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The opening ceremonies of the 2002 Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City featured, among the nods to Utah Native Americans and culturally diverse musicians, a U.S. flag disinterred from the carnage of the World Trade Center. The cause of some initial discomfort to officials of the International Olympic Committee, the wounded flag did make it to the February 8 event, carried into the stadium before a hushed crowd of 55,000. Too fragile to fly, this new symbol of global unity bore the hurt of all civilized nations. Yielded from the ground of ontological innocence, a space of victims and heroes, the flag arose phoenixlike from the ashes. Such are the conditions under which the catastrophe—encoded most simply as 911—has continued to circulate. The Olympic episode would stand as a banner for international cooperation, even as one nation exercised a supreme unilateralism that was reconciled with calls for infinite retribution. From Ground Zero, a new era dawned as the flag moved from the fallen global pinnacle to the world's level playing field. Henceforth, it was presumed, everything would be different. Whatever was building before that day—especially doubt at the fairness at the world's field—would have to be forgotten. For those of a critical disposition, the urgency would seem to be to remind the public of those other times, of those prior issues that remain.

So, the Dickensian terms of 911 have emerged: the best of times, the worst of times; everything has changed, nothing has changed. Whatever the bleak remnants of 911, it continues to stand as a Manichean frame of all-or-nothing that can only wreak havoc on the Left, which is spurred to imagine its own conditions of public access as existing in a state of emergency. To accept that everything is now different invites amnesia but also manacles the future to official crisis management. Simple refusal of these declared new times is, at best, unnewsworthy, and at worst, self-anesthetizing to what it is now possible to say. The cult of the news that raises the specter of public access clashes with those very critical traditions that would ennoble the voices of opposition. The results are bound to be disorienting and self-censorious to radical intervention long after the dust has settled. Whatever historical and political economic analysis that can be brought to bear on the straitjacket of 911 as an event needs to be coupled with an unhealing of the conditions under which the Left intervenes. This special issue of

*Social Text* is devoted to opening up both the analysis and the interventions, to complicate the terms of good and evil, under the shadow of which we are supposed to think our world and operate within it. Our contribution comes amid many journals of leftist tendency that have had to grapple with the problem of publishing after the fact under the presumption of continued urgency to complicate reductive terms of public reception.

Manichean narratives are always tempting because they give us a false sense of moral security, wrapping us in a narcissistic cocoon, allowing us to digest the indigestible, to assimilate the unacceptable. Within this discourse, an orderly and peaceful world has been subjected to arbitrary and irrational attack, and our own regenerative violence will restore the everyday order of the world “before the fall,” a prelapsarian order for which the “American Nation” is already nostalgic. The desire to narrate events in this manner is an understandable response in the wake of a traumatic crisis, but it is also our civic responsibility to be skeptical about such ahistorical narratives. Bin Laden, fingered so hastily as the incarnation of evil, was, as we know, at one point recruited and supported by the United States. In the 1980s, government-sponsored centers in Brooklyn recruited Muslim fundamentalists to fight the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. At that time, bin Laden was on the good side of the Manichean divide. Our government, as in the *Rambo* imaginary of the day, called bin Laden and his fellow *moujadheen* “freedom fighters.”<sup>1</sup>

Since World War II, U.S. foreign policy has repeatedly used Muslim fundamentalists against both communism and progressive forms of nationalism, recruiting fundamentalist allies among the Muslim Brothers in Egypt against Nasser, using the *Jamat-i-Islam* against Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, and encouraging bin Laden against the secular communist Muhamed Najibullah in Afghanistan. At the time of the Gulf War, George W. Bush’s father offered us a similar discourse about another incarnation of evil, Saddam Hussein, who had previously been the ally of American policy and the darling of U.S., British, and German corporations. After his fateful mistake of invading Kuwait, Hussein was transformed into a reincarnation of Hitler with the rapidity with which new enemies for “Hate Week” were fabricated in George Orwell’s *1984*. The short-lived Office of Strategic Influence, developed for the younger Bush’s war, was meant to spread disinformation through foreign news media until it was slain by domestic editorial cartoons.<sup>2</sup> Manichean discourses, then, are all subject to these quick reversals of evaluation.

The discourse of “loss of innocence” is also disturbing, for it elides a primal U.S. colonial legacy: to wit, the earlier home-based crimes committed against Native Americans, African Americans, and others. The idea that “we” have only now lost our innocence implies a privileged, dominant point

of view. African Americans, for example, have long been the victims of homegrown horror: slavery, lynching, and the terrorism of the Ku Klux Klan. Indeed, we need an expanded and more precise definition of terrorism, one that also includes state terrorism and vigilante terrorism. The idea of an only-now-lost innocence is rooted in deafness not only to the dynamics of U.S. history but also to the consequences of U.S. foreign policy in the world. Implicitly, a sense of innocence is premised on the privilege of not knowing what has been done in “our” name. It is one thing for citizens of an isolated island that exercises no power in the world to be ignorant of that world, but it is inexcusable for the citizens of a powerful nation-state whose weight and pressure are felt around the world to be ignorant of the very world being dominated. (In answer to the question “Why do they hate us?” the joke goes that they hate us because we don’t even know why they hate us.) Narratives of innocence simply reproduce the very kind of thinking and acting that has caused widespread resentment of the United States and its unilateral and self-serving interventions around the world—resentment on which death cults like that of bin Laden can build and thrive.

