IN THE SHADOW OF TWO TOWERS

9/11 in the Alternative Internet Media



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It is in conversation thoughts become crystalized

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'The opposite of a correct statement is an incorrect statement, but the opposite of a profound truth is often another profound truth.'

Niels Bohr, 1922 Nobel Price winner in Quantum physics

I Introduction

One could argue 9/11 is the 'mother of all stories'. Everyone remembers where they were when they heard the news; either out on the street or inside a building, glued to their TV-sets at home or on their way to work or school and on the phone with a friend or family member. 'Hey, do you know what happened in New York?' Everyone will remember the overwhelming feelings of shock and disbelief, the conversations, the fear, the surreal images. Once again the two towers. Once again those incoming planes. The screaming. The explosions. Rewind, then watch again. Enter the experts, the people that know; the opinions. And after a while, eventually the slowly growing notion that, despite the horror of that sunny September morning, life would go on, like before.

But did it? Even though the attacks of September 11th 2001 took place more than three years ago, the impact of the, until now, biggest and most drastic event of the 21st century can still be observed daily in any of the international and local media. An arbitrary Netherlands news broadcast in December 2004 illustrates this: five items, two of which have a direct or indirect connection to 9/11. One is about the infamous 'terror alert', which according to Dutch secretary of state Johan Remkes remains 'undiminished as a result of 11 September, 'Madrid' and the assassination of Theo van Gogh¹'. Another item covers the reorganization of secret service agencies in the United States, which was carried out under pressure of relatives of the victims of September 11, and will have to make sure future terrorist attacks are to be prevented.

Notwithstanding the continuous extensive coverage of 9/11 related news stories, it is debatable whether the in the media overly heard exclamation of 'nothing will be the same after September 11' is bound to become true, and if so, it will become true for the most obvious reasons. Not unlikely might existing relations actually have been consolidated because of the event. We cannot glance in future history books, but if we could, we might find a whole different explanation of 9/11 and its aftermath than we are able to foresee now.

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¹ The 11 March 2004 Madrid bombings and the assasination of Filmmaker van Gogh in the same year could be perceived as events that had little to nothing to do with the 9/11 attacks, but also could be opted for a theory that these were directly or indirectly related to September 11.

All we can tell at this point in time is that September 11 is still 'a hot topic', and does not seem to be losing any steam, both in the 'traditional' media -television, radio and press- and in the 'newer' media, on the Internet. The effects of a couple of chaotic hours in New York and Washington have proven to be enormous, and have lead to a string of events; from wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, -which possibly caused the death of more than one hundred thousand citizens²- and a US presidential re-election, to an apparently fully operating terror warning system in the US and terror watchfulness all over the world. There have been political earthquakes on the European continent, growing tensions within societies and between ethnic groups in populations, mass demonstrations, transatlantic alienation, and a seemingly perpetual state of anxiety and concern among civilians worldwide. Post 9/11, the 'the two towers' are still casting a shadow over many a national and international event, creating a climate in which the economically and politically powerful attempt to find a way to profit. *Cui prodest scelus, est fecit*, one could say. Free translation: he who benefits from a crime is guilty himself.

This is an explorative study into the field of alternative media which will focus on alternative, Internet based views regarding the happenings on September 11. The research will be conducted using content analysis. Evidence suggests that the journalism of alternative media generally does differ from mainstream journalism. Whereas mainstream journalism has a tendency to privilege the powerful, alternative media set out to privilege the powerless and the marginal; to offer a perspective from below and say 'the unspoken' (Harcup, 2003: 371). The alternative press actively selects alternative sources to hear other sources in society. Journalists in the mainstream media, on the other hand, tend to rely upon official sources as the basis of their news stories, handing those in positions of power considerable influence over what is covered in the news (McChesney, 2000; in Harcup, 2003: 361). Therefore it seems worthwhile to have an in-depth look into the field of alternative media concerning events of the magnitude of 9/11. Alternative ways of seeing the world do exist; ways which are well worth investigating.

With regard to the Internet, many alternative news sources (and consequently alternative worldviews) can be found on the World Wide Web, though the fact that these cannot always be checked upon, or taken seriously, should not be underestimated.

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² Source: The Lancet (2004). www.cnn.com/2004/WORLD/meast/10/29/iraq.deaths.

Even though one has to wade through a bulk of unreliable hog-wash at times, there seem to be interesting and valuable views out there on the Internet. Therefore, it is rather surprising that many traditional media outlets seem so reluctant to use information that comes to them from the digital universe. Several newsroom offices and editorial staffs of mainstream newspapers admit that only a small percentage of available news stories make it to the columns of the actual newspaper (van Ginneken, 2004: 27).

Extra information can in many cases inspire us to come up with critical questions (Hamelink, 2004: 98). Knowledge is power. And to what extent do we, as a (world) population, know what we have to know? For instance, only on the Internet one can read about the press conference in Amsterdam on May 18th 2005, where the US attorney Philip Berg stated, 'Bush and his cronies either made 911 happen or let it happen. If they let it happen, then they made it happen; and they must he held accountable.' (American Free Press, 7/9/2004).

Research Question

My aim is to analyze how the alternative media cover the event of 9/11. To do so, the method of framing analysis will be used. I will investigate which types of frames appear in alternative media outlets on the Internet and describe them extensively. The research question is:

- Regarding the September 11 attacks, which frames are being used in the alternative Internet media?

Before I point out the social and scientific relevance of this research, I will first go over a couple of restrictions the study brings forth. Many alternative sources ranging from independent newspapers, magazines and leaflets to television programs, documentaries and films are available nowadays. I will restrict myself to alternative media sources in *cyberspace*. The Internet is one of the fastest growing media for alternative sources in the world, and supposedly has, because of its huge reach, a substantial influence on the global population at large. Although I believe that other alternative outlets would without a doubt contribute to the overall research, investigating even a small selection of these would become too time-consuming.

Also, a restriction is made in *the amount* of investigated alternative Internet sources. With so many websites and weblogs already out there, and more being added every day, the Internet is expanding at a daunting pace. It would obviously be impossible to investigate all September 11-related alternative content on the web; I therefore select 10 alternative websites that I focus on.

Finally, this study will focus on the 'sender' as well as the 'text/message' part of the communication process. The content of websites and newspapers will be investigated and, afterwards, placed in a broader context. The 'receiving end' of the process, the influence the content has on the receptor, will be left outside of this study. It could be truly interesting to investigate what people know of any existing alternative theories regarding 9/11, and if the medium they largely turn to for information affects in any way their knowledge of the event, and perspective or worldview. Adding reception factors to the research would be too time-consuming at this point as well, but again, might make for an enlightening future study.

I regard this study relevant in a number of areas. The event has many levels, all of which need to be put to academic tests. Even though 9/11 was extensively covered, much academic work on the media and its relations to this event has yet to be published. Further, 9/11 has been a historical event with consequences that are still being felt by many world citizens four years after. In the Netherlands, the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon in 2001 have been chosen by the population as the second most important event of the last 30 years (only losing out to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989) and much of the recent tensions between groups of habitants of Dutch origin and foreigners are being explained by pointing at September 11 (NRC Handelsblad, 2005). The title of a book about 9/11 called *Two Hours That Shook the World*, is indeed telling and refers to the enormous impact the morning of September 11, 2001 had on the world as we see it today. Researching the framing of the 9/11 events by alternative media outlets can therefore be valuable.

Also, in an age of a rapidly expanding cyberspace, research of alternative sources on the Internet is fairly scarce. The promise of the Internet lies in its abilities to break down barriers of communication, possibly leading to new ways of providing and distributing information. The Internet could have a large impact on future generations, making a research of how the alternative Internet-based media cover large world events like 9/11 a useful one.

Last but not least, according to many alternative media outlets, trying to find out what might have happened on September 11 2001 is still a quite misty and ambiguous affair, something I will point out in the following chapters. As previously stated, several different views on the event exist, and there seem to be a lot of unanswered questions. A Zogby Poll of New Yorkers' feelings on the work of the Sept. 11 commission in November 2004 showed that nearly half of the city's residents believed that federal officials knew of the attacks in advance, but failed to act (CBS New York/ AP 11/08/04; Zogby 2004). The frequently found accusation that the American government, until this day, is being highly secretive about most evidence surrounding 9/11, makes any investigation into September 11 a priori an interesting one.

Outline

The next chapter, chapter II, is about the question of how most of the mainstream media operate, in what way the power in the communication process is distributed, and will focus on how they differ from the alternative media. Chapter III consists of the methodology of the study, and in chapter IV I analyze the results. Finally, in chapter V, the results are discussed and some suggestions for future research are being offered.

First, however, we will go back to September 11th, 2001. The *morning* of that infamous day to be precise, as the context of the 9/11 events is reconsidered and described.

The 9/11 events

On the clear and sunny morning of the 11th of September 2001, four commercial airplanes take off from airports in the cities of Boston, Washington and Newark, bound for west coast destinations. Shortly after takeoff, nineteen hijackers, (according to written statements of telephone communication between passengers/flight personnel and family members and ground workers), force themselves into the cockpit holding box cutter knives and take over the control of the various aircrafts. Skirmishes break out at this point, again according to telephone statements from cabin personnel, who from this moment on are unable to reach the cockpit and do not believe the pilots are still in charge of the plane.

From flight 77, the plane that would later crash into the Pentagon, few phone calls were recorded. There is one witness statement. CNN commentator Barbara Olson calls her husband Ted, to tell him the plane has been hijacked. At that moment, flight 11 is already on its way to New York City, and will start its final decent to slam into the north tower of the World Trade Center shortly before nine in the morning. The impact can be seen in the wide vicinity of New York City. A French camera team, ready to enter the WTC building with a squad of firemen to shoot a documentary, will later that day cater for the only available images of the flight 11 crash. CNN broadcasts the first TV images:

'This just in. You are looking at ... obviously a very disturbing live shot therethat is the World Trade Center, and we have unconfirmed reports this morning that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center' (CNN, 11/9/01).

Little over nine in the morning, flight 175 of United Airlines crashes into the south tower of the WTC complex. Millions of people see the images of this happening live on their television sets. Firefighters climb the stairs of both towers to look for survivors. There is no live footage of the crash of flight 77 in the military headquarters of the Pentagon, at 9.38 in the morning. The last hijacked plane, flight 93, crashes a couple of minutes after 10 a.m. in a cornfield close to the city of Pittsburgh. Like with flight 77, no footage of this crash. The rumors of fighting passengers, 'who attempted to force the hijackers out of the cockpit till the bitter end' are being affirmed by the major networks. An official explanation for the crash is not given. The two towers of the WTC will come down a little later, making for spectacular TV images. People just leaving the buildings have to run for cover to survive the collapse.

The phenomenon 'Ground Zero' is born. At this moment, president George W. Bush has left the elementary school in Florida where he attended a public reading class, and is presumably in Texas, having traveled there protected by his airplane squadron (Air Force One) (www.cooperativeresearch.org). It is not until later in the afternoon that the president, who took the news in of the second attack sitting in the classroom in Florida, will make an appearance in the disaster area. Before he left the school he made a statement in the presence of the press and mentioned 'an attack on America' (CNN, ABC). At six in the evening president Bush returns to the White House and addresses the nation. In what will later be known as 'the Bush Doctrine', he warns 'not to make a distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them' (Washington Post, 1/27/02). The world, from that point on, starts to get ready for war. A war that is soon to follow when American troops invade Afghanistan to go after the Taliban leaders. Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad heads on the 13th September 2001, two days after the attacks: 'Amerika koerst af op wraak' ('America sets course for revenge'). The article states: 'The United States are looking for retaliation. But who to go after? And who will back them up?' (NRC Handelsblad, 13/9/2001). On the 14th of September it is all too clear: 'the attacks make the world ready for the battle against terrorism' and there is an 'unprecedented support for US actions' Handelsblad, 14/9/2001). There is a political consensus. The war in Afghanistan is generally seen as the appropriate answer to 9/11.



II Media, Knowledge and Power





Left: David Letterman interviews an emotional Dan Rather, anchorman of news network CBS, shortly after 9/11 (John Filo / CBS Television). Right: Osama bin Laden appeared in a two week period on the cover of three different magazines.

Living in an increasingly complex world, we (as a public) necessarily are becoming more and more dependent on the media for our knowledge of anything beyond the horizons of our familiar environment. According to Sonia Livingstone (in Gripsrud, 1999: 91-102), mediated knowledge enables audiences to do two things. It gives them better understanding or recognition of the familiar, and it instructs them, shows them new things; people, places and lifestyles we would not know about in a world without modern mass media. John Thompson (1994; in Gripsrud, 1999: 97) speaks in this regard of 'mediated worldliness': our sense of place in the world being increasingly shaped by mediated knowledge. Livingstone poses four questions that address the matter of what knowledge the media may offer and how audiences do or might come to know of it:

- -*Who* knows?: questions of transmission of knowledge and access to ideas and knowledge. Who is the expert? Who do people turn to when they want to be informed?
- -How do we know?: questions regarding the modes of mediated communication; how knowledge is mediated, whether there is interactivity or an absence of feedback.
- -What do we know?: questions focusing on what sort of information will reach us. What can we know? How is knowledge constructed, transformed and re-embedded?
- -Whose knowledge is being (re) produced?: questions that regard mediated knowledge and power.

For this study especially the last two notions are of importance. They are linked in the sense that often *what* we know is in any other way related to the source that particular knowledge is originating from; a source that could be the government, large media corporations, political institutions, or press agencies. Is it possible to know everything that happens in the world from the mainstream media, or do we need other sources to provide us with extra, crucial information? The balance of power in the media landscape seems to be at the heart of what we know, and whose knowledge is being transmitted to us; something I will discuss in the next part of this chapter.

