

Americanness and Puritanism: the writing of a Puritan national  
identity through discursive practices of U.S. foreign policy

*Erica Simone Almeida Resende*

**Abstract**

Looking into the U.S. “War on Terror”, we will argue that the articulation of U.S. foreign policy in the aftermath of 9/11 was made possible by a discourse on “Americanness” capable of rendering reality once again intelligible after 9/11. It is a discourse of Americans about America and Americans, which, through imaginary formations, creates realities, subjects, actions, and relationships, and regulates what can be thought, said, understood, and conceived from a specific position in a particular moment in time. We will argue that this discourse on “Americanness” is made possible by a specific cultural formation made up of meanings and representations which are markedly Puritan. By employing methods of discourse analysis, we will show how said discourse is (re)produced through practices of U.S. foreign policy such as the “War on Terror”, which emulates the dominant structures, vocabularies, meanings, narratives, symbols and representations of the typical Puritan political sermons of the 1600’s Colonial America: the “jeremiads”. We believe that the United States of America, through its practices of foreign policy, constructs its national identity as ideologically Puritan, thus blurring the lines between politics and religion, public and private, nation and creed.

**Key Words:** United States, foreign policy, identities, discourse analysis, War on Terror, Puritanism, Americanism.

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**1. Introduction**

Notwithstanding the broad literature on the implications and consequences of the War on Terror<sup>1</sup>, there were few attempts to understand its constitutive conditions. In other words, how the War on Terror was able to emerge as a valid and legitimate political option after 9/11. As correctly pointed out by Lozzano (2007:98), “how is it that on September 10<sup>th</sup> 2001 there wasn’t a War on Terror, but after September 11<sup>th</sup> there was already a

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War on Terror?” The fact is that most analysts have taken for granted that the War on Terror had been a reaction to a specific event: the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Few were the ones to wonder why has the reaction to those events taken the specific form of the War on Terror and not another? In other words, which are its “conditions of possibility” (LYNN-DOTY, 1993)?

Except for a few isolated attempts<sup>2</sup>, few scholars have tried to identify the realities, subjects and relationships that had to be present and positioned in order to create the reality in which the War on Terror could be articulated and accepted as possible? How did it come to be understood as possible, conceivable, thinkable and adequate as a reaction to 9/11? Which structures of meaning and subjectivity allowed the War on Terror to be conceived as adequate? The answers to such questions require the analysis of the discursive dimension of the “War on Terror”.

We will argue that the War on Terror should be interpreted as a discourse aiming to suture the fissures opened at 9/11. The terrorist attacks caused a social crisis by disrupting the intelligibility grids that gave sense to the world. With the collapse of common sense in 2001, a “void of meaning” (CAMPBELL, 2002) dislocated and upset the dominant political discourses. The War on Terror has only been possible due to its capacity to recompose and restore the meanings, representations, narratives and symbols that allowed individuals to make sense of reality.

By adopting a self-referring system of representations and meanings, the War on Terror rearranged a discourse of Americaness that allowed Americans to make sense of reality and of themselves, and thus overcoming the social crisis. Through methods of text analysis, we will demonstrate that the War on Terror comes from a long-standing discursive formation of Puritan ideology. Through its reproduction by practices of U.S. foreign policy, this Puritan discourse attempt to naturalize and inscribe as permanent a national identity of Puritan ideology.

Focusing on the role of discourses and power in socially constructing reality, identities and interests, this paper will attempt to problematize the relationship between culture and foreign policy by arguing that foreign policy constitutes a cultural system of meanings and representations that strives to write a national identity based on a specific ideology, in a never-ending attempt to stabilize and fix meanings in order to discursively impose and naturalize dominant structures of power.

By exploring the relationship between language, meaning and policy-making, we will follow a recent trend<sup>3</sup> in International Relations regarding the role of discourses on processes of reality, identity and interests construction. By mapping, identifying and highlighting the discursive

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mechanisms that made possible the articulation and universalisation of the War on Terror, we hope to contribute to the Studies of Foreign Policy.

## 2. Identity, interests, and foreign policy

Contrary to traditional IR scholarship, we do not conceive foreign policy as the result of decisions taken by individuals or bureaucracies in response to changes in strategic interests. If foreign policy is to be understood as the link between state actors and the international environment, one would have to accept a relation of causality between actors and interests, agents and structure, thus privileging an analysis anchored on unitary and rational actors, an objective identification of strategic interests, power as expression of capabilities, and on eternal and structural constraints on state action.

However, this representation of reality has several problematic aspects. First, it posits reality and interests as being “out there”, liable to objective observation and identification. Second, it prevents the politicization of strategic interests: interests just are; they do not become interests. Third, by positing foreign policy as the mere reaction of a unitary, rational and eternal actor, with pre-existing identity and interests, this representation of international politics becomes refractory to any kind of social conflict. According to this view, foreign policy is naturalized as a “bridge-builder” (MESSARI, 2001:227) between pre-existing entities.

Following post-modern/post-structuralist authors such as Ashley (1984), Campbell (1998), Hansen (2006), Messari (2001), Nabers (2009), Neumann (1996a, 1996b), Shapiro (1988), Walker (1990, 1993), Weber (1998) and others that, we are led to accept the notion of foreign policy and interests being in a co-constitutional relation. This leads us to conceive foreign policy as a fundamental discursive practice in the processes of State co-constitution and identity.

As Hansen explains (2006:xvi):

*Foreign policies are legitimized as necessary, as in the national interest, or in the defense of human rights, through reference to identities, yet identities are simultaneously constituted and reproduced through formulations of foreign policy. Policies require identities, but identities do exist as objective accounts of what people and places “really are”, but as continuously restated, negotiated, and reshaped subjects and objects. To theorize foreign policy as discourse is to argue that identity and policy are constituted through a process of narrative adjustment, that they stand, in social science terminology, in a constitutive, rather than causal, relationship.*

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In short, foreign policy depends on representations, narratives, symbols, meanings being attributed to the nation, the people or the interest that is to be protected from danger or peril, or to be defended at a time of crisis. In order to make a legitimate claim about the protection from a danger situation that one seeks to eliminate, one has to first give meaning to reality and populate it with objects and the relations among them. The state, through its foreign policy, articulates and give specific identities to other states, regions, peoples and institutions at the same time it creates and gives an identity for itself. Identity, politics, discourse and key to understand how states relate to each other: the very identity of 'America' – and of 'not-America' – creates the discourse terrain which gives the boundaries between domestic and foreign, order and anarchy, good and evil.

