



**LUND**  
UNIVERSITY

Department of Political Science

STV004  
HT05

Tutor: Anders Uhlin

# National Identity as a Political Battlefield

Conflicting Narratives of the 2004 American Presidential  
Election Campaign

Peter Lilja

# Abstract

The official rhetoric of American Presidents is viewed by many non-Americans as somewhat ridiculous and unduly pompous and self-righteous. Vanessa Beasley, on the other hand, has argued that the constant references to the superiority of the American nation in the rhetoric of its presidents have been required in order to keep the extremely diversified nation together.

Starting from a constructivist philosophy of science and using a narrative theory of identity construction, the aim of this thesis is to investigate the role of national identity in American politics and how it's leading politicians use and contributes to the construction of such an identity. It does so by analyzing the central speeches of the National Conventions of the 2004 Presidential election.

The result of the analysis is supportive of Beasley's general conclusions and shows the importance of national identity in U.S. politics. Both parties use references to such an identity in order to defend or oppose different policy practices. The stories used to define how a true American is supposed to act are taken from the overall theme of the civil religion of America used by presidents since the foundation of the nation. These are then, in line with the narrative theory used, causally emplotted and selectively interpreted in order to suit the preferred policy practices of the narrator.

*Key words:*, The United States, National Identity, Identity Construction, Narrative Theory, 2004 Presidential Election

**Characters:** 84 955

# Table of contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1	Research Perspective: some Points of Departure .....	2
1.2	Statement of Purpose .....	3
1.2.1	Limitations.....	3
1.3	Outline .....	4
<b>2</b>	<b>Narrative and Identity: a Theoretical and Methodological Framework</b> .....	<b>5</b>
2.1	Narrative Theory: The Stories of Identity .....	5
2.1.1	The Dimensions of a Narrative Construction of Identity .....	7
2.1.2	National Identity in a Narrative Context .....	9
2.2	Analyzing the Narratives of America: Methodological Considerations .....	10
2.2.1	Discourse, Narratives and an Interpretative Approach.....	10
2.2.2	Finding and Interpreting Narratives in Speeches .....	11
2.2.3	Material considerations.....	12
<b>3</b>	<b>The United States of America and the Challenge of “E Pluribus Unum”</b> .....	<b>14</b>
3.1	The Shared Beliefs of the United States.....	14
3.2	The Civil Religion and Presidential Rhetoric.....	16
<b>4</b>	<b>Narratives in the Speeches of the 2004 National Conventions</b> .....	<b>20</b>
4.1	Defining the Stories Used: The Purpose and Challenges of America in a New World Order.....	20
4.1.1	The Democratic Party and the Dimmed Light of America .....	20
4.1.2	The Republican Party and the Historic Mission of America.....	23
4.2	Two Faces of American Identity: Emplottment and Selective Appropriations in the Stories Used .....	26
<b>5</b>	<b>Concluding Discussion: National Identity in U.S. Presidential Politics</b> .....	<b>30</b>
	<b>References</b> .....	<b>33</b>
	<b>Appendix 1 – Publishing Policy of Vital Speeches of the Day</b> .....	<b>35</b>

# 1 Introduction

The United States is a country that leaves few people unaffected. Many feel discomfort faced with the glowing patriotism and self-proclaimed greatness present in the official rhetoric of its presidents and other political leaders. The seemingly blind conviction of this, often claimed to be God-given, American superiority can easily be interpreted as ridiculous and unreasonably pompous. However, there may be yet another view of these so often used references to the greatness of the American nation.

Vanessa Beasley (2004)<sup>1</sup> argues that given the extreme diversity of the American people, the nation's political leaders have been forced, during the centuries, to devote a lot of attention to convincing the citizens of the United States of their unity, in order to keep the nation together, a need which have become even more important with the increasing diversity of America.

This creates interesting opportunities for students of identity and politics. Developments in the social sciences in recent years have shown that the concept of identity may be a subject for political struggle in its own right. The power to control how certain identities are being articulated can indeed be a very effective way of gathering support for policy suggestions one wishes to see implemented. In order to be able to understand how such political struggles are fought, and at the same time get a better understanding of the American leaders' contributions to the creation of an American national identity, this thesis will investigate such matters in the context of the 2004 Presidential Election campaign.

In this respect, developments in social theory have presented a very useful tool for such an endeavor. The development of, what Somers (1994) calls a reframed narrativity<sup>2</sup> gives social scientists the opportunity of unpacking the concept of identity and identify the stories used in its construction. It is those stories and how they are put together that will be the focus of this thesis' efforts at understanding the workings of the politics of identity in the United States.

---

<sup>1</sup> The work referred to here will be much more thoroughly presented in chapter three of this thesis.

<sup>2</sup> Narrative theory will be presented at some length as this thesis' main theoretical framework in chapter two and therefore I will not discuss it in more depth here.

## 1.1 Research Perspective: some Points of Departure

According to Phillips & Hardy, “[r]esearch questions begin with research philosophies. Or, to say it another way, research questions grow out of the set of basic assumptions about the topic of study held by the researcher” (Phillips & Hardy 2002:61).

In formulating the purpose and research questions of this thesis I have mainly been inspired by social constructivism<sup>3</sup>. A central point of departure of this philosophy of science is that actors *construct* their reality by interpreting events within the framework of the *intersubjective meanings* of which they are a part. This is a kind of collective knowledge which, according to Adler, has “[...] structural attributes that do not merely constrain or empower actors. [It] also define their social reality” (Adler 1997:327). Hopf (1998:173) adds to this by claiming, as do constructivists, that an intersubjective social context is necessary in order to make behavior or action meaningful. As Wendt argues; “Actors acquire identities – relatively stable, role specific understandings and expectations about self – by participating in such collective meanings” (Wendt 1992:397).

Identities, then, in a constructivist view, are central objects of analysis, since they, in telling you who you are, also implies certain interests or preferences which will have a strong influence on the way an actor chooses to act in a specific situation (Hopf 1998:175).

Thus, in order to analyze how a certain identity implies a certain form of practise it is therefore central to understand the intersubjective reality of the actor in question, because “[...] collective understandings provide people with reasons why things are as they are and indications as to how they should use their material abilities and power” (Adler 1997:322). In order to explain reality, material factors is not enough, because “the identities interests and behavior of political agents are socially constructed by collective meanings, interpretations and assumptions about the world” (Adler 1997:324), which indicates an ontological position that argues that reality is constructed of both material and social factors, where the social factors endow physical objects with meaning.

---

<sup>3</sup> According to Lundquist (1993:122) the choice of theory will have affects on the result of a study. This is because the theoretical points of departure both affect the choice of research problem to begin with, and the way to approach it methodologically. This means that people who are supportive of other philosophies of science probably will disagree upon such things as the importance of a phenomenon like identity to politics, and thereby find the results of this thesis uninteresting and perhaps even useless in some respect. This makes it important to be open, right from the start, with the theoretical perspectives guiding the formulation of the research problem and the methodological implications connected to it.

## 1.2 Statement of Purpose

Inspired by the works of Beasley and Somers, and taking as a point of departure the view of identity as socially constructed by intersubjective meanings, and being constitutive of interests and thereby action, this thesis aims at *using a narrative approach in order to analyze how the main political parties of the United States uses and contributes, through their rhetoric, to the creation of an American identity.*

To reach this aim, the following research questions<sup>4</sup> will have to be addressed;

- Which stories are used in the rhetoric of the Democratic and Republican parties when it comes to identifying what America is all about?
- How (if at all) are the stories of America being used, in the rhetoric of the political parties, in order to legitimate or oppose different policies, and how is this important when it comes to identity construction?

### 1.2.1 Limitations

Given the quite extensive character of the research questions presented above some clear limitations are needed in order to make the analysis manageable. The empirical material, therefore, consists of speeches made by the Presidential and Vice Presidential candidates at the 2004 Democratic and Republican National Conventions and the conclusions of this thesis can thereby only say something about this specific context. It makes no efforts to present any kind of conclusions concerning the way that politicians uses notions of national identity in order to legitimate or oppose policy suggestions in general. It should also be mentioned that the analysis focuses on the aspects of those speeches concerning international issues since those are the ones given the most attention by the speakers.

As was argued above, identity is a very complex phenomenon and it should also be mentioned, for reasons of clarity that this thesis does not claim to give any complete analysis of the process of identity construction in the American context. What it wants to do is rather to use narrative analysis in order to investigate how the content of such an identity is used politically in order to advance certain policy suggestions, something which indirectly contributes to the construction of that identity according to the theoretical approach of this study.

---

<sup>4</sup> The question are formulated within the context of the narrative approach to identity construction presented in chapter two, which, as the reader will discover, highlights the use of stories in this process.

## 1.3 Outline

The first chapter of this thesis presents the area of study and the purpose and research questions related to it. It also contains a brief section on its more general scientific points of departure. Chapter two presents the theoretical framework which guides the overall approach of the thesis analysis. It also presents the methodological considerations made in relation to the process of analyzing the empirical material and some comments on that and other materials used. The third chapter works as a background and presents studies of how presidents, through history, have participated in the construction of a national American identity. Chapter four, then, contains the narrative analysis of the speeches of the 2004 national conventions. Chapter 5, finally, will contain a concluding discussion of the thesis' results in which the research questions will be answered and discussed in relation to the overall aim and theoretical departures of the study.