People need the media to understand what is going on around them, but in crisis situations, which the September 11 attacks obviously were, people tend to rely on the media even more than they usually do. 'During a severe social disruption, there is an unusually high need for information and sense making by individuals' (Lowrey, 2004: 339). The search for extra, additional information is a logical consequence of having witnessed a traumatic event like 9/11, but long term foremost that last notion, 'the sense making', is of importance. The public seeks a mental framework news can be placed in. A way of understanding what happened and how it might affect individual life. The mainstream media often are more than willing to lead the public in how to make sense of the world around them.

The agenda setting theory focuses on the idea of the mass media forcing attention to certain issues, but doing so in an indirect way. They filter and shape the news, and 'constantly present objects suggesting what individuals in the mass should think about, know about, have feelings about' (Lang & Lang, 1984: 220). In general, agenda setting describes a very powerful media influence. The media do not define what the public should think exactly, but about which issues opinions are being formed and maintained. The topics the public talks and thinks about largely originate from the mass media, making agenda setting a subtle process that seems psychologically explainable. Humans are -as social beings- continually in a process of orientating on the environment (McCombs, 1972: 176). The media satisfy this desire and 'put certain issues on the public agenda'. Issues that they deem important are consequently covered extensively in the media and get a lot of 'air-time'. The notion of agenda setting received a lot of criticism throughout the years, as it is a complex matter to investigate in which ways the media-agenda dictates the public agenda, and how it exactly works.

Do the media focus on relatively neutral issues and by putting emphasis on them make them more important, or do they elaborate on already much talked-about issues in society? Agenda-setting, like most theories concerning media effects, is quite hard to measure; but an important theory nonetheless, as it sheds some light on the idea of the media influencing society in an indirect and subtle way.

The Dominant View

Universally perceived as reliable, the mainstream media are for the majority of the public the most important source of information in the world (Hamelink, 2004: 66). Although there are more and more alternative news sources available to enable people to form an opinion based on different types of information, these oftentimes do not reach the public. Most of us quickly read a newspaper in a train or bus going to work, glance over the headers that make the stories of the day or watch the evening news, which is considered 'the most reliable news source' (van Ginneken, 2004: 179).

Why are the mainstream media considered to be reliable? One of the main reasons might lie in one of the most important ethical principles journalists should follow: the principle of objectivity - the unprejudiced provision of information about the activities, approaches, and views of both the majority and the minority (EthicNet -Databank for European Codes of Journalism Ethics, www.uta.fi/ethicnet/index.html). Nevertheless, in the majority of today's mainstream news stories one -dominant- vision of an event seems to prevail. Cees Hamelink (2004: 75) states that especially in situations of crisis 'the mainstream media often only offer a limited definition of reality. Dissident voices get little or no attention'. During the war in Iraq for example, most journalists were 'embedded' in military units. They consequently did not possess a wide margin to conduct thorough journalistic research and write their 'own story', being refrained from any critical perception of a much more complex reality. The suggested point of view by the (in this case American) government was adopted without much resistance by the large media outlets. A reason for this happening can be found in the intertwining of political and media elites, as they share a lot of worldviews and opinions, and are often dependent on each other (Hamelink, 2004: 86).

Another reason the mainstream media generally offer a limited or watered down presentation of reality lies in the fact that the world is ambiguous and complex and that people, caught up in the hassle of everyday life, desire and often even demand, simplicity (Hahn, 2000: 96). Newsroom editors know this and simplify the content accordingly in order to remain competitive. There is some concern that the mass media are experiencing a process of tabloidization, which involves a downgrading of hard news and an upgrading of more entertaining related news (Watson and Hill, 2000: 300) to hold the public's attention. Market pressure could be a reason for this happening. As an editor of a Dutch TV news show, Hans Larousse, put it: 'As soon as we start presenting several possible scenarios regarding a certain news story, half of the viewers have already switched to channel 5' (Hamelink, 2005). Generally speaking, editors believe that by not exposing people to all layers of a particular news story, they would still offer them a grip on reality, even if that grip at times might prove to be based upon an illusion.

Warren Breed (1958; in Severin and Tankard, 1999: 373) studied the ways in which the media maintain status quo in society. He came to the conclusion that the mass media tend to sacrifice accurate reporting of significant events for 'convention, public orderliness and decency'. The media generally conform to their leaders and the existing social structure. Breed speaks in this regard of certain areas that are not discussible, so called *taboo'd areas*. An example of such a taboo'd area is, according to Severin and Tankard (1999: 373), the inequities that were seen in the draft for Vietnam; rich sons going to college, poor sons being send to war. A topic that seldom made the headlines of a major news outlet, comparable to the situations in 1991 and 2004, during both Operation Desert Storm and the war in Iraq, when the same thing occured. According to James Curran (2000: 207) 'all but the alternative media respect strong cultural taboos against systematic critiques of business power that might challenge the virtues of free-market capitalism.' Several taboo'd areas of the news are usually discussed in the alternative media, which nowadays can be found in large numbers on the Internet.

The dominant vision of the 9/11 attacks in the media was, according to several scholars, an equivalent of the governmental vision of the events. Hamelink (2004: 44) believes political good-evil discourse to be an important factor in the framing of September 11 by the mainstream media. Additionally, Elisabeth Anker (2005: 23) suggests that both political leaders and the media used the concept of 'melodrama' to explain 9/11 to the public.

Melodrama is a mode of popular culture that provides unambiguous distinction between good and evil through clear designations of victimization, heroism and villainy. In the case of 9/11 it is clear who the victim is (the west, and ideals of liberty and democracy), the villain comes from the outside and the heroic savior can redeem the victim's virtue through an act of retribution. The camps of good and evil are thus divided into absolutes, leaving little space for shadow, doubt or ambiguity. 'Freedom has been attacked by a faceless coward. Freedom will be *defended*' (NBC, 2001). We, as a society at large, need a common enemy to make the world more transparent and easier to understand, something both the politicians and the media are aware of quite well. April Eissman (2003: 55) states how the American mainstream media in the days following 9/11 'degenerated into an irresponsible organ of patriotic propaganda, remained silent on uncomfortable issues, and actively marginalized dissenting opinion. Despite the lack of hard evidence, the enemy had already been decided upon'. According to Eissman, the mainstream media were -in the weeks following September 11- 'media of manipulation', closing professional lines and only offering a limited (government supported) view of the events.

Douglas Kellner (2004: 145) writes how the September 11 coverage on American television purposefully stirred up war hysteria, without trying to find out in an intelligent manner what had exactly happened, why, and what the adequate response should be. The first couple of days, the media en masse embraced the 'Clash of Civilizations model', as the ultimate proof for the fact culture philosopher Samuel Huntington was right when he heralded the imminent 'battle between civilizations' -and in this case specifically between the West and Islam- in 1993. Metaphors that appeared in the media as 'The forces of darkness', 'America's new war', 'Attack on America', and a Bush-dualism like 'You're either with us or against us', can hardly be not seen as the explanation of events out of a model that draws from a looming clash of civilizations. According to Kellner, the titles of New York Times articles during the first weeks after the 9/11 attacks speak for themselves. Newspaper headers like 'Barbarians at the Gate', 'The force of Islam', 'This is a religious war', 'Yes, this is about Islam' and 'Two views: can the Koran condone terror? ' and other good against evil-discourse do not leave a lot to the imagination regarding the fierce battle ahead and the enemy we, as the West, would be dealing with. Kellner (2004: 147) argues: 'Personal bias ran unchecked. All-out hysteria was the order of the day, and throughout September 11 and its aftermath, ideological warhorses like William Bennett came out and urged that the United States declare war on Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya, and whoever else harbored terrorists'.

According to Ervand Abrahamian (2003: 544) the media were also dragged along out of laziness, and (again) out of conviction that a more simplistic interpretation of things would enable the public to get a grip on the far more complicated reality.

Ultimately, the mainstream media networks followed themselves and each other in a wild 'frenzy' that reinforced propagandistic tendencies. The Clash of Civilizations interpretation of September 11 by the media suited the Bush-administration perfectly, rendering it possible for them to carry out the planned international policies.

Three Views on 9/11

The problem of giving a meaning to the September 11 attacks lies in the fact that it was so hard for journalists to describe, and even more challenging, to explain the events. It is inevitable that during and after drastic world events different 'stories' or versions of what has happened emerge and start to circulate. Hamelink (2004: 67-68) states that:

'Usually there is a 'dominant' story, which is being adopted by the media and presented as 'the truth'. Subsequently, critical versions of the event appear which most of the times do not make it to mainstream media outlets, but might make an appearance in magazines and books. Finally there is the alternative version of the event, which presents yet another perspective on things'.

According to Hamelink and several sources (websites and weblogs) on the Internet there are at least three stories -or paradigms- regarding 9/11, (with one of them being predominantly present in the mainstream press) which I will describe in further detail next.

The *dominant/ mainstream* story or paradigm perceives the September 11 attacks as a natural disaster that could not have been prevented. Fundamentalist Muslim-terrorists, supported and funded by Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network, planned and organized the event with scrupulous precision, intending to deal the western world, and all it stands for, a devastating blow (Hamelink, 2004: 73). Blinded by hatred against the West, and particularly the US, the assaults were a declaration of war. We -as the west- were surprised and shocked by so much evil. Spokesmen of the American government and Pentagon use the dominant story extensively to explain the 9/11 events.

A variation of the dominant story focuses on the aspects of *how* the events could have been carried out so strikingly easy and if actual prevention could have been possible. It concentrates on the mistakes that were made by various secret services in the months and weeks previous to the attacks and intends to find an explanation in incompetence.

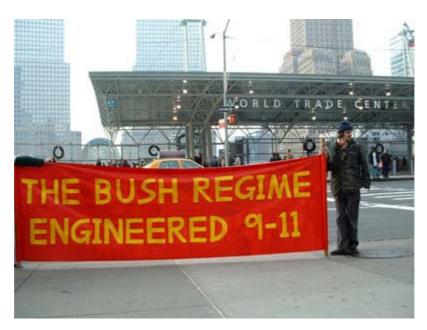
According to governmental and military spokesmen, key figures within FBI, CIA and other secret service agencies, did not pay enough attention to warnings and signs of an approaching catastrophe. This is the interpretation of the 9/11 commission, an investigating body that was created 'to prepare a full and complete account of the circumstances surrounding the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks' (http://www.9-11commission.gov). According to several alternative Internet websites, the dominant story sees the 9/11 events as attacks from radical fundamentalists who acted out of hatred towards the west. American government and secret services could be blamed only for disregarding warnings beforehand, and responding slow to the actual attacks, due to incompetence of individuals in the bureaucratic chain of command.

The *critical* explanation of the 9/11 events largely consists in the findings of the 9/11 commission, but takes these findings one step further (www.Oilempire.us). Trained Al-Qaeda terrorists are still to blame for 9/11, but, according to this scenario, president Bush, key members of the US government and the FBI had all been informed and warned of the September 11 attacks and even the targets that were selected out. Yet nothing was done to prevent them, simply because of the enormous political advantages 9/11 could yield



The critical story accuses the US government of holding back vital evidence. It also accuses the 9/11- commission for not investigating the September 11 events thoroughly enough, or focusing on the wrong aspects, like the incompetence of certain individuals instead of on the willingness to 'let 9/11 be carried out' and not making any effort to stop the events from happening.

Whereas the critical theory raises doubts that September 11 was a surprise attack, believers in an *alternative* story regarding 9/11 doubt if the 9/11 events really happened the way the majority of the people think they did. They ponder if, in any way imaginable, other groups (apart from the presumed nineteen hijackers or members of the terrorist network of Al Qaeda) might have been involved in the carrying out, planning or organization of the attacks. (Hamelink, 2004: 74). The American government and the American secret services (FBI and CIA) are named as possible collaborators or instigators of the events. This is the interpretation of the 911truth movement, which is protesting against US governmental silence and secrecy since the first questions regarding the events, towards the end of 2001, started to come up.



(Above: 9/11truth demonstration in New York)

This is also an interpretation frequently encountered on the Internet, and which, at first glance, is virtually nonexistent in any of the mainstream media outlets. Although controversial, the alternative explanation of the September 11 attacks does have a growing following among several groups in society.

Who have the power?

When talking about power and influence, we should focus on the fact that various groups are involved in the making and covering of the news the way we see, read and hear it. The owners of large media corporations, the government, journalists/ opinion makers and advertisers are all major players who, consciously or unconsciously, influence the outcome and the content of news.

But what, exactly, is power? According to Curran (2000: 204) the notion of power evolves around having access to and using resources to make people do things they would otherwise not do. It is obvious the governments possess such power, and the media are in many ways involved in the production and reproduction of this power. They select and represent actors, choose to emphasize certain actors and downplay others, transmit values and provide the public with a certain mindset regarding life, government and society. The irony is that, in spite of the highly competitive appearance of the free market place of ideas America is nowadays, the news content seems relatively onesided, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Severin and Tankard (1999: 392) suggest that part of the answer could be found in a tendency towards private ownership and concentration. Publicity and commercialization could result in a greater conformity than in many systems that are more highly regulated. Universally a high level of concentration of control in the hands of governments, interest groups and media elite is perceived as dangerous to democracy and pluriformity of voices in society (Graber, McQuail & Norris, 2003: 2). Financial dependency might in that sense lead to a less critical view towards government and policy makers.

Although being criticized for the lack of presenting enough waterproof evidence to back up his claims and being 'anti-American', Noam Chomsky offers a run-through of economic and power based causes for a bias in news content in his propaganda model (explained in great detail in Manufacturing Consent, Chomsky & Herman, 1988).