If foreign policy depends on representations of identities, and if this is process of creating representation is made possible through foreign policy, then one should accept the notion that policy and identities are ontologically linked: only through the implementation of foreign policy – or its performance, as has been posited by Judith Butler (1990) elsewhere – will identity come to life. At the same time, said identity is constructed so to legitimate and naturalize the political option it proposes (SHAPIRO, 1988; CAMPBELL, 1998; WEBER, 1998). According to Hansen (2006:21), identities are thus “articulated as the reason why policies should be enacted, but they are also (re)produced through these very policy discourses: they are simultaneously (discursive) foundation and product.

Hansen's view is shared by David Campbell, for whom the relation between identity and foreign policy results from the security notion itself since “danger is not an objective condition”, but “an interpretation effect” (CAMPBELL, 1998:2). If not all risks are the same, and not all risks are interpreted as danger, he argues, one should then take into account the role subjectivity in the articulation of danger. This begs the important question of understanding how the meanings are produced as to reflexively construct threats, (re)produce collective identities, as well as to privilege the state as the single space and actor capable of generating security and the feeling of collective belonging.

By rejecting a relationship of causality and materiality between identity and foreign policy, we are then able to conceive both identity and policy as discursive, relational, political, and social practices. They are discursive because objects cannot be conceived outside language; they are relational because one can only speak of the 'Self' in the presence of the 'Other' ('Western' in opposition to 'Eastern', for example); they are political because opposing discourses struggle between themselves for domination in

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order to impose their own regime of truth; and they are social because meanings are disseminated through cultural codes which are collectively articulated and propagated in the social realm.

Such an understanding has led Campbell (1998) to posit foreign policy as a central practice for the constitution, production and maintenance of identity and of the state itself. According to Campbell, foreign policy is then revealed as a political practice for constructing borders, since it discursively produces differences based in dichotomies such as 'inside'/'outside', 'domestic'/'foreign', 'friend'/'foe' and 'Self'/'Other' sustained by identity markers (MANSBACH; RHODES, 2007) of specific ideological content. The function of those markers is to establish the horizon of "Self" in regards to the "Other": what may be included and what should be excluded. In other words, foreign policy is a social practice that converts difference in 'Otherness' by constructing and naturalizing a privileged 'Self'.

Going back to the War on Terror and its conditions of possibility, we believe that 9/11, by marking the collapse of the then dominant discourse about America and Americans, provoked a crisis of meaning. The dominant meanings, representations, symbols, and myths, which allowed individuals to make sense of reality and of themselves, were abruptly disrupted. The grids of intelligibility that gave sense to 'America' collapsed, thus igniting a collective trauma in national imaginaries. Notions such as "Who are we?", "What world is this?" and "Where are we going?" seemed to be lost as the Twin Towers collapsed. In order to overcome trauma, and to reestablish order, the dominant discourse has to be reconstituted, rearranged and re-stabilized. The 'void of meaning' (CAMPBELL, 2002) had to be filled, the 'broken time' (CAREY, 2001) had to be mended, the events had to be domesticated.

The events of 9/11 had broken down the dominant discourses about America and the Americans. The broken meanings had to be rearticulated and written, so that Americans could make sense of reality once again. The War on Terror that followed the terrorist attacks could be interpreted as an attempt to recompose the broken meanings of 'Americanness', which would then explain why its discursive articulations were dominated by self-references, as we shall see in the following sections.

### **3. Analysing the War of Terror discourse**

We take out concept of discourse from Jackson (2006:164), who characterizes discourses as 'sets of related ideas that employ a specific array of vocabulary, rules, symbols, labels, presumptions, narratives and other forms of social action that, in its turn, determine what is possible – or impossible – of being stated about a certain object; that is what becomes understood as normal, as if it was originated in common sense, and therefore

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accepted as ‘legitimate knowledge’. In this sense, discourses set the parameters, possibilities and interests of political formulation.

In this sense, discourses are social practices that produce “things”, instead of describing or representing them, making them part of reality’s constitution. They are social practices because they create realities and populate them with objects, attributing them identities, characteristics and qualities, creating relations between realities and these objects and between the objects themselves. When speaking of an “iron curtain”, Churchill did not describe reality: he built it. Despite being totally imaginary, the “iron curtain” created a specific reality: a policy of spheres of influence between two super-powers that divided Europe in two regions. Notwithstanding the origin on the discursive realm, it produced effects as real as the concrete Berlin Wall.

It is them which allow us to express, compare, classify, separate and create mental representations about the past, present, future and their respective realities. In the words of Gärdenfors (2002:5), language allows us to share world views. One should try to understand how power relations act on discourses in socially constructing partial, temporary, contingent and particular demands as total, permanent, necessary and universal truths. This makes us understand how discourses produce certain meanings at the same time as they consolidate an ideology with the inclusion or exclusion of meanings.

The common sense about what is ‘adequate’, ‘proper’, ‘legitimate’, and ‘justified’ is reconfigured in such a way that policies, norms, values and institutions that were unthinkable before the crisis now are understood to be acceptable. What had been understood as unacceptable becomes, after a crisis, not only acceptable but *the* only possible option.

The rearticulation of common sense is what allows for the conditions of possibility of policy change to come into being. How does this happen? The conditions of possibility of a dominant discourse are set by what Foucault (1972:38) has called a ‘discursive formation’: it regulates what may be said, thought, imagined and conceived based from a specific position. A discursive formation possesses the relative internal coherence, even if heterogeneous or contradictory. A statement belongs to a discursive formation just a phrase belongs to a text, even if it is deficient or incomplete.

Following Foucault’s concept of ‘discursive formation’, Pêcheux and Fuchs (1975) suggest that every discursive formation exteriorizes a specific ideology that determines the norms ruling a specific discourse. By setting the normative horizon of what may be said, who may say it and how, the ideology manifests itself in the norms that give intelligibility to the discourse. When we carefully look into the texts that make up a discourse, we are able to identify regularities, point out the rules that govern their utterance,

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and thus map the ideology that gives sense and rationalizes the discursive formation.

The countless texts related to 9/11 not only tried to express emotions but also to explain, interpret, conceive and suggest a specific policy response. To be accepted as necessary, valid and legitimate, however, it was crucial to articulate the discursive “framing” of the events. Therefore, we lay down representations of causal relations and motivations, selected the most efficient information for the generation of the desired framing, defined certain words as relevant in detriment of others and also sought to guarantee the broad dissemination of discourse.

Through the analysis of texts, we will be able to identify the main discursive framings of the War on Terror. Among all possible text analysis methods<sup>4</sup>, we opted for the following: (1) the mapping of predication, presupposition and subject positioning modes, following Lynn-Doty’s model; and (2) the identification of the narrative structure actantial schemes, adopting A.J. Greimas’ model of narrative grammar. Due to the great volume of texts that integrate the discursive corpus of the ‘War on Terror’, we have opted to limit our sample. Resorting to a small but representative set, we have determined the so-called ‘pioneer texts’<sup>5</sup> that have been submitted to analysis<sup>6</sup>.

Looking now to Lynn-Doty’s (1993) model, we seek to map the modes of **presupposition, predication and positioning of subjects** in order to isolate the “previous knowledge” (STEVENS, 1980) necessary for the production of meanings of a discourse. In Quine’s (1936) words, it is a “truth by convention” since it is not natural, what implies an ideological content. Its mapping allows the identification of specific contents from the reality object of naturalization through discourse. Our analysis suggests the discursive construction of the following representation of reality in the “War on Terror”:

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The “War on Terror” gains ideological content as it puts certain actors in a collision route, suggests as natural certain logics of association and repulse, imposes hierarchies, presupposes the existence of certain motivations and identities, among other factors. The most worrisome is the way it constructs a reality whose “History’s engine”, per say, would be a natural and self-evident fight between “good” and “evil”. The result is the construction of a common sense of inevitable clash between actors separated by clear dividing lines marked by dichotomies. It is a discourse that constructs as inevitable a global confrontation in which alternatives such as neutrality or differences accommodation is shown as impossible.

Our conclusion is that the War on Terror’s discourse constructs a specific reality that is accepted and experienced as self-evident and right. Only through a cultural-linguistic system that is common to speaker and listener the announcements that compose discourse can make sense. The modes of presupposition, predication and positioning allow for the selection of meanings used in the articulation of realities’ representation imposed to the participants of the communication process, thus naturalizing it.

Another important dimension of the discursive process of identities and subjectivities construction is the **narrative**. It generates a feeling of belonging to a time and space by creating a continuous line from this feeling

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between individuals separated by years, decades or centuries. When we hear and reproduce stories, we create a sentiment of identification with people, places and remote times; we connect to the myth of “common past” with the group to which we belong. The narratives constitute social practices of the “identity-doing”. Nevertheless, every narrative is “edited”. It privileges certain aspects to the detriment of others, it positions characters, suggests relations and motivations among them, appropriates other narratives etc. In this sense, the narrative makes choices and these are not random.

Resorting to the Narratology studies from A.J. Greimas (1983), we seek to identify the main actors – or “actants”, according to Greimas – of the “War on Terror” discourse. Thus, the identification of the actants allows for the evidencing of the norms that rule the plots of a narrative. Our analysis of the “War on Terror” generated the actantial scheme below, based on which we could isolate the logic (or grammar) that rules its narrative:

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As the roles are distributed to the different subjects – America as hero, the world and humanity as receivers etc., the narrative already defines what each one must do, with whom it will relate, what are its motivations and objectives, to whom they must oppose etc. The narrative attributes the common sense and obviousness marks to behaviors, alliances and arrangements, besides the United States’ leading role in the plot.

We also observed how the constant construction of meanings and representations of Americanness highlights as the main regularity among the

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announcements composing the narrative. Repeated references about what must be understood, conceived and represented about America and the Americans seems to organize all demands in chains of equivalence, what confers specificity to this discourse. In this sense, a signification of Americanness seems to unify the disperse demands of the social field, articulating and integrating them in a totality whose specificity would be the presence of the same subjects constructed by their demands: America and the Americans.

Nevertheless, every language possesses a history: the words don't have an inherent meaning; they acquire them according to their respective discursive formations, in highly politicized long duration processes. We understand the discourse of the War on Terror, as well as the discourse of the Cold War, to contain traces of a single origin: the Colonial America Puritanism. Proceeding with the research previously opened by Campbell (1998), we aim to raise the genealogy of the War on Terror's discourse that, in our point of view, resorts to the same system of meaning, representation, symbols and myths of the typical sermon from Colonial America puritans: the "jeremiads".

### **4. Analysing the Jeremiad discourse**

In his research about the Cold War, Campbell (1998) observed how U.S. foreign policy texts from that period, especially documents written and discussed within the National Security Council, reproduced a very specific representation of reality. He observed the recurrence of articulations such as "free and peaceful America", threatened by "an international conspiracy", values "granted by God" and that would be at the roots of the "western civilization", among other representations.

Identifying a sort of pattern in the production of difference between "America/non-America", Campbell understood that a constant and deliberate evocation of a "national mission", the "republic's objectives", the "defense of freedom", the "affirmation of the individual" and the "predestination of America" signaled that those strategic documents did much more than simply offer an analysis of international politics: they reaffirmed a specific national identity. "Stamped as 'Confidential' and read by the elite, the texts blurred the lines between internal and external with almost-puritan figurations", he observed (CAMPBELL, 1998:32).

In fact, the meanings and representations identified by Campbell remitted directly to a typically American puritan ideology. Symbols, myths and narratives such as "exceptional America", "predestination", "beacon of the world", "benign empire" – above all as opposed to the "Evil Empire"

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symbolized by the Soviet Union – seemed to attend the foreign policy discourse of the time, what indicated an attempt to print puritan ideology with a national, permanent and natural appearance. Its inscription in the foreign policy practices becomes more evident if we look not only at the language and symbols used in the text that make its discourse, but to its narrative structure, that reproduces the typical sermon of the puritans in Colonial America: the “jeremiad”<sup>1</sup>.

Having experienced its apex in the colony of Massachusetts in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, the “jeremiad” had as its main themes the lamenting about society’s decay, announcement of an impending doom and the summoning of the true faithful to permanent surveillance in order to assure salvation. Its specificity resides in the strong tone of alert about the certainty and imminence of the reckoning day, when those who fell in sin and degeneration shall receive the deserved punishment for their contribution to social and moral vices.

Originated in the prophet Jeremiah’s preaching in the Old Testament, the “jeremiad” narrative laments the current degeneration of the people, exhorts to action and alerts for the permanent zeal towards sin and evil coming from the impending apocalypse. Bercovitch (1978) explains that the American jeremiad, through supplying the ideal climate for the liberation of “tireless ‘progressive’ energies needed for the success of the [puritan] enterprise” in the Old World, became a fundamental instrument on the construction of what he understands to be a “proto-matter” of American national unity.

For Campbell, there is a relationship between puritan ideology in Colonial America and the North American foreign policy: Puritanism would be the main “identity marker” of the North American political discourse.

*In employing this mode of representation, the foreign policy texts of the postwar period recalled the seventeenth-century literary genre of the jeremiad, or political sermon, in which Puritan preaches combined searing critiques with appeals for spiritual renewal. Later to establish the interpretive framework for national identity, these exhortations drew on a European tradition of preaching the*

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<sup>1</sup> The term ‘jeremiad’ constitutes an eponym and comes from the prophet Jeremiah, remitting to the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Lamenting from the Old Testament. Bercovitch (1975, 1978), Elliot (1975, 2002) and Miller (1958) understand that the narrative structure of the Jeremiad (history review, description of state of decay and degeneration, announcement of an impending doom, call for reform or conversion, and summoning for good deeds) is commonly reproduced in North American public discourse.

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*omnipresence of sin so as to instill the desire for order, but they added a distinctively affirmative moment.* (CAMPBELL, 1998:32)

Quoting the Canadian literary critic Sacvan Bercovitch, Campbell postulates the genealogy of U.S. foreign policy discourses beyond the Cold War itself.

*The American Puritan jeremiad was the ritual of a culture on an errand – which is to say, a culture based on faith in process. Substituting teleology for hierarchy, it discarded the Old World ideal of stasis for a New World vision of the future. Its function was to create a climate of anxiety that helped release the restless “progressivist” energies required for the success of the venture. The European jeremiad thrived on anxiety, of course. Like all “traditionalist” forms of ritual, it used fear and trembling to teach acceptance of fixed social norms. But the American jeremiad went much further. It made anxiety its end as well as its means. Crisis was the social norm it sought to inculcate. The very concept of errand, after all, implied a state of unfulfillment. The future, though divinely assured, was never quite there, and the New England’s Jeremiahs set out to provide the sense of insecurity that would ensure the outcome.* (BERCOVITCH, 1978:23)

Bercovitch thus highlights the relationship between Puritanism and American national identity:

*Despite their allegiance to theocracy, the emigrant Puritans were part of the movement toward the future. Their rhetoric and vision facilitated the process of colonial growth. And in sustaining that rhetoric and vision, the latter-day Jeremiahs effectually forged a powerful vehicle of middle-class ideology: ritual of progress through consensus, a system of sacred-secular symbols for a laissez-faire creed, a “civil religion” for a people chosen to spring fully formed into the modern world – America., the first-begotten daughter of democratic capitalism, the only country that developed, from the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries, into a wholly middle-class culture.* (BERCOVITCH, 1978: 27-8)

Therefore, Campbell proposes that the linguistic system employed to mean “America” and “non-America” would have been appropriated and adapted from the “jeremiad” tradition from New England’s puritans. Its

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system of meanings, representations, symbols, myths and metaphors, whose content Bercovitch had already identified as typical of North American middle class culture, was reproduced from the foreign policy discourse so as to construct and regulate an ideologically puritan American “Self”. In this case, we should question if the “War on Terror” obeys to such a proposition. It’s necessary, however, to know beforehand a little bit more about the puritans and their lamenting sermons.

Of Calvinist confession, the puritan movement became strong during the Anglican Reform in 16<sup>th</sup> Century England, when it preached for the breaking up with both the Roman and the Anglican Church. The term “puritan” started to gain popularity in 1560 when Calvinists discontent about the “Elizabethan Agreement”<sup>2</sup> started to attack the superficiality of the religious reform. Defending the “purification” of the English Church from catholic marks, the puritans proposed to radicalize Calvinism in the Anglican liturgy.

Its main characteristic resides in the belief on the supreme authority of God over men, over which He exerts omnipotence and omnipresence. For the puritans, the words from the Scripture would be, literally, truthful and non-contestable accounts, based on which life on the terrestrial dimension should be organized. In this sense, the typological hermeneutics of the puritan linguistic system gains importance. Being the Bible history’s true account, it would be up to the individuals to interpret the signs, symbols and narratives of the Old Testament, project them to the present and thus predict God’s designs for the future<sup>3</sup>.

Accepting the notion of predestination, in which God chooses at birth the souls that will be saved and the ones that will be damned, the puritans saw themselves impelled to keep constant vigil over themselves in search for signs of “divine grace”. In other words, they sought for signs of election as a way to distinguish themselves as the “chosen people”, reason why the accounts of “divine touch” on the experiences congregation were encouraged. The self-attribution of “chosen people” led them not only to live “by the Scriptures”, but to be responsible for the Church’s purification process, since that was God’s desire.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1559, seeking to appease internal religious divisions inherited since Henry VIII, Elizabeth I reestablished the independence of the Anglican Church from Rome and her authority as head of the English Church.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Elliot (2002) describes how the three days Jonah spent on the whale’s belly, in the Old Testament, was projected into the New Testament as the three days Christ remained buried. From this typological practice, the puritans inferred the present-day duty to keep themselves praying three days before Easter.

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Promoting their duty with unpaired zeal and dedication – to eradicate habits and behaviors contrary to the Scripture, repress conduct deviations and purify the Anglican Church “from the inside out”, the puritans became an extremely combative and radical group in English society. Seeking to substitute the Episcopal line of the Anglican Church for an extremely Calvinist Presbyterianism, they reached the end of Elizabeth I reign as an isolated a repressed group, especially because of their radicalization.

Around 1630, in the center of revolutionary movements in which demands and social frustrations started to be expressed by confessional conflicts, the most radical puritans understood that the only way for England’s purification was the total breaking up and its re founding in other lands. Based on the Hebrew’s escape from Egypt to the Promised Land in Canaan narrative (Book of Exodus), John Winthrop defends the abandonment of corrupt England in search of the New Canaan, where they could raise their children under the graces of God as His elected people. In possession of authorization contract for the foundation of Massachusetts Bay Co., the group led by Winthrop was to embark in the *Arbella* towards America, initiating the “Great Immigration” (1630-1640).

Certain of their predestination as the chosen people, whose destiny was already determined by Divine Providence, they left towards the New World certain to arrive to “city on the hill” described in the Scriptures. Arriving in New England, they founded the colony later to originate the city of Boston. Isolated by the distance and blessed by the lack of interest from the Crown, the puritans could, then, promote the spiritual purification they could not in their homeland. In this sense, they implemented a real theocracy in which the clergy had great influence on political, social and religious organization, allowing Puritanism to develop in fruitful soil, imposing rigid norms for the moral and social control of the community.

The feeling of “predestination” and of “chosen people” was so intense and generated such expectations and anxiety that the first great “jeremiad” was proclaimed still on the *Arbella*. Facing the harsh crossing of the Atlantic and dispirited with doubt and uncertainties about what awaited them in the New World, the faithful led by Winthrop needed comfort and reassurance about reality and themselves. Resorting to typological hermeneutics, Winthrop appropriates the biblical narrative of the Hebrew’s exodus from Egypt and adapts it to the migration of the puritans to New England. Resorting to images, metaphors and analogies of deep resonance in the puritan imaginary, Winthrop builds a narrative of reassurance of the predestination, the Covenant with God, the call to the puritans sent by “Divine Providence” for the foundation of a kingdom of virtue in a “land

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emanating milk and honey” just as Canaan. After sacrifices and probations, the safe arrival of *Arbella* was conceived as a sign of the Divine covenant, of their own status of “chosen people” and thus their calling towards building a “city on the hill” where the salvation of their souls would be guaranteed.

The first decades of community life went by under constant reaffirming of this myth through the circulation and consolidation of the “jeremiad” discourse. Among the main themes of the discourse were the covenant with God, the puritan predestination, the analogy between New England and New Zion (or New Jerusalem), the probation and sacrifice, that would assure the soul’s salvation in Judgment Day, the interpretation of physical phenomena as signs of divine grace, the importance of work, vigilance and prosperity for the continuation of the blessing, the imperative of a life of simplicity and virtue in strict obedience to the Scriptures’ laws and the mission of the elected to give the world the example as the chosen people. The aim was to foment the community’s union around puritan values, to provide norms of behavior for the public and particular sphere, to denounce relapses or deviations, to demand conversion and the overcoming of doubts and anxieties.

According to Murphy’s (1990:283) characterization, the “jeremiad” promoted the social control as it demanded reassurance from audiences – and not questioning – of the dominant structures. At the same time as it created anxieties, fear and uncertainty, it gave comfort, relief and certainty as it called the faithful to action, vigilance and zeal. Its paradox is that it allowed the individuals to give meaning to reality and themselves only as long as there was danger or adversity. In a situation of “normality”, its articulation would fail. Thus, the “jeremiad” discourse revealed itself so effective for the control and discipline of the social body that its practice became institutionalized. Between 1634 and 1834, the opening ceremony of the General Court of Massachusetts was inaugurated with a “jeremiad” sermon.

The structure sustaining the articulation of meanings in a stable chain depends on the fixation of the of the puritan identity’s representation as the “people chosen by God”. The social body only gains suture and internal cohesion appearance while the “jeremiad” discourse is able to sustain the floating meaning “we” as representative, through the logic of equivalence, to the puritan settlers, the election, the predestination, the Scriptures’ laws, the mission dictated by God, the “city on the hill” etc. Through the logic of difference, it posits itself in cross opposition to Catholics and Anglicans in general, to the English Church, to the Old World, to the corrupt and degenerate life, the damning of the soul etc.

Starting the identification of the subjects’ modes of presupposition, predication and positioning, it becomes almost unnecessary to highlight the strong theological content of the system of meanings employed here: the puritans imagined themselves as a powerful army commissioned by God to

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fight and defeat the Antichrist and thus prepare the world for the “Second Coming“, when Christ will put forth the Final Judgment, condemning the unfaithful, corrupt and degenerate to damnation and confirming salvation to the elected, blessed, faithful, converted, pure and vigilant. For the speech to make sense, it is necessary to presuppose a reality full of anxiety and facing clear and present danger.

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Bercovitch (1978) highlights the implications of the “jeremiads” for the processes of American national identity construction. By employing absolutes on the sustaining of its system of meanings – good vs. evil, vigilance vs. damnation, faith vs. fall, cohesion vs. degeneration, the discourse prints onto those first communities in Massachusetts – which decades later would propel the foundation of a new nation – the mark of an identity forged on anxiety, the tension of being the “beacon of the world”, the impossibility of questioning the certainty of the mission given by God, the permanent vigilance not to depart from path of the elected, the imperative of maintaining cohesion and uniformity at all costs. The constant reassurance of covenant with God implies the almost impossibility of self-criticism, of questioning the apocalyptic vision of history and the revision of mission predicted for the United States.

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The predication of reality and the subjects in absolute and excluding terms, besides the presupposition of the existence of an intolerant God, rigorous on the punishment of deviations, creator of probations and tests, and that gives the world an apocalyptic end, builds up a very rigid feeling of mythological-religious belonging. At the same time such configurations of meanings normalize an essentially theocratic political and social structure, what will profoundly mark the norms that will rule puritan life in the colonies. For Bercovitch (1978), it is the beginning of a process of construction of the American national identity.

In relation to its narrative grammar, the “jeremiad” attributes the puritans with the role of Subject in the plot, due to their alliance with God and the commitment to purify the world and convert the unfaithful. Elected and blessed, they will make from the “city on the hill” the “beacon of the world” for salvation on Judgment Day. Obstacles, threats, probations or difficulties are expected, and their overcoming is proof of “divine touch”. Their mission is certain, since it was predetermined by “Divine Providence”, thus refusing critic or refusal.



Campbell’s reference to a speech by President Bush during the Gulf War in 1991 makes sense, therefore: “Over the course of existence of a nation, we are called forth to define who we are and what do we believe in” (BUSH apud Campbell, 1998: 12). For Campbell, the connection proposed by George Bush between American national identity and the threat indicates

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exactly the importance of subjectivity on the articulation of the dangerous situation. Being an unaccomplished entity, the State engages in a process of permanent reproduction, seeking situations in which they are exposed to the outside/external/foreigner/Other in order to be able to reaffirm that which belongs to the inside/internal/national/Self. Through foreign policy, such privileged arena of contacts between borders, the State employs fear discourses to convert the external into a threat and thus reassure its moral and spatial borders and stabilize its own identity.

According to Campbell (1998:13), “the constant articulation of danger through foreign policy is, therefore, not a threat for the identity or existence of the State, but its possible condition”. Through a constant articulation of threat and making of “Otherness”, the state seeks out and constructs its own legitimacy. Considering, however, that threats as well as the identities are never fixed, the state needs to continue to rearticulate and rewrite its domain and space. In this sense, rewriting should be understood as the attempt to present as permanent that which is contingent. And, in the case of the United States, an imagined community *par excellence*, it is the writing of a puritan national identity.

**5. The discourse of Americanness in U.S. foreign policy practices**

As suggested by Laclau (1996), the identity is constituted based in difference relations toward an “Other”, that, in its turn, establishes the borders of the “Self” under construction. The “Other” must, necessarily, become a signifier for threat, chaos, instability and negativity in order to allow the articulation of the “Self” as a signifier for security, order, stability and positivity. In this sense, the “War on Terror” strategy is to construct a reality based in representations and meanings ruled by dichotomous relationships, whose positive poles are attributed to America and the Americans. Their identities, interests and behaviors are presented as self-evident when put in relation to their necessary opposites, articulated by discourse as being terrorists, tyrants, dictators, barbarians and evil. We see, therefore, a discourse that is basically self-referential: a discourse articulated by Americans about America and Americans in opposition to non-America and non-Americans.

As pointed-out by Passavant and Dean (2002), the discourse on Americanness (re)produced by the “War on Terror” attempts to build borders, to inscribe as permanent a contingent identity and to claim for the state an exclusive and privileged role in overcoming of the 9/11 crisis. The discourse draws a borderline in the world, putting the United States and, consequently, the American society (as well as its members and values) in the positive pole

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in relation to the “Other” which then functions as the negative pole that gives content to the American “Self”.

In this sense, the evocation of the “borderline” between “us” and “them” and the claim that neutrality is impossible only reaffirm the arbitrary, excluding, authoritarian and disciplining nature of the political practices constructed by this discourse. In effect, the affirmation that “who is not on the United States’ side would automatically be against it” translates the impossibility of accepting alternative practices not aligned with the world’s representation in the terms articulated by the “War on Terror”.

The situation becomes even twisted if we consider how America and Americans are signified as agents of the world’s liberation and transformation. Alluding to an American higher moral responsibility to itself and the world, fruit of a transcendental call (a mission given by God to its chosen people or a call from History itself), the “War on Terror” prohibits questioning, contestation, doubt or criticism. In fact, because it is a transcendental attribution, its understanding would be out of reach for human comprehension.

As correctly observed by Nabers (2009), the process of (re)construction of the senses broken by 9/11 was only possible with the consolidation of a discourse able to agglutinate the multiple and varied elements dispersed on the social field around a unique chain of equivalences that is constituted in opposition to what is external to it. The “War on Terror”, as it constructs the “Other” as an antagonistic force, assures and legitimates the meaning of national identity based on strategies of dissemination of fear and anxiety towards this same “Other”. In a way, the American “Self”, to be restored, demanded the construction of a non-American “Other”. Here we remember Schmitt (1972), to whom the opposition between friend and foe constitutes the essence of politics; reason why, we understand, the discourse constructs its truth in opposition to the enemy’s truth.

We observe, therefore, a strategy of signification of America as a subject gifted with a unique and special condition in relation to the other societies, the “land of freedom”, especially as compared to societies characterized by the “lack of freedom”. The predominance of the “freedom” signifier is not surprising, as it is capable of structuring discourse and present America as the only possible alternative in a world where threat is real and lurks ahead. Through the dissemination of such meanings, the “War on Terror” reveals itself capable of determining and normalizing as appropriate and acceptable certain policies in reaction to the terrorist acts as it completely depoliticizes them. Resorting to Stuart Hall (1988), we are facing a discourse that was able to operate a real change on the North American society’s common sense.

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The fact is that immediately after 9/11, the “War on Terror” was already taking over the language and symbolism proper of the representation of war: the description of the attacks as “acts of war”, the designation of the area around the towers’ wreckages as a “battlefield”, the almost immediate classification of the dead as “war casualties”, the issuance of war medals to the military killed on the Pentagon attack etc. The normalization of the North American response to the 2001 acts was already under preparation with language, opening space for the policy of terrorism militarization to be accepted as the only one possible, converting the W. Bush government in a “war cabinet”.

Jackson (2006:167) points out two important political consequences of the articulation between terrorism and war. First, the insertion of terrorism in the specific cultural set of North American experiences with war, thus liberating a broad mass of discursive resources with deep resonance in the collective imaginary of a society so marked by national myths such as the “independence war”, the “Second Great War”, its “war heroes”, the “Cold War” etc. Second, the rapid rationalization and legitimation of a military response capable of opening the way for the obvious demand to exceptional powers traditionally restricted to times of war to the State.

Still about the discursive articulation between terrorism and war, Lawler (2001) reminds how all wars involving the participation of the United States always sought justification and legitimation in “just war” narratives. In fact, promoting a war demands a high degree of social and political consensus, and a language able to articulate the “War on Terror” to the “just war” narrative allows the construction of a degree of consensus. For this reason, the “War on Terror” discourse sought to lose its meaning as a “war of aggression” and to construct for itself a “self-defense war” representation and, therefore, of a “just war”. We can identify such a strategy in the form of a discourse that sought legitimation in international law through the articulation of “preemptive action” as according to the right of self-defense. The constants of justice and liberation of an oppressed people as the *casus belli* for the Afghanistan intervention constitutes an example of this articulation.

In another level of analysis, the representation of the terrorist acts as “acts of war” and the “War on Terror” as a “just war” refers to the symbolism of the American frontier myth<sup>4</sup>. The connection may be observed in the distribution of pamphlets of “Wanted dead or alive” type<sup>5</sup>, in the offer of rewards for information or even the capture of the terrorists and the resource

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<sup>4</sup> For the role of the frontier in the formation of American national identity, see Turner (1996). For a review of that idea, see Billington (1966). For its relation with the myth of exceptionalism, see Etulain (1999).

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to a deck of cards with the pictures of wanted Iraqi officers. Added to the representation of terrorists as dirty men who live hidden in holes in hostile and faraway lands<sup>6</sup>, besides the image of President W. Bush in cowboy boots and with a strong Texan accent, this set of representations easily evoked the rich American foundational mythology of the Wild West and the potential of its redeeming violence<sup>7</sup>.

In effect, more than a “physical” place, the myth of the frontier represents the historical struggle between “civilization” (the city) and “barbarism” (the nature of the Wild West). In search for the Pacific, the pioneer ventures into the unknown, learns to understand nature, applies his creativity and strength of will to conquer it and therefore survive. According to the dominant understandings about this myth, America is constructed by the pioneer coming from the Old World who, arriving in the “wilderness” of the frontier, not only imposes his will over nature, transforming and dominating it, but also purifies it opening way for progress and civilization of which he’s the main agent.

In this sense, the myth of the frontier melds with another important narrative identified here: the one of America as the agent of History, responsible for and in charge of bringing progress and modernization to the world. In fact, it is the myth about the role of America in historical clash between “civilization” and “barbarism”, that posits the United States as the guiding nation by the irresistible force of History and incumbent with the mission of promoting modernization of the primitive and savage peoples.

The certainty about America’s mission becomes especially visible in the form with which the “War on Terror” is predicated with certain victory: it might take long, but it will come for sure. It is illustrative how the use of unconditional future marks the impossibility of another result other than victory. Thus, the use of an unequivocal language of the “we shall prevail”, “we shall be successful”, “terror shall be defeated”, “we shall prevail over

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<sup>5</sup> The TV show ‘*America’s Most Wanted*’, broadcast weekly by the Fox network, adapted its format for a special edition titled ‘*Most Wanted Terrorists*’. Equally worth of note is the list of terrorists wanted by the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI): ‘Most Wanted Terrorists’. Available at: <http://www.fbi.gov/wanted/terrorists/fugitives.htm>. Access in April 20 2009.

<sup>6</sup> In this sense, the following phrase by President W. Bush over the Afghanistan campaign is exemplary: ‘*We will smoke them out of their holes*’. Camp David Pronouncement, September 15 2001. Available at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/topical/pol/terror/>. Access in: April 20 2001

<sup>7</sup> For the reinterpretation of the frontier thesis articulated with the myth of redemption through violence, see Slotkin (1973). For the persistence of the thesis on the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, see Slotkin (1998).

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evil” type doesn’t leave space for doubts or dissidence over the final result, despite the uncertain chronogram. The certainty of victory overlaps the uncertainty over the war’s duration.

In the field of the difference conversion into “Otherness”, it is necessary to highlight how discourse constructs a representation of America as an inherently benevolent subject in a world that is essentially evil. For Hughes (2003:154), it is the “cult of innocence” characteristic of North American discourse. In fact, the history of North American foreign policy is full of enunciations representing the United States as a young, pure and innocent nation, untouched by the selfish power and self-destructive power relations that ruled the behavior of European potencies. In this sense, from the “George Washington’s Farewell Pronouncement” of 1796 to the Bush Doctrine, the resource to a language construction of an innocent, benevolent and noble-minded America, seeking to survive and serve as an example in a malevolent, damned, perverted and amoral world is visible. It is a discursive regularity on the signification of its external motivations as unclad of self-interest or the *realpolitik*’s logic the American discourse attributes to other nations.

The fact is the representation of the North American society as a “victim” of “coward attacks” and “evil acts” sends in an inescapable way to binary constructions opposing an “innocent” and “victim” nation to a necessarily “guilty” and “evil” terrorism. This dichotomous representation rescues and adapts old narratives and symbols that once more conduct to the frontier mythology: the fight between “good guys and bad guys”, so characteristic of westerns. The “good guy”, incarnated by the courageous hero in a white hat, with a firm character and pure heart, always ready for sacrifice in defense of what is good and right. To confront him comes the “bad guy”: a corrupted man in black hat, of ragged and dirty appearance, unshaved beard and uncombed hair, treacherous, selfish and coward, willing to go all the way in order to get what he wants.

In this classical representation of the fight between “good” and “evil”, language is employed to trace a clear line between the American “Self” and the terrorist “Other”. The representation of Americans as essentially “pure”, “innocent”, “benevolent” and “altruists” necessarily transforms the terrorists into “corrupted”, “villains”, “bad” and “selfish”. The strategy produces the signification that all the Americans and America do is morally good and right, while, because of the opposition to what is “good”, all the terrorists and terrorism do is wrong and evil. As a consequence, we have a reality that does not allow for alternative explanations for the terrorists’ behavior other than their “evil” nature.

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As Murphy (2003:616) observes, this kind of discourse rationalizes the terrorist attacks as a product of malevolent, sick and inhuman bent. “They did what they did because it is their nature”, repeats Murphy. Such an articulation presents terrorists as basically inhuman figures, acting out of pure and simple irrationality, passions, hatred and violence. This articulation is an example of the “Otherness” essentialization that pushes it to nature’s dimension and outside of humanity. Simultaneously, it depoliticizes, demonizes and dehumanizes any motivation that could make sense for the attacks. As a consequence, we have the essentialization of 9/11 as product of evil, what excludes it from comprehension, dialogue or negotiation. The repetition of expressions such as “evil acts”, “today we have seen evil” and “the worst of human nature” opens way for the normalization of a violent policy of eradication and purification of the malevolent and animal character of the terrorists, something essential to legitimize the “War on Terror”.

In effect, the “War on Terror” was able to adapt national mythology to create the conditions of possibility for its violence practices. Already feeding from the “Manifest Destiny”<sup>8</sup>, the “White Man’s Burden” narrative<sup>9</sup>, the frontier and the call of History’s symbolism, the “War on Terror” discourse finally added the final element to its equation: the theological predestination. In a certain way mixing itself with the exceptionality myth, it finds resonance in the imaginary of a society that believes itself blessed and chosen by God to act under his name.

The use of expressions such as “divine call”, “mission” and “crusade”, the symbolism in the homage to the dead in 2001<sup>10</sup>, the extensive quotation of Psalm 23<sup>11</sup> in the national pronouncement on 9/11’s night, besides recurrent calls for prayers and blessing, reinforced the theological character – thus imperative and incontestable – of the “War on Terror”<sup>12</sup>. The religious language, even if we speculate it to be directed to the conservative

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<sup>8</sup> Term coined by John Louis O’Sullivan in 1845 to justify the annexation of Texas and Oregon.

<sup>9</sup> Title of a poem by Kipling, originally published in the McClure magazine, in 1899, in support for the North American intervention and occupation of the Philippines.

<sup>10</sup> 14 September 2001 was declared by the President as the ‘National Day of Prayers and Remembering’. Its symbolical apex took place in the religious ceremony in the National Cathedral, in Washington. According to Jackson (2006:185), the place, occasion, rhetoric and military rites that dominated the ceremony made it a real ‘call to arms’ for a religious war.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.’

<sup>12</sup> For a broad study on the construction of wars as ‘crusades’, see Alkopher (2005).

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electorate of the South that composed the base of W. Bush's election, has an undeniable appeal to other sectors and segments due to its easy decoding into the lines of the plot of "good guys versus bad guys". It is the signification of America according to the "jeremiad".

In terms of implications for the political-strategic sphere of North American foreign affairs since 2001, what first calls our attention is the way through which the "War on Terror" dislocated the sense of strategic action from the field of calculus and adequacy between means and ends for the theological field of intersection between monotheistic faith and monolithic truth. The use of a language rich in religious references, metaphors and symbols – essentially from the Judeo-Christian tradition – signals the ideological content reproduced by that discourse: the inscription of the United States as a nation elected by God. According Der Derian's observation (2003), this identification makes the strategy recur to inspiration and revelation instead of reason and analysis.

In effect, such a particularity makes the North American foreign policy to assume the characteristics of a project that seeks to recreate the world in the image of puritan America. The floating of signifier, the modes of presupposition, predication and positioning of the subject, the narrative grammar similar to the "jeremiads", allows for the "balance of power" to be decoded as "global suzerainty" and "peace" as "endless war", observes Der Derian (2003:21).

Another implication resides in the form through which the "War on Terror" feeds from articulations and the self-attribution of ethical, technological and military superiority towards the rest of the world. Repeated articulations about the United States' leading role in the production of the international order, its role as agent of superior and irresistible forces, the self-celebrating language of its military power, besides the representations of America as a "force of good in battle against evil", "cradle of freedom", "defender of principles and values valid for all individuals" etc, indicate the myth of the extremely benevolent foreign policy, that is just, ethically superior and, therefore, infallible and immune to criticism.

In this sense, as we observe how the discourse over the "War on Terror" reproduces, in general terms, the representations, meanings, narratives and symbols of the puritan sermons of Colonial America, we must recognize that we are facing a discursive formation of great reach, whose important political implication is the inscription of the meaning of American national identity – that is, Americanness – as puritan. The practices of foreign policy, thus, create, reproduce and naturalize an identity of puritan traits: a Christian and exceptional nation, unique in the world, an elected people, agent of History, promoter of civilization, progress and modernity, with a

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moral responsibility for itself and the world by divine attribution, depository of principles and values defined by God and, therefore, true and universal, a nation producer of freedom and force of order and stabilization in a world of chaos and uncertainty.

## 6. Conclusion

James Der Derian (2002) once observed how it is not the rational calculation of interests that makes us go to war. We make war for what we see, perceive, portrait, imagine and speak of the others', he claims (2002:185). Wars are made possible by the ways 'we construct difference in relation to others and similarity among ourselves through representations'.

In this sense, W. Bush's 'dividing line' was not territorial or spatial *per se*, as if delimiting a border dispute between two sovereign national entities, but an imaginary line that evoked the constant and mutual production of differences between who is on one side of the line and who is on the other. This 'dividing line' reaffirms the claim of foreign policy as a social practice for (re)producing national identity. Discourses arising from the 'dividing line' are the ones that construct the conditions of possibility for foreign policy decisions that convert difference into 'Otherness'.

This is exactly how we must understand the 'War on Terror': a social practice through which the state takes the exclusive role of representing the national community as it engaged in a never-ending process of production of differences faced by an external 'Other'. Acting in preservation the domestic body, statements of foreign policy construct an 'Other' that must be repelled, tries to universalize a specific world view, rewrites the meaning of the collectivity, disciplines internal behavior, silences dissent, and punishes deviations.

With the destabilization of the dominant discourses, the "intelligibility grids" of America society were undone: "Who are we?"; "Where are we?"; "Where are we going to?". The discourse of the "War on Terror", in trying to recompose the dominant systems of signification, worked as a response to the crisis opened by 9/11. In effect, it was a discourse that offered intelligibility to the post-9/11 reality. An American discourse about Americans and America capable of producing and disseminating a set of representations and meanings that became dominant in the attribution of meaning to Americanness and non-Americanness at that moment.

In establishing dislocated meanings, the "War on Terror" discourse also constructed the conditions of possibility for legitimating norms, institutions, costumes and behaviors unconceivable up to then. The political changes that followed were accepted as legitimate, natural and fruit of common sense due to the re-articulation of the meanings of "Americanness".

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More precisely, they were perceived as *the* only acceptable. It was, therefore, power in its purest form: the power that excludes alternatives from the borders of possibility.

Besides that, in resorting to a set of meanings and representations characteristic of the typical puritan sermon, the “jeremiad”, appropriating and adapting them to the 9/11 context, the discourse of the “War on Terror” reproduces very specific ideological contents, of puritan genealogy. The use of explicitly apocalyptic and biblical language, the representation of reality as the clash between “good” and “evil”, in which America acts guided by the hand of History, of progress and modernity, the signification of terrorism as an “imminent threat”, capable of destructing not only America, the world itself, the rationalization of the need for “continuous and permanent alert”, besides the reproduction of puritan narratives of the “elected people”, “commissioned” to being the “moral guide” to the rest of the world – the “city on the hill” illuminating the way for salvation, all points to the working of a discursive formation that works to, simultaneously, inspire comfort and hope and to establish control, order and cohesion.

Our article sought to contribute to the identification of discursive formation of long duration – that we here call the “Americanness discourse” – that, as we understand, seeks to articulate and impose an ideologically puritan American national identity. Notwithstanding isolated attempts to compare terrorist fight campaign discourses and security doctrines of different North American governments<sup>13</sup>, there haven’t been any propositions of tracing the genealogy of such discourses. We observed how these articulations travel through long periods, being appropriated, adapted and used continuously, from Harry Truman to John F. Kennedy<sup>14</sup>, from Ronald Reagan<sup>15</sup> to Bill Clinton<sup>16</sup>, from W. Bush to Rudy Giuliani, John McCain and Sarah Palin<sup>17</sup>, we are led to suggest the existence of a discursive formation that is previous

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<sup>13</sup> See Jackson (2006), Sjöstedt (2007) and Winkler (2006).

<sup>14</sup> Kennedy made frequent use of the ‘city on the hill’ and frontier mythologies. See Murphy (1990).

<sup>15</sup> Reagan describes the United States as the ‘city on the hill’ in his farewell speech to the nation.

<sup>16</sup> Adapting the elected people in a covenant with God, Clinton recycles it into the ‘New Alliance’.

<sup>17</sup> In the Republican National Convention of 2008, Giuliani and McCain spoke of the ‘American mission’ of being the ‘city on the hill’. Palin used the expression on the debate among candidates for the vice-presidency.

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to the political constitution of the United States of America<sup>18</sup> itself, that seeks to inscribe national identity as puritan one<sup>7</sup>.

### Notes

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<sup>18</sup> Such an affirmation mustn't be understood as our recognition over the existence of a solid, uniform, continuous and permanent formation on the North American political debate. On the contrary, we want to highlight its notable capacity for adaptation, transformation and resistance to crises and ruptures.

<sup>1</sup> Bacevich (2004), Boggs (2003), Booth and Dune (2002), Callinicos (2003), Cole (2003), Hiro (2002), Mahajan (2003), Malik (2003), Scheuer (2005), Woodward (2002).

<sup>2</sup> Jackson (2005), Nabers (2009).

<sup>3</sup> Collins and Glover (2002), Croft (2006), Hansen (2006), Jenkins (2003), Leeman (1991), Murphy (2003), Sjöstedt (2007), Silberstein (2002), Zulaika and Douglas (1996).

<sup>4</sup> There are several methods of discursive analysis, although none is necessarily more correct or valid than the other. In fact, one might argue that the choice depends more on the research problematique or the available sample than anything else. See Fairclough (2003), Jaworski and Coupland (1999), Rogers (2004), Shiffrin (1994), Tannen *et al.* (2003), Van Dijk (1997), Wodak and Meyer (2001).

<sup>5</sup> Term used by Neumann (HANSEN, 2006:225) to designate the main texts composing a discourse.

<sup>6</sup> For the 'War on Terror': the 9/11 presidential speech; the 20 September 2001 presidential speech; the 7 October 2001 presidential speech, announcing the invasion of Afghanistan; the 29 January 2002 'State of the Union' address, also known as the 'Axis of Evil' speech; the 1 June 2002 presidential speech, also known as the 'West Point Speech'; and the 'National Security Strategy' of 2002. For the 'Jeremiad': 'Errand into the Wilderness', from Samuel Danforth (1671) and 'Model of Christian Charity' from John Winthrop (1630). After collecting a dozen texts, we opted for following Bercovitch's (1978) and Elliot's (2002) recommendation to take the above mentioned pieces as the most representative of the 'Jeremiad' genre.

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**Erica Simone Almeida Resende** received her PhD in Political Science from the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil in 2009. The title of her dissertation is: 'Americaness, Puritanism and Foreign Policy: constructing national identity and (re)producing Puritan ideology in discursive practices of U.S. foreign policy'.