## 2 Narrative and Identity: a Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This chapter presents narrative theory as the overall theoretical approach of this thesis. It will describe the general use of narrative theory in a social scientific context and the relationship between narratives and identity. It will also connect the theoretical discussion to the purpose and questions of this study, thereby presenting the methodological decisions made concerning the analytical approach of this thesis.

### 2.1 Narrative Theory: The Stories of Identity

Given that identities are socially constructed phenomena, it becomes interesting to understand how this process of construction works. Who participates in the process and how do they relate to one another? One useful way of analyzing this process is to think of identities in terms of stories, or *narratives*.

Somers has argued that the use of narratives, for a long time, filled the role as the *epistemological other* of the social sciences in order to differentiate it from the humanities. Rigorous methodological techniques and the focus on theory was put in relation to the mere descriptive use of storytelling (narrative theory) used by e.g. historians (Somers & Gibson 1994:38). This is, however, changing since the development of a reframed narrative within the social sciences opens up possibilities of using narratives in a way that does not just retell stories but is ontological, that is constitutive of being and therefore useful for studies of identity.

Even if a narrative is a kind of story, it at the same time refers to something more. According to Patterson & Monroe a “[...] narrative also refers to the way in which we construct disparate facts in our own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of our reality” (Patterson & Monroe 1998:315). Somers agrees with this and even argues that narratives are “[...] an ontological condition of social life” (Somers 1994:614). According to her, recent research of narratives have shown that people use narratives both in the process of constructing identities, as a guide to action and that people’s experiences are shaped by narratives and that they thereby tend to make sense of their reality by using them (Somers 1994:614).

The underlying thought is that it is through the use of language and communication that people construct meaning in their social reality. Ammerman argues that it is the ability to use a particular group’s language that makes it



possible for us to be a member of a group or share an identity (Ammerman 2003:213). However, even though languages and communication are vital areas of analysis we must look beyond the concrete texts if we are to understand the true workings of narratives. Ammerman claims that the most important advantage narratives give us is a possibility of focusing on “[...] the *relationships* and *actions* that give words their meaning” (Ammerman 2003:213) Bruner concurs with this and writes that “[t]he central concern is not how narratives as text is constructed, but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality” (Bruner 1991:6).

According to Somers there are four different characteristics of this new kind of social scientific narrative. She calls them “1) relationality of parts, 2) causal plotment, 3) selective appropriation, and 4) temporality, sequence and place” (Somers 1994:616). She goes on explaining that;

Together, these dimensions suggest narratives are constellations of *relationships* (connected parts) embedded in *time and space*, constituted by *causal plotment*. [...] Narrativity demands that we discern the meaning of any single event only in temporal and spatial relationship to other events. Indeed, the chief characteristic of narrative is that it renders understanding only by *connecting* (however unstably) *parts* to a constructed *configuration* or a *social network* of relationships (however incoherent or unrealizable) composed of symbolic, institutional, and material practices (Somers 1994: 616)

This is in accordance with Dunn (2004:124f) who sees the use of narratives as a process where events and meanings are being connected through three steps which he calls selecting, plotting, and interpretation. Thus, it is by arranging an event within the larger framework of our life that we interpret and give the event meaning (Ammerman 2003:213). This implicates that we tend to feel insecurity when we are unable to place an event within the existing framework, or story, of our life, because “[t]o make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality” (Somers 1994:617). It is to interpret new experiences and events in light of what we already believe about the world in order to be able to make sense of them. The emplotment of narratives, when actors situate events and experiences within their existing understanding of the world, thus creates meaning at the same time as explanation and order and “[...] plays a central role in cognition, in organizing our perceptions of reality into a coherent and meaningful pattern” (Patterson & Monroe 1998:319).

### 2.1.1 The Dimensions of a Narrative Construction of Identity

There are four different types of narratives that come into play when identities are being constructed. These are *autobiographical*<sup>5</sup>, *public*, *conceptual* and *metanarratives* (Somers 1994:617).

Autobiographical narratives are “[...] the stories that social actors use to make sense of – indeed, to act in – their lives” (Somers 1994:618). They are used by actors in order to define who they are. In a way, one could consider the autobiographical narratives to be something of, what Ammerman (2003:214) calls, a core self. This core is, however, nothing essential or immutable, but is constantly being contested and negotiated in the different social environments that an actor finds him or herself. The autobiographical narratives construct a sense of self by turning singular events into episodes in order to make it possible for an actor to make sense of his or her life. These episodes are then used as a framework for making sense of new events (Somers 1994:618). Ammerman argues that “[p]ersons understand themselves as certain sorts of characters who are capable of acting in certain ways and incapable or unwilling to act in others” (Ammerman 2003:214) by interpreting new events in light of the themes of their already existing autobiographical narratives. From this it is clear that the process of creating an identity or constructing a self is what Somers (1994:618) calls, a process of becoming, indicating that identity is something that is never fixed or final.

Even though the autobiographical narratives are basically about the construction of individual selves they are at the same time dependent on a social context, they are *interpersonal*. Somers writes that this kind of narrative only can “[...] exist interpersonally in the course of social and structural interactions over time” (Somers 1994:618). Ammerman (2003:214) argues that even though the autobiographical narratives of an individual need not be conceived as real or rational by other actors<sup>6</sup> they are often guided by the collective knowledge of the social context in which the actor is a part. The intersubjective meanings within a particular social environment or discourse thereby tend to sustain and transform

---

<sup>5</sup> This dimension of narrative refers to the stories that actors use to make sense of their own lives as individuals. Somers (1994:618) calls this type of narratives *ontological* but I follow Ammerman (2003:213) who argues that the term “ontological”, when used in the context of individual self construction, can be misunderstood as something essential or immutable, and that the term *autobiographical* thereby is better suited since it underlines the view that this individual notion of self also is a narrated construction. Even if they use different terms they both agree about the function of this type of narrative, since Ammerman to a large degree builds her arguments about the narrative construction of identity on the work of Somers.

<sup>6</sup> The prime example in Ammerman’s text is the religious believer, since her object of study is religious identity. In the process of constructing such identities the autobiographical narratives of a believer consists of stories with religious significance which becomes real for the believer since they are being used to interpret events and in constructing reality. This is of course not real to a non-believer because the specific religious autobiographical narratives are not part of the story of a non-believer’s life. Other examples of this phenomenon used by Ammerman are the voices heard by a schizophrenic or the body image that tells an anorectic girl she is fat (see Ammerman 2003:214, 216ff).

certain narratives over time. This is what Somers (1994:619) calls public narratives.

Public narratives are, according to Somers “[...] attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the single individual” (Somers 1994:619). These public narratives thus exist beyond the consciousness of any individual and are what could be described as publicly constructed shared beliefs or the intersubjective meanings of a particular social context. They are “[...] attached to groups and categories, cultures and institutions” and “provide recognized ‘accounts’ one can give of one’s behavior, accounts that identify where one belongs, what one is doing and why” (Ammerman 2003:214). It follows from this that the public narratives are the stories that we are told about our place in a social context from such diverse places as the media, political institutions, churches and religious organizations, and even our own families. These public stories can be very strong or hardly noticed at all. Either way, they are influential when it comes to identity construction because of the fact that they produce stories which individuals can adopt and make their own. Ammerman claims that “[w]e may understand identity as emerging [...] at the everyday intersections of autobiographical and public narratives” (Ammerman 2003:215) in the way that the autobiographical narratives of individual actors are shaped in accordance with or in opposition to different public narratives of the social environment in which the actor lives. Ammerman explains it in a very good way as follows;

We tell stories about our selves (both literary and through our behavior) that signal both our uniqueness and our membership, that exhibit the consistent themes that characterize us and the unfolding improvisation of the given situation. Each situation, in turn, has its own story, a public narrative shaped by the culture and institutions of which it is a part, with powerful persons and prescribed roles establishing the plot. [...] Both the individual and the collectivity are structured and remade in those everyday interactions (Ammerman 2003:215).

Somers also mentions metanarratives, which are the largest narratives of human existence in which we are all embedded. This is the different paradigms of how stories go. Examples of metanarratives are Civilization vs. Barbarianism, the rise of Modernization, Liberalism and the triumph of Liberty and so on (Somers 1994:619).

The final dimension of narrative that Somers discusses she calls conceptual narratives. These are the narratives that social researchers construct when they present explanations of the social world. Two central aspects of this narrativity are what she calls *narrative identity* and *relational setting* (Somers 1994:620), which is a way of thinking about a narrative explanation of identity construction in order to be able to explain social action. The basic assumption of the narrative identity is that “social action can only be intelligible if we recognize that people are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the stories through which they constitute their identity” (Somers 1994:624). That is that people act the way they do because of who they perceive themselves to be at a specific time and in a specific place, which means that they might have behaved differently at another time or place since the prevailing narrative could then be different, because a narrative identity is constantly being

constructed and reconstructed in and over time (Somers 1994:624). Because of this Somers conclude that “the meaningful implications of a narrative concept of identity can only be determined by empirical inquiry, not by a priori assumptions” (Somers 1994:622).

