

**The “Fuzzy Dream”: Discourse, Historical myths, and Militarized (in)Security -
Interrogating dangerous myths of Afghanistan and the ‘West’**

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“To the other nations who are not witnesses, who are not subject to the same oppressions, they cannot know. Unfathomable the words, the terminology: enemy, atrocities, conquest, betrayal, invasion, destruction.

They exist only in the larger perception of History’s recording that affirmed, admittedly and unmistakably, one enemy nation has disregarded the humanity of another. Not physical enough. Not to the very flesh and bone, to the core, to the mark, to the point where it is necessary to intervene, even if to invent anew, expressions, for this experience, for this outcome, that does not cease to continue.

To the others, these accounts are about (one more) distant land, like (any other) distant land, without any discernable features in the narrative, (all the same) distant like any other.

This document is transmitted through, by the same means, the same channel without distinction the content is delivered in the same style: the word. The image.”¹

“We are power’s virtual hostages, and we are dealing with a coalition of all the powers against all the populations.”²

"Pointless news crawls up 37 per cent... Do Democrats cause cancer? Find out at foxnews.com... Rupert Murdoch: Terrific dancer... Dow down 5,000 points... Study: 92 per cent of Democrats are gay... JFK posthumously joins Republican Party... Oil slicks found to keep seals young, supple..."³

In an article entitled “Modern Hate”, authors Suzanne and Lloyd Rudolph reveal how the mythlogy underscoring Hindu extremism in India can largely be traced to television and audio broadcasts in the 1980’s which recast an ancient legend (of the god Ram) into a “much less tolerant” version than in the past. “This new, high-profile recasting of Hindu identity,” the authors argue “provided the symbols politicians use to spark communal violence.”⁴ Black slavery, in turn, was acted out and legitimized through mythical roots that were constructed by

¹ Cha, Theresa Hak Kyung. (1995) *Dictee*. New York: Tanam Pression, 1982; reprint, Berkeley: Third Woman Press, p32-33.

² Baudrillard, Jean. “The Mask of War” in *1000 Days of Theory*, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (Eds), 11/3/2005, www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=494.

³ In October 2003 the creator of *The Simpsons*, Matt Groening, revealed that Fox News had threatened to sue Fox Entertainment - which makes the show - over the satirical use of rolling ticker lines on the screen. The above read the ticker on the program that sparked the threat. Ciar Byrne, "Simpsons parody upset Fox News, says Groening" *Guardian Unlimited*, October 29, 2003.

⁴ Cited in Kaufman, Stuart J. *Modern Hatreds: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*, Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 2001, p11.

colonial slave masters who normalized and neutralized the colonial practice through ‘factual’, ‘scientific’ claims; Immanuel Kant and David Hume both wrote of the natural inferiority of Blacks, justifying slavery as “a civilizing practice towards ‘savages’”, rationalizing colonialism and imperialism.⁵

Why do ‘we’ see what we see when we see it, and why do we not see what we don’t see when we don’t?⁶ This essay argues for the urgent need to critically interrogate discourses of foreign intervention and highlights the political implications of failing to do so. By complicating, interrogating, and historicizing particular narratives and representations of Afghanistan and contrasting narratives of the ‘West’⁷ it simultaneously reveals how the recent foreign interventions in Afghanistan have reflected commensurability with these narratives and how the West’s practical engagement with the site of Afghanistan has reflected and served to reproduce them. At this critical moment in world politics, successful policy making relies on maintaining public support and myth-making is playing a key role in producing a complicit/nationalistic/ignorant/fearful audience: Der Derian provides some useful insight in light of a discussion of a global “*in terrorem*” thrust into the spotlight following the 9/11 attacks on the US World Trade Center: “People go to war because of how they see, perceive, picture, imagine, and speak of others; that is, how they construct the difference of others as well as the

⁵ Eisenstein, Zillah. *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West*, Zed Books: New York, 2004, p74-91.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p37.

⁷ The two are intricately connected because, as Trubshaw explains, myths are often constructed by contrasting perceived ‘opposites’ – “The king with his servants, the rich with the poor, heroes with monsters, gods with humans, the socially approved with ‘outcasts’, order with chaos, constructive with destructive agents and forces, young with old, male with female, light with dark, and so on.” Trubshaw, Bob. “Custard: What are Myths?”, 2003-4, www.indigogroup.co.uk/foamycustard.Foamy

sameness of themselves through representations”.⁸ The intimate relationship between discourse, the media, and policy-making is irrefutable.

My goal is twofold: 1) to reveal the importance of critically interrogating discourse which is infused with hierarchical power structures that influence political action and perpetuate violence on particular bodies, and; 2) to show through an analysis of the discourses around the intervention in Afghanistan, nationalist military response has been legitimized in the name of liberation, democracy, and development while simultaneously occluding the role of the West in Afghanistan’s self-sustaining war economy. I do this first through a theoretical discussion of myth/discourse and the mediums through which they can be deployed such as the media. The second section of the paper illustrates these arguments through an analysis of the myths that dominated the media before, during, and after the military intervention in Afghanistan. Through this case study I critically engage in a discursive analysis of the elements that are deployed in the dominant myths which serve to legitimize a long history of imperial intervention especially in the Middle East context.

Herein lays the potential to reveal the negative and violent power of discourse and myth-construction; by failing to query the “naturalness” of history important contradictions and connections are obfuscated and imperial logic gets reproduced. “New routes to seeing” explains Immanuel Wallerstein, “are needed to lay bare the power structures that cover over history.”⁹ Attempts at understanding political situations and engaging in international intervention and diplomacy in places such as Afghanistan require that we become aware of dominant narratives

⁸ Der Derian, James. “*In Terrorem: Before and After 9/11*” in Ken Booth and Tim Dunne (eds.), *Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order*, 2002, Palgrave Macmillan, pp101-117, p110.

⁹ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p39.

that are produced, critically interrogate who is producing them and for what purpose, how they are being disseminated, and understand what is at stake in failing to do so.

Discourse, Narratives and Dangerous Myths

Wallerstein has asserted that all history is myth.¹⁰ Respected scholar and anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot has similarly argued that history is “necessarily a distortion of “historical facts” which “are not created equal.”¹¹ The well known and celebrated tale of the discovery of the Americas is a useful illustration of these statements: The events of 1492 are often cited, mostly in certain feminist and post-colonial texts, as an example of how historiographical assumptions get reproduced and become historical and absolute “truth”, or the “ultimate history”.¹² That is, as Carole Patemen reminds us, “When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure – there is no bloodshed – and Columbus Day is a celebration”.¹³ The enslavement, killing, plundering, rape, “total cruelty”, and ultimate genocide of the people and land of the newly discovered “Americas” by European “explorers” is not part of the “historical myth” retold around the Thanksgiving dinner table. Why not?

Disagreement around the production of knowledge has been at the heart of some of the most divisive debates within academia – that is, our relationship with knowledge and ‘knowing’ in general is highly mediated by myths: “Anything that has the status of knowledge” explains French philosopher Michele LeDoeff “can turn out to be riddled with mere beliefs, myths, or

¹⁰ Wallerstein, I. (1983). *Historical Capitalism*. London: Verso.

¹¹ Trouillot, Michel-Rolph, *Silencing the Past*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1995, p49.

¹² Taylor, Peter J. “Foreword: A Debate on the Significance of 1492” in *Fourteen Ninety-Two: The Debate on Colonialism, Eurocentrism, and History*, by J.M. Blaut. Africa World Press, Trenton, 1992, viii.

¹³ Pateman, Carole, “Contract, The Individual, and Slavery,” in the *Sexual Contract* Ch.3, p26.

shocking representations”.¹⁴ Similarly, Peter Taylor employs the label “historical myth” or “Ossian”¹⁵ to indicate that what is commonly called history or knowledge are often institutionalized frameworks, cognitive blockages, ingrained discourse or social beliefs that have become ingrained in the collective epistemic imaginary.¹⁶ Interestingly, ‘mythology’ was adopted by early folklorists to characterize the living systems of tales and beliefs of ‘primitive people’ such as Native American Indians. The earliest uses of the word are recorded in the form of the Greek word *mythos*; interestingly, in the *Illiad*, reveals Trubshaw, the word is used 167 times usually to refer to a powerful male making boasts or giving orders.¹⁷ In the twentieth century, ‘myth’ began to refer to stories that were ‘sacred’ to a society – “metaphorical means of conveying ‘truths’ (or perceived truths within that society)” – which provided a sort of structure to that society: “They explained such matters as the origin and organization of the cosmos, social organization such as gender and kinship, and told of deities and heroes.”¹⁸ Myths are ‘alive and well’ in modern day ‘Western’ cultures, argues Trubshaw, and are intermeshed with political ideologies to provide a ‘deep structure’ to how we think about the world; they are essentially “narrative forms of ideology”. In the modern world, these myths manifest as “fragmentary references, indirect allusions, watchwords, slogans, visual symbols, echoes in literature, film, songs, public ceremonies, and other forms of everyday situations, often highly condensed and emotionally charged.”¹⁹

¹⁴ LeDoeuff, Michele. *The Sex of Knowing*, Routledge 2003, pgx.

¹⁵ The “Great Ossian” was a reference in Taylor’s piece to the characterization by Jim Blaut, Gunder Frank, and Samir Amin, of history as granting certain spatial, social, and epistemological preference to particular histories. This reference is alluding to a piece of 18th century nationalist forgery that rewrote Celtic historical geography by putting a peripheral region at center stage.

¹⁶ LeDoeuff, *The Sex of Knowing*, pg xvi.

¹⁷ Trubshaw, “Foamy Custard”.

¹⁸ Trubshaw, “Foamy Custard”.

¹⁹ Flood, Christopher G. *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction*, Garland, 1996, p84. Note: I should distinguish here how I differentiate between ‘myth’ (as a particular form of ‘narrative’) and ‘narrative’ as an element of ‘discourse’.

The danger of myth is precisely its ability to attain the status of knowledge, gaining authenticity as comprehensive and total. This is problematic because “Nothing”, as Eisenstein argues “escapes invention, interpretation, or subversion.”²⁰ Let’s return momentarily to our example of 1492 and the ‘discovery’ of the Americas. A key “collective fiction” or myth that contributed to the ‘discovery’ and entitlement narratives regarding the New World land was the notion of *terra nullius* – the idea that prior to European occupation, the land was uninhabited and belonged to no one. In her article exploring the philosophical imaginations around Australia’s colonial past, Lloyd explains how such a dominant and determining fiction of a culture like *terra nullius* manufactured a myth of Australia’s sovereignty as built upon notions of discovery and peaceful settlement rather than violent invasion and conquest. The result, as in the Americas, is a history built on emotions of pride and a legitimization of the idea that the human presence that had inhabited the land was not ‘fully human’ or was ‘lesser human’ and had no ownership over the land.²¹

Academia commonly uses the terms discourse or narrative in analyses that interrogate the power of language by deconstructing its utilization and its underpinnings. I want to delineate between these terms and my deployment of the word myth. Discourse or discourse analysis is a social concept that is often linked to Michele Foucault and Jurgen Habermas (although each philosopher deploys the concept differently) and generally refers to an institutionalized way of thinking, writing, and speaking, or, in the words of Judith Butler “the limits of acceptable speech”.²² Discourse affects our view of all things and can simultaneously constitute a social subject and can be performed by a subject. Discourse thus is infused with power relations and is

²⁰ Eisenstein, Zillah. *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West*, Zed Books: New York, 2004, p43.

²¹ Lloyd, Genevieve. “No One’s Land: Australia and the Philosophical Imagination”, *Hypatia* Vol. 15, no. 2 (Spring 2000) pg31-32.

²² Butler, Judith (1997). *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York: Routledge, 129-33.

intrinsically connected to the production of knowledge.²³ Narrative, in turn, is a story or part of a story recounted in any medium. Most commonly used in literary theory, a narrative is understood, by the creator and the reader, to have multiple points of view representing different participants and/or observers. For example: “In stories told verbally, there is a person telling the story, a narrator whom the audience can see and hear, and who adds layers of meaning to the text nonverbally. The narrator also has the opportunity to monitor the audience's response to the story and to modify the manner of the telling to clarify content or enhance listener interest.”²⁴ Interestingly, Walter Fisher claimed in his theory the Narrative Paradigm, that all communication is in and of itself a form of storytelling.²⁵

I use the word myth then to denote a particular type of narrative that is imbued with discursive power (that is, intentionally deployed power-filled words, images, rhetoric, etc.) in order to communicate a specific worldview and with the intent of eliciting a certain response from the audience. I use it pejoratively as well; in popular use, the word *myth* arose as a label for religious beliefs and stories from cultures outside the West as being false.²⁶ Myth then signifies a story, produced through narratives and propagated by discourse, which is believed to be true but which is created with an underlying agenda.

There is a dangerous relationship between the construction and dissemination of myths through the deployment of discourse and the development of international policy. The political implications of failing to deconstruct myths that perpetuate and justify imperial intervention and militarized violence are severe. It is imperative that we learn to recognize and acknowledge collective imaginings/myths such as *terra nullius* because they are constitutive of our present

²³ See Foucault, Michel (1975). *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, New York: Random House.

²⁴ Wikipedia, “Narrative”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative>

²⁵ Fisher, Walter R. (1987). *Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value, and Action*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.

²⁶ Wikipedia, “Myth”, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Myth>

social and political world, influencing how we perceive the past, constructing beliefs and attitudes in the present, and impacting the decisions and actions we make in the future.

The Power of Words

“People think and see through language,” explains Eisenstein “but language is also a barrier.”²⁷ Discourse acts as a variable in deliberately constructed stories/myths which require particular terminology to ensure a proscribed reading. For example, the words “terrorism” and “terrorist” are ambiguous terms which in and of themselves are essentially devoid of meaning, but when used by those with a particular agenda, become politically and determindly loaded. For example, over one hundred definitions of the word “terrorism” have been found to exist and which have been used. The pejorative use of the term exemplified by the familiar phrase "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter", is cogently expressed in Bruce Hoffman’s book

Inside Terrorism:

‘What is called terrorism’, Brian Jenkins has written, ‘thus seems to depend on one’s point of view. Use of the term implies a moral judgment; and if one party can successfully attach the label terrorist to its opponent, then it has indirectly persuaded others to adopt its moral viewpoint.’ Hence the decision to call someone or label some organization ‘terrorist’ becomes almost unavoidably subjective, depending largely on whether one sympathizes with or opposes the person/group/cause concerned. If one identifies with the victim of the violence, for example, then the act is terrorism. If, however, one identifies with the perpetrator, the violent act is regarded in a more sympathetic, if not positive (or, at the worst, an ambivalent) light; and it is not terrorism.²⁸

This indicates not only the subjectivity of the term, but perhaps also suggests the need to question the usefulness of the term itself . Its ambiguity means that explanatory control rests on whomever possesses the power to define it and that power is enacted through strategies that

²⁷ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p29.

²⁸ Hoffman, Bruce "*Inside Terrorism*" Columbia University Press 1998, p32.

utilize not only manipulations of language, but also of symbols, imagery and the mediums of information dissemination. ‘Terrorism’ explains Eisenstein, has become a catch-all term for any enemy who challenges US imperialism.”²⁹ Other such words as “development”, “security”, “peace”, and “fundamentalism” have similarly been utilized to facilitate certain historical myths in the current situation in Afghanistan which become normalized as a common discourse that naturalizes particular types of practical engagements. Thus, language or discourse plays a critical role in the strategic construction of particular narratives that inform our understandings of a particular event, region, or people. According to Eisenstein, “rhetoric” is a large part of the problem contributing to dangerous myths: “The US appropriates ‘democracy’ for it’s own global agenda, and displaces ‘terrorism’ to others elsewhere.”³⁰ The danger thus lies in the portrayal of whole or partial truths and in their imperial logic which often denies the existence or silences alternate ‘myths’ and competing voices.

Hannah Arendt provides a disturbing example of the power of words in her historical analysis of the “Final Solution”, the code name for the extermination of Jews in Hitler’s Germany.³¹ The “language rules” (*Sprachregelung*) or the discourse of the Nazis played a very particular and deliberate role in garnering support for its ambitions while maintaining a certain level of secrecy regarding some of the more atrocious realities. For example, gassing centers in Auschwitz and Chelmno, in Majdanek and Belsek, and in Treblinka and Sobibor, were called “Charitable Foundations for Institutional Care”, and gassing in general was referred to as “the humane way” of killing “by granting people a mercy of death”. Prescribed code names for killing were “final solution,” “evacuation,” and “special treatment”. Similarly, phrases such as “change

²⁹ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p8.

³⁰ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p11.

³¹ Arendt, Hannah. “The Final Solution: Killing” in *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Books, 1994, p85.

of residence” and “resettlement” were used to describe Jews who were temporarily resettled in ghettos and “labor in the East” was a phrase used to describe those Jews who worked temporarily as slave laborers for Germany. “For whatever other reasons the language rules may have been devised,” explains Arendt “they proved of enormous help in the maintenance of order and sanity in the various widely diversified services whose cooperation was essential in this matter”.³²

As Arendt indicates, a fundamental element in the manufacture and perpetuation of myth is through the control of discourse and deterrence of dissenting voices. A prominent example of this in Canada post 9/11 is the reaction following the keynote speech of University of British Columbia Professor Sunera Thobani (former President of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women) at a conference on “Women’s Resistance: From Victimization to Criminalization”. Her speech made links between the war on Afghanistan to a history of US imperialism and critiqued justification of the war through colonial discourses. Rather, she argued, US aggression in the non-Western world has resulted in increased militarization that has violent consequences particularly for women and that there would be “no emancipation for women anywhere on this planet until the Western domination of this planet is ended” and called for opposition to the war.³³ What followed was a fierce attack by the media and politicians, including Alexa McDonough, the female head of the New Democratic Party (NDP) and Hedy Fry, Minister for Multiculturalism and Women’s Affairs. The campaign distorted her speech, attacked Thobani personally and demonized her character, and labeled her a “terrorist

³² Arendt, “The Final Solution”, p85. Note: Interestingly enough, as Arendt also points out, the term “language rule” (*Sprachregelung*) was itself a code name: “It meant what in ordinary language would be a lie”. (p85)

³³ Arat-Koc, Sedef. “The Disciplinary Boundaries of Canadian Identity After September 11: Civilizational Identity, Multiculturalism, And the Challenge of Anti-Imperialist Feminism”. *Social Justice*, San Fransisco: 2005. Vol. 32, Iss. 4; pg. 32. Her speech also included a statement that “the West for 500 years has believed that it could slaughter people into submission and it has not been able to do so. And it will not be able to do so this time either.”³³

sympathizer”. Others denounced her statements as a “hate crime” or labeled her as “anti-Western”³⁴

The vicious reaction that dominated the public discourse following Thobani’s speech exemplifies Butler’s warning: that intellectual positions considered ‘post’ or ‘relativistic’ have been deemed “complicitous with terrorism or as constituting a ‘weak link’ in the fight against it”. The reaction to Thobani’s speech was part of a general suppression of dissent during which opinions that strayed from unquestioning cooperation with the US (or dared to search for underlying causes linked to US imperialism) were not tolerated. As Zinn shows in his exceptional and provocative book *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-present*, squashing dissent and sometimes disappearing dissent from history altogether is part of a larger pattern of mythmaking. In the chapter “The Unreported Resistance”, Zinn reveals popular movements of resistance and dissent that occurred during the Carter-Reagan-Bush years that were absent in mainstream media reporting, including: the Plowshares Movement, the United Farm Workers, Food Not Bombs, the Council for a nuclear Weapons Freeze, the Stonewall riots, LGBT social movements, opposition to the celebration of Columbus Day, and the anti-war protests during the Gulf War, among many others.³⁵ What generally passes as knowledge is always the manifestation particular voices or movements being silenced or disappeared while a particular cultural milieu fosters the regulation of access to knowledge and what counts as knowledge.

The myth is ostensibly damaging as a result of the apparent objectivity that clouds out dissenting voices and conflicting memories. Armstrong explains, the hidden fallacy of stories about political or cultural dilemmas today is that they are generally selective and self serving,

³⁴ Ibid., p415.

³⁵ Zinn, Howard. *A People’s History of the United States: 1492-present*. Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2005.

leaving out convenient aspects: “The tales of our pundits, politicians, and terrorists are mythical rather than factual, expressive of a state of mind. These partial narratives represent an ideal rather than a complex reality.”³⁶ The instance illustrated above in the reaction to Thobani’s speech is an example of how the public sphere comes to be constituted by what can and cannot be said, what Butler calls ‘the limits of the sayable’ which defines the public space in which speech operates and who are legitimate speaking subjects. What “can” be heard, seen, read, felt, and known, that is, will circumscribe the public sphere itself – controlling the way in which people see, how they hear and the way they respond thus fostering a hegemonic understanding of the political and social world.³⁷

That myths are mediated by embedded social hierarchies of power is pivotal. The important and problematic role of reproducing discourses that facilitate certain historical myths can be understood if we acknowledge that it is through these means that understandings of identity and difference which rely on hierarchies of race, gender, class, ethnicity, nationality, and sexuality and of the legitimacy of violence are deliberately constructed. Relations of power, explains Eisenstein, are “absorbed by power-filled discourses which appropriate and silence subversive varieties.”³⁸ Under the hero/neo-colonial gaze, the “other” is objectified, commodified, and ahistoricised through a “political economy of domination.”³⁹

This Broadcast is Courtesy of...

³⁶ Armstrong, Karen. “Our truth is just a bit-player in the tragic, conflicted whole”, *The Guardian*, August 26, 2006.

³⁷ Butler, Judith. *Prekarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Verso, 2004, preface xvii-xx.

³⁸ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p3.

³⁹ Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, Routledge: New York, 2000, p70-71.

*“There is no ‘good’ use of the media; the media are part of the event, they are part of the terror, and they work in both directions”.*⁴⁰

Who has the power to manipulate myth and what are the mediums through which these problematic myths are transmitted to the public? I want to briefly interrogate here the role of the media, political leaders and governments, and academia (or more specifically, scholars, teachers, and academic commentators) as composers and transmitters of myth. The war in Afghanistan, argues Der Derian, has transformed into a “mimetic war of images” in which battles of imitation and representation, rather than ‘rational calculations of interests’ result in war.⁴¹ Similarly, Baudrillard explains how the media frenzy that followed the collapse of the Twin Towers replaced a real and formidable event into a “repetitive, rehashed pseudo-event”, which simultaneously imbued the symbolic images with interpretations of terrorism. Indeed, “terrorism would be nothing without the media”.

This power of the media has been noted by several scholars: The “CNN effect” is now taken seriously in academia where analyses transpire of the time and space compression that has occurred with the new media’s capability to transmit war images faster than ever. El-Nawawy and Iskandar reveal the effects that Al-Jazeera, the Arabic satellite TV news network that broadcasts from Qatar in the Arabian Gulf, has had by entering living-rooms around the world as a ‘dissident voice’ (“These days, Al-Jazeera sets the agenda... Since the beginning of the second Palestinian Intifada, the network has been the preferred source of news for the family)⁴².

Consider the increasingly biased reporting prevalent in Fox News Channel (FNC), a cable news channel owned by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation: Despite its self promotion

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Spirit of Terrorism*, London: Verso, 2002, p31.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² El-Nawawy, Mohammed and Adel Iskandar, *Al-Jazeera: How the Free Arab News Network Scooped the World and Changed the Middle East*, Westview Press, p3.

under the slogan "fair and balanced", in 2001, the media watch group Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting studied the guestlist of FNC's flagship news program, *Special Report*, and found that Republicans made up 89 percent of Fox News' partisan guests, outnumbering Democrats 50 to 6 while avowed conservatives made up 71 percent of guests.⁴³ Former Fox News producer Charlie Reina, described how the Fox newsroom is being permeated by bias:

The roots of Fox News Channel's day-to-day on-air bias are actual and direct. They come in the form of an executive memo distributed electronically each morning, addressing what stories will be covered and, often, suggesting how they should be covered. To the newsroom personnel responsible for the channel's daytime programming, The Memo is the bible. If, on any given day, you notice that the Fox anchors seem to be trying to drive a particular point home, you can bet The Memo is behind it.

The Memo was born with the Bush administration, early in 2001, and, intentionally or not, has ensured that the administration's point of view consistently comes across on FNC. This year, of course, the war in Iraq became a constant subject of The Memo. But along with the obvious - information on who is where and what they'll be covering - there have been subtle hints as to the tone of the anchors' copy.⁴⁴

A study by the Program of International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland (PIPA) found that Americans who relied on the Fox News Channel for their coverage of the Iraq war were the "most likely to believe misinformation about the war, whatever their political affiliation may be." Which in turn increased viewers' support for the war. It also reported that people who watched FOX more than other news sources believed several "untrue" reports that had been supported and promoted by the US administration and FOX supporting the Iraq invasion.⁴⁵

The role of the media as a global medium for disseminating myth encompasses a more expansive set of tools than news broadcasts and print media. Modern myths, explains Trubshaw,

⁴³ Carter, Bill and Jim Guttenberg, "[Fox News Head Sent a Policy Note to Bush](#)", *New York Times*, November 19, 2002.

⁴⁴ See Charlie Reina, "[The Fox News Memo](#)", *Poynter Forum*, October 30, 2003; Tim Grieve, "[Fox News: The inside story](#)", *Salon*, October 31, 2003; Matt Gross, "[The right-wing bias was up-front and obvious](#)", *Poynter Forum*, October 31, 2003.

⁴⁵ "Fox News", SourceWatch: A Project of the Center for Media and Democracy, <http://www.sourcewatch.org>.

find their most definite expression in ‘non-written’ media such as TV, cinema, radio, and computer games⁴⁶. An example of how the radio can be utilized to propagate racist myths with horrific results has been found in studies of the Rwanda genocide. As thousands of people were being slaughtered, a new radio station called Radio-Télévision Libre des Milles Collines (RTLHC) continued broadcasts began almost a year earlier which warned the population of “Tutsi devils” who killed their victims “by extracting various organs...for example, by taking the heart, the liver, the stomache...” and advocated the killing of Tutsi : “...the cruelty of the iyenzi [cockroach] is incurable, the cruelty of the iyenzi can only be cured by their total extermination.”⁴⁷ Announcers on the radio station encouraged listeners to phone in and reveal where Tutsi were hiding; on one broadcast, an announcer read out the names and addresses of thirteen people and urged listeners to hunt them down.⁴⁸ The role of the RTLHC in disseminating propaganda and inciting violence was so profound that UN representative Romeo Dallaire begged the UN and the US government to neutralize the station: “It was inciting people to kill, it was explaining how to kill, telling people who to kill, including whites, including me.”⁴⁹ Belgian military intelligence officer, Lieutenant Mark Nees, remains convinced that if RTLHC had been halted, the genocide could have been weakened, or undermined altogether.⁵⁰ Such violent discourse and the manipulation of media for its dissemination as propaganda is not unique to the Rwanda genocide: Palestinians have invariably been described as “cockroaches”, “vipers”, “crocodiles”, etc, as part of a racist agenda that, as a result of the development and

⁴⁶ Trubshaw. “Foamy Custard: What are Myths?”.

⁴⁷ *Broadcasting Genocide: Censorship, Propaganda and State sponsored Violence in Rwanda 1990-1994*. Article 19, October 1996, p146-7.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p120.

⁴⁹ André Guichaoua (ed.), *Les Crises Politiques au Burundi et au Rwanda (1993-1994)*. Université des Sciences et Technologies de Lille. Paris: Karthala, 1995, p.526.

⁵⁰ Melvern, Linda. *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, Zed Books, 2000, p72.

increased access to satellite TV, has been widely disseminated under Ariel Sharon's Zionist agenda.⁵¹

The medium for the dissemination of myth is not, however, limited to TV or radio news broadcasts, particularly in the technologically infused new media culture where movies, cartoons, comics, music videos, and the internet have saturated pop culture so thoroughly that it has become easier than ever to propagate myth to viewers/listeners around the globe.

In contemporary culture, the media have become central to the constitution of social identity. It is not just that media messages have become important forms of influence on individuals. We also identify and construct ourselves as social beings through the mediation of images. This is not simply a case of people being dominated by images, but of people seeking and obtaining pleasure through the experience of the consumption of these images. An understanding of contemporary culture involves a focus both on the phenomenology of watching and the cultural form of images.⁵²

Consider, for example, the increase in films infused with US militarized patriotism or the recent obsession with Internet blogs and now videos posted on UTube from soldiers stationed in Afghanistan. Hunt explores the political racist/sexist currency of a cartoon circulating on the internet post9/11 of five Taliban leaders looking horrified after reading a document that states, "To the Taliban: Give us Osama bin Laden or we'll send your women to college".⁵³ I similarly encountered an image via email of beloved cultural cartoon icon Homer Simpson in front of an American flag holding a shotgun with Osama bin Laden in the target site. In pop culture it appears that war has become back 'in style' celebrating images that glorify heroic soldiers and valorize war while the aftereffects are often invisible. Consider an article in Rolling Stone

⁵¹ Adbo, Nahla. "Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and Essentialism: Some Reflections on September 11th and Beyond" in Hawthorne, Susan and Bronwyn Winter, eds. *After Shock: September 11, 2001 Global Feminist Perspectives*, Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2003, p412.

⁵² Angus, Ian and Sut Jhally, *Cultural Politics in Contemporary America*, cited in hooks, bell *Yearning: Race, gender, and cultural politics*, Between the Lines, 1990, p5.

⁵³ Hunt, Krista. "The Strategic Co-optation of Women's Rights: Discourse in the 'War on Terrorism'", *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 4:1 April 2002, pg116.

magazine which lists the results of a poll of some of the most popular songs soldiers listen to in order to get ‘pumped up’ for a mission. Hard rock, heavy metal, and rap such as 2Pac’s “Hit ‘Em Up” and Drowning Pool’s “Bodies” apparently helps soldiers “get ready to kill” and “haul balls down the road”.⁵⁴ The problem is that the media and pop culture has the exceptional ability to generate myth through, for example, ambiguous wording, military jargon, the severing of causal connections, banishment of bodies, and the cool demeanor of third-person-reporter-speak⁵⁵: We are faced with “pseudo concrete images” explains Eisenstein, “Žizek’s “plague of fantasies” which blur our viewings. Because of the irrepresentability of the ‘real’ there is just surplus-obedience; we obey rather than confront.”⁵⁶

Afghanistan

The historical production of particular myths of Afghanistan have relied on representations of the country in the West that are largely simplistic, ahistorical, and politically motivated. Afghanistan is a sort of “fuzzy dream” for most in the West: embodied in a series of fabricated images of war and poverty, de-contextualized photos without names or places, numbers and graphs claiming statistical quantification, and disjointed yet often repeated phrases and metaphors. A particular mythic representation of Afghanistan is being (and has been) proliferated in the international community, through media, history books, foreign policy documents, political commentators, academia, and virtually any other body of communication. The vigor with which particular discourses have materialized since 9/11 are representative of

⁵⁴ “Soundtrack to the War”, *Rolling Stone*, August 24, 2006.

⁵⁵ Note: Alternative media and pop culture have also been crucial venues for alternative voices and resistance, which have generated spaces for critique of the war on terror. Fictional films like *Three Kings*, Stanley Kubrik’s famous *Full Metal Jacket*, and documentaries like *The Road to Guantanamo* have found the unique space to disrupt highly managed media representations of war .

⁵⁶ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p41. See also Jameson, Frederic, *Marxism and Form*, Princeton University Press, 1971, p308, 312, 341.

their link to the West's militarized 'War on Terror' and more generally of the embedded relationship between political policies and militarized discourses which legitimate the West's military engagement and development policies. That is, Afghanistan serves as an unfortunate example of the very real power of discourse and myth-making which affect the form that international engagement takes; this in turn reproduces those myths in a cycle of destructive imperial engagement.

In trying to understand the current political situation in Afghanistan, and in attempting to formulate international policy in the region, it is vital that we are aware of the dominant narratives or 'myths' that are being produced, who it is that is producing them and for what purpose, and what is at stake in failing to interrogate them. Any policy that does not take the role of deliberately constructed narratives and the mediums through which they are disseminated into account will not only continue to replicate them, perhaps unknowingly, but any "securitizing", "peacebuilding" and "development" efforts built on these terms can never result in long-term success. The emancipatory possibilities of such a critical project of discourse deconstruction lie in: 1) understanding the raced/classed/gendered power hierarchies that are their foundation; 2) uncovering the nationalized militarization and the hypermasculinized and hyperfeminized normativities that are embedded within these myths, and; 3) the recognition of the detrimental effect of the West's 'myths' and configuring the reconceptualisation of policy alternatives through its contestation.

By looking critically at what has become the common language of foreign engagement in Afghanistan, the foundation of historical narratives or 'myths' that perpetuate a certain image of Afghanistan, and which in turn results in very particular attitudes that imbue foreign policy, begin to be revealed. I will utilize two broad (and inextricably linked) categorizations which

most accurately encapsulate the dominant strains of discourse to help clarify how this relationship is constructed and by thus identifying them as such attempt to de-bunk the myths they create. These ‘myths’ which have become normalized and banal in foreign policy, media, and some academic discourse I define as the ‘heroism’ discourse/myth and the ‘militarization’ discourse/myth.

Superman and G.I. Joe

“When we read the history books given to children in the United States, it all starts with heroic adventure – there is no bloodshed – and Columbus Day is a celebration.”⁵⁷

The ‘heroism’ narrative can be called by several names: the ‘saviour syndrome’, “mediatically generated” or “hybrid techno-medical” humanitarianism⁵⁸, “foreign aid”, “humanitarian intervention”, etc. This narrative constructs foreign engagement in a region as spectacle and as prized commodities to be admired and ‘sold’ to the public; it constructs the West as ‘saviours’ and the ‘Other’, in this case Afghanistan, as the victim in need of saving, accomplished through images and tales of passion and fervour that often pathologize the other and valorize the Western interveener. When the US, with the support of the UN, bombed Afghanistan in 2001 in response to the events of September 11th, the mission was entitled “Operation Enduring Freedom”. Today, as reconstruction and ‘peace-building’ efforts are underway in Afghanistan in tandem with military operations, political conversations and media productions are saturated with calls to “win the hearts and minds” of the people of Afghanistan and of the necessary and benevolent role the West must play in instilling ‘freedom’, ‘justice’ and ‘democracy’ in the war-torn and poverty stricken region. Debrix, offers an analysis of what he

⁵⁷ Zinn, A People’s History, pg. 26.

⁵⁸ Debrix, “A Taste of their own Medicine”, p172-173.

calls “the global humanitarian spectacle” to demonstrate how medical and humanitarian NGO’s simulate “heroism, sentiment, and compassion”; medical catastrophes and civil conflicts, he explains, have indeed become prized commodities for globalizing neoliberal policies of Western states and international organizations to sell to ‘myth readers’: “They give Western states and the UN the opportunity to put their liberal humanistic policies into practice, while, for Western media, humanitarianism simply sells”.⁵⁹

There are several repercussions of this myth, explains Debrix. First, this has resulted in real humanitarian and moral issues being overlooked; Second, images are being purged of their content. Myth has thus becoming the very real enemy of true humanitarianism; that is, we’ve become so inundated with superhero mythologization of real world events that the embedded paternalism and unrealistic goals go unnoticed.⁶⁰ Additionally, this narrative reinforces a victimology of the ‘Other’ and in fact capitalises on it, while simultaneously hiding the paternalistic and neo-colonialist ideologies in humanitarian garb. The role of the media and consciously generated and disseminated images is particularly pronounced here, as passion and spectacle are valued in the commodification of images over content and history. Jean Baudrillard states “There is no possible distinction, at the level of images and information, between the spectacular and the symbolic, no possible distinction between the ‘crime’ and the crackdown”.⁶¹

The militarization narrative, in contrast to the ‘objective benevolence’ of the heroism myth, utilizes constructed and one-dimensional conceptions of militaries, security, and defense. This narrative relies on the myth that militarization is always a useful tool in securitization. For example: Following the NATO air strikes in October of this year that killed at least 50 civilians and an augmentation of Taliban suicide attacks, Afghanistan’s President Hamid Karzai called on

⁵⁹ Debrix, “A Taste of their own Medicine”, p172-173.

⁶⁰ Ibid, p178-179.

⁶¹ Baudrillard, Jean. *The Spirit of Terrorism*, London: Verso, 2002, p31.

the need for more military operations, an international air force, and an increase in Afghan soldiers and police as mechanisms necessary to “tackle the root causes of terrorism”.⁶²

Words such as ‘freedom’, ‘democracy’, ‘justice’, and ‘women’s rights’ have become permanent variables in the mantra that has been used liberally and repeatedly as part of the common and often un-stated, assumptions that intervention by NATO, American, Canadian, and British forces will improve the lives of Afghanistan people over ‘there’ and increase security for us over ‘here’. Thus, as the military continues to occupy the region, we in the West are continually told that Afghan women and men have now been “liberated” from an oppressive regime by the West. This is bolstered by the assumption that the Afghan people support the US-backed government and want the military there for security (That is, that they are better off now than before). There is a dominant assumption that the West can “win” the “war on terror” and that military measures in the Middle East are necessary to prevent future terrorist attacks. If prospects look dim in the region, this narrative implies the appropriate response is to increase combat troops and artillery. Finally, embedded in these images is the assumption that reconstruction, delivery of humanitarian aid and development can coexist alongside military efforts to fight off insurgents/terrorists and “pacify” the opposition. Thus, reports on the increasing numbers of casualties of the war does not appear incongruous with claims of ‘peace-making’ and ‘development’ - therefore we must protect it the puppet government and fight the insurgents.⁶³

This type of narrative serves several purposes, including the reinforcement in the public of the legitimacy of military response to crises and the re-construction of power and dominance through the image of military superiority, fighting capacity, and mechanisms of control. The result of such myths is the reaffirmation of the importance of state-led military missions (which

⁶² “Roadside blast kills 14 in Southern Afghanistan”, MSNBC.com, October 27, 2006.

⁶³ Rosenfeld and Albo. “Unionists, Canada and the Afghan War”.

contribute to the maintenance of armed forces by attracting future recruits) and their necessity for resolving multiple types of international crises.

Enloe defines militarization as a sociopolitical process by which militarism as an ideology is “driven deep down into the soil of a society”.⁶⁴ Militarism, in turn, encompasses beliefs, values, and assumptions including the use of armed force to resolve tensions, the effectiveness and naturalness of hierarchy, the need for a state to have a military in order to be perceived as legitimate, and that the feminine require armed protection while the masculine is only a “manly man” if he participates in the culture of armed conflict.⁶⁵ The process of militarization involves cultural, institutional, ideological, and economic transformations through which militaristic needs, presumptions, and ideas gradually come to control or determine a person or thing.⁶⁶ In her work on the study of gender and militarization, Enloe has revealed how gendered notions of masculinity and femininity are fundamental to the very establishment and maintenance of military structures: “None of these institutions – multilateral alliances, bilateral alliances, foreign military assistance programs – can achieve their militarizing objectives without controlling women for the sake of militarizing men.”⁶⁷ Additionally then, governmental policies and actions in the international arena (an arena deemed untouchable and irrelevant to women in orthodox studies of international relations) “*directly produce changes in women’s lives*”.(My italics)⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Ibid., p220.

⁶⁵ For a more detailed description, see Enloe, Cynthia. *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004, p3.

⁶⁶ Enloe, Cynthia. *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, p2-4.

⁶⁷ Enloe, Cynthia. “Beyond ‘Rambo’: Women and the Varieties of Militarized Masculinity,”p85.

⁶⁸ Moon, Katherine H.S. *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in U.S.-Korea Relations*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, p24.

Enloe's work is particularly relevant in this project which seeks to complicate, interrogate, and historicize particular mythic representations and narratives because it de-naturalizes militarizing, war, and soldiering (so often presented as conventional and innate responses to conflict) and reveals them as deliberate actions of intentional policies and war-making strategies ("Militarization and the privileging of masculinity are both products not only of amorphous cultural beliefs but also of deliberate decisions")⁶⁹. It also helps demonstrate that by 'erasing' history the structures that enabled it are legitimized and thus perpetuated; that is, militarization, hegemonic masculinity, and the absence of women is represented as natural, normal and thus are potentially destructive mechanisms.

Discourses of Danger

Several problematic elements repeatedly appear in Western narratives that are embedded within both of these categorizations of discourse. These elements have become normalized and banal in the media resulting in the audience ('myth readers'⁷⁰) becoming de-sensitized to the dangerous ideological and imperial agendas they empower. In recognizing how these elements - which are intricately connected to each other - become mobilized and identifying the assumptions, distortions, and social hierarchies that are their foundation, the discursive power of myths that legitimize violence and imperial politics in the name of security begins to be revealed; the myths themselves unravelled.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p33.

⁷⁰ This term was originally used in Debrix, Francois. "A Taste of Their Own Medicine: Medical Assistance and Humanitarianism as Substitutes for UN Peacekeeping", in *Re-Envisioning Peacekeeping: The United Nations and the Mobilisation of Ideology*, 199, University of Minnesota Press, pp171-208.

The first element is that of binarisms or dualisms: The dichotomies of “East” and “West”, “good” and “evil”, “civilisation” (the West) and “barbarism” (Islamic countries)⁷¹, “for the war” and “against the war”, “progress” and “backwardness”, “peace” and “war”, “pre” and “post” conflict, and “normal” and “abnormal” has produced false dichotomies that position history and policy decisions in simplistic black or white terms and compartmentalise actors into good versus bad. Consider for example the upsurge since 9/11 of “good vs. evil” and “with us or against us” rhetoric. The danger of such dualistic modes of thought is in its polarization of the world with distinct boundaries and borders. Additionally, such discourse, explain Tuathail and Agnew, “freely fuses fact with fiction and reality with the imaginary to produce a reasoning where neither is distinguishable from the other”.⁷² In a recent talk on Canadian Foreign Policy in Afghanistan, Walter Dorn of the Canadian forces college, RMC recognized these problematic binaries as part of a policy of extremism that works to create explicit enemies and allies while rendering the ability to see humanity in each other as impossible. This is a strategy of maintaining power, he explained, that instead creates a self-fulfilling prophecy by polarizing more people and creating more enemies, not only in ‘foreign’ regions but also within the West.⁷³ Even bin Laden, in his pre-recorded message that was broadcast on the first night of the war launched by the US with a massive bombing assault on October 7th, employed provocative

⁷¹ Butler, Judith. “Explanation and Exoneration, or What We Can Hear”, *Social Text* 72, Vol. 20, No. 3, Fall 2002.

⁷² Tuathail, Gearoid O and John Agnew. “Geopolitics and Discourse: Practical geopolitical reasoning in American Foreign Policy”, *Political Geography*, Vol. 11, No. 2, March 1992, p197.

⁷³ Walter Dorn, Canadian Forces College, RMC, presentation entitled "Afghanistan and the Canadian Forces" at University of Toronto, October, 27, 2006. Note: Interestingly enough, he then juxtaposed this view which he problematically labeled the “Hawk” view, with that of the “Dove” which was also critiqued for over polarization and its “seductive simplicity”. His analysis of the “Dove” would likely fall under what Butler calls the “raw public mockery of the peace movement” that works “to produce a consensus of public opinion that profoundly marginalizes antiwar sentiment and analysis, putting into question in a very strong way the very value of dissent as part of contemporary U.S. democratic culture”. (From Butler, “Explanation and Exoneration”, p178.)

dualisms: “I tell you that these events have split the entire world into two camps: one of faith, with no hypocrites, and one of unbelief – may God protect us from it”.⁷⁴

The perpetuation of these binaries is deeply problematic insofar as they are the foundations of the discursive field upon which hierarchies of identity and difference that determine the nature of relations between states is constructed. What this means is that the sovereign state and its’ foreign policy objectives constitute what David Campbell calls a “moral space of identity”⁷⁵. In his re-theorization of foreign policy, Campbell exposes the essential role binaries play in the processes implicated in state identity formation:

It emphasizes the exclusionary practices, the discourses of danger, the representations of fear, and the enumeration of threats, and downplays the role of affirmative discourses such as claims to shared ethnicity, nationality, political ideals, religious beliefs, or other commonalities.⁷⁶

Looking specifically at the relationship between the US and Afghanistan, the US has defined its own identity (as good, modern, normal, etc.) in relation to its difference from the Afghan ‘Other’, cultivating its demonization on the basis of perceived danger and moral valuations (superior/inferior) that are spatially constructed. Claims that the West is constructing a peaceful, democratic, and liberal nation (values claimed to be at the core of “our civilization, freedom, democracy and ways of life”) are motivated by the need to transform “their barbarism, inhumanity, low morality and style of life”.⁷⁷ Eisenstein explains that ‘Others’ are constructed or fabricated in order to deal with the fear of not-knowing: “Creating the savage, or slave, or woman, or Arab allows made-up certainty rather than honest complex variability and

⁷⁴ bin Laden, Osama. “The Winds of Faith”, October 7, 2001.

⁷⁵ Campbell, David. *Writing Security: United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, p73-74.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p70.

⁷⁷ This language was used repeatedly by George Bush, Dick Cheney, and Donald Rumsfield and disseminated by all US media. See Abdo, “Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and Essentialism”, p410.

unknowability.”⁷⁸ Unfortunately, this is not a novel phenomenon unique to the contemporary situation in Afghanistan: articulations of security that rely on definitions of ‘otherness’ as threats to security, argues Campbell, replicates the logic of Christendom’s ‘evangelism of fear’. Obstructions to security/order/God become defined as irrational, abnormal, mad, etc. in need of rationalization, normalizations, punishment, moralization, etc.: “The state project of security replicates the church project of salvation”.⁷⁹ As is commonly known, under Christendom it was such ‘discourses of danger’ that were instrumental in establishing its own authority and disciplining its followers. Similarly, by relying on discourses of danger to define who “we” are, who “we” are not, and who “they” are that we must fear, the state constructs enemies who’s elimination/domination is necessary to preserve the states own identity (and security): “All powers are geared against a single “alien.” And all the rationalizations are raging against the advent of “Evil.”⁸⁰ Thus, the “war on terror”, or Afghanistan, or Iraq, becomes, in the words of Baudrillard, an endless war of prevention to “exorcise” “evil”; an ablation of a non-existent enemy masquerading as the leitmotiv for universal safety.⁸¹

These elements of oppositional binaries is closely related to the second element: contemporary discourse has developed from and further perpetuates a particular ideology that emanates from a neo-liberal capitalist and imperial agenda that is founded upon neo-colonialist attitudes and assumptions. “The US campaign to ‘fight terrorism’, initiated after September 11th” explains Nahla Abdo “has crystallized all the ideological underpinnings of colonial and imperial policies towards the constructed ‘other’.”⁸² This emerges in the “heroism” myth mentioned

⁷⁸ Eisenstein, Zillah. *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racism, and the West*, Zed Books: New York, 2004, p43.

⁷⁹ Campbell, *Writing Security*, p50.

⁸⁰ Baudrillard, “The Mask of War”, p2.

⁸¹ Baudrillard, Jean. “The Mask of War” in *1000 Days of Theory*, Arthur and Marilouise Kroker (Eds), 11/3/2005, www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=494.

⁸² Abdo. “Eurocentrism, Orientalism, and Essentialism”, p412.

above; for example, Debrix explains how narratives around humanitarianism serve an ideological purpose in that it “contributes to the reinforcement of neoliberal policies in ‘pathological’ regions of the international landscape.”⁸³ It also emerges in the militarization myth, insofar as neoliberal globalisation relies on the institutionalization of neo-colonialism and the commodification and (re)colonization of labor via militarized strategies of imperial politics. That is, as Agathangelou and Ling point out, “Neoliberal economics enables globalized militarization”.⁸⁴

Embedded in this normalization of neo-colonial frames are the elements of linearity and thus assumed rationality of reasoning in the West. As Canada stepped up its role in direct combat operations (which included an increase of combat troops, fighter jets, and tanks with long-range firing capacities⁸⁵), Stephen Harper appealed to troop morale on the ground in Afghanistan, stating: “Canada and the international community are determined to take a failed state and create a “democratic, prosperous and *modern* country.”⁸⁶ (my italics) Proposed solutions to the conflict(s) in Afghanistan have been framed and justified not only as ‘saving backwards Afghanistan’ but also as generously bringing it into the modern, capitalist, neoliberal age. Moreover, this element represents an continuity of colonial power, presenting the *one* correct truth or resolution, emanating from the ‘objective gaze’ of the ‘problem-solving’ Western world. Representations of Afghanistan present Western voices as the authority and the potential progress such authority can bring to the ‘East’ as naturally desirable. This ‘rationality’ also presumes an inherent value of Western methodology (including statistical analysis,

⁸³ Debrix, “A Taste of Their own Medicine”, p173.

⁸⁴ Agathangelou, Anna and L.H.M. Ling. “Powers, Borders, Security, Wealth: Lessons of Violence and Desire from September 11, *International Studies Quarterly* (2004) 48, pg531.

⁸⁵ Rosenfeld, Herman and Greg Albo. “Unionists, Canada and the Afghan War”, *The Bullet: A Socialist Project e-Bulletin*, No.32, October 27, 2006.

⁸⁶ “Canada committed to Afghan mission, Harper tells troops”, Monday, March 13, 2006 | 11:38 AM ET , CBC News, cbc.ca

quantification of data, etc) and devalues alternative epistemologies including those of the Afghan people. This is problematic for several reasons: 1) It forecloses and discourages thinking “outside the box” and instead relies upon the “master’s tools” which include violent military force, the installation of a democratic regime, peacekeeping, and reconstruction and foreign aid – alternative strategies are deemed “radical”, “unworkable”, and “anti-American”; 2) it prioritizes numbers and statistics over lived experiences. By relying on tallies of deaths, percentages of voters, and numbers of insurgents for example, the experiences of those living in the region are obfuscated and devalued, and; 3) it reproduces a colonial hierarchy of knowledge production.

Old colonial narratives of have re-surfaced with renewed vigor in the case of Afghanistan is contingent on and mutually reinforced by opposing narratives of a ‘civilized’ and ‘developed’ ‘West’. For example:

“Consider the language which is being used... Calling the perpetrators evildoers, irrational, calling them the forces of darkness, uncivilized, intent on destroying civilization, intent on destroying democracy. They hate freedom, we are told. Every person of colour, and I would want to say also every Aboriginal person, will recognize that language. The language of us versus them, of civilization versus the forces of darkness, this language is rooted in the colonial legacy.”⁸⁷

This colonizer/colonized dichotomy is key to the civilisational justification the US administration pursues (“We wage war to save civilization itself”⁸⁸) which, as Agathangelou and Ling explain, is motivated by a constructed medieval evil that threatens American freedom and democracy, the apotheosis of modern civilization, and therefore must be disciplined/civilized. In his Speech to Congress on September 21, 2001, Bush portrays the irrational Other as Evil and retributive seeking to destroy the ‘developed, ‘secure’ ‘prosperous’ and ‘civilized’ free world:

⁸⁷ Thobani, Sunera. “It’s Bloodthirsty Vengeance” in Hawthorne, Susan and Bronwyn Winter, eds. *After Shock: September 11, 2001 Global Feminist Perspectives*, Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2003, p92.

⁸⁸ Bush, G.W. “President Discusses War on Terrorism.” In Address to the Nation, World Congress Center, Atlanta, GA, November 8, 2001 (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2001/11/20011108-13.html>).

These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life...Al Qaeda is to terror what the mafia is to crime. But its goal is not making money; its goal is remaking the world, and imposing its radical beliefs on people everywhere.”⁸⁹

This production of othering and re-institutionalization of colonial discourse has been enabled by and facilitated ‘culture clash’ explanations.⁹⁰ The danger of such theories, warns Razack, lies not only in their decontextualization and dehistoricization, but also on its reliance on the Enlightenment narrative and notions of European moral superiority that justify the use of force. This is evident in the unproblematic way in which outside forces have assumed a right of interference in the region spanning from the 18th century when imperial powers demarcated the Durrand Line (which created a border between British India and Afghanistan with the goal of making Afghanistan an effective ‘buffer state’ for British Imperial interests⁹¹) to the American intervention that began in the Cold War, followed by the Soviets in the 1980’s and the Americans, Canadians and British today. In fact, The West’s practical engagement in Afghanistan reveals how it has served to reproduce this neo-colonial myth as well as the complexities and paradoxes which simultaneously de-stabilize that myth. During the cold war, the Soviet and the Americans used Afghanistan as the battleground for power, choosing to sponsor and condemn various regimes as they saw fit; this history of foreign engagement contributed to state fragmentation, underdevelopment, and the self-sustaining war-economy that

⁸⁹ Bush, G.W. “Bush’s Speech to Congress.” *New York Times*, September 21, B4.

⁹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington’s book *Clash of Civilizations* has been prominent in discussions of culture clash, in which he attributes the primary source of contemporary conflict to the cultural difference between the ‘West’ and non-West. See Huntington, S.P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. New York: Touchstone Press, 1997. For a widely cited critique of Huntington’s book, see Said, Edward. *The Clash of Ignorance*.” Media Monitors Network, October 11, 2001 (www.mediamontiors.net/edwar40.html).

⁹¹ Goodhand, Jonathan. “Afghanistan in Central Asia” in Pugh, Michael and Neil Cooper *War Economies in a Regional Context: Challenges of Transformation*, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2004, p49.

persist today. An example of this is the use of rentier incomes during the early 1900's that were used as a means of control and coercion.⁹²

That the West still approaches Afghanistan with a 'backwards' mentality is also evident in the attitude towards Afghan women. A critical analysis can explore how existing misrepresentations of the Third World affect Western security agendas, and vice versa, and the resulting effect of these agendas on the same women they supposedly aid. Under the guise of exporting democratization and achieving emancipation, the US-led "liberating" coalition not only ignored women's security, they decreased their security. Even more troubling is that this was committed while justifying the invasion of Afghanistan to the American public as a mission to "save the women". This proclamation is in and of itself illustrative of the Western ethnocentricity and the persisting colonialist stance that endangers Third World women's security in a transnational world dominated by a US empire: "To position women's rights as a rallying point for war paints politicians and the public at large into a corner...It's a calculated exploitation of leftist concerns in order to suppress dissenting thought".⁹³

The US government repeatedly referred to the oppression of women as being of paramount concern, leaving the impression that they would indeed "liberate" these women and in a sense justifying their invasion to their populace. Then US Secretary of State Colin Powell

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Raha, Maria. "Veiled Intentions: The U.S. Media's Hug and Run Affair with Afghan Women" in *The W Effect: Bush's War on Women*, Flanders, Laura (Ed.), The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004, p179. Note: For a more thorough discussion of the history of women in Afghanistan see: Hans, Asha. "Escaping Conflict: Afghan Women in Transit" in *Sites of Violence: Gender and Conflict Zones*, Giles Wenona and Jennifer Hyndman, Eds. University of California Press, 2004, p232; Shirzai, Ajmal. "Displacement and Conflict Resolution in the Context of Afghanistan." Paper presented at the International Conference on Forced Migration in the South Asian Region: Displacement, Human Rights and Conflict Resolution, Centre for Refugee Studies, April, Jadavapur University, Calcutta, 20-22; Faryal, Tahmeena. "Testimony Before the Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives on International Operations and Human Rights", in *After Shock: September 11, 2001: Global Feminist Perspectives*, Hawthorne, Susan and Bronwyn Winter (Eds.), Vancouver, Raincoast Books, 2003, p161; Raha, Maria. "Veiled Intentions: The U.S. Media's Hug and Run Affair with Afghan Women" in *The W Effect: Bush's War on Women*, Flanders, Laura (Ed.), The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2004, p179; *Women in Islam and the Middle East*, Roded, Ruth (Ed.), I.B. Tauris Publishers, 1999.

stated: “The recovery of Afghanistan must entail the restoration of the rights of Afghan women. Indeed, it will not be possible without them. The rights of the women of Afghanistan will not be negotiable.”⁹⁴ In November 2001, even Laura Bush spoke on the topic of Afghan women in the weekly radio address usually given by the President. She stated that “the brutal oppression of women is a central goal of the terrorists” and that “the fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”⁹⁵ In wake of the US intervention, however, it appears that women’s oppression was used as justification for its own militarized agenda. A Report of Rights & Democracy’s Mission to Afghanistan from the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development states: “Women’s rights have been brought to the forefront by political leaders who have learned to use the women’s human rights discourse to justify their military interventions.”⁹⁶ And the media, exclaims Christine Delphy, “drew a veil” over the histories that conflicted with these aims.⁹⁷ Maria Raha vibrantly conveys the undeniable relationship between the U.S politically constructed narratives of Afghan women (as oppressed and in need of “saving”) as legitimating for intervention and the media’s role in disseminating them. I quote her here at length:

The road of post-9/11 pop culture and news media is littered with as many nods to Afghan women as a typical Bush speech is with references to “the evildoers.” To wit: As reported in the *USA Today* in February 2002, the website for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan received such heavy traffic after a mention on Oprah that it crashed. As of this writing, a total of seven books on Afghan women have been released by major publishers since September 2001. Just weeks before the United States invaded Afghanistan, CNN re-ran *Beneath the Veil*, a documentary on the topic. Meanwhile, the word

⁹⁴ “Afghanistan: No one listens to us and no one treats us as human beings”, AI Index: ASA October 6, 2003, p1. <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engasa110232003>.

⁹⁵ Raha, “Veiled Intentions”, p179.

⁹⁶ Brunet, Ariane and Isabelle Solon Helal, “Women’s Rights in Afghanistan: Report of Rights & Democracy’s Mission to Afghanistan September 2002”, International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development, December 6 2002, p8.

⁹⁷ Delphy, Christine. “A War for Afghan Women?” in *After Shock: September 11, 2001: Global Feminist Perspectives*, Hawthorne, Susan and Bronwyn Winter (eds.), translated from French by Bronwyn Winter, Vancouver: Raincoast Books, 2003, p336.

“burqua” became ubiquitous: It showed up on the American Dialects Society’s 2001 Words of the Year list, and the *American Heritage College Dictionary* rushed to include it in their last edition. Even the New York Post jumped on the burqua bandwagon (albeit in a completely bizarre way), using the word to describe the shroud with which Michael Jackson covers his children.⁹⁸

The final problematic element which, like the previous points, is intricately connected to the others, is the ahistorisation, or lack of history, of Afghanistan in contemporary discourse. The representations of Afghanistan that have proliferated in the media as well as in policy documents have for the most part been simplistic, ahistorical, or historically selective and thus politically motivated. In her critique of the narratives that followed the events of September 11th, Butler explains how specific representations of history proliferated:

There is no relevant pre-history to the events of September 11, since to begin to tell the story in a different way, to ask how things came to this, is already to complicate the question of agency which, no doubt, leads to the fear of moral equivocation. In order to condemn these acts as inexcusable, absolutely wrong, in order to sustain the affective structure in which we are, on the one hand, victimized and, on the other, engaged in a righteous cause of rooting out terror, we have to start the story with the experience of violence we suffered.⁹⁹

What happens, however, when we begin to interrogate that history that has become ‘common sense’ and investigate other sources of knowledge and experience outside of Western mainstream discourse? We might discover, for example, as Pugh and Cooper revealed, that external intervention in Afghanistan’s past were key factors in creating conditions of state fragmentation, ‘underdevelopment’, and a self-sustaining war-economy. In the 1980’s, Soviet invasion contributed to the destabilization of the state’s primary functions, including its monopoly on the use of force, which allowed the mujahidin to take control in the countryside. The Soviets “deliberate efforts to terrorize rural populations and destroy infrastructure” resulted in an extreme decrease in food production, internal and external displacement, rapid

⁹⁸ Raha, “Veiled Intentions”, p178.

⁹⁹ Butler, “Explanation and Exoneration”, p180.

urbanization, and refugee communities in neighboring India and Pakistan.¹⁰⁰ From 1979 to 1992, massive military and financial support was continuously provided via the ‘CIA/ISI pipeline’, the logistic support system of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), in order to provide arms for resistance of the Soviets. The result was an extreme saturation of arms and ammunition which today have achieved status as political currency.¹⁰¹

The role of the US in the development of the shadow economies in Afghanistan is often absent from any discussion of ‘development’ or ‘security’ in the region. The drug trade in the 1980’s was in fact, argues Goodhand, supported by the proxy backers of the mujahidin as a “weapon of war to destabilize Soviet-controlled Afghanistan and the Central Asian republics”.¹⁰² With the decline of ‘superpower patronage’ in the 1990’s, warlords began to develop internal revenue sources and power and sovereignty fragmented with little incentive to unite and abolish the ‘illicit’ economy. Thus, the state-building that had developed in the 18th century was profoundly destabilized¹⁰³.

The trend of international involvement continued with the arrival of oil companies and international diplomatic and aid organisations. Under the newly perceived stability under the Taliban, U.S. and Argentine oil companies began to compete fiercely for the valuable resource: “Afghanistan became a significant fulcrum for the ‘new Great Game’ in Central Asia, as great powers competed for access to the energy reserves of the Caspian Sea basin and the routing of pipelines in the region”.¹⁰⁴ Following a shift in the US attitude toward the Taliban, the UN Security Council began to impose sanctions in 1999 with the goal of weakening the regime; as

¹⁰⁰ Goodhand. “Afghanistan in Central Asia”, p50-51.

¹⁰¹ Goodhand. “Afghanistan in Central Asia”, p51.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid., p52.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., p54.

Goodhand argues, however, this resulted in the strengthening of ‘hard-liners’ in the movement and fostering closer ties between the Taliban and radical Islamic groups.

Conclusion: The Dangers of Myth-making

We need to navigate critically and cautiously through the multiple stories, silences, and complex and contradictory narratives that lie beneath the surface of imperial myths. Kaufman, for example, explains that in order to study incidences of ethnic conflict, we must begin by trying to hear the myriad narratives and different assumptions and combine insights from multiple methodological and theoretical approaches.¹⁰⁵ We need to understand that “some people are just written out of history”¹⁰⁶, and the stories of history are so partial and there is so much those of us in the West don’t see that we can never believe that we have arrived at a ‘truth’ or ‘reality’:

History is never just simply the ‘past’. Nor is history simply its official rendering...History is made while old histories are simultaneously reproduced, without most of us ever owning the story told...Once I see interpretation is *already* embedded in the very process of thought I recognize that there is a *before* that I cannot completely ever know or recover. The very idea of history itself is destabilized as a process of storytelling with different storytellers...I therefore need to know whose story I am reading, who is telling the story, and from what timebound lens it is being told.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps the best response is, as Peter Hulme suggests: “to read speculatively, recognizing that the story can never be fully recovered, and that which has been recovered is often distorted and manufactured.”¹⁰⁸

There are emancipatory possibilities in a critical project of discourse deconstruction: it lies in the recognition of the detrimental effects of imperial, neo-colonial, orientalist ‘myths’ and

¹⁰⁵ Kaufman, *Modern Hatred*, p2.

¹⁰⁶ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p77.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p24-25.

¹⁰⁸ Hulme, Peter, *Colonial Encounters*, New York: Basic Books: Methuen, 1986.

the policy agendas that are made possible through them. By beginning to delve into the complex and interrelated factors of Afghanistan's history in the previous section, the dangers of historical narratives that conceal these elements start to become visible: "By myth man has lived, died and – all too often – killed."¹⁰⁹ While pressure must be put on the messengers of violent and deliberately myths, we must also take responsibility and listen critically to the multiple narratives around us in order to realize a more "panoptic"¹¹⁰ vision; understanding, nonetheless, that we can never achieve a whole or complete understanding or "truth". "As we listen to the antithetical mythologies that tear our world apart," argues Armstrong "we need to be receptive to the counter-narrative that opposes our point of view and expresses the 'other' perspective."¹¹¹ One way to 'see' without an imperial or colonial gaze is to connect heterogeneity into a form of "collective assemblage" in a Deleuzian and Guattarian sense; that is, accept concrete multiplicities in order to see variation without conquest.¹¹²

What are the historical myths being produced as we speak? Will history books teach young children stories about 'uncivilized' and 'barbaric' Afghanistan, harbinger of evil and Muslim terrorists, saved by the heroic and technologically vanguard strategies of Western militaries? All myths are political and embody a very particular and power infused representation about how the world works. We must historicize particular forms of knowledge and acknowledge their partiality by unpacking the theories that underpin the "facts" produced by situated knowledge's; "A thicker and more complex vision of humanity is urgently needed."¹¹³ If, as Taylor pronounces, history and its myths are not indeed about the past, but rather the

¹⁰⁹ Trubshaw, "Foamy Custard".

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Armstrong, Karen. "Our truth is just a bit-player in the tragic, conflicted whole", *The Guardian*, August 26, 2006.

¹¹² Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p76. See also Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p40-41.

¹¹³ Eisenstein, *Against Empire*, p25.

future, than the question we must continually ask ourselves (and of other myth producers, as we are all implicated in this process) is what kind of world is being produced through what myths and who is benefiting and who is being disappeared?

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