As a result of an elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents, we as a public would only receive 'filtered out information'. According to Chomsky and Herman's model (1988: 2), potential news information has to pass several filters in order to get published by the mainstream media outlets. These filters are Ownership, Governmental Institutions, Flak, Advertisers and Journalistic Norms.

In the United States, but increasingly worldwide, a small number of large companies have obtained a great influence on the content and presentation of news, through processes of concentration of ownership and horizontal integration. This 'creation of a media elite' and tangling of interests could harm an objective news coverage. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988: 5), the media conglomerates (lead by 'media-tycoons' like Ted Turner of CNN and Rupert Murdoch of FOX) are driven by the free market. Many major news outlets, like the New York Times and CBS are linked to much bigger corporations which are controlled from above. The big players in the media landscape at this moment are conglomerates like Disney, Viacom, General Electric, AOL Time Warner and Bertelsmann (Thussu, 2000: 120). Their first concern is making profit; independence and alternative or critical (world) views would be of less importance. Mainstream media outlets do interact with governmental institutions and are dependent on them for support and access to information and expertise, a dependence which leads, -according to Chomsky and Herman (1988: 8-9)- to a power disbalance. More often than not, the government successfully affects the news coverage of the big companies by applying direct (financial) or indirect (psychological) pressure. The coverage of news network 'FOX News' is obviously one of the most explicit examples of how an, in principle, independent news source can degenerate into a mouthpiece of the government, but in many cases it is not about FOX alone. The alternative TV documentary 'Outfoxed' elaborates on the climate that was created after 9/11, and shows that all big American news networks were more or less obliged to join the patriotic, biased and often partisan news coverage to not lose any ground and stay in the market, the so-called 'Fox-effect'. FOX News obtained huge viewer ratings with its news coverage. For the other cable networks, joining the bandwagon could mean staying in touch with the frontrunners, regardless of the fact it might eventually endanger journalistic integrity.

Apart from the fact that governmental institutions influence media content indirectly, they also create a lot of the news themselves.

The American president is the biggest newsmaker in the world (McCombs 1972; in Bryant & Zillman, 1994: 9), as are the Pentagon, the State Secretary and several other mainly American governmental institutions (van Ginneken, 2004: 97). As was stated in the previous chapter, the American media often emphasize the news that fits in with the policy of the US government (Frederick, 1993: 198). According to Chomsky & Herman (1988) there are several reasons for this. The government possesses over a large number of largely economical means to apply pressure.

The radio and TV companies and networks all require government licenses and franchises, and are thus potentially subject to control and harassment. Still, the use of such means is often not necessary as most mainstream media outlets largely regulate themselves. Like many other professions, it is often in the best interest of journalists to follow the general trend. The reasons for doing so could be found in feelings of commitment and obligation, to make a career move, or simply out of fear of psychological or material sanctions (Breed, 1985; in van Cuilenburg, 1992: 240). Chomsky and Herman (1988: 14) speak in this respect of 'flak', a control mechanism (or tool) that refers to negative responses to a media statement or program that take the form of letters, telegrams, phone calls, petitions, bills before congress and other punitive action. Flak is being used to demonstrate discontent, and can be applied directly or indirectly, by the government, the editors, and the owners of media companies. Often, subtle flak alone is sufficient to change behavior and evade future unpleasant statements.

Advertisers also play a major part in the media circus. In the days following September 11 commercials were being banned from American television, but this 'advertising silence' did not last long (Nacos, 2002: 2). McQuail (1992: 13) states that advertisers clearly influence media content. Especially when they are very powerful and the content of the advertisement corresponds with the journalistic content of the medium, they would be able to alter the message indirectly. In the weeks after September 11, many American companies 'used' nationalistic feelings in their advertisements after the ban on commercials expressions was removed, mainly because it was an easy way of linking a positive message to their products. Conversely, the media content will also have to correspond with the opinions and notions of the advertisers. 'The contents of the media always reflect the interests of those who finance them' (Altschull, 1995: 461).

A final filter, according to Chomsky and Herman, consists of the norms, routines, worldviews and opinions shared by those working in the journalistic profession. Apart from the pressure to adapt to moral and informal codes that run through organizations, (O'Sullivan 1983; in van Ginneken, 2002: 86) most journalists come from the same middle class background and share aspirations, ideals and political views. When covering certain events, journalists also tend to adapt and conform to one another, resulting in so called *pack journalism* (van Ginneken, 2002: 84). All in all, according to Chomsky and Herman (1988: 14):

'the elite domination of the media and marginalization of dissidents that results from the operation of these filters occurs so naturally that media news people, although operating with complete integrity and goodwill, are able to convince themselves that they interpret the news "objectively" and on the basis of professional news values'.

The role of the International News Agencies

At present, there are three international news agencies that dominate world news: Associated Press, Reuters and Agence France Presse (van Ginneken, 2004: 115). On a typical day, Associated Press is said to deliver millions of words and hundreds of photos and graphics (Rampal, 2002; in Kamalipour, 2002: 102). Press releases are being put out round the clock by the hundreds of journalists who work for one of the big three, leading to the fact that roughly 75% of all mainstream news we read, hear or see on a daily basis originates from one of the large international news agencies. The agencies sell the press releases to the smaller local agencies which (having no financial means to investigate all news stories themselves) publish many of them without much criticism. According to Chomsky (1997: 2) this situation refers to the elite media setting a framework within which others operate. 'If you are an editor of a newspaper in Dayton, Ohio and you don't have the resources to figure out what the news is, or you don't want to think about it anyway, this tells you what the news is.'

This reflection of media power structures works on a global level as well. Most news stories that Dutch Press Agency ANP covers stem from press bulletins that were released by one of the big international news agencies. Newspapers do have their own reporters to cover important events, but it is hard to bypass official AP, Reuters and AFP press releases, apart of the fact that in many areas of the world no journalists are present when something crucial

happens (van Ginneken, 2004: 138). As the three large international press agencies produce the bulk of today's world news, they have a major responsibility to cover the news objectively. But are they always doing this? Reuters, for example, affirms to remain 'independent and neutral' in all circumstances, but received governmental subsidy (Taylor, 1997: 68) as did AFP. National governments have always had ties with the international news agencies, making the question whether news brought out by Reuters, AP, AFP is as independent and neutral as is generally believed to be a relevant one. A very limited body of research tells us something about the image news agencies create of the world they cover. Clare (1997; in Paterson, 2003: 5) concludes after research that although possibly accidental, 'the big agencies do stereotype the developing world by the construction of mainly negative images, while promoting positive images of the developed world'. All in all one could say the threat of 'a news agency stranglehold' might lie in the fact that the limited output of the major agencies could result in limiting public discourse as well as a relatively small range of topics available for public consideration (Paterson, 2003).

The alternative media

Besides solely relying on mainstream coverage, people have the possibility to obtain their information from alternative media, which can take the form of (for instance) leaflets, books, documentaries, magazines or -increasingly- Internet websites. According to Hamelink (2004) the alternative media could offer a different view on today's topics and news stories. Although skeptical of the relevance of the alternative press to the daily concerns of ordinary citizens, Fiske (1992; in Atton, 2002: 11) believes that differences certainly do exist between the mainstream media and the alternative media in their selection of news, and in the way that selection is made, particularly how the alternative media politicize the 'repression of events'. Chris Atton (2002: 14) points out that alternative media construct news based on alternative values and frameworks that might lead to other interpretations of stories, as most stories have several sides to them. Alternative media outlets could also choose to publish a story which is not normally considered 'news' by the mainstream media (Glasgow University Media group, 1976: 245) or cover stories that are anti-establishment or even radical in tone.

Radicalism and the desire for social change could be at the heart of a constructive definition of alternative media. According to Atton (2002: 15) most alternative media are without a doubt oppositional in larger part and criticize corporatism as well as governmental politics.

'They are radical in the sense that they are opposed to hierarchical, elite-centered notions of journalism as a business' (Atton, 2003: 268). O'Sullivan (1994; in Atton, 2002: 15) believes the alternative media 'avowedly reject or challenge established and institutionalized politics' to advocate social change in society and a reevaluation of traditional values. Besides, most alternative media, (especially on the Internet), also claim to promote 'truth' and 'openness' as opposed to the 'secrecy, lies and cover-ups of the government/ mainstream media' as websites like 'whatreallyhappened.com' 'supportthetruth.org' or 'truthout.org' show, looking at their domain names alone.

The alternative media are also different in the sense that they are generally citizen-controlled instead of state or corporate controlled, like the mainstream media outlets discussed in the previous chapter. This makes it hard for alternative media to reach circulation figures comparable with its mainstream counterparts, although it is clear that nowadays alternative media in the form of Internet web content make it to a lot more people's homes than the leaflets or pamphlets in the '70s or '80s were capable of. According to Clemencia Rodriguez (2001; in Atton, 2003: 267) the alternative media could turn out to be a radical challenge to the professionalized and institutionalized practices of the mainstream media. 'The alternative media as citizens' media' would be able to offer a close and non hierarchical relationship between reader and content, and between reader and writer, could occur, 'leading to hybrid forms such as the activist-journalist and the native reporter' (Atton, 2003: 269).

Alternative media on the Internet

"Cyberspace...does not merely weaken the significance of physical location, it destroys it...they do not cross geographical boundaries, they ignore the existence of boundaries altogether."

(D. Post - Governing Cyberspace, 1997; in Murray & Scott: 495)

For Downing (1988; in Atton, 2002: 35), the alternative press is inseparable from an alternative public sphere; a space in which 'experiences, critiques and alternatives could be freely developed' on a self managed, democratic basis. The Internet (as we know it right now) might very well start to move into the direction of becoming such a space - a major alternative to the 'media hierarchies of the public realm' (Atton, 2002: 35).

At the turn of the century the amount of Internet-users surpassed the 500 million mark worldwide with North America, Western Europe and Japan leading the way, but rapidly increasing numbers of Internet subscribers in developing countries like China, Brazil and India. There is little doubt that Internet growth in the coming years will be impressive, and that news gathering and distribution will go through some drastic changes because of this (van Ginneken, 2004: 139).

With regard to the Internet and a plurality of voices in society, two approaches, called 'boom' and 'doom', have become the main theoretical focus. The first -more optimistic- vision ('boom'), examines the Internet from a perspective of discontinuity: a radical and better society will emerge (Atton, 2002: 134). In other words, the Internet might lead to a more democratic and pluralistic society, with less government control and more freedom. 'In cyberspace the elements of physicality are lost and the ability to regulate is impaired' (Murray & Scott, 2002: 496). The followers of the 'doom' approach on the other hand, regard the democratic potential of the Internet with pessimism. They perceive the development of Internet in line with existing power relations. Chomsky (1994) is among the advocates of the 'doom approach', believing that the World Wide Web, instead of a force of liberation, might become another 'spectacle' of consumption, control and pseudo-communication. Skeptics further point out that access to the Internet is restricted by the inequalities of ownership. Power disbalances in the real world would inevitably hinder the functioning of cyberspace.

Yet the arrival of the Internet has demonstrably facilitated radical and alternative expressions (Downing, Ford, Gil & Stein, 2001) as it provides a cheap, global and free from official regulation means of communication. Many commentators believe that the rapid development of the Internet has indeed 'marked dissolution of constraints on freedom of expression and on the monopoly of publishing and distribution' (Atton, 2002: 138). Having had a lot of difficulties to reach their intended audiences in the realm of traditional press, the Internet might provide the alternative media new opportunities to promote ideas and information; although one should always remember that the Internet remains a globally discriminative medium, which at this point is still far from universally available (Thussu, 2000: 255).

Regardless of the fact whether one supports a boom or a doom approach concerning the Internet and society, an example of an alternative website like The Independent Media Center shows how alternative media initiatives on the Internet are increasingly becoming more important. The Independent Media Center is known for its open publishing newswires and Internet weblog sites where anyone with Internet access can publish information. Its content is determined by its participants, removing the wall of separation between 'news makers' and 'news consumers'. Everybody is encouraged to participate in order to get the truth out, and look for objectivity and unbiased professionalism as opposed to the media manipulation of today's large corporations (Independent Media Center, 2005).

Participation, interactivity and a new model of publicness are the pillars of Jurgen Habermas' *Public Sphere* theory; a public space or forum being created where individuals can come together as equals, capable of producing or reproducing a public opinion through discussion, argument and reason debate (Slevin, 2000: 188-190). The public sphere-idea has been criticized extensively as being naïve and unrealistic in times of one-sidedly channel communication and mass media control, but as the above mentioned initiative shows, could prove significant with regard to the Internet, which might be capable of opening up opportunities for participatory opinion formation, interactivity and pluriformity.

All in all, the Internet *in theory* offers an expansion of information available to individuals (Slevin, 2000: 206). According to intercultural communications specialist Aizu (in: Slevin, 2000: 209), the Internet creates a global arena for 'seemingly minor culture that the mass media cannot pay attention to'.

Everybody is free to say whatever they want to say on the Net, every theory can be heard, even if the public is still rather small compared to mass media outlets. Could it therefore be possible for the Internet to surpass the filters Chomsky and Herman talk about and hand citizens a possibility to truly get involved in direct democracy?

According to Pippa Norris (2001: 14) it is too early to tell what will be the political consequences of the rise of the Internet. She states that, so far, the potential of the Internet has failed to have a dramatic impact on 'politics as usual'. On the other hand there is a chance that the WWW ultimately facilitates an unlimited flow of communication and information with a minimal role for gatekeepers and government censors (Norris 2001: 16). Atton (2002: 153) states that the contemporary alternative media can provide 'empowering narratives of resistance', independent from government, state and other dominant political institutions.

