Chapter 5

Hitler, Stalin, and bin Laden: External and Internal Othering since the Mid-1980s

The idea that Hitler fathered children or was cloned has become less important over the last twenty years, but it has not lost all of its cultural power. Capitalizing on the myth, on November 18, 2003, the tabloid Weekly World News declared that “OSAMA RECRUITS CLONED HITLER!” The photo montage on the cover—bin Laden and the Hitler clone together on the back of a camel—establishes through spatial proximity and physical contact a metonymic link between the two figures, implying that bin Laden himself is a Hitler clone. The photo thus visualizes and literalizes that metaphor, popular in the United States since 9/11, that bin Laden is the “new Hitler.” The magazine thus satirizes the notion that both are of the same evil, an evil that manifests itself as anti-Semitism and hatred of “natural” U.S. values such as liberty and democracy.

Bin Laden, of course, is not the first of America’s postwar enemies who has been likened or linked to Hitler. Bill Clinton, for example, compared Slobodan Milosëvić to Hitler when arguing for a military intervention in the Kosovo; and both George Herbert Walker Bush and George W. Bush have, at different times, done the same with Saddam Hussein. In fact, such rhetoric has steadily proliferated in U.S. political and cultural discourses since the early 1980s. It has been frequently employed by the right—and much more sparingly by the left—in order to chart national, international, or personal conflicts. Bill Clinton, Howard Dean, Arnold
Schwarzenegger, and many others have been compared by opponents to Hitler at some point, Ted Turner has done the same with Fox News, and in 1991 Madonna even likened AIDS to Hitler.1

As far as international conflicts such as wars between nations or the war on terrorism are concerned, this rhetoric testifies to the reconstruction of a positive national self-image. Aligning a new foreign enemy with Hitler frames the new conflict as the continuation or repetition of World War II. Over the past decades, World War II—highly unpopular when it was fought—has increasingly figured in the American cultural imaginary as the mythical battle between good and evil, as a fight in which the United States definitely fought on the right side. Accordingly, the reference to World War II allows the culture to cast U.S. soldiers, whose image had been severely tarnished by the Vietnam War, again as liberators and morally integer, as those fighting a just fight. Aligning the new enemy with Hitler legitimizes U.S. military intervention and presents it as the only way to stop the enemy’s imperialist aggression. Moreover, as World War II has been increasingly misremembered as a war to stop the Holocaust, the new confrontation is projected as an effort to prevent another Holocaust. Like Hitler before him, the comparisons and metaphors imply, the new enemy will not listen to reason, cannot be negotiated with, and must not be appeased.

Such rhetorical efforts are usually not concerned with the ideological parallels between Hitler and those who are compared to him, with belief systems and political convictions, that is. Rather, the Hitler comparisons are part of the shift from ideology to ontology, whose influence on conceiving of Hitler as evil incarnate I trace in this book. When the focus is on ontology, it does not matter that Hitler and the new enemy often hold diametrically opposed convictions. What matters is that both are perceived as manifestations of the same ontological evil, and that their beliefs—those they share and those they do not share—are seen as symptoms of this evil. Hitler can try to provide Arafat with nuclear weapons—as in James Marino’s *The Asgard Solution* (1983)—or his clone can ride with bin Laden on a camel because differences in ideology are downplayed. The complex causes for international conflicts are personalized and reduced to the opposition of good and evil. The United States is projected as good, as a peaceful, democratic nation that, devoid of any self-interest, promotes human rights and democracy on a global scale, aides the oppressed, and fights evil everywhere. And so are, because they side with the United States against evil, America’s old and new allies—Israel, Britain, and, frequently now, Germany.

Hitler Fiction participates in this mapping out of allegiances and enmities, in the cultural work of othering, as I would like to call it.