The concept of a relational setting builds on what Laclau & Mouffe has called the *impossibility of society* (Mumby 1993:5), that society as some fixed totality does not exist. Rather, a relational setting is a social network of relationships. It is used to create a way of relating a narrative identity to what Somers calls social forces, such as market patterns or institutional practices. Included in this network are institutions, public narratives and social practices and it is within this network that the construction of identity takes place, in the “contested but patterned relations among narratives, peoples, and institutions” (Somers 1994:626). This implies that also a relational setting is constructed and reconstructed in and over time and that we need to investigate empirically the relations between parts rather than make assumptions about the whole in advance in order to understand the social environment that surrounds and affects actors.

Even if actors create identities through the use of narratives and acts upon them within a specific relational setting they are not free to use or produce narratives at will. Somers argues that there are always a limited number of available stories that actors can use. The struggle over which narratives that will dominate a social context is political and constantly contested (Somers 1994:629). In this view politics becomes the struggle of establishing meaning and thereby to create a myth of society that maintains and reproduces the prevailing system of power relations within a relational setting (Mumby 1993:6f).

## 2.1.2 National Identity in a Narrative Context

To understand national identity in a narrative context we must begin by asking what a nation is. A very suitable answer to this question is given by Benedict Anderson, who argues that nations are *imagined communities* (Anderson 1991:6). He writes that;

It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion (Anderson 1991:6).

These imagined communities are perceived as limited and sovereign in relation to other nations. How is, then, this imagined community of a large number of different people with no closer relations possible? From a narrative point of view this could be explained by the fact that the members of a nation are part of a specific relational setting in which a discursive construction of national culture “maintains and reproduces the prevailing system of power relations” (Mumby 1993:6) through the use of narratives. The national identity of a nation (as an imagined community) is build upon shared beliefs and symbols which are given meaning through the use of national stories. Closely associated with this is what Michael Billig has called a process of *flagging*. He argues that “[...] national

identity in established nations is remembered because it is embedded in routines of life, which constantly remind, or ‘flag’, nationhood” (Billig 1995:38). This creates a kind of collective memory which, Billig argues, is also a collective forgetting, because parts of a nation's history which can be presumed to threaten its unity is eradicated from the collective memory and also from the narratives of the past. Therefore this collective memory is made up by a process of selective appropriation where events are being related to each other, not chronologically, but in a thematic way in order to give meaning to the nation itself and its origin (Somers 1994:617).

In a narrative context then, national identity can be seen as a constructed imagined community held together by a discursive order in which institutions, public narratives and peoples interact in the creation of symbolic flaggings and a collective memory build on stories that are selectively appropriated and emplotted in order to establish meaning, purpose and unity among actors with otherwise very different personal interests and identities. However, there is within this discourse of national identity a constant struggle over how dominant certain narratives should be or how certain events are to be related to the overall story of a particular nation, making national identity, as every other kind of narrative identity, a constantly reconstructed process of becoming. National identity thus, “[...] is not spontaneous and consensual but it is the product of the complex relations among narrative, power, and culture. The relationships among social actors in institutional settings are thus as much political as they are social” (Mumby 1993:6f).

## 2.2 Analyzing the Narratives of America: Methodological Considerations

This section is intended to move from this general theoretical framework to more concrete reasoning on how to analyze narratives in the context of the present study.

### 2.2.1 Discourse, Narratives and an Interpretative Approach

As was elaborated on above, a national identity, in a narrative context, can be seen as a constructed imagined community held together by the use of narratives. It should also be clear that the constant construction and reconstruction of such an identity does not take place in some kind of vacuum, but in a relational setting in which there is a political and social struggle concerning the power to decide which narrative that will be allowed to dominate. I see this relational setting as a form of discursive field within which different discourses, built upon narratives, struggle for influence and domination. According to Laclau & Mouffe discourses are relational entities “[...] whose identities depend on their differentiation from

other discourses” (Howarth 2000:103). A discourse of American identity, in other words, depends on other notions of such an identity within the discursive field or the relational setting in which the struggle for influence over the definition of an American identity takes place. The discourses presented by rivaling parties in a national election would be a suitable case study of such a discursive struggle.

According to Laclau & Mouffe a discourse consists of both ideas and related practices (Howarth 2000:103). In relation to this, Somers (1994:614) have argued that narratives are used by people both to make sense of their reality and as guidelines for action. In this way one could argue that just as identities are constructed by the use of narratives, so are discourses. In fact, an identity, in this view, is a kind of discourse, since it contains both ideas of self and others and the guidelines or practices that prescribe certain kinds of actions based on those ideas. The result of this is that if we want to understand the connections between the ideas and actions championed in a particular discourse, an analysis of the narratives used within that discourse is a good way to go about. Thus, since this thesis aims at analyzing how competing discourses of American identity leads to different policy practices, a narrative analysis is suitable.

Patton (2002:115ff) and Riessman (1993:2) states that narrative analysis requires an interpretative methodological approach. Riessman writes that “[i]nterpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations” (Riessman 1993:2) and Feldman et al. (2004:151) argues that this makes narrative analysis about uncovering the meaning embedded in those representations. Riessman (1993:5) argues that what narrative analysis really means is to interpret what the subjects of the study have already interpreted by their use of specific narratives. How then are these interpretations to be made within the context of this study?

## 2.2.2 Finding and Interpreting Narratives in Speeches

According to Patton, Kneller has argued that “[i]nterpretation involves opening myself to a text (or its analogue) and questioning it” (Patton 2002:115), and that has been a lead method of this thesis analysis. In order to be able to find the stories embedded in the speeches of the national conventions, I have in a first step asked (in a figure of speech) the texts<sup>7</sup> the following questions;

- What is America all about in terms of purpose and character?
- What challenges are facing America today?

The answers of those questions have then been put together to stories of what America is all about and what challenges the nation faces in the contemporary world. These answers are not always directly obvious in the texts, but as Feldman et al. have pointed out “[e]lements of the story often have meaning based on what

---

<sup>7</sup> The texts analysed in this theses are printed versions of the speeches given at the national conventions.

they are implicitly contrasted with, in other words, what they are *not*” (Feldman et al. 2004:151). Therefore I have sometimes been forced to draw conclusions from passages that only implicitly mention the aspect in question. In order to obtain intersubjectivity, that is the possibility of other researches to recreate my results (see Lundquist 1993:52ff), I have used, quite extensively, quotes from the texts themselves in order to show what have led me to certain conclusions and thereby to obtain as much validity in my interpretations as possible.

In the second part of this thesis analysis, the stories found in the speeches are interpreted in light of the characteristics of the reframed narrative presented above. I have searched the texts for signs of how the stories are used in order to legitimate or oppose different kinds of foreign policy practices, by interpreting how the stories of America are emplotted and selectively appropriated to suite the narrator in question. Here as well, the use of quotes and references to the analyzed texts serves as scientific lifelines, as well as references to the theoretical frame presented above which works as the glasses through which the entire analysis of this thesis is being conceived. The quite extensive theoretical presentation above is a way of making the overall approach of this thesis’ analysis understandable to the reader, in order to make the interpretations possible to follow.

However rigorous one tries to be when it comes to obtaining intersubjectivity and scientific validity, there is no way of totally removing oneself from the interpretations made (Patton 2002:115). The simple fact that I am who I am will mean that personal experiences, views and opinions will somehow have affected the results of my analysis. In order to be scientifically honorable this must be mentioned, and since it is unavoidable, the willingness of a researcher to publicly present and discuss his or her results is also required (Lundquist 1993:52) in order to obtain scientific validity.

### 2.2.3 Material considerations

The empirical material of this thesis analysis consists of first-hand sources. They are printed version of the speeches given by the candidates of the 2004 Presidential election. They are published by the American journal *Vital Speeches of the Day*<sup>8</sup>. Not all speeches of the national conventions are published in this journal, which have made my selection of speeches to analyze depend on their first selection. However, this did not become a problem since the time and space limits of this project forced me to restrict my analysis to the two central speeches of each convention, those of the Presidential and Vice-presidential candidates, which were all published in its entirety by the journal.

Something that should also be mentioned in relation to this material is that even if the speeches are given in similar contexts, the Republican candidates are at the same time the President and Vice President in office, defending the policies of their previous term in the White House, while the Democratic candidates are free

---

<sup>8</sup> The publishing policy of *Vital Speeches of the Day* can be found in its entirety in Appendix 1.

to focus on criticizing those same policies, something that can be good to keep in mind. Apart from that, I find the context of the national conventions a good choice because they are the main events of the election campaign in which the candidates can speak their minds, uninterrupted, to the entire nation, and the world, because of the extensive media coverage.

When it comes to the rest of the sources of the thesis I have tried to avoid introductory or summary texts. Only when the importance of the actual source is of no greater importance for the arguments made have that kind of sources been used.



# 3 The United States of America and the Challenge of “E Pluribus Unum”<sup>9</sup>

This chapter will briefly present some earlier studies of American identity. It draws extensively on Vanessa Beasley’s book *You, the People. American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* (2004), which is a rhetorical analysis of how presidents from 1885-2000 have communicated a sense of shared beliefs to their diversified citizens, in order to create, as the national seal of the republic claims, out of many, one national identity. Even if Beasley’s methodological approach differs from the narrative approach of this study, the historical scope of it makes her results well suited as a background and a point of departure for this thesis’ analysis, which focuses on a time-period following directly upon where her analysis ends.