Many alternative theories regarding today's big events might have never reached the public in the past, in times when the majority of the people largely had to rely on mainstream media coverage to form an opinion. In the case of the 9/11 events, the Internet offers the interested alternative websites and communities, discussion forums, photos, columns and a huge amount of information from experts and laymen alike – making it quite challenging to separate the relevant from the useless information at times. Abundance is not always a blessing, but the fact remains that the authorities of the industrialized nations are losing the capacity to censor or even monitor the internal and international communications of their citizenry; a thing that might affect pluriformity and a free flow of communication in a positive way.

III Methodology

The following chapter focuses on the research design and the way in which the research is being conducted. The concept of framing is essential in this study.

Framing Theory

Understanding mass communications through the concept of framing has become increasingly common, whether in the fields of social psychology, public opinion, or media studies (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003: 6). The idea of framing first appeared in Ervin Goffman's (1974) work. Goffman presumed that the organization of messages affects subsequent thoughts and actions, and that 'we actively classify and organize our life experiences to make sense of them'. These 'schemata of interpretation' are named *frames*, they enable individuals to 'locate, perceive, identify, and label' (Goffman, 1974. In: Simon and Xenos, 2000: 4).

Frames are 'persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis and exclusion by which symbol handlers routinely organize discourse' in a so called frame-building process; a process that refers to factors that influence the selection and structural qualities of certain frames (Gitlin, 1980; in De Vreese, 2005: 26). Symbol handlers in this case could stand for journalists, elites and social groups which all -in a continuous interaction- affect the eventual outcome. The idea of 'news frames' refers to interpretive structures that journalists use to set particular events within their broader context. News frames bundle key concepts, stock phrases, and iconic images to reinforce certain common ways of interpreting certain facts, developments and processes (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003: 6).

Conclusively, the concept of framing refers to the process of selecting out and making sense of particular, salient phenomena (Entman, 1993: in De Vreese, 2004: 237) and is related to the organization of knowledge that people have about the world in the light of their underlying attitudes toward key social values (e.g. risk, nature, freedom), their notions of agency and responsibility (e.g. individual autonomy, corporate responsibility), and their judgments about the reliability, relevance and weight of competing knowledge claims (Miller, Jasanoff et al.

1997; in De Vreese, 2003: 25). Framing serves different functions for different actors. Political leaders use frames to simplify their message and political communication in general. The media can rapidly sort key events from surrounding trivia and label certain events and information, and the public uses frames to make sense of complex and unfamiliar events (Norris, Kern and Just, 2003: 7).

In the realm of framing theory, certain frames are pertinent only to specific topics or events, and are called *issue-specific* frames. Others can be identified in various topics and situations. These frames can be labeled *generic* frames. Semetko and Valkenburg (2000; in De Vreese, 2003: 32) identified five of these generic news frames: 'conflict', 'human interest', 'attribution of responsibility', 'morality' and 'economic consequences', each of which were generally applicable to different types of news stories. Aside from the generic frames, there is a great abundance of frames being used which differ from issue to issue. In the realms of elections for example, Shah, Watts, Domke and Fan (2002; in De Vreese, 2003: 27) identified three frames recurrent in the news during the final stages of the Clinton presidency. They identified 'Clinton behavior scandal', 'Conservative Attack scandal' and 'Liberal response scandal'. Drawing on a content analysis of several US newspapers regarding the presentation of US national budget deficits in the media four frames were identified, and these were labeled 'talk', 'fight', 'impasse', and 'crisis' (Jasperson et al., 1998; in De Vreese, 2003: 28).

A news frame might affect public opinion, especially if there are mainly 'one-sided messages'. A 'War on Terrorism' frame could render public opinion ready for a war against terrorists. An 'International threat' frame could make people anxious and fearful. Crossnational research has shown differences in the frames that were used to describe the enlargement of the European Union in 2003 in the international press. Spanish newspapers were found to be extensively using a 'historical frame' to describe the event, whereas Dutch newspapers framed the enlargement mainly in terms of 'conflict' and 'economic consequences'. This was in concurrence with polls held among the public, which generally showed a more positive attitude amongst Spanish citizens regarding Euro enlargement (Boedhoe, 2003). How exactly public opinion formation works is not all that clear however, as the question remains whether news frames in general affect public opinion or vice versa, or another mechanism is at work (Norris, 2002).

Further, according to Norris, Kern and Just (2003: 9), just like scientific paradigms, long-established journalistic frames can break down; making place for alternative ones, as the meaning and interpretation of similar events is being disputed.

Framing Analysis

For this study, to provide data for the answering of the research questions a content analysis of September 11 related Internet articles was conducted. Content analysis is the application of scientific method to documentary evidence (Berelson, 1952: 12). Holsti (1969: 14) offers a broad definition of content analysis as 'any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages'. Media content can reflect the process of news making and is therefore considered as a standard methodology in the social sciences on the subject of communication content.

The research will focus on the question which frames are being used in the alternative media on the Internet regarding the September 11 events. Both news articles and columns with opinions and statements regarding the 9/11 events were being investigated. The research has a qualitative nature. This type of research allows one to understand and analyze the information more broadly, and examine complex processes without being limited to rigidly definable variables. The unit of analysis and of coding in this study is the news story, defined as a semantic entity. The universe of texts consists of 60 9/11 related articles, distributed over ten Alternative Internet websites.

Scholars agree that frames are 'specific textual and visual elements', or 'framing devices' (De Vreese, 2003: 27), which form constructs that citizens may make use of There is little consensus as of how to identify frames in the news. *The deductive* approach works with previously defined and operational frames. The *inductive* approach is more explorative, and refrains from analyzing news stories with a priori defined news frames in mind (Gamson & Neuman et al. 1992; in De Vreese, 2005: 53). Due to the specific nature of the research, I have chosen for the latter approach, allowing me to discover frames in the texts without having pre-selected frames in mind during the analysis.

The framing analysis follows three basic steps. First, in the texts themes and actors were uncovered, leading to a division of groups which was later to be categorized into frames. As a first step themes regarding cost and benefit elements, oil production and the balance of power were found in various articles. In this respect the website TruthOut for instance quotes Noam Chomsky in one of its articles, stating that 'Controlling the oil in Iraq puts America in a strong position to exert influence in the world'. Actors like Bush, bin Laden, US corporate industries, oil companies and the Carlisle investment groups were also frequently encountered, all in relation to power and money dynamics and US policies in the world. Further themes about public disinformation, silenced 'whistleblowers', and all kinds of questions regarding the day of the attacks were found. Actors consisted of people who tried to warn the public and bring information out in the open, (such as Sibel Edmonds, who worked as a translator for the intelligence service, but was silenced by the authorities) the government and secret services, -who supposedly would have been 'in' on 9/11 unfolding- and the 9/11 commission investigating the attacks. Generally, themes and actors were uncovered looking for parts or sentences in the text that reflected perceiving the 9/11 attacks from a particular perspective. For instance TruthOut mentioning that 'to fulfill its mission, the 9/11 commission ought to provide the answers; but the Bush administration to date has acted to stop such answers from reaching the public' can be seen as a theme of people disinformation and 9/11 commission failure, eventually leading to a 'Cover-Up' frame. Also for the 'Consequences of War on Terrorism', and the 'Mass Media Disinformation' frames themes and actors were uncovered.

To further classify and be able to induct frames from the universe of texts, Garrison and Modigliani's 'framing devices' (1989; in De Vreese, 2003: 33-34) which condense information and offer a media package of an issue, were used to define the different frames. They came up with: (1) metaphors, (2) exemplars, (3) catch-phrases or slogans, (4) depictions and visual images as framing devices. All texts were screened for this kind of information, -characteristics- connecting them to the earlier uncovered themes and actors. A slogan like 'the administration definitely had foreknowledge of 9/11' can thus be classified in a 'Cover-Up' frame; a metaphor describing the government as a 'moneymaking machine' or 'being run like a business' could be placed into the 'Money and Power' frame, and the media being described like 'a lapdog of the authorities' would, together with earlier encountered themes and actors, uncover a 'Mass Media Disinformation' frame.

Exemplars were found a lot in the texts, especially in parts that describe the different consequences of 9/11 or the attacks on September 11 itself. Visual images were less frequently found, but photographs of people in the burning WTC after the attacks in an article which raises serious questions regarding the collapse of the buildings could, according to some website articles, also be rendered 'Cover-Up' frame material.

Conclusively, to further offer argumentation for the definition of the different inducted frames, problem-solution and cause-effects dynamics within the frame were being analyzed. Every frame shows directly or indirectly what is the main concern of the writers regarding particular themes and actors and which may be the reasons and effects. Most of the times, a solution is offered as well, a way of improving a situation or eventual outcome. Warnings for a malfunctioning government were found a lot in the studied data, with some added suggestions to improve liberty, openness and clarity.

Time Period

As stated before, the September 11 events were of enormous magnitude, still affecting the world we live in today. As this study reflects both on the direct aftermath as on the more recent developments and theories regarding the 9/11 events, the sample focuses on articles that appeared between August, 2002 and August, 2005. A margin of three years was chosen to be able to select articles from different time periods, as recent articles supposedly would have a different outlook on the events compared to the older ones. Over 800 articles with regard to September 11 were found on the selected websites, with more being added every week. Final content analysis articles were 60 articles, all in the above mentioned timeframe. The selection was made on a consistent basis, picking the first article of every new page of articles, until a total of 6 articles per website was reached, making for 60 articles in total.

Data

This study's population consists of 9/11 related articles on US based Internet websites. The articles were sampled from ten prominent and/or often visited US alternative websites, and I will explain now in further detail how these were being selected.

First, the *reputation* of the website, in this case whether the website is mentioned in overviews of alternative web content and comes up among the first in search engines like Yahoo and Google, was an important criterion. Also the amount of visitors was being looked at. Does the site mention an average number of readers or subscribers a month? Alternet for instance provides free online content to over 1.5 million readers every month. Secondly, self labeling or proclamation of being 'alternative press' or 'an alternative to the mainstream media' was considered a criterion in the selection of the websites. This information could mostly be found in the 'about us' section of the website, sometimes in the title or under title of the site, in the various columns, layout or types of news that are being covered. A further criterion is whether or not the website contains information regarding 9/11. Some websites display mainly 9/11 related material, like 9/11 CitizensWatch and 9/11Truth, others also look into other (world) events and information. Also, the genre of the websites was of importance; all websites should be in the 'news-genre', meaning that there was a newspaper like format present with daily or weekly updates of news stories. Finally, each of the studied websites needed to express their own view regarding the September 11 events, whether in columns, articles or written statements. Therefore, aside from news articles, columns were also regarded study material.

Something to further note is the fact that several websites published stories that had earlier appeared in 'mainstream media' outlets like BBC news online and in international newspapers. The websites in these cases are redirecting the reader to the original sources. Most websites seem to perceive one of their tasks in the process to be collecting and publishing all material they can find regarding 9/11, so readers have all the information available to them and some news stories will not be forgotten or overlooked.

Following above-mentioned criteria, the selected websites are: AlterNet (www.alternet.org), the Arctic Beacon (www.arcticbeacon.citymaker.com/arcticbeacon.html), American Free Press (www.americanfreepress.net), Counter Punch (www.counterpunch.org), Democracy Now (www.democracynow.org) and From the Wilderness (www.fromthewilderness.com), Truth Out (www.truthout.org), What Really Happened (www.whatreallyhappened.com), 9/11 Citizens Watch (www.911.citizenswatch.org), 9/11 Truth (www.911truth.org). Next, the ten selected alternative websites will be briefly described.

AlterNet

A project of the Independent Media Institute, a 'nonprofit organization dedicated to strengthening and supporting independent and alternative journalists' (Alternet, 2005). AlterNet is a quite extensive alternative website covering various types of news. The site offers different sections of international and local topics, like 'War on Iraq', 'Terrorism and Counter terrorism', 'Election 2004' and 'War in the Middle East'. The website also covers specialized topics like drugs, health care issues and human rights and liberties.

The editors say of the website:

"AlterNet is a highly acclaimed Internet information source that provides readers with crucial facts and passionate opinions they can't find anywhere else. We are hungry for the trustworthy, stimulating and value-driven information we need to create change."

9/11 content:

Alternet has a special section on September 11 which covers a fairly large number of articles and columns regarding the September 11 events. One of them is called "The truth about September 11" and points out that 'there are still no plans for a public investigation of how more than 3,000 Americans lost their lives, of what could have been done to prevent the attacks or reduce their impact'. The Bush administration is fiercely criticized in various articles, like "It's still a free country" by John K. Wilson, who states that 'on Sept. 11, the Twin Towers weren't the only structures that came crashing down. So, too, did many civil liberties in America, although most Americans remain unaware of the fact'. Another article points at the communication breakdown during the 9/11 events, that resulted in the loss of more than hundred firemen. In "Too Hot too handle" Eric Boehlert asks: 'Why are so many journalists ignoring this story?

The Arctic Beacon

Quite radical in tone, The Arctic Beacon calls itself the 'last frontier of truth' and offers daily stories of alternative news content. Columns are presented in the form of weekly newsletters, covering a variety of mostly anti-establishment and/ or anti-governmental topics. A question of reliability emerges when observing that most of the daily articles are written by one person, Greg Szymanski. Who is he? His sources are rarely revealed, making the content of this site at least a little suspect.

The editors say of the website:

'the corporate-driven media ignore the truth and pacify the American people with entertainment news as well as merely echoing the government's lies and deception. The Arctic Beacon's "soul is not for sale".'

9/11 content:

On one of its main pages The Artic Beacon certifies: 'Our government lies to us on a daily basis about the real cause of 9/11 and the real reason for the invasion of the Middle East.' Several articles cover a supposed complicity of the Bush administration in the 9/11 attacks. One of the articles 'One of the 19 WTC Hijackers "Alive and Well" in Casablanca' states that 'Mainstream media stays silent on stories and if Americans want to find out the truth about the war in Iraq and other important stories like the 9/11 scandal, they'll have to rely solely on the foreign press or alternative sources on the Internet.' Regarding the nineteen 9/11 hijackers still being alive The Arctic Beacon says: 'First, a major story broke last week in Casablanca, Morocco, being reported by the Saudi and British press then circulated. To date major American newspaper and television stations have not said a word, covering it like a second-rate dog show in Hoboken, NJ.'

American Free Press

Also fairly radical in tone, American Free Press has a newspaper-like format; on its main page an extensive list of topics, ranging from Domestic, to World, War on Terror and Health.

There is an editorial section consisting of a list of various weekly columns, written by staff/ reporters of American Free Press itself. Interesting is the section 'Uncensored Stories' which includes several alternative 9/11 related stories, like 'Mainstream media avoid questions of 9/11'. The site, besides offering an alternative to the 'corrupt mainstream media' calls out reporters to hand in stories which will not be altered by editors.

The editors say of the website:

'Funny isn't it that in this "information age" we aren't getting the information we need? American Free Press is your alternative to the controlled media monopoly.'

9/11 content:

There is a lot of alternative media content regarding September 11 on the American Free Press website.

In the section 'The Truth about 9/11' various articles can be found. 'Al Qaeda not involved' covers an interview a 'special correspondent' had with Bin Laden for a Pakistan newspaper, quoting Bin Laden told him (the reporter) he was not responsible for 9/11. The source takes the reader back to another alternative website. The mentioned sources are fairly dubious, although American Free Press claims to have done its own research. Andreas von Bülow (head of the German Secret Service from 1969 to 1994) supposedly told AFP: 'Ninety-five percent of the work of the intelligence agencies around the world is deception and disinformation. Journalists don't even raise the simplest questions- those who differ are labeled as crazy.'

CounterPunch

An American Political newsletter that appears twice a week, Counter Punch covers a wide spectrum of op topics, from the War in Iraq, environment, to a lack of important information regarding other large world events.

The editors say of the website:

'We bring our readers the stories that the corporate press never prints. We aren't side-line journalists here at CounterPunch. Nothing makes us happier than when CounterPunch readers write in to say how useful they've found our newsletter in their battles against the war machine, big business and the rapers of nature.'

9/11 content:

There is a large archive of 9/11 related stories on CounterPunch, ranging from foreknowledge and compliance of the government to neglect of a terrorism threat in the years leading to September 11.

Cover-ups and the failure of the 9/11 commission are written about frequently, which articles like 'Failing to respond to 9/11' and '9/11 commission is Bush's new lapdog' show. Human rights and liberties are also discussed, as the article by Elaine Cassel, 'The War on Civil Liberties' illustrates.

Democracy Now

Largely an alternative radio and TV news program, Democracy Now is an independent organization run by two award winning journalists. On the website, all kinds of information encountered on the Internet and found interesting are gathered and laid out. The websites has a lot of video/ audio footage apart of written materials and a large section on the 'war on terrorism'.

The editors say of the website:

'For true democracy to work, people need easy access to independent, diverse sources of news and information. Democracy Now is funded entirely through contributions from listeners, viewers, and foundations.'

9/11 content:

9/11 content can be found in the archive, which consists of over 1000 articles in different sorts of categories. Most of these articles are in fact transcripts of radio shows, featuring a host and guest speaking about a particular topic. Much of the 9/11 related content is about the aftermath of the attacks, with the war in Iraq and the reaction of the Bush administration to the events being especially extensively covered.

From the Wilderness

Like some of the other websites, From the Wilderness (read by 20.000 subscribers in more than 40 countries) has a newspaper-like layout with new content and articles being added every day bringing 'key stories from around the world'. The site also has various sections with titles as 'Regional conflicts', 'Oil and energy' and 'Osama bin Laden'. Several independent journalists frequently contribute to the website. From the Wilderness states having been used as a source by the BBC for a coverage on oil production.

The editors say of the website:

'From The Wilderness has been as much as a year ahead of the mainstream media on major stories (...) and is about the publication of documented truth and the letting go of fear through education.'

9/11 *content:*

There is an enormous section called 'the world since 9/11' with many articles covering the Bush family, civil liberties, the war in Iraq and Al Qaeda related material. There is also a '9/11 timeline' and articles which mention foreknowledge of the Bush administration in the events.

911Truth

This site (the site of the 9/11 Truth movement) offers 'breakthrough news and ongoing stories regarding the 9/11 events and its aftermath'. Meanwhile, 'battles for peace, rights and solvency' are being covered and discussed. 911Truth provides its readers with media, educational and 'organizing materials' and a philosophy, as the section '15 reasons to doubt the official story of 9/11' shows.

The editors say of the website:

'911Truth.Org is a campaign to expose the truth surrounding the events of 9/11. Without truth, there can be neither choice nor Democracy. And without Democracy there can be neither peace nor justice. In other words, those who have sought peace and justice must now fight first for truth and freedom.'

9/11 content:

Under the header of 'the 9/11 key' ('and why 9/11 truth is still the mother issue of them all'), a lot of 9/11 related content can be found. There is a section called 'In the media' which consists of 9/11 truth related stories that 'slip through' in the mainstream media. Another section highlights history and plans and projections of the 9/11 truth movement.

9/11 Citizens Watch

9/11 CitizensWatch is also a website which solely focuses on 9/11. No other alternative news is covered, making for one of two selected sites which have made September 11 their main reason for existence. It is 'a new citizen-led oversight process established to monitor and constructively engage the Government-sanctioned National Commission on the Terrorist Attacks on the U.S.

The editors say of the website:

'The underlying imperative is restoring the people's faith in their own voice and in those they have elected to serve them in representational government (public integrity); and ultimately simply in, the truth.'

9/11 content:

Doing a search on the website discloses a lot of 9/11 related articles and material; some tracked back to other sites or news agencies, some own editorial work. A couple of critical articles on the Bush administration and the 9/11 commission show up, as well as many other 9/11 stories, questions being asked and columns which address several September 11 related topics. The ultimate goal of 9/11 CitizensWatch is to conduct a truly independent 9/11 investigation into the September 11 events, but mention that 'we can only fully understand the events of 9/11 and the growing threat of terrorism in the broader context and deeper understanding grounded in the history, geo-politics and global economic trends since the end of the Cold War era.'

TruthOut

TruthOut is an independent website covering topics such as environment, voting rights, women and health and features editorials and columns by several journalists. TruthOut is visited more than 4 million times a month 'by readers seeking the straight story and wanting to be involved in building a better tomorrow'.

The editors say of the website:

'We started TruthOut in the aftermath of the 2000 presidential election hoping that we could reach a few people, have some small impact on the dialog, and maybe -just maybe- try to restore a little integrity.'

9/11 content:

A lot of articles regarding 9/11 on this site, written by editors or journalists from TruthOut or other newspapers and agencies and covering topics ranging from 'the 9/11 cover-up' and 'post 9/11 health risks' to 'the silence around September 11' and 'who let Saudis flee after September 11?'

What Really Happened

This site has a day to day format, publishing alternative stories from around the world and dividing them into categories such as 'cover ups', 'Israel', 'science and health' 'mainstream media', '9/11' and 'economy'. Some links redirect the reader to articles that were published on other websites and/ or put out by newspapers/ agencies, making What Really Happened one of the largest collections of alternative news stories on the Net today.

The editors say of the website:

'This website is non-partisan, anti-war, and anti-lie. The purpose of this site is to expose deceptions by governments and media used to trick the public into wars and out of their money.'

9/11 content:

In the huge archive there is a '9/11 section' with almost daily updated stories regarding September 11. Some of the news overlaps with other websites, some insights and articles are written by editors of the website itself, like the theories on the collapse of the WTC and the questions surrounding the real identity of the nineteen hijackers. Other news bites take the reader to other websites, like Al Jazeera in the case of the Madrid suspect denying having been part of 9/11 preparations.

V Analysis

In this chapter the results of the research are presented and discussed and the research questions addressed. In order to answer the main research question, *Regarding the September 11 attacks, which frames are being used in the alternative Internet media?*, 60 online articles were studied and divided into different frames.

Four main frames were found studying the online articles. These were uncovered screening the articles for common themes, which were being linked together to form constructed, 'issuerelated' frames. The 'Money and Power' frame was formed tying together themes within news stories that involved costs and benefits, oil reserves in the Middle East and the way the US government tries to gain control over them, ties that US corporations or political figures have or have had with Saudi financers and the general balance of power in the world. The 'Consequences of War on Terrorism' frame focuses on the War of Terrorism that was started by the Bush administration after September 11 and deals with the question whether international terrorism is fought the most adequate way, and if terrorism is really the threat the authorities make it out to be. It ties together themes of the loss of civil liberties in the US (the treatment of prisoners in Guantánamo Bay and the Patriot Act i.e.) and regional instability caused by military operations. The 'Cover-Up' frame in turn, focuses on the day of September 11 itself and was found to be extensively present in the investigated data. This frame involves specific 9/11 related themes, like stories about the stock trades of US airline companies in the week before 9/11 and controlled demolition that would have brought the twin towers down, and the covering-up of information brought out by certain whistleblowers/ informants. Ultimately, the Cover-Up frame deals with doubts regarding 'the official story' and the call for a new and truly independent investigation into 9/11. Finally, the 'Mainstream Media Disinformation' frame ties together themes of public disinformation as a result of the mainstream media ignoring many 9/11 related questions, doubts and uncertainties. The four frames and their underlying themes and actors can be reviewed in figure 1.1.

Frame 1: COVER-UP

themes:

- * Call for thorough 9/11 investigation/ Insufficiency 9/11 commission
- * Stories on 'whistleblowers'
- * Governmental/ secret service warnings; Information not tracked down before 9/11
- * Stock trade scandal
- * 'Use of a Pearl Harbor like event by the government'
- * Controlled demolition
- * Stories concerning hijackers/ Uncertainty about what happened on board plane

Frame 2: MONEY AND POWER

themes:

- * Costs and benefits/ Oil
- * Financial institutions/ Money
- * Bush-Bin Laden connection (Carlisle Group)
- * Power balance

Frame 3: CONSEQUENCES OF WAR ON TERRORISM

themes:

- * No international terrorism threat/international terrorism augmenting
- * Loss of civil liberties/ rights in the US
- * Regional instability (wars Iraq and Afghanistan)

Frame 4: MAINSTREAM MEDIA DISINFORMATION

themes:

- * Lack of uncovering truth/ People disinformed
- * Media and government linked
- * Internet only 'free' medium

Figure 1.1 Frames by themes and actors

Description of the Frames

As stated before, four major frames were found investigating the 60 online articles regarding the 9/11 events. I will now describe each of the frames in further detail. Figure 1.2 shows the times each frame was found in the data. Something important mentioning in this respect is the fact that one article could consist of more than one frame, which frequently turned out to be the case. Several articles, for instance, go into topics ranging from the day of 9/11 itself and unanswered questions regarding the attacks, and later discuss the consequences of the attacks for foreign policy and the way the mainstream media covered (or did not cover) the events.

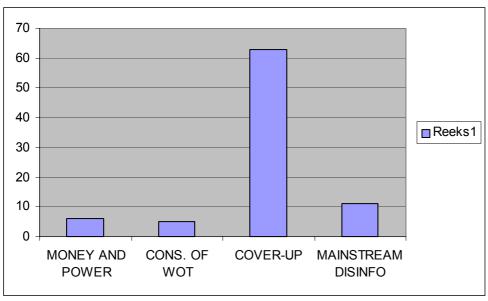


Figure 1.2 Frames and distribution in 9/11 related online articles (n=60)

The Money and Power Frame

The 'Money and Power' frame was found 6 times in the 60 online articles, making for one of the least used frames in the studied data. As said above, costs and benefits, oil production and control over them are some of the main themes within this frame, as is the balance of power in the world and the way this power is distributed. Often the US government is named as the main initiator in the pursuit for this power or as the 'main player' that would profit the most from transactions that involve oil, money and investments.

Articles consisting of the 'Money and Power' frame have oil/benefits/costs or related keywords in the leads as can be seen from sentences like 'Iraq is the last corner of the world in which there are massive *petroleum* resources' (TruthOut, 1/24/2005) and 'What bin Laden and Bush don't talk about: the politics of *oil*' in the header of an AlterNet (11/5/2002) article.

Slogans and Catch phrases are found as well. 'Cui Bono?' is Latin for 'who benefits' and refers to profits that were made from 9/11. This slogan accompanies an article which goes into several actors and groups that would have made a lot of money out of the September 11 attacks.

Other slogans include 'Pass a law, make a business' (From the Wilderness, 7/9/2004) and 'We are America's oldest company, largest company, busiest company, most successful company' on the same website, which refers to an introductory overview of the US Department of Defense website. The department itself stating it is run like a big company, is something that From the Wilderness found worth mentioning, implying that politics and economics are increasingly intertwined, something not even considered a secret. War leads to an accumulation of money and power according to the 'Money and Power' frame. War is seen as one of the biggest businesses in the world.

Themes and actors

Four themes concerned with money, business, politics and the balance of power in the world were uncovered in the data, eventually resulting in a 'Money and Power' frame. Two of these four themes can be tied together, (costs and benefits and oil production), as most of the costs and benefits that are mentioned in the texts are directly or indirectly tracked down to topics of power and control over the oil fields in the Middle East. In fact, all themes in the 'Money and Power' frame are linked in some way or another. The frequently mentioned Bush-bin Laden connection mainly refers to Oil Production and Balance of Power, issues that in turn connect to a Costs and Benefits theme. Actors and groups that were found in the texts include the Bush family and the Bush administration, the Carlisle group -a large global investment company with connections all over the world-, the bin Laden family and other prominent Saudi families and groups, US secret services agencies like the FBI and CIA, and oil companies and large financial institutions.

Costs and Benefits/Oil Production

The mentioning of costs and benefits in the Internet articles are mostly related to oil production and to the question which group controls the oil fields in the Middle East. This theme is closely tied to the theme of balance of power, as in many cases the concepts of money and power are connected. TruthOut (11/21/2003) states for instance that 'profits from oil-production must flow primarily into the right pockets, that is of US and secondarily UK energy corporations.'

The word 'oil' is mentioned frequently in the articles that were 'Money and Power framed'; not surprising looking at how oil, according to this frame, is seen as one of the main requisites for the accumulation of power and wealth in the world. In an article on American Free Press (6/192004) a list of financers and political figures sums up who would (and probably did) benefit financially from 9/11 and the following operations, one of the recurring themes within the 'Money and Power' frame.

Balance of Power

Tied to the theme of costs and benefits, this theme is about how money earned from oil production, leads to the possibility to exert influence in the world and shift the power balance in ones favor. The US government and large US financial institutions are frequently described as 'gaining power' or 'becoming more powerful' as a result of the 9/11 events. Oil is in this regard mentioned as the main power-tool or instrument as TruthOut (1/24/2005) comments: 'Controlling that resource puts the US in a very *powerful* position to exert influence over the world'.

Bush-Bin Laden connection (Carlisle group)

The Carlisle group is a large investors group which is said to have linked the interests of powerful Saudi figures and US investors and political individuals, exerting power by making large investments worldwide. According to the 'Money and Power' frame, members of the Bush family and the Bin-Ladens would supposedly have been business partners within the Carlisle group for decades.

Democracy Now (9/16/2003) states that 'there's been a long *relationship* between the Bush family and Saudis that really dates back more than 20 years', and 'Vanity Fair Magazine reports that about 140 Saudis were allowed to leave the US the day after the 11th, 'allowed to leave our air space and were never investigated by the FBI, and that departure was *approved* by high level administration' (Democracy Now, 9/16/2003), something that can be linked to the later to be described 'Cover-Up' frame. This rumor is seen as an illustration for intertwining money and power interests.

Problem/ Solution

The focus of the 'Money and Power' frame is not on the actual attacks themselves, but primarily on the aftermath and how the 9/11 events were used to reap the rewards by several groups in society. US government, US financers and Saudi investors all benefited and in several ways extended their influence. At a deeper level, the problem the 'Money and Power' frame addresses is one of inequity. The big money-makers of the world having their way, gaining power and making profit without the population knowing and being able to do anything about it. Corruption, scandal, abuse of trust and the cynical notion that US financers and Saudis cooperated together before, during or after the attacks are key elements of this frame, which basically deals with the gap between the powerful and powerless in the world. Most articles merely show there is a problem, but do not offer many solutions, perhaps due to the complicated nature of the issue. By pointing at injustice, inequities and power-disbalance in society, the alternative websites seem to believe they may start a 'silent revolution' among their readers. From the Wilderness (7/9/2004) states that a solution could be found in an ideal collaborative effort. 'One opportunity to build a better understanding of 9/11 will flow from an analysis of 9/11 profiteering. As we understand the profit flows, we can then drill down to define the banks, companies, organizations and investors who benefited as well as the particular individuals in key leadership positions who profited personally.' Although difficult to accomplish, openness in policy-making or an 'open society' in general might be the eventual solution the 'Money and Power' frame has to offer.

The Consequences of War on Terrorism Frame

This frame was found 6 times in 60 articles and focuses mainly on the effects the war on terrorism (ignited by the Bush administration shortly after September 11) has on civilians worldwide. Central in this frame is the notion that, if a war on terrorism is taken literally, it cannot be won. One of the most important themes of this frame is the question whether the threat of international terrorism is really as big as the government claims it to be, and whether taken action has been productive at all or perhaps has even been counter-productive, leading to an augmentation of terrorist groups around the world who would like to hurt the US and its policies.

The 'Consequences of War on Terrorism' frame perceives the 9/11 attacks as a turning point in history. A turning point in the way of looking at who can be considered good an who evil, what threats are looming to disrupt western society and how to counter them. The 'war on terror' that was instigated by the Bush administration has, according to this frame, worked counter-productive and measures that were taken and adopted by many governments worldwide have resulted in a climate of hatred and retaliation, a loss of civil liberties and human rights and did lead to war and mistreatment of people.

Themes and actors

Three main themes have shown to dominate this frame. First, -and often mentioned in the data- is the loss of civil liberties of people in the US and abroad, and a decline of human rights and conditions of prisoners held in Guantanamo Bay and Iraq. Further, the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan are being heavily criticized. Websites point to the fact that these operations have caused more violence and mayhem, and the whole idea of this kind of warfare is considered dangerous as it might lead to a destabilization of the whole Middle Eastern region. Finally, most websites question the adequacy, productivity and efficiency of the idea of a global warfare against terrorism, and might have lead to more problems than it was able to solve. Actors and groups that were found in this frame include the Bush administration, foreign administrations, prisoners and those accused of acts of terrorism, civil liberty groups in the US and various secret services and organizations.

Loss of Civil Liberties/ Human Rights

The loss of civil liberties due to the War on Terror that was initiated by the Bush administration after 9/11 is one of the recurrent themes within this frame. Governmental power has increased as a result of 9/11, through the adoption of the US Patriot Act. Democracy Now (5/21/2004) states that 'The Bush administration *rolled back civil liberties* and social programs in our country'. 'This may infringe on important *civil liberties* including presumption of innocence and probably cause unreasonable searches and seizures' (9/11CitizensWatch, 2/18/2005).

The 'delicate balance' between liberty and security is at stake and this frame warns against 'developments that might lead to the creation of a totalitarian system, in which the rights of individual citizens are not protected the way they used to be. (From the Wilderness, 2/22/2004). Another aspect is the loss of human rights in the case of detention of presumed terrorists. The mistreatment of prisoners in Guantánamo Bay is mentioned. 'Since the war in Afghanistan, the US has held prisoners, including US citizens, in a manner that defies the Geneva conventions on the *treatment of prisoners*. On September 11 the Twin Towers weren't the only structures that came crashing down. So too did many civil liberties in America, although most Americans remain unaware of the fact.' (AlterNet, 9/10/2002).

Warfare/Regional instability

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are, not surprisingly, also frequently mentioned in the data that displayed the 'Consequences of War on Terrorism' frame. David Krieger writes on Counter Punch (8/23/2003): 'It is important to take a hard look at the direction our country has taken since these tragic events occurred', commenting on US foreign policy and politics of retaliation. The attacks on above mentioned nations are widely condemned and seen as a way to enlarge hegemony over a region (the Middle East), destabilizing it in the process and 'killing more people than died at the WTC and at the Pentagon'. Also mentioned are the lies about weapons of mass destruction which were never found in Iraq, lies about Saddam Hussein being connected to Osama bin Laden and discussions about how the US government fooled the American public into believing the invasion of Iraq was a necessary response to 9/11.

International Terrorism/War on Terrorism

A third theme that was discovered in this frame was one that deals with the question whether the threat of international terrorism is in reality as big as the government claims it to be, and whether any taken action has been productive or counter-productive. TruthOut (9/11/2004) wonders: 'Have we found security and freedom in dividing the world into "us" and "them" and labeling entire nations "evil"?'

Counter Punch (8/23/2003) also doubts the effectiveness of the war on terror, and to what extent it has made the world a safer place. 'Two years after 9/11 citizens do not appear to be safer than they were before 9/11'.

Problem/ Solution

The heart of the problem of the 'Consequences of War on Terrorism' frame is concerned with the threat of increased governmental power as a result of 9/11. This frame directly and indirectly tries to warn the reader for 'a loss of freedom, for a new bureaucracy, a totalitarian regime'. "What have been the results of the 9/11 attacks?" is the main question being asked. Most websites are straightforward about the answers. Warfare, instability, loss of rights and liberties and a stronger, more in control government that holds all the cards. The 'Consequences of War on Terrorism' frame is connected to the 'Cover-Up' frame in the sense that 9/11 has also lead to a climate of secrecy and covering up crucial evidence surrounding the September 11 attacks. Both frames point at the government using the events to increase its power and citizens losing knowledge, the ideal of an open society and rights and liberties. A solution might lie in 'a return to decency and values that make this country strong' (Counter Punch, 8/23/2004). Thus, a new policy -or foreign policy- could alleviate the problem to a certain extent. According to 9/11CitizensWatch (2/10/2005) 'there may be increasing signs that congress, media and the American people are awakening to the dangers of these policies and vocally and actively oppose them'. Although a steep challenge, providing knowledge to certain groups in society and the public on a whole might eventually lead to a way to alter the course that was taken after 9/11.

The Cover-Up Frame

The Cover-Up frame is all about secrecy and the hiding of evidence and information by people and organizations of authority. This frame connects several other frames besides being a very clear and dominating frame in itself, appearing 63 times in the investigated data, making for the by far most consistently found frame.

It is linked to the 'Consequences of War on Terrorism' frame as September 11 has lead to an-according to the alternative data- unprecedented era of governmental secrecy and cover-up. This frame is also connected to the 'Money and Power' frame, as a group or organization will have to be in a position of influence and in the possession of financial means to be able to hide or downplay certain information. Vice versa, a 'cover-up' of important information could lead to a status quo of existing relations. Conclusively, this frame is linked to the 'Mainstream Media Disinformation' frame which is about the mainstream media blocking the public from having access to certain information. Whereas the 'Mainstream Disinformation' frame focuses on the role of the media in this process, the 'Cover-Up' frame holds the authorities and key figures and organizations in society accountable for covering-up information surrounding 9/11.

Thus, many questions remain unanswered, as long as the public is being deprived of key knowledge and information of the 9/11 attacks. Whether stating the authorities would have known about a looming catastrophe or it was an 'inside job' (acted out by the authorities themselves), the 'Cover-Up' frame calls for a new inquiry to address all the unanswered questions regarding the 9/11 attacks that are still pending. Some people, like Phil Berg on The Arctic Beacon (5/15/2005) have no doubts about who was really in command. 'Either our government made 9/11 happen, or *let it happen*. We need to bring these criminals to justice for killing over 3000 Americans, not to mention the thousands who have needlessly died in Iraq and Afghanistan'.

Certain characteristics were found that imply the existence of a 'Cover-Up' frame. First, both in headers and in the articles themselves, words as 'silenced', 'gagged', 'blocked the public from knowing' were frequently used. 'Is it worth noting that Glenn Cramer was *subsequently gagged* by the FBI' (Democracy Now, 9/10/2004) and 'the White House *blocked the public from knowing* what really happened' (American Free Press, 6/19/2004) are examples of a 'cover-up' mechanism at work. Further, metaphors were used to point at the failure of the 9/11 commission and the covering-up of evidence, both in the lead and in the articles, such as in '9/11 commission is Bush's new lapdog' (Counter Punch, 4/24/2004) and '9/11 closes its doors to the public' (From the Wilderness, 7/9/2005). The term 'whistleblower' was also frequently found, both as noun ('yesterday a *whistleblower* finally had her day in court') and as a verb ('investigators *blew whistle* on constrained non-investigation').

FBI, authorities and mainstream media are all being held accountable for blocking and covering-up information, appearing in virtually every article as the main adversaries to the public's rights to 'know'.

Within the online articles critical questions are posed as well. Counter Punch (10/18/2004) wonders: 'what caused the original tower damage and did that damage severely weaken the structure?', suggesting that something else besides jet fuel or impact might have resulted in the collapse. Metaphors and symbols are used occasionally here. What Really Happened (7/1/2004) speaks of 'a *mountain* of unanswered questions'. '*Inside job*' is mentioned frequently to point at supposed government complicity, suggesting the attacks came from the inside. Some websites write about a '9/11 *puzzle*', which pieces are still laid out on the floor, waiting for someone to put them all together, and a pointer to the game of chess is made in 'Two moves to *checkmate*' on What Really Happened (4/2005), implying that the government can't hold up the official theory and ought to surrender to conduct a full investigation. On the Arctic Beacon (11/30/2003) is talked about '*unraveling* the 9/11 scenario' and a presumed '*government's hand* in 9/11'. In the article 'More *holes* in the official theory' (AlterNet, 3/26/2004) suggests the official story is like a sinking ship, destined to go down.

Slogans and catch phrases were also used. What Really Happened (2003) added the motto of the Mossad to one of their articles, 'By way of deception, thou shalt do war' and a fat printed quote of a firefighter with regard to the collapse of the towers: 'It didn't seem real. There are thousands of these steel beams that just fell like pick-up sticks'. TVNewsLies (on What Really Happened, 4/2005) opened one of its articles with: 'What we have here is solid undisputed evidence that we were never told the truth'. Not many depictions were found, but What Really Happened (3/7/2002) printed an official autopsy-list of casualties of the 9/11 attacks, which shows no Arab names on them. The same site also comes up with photographs that have to prove 'there was no inferno prior to the collapse of the towers'. Photos show people looking out from the impact area of the building. 'There should have been *no* survivors between floors 93 and 98 if an 800c inferno was raging at the core of WTC1' is the underwriting of the photo material (What Really Happened, 6/14/2005).

Themes and actors

'The Cover-Up' frame deals with two main topics. The first one is about the silencing of individuals or investigating bodies that could come up with key information regarding governmental complicity in the 9/11 attacks. The second topic is concerned with the many pending questions regarding 9/11 that remain unanswered and mainly focus on the events of the day of September 11 itself. The government, whether related to the first or second topic, is seen as the main actor and initiator of the ultimate 'cover-up', refusing to address uncertainties and doubts that live among the population, silencing whistleblowers and not authorizing independent investigations. Apart from the government, other groups and actors include people that would held key information, the 9/11 commission, several politicians of the US senate and congress, American and foreign secret service agencies and foreign politicians and authority figures.

Criticism of the 9/11 commission

on the morning of September the 11th.

themes in this frame. Much of the information that came out of the hearings and investigation of the 9/11 events was supposedly shoved aside and never tracked down, making sure political figures who were in office during the attacks could be spared. TruthOut (4/21/2003) states that 'to fulfill its mission, the 9/11 commission ought to provide the answers. But the Bush administration, to date, has acted to *stop such answers from reaching the public*.' Successfully it seems, as From the Wilderness (7/9/2004) points out in its article 'the Final fraud', '9/11 Commission closes its door to the public. *Cover-Up complete*'. Some articles go into several people not commenting on their actions on September 11, like general Eberhart who was in charge of NORAD at the time but did not act to prevent the airplanes from continuing its flight in US airspace. All in all there is a lot of criticism regarding the methods

used by the 9/11 commission, doing an inadequate job at finding out what exactly happened

Criticism of the work of the 9/11 commission investigating the 9/11 events is one of the

Public disinformation/ Cover-up of 9/11 evidence

Another theme in this frame is the blocking of key information by the authorities to prevent it from reaching the public. Due to efforts of political figures, the government, and other authorities much of the information stayed under the cover.' The White House *blocked the public* from learning what Bush had been told about the Al Qaeda threat in the weeks before 9/11 and *hid* crucial information' (TruthOut, 9/11/2004). According to Democracy Now (4/29/2003) 'the administration definitely had foreknowledge of 9/11. They failed to prevent the attacks and since then there has been a massive *cover-up*'. Like in the other frames, there is a discrepancy between 'us' (the public, left in the dark about many important things) and 'them' (the authorities, the ones in power).

Generally, one could say that according to the Cover-Up frame the public and the government are two forces that oppose each other. 'The Bush administration has blocked the public from release of the full classified version of the report for more than five months' (911CitizensWatch, 2/18/2005). Clues regarding the events itself were, according to this frame, also covered-up by authorities. 911Truth (3/25/2005) mentions destroyed air-traffic controller tapes by the government. 'But these tapes, which could have helped determine how the agency responded to clues that four planes had been hijacked, were destroyed before they were ever heard.' What Really Happened (7/2/2003) warns that 'the destruction and removal of evidence must stop immediately'.

Silenced whistleblowers

A whistleblower is an employee or former employee of an organization who reports misconduct to people or entities that have the power to take corrective action (Wikipedia, 2005). One of the current themes in the 'Cover-Up' frame is the continuous silencing or 'gagging' by the authorities of individuals who go public on a 9/11 related issue.

911Truth mentions that: 'Government invokes its power to *silence whistleblowers* either directly or indirectly' (911Truth, 4/22/2005).

Various websites mention the silencing of people who try to get 9/11 info into the open, often leaving them with empty hands and disillusioned.

Instead of being encouraged to testify about what she knew about 9/11, government agents were told to"put the screws" to Schneider (the Arctic Beacon, 5/26/2005). As the Arctic Beacon (5/26/2005) writes: 'she finds herself in seclusion, the victim of harassment, and over 200.000 in debt from legal bills'. The case of Sibel Edmonds, a former Turkish-American translator who found out about crucial 9/11 information while working for the FBI, is also covered extensively. In 'Gagged but not dead' (TruthOut, 5/14/2005), Sibel herself comments on how she became a whistleblower, was fired by her boss and had to swear to never go public, which in the end, she still did: 'In the past three years I have been gagged, I have been threatened and been prevented from pursuing my due process'.

Governmental/Secret service warnings; information not tracked down before 9/11

A theme that is widely present is the theme of the warnings of upcoming attacks in the weeks, months and years before 9/11. According to American Free Press (7/2004) 'the CIA and FBI have known -since 1995- about the terrorist plot to use civilian aircrafts to attack the WTC. This airline terror plan, codenamed 'Project Bojinka', was first found in a Philippine apartment in January 1995'. American Free Press quotes Die Welt, which stated that both FBI and CIA were made fully aware of all details of this project. Specific warnings from foreign intelligence agencies were also disregarded in the weeks leading to 9/11, as From the Wilderness (7/9/2004) comments: 'The US was in possession of information that *forewarned* of the attacks in sufficient detail to have prompted their prevention'. 'Who knew?' wonders American Free Press (6/19/2004), and 'FBI missed changes to stop 9/11' (BBC, on What Really Happened, 6/10/2005). Not only the secret services and government were, supposedly, warned. Many other people also seem to have been in on the danger of a 9/11 catastrophe unfolding. 'The attorney general Ashcroft was told by his staff to only take private planes for the rest of his tenure and Mayor Willie Brown of San Francisco was warned not to fly in the week before September 11' (Democracy Now, 16/9/2003). From the Wilderness (6/11/2004), goes into the story of Odigo, a US (in the WTC) based company that had stated that 'workers were warned of an upcoming attack and stayed at home on September the 11th'. The question why the government knew but did not act is also posed.

Possible answers are given on TruthOut (4/21/2003). 'The authorities deliberately concealed the fact that they had ample warnings of terrorist attacks and failed to act on them in order to carry out a full-blown war on terrorism as a means to justify their neo-conservative goals'.

Stock trade scandal

Stock trades in the week before 9/11 were also mentioned and presented as crucial 'foreknowledge evidence'. What Really Happened (5/11/2004) wonders: 'How could someone have placed anonymous put options on American Airlines and United Airlines just prior to the attacks of 9/11?' This question is asked on several other websites too, suggesting a lot more people could be imagined knowing the attacks would soon take place. 'A jump in American Airlines put options 60 times above normal on the day before the attacks' states American Free Press (7/2004). From the Wilderness (12/17/2003) adds: 'This sure would be one of the most extraordinary coincidences in the history of mankind if it was a coincidence'.

Use of a Pearl Harbor like event

The fact the 9/11 attacks might have been in the planning by the US authorities for years and acted out on September 11 is a recurring theme in this frame as well. Several websites mention the existence of documents describing a 'Pearl Harbor like event' which would ignite fear in the population, maneuvering the government into a position of control to carry out a certain foreign policy, directed at global hegemony. Counter Punch (10/18/2004) comments: 'The strategy included creating an event like Pearl Harbor in order to scare the American people, paving an easy path to war with immediate public approval'.

Controlled demolition

'Why did the Trade Center Skyscrapers collapse?' is asked by 911Truth (6/15/2005) in an article that explains the possibility it could not have been the jet fuel of the airlines, but a controlled demolition (placed explosives) which took the two towers down.

'Only *professional demolition* appears to account for the rage of facts associated with the collapse', the website suggests. 9/11CitizensWatch (2/10/2005) adds that 'a former Bush team member during his first administration is now voicing serious doubts about the collapse of the WTC on 9/11, commenting the official theory is "bogus" and it is more likely *controlled demolition* destroyed the Twin Towers and the adjacent building 7'.

The Artic Beacon (5/1/3/2005) presents the case of WTC maintenance worker William Rodriguez, who attempts to get to the truth, claiming to have heard detonated bombs go off in the towers before and after the airplanes made its impact. 'William Rodriguez heard a series of explosions rock the lower levels of the WTC minutes before the north tower came crashing down, establishing further evidence the building collapsed from a controlled demolition not burning jet fuel like the government contends.'

Identities hijackers/ Uncertainties about what happened on board of planes

Further unanswered questions concern the identities of the 19 hijackers who were on board of the 4 airliners, something which is addressed by the majority of the websites. The Arctic Beacon, 911Truth and What Really Happened mention that 'five of the 19 alleged hijackers are alive and well'. 'Who were on board of these planes? Some of them were interviewed and deny they have anything to do with 9/11' wonders the Arctic Beacon (5/7/2005). False information? Or swapped identities/ stolen or false passports? The websites call for a new investigation. Uncertainties and doubts also linger regarding what exactly happened on board of the planes during the hijackings. 'Where are the black boxes of the flights?' Phil Berg asks on the Arctic Beacon (5/15/2004). Col. De Grand Pré, on American Free Press (6/2004) is still surprised about how 'a hijacker armed with a box cutter could dispatch two strapped and trained pilots'. And why did the air-defense system (NORAD) not react more swiftly? (Counter Punch, 8/23/2003) and what is the reason for the names of the hijackers not appearing on any of the passenger lists? (What Really Happened, 7/2/2004).

Problem/ Solution

The underlying problem of the 'Cover-up' frame is explained fairly straightforward by 911Truth (3/25/2005). 'In blocking the free exchange of information, public officials are heavily damaging one of the key democratic values that the terrorists themselves wanted to knock down on September 11'.

The responsibility of this taking place lies with the authorities, whose tendency to hide information and withhold evidence and knowledge the public should know about, is at the core of the 'Cover-Up' frame. Rick Blum talks on 9/11Truth (9/11/2004) about 'a great wall being erected between the government and the public'. Whether it concerns whistleblowers that were silenced, evidence destroyed or put aside, or questions that were never asked, this frame accuses those in charge of keeping the public in the dark whenever possible.

According to most websites the eventual final solution would be simply to 'uncover', to bring out in the open what is hidden, although there is little consensus on the ways to accomplish this. Openness and providing the public with information could encourage change. A solution also lies, according to 9/11Truth (3/25/2005) in a 'vigorous hunt for the truth'. People should create new means to spread the information and 'work to thwart Bush's attempts at global domination'. An independent investigation (perhaps at grassroot level) is also crucial in finding out what happened during and in the period leading to September 11, 2001. American Free Press (6/19/2004) is fairly optimistic about the results. 'That there is at this time still no thorough congressional investigation of the events of 9/11 is itself a major unanswered question. But with government cooperation or without, the historical truth will be uncovered'. It is one of the main reasons most alternative websites exist, calling out for some sort of revolution which should start at the people's level. Could the Internet offer some sort of solution? Most websites indirectly suggest their position is crucial in the uncovering of covered-up information. David Corn on TruthOut (11/21/2003) believes that 'as soon as the cover-up would come undone, the Bush administration would have to worry about the consequences'.

The Mainstream Media Disinformation Frame

Finally, the 'Mainstream Media disinfo' frame -found 10 times in the 60 online articles- is all about the mainstream press ignoring the unanswered questions regarding 9/11 and simply adopting the official governmental explanation as 'the only true story'. The mainstream press is seen as an instrument of government policy and found prone to authority pressure to ignore or downplay certain issues in their coverage, and overstate other issues. Linda Heard comments cynically on CounterPunch (8/23/2003): 'The US government and the subservient media make a great team.'

TruthOut (9/11/2004) criticizes 9/11 commission coverage by the mainstream media outlets and questions their independence and objectivity: 'The media has also compromised its role as an independent watchdog. Until recently, there has been minimal media coverage of the 9/11 commission. Virtually all mainstream outlets have downplayed the issue, we are not sure why.' The final result, as will be discussed in the Problem/ Solution part of this frame would be a disinformation of the public, a public that is largely dependent on the mainstream media for their knowledge of the world and opinion formation.

A lot of words are being used in the articles to imply mainstream media disinfo on the events of 9/11. The mainstream media "purposely ignored", and have "hidden the truth", "didn't provide any answers", "censored delicate revelations", and "stayed silent on stories", all showing there are things out there people should know but cannot, because of media cover-up tactics. The Arctic Beacon (5/15/2005) comments that 'the mainstream media cover important 9/11 related issues like a 'beauty contest held for the 55 and over crowd in Miami Beach'. In 'Media silence on 9/11' TruthOut (11/25/2004) states: 'the media has compromised its role as independent watchdog' and 'Fox TV has treated the viewer to a virtual media-blackout'. The 'Mainstream Media Disinformation' frame was found in a lot of articles that also display some of the other frames, mostly in a part that was written to explain 'why the public is so unaware of certain facts and issues'.

Themes and actors

Four themes dominate the 'Mainstream Media Disinformation' frame. Three of those are concerned with power-issues in the media landscape and the public being refrained from crucial information. Because of a supposed intertwining of interests of media organizations and government, certain questions will remain unanswered, leading to an uninformed public, connecting themes regarding 'lack of presenting alternative theories', 'media and government linked' and 'an uninformed public'. The fourth theme shows a sparkle of hope. As long as the Internet continues to be a free medium, people have an opportunity to try finding answers to certain questions and stumble across information that otherwise would have remained hidden. Actors and groups in this frame include media organizations, chief editors and journalists, -both working for mainstream media press and alternative/ Internet press-, mainstream media outlets, the US government and the public.

Lack of presenting alternative theories/addressing unanswered questions

One of the main themes within this frame is the lack of presenting alternative theories regarding what could have happened on 9/11, leaving the public with only one explanation, one (official) scenario and without any answers to things they might want to know more about. Mark Morford writes on SFGate (What Really Happened, 10/27/2004): 'It has very much to do with the media toeing the line of "safe" information and not asking truly difficult or radically off-track questions of our leaders or of the strangeness happening in the world.' According to the alternative websites, the media do not offer any alternative theories or views on things, taking a 'safe route' and avoiding any stories or information that would risk altering the status quo.

