produced […] nothing but the signs of its resemblance.”30 So, in a way, power is real only because the people assign it to the state. This is also the reason why coercion, as an exercising of power (or as a sign of power), can actually work within society. In this hyper-real structure, it is time for the people to take that assignment of power back and actually works with the state towards a compromise. Thus, hegemony should not be considered as actual proof of a marriage between coercion and consent, but more as a semblance of a necessary compromise to maintain a sustainable society.

At this stage, post-hegemony means, to use Laclau and Mouffe’s term again, a more democratic practice of hegemony. In this changed social landscapes, it is not sufficient to only speak of the articulatory moment but also of the articulation through “confrontation with antagonistic articulatory practices.”31 So instead of luring people into consent, post-hegemonic articulation now needs to confront its opposed articulation from the mass, which results in a more compromised articulation/ ideology that unites the society. Thus it is time for a hegemonic formation to “embrac[e] that opposes it,” instead of suppressing (outwardly or subtly) what opposes it.32 This “terrain of hegemonic recomposition carries a potential for the democratic expansion and deepening socialist political practice.”33

However, with all that has been said about post-hegemony, one should also admit that this view of post-hegemony is a little too optimistic. It is true that with the spread of the internet
and technology, the subaltern can actually speak for itself (even without the leadership of “organic intellectuals”), spread its views and gather consent on its own. The consequence of this is the ruling class can no longer ignore these voices, and it is time to talk more about compromise rather than about artificial consent. However, the other side of this technological growth is that it is easier now to spread and naturalize the bourgeoisie ideologies, as the media now rely very much on the so called ‘credible sources,’ like the claims of the secretary of state and other high officials, etc. These sources are “readily available, are newsworthy in themselves, are supplied by credible sources, and do not require careful checking.”

The mainstream media “serve the state by accepting the assumptions and frameworks of state policy, transmitting vast amounts of state propaganda, and confining criticism to matters of tactics while excluding criticism of premises and intentions.” As a result, the mass media becomes a political tool to incorporate the mass into the nation.

Thus, one can notice that there are two channels of influence here: the top-down voice of the ruling class and the upward voice of the “multitude.” In the ideal scenario, these two opposite voices will compromise and merge with a fair balance. However, in reality, this can hardly happen. The compromise, the “incorporation of the mass into the nation” is most likely to be tempered with because power nowadays has become naturalized, “silent and invisible daily functioning.” It has become “internalized law.” This internalized law is manifested in the construction of “parameters of legitimate discussion and debate over alternate beliefs, values and worldviews,” and also in the construction of parameters of the extent to which the voices of the subaltern is heard, that is, the extent to which the upward influence is determined. So, even in post-hegemonic age, the act manipulation still exists. And as long as manipulation is still detected, the existing power is still very much threatened.
In the case of 9/11, there is obviously no compromise. Public memory of the event, as supposed to be a combination of official and vernacular memory, is actually overwhelmed by official memory. Unity is presented as a legacy while in fact it is doubtful that the isolated group, i.e., the Muslim Americans would think the same. There is no compromise on how to construct the concept of unity or disunity after 9/11. There is only one way to do it, that is, building unity into the dominant discourse and transform it into a norm. There is only one interpretation, one ‘preferred reading,’ one way to decode the effect of the event. And while Muslim Americans can voice their experiences that would challenge this unity discourse within the community, via the internet and other social networks, their voices are still considered not representative enough to overthrow the discourse of unity. The result is that ten years after the event, unity still thrives and prevails as a legacy that Americans should behold.

That said, I do not mean to look for an absolute or ideal democratic practice of hegemony. Rather, I am trying to find a way to re-conceptualize hegemony in modern society. In today’s society, the power is very much secured although there are a lot of discontents and demonstrations of those discontents going on. However, among all those strikes and demonstrations, I wonder if there is actually any particular plot to overthrow the existing government and establish a new one. What actually happens is that people just want more things to be done from the existing government. The question is how we can conceptualize hegemony to reflect the current phenomenon. I do not think Gramsci’s hegemony or post-hegemony actually reflect the current state of power and control. It has been proved that even though Gramsci tries to construct hegemony as a concealment of power through the obtainment of consent, hegemony still emerges as an obvious manipulation of consent. And post-hegemony,
though successful in deviating from the manipulated consent and heading towards a compromise, fails to conceal the exercise of power as well.

My argument is that as long as the exertion of power remains apparent, it is still contested and struggled against and the state will always stand the risk of being overthrown. And yet, to conceal the exertion of power, the ruling class cannot perform an articulatory practice that satisfies and meets the demands of all the antagonist viewpoints. At the same time, it is no longer possible to ignore all those opposed views either. Even if the ruling class wants to compromise, this act cannot simply be a balance of different viewpoints because as viewpoints are wildly diverse, a balance of all those will result in nothing but a mess, a state of anarchy. Yet at the same time, it is necessary to maintain a certain unity within society with an invisible exertion of power. For me, this secured-ness of current power is based very much on the construction of myth.

I propose that we think of this invisible manipulation through the creation of myth. The advantage of incorporating the concept of myth into the construction of power and hegemony is that it provides a grey area for manipulation, consent, non-consent and compromise to exist without threatening the existing power. Roland Barthes defines myth not by the object of its message but by “the way in which it utters this message.” According to Barthes, myth is a system of communication, a “type of speech chosen by history.” Basically, this means that myth is a way of communication that is historically oriented, or shaped by discourse. In this way, the idea of myth in the construction of power reflects Laclau and Mouffe’s practice of articulation. The only difference is that myth incorporates the consideration of historical discourse, which makes it stand the test of time and social changes. So in modern society, I think we should think of a “mythological” practice of hegemony.
To maintain the power, it is necessary to make people think that they are not in one way or another forced to believe in any ideology, or to consent to any common-sense. Rather, it is necessary to make them acknowledge that what is going on is a myth, and whether it is true or not depends on their preference. That said, it does not mean once myth is created, the ruling class can do whatever it interests dictate. Rather, it means that on the one hand, the ruling class has to perform certain acts to maintain the myth by showing that the opposed viewpoints are heard, and on the other, it can choose to what extent it would let these opposed views influence its policies.
NOTES

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7 Peek 63.

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16 Ibid.

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18 Lule 14.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Could you tell me a little about yourself? (your job, where you live, your education background, etc.)

2. Do you remember where you were on 9/11/2001? What did you feel on that day?

3. Do you watch/read about 9/11 anniversary each year? Does it make you feel more patriotic?

4. Did you watch or read about the issue regarding the construction of an Islamic Center near Ground Zero? What did you think of it? What was your reaction?

5. Were there any changes in the way you were treated or looked at in your community before and after 9/11?
   If yes, do those treatments last until now or are they over? Do you feel attached to your community more or less?

6. Do you think that 9/11 unites everyone in the States together?
Informed Consent

Greetings!

My name is Giang Nguyen Dien. I am a Master student of American Culture Studies program at Bowling Green State University. I am writing a thesis about the notion of national unity after 9/11 under the supervision of Dr. Andrew M. Schocket. I am writing to request your consent to participate in my project.

The purpose of the research is to find out whether the idea of national unity post-9/11 reflects the reality of Muslims experience in America. Therefore, I would like to interview American Muslims to find out about their feelings and experiences after the event. Although the research does not benefit you directly, your voice is very important as it will provide me, an outsider, with insights into the experience of Muslim Americans after 9/11.

In the project, I attempt to explore how the media deals with the notion of national unity and find out whether this description of unity is reflected in the lives of Muslim Americans, who emerge as a special group after the event. I will be very grateful if you share with me your life experiences after 9/11. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study. You will decide the place and time of the interview. If you cannot arrange a face-to-face meeting, I will interview you by phone. I will send you all the necessary documents with a stamped envelope so that you can send the signed consent letter back to me. You will decide when I am allowed to call you for the interview. No interview will be conducted before I receive the signed consent letter. The interview will not last longer than 30 minutes. Your answer will be audio-recorded. I will also take notes during the interview if you permit me to do so.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time. You may decide to skip questions (or not do a particular task) or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Deciding to participate or not will not affect your relationship with Bowling Green State University.
All the information you share with me will be kept confidential. After the interview, the data will be stored in my locked case. Then, it will be encrypted and protected in my password protected computer. I am the only one to have access to the case and the computer. Also, your identity will not be disclosed. I will use pseudonyms when I quote your interview answers. The data will be kept until the end of August 2012, when it will be destroyed to maintain confidentiality.

The risk in taking part in this study is no greater than encountered in daily life.

If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you can contact me by phone at 714-271-8083, or email me at giangn@bgsu.edu.

You can also contact my advisor, Dr. Andrew M. Schocket by phone at 419-372-8197, or by email at aschock@bgsu.edu

If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University's Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716, or at hsrb@bgsu.edu.

Thank you very much for your time and participation.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature Date
Thank you for your submission of Revision materials for this project. The Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

The final approved version of the consent document(s) is available as a published Board Document in the Review Details page. You must use the approved version of the consent document when obtaining consent from participants. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that you are responsible to conduct the study as approved by the HSRB. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures, those modifications must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the modification request form for this procedure.

You have been approved to enroll 15 participants. If you wish to enroll additional participants you must seek approval from the HSRB.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must also be reported promptly to this office.

This approval expires on March 11, 2013. You will receive a continuing review notice before your project expires. If you wish to continue your work after the expiration date, your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date.

Good luck with your work. If you have any questions, please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 419-372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence regarding this project.