## 3.1 The Shared Beliefs of the United States

Unlike most countries of Europe, America is held together by, what Beasley calls, ideational models of national identity<sup>10</sup>. She argues that “Americans are Americans because they share certain ways of thinking, even if there has been debate about exactly what these ways of thinking are” (Beasley 2004:46). She argues, that even though scholar may have disagreed upon what these shared beliefs consists of, the presidents of the United States have not. Her conclusion is that even if they have used concepts like equality and liberalism in their efforts to contribute to a national identity, “[...] they most commonly associate American national identity with Puritan notions of an American civil religion” (Beasley 2004:47), in order to manage the diverse democracy of the Unites States and to describe an American identity as consisting of both special principles and attitudinal positions. Before we examine the content and structure of such a civil

---

<sup>9</sup> “E Pluribus Unum” means “Out of many, one” and is the motto, printed at the front side of the national seal of the United States.

<sup>10</sup> European nations on the other hand are historically more homogenous and much older, thereby drawing on a more naturalistic model of identity. You are Swedish because you are born in Sweden and so are your forefathers for generations. Longley (2002.8) argues that European nations tends to use references to a glorious past in their identity construction while America, lacking such long history, are more oriented towards the glory of the future, of what it will become.

religion we need to examine what Beasley calls the shared beliefs of America in more detail.

According to Longley (2002:6) America is a nation that is imagined into existence by an act of will. When the Founding Fathers sat down to write documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the new Constitution they made up an ideal picture of what the new nation would strive to become. Even since, America has in some way been about becoming what it was meant to be. According to Beasley, the poet John Winthrop described his “[...] vision of America as a ‘city on a hill’” and thereby “articulated a mythic yet supremely influential mission for the young nation” (Beasley 2004:30).

The language of the founders of America is heavily clothed with religious symbolism. This is due to the fact that the founders of America saw the American people as God’s chosen people, with a divine mission to create God’s country on Earth, in the words of Winthrop to “[...] build up in the midst of the wilderness” a “foretaste of paradise” (Beasley 2004:30). According to Longley, Thomas Paine declared that “[w]e have it in our power to begin the world over again” (Longley 2002:6), thus emphasising the American mission to create something new in relation to the societies of the old world, indicating the destiny of the United States to be a role model, or a city on a hill, for other nations to follow. Ferguson, in his analysis of the concept of liberty in American history and politics, also points to the centrality of religious beliefs in the creation of the American republic. He quotes John Adams:

“I always considered the settlement of America with reverence and wonder, as the opening of a grand scene and design in Providence for the illumination of the ignorant, and the emancipation of the slavish part of mankind all over the earth.” (Ferguson 2004:33).

Ferguson also argues that this, what he calls, new-world Protestantism, “[...] provided the oppositional platform from which insecure provincials challenged their mother country” (Ferguson 2004:28). He claims that the weekly indoctrination of clergy men provided the needed sense of moral differentiation and sense of unity that where necessary in order to challenge the British Empire.

From this it seems clear that some kind of religious feeling of mission and destiny lies at the very heart of the creation of the United States and that this feeling is a core feature of the nation’s shared beliefs. But there are also other specific beliefs that have been central in the rhetoric of previous presidents. According to Beasley, some scholars, like Louis Hartz, have argued that what really makes Americans American is a belief in a Lockean liberal idea (Beasley 2004:33). Beasley argues that also Lipset emphasizes the centrality of liberalism since he sees the following characteristics as central to Americans; liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism and laissez-faire, which are all united in liberal philosophy (Beasley 2004:33).

However, according to Beasley, other scholars have argued that it is not liberalism, but republicanism that is most central to Americans. The proponents of republicanism argues that, “[...] foremost among those [American] principles were ‘love of our country, resignation and obedience to the laws, public spirit,

love of liberty, [and] sacrifice of life and all to the public” (Beasley 2004:33). This republican philosophy differs most from liberalism in its accentuation of the public above the individual, and according to promoters of this view republicanism and not liberalism was the rallying cry of the colonialists in their fight for independence from the British crown.

On the other hand, Smith, according to Beasley, rejects both liberalism and republicanism as the defining idea of the American people. He argues that: “[...] another set of beliefs, which he classifies as corresponding to ‘multiple traditions,’ has evolved within the United States as ‘political parties and actors [have] offer[ed] varying civic conceptions blending liberal, republican, and ascriptive elements in different combinations” (Beasley 2004:34) at different times, in order to meet the needs and fears of the public. Smith’s conclusion is that Americans value both individuality (liberalism) and conformity (republicanism) at the same time and that this constant negotiation of different concepts is itself typically American and that it works as the cement so vital to the American political community (Beasley 2004:34f). This negotiation of apparently contradictory values is also evident in different “value analyses”<sup>11</sup> which concluded that prominent common values in the United States included such diverse features as:

[...] an activist approach to life, emphasis on achievement and material success, a moral character (‘oriented to such Puritan values as duty, industry, and sobriety’), religious faith, scientific and secular rationality, idealism and perfectionism, equality, self-reliance, tolerance for diversity, and external conformity (Beasley 2004:35).

From this, one could argue that the shared beliefs of America and thereby the ideational base of a collective American identity rests on a moral base of new-world Protestantism which draws heavily on Puritan notions of mission and destiny together with a mixture of political philosophy consisting of contending liberal and republican values and as McClay (2004:13) argues, a dose of Enlightenment philosophy that was very present in the generation of the Founding Fathers.

### 3.2 The Civil Religion and Presidential Rhetoric

The conclusion of the discussion above takes us back to what Beasley (2004:46f) argues is the most common theme of presidential rhetoric when it comes to defining an American identity, the so called civil religion of America, which in a

---

<sup>11</sup> This refers to studies from e.g. social psychology, political science, sociology and speech communications, which, using research methods from the social sciences rather than political philosophy, tried to examine the core values of the United States. The study referred to here was made in the 1960s by Ethel Albert and Robin Williams and is, according to Beasley, a classic study when it comes to America’s traditional core values (Beasley 2004:35).

way includes all the above mentioned beliefs and gives them a kind of sacred status. Before we have a closer look at how presidents have used the concept of a civil religion in order to refer to the shared beliefs discussed above, we will have a closer look at how the American civil religion has been conceived. Huntington describes it in the following way:

“America’s civil religion provides a religious blessing to what Americans feel they have in common. It is perfectly compatible with each American belonging to his or her own denomination, believing in a Christian or non-Christian God, [...] It is not compatible, however, with being atheist, for it is a religion, invoking a transcendental Being apart from the terrestrial human world” (Huntington 2005:104).

As Wald (2003:55) puts it, a civil religion is about how a nation tries to understand its historical experiences and national purpose in religious terms. He argues that a civil religion has no fully developed code, nor has it the status of a state religion. It is not part of, or competing against any specific church or denomination, but it “[...] is a code subscribed to, in varying degrees, by all religions in the nation” (Wald 2003:56). According to Wald, the function of a civil religion is to, by giving the nation a sacred character, make it possible for adherents to different faiths to harmonize their religious and political beliefs, thereby acting in a unifying fashion (Wald 2003:56).

Huntington (2005:104f) argues that the civil religion of America rests on four pillars which he argues is; (1) the proposition that the American system of government rests on a religious base, (2) the belief in the destiny of the United States as God’s chosen people, (3) the prevalence of religious symbols in American public rhetoric, rituals and ceremonies, and (4) that national ceremonies and activities themselves take on a religious form and perform religious functions. Even if it should not be conceived as a religion in the normal use of the word, McClay (2004:12) argues that the civil religion of America, nevertheless, presents religious symbols, texts, holidays, and monuments<sup>12</sup> as does any “normal” religion. In relation to this, Beasley argues that “[...] a constitutive rhetoric based on American civil religion offers its subjects the same promises that most religions do: rebirth, redemption, and renewal – the ability to overcome the past by becoming part of *Novo Ordus Seclorum*<sup>13</sup> (Beasley 2004:50).

Basically, Beasley argues, the use of a rhetoric built upon the theme of the civil religion as the ideational base of American identity, makes it possible for presidents to claim a logic that “[...] invites the American people to cast of the weight of their original identities and unite in one conviction: All individuals are equally ‘heirs to the promise’ of both God and the United States” (Beasley

---

<sup>12</sup> For example the Stars and Stripes as a sacred symbol, the Declaration of Independence as a holy text, the Founding Fathers as saints, their memorials as holy sites and the national anthem and other patriotic songs as hymns and so on (see McClay 2004).

<sup>13</sup> ”*Novo Ordus Seclorum*” means “A New Order of the Ages” and is printed at the back side of the National Seal of the United States of America, emphasizing the belief in the destiny of the United States as a shining beacon, or a city on a hill, for the rest of the world to follow.

2004:52). According to President Coolidge in his 1925 inaugural address, America is about giving up on differences by becoming part of something larger in order to strengthen and enlarge one's freedom (Beasley 2004:60).