Media and government linked

The main reason for above described mechanism is a theme of linked interests of mass media and government, as was described earlier in chapter II of this thesis. Mass media outlets tend to close their ranks and choose to stay with the official line to avoid punishment and harassment, especially in situations of crises and uncertainty.

AlterNet (9/11/2002) mentions that: 'The American media has purposely ignored a lawsuit against Bush in order to protect the administration against any type of public backlash'.

People uninformed

As discussed earlier in the 'Cover-Up' frame, the eventual outcome of abovementioned themes is a lack of information available to the public. TruthOut (11/25/2003) states: 'Sadly stories about Al Shehri (one of the alleged hijackers who would still be alive) are left *of the front pages*, either *ignored* or *hidden* on back pages. At the same time, Americans are left *uninformed*, essentially ignorant of the major issues facing our country'. And, later in the article: 'the mainstream media ignored the Sibel Edmonds case, and their *refusal* to cover her story is the most important reason Americans remain *unaware* of her plight'. According to this frame the mainstream media ought to address all possible theories, and by not doing this, are willingly depriving the public of additional and possibly crucial knowledge.

Internet the only 'free' medium

In the opinion of the writers of the online articles, fighting to get the mainstream media to address delicate questions and issues might be a little too much to ask for. There just is too much money and prestige involved, the stakes are too high. In the opinion of the websites, the Internet could become, and perhaps already is, the only 'free medium', largely uncensored and offering alternative views on many events which still reach a reasonably large audience. As Counter Punch (10/18/2004) writes: 'If Americans want to find out about the war in Iraq and other important stories like the 9/11 scandal, they have to rely solely on alternative sources on the Internet'. According to this frame it certainly seems the Internet could be considered the saving grace in times of a withholding of information.

Problem/ Solution

The mainstream media ignoring certain issues leads to an uninformed audience. But what is the deeper reason for the major media avoiding to touch the delicate topics? According to AlterNet (9/10/2002) 'it is professional suicide to dare suggest an alternative truth to the one supplied by the Pentagon'. Fear of losing market shares, or more importantly, one's job and career perspectives and consequently yielding under authority pressure is a theme which coincides with Noam Chomsky's theories in 'Manufacturing Consent'. What about the fear for not being taken seriously by covering issues that no-one else will? Counter Punch (10/27/2004) states: 'Every journalist knows that buried just beneath the slippery surface of any good conspiracy theory is a gem or three of real truth. Questions that probably never will be researched, because it has been cast into the 'madhouse of outrageous impossibility' and is therefore rendered impotent and hopeless'.

As long as the mainstream media are not fully independent of government funding and harassment, as long as media professionals bow under pressure from their colleagues, bosses or the authorities, a solution to an apparent mainstream media disinformation might be light-years away. The unlinking of the interests of media and government seems to be a 'Hercules task', making the alternative media on the Internet the only true alternative for whoever is interested in seeking the truth and finding out about issues from a different perspective. This fact gives the alternative websites their reason for existence, warriors for a 'good cause'. At least in the minds of the website editors. The Artic Beacon (2004) puts it this way on their website: 'The corporate-driven media ignore the truth and pacify the American people with entertainment news as well as merely echoing the government's lies and deception. The Arctic Beacon's soul is not for sale'.

VI Discussion

During the last stages of my research, four bombs exploded in the Underground system of downtown London, killing over 50 passengers. An occurrence which showed that international terrorism remains a not to be underestimated issue, bound to stay on the political agendas for the coming years and perhaps even decades. 'September 11' caused a climate of unprecedented security measures, warning systems, the exchange of information and the tracking or expulsion of terrorism suspects. Nevertheless, if someone wishes to cause havoc among citizens, that is proven to be very much possible in every corner of the globe. Whether we like it or not, unexpected attacks by an almost invisible enemy is something we will have to learn to deal with in our daily lives.

Regardless of this fact, -according to the alternative media on the Internet- there are after more than four years still a lot of clouds of doubt and mystery hanging over that first big terrorist attack of the century. Many alternative Internet websites point at strange facts, questions and in the mainstream media scarcely mentioned issues either on the morning of September 11 itself, the days leading up to 9/11 or in the aftermath of the events.

As described earlier, Hamelink (2004) mentions that, in the case of a major world event, usually three views come up; the dominant, the critical, and the alternative view. Looking at the data of this study, it seems that the critical and alternative view regarding the 9/11 events are far more present in the website articles on the Internet than the dominant view. Both the critical and the alternative view were discovered extensively in the four frames found in the material

A theme that turned out to be present in all articles was direct or indirect criticism of the Bush administration. Whether related to the way the 9/11 events and the aftermath were handled, or key figures of authority assisted or even planned September 11, the main recurring theme of all online material is one of condemnation of the incumbent government. All websites more or less share the view of Alternet which comments that 'our government has failed us' and calls for action 'to change the course and direction of our government in both foreign and domestic policy'.

It is the task of the alternative media to come up with 'alternative truths and worldviews', otherwise the notion alternative would be an obsolete one. 'Alternative' literally means 'different, away from the ordinary'. One of the main practical implications of this is that the alternative media are generally far more critical towards governments and authorities. As stated before, according to Atton (2002) most alternative media are without a doubt oppositional in larger part and criticize corporatism as well as governmental politics. Not only because most alternative or radical press is independent of government funding and support, but also because most alternative media stem from a tradition of left wing and oppositional press which is largely society- and authority critical in nature.

This study confirms Atton's theory, as one of the common themes in each of the four frames that were uncovered studying the data, appeared to be a criticism of the Bush administration and its policies. All frames deal with failures, malpractice and in some cases even malicious behavior by the US government and authorities. In this respect, one could say that although the alternative media nowadays largely come together on a new medium, -the Internet- the message is still the same as that of Liverpool's Free Press in the 1970s. The main message of the alternative media remains: we, as citizens, are being manipulated by the authorities and have to fight for our rights to know the truth. However, the impact the alternative Internet media have might turn out to be significantly larger than the alternative media of old could ever dream of. The immense reach of the Internet means that far more people will end up being exposed to alternative views and opinions than was the case a few decades ago.

Atton's (2002: 14) statement that the alternative media outlets construct news based on alternative values and frameworks was also confirmed. Specific frames that were uncovered in this study showed themes that deal with money, power, dependence, secrecy, manipulation and a lack of information provided by the government. Different interpretations of the 9/11 events were discovered; interpretations which can hardly be found anywhere in the mainstream press, but seem to flourish in the Internet based alternative media. Both the 'critical view' and the 'alternative view' from Hamelink's three earlier described views were found extensively, which suggests that the Internet could be a place where these ways of looking at the September 11 attacks are particularly strongly advocated.

Investigating the online 9/11 related material four main frames were found to dominate the alternative websites. By far the most visible frame has proven to be the 'Cover-Up' frame, which deals with a secretive and scheming government that might have known about the 9/11 attacks all along, or may even have assisted in the planning or eventual execution. A government which silences individuals who threaten to find out about what really happened on September 11, and has no intention to answer the many lingering unanswered questions. This coincides with Curran's (2000) notion that 'all but the alternative media respect cultural taboos and that most taboo'd areas are usually discussed in the alternative media'. Regarding 9/11, not the vision of the ones in charge was being put forward. On the contrary, many topics that are 'better not talked about' as they seem outrageous and extraordinary were found in the data, as the widely present 'Cover-Up' frame shows.

The three other frames were found far less frequently, but together make for an interesting set of concepts. The 'Money and Power' frame is about economic power in a world that is dominated by the West (and mainly by the US), and how this power is maintained and accumulated. The 'Consequences of the War on Terrorism' displays how, instead of making the world a safer place, the policies after 9/11 rolled back civil liberties even more and has widened the gap between citizens and government. The 'Mainstream Media Disinformation' frame adds the influence of the mass media on society. An influence which, according to this frame, is also based on direct or indirect governmental influence and pressure. Authorities and mainstream media work together to refrain the public from knowing the real truth regarding an event like 9/11.

The Four Frames: Power Maintenance and Accumulation			
Frame 1 Frame 2 Frame 3	'Cover-Up' frame 'Money and Power' frame 'Consequences of WOT' frame	<i>→ → →</i>	Political Power Economic Power Political Power
Frame 4	'Mainstream Media Disinformatio frame	n' →	Ideological Power +Controlling Instrument

figure 1.3

In all frames the alternative media point at a maintenance or accumulation of power of the government at the expense of the individual citizen, with the mainstream media as a control mechanism. *Economic power* in the 'Money and Power' frame, *political power* in the 'Consequences of the War on Terrorism' frame and in the 'Cover-Up' frame, and *ideological power* in the 'Mainstream Media Disinformation' frame are increased using the mainstream media as a tool (see figure 1.3). Together, the four frames seem to form a complex system of interdependence and causes and effects. The mainstream media are used as a control mechanism to cover-up the 9/11 events, power is exerted to control the media, and the frame that was found most frequently in the data, the 'Cover-Up' frame -which deals with government complicity-, can be linked to the above mentioned concept of power maintenance and accumulation (frame 2 and 3), as the economic and political increase of power is a direct result of the event and the subsequent cover-up, which is illustrated in figure 1.4. Most articles consisted of more than one frame, showing that, according to the alternative media, more processes are at work at the same time and directly or indirectly influence each other.

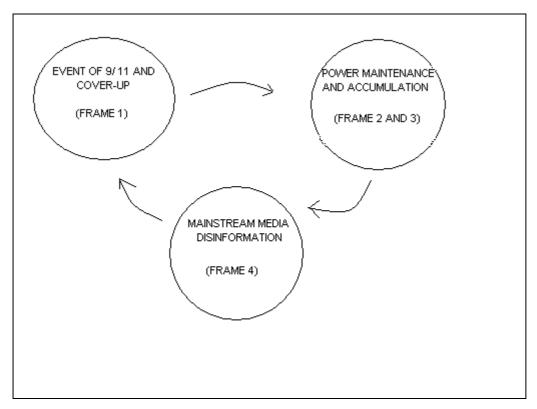


figure 1.4

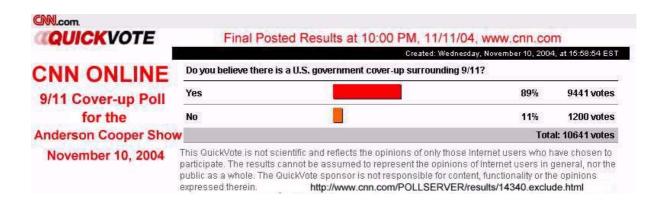
This has been a study that used a qualitative research method. It provides an insight into how the alternative media frame an event like September 11, but some choices that were made have their implications. One of such choices is a geographical restriction. Because of the purpose of uniformity only US websites were selected and investigated. Taking websites from other regions or countries into account might bring forward other findings and results. A cross national study might shed light on differences that might exist between alternative media of various western and non-western countries. Also, because of the qualitative nature of the research, one could argue whether the selection and construction of the discussed frames did not create a bias in some way or another. I have explained based on which criteria the frames were constructed and how I came to conclusions regarding themes, actors and dynamics. However, the research ought to be conducted again with different coders to confirm the results and come to more general findings. As a suggestion for further research, it would be helpful to complement my interpretative and explorative study with a thorough quantitative study, which would focus on word counts, sentence constructions and header or under title analyses.

Eventually, this study has raised more questions than it answered. How much influence *do* the alternative media really have, and for how long will they be able to voice their opinions? This depends largely on the future of the Internet as a free medium, as was discussed in chapter II. Will the Internet lead to a more democratic and pluralistic society; or will Noam Chomsky's 'doom scenario' come true, which perceives the development of the Internet in line with current power relations?

A question which would make for an interesting future research is to what extent the alternative media construct the world views and opinions of the public. As I stated earlier, living in an increasingly complex world, we as a public are becoming more and more dependent on the media for our knowledge of anything beyond the familiar. It seems often that *what* we know is in any other way related to the source that particular knowledge is originating from (Livingstone, 1999). Are the people who receive their knowledge mainly from mainstream sources less informed, more informed, or informed in a different way compared to the people who use the alternative media on the Internet to find out what happened in the world? Also, would the people who turn to the alternative media often have different opinions, mind sets and world views? Such a reception research could take this study as a stepping stone and elaborate on public opinion formation.

Another interesting future framing research could evolve around other large scale world events and look into how they are framed both in mainstream and alternative media? Will the same frames show up or different ones?

Regarding the 9/11 events, this poll from the CNN website (november 2004- 911Truth.org) shows that 89% of the roughly 10000 people that participated believe there is a US government cover-up surrounding 9/11, a reminder for the fact that the unanswered questions regarding the attacks on September 11, 2001 will probably remain in the minds of millions of people in the coming years.



As things stand now, we will all likely continue living in the shadow of the two towers for a while. One thing we do know is how important it is to have a large amount of information available at our fingertips at all time, regarding every world event of significance. We, as world citizens, are not able to be physically present all over the globe to see how events turn out and should be understood. There are people who do that for us. People we need to put our trust in and who will need to be reliable. Regarding reliability and the checking of sources the alternative media obviously have a great responsibility. Not everything should be said and suggested just for the sake of saying and suggesting it. And could it not be possible that at times the alternative media might be even more biased than the mainstream media, as they are backed by a certain ideology instead of something cold and non-discriminating as money? Still, the 'alternative media as citizens' media' as Rodriguez (2001; in Atton, 2002) calls it, could have the ability to offer a new philosophy of journalism. A journalism that originates from the everyday life of people and handles world events in a more objective, independent way.

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VII Appendix: Website Articles

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