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**SEPTEMBER 11, 2001: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF  
IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATIONS ON TELEVISION NEWS**

**by**

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I declare that *September 11, 2001: a critical analysis of ideological representations on television news*, which I hereby submit for the degree Magister Artium (Visual Studies) at the University of Pretoria, is my own work, and has not previously been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

31 May 2004

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Ms Julie Reid

"No event can withstand being beamed across the whole planet"

(Baudrillard 1994:2).

"...[s]ystems of thought ... discourses of power, ideological fictions - minded forg'd  
manacles - are all too easily made, applied, and guarded"

(Said 1978:328).

## SUMMARY

Title: September 11, 2001: a critical analysis of ideological representations on television news.

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### **Summary:**

This dissertation analyses the extent to which dominant political ideologies generate meanings in television news texts. The working process of the television news system and the manner in which television news constructs news programmes are discussed. In light of the televisual mode of news production, the author demonstrates how ideologically inspired meanings can systematically enter the television news system and thus potentially manipulate the production of television news broadcasts, though making a semiotic analysis of the CNN representations of September 11.

This study is situated within the field of visual culture studies, and semiotic theory is employed to a great extent throughout. The author discusses the influence of dominant political ideologies on the television news production process, and how this contributes to the restriction of the polysemy of the television news sign. Television news representations may be mediated and manipulated in such a way to encourage viewers to produce readings that are favourable towards a certain dominant political ideology.

The many mechanisms that television news utilises to create meaning are discussed. The mechanisms that are identified by the author as being the most effective in the production of ideologically inspired meanings are paid particular attention. These semiotic mechanisms include the manipulation of iconic signs, the construction of arbitrary signs and the representation of myths.

The CNN representations of the September 11 events are analysed for their ideological content, and the author contends that these televisual representations were deliberately constructed to inspire readings that would be favourable to the ideology of Americanism. Therefore, Americanism, as an example of a dominant political ideology, is discussed. The visual mechanisms employed by CNN after September 11 are analysed. These include the editing of visually recorded footage, the treatment of the newsreader and the incorporation of the image of the American flag. The author offers a reading of the ideological motivation of these texts. The media myths that are constructed to naturalise Americanism, such as the myth of the hero and the myth of the tower, are discussed with regard to the manner in which they were represented by CNN after September 11. The iconic representations of key political figures involved with the September 11 events are also discussed and their ideological meanings uncovered.

The CNN television news broadcasts functioned both to inform an international audience of the terrorist attacks and reinforce an ideology in crisis: namely, Americanism. CNN repeatedly employed many visual mechanisms to encourage viewers to produce readings that were favourable to Americanism. While Americanism entered a period of crisis, it mobilised its Ideological State Apparatuses, including television news, to reinforce and justify its position of power in order to maintain its own dominance after a deliberate blow.

This study suggests that the CNN representations of September 11 are an accurate indication of how dominant political ideologies can effect the construction of television news texts. Where television news broadcasters reach large audiences while being ideologically aligned, and viewers are deliberately encouraged to produce certain ideologically inspired readings, television news becomes a medium through which widespread ideological domination can be achieved.

**Key terms:**

Americanism; American ideology; American monomyth; dominant political ideology; globalisation; Ideological State Apparatus; media imperialism; myth; September 11; television news.

**Opsomming:**

Hierdie studie ondersoek die invloed wat dominante politieke ideologieë op die skep van betekenis in televisienuus tekste het. Die werksproses van die nuus sisteem, sowel as die manier waarop televisienuus betekenis konstrueer, word bespreek. Deur 'n semiotiese analise van CNN se dekking van die gebeure op 11 September illustreer die outeur hoe ideologies-geïnspireerde betekenis die televisienuus sisteem infiltreer en sodoende die produksie van televisienuus uitsendings manipuleer.

Die studie is gesitueer in die veld van visuele kultuurstudie en daar word deurgans van semiotiese analise gebruik gemaak. Die outeur bespreek die invloed van dominante politieke ideologieë op die skep van televisienuus tekste, en hoe dit bydra tot die rigiditeit van 'n televisienuus teken. Die outeur ondersoek ook die moontlikheid dat manipulasie en mediasie die kykers aanmoedig om die tekste te interpreteer op 'n manier wat gunstig is vir die dominante ideologie.

Verskeie van die meganismes wat televisienuus aanwend om betekenis te skep word bespreek. Klem word geplaas op die meganismes wat volgens die outeur meer effektief is in die skep van ideologies geïnspireerde betekenis. Hierdie semiotiese meganismes sluit die manipulasie van ikoniese tekens, die konstruksie van arbitrêre tekens, en die uitbeelding van mites in.

Die CNN representasies van die 11<sup>de</sup> September word geanaliseer en die outeur poog om te bewys dat hierdie representasies spesifiek gekonstrueer word om Amerikanisme te perpetueer. Vir hierdie rede word Amerikanisme bespreek as 'n voorbeeld van 'n dominante politieke ideologie. Die visuele meganismes wat deur CNN aangewend is rondom die 11<sup>de</sup> September word geanaliseer. Laasgenoemde sluit die redigering van die visuele materiaal, die hantering van die veronderstelde nuuskyker, sowel as die inkorporasie van die Amerikaanse vlag in. Die outeur maak 'n moontlike analise van die ideologiese motivering vir hierdie tekste. Media-mites, byvoorbeeld die mite van die held en die mite van die toring, wat gekonstrueer word om Amerika te naturaliseer, word bespreek met verwysing na die wyse waarop dit aangewend is in CNN se uitbeelding van die gebeure op die 11de September. Die ikoniese representasie van

politieke sleutelfigure betrokke by die 11<sup>de</sup> September, word ook bespreek en ‘n poging word aangewend om moontlike ideologiese betekenis te ontgin.

Aldus die outeur was die funksie van die CNN televisienuusuitsendings tweeledig. Eerstens het dit ten doel gehad om inligting oor die gebeure aan ‘n internasionale gehoor oor te dra. Tweedens moes dit Amerikanisme bevorder. CNN het die visuele meganismes op só ‘n manier aangewend dat dit ‘n interpretasie ten gunste van Amerikanisme bevorder het. Volgens die outeur het Amerika in die krisistydperk sy “Ideological State Apparatuses”, insluitend televisie, gemobiliseer om sy posisie te regverdig en sy eie dominansie te verseker.

Hierdie studie voer aan dat die CNN-uitbeeldings van die 11<sup>de</sup> September ‘n aanduiding is van hoe dominante politieke ideologieë die konstruksie van televisienuusstekste kan beïnvloed. In ‘n geval waar televisienuus groot gehore bereik en terselfdertyd ideologies-geïnspireerde lesings aanmoedig, kan televisienuus ‘n medium wees waardeur ideologiese dominansie afgedwing kan word.

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## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background and aims of study

In describing the field of visual culture, Nicholas Mirzoeff (1999:1) discusses the rapid visualisation of modern life. He states that "[h]uman experience in now more visual and visualized than ever before ... For most people in the United States, life is mediated through television" (Mirzoeff 1999:1). Because television news is positioned at the centre of contemporary society, it is perhaps the most influential of all mass media channels of communication. The author wishes to illustrate that the television news system, owing to its placement at the nucleus of contemporary society and its consequent widespread audience, is a medium often utilised by dominant political ideologies that wish to naturalise their position of power.

From a sociological perspective, television news has become an integral part of collective society, as it performs the function of both an informer, and sometimes even an entertainer. Mannes (1971:143) claims that to ignore the social phenomenon of television news is to ignore the very fabric of one's own society. Television, and particularly television news, finds itself placed in the nucleus of culture, rather than at the periphery: it is situated in the centre of the cultural sphere rather than at its boundaries (Fiske & Hartley 1978:86). In a rapidly modernising and highly differentiated global community, television forms a necessary alternative for group contact. It stands in place of the communal meeting-of-the-whole, which is now impossible; television thus produces or manufactures essential elements of social togetherness (Alexander 1981:18). Television can be seen, in the most simplistic terms, as a space where society maintains contact with itself, and the many different fragments or individuals of society can, without physical relocation, indulge in contact with other segments of society, even if that contact does not include any kind of dialogue.

The aim of this study is to investigate how ideology operates, but more specifically, how it functions within the television news system, and how ideology can use this system to secure its dominance. Where television news holds a position of cultural

centrality and transmits its messages to a vast audience, the author aims to demonstrate that it functions as an influential Ideological State Apparatus. This study aims to establish that the possible (mis)representation of events on television news occurs as a result of the alteration of the meaning of events because of television's tendency to serve a dominant ideology. The author attempts to illustrate this phenomenon through a semiotic case study of the CNN<sup>1</sup> television news broadcasts of September 11, 2001 (hereafter September 11).<sup>2</sup>

From the myriad dominant political ideologies in contemporary society, the author has selected American ideology<sup>3</sup> for discussion in this study. As this dissertation makes a case study of September 11, and Americanism is the ideology that can be most closely linked to the CNN television news representations of these events, a detailed examination of Americanism as a dominant political ideology is undertaken. The assumption that Americanism was the ideology most prevalent in CNN broadcasts of September 11 is examined in detail, and the semiotic codes of the CNN television news reports, which are believed to reveal American ideological content, are analysed. This study therefore contends that Americanism utilises television news broadcasters, such as CNN, as a system for maintaining its dominance. The above-mentioned case study is carried out as an illustration of the main aim of this study: to establish that television news operates as a carrier medium for dominant political ideologies.

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<sup>1</sup> The American television news network CNN broadcasts different news programmes to its American audience and its international audience. This study makes an analysis of the representations of the events of September 11 2001 on CNN's international broadcast. When 'CNN' is used in the text the international CNN news channel is referred to.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this study, the author refers to the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington as September 11 and not 11 September 2001. The former term has become the one most frequently circulated in mass media references to the events and since this study is intricately involved in media analysis the term 'September 11' will be used. The use of the term 'September 11' is deliberately selected instead of the term 'September 11 terrorist attacks'. The latter term may be more descriptive in nature, but it is also more emotive, and thus lacks objectivity more than the former term. When the term '11 September 2001' is used, the date is referred to and not the terrorist attacks.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed description of the term 'American ideology' as it is used in this dissertation is given in Chapter Three (see 3.2). The author delineates Americanism as a political ideology: it serves the interests of the American ruling government, and functions to ensure the American government's maintenance of power. Americanism involves the adherence to the capitalist economic system, and is identifiable by its patriotic and nationalistic stance with regard to the interests of the United States of America.

According to this dissertation, a dominant ideology is understood to entail the exertion of power by one group in society over another (Eagleton 1994:7). A dominant ideology may function as a set of beliefs or ideas of the ideals that are most highly valued by a particular society (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:9). The attainment of these ideals involves following a set of rules or code of conduct that describe acceptable or desirable behaviour to the adherents of the dominant ideology (Skidmore 1993:7). Such behaviour often serves to maintain the dominant group's position of power. A dominant ideology will, at all times, work to maintain its dominance by performing various actions of system maintenance that justify and naturalise its position of power (Eagleton 1994:8; Fiske 1996:116). Where a dominant ideology acts as a social force of domination a false consciousness is created, whereby members of society believe that the dominant group's position of power is the correct and desirable state of affairs.

American ideology is analysed as an example of a dominant political ideology. This particular ideology has been selected for numerous reasons. First, an examination of American ideology is extremely topical in the light of world events during the first years of the twenty-first century. Second, American ideology is undoubtedly an extremely pervasive ideology, not only within the borders of the United States of America, but also world-wide. The rapid and on-going trend of globalisation has facilitated the dissemination of American ideology so that international audiences are exposed to American products, American entertainment, American news media and consequently, an American way of thinking. Third, the analysis of American ideology as a dominant political ideology is imperative for the case study section of this study. The representation of September 11 on CNN is examined semiotically in order to uncover whether these representations contained American ideological connotative or mythical meanings.

The nature and functioning process of myth is examined, specifically because myths are often closely connected to, or produced by, dominant ideologies. Myths often function as supportive structures of dominant ideologies. Certain American myths are examined in detail because of their relevance and widespread representation on CNN prior to and following September 11.

The case study of September 11 has been selected because this took place so recently at the time of writing, because of its undoubted political significance, and the overwhelming amount of television news coverage dedicated to it. The author has decided to examine only the coverage of American television news channel CNN, not only because this is a specifically American news channel (making it one of the clearest representations of visual ideology surrounding September 11), but as an attempt to focus the scope of this study. The author suspects, however, that many other international Western television news networks may have represented September 11 in a similar fashion to CNN.

Similarly, this dissertation also recognises that many television news channels represented September 11 in an entirely dissimilar manner to CNN, and encoded their texts with meanings that were not necessarily favourable to Americanism. The author acknowledges that there are many diverse ideologies at work in the global media, and these ideologies are often in conflict with one another. Conflicting ideologies, or belief systems that operate according to different social rules or norms, can be observed clearly in television news representations from broadcasters who adhere to different dominant political ideologies. Hence, the study of how ideology operates in television news is far more complex and intricate than can be revealed by the study of simply one ideology as it is represented by one television news channel.

For instance, the Arab television news channel Al-Jazeera broadcast television news codes that were encoded with meanings that were clearly anti-American in nature after September 11. The South African television news programmes on the channels SABC and eTV, although originally sympathetic to the American situation, broadcast news programmes that were clearly critical of America during the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq (Mokushane 2002:3). Different television news channels have different ideological loyalties, and these ideologies may be in direct conflict with one another.

The author does not believe that this should be considered problematic. While a television news channel operates as a carrier medium for one ideology, it will transmit meanings that are biased in favour of that ideology. It is beneficial to the reader that television news channels adhere to different or conflicting ideologies so that through

watching and decoding two or more television news channels, the viewer<sup>4</sup> can receive the insights of disparate ideologically aligned broadcasters. Where readers receive 'all the sides of the story', it can be argued that they may be obtaining a view of events that is closer to what happened at the site of the event, than what is represented on only one television news programme.

What the author does find problematic, however, is that this rarely occurs: most viewers choose to watch only one television news programme or channel. Accordingly viewers can only receive the messages and meanings of a single ideology, and not the meanings of the ideologies that are in conflict with it. Thus viewers' view of the world is simplified and the complexities of a story erased while they are only exposed to a single ideological view of an event. Furthermore, while there are many conflicting ideologies at work in the global media, Americanism is perhaps the most pervasive of these. Owing to the trends of media imperialism and globalisation, America has obtained the monopoly of a larger portion of the world's media than any other country, allowing the widespread and global dissemination of ideologically constructed texts that carry meanings favourable to Americanism. Therefore, even though there are many diverse ideologies finding representation in the global media, an analysis of the ideology of Americanism is of particular importance.

The author believes that the notion of ideological messages appearing on television news is of pivotal importance in contemporary society, and that this study is consequently of great importance. Dahlgren (1981:101) states that, "TV news has become the major source of news for a majority of the population, and the *only* news source for many; moreover, it has become the medium most trusted by the public". Similarly, Douglas Kellner (1987:485) argues that most people derive a significant part of their information concerning the events of the world from electronic media, but most especially from television news. If this statement is taken to be correct, then the nature of the information that television news disseminates to a wide audience on a daily basis, is of major concern. While a large part of global society obtains information about the world from television news, it must be established whether or

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study the author refers to the 'viewer' as a passive television watcher who may not necessarily produce a reading after receiving the televisual text. A 'reader' is understood to be a television watcher who actively interprets the televisual text and produces a reading.

not the medium of television news is capable of representing an unbiased version of events.

Indeed, the television audience relies on television, as it is only through constant viewing that an individual, living in contemporary industrialised Western society, can remain informed and therefore be able to participate fully in society (Fiske & Hartley 1978:73). This dissertation examines how television is situated at the centre of contemporary Western society and how dominant ideologies infiltrate the working process of television news, thus entering the social sphere that television news has created. As television news has now become the site where audiences receive exposure to ideological meanings, extensive examinations of these notions are necessary to achieve an understanding of the functioning of contemporary Western society. The impact that television has on society validates a study of this medium.

The television representation of September 11 is selected by the author for a case study because of its political and social significance. The economic, social and political repercussions of September 11 in New York and Washington are not discussed here, as such issues extend beyond the scope of this study.

## **1.2 Methodology**

This study aims to establish whether dominant ideologies can alter the manner in which certain events are represented on international television news. That television news representations of events are mediated accounts of what happened at the site of an event is not debated. This study does not attempt to suggest a framework whereby television news representations can become less biased in nature. The purpose of this study is to understand the working process of television news, and to uncover the elements in this process that may result in (un)biased representations.

The first part of the study is a literature study and focuses on television as a communications channel. The latter part comprises an application of the theoretical principles to a case study. The theories that are examined in the first part of the study are applied to a particular event, namely the CNN television news representations of September 11, and it is hoped that this application will clarify the assumptions made

in the first part of the study. The author recognises the inherent weakness of the case study approach in that the conclusions established by such an approach may only be applicable to the specific event that is being examined, and are not necessarily universally relevant. Nonetheless, the author wishes to illustrate the importance of the study, particularly because the event with which the case study deals is of such ideological, sociological, and visual significance to global society.

The conclusions drawn in this study are based on assumptions that are qualified and investigated as far as possible. The interpretative and descriptive nature of this study situates it as qualitative research. All assumptions are critically examined in as much detail and as objectively as possible.

### **1.3 Theoretical approach and overview of literature**

The areas of study and modes of analyses that are used in this dissertation are closely linked to one another: they all fall under the umbrella term of cultural studies. Particular emphasis is laid on the area of cultural studies known as visual culture, which is relevant because of its firm emphasis on the visual aspects of cultural production. Walker and Chaplin (1997:2) emphasise the importance of the visual element of visual culture. They insist that when analysing any visual text, primary importance must be placed on its visual aspects. Walker and Chaplin (1997:2) state that "it is this emphasis which, in the main, distinguishes Visual Culture from Media and Cultural Studies". Mirzoeff (1999:1-3) explains the importance of the study of the visual because of the rapid visualisation of modern life, and he delineates visual culture as a field that is primarily concerned with the visual experience of everyday life. This is important when establishing the research methodologies of this study. The first point of concern in this study is a critical analysis of television news, placing it immediately in the sphere of visual culture studies because of the inherently visual nature of television.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The author recognises that the study of the medium of television news has originally been the intellectual terrain of the field of media studies. Important insights and findings have been established in the field of media studies with regard to television. Nonetheless, since television news forms part of a widely accessible social and cultural sphere (see 3.3), the author believes that a study of television news is warranted within the field of visual cultural studies.

Also of particular concern in this study is the workings of ideology and its affect on the cultural production of television news. Interestingly, while the author attempts to discover the workings and influence of ideology in television news, John Storey (1996:xiii) claims that "[i]deology is without doubt the central concept in cultural studies". Indeed, many critics have emphasised that issues of ideology form perhaps the pivotal concern of cultural studies, thus making it an appropriate apparatus for the evaluation of ideology in a culturally produced communications medium such as television news.

John Fiske (1996:116) examines the origins of cultural studies in the writings of Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci and Stuart Hall, and notes how ideology not only forms the basis of cultural studies, but also manifests in television. The Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies's attention to the insights of the operations of ideology by Althusser and Gramsci is of particular relevance for this study. Theories such as Althusser's notion of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) are of course applicable to any analysis of the media, and are examined and utilised in this dissertation.

Agger (1992:5) illustrates the relevance of cultural studies when analysing ideology in television news. He states: "I conceive of cultural studies in its best sense as an activity of critical theory that directly decodes the hegemonizing messages of the culture industry permeating every nook and cranny of lived experience" (Agger 1992:5). Of first interest here is that Agger delimits the scope of cultural studies to an analysis of the "culture industry", of which the mass communications media, including television news, form an integral part. Of second interest is that he identifies cultural studies as a means to study the encoded messages within cultural productions that function hegemonically. Cultural studies is clearly set up as a mechanism for the study of the movements of hegemony and ideology within culturally produced 'readable' texts, such as television news.

As a large part of this study rests on a theoretical analysis, a number of sources are consulted that discuss the workings of the television system. The most prominent of these authors, John Fiske (1978, 1987, 1989) is seminal to any analysis of television, as he explains the way in which television transmits information to viewers. During

this process of transporting information televisually, Fiske explains the functioning of visual signs and codes, how news is made readable for the audience, and the role that ideology plays in television.

John Hartley's (1982) *Understanding News* is a relatively old source but still an important one. Hartley documents the most common signs and codes employed in television news production, and explains how these television news conventions create meanings of authority and objectivity that are received by the reader of television news. After intensive observation of recent television news broadcasts, the author noted that the television news conventions that Hartley described in 1982 have changed little. Hartley's framework and documentation of television news signs and codes is therefore applied to recent television news representations, in order to uncover the ideological content contained within them.

The field of semiotics, which is positioned in the sphere of cultural studies, is delved into during the course of this study. The relevant television news visual signs and codes are analysed according to their encoded and decoded meanings and the ideological influence on those readings. An understanding of the production process of the television news sign must be reached before an analysis of the ideological content of the sign can be made. A semiotic mode of analysis is used in the case study section of this study in order to uncover the presence of American ideology in CNN television news representations of September 11.

A number of sources have been consulted with regard to semiotics in order to make a substantial semiotic analysis of the visual material in question. These include Gottdiener's (1995) description of semiotics in a postmodern age, Seiter's (1987) explanation of how a semiotic analysis can be made of a television programme, and Fiske's (1989) notions of the text and the audience. Bignell's (1997) *Media Semiotics* is referred to closely for its specific emphasis on semiotics and television. Barthes's *Mythologies* (1957) is referred to often as the author feels that this book is valuable in terms of semiotic investigation. Furthermore, although many critics have commented on or referred to Barthes's theories of myths, the author believes that there has been no significant departure from notions of myth since *Mythologies*. Since myth contributes

to the manipulation of representations on television news, it is an important component of this dissertation.

Television as a tool of ideology has been investigated at length by critics like Kellner (1987:471-500), and Gitlin (1987:506-529), but these studies aim to expose ideology within the context of television as entertainment. Amongst the apparent wealth of critical attention given to the issues of reality and ideology in television entertainment, this study aims to emphasise these same issues in the realm of television news.

Fiske (1989) and Michael J Wolf (1999) both discuss the possibility that television news is becoming a medium of entertainment instead of a disseminator of factual information. Since the nature and working process of television news is analysed in this study, these views are of importance. The author discusses how television news's entertainment quality affects the level of its ideological content.

ME Price (1995) discusses how the medium of television is used to manufacture loyalty to a government and patriotism to a state, hence assisting the creation and maintenance of a national identity. Price claims that governments of countries all over the world wield their power and influence over the television news media to represent stories that will produce particular conceptions of the government and the state in the mind of the viewer.

When discussing American ideology as a force of political and social domination, the insights of Edward W Said (1978, 1993) and his notions of Western cultural imperialism are referred to. In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), Said describes the negative stereotypical view of Arabs held by the West: this study analyses how this myth has surfaced in recent American news media representations and explains how this mythical stereotype functions to naturalise American dominance. Said (1993) also describes America's position as a superpower, and acknowledges the importance of the news media in the dissemination of American cultural imperialism.

Louis Althusser's (1970) theory of Ideological State Apparatuses is of great importance to this study. This dissertation operates under the assumption that television news operates as an Ideological State Apparatus: television news functions

to represent a view of reality that justifies and naturalises the position of power of the dominant ideological group within a society.

Ken Sanes's (2001b) theory of the hierarchy of news personalities is utilised in this dissertation in the author's analysis of particular news personalities and their status within the television news media. According to Sanes (2001b), television news operates similarly to a caste or class system where the most privileged class receives the most positive news coverage and the 'lowest' class receives only negative representation. This concept is pivotal to this study when analysing the treatment by CNN of the news personalities George W Bush, Colin Powell, and Osama bin Ladin. Dixon Wexer (1963), J Nachbar and K Lause (1992), John Lash (1995) and JS Lawrence and R Jewett (2002) are referred to as key sources when discussing the myths of the American hero and the arch villain. In the case study, the author demonstrates how these myths were applied to the above-mentioned news personalities on television news in order to naturalise American ideology.

In the case study section of this study the author repeatedly refers to Internet, newspaper and magazine articles as sources. Although such sources may not always be reliable or of questionable academic merit, the articles referred to here have been assessed in terms of their quality. Furthermore, writers such as Ken Sanes, Norman Solomon, and Mark Crispin Miller are widely acknowledged as being amongst America's leading mass media critics, and therefore the articles by these writers are considered to be of value. The subject of enquiry of this study lends itself towards an investigation of the mass communications media. It is therefore apt that a large portion of the literature used for this study should stem from the mass communications media.

#### **1.4 Overview of chapters**

Since semiotics is used as a mode of analysis to attempt to unravel the meanings encoded in the CNN television news representations of September 11, Chapter Two examines the theoretical underpinning of semiotics. The communicative process of semiosis is examined and particular emphasis is placed on how this process occurs within the medium of television news.

Chapter Three concentrates on a detailed analysis of the functioning process of dominant political ideologies. The framework or social structure of a dominant ideology is examined, in order to shape an understanding of how ideologies can infiltrate and manipulate the medium of television news. A tentative definition of American ideology is given and the manner in which television news serves to maintain and naturalise American ideology is analysed in detail. The working and structure of myth is also analysed in Chapter Three (see 3.3), which is important to this study because the myths contained in the CNN representations of September 11 are analysed later in this study. This study operates according to the assumption that while dominant political ideology functions as an overarching system of societal domination, myths function as the mechanisms of naturalisation for the dominant ideology.

In Chapter Four the findings gathered in Chapters Two and Three are applied to the CNN television news broadcasts of September 11. Certain media myths represented on CNN during and following the events of September 11 are analysed for their significance in operating as naturalisations or justifications of American ideology. A detailed semiotic analysis is made of the CNN television news representations of September 11 by focussing on the ideological content of the arbitrary and iconic signs and codes.

The concluding chapter of this dissertation, Chapter 5, highlights the main assumptions that are investigated throughout this study. The conclusions, drawn by the author, and the implications of these conclusions are explained. The value and significance of this type of study is made clear, while the limitations are acknowledged and further areas of inquiry that pertain to the concepts explored are suggested.

Of central importance to this study is the manner in which ideological meanings were represented by CNN after September 11. As Chapter Four demonstrates, numerous signs and codes were carefully constructed by CNN in order to positively reinforce the dominant political ideology of Americanism. In order to understand the configuration of these textual representations, the semiotic functioning of television

news, or the process of semiosis as it occurs in television news, must be examined. This is done in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE SEMIOTICS OF TELEVISION NEWS

Television news forms the primary site for the acquisition of news for a majority of the world's Western population (Dahlgren 1981:101). Its importance as a space for societal contact is immeasurable; because the collective physical gathering of the whole is practically impossible, individuals maintain contact and knowledge of their specific societies through television news. Individual viewers rely on the television news medium to supply them with unbiased representations of their world, thus insuring their contact with and in it. Without such contact, an individual may become alienated from the world and lose capability to function as a knowledgeable member of society. Television news's social function is the primary reason for the importance of the accuracy of its representations. Television news holds a social and legal responsibility for representing reality in a reliable manner, so an investigation of its fulfilment of this responsibility is paramount. A semiotic investigation of the encoding process of television news, and an analysis of television news visual codes, reveal that television news possesses the capability of manipulating the meaning of represented events. Moreover, television news endeavours, through various semiotic tactics, to construct messages that are limited in meaning, thereby transcending the context of the viewer and attempting to eliminate the possibility of polysemy in the sign. The meaning towards which television news guides the viewer's reading is not incidental, but invariably ideologically constructed. Hence, the working process of television news only allows a selective view of reality, where meanings are ideologically manipulated; and the factual representation of reality, on which society relies, is consequently imprecise.

This chapter examines the social importance of television news. Furthermore, a detailed analysis of television news codes is made, and it is determined which codes are most adequately suited as carriers of ideological meanings. These are identified as the codes that most adversely affect the 'accuracy' of television news representations and inspire ideological readings. This chapter also investigates the semiotic concept of polysemy and how it is inspired by the viewer's context. An investigation is launched as to how television news attempts to overcome the possibility of its readers producing a multiplicity of meanings when decoding its texts.

Since semiotics is employed as a mode of analysis to attempt to uncover the meanings encoded in the CNN television news representations of September 11 in Chapter Four, this chapter investigates the theoretical foundations of semiotics. The communicative process of semiosis is discussed with close attention to how this process occurs within television news. An understanding of how television news signs and codes are constructed must be reached before investigating how these codes may function as carriers of ideological meanings, which is done in Chapter Three. Furthermore, an inquiry into the process of semiosis as it occurs in television news is performed first, so that the author's findings may be demonstrated through application in the case study in Chapter Four.

## **2.1 The codes of television news**

Television news is a semiotic experience (Fiske 1989b:59). This study pursues a semiotic analysis of a specific television news event, namely the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States of America, for the purpose of uncovering specific ideologies manifested within the representation of those events. Before such an analysis can be made, however, it is important to investigate and understand the signs and codes most commonly used in television news, and the way in which they operate to create meaning. This study also investigates which television news signs are the most effective carriers of ideological content, and which signs do not perform this task as effectively.

In semiotics, there is rarely a recognisable resemblance between the visible sign and the subject or object to which it refers (Lewis 1990:159). There is no natural relation between the given sign or code and the meaning that the producer of the sign or code intends. Signs are arbitrary and are not restricted to having to bear a visible resemblance to that which they represent in order to be understood (Lacey 1998:57). Indeed, a sign may be completely abstract and yet contain a concrete meaning that can be widely interpreted within the society where it functions. At the foundation of semiotics is the understanding that the meaning of a sign may depend entirely on the individual reader's relationship with the sign or the referent. Meaning may depend on

the context<sup>1</sup> of individual readers, or the ideologies that operate within the text or within the society of which individuals are a part. The relation between the signifier and the signified is usually not natural, but learnt according to the conventions of a society (Lewis 1990:160). This study investigates how context affects the meaning of a visual text at a later point (see 2.2), but the author would like to make clear here that the meaning of the sign, code or text does not necessarily depend on its visual appearance.

Certain signs do, however, bear more resemblance to their referents than others. The degree of a sign's visible resemblance to its referent is determined by its motivation. While highly-motivated signs contain an obvious visible resemblance between the signifier, the signified and the referent, in a sign of low-motivation there is only a slight visible relationship between the three components of the sign (Fourie 1996:44). Television news is an interesting conglomeration of both high-motivated and low-motivated signs. In arbitrary or unmotivated signs, the signifier relates to its signified by convention alone, and there is an agreement amongst its users, who are commonly members of the same society or language group, as to what an arbitrary sign means. The weaker the motivation of a sign, the more constraining the role of convention will be on the meaning of the sign (Fiske & Hartley 1978:39).

Linguistic signs, such as onscreen graphics, are visible to viewers during news broadcasts, but are entirely arbitrary in nature. These arbitrary signs, although low in motivation, can at times be pivotal to the meaning of the television news broadcast, and are used to disseminate additional information to the viewer. Sometimes this information is directly connected to the story being related by the newsreader, but at times the information can be connected to an entirely different event. These types of arbitrary signs are also commonly used in television news to announce the theme or event that is discussed by the newsreader. What is interesting to note about arbitrary television news signs is that they are manufactured by the television news

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<sup>1</sup> Context includes the situational, physical, and social circumstances of both communicator and recipient that take part in the process of semiosis. It is generally accepted that the context of the reader may be the prime determinant that effects the reading of a sign. Individual viewers may adapt the meaning of a sign according to intertextual associations that they make with that sign, or because of past experiences with the referent of the sign. The notion of context means that the reading of any sign by an individual recipient is a subjectively personal action.

broadcasters themselves. These arbitrary signs are carefully considered and decided upon by broadcasters, and can also be changed by the producers of television news at a moment's notice. The appearance of an arbitrary sign on television news depends entirely on the intentions of the producer of the sign.

Television news is, however, also characterised by the use of iconic, or high-motivated signs, where the signifier visibly resembles the referent (Fourie 1996:40). In an iconic sign the signified exerts a great deal of influence or control over the appearance of the signifier (Lacey 1998:66). The form of the signifier is determined by either the signified, or by convention. In arbitrary signs of low-motivation the form of the signifier is determined by convention, while in highly motivated or iconic signs the determining influence is the signified (Fiske & Hartley 1978:39). Iconic signs are evident when photographs are shown on the news, or when video recorded footage taken at a physical event is played. The high resemblance that these signs bear to scenes from the real world, is of pivotal importance to television news as this assists in creating the realism or naturalism that television news strives for.

Iconic signs look real and natural, and because of this they supply the viewer with a representation of reality that is highly realistic. Television news's dependence on iconic signs is therefore evident. While arbitrary television news signs explain a news event to the reader, they do not serve to prove it. The justification of the existence of an event depends solely on iconic signs. Iconic signs function as the 'evidence' to support claims made by both the newsreader and by the visual arbitrary signs. According to Allen (1999:37), "an event, including the existence of a war, nowadays does not exist unless there are pictures available to illustrate it". Visual recorded footage of any given event 'proves' that the event happened, even though it may not have happened precisely as the arbitrary signs might indicate. One may argue that without the visual footage (visual proof) of iconic signs, the arbitrary signs are rendered meaningless, because if there are no pictures of the event, then the reality of the event itself is in question. In this case, the arbitrary signs contained in the television news broadcast may refer to nothing.

When examining the specific signs and codes most commonly used in television news, it is important to understand how the television news story is visually signified,

structured and presented. According to Hartley (1982:107), a television news report consists of three presentation elements. First, the newsreader introduces the topic, explains the relevance of the topic to other elements, and concludes the representation of the event or topic. Second, the correspondent reports from the field close to the site of the event, who explains the context and the significance of the topic or event. Third, the film report presents images of the event (Hartley 1982:107). Hartley claims that along with these three presentation elements, the television news story is represented by four modes of presentation.

The first of these modes of presentation is what Hartley (1982:108) calls the "talking head", which is the newsreader or correspondent. Bignell (1997:124) investigates the neutral appearance and treatment of the television news presenter. This individual, also known as the news anchor, is seated in an indoor studio, which is neutrally lit with a notan lighting<sup>2</sup> technique. Fourie (1997:78) also comments on the neutral appearance of the television news studio. There are usually no curtains, paintings, elaborate decorations, furniture or even pot plants. The newsreader's dress is conventionally formal (Fourie 1997:78). Male newsreaders wear suits, and female newsreaders wear formal business clothes, which include blouses, jackets and unobtrusive jewellery (Bignell 1997:113). The facial expression of the newsreader is neutral and the tone of voice does not contain extreme emotion (Fourie 1997:78). The newsreader will use impersonal linguistic codes and will almost never say the word "I". There is a lack of gestural signs by the newsreader, as clearly such signs would indicate some kind of emotion towards the event that is being represented (Bignell 1997:113). The bottom frame of the shot cuts the figure of the newsreader above the elbows so that the hands are not included in the picture frame: newsreaders will not raise their hands or use emotive hand gestures, as such movements may connote bias, emotion or subjectivity.

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<sup>2</sup> Notan lighting refers to a filmic lighting technique where light does not appear to come from any particular direction. The light is non-selective, and all areas are equally bright. Notan lighting is extremely low in tonal contrasts and the background area is also lit. The impression is flat and essentially two-dimensional. All shadows and areas of sharp lighting contrast are eliminated. Notan lighting offers the opposite lighting effects to chiaroscuro lighting, which is of extremely high tonal contrasts (Millerson 1991:238).

The efforts made to make the television newsreader appear visually neutral may be identified as a television news code. The neutral treatment of the newsreader is not incidental, but is a well-structured and manipulated code that is constructed in such a way as to convey a specific meaning to the reader of television news. Functioning as a visual code, the neutral treatment of the newsreader is imbued with a meaning that must be uncovered and interpreted by the viewer. It is clear that the newsreader is a signification of neutrality. Bignell (1997:118) states that the newsreader is a sign who represents the mythic objectivity of both the newsreader and the news institution with regard to the events being reported. It is obviously in the interests of television news broadcasters to communicate to viewers their objectivity and lack of bias when representing events, as this benefits the news organisation's credibility. The newsreader is the main point of contact between the news broadcasters and the viewing audience (Hartley 1982:107). It is the newsreader who introduces events to the viewer, and who explains those events. The newsreader thus forms a vitally important sign to the news broadcast, and is a site for the news organisation to signify its neutrality and objectivity.