The presidential focus on this ideational base, or faith, as something intended to unite all Americans regardless of their origin, is easily understandable given the diversity of the American people, but it is also a central aspect of how presidents have used the civil religion in order to differentiate between Americans and others. The American people is not only united by their shared belief in America but also, at least in presidential rhetoric, by shared attitudes or characteristics built on those beliefs which is a central part of what differentiates them from other peoples. In a somewhat ironic fashion, this means that American nationalism, in the rhetoric of its presidents, is built in part on a condemnation of other nation's nationalism, because the character of the American is defined in opposition to the covetous, unintellectual force and irrational passions of *individuals* of other nationalities. Beasley argues that "[e]ven during times of war, the 'other' in presidential discourse is typically not described in terms of nationality but instead as an alien, illogical impulse" (Beasley 2004:53), striving for diversity in opposition to the unity created by the rational faith of America. This is in line with the argument of O'Hagan who in her study of what she calls civilizational identity argues that

"[t]he other in this context, is one who seeks to destroy these universal values and aspirations [here, of the United States]. These values include freedom, justice, democracy, and human rights. The other is constituted as someone who does not subscribe to these values and is consequently a 'barbarian': they are regressive and repressive" (O'Hagan 2004:35).

One example of this is Woodrow Wilson who, in his 1917 inaugural address, argued that it was "[...] the negative forces of foreign nationalism that gave him no other choice" (Beasley 2004:54) but to involve the United States in the First World War. At the same time he also asked his citizens to "[...] repudiate any allegiance they might have to their countries or cultures of origins in favor of a more reasoned and restrained dedication to the United States" (Beasley 2004:54), one in line with the beliefs and adherent attitudinal positions of the civil religion. Beasley (2004:55) argues that in the rhetoric of its presidents, the strength and prosperousness of Americans are dependent on clarity of the conviction that the ideational unity of America is superior to other forms of unity, be it race, ethnicity, class or anything else<sup>14</sup>.

In order to summarize, the rhetoric of a civil religion, based on the shared beliefs of the nation have given presidents the possibility of offering their citizens

---

<sup>14</sup> This may seem strange considering the extensive racial problems that are a central part of American history. However, Beasley argues that "[...] the fairly religious notion of faith and belief have long been part of the way Americans have dealt with racism in particular and oppression in general" (Beasley 2004:61). She writes that "[...] such 'religio-political' discourse can indeed tap into myths that 'allow the American audience to transcend the mundanities of day-to-day existence, making them part of a larger and more satisfying social enterprise'" (Beasley 2004:61).

a way to conceive themselves as united despite their individual differences. It also stresses the insignificance of those differences in relation to the unifying beliefs in America. Beasley claims that “[p]aradoxically, then, in a country that purports to value individualism, specific markers of individual difference have been largely *verboden* in this type of presidential rhetoric of national identity” (Beasley 2004:53). The values and attitudinal positions attributed to a belief in such civil religion, also presents presidents with a possibility of defining the American character in relation to more irrational, passionate, regressive, or, to be a bit harsh, barbaric individuals of other parts of the world, making the civil religion an effective rhetoric of national identity. This is, however, not to say that it is without complications.

Beasley (2004:65) argues that one such complication is the high level of morality implicit in this kind of rhetoric. In order to be faithful to the national ideals of the civil religion, an individual is forced to set aside more personal experiences, resorting to “[...] the disciplined turning of the other cheek, perhaps, rather than an impassioned obscene gesture” (Beasley 2004:65). This is, of course, more easily said than done and can be a reason for the often obvious contradictions of American creed and deeds.

Another complication when it comes to this kind of identity construction is its dependence on a specific type of opposition in order to survive. Beasley argues that “[...] it needs world wars, and Auschwitzes, and Sarajevos, and other examples as evidence of the kinds of un-American events that passionate tribalism can lead to” (Beasley 2004:66), something that became obvious in the rhetoric of president Clinton, who took office after the end of the Cold War when all external enemies seemed to have been conquered with the collapse of the Soviet Union. This brought to the fore the problems caused by the extreme diversity of the American people, so long neglected out of the need to unify in face of external threats. According to Beasley, this forced Clinton to become the president that most obviously would come to challenge the civil religious rhetoric, and instead try to argue that the nation’s strength was to be found in its diversity. He also argued against the notion that the United States held some special position in the world. Instead, he claimed that it was as vulnerable to the threats of the new world as any other nation (Beasley 2004:158ff). However, Clinton also stressed that “Americans need not abandon their shared beliefs altogether to accept this new logic, for all their actions should be guided by an overarching belief that ‘our Nation can summon from its myriad diversity the deepest measures of unity’” (Beasley 2004:166), thus once again emphasizing the persistence of the civil religious base of American identity used by presidents from 1885-2000, even if it, during the Clinton years, seemed to become somewhat weakened and adjusted to the new world of American hegemony of the post-Cold War, and pre-September 11, 2001, era.

# 4 Narratives in the Speeches of the 2004 National Conventions

This chapter contains the analysis of the speeches given by the Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates of the National Conventions of 2004. The first, quite extensive part of this analysis aims at uncovering the stories about America and the challenges facing the country, used by the candidates of the election and is basically descriptive in character. The second part starts out from the theoretical discussion about the use of narratives and analyzes how the stories used by the candidates are put together in order to legitimate or oppose different policy strategies.

## 4.1 Defining the Stories Used: The Purpose and Challenges of America in a New World Order

### 4.1.1 The Democratic Party and the Dimmed Light of America

When it comes to defining America, the democratic candidates in the Presidential election, John Kerry and John Edwards, both use a familiar picture to describe the nation's purpose in the world, first used by John Winthrop in his description of America as a city on a hill. That is the picture of America as a shining beacon of freedom and democracy, the role model of other countries. In the words of Vice Presidential candidate Edwards:

[...] together, we will ensure that the image of America – the image all of us love – America this shining light, this beacon of freedom, democracy, and human rights that the world looks up to – that that beacon is always lit (Edwards 2004:618).

From this it seems clear that the purpose of America, in the view of the democratic candidates, must be to shoulder the responsibility of setting an example for the rest of the world to follow and, according to Kerry, this is a role that the United States has indeed lived up to in the past. He argues that he, as a boy living in the divided city of Berlin, saw in the eyes of people “the gratitude [...] toward the United States for all that we had done” (Kerry 2004:611) during the World Wars and the following Cold War. That is where he claims to have

learned to feel proud of the freedom of the United States and learned to understand the importance of American leadership.

Recently however, according to Kerry, the image of the United States has been stained in the eyes of the world, by President Bush and his administration. In contrast to the present President, Kerry argues that:

I will be a commander in chief who will never mislead us into war. I will have a Vice President who will not conduct secret meetings with polluters to rewrite our environmental laws. I will have a Secretary of Defense who will listen to the best advice of our military leaders. And I will appoint an Attorney General who actually upholds the Constitution of the United States (Kerry 2004:611).

The reputation and position of the United States is, in other words, threatened by the un-American actions of the Bush administration, which have deceived the American people. Kerry goes on;

We have it in our power to change the world again. But only if we are true to our ideals – and that starts by telling the truth to the American people. That is my first pledge to you tonight. As President, I will restore trust and credibility to the White House (Kerry 2004:611).

The main point of the Democrat's criticism of the Bush administration concerns the nation's biggest challenge yet, the war on terrorism in general and the Iraq war in particular. Kerry promises that if he becomes president, he will restore the "[...] nations time-honored tradition: [that] the United States never goes to war because we want to, we only goes to war because we have to" (Kerry 2004:612), thus emphasizing the view of the Iraq war as an unjust war into which the American people were misled. This becomes very clear later in Kerry's address when he states;

Saying there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq doesn't make it so. Saying we can fight a war on the cheap doesn't make it so. And proclaiming mission accomplished certainly doesn't make it so (Kerry 2004:612).

The Democratic candidates does not disagree with the republican administration on the fact that the nation is at war, and that it is a war unlike any the nation has ever known (Kerry 2004:611, Edwards 2004:618), but they argue that the behavior of the Bush administration when it comes to handling the war and the security of the American people in this new world, have had the effect of destroying the nation's international credibility, made it more vulnerable to the threats of terrorists and made it impossible for America to be the shining beacon it is supposed to be. And in this new world of global terror American leadership is essential. However, Edwards argues;

But we can't do this alone. We have to restore our respect in the world to bring our allies to us and with us. It's how we won the World Wars and the Cold War and it is how we will build a stronger Iraq (Edwards 2004:618).

In sum, according to the Democratic candidates, the Bush administrations politics have left an America that is feared and disrespected in the world. The



politics of the republican President have dimmed the light that America is supposed to be. And according to Kerry (2004:612) the challenge of the future is to once again make America a beacon in the world. How then, according to Kerry and Edwards, is this to be achieved? The short answer is, by becoming more American. The country needs to have a leader that is guided by the true American values. Kerry argues that;

We believe that what matters most is not narrow appeals masquerading as values, but the shared values that show the true face of America. Not narrow appeals that divide us, but shared values that unite us. Family and faith. Hard work and responsibility. Opportunity for all – so that every child, every parent, every worker has an equal shot at living up to their God-given potential (Kerry 2004:613).

The central point of Kerry's argument is that only by returning to the core values that unites the American people can the nation become once more what it is meant to be. According to him "[v]alues are not just words. They're what we live by. They're about the causes we champion and the people we fight for" (Kerry 2004:613). To be a true American is, in other words, to live by the shared values of the nation, which is the foundation for the national unity so essential to both Kerry and Edwards. The centrality of this and what it means is expressed by Kerry in the following way;

The measure of our character is our willingness to give of ourselves for others and for our country. These aren't Democratic values. These aren't Republican values. They're American values. We believe in them. They are who we are. And if we honor them, if we believe in our selves, we can build an America that's stronger at home and respected in the world (Kerry 2004:615).

The sum of all this is that America is in desperate need for a leader guided by those core values. Who believes in the strength of the nation, stemming from its diversity and the genuine love of country that is shared by its citizens. According to Kerry (2004:613) this is what makes the United States both great and good. In the words of Edwards this will mean that:

A new President [guided by these principles] will bring the world to our side, and with it – a stable Iraq and a real chance for peace and freedom in the Middle East [...] That's how we can address the new threats we face. That's how we can keep you safe. That's how we can restore America's respect around the world (Edwards 2004:618).

All of this leads to a second core view of America used in the speeches of the Democratic National Convention. That is the idea of America as the land of the future. Kerry states, early in his address that;

The journey isn't complete. The march isn't over. The promise isn't perfected. Tonight we're setting out again. And together, we're going to write the next great chapter of America's story (Kerry 2004:611).

Americans, according to Kerry, are the can-do people, who have always looked to the next horizon and always reached for that which has seemed

impossible (Kerry 2004:611, 615). He argues that there has never been a time more urgent for Americans to stand up and define themselves to the world than now, to show the world the true face of American values, to once again make America a beacon in the world (Kerry 2004:612, 615), and to reject the un-American politics of the Bush administration which have so severely damaged and weakened the American nation, both internationally and domestically. Kerry accepts to be the Presidential candidate of his party “[...] on behalf of a new birth of freedom” and “[...] for all those who believe our best days are ahead of us – for all of you – with great faith in the American people [...]” (Kerry 2004:611, Edwards 2004:619).

According to Kerry, America faces its most important election of our lifetime. The nation is at war against a new kind of enemy, and at the same time it has become something of a fallen idol in the world, feared but not respected, mistreated by a leader who does not act in accordance with the core values of the nation. However, if that leader is replaced by one who can bring America back to its origin, to its true ideals, then the American people can conquer any obstacle. The future, Kerry argues “[...] does not belong to fear, it belongs to freedom” (Kerry 2004:613). He finishes by once again stressing that:

It is time to reach for the next dream. It is time to look to the next horizon. For America, the hope is there. The sun is rising. Our best days are still to come. Goodnight, God bless you, and God bless America (Kerry 2004:615).

#### 4.1.2 The Republican Party and the Historic Mission of America

The republican candidates of the Presidential election use yet another story about the purpose of America. George W. Bush puts it in the following way;

The story of America is the story of expanding liberty: an ever widening circle, constantly growing to reach further and include more. Our nations founding commitment is still our deepest commitment: In our world, and here at home, we will extend the frontiers of freedom (Bush 2004:707).

In, other words, according to Bush, America were founded with the purpose to expand liberty to its own people and to the world. This feeling of mission is central to the way that Bush speaks of the American people. In fact, he argues that the American people and the American nation itself is the product of the transformative powers of liberty because “[t]hat power brought settlers on perilous journeys, inspired colonies to rebellion, ended the sin of slavery, and set our nation against the tyrannies of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (Bush 2004:710). He goes on proclaiming that he believes “that America is called to lead the cause of freedom in a new century” (Bush 2004:711) and that it is the wisest use of American strength to advance freedom because of its transformative powers. The importance of this American mission is stressed by Bush in the following way;

I believe all these things because freedom is not America’s gift to the world, it is the almighty God’s gift to every man and woman in this world. This moment in

the life of our country will be remembered. Generations will know if we kept our faith and kept our word. Generations will know if we sized this moment, and used it to build a future of safety and peace. The freedom of many, and the future security of our nation, now depend on us (Bush 2004:711).

Following this, Vice Presidential candidate Cheney claims that the 2004 Presidential election is one of the most important in the history of America because the nation have come to a defining moment in its history (Cheney 2004:713). He argues;

Like other generations of Americans, we soon discovered that history had great and unexpected duties in store for us. September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, made clear the challenges we face. [...] Just as surely as the Nazis during World War Two and the Soviet Communists during the Cold War, the enemy we face today are bent on our destruction. As in other times, we are in a war we did not start, and have no choice but to win (Cheney 2004:712).

This mission of securing freedom in the world is something that America, according to Bush and Cheney, has done before, and as a response to the criticisms of their methods, they argue that there have always been doubters of the importance of America's mission. However, as Bush puts it, because of the fact that "[...] generation[s] of Americans held firm in the cause of liberty, we live in a better and safer world today" (Bush 2004:710).

Even so, the world of today is very different from the days of those earlier efforts, according to Bush and Cheney. Bush states that the lessons of September 11<sup>th</sup> made it clear that new and different approaches needed to be developed and that, as he claims "[w]e must, and we will, confront threats to America before it is too late" (Bush 2004:709). Cheney describes the present threat in the following way, referring to the lessons of September 11;

On that day we saw the harm that could be done by 19 men armed with knives and boarding passes. America also awakened to a possibility even more lethal: this enemy, whose hatred of us is limitless, armed with chemical, biological, or even nuclear weapons (Cheney 2004:712).

In the view of the candidates of the Republican Party it is the God given mission of America to eradicate the evil represented by the terrorists and at the same time fulfill its founding commitment of expanding liberty in ever wider circles.

The challenges facing America, in the republican view, is, to summarize, above all the very real and imminent threat of evil terrorist bent on the complete destruction of the nation. In order to stop this, a resolute leadership guided by an understanding of the historic importance of American leadership in this struggle is needed, because "[i]f America shows uncertainty or weakness in this decade, the world will drift toward tragedy" (Bush 2004:707). Cheney argues that it is here that the differences between the presidential candidates are most obvious. According to him;

George W. Bush saw this country through grief and tragedy, he has acted with patience, and calm, and moral seriousness that calls evil by its name. In the great

divide of our time, he has put this nation where America always belongs: against the tyrants of this world, and on the side of every soul on earth who yearns to live in freedom (Cheney 2004:714).

In opposition to this leadership Cheney describes John Kerry as not having understood how the world has changed. He accuses him of being indecisive and weak since he “[...] denounces American action when other countries don’t approve as if it the whole object of our foreign policy were to please a few persistent critics” (Cheney 2004:713). Kerry is also considered dangerous for the country because Cheney sees him as being in constant disagreement with himself, reflecting “[...] a habit of indecision, [which] sends a message of confusion” (Cheney 2004:714), in relation to the plain and simple and resolute (that is, the truly American) leadership of President Bush, who “[...] understands the miracle of this great country” (Cheney 2004:714).

As have been pointed out, Bush and Cheney sees the American people as involved in a destined struggle of historical proportions, however, they are both confident that the nation will prevail. Bush argues;

[...] we have seen Americans in uniform storming mountain strongholds, and charging through sandstorms, and liberating millions with acts of valor that would make the men of Normandy proud. Since 2001, American have been given hills to climb, and found the strength to climb them (Bush 2004:706).

This shows, according to Bush “[...] that our country remains the hope of the oppressed, and the greatest force of good on this earth” (Bush 2004:710). Exactly as the Democratic candidates, the republicans also use the idea of America’s perfection in some distant future. However, according to them the nation is already heading in the right direction. September 11<sup>th</sup> became a defining moment where the unity and strength of the American people were put to the test. Bush states;

My fellow Americans, for as long as our country stands, people will look to the resurrection of New York City and they will say: Here buildings fell, here a nation rose. We see America’s character in our military, which finds a way or makes one. We see it in our veterans, who are supporting military families in their days of worry. We see it in our young people, who have found heroes once again (Bush 2004:711).

In the close up of his address Bush once again stresses the importance of the nations mission to the world and the way the American people, both today and yesterday, have risen to the challenge. In his own words;

This young century will be liberty’s century. By promoting liberty abroad, we will build a safer world. By encouraging liberty at home, we will build a more hopeful America. Like generations before us, we have a calling from beyond the stars to stand for freedom. This is the everlasting dream of America – and tonight, in this place, that dream in renewed. Now we go forward – grateful for our freedom, faithful to our case, and confident in the future of the greatest nation on earth. God bless you, and may God continue to bless our great country (Bush 2004:711).

## 4.2 Two Faces of American Identity: Emplotment and Selective Appropriations in the Stories Used

What is striking with the stories described above is the centrality of what being American means and obligates. Certain policies are championed or opposed with reference to what is considered the proper behavior of a true American. Being American, in other words, seems to be enough to be expected to act or think in a special way. The national identity of America is thus of great importance when it comes to politics. Even so, however similar the stories used by the two parties may seem at some level, they champion different policies and describes two quite different American identities. Dunn writes;

Narratives of national identities are generally formed by a gradual layering of events and meanings, usually through three steps: the selection of events themselves, the linking of these events to each other in causal and associational ways (plotting), and interpreting what the events and plots signify (Dunn 2004:124f)

As have already been mentioned, this is in line with Somers argument that a narrative consists of causal emplotment and selective appropriations through which the involved parts of the narrative are put in relation to each other (Somers 1994:616). She also stresses the importance of the time and space dependencies of narratives. The following section is devoted to an analysis of how processes of emplotment and selective appropriations lead to two stories of American identity which are both similar and at the same time very different.

First, however, we must be clear about what kind of narrative within the process of identity construction we are dealing with. It may very well be that the candidates of the presidential election are expressing their personal views on what being American means, that they are sharing their personal autobiographical narratives of America. These are, however, also being presented in a political context which makes them what Somers calls public narratives, that is, “[...] attached to cultural and institutional formations larger than the individual” (Somers 1994:619), in this case political parties involved in a presidential election campaign, making them part of the relational setting or social network within which Americans create their own personal identity (Somers 1994:626). The narratives used by the political parties, are in other words offered to individual Americans to be tested against their existing autobiographical narratives of what being American means. It is as public narratives, rather than autobiographical narratives of individual politicians, that the stories used by the candidates are of interest here. Let’s now turn to how the process of emplotment and interpretation, or selective appropriation, creates two different narrative identities of America implicating different courses of action.

As have already been mentioned, there are similarities in the stories used by the Democratic and Republican parties. They are connected to the process of emplotment, of describing the overall plot of the events in which the American nation is embedded.

There is, in both the Democratic and Republican stories of America, a sense of uniqueness and purpose. All analyzed stories contain thoughts about an American mission. The mission is for the nation to be the champion of freedom. Kerry argues that America is all about “[...] the great idea of freedom for which so many have given their lives” (Kerry 2004:613), and Bush states that this “[...] our nation’s founding commitment is still our deepest commitment” (Bush 2004:707). Connected with this theme is the importance of American leadership obvious in the stories used by both parties. Bush argues that he has a “[...] clear and positive plan to build a safer world” (Bush 2004:707), indicating that the duties of the American president goes well beyond the borders of the United States, it means paving the way for freedom and peace everywhere. Kerry adds that America needs to be a beacon in the world that will “[...] lead a global effort against nuclear proliferation – to keep the most dangerous weapons in the world out of the most dangerous hands in the world” (Kerry 2004:612), as an example of an area where American leadership is required. Leading the world towards freedom and peace is, in other words, the mission and purpose of America and has been so for a long time. The sacrifices of Americans during the World Wars and the Cold War, which tipped the balance to victory for the forces of good, are proof, in the stories of both parties, of how America has honored this mission through the course of history.

This story of America’s fight for freedom has today reached a new turn. The nation is once again at war against the evil forces in the world, this time in the shape of global terrorism (Kerry 2004:612, Edwards 2004:618, Bush 2004:709, Cheney 2004:712). This is the central plot of the stories used by both democrats and republicans during the 2004 National Conventions. A new world order has replaced the old one and America is once again involved in a destined battle, against terrorist groups of global reach, the evildoers of this new age.

There is however great differences between the narratives of the two parties when it comes to the process of selective appropriation, when different events are to be incorporated, and given meaning in this shared idea of America. Somers argues that “[t]o make something understandable in the context of a narrative is to give it historicity and relationality” (Somers 1994:617), meaning that events of recent times have to be incorporated into this shared plot of American mission and purposefulness in order to be made understandable. It is the way that those recent events are interpreted into the story of America that shows the two different narratives of American identity that are presented at the National Conventions for people to evaluate in relation to their own life-stories.

The most obvious disagreement concerns the invasion of Iraq. The Republicans, not surprisingly, sees the war in Iraq as a part of this American mission of expanding freedom and defeat the tyrants of the world and also as a part of the war on terrorism (Bush 2004:709) which is part of that same plot. The decision to attack Iraq was, in their view, the only way for America to act. Bush declares;

Because we acted to defend our country, the murderous regimes of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban are history, more than 50 million people have been liberated, and democracy is coming to the broader Middle East (Bush 2004:709).

Only by engaging the opponents of freedom could America live up to and honor its historic mission to the world. Bush states that with the invasion of Iraq “[...] we are serving a vital and historic cause that will make our country safer” (Bush 2004:709). The new times, since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, have, according to Bush and Cheney forced America to think differently and to develop an new approach in the struggle against an enemy, bent on their destruction (Cheney 2004:713). Faced with the threat of terrorists armed with weapons of mass destruction, America can not wait for the rest of the world to realize the seriousness of the new situation but must shoulder the responsibility of leadership and act alone. In the words of Bush;

[w]e are staying on the offensive – striking terrorists abroad – so we don’t have to face them here at home. And we are working to advance liberty in the broader Middle East, because freedom will bring a future of hope, and the peace we all want. [...] We have led, many have followed, and America and the world are safer (Bush 2004:709).

By acting, being a resolute leader and showing the way for the rest of the world, the nation have honored its historic purpose and thereby remained, in Bush’s words, “[...] the hope of the oppressed, and the greatest force of good on this earth” (Bush 2004:710).

The Democrats, on the other hand, does not interpret the invasion of Iraq in the same way at all. In fact, they do not even see the invasion of Iraq as a part of the nation’s mission to advance freedom, a self image that we have already established that they share with their political opponents. Kerry argues that the unilateral actions of the Bush administration have failed the American ideals and made the nation feared and disrespected with the result of weakening its possibility to fulfill its historic mission of promoting freedom (Kerry 2004:611f). He argues that Iraq did not at the time of the invasion present the grave threat to the American people that the Republican administration claimed. He argues;

Before you go to battle, you have to be able to look a parent in the eye and truthfully say: ‘I tried everything possible to avoid sending your daughter into harm’s way. But we had no choice. We had to protect the American people, fundamental American values from a threat that was real and imminent’” (Kerry 2004:612).

However, saying that there are weapons of mass destruction in Iraq doesn’t make it so and the war against that country is not considered, by the Democrats as a necessary battle in the more far-reaching war on terror (Kerry 2004:612). American values and traditions on the other hand suggest, according to the Democrats, another approach to American leadership. In relation to the unilateral style of Republican leadership, Kerry argues;

We need a President who has the credibility to bring our allies to our side and share the burden [...] Here is the reality: that won’t happen until we have a president who restores America’s respect and leadership – so we don’t have to go it alone in the world. And we need to rebuild our alliances, so we can get the terrorists before they get us. [...] In these dangerous days there are a right way and a wrong way to

be strong. [...] We need to make America once again a beacon in the world. We need to be looked up to and not just feared (Kerry 2004:612).

In this view, American leadership comes from feelings of respect and gratitude from other countries helped by the United States at earlier points in history. It is not a an America of offensive and feared leadership but an America that is a beacon to the rest of the world, gathering alliances in order to lead a joint effort of combating terror and spreading freedom. As Edwards explains;

We have to restore our respect in the world to bring our allies to us and with us. It's how we won the World Wars and the Cold War and it is how we will build a stable Iraq (Edwards 2004:618).

From this is it seems clear that even if the stories used by both Republicans and Democrats are similar in some respects when it comes to the relationship between America and the rest of the world, the way they are used to selectively appropriate or interpret and give meaning to events of today produces different accounts of what America is all about and needs to do. As Patterson & Monroe (1998:315) have reminded us, narratives are what help us make sense of our reality, which implicates that the narratives that are given prominence within a relational setting will have a large effect of how we interpret the world around us. Somers (1994:614) have also claimed that narratives, at the same time as they help us construct an identity, become our guide to action. In this case, two competing narratives stand against each other in the political struggle for dominance within the relational setting where ordinary Americans construct their identities.



## 5 Concluding Discussion: National Identity in U.S. Presidential Politics

“[...] social action can only be intelligible if we recognize that people are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the stories through which they constitute their identity” (Somers 1994:624)

This statement by Somers is a central point of departure for this thesis. In the words of a constructivist it means that if we want to understand the actions of an actor we must understand how that actor's identity are formed by the intersubjective meanings of which the actor is a part and what interests that identity bestows upon the actor. As have been shown in the theoretical framework of this thesis, one way to do so is to view identity as constructed by narratives.

In a narrative context a national identity can be seen as an imagined community held together by national stories that are designed to, in Billig's words, flag the unity of the community. However, as Mumby have argued, and this thesis' analysis has shown, a national identity is not consensual but the product of the relation between different narratives and power relations, and therefore unavoidably political in character. Since political parties are parts of the institutional arrangements of the relational setting within which the national identity of America is being constructed, the stories used by the candidates in the context of the national conventions works as what Somers calls public narratives. Such narratives are “[...] attached to groups and categories, cultures and institutions” and “provide recognized ‘accounts’ one can give of ones behavior, accounts that identify where one belongs, what one is doing and why” (Ammerman 2003:214). They exist beyond the consciousness of any individual and thereby become part of the intersubjective meanings of a social context.

The analysis of the speeches given by the candidates of the of the 2004 Presidential election are clear evidence of the importance of national identity in American politics. As the results of the analysis shows, there is no question of the fact that there is a close relationship between notions of American identity and the different policy suggestions of the two parties presented in the speeches of the National conventions. The narrative approach of this analysis has shown that both parties are using stories of what American identity is all about in order to oppose or justify certain policies, or in more theoretical language, they present public narratives for individuals to identify with and act according to.

The Democratic narrative of American identity is focused on America as a *role model* in the world. This narrative acknowledges the dangers against America present in the contemporary world, in the form of global terrorism and the need of the nation to stand for freedom and democracy in this situation. The narrative goes that only if America becomes a beacon of freedom and democracy, which is

respected and looked up to, will the nation be able to fulfill its mission of leading the world towards peace. The right way to act in this situation is to build broad international alliances which together can overcome the threat of terrorism more effectively than any nation on its own.