At the same time, the imperial policies of the United States—its oil-driven hegemony in the Gulf, its murderous sanctions on Iraq, its blind support for Israeli policies—do not turn the 911 terrorists into legitimate avengers of the crimes committed toward populations in the “Third World” in general. While we can share the criticism of U.S. foreign policy and even explain the causes of a widespread frustration against U.S. and transnational corporations, we must articulate a space for a forceful critique that would also address such a fundamentalist worldview. Terrorist crimes do not avenge other crimes; they simply add more crimes. A fundamentalist Manichean discourse projects a righteous East pitted against a corrupt and infidel West. Bin Ladenist discourse is a demonizing discourse that turns all Jews, Christians, Buddhists, and even Muslims who do not share his interpretation of Islam into infidels worthy of death. Such demonizing and reductivist discourses are shared, we must insist, by all fundamentalist movements, whether they be Muslim, Christian, Jewish, or Hindu. The geography of Islam cannot be singled out as the only space that produces fundamentalism. Bin Ladenism, furthermore, has posed a serious threat not only for non-Muslims around the world but also for the human rights and civil rights of Muslim citizens themselves in the Arab/Muslim world, in the United States, and elsewhere. Like Christian and other versions of fundamentalism, bin Ladenism’s long-term goal is ultimately a religious war that would universalize its Truth. We who have been concerned with multicultural vision and minority rights must at the same time deplore not simply acts of terror, but *all* monological world visions and political philosophies.

The Muslim fundamentalist vision, furthermore, does not represent all Muslims or the multilayered culture of Islamic civilization. In fact, it is at odds with the practice of multiculturalism *avant la lettre* that has prevailed, for the most part, under the auspices of Islam. Pitting Western modernity against Eastern fundamentalist traditionalism is therefore another false binary. This extremist strain that has nominated itself to speak on behalf of all Muslims is very much a product of modernity.<sup>3</sup> Also, far from a natural and ancient blood feud, Jewish-Arab hostility is an invention of the past century. Muslims and Jews were oppressed together during the Spanish Inquisition, and subjected together to forced conversion and expulsion. The Ottoman Empire welcomed Jews both after the Inquisition in 1492 and with the onset of the Holocaust in the late 1930s. In fact, the Holocaust took place in the modern Christian West, never in the Islamic East. Unlike the tolerant Islamic tradition, which has valued Christians and Jews as protected minorities representing the “people of the book,” bin Laden’s discourse demonizes both Christians and Jews as infidels, creating a new tradition produced within modernity.<sup>4</sup> This is why it is wrong to refer to his ideas as “medieval,” a word that is itself a Eurocentric designation, for what was in Europe the so-called Dark Ages was for Islam and for Judaism the height of civilizational creativity.

Reading Islamic civilization ahistorically and essentializing Muslims amount to a neoimperial fundamentalism incapable of forming complex discourses and policies. Yet when the fight against U.S. global dominance is coupled with an antidemocratic world vision, the Left is placed on the horns of a terrible dilemma. Any fundamentalist world vision, even when fighting against globalization or neoimperialism, does not make available the solidarities upon which the Left has historically depended or the transnational coalitions that the antiglobalization movement has pursued. At issue, then, is not only bin Ladenist terrorism but also the world order it seeks to create. At the risk of sounding nostalgic, one can safely say that there ain’t no Che Guevara in that cave.

Fighting neoimperial violence with blind terrorism is not only unjust but counterproductive. Terrorist attacks tend to harden attitudes and legitimize repression. In the wake of 911, the antiglobalization movement, which was gaining momentum, has been placed on the defensive. When the World Economic Forum fled Davos, Switzerland, for the safer shores of Manhattan for its January 2002 meetings, its million-dollar diners were welcomed as citizens of the world. Protesters to the parties were portrayed as outsiders, regardless of where they hailed from. In the name of Ground Zero, an edict of zero tolerance mandated that not so much as spit could issue from the bodies of the demonstrators. While in the East Afghani women are liberated from their *burkhas*, at home antiglobalizers

are forcibly unmasked by police, as part of surveillance aimed at both exposing the protester's identity and depriving a political movement of its culture of theatricality. While Afghani women "gain face" by removing their veil, in what is seen as a triumph of Western modernization, protesters "lose face" by being deprived of their masks. And, as if to unveil Islam itself, pilgrims to Mecca this year had their eyes scanned so that their identities could be tracked wherever their faith might lead them. If, however, repression is a function of the magnitude of a threat, we must ask why the demonstrators in Seattle, Ottawa, Genoa, or New York are treated as if they are about to take the Winter Palace. Perhaps the mobile encampment of capital that traipses through these cities under so many aliases (WTO, G8, WEF, IMF) harbors a terror still more revolutionary.

Just as bin Ladenism makes no distinction between military and civilian targets, between the army general and the janitors working in the World Trade Center, Bush's war against terror readily substitutes a crime suspect for what he had previously taken as a legitimate national government, which is then made equivalent to the populace. In the name of war against terrorism, the Patriot Act erases legal and technical distinctions between domestic and international targets of surveillance and law enforcement in a manner that continues McCarthyite traditions. Calling the actions a war already begs the question of which antagonists are joined in battle. Although President Bush declared that we are at war, he has refused to regard the captured Taliban as prisoners of war. The same president who failed to sign the Kyoto Treaty for international cooperation regarding the global environment followed suit by flouting the Geneva Convention. If Enduring Freedom was a war, it was a war of excision, not of conquest, where territory was to be neutralized rather than appropriated. And if this is Bush's dog wagging, it is not only to displace blame for the recession (or for Enron) but also to further dispossess its own domestic victims. In meticulously orchestrated aerial maneuvers, bombing and starving the Afghan people (the latter done more indiscriminately than the former) effectively quarantined their national soil. While supposedly confirming a technological advance over the visually precise Gulf War, the bombing of Afghanistan was presented as a great cloud of dust that burned dim illumination over crackling videophones. While homeland security has been violated irrevocably, a sense of boundary is being reinstalled somewhere overseas. