Homeland/Target:
Cities and the "War on Terror"

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Programmes of organized, political violence have always been legitimized and sustained through complex imaginative geographies. This chapter demonstrates that the Bush Administration's "war on terror" rests fundamentally on such dialectical constructions of (particularly urban) place. The essay argues that the discursive construction of the "war on terror" since September 11th 2001 has been deeply marked by attempts to rework imaginative geographies separating the urban places of the US "homeland" and those Arab cities purported to be the sources of "terrorist" threats against US national interests.[1]

Introduction

Programmes of organised, political violence are always sustained through imaginations of place and of geography. Whilst the places of the "homeland," which are purportedly defended tend to be sentimentalised and romanticised within such imaginations, those of the purported "enemy" are often simultaneously dehumanised and demonised. Crucially, such imaginative constructions of the "home" places, or territory to be protected, and the enemy places to be assaulted and turned into military targets, are therefore always manufactured together. The highly charged attachment to the homeland places works in parallel with calls to violence against a demonised, "foreign" place. Both of these constructions, moreover, often rest on homogenous imaginations of the

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two communities. Any sense that home or enemy places are actually diverse and made up of many diasporic, ethnic, and political groups tends to be lost in the recourse to absolute ideas of what is good, what is evil, and who is the righteous victim.

In what follows, I seek to demonstrate that George Bush's "war on terror" rests centrally on such a parallel sentimentalisation of US cities and the demonisation of Arab ones. In particular, the "war on terror" rests centrally on Bush's "with us or against us" rhetoric, which pits the "turf" and "homeland" of the continental US—spaces of intrinsic "freedom" to be "secured"—against the demonised and dehumanised cities of the Middle East. These are cast as intrinsically evil or barbarian places, labyrinthine and structureless cities that are, essentially, "nests" of terrorism to be assaulted and cleansed in order to save Freedom. Because of the inseparability of the imagination of homeland and target places in the "war on terror," it is inadequate to address the programme of "homeland security" or the US invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan in separation. Rather, the way places are represented within both these programmes needs to be looked at together.

This contribution does just this. It explores the two sides of place construction in the war on terror in an integrated way. On the one hand, then, an analysis is undertaken of the way in which the cities of the US homeland are, post 9/11, being represented as intensely vulnerable places requiring massive state effort at "homeland security." On the other, attention turns to the way in which the cities of Iraq are being widely represented by US politicians, US military commentators, the media, and in popular cultural spaces, as little but "nests of terrorism" to be assaulted through massive US military fire power.

As Edward Said's (1978) book, *Orientalism*, demonstrated, this two-sided construction of places is the latest in a centuries-old story. Ever since the dawn of Western colonial power, Arab cities have been represented by Western powers as dark, exotic, labyrinthine places that need to be "unveiled" for the production of "order" through the superior scientific and military technologies of the occupying West.

The Bush Administration's language of moral absolutism is, in particular, deeply Orientalist. It works by separating "the civilised world"—the "homeland" cities that must be "defended"—from the "dark forces," the "axis of evil," and the "terrorists nests" of Islamic cities, which are alleged to sustain the "evildoers" who threaten the health, prosperity, and democracy of the whole of the "free" world. The result of such geographical imaginations is an ahistorical and deeply Orientalist projection of Arab civilization that is very easily worked to recycle what Said called, just before his death, "the same unverifiable fictions and vast generalizations to stir up 'America' against the foreign devil" (Said, 2003: vi).

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Discourses of "terrorism" are crucially important in sustaining such binaried notions of place, and the highly different values accorded to human lives in each zone that result. Central here is the principle of the absolute eternality of the "terrorist"—the inviolable inhumanity and shadowy, monster-like status of those deemed to be actual or dormant "terrorists," or those sympathetic to them. The unbound diffusion of terrorist labeling within the rhetoric of the "war on terror," moreover, works to allow virtually any political opposition to the sovereign power of the US and its allies to be condemned as "terrorist" or addressed through emergency "anti-terrorist" legislation. Protagonists of such opposition are thus dehumanized, demonized, and, above all, delegitimised.

Securitising "homeland" cities

The first element in the geographical imaginations that fuel the "war on terror" is an appeal by the Bush Administration to "securitise" the everyday urban spaces and infrastructures of the US "homeland." This is paralleled with endless cycles of manufactured fear, from the famous colour-coded warnings of the risk of terrorist threats, to a wide range of political adverts and media outputs carefully describing what a "dirty bomb" or vials or "anthrax" could do to a major US city. Paradoxically, the programme for "homeland security" relies, then, on the manufacture and endless extension of pervasive feelings of insecurity.

Here, endless discussions of "security" emphasize a virtually infinite range of threats from a limitless range of people, places, and technologies—all to justify a massive process of state building. The basic spaces and systems of everyday life in US cities—airport immigration points, the Internet, the postal system, subway and train networks, the electricity grid, street grids, public spaces, the water systems—are portrayed as geographical or technological borders through which a potentially threatening "Other" might leap at any time or place. Vast efforts are being made by US political, military, and media elites, in particular, to spread what Jonathon Raban (2004: 3) recently called a "generalized promiscuous anxiety through the American populace, a sense of imminent but inexact catastrophe" lurking just beneath the surface of normal, technologised, (sub)urbanised, everyday life in the US.

This reimagining of "homeland" cities involves four related areas of work. First, a massive process of "re-bordering" is underway. This has involved a reimagination of the nature of US civil society as a bounded, national space whose flows and connections elsewhere—of people, information, commodities, and money—can be demarcated, surveilled, and carefully filtered. Most obviously, this involves the militarisation of national borders, the insistence of

biometric passports for all nations who have a visa waiver agreement with the US, and the installation of a wide range of "smart" sniffing and detection devices through the technological fabric of US cities. Radiation sniffers now straddle the entrances to container ports. Anthrax detectors inhabit the innards of the postal system. New York police officers carry portable devices for detecting "dirty bombs". And so on. Jonathan Raban captures the palpable transformation of US urban landscapes well. "To live in America now," he writes:

at least to live in a port city like Seattle – is to be surrounded by the machinery and rhetoric of covert war, in which everyone must be treated as a potential enemy until they can prove themselves a friend. Surveillance and security devices are everywhere: the spreading epidemic of razor wire, the warnings in public libraries that the FBI can demand to know what books you're borrowing, the Humvee laden with troops in combat fatigues, the Coast Guard gun boats patrolling the bay, the pat-down searches and X-ray machines, the nondescript grey boxes equipped with radar antennae, that are meant to sniff pathogens in the air (2004: 4).

Second, major crackdowns have occurred on diasporic social groups deemed potentially to harbour, or provide sympathy to, terrorist groups. Arab-American communities, in particular, have faced the brunt of this escalation of state incarceration, profiling, and repression as McCarthyist obsessions with the "enemy within" have been Orientalised on the post 9/11 world. Tellingly, the largest Arab-American community in the US, the Detroit suburb of Dearborn, was the first city district to receive a local departmental office of Homeland Security.

In most mainstream US media discussions, such places have been portrayed unerringly as zones of threat. They are represented as homes to people who, whilst being US citizens, must, inevitably, be loyal to the "terrorists" who, as we shall see shortly, are judged by many neo-conservative commentators to be the sole inhabitants of the enemy zone (Middle Eastern cities like Fallujah). Consequently, "Arab" and "American" are widely portrayed as antithetical adjectives in the mainstream US media since 9/11.

Third, a broader chill on dissent has been notable in post-9/11 USA, as anyone deemed to be insufficiently patriotic within the escalating militaristic fervour has been increasingly vulnerable to accusations that they, too, have sympathy with "terrorists." Notable here has been the campuswatch.org campaign, where Middle Eastern scholars across the US who have been espousing the work of Said or other postcolonial scholars have been publicly "exposed" and students attending their sessions have been urged to denounce their professors in class.

Finally, the very language of "homeland security" invoked by the new state apparatus has played a vital role. Crucially, it has worked to problematise the sorts of cosmopolitan and diasporic mixing which is now the dominant feature of most US cities. This language, which uses "folksy" words like "turf," as well as the endless use of the word "homeland" itself, is intrinsically

anti-cosmopolitan, anti-urban, and anti-immigrant. Paul Gilroy (2003: 274) recently argued that the widespread invocation by the Bush Administration, following Samuel Huntingdon, of the idea of a "clash of civilizations," necessarily "requires that cosmopolitan consciousness is ridiculed" in the pronouncements of the US state and the mainstream media.

This geographical reimagination of the US "homeland," in a world of intensifying connection, mobility, and porosity, means that a sort of homogeneous community within US cities of authentic, patriotic US citizens is being suggested. Such an imagination undermines the legitimacy of large swathes of the social fabric of the nation. First Tom Ridge, the Homeland Security Secretary, for example, has widely argued that, post-9/11, "the only turf is the turf we stand on." This suggests that the US nation is a singular, almost ruralised and domestic community that is tied closely to the "turf" of the land.

This geographically fixed imaginary, with its strong borders separating the US "turf" from the outside world, contrasts starkly with the language of previous generations of US politicians who widely celebrated the boundless sense of mobility, possibility, immigration, and assimilation within US nation building. As Amy Kaplan (2003) has argued, the reality of an urban, multiethnic USA, with many competing turfs and multiple points of view—a reality which was, ironically, demonstrated by the large number of nationalities represented on the lists of dead on September 11th 2001—is therefore denied. Instead, the language and programme of "homeland security" hints that a privileged, singular community exists of those settled and authentic US social groups whose deep connections with their "turf" mean that they can be relied upon to be sufficiently patriotic.

The positions of more recent waves of immigrants, meanwhile—especially "illegal" ones—become dramatically more perilous. This is especially so as such groups have been widely linked in the media with "terrorist" groups, allowing many of their members have been incarcerated, both within the US and in the extra-territorial "camp" at Guanttánamo Bay, without trial and with the possibility of remaining in captivity until death. As with the civilians of Iraq and Afghanistan who have died in the wars, then, the reimagining of the geography of the US "homeland" has played a crucial role of stripping demonised groups of both life chances and even the right to life.

Constructing Arab cities as military targets

Inseparable from such reimaginations of the geographies of the US national space, a many-stranded effort has been underway since 9/11 to portray certain Middle Eastern cities as intrinsically barbarian and terroristic spaces. This has been necessary to legitimise their assault by massive US fire power, allegedly

to protect the "freedom" of the sentimentalised places of the US homeland. These two parallel discourses have worked powerfully to establish the absolute separation of the "us" and the "them," a separation that allowed the huge violence against the everyday spaces of Iraq and Afghanistan to be legitimised.

This invocation of assaults of demonised places to protect the places of the "homeland," of course, is actually a very large part of the story of the legitimisation of the assault on Iraq. The WMD attack on European and US cities within 45 minutes is a crucial example here. But the pronouncements of Bush and Blair are only the tip of the iceberg here. Much less discussed, but perhaps more powerful still, have been the way in which Iraqi and Afghani cities have been portrayed as little but targets for ordnance within a wide range of media, military, and computer-game environments. It is worth exploring a few examples of how this has been done.

First, the voyeuristic consumption by Western publics of the US urban bombing campaigns, which have been such a dominant feature of the "war on terror," is itself based on representations where cities are actually constructed as little more than receiving points for the dropping of murderous weaponry. Vertical web and newspaper maps, in particular, have routinely displayed cities like Baghdad as little more than a collection of impact points where GPS-targeted bombs and missiles are either envisaged to land, or have landed, are grouped along flat, cartographic surfaces viewed as if from space (Gregory 2004a). Meanwhile, the weapons' actual impacts on the everyday life for the tens of thousands of ordinary Iraqis or Afghanis who are caught up in the bombing, as "collateral damage," have been both marginalised and violently repressed by the US military. Most famously, this has involved the bombing of Al-Jazeera transmission facilities because they transmitted images of the dead civilians that resulted from the bombing. As Derek Gregory (2004b) has argued, in these representations, Arab "cities" are thus reduced to the "places and people you are about to bomb, to targets, to letters on a map or coordinates on a visual display."

Strikingly, the failure even to count the 100,000 or so dead Iraqi civilians that had resulted, by December 2004, from the war's bombing campaigns and urban battles (Roberts et al. 2004), reveals that the civilians of targeted cities are "cast out" so that they warrant no legal status or visual presence. In stark contrast to the inviolable lives lost on 9/11, because they are deemed to inhabit intrinsically "terrorist" places, their sacrifice can go largely unremarked; their bloody deaths can go blindly unrepresented.

Second, such casting out of the lives and suffering of ordinary civilians is legitimized and obscured in the "war on terror" by a wider discourse in which entire cities of such victims are portrayed as little more than "factories" or "nests" sustaining "terrorists" and "extremists." To achieve this, huge efforts

are being made by both the US military and the mainstream US media to construct Islamic cities as dehumanized "terror cities"—nest-like environments whose very geography undermines the high-tech, orbital mastery of US forces. For example, as a major battle raged there in April 2004 in which over 600 Iraqi civilians died, General Richard Myers, Chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, labeled the whole of Fallujah a dehumanized "rat's nest" or "hornet's nest" of "terrorist resistance" against US occupation that needed to be "dealt with" (quoted by News24.com).

In the bloody urban battles of 2004 for Saddam City, Fallujah, and Najaf, the promulgations of the US military forces fighting in Iraq—and their leaders back in the US proper—have also routinely blended Islamophobic racism and crude Orientalism. Again, this worked continually to reinforce the perception that these cities are little but "nests" of terrorist violence that necessitate targeting by superior US surveillance technologies and military firepower which will somehow act to "cleanse" or redeem the intrinsically terroristic urban places of Iraq. "The Iraqis are sick people and we are the chemotherapy," boasted one US Marine to the New Statesman in April 2003.

Widespread pronouncements of the fighting US soldiers themselves illustrate these geographical imaginaries all too clearly. US Marine snipers, after the battle of Fallujah, for example, talked exultantly about their "kills" of "rag-heads" and "sand niggers" in Fallujah (Davis 2004). Shocked senior British officers in Iraq—whose forces are far from blameless in terms of brutality against Iraqi civilians—even alleged (anonymously) that American forces often viewed Iraqi civilians as *Untermenschen* (the Nazis' word for subhuman). This view, of course, has been reinforced by the extending list of prison torture scandals that have erupted since the end of the 2003.

Added to these street-level discourses, a large group of professional "urban warfare" commentators, writing regular columns in US newspapers, have routinely projected deeply racist notions implying that the inhabitants of targeted Iraqi cities are merely subhuman pests requiring extermination. An important example comes from the highly influential "urban warfare" commentator, Ralph Peters, writing in the neo-conservative *New York Post*.

To Peters and many like him, cities like Fallujah and Najaf are little more than killing zones that challenge the US military to harness its techno-scientific might to sustain hegemony. This must be done, he argues, by killing "terrorists" as rapidly and efficiently—and with as few US casualties—as possible. During the battle of Fallujah, Peters labeled the entire City a "terror-city" in his column. Praising the US Marines "for hammering the terrorists into the dirt" in the battle, he nevertheless castigated the cease-fire negotiations that, he argued, had allowed those "terrorists" left alive to melt back into the civilian population (2004a).

In a later *New York Post* article, Peters (2004b) concluded that a military, technological solution was available to US forces that would enable them to "win" such battles more conclusively in the future: killing faster, before any international media coverage is possible. "This is the new reality of combat," he wrote. "Not only in Iraq. But in every broken country, plague pit and terrorist refuge to which our troops have to go in the future." Arguing that the presence of "global media" meant that "a bonanza of terrorists and insurgents" were allowed to "escape" US forces in Fallujah, US forces, he argued "have to speed the kill." By "accelerating urban combat" to "fight within the 'media cycle' before journalists sympathetic to terrorists and murderers can twist the facts and portray us as the villains," new technologies were needed, Peters suggested. This was so that "our enemies are overwhelmed and destroyed before hostile cameras can defeat us. If we do not learn to kill very, very swiftly, we will continue to lose slowly." It is arguments like Peters' that have been central in constructing Fallujah as the crucial, symbolic space of resistance within the whole Iraqi insurgency. Such a symbolism has made the destruction of resistance in Fallujah a central objective of US forces.

Third, the construction of Arab cities as targets for US military firepower now sustains a large industry of computer gaming and simulation. Such simulations—which are created especially to create positive images for the US military amongst younger computer game users—propel the player into the world of the gaming industry's latest obsession: modern urban warfare. They work to further reinforce imaginary geographies equating Islamic cities with "terrorism" and US military intervention.

Such games serve to further blur the boundaries separating war from entertainment. Worse still, they demonstrate that the entertainment industry is actively collaborating in constructing a culture of permanent war. Within such games, Arab cities are represented merely as environments for participants to enter in search of animalised "terrorists" to kill repeatedly (without blood or screams). When people are represented, they are the shadowy, subhuman, racialised figures of absolutely external "terrorists" to be annihilated repeatedly in sanitized "action" as entertainment or military training (or both). Andrew Deck (2004), writing on the website *No Quarter*, argues that the proliferation of urban warfare games based on actual, ongoing, US military interventions in Arab cities, works to "call forth a cult of ultra-patriotic xenophobes whose greatest joy is to destroy, regardless of how racist, imperialistic, and flimsy the rationale" for the simulated battle.

These representations, of course, resonate strongly with the pronouncements of military urban warfare specialists in the wider media like those of Ralph Peters discussed above. They also blur with increasing seamlessness into news reports about the actual Iraq war. Kuma Reality Games, for example, which has actually sponsored Fox News' coverage of the "war on terror"

in the US, uses this sponsorship to promote an urban combat game. In their words, this centres on US Marines fighting "militant followers of radical Shi-ite cleric Muqtaqa al-Sadr in the filthy urban slum that is Sadr city."

The US Army—which now brands itself as "the world's premier land force"—itself works hard and at many levels to demonize Arab urbanism per se through the medium of video games. In fact, it is now one of the world's biggest developers of video games, which it now deliberately deploys as aids to training and recreation amongst US soldiers and the generation of both recruits and revenue.

The US Army now gives urban warfare computer games such as *America's Army*—with its simulations of "counter terror" warfare in densely packed Islamic cities in the fictional country of "Zekistan"—free to millions over the Internet as an aid to recruitment. *America's Army* has been followed up by the even more elaborate game, *Full Spectrum Warrior*, another ex-military training video game in which US forces again wage urban warfare in simulations of Middle Eastern cities, whilst this time dispensing racist and Islamophobic expletives. Even some video game reviewers have criticised the racism of the game. One reviewer on the *GamingAge* website argued that "this game would have been fine without the tawdry 4 letter words and negative racist remarks" from the simulated US soldiers. Such racist remarks have done little to inhibit the game's popularity, however. Writing in a chat room on the neo-conservative *FreeRepublic.Com*, one reviewer of the game gushes that, "given the current state of the world, it's amazingly relevant, not to mention fun to fire on raghead terrorist wanna-be's."

Finally, to parallel such virtual, voyeuristic, "Othering" of Arab cities, US and Western military forces have constructed their own simulations of Islamic cities as targets—this time in physical space. A chain of 80 mock "Islamic" urban districts have been built across the world since 9/11 designed purely to hone the skills of US forces in fighting and killing in "urbanized terrain." Taking 18 months to construct, these simulated "cities" are then endlessly destroyed and remade in practice assaults that hone the US forces for the "real thing" in sieges such as those in Fallujah.

Replete with minarets, pyrotechnic systems, loop-tapes with calls to prayer, donkeys, hired "civilians" in Islamic dress wandering through narrow streets, and olfactory machines to create the smell of rotting corpses, this shadow urban system simulates not the complex cultural, social, or physical realities of real Middle Eastern urbanism. Rather, it reflects the imaginative geographies of the military and theme park designers that are brought in to design and construct it.

Conclusions

This brief essay has shown that Bush's "war on terror" rests fundamentally on imaginations of geography which necessarily represent both the cities of the United States and those of the Middle East in highly charged ways. Given the highly urbanised nature of both the USA and Iraq, highly contrasting and symbolically charged representations of cities are the central pivot of such imaginative geographies. Such geographical imaginations, far from being of mere academic curiosity, have done, and are doing, massive political and geopolitical work. Without their widespread acceptance and recycling, and their incessant symbolic violence, the war on Iraq, simply put, would have been impossible. Without the flowing of racist and incendiary representations of Arab urbanism as little more than a domain for the killing of "terrorists" in a wide swathe of US popular culture, the war could not have been sustained. And without the careful construction of imagined geographical zones of peace from those of war, the casting out of civilians who die as "collateral damage," or who are thrown into extraterritorial camps with no legal rights—potentially to the end their days—could not have occurred so effectively.

This is because the successful construction of the geographical imaginaries outlined in this essay has, very literally, worked to demarcate where death is of consequence and where it is not. It has provided the mental and psychic guidance for ethical decisions of where human beings have worth and must be protected and where they do not and can be killed with no recourse to visibility, ethical dilemma, or risk of illegality. More troubling still, these implicit, but all-important, distinctions have been routinely re-circulated in the "popular geopolitical" spaces of entertainment and the voyeuristic consumption of war.

The ultimately tragedy of the geographical imaginaries that are at the root of the "war on terror," however, is that they are almost indistinguishable from those invoked by Osama Bin Laden. Whilst the homeland and target places are obviously reversed in Bin Laden's rhetoric, the geographical imaginaries invoked by both Bush and Bin Laden are otherwise startlingly and depressingly alike. Both assert the power of righteous victimhood and the inviolate importance of homeland cities, whilst at the same time projecting a God-driven violence on the demonised Other—whether it be places or people. Both invoke homogenous notions of community and deligitimise, or demonise, the cosmopolitan and diasporic mixing in cities that is the very essence of contemporary social change. Both cast out the dehumanised civilians who inhabit targeted places, and who die as a result of the called-for violence, from any legal, ethical, or theological protection. And both benefit from the inevitable circle of atrocity, or terror and counter-terror, which results.

The challenge, then, is to collectively dismantle both these self-reinforcing fundamentalisms, along with their associated baggage of hate-filled geo-

graphical imaginaries, which together work to sustain this dance of death. Only by achieving this, and by pushing all such fundamentalisms to the lunatic fringes where they belong, might the possibility of building up tolerant, cosmopolitan, and transnational civil societies on our rapidly urbanising planet realistically emerge.

This is not to romanticise multicultural cities or to see them as panaceas. Far from it. All such mixing is necessarily ambivalent; hatred, tension, and misanthropy are inevitably leavened through all such cities. Rather, it is to stress that such cities are now the norm and to urge that all political and geographical imaginaries should only be considered legitimate when they take this as a basic starting point. In today's world, all calls to homogenous community, and all geographical imaginations based on them, can do little but end up being calls to violence.

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