The Republican narrative of American identity builds upon a God-given mission to *spread freedom* to the rest of the world. It is a narrative that highlights the dangers facing America in the shape of evil terrorist organizations wanting to get access to weapons of mass destruction in order to destroy the United States, sometimes even sponsored by tyrannical and autocratic leaders of other nations, who thereby stands in the way of the God-given right to freedom of their citizens. This narrative claims that America must act in such a situation, because without resolute American leadership, the world will go towards tragedy. The only way to honor the purpose of America in this world, according to this narrative, is to defeat the terrorist and those who support them wherever they are and before they get a chance to strike again. Only when these opponents of freedom have been removed is there a chance for peace in the world. Being a leader means to have the courage to lead the way, and let others follow, regardless of other's opinions concerning the methods used.

As is obvious, the Democratic storyline with a focus on America as a role model are used in order to oppose the unilateral policies of the Bush administration which have left America disrespected in the world, and to justify a more multilateral approach to foreign policy dilemmas. The Republican storyline, on the other hand, depicts America as a strong and resolved leader with a mission of spreading freedom and conquer evil. This notion of American identity are used in order to defend the possibility of unilateral action in world affairs, and to discredit the Democratic candidates as un-American in their unwillingness to do what is necessary in order to fulfill the nations historic mission without the approval of other nations.

One thing that is interesting in these seemingly contradictory visions of American identity is that they, at the same time, must be considered as opposing sides of the same coin. In their construction of a national identity, both parties use aspects of the civil religious rhetoric which, according to Beasley, have been used by presidents since the foundation of the nation. This should come as no surprise since, as Somers have argued, narratives need historicity and actors are never free to create narratives at will. Thus, in order for the parties to make their vision of national identity understandable (and attractive) to their citizens, the long history of the civil religious rhetoric makes it the most useful source of stories available. Therefore, there are similarities in the two narratives regarding the fact that America has a special mission in, and is supposed to lead, the world.

The differences between the stories occur when this relatively consensual vision is to be used in order to justify very different policy practices. In this case, the storyline of how America and the world are threatened by global terrorist groups and how they are to be handled needs to be incorporated into the larger story of America. That is how we make sense of new events, according to Ammerman. Somers have claimed that a social scientific narrative is dependent on relationality of its parts, which is achieved by actors through causal

emplotment and selective appropriation, which means that the parties consciously connects parts of the civil religious themes available to them that goes best with the policy they wish to justify in a way that makes it seem the right thing to do *as an American*, something that becomes obvious in the results of this thesis' analysis.

It seems obvious then, that the candidates of the 2004 national conventions feel a need to control the articulation of an American national identity, to establish a hegemonic public narrative, in order to find support for their policies. This is possibly extra important in a nation as diverse as the United States.

The aim of this thesis has been to analyze the role of national identity in U.S. politics by the use of a narrative theory of identity. The results of the analysis have shown that it has great importance, in the way both major parties use arguments of Americanism in order to justify or oppose different policy suggestions. As Beasley has also shown, in order to keep the country together the constant reminding of national unity and identity has been required by its presidents since the birth of the nation. In the theoretical view adopted here, this means that the political parties of the United States at the same time participate in the overall process of identity construction of individual Americans, because they become part of the intersubjective meanings of the American social context.

Finally, some caution is called for concerning the reach of those results. National identity has been found of great importance in presidential politics, but the political system of the U.S. is a vast and complicated system. In order to make claims valid for the entirety of this system, more detailed research of its other dimensions is required. It should also be mentioned that even if it is *national* identity that is central to the presidential politics of the United States, other social contexts may highlight different kinds of identities, making the study of the connections between identity and politics relevant in other contexts as well.

# References

- Adler, Emanuel, 1997. "Seizing the Middle Ground: Constructivism in World Politics" p. 319-363 in *European Journal of International Relations* Vol. 3(3)
- Ammerman, Nancy T., 2003. "Religious Identities and Religious Institutions" p. 207-224 in Dillon, Michele (ed.) *Handbook of the Sociology of Religion* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Anderson, Benedict, 1991. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* New York: Verso
- Beasley, Vanessa, 2004. *You, the People. American National Identity in Presidential Rhetoric* College Station: Texas A & M University Press
- Billig, Michael, 1995. *Banal Nationalism* London: Sage Publications
- Bruner, Jerome, 1991. "The Narrative Construction of Reality" p 1-21 in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 18, no. 1
- Bush, George W., 2004. "Now We Go Forward. Address by George W. Bush, President of the United States. Delivered to the Republican National Convention, New York, New York, September 2, 2004" p 706-711 in *Vital Speeches of the Day* Vol. 70(23)
- Cheney, Dick, 2004. "Seeing Our Cause to Victory. Address by Dick Cheney, Vice President of the United States. Delivered to the Republican National Convention, New York, New York, September 1, 2004" p. 711-714 in *Vital Speeches of the Day* Vol. 70(23)
- Dunn, Kevin C., 2004. "Narrating Identity: Constructing the Congo During the 1960 Crises" p. 123-144 in Goff, Patricia M. & Dunn, Kevin C. (eds.) *Identity and Global Politics. Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Edwards, John, 2004. "Lets Make America Stronger. Address by John Edwards, United States Senator from North Carolina, Democratic Vice Presidential Candidate. Delivered to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Boston, Massachusetts, July 28, 2004" p. 615-619 in *Vital Speeches of the Day* Vol. 70(20)
- Feldman, Martha S. – Sköldberg, Kaj – Brown, Ruth N. – Horner, Debra, 2004. "Making Sense of Stories: A Rhetorical Approach to Narrative Analysis" p. 147-170 in *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* Vol. 14(2)
- Ferguson, Robert A., 2004. "The Dialectic of Liberty: Law and Religion in Anglo-American Culture" p 27-54 in *Modern Intellectual History* Vol. 1(1)
- Hopf, Ted, 1998. "The Promise of Constructivism in International Relations Theory" p. 171-200 in *International Security* Vol. 23(1)
- Howarth, David, 2000. *Discourse*. Buckingham: Open University Press
- Huntington, Samuel P., 2005. *Who Are We? Americas Great Debate*. London: The Free Press/ Simon & Schuster UK

- Kerry, John, 2004. "The Hope is There, Looking Towards the Next Horizon. Address by John Kerry, United States Senator from Massachusetts, Democratic Presidential Candidate. Delivered at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, Boston, Massachusetts, July 29, 2004" p. 610-615 in *Vital Speeches of the Day* Vol. 70(20)
- Longley, Clifford, 2002. *Chosen People. The Big Idea that Shapes England and America*. London: Hodder & Stoughton
- Lundquist, Lennart, 1993. *Det vetenskapliga studiet av politik* Lund: Studentlitteratur
- McClay, Wilfred M., 2004. "The Soul of a Nation" p 4-19 in *Public Interest* Spring 2004
- Mumby, Dennis K, 1993. "Introduction: Narrative and Social Control" p. 1-12 in Mumby, Dennis K. (ed) *Narrative and Social Control: Critical Perspectives* New York: Sage Publications
- O'Hagan, Jacinta, 2004. "'The Power and the Passion': Civilizational Identity and Alterity in the Wake of September 11" p 27-46 in Goff, Patricia M. & Dunn, Kevin C. (eds.), *Identity and Global Politics. Theoretical and Empirical Elaborations*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
- Patterson, Molly & Renwick Monroe, Kristen, 1998. "Narrative in Political Science" p 315-331 in *Annual Review of Political Science* Vol. 1
- Patton, Michael Q., 2002. *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed) London: Sage Publications
- Phillips, Nelson & Hardy, Cynthia, 2002. *Discourse Analysis. Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications
- Riessman, Catherine K., 1993. *Narrative Analysis* Newbury Park: Sage Publications
- Somers, Margaret R., 1994. "The Narrative Construction of identity: A Relational and Network Approach" p 605-649 in *Theory and Society* Vol. 23(5)
- Somers, Margaret R. & Gibson, Gloria D., 1994. "Reclaiming the Epistemological "Other": Narrative and the Social Constitution of Identity" p. 37-99 in Calhoun, Craig (ed) *Social Theory and the Politics of Identity* Malden: Blackwell Publishers
- Wald, Kenneth D., 2003. *Religion and Politics in the United States* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Wendt, Alexander, 1992. "Anarchy is what States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics" p. 391-425 in *International Organization* Vol. 46(2)

# Appendix 1 – Publishing Policy of Vital Speeches of the Day

This appendix contains the publishing policy of the journal *Vital Speeches of the Day*. It can be found on the first page of every volume of the journal. The following quote is taken from the first page of the issue of Sep 15, 2004; 70; 23.

## POLICY OF VITAL SPEECHES

The publishers of *Vital Speeches* believe that the important addresses of the recognized leaders of public opinion constitute the best expression of contemporary thought in America, and that it is extremely important for the welfare of the nation that these speeches be permanently recorded and disseminated. The publishers have no axe to grind. *Vital speeches* will be found authentic and constructive.

It is the policy of the publishers to cover both sides of public questions and to print all speeches in full. Where it is necessary to condense a speech for reasons of unusual length or the use of extraneous matter it will be so stated when printing. They feel that it is only in the unedited and unexpurgated speech that the reader can best obtain the view of the speaker.

This material gives the reader the best thoughts of the best minds on current national problems. It also offers the student of public speaking examples of the effective speech of today of those who have attained leadership in the fields of economics, politics, education, sociology, government, criminology, finance, business, taxation, health, law, labor, etc. Thus the student of public speaking obtains the finest text book material with a sound knowledge of public questions.