Susan Jeffords and Fahed Al-Sumait (Eds.), **Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World's Most Wanted Man**, Urbana, Chicago and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2015, pp. 259, $87.93 (hardcover), $30.00 (paperback).

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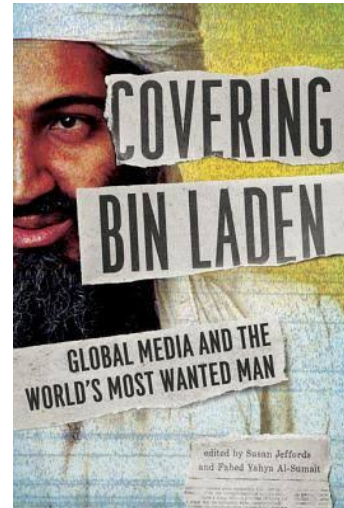Bowling Green State University, USA

        This collection primarily concerns mainstream media's rhetorical construction of Osama Bin Laden (OBL) from 9/11 2001 to his death in May 2011. At the time of publication in 2015, editors Susan Jeffords was a professor of English and women's studies at the University of Washington, and Fahed Al-Sumait was an assistant professor of communication at the Gulf University for Science and Technology in Kuwait.

        The editors of **Covering Bin Laden: Global Media and the World's Most Wanted Man** propose that the volume provides an opportunity to compare media perspectives across national and regional boundaries, media formats and methodologies, theories and disciplinary practices. In addition, it provides insight into global media and demonstrates that there is no stable "object" of global media attention in coverage of newsworthy events or persons.

        Opening the collection, Richard Jackson argues that media coverage of OBL's death is an essentially meaningless simulacrum that seems real, at first, but reveals itself as symbolic imitation of a meaningful event, one that made little or no difference in strategic or material terms. Both the facts as to his death and their interpretation remain highly uncertain. Media attempted to construct the event as important and meaningful. Yet the organization of which OBL was titular head, Al Qaeda, was ontologically uncertain: was it an organization in the traditional sense, a diffused network, a branch of a much broader international jihadist movement, or part of a broader pan-Islamist movement upon which it was parasitic? What, exactly, were its broader ideological drivers, aims and goals? Without really knowing Al Qaeda it was not possible to know who Bin Laden was or what he did nor the meaning of his death. In place of certainty, counterterrorism officialdom engages in *fantasies*, imagining exaggerated or unrealistic scenarios that they treat as real threats.

        Aditi Bhatia identifies discursive dichotomies in representations of both OBL and President George W. Bush. For Bush, OBL is *inherently* evil, dark, barbaric, and justly hunted in order to exact revenge. For OBL, it is the Western nations that are these things—but not inherently since they *could* stop if they ceased their engagement in specified undesired actions. For OBL the actions of Al Qaeda are not terrorism but constitute a just resistance to western attacks on Islam for over half a century. For Bush, the war is between Islam and the West, and OBL agrees. But both Bush and OBL display "double contrastive identities" where the roles of good versus bad, etc., are reversible depending on which side's perceptions are taken into account.

Andrew Hill examines how OBL's video appearances and audio broadcasts after 9/11 allowed him to continue his intervention in the War on Terror (while usefully providing the West with justification for global struggle against terrorism). These lent a spectral or ghostly character to his continuing presence and, in the case of audio recordings, constitute a type of "acousmetre" (a being who speaks but is not seen—a source of fear), a demonic trickster who can play with and reconjure his image and appearance, and a frustrated "objet petit" (that which sets desire into motion, yet cannot be found—until his killing in 2011). The killing of OBL highlights the distinction between real and symbolic death, inviting exploration of the space between those two statuses.

Alexander Spencer considers how study of uses of metaphor in media aids our understanding of how media construct terrorism, naturalize specific countermeasures and place others outside the mainstream of debate. In German and British tabloids, terrorism was variously understood as (1) *war*, where Islamic jihadism was often conflated with Nazism, and calling on a military response; (2) *crime*, calling for anti-terror laws against the terrorist "criminal"; (3) *uncivilized evil or barbarism*, constituting terrorism as other, foreign, and non-western, calling for the securing of borders and (4*) disease*, something that cannot be reasoned with, and contagious, calling for measures of quarantine. Changes of metaphor may reflect the reality of changed circumstances, or the interests of those using the metaphors, or may occur if the inferences they make by mapping one domain on to another are supported by physical and cultural experience.

What can be said about the media in whose terrains such symbolic constructions were attempted? Courtney Radsch looks at the relationship between Al Jazeera and Al Qaeda, both seen as global media and mediatized organizations or networks, linked to Arab satellite television, the Internet and social media. Both organizations amplified the idea of an Arab collective community and historical narrative, especially around Palestine and Iraq that posed a threat to U.S. hegemony. If Al Qaeda was the conscience of "umma," Al Jazeera was seen as its voice, and the voice of those who have no voice in traditional Arab and western media. From 2004 to 2010, Al Jazeera was consistently the preferred international news station in nearly every Middle Eastern country. During this period it passed from being a "beacon of freedom" in western eyes (on account of its preparedness to challenge Arab regimes) to being a "harbinger of hate" that would favor the interests of Al Qaeda, it was thought, over those of the USA. Any interest on the part of Al Jazeera in fulfilling this role was contained by its (short-lived, as it turned out) attempt to "mainstream" itself as a U.S. station.

Norah Mellor finds that the main difference between coverage of OBL's killing in Arab as opposed to western media was that Arab media focused on the issues surrounding OBL and his family, foregrounding the wives' support of OBL as part of their duty as virtuous Muslim women—bearers of culture in ways that combine patriarchy with cultural connectivity. Anglo-American media focused on the image of OBL as a sexual being, his supposedly exaggerated sexual appetite, and contributed to the myth of OBL as a neurotic evil. Thus they turned the women into soft news for viewers' entertainment whereas Arab media represented them through humanitarian lenses as victims to be rescued and protected, in focusing on hard news events marking their detention and release in Pakistan.

Susan Moeller, Joanna Nurmis and Saranaz Barforoush examine how media dealt with the challenge of how to represent and "frame" OBL after his death in the absence of photos of his body, comparing and contrasting this scenario with the hanging of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and the street torture and murder of Colonel Qaddafi in Libya. They discuss in what ways it might be said that photographs may constitute—or fail to constitute—"evidence." Some media ran benign photos of OBL, perhaps with a view to triggering the sentiment of frisson that comes upon the gaze of the image of a person who is soon to die; others ran such photos but paired them with dramatic headlines that defined OBL as the icon of terror, or paired more ominous images of OBL with neutral headlines and text.

Purnima Bose provides an in-depth analysis of the satirical Pakistani film *Tere Bin Laden* to show how Pakistani middle classes simultaneously critique U.S. foreign policy yet become complicit with it. The movie satirizes the role of global media in promoting security agendas in alignment with the views of executive and legislative branches of government, and in constructing an idealized view of the U.S., and then mocks the Pakistani audience who buy into this dream. The War on Terror is portrayed as cartoonish, in which official narratives cannot be trusted. The movie plays with controversies that surrounded the apparent admission of guilt by OBL in the first of the OBL videos, which many believe to have been faked by the CIA.

Ryan Croken examines the publicly imagined symbolic relationships between the names "Osama" and "Obama." These were sometimes treated as synonymous, either rendering "Obama-is-Osama" as a foreign infiltration into the heart of American identity or, in sharp contrast, as a "cool," "badass," and fundamentally American agent. This latter version can be represented as protective of America precisely because it carries a particular brand of Occidental, vernacular "blackness." Rather than being twins, therefore, Obama and Osama become perfect foils, gaining currency as antonyms and offering an alliance between white Americanness and black vernacular criminality *on condition* that such blackness be directed outward against a common Arab/Muslim foe. This strategy was succeeded by a rise in anti-Muslim sentiment. Its ultimate results were a romantic fascination with extralegal military operations, fetishized blackness, extreme nationalist fervor and overt discrimination and violence against Arabs/Muslims.

Simon Ferrari looks at the budding genre of video "news games" based on OBL, charting a course from games developed in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 that were rather primitive and unprofessional, created independently of moneyed interests, to a more professional and corporatized variety that appeared after the killing of OBL in 2011. A rough typology of news games includes the categories of current event, documentary, literacy, news puzzles, interactive infographics, and a number of community activities and software platforms. Ferrari's account discusses important practical and theoretical questions: how do we distinguish between subjective and objective work in a "non-reproducing" medium? What are the best ways to make games quickly in response to a current event, and what are the risks of such rapid production? What are the dangers of financial relationships between the military and cultural producers? How do we talk seriously about "outsider art" or the creations of amateur designers? What is the potential for censorship by mass distribution platforms such as Microsoft's XBOX Live Arcade, the PlayStation Network, and Apple's App Store?

Brigitte Nacos considers the implications of media coverage of OBL for Muslims in America. Muslims were already negatively stereotyped by media before 9/11. In the months immediately after 9/11, voices that defended civil liberties and rights of American Muslims and Arabs were more numerous in the mass-mediated debate than those that wanted to see such freedoms curbed. But the "clash-of-civilizations" narrative persisted and even intensified with the advent of the war in Afghanistan so that by the first anniversary of 9/11 media had retreated to the negative and stereotyped patterns of the pre-9/11 period. Only weak coverage was given to Muslim leaders who spoke out against the 9/11 attacks and terrorism in general. There was much greater media openness to voices that advocated torture, proposed the (mainly false) belief that a majority of Americans supported torture, used language that was extremely deprecating of Muslims and Islam, and substituted the term "abuse" for "torture." These developments very likely had an influence on those who had access to Muslim prisoners in detention centers like Abu Ghraib. Torture became more prevalent in popular entertainment as something that was regularly practiced by the "good" guys—the main case in point, of course, being the character of Jack Bauer in Fox's *24,* a series that unreasonably popularized the almost never occurring ticking-time-bomb scenario and its justification for torture—a meme that readily entered public debate, mostly uncritically.

As the editors promise, the volume offers many valuable insights. Its own framing of the subject, however, remains insufficiently problematized, in a way that threatens to reinforce mainstream media personalization and myth even as it critiques them. There are one or two important exceptions, but few contributors demonstrate familiarity with a substantial literature on the centuries' old history of western intrigues in the Middle East and on what might loosely be described as the study of Orientalism. Few confidently critique mainstream media narratives as to "what happened." I found not a single reference, for example, to the contrary narrative of the killing of OBL proposed by celebrated investigative reporter Seymour Hersh, even though in their epilogue the editors do critique the movie *Zero Dark Thirty* for its disingenuous acceptance of CIA accounts of the contribution of torture to the discovery of OBL. The complexities of Western intelligence fabrications and manipulations of jihadist movements, of the divide-and-rule constructions and exploitations of Sunni-Shi'a conflicts, these remain almost entirely absent. Too often what is left is a war on shadows by shadows from shadows.