The code of the television newsreader signifies more than just neutrality; it is also a message of authority. Television news itself is usually regarded as authoritative in that it functions as the bearer and disseminator of factual information about the world that would otherwise be unavailable to the individual viewer (Bignell 1997:113). The newsreader assists in creating the authoritative status bestowed on television news. Fiske (1989b:68) claims that the authoritative status of the television newsreader is explicit. Bignell (1997:116) states that the authority of television news is a mythic meaning. The visual code of the newsreader communicates the meanings of both neutrality, and authority to the viewer. But these meanings are mythic: they function on a connotative order of signification rather than at the level of denotation (see 2.2). That television news is both neutral and authoritative is not *apriori*, but the visual code of the newsreader would suggest that it is. What is more, the acceptance of this code is vital for television news to maintain its mythic status. The culturally learned and culturally determined nature of codes ensure that television news may rely on the code of the newsreader to communicate its neutrality and authority. This serves to reiterate Fiske and Hartley's (1978:162) claims that before one can watch the news, one must first accept that it is a true representation of the way things are. This would

imply that when viewing the newsreader, viewers are required to accept unequivocally that television news is neutral and authoritative.

The second of Hartley's (1982:108) modes of television news presentation is the visual graphics that are incorporated into the broadcast. These include animation and computer displays, and can be used to fill the whole screen, or they can appear behind the newsreader. The most notable use of graphics in television news is the title sequence of the news programme. Title sequences appear at the beginning of a news broadcast, and function as a sign that announces the start of the programme. Apart from signifying the start of the news broadcast, title sequences are visual signs that give news organisations a recognisable brand image. Thus the news programme obtains a consistent identity, and it is differentiated from other news programmes. The title sequence often contains computer graphics that are fast moving and smooth in appearance. Bignell (1997:116) states that this feature connotes technological sophistication and promotes the news programme's mythic authoritative status. Evidently, the title sequence, similar to the newsreader, is a code containing a number of meanings. It signifies the start of a news programme, it gives a news organisation a specific identity and differentiates it from competing news organisations, and it upholds the status of authority that is attached to television news. What is interesting is that, apart from its other functions, the title sequence as a code is constructed to maintain the myth of the authoritative voice of television news.

In recent years, as the technological capability of television news has improved, the onscreen graphics in television news broadcasts have changed considerably. In 2001, the major television news network CNN radically changed its onscreen graphics format, and other large television news networks quickly followed suit (Sanes 2001b:1). The CNN television screen is divided into a number of different sections. The top section of the screen is the largest and it shows the newsreader in a medium close-up shot. Below the image of the newsreader are five or more separate sets of arbitrary signs. There are two coloured bars, which stretch parallel to one another across the bottom of the screen. The top bar contains text that relates to the headlines that are being read by the newsreader. The lower of the two bars also contains text, but it scrolls continuously from right to left across the bottom of the screen. The information in this bar is not connected to the information that is communicated in the

bar directly above it. Above the top bar to the left of the screen is another shorter bar that extends roughly a quarter of the way across the screen. This bar also contains text and it is used to name the topic that is being discussed in the television news programme at a specific moment. Directly opposite this bar is another short bar to the right of the screen. The text in this bar reveals the value of currencies. Directly above this bar, on the right side of the screen, is the logo of the television news organisation, CNN.<sup>3</sup>

All of the visual signs and codes in the bottom section of the screen are constructed to produce meaning, whether it be informative, mythic or ideological. All of these codes are linguistic, which makes them arbitrary. Furthermore, the colours used in the bars may be of visual or ideological significance. These codes are computer-generated signs and hence fall within Hartley's (1982:108) second mode of presentation. Similar to the title sequence, the technological sophistication signified by the computer graphics in the lower part of the screen during a television news report communicate a message of authority. Once again, television news constructs its arbitrary signs to function in the service of the mythic authoritative status of television news.

The third mode of presentation in television news is the nomination (Hartley 1982:108). These codes are captions that appear as text on the screen below any participant in the news, or they may be verbal introductions that designate a participant. The nomination may be used to introduce the newsreader, the correspondent or an interviewee. The nomination is a code with a purely informative function: it tells viewers the name and sometimes the position of an individual who appears on the television news programme. It is interesting to note that the title sequence and the nomination are both purely arbitrary signs. The title sequence is almost always easily identifiable as the signification of a specific news organisation, but individual viewers will only know this because they have learnt to associate a specific title sequence with a certain news organisation through regular television viewing. Hence, the title sequence is an arbitrary code because it has to be learnt, and

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<sup>3</sup> The format that is described here may vary slightly in different news organisations. This is primarily a study of the visual appearance and representations delivered by the television news channel, CNN. The description of the CNN visual format given here is accurate at the time of writing, but the visual format may change in the future.

it becomes a cultural convention. The nomination is a linguistic code, automatically classifying it as an arbitrary code.

The newsreader is iconic in nature because the picture of the human figure that viewers see on the television screen looks similar to the actual newsreader, but certain elements of the newsreader's appearance and environment are arbitrary. The formal clothes of the newsreader are not similar in appearance to the message that they signify: namely, that the newsreader or news organisation are both objective and authoritative. The neutral appearance of the studio in which the newsreader is situated is an arbitrary code, as is the non-gestural stance of the newsreader and the lack of expression or use of personal linguistic codes. These aspects that are connected to the newsreader are all carefully constructed codes that are used to signify a certain meaning. It must be noted, however, that the meaning of these codes bears no visible resemblance to the signifiers, making the code of the newsreader an arbitrary one.

It is evident that television news broadcasters engineer the visual signs and codes, which appear in their news broadcasts, as carriers of a particular message. The arbitrary signs and codes appearing on television news serve to create and maintain the myth that television news holds some kind of authoritative status. This action must be questioned: why do television news organisations find this status of authority so desirable? Simply, if a television news organisation holds a position of authority, or if it appears to do so, then the credibility and believability of the representation of world events that it offers is reinforced. Moreover, if a television news programme's representations of reality are believed by the viewing audience owing to the news organisation's authoritative identity, then misrepresentations of reality on the news become easier to perform. If viewers trust television news because of its status of authority, then they are not likely to start mistrusting television news, so long as that authoritative status is upheld and maintained.

According to Hartley (1982:108), the fourth mode of presentation is that of actuality. This comprises the filmed footage recorded in the field by television news cameramen. This may appear in the news broadcast as a section of filmed footage with a voice-over. The code of the audio voice-over in this instance has an informative or explanatory function, as it assists the viewer in achieving an

understanding of the visual footage. The actuality may also show the reporter standing directly in front of the camera while relating the events verbally. Another variation of the actuality is the vox pop: here an interviewee is captured full frame while talking to an unseen reporter who is positioned off-frame (Hartley 1982:108). The actuality consists of iconic imagery or signs. This is the section of the news broadcast in which signs most closely resemble their referents, and therefore one could state that the actuality is the most 'real' section of television news, or it is the closest representation of reality in it.

Nonetheless, the iconic signs contained within the actuality cannot be as easily manipulated by news broadcasters as the arbitrary signs in the first three modes of presentation. These iconic signs are not reproduced by the television news broadcasters themselves, but are simply captured by the broadcasters.<sup>4</sup> Therefore it is more difficult for news broadcasters to make filmed footage or iconic television news codes carry a message whose meaning will be favourable to a certain ideology, than it is to manipulate arbitrary television news codes into doing so. Fiske (1989b:68) states that live television news inserts rarely fit into the chosen ideological slot. There are always contradictions within these codes that remain unresolved and resist the mythic role and the ideology perpetuated by the television news programme (Fiske 1989b:68). The real events which take place in the world are unwritten and uncoordinated. They are not consciously constructed as a visible sign that will support a certain myth or ideology. The arbitrary signs that appear in television news programmes are carefully produced, and can be manipulated at will by the news broadcasters themselves. Evidently, the site for the emergence of ideology in television news broadcasts is the arbitrary sign, which can be easily manufactured. The iconic television news sign can only serve a specific ideology by chance, as it is less easily manipulated by broadcasters.

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<sup>4</sup> Although supposedly the broadcasters do not create these iconic signs, Baudrillard (1994:16) suggests that television news makers can create or cause events in the physical real world for the purpose of being able to represent these events afterwards. Also, even though images that are captured by television news cameramen in the field are not easily manipulated on film after the time of recording, the process of selection can adjust their 'reality' by excluding pivotal scenes or points of view.

It is evident that when attempting to uncover the presence of ideologies in television news through a semiotic analysis, it is imperative that the focus of the study fall on arbitrary television news codes. Iconic signs and codes are captured on film by reporters, and it is possible to change the level of reality in these segments of the television news programme by selectively broadcasting only certain scenes from a single event, and misrepresenting the event in the accompanying arbitrary signs. It is more difficult to manipulate the actual filmed footage of the event than the arbitrary signs that also represent the event, as this would require more than clever editing and a reconfiguration of some onscreen computer graphics. Iconic signs rarely fit perfectly into the ideological framework that television news strives to maintain (Fiske 1989b:68). Conversely, arbitrary television news signs are perfectly malleable, and can be easily manipulated by television news producers to carry encoded messages that are favourable to a certain ideology.

Seiter (1987b:26) explains that arbitrary signs such as text or visual graphics are used on television to close down the number of possible meanings that the accompanying image may have. Television news utilises graphics and arbitrary signs in an attempt to guide viewers' reading of the iconic visual footage, and while the visual imagery may not be obviously ideological, the graphics that 'explain' it may coax the viewer towards an ideological reading. This same ideological action is employed when the representation of a myth is incorporated in a television news broadcast: Barthes (1957:117) explains that myths empty out a sign of various possible meanings, directing the reader's decoding process to only one meaning.<sup>5</sup> Hence, arbitrary signs are encoded with only certain meanings as they are endowed with almost sole responsibility for ensuring that television news broadcasts contain ideological content. Arbitrary signs give each organisation a separate identity, while at the same time representing the myth that television news is a voice of authority on world affairs.

The maintenance of television news's authoritative status is of pivotal importance to its role as a carrier of ideology. While audiences are convinced by arbitrary signs to accept the authority of television news, news organisations are at greater liberty to

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<sup>5</sup> The functioning process of myths and the manner in which myths are incorporated into television news broadcasts in order to produce ideologically constructed meanings is discussed in section 3.3.

reconstruct the reality in television news representations in order to serve an ideology. Arbitrary signs can also be easily engineered to carry ideological messages to the audience directly, while iconic signs cannot. The following section extends the semiotic investigation of television news beyond the analysis of signs and codes, and examines the working process of semiosis in television news. The process of communication that takes place between the producers of television news signs and codes and the reader of television news, is closely investigated.

## 2.2 Semiosis in television news

The process of semiosis is a complex one, especially with regard to the medium of mass television news. In any communicative action, the likelihood of the reader interpreting the message precisely as the producer intended is not high. This kind of interpretative accuracy is often rendered impossible. The moments where the producers encode the sign, and where readers decode the sign in order to extract meaning, are what Hall (1980:129) calls the determinate moments. What occurs in the production of meaning of the same sign at each determinant moment or action of decoding may be varied, as the decoded meaning does not always bear any similarities to the encoded one. What is more, this disparity of meanings at each respective determinant moment is sometimes largely expected and accounted for. Obviously, the process of semiosis must possess some shortcomings that inhibit or prevent readers from making a 'correct' reading of the message, or which prevent the producer from communicating the message clearly. The characteristic nature of signs, where signs possess a varied or even limitless number of possible meaning potentials, is commonly referred to as polysemy.<sup>6</sup> The televisual sign faces particular difficulties in accurately conveying its message to its viewers, because its combination of the visual and the aural make it inherently complex (Hall 1980:131). Nonetheless, television broadcasters attempt daily, through various means, to rectify the

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<sup>6</sup> Stuart Hall introduced the notion of polysemy. In semiotics, a sign may be described as polysemic if any decoded reading is possible on its connotative level of meaning. Hall (1980:134) maintains that all signs are capable of polysemy, as any connotative configuration is possible for any sign. The term 'polysemy' describes the argument held as fact by many semiologists that all signs contain the potential of producing many possible meanings, depending on the interpretation of the sign made by the reader. The meaning of the sign then oscillates from reader to reader. Bignell (1997:54) argues that all signs are polysemic, and while signs may attempt to narrow down their polysemic nature considerably, or limit the number of possible readings open to the viewer, signs can never eliminate polysemy.

characteristic tendency of semiosis that allows a sign a wide possibility of meanings, resulting in disparate determinant moments. An examination of the process of semiosis must take place to discover where the shortcomings lie that prevent an act of unadulterated communication.

According to Morgan and Welton (1992:5), the process of semiosis takes place in a linear fashion: the message originates with the information source, which can also be described as the producer or communicator. With regard to television news, the information source is the camera journalists, as well as the news editors and sub-editors, or the television news organisation. The message is then carried through a transmitter, which would constitute the technical channel of television transmissions. The original signal then reaches the viewer, who is simultaneously affected by some kind of noise source (Morgan & Welton 1992:5). According to Morgan and Welton (1992:5), noise constitutes anything which shares the same channel as the message, or events, which take place as the message arrives at the receiver, that interfere with the accurate decoding of the message. Notwithstanding, the message is decoded at this point and is said to have reached its destination (Morgan & Welton 1992:5).

It is possible that some sort of technical or physical interference, or noise, may inhibit the receiver from concentrating solely on decoding the message, and the resulting reading may vary greatly from the intended meaning of the producer. But, this may not be the case with all instances of television news semiosis. If television news viewers receive a television news broadcast without technical difficulties or any kind of distraction, then it does not suffice to say that these viewers will interpret the message contained in the television news medium exactly as the news producers intended.

Nick Lacey (1998:90) admits that signs can generate more than one meaning. Signs, including television news signs, are polysemic. But it is not sufficient to assume that the polysemic nature of signs results from the viewer's inability to concentrate completely on a given sign because of noise. This would mean that without an element of noise, the receiver's interpretation of the message would not vary at all from the intended message, which exists in the mind of the producer. The meanings created from actions of decoding performed by numerous readers would then be

nothing more than different degrees of understanding, according to the respective amount of noise present at the moment of each reading.

Lacey (1998:27) claims that the factor that affects the meanings created during the decoding of a message, is the context of the individual reader (see 2.1). According to Lacey (1998:27), if the context is changed the meaning of the message created by the reader will also change. Fiske and Hartley (1978:81) describe the relationship between the communicator and the viewer as one that is complicated by the notion of context. On many occasions the contexts of the two parties may differ. The message is then encoded according to the set of signs and codes that are most commonly used, or are most familiar to the producer of the message. The message is decoded using the signs and codes that have been culturally learned by the reader respective to the society within which they were learnt. Because the contexts of the producer and the receiver differ, the encoding/decoding systems also differ, resulting in what Fiske and Hartley (1978:81) call an aberrant decoding. Hall (1980:131) explains that an aberrant decoding results from a lack of symmetry between the two determinant moments. While the producer and the reader operate with two dissimilar sets of codes or conventions of signification, the meaning of the sign produced by the reader and the intended meaning of the producer is disparate. According to Hall (1980:131),

[t]he codes of encoding and decoding may not be perfectly symmetrical. The degrees of symmetry - that is, the degrees of 'understanding' and 'misunderstanding' in the communicative exchange - depend on the degrees of symmetry/asymmetry (relations of equivalence) established between the positions of the 'personifications', encoder-producer and decoder-receiver ... What are called 'distortions' or 'misunderstandings' arise precisely from the *lack of equivalence* between the two sides in the communicative exchange.

Clearly, the greatest obstacle that hinders the process of semiosis is a lack of equivalence of understanding between producer and receiver, which, being contextually determined, varies accordingly and originates from a difference in the encoding systems of each party involved in the act of communication. What is interesting is that context is not part of the process of semiosis. Instead, context is something outside the act of communication or text, but it influences the final reading made by the receiver (Lacey 1998:28). The producer can manipulate the message that

is being encoded as the producer decides what the message will communicate, how it will be sent and how it will be encoded. Nevertheless, the producer cannot manipulate the context in which the produced sign will be read. The producer is unable to change the situation of the reader, nor can the producer change the set of signs and codes used by the viewer to decode the message, to suit the set of signs and codes used in the sign's production. The producer can manipulate every step in the process of semiosis up to the point where the viewer receives and interprets the message.

The context of the viewer begins to affect the message, and seemingly, the more different the viewer's context is from that of the producer, the more the decoded message will vary from the encoded one. Hartley (1982:47) maintains that "[s]imply because the 'same' message goes out to twenty million people, it does not follow that twenty million people interact with it in the same way to get the same 'meaning' and the same understanding". Fiske (1996:127) claims that the prime determinant of the meaning of a sign is the social context of its use. Hartley (1982:151) interestingly comments that the act of decoding is a site where socially-constructed conventions or contexts will reveal themselves. Hence, not only will the context of the reader affect the reading of the message, but the context of the viewer will be revealed when analysing the produced reading.

When attempting to trace the workings of the process of semiosis, and how closely the meaning interpreted by the viewer resembles the meaning intended by the producer, it is important to note that there are different kinds of meaning. Tolson (1996:3) proposes that a final statement about meaning is impossible simply because meaning is so evasive. Meaning is located in the mind of the reader, and even when two readers exist in exactly the same social situation, their minds may differ greatly.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>7</sup> The author is aware of the Postmodern notion that intentionality should be disregarded and more importance should be laid on the decoded meaning of the receiver. Barthes (1977:147) problematises this issue, recognising that "[t]o give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing". Thus, the recognition of the producer's intention consequently damages the possible polysemy of the text. But Barthes (1977:147-148) insists that no text can be fully deciphered without considering the intention of the producer as well as the decoded meaning of the reader, and warns that the reader should not be paid importance at the expense of the author or producer. The author is in agreement with Barthes, and believes that, despite Postmodernism's emphasis on the importance of the reader, the intention of the producer is of equal importance and also requires investigation. Furthermore, where the producer inevitably manipulates the encoding of a text according to the producer's intended meaning, the intentionality of the producer consequently becomes

reader's life experience and personality may also affect the interpreted meaning of a sign. According to Hartley (1982:139), there are two domains of lived culture. Experienced meanings result from personal interaction at a subjective level, and appear in institutionalised situations such as family, school and work. This is a highly subjective reality, and is testament to how individual human beings attempt to become the central figure in their own consciousness. Once individuals achieve a place of centrality within their own reality, then the events of the world decrease in relevance according to how little they affect the individual. Mediated meanings are constructed to reach through experienced meanings, and to convince viewers that events in the outside world bear relevance for them. Such meanings are carried by the mass media, including television, television news, newspapers, magazines, radio, and the Internet. But, viewers produce mediated meanings in the same context as experienced meanings. Thus, mediated meanings do not escape the effect of readers' situational context, and the reader will naturally personalise the mediated meaning, transforming it into an experienced meaning (Hartley 1982:139).

The theory of preferred reading is described by Hall (1980:136) as three hypothetical positions. Hall (1980:136) claims that a decoding of any televisual text is always constructed from one of three positions. The theory of preferred reading operates under the assumption that the given text contains a dominant ideology, or that the text is an illustration of a dominant ideology. A dominant reading is produced by a viewer who accepts the dominant ideology. This is the first hypothetical position; it is the dominant or hegemonic position. The symmetry between the encoding system of the producer and the decoding system of the reader is high, and the viewer decodes the text in terms of the reference code in which it had been encoded (Hall 1980:136). A negotiated position or reading is produced by a reader who accepts the dominant ideology, but because of the individual's social position, the meaning has to be adjusted to some extent. The dominant codes used in the televisual texts are hegemonic and they supply representations of events that are global in nature (Hall 1980:136). Dominant codes operate on a macro level, taking national interests of state into account. The negotiated position acknowledges the dominant code, and its

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part of the text. Hence, the author believes that the text cannot be adequately deciphered while ignoring the intention of the producer.

national significance, but contains an adaptive characteristic where such hegemonic messages are transformed to suit a more situational or local environment. The legitimacy of the dominant code is upheld while applying that code to micro level local conditions. The dominant code may lose some of its hegemony in this transformation, and the negotiated reading may be fraught with contradictions when trying to serve the interests of a local position and satisfy the dominant code (Hall 1980:136).

When an oppositional reading is made, it is because the reader is in direct opposition to the dominant ideology contained in the text (Fiske 1996:121). These readings, or produced meanings, are measured with regard to their agreement or disagreement with a certain dominant ideology. An oppositional reading does not necessarily result from a lack of symmetry between the encoding and decoding systems of the producer and reader. The reader may decode and understand both the denotative and connotative intended meanings of the televisual text, and still be unable or unwilling to adapt the message to a local level. The viewer will unravel the dominant code only to reconfigure it in some alternative framework of reference (Hall 1980:136). The context of the individual reader may be the determining factor in such a reconfiguration. The difference between the reader's context and the context of production of the original text may also affect the dominant code's adaptability to the reader's situation, thus straining the reader's ability to accept the dominant message. The experienced meanings produced subjectively by the viewer will dominate the mediated meanings. The constructed or mediated texts produced by the mass media are imbued with ideological content, and when decoded by the reader, produce meanings that are highly subjective. Whether the reader produces a meaning that is in agreement with the ideological content of the text, or in direct opposition to it, the reader's context will certainly direct the decoding of the text.

While different types of meaning may arise from televisual texts, each reading also possesses different levels of meaning. Similar to Hall's (1980) three hypothetical situations with regard to types of meaning, Barthes (1977:18) also arranges the levels of meaning in a triadic fashion. Barthes identifies three different levels of meaning or orders of signification in the sign. The first order is that of denotation that indicates the literal or dictionary meaning of a sign. This meaning is accepted by convention

amongst the group of users of the given sign (Barthes 1977:18). It is important to note that should the decoding system of the reader be incongruous with the encoding system of the producer, then the denotative meaning may evade the reader. Without an understanding of the literal meaning of the sign at a denotative level, all subsequent levels of meaning will be constructed contrary to the producer's intended message. Hence, for even partially successful communication to take place, a shared knowledge of the societal agreed meaning of the denotative meaning of a sign must exist.

The second order of signification, according to Barthes (1977:19), is that of connotation and myth. This refers to the communicative value that a sign or code has by what it refers to, over and above its denotative meaning. This is often a subjectively personal meaning, which can depend entirely on the context of the reader. The second order of signification depends on what one personally associates with a sign according to previous experience with what the sign signifies (Barthes 1977:19). Hall (1980:133) argues that signs attain their ideological meaning at the connotative level. On the denotative level, meaning is already fixed and cannot be as easily exploited or manipulated by producers to produce a specific ideological reading. But at the level of connotation, meaning is more fluid and not fully naturalised, so the meaning of a sign may be transformed (Hall 1980:133). Both the ideological intent of the viewer and the situational ideological position of the viewer alter signification at the level of connotation. Barthes places ideology on a third level or order of signification. Signs and codes can function as carriers of ideology, and the ideological content of a text can affect the meaning at which the reader arrives. Although not all three types of meaning need exist simultaneously in a single reading of a text, all three levels of meaning may operate concurrently during the decoding determinant moment.

While meaning is constructed of three different levels and occurs as one of three different types, the notion of meaning is further complicated, as it must be understood that meaning itself is a mediated construct. The televisual mass media texts that contain and transport the signs that result in an act of decoding and a production of meaning, are examples of mediated meanings. Indeed, all signs are mediated by receivers, and the meaning of signs is polysemic or multivocal (Gottdiener 1995:21). A single sign or text is embedded with the possibility of producing multiple meanings. The television text in particular is inherently polysemic, as any television text has a

multiplicity of meanings (Fourie 1997:182). Clearly, the meaning created at the event of the decoding of the message is not the same as when it was produced (Fiske 1989a:188).

Hartley (1982:22) describes how the effects of context on the process of semiosis means that signs do not have a fixed internal meaning, but rather only meaning potentials. A sign's meaning is moulded or directed depending on the context in which it is used. That the context of a sign directs the meaning of the sign is undoubtedly clear. When a sign is constructed by the producer, a message is encoded and transmitted in the sign according to the producer's sign systems and social conventions. After the sign has been transmitted out of the context of the producer and into the context of the reader via various channels and mediums, it may be put into use in a context that is decidedly different from the context where it originated. Meaning is created as the viewer attempts to decode the message embedded in the sign, or as the sign is put into use. Nonetheless, the overriding influence of the context of the reader may have a pivotal affect on the meaning that is created, so much so that the eventual meaning may be drastically different from the intended meaning of the producer. Evidently, should a single sign or text be channelled to many different contexts, the individual reading of the same sign in each context may differ from the producer's intended meaning.

When considering the process of semiosis, it would seem nonsensical for any mass communications medium to deny the influence of context on the reading of a sign. It is therefore surprising that Hartley (1982:24) argues that television news attempts to inject its audience with a single, uni-accentual value for signs. This would suggest that television news denies the value of the individual viewer's context on the meaning of a sign. Consequently, television news does not tolerate ambiguities (Hartley 1982:24).

Television news codes are constructed in such a way as to report a story with utmost clarity, while ignoring or editing out any point of uncertainty. Television news representations work hard at editing out any viewpoint or view of events that may constitute uncertainty, and these televisual texts attempt to affirm a single meaning in the reading made by viewers. Television news texts do not represent varying opinions from different sections of society concerning a single event, if those opinions may

contribute to the ambiguity of the story. Obviously, varying opinions of a single event may raise questions as to what took place at the site of the event. Television news usually gives a single representation of the event, describing only one account of what took place, thereby avoiding uncertainty. Once television news has selected one account, from numerous different accounts of the same event, it will expect its viewer to establish the same meaning of the represented event. Television news not only attempts to limit the meaning of an event by selectively revealing only certain accounts of the event, it also limits the meaning of the visual imagery that it chooses to use as an illustration of an event. Arbitrary televisual signs, such as text and computer graphics, serve to guide the reading made by viewers of the accompanying visual footage, and in doing so these arbitrary signs limit the meaning of the text (see 2.1). Morgan and Welton (1992:28) state that the mass media, including television news, aim to disseminate a single message or meaning simultaneously to all viewers. When considering the influence of context on the eventual meaning of a sign, it seems that any success in this attempt would be unlikely.

Even though the context of viewers may vary from that of the producer and from each other, Fiske and Hartley (1978:85) state that despite contextual disparities, individual readers may be familiar enough with culturally generated sign systems to not only produce the same reading as other readers, but also to reach the intended meaning of the producer. Each society operates within the parameters of its own codes and conventions. Individuals within a society will learn the sign systems that are conventional to that particular society, and will be able to distinguish that certain signs have a common meaning within society. Certain codes have an advanced cultural use and are widely distributed within a specific society. Such codes are learnt by their users at an early age, and their meaning becomes naturalised, reaching a state of near universality amongst their users (Hall 1980:132). Lacey (1998:59) admits that even though an individual viewer may attach a certain connotation to a sign, many connotations are attached to signs in such similar ways that these connotations become the socially accepted meaning for the sign. According to Fiske and Hartley (1978:85), television news functions as a central social tool for overriding individual distinctions, and establishing the meaning of a sign as a collectively understood convention. Television works constantly to establish equilibrium between the encoding and decoding processes (Hall 1980:132). Hence, television news does not

try to deny context, rather it continually labours to establish a set of signs that will transcend context.

Once this set of television codes and conventions is established and learnt by television news viewers, little space is allowed for a disparate reading of such signs or codes, since their meaning is already set as a social convention. According to Barthes (1957:117), a signifier or myth can be stripped of numerous possible meanings and have its polysemic value depleted, encouraging the viewer towards a single meaning, and making the viewer accept that single meaning as a natural fact. The ideal television sign, it would seem, is one where the connotative meaning of the sign is transformed into a denotative meaning. Tolson (1996:3) draws attention to how some viewer's might produce readings that are similar to one another, by claiming that although what happens in the reader's mind is not entirely predictable, it is to a large extent common and conventional. Television news operates as an agent that capitalises on the similarities in the way different viewers read the same sign. Television news attempts to transform these socially produced similarities into culturally learned convention, so that by using only those signs and codes whose meaning is already agreed upon by almost its entire viewing audience, ambiguities are largely eliminated. The frequent use of a sign renders it conventional, and the number of its users expands (Fiske & Hartley 1978:63). As more readers agree upon the meaning of a sign, the popularity of the sign grows. Television news prefers to use such a sign in order to eliminate ambiguities and to transfer its message to a larger audience.

Fiske and Hartley (1978:63) claim, however, that this characteristic of television news results in many signs becoming clichés. If a sign becomes so widely understood that it is used on an extremely regular basis, the sign risks becoming a cliché. According to Fiske and Hartley (1978:63), once a sign becomes overused then its readers determine that its signifier depends entirely on convention, and it bears no reference to reality. But, when considering that some audiences possess a disregard for the distinction between a false signifier and reality, this explanation seems questionable. What a cliché lacks in excitement or originality, it gains in containing a meaning that is accessible to a very wide audience. When a sign becomes a cliché, it has been used widely and over an extended period of time, making the meaning contained within the

sign conventional, and unambiguous. In attempting to eliminate ambiguities from television news representations, such a sign would surely provide a useful mechanism in the medium of television news.

Evidently, television news's aims to eliminate ambiguities from its own representations of reality sees the medium of television news attempting to convert connotative meanings into denotative ones, but semiosis renders this a decidedly difficult challenge. The context of readers lies outside the process of semiosis, but can be the most influential factor on the meaning produced by viewer. It would seem that if the sign is powerful enough, or if the individual readers understand its meaning as it is agreed upon by a large number of its users, then the common meaning is produced at the determinant moment of decoding, rather than a subjective, connotative, or context based meaning. Hence, the influence of context on the meaning of a sign diminishes as a sign is popularised. The question now is whether a limitation of ambiguities is television news's only motivation for transmitting signs, which will be minimally affected by context when their meaning is extracted by television news viewers.

Hartley (1982:24) suggests otherwise: “[s]ince signs are necessarily multi-accentual, any discourse which seeks to close their potential and prefer one evaluative accent over another, is ideological”. Signs possess a possibility for multiple interpretations and multiple meanings. Lacey (1998:90) explains that while certain signs contain references to socially agreed meanings, the reader is at liberty to make any reading of a text, so long as the meaning produced by the reader can be justified by that text. Television news's attempts to instil its signs with a singular uni-accentual meaning, reveals its function as a carrier of ideology. Dominant ideologies embed themselves in television news and work to ensure that all the readers of the television news medium will produce the same reading from the text. This reading must be favourable to the dominant ideology, so a negotiated or dominant reading is encouraged. If a television news sign is multi-accentual in nature and is open for multiple interpretations, the readings produced by individual viewers may vary greatly, and many of the decoded meanings may veer away from a negotiated or dominant reading towards an oppositional reading.

Once ideology has implanted itself into the medium of television news, its affects on television news representations of reality are telling and paramount. These can be uncovered by examining the process of semiosis. While signs contain the ability to produce numerous different meanings because of the notion of context, television news attempts to restrain this inherent quality of the sign. The ideological content of television news representations requires that readers accept a single meaning of a text, and the text encourages readers to produce only that specific reading.

In conclusion, this chapter demonstrated not only the importance of television news as a central site of social contact, but also that the structural framework of television news disallows its representations of reality to be formed without ideological interference. Television news holds a privileged status as the site for societal contact, as the place where a large portion of Western people receive information about themselves. Individual viewers rely on the accuracy of television news representations of reality, not only to acquire information about the world, but also to remain in contact with it as informed members of a large society. Nonetheless, many factors in the working process of television news making may adversely affect the accuracy of television news representations. The selective nature of the editing process, or the attempts of television news to overcome the contextual influence on the process of semiosis, result in ideological representations of reality. These televisual texts are instilled with meanings that are not only ideological, but also limited in nature so as to make the result of an ideologically favourable decoding more likely.

The next chapter examines the working process of ideology, suggesting that it functions in a parallel fashion to the process of semiosis, and consequently is able to infiltrate television news. The next chapter also investigates the existence of an American ideology, and examines how television news is utilised by this ideology as a mass communications tool for the security of its continued dominance, and as a means for American cultural imperialism.

## CHAPTER THREE

### IDEOLOGY

The presence and influence of ideology on television news representations is of pivotal importance in establishing the degree of 'accuracy' in television news representations. Dominant political ideologies operate in a hierarchical fashion within society, positioning a dominant group to exert power over society. The societal structure of dominant political ideologies is therefore investigated in this chapter. They must find mechanisms of domination; these are carrier mediums through which ideological messages that legitimise the dominant group's position of power are transferred to a mass audience. Television news is investigated as a carrier medium of ideologically inspired messages. The structure of the process of semiosis, as it occurs in the mass communications medium of television news, is analysed in comparison with the societal framework of dominant political ideologies.

'American ideology' is investigated as an example of a dominant political ideology (see 3.2). This chapter describes America's status as a superpower, and its consequent global influence on ideology. The description of American ideology is of importance to the case study of the television news representations of September 11, as the presence of American ideology in these television news representations is analysed semiotically.

The structure and functioning of myth is also discussed in detail in this chapter. Myth is understood to be a mechanism of legitimisation of a dominant ideology, and dominant ideologies often find material expression in the significations of myth. The nature and functioning of myth is therefore of paramount importance in the understanding of a dominant ideology's task of legitimisation. Because mythical significations of ideologies appear in television news, this chapter describes the presence of a cultural sphere, which is the social space occupied by ideology, myth and mass communications mediums such as television news.

### 3.1 Ideology in television news

Television is positioned at the centre of culture (see 1.1), and within the boundaries of culture the exercise of power dictates the shape and structure of culture (Silverstone 1988:22). Since the exertion of power is a deciding force in the process by which culture functions, and since television's societal space is at the core of culture, it seems likely that television plays a role in the operation of power. This flexing of power within culture can be understood as ideology, and the interplay that occurs between ideology and television must be uncovered to observe ideology's affect on the process of semiosis in television news, and the symptomatic affect on the nature of reality in television news.

The nature and performance of ideology is of importance, as it is suggested later that the inherent structure of ideology is decidedly similar to the structural process of semiosis. This similarity accounts for the easy semiotic infiltration of ideology into the television news system. But in order to examine the workings of ideology within the process of semiosis, and specifically within television news, it is first necessary to describe the structural framework of ideology. This study temporarily adopts a less semiotic mode of analysis in order to investigate the cultural phenomenon of ideology, but returns to semiotics again at a later point to demonstrate ideology's relationship with the communications medium of television news.

According to Sargent (1996:3), an ideology is a value system or a belief system that is accepted by a specific group of people to be fact or 'truth'. This set of beliefs appears to be unequivocally true in the minds of the social group that upholds the given ideology. Vincent (1995:16) describes ideologies as bodies of concepts and symbols that explain the 'correct' social arrangement of society and describe what individuals should aspire to and what should be rejected. Ideologies thus belong to the explanatory framework of cultures (Carlsnaes 1986:166). Being familiar with the dominant ideology of a culture means that an individual is equipped with a set of rules and expectations, which explain not only the norms of the culture, but also what is allowed in the culture and what is not. As a collection of ideas about the world, ideologies delineate the ideals that are most highly valued by a certain group, and thus clarify what is valued and what is not, and what should be maintained and what

should be changed (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:9). Skidmore (1993:7) explains that ideology offers individuals the rules of conduct, and defines specific roles in society.

Ideologies perform a descriptive function; they chart an intellectual map for individuals of how their society works or should work (Heywood 1998:12). This 'map' supplies individuals not only with a view of their own society, but also with a view of the rest of the world. Ideologies perform a process of simplification: while they offer members of a certain group a specific mental picture of the world, they simplify the complexities of the world into a more simple and understandable format (Sargent 1996:3; Macridis & Hulliung 1996:10). (It is worth noting that even though this intellectual purpose of ideology is a vital one, should ideology obscure the 'map' or picture of the society within which it functions or that of the rest of the world, individuals accustomed to operating within the confines of that ideology may not have an accurate view of their own society or of the world).

According to Sanes (2001b:1), ideologies produce stories and meanings that embody notions of whether certain behaviour or elements in culture are of positive or negative value. Hence the fundamental value system of a culture is perpetuated and communicated to members of the culture through and because of its ideology. Furthermore, ideology attempts to project the idea or opinion that its values and criterion of the norm are the way that things should be. An ideology naturalises its picture of the world. Bignell (1997:25) describes ideology as a means of perception whereby some ideas about reality and the world appear self-evidently true, while others are self-evidently untrue. The dominant ideology appears not as a suggestion of the way things should be, but rather as natural and common sense (Bignell 1997:25). According to Eagleton (1994:9), ideology is a naturalising and universalising force, which makes its messages appear natural and unchangeable when they are not so. Ideology is undoubtedly a cohesive force (Skidmore 1993:7) that is engineered to manipulate a large number of people to behave a certain way and believe in a specific set of ideas, without recognising that they have been ideologically manipulated to do so. Consequently, Eagleton (1994:8) reasons that ideologies can be understood as a set of rationalisations or justifications of the sometimes unjust social interests of a dominant group.

Mason (1993:3) claims that ideology comprises a construct of ideas that operate to maintain the interests and power of a given class. This explains ideology's activity of concealing its own influence by making the ideas that it projects seem natural. Thompson (1990:7) describes ideology as the way in which culturally produced meanings, or meanings generated by cultural phenomena such as written or visual texts, serve to establish the power structure of society where a dominant group exerts power. According to Thompson (1990:7), "[i]deology, broadly speaking, is *meaning in the service of power*". Fiske (1996:116) states that a dominant class within culture tries to naturalise the meanings and values it projects to serve its own interests by securing its own dominance. The dominant section of society constructs a view of reality, which describes its place of power as something that is natural and desirable. This ideology also delineates desirable behaviour, and while such behaviour is of benefit to the ruling section of society, the ideology perpetuated by this dominant section makes this behaviour seem natural and proper.

Some analysts of ideology see it as a means of maintaining social order, particularly because ideologies describe the best kind of society, according to the values of a certain group, and describe how that society may be obtained and maintained (Adams 1993:3). Adams (1993:4) explains that ideology is a type of moral force; ideology is primarily concerned with values and how the individual members of society should behave towards one another. According to Adams (1993:4), ideologies attempt to produce the best kind of society, and the values that an ideology embodies are what is best for human beings, according to the values held by the group. This explanation of ideology as a moral force is not in accordance with the widely held assumption that ideology operates as a force of social domination, which is the view held by this study. What Adams (1993:4) describes as the 'moral' values of an ideology, and ideology's function of describing the best way to behave, may be an ideologically induced false consciousness. Adams's (1993:4) version of ideology may describe something that is not necessarily what is best for human beings, but what is best for some human beings (the dominant ideological group), but the description is legitimised so that it may masquerade as a value that is concerned with the welfare of the entire group. The ideological structure of society is such, that the whole of society operates for the benefit of the small dominant group, but this situation is legitimised and made to appear natural so as to maintain the dominant group's position of power.

For the purposes of this chapter, ideology is examined as a tool of political and cultural hegemony, where the politically dominant group of society exerts power over a mass of individuals. Once the structural framework of a dominant political ideology is specified, it is suggested that this framework assists in its penetration and manipulation of television news.

The characteristic nature of ideology that has just been described constitutes the idea that ideology is, or constructs, a collective social false consciousness. Indeed, Heywood (1998:14) claims that falsehood is implicit in ideology. This falsehood emanates from an ideology's source or its point of creation, which is generally amongst the ruling portion of society. An ideology is manufactured to disguise this section of society's exploitation and oppression of the larger, yet less powerful, majority group of society, and in such an environment an element of falsehood is inevitable and unavoidable (Heywood 1998:14). The ruling section of society aims to create a consensual or hegemonic situation whereby the co-operation and agreement of the larger section of society is secured. But this consensus does not originate with the participating performers of consensual behaviour or thought. If society can be viewed as a triangular hierarchy, with the smaller dominant section of society at the top of the hierarchy and the larger oppressed section of society at the bottom, then consensus can be seen to descend from the top of the hierarchy instead of ascending from the bottom (Mueller 1973:94). Mueller (1973:108) states that "ideology is the legitimation of domination". Elements of consensus are enforced by downward pressures that filter through the various institutions of a society.<sup>1</sup> One such institution may be television news. Indeed, Bignell (1997:127) claims that in television news, society is represented as a natural hierarchy, where some people are naturally more important than others.

The consent of the majority of society to the relatively small dominant section is vital to the maintenance of an ideology, but also happens in a manner that frequently goes unnoticed. Mason (1993:3) admits that an individual does not need to be able to identify or articulate an ideology, or even be fully aware of its existence or set of

values, in order to act according to its demands. For those placed at the top of the societal and ideological hierarchy, this type of consensual intellectual thought is the ideal. Zinn (2003:3) implies that the formation of an ideology can be traced as a historical and evolutionary process of natural (or unnatural) selection. Certain orthodox or conservative ideas are encouraged, financed and represented through cultural institutions by the dominant decision-making section of a culture. Ideas that are contrary or not beneficial to the maintenance of the dominant section of society's power are not financed, and are not represented to the rest of society through the cultural institutions that are constructed by and operate to serve the dominant section. This ideological action can be seen as a type of limiting of ideas (Sargent 1996:8). The dominant group of society is unlikely, except in extraordinary circumstances, to convey ideas and values that fall outside its ideology, as these ideas may not be primarily focussed on securing the continued power of the dominant group (Sargent 1996:8). Evidently, ideas that are ideologically suitable in the view of the dominant section of society, survive more easily. Such ideas survive because they are safe, they are not radical, and they do not threaten to disrupt the existing order, or destabilise established wealth or power.

The question now arises as to why, and how, large sections of society are so easily and regularly misled by ideology and its operations. Is the intellectual activity of society so stagnant that a force of domination, or even exploitation, can go completely unnoticed? Hartley (1982:142) suggests that readers of ideological messages are not dormant in their reaction towards ideological meanings uncovered in communicative texts. On the contrary, he states that continuing resistance to dominant ideologies is testament to how readers are not always successfully misled by ideological texts (Hartley 1982:142). According to Hartley (1982:142), a "dominant ideology, and its reproduction in so many influential spheres (family, school, media, politics), the continuing existence of so many forms of resistance to it suggests that its 'readers' are not so easily duped ... It has an uphill struggle on its hands, and it has to engage in this struggle every day, on all channels, at full volume".

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<sup>1</sup> Societal institutions, which carry ideologically inspired messages, are what Althusser (1970) calls Ideological State Apparatuses. These are discussed and explained later in this section.

This complex task, which an ideology must execute expertly if it is to survive, means that a dominant ideology has to make every effort to represent its ideas as completely plausible, so that they elicit as little resistance as possible. A dominant ideology, although the creation of an elite section of society, must be attuned to the social and economical situation that occupies the part of society that it aims to dominate. In order for an ideology to be accepted by a certain group it must represent the group's needs and social aspirations in a coherent and readable formal structure. An ideology must translate what individuals experience in their daily lives into political terms (Mueller 1973:102). Ideologies cannot be overly inventive regarding the social environment that they represent, as readers would too easily recognise the difference between the reality of their daily experience and the 'reality' represented by the ideology.<sup>2</sup> Eagleton (1994:7) claims that to describe ideology as purely illusionary would be inaccurate, because it contains an element of materiality. In fact, he suggests that part of what makes the notions that an ideology projects so believable is that they are 'true' Eagleton (1994:7). The consent of the majority of society is not won by attempting to convince them that they are something that they are not. Instead, ideology must utilise already widely accepted assumptions about the real conditions of society and represent them in a manner which not only makes sense, but depicts the position the dominant section of society as plausible and correct (Hartley 1982:59). Ideologies are strategies of displacing and rearranging already understood realities, some of which might be embarrassing to the dominant group, and reconfiguring these 'realities' in such a way as to legitimise the dominant group's domination (Eagleton 1994:8).

A definition of ideology has already been discussed, and an admittedly simple and broad definition of this largely ambiguous term has already been attempted (see 1.1). It is important for the purposes of this study, however to pinpoint the type of ideology with which this analysis is concerned.<sup>3</sup> Thompson (1990:93) claims that the role of

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<sup>2</sup> There are, of course, exceptions to this assumption. Readers may recognise the inaccuracy in ideological representations of their social situation and not object to this. These gross inaccuracies of representation may be an attempt to disguise the injustices of a government. The non-response of readers is most likely to occur in countries ruled by dictatorships or non-democratic governments, where signs of dissent towards government policies are punished severely. Recent examples of this type of governmental situation may be Zimbabwe, North Korea, China, Iran or Iraq (until April 2003).

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx has become almost synonymous with any discussion of ideology. The author recognises the Marxian criticism of the capitalist ideological structure, but this study is less concerned with issues of class and the plight of the proletariat, and focuses on politically based ideologies. The operations of political ideologies undoubtedly affect the class system of society, but this study focuses solely on the

the state coincides with the interests of the dominant group of society. If this is so, then the functioning of the political arena is intermingled with the ideological structure of society. This study hence endeavours to concentrate specifically on political ideologies. A political ideology is a reasonably plausible pattern of ideas about politics, the rule of the government,<sup>4</sup> and its power over the state (Skidmore 1993:7). According to Eagleton (1994:11), the term 'ideological' is itself inherently descriptive of the way in which cultural phenomena are interwoven with political power. A political type of ideology explains the structure of a state's political regime and its institutions, and it explains to individual members of society their roles within the regime (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:2). A political ideology successfully simplifies ideas about the manner in which the government of a country interacts with its population, and what is expected from individuals. Political ideologies require an unquestioning conformity to the political system (Mueller 1973:86). This consensus includes an acceptance and often-compulsory involvement in the institutions of a country that have been supported and established by the government.

A political ideology gives value to a political regime, not only by legitimising the position of power of the regime, but also by establishing a coherent set of rules which, once successfully implemented, facilitates the orderly functioning of the state and the continued position of power of the political regime (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:9). By noting the similarities between the functioning of a political regime and a dominant group of society in the attempt to maintain power, it can be concluded that the realms and the workings of the government of a state or a political regime, and the dominant group of society, are usually interconnected. Indeed, Thompson (1990:92) claims that the establishment and maintenance of a dominant ideology is usually one of the responsibilities of the state, and of the societal institutions established and run by the state. The analysis of a country's dominant political ideology can provide insight into the method of domination employed by the dominant group.

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imperialist and dominating nature of political ideologies, and not on the economic aspects of political ideologies. While some ideologists refer to ideology as a force of social morality, the Marxian perspective sees ideology primarily as a force of domination, which *is* adopted by this study.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this study, the term 'government' refers to the organisation of governance within a state, and more specifically, to the group of persons who have the authority to dictate how the state is run. These persons are assumed to be members of the dominant ideological group of society, and the government is understood to be the production of the most powerful or dominant ideology within the state, at the time of the government's inception.

Political ideologies perform a pivotal function in the process of intellectual inquiry. A political ideology is a set of principles, doctrines and ideas that facilitate this inquiry, and it creates a structure within which the search for political knowledge can take place and a political discourse can be established (Heywood 1998:12). This function of a political ideology is an important one, as it supplies members of society with a site to discover and uncover the political structure itself. Political ideologies consequently become a set of tools that formulate the reader's understanding of an entire political framework.

Nonetheless, even though political ideologies provide a site of political enquiry, they are also characterised by their requirement of the population's quiescent mass loyalty and acceptance (Dahlgren 1981:111). This is won through a characteristic process of legitimising the position and functioning of the dominant political regime (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:9). This loyalty from the populace is characterised by an attitude of non-interference in the political and administrative activities of the state. Characteristically, non-intrusion in the power of the state involves an acceptance of the power of capital to shape society, and a lack of political will or power to challenge the dominant social organisation (Dahlgren 1981:111). Political ideologies serve as instruments for the manipulation and control of a large portion of society for the maintenance of political power and influence. This type of power assertion is practised by a country's governmental leaders, who work for the unwavering support of their country's population by injecting ideological messages into various cultural channels that form the point of contact between their positions of power and citizens. This habit of governmental leaders has been both complicated and aided by advances in technologies of communication, and one such cultural institution of the communications media is television news.

Mason (1993:4) claims that ideology always produces a text, as a textual communicative sign or code is the apparatus that translates an ideology's messages into readable manifestations, which can be received by a viewer. Moreover, an ideology will only be effective as a means of political or social domination if it can manifest in a textual format and embed itself into a carrier medium that will insure its being deposited into the minds of a mass of individuals. Alexander (1981:21) claims

that social institutions in every section of society can be associated with some kind of social control. Evidently, the cultural institutions of a society are where the textual appearances of ideologically constructed meanings take form and physical shape. Television is the site where readers experience contact with the forces of domination within society, as television performs at the centre of culture, and is a site where society maintains contact with itself.

Thompson (1990:11) claims that the world "is increasingly traversed by institutionalized networks of communication, and ... the experience of individuals is increasingly mediated by technical systems of symbolic production and transmission". According to Thompson (1990:75), while the ever increasing number of mass communications mediums, including television, have become a central feature of contemporary life, the nature of ideological domination in society can no longer be understood without investigating the mass communications mediums through which ideologies are transferred to a mass audience. Lewis (1990:159) describes the act of watching television as experiencing a complex interplay of ideologies. Consequently, in order to reach a large number of readers, and to make themselves physically apparent in society, ideologies have found textual expression in television.

Sanes (2001b:2) claims that ideology permeates the entire sphere of television news reporting. Douglas Kellner (1987:472) states that television has the function of transmitting ideology because it is represented through images; since television is primarily a pictorial medium, it is an efficient carrier medium of ideology, and one that is widely accessible. According to Price (1995:3), "[i]magery affects loyalties: that has always been known ... The millions of images that float through the public mind help determine the very nature of national allegiances, attitudes towards place, family, government and state". Thus a communications channel that operates with such an intense concentration on imagery finds itself penetrated by ideological meanings.

It would seem that the television audience has a particular reliance on television news. Society has thus, to a large extent, become psychologically dependent on television as a means of mass media communication and the main source of information (Fiske & Hartley 1978:73). What is interesting is that this dependence on television appears to

increase in a time of crisis within a society (Fiske & Hartley 1978:73). Such a crisis might be a war, a serious disaster, or acts of extreme violence or terrorism.<sup>5</sup> It is not clear, however, whether this is because of a genuine need among individual members of crisis-stricken society for additional information, or whether it is a fulfilment of a human desire to be entertained by the sensational stories on the news.

Nonetheless, as is discussed in Chapter Four, it is at a time of social crisis that a dominant ideology is most severely tested, in terms of maintaining its dominance. At such a time, a dominant ideology must ensure the production of mythical texts within cultural forms of communication (including television news) that naturalise its position of power. It is interesting to note that at the time when the production of ideologically inspired texts is intensified, the audience of television news expands and becomes more dependent on television news. Consequently, while more ideological meanings are transmitted on television news, more people are watching television news and receiving these messages.

John Fiske (1989a:185) makes the seemingly startling statement that television news is equated with television entertainment, and that the lines between the real and the fictional are becoming more and more blurred. He raises the concern that while television news remains exclusively dedicated to the dissemination of factual information, it will not enjoy enough popularity to be of any importance. Should television news become more popular, then it would matter more to more people. Fiske (1989a:185-194,196,197) therefore maintains that television news will only raise the levels of its own popularity by transforming itself into a form of entertainment.

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<sup>5</sup> Society's natural elevated dependence on television news was compounded by the events of September 11 2001, especially in the United States of America. The nature of the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks were extreme, violent and widely unexpected, thus rendering the American public's reliance on television news's representation of reality with regard to September 11 2001 particularly acute. This is important for the case study analysis in Chapter Four, which demonstrates that the CNN representations of the September 11 2001 events carried meanings that were akin to the dominant political ideology of Americanism. If society's dependence on television news was elevated post-September 11 2001, and certain television news broadcasts were encoded with ideological meanings, then those meanings reached a larger audience than normal, elevating the importance of investigating the encoding of the September 11 2001 television news broadcasts.

Because it is not foreseeable that television news will become entirely concerned with entertaining the audience as opposed to informing the audience, what Fiske may be describing is a type of Postmodern double coding. Television news cannot become totally fictional; it must maintain a visible connection to the 'real' world in order to remain believable. But television news can attempt to report real events in the most entertaining way possible. Charles Jencks (1986:14-15) defines Postmodernism as double coding: the combination of old and new techniques, and the amalgamation of the popular and the elite. Such aesthetic actions (Jencks was describing Postmodernism in terms of architecture) result in a multiplicity of meanings being communicated by the same medium at once. In terms of television news, if Fiske's suggestion to popularise news is to be followed, it must be double coded: television news texts must be infused with meanings that will both inform and entertain the reader at the same time.

Fiske (1989a:193) admits to the importance of television news as the most central, widely used and popular source of information. But he also claims that television news must be entertaining, and what is more, suggests that it should become part of popular culture. Fiske's ideas regarding the popularising of news are not isolated. Woolley (1992:1) expresses concern at the rapid rate at which the world is becoming artificialised, and describes this phenomenon in Disney terms as 'imagineering'. Baudrillard (1994:14) states that news events and Disneyland have the same effect because they conceal that reality no longer exists outside, but only inside the borders of their artificiality. That both Woolley and Baudrillard have in some way metaphorically connected reality or news (which should be near equivalents) to an entertainment construct like Disney is revealing. Hartley (1982:47) also admits to the entertainment quality of television news. Television news, although primarily a reporter of information, is contained within a medium that is concerned largely with entertainment. Hartley suggests that while television news finds itself in competition with many other programmes on television, news broadcasts must of necessity become more entertaining in order to draw viewers.

The ideological implications of television news functioning as a medium of entertainment are simple, yet significant. Obviously, the more entertaining a news broadcast is, the more viewers it will attract. If television news functions as a

supportive structure of dominant ideologies, and simultaneously as an entertainment medium, then television news may transmit ideologically imbued messages to larger audiences than if it were to function purely as a disseminator of information. Thus the increased entertainment value of television news increases its effectiveness as a legitimating structure of dominant ideologies.

In the realms of a political ideology, governments have to devise a system of manufactured or manipulated consensus. System maintenance is of great importance to the survival of a political ideology (Mueller 1973:94). The reinforcing of political loyalties within society must occur on a regular, even daily basis. Television news, as a central point of societal contact, is a space where governments can regularly make themselves visible to a large section of society (Dahlgren 1981:101). Bignell (1997:127) claims that the ideological role of television news is to construct and control a mythic climate of opinion among members of society about the way society functions. This myth (see 3.3) is the naturalised 'knowledge' that daily life and the actions of the government operate exactly as they ought to. Hence, television news represents a mythic definition of normality according to the requirements of the dominant political ideology, and it represents this myth as the natural state of affairs.

While ideology forms an advanced and integral part of television news representations of reality, ideology also adapts the configuration of representations of reality, and constructs a television news discourse or mode of codification of reality that is aligned with the doctrines of the dominant political ideology. Each television news report is crafted by a specific assortment of signs and codes, including language and visual imagery (see 2.1). These television news codes function as significations or representations of events in the world. But the conventions and codes used by television news are not necessarily created with the sole intention of screening an unbiased representation of reality, but rather are engineered as mechanisms that are representative of the dominant political ideology's mythic notion of reality (Chaney 1981:117). Hence, the 'real' representation of reality on television news is replaced by an ideologically constructed mythic representation of reality.

In this way, politically contentious features of reality such as instances of behaviour that threaten the dominant ideology, or events that may expose a significant fault or

complaint with the power structure of society, are dealt with by employing television news's strategic devices that mythically represent these elements as normal and unthreatening (Chaney 1981:117). Sanes (2001b:1) describes ideology as a form of image manipulation in television news. The doctrines of the dominant ideology are embedded in the visual imagery of television news reports, but this imagery must inevitably be tampered with to a certain degree so that the structure of its meaning may be compatible with the dominant political ideology. The programme of the dominant ideology is made implicit in television news representation, while at the same time it is also made explicit. The manifestation of ideological content in a television news report may take the form of legitimations or justifications for the events being represented according to what is acceptable to the dominant ideology (Sanes 2001b:1).

Television news is therefore unquestionably an ideologically mediated version or representation of reality (Chaney 1981:118). This supposition is contrary to the widely accepted cultural assumption that television news is an environment free of bias or subjectivity. Nonetheless, the legal requirements of television news to eradicate politically or subjectively biased representations of reality from its operations do not necessarily prevent the insertion of ideologically inspired myths into the television news system. In fact, Bignell (1997:128) suggests that even the impression of neutrality exuded by television news is ideologically inspired. Although a news report appears to be balanced and objective in nature, television news uses the dominant ideology to determine a neutral way of representing events. What is represented as factual and unbiased is in fact a mythic construction of what the dominant ideology constructs as an unbiased perception (Bignell 1997:128).

The selective nature of television news also affects the meanings or perceptions of reality that are generated through television news representations. By selecting one view of a specific event, all other views are excluded, and viewers are only exposed to a singular meaning of the represented event. The selected viewpoint is selected out of many because it is the viewpoint of least resistance and has the highest congruence to the myths generated by the dominant political ideology. It is not only viewpoints that are treated selectively by television news, but the actual events themselves. Some events are selected to be represented on television news, while others are not. Mueller

(1973:94) suggests that events that bear significance to issues of secondary importance, are given preference in television news rather than issues of primary importance. It is in the interest of the dominant political ideology, while working to maintain its position of power, to generate discourse in the public sphere that centres on non-issues, rather than issues that may threaten political stability. Public debate about secondary issues deflects the attention of readers away from issues of critical importance, while simultaneously creating the illusion of political participation (Mueller 1973:94).

The process of selection in television news may not simply be a matter of subtle ideological notions on the part of the news organisations, but may result from actual censorship imposed by political figures. Price (1995:8) claims that government officials throughout the world have flexed their political power to influence the content of television news broadcasts so that news representations appear to support ideological notions of the state. The magnitude of this influence may range from slight arrangements of language or imagery pertaining to a certain news story, to the entire exclusion of news stories. The issue of selection in television news is of ideological concern to dominant societal groups who hold political authority, because it does not serve the interests of any government to propagate the ills of the society that it dominates. The dominant political ideology must avoid any cultural expressions that might incite dissent. Consequently, minor societal problems are camouflaged by dominant political groups and by television news, unless the level of transgression is such that it cannot be concealed, in which case such an issue is met with adamant justifications and legitimations from the government (Mueller 1973:101).

Television news occurs as a form of social production; as previously stated, it also situates itself firmly at a central point of culture. But Dahlgren (1981:101) suggests that although this is the case, television news also produces the public itself. It is through constant television news viewing that individuals maintain contact with society, but by viewing television news individuals also become members of society. The widespread implications of this phenomenon are compounded by the rapid spread of mechanisms of mass communications, including television, and there are few societies in the world that are not touched by the representations of mass communications media (Thompson 1990:1). Television news provides a platform

where individuals may find a point of entry into the political arena and become informed about political and public life (Dahlgren 1981:101). Nonetheless, readers of television still face the dilemma that the main point of entry into an 'informed' and active public and political life is saturated with ideological mechanisms that function to mystify readers' views of the public sphere to which they attempt to gain access.

Ideological connotations are thus always present in television news broadcasting (Feuer 1983:16). Sanes (2001b:1) states that ideology is embedded in every action that the television news media performs. Television news is characterised as a communications medium that can be semiotically analysed (see 2.1 and 2.2), and this mode of analysis is central to this study. While understanding the operation of ideology within society to be a hierarchical structure of domination, the structure of the process of semiosis as it operates in the medium of television news bears remarkable similarities to the structure of the ideological system (Figure 1).

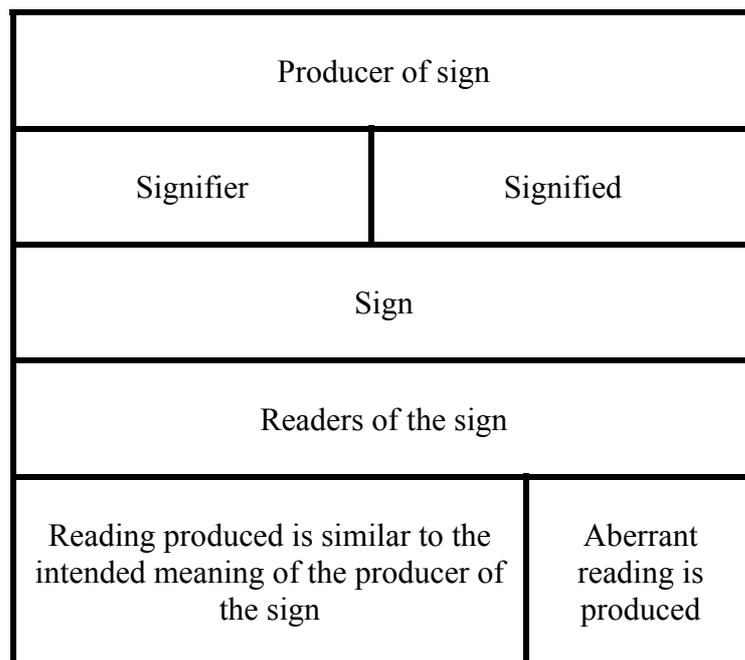


Figure 1: The process of semiosis

The process of semiosis occurs on five distinguishable levels (Figure 1). The first level is occupied by producers of signs. All signs are manufactured on the second level of semiosis, where the signifier and the signified are combined, consequently producing the third level of semiosis, namely the sign. When the sign is received by

readers the process of semiosis reaches the fourth level. The readers then interpret the sign and attempt to extract the signified from the signifier on the fifth level of semiosis.<sup>6</sup>

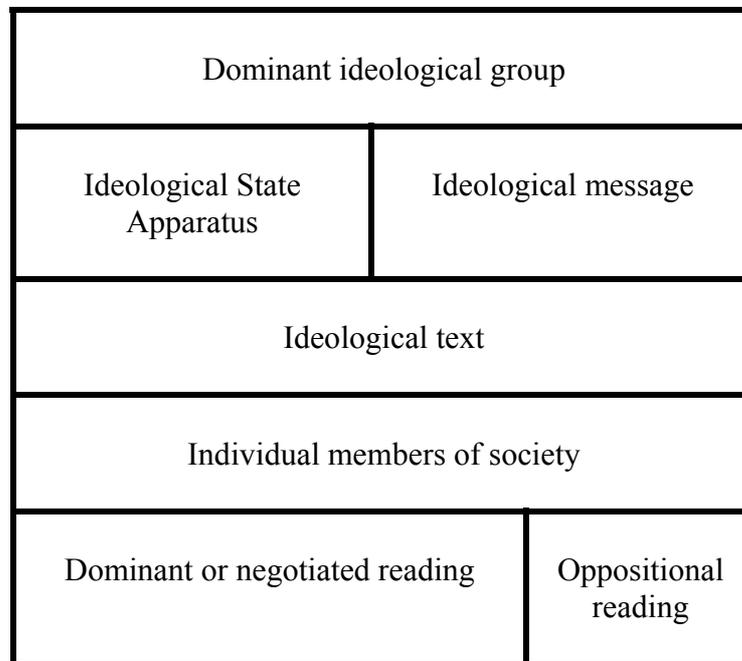


Figure 2: The societal structure of a dominant political ideology

The dominant group that holds political power is situated at the top of the hierarchy that corresponds to the structure of society (Figure 2). Amongst this dominant group are the producers of signs who operate on the first level of semiosis, or individuals who have influence over the producers of the signs. Producers manufacture signs that are imbued with the ideological meaning that is injected into them by the downward pressures of the dominant ideological group. On the second level the ideological message, or the signified, is combined with a carrier medium, which may be an ideologically constructed state institution or what Louis Althusser (1970) terms Ideological State Apparatus. The Ideological State Apparatus now functions as the signifier. Once the intended message has been infused with the Ideological State Apparatus, an ideological text is produced on the third level of the societal structure of

<sup>6</sup> This description of the process of semiosis is admittedly simplistic. For instance, the inclusion of myth in the process of semiosis would fragment this visual representation between the third and fourth levels considerably, where myth takes the third level as its signifier, and thereby displace the fifth level (Barthes 1957:114). The inclusion of myth in the process of semiosis is investigated later in this study.

a dominant political ideology. The second level has itself been largely affected by the downward pressures of ideology. The dominant ideological group may have had influence or control over the manner in which cultural institutions were formed, or may have placed legal restrictions on the manner in which they operate. The Ideological State Apparatus, or the signifier, is therefore ideologically suitably equipped for the transferral of ideologically loaded signs.<sup>7</sup>

The sign reaches numerous members of society who are exposed to the Ideological State Apparatus in which it is contained on the fourth level of the ideological structure of society. In cultural terms, the ideological message of domination has filtered down from the top of the societal hierarchy to the larger, but less powerful, section of society (Figure 2). Semiotically, the sign has been transferred from the point of its inception where the producer encoded it according to a certain intended meaning, and carried via a communication channel and has been placed within a new context, which may vary greatly from that of the producer (Figure 1). In both cases, a message has moved from the first to the fifth levels.

What happens at this point is vital to both the process of semiosis and the success of the dominant ideology's attempt to maintain power. While the context of the reader may vary greatly from the context of the producer, the reader's mental communicative vocabulary may not be similar to the codes and conventions used by the producer (Figure 1). Consequently, the context of the reader may affect the interpretation of the sign, and the meaning produced by the reader may not resemble the meaning intended by the producer. This occurrence in the process of semiosis (Figure 1) corresponds with the reading produced within the social ideological hierarchy (Figure 2). If the decoded reading differs from the intention of the producer it becomes what an

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The purpose of this simplified visual representation of the process of semiosis is to demonstrate its structural similarities to the hierarchical social structure of a dominant political ideology.

<sup>7</sup> The author recognises the simplicity of this 'top-down' model of the functioning process of ideology. Of course, ideological pressure is at times exerted from the larger section of society on the smaller more dominant group, or from the bottom up in terms of the model given here. But this type of power exertion is contrary to the 'ideal' functioning of a dominant political ideology, where a small and powerful group dominates a larger, less powerful group. The exertion of power from the bottom up may be inspired by a resistance ideology, where the larger group of society begin to revolt and reject the exertion of power by the dominant group. Since this dissertation does not make a study of resistant ideologies, but focuses instead on dominant political ideologies, this top-down model of the working process of ideologies is considered sufficient. This model is also relevant and applicable to the Ideological State Apparatus of television news.

aberrant reading (see 2.2). The ideological message of the sign may be lost to the reader, and either a 'misinterpretation' of the sign will occur, or perhaps an oppositional type of reading will be produced.

Nonetheless, if the encoding process of the producer and the decoding action of the reader have a high level of symmetry, the reader may produce a reading that is similar to the intended meaning of the producer (see 2.2). The producer of television news must attempt to manufacture a sign that will most effectively and accurately transfer the intended meaning to as many individual readers as possible, keeping instances of the production of an aberrant reading to a minimum.

Similarly, on receiving ideological messages through established cultural institutions, some individuals are likely to disagree with the dominant ideology. At this point in the societal hierarchy, the work which the dominant group has performed to justify its own dominance, will result in the majority of individual members of society reaching an attitude of agreement with the structure of society. These individuals are most likely to produce dominant or negotiated readings when decoding a sign that has been constructed or encoded to carry a meaning that is favourable to the dominant ideology. Individuals may also disagree with the power of the dominant social group, and they will be likely to produce oppositional readings (see 2.2).

The process of semiosis and the ideological structure of society thus appear to operate in a parallel fashion. The sign's original meaning is created by the producer and is transferred via a certain channel to the reader, where another meaning is (re)constructed. This communicative process can be structurally envisioned. The cultural process whereby a dominant group of society subtly but convincingly allows its power and influence to seep into the larger but less influential section of society, can be structurally described in a manner that is markedly similar to the structure of the process of semiosis.

This similarly either could be coincidental, or a very deliberate formation of the manner in which society communicates. The author concludes that the process of semiosis has been configured according to the structure of ideology; it has become a near mirror image of the working process of ideology. Indeed, the two structures are

now intertwined, making it almost impossible to separate them. The influence of the dominant ideology on the process of semiosis has seen cultural communicative acts evolve to almost exactly replicate the ideological structure of society. This pivotal similarity grants the dominant ideology easy infiltration into the semiotic process of communication.

Television news is a complex communication medium, but the process of semiosis is certainly applicable to the multitude of texts that it produces. The implication of television news functioning according to the process of semiosis, is that the infiltration of dominant ideologies into this mass communications medium is verified. Indeed, Sanes (2001b:1) claims that most of the communicative actions performed by the television news media involve the exertion of cultural power. Gottdiener (1995:28) refers to a cultural form of communication such as television news as a "substance of expression" that is a material codification of a specific ideology that corresponds in appearance and structure to that ideology.

The presence of ideologically inspired meanings in television news representations is therefore evident. According to Eagleton (1994:7), "[a]n ideological notion is one which is somehow convenient for our rulers - one which conceals or naturalises or otherwise legitimates an unjust form of power". Political ideologies function constantly to utilise the cultural institutions of society, including mass communications mediums like television news, as tools of system maintenance to ensure the continued position of power of the politically dominant group. The process of semiosis, which is the operational communication process of the television news system, is expertly engineered to accommodate the structural formation of the societal ideological hierarchy, consequently converting television news into an effective carrier medium of ideology.

Continuing on the assumptions concerning the operative workings of a dominant political ideology uncovered in this section, the next section makes a detailed analysis of a specific dominant political ideology, namely the so-called American ideology. The examination of this ideology is of major importance to the later semiotic analysis of television news reports (see 4.1).

### 3.2 Examining American Ideology

Said (1993:344) describes the present period as one of "American ascendancy". The United States of America is widely regarded as a superpower: a nation of immense political, cultural and economic strength and influence. America's position is enhanced because it is the only country that has triumphantly maintained its superpower status to the present day (Said 1993:341). Bernard Lewis (2002:167) explains that the dominant civilisation of the present day is Western, and while the Western world is spearheaded by the United States of America, Western, or more specifically, American standards govern societal values and ways of living. Sardar and Davies (2002:11) have adjusted the term of description for America's elevated position by calling it a "hyperpower". America is a country so powerful that its political and cultural activities affect the lives of people everywhere in an array of different ways (Sardar & Davies 2002:11).

This section analyses a dominant American political ideology, and while the author recognises that this ideology is currently not the only one in America, this study operates under the assumption that the American ideology described here is one of particular social dominance. For the purposes of this study, the American ideology may be defined as a belief system characterised by the nationalistic interests of America. It is an ideology that is mythologised with characteristic American patriotism. The America ideology operates within and supports a capitalist economic system, and its international influence has been facilitated by the growing trend of globalisation.<sup>8</sup> Because globalisation has served to impregnate many world-wide communities with elements of American ideology, an imperialistic and even colonial manner has become evident in American ideology. Nonetheless, the author stresses that American ideology also incorporates positive elements of American culture, such as a faith in the American Dream, and a belief that America represents the ideals of freedom and democracy.

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<sup>8</sup> Globalisation is understood in sociology as the process whereby information, commodities and images, having being manufactured in a specific nation or region of the world, are entered into a global flow and transported around the world. The growing trend of globalisation has been facilitated by the exports of transnational companies, satellite television and the Internet. The flow of commodities and information has occurred mainly from Western countries to developing countries, raising concerns that globalisation is a newer form of cultural imperialism (Bullock & Trombley 1999:367).

When examining American ideology with regard to the mass communications medium of television news, the notion of media imperialism naturally arises. Chris Barker (2000:282) confirms that the United States of America has the monopoly over world-wide television media and is the largest exporter of television programmes, including news. Barker (2000:282) describes media imperialism as an action of the media, that supports a capitalist economic system. According to Barker (2000:282), "[t]he media are seen as vehicles for corporate marketing ... This is allied to the assertion of a general ideological effect by which media messages create and reinforce audience attachment to the status quo". Evidently, the mass media operate as an advertising tool, and attract a consumer base for multinational corporations, thus encouraging the maintenance of the capitalist system.

The author recognises the key role that media imperialism plays in the continued reinforcement of Americanism. Because America controls a vast portion of the global media, the possibilities for advertising American-made consumer products to non-American consumers is extremely broad. Considered in this light, media imperialism is a facilitator of globalisation, but only where globalisation means the Americanisation of non-American markets. This dissertation is concerned primarily with the operating process of television news programmes, thus television advertisements (which admittedly interrupt television news broadcasts regularly) fall beyond the scope of this study. Nonetheless, media imperialism, or the media's capabilities for furthering the capitalist economic system through advertising, illustrates how the mass communications media can function as a supportive structure of ideology.

CNN is an American television news channel, which boasts a particularly large portion of the international news media. The channel was founded on 1 June 1980 by Ted Turner, and by 1990 CNN was viewed in more than 90 countries and had become a global news service. CNN is now 24-hour news network that covers international events and has correspondents stationed around the world (Television. The history [sa]). While television news functions as an Ideological State Apparatus, it can be suggested that CNN acts as a supportive structure of Americanism. CNN's expansion of its global audience certainly contributes to the rapid trend of globalisation,

otherwise termed as the Americanisation of non-American markets and cultures. Moreover, this study suggests that Americanism is the dominant political ideology in the United States of America. That said, the author believes that because of its contribution to the American led trend of globalisation and its consequent support of a capitalist economic system, CNN is a major Ideological State Apparatus of Americanism. Furthermore, even though an incredibly pervasive ideology, Americanism must, like any other ideology, regularly work to reinforce its position of power by gaining the consent of a large number of individuals. Because CNN's audience is extremely large, it seems unlikely that this medium of communication would be ignored by Americanism, but instead is employed to transmit messages that are favourable to Americanism to a wide audience.

The author recognises that the United States of America wields great political and economic power within the international community, but this study concentrates specifically on America's cultural power, influence and dominance. American ideology is thus discussed in some detail, as this study suggests that it is influential in the construction of certain television news reports. Visual representations of American ideology are semiotically analysed, as they appeared in television news broadcasts of September 11 (see 4.2).

For the purposes of this study, it is assumed that the dominant group of an American political ideology consists largely of members of the current American political regime. Macridis and Hulliung (1996:15) identify three categories of political ideologies. The first type of political ideology is a status quo ideology, which is structured to rationalise or defend the existing state of affairs within society. Radical or revolutionary political ideologies attempt to manufacture a dissident climate of opinion, and suggest major and immediate changes in the structure and functioning of society. Reformist ideologies encourage changes within society, but aspire to enact these changes at a gradual pace and suggest less radical changes than revolutionary ideologies (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:15). This study subscribes to the notion that the dominant American political ideology is a status quo type ideology.

Hornberger (2002:1) claims that America's position of power stretches further than its status as a super or hyperpower. America has transformed its global influence to

imperial levels, moulding itself into a colonising force and a "full-blown empire in the Roman and British sense" (Hornberger 2002:1). Bergen (2001:241) also describes America in imperial terms, stating that "... the pervasiveness of American cultural and military power made the United States much like the Roman Empire during its golden age ...". The historical comparison to previous empires is an apt one. Lewis (2002:167) explains that the advanced power of one nation over a number of other nations is a recurring historical occurrence that is easily characterised: throughout history an expanding and dominant country or culture has projected its ideas and values onto other cultures. (Obvious examples of this kind of cultural domination are manifested in the Ottoman Empire, the Roman Empire and the British Empire). Lewis (2002:167) states that such empires "... impose their norms over a wide area and radiate their influence over a much broader one, far beyond their imperial frontiers." While American culture easily displays the characteristics of a dominant empire, Lewis also states that Western or American civilisation is the first imperial power to embrace the entire globe. Hornberger (2002:2) suggests that America's power as an empire has far outstripped its imperial predecessors, as its domination is more extensive than any other empire in history. Evidently, what is important is not that America is a hyperpower or empire of immense strength, but that America exercises that power over other nations in a manner to control and dominate them.

Sardar (1993:880) explains that when one culture or country attains a position of domination or power, its interaction with less powerful cultures is not one of tolerant coexistence. Instead, the dominant culture will not try to combine with a weaker culture, and no amount of compromise will be negotiated for a type of cultural amalgamation. The dominant culture simply absorbs the weaker culture, bearing little regard for the continued maintenance of the weaker culture, and in fact showing no tolerance for its existence (Sardar 1993:880). When considering the advanced cultural power of America, the characteristic action of a dominant culture as delineated by Sardar (1993:880), may indicate a further description of the intense cultural influence and domination exercised by America. Lewis (2002:165) claims that the intolerance for other cultures displayed by the American ideology has resulted in a loss of cultural authenticity in many regions which have undergone the impact of Americanism.

It is characteristic of societal behaviour for the dominant group of society or the group that holds most power, to exercise that power over subordinate group. The dominant group exerts power and influence for the purpose of maintaining its dominant position. It would appear that America's cultural dominance operates in a similar fashion, aligning the cultural exercise of power with actions of ideological indoctrination. In a global or international environment, America's advanced position of power allows it to perform the ideological role of a dominant force. But, as with all dominant ideological groups, America is not and cannot be passive in this position of dominance. Instead, an ongoing and systematic action of power maintenance must take place, if the dominant force is to retain its position of power, and if America is to remain a hyperpower.

Hence, America is not only the country that holds the position of the world's most powerful nation, but it is also a force of domination, which ensures that it remains powerful by dominating the cultures of other nations. Said (1993:346) claims that America re-enacts a constant performance that attempts to convince non-American cultures that American ideas, laws and notions of peace are desirable and natural. Said (1993:346) states that this characteristic of American domination is remarkable not simply because it occurs. Indeed, when considering the structural framework of the workings of a dominant ideology (see 3.1), such an action from a culture as immensely powerful as America is to be expected. The remarkable element of continued American domination is that it is done with a vast level of consensus from both Americans and non-Americans. The constant actions of American cultural domination have resulted in the engineering of a massive collective cultural space. This is a public sphere that not only explains and justifies American culture, legitimating its position of power, but it is also a sphere that is freely available to a large section of world<sup>9</sup> culture in which individuals may participate (Said 1993:346).

This American public space is of paramount importance to the functioning process of an American ideology. Zinn (2003:3) claims that the American ideology is formed by

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<sup>9</sup> There are countries whose citizens cannot easily take part in this collective media based public sphere for various reasons. Inhabitants of economically and technologically challenged Third World countries may not have access to mass media channels like television sets or personal computers. Also, governmental censoring of mass media material may result in citizens of certain countries receiving only limited or no broadcasts from external sources.

the selective limiting of ideas. This does not mean that individual members of society are repressively told what to think, but they are encouraged to think in a certain way, as only the ideas that support American ideology, are permitted to enter the international American public sphere. The ideas that are not overtly favourable to American ideology are excluded from American public display, effectively excluding dissident elements from a large and widely used societal space (Zinn 2003:3). Within this space critics of the dominant American ideology are identified and isolated, and represented as irresponsible or irrational, if they are represented at all (Amin 2003:5). Since television news positions itself at the centre of a large part of society, it facilitates this public space that is the construction site of American ideology.

Kellner (1987:473) states that through television news "... people passively receive ideologies that legitimate and naturalise American society". American ideological domination must be consolidated and justified as convincingly as possible. American ideology typically utilises the cultural institutions of society to transmit meanings to subordinate groups, ideally resulting in consensual thoughts and behaviour from these groups. Television news, because of its cultural position of centrality and its capabilities of reaching a vast audience, is evidently a most effective tool for American ideology's intentions of disseminating meanings that encourage support for the idea of Americanism.

Said (1993:346) claims that the television news media play an extraordinary and extremely effective role in manufacturing public consent for American ideology. While individual Americans are exposed to the cultural institutions of American society, and American readers are encouraged to produce meanings that are consensual in terms of the dominant ideology, individual readers in other nations are also ideologically indoctrinated by American ideology. Indeed, it would seem that American ideology has infiltrated the trend of globalisation, and as such the ideology of America has obtained a global reach. Bignell (1997:131) expresses the concern that the trend of globalisation has less to do with the creation of an international platform on which all cultures can find expression, but happens more as an action of elimination and selection where the ideas of subordinate cultures are ignored, and the values of dominant Western or American cultures are highlighted. Sardar (1993:880) implies that globalisation is in fact the Westernisation of the globe, and that non-

western cultures are smothered in this environment. Once again, it is apparent that a dominant cultural ideology such as Americanism will not tolerate the presence of a non-American ideology, and if this divergent ideology cannot be eliminated, then the dominant ideology must at least ensure that it is ignored.

According to Bignell (1997:131), the effects of globalisation are apparent in television news where the values of an American dominant ideology are naturalised in the codes of television news discourse, and screened all over the world. Price (1995:18) explains that while television news broadcasters of the past functioned to secure a visible national identity for the country in which the broadcaster was operating, now television news broadcasters attempt to establish a global, trans-national and virtually universal identity. According to Price (1995:18), the infiltration of a dominant country's ideological television messages into the television broadcasts of a less dominant country, depends on each country's power to disallow such ideological interference. Clearly, the more power a nation possesses, the more its technological communicative infrastructure will accommodate the aspirations of the television news media, and the more it will be able to transmit messages of domination. The less powerful a nation is, the more messages it will receive from dominant nations because it will not have the power to resist them. Thus, it would seem that American international television news broadcasters have not abandoned their purpose of establishing a specifically American national identity, but now aim to transmit this identity to global, rather than only American, audiences. Baudrillard (2002:155) describes this kind of universality as the universality of values, culture and a sense of democracy. The purpose of television news broadcasters has remained the same, but it is simply performed on a global rather than local scale, and the 'universal' identity that American broadcasters attempt to establish can more accurately be described as a universally American identity.

When taking the advanced economic, technological, and political power of America into account, and recognising the international reach of its television news media apparatuses, the assumption made is that America has unrivalled global ideological power. In this sense, globalisation has become synonymous with the Westernisation or Americanisation of the globe. According to Sardar (1993:880), the trend of globalisation has not, as was originally anticipated or envisaged, been an all-inclusive

amalgamation of many diverse cultures, but rather an attempted suffocation of the non-Western and non-American cultures of the world, resulting in an international environment that is ideologically dominated by a single American culture. Ebeling (2002:3) states that globalisation should thus be recognised as an extension of American power over parts of the world.

Ebeling (2002:4) describes American ideological indoctrination of non-American countries as a massive project of disseminating American values and recreating the whole of the Western world in the American image. He criticises this American action by metaphorically describing it with (Christian) religious connotations, saying that it operates as "a messianic mission of global redemption" (Ebeling 2002:4). Also sharply critical of American ideology, Samir Amin (2003:2) claims that American ideology is widely understood by its adherents as a religious conquest or a God-given mission to envelop the entire globe. Amin (2003:2) applies a relatively extreme criticism of American ideology, stating that the American people regard themselves as a divinely selected 'chosen people', which is immediately reminiscent of the Nazi regime. While Amin's (2003:2) criticisms of American ideology may seem overly extreme, they do highlight the concern felt by peoples throughout the world for the American tendency to infiltrate other cultures, transforming them from their original cultural state into something more specifically American. Price (1995:13) claims that globalisation results from a transcultural movement towards sameness, but it is important to consider whether the prerequisite for different cultures to become the same means that all cultures must become American.

The role of television in the process of American ideological domination of non-American cultures is paramount. Price (1995:58) explains that Westerners identify the arrival of American television in non-Western nations as an indication of 'progress' in the metamorphosis to a Western version of democracy. The American dominant ideology aims to displace the traditional narratives of a country, to dispel any inward focus and shift in the popular consumption of a culture to specifically American narratives and imagery. But, in spite of the ideological pressures that Western and American media exert on non-Western states, Price (1995:57) claims that the Western or American televisual infiltration of non-Western countries media does not occur

without contestation. In fact, Price (1995:56) explains that the Western news media's attempt to manipulate a heterogeneous world population is not altogether successful.

According to Price (1995:57), non-Western states have instinctively developed a type of defence system against the barrage of media imagery that aim to infiltrate and displace their countries' traditional visual media vocabulary and conventions. This action of 'defence' is partially predictable, as the nature of many media codes and conventions is culturally specific: codes are formed by certain societies, and the meaning of codes are agreed upon by their users so that the production of meaning of codes requires that readers be fluent in the codal vocabulary of the culture from which they originate. Therefore, the codes and conventions of a culture are unique and specific to that culture, being formed, learnt and used within the confines of that culture. Hence, the regular visual media expression of a society's set of codes is an affirmation of a collective cultural identity. While Western or American televisual texts aim to replace non-Western states media codes and conventions, the cultural or national identity of non-Western states is coming under threat. Price (1995:57) describes a global state in which non-Western countries screen out the invading imagery of the West with varying degrees of success. This resistance to visual messages from the West and America results in a type of 'walling in' where a non-Western state's inward focus becomes extreme in order to protect the valued inner cultural conventions that are threatened from without. According to Price (1995:58),

[t]oo many Westerners identify the arrival of consumer television and familiar imagery with progress in the conversion to democracy, when all it may be is a temporary and ineffective antidote to its opposite. Television's impact may be as superficial as its glossy exterior. The mesmerization and addiction of a public may have their limits where other entities that have shaped behaviour - the family, the church, the state - strongly reassert themselves. And globalism may only be the temporary vanquishing of borders by technology, awaiting the structuring of new lines of demarcation. The existing order will not pass quietly. If the new kingdoms, those that flourish on porous borders, threaten, the existing states will do what can be done to control the flow of information, to affect reception, and to reorganise the space in which information can flow.

Nonetheless, regardless of its rate of success, American television news is generally believed to function as an instrument of American ideology to dominate and

manipulate non-Western countries or countries that are not yet sufficiently Americanised. But this action is not only performed on a global scale by American television news broadcasters, as it must occur locally for an American audience to secure the continued support and loyalty of the majority of the inhabitants of the United States of America. Consequently, American readers of television news are also exposed to the ideologically mediated meanings of American television news broadcasts.

It appears that American ideology functions within the United States of America in a symmetrical mode of operation with the structural framework of a political ideology (see 3.1). Zinn (2003:3) states that American society is one where ideas that do not subscribe to the dominant political ideology are limited, and where certain ideas dominate collective thought. This description is not dissimilar to the characteristic action of selection performed by political ideologies on the ideas and values that are supported and endorsed by the cultural institutions of a society (see 3.1). Zinn (2003:3) states that in American society, the ideas that are selectively favoured by various cultural institutions, including television news, form an American ideology.

Zinn (2003:3) also considers how the delineation of American political thought within American culture meets with little dissent. (It is noteworthy that observations regarding the level of dissent towards American ideological action vary considerably between American and international environments). Dissident ideas can exist within American society, but they are discouraged by the popular communications mass media, and if they do arise they are drowned in an overwhelming discourse of criticism (Zinn 2003:4). Riemer (2003:1) reasons that the dominant ideological group, in its efforts to maintain the status quo of American ideology, is determined to deflect any criticism that may reflect adversely on the legitimisation of American ideology. Ideas that are not compatible with American political ideology are made to look disreputable in the public sphere. According to Zinn (2003:4), the political ideologically dominant group of American society watches its critics carefully, and is always ready to overwhelm, suppress and dominate them. The resulting public behaviour is one of near unanimous co-operation with the ideologically dominant group, as such behaviour is less likely to be met with the domination and intimidation that originates from the top level of American ideological hierarchy.

American ideology works to keep the intellectual thought of American society inwardly focussed. The ideas that are represented in America's cultural institutions like television news, whose representation the dominant political ideology endeavours to support both technically and financially, express meanings that are only concerned with America and its cultures. It would seem that dominant American political ideology would not favour American citizens thinking about anything that is not American. Sardar and Davies (2002:12) term this as "knowledgeable ignorance", whereby a large portion of American society, though highly educated, has become ignorant in matters concerning the rest of the world.

Sardar and Davies (2002:11) claim that for most Americans, the history and ideas of the United States of America are the only measure for what is natural and proper. The implication is that many Americans are informed only of the historical and ideological circumstances of their own country, and remain uninformed of the histories and values of non-American countries and cultures. What is more, Sardar and Davies (2002:11) state that the majority of Americans 'know' non-American people, cultures, civilisations, religions and histories as something that they are not, and could not possibly be. Americans may receive these misguided assumptions through the American mass media, or they may follow well established but inaccurate stereotypes of non-western or non-American nations, which may also be represented in the mass media. Disappointingly, most Americans have the means to 'know' differently or to uncover the false 'knowledge' that they accept as truth with regard to non-American cultures, but most choose not to do this (Sardar & Davies 2002:12). Evidently, the political ideological manipulation of the collective American psyche is powerful enough to discourage this kind of questioning, and is successful in guiding common thought to specifically American ideas, both about America and the rest of the world.

One of the most contentious issues in recent years in all manner of international discourse and criticism, is America's military intervention in economically and politically weaker countries. It is not within the scope of this study to examine the historical and political circumstances of any particular instance of military action taken by the United States of America. Instead, this study analyses the operations of

the television news system and how this apparatus may be used by a dominant American political ideology to gain and sustain the support of television news viewers, whether they be American or non-American. Obviously, the effectiveness of television news's ideological function is most extremely tested in a national political time of crisis, such as a devastating act of terrorism or a war.

Amin (2003:5) explains that during periods of national calm the pressure exerted by the dominant group on the subordinate group naturally eases. But when a society is under strain, the dominant ideology must reassert itself as the ruling force. An enemy will be identified as the element responsible for the sufferings of the society: the dominant ideology will simplify the complex problems of society and claim that the problems may be solved by the destruction of a single enemy. The dominant political ideology will give added emphasis to the goal of the destruction of the 'enemy' as a tactic to distract the public's attention from its own failings as a ruling force which may have resulted in the society's difficult situation. Amin (2003:5) observes that in the case of American ideology, the 'enemy' is always a foreigner to America, as everything American is delineated as fundamentally good. The operation of American ideology in a time of national crisis is of cardinal importance to this study, as the television news representations of September 11 are analysed (see 4.2). According to Blecher (2003:10), the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre "... gave renewed impetus to American hegemony and stripped away the public's hesitation to project force around the globe."

Indeed, Macridis and Hulliung (1996:10) state that in times of social stress an ideology's strength may be pronounced, and ideologies then become tools of social manipulation. The dominant group will characteristically simplify the matter of urgency, as it is a pivotal function of a successful ideology to provide society with a simple yet understandable picture of the world. The dominant group's simple propositions and promises on how to rectify the societal state of affairs then seem reasonable and plausible. During times of social stress, the continued success of a dominant ideology depends more acutely than ever on the widespread agreement of the social group. The greater the uniformity of opinion required, the greater the emphasis on unifying texts and myths (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:9).

According to Said (1993:346), the American television news media play an expert role in fostering a prevalent opinion amongst the American population that America has a responsibility to correct the wrongs in the rest of the world. He declares that the common American assumption is that the interests and values of America are also of primary importance to the rest of the world (Said 1993:346). While this may be a simple, though drastic, attack on American common opinion, it is interesting that Said (1993:346) pinpoints the news media as the origin of such misguided assumptions amongst the American population.

Ebeling (2002:1) also expresses concern at the American government's willingness to intervene in the affairs of other countries, under the guise of setting right the wrongs of the world: this justification seems to win the widespread support of the American people. Ebeling (2002:1) suggests that the nature of a government's political ideological structure can be uncovered in its foreign policy. According to Ebeling (2002:1), a government will either respect the freedom and right of other nations to manage their own affairs, or it will not. Riemer (2003:2) claims that Americans regularly display a lack of respect for the views or values of non-Americans on a global stage. More importantly, whether or not a government intervenes in the affairs of another country, it will require the support of its own population, whatever its actions (Price 1995:47). The American government, or the politically and ideologically dominant group of American society, must ensure the performance of ideological system maintenance in order to retain its position of power. This is done by securing the mass loyalty of the American people, and a central communicative apparatus for this function is the television news media.

Certainly, American television news broadcasters perform an action of selection during the construction of television news programmes. The problematic element of this occurrence is not necessarily that representations on television news are ideologically manipulated, but rather that television news viewers passively read television news texts as exact and unmediated. Schlesinger (1978:165) states that "[m]ore and more Americans, it appears, are forming their impressions of the world on the basis of the things they see on the tiny screen".

Zinn (2003:4) describes American society in terms of a cultural hierarchy that is similar to a political ideological hierarchy (see 3.1). The smaller but more dominant group owns more economic wealth, in comparison with the larger, subordinate group. Zinn (2003:4) claims that this economic power gives the dominant group of American society inevitable control of the press, including television news. According to Zinn (2003:4), having control of the American press is almost equivalent to having control of the thinking of the American nation.

Solomon (2002b:1) posits that there is a mutual reliance between the American television news media and the American government. According to Solomon (2002b:1), regular collaboration takes place between the two bodies, with television journalists working closely with government officials to produce news stories, and the American government keeping a close watch on journalists whose television news representations of the government may affect the loyalty of news viewers. If Solomon's description of the relationship between the American government and American television news broadcasters is accurate, then politically ideological meanings may be regular and inevitable.

The American television news media appear to work in conjunction with the dominant American political ideology to keep American viewers closed to experiences and ideas from the rest of the world. This increases a condition of insularity and also a loyalty towards an ideology that is largely all that American viewers are informed about (Sardar & Davies 2002:11). According to Sardar and Davies (2002:10),

[n]o society is more open than America, more blessed with the means of communication, the resources to learn and to know, to express and project its ideas. Yet the product of this enormous American infrastructure - its media - is intensely inward looking and self-absorbed. The rest of the world also learns about and experiences America through its media ... whose works are shaped by American consciousness and outlook.

America's insularity and inward focus would not be so problematic were America not such an internationally pervasive cultural force. But America is a hyperpower and its cultural projections are injected into the readable open public sphere of a global society. While America's status of power remains unrivalled, its meanings and

messages dominate the public sphere of the mass media and television, which lie at the centre of culture (Said 1993:352). America fills this common central public space with specifically American type values, ideas, meanings and subjects, effectively trying to Americanise all of culture from the inside out. The mass communications medium of television penetrates deeply into culture (Said 1993:353). America's hyperpower status allows this single country to dominate a large portion of the world's public sphere, which is, it is argued in this study, to a great extent shaped by television news. When transmitting to both domestic and international audiences, American television news broadcasters perform an ideological function of the dissemination of messages and representations that are likely to produce dominant readings according to the dominant political ideology of Americanism. The cultural arenas of both America and the world are bombarded with representations of America, and only of America, that are illustrative of the notions and values of Americanism.

To sum up: according to Said (1993:353), the holder of the greatest power in the configuration of Western technological mass media is the United States. The utilisation of television news as a representative medium for American ideology is therefore inevitable. America's insular attention and its pronounced position of power result in a wealth of specifically Americanised representations in the media and global society. Americanism operates as a dominant political ideology, and utilises the cultural institutions of a society, such as television news, to subtly convince a wide audience of its own legitimacy. The author recognises that the assumption that American ideology is a dominating social force that operates through cultural establishments including television news, may be challenged. The contentions made in this section with regard to the nature of American dominant political ideology are a selective view expressed by the author, but they are qualified since they are in agreement with many quoted sources. An understanding of American ideology as a dominating social force is important for the later case study of television news representations of American political ideology in the broadcasts of September 11.

The next section examines more closely the manner in which the dominant ideology of Americanism, is manifested in television news representations. Myths are ideologically constructed narratives or symbols, which may be represented in

television news broadcasts in order to transmit ideological meanings within the television text. Myths are the semiotic apparatuses of a dominant ideology, and hence the construction and operations of myths must be analysed in detail.

### **3.3 Myth in television news**

Traditionally, a myth is understood as a 'sacred' narrative, which may be closely akin to fairytales and legends, but in contemporary popular culture<sup>10</sup> and the mass media, myths can be described as justifications of societal structure (Bullock & Trombley 1999:555). The similarity between myth and ideology (see 3.1) is immediately apparent, but not unexpected. Myth does not function separately from ideology, but is indeed partially manufactured by the dominant ideological group as an ideological narrative or visual construct, which functions to transmit the justifications of a dominant ideology to readers of the myth. Hence, myths take part in the naturalisation of the cultural situation that the dominant ideology encourages, and form a vital component of the dominant ideology's process of system maintenance.

Thus the legitimisations required by a dominant political ideology for its system maintenance are performed, in part, by mythical significations. The workings of the political myth can be identified and analysed in a similar fashion to a political ideology (Tudor 1972:17). A political myth does not differ formally from any other type of myth. The reasoning and mode of operation in a political myth is the same as in any other type of myth. The characterising feature of a political myth appears in its subject matter. For instance, while religious myths deal with gods, political myths mythologise politics (Tudor 1972:17). The category of political myths is of importance later in this study, as the political content of a number of mythical representations are analysed as they appeared in the television news reports of September 11.

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<sup>10</sup> Since the 1950s the term 'popular culture' has been understood as the collection of everyday visual, stylistic and material expressions of ordinary people. While high culture implies limited access, popular culture strives to be more inclusive. Popular culture is visualised through a number of consumer products and cultural objects such as advertisements, films, music videos, fashions, or consumer product design (Bullock & Trombley 1999:666). Television news, being entrenched in the popular culture phenomenon of television, can be considered as part of popular culture.

Roland Barthes (1957:109) describes myth as a system of communication, or more accurately as a mode of signification. The importance of myth in the analysis of ideology is immediately apparent, because ideology utilises modes of communication and the process of semiosis (see 3.1). According to Barthes (1957:109), there are no formal limits on myth as it is not defined by its signifier, but by the signified, which is attached to the object of signification, and since all objects can be signified, everything can be mythologised. Thus myth can appropriate anything to carry its signified. It would seem that this renders the field of investigation impossibly wide. This study necessarily delineates its focus to the field of television news exclusively.

Where a dominant ideology attempts to legitimise its dominance, myth may function as a mechanism of this legitimisation. Tolson (1996:7) states that a mythology forms a cultural meaning system, which when it is practised enough through cultural use, becomes 'common sense'. When a mythology or myth is represented and perceived by readers on a regular basis, and its meaning becomes standard or common amongst the majority of its readers, its meaning is not only widely agreed upon, but is also widely regarded as an example of the 'way things are' or 'the way things should be'. Barthes (1957:131) claims that the naturalisation of the message contained in myth, is the cardinal function of myth. Tudor (1972:138) explains that the success of a myth depends largely on whether it is accepted as true by the recipients of the myth. Myth must then itself be naturalised, but once it is the myth-reader takes the signification of the myth to be fact, whereas it is instead merely a semiological representation (Barthes 1957:131).

Myths represent societal situations that are constructed and transient as natural and eternal, and supply their explanation as factual and justified (Barthes 1957:143). The naturalisation of a myth occurs when it is able to incorporate instances of lived experience into its representations of society, making these mythological representations appear plausible to readers (Tolson 1996:7). Again, this characteristic function reveals ideological tendencies in the process of naturalisation found in representations (see 3.1).

Myth performs a social function as it gives shape to a symbolic narrative that links the present audience with past audiences (Mason 1993:4). Indeed, Tudor (1972:140)

describes myths as "historical phenomena". Even so, myth does not necessarily subscribe to an 'accurate' account of history (Barthes 1957:151). While the context in which the myth-reader operates might be inherently complex, myth simplifies the reader's situation, eliminating contradictions and formulating a picture of the world that is easily understandable (Barthes 1957:143). Myth offers the myth-reader a kind of intellectual comfort, by eliminating complexities in its messages. (These complexities may be elements that undermine the seemingly natural state of the mythical signification). Myth therefore functions as a sort of orientating force, supplying readers with a (fictional) sense of their individual place in history and in society. According to Mason (1993:4), myths have the ability to shape perception and belief. Mythological narrative may transmit a 'moral' message as an indication to readers of what is right and wrong, bearing in mind that these notions of right and wrong are prescribed according to the expectations of a dominant ideology. Myths attempt to transcend the personal and the particular, to create a type of universal message and convey the experience of an entire culture (Mason 1993:5). They are generalisations of cultural experience that serve to situate readers within their culture and supply them with a sense of cultural identity.

Silverstone (1988:29) believes that myth is a basic element of culture that represents a culture's thinking about the world and itself. Myths are a system of stories and narratives which, through their continued use, legitimise and preserve the cultural identity of a society (Silverstone 1988:29). Myth has a collective nature and operates as a cohesive force by subtly yet convincingly persuading disparate peoples that they are part of the same society and culture (Mason 1993:4). Barthes (1957:143) explains that myths eradicate contradictions so that it is easier to believe that people who are actually very different from one another, belong to the same society. Political myths are always orientated for the expression of a particular group, not an individual (Tudor 1972:139). A political myth has a hero or protagonist around which the narrative expands, but it is not an individual. Individual figures do appear in political myths, but always as representations of their group (Tudor 1972:139). According to Price (1995:40), myths play a vital role in the formation of a country's national identity, where a national identity is a collection of myths, ideas and narratives that are constantly represented by the dominant group of society as a means for maintaining power. Insofar as it is significant that myths are the key component in the

formation of a national identity, and persuade individual members of society that they all have something in common, it is also notable that myths are the tools of a dominant ideological group for maintaining its position of power.

Consequently, Price (1995:16) states that ideology has become an influential element in the structure of a national identity because of its successful utilisation of the cultural apparatus of myth. Indeed, Tudor (1972:121) describes ideology "as a heterogeneous collection of practical beliefs which have been reduced to a system through being interpreted in the light of a single key doctrine ... this key doctrine is often (though not always) a political myth". Mason (1993:4) describes myths as the expressions of entire peoples, which operate on a communal or societal instead of an individual level. Myths function as collective symbols that reinforce cohesion within a culture, and have a central position in the manner in which a society forms ideas about the state (Price 1995:3). But while myth performs the important role of securing cohesion of cultures, it is in fact a collection of fictional constructs. Even though myths naturalises the way in which society functions, myths are themselves fictions. Myths therefore use fictional narratives to justify 'real' lived culture.

The fictions that myths create are specifically engineered to convey the experience of an entire culture in a mythical or fictitious format. This forms the fundamental difference between an ideology and a myth. Ideology and myth must not be mistaken as equivalents, as they are in fact not entirely equivalent (Mason 1993:5). Myths are situated with connotation on the second level of meaning, while ideology occupies the third order of signification (Barthes 1977:20) (see 2.2). For the purposes of this study, a dominant political ideology is understood as an overarching societal system of domination, and myths operate as the dominant ideology's mechanisms of naturalisation (see 3.1).

While myths attempt to legitimate 'reality', they nonetheless take the form of fictional representations and do not pretend to be real. The subtle and perhaps subconscious message of a myth may imply a justification of society's workings to the reader, but the myth itself takes the form of a fictional narrative. Ideology pretends to be the truth, and attempts to hide or disguise its false nature. The dominant ideology produces a false consciousness amongst individual members of society, and strives to

justify its own position of power by representing the framework of society as the norm. Hence, ideology is a falsified societal construct, which works to hide its false nature from the society that it dominates. Myth is an ideologically inspired fictional representation, which does not attempt to hide its fictional nature, but still aspires to transmit a message to the reader that will naturalise the dominant ideology's position of power.

This study delineates its field of inquiry to specifically political type myths. Tudor (1972:138) claims that a political myth "purports to be an actual account of events". Political myths, although semi-fictional, do not admit to their fictionality. A portion of a political myth stems, of course, from the real world: political myths take as their subjects real political figures and events (Tudor 1972:138). But they mythologise these real people, transforming them into protagonists or villains, and hence fictionalising them (Tudor 1972:139). Unlike other myths, political myths do not acknowledge their own fictional element, but pose instead as factual representations. Evidently, while political myths formal structure does not appear different from other types of myth, political myths differ from other myths in that they purport to be factual depictions of the real world, or the way that things are.

Evidently, all myth operates as a type of fiction, which is inherently problematic when mythical representations, and especially political myths, appear in the medium of television news. Obviously, the inclusion of an inherently fictional element such as myth in television news representations, may adversely affect the level of 'accuracy' in such representations. The fictional quality of myth must be analysed. According to Barthes (1957:112), a sign is produced once the separate elements of the signifier and the signified are combined. The signifier is empty of meaning, but once it is weighted with a definite signified it becomes a sign (Barthes 1957:113). This is what Barthes (1957:114) calls a first-order semiological system.

Myth operates with a tripartite pattern, possessing a signifier, signified and sign (Barthes 1957:114). But instead of selecting as its signifier an object or representation yet to be imbued with meaning (as in the first-order semiological system), myth will take the sign from the first-order semiological system as its signifier. Therefore the original sign, the total of a concept and an image in the first-order semiological

system, is converted into a signifier in a second-order semiological system (Barthes 1957:115). Once a signified is added to the signifier (the first-order sign) it empties out the signifier of histories or associative values, and narrows its meaning possibilities to only that which is contained within the second-order signified (Barthes 1957:117).

The author concludes that myth then produces a sign whose richness of polysemy is severely reduced in comparison with the sign in the first-order semiological system. The myth sign is less constituted from physical or material representations than the first-order semiological sign. While the first-order sign is part signifier and part signified, myth is part signified and as its signifier, part (first-order) sign, which is also part signified. The semiological balance of signification is now upset. The notion of concept is allowed to dominate the construction of the mythological sign. Hence, in myth, while the number of possible meanings or interpretations is reduced, the conceptual content of the signified increases. As the myth sign allows more space in its construction for the containment of concept, or signifieds, there is more space for the inevitable intrusion of ideologically formed meanings into myth.

Bird and Dardenne (1988:72) explain that a myth only gains meaning in its representation. Cultural themes, values and identities can only exist if they are communicated. What is more, a myth can only achieve great power if it is communicated regularly and widely within society (Bird & Dardenne 1988:72). Myths are reararticulated, reconfigured, reinvented and reinterpreted over time, to not only secure their own continuation, but also to encourage the continued survival of the societal framework that places the dominant group of society in a position of power. But to be represented at regular and definite intervals, a mythology requires a semiotic or communicative repertoire (Mason 1993:4). No amount of communication is possible without an operative communicative channel and the conventions of signification, that are understood by the readers of the channel. Myths must be encoded and signified to readers while employing the conventions that will be familiar to them. Furthermore, myths must be manifested in the physical mediums of mass communications to be represented widely and often enough to secure the continuation of the myth and the dominant ideology that it exemplifies.

Consequently, myths are a semiotic occurrence, and may operate, though not exclusively, as a form of the signification of a dominant ideology. Myths, like dominant ideologies, encourage the production of limited meanings and attempt to direct the reading produced by the reader to a narrow selection of possible meanings. Once a myth is physically manifested in a form of signification, it empties out the signs that it uses of possible oppositional or disparate meanings, and replaces those meanings with a signification that guides the reader to read the text in one way (Bignell 1997:23). All signs naturally contain an element of polysemy, instilled by the context, history, interpretative skills and knowledge of readers. When a sign is taken up by a myth its polysemic nature is diminished as myth empties the sign of possible meaning potentials (Barthes 1957:117). This action of myth is undoubtedly ideologically inspired. As myths function to naturalise the position of a dominant ideological group, the dominant ideology seeks to only have those meanings which justify its existence represented in cultural modes of communication, thus limiting the meanings transmitted by the mythical representations of a culture. Hence, mythologies are as selective in their represented meanings as are dominant ideologies, and for the same purpose.

Silverstone (1988:23) comments that myths, once they have found semiotic representational form, reside in a particular space of lived culture: this space dictates common sense, a sense of cultural and national identity and even the public dreams and aspirations of a nation. According to Silverstone (1988:23), television is like a myth because it shares the same public space that myth occupies. It has already been established that television operates at a central point of culture, and that ideology creates and resides in a common public sphere that is facilitated by the mass communications medium of television. This public sphere would be overwhelmingly full, if imagined as the container of the three separate cultural entities of television, ideology and myth. But the central public sphere must rather be understood as a space where these three elements overlap and intermingle. In the public sphere, television, ideology and myth extend into each other and while they can and do exist separately, combined they can produce cohesive, meaning making exercises. These three cultural elements function in collaboration, and once they have done so, it is difficult to separate them.

While ideology influences the construction of myth and dominates the representations of television, myth naturalises the position of a dominant ideology and finds its representational form in the medium of television. Television simultaneously functions as a signifier of myth and also as a carrier medium of ideology. While the relationship between television news and dominant political ideologies has already been examined (see 3.1), the manner in which television news facilitates the cultural representation of myths must be explored.

Hartley (1982:30) describes television news as a "myth-maker". While the manufacture of a myth cannot be entirely attributed to television news alone, this medium functions as a channel and a site for the physical and visual manifestation of myths.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, while working as the semiotic carrier of myths, television news acquires its own mythical quality (Bird & Dardenne 1988:70). Television news does not only participate in making myths, it also becomes myth. Like ideology, and like myth, the myth of television news functions as an explanatory framework for society, telling its audience how to behave, who is in power and why it is correct that those who have power must maintain power.

The television news myth visually transforms a confusing and baffling world into a coherent mythical representation of reality, assisting viewers in making sense of their social environment (Bird & Dardenne 1988:70). In this sense, television news is not a mere sequence of facts, but a mythological narrative that offers reassurance and familiarity to its readers, while reinforcing the naturalised appearance of the dominant ideology. As a myth, television news offers its readers representations of specific portions of community experiences, transforming itself into a platform for an individual viewer's entrance into society, while still making its 'fictions' seem credible by including snippets of community life.

With regard to the mythological nature of television news, Silverstone (1988:24) claims that television news is not only myth, neither is it all myth. Indeed, although

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<sup>11</sup> The author acknowledges that the construction of a single myth is a complex social process that may take place over time and be influenced not only by a dominant ideology, but also by less dominant or oppositional ideologies, and by the traditional cultural narratives of the society in which the myth is formed. Television news is not the exclusive medium of myth representation as mythologies may

myth does not attempt to make the 'truth' disappear, its function is to distort the 'truth' that it signifies (Barthes 1957:121). While myth does not deny its fictionality, television news pretends to be a factual and objective representation of reality. Television news attempts to disguise its untruths, and masks its misrepresentations of reality as unmediated accounts of the real world. Nonetheless, Silverstone (1988:24) claims that all televisual communications are touched by myth. It would seem that while television news occupies the same social sphere as ideology and myth, it cannot escape the ideologically inspired fictions of myth. But while television news attempts to disguise its misrepresentations and biased content, it can be assumed that so long as myth is inherently fictional, television news will attempt to hide its own mythical nature.

While myths usually describe fictional yet dramatic or sensational narratives, television news poses as a rational and logical account of worldly events (Tuchman 1981:84). This appearance of rationality is maintained through a variety of visual signs and codes, designed to connote the authoritative status of television news. Nonetheless, television news, in a manner similar to myth, naturally allows added representation to an event with a higher degree of sensationalism. While perhaps more important news stories are aired only for seconds, highly sensational though less important stories may air for many minutes in a television news broadcast (see 4.2.1). Thus, although television news attempts to hide its mythical nature, by employing various codes to signify its own objectivity and authority, its mythic elements are revealed in its characteristic preference for the sensational.

An understanding of myth therefore further uncovers the biased nature of television news's potential (mis)representations of reality. While myth resides and finds itself represented in television news, myth is not an objective view of reality, but rather it forges its own fictional reality (Bird & Dardenne 1988:70). Television news represents the fictional content of a myth, applied to its accounts of 'real' events, producing a representation of reality that takes the narrative form of a certain mythological (fictional) construction (Silverstone 1988:29). Tuchman (1981:96) states that

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appear in many different cultural channels such as literature, theatre, newspapers, films, advertisements

[r]ecognition that the frame of television news - including its rendition of time and its arrangement of space on film and video - is qualitatively different from that of everyday life and realization that news *cannot* be a veridical account free us to look at the production of news as the generation of myth.

Fiske and Hartley (1978:43) explain that myths are not static constructs but are constantly in a state of flux, changing and updating themselves to the situational environment of the culture in which they operate. Myths are constantly finding new objects of signification, while discarding old ones, and although the 'same' myth may appear in different mediums over time, the mediums themselves that myths choose to inhabit may influence a change in the narrative of the myth (Barthes 1957:110). Myths are flexible, and must be so if they are to find continued relevance and representation in a rapidly changing society. Since a dominant ideology will extract portions of lived culture and combine its justifications of its own power with these, if the shared cultural experience of a society changes, the mythological naturalisations of the dominant ideology must also change. Fiske and Hartley (1978:43) state that television news plays a vital role not only in the re-representation of myths, but in facilitating the formal changes in the structure of a myth.

The rapidity with which television news accommodates the changing structure of myth is therefore vital to its effectiveness as a medium of mythological representation. Television news functions as a semiotic conglomeration of both iconic and arbitrary signs. While iconic signs, or recorded footage at the site of 'real' events, cannot be easily or quickly manipulated by television news broadcasters, iconic television news signs can be changed or altered almost instantaneously (see 2.1). The malleable nature of television news's arbitrary signs allows both dominant ideologies and myth to find representation through arbitrary signs by the manipulation of the visual appearance of the sign, and therefore the intended meaning. The message of the arbitrary sign becomes one that is potentially favourable to the dominant ideology, or representative of a specific myth. But the ability of the television news arbitrary sign to rapidly alter or reconfigure its appearance also makes it an excellent facilitator as a representative medium of myth, as a myth is in a constant state of flux (Fiske & Hartley 1978:43). Hence, as with ideology, the presence of myth within a

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or music video. This study, however, focuses exclusively on the medium of television news.

television news broadcast must be uncovered by examining the arbitrary signs and codes that have been crafted for the television news representation of reality.

This chapter has analysed the functioning process and framework of a dominant political ideology, and noted the similarities of this cultural hierarchy to the working process of semiosis as it occurs within the medium of television news. The assumption established in this chapter is that the similarities of these two structures are not incidental, but rather a cultural phenomenon wherein the communicative process of semiosis is engineered to facilitate a dominant political ideology. American ideology was examined as a contemporary example of a dominant political ideology. Through examining the cultural narrative occurrence of myth it was established that myth is not only a form of justification and naturalisation of the dominant ideology, but that myth, ideology and television also occupy the same cultural space. The next chapter makes a case study analysis of the television news event of September 11 as it was represented by the television news channel CNN, and the ideological and mythical content of these televisual texts is analysed semiotically.

**CHAPTER FOUR**  
**THE REPRESENTATION OF SEPTEMBER 11**  
**BY CNN**

This chapter undertakes a case study analysis of the CNN television news representations of September 11, in order to illustrate how television news can naturalise and justify the dominant ideology of Americanism, through the representation of carefully constructed codes and American myths. This chapter furthermore analyses a selection of the media myths that surrounded September 11. This analysis is based on the assumptions that were established in previous chapters: namely, that American dominant ideology is supported by the framework of the television media, and this ideology is supported by carefully constructed myths that are constructed to naturalise it.

The American hero monomyth, and how it was applied to key media personalities surrounding September 11, is examined closely. An analysis of the mythic meanings attached to the tower by American ideology is discussed, in order to establish how September 11 subverted these meanings. The author suggests that the representation of the American hero monomyth reinforced and re-established American ideology after the massive blow that destroyed the tower myth.

The entertainment value of September 11 on CNN is discussed with regard to its ideological implications. The iconic and arbitrary codes broadcast on CNN during its coverage of September 11 are semiotically investigated in order to reveal their ideological content. The myths that surround the American flag are examined and the author analyses how this arbitrary symbol was incorporated into CNN representations of September 11. The iconic footage of the key political figures surrounding September 11 is analysed in order to uncover how these representations functioned to reinforce each news personality's mythic status.

#### 4.1 Media myths of September 11

Semiotically, the iconic imagery surrounding the event was incredible and perhaps the most startling footage ever aired live on television news. But, most significantly, September 11 struck a severe blow to the dominant American ideology. The television news media, a support structure and a tool of dissemination of American ideology, quickly inherited the task of structuring new ways in which to repair and reinforce the damaged visual representation of the dominant American ideology. A series of new myths was manufactured and represented constantly by the television news media in a full blown attempt to counter the extent to which American ideology had been undermined by the terrorist attacks. These myths were not necessarily wholly new, but adaptations of already well-established myths to create powerful and up-to-date visual media representations, and functioned within the medium of television news to rejuvenate and sustain the dominant ideology. The next section examines the myth of the American hero, how this myth functions to naturalise American ideology.

##### 4.1.1 *The American hero: George W Bush and Colin Powell*

According to Ken Sanes (2001b:1), television news operates according to a hierarchical structure similar to a class system in its treatment of news figures, where each news personality occupies a space somewhere between the privileged elite class and the most utterly oppressed class. Depending on the personality's position within the news class system, a figure in the news may receive wholly positive coverage, aimed at glorifying the individual, mediocre representation that is neither completely positive nor negative, or total and outright negative representation, effectively 'demonising' the figure (Sanes 2001b:5). The 'lowest class' in the hierarchical structure of the representation of television news personalities, where the individual's news image has suffered a total and irreversible collapse, is examined later (see 4.1.2). It is important, however, to note that the lowest class of personal news image is the binary opposite of the highest media image position according to Sanes (2001b:5): the most privileged class of saints and heroes.

The myth of the hero is one that is common to almost all cultures (Lash 1995:89). The hero's significance to this study is paramount. While the prominence and strength of a

dominant ideology is most severely tested during a time of social crisis (see 3.2), heroic mythological lore demonstrates how a society's hero(es) are called upon to perform their incredible feats only during a time of social strain (Lawrence & Jewett 2002:26). The parallel between the periods during which dominant ideologies must operate at their highest intensity, and the times when a hero is called into action, leads to the obvious assumption that the hero myth is an inherently ideological construction, manufactured to support the dominant ideology while that society is enduring a period of crisis or pressure. Thus, while September 11 and the following weeks marked a period during which the American public and ideology experienced serious strain, the representation of the hero myth on television news was relatively predictable and evident. An analysis of the American hero myth is therefore required.

Nachbar and Lause (1992:315) claim that American heroes, unlike their British counterparts, are not aristocrats or demigods, such as King Arthur or Saint George. They are, instead, common people, who demonstrate modesty about their heroic ability and engage in everyday societal activities. American heroes are assimilated into society, and although their heroic status always identifies them as something different from an 'average' member of American society, they are never above or consider themselves superior to the society they have sworn to protect. According to Nachbar and Lause (1992:315), "American heroes are up in the sky for us to point at and admire, but they are also right next door so we can share with them a cup of coffee and a heartache".

Lawrence and Jewett (2002:22) identify a mythological narrative that they term the "American monomyth". This is a recurring myth within the cultural representative structures of society, where characteristically a peaceful and harmonious community finds itself under threat by some form of evil. Once the institutions of the society fail to eradicate the evil threat, an individual carries out a certain task or series of tasks to aid the stricken community. The hero's actions secure the safety and continued existence of the community, and the destruction of the menacing evil force (Lawrence & Jewett 2002:6).

The American monomyth typically depicts an Eden-like setting where the effective and desirable functioning of society has been disrupted and must be restored by the

intervention of a hero (Lawrence & Jewett 2002:22). While the characteristics of the narrative structure of the American monomyth can be identified, so too can the common characteristics of the American hero. Most significantly, according to Lash (1995:5), the hero is almost always a male figure.<sup>1</sup> Wecter (1963: 482) states that very little heroic status is reserved for women throughout the history of American hero worship. Apart from the obvious issues of gender inequality in the ranks of American heroes, the fact that a hero is almost always male results in a significant situation with regard to the hero's relationship with power. According to Lash (1995:33), the male is always implicated because of his excess of physical strength; the male is faced with the responsibility of managing an excess of brute force. While the hero is always male, the hero's primary responsibility (a responsibility which is markedly absent from the life of the female) is to master, yet to never abuse or over-use his excessive power.

Therefore a hero is always faced with and identified by his struggle to overcome and control power, often his own. A hero must use his power to serve society unselfishly (Wecter 1963:12), but he must never use his power to dominate it (Lash 1995:6). He must ignore this temptation, and only endeavour to enter into conflict with adversaries who are his equal in power (Lash 1995:6). The hero does not enter conflict or exert his power willingly, but only because the situation calls for him to do so.

The characteristics of the hero myth and hero figure can be further delineated to identify specific types of American hero. Nachbar and Lause (1992:316) identify two categories of American hero. The first are citizen heroes; these figures embody the myths and ideology associated with mainstream America. A citizen hero strives to uphold the traditional moral value system of the nation (Nachbar & Lause 1992:316). Abraham Lincoln and George Washington are apt examples. (In South Africa, figures such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu are widely represented in the media as

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<sup>1</sup> The gender of hero figures has displayed a notable shift towards the feminine in recent years within the popular culture and entertainment industries. There has been a significant influx of representations of females as hero figures on television and in film. Examples of these heroines are *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, Lara Croft from *Tomb Raider*, Max from *Dark Angel*, Trinity from the *Matrix*, *Charlie's Angels*, Eowyn in *The Lord of the Rings. The Return of the King*, and Sydney Bristow from the television series, *Alias*. According to the author, television news representations have yet to follow this new popular culture trend and include women in their heroic representations.

citizen heroes). The second type of hero, rogue heroes, are representatives of the values inherent in a belief in individual freedom. Rogue-heroes concentrate on challenging the mainstream, rather than upholding traditional values (Nachbar & Lause 1992:316). Figures such as James Dean and Elvis Presley are good examples. While rogue heroes make a fascinating subject for study, this study concentrates exclusively on citizen heroes, as the latter are most closely associated with the events of September 11 on television news representations.

According to Nachbar and Lause (1992:316), a figure must attain certain virtues before acquiring the status of citizen-hero. The citizen-hero must be exceptionally gifted in some way. Lawrence and Jewett (2002:47) state that the American monomythic hero is distinguished by his extraordinary capabilities, such as exceptional sporting or physical capabilities, or uniquely advanced moral integrity. The citizen-hero must also exude and respect the values and beliefs that are central to American society (Nachbar & Lause 1992:316). He must be an example of a good citizen who is compassionate, honest, and brave, and have an interest in community activities. Most importantly, a citizen-hero must put his exceptional capabilities to use in a manner that will ensure the protection of the community. He must use his power to preserve and further the well-being of society (Nachbar & Lause 1992:316).

Because citizen-heroes put their powers to work in order to protect society and defend the traditional values of American society, their activities are to the benefit of American dominant ideology. Citizen-heroes' defence of the mainstream is in fact a defence of the dominant ideological system. Citizen-heroes are not only favoured by the dominant ideology over rogue-heroes, but are also to a large extent constructed by the dominant ideology. Also, since the apparatus of television news often naturalises and reinforces the dominant ideology, the citizen-hero monomyth is a popular representation where television news fulfils this function.

Wector (1963:2) claims that homage to American heroes is a vital and necessary part of American patriotism. According to Wector (1963:3), an American hero, like the American flag, forms a collective symbol that encourages a sense of national continuity. Hero myths in the United States perform an important social function of creating a collective sense of unity within American society. While the American hero

serves as a unifying societal force, the citizen-hero remains the ideological construct of a dominant ideology. Thus while supplying a sense of continuity to his admirers, the American hero also manipulates a continuity of beliefs; the beliefs that he represents are favourable to the dominant American ideology.

A successful American hero is therefore one who recognises the major characteristics of the American hero monomyth, and perpetuates them in a manner to which the American media, including television news, is receptive. But often the representation of a new American hero on television news will be more a result of the circumstances within American society than of any particular heroic action performed by the 'hero'. Nachbar and Lause (1992:322) contend that while heroes may shape certain events, the time period during which a hero operates can determine not only the nature of the hero, but also who the hero is. Solomon (2001d) claims that there was such a collective social desperation in America for a strong national leader prior to September 11, that George W Bush was catapulted into American monomythic hero status, and represented as such by the American media, despite his sometimes embarrassing and previously somewhat antagonistic relationship with the press.

Lawrence and Jewett (2002:128) contend that the establishment of the American monomyth within the realms of the United States presidency is not favourable when the position of the American President is compared to that of the traditional or characteristic monomythic hero. The United States president is a figure whose power is bestowed upon him, not by fate, destiny or divinity, but by the common people who have elected him. His power is limited as it will last for a specific length of time only, and it is further limited by the American constitution (Lawrence & Jewett 2002:128). But according to Wector (1963:486), "[o]ur most powerful hero epics centre about our leaders". Similarly, Lawrence and Jewett (2002:126) state that "[t]he U.S. president, standing so often at centre stage during historic crises, has been woven into the fabric of national mythology".

Despite the apparent disparities between the position of the American president, and the traditional American monomythic hero, the latter is evidently adapted to meet the representative criterion of the former. This is not entirely unexpected, as myths are flexible in nature and can change over time and fluctuate according to the context in

which they operate (Barthes 1957:110). Hence, the American president, lacking superhuman monomythic capabilities, can be (though is not always) depicted as a mythical hero figure at certain pivotal times.

George W Bush did not receive monomythic hero status automatically when he attained the American presidency. Indeed, prior to September 11 2001, Bush appeared to have a near disastrous relationship with the press and his media image waned in popularity. This media bashing of Bush seemed to be sparked or at least boosted by Bush's 'triumph' during the elections, which led to his entering presidential office. The United States presidential elections quickly spiralled into a media scandal, as inefficient election organisation brought the results of the election into doubt. According to Solomon (2002a:1), the election debacle saw the media represent George W Bush with a sense of disorientation, and the usual reverence paid by them to the incoming president was notably absent.

Bush's apparently habitual tendency to perform linguistic blunders have been documented by countless reporters and television news journalists. Ironically, Bush's media reputation of performing verbal indiscretions or blunders may have contributed to his status as an American hero. Wecter (1963:482) states that while the true American hero must possess and project many virtues, elevated intelligence is not a necessary characteristic. In fact, displaying advanced intelligence is not even desirable. The American hero must be decent, honourable and strive to uphold justice, but a quality of genius is not necessary and may do the hero harm, if his genius is an overwhelming part of his character (Wecter 1963:482). Wecter (1963:485) claims that in general, the collective American community regards a hero's character and ability to do good to be of primary importance, while great intelligence is inessential. According to Wecter (1963:482,485), "... in America at large there is a pretty strong prejudice against the wise guy ... Hard work, tenacity, enterprise, and firmness in the face of odds are the qualities that Americans most admire, rather than originality or eloquence of tongue and pen".

Thus, Bush's reputation for making a hash of his words in front of the media cameras may have unwittingly won him some affection with the American public. It was, however, the events of September 11 that quickly allowed Bush to attain monomythic

American hero status. According to Mark Crispin Miller (2002:1), "[c]ountless leaders have been deified by national emergency, but few have been remade as quickly and completely as George W. Bush". September 11 saw a serious, totally unexpected and previously unprecedented assault not only on two American cities, but on American ideology. The American media, as an instrument of American ideology, was initially traumatised by this attack (Miller 2002:4). But the American media, including CNN, quickly started to function in ways to reinforce the ideology to which these communications mediums were aligned. The task of the American media, however, was to reconstruct a damaged American ideology, and to create and represent media myths that could rejuvenate the American ideology. The myth of the American hero gained central focus in the collective public sphere of television news, ideology and myth. Representations of George W Bush in the American media transformed the United States president into a hero, not because he behaved heroically, but because the predicament of American ideology required a strong and capable leader who, once mythologised by the media and American ideology, could represent American ideology as unshaken by the deliberate attacks directed at it.

Hence, the American media, operating in the service of American ideology, began to guard Bush's public persona with a loyalty that was ultimately lacking prior to 11 September 2001 (Miller 2002:3). According to Sanes's (2001b:3) hierarchial structure with regard to the treatment of television news personalities, Bush originally occupied a position in the news class system that Sanes calls "fair game". News personalities who are fair game occupy a space somewhere between the class positions of Saints and heroes, and the lowest class of scapegoats and villains. All figures in the fair game category are probed and extensively cross-examined by the media. When a fair game media personality is discovered to have a weakness of some kind, or to have performed an action that contradicts the values associated with the dominant ideology that the media is aligned to, the figure is discredited by the media. According to Sanes (2001b:3), the American president "... is the fairest game of all".

Sanes (2001b:7) admits that a figure may migrate from one category to another in the television news system of personality representation. Although this system is normally stable, breaking news or a newsworthy story often results from the dramatic and sudden change in category by a news personality. According to Miller (2002:1),

Bush's somewhat negative reputation was almost instantly erased by the American news media. Television news channels, including CNN, attempted to enforce a kind of mass amnesia that would cause viewers to forget Bush's previous media persona, and accept his new mythological status as an American hero. The American media set to work to legitimise and naturalise Bush's new-found hero status.

Hence, the context of George W Bush's position as the American president was the main contributing factor that led to the rapid construction of the media representation of him as an American monomythic hero. Malala (2002:10) claims that Bush's main strength lies in how convincingly he is portrayed in the media as a leader who is capable of combating the threat of global terrorism. Obviously, had the September 11 terrorist attacks not taken place, Bush's terrorist fighting capabilities would not be of such elevated importance, and neither would his monomythic hero status.

In the months following September 11, the American media continually compared Bush to historical figures of massive public stature and phenomenal leadership qualities. These included Julius Caesar, Franklin D Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin (Miller 2002:2). That Bush was deliberately compared to a number of figures, who at some point in history wielded considerable power and influence, reveals the American media's intention of establishing his position as such a leader. But the American news media's attempts to mythologise Bush as a monomythic hero are also revealed in the shift of selectivity with regard to the United States president. According to Miller (2002:2), the American news media worked to idealise its representation of George W Bush, by ignoring all discordant facts about him; facts that the media would have not hesitated to report prior to September 11.

This selection is in accordance with the media's function of broadcasting mythological representations: according to Barthes (1957:143), myth simplifies that which it represents, in order to represent the world for its readers as one that is without contradictions. Emphasising unsavoury facts about Bush's past post-September 11 would have directly contradicted the American news media's intention of mythologising him as a monomythic American hero. Such contradictions are not tolerated in mythological representations because not only do they reveal the complexities of the issue at hand, but these complexities may reveal that the myth

itself functions only connotatively and is not necessarily a denotative signifier. Indeed, this highlights an important area of concern to this study: that of the nature of the representation of reality in television news. Where the representation of myth means that certain facts are omitted from television news broadcasts, reality is inevitably compromised.

Within the spectrum of the television news reporting of September 11, the dominant political ideology of Americanism was undermined by terrible acts of terrorism. CNN, amongst other television news stations, was quickly employed by American ideology to reinforce and reconstruct the dominant ideology, by representing myths that accord with and naturalise Americanism. In representing these myths, including the myth of the American hero, certain television news channels, including CNN, excluded any information from their representations that could discredit the myths. The selective nature of television news<sup>2</sup> thus functioned to support the myths that were represented by the American media after September 11 2001. Only a selected view of George W Bush was represented by the American news media, and consequently only a selected part of reality reached the television news reader.<sup>3</sup>

While Bush arguably only attained American monomythic hero status in television news representations after September 11, therefore owing his position as an American hero to context, Colin Powell was represented by the American media as a hero since the first Gulf War in 1991. Parry and Solomon (1996:1) state that Powell emerged from the first Gulf War, during which he served as a United States army general and

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<sup>2</sup> Television news is, by nature, selective. The limited time allotted to each story in a television news broadcast, and the length of the news broadcast itself, means that only a select few worldly events are represented on television news (Rath 1989:80). Rath (1989:80) states that the selection of information, topics and images that constitute the television news broadcast depends almost exclusively on the limited amount of airing time. Tim Allen (1999:38) comments that a television news broadcast needs to focus directly on the crisis point of any situation. Telling the entire story, or giving a detailed explanation of what led to the crisis, takes too much time. The story in its entirety is sacrificed for a slightly more extended view of the drama.

<sup>3</sup> George W Bush was certainly not the only hero represented by the American media during and after the broadcasting of September 11. British Prime Minister Tony Blair received widespread praise by the American media in the days and months following September 11. An American television network MSNBC, broadcast that Tony Blair's approval ratings were higher amongst the American public than Winston Churchill or Margaret Thatcher (Harnden 2001:1). Blair's immediate show of sympathy for the American nation after September 11, and his consistent political support of the Bush administration's controversial foreign policies in dealing with terrorism, transformed representations of Blair in the American media to that of a hero (Harnden 2001:2).

oversaw the execution of Operation Desert Storm, as a media hero, and the media since projected super-human powers onto its representations of him. Unlike Bush, Powell has not occupied any category on the news media's hierarchy of personality representation other than that of the most privileged class of Saints and heroes.

According to Rockwell (2003:1), "Secretary of State Colin Powell is often portrayed as a war hero, a diplomat, a moderate, who lends balance to the Bush administration. He's a media darling". Seemingly, Colin Powell has avoided all media attacks on his persona and escaped discrediting reports (Parry & Solomon 2002:3). Powell attained American monomythic hero status with apparent ease, and his ability to do so stemmed from various elements of how the American media have chosen to represent him (Karon 2001:1). Karon (2001:1) states that Colin Powell's hero status closely aligns him with the realm of popular culture or positions him as a figure of popular entertainment. According to Karon (2001:1), "[t]here's a temptation, in a nation that builds its icons on templates forged in Hollywood, to imagine Colin Powell as some kind of movie hero".

Michael J Wolf (1999:18) refers to the transformation of television news into a source of entertainment as the "entertainmentization of news". According to Wolf (1999:19), this transformation is necessary simply because while viewers can choose to watch channels that deliver exiting and exhilarating content instead of news, a television news broadcast must be sensational to compete with other television channels and programmes. Consequently, while television news is imbued with the characteristics of an entertainment medium, news personalities take on the roles that are scripted for them. According to Wolf (1999:20), "[i]f it is true that we know our leaders as we see them on television, it follows that they will begin to take on the qualities (or at least we will endow them with the qualities) that work for other television personalities".

Television news, as a mass entertainment medium, contains its own narratives, which inevitably resemble a film script. The television news plot pits a hero, or group of heroes, against an enemy or villain. Television news, like Hollywood, has its own stars, who earn their celebrity status by playing the part of the hero, not in a film, but in news network entertainment features. The most distinctive difference between Hollywood film production studios like 20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox, Time Warner Studios, New

Line Cinema, DreamWorks, or Disney, and television news networks, such as CNN, BBC, ABC, or Sky News, is that while a motion picture film averages a running time of two hours, television news is broadcast twenty-four hours a day.

Nonetheless, the similarities between the entertainment industry's production of celebrities and the representation of heroic figures by television news networks is notable. Within the television news sphere of infotainment, Colin Powell seems to have been perfectly moulded to perform a leading role of American hero. Karon (2001:1) calls Powell a subliminal reminder of African-American actor James Earl Jones; a loving but stern father figure who unconsciously reminds us of films such as *Field of Dreams* or *The Lion King*. Parallel comparisons can also be drawn between Powell and other prominent black political figures such as Martin Luther King and former South African president Nelson Mandela.<sup>4</sup>

Another aspect of Colin Powell's persona, which may nourish his media image as an American monomythic hero, is that he is closely related to the issue of American immigrants. Although Powell was born in the United States of America, his parents are originally from Jamaica. Engle (1992:334) suggests that the experience of immigration has been central to American collective culture for a large section of its history. Every race group in America, except for the Native Americans, possess an awareness that their racial origins lie elsewhere. Much of American popular culture explores the theme of physical dislocation, and the idea of immigration is subconsciously attached to almost every American, and is an overwhelming part of American history (Engle 1992:334). Colin Powell's closeness to the experience of the immigrant may, in the news media's representations of him at least, connect him with this collective shared American experience of a sense of dislocation, and aid his media hero status.

Parry and Solomon (2003:1) claim that Colin Powell invokes a quintessential American Horatio Alger myth. Horatio Alger Jr. was an American author who published over 130 novels during the post-American Civil war era at the end of the

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<sup>4</sup> An analytical discussion of how Powell's identity as a black person reinforces his positive media image is undertaken in section 4.2.3.1.

nineteenth century. All of these books contained the same theme: a socially and financially disadvantaged individual faces incredible odds, overcomes various challenges, and by constantly displaying tremendous strength of character and good morals is rewarded by achieving great success and status (Kanfer 2000:1). Horatio Alger successfully mythologised the American Dream of equal opportunity and upward social mobility, and his books were extremely popular during his lifetime. Nachbar and Lause (1992:315) claim that the most popular American heroes are common men who originate from humble beginnings and rise to great heights through determination and hard work, consequently functioning as an example of the American Dream myth. The implication signalled by such heroes is that each person in America is capable of achieving similar goals (Nachbar & Lause 1992:315). According to Bleifuss (2001:1), Powell's humble beginnings as a child from the Bronx, a working class suburb of New York, to an excellent career as a General in the United States army and finally the Secretary of State, affirms the myth of the American Dream and the Horatio Alger myth.<sup>5</sup>

Colin Powell is in fact listed as a member of the Horatio Alger Association of Distinguished Americans (Kanfer 2000:1). (It is notable, that President George W Bush is not a member of this association). Undoubtedly, Powell's evocation of the Horatio Alger myth contributes considerably to his American monomythic hero status. His identity as a black man immediately attaches Powell to a traditionally disadvantaged community (Parry & Solomon 2002:1). But Powell has overcome these disadvantages and attained a position of immense power. Seemingly, Powell's personal history has won him favour with the American news media. Parry and Solomon (2002:1) state that Powell is so popular with the American press, that even by the standards of contemporary media excess, no public figure has ever been embraced and promoted by the press to the same degree.

The monomythic American hero status of George W Bush and Colin Powell varies considerably. While Bush's American hero status has relied almost entirely on the fact

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<sup>5</sup> Former New York mayor, Rudi Giuliani, invokes the Horatio Alger myth in a similar fashion to Powell. Giuliani also spent his youth in the Bronx, and later ascended to a position of social power. It is necessary to mention Giuliani as he functioned as a central figure on television news in the weeks after September 11, because of his position as mayor of New York at the time of the terrorist attacks.

his position as the nation's leader coincided with a national time of crisis sparked by September 11, Colin Powell achieved American hero status because of the ease with which specific aspects of his persona can be aligned with the main characteristics of the American monomyth and the myth of the American Dream. Bush and Powell were both important media personalities with regard to the television news representations of September 11 as broadcast on CNN. Both Bush and Powell were represented by CNN according to the ideologically constructed myth of the American hero, even though their respective success at performing the role of the hero may have differed considerably. Nonetheless, the American hero myth undoubtedly functions as a constructed justification and naturalisation of American ideology.

In a time when American ideology found itself under threat and attack, the American hero myth was quickly reconstructed and applied to two powerful American public figures. Television news channels, such as CNN, as supportive structures of American ideology, were carrier mediums of this myth, resulting in numerous television news representations of George W Bush and Colin Powell as monomythic American heroes during the days and weeks following September 11. The following section examines the myth of the arch villain figure and how the villain figure forms the antithesis of the hero, yet ironically justifies and naturalises the hero's power. The manner in which the American news media, including CNN, applied the villain myth to the collective community of Arabs or Muslims is discussed, as well as the application of the villain myth to the individual news personalities Osama bin Ladin and Saddam Hussein.

#### ***4.1.2 The villain: terrorism and 'Islamophobia'***

While continuing to assume that the television news representations of September 11 on CNN subscribed to the structural format of the American monomyth, according to monomythic lore the hero is always challenged by the evil presence of an arch villain (Nachbar & Lause 1992:323). The representation of the American monomyth on television news thus requires the representation of an individual who poses a threat to the American community, who has done this community some kind of harm, and who will inevitably do 'battle' with the American hero(es).

According to Sanes's (2001b:4) hierarchy of television news's treatment of news personalities, such figures constitute the lowest class, that of scapegoats and villains. Scapegoats and villains suffer the worst publicity, as they are represented by television news to have violated a highly valued ideologically constructed rule of conduct, which the society in which the figure appears as the villain values greatly. This rule of conduct is aligned with the dominant political ideology, and it is therefore manufactured to ensure the naturalisation of it. A transgression of the rule of conduct is a direct assault on the dominant ideology, but its adherents read this action as an attack on their society, and therefore conclude that the action is unacceptable. Consequently, there is widespread agreement amongst the society in which the 'transgression' occurred that what the villain figure has done is wrong (Sanes 2001b:4).

In television news representations, as well as in the American monomyth, the values and beliefs that are embodied by the villain are often antithetical to those embodied by the hero (Nachbar & Lause 1992:323). The American monomyth as it is represented on television news is, however, a type of representation, wherein one figure is wholly bad and another figure is wholly good. This is certainly a simplistic and biased view of situations that have a far more complex nature. Television news broadcasts, in the service of a dominant political ideology, selectively represent only the virtuous characteristics of its heroes, and only the supposedly evil traits of the villain. This process of selection simplifies the situation for readers of television news, and reveals the insertion of ideological influence in the news broadcast, as a dominant ideology simplifies a complex social environment.

Naturally, something is lost through the process of selection and simplification on television news representations. According to Lawrence and Jewett (2002:358),

[t]he monomyth's failures lie in the stereotypical identification of who is evil, its melodramatic exaggeration of evil traits, its facile belief in selective punishment, and the assignment of a retributive role to nature and to superheroes. Monomythic materials may overplay the role of conspiracy in accounting for evil, overlooking the propensities for evil within each member of the chosen community.

The simplification of events and complicated world issues can also lead to a uncomplicated view of the people involved: stereotypes depict only a selected aspect that is perceived to be a common trait amongst a specific group of people, and exclude many other traits of the group. The trait on which the stereotype may focus is often a mythical construction, engineered to encourage a certain and often negative reading of the entire group. Hence, the same type of selection process that contributes to an individual's representation as a villain or hero, is also involved in the construction of a stereotype.<sup>6</sup>

Said (1993:364) claims that in America there has long been a cultural bias against, and negative stereotype of Islam and Arabs. This "cultural war against Arabs and Islam" in the United States of America has been supported by derogatory popular culture depictions: racist and unflattering caricatures of Arabs or Muslims suggest them all to be terrorists (Said 1993:364). Shay and Schweitzer (2003: 2) claim that in America, the world's Muslim community are often depicted as a single cultural block whose focus lies in making the 'innocent' West a primary target of aggression. This assumption is obviously inaccurate, and Shay and Schweitzer (2003:2) state that most Muslim states are secular regimes that have adopted and embraced Western culture, values, lifestyle and technologies.

Said (1993:357) describes the media coverage of the First Persian Gulf War in 1991 as an exercise that followed the American government's intentions of demonising its Arab enemy. While the media posed as well-informed and unbiased, Arabs were portrayed as brutal and violent terrorists who could only understand force, and Islam as an intolerant, cruel and uncivilised religion (Said 1993:357). Ziauddin Sardar (1993:888) explains that according to mass media representations, in a post-Cold War period the new 'enemy' of the West is not Communism, but Islam. The image of the Muslim fundamentalist has become a media myth (Sardar 1993:888).

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<sup>6</sup> A stereotype is a highly simplified and generalised set of signs which indicate the social classification of particular groups of people. Stereotyping is an action of classification whereby individuals can structure their experience and make sense of events. Stereotyping orders the psyche of the individual. This process entails the simplification of people and events surrounding the individual, whereby attention is given only to certain identifying characteristics or distinctive features (O'Sullivan, Hartley, Saunders, Montgomery & Fiske 1994:300).

Edward Said's book *Orientalism* (1978) examines the complex relationship between the Orient and the West. According to Said (1978:1), the Orient was a Western construct evoked to establish the West's identity: the Orient forms the West's contrasting image, and hence it is the Other. In *Culture and Imperialism* Said (1993:364) continues to explore this theme, and claims that the American stereotype of Arabs ignores the possibility that there may be a history, a rich culture, and many disparate societies within the world Muslim community. It would appear that such an attitude on the part of the American community has fuelled the television news media's search for an arch villain to pit against its heroes prior to September 11. The representation of Muslims on television news before, but particularly after September 11, may have manifested in an attitude amongst the American media and its audiences that Merten (2001:8) calls "Islamophobia". The presence of an element of Islamophobia in the collective American psyche may be revealed in the drastic rise of anti-Muslim violence in the United States after September 11 (Matshikiza 2001:26). Workers who appear to be Arab, from an Egyptian grocery store owner in San Gabriel to a Moroccan gas station attendant in Illinois, were brutally attacked and sometimes killed (Matshikiza 2001:26). Such attacks on innocent individuals, who were in no way related to any terrorist activities, and as different from each other in culture and nationality as an American from a German, reveal the degree to which the ideologically constructed stereotype of Arabs, which pictures Arabs as violent and as one social group, is pervasive in America.

Sanes (2001b:1) states that much of the popularity of television news stems from its creation and depiction of a society's scapegoats. The media, by representing scapegoats who are held responsible for the ills of society, generate audience emotions of anger and ridicule against the scapegoat or villain figure (Sanes 2001b:1). Media discrediting attacks are usually disguised as an attempt to support the values of society by exposing an individual or group who has violated those values (Sanes 2001d:1). Fritz (2003:7) claims that the media performs a vital role in the demonisation of opponent figures to American ideology. Television news is under pressure to constantly create and represent scapegoat and villain figures, myths and stereotypes in order to maintain popularity with audiences, as well as to naturalise a dominant political ideology.

President George W Bush, performing his role as the American hero in a post-September 11 America, seems unconsciously aware of and perhaps subject to the American Islamophobic condition. In a press statement after September 11, but before the American military assault on Afghanistan, Bush unequivocally referred to his administration's efforts to combat global terrorism as a crusade (Matshikiza 2001:26). The word 'crusade' is immediately connotative of the violent conflict between the Ottoman (Muslim) Empire and the Christians from the West beginning in the eighth century and spanning the next eight centuries. The Crusades were mainly a series of Christian military campaigns of reconquest to recover the Arab occupied Holy Land (Lewis 2002:5). The long and bloody feud was considered a holy war or *Jihad* by both sides, and was inherently religious in nature. Fritz (2003:7) claims that Bush's reference to the Christian Crusades not only confirmed the worst fears of the present day Muslim community, but also revealed an underlying Western attitude of hatred towards Arabs. Bush's selection of the term 'crusade' in describing the American government's now (in)famous 'War on Terror' could not have been less diplomatic. Apart from being another example of a Bush verbal blunder, the American president unwittingly expressed the anti-Arab sentiment present in the American collective psyche.

The Western/American derogatory and negative stereotype of Arabs and Muslims is one that is founded in centuries of cultural conflict, and is perpetuated by ideologically constructed villain or scapegoat myths that are represented by American television news. The derogatory American stereotype of Arabs projects the villain myth onto an entire group of people, but an individual can also be identified and labelled by the television news media as a scapegoat or villain figure. While George W Bush had a meteoric rise to the status of American hero to meet Colin Powell who was already there, the numerous television news representations of the two men required their monomythic hero status to be verified and justified by the representation of a monomythic villain.

Osama Bin Ladin was quickly established as the monomythic super villain on television news representations of September 11, and in the weeks following the terrorists attacks in New York and Washington, his place at the bottom of the television news hierarchy of news personalities was solidified. According to Foden

(2001:5), Bin Laden was portrayed in the American media as the United States's primary enemy. Indeed, this can hardly be disputed: Bin Laden has for decades held a vendetta against the United States, has orchestrated violent terrorist attacks against American civilians in the past, including a bombing at the World Trade Centre, and struck a terrific blow by successfully arranging the demolishing of both World Trade Centre Towers and part of the Pentagon (Bergen 2001). Consequently, Bin Laden's self-admitted hatred of, and mission against the United States, as well as the acts of terrorism against Americans performed by members of Bin Laden's Al Qaeda terrorist network, are the elements that delineate him as a villain figure in American television news representations.

Second, Bin Laden is an Arab Muslim, immediately conjuring up connotations in American television news representations of the derogatory Islamophobic stereotype. Third, Bin Laden is not American, and his lack of 'Americanness' makes it possible for him to be completely evil, as something categorised as American cannot be anything but wholly good, according to American ideology (Amin 2003:5). The American television news media thus had little difficulty in projecting the mythical role of the monomythic villain onto its representations of Osama Bin Laden.

Rutledge (2003:1) verifies the American monomyth by claiming that one of its defining elements is the constant dichotomy and duality between the hero and villain figures. The hero and villain figures are binary opposites: the meaning of the signification of a hero figure is determined by the hero's antithetical opposite, who is the villain. While the hero is completely good and virtuous, the villain is entirely evil. The super hero figure ironically relies on the villain, as it is only through doing battle with the villain and scoring an impressive victory over him, that the hero's advanced capabilities can be displayed. The hero trusts the villain to perform some terrible act of evil, so that he can publicly thwart the villain, and thus reinforce his hero status (Rutledge 2003:1). The representation of the hero and the villain are intertwined and symbiotic in nature. It is notable that the first television news representations of George W Bush as a hero, and the increase in television news representations of Colin Powell as a hero, coincided with a mass of representations of Osama bin Laden as an arch villain in the weeks after September 11. While the manner of representation of these news figures depended largely on the context of a post-September 11 America,

the existence and representation of the hero coincides and depends on the existence and representation of the villain.

Indeed, this subscribes to the functioning process of ideology. While there is no villainous figure threatening a society, a hero is not needed. Similarly, when society experiences a period of prosperity and calm, the downward exertion of power from the ideologically dominant group is naturally eased (Amin 2003:5). When society begins to experience a period of crisis, such as a war, or some kind of disaster, the ideologically dominant group immediately increases its exertion of power over the subordinate group (Amin 2003:5). It is during such a time that representations of villains and heroes, as ideologically constructed mythical apparatuses, become more apparent in both the news media and popular culture. The hero figure must be read by the viewer as an instrument of it, indicating that the dominant ideology has the power and the means to rectify the undesirable situation that the society is in. The villain figure must be represented as the converse of the hero, and therefore the villain is the antithesis of the dominant ideology. The villain must be represented as the bearer of sole guilt with regard to the crisis in society, because it must not be suggested that the crisis was caused by the failings or shortcomings of the ideologically dominant group.

Representations of Osama bin Ladin on the American television news channel CNN, increased radically after the events of September 11. Bin Ladin's American monomythic value lay in that he not only provided a singular evil figure with whom the American monomythic heroes could engage in indirect political and military battle, but he also shouldered the blame for the crisis a traumatised America faced, diverting public attention away from the failures of the American government in preventing such a disaster.<sup>7</sup>

After the American military invasion of Afghanistan and the forced expulsion of the Taliban regime, Osama bin Ladin seemingly disappeared from the Western eye. At

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<sup>7</sup> According to Miller (2002:4), the American news media displayed strange but outright disinterest in investigating the failures or shortcomings of United States intelligence and security systems that may have prevented a terrorist attack such as September 11 2001. Miller (2002:4) suggests that in this instance the American media were co-operating with the intentions of the American government, who do not want September 11 publicly investigated, fearing that their inefficiency for dealing with the threat of terrorism may be exposed to American audiences.

the time of writing, the whereabouts of Bin Ladin is unknown. Bin Ladin has not, since September 11 2001, been successfully linked to any major terrorist attacks. Rutledge (2003:1) claims that this non-action by the figure of the villain could not be tolerated if the survival of the monomythic hero was to be sustained. George W Bush and Colin Powell needed another villainous figure or scapegoat against which to pit their monomythic capabilities if they are to remain in the position of American heroes.

Saddam Hussein's stature as a villain is already well established in American television news representations (Rutledge 2003:1). Hussein has held the position of villain and scapegoat on American television news representations since the 1991 Gulf War, and most Americans were already familiar with him. Carruthers (2000:42) states that the American news media concentrated their efforts on demonising the figure of Saddam Hussein since 1991. According to Carruthers (2000:40), "[t]he White House repeatedly explained Saddam Hussein's behaviour by reference to Hitler's aggressions in 1930s Europe, with television and press reports voraciously seizing on Bush's preferred analogy". What made the 2003 Gulf War seem similar to the plot of a cinematic film sequel was that the American hero figure against whom Hussein had been pitted in 1991, was President George Bush, the father of George W Bush (see 4.1.1). Nonetheless, the "Hitlerising" of Saddam Hussein by the American news media continued in 2003.

Had Osama bin Ladin proved a more formidable opponent for the American president, his Secretary of State and the entire Bush administration, it is unlikely that the television news media's attention would have shifted so entirely to the depiction of Saddam Hussein as an arch villain. Indeed, it was more difficult for the American television news media to convince the American audience and international viewers that Saddam Hussein was in fact a villain. While Bin Ladin had arranged an attack of monumental proportions on American soil, Saddam Hussein had done no such thing.<sup>8</sup> The antagonistic relationship between Hussein and the United States that had existed

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<sup>8</sup> The author does not deny that Saddam Hussein and his regime were responsible for many unjust and cruel crimes against humanity. But the acts of murder and brutal torture carried out by Saddam Hussein's regime were directed at the Iraqi and Iranian people. During Hussein's war with Iran, the Iraqi president received support and weapons from the United States. Hussein has never been connected to any military or terrorist action against the United States of America.

since 1991 compensated for the lack of his dastardly deeds against America and contributed to his status as a villain. Also, Hussein is, like Bin Laden, an Arab Muslim, once again attaching connotative meanings of the American Islamophobic stereotype to him.

The American news media appeared to have successfully demonised Saddam Hussein in the minds of the American public before the 2003 Gulf War. According to the novelist, Arundhati Roy (2003:15), a *New York Times* survey revealed that 42 percent of Americans believed that Saddam Hussein was directly responsible for the September 11 attacks. This is despite the fact that no evidence has been released to support this.

Rutledge (2003:1) claims that according to the mythological construction of heroes and villains, every hero must have a 'sidekick', and all villains have a group of henchmen. While George W Bush can enjoy the company of Tony Blair, Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, Condoleezza Rice and the rest of the Bush administration as 'sidekicks', Osama bin Ladin's Al Qaeda network is supposedly constituted of an army of underground terrorist henchmen (Bergen 2001:30). According to Amin (2003:5), in the past the term used to describe the collective group of America's enemies was "Communists".<sup>9</sup> More recently, the term which American television news representations use to describe the group who associate with the arch villain, and who are represented by the villain, is "terrorists" (Amin 2003:5). The figure of the terrorist becomes endowed with the villain myth, and the term 'terrorist' is indicative of a collective community of villains.

According to Solomon (2001b:1), American television news repeatedly defines terrorism in the same manner as the American government: terrorists are those who behave aggressively towards the United States with the intent to do harm to American individuals. Solomon (2001b:2) suggests that the American news media should

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<sup>9</sup> The Cold War was a period of global competition between the United States and the former USSR, a communist regime, together with each country's allies lasting from 1945 to 1989. The origins of the Cold War are ascribed to a breakdown of co-operation between these two superpowers in the final years of World War II. During the 1950s the two countries entered into an arms race, involving nuclear weapons. By the 1970s, the danger of this type of confrontation was becoming apparent and both the United States and the Soviet Union worked to implement strategic arms limitations (Bullock & Trombley 1999:136).

expand their use of the term 'terrorist' to include all organised acts of violence against civilians of any nationality.<sup>10</sup> But Solomon (2001b:2) claims that such consistency in news media representations would be met with opposition by the American government: the unbiased use of the term 'terrorist' could then equally be attached to the United States government.<sup>11</sup> Chomsky (2001:13) claims that the American government and media cannot maintain a consistent use of the term 'terrorism' because to do so would reveal that America itself is a terrorist state. This would not be tolerable for the dominant ideology of Americanism. While American television news networks function in the service of American ideology, the politically dominant group of American society and the United States government appear to dictate the meanings that are favourable to Americanism in certain linguistic codes, that are then disseminated by American television news representations.

Indeed, Solomon (2001b:1) claims that not only are American television news networks encouraged to broadcast the visual and linguistic codes that contain the meanings that are favoured by the American government, but they are expected by the United States government and the American public to do so. During early October 2001, the CNN website displayed a curious announcement. Apparently someone had publicly stated that CNN had not referred to the hijackers who directed aeroplanes into the World Trade Centre towers and the Pentagon as terrorists. The announcement on the CNN website proclaimed that this complaint was false, and that CNN had continually made use of the term 'terrorist' and would continue to do so. According to Solomon (2001b:1), the CNN disclaimer was accurate.

In the months after September 11 the American government, worked to exert ideological power over the American public in order to reassert its dominance.

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<sup>10</sup> Bullock and Trombley (1999:862) describe terrorism as an organised use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends. A common characteristic of terrorist actions is that civilians are taken captive or killed violently in order to attract media attention to the terrorist group's ideals or political intentions. There is no mention in this definition of terrorism that the civilians who come under attack by terrorists are necessarily American. Rather this definition implies that acts of terror against civilians of any nationality constitutes terrorism, however the author recognises that the term 'terrorist' may have a meaning relative to the user of the term.

<sup>11</sup> In the past American missiles have killed thousands of innocent civilians in places such as Iraq, Sudan, Panama City, and Yugoslavia. The American media did not refer to the United States government's actions as terrorism with regard to these instances of violence against civilians (Solomon 2001:2).

American television news channels, including CNN, while working to justify and reinforce Americanism during this time of crisis, represented the ideologically constructed myths of the American monomythic hero and villain, which were selectively attached to certain news personalities. While the villain myth was constructed and represented as a supportive myth to that of the American hero monomyth, myths that surround personalities in the news were not the only mythical representations on television news that served to reinforce American ideology. The next section examines the (American) myth of the tower, and shows how it was represented on American television news after September 11.

#### ***4.1.3 The myth of the tower: The World Trade Centre and the Two Towers***

The entwined relationship between themes in popular culture such as films and television news is ever present. This is evident in many characteristics of television news and can be observed in the process of popularisation of television news (see 4.1.1, 4.1.2). The release of the film *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers* in the year after September 11 appears entirely coincidental. But the film's director, Peter Jackson, considered changing the title of the film before its release because of the obvious correlation, in the title, to the World Trade Centre. Jackson did not change the title but his consideration of doing so reveals that popular culture entertainment functions as part of lived experience. But the fictional narrative of *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers* positively reinforced and represented a myth that had been absolutely subverted with the tumbling of the World Trade Centre Towers in New York.

Lev Grossman (2002:54) examines how the themes explored in popular culture often reveal the collective thought processes of society. According to Grossman (2002:54), "[p]opular culture is the most sensitive barometer we have for gauging shift's in society's collective mood, and it's registering a big one right now ... With *The Two Towers* ... we are seeing what might be called the enchanting of America". The recent appearance of the *Lord of the Rings* (2001, 2002, 2003) trilogy in the sphere of popular entertainment has resulted in a massive popular culture phenomenon. Although this study is concerned primarily with television news, the widespread attention focussed on this single portion of popular culture and the characteristic popularisation or

entertainment quality of news, makes a brief discussion of Tolkien's fantasy tale applicable to this study. Furthermore, the obvious correlation between the key semiotic symbolism of *The Two Towers* and the World Trade Centre Towers, coupled with the evocation of the tower myth in *The Two Towers*, further enhances the relevance of such a discussion (Figures 3, 4).

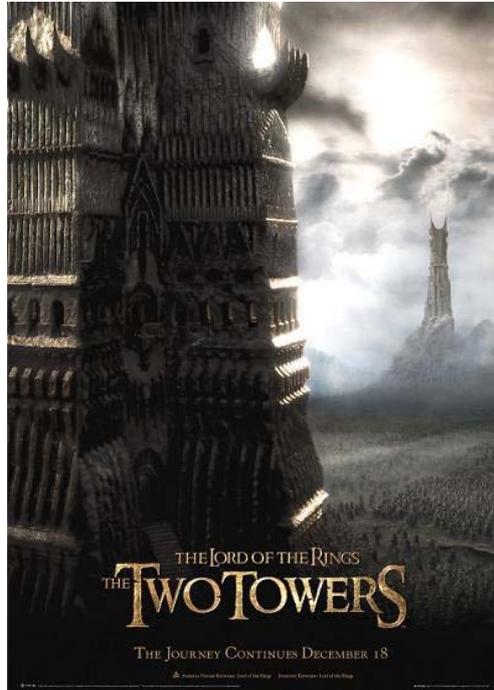


Figure 3: A poster for *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers*, 2002.  
(The Lord of the Rings 2002)

JRR Tolkien's (1954) trilogy of books, *The Lord of the Rings*, is a fictional narrative, which is scattered with the image of the tower.<sup>12</sup> There is the tower at Helm's Deep, the scene of a spectacular battle between the armies of the story's heroes and the evil forces who serve the arch villain character (Tolkien 1954:157). Orthanc is a tower,

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<sup>12</sup> Tolkien includes numerous descriptions of various towers in the text of *the Lord of the Rings*. This inclusion of the tower image highlights a mythical human fascination with the tower.

At Helm's Gate, before the mouth of the Deep, there was a heel of rock thrust outward by the northern cliff. There upon its spur stood high walls of ancient stone, and within them was a lofty tower ... There stood a tower of marvellous shape... A peak and isle of rock it was, black and gleaming hard: four mighty piers of many-sided stone were welded into one, but near the summit they opened into gaping horns, their pinnacles sharp as the points of spears, keen-edged as knives... A strong and wonderful place was Isengard, and it had long been beautiful ... was naught, only a little copy, a child's model or a slave's flattery, of that vast fortress, armoury, prison, furnace of great power, Barad-dûr, the Dark Tower, which suffered no rival, and laughed at flattery, biding its time, secure in its pride and immeasurable strength (Tolkien 1954:157, 192, 388).

which is occupied by Saruman, a henchman figure of the most terrible and evil character, Sauron (Tolkien 1954:192). Sauron, the quintessential villain, himself makes his headquarters in a tower building called Barad-dûr (Tolkien 1954:192). His status as a villain is comparable to the villain construct often represented on television news (see 4.1.2). Predictably, the White City, Minas Tirith is the setting for a final struggle between the forces of good and evil, has in its walls a tower, the Citadel (Tolkien 1955:12). The main character and most unlikely hero of the books, the hobbit Frodo Baggins, is temporarily kidnapped and held captive in a tower (Tolkien 1954:438).



Figure 4: A poster for *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers*, 2002.  
(Empire movies 2002)

The second part of Tolkien's trilogy is aptly titled *The Two Towers*. There is, however, some confusion as to which two towers the title refers to since myriad towers are mentioned. According to Peter Jackson's (2002) cinematic interpretation of Tolkien's second *The Lord of the Rings* book, the two towers are Orthanc and Barad-dûr. While there can be no doubt that one of the towers referred to in the title is Orthanc, Tolkien's literary piece is less explanatory as to which tower is the second one: Barad-dûr, Minas Morgul, Helm's Deep, or Minas Tirith. Despite this aspect of confusion, the

overwhelming presence of the tower image in *The Lord of the Rings* books and films is unmistakable.

The human psyche's fascination with the tower is a collective condition, which has manifested in various cultural expressions. *Genesis*, the commencing point of Biblical history, describes the construction and consequent destruction of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), from whence a gathering or settlement of people were scattered to different regions of the world (Figure 5).

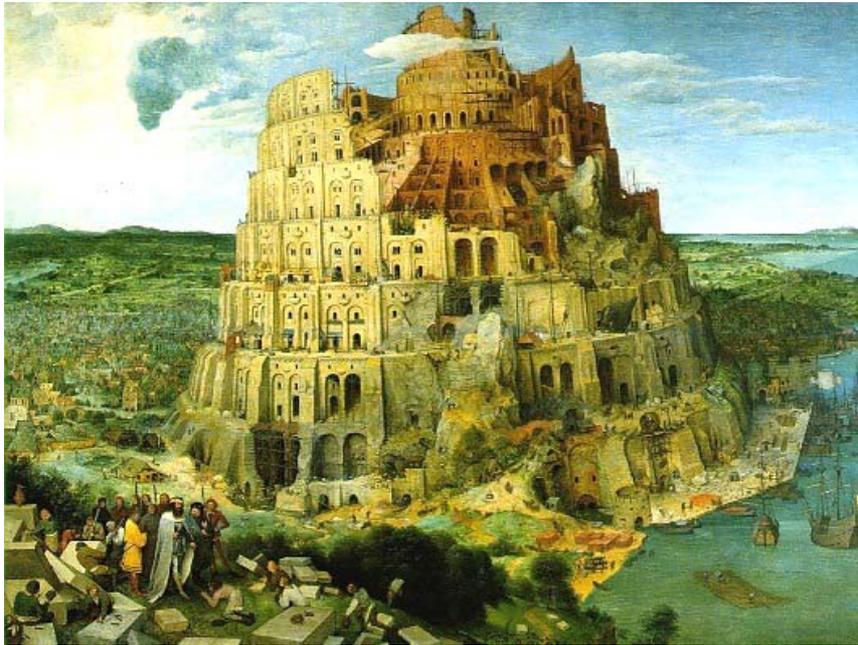


Figure 5: Pieter Bruegel, *The Tower of Babel* (1563). Oil on canvas, 81 x 61 cm.  
Collection: Kunsthistorisches Museum.  
(Web gallery of art [sa])

According to Diprose and Johnsen (1996:1), towers have always formed a vital element of fairytale and fantasy narratives. Rapunzel is the tale of a young girl who is imprisoned in a tower by an evil and villainous witch, and in *The Wizard of Oz*, the heroine Dorothy visits a wizard who lives in the Emerald City, a massive collection of towers. One of the Seven Wonders of the World was a tower: the lighthouse of Alexandria was built two thousand years ago, but was toppled in 1326 by an earthquake (Diprose & Johnsen 1996:2). The Leaning Tower of Pisa is not only a popular tourist attraction, but is also an icon that is recognised world-wide.

Fiske (1989:200) claims that the human enchantment with the tower is attributable to the delight that is experienced when overcoming the natural force of gravity. Because all natural life is attached to the earth by gravity, an object of great height such as a tower is perceived as an exciting aberration (Fiske 1989:200). According to Fiske (1989:199), "[v]erticality liberates. Humans distinguish themselves from other animals by rearing up on their hind legs, despite the consequent problems in the lower back ... the spatial relationship of the *up* to *down* becomes a concrete metaphor for a variety of social, moral, and physical properties". Humans seem to attach superiority to an elevated position, whether that position is physical or societal. Typically we envision their class position in society not on a horizontal format, but vertically from higher to lower (Fiske 1989:199). Indeed, this study operates on the assumption that an ideologically more dominant, hence superior, group in society is positioned at the top of an ideological hierarchy, while the subordinate group occupies a lower place.

According to Fiske (1989:199), up is a spatial metaphor that connects meanings of superiority to otherwise arbitrary ideas, categorising them and making them coherent in meaning: high morals, high values, high art, high class, high taste. While the notion of height connotes power, wealth, and a high social position, the down metaphor forms a binary opposition: low class, low taste, low moral standards, low income, low skills, low education (Fiske 1989:199). These creations of meaning connected to the up/down metaphor may stem naturally from the religious notion that has occupied Christian minds for centuries; the notion that God occupies heaven which is above, while evil and the Devil dwell in hell below.

The meaning of superiority and power that humans of disparate cultures have attached to height has manifested in the human fascination with the construction of the tower. Diprose and Johnsen (1996:3) claim that the tower is the ultimate artificial construction, functioning as an icon of human genius and a defiance of gravity. Fiske (1989:200) points out that prior to the construction of the Eiffel Tower, the tallest buildings in Europe were cathedrals. In earlier Western societies, religion dominated the heights, as most towers built before the beginning of the twentieth century were commissioned for a church (Diprose & Johnsen 1996:3). The religious connotation of the up/down metaphor was reinforced and maintained within the collective human

psyche until the industrial revolution, when high buildings could be built without requiring a necessarily religious justification.<sup>13</sup>

The Eiffel Tower, erected in 1889 by Alexandre Gustave Eiffel for the World Fair, was originally intended to be a temporary construction, but it resulted in such fascination from the public that it has never been dismantled (Facer 1992:31) (Figure 6). The World Fair included many nations, so that the Eiffel Tower immediately acquired Biblical connotations of the Tower of Babel. The Eiffel Tower, built in the first years of the Modernist era, symbolised the prized Modernist ideal of progress, particularly technological progress (Hughes 1980:9-10).



Figure 6: The Eiffel Tower.  
(Eiffel Tower [sa])

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<sup>13</sup> The industrial revolution is a general term for the period of rapid industrial and economic development, which was initiated in Britain and took place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The refinement of industrial techniques of manufacture led to changes in all spheres of social experience with the arrival of trains, motor cars and factory produced products, as well as advancements in the construction of buildings leading to the erecting of skyscrapers (Bullock & Trombley 1999:425).

The rapid advancement of science and technology was illustrated by the Eiffel Tower, as well as a new promise of wealth and power: planners of the World Fair marvelled at how the tower turned its back on traditional wealth, which was based on the ownership of land. Instead, mankind had now undertaken a conquest of the sky and the limits of horizontality had been broken (Hughes 1980:11).

During the more technologically advanced twentieth century the construction of the tower transformed from a place of religious worship into a temple of capitalism.<sup>14</sup> Fiske (1989:200) states that within a capitalist system, great height is synonymous with enormous wealth and political power. The executives who have the highest salaries and the highest positions in their companies, occupy the highest offices in a building, despite the obvious convenience of being close to the ground entrance floor. Renting or owning the penthouse apartment or suite of a hotel or apartment building is widely considered a status symbol and a luxury that can be afforded only by the most wealthy. Whereas castle turrets dominated the landscapes of the past, corporate buildings now dominate cityscapes, and the taller the tower, the more successful and powerful the corporation that occupies it is believed to be (Diprose & Johnsen 1996:3).

According to Henri Lefebvre (1974:49),

[t]he dominant form of space, that of the centres of wealth and power, endeavours to mould the spaces it dominates (i.e. peripheral spaces), and it seeks, often by violent means, to reduce the obstacles and resistance it encounters there ... monuments have a phallic aspect, towers exude arrogance...

Evidently the modern tower is an illustration of domination: while the corporation whose offices and employees inhabit the tower building may dominate a section of the economic environment, the tower building itself dominates the physical environment that it occupies.

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<sup>14</sup> The economic system endorsed and implemented by American ideology, is that of capitalism. The American version of democracy or the United States system of governance is now almost synonymous with capitalism (Sardar & Davies 2002). America's global economic dominance and the sale of American products such as McDonald's fast foods and Nike products on international markets bear testament to America's success as a vessel of capitalism. The American capitalist system is therefore inherently connected to American ideology and the Americanisation of the globe.

Thus the myth of the tower in Western society has metamorphosed from expressing a religious meaning to connoting a capitalist one. The mythological implication of this transformation is that the corporate tower, which at its denotative level of meaning is simply a tall building with offices inside it, at the level of connotation is a representation of capitalist ideological values such as wealth and power. Within a South African context a particular image of the tower has come to attain such connotative meanings of wealth. The Brixton and Hillbrow towers are two tall structures that characterise the Johannesburg skyline (Figure 7). Johannesburg is the economic epicentre of South Africa, and the skyline of the city is only identifiable owing to the two tall structures that project vertically from it. Hence, the image of these towers is manifested with connotative meanings of financial wealth and capitalistic power.



Figure 7: The Hillbrow Tower in Johannesburg.  
(Hillbrow tower ... [sa])

The myth of the tower has often been represented in popular culture. Fritz Lang's film, *Metropolis* (1926), depicts a massive city of towers where a large working class is dominated and oppressed by an elite upper class (Figure 8).



Figure 8: A scene from *Metropolis*, 1926.  
(Images from the ... [sa])

The film classic *King Kong* (Cooper & Schoedsack 1933) sees the massive namesake of the film scaling the Empire State Building (Diprose & Johnson 1996:4). In the 1997 film, *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996), the Empire State Building is featured again, but this time it is destroyed spectacularly by invading aliens. Rather than undermining the strength of the tower myth, this scene of destruction in *Independence Day* serves to reinforce it: evidently, the modern tower is representative of such strength that only something as powerful as a technologically advanced alien race from outer space can destroy it.

It is surprising then, that during the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, cinematic representations of towers have acquired more sinister associations (Diprose & Johnsen 1996:4). While JRR Tolkien's book represents numerous towers, Jackson's (2002) film *The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers* represents only two out of the many towers described in the book, and both of these towers are aligned with

the villainous forces of evil. No mention is made of the towers whose occupants are associated with goodness. *Minority Report* (Spielberg, 2002) and *The Fifth Element* (Besson, 1997) both visually describe futuristic cities of towers, where motor cars can fly, but societies are dominated by sinister forces of authority (Figure 9). The closing shot of the film *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999) depicts the destruction of a number of corporate towers, but it is an entirely different representation of tower destruction to that employed in *Independence Day*. These towers implode because of a successful anarchistic plot hatched by the main character(s): their destruction is a protest against the capitalist system that the myth of the tower represents, and not a glorification of the traditional capitalist tower myth.



Figure 9: A scene from *King Kong*, 1933.  
(King Kong [sa])

This study has examined television news as a metaphor for an entertainment medium rather than an apparatus for factual information dissemination. In considering the popularisation of news, the construction of a cinematic-like news plot or screenplay, the representation of television news personalities as mythical hero or villain figures, and their positioning within the news to play the 'leading roles' of the television news narrative have been discussed. The tendency for television news to give priority to stories of sensational value also reveals television news's habit of functioning as a popular entertainment medium. Patterson (2001:4) acknowledges the integral

connection between news and the entertainment industry, claiming that just as television news has profoundly affected the manner in which films are produced, the film production industry influenced how the events of September 11 were depicted on television news. The representations on television news were therefore immediately likened by many to scenes of destruction produced by the popular entertainment industry (Patterson 2001:4).

The entertainment value of the television news representations of September 11 was at an optimum level the moment the first hijacked aeroplane hit the North Tower of the World Trade Centre. The visual images of the Towers burning and collapsing were more sensational than any journalist's expectations. The location of the event made it easy to report: it was not occurring in a remote country across the globe from the headquarters of all the major television news networks, but a few city blocks away. There was no need for the use of satellite videophones resulting in bad quality recorded imagery. Television news cameras could capture the action from all angles, and these were broadcast on television screens repeatedly and in slow motion. Certainly, the location and the magnitude of the attacks resulted in the event becoming one of the (if not the most) reported and widely represented events in history. For instance, had the same occurrence taken place in Beijing, Baghdad, Moscow, or Johannesburg, it is unlikely that it would have received as wide television news coverage as September 11 in New York.

The magnitude of the events inject the undermining of the American capitalist tower myth, which occurred with the collapse of the World Trade Centre Towers, with extra potency. According to Vulliamy (2001:28), the World Trade Centre Towers were iconic symbols of capitalism. Indeed, the tower's colossal size and key location gave them a kind of trophy status, indicative of the American ideology (Pinckney 2001:27). While films and the popular entertainment media have conditioned American audiences that the World Trade Centre and any tall towers are vulnerable to attack, and the World Trade Centre had been attacked in 1993 when a car bomb exploded in the basement, the Towers survived that onslaught, and this convinced adherents of American ideology of the World Trade Centre's impregnability (Pinckney 2001:27). But with September 11 this surety of the indestructibility of America's largest icon for capitalist and Americanism was proved false. Matshikiza (2001:26) states:

Now terror had not just come to America, it had struck down the tallest and most dazzling twin towers that symbolised the wealth, the grace and the power of its most dazzling city ... The politicians and generals were temporarily lost for words. But the television cameras were there to tell it like it was, almost as it happened.

The elongated shape of the tower naturally renders it a phallic symbol. While the phallic symbol is associated with masculinity, a dominant ideology, such as Americanism, can be considered to possess an element of 'maleness'. The male is conventionally associated with the exertion of power (Lash 1995:5) and ideology functions to exert power. The exertion of power over a certain group by a dominant ideological group can therefore be thought of as a so-called male activity. The myth of the tower, where the tower visually evokes a sense of masculinity, functions as a visual metaphor for a dominant ideology. Not only did the World Trade Centre Towers form two colossal phallic symbols, but they were also connected to American ideology as they represented American wealth, power and a capitalistic value system. Hence, the widely witnessed destruction of the two World Trade Centre Towers became a symbolic 'de-masculinating' of American ideology. It was a graphic metaphor for the castration of American power.

Consequently, the graphic and brutal destruction of such a massive and established icon of American ideology served as a powerful undermining blow to Americanism. The monomythic American tower myth that positions towers as objects of admiration and awe, and specifically the connotations of American power that were attached to the World Trade Centre Towers, was instantly dispelled by the constant repetition of television news imagery depicting the downfall of the Towers.

American ideology, if it was to restore its influence, had to immediately react to this unexpected crisis. Television news, as a medium of naturalisation and support system of the dominant ideology, reinforced Americanism in the hours and days after September 11. American myths were represented on television news for this purpose, with meanings that combated the forces which had undermined American ideology (see 4.1.1, 4.1.2). Only hours after the first television screening of the attacks on the World Trade Centre, the semiotic construction of television news stations such as CNN changed. New signs and codes were displayed on television screens with

meanings that adhere to American ideology. The next section studies a selection of these codes, as they appeared on CNN, to determine how they functioned to support American ideology.

## **4.2 A semiotic analysis of the representation of September 11 on CNN**

This section examines the semiotic codes represented on the major television news network CNN of September 11. The manipulation of the recorded footage or the iconic imagery is examined in terms of the newsworthiness of the events and the consequent 'entertainment' value of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington as represented on CNN. The popularisation of television news with specific reference to September 11 is discussed. The arbitrary signs and codes manufactured and represented by CNN in the days following September 11 are examined to determine the nature of their ideological content. The treatment of the newsreader figure and the newsreader's environment, and the onscreen computer generated graphic broadcast by CNN are paid particular attention.

### ***4.2.1 September 11 and ideology: an entertaining event***

As previously stated, John Fiske (1989a:193) equates television news with popular entertainment and encourages the popularisation of television news. According to Fiske (1989a:193), television news should adapt to a popular culture format and place emphasis on functioning as entertainment, rather than as a medium of dissemination of accurate information, so that more viewers will be more willing to regularly watch television news. The popularisation of news that Fiske advocates is apparent in contemporary television news broadcasting, particularly in the CNN representations of September 11. The conversion of television news into an entertainment medium also has societal ideological implications: when television news functions as a carrier medium of ideological meanings, and more viewers are likely to watch a news broadcast that has a high entertainment value, the ideological meanings contained in television news programmes will reach a wider audience.

It is suggested in this section that CNN's representation of September 11 was both popularised and ideologically guided. The television news images of September 11 in

New York and Washington were spectacular and tragic in content, immediately fixing them as an event of fascination for television news viewers. At 8:45am New York time a hijacked passenger jet, American Airlines flight 11 from Boston was deliberately crashed into the North Tower of the World Trade Centre in Manhattan, New York. While a gaping but fiercely burning hole appeared in the side of the North Tower, and a massive plume of smoke rose into the air, a second hijacked airliner, United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston, crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Centre (Figures 10, 11). Both buildings started to burn and some people who were caught inside the buildings close to the site of the flames began jumping from the windows and falling to the ground (September 11: Chronology ... 2001).

At 10:05am the South Tower collapsed, with many civilians still trapped inside, sending up a massive cloud of dust (Figure 12). The North Tower collapsed at 10:28 am, with the top section of the building folding in on the bottom section, also causing a huge cloud of smoke and dust (Figure 13). In the days following September 11 the clouds of dust and smoke emanating from the site of the collapsed World Trade Centre towers did not dissipate (Figure 14). A third hijacked aeroplane was crashed into the Pentagon, in Washington and a large section of that building also collapsed (Figure 15). Another aeroplane crashed in an open field in Pennsylvania, after passengers allegedly tried to take back control of the aircraft from their hijackers (Figure 16) (September 11: Chronology ... 2001).



Figure 10: A second aircraft approaches the World Trade Centre, South Tower.  
(Day of terror ... 2001)



Figure 11: The explosion of the World Trade Centre, South Tower.  
(Day of terror ... 2001)



Figure 12: The collapse of the World Trade Centre, South Tower.  
(Day of terror ... 2001)



Figure 13: The collapse of the World Trade Centre, North Tower.  
(America's day of ... 2001)



Figure 14: A dust cloud emanates from the World Trade Centre at Ground Zero.  
(America's day of ... 2001)



Figure 15: Smoke over the Pentagon in Washington.  
(America's day of ... 2001)



Figure 16: The aeroplane crash site in Pennsylvania.  
(America's day of ... 2001)

The National Association of Broadcasters in the United States of America set up a specific list of criteria for the content of television broadcasts, called the television code, in 1969 (Kirschner & Kirschner 1971:31). This list was to serve as a guideline for television stations when producing televisual material. One of the criteria on the National Association of Broadcasters list is that "morbid, sensational or alarming details not essential to the factual report ... should be avoided. News should be telecast in such a manner as to avoid panic and unnecessary alarm" (Kirschner & Kirschner 1971:38).<sup>15</sup> On 11 September 2001 this legislative guideline for television news broadcasting was ignored by CNN. The scenes of the World Trade Centre Towers and the Pentagon, struck by terrifying terrorist attacks, were immediately, openly, and continuously screened on CNN and other news channels. Evidently, the topicality and entertainment value of September 11 was too high for a large television news network such as CNN to take into account the level of public panic and alarm which would result from its unflinching representation of the violence of the terrorist attacks.

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<sup>15</sup> The Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa reinforces this criterion. The Code of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission of South Africa (1993:7) states that news should be reported truthfully and accurately, while avoiding distortion, exaggeration or misrepresentation.

News broadcasters need to determine the topicality of an event, and allocate airtime only to those events that meet the highest standard of topicality. Rath (1989:82) calls this type of an event one that has historical relevance; it must be an event of such significance that it rises above the chaos of daily mundane factual details. Rath (1989:84) claims that for an event to be topical it must contain a sense of suspense, and it must be extraordinary. The event must be extreme in nature; it must be unexpected, horrifying, or monstrous. Most importantly, to reach the highest state of topicality, an event must be spectacular and sensational. Lacey (1998:153) describes a newsworthy event as one that has magnitude; the event has to be big. According to Lacey (1998:153), stories must be remarkable, and most importantly, a story must be negative. Lacey (1998:153) explains that most news stories are 'bad news' because 'good news' takes longer to happen and is therefore less likely to be surprising or extraordinary. That 'bad news' is favourable as a topical story in television news reveals the tendency of television news to represent the sensational. While sensationalism is listed as one of the elements of a topical event, it seems ironic that sensationalism also proves to attract greater numbers of television news viewers (Bell, Joyce, & Rivers 1999:117). The question arises whether sensationalism is truly what makes an event topical, or is it simply what makes the event entertaining with television audiences? Lacey (1998:153) states that apart from being extremely sensational, the most newsworthy events are negative rather than positive. September 11 fitted the criterion of a newsworthy event in such excess that it may be regarded as the quintessential television news topical and entertainment event.

September 11 happened suddenly: no one expected such a massive and horrifying catastrophe (Matshikiza 2001:26).<sup>16</sup> The number of innocent victims involved in the event, added to the gruesome way in which they lost their lives, contributed to the horror. (Victims of the terrorist attacks either died on a crashing plane, fell to their deaths after leaping from a high building, were incinerated, or were still inside the

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<sup>16</sup> Apart from the natural human reaction of shock there are also ideological reasons why the September 11 terrorist attacks were largely unexpected. Never had the American mainland been attacked, and New York was the cultural and economic centre of this superpower. The largest single violent onslaught to American territory prior to September 11 2001 was the 1941 Japanese air attack on Pearl Harbour. But Hawaii is not part of the mainland territory of the United States of America. According to Chomsky (2001:9), the September 11 attacks were surprising not because of their scale but because of their target. Also, the author believes that the attack and destruction of the World Trade Centre came as a surprise because of the mythic invincibility of American power and the American tower myth.

buildings when they collapsed). The terrorist attacks were extremely violent in nature, causing the dramatic destruction of not only four hijacked airliners, but also the collapse of the World Trade Centre and part of the Pentagon. The images of the tragedy broadcast on CNN were without doubt, representations of something totally out of the ordinary. These events immediately rose above the mundane norm of experience to the level of the extraordinary and the exciting. Of course, the attacks on Manhattan and Washington classified as bad news and were negative in nature, raising their degree of newsworthiness. Finally, the sensationalism of the September 11 was unprecedented: the scenes of destruction were spectacular not only because they were so unexpected, but also because of their magnitude.

September 11 yielded a television news story that was unquestionably sensational and topical. Consequently, CNN did not hesitate to report the events: in fact CNN represented nothing else for days following September 11.<sup>17</sup> Events that did not bear immediate relevance to September 11 were not reported on CNN. Frerichs (2002:1) states that the amount of space and time made available by CNN and other American news media for the representation of September 11 and their aftermath was both unprecedented and extraordinary. Rath (1989:80) suggests that the selection process of television news is governed mainly by time constraints, where the most topical and newsworthy stories will receive the most coverage and less newsworthy stories are reported in less detail.

But CNN's process of selection and time allocation to the representations of September 11 was by normal television news standards extreme. The notion of selection in television news became redundant in the days following September 11. CNN did not select the story of September 11 as one that would receive more coverage than any other, because it was the only story that received representation. The allocation of time to certain stories according to their topicality and newsworthiness was of no concern because there was only one story to report. CNN

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<sup>17</sup> CNN was not the only television news channel to radically and rapidly reconfigure its news format immediately prior to the events of September 11 2001. Bongani Majola (2001:17) notes that most international television news networks cancelled all advertising in the first week after the September 11 2001 events (at the cost of billions of Rands) so as to allocate the maximum amount of airing time to the representation of the terrorist attacks and their repercussions. This action was not limited to the major news networks: the South African channel eTV cancelled all of its advertising over the first two days after the events of September 11 2001 (Majola 2001:17).

further intensified its constant representation of September 11 by cancelling breaks in news reporting such as weather report inserts, or sports updates. During the first week after the 11 September 2001, CNN cancelled all advertisements, costing the station billions of dollars, but resulting in un-interrupted television news representations of the disasters in New York and Washington (Majola 2001:17).

The resultant lack of a selection process meant that for the days following September 11 the images screened most often on CNN were those of the hijacked aeroplanes hitting the World Trade Centre, the consequent colossal explosions and the collapse of the Towers. CNN's emphasis on the terrorist attacks was unrelenting. The images of the disaster were broadcast over and over again. This repetition, while maintaining the entertainment value of the CNN news broadcasts, also served an ideological purpose: namely, to inspire sympathy for the American situation. By a continual repetition of the horror of the event, CNN was not only attempting to inspire a sympathetic reading amongst its viewers, but it was also trying to eliminate the possibility of other readings being produced. Certainly, while faced with nothing but the continuing images of the terrorist attack, readers, for the most part, could surely do little else than be horrified and thus sympathise with America, Americans and Americanism.

CNN did not, as is the norm in television news practice, perform a process of selection for representation between different news stories according to each story's sensation value or topicality. Nonetheless, a degree of selection did occur in CNN's representation of September 11, whereby certain aspects of the terrorist attacks were represented on CNN more than other elements. According to Allen (1999:38), television news broadcasts automatically focus most of their attention on the crisis point of any situation, disregarding the representation of other related events. Washington was the target of a terrifying terrorist attack on 11 September 2001: a hijacked airliner was deliberately crashed into the side of the Pentagon. The significance of this act of terrorism is enormous as a show of undermining American power and authority. Washington is the capital city of the United States: it plays host to America's seat of government, it is the site of power for the American president, and the Pentagon is the nodal operations point for American military activity. Yet the terrorist attack carried out in the city of Washington received scant representation on

CNN when compared to the terrorist attacks in New York. Quite simply, the casualties of the New York disaster were significantly higher than those in Washington, making New York the central crisis point and the point of emphasis for television news broadcasters such as CNN.

Bell, Joyce and Rivers (1999:117) state that television news stories that are supported by exciting or spectacular visual material are, during the process of selection that is inherent in television news, given higher priority over stories that are supported by less sensational recorded footage. Obviously, such footage is more entertaining and thus more likely to attract a greater number of viewers. Television news, being an inherently visual medium, gives preference to those stories that are supported by visual material, as opposed to those that are not. Evidently, news stories that are not supported by recorded visual footage attain a very low priority with news organisations, no matter what their importance (Lacey 1998:153). Many individuals had recorded the spectacular scenes of the aircraft being guided into the World Trade Centre Towers from an array of different angles. CNN cameras recorded the collapse of the two towers. But no one, it seemed, had captured on camera the descent and final impact of the airliner which smashed into the side of the Pentagon. Once again, CNN's selection of the terrorist attacks on New York as the main focal point of television news representation, meant that the events in Washington received lesser television news attention. Consequently, even though CNN editors were not faced with selecting between different stories to be represented on CNN, a process of selection did occur between different aspects of the same story with regard to September 11. Thus, while a television news broadcaster limits its potential selection of representations to only one story, eliminating even weather broadcasts and advertisements from the process of selection, the CNN representations of September 11 were nonetheless reflective of the inherent selective nature of television news.

The continual re-playing of the disastrous imagery thus functions in an ideological manner once again. The images of the destruction of the World Trade Centre was more spectacular in visual content than the terrorist attacks on Washington or the aeroplane crash in Pennsylvania. The World Trade Centre disaster was also visually recorded to a greater extent than the latter two events. The destruction of the World Trade Centre then constitutes a more entertaining visual sequence, than the events in

Washington and Pennsylvania, thus accounting for the great amount of airtime devoted to the event by CNN. Evidently, CNN continually selected and broadcast the most entertaining portion of the September 11 terrorist attacks, and allowed far less airtime to the parts of the September 11 story that were less entertaining.

From an ideological perspective this action by CNN was highly significant. As stated previously, during a time of social crisis a dominant ideology will take action to naturalise and justify its position of power. A dominant ideology will do this by mobilising its Ideological State Apparatuses, which includes television news, to transmit messages that legitimate and reinforce its position. Interestingly, the reliance of television audiences on television news seems to increase during a social time of crisis. In the case of September 11, this reliance was coupled with the element of the entertainment value of the event. September 11, as represented on CNN, was a hugely entertaining event and it was constructed by CNN to be so, in order to attract the maximum number of viewers. Therefore, at the time when CNN was required by the dominant political ideology of Americanism to intensify its representation of ideologically imbued messages, CNN was also attempting to attract as many viewers as possible by popularising its representations. Consequently, a far larger audience than normal were receiving messages that were far more intensely ideological in content than normal.

In March 2003, the philosopher Paul Virilio organised an exhibition at the Fondation Cartier Pour L'Art Contemporain in Paris, entitled *Unknown Quantity* or *Ce Qui Arrive* (Billson 2003:5). The significance of this exhibition is that its theme was disaster imagery, and the photographs on display depicted various types of human tragedies, from plane crashes to sinking ships (Billson 2003:5). Billson (2003:5) describes the catastrophic images as possessing "staggering beauty". The exhibition included images of train wrecks, collapsed buildings, wrecked oil tankers and a variety of toppled man-made structures. The inclusion of some type of representation of September 11 in this exhibition seems inevitable: the artist Wolfgang Staehle's web-cam recordings of the Manhattan skyline on September 11 were on display.

The *Unknown Quantity* exhibition is indicative of an apparent collective human condition of fascination with the catastrophic. The film industry has long identified

this element of its audience's unconscious and has catered for this demand by producing countless films that contain spectacular and sensational scenes of disaster. But the scenes of horror available in the entertainment industry are controlled and constructed images of fictional events. At the *Unknown Quantity* exhibition viewers were admiring visual representations of actual events and real disasters, not fictional constructions. The image of the disaster has transformed from the realm of the appalling to a medium of entertainment.

Patterson (2001:4) acknowledges the integral connection between television news and entertainment, claiming that just as television news has profoundly affected the manner in which films are produced, the entertainment industry influenced how September 11 was depicted on television news. The representations on television news by networks such as CNN, were therefore immediately and justifiably likened by many to scenes of destruction produced by the popular entertainment industry (Patterson 2001:4). When describing the television news scenes of destruction, McEwan (2001:26) states: "These were the kind of events that Hollywood has been imagining in the worst of its movies".

According to Ken Sanes (1997:2),

[i]n the realm of "nonfiction" television, this (American) culture is now giving us a new kind of virtual news program that has many of the qualities of science fiction, with computer-generated images and newsrooms that have become futuristic stage sets. A growing number of the news stories that are part of these programs are designed to keep us from reaching for our remote controls, with absorbing plots and characterizations that look suspiciously like what one might see in television's dramatic series.

While television news is encased in the medium of television, news networks must compete with myriad other television genres for regular and widespread viewership. Many other television programmes are constructed primarily to entertain the viewer, and while the viewer is accustomed to being entertained by a televisual text, the viewer may also have the option of tuning into numerous different television channels at any time of the day. Television news programmes must then capture and hold the attention of viewers if they are to ensure that they do not choose to watch something that is more entertaining.

Perhaps the first most notable characteristic of the CNN representations of September 11 was the constant repetition of the iconic imagery captured of the disaster. In the first hours after the terrorist attacks footage of the airliners crashing into the World Trade Centre, which had not been captured by CNN cameras but by members of the public on home video cameras, started appearing on television screens. But the aftermath of the aeroplanes smashing into the World Trade Centre was professionally captured by CNN cameramen, including the collapse of both of the towers. The images of the buildings on fire, the multiple images of the second aircraft hitting the South Tower from various angles, and the images of each tower collapsing, also from various angles, were repeated on CNN on a near continuous basis. The continuous repetition of the iconic images of destruction can be attributed to the high sensation value of the event, which directly raised the entertainment value of the representations. As long as CNN kept replaying the never-seen-before iconic imagery of the destruction of the World Trade Centre, television viewers would be entertained by the sensational spectacle and keep watching, and consequently be exposed the televisual texts that contained ideologically inspired meanings.

Ganor (2001:1) claims that the footage that was replayed on television news broadcasts repeatedly of the terrorist attacks, alluded to a fantasy Hollywood type genre and not to any type of representation of reality. Evidently, the spectacular and sensational nature of the iconic imagery involved in the CNN representations of September 11 constituted a great deal of the event's television news entertainment value and thus attracted greater audiences that would be exposed to ideological texts contained in the broadcasts. But the arbitrary codes utilised by CNN, and the mythic representations contained in its broadcasts with regard to September 11 also serve to fulfil an entertainment agenda. The mythical constructions of hero and villainous characters, strategically placed within a cinematic type plot, were represented on CNN in the weeks following the 11 September 2001, as discussed previously. The arbitrary codes of CNN in the days and weeks following September 11 were both entertaining in appearance and heavy with ideological content, and are analysed in detail in the next section.

*4.2.2 A semiotic analysis of September 11 on CNN: the visual representation of American ideology*

The representations of the terrorist attacks on CNN and other television news channels were confused and lacking in the usual smooth and ordered appearance of television news accounts of events in the first minutes after the attacks (McEwan 2001:26). Traditionally, newsreaders lack emotional facial expression and maintain a neutral tone of voice that does not contain high emotion (see 2.1). But on September 11 newsreaders appeared not to believe what they were presenting, and used uncharacteristic, highly emotive language. The signification of status and authority, which usually accompanies CNN television news broadcasts, was notably absent (see 2.1). The gravity and abruptness of the disaster seemed to result in a near complete loss of the image of authority usually signified by CNN (McEwan 2001:26).

But this condition was merely temporary. According to McEwan (2001:26), CNN, as well as other major television news networks, rapidly recovered a high level of professionalism, and after only a few hours were once again not only re-representing codes that carried meanings of authority, but new codes that carried meanings that adhered to ideological content. As previously mentioned, CNN repeated of the iconic recorded imagery of the terrorist attacks, replaying the scenes from numerous different angles, in slow motion and in real time. This manipulation and careful editing of the images as such was not the shocked or out-of-control response of a panicked news broadcaster, but a well-planned and purposeful action.

But the professionalism and controlled functioning of CNN was most aptly displayed not only in the manipulation of iconic imagery, but in the careful construction of arbitrary signs and codes. The arbitrary codes included in a television news representation often reveal the intentions of the news network as these codes, unlike the iconic codes, are constructed and manipulated entirely by the news broadcaster. The appearance and encoded message of the arbitrary news sign or code, which can be changed and reconfigured by the news broadcaster at a moment's notice, depend entirely on the intentions of the producer or the television news broadcaster. Importantly, if television news functions as a support system of a dominant ideology, and arbitrary signs are imbued with the intentions of the television news broadcaster,

then arbitrary signs are the most likely signs within a television news representation to reveal the presence of a dominant ideology (see 2.1).

The code of the newsreader, who operates as the central figure in any television news broadcast by coherently explaining different and connecting different sections of the news programme, is a complex signification that is both iconic and arbitrary in nature. Despite the newsreader's iconic element, arbitrary signs and codes are attached to this figure in order to connote a visual appearance of trustworthiness, neutrality and authority. Traditionally, the newsreader is situated in an indoor studio, lit with notan lighting, and the studio is conservative yet sophisticated in appearance. The signification of the newsreader's environment is one that expresses the neutrality of the news organisation.

On 12 September 2001 the usual code of neutrality attached to the visual environment of the newsreader was replaced by a more emotive environment on CNN. CNN newsreaders were now situated outdoors. They appeared to be sitting on a rooftop somewhere in New York, and were strategically placed so that the portion of the Manhattan skyline that contained the pillar smoke, which was still billowing from the site of the fallen World Trade Centre Towers, formed the background shot behind the newsreaders. Immediately the positioning of the newsreaders on CNN transformed them from signifying of neutrality to signifying connotative meanings of a more emotive nature.

This uncharacteristic action of CNN threatened the mythic image of objectivity that it usually represents. The neutral, sophisticated and controlled environment of the most central figure represented in a television news broadcast is pivotal in communicating to viewers a lack of bias, and objectivity, on the part of the news organisation. CNN's motivation for sacrificing an important set of signs, which connote its own objectivity, must have been overwhelming. Also, the selection of the signs that replaced the usual signs that accompanied the newsreader is revealing of this motivation.

Fiske (1989b:68) explains that recorded visual imagery played on a television news broadcast rarely fits perfectly into an ideological slot that is entirely compatible with the dominant ideology (see 2.1). The recorded footage of September 11 directly

undermined the dominant ideology of Americanism, as the images depicted a catastrophic and unprecedented attack on major symbols of American wealth and power (see 3.3). CNN, as a supportive structure of Americanism, set about producing and representing arbitrary codes that were powerful enough to counter the enormous shock of the iconic imagery which it kept repeating. While the recorded footage of September 11 on CNN directly enfeebled American ideology, the arbitrary codes represented by it blatantly carried significations of Americanism in order to reinstall some measure of power for American ideology.

Thus, the extreme and uncharacteristic action of CNN to supplant the news studio with the outdoor scene of destruction behind the newsreaders may have been ideologically inspired. Instead of newsreaders being contained in a calm and controlled environment, they were now situated within the scene of a helpless and distraught city. The portions of the television news broadcast during which the newsreader addresses the viewer usually do not simultaneously contain scenes from the actuality. Now, viewers were confronted with the magnitude of the disaster of September 11 at all times, even when the newsreader was speaking. The shot of the site where the two World Trade Centre Towers had fallen was, no doubt, selected by CNN to stir emotions in the newsreader, particularly emotions of sympathy. Although the scenes behind the newsreaders of the dust clouds over Manhattan were themselves iconic in nature, the specific selection of this sign is understood by the author to have been a indexical for emotion, tragedy and sympathy: the motivation for the sign is therefore low, allowing it to function as an arbitrary sign. While the outright inclusion of highly emotive representations are unconventional for television news broadcasts, CNN's significations were highly emotive, and thus ideological in content.

The drastically reconfigured arbitrary codes surrounding the newsreader were coupled with the computer graphic arbitrary codes in the bottom section of the television screen (see 2.1). Mokushane (2002:2) states that minutes after the attacks on the World Trade Centre, CNN started broadcasting the headline "AMERICA UNDER ATTACK" which was displayed on CNN television news programmes for the days

and weeks to follow (Figure 17).<sup>18</sup> According to Matshikiza (2001:26), "For days CNN's running subtitle was: America Under Attack. Then, ominously, they changed it to: America's New War". Both of these headlines contain significant emotive qualities: the choice of language or arbitrary linguistic signs does not connote objectivity.



Figure 17: Still frame of a CNN television news broadcast.

(My jump station.com [sa])

But the ideological motivation of the arbitrary linguistic codes that appeared on the television screen during CNN news representations of September 11 can be more easily revealed through analysing their colour. The headline bar in the bottom section of the CNN screen represented all of the linguistic codes in red, white and blue. According to Frerichs (2002:1), CNN expertly amalgamated and wove the three colours into all of their representations of information and its corporate logo. The selection of the colours was obviously not coincidental, but specific. The colours

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<sup>18</sup> According to Frerichs (2002:1) the phrase "AMERICA UNDER ATTACK" was later replaced with "AMERICA STRIKES BACK". This phrase is reminiscent of the George Lucas *Star Wars* film, entitled *Star Wars: Episode V - The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). The term is therefore suggestive that America owns the status of an empire.

directly correlate with the colours of the American flag: a symbolic sign of American power and ideology.

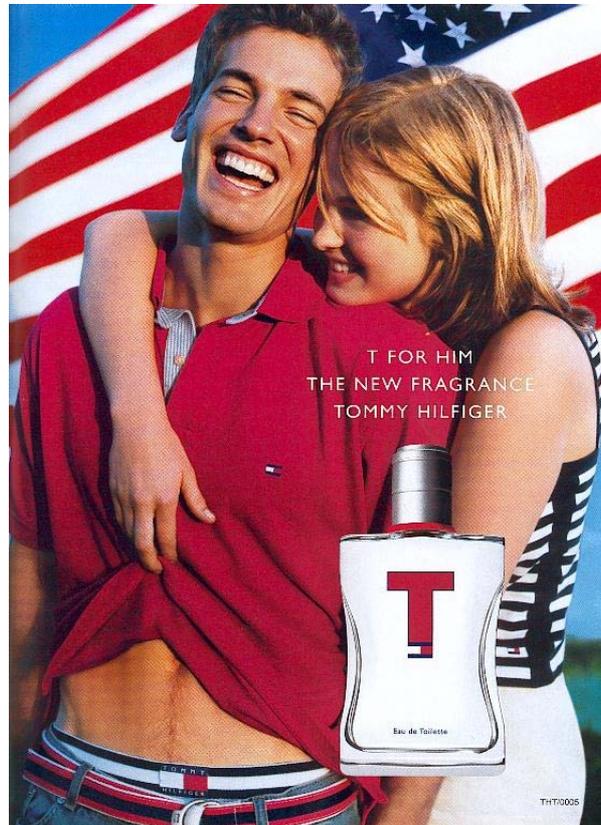


Figure 18: A Tommy advertisement featuring the American flag, 2002.  
*Marie Claire* July:10.

The American flag has attained somewhat of a mythic status, similar to the American capitalist tower myth (see 4.1.3). Within an American ideological environment the flag is regarded with special reverence. According to the United States Code of Patriotic Customs "No disrespect should be shown to the flag of the United States of America; the flag should not be dipped to any person or thing ... The flag represents a living country and is itself considered a living thing" (United States code ... sa). The reverence, which is paid to the American flag within the American ideological system, is built into the Ideological State Apparatuses of the American nation. At large sporting occasions the audience is required to stand while the flag is hoisted to the accompaniment of the national anthem (Vulliamy 2001:28). Part of an American

child's schooling is to be taught the history of the flag, and upon taking American citizenship all immigrants must pledge allegiance to the flag (Vulliamy 2001:28).

The American flag, apart from its representation on television news, has become part of American popular culture. Tommy Hilfigger, a top American fashion designer, utilises the colours of the American flag as a trademark in his logo and his advertisements (Figure 18). Hilfigger has elevated the notion of the American flag to the realm of 'cool' and his red, white and blue images aim to sell *Tommy* merchandise by playing on the aspirations of consumers to be more 'American'. The American film industry, similar to the fashion industry, has continually glorified the sign of the American flag. Examples of this practice are evident in a number of contemporary American films.

The opening camera shot of the film dealing with the Second World War, *Saving Private Ryan* (Spielberg 1998), is a close up view of an American flag. This semiotic code immediately indicates one of the themes of the film: patriotism. *Pearl Harbour* (Bay 2001) is saturated with visual representations of the American flag, the most striking of which is the image of a large collection of coffins containing the bodies of those killed in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. Each coffin is draped with an American flag. In *The Patriot* (Emmerich & Delvin 2000) the young and idealistic Gabriel sows together an American flag that has been ripped apart in a violent battle (Figure 19). Later in the film, after Gabriel's death, his father rides to the penultimate battle of the film carrying the flag, which his son painstakingly repaired, to thwart the British oppressors of American freedom (Figures 20, 21). In the final camera shots of the film *Spider-Man* (Raimi 2002), which coincidentally represents the quintessential American hero monomyth, the audience watches the acrobatic hero swinging between the buildings of New York only to come to rest atop a flagpole with the American flag waving behind the superhero (Figure 22).



Figure 19: A scene from *The Patriot*: Gabriel finds the flag, 2000.  
(All movie photo.com [sa])



Figure 20: Mel Gibson in *The Patriot*, 2000.  
(All movie photo.com [sa])

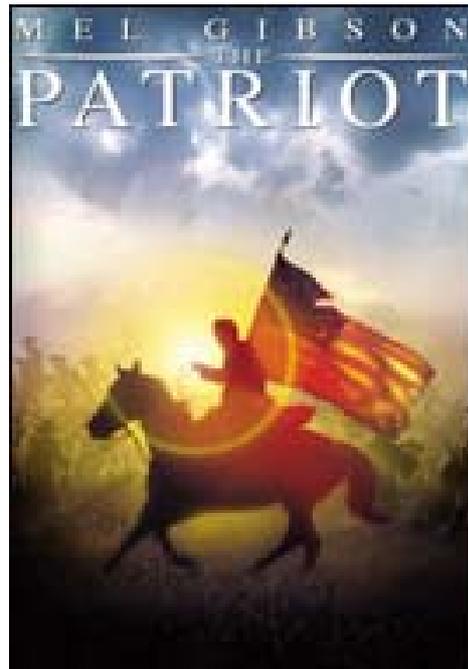


Figure 21: A poster for *The Patriot*, 2000.  
(All movie photo.com [sa])



Figure 22: A poster for *Spider-Man*, 2002.  
(Poster planet ... [sa])

According to Vulliamy (2001:29), the American flag has long operated as a symbol that the American nation embraces and which is overtly represented during a societal time of crisis. In 1942, despite major shortages of cotton and rayon, the United States war production board gave the manufacture of American flags the highest priority, recognising the importance of the wide distribution of this symbol of Americanism in a collective time of difficulty (Vulliamy 2001:29). It is inevitable then, that the widespread appearance of the American flag throughout the United States of America would be revived after September 11.

According to Vulliamy (2001:29), following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, many Americans started displaying the flag on their homes, offices and particularly on themselves. Bandannas, wrist bands and t-shirts were wrought from the flag. The American store Wal-Mart sold over 450 000 American flags countrywide in the days following September 11 (Vulliamy 2001:28). Vulliamy (2001:28) claims that the widespread display of the flag in America after September 11 revealed a piece of the collective mythic American psyche. The American flag is an important symbol of a powerful ideology, which had now suffered an unexpected and unimaginable onslaught and found itself in an uncertain position. The flag, as an already well-established of sign Americanism, 'Americanness' and American-togetherness, became the totem that a diverse community of Americans could embrace in a show of patriotism. The reaction of a large portion of the American people to rally around the flag after September 11, reveals the almost subliminal power of the flag symbol.

A photograph, depicting three New York fire fighters raising an American flag amongst the rubble at Ground Zero, was widely published in the American news media after September 11. The image became intensely popular and was regarded, by the American news media and, no doubt, by many Americans, to be a symbol of defiance against adversity and loyalty to America. The American press did not miss the similarities between the image of the flag-raising fire fighters and the famous photograph of six American marines raising an American flag atop Mount Suribachi on Iow Jima during the Second World War (Figure 23). Both photographs functioned as iconic symbols that American society appeared to attach great sentiment to in two

separate national times of crisis. Both photographs function as symbols of patriotism and loyalty to America because both include the same arbitrary sign, namely, the American flag and hence demonstrate the ideological power of the image of the flag.



Figure 23: American World War II marines and New York fire fighters raise the American flag.  
(Coping with the ... [sa])

The American flag arbitrarily, but clearly, signifies to many Americans the values and beliefs that are in accordance with the dominant ideology of Americanism. Hence, the action of displaying the American flag is an action that is a show of support for or allegiance to the American ideology. The widespread acceptance of the symbol of the American flag is a naturalisation or justification of American ideology. While American ideology required serious reinforcement after the undermining of its power that was visualised by September 11, the widespread representation of the flag contributed to this ideological requirement. What seemed like a natural reaction to many American individuals, namely to display the flag, revealed instead the pervasiveness of American ideology: once American society, culture, belief system, or way of life came under threat, individuals immediately showed their support for

Americanism. The action of displaying the American flag has become naturalised in America, and this is indicative of the naturalised state of American ideology.

Television news channels, including CNN, as Ideological State Apparatuses and instruments of ideological naturalisation and justification, performed the same action of patriotism during a time of societal threat. Under the guise of operating as an unbiased disseminator of information, the flag was not represented in its usual format on CNN television screens. But the flag was only slightly disguised, the colours were only slightly rearranged, used to spell out the emotive headlines and represented on television news screens on a near constant basis.

Thus the selection of the colours red, white and blue for representation in the computer-generated graphics in the bottom section of the screen by CNN are of telling significance. The iconic imagery or recorded footage of September 11 directly undermined and even threatened American ideology. CNN could not, even through clever editing techniques, adjust the signification of the iconic images to meanings that were more favourable to American ideology. If CNN were to operate effectively as a supportive structure of the dominant ideology of Americanism it would have to produce arbitrary codes that signified meanings which were indicative of a positive representation of American ideology. Consequently, CNN took relatively drastic steps, which broke with usual television news practice and conventions, to ensure that its arbitrary codes explicitly signified a favourable representation of Americanism. The codes attached to the newsreader, who usually operated as significations of neutrality, were replaced with an iconic code that arbitrarily functioned to stir interpretations of sympathy within the CNN reader. The American flag, a symbol of American patriotism and central token of American ideology, was metamorphosed in format so that its colours could overtly and at all times be displayed.

The presence and influence of dominant American ideology on the CNN representations of September 11 is therefore evident. The analysis of both the mythical content and the semiotic construction of arbitrary codes on the CNN representations reveal a definite ideological motivation attributed to dominant American ideology. The next section examines how the iconic representation of George W Bush and Colin Powell were aligned with the American hero monomyth on

major news networks such as CNN after the events of September 11. Consequently, the representation of the American hero monomyth inversely spawned the representation of an arch villain(s) figure, to function as a supportive myth to the hero myth, and these are also discussed.

#### ***4.2.3 Iconic ideological representations of September 11 on CNN***

While the arbitrary codes represented on CNN prior to September 11 were constructed to signify the reinforcement of American ideology, the iconic imagery of the violence of September 11 was impossible to manipulate. Nonetheless, the regeneration of American ideology was a task that had to be rapidly performed by the American media, including CNN, as this ideology was threatened.

The American capitalist tower myth, a mythological construction of American ideological motivation, was subject to complete onslaught with the spectacular destruction of the World Trade Centre Towers. The need for the reinforcement of American ideology became more desperate with this blatant and unprecedented opposition to Americanism. The undermining of the tower myth itself could not be undone by news broadcasters such as CNN, as it was visualised in the iconic imagery captured of the event. The mythical significations attached to the United States President and Secretary of State, and the arbitrary codes manufactured by CNN therefore became the sites of American ideological reconstruction.

The representation of the American monomyth on CNN and other television news channels served not only as an entertaining news plot, but also produced television news representations of American ideology. The content of American ideology television news representations of the American monomyth, as this myth was applied by news broadcasters to the representation of September 11, can be uncovered and examined by analysing of the central figures of this particular expression of the monomyth. The author suggests that the iconic recorded footage of George W Bush, Colin Powell, and Osama bin Ladin was broadcast selectively by CNN in order to represent each of these figures in a manner most befitting of their monomythic roles, which is examined in the following section.

*4.2.3.1 The representation of the American hero monomyth on CNN*

When George W Bush first received the news that a second plane had struck the World Trade Centre, the president appeared as visibly shaken and as lost for words as the television news networks that struggled to maintain a poise of objectivity and authority in the first hours of broadcasting the events of September 11. CNN broadcast footage of the moment when President Bush was first told of the terrorist attacks in New York. Bush had been on a visit to the Emma E Booker Elementary school and was in a classroom, seated in front of a group of young school students. The camera frame included some of the children seated at their desks, their backs to the camera, and Bush seated in front of the classroom with his back to the blackboard. But when Andrew Card, White House Chief of Staff, hastily walked up to the president and whispered briefly into his ear, the camera immediately zoomed in to focus on the President. Card then backed away quickly, leaving Bush alone in the centre of the camera shot. Bush revealed an entirely baffled expression, stared blankly ahead of him for a long moment and said nothing (Day of terror ... 2001).

The visual environment in which Bush was situated for this vital portion of the CNN broadcast was not ideal for the purposes of iconic reinforcement of American ideology. It may have been more encouraging if Bush had been captured in a position that reaffirmed his power and status as the American President. Had Bush been in the Oval Office, in front of the White House or descending from Air Force One and hard at work ensuring the safety of the American people, it may have served better to bolster the shaken American ideology. Ideally, Bush might have been represented alongside the symbols that signify the American presidency and American power. In the context of the massive disaster of September 11, Bush's activity of reading to a class of elementary school students seemed trivial and unimportant.

But similar to the major television news network's rapid recovery after a temporary period of panic, the television news representations of George W Bush were soon reinforced with ideological meanings. Originally unprepared, the onscreen actions of the President and CNN's representations of Bush, were quickly constructed over the duration of 11 September 2001 to represent the American hero monomyth. Soon after the first representation of the somewhat confused initial reaction of the president,

CNN again broadcast the scene of the classroom (Figure 24). This time the scene had changed notably. George W Bush strode confidently into the classroom (we can assume that he had exited the classroom at some point to speak with his staff or gather more information on the terrorist attacks). The students, their teachers and members of Bush's staff now stood behind the president and flanked him on either side. Bush stood, rather than sitting cross-legged as before, and addressed the press and television cameras (Day of terror ... 2001). The environment had quickly been manipulated to reinforce both the president's visual appearance of power and American ideology. Bush was visually associated with one of the presidential trappings: a lectern had been placed in front of the classroom that bore the American Coat of Arms (Day of terror ... 2001). The children's and teacher's physical relocation to stand behind and around the President, rather than occupying a space out of the camera shot as before, suggest a show of their support and loyalty to him.



Figure 24: President George W Bush at Emma E Booker Elementary school.  
(Day of terror ... 2001)

Three and a half-hours later, Bush addressed television news cameras from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana (Figure 25). The camera framed him in a medium long shot, but his hands, which were occupied with a number a notes, were cropped out of the shot (Day of terror ... 2001). The exclusion of Bush's hands from the shot is immediately reminiscent of the treatment of the television newsreader figure: the hands are never shown and the newsreader hardly ever moves the hands while speaking. Hand movements while speaking, although normal in person to person conversation, connote an emotional attachment to the subject of the discourse. The

visual exclusion of the hands in television news constructs a signification of objectivity and authority. Television news cameras had now applied this camera code to Bush, thus signifying authority.



Figure 25: President George W Bush at Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana.  
(Day of terror ... 2001)

The background wall behind Bush was pale grey in colour. Bush's suit was also grey and blended seamlessly with the plain background wall. But the significance of Bush's dress in the shot was that he was wearing a red tie and a light blue shirt. The lights from the press core were so bright that Bush's shirt appeared almost white. Directly behind Bush, appearing over his head and shoulders, were two American flags. The flags were not draped or opened out, but hung instead from two short flagpoles that reached only a short distance over Bush's head. The resulting image was that only the blue star-filled portion of the flags were visible behind Bush. Bush's red tie and 'white' shirt then visually suggested the stripes of the flag (Day of terror ... 2001). It is doubtful whether Bush intended to manipulate the retinal closure of the image to produce the visualisation of an American flag. But his positioning with the camera shot unwittingly reinforced the visual representation of American ideology.

Bush's tone was calm and he invoked religion by asking God to bless the victims of the attacks, their families and America. His calm and controlled manner, as well as the exclusion of his hands from the camera shot, injects a signification of authority into his representation. The appearance of the American flag both visually and symbolically connect Bush to American ideology, while his linguistic condemnation of the terrorist attacks and his (Christian) religious reference indicate his commitment to the defence of American values, beliefs and way of life. By announcing his

intention to utilise his position of power as the American President (which constitutes that which makes him stand out above the ordinary man) to defend the American crisis-stricken community, Bush fulfilled the criterion on the American citizen-hero.

At half past eight in the evening, President Bush delivered an address to the nation broadcast on most television news networks, including CNN. He was seated behind his desk in the White House, and therefore he was situated in an environment that connotes his presidential power (Day of terror ... 2001). Bush held his hands in front of him on the desk but he kept moving them after he started speaking. The camera zoomed in to include only his head and shoulders so that his hands could no longer be seen. Once again, the television news code of excluding the hands or hand motions was applied to the President in order to signify his authority. Over his right shoulder hung an American flag, but this time only the red and white stripes were visible. Over Bush's left shoulder hung a flag of the American Coat of Arms. The latter flag was mostly dark blue in colour and a number of white stars were revealed (Day of terror ... 2001). Once again, all of the visual elements that constitute the American flag, were included in the television news camera frame.

In his address to the nation Bush repeated his calm tone and his verbal commitment to protect the American people. He made it clear that he had put to work all possible resources to determine who was responsible for the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. He vowed that if the need arose, the American military would be called into action. Bush stated

[t]he search is underway for those who are behind these evil acts. I've directed the full resources for our intelligence and law enforcement communities to find those responsible and bring them to justice. We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them.

Bush also repeated a (Christian) religious reference in his address, this time quoting directly from the Bible:

And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me.' ... None of us will ever forget this day, yet we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world ... Good night and God bless America (Day of terror ... 2001).

Bush's pledge to take a course of action which would both defend the American people and punish the "evil" persons responsible for the attacks, both directly and indirectly, established his persona as the American monomythic hero. American citizen heroes must use their extraordinary capabilities to ensure the safety and well-being of society, and Bush quickly started to perform in the role of the citizen hero (Nachbar & Lause 1992:316). Furthermore, Bush's repeated reference to the Christian religion is of telling significance. According to Nachbar and Lause (1992:316), the American citizen hero must respect and work to uphold the values and beliefs that are central to American ideology, and an American way of life. The Christian religion is intricately woven into the framework of an American ideology (see 3.2, 4.1.1). Hence, by repeatedly referring directly to the Christian faith, Bush aligned himself with American ideology and demonstrated his respect for core American values and beliefs.

Nachbar and Lause (1992:315) describe the American hero as an 'average' member of American society. The American hero, although endowed with certain extraordinary capabilities which he must use for the benefit of society, must never consider himself superior to society. During his address to the nation there were three picture frames placed on a shelf behind Bush, each turned so that the picture faced the camera. One picture frame was placed to the President's right and two were placed on his left side. The frames were strategically positioned to fit exactly in the space within the camera frame, between the side of Bush's upper arm and the edge of the camera shot (Day of terror ... 2001). The picture frames contained photographs: the reader could assume that these were pictures of Bush's loved ones. The picture frame on the very right of the camera shot contained a photograph of Laura Bush, the President's wife.

The picture frames flanking the President on either side are indicative of his position as a common man: they are significations of Bush's status as an 'average' individual, suggesting that he is occupied with the same daily concerns as most Americans. These strategically placed signs indicate that the President, like all other American people, cares for those close to him. These signs suggest that all members of American society can identify with Bush, as his heroic status does not transform him into something more than an ordinary man.

On 14 September, 2001 the signification of Bush as common man was reinforced. CNN, and other news networks, broadcast footage of Bush's visit to Ground Zero, the site of the destroyed World Trade Centre Towers. Bush was not dressed in his usual suit, but in slacks and a casual light brown anorak type jacket. On Bush's left side stood a senior fireman who was wearing a fireman's helmet. Bush grabbed a bullhorn from one of the rescue workers, climbed atop a pile of wreckage and gave an impromptu speech to the firemen and rescue workers (Day of terror ... 2001). Bush's tone was no longer formal or calm, but emotive and excited. He placed his left arm around the elderly fireman's shoulders, but lifted this arm at certain points in his speech. CNN cameras did not attempt to exclude the president's openly emotive hand movements.

During Bush's speech the crowd of firemen and rescue workers spontaneously started cheering and chanting "USA, USA, USA!". At this point the CNN camera shot changed briefly from the one of Bush and the fireman, to a bird's eye view extreme long shot of the crowd gathered around Bush (Day of terror ... 2001). This deliberate action of shot selection at the exact moment of the crowd's cheering, places emphasis not only on the crowd, but also on their enthusiastic show of support for the American President. The size of the crowd was revealed by this shot, and that this specific shot coincided with the crowd's raucous chanting was not coincidental, but engineered by CNN in order to produce a specific meaning. The representation of this event, including the expert selection of camera shots to include the representation of the large demonstration of support for the American President, fuelled his meteoric rise to the ranks of American monomythic hero. Bush's casual appearance, friendly manner and the highly emotive nature of his speech qualified his persona as that of common man, significantly contributing to his position as an American hero.

The nature of Bush's visit to Ground Zero was itself largely a signification of the President's familiarity with the common man. Had he not visited the site but remained in the White House, it would not have affected his capability of dealing with the crisis at hand. But the images on CNN of Bush walking amongst the ordinary men at Ground Zero were a signification of his solidarity with the average American. Bush deliberately 'took a step down' to meet normal Americans on their level. The

Presidential visit to Ground Zero three days after the attacks were specifically engineered by the White House, and represented by CNN to assist the launching of Bush into the role of American monomythic citizen hero.

With the sudden terrorist attacks on key and symbolic targets of American infrastructure American ideology immediately came under threat. September 11 unfolded in a parallel fashion to the traditional construction of the American monomyth where the peaceful and effective functioning of society is disrupted by a force of evil, which must be thwarted and eliminated by the actions of a hero (see 4.1.1). The magnitude of the terrorist attacks and their impact on American ideology called for the immediate representation of a quintessential American citizen hero if the reconstruction of the power of American ideology was to appear possible. The American media, including CNN, loyally functioned to reinforce and reinvigorate American ideology in a societal time of crisis, resulting in the near instant catapulting of Bush's persona into the role of American monomythic hero in television news representations.

Colin Powell's television news representation as an American monomythic hero prior to September 11 was not as immediate as Bush's simply because he was not available for television news cameras. Powell had been on a trip to Latin America when the terrorist attacks took place in New York and Washington, and it took him most of that day to return to the United States. Hence, unlike Bush, Powell did not receive any television news representation in the hours after September 11. But Powell already possessed American citizen hero status, so his representation on television news immediately prior to the September 11 was not vital in constructing his status as an American monomythic hero.

On 12 September 2001, Powell spoke at a press conference at the American State Department. An initial wide angle shot revealed most of the room, including some members of the press corps seated with their backs to the camera. The lectern at the far end of the room was flanked by two flags that hung from short flagpoles. The flag of the left was the American flag, and the flag on the right revealed the American Coat of Arms. (This is the same configuration or placement of flags in Bush's address to the nation of the evening of 11 September 2001). But as Powell walked into the

room and stood behind the lectern the camera zoomed in on him. The camera shot included only his head and shoulders: once again the hands were excluded from the frame in order to connote objectivity and most especially, authority. Directly behind Powell's head hung a large blue and gold oval shaped map of the world (Day of terror ... 2001).

Colin Powell, as a monomythic American hero maintains his connection with the 'average' American because of a consistent trait: his 'blackness'. That Powell is black immediately conjures connotations and meanings of a disadvantaged section of American society. His status as a black man, who occupies a position of power, subconsciously suggests to the reader that he has struggled severely during his life because of his race, and has overcome these difficulties. Powell invokes the American Horatio Alger myth, but although he occupies a position of power and has achieved great success, both his race and the Horatio Alger myth that he invokes verify that he, at some point, experienced a period of suffering (see 4.1.1). Consequently, media representations of Powell need not explicitly depict him as an 'average' American, as is done with George W Bush. Powell's image as a common American remains fixed in that his 'blackness' continually signifies his connection to a traditionally disadvantaged community.

Hence, the representations of Powell on American television news are rarely occupied with establishing Powell's image as a common American. Indeed, the inverse is more applicable to Powell, since American media representations of him work to attach an explicit signification of power. Once again, Powell's race suggests that he originates from a disadvantaged position and belongs to a disempowered community. Since a powerful black person is a rarity in such a social environment, American television news representations of Powell are occupied with justifying his position of power in order to maintain his citizen hero status. American media representations of Powell must make his position of power, and his monomythic hero status, 'believable' to readers of television news.

Hence Powell is flanked by two important symbols of American ideology. Both symbols had been used the night before on television news broadcasts. The American flag and the American Coat of Arms flag had formed two visual pillars on either side

of the American president during his address to the American nation on 11 September 2001. Therefore, the symbols, which had accompanied the presidency, were also attached to Powell, signifying his high position of authority and power.

Linguistically, Powell reinforced Bush's verbal media messages during the press conference of 14 September. He made it clear that the United States would find those responsible for the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, and that justice would be meted out. Powell threatened the Afghanistan's Taliban regime, saying that they were suspected of harbouring terrorists in Afghanistan. Powell also pointed out that, although it had not yet been proved, he was certain that Osama bin Ladin and his Al Qaeda network were responsible for the tragedy. By saying this Powell, was performing an important task in the reinforcement of American ideology, and he was further constructing his own position, and that of Bush, as an American monomythic hero.

Powell singled out an enemy or arch villain. For Powell and Bush to fulfil their roles as American heroes, the thwarting of an evil and monstrous enemy had to take place. The identification of an enemy or villain was therefore vital. Also, the representation of a scapegoat figure served to simplify the complex conundrum which American society had been thrown into after September 11. While it is the nature of a dominant ideology to produce representations that simplify a complex societal situation in order to more easily naturalise its own power, part of the simplification of September 11 situation in television news representations was to identify a villain figure as the sole carrier of guilt, rather than represent the myriad complex historical issues that may have led to the attacks.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, placing all of the guilt and blame for the crisis of September 11 on one figure, and those who supported him, served to distract attention away from the failings of American intelligence to prevent such an attack.

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<sup>19</sup> Peter Bergen (2001:242) claims that Osama bin Ladin's quarrel with the United States lies in America's intervention in the Middle East: these include the continued United States military presence in Arabia, America's continued support for Israel, and its continued bombing of Iraq long after the end of the first Gulf War. America has also stirred negative sentiment world-wide with its often violent international intervention: America has entered into military conflict with an economically weaker region almost every year since the Second World War including Kosovo, Iraq, Panama City, Nicaragua, Korea, Vietnam, Haiti, and Somalia.

Hence, the American media's representation of Osama bin Ladin as an arch villain figure not only enhanced Bush and Powell's American monomythic citizen hero status, but also reinforced American ideology. CNN, as well as other television news networks, followed Powell's lead in identifying Osama bin Ladin as the enemy of the United States and continued to represent him as an arch villain in the days and weeks after September 11. The following section examines the iconic imagery selected by CNN for the representation of Osama bin Ladin at that time.

#### **4.2.3.2        *The representation of the arch villain on CNN***

The representation of Osama bin Ladin on television news channels, including CNN, increased drastically after 11 September 2001. According to American monomythic lore, Bin Ladin met the requirements of a quintessential arch villain to perfection. Bin Ladin is an Arab Muslim: in terms of the American derogatory stereotype concerning Arabs a similar negative connotation was attached to Bin Ladin by American television news readers (see 4.1.2). According to the continued statements of members of the Bush administration, Bin Ladin is also a terrorist, and while the notion of 'terrorism' had already been established as the collective threat to Americanism by the American media, Bin Ladin's arch villain persona was easily reinforced on CNN by his position as the leader of the Al Qaeda network.

With regard to CNN's functioning as a supportive structure of American ideology and the urgent need to reinvigorate that dominant ideology after September 11 events, the representation of Osama bin Ladin as an arch villain was absolutely pivotal. It is the nature of the American monomyth that the hero is set against a figure who forms his antithesis (Rutledge 2003:1). The binary opposition of the hero and villain figures within the American monomyth is simplistic: the hero and his cause are wholly good, while the villain and his intentions are totally evil. But this dichotomy serves to justify and naturalise the position and power of the hero, thereby justifying the ideology that the hero represents. If Bush and Powell were to reach the ultimate or highest American monomythic hero status, thereby performing their functions of 'saving' Americanism, their power had to be justified by the presence of an arch villain.

Unlike his American monomythic counterparts, Bush and Powell, Bin Ladin himself was not available for Western cameras. Consequently, CNN imagery of Bin Ladin was poached from previously recorded footage. These images ranged from Al Jezeera television news reports to inserts from what CNN claimed to be Al Qaeda training videos. No up-to-date or post-September 11 filmed footage of Osama bin Ladin was immediately available to American television news broadcasters.

Bin Ladin's physical appearance on television news channels such as CNN is significant with regard to the negative or derogatory stereotype of the Arabs group that exists in the West and America. Bin Ladin was represented in a number of short video clips on CNN news broadcasts after September 11 2001. In these representations Bin Ladin is always wore some type of headgear: either a wide rimmed cap or cloth. He sports a long black beard, a feature common amongst devout Muslim men and a signification of Bin Ladin's position as a Muslim (Figure 26). Furthermore, he was often dressed in long white garments, also a signification of his religious and cultural position (Day of terror ... 2001).



Figure 26: Osama bin Ladin.  
(Day of terror ... 2001)

Bin Ladin's iconic physical appearance assisted the near immediate establishment of his status as a super villain in American television news representations post-September 11. His clothes, beard and darkened skin colour immediately signified him as the Other: he is not American, he is something else, and according to Americanism, this is not desirable. According to American monomythic lore, the villain is the

antithesis of the hero. Bin Ladin's identify as an Arab Muslim then suited the monomyth, where his hero enemies are American and Christian. Moreover, Bin Ladin's physical appearance signified his identity as an Arab Muslim, resulting in the attachment of the derogatory American held stereotype of Arabs. According to Said (1993:364), the negative view of Arabs is pervasive in America, and often reveals itself in myriad cultural representations of Arabs or Muslims, which depict Arabs as a unified social group and as uncivilised terrorists.

Not only did Bin Ladin's physical appearance connect him to the negative stereotype of Arabs or Muslims, but the fact that he controlled a large and violent terrorist network meant that he could be identified as a terrorist as well. Bin Ladin's occupation with terrorism only served to reinforce the American held negative stereotype of Arabs, which assumes all Arabs and Muslims to be terrorists. In accordance with this stereotype the notion of the terrorist had already become accepted as the collective enemy to the United States in American news media representations. The physical and iconic signification of Bin Ladin as an Arab Muslim, added to the arbitrary information broadcast on CNN that he was dangerous terrorist responsible for the worst attack against American civilians in history, resulted in the representations of Bin Ladin on CNN functioning as an example of Islamophobia (see 4.1.2).

CNN's selection of iconic footage recorded of Osama bin Ladin was significant in representing him both as a terrorist and as an arch villain. One short piece of footage was aired repeatedly on CNN post-September 11: it showed Bin Ladin dressed in a long white robe, with a white cloth covering his hair. He is kneeling on his left knee and he aims a rifle at a position out of the shot towards the left side of the screen. He fires a shot. Behind him the background of the shot is filled with a row of male figures, but their heads and shoulders are cropped out of the frame. They are all armed with rifles. Once Bin Ladin has fired a shot, he looks to his left and smiles (Day of terror ... 2001).

Bin Ladin is not only visually connected to the image of a gun, but he is shown to be using one. The iconic attachment of Bin Ladin to such a violent instrument produces a code that signifies a negative meaning with regard to him and reinforces his image as

both a terrorist and a villain. In another video clip, he is shown outdoors in an arid desert-like landscape and dressed in green army-type clothing. He is holding a walkie-talkie radio, an instrument often used by soldiers for short range communication (Day of terror ... 2001). It is significant that Bin Ladin is again visually associated with equipment that can be connotatively connected to war or violent activities. These connotative meanings, which can be produced by decoding the signs of weaponry or army-type objects, contribute to the villainous image of Bin Ladin, while affirming his status as a terrorist.

The inclusion of the gun in the image is repeated in other representations of Bin Ladin. Another short video clip played on CNN revealed a medium shot of Bin Ladin facing straight towards the camera. He is wearing a white cap and a white robe, but over the robe Bin Ladin wears a green and brown army-type camouflage jacket. Bin Ladin speaks into a microphone and during the clip he raises his right hand into the shot (Day of terror ... 2001). Not only is this action decoded as an emotive one, but the hand is held in a fist, making it a sign of forcefulness or aggression.

The camouflage jacket is an important signification: once again it visually connects the figure of Bin Ladin with the notion of terrorism. But the most significant sign in the frame appears next to Bin Ladin's left shoulder. Behind him, leaning against the background wall, is a rifle. It had been propped up so that the top section of the weapon protrudes into the shot (Day of terror ... 2001). Once again, he is visually connected with a symbol of violence and warfare. It is likely that Osama bin Ladin consciously intended the inclusion of the gun into the television frame, but he did not intend his address for an American or Western audience. It is also likely that Arab/Muslim audience members living in the Middle East would extract a different meaning from the sign of the rifle than a Western American audience, but the readings produced by this societal group are not the focus of this study. Nonetheless, the consistent attachment of weaponry and other war-like equipment in the iconic imagery of Bin Ladin on CNN representations serve to enliven his persona as an arch villain and visually authenticate his position as a terrorist.

The American television news media has in recent times represented and identified the collective group of America's enemies with the term 'terrorist' (see 4.1.2). Osama

bin Ladin's position as an arch villain is then reinforced as not only is he a terrorist, but he is the leader of a large terrorist network and is responsible for a horrendous attack on American civilians. The CNN representations of Bin Ladin repeatedly and selectively revealed images of him that attached the Al Qaeda leader to symbols of violence or warfare (Day of terror ... 2001). Iconically, Bin Ladin's status as an arch villain was constructed and supported on CNN by the repeated re-screening of him in the company of the signifiers of 'terrorism'. His personal appearance or identity as an Arab and a Muslim in CNN representations attach connotative meanings that may have invoked a negative Arab stereotype. Thus, the stereotypical connotations attached to his physical appearance by American readers, added to his iconic coupling with signifiers of warfare, contributed to Bin Ladin's American media image as the quintessential arch villain.

This chapter applied the findings and assumptions that were made in Chapters Two and Three to the case study of the television news event of September 11. Certain myths and the manner in which they function to support the dominant political ideology of Americanism were discussed in detail: the American hero monomyth, the arch villain myth and the myth of the tower were analysed in particular detail. The CNN representations of the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington were examined with regard to their arbitrary codes, in order to uncover any ideological content. The importance of the image of the American flag was discussed with regard to how these colours were represented on CNN. The iconic mythologising of key media figures who were represented on CNN after the events of September 11 2001 was analysed. The following chapter clarifies the conclusions drawn by the author, and briefly summarises the key areas of concern to this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation has explored how dominant political ideologies, such as Americanism, may affect the manner in which television news constructs its representations of key events, such as September 11. This chapter briefly summarises the main issues dealt with in this study, and describes the limitations of it, while suggesting further areas of investigation that have not been examined. This chapter also describes the necessity for this type of analytical investigation and explains the validity of analysing the ideological content of television news broadcasts. The influx of technological mass communications mediums over the last few decades has provided dominant ideologies with various new possibilities to exert power, and these must be investigated critically.

#### 5.1 Summary of chapters

In Chapter Two the semiotic configuration of television news broadcasts was analysed in order to uncover and identify the ideology contained in certain television news broadcasts. This investigation of the televisual process of semiosis was necessary as it was applied to the case study television news event of September 11 in Chapter Four.

Since this study aimed to establish whether ideological influence can manipulate or even guide the construction of television news reports, thus resulting in biased representations of events on television news, the nature and working process of dominant ideologies was discussed in Chapter Three. Ideology, as a social force of domination or exertion of power was examined, and particular attention was given to how dominant ideologies function within television news. It was concluded that the medium of television news operates as an Ideological State Apparatus, or as a culturally constructed tool that functions to justify and naturalise the position of power of the dominant political ideology. Chapter Three examines American ideology and its most telling characteristics were analysed as an example of a dominant political ideology.

In Chapter Three the working process of semiosis and the framework of a dominant political ideology were also examined, in order to discover how these seemingly separate societal structures function in a symbiotic manner. This was done to further illustrate the presence of ideologically constructed meanings in television news representations. The nature and functioning process of myth was examined, specifically because myths are often closely connected to, or produced by, dominant ideologies. Myths usually function as supportive structures of dominant ideologies. Certain American myths were selected and examined in detail because of their relevance and widespread representation on CNN after September 11.

The assumptions and conclusions drawn in Chapters Two and Three were applied in Chapter Four. This chapter undertook a case study of the CNN representations of September 11 in New York and Washington in terms of the representation of ideology in television news. The arbitrary and iconic imagery employed by CNN while representing September 11 was semiotically analysed in order to uncover the ideological content of these signs and codes. The mythologised representations of George W Bush, Colin Powell and Osama bin Ladin on CNN were investigated semiotically and the author concluded that these representations were illustrative of the American monomyth, consequently rendering them representations of American ideology.

## **5.2 Conclusions and implications**

This study concludes that television news programmes operate as Ideological State Apparatuses and serve to legitimise and naturalise the position of power of a dominant ideology. Television news becomes a representative medium of a dominant ideology when its signs and codes are imbued with ideologically inspired significations, and it broadcasts mythological representations that contain connotative meanings that further serve to legitimise a dominant political position.

This dissertation concludes that television news, when utilised to serve a dominant ideology, may broadcast representations of events in such a way as to legitimise the dominant ideology. Hence television news broadcasters do not represent unbiased versions of events. While television news operates as an Ideological State Apparatus,

its representations are manipulated so that the audience will decode these representations to produce meanings that are favourable to the dominant ideology.

The implications of this assumption, which has been investigated and qualified throughout this study, are tenfold. Most importantly, if this assumption can be taken to be correct, and television news representations are ideologically constructed, then television news may not be performing its legal and social responsibility of disseminating factual information that is free of bias. Television news audiences must reconsider the medium, which they may have been reading passively, and question the intention of television news broadcasters before decoding their messages. The author believes that this implication of this study is of critical importance when taking into account the manner in which television news audiences have tended to accept, without question, the meanings that they receive from television news broadcasts.

The many implications of television news's status as an Ideological State Apparatus are widespread and do not all fall within the scope of this dissertation. For instance, the psychological effects, or the influence on an individual viewer's belief or value system, are not investigated here, but that does not mean that these implications are not of paramount importance.

### **5.3 Contribution of study**

The author believes that the manner in which representations on television news are affected by the influence of dominant political ideologies has been thoroughly investigated and illustrated in this dissertation. The value of this type of study is of increasing importance in contemporary society. It has been stressed throughout this dissertation that the importance of television as an influential social mechanism must not be underestimated. Television, and specifically television news, functions as the main source of information about the world to many individuals, and as such television has transformed itself into a central site of cultural production. Consequently, any analysis of this mass communications medium is of great importance, since its influence and impact on contemporary society has been so extensive.

Moreover, the author hopes that this study has demonstrated that television news can function as an effective Ideological State Apparatus. The author feels that this demonstration of the working process of dominant political ideologies in contemporary times is of significance. In order to gain an understanding of how any particular society operates, the most prevalent and influential ideology or ideologies at work in that society must always be considered. Dominant ideologies are not only a set of ideas, and do not only constitute the exertion and consequent naturalisation of power, but they are also a collection of the beliefs and ideals most highly valued by a society (Macridis & Hulliung 1996:9). In order to gain insight into a society, the representations or manifestations of dominant ideologies must be extracted from cultural modes of communication.

It is vital to examine how television news, and other mass communications mediums, operates as an Ideological State Apparatus' if an understanding of how forces of domination function in contemporary society. Although the concept of ideology as an exertion of social power has been studied and written about at length, ideology's use of the mass media as a tool for the dissemination of ideological messages is an action that is only as old as the mass media itself. According to Thompson (1990:3,7),

Most importantly, the writers who have concerned themselves with problems of ideology have failed to deal adequately with the nature and impact of mass communication on the modern world ...

Hence the study of ideology requires us to investigate ways in which meaning is constructed and conveyed by symbolic forms of various kinds, from everyday linguistic utterances to complex images and texts; it requires us to investigate the social contexts within which symbolic forms are employed and deployed; and it calls upon us to ask whether, and if so how, the meaning mobilized by symbolic forms serves, in specific contexts, to establish and sustain relations of domination.

Television news has become a medium that transmits ideological meanings and messages to a mass audience. The author is in agreement with Thompson, as quoted above, and believes that although the concept of ideology has been investigated by various critics in the past, how ideologies have come to utilise new mass media communications mediums in recent decades to secure their own dominance has not yet been investigated thoroughly (Although the comment by Thompson as quoted

above dates from 1990, the author believes that the statement is still relevant at the time of writing). This area of study requires serious attention. Additionally, the structural framework of dominant political ideologies or the manner in which these forces exert power over large sections of society should be of key interest when attempting to understand the workings of the contemporary world. The author hopes that it has been clearly demonstrated that television news may function as a tool for dominant political ideologies to exert power over a wide audience, justifying an in-depth analysis such as this one.

This dissertation has examined Americanism as an example of a dominant political ideology, but it does not suggest that this is the only dominant political ideology operating in the news media. Indeed, at the time of writing the author has observed many diverse dominant political ideologies operating through mass media communications channels, of which Americanism is only one. For instance, a decidedly anti-American ideology was transmitted on the Arab television news channel, Al-Jazeera, during the recent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The author acknowledges that CNN and other American television news channels are certainly not the only news mediums that endeavour to transmit ideologically loaded texts: this is rather a cultural phenomenon that is performed world-wide by news outlets that adhere to many diverse ideologies. But, the author stresses that a study of Americanism is particularly relevant because of the pervasiveness of American ideology in the global media: American programmes and television news broadcasts are transmitted to a global audience, resulting in the widespread dissemination of texts that contain American ideologically inspired meanings.

Many of the concepts dealt with in this dissertation have been discussed and analysed in detail by other critics. The functioning process of television news has been thoroughly and accurately documented by John Fiske (1978, 1987, 1989b, 1996) and John Hartley (1978, 1982). The discourse surrounding the concept of ideology has been the subject of many discussions, but most notable of these referred to in this study are the insights of Louis Althusser (1971). Semiotics and the social functioning of myth form some of the concerns that occupied Roland Barthes (1957). Although all of these important and valuable areas of investigation have been investigated

previously, the author hopes that an effective application of these theories has been accomplished in this study.

#### **5.4 Limitations of study and suggestions for further research**

The scope of the area of investigation of this dissertation is admittedly limited. Various theories, such as audience reception theories, that are related to the analysis of television were not dealt with in this dissertation as they fall beyond the scope of this study. The space for further investigation into how ideologies are represented in contemporary means of cultural mass communication is immense. This is due, in part, to the limited amount of analysis performed on ideological representations or how ideologies operate in contemporary mass communications mediums. But this site for potential future investigation is so large simply because there are so many forms of mass communications, and there are numerous ideologies finding representations in these mediums throughout the world.

Nonetheless, although there are innumerable facets of the mass communications sphere that merit investigation, the author has identified certain areas which may require attention in terms of the issues discussed in this study. The first and most obvious limitation of this dissertation is that only one mass communications medium was analysed: television news. The news media and the press constitute more than television news exclusively. News magazines, newspapers, news radio and Internet news websites also function as disseminators of factual information, and each of these mediums function according to a separate operations process. These working processes must be investigated in order to understand the meanings that are carried to audiences daily, and how they may influence society.

While attempting to uncover how ideologies disseminate or maintain their dominance by utilising forms of mass communication, it must be recognised that ideology's manipulation of these mediums is not necessarily restricted to the news media and the press. The author contends that forms of entertainment, such as films, sitcoms, television drama series, soap operas, television talk shows, fashion and celebrity news magazines, and computer games may function as mediums of naturalisation of justification for ideologies. Therefore, when attempting to understand ideological

exertion of power as it occurs in mediums of mass communication, the selection of a specific medium for investigation should only result after considering the numerous possibilities for a site of analysis.

Furthermore, this dissertation has paid particular attention to the structure and nature of dominant political ideologies and myths. The author feels that the importance of this issue is so immense that the investigation of dominant political ideologies and myths requires further in-depth investigation. But, the author would like to stress that dominant political ideologies constitute only one type of ideology: there are many disparate types of ideologies finding expression in the mass communications mediums at the time of writing. These include feminism, which is evident in the new trend of female heroines in popular culture representations. In terms of a South African context, a 'nation building' ideology is apparent in many locally produced television entertainment programmes, as well as the South African news media. Such ideological representations require critical attention. Also, when selecting a specific ideology for analysis, the author has concentrated exclusively on the dominant political ideology of Americanism. Once again, other nationalistic ideologies, which are represented in mass communications mediums, could be investigated.

This study has analysed a Western television news station, CNN, and a Western dominant political ideology, Americanism, and some of its mythical expressions. The author acknowledges that the area of investigation of mass communications mediums and their function as disseminators of ideologically inspired meanings extends beyond a Western sphere. Non-Western television news stations, such as Al-Jazeera, and non-Western entertainment mediums should be analysed in order to uncover the ideologies that operate within them.

The reaction of the South African news media to September 11 was interesting and warrants investigation. Initially, the ideological messages transmitted by the South African news media directly after the events of September 11 did not reveal any significant differences from those represented by CNN. But the opinion expressed by South African television news broadcasters and newspapers changed considerably in the weeks following September 11. Thapelo Mokushane (2002:2-3) states that

although the South African news media initially sympathised with the American situation, when the United States invaded Afghanistan this sentiment was reversed.

The South African media reminded its audience of how the American delegation had stormed out of the World Conference Against Racism in Durban just days before September 11: an action that was not considered favourably by most of the South African media, especially within the context of South Africa's recent political history of apartheid (Mokushane 2002:3). The sympathy for America, which had existed in the South African media directly after September 11, also began to wane as images of the innocent victims of the American invasion of Afghanistan began to appear on television screens. According to Mokushane (2002:3), the South African news channels SABC and eTV attempted to represent a far less biased view of events than the American news media, and made a concerted effort to accommodate the ideological interests of South Africa's Muslim and Asian population, as well as the Western population.

Because the South African news media transmits its messages to disparate and culturally diverse audience, its texts must accommodate all sections of that audience if it is to remain popular with all of its readers. Consequently, the South African news media is burdened with an intensely difficult task. The author believes, however, that the South African news media has generally (though not always) fulfilled this task to the best of its abilities. In a country where a democratic rule of government is not yet a decade old, the South African news media still appear to be particularly conscious of allowing each voice of opinion to be represented. It is difficult to decipher whether this is due to the need to appear politically correct in a sensitive social situation, or a genuine attempt to represent an unbiased view of events. Nonetheless, South Africa's position as a newly formed democracy and the expansive network of disparate ideologies that operate through its mass media, makes South African television news a necessary and interesting site for investigation.

In the case study, this dissertation focussed solely on one television news event: the representations of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington. The author believes, however, in terms of investigating the ideological content of television news broadcasts, that there are many other historical events that merit

investigation. For instance, the Western television news representations of the Second Persian Gulf War, which took place from April to May in 2003, were, according to the author, saturated with ideologically constructed codes and meanings, and these merit in-depth analysis. The author's personal observation of the CNN television news representations of the 2003 Gulf War revealed that codes and meanings produced by CNN during its coverage were not as closely adherent to the dominant ideology of Americanism as they were during CNN's coverage of September 11. The semiotic significations produced by CNN during the Second Gulf War suggested that CNN may have been opposed to President Bush's Administration entering a war with Iraq. The ideological shift that occurred in CNN news representations between September 11 2001 and April 2003, from functioning as a supportive structure of Americanism to reacting as a critical voice against Americanism, is a trend that deserves to be documented and analysed further.

Owing to the employment of embedded journalists,<sup>1</sup> the Second Gulf War produced more iconic recorded footage of frontline action than captured in any event of human conflict. This wealth of iconic imagery is loaded with meanings that have ideological implications and should be documented and analysed. For instance, the destruction of the statue of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad by American soldiers pertains directly to the political ideologies of Americanism, and Anti-Americanism.<sup>2</sup> The televised images of the night-time bombing of Baghdad by American aircraft and the numerous images of Iraqi civilians who had been killed or wounded by American bombs, constitute a collection of internationally broadcast televisual representations that reflect fairly negatively on the political ideology of Americanism. The impact of this televised event is extremely significant in terms of the concerns of this study, but also with regard to a global societal opinion of the United States of America.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Embedded' journalism is a phrase that was introduced into television news production with the advent of the Second Gulf War. An 'embedded' journalist is one who is assigned to a military unit, and travels with that unit to report on its activities. The result is that often an embedded journalistic team will record moments of violent action in which the military unit is involved. During the Second Gulf War approximately five hundred embedded journalists were assigned to various military units (Cohen 2003:9).

<sup>2</sup> Before American soldiers pulled down the statue of Saddam Hussein with an American armoured vehicle, one American soldier briefly draped an American flag over the face of the statue. The ideological value of the symbol of the American flag is vast and this iconic set of televisual images

Because television news may influence reader's views of reality and their ideological loyalty, the significance and necessity of critically examining televised events must not be ignored. This study has examined how television news is situated at the centre of a contemporary social sphere, as it functions as the site where a large portion of global society receives its information. The importance of receiving unbiased information from television news is both obvious and paramount. Nonetheless, this study has demonstrated that television news may function as an Ideological State Apparatus, transmitting only the meanings that are favourable to a certain dominant political ideology. Hence, television news representations contain an element of bias, and the polysemy of television news texts is limited. Readers of television news must learn to recognise this action of misinformation. Television news is a pivotally important source of information, and continues to impact on contemporary society. Even if it cannot be checked, the operation of ideological exertion of power through the medium of television news must not be ignored, but documented if an understanding is to be reached of how society operates in contemporary times.

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should be analysed in terms of its ideological content (see 4.2.2). The toppling of the statue of the so-called despotic leader Saddam Hussein also produces obvious ideological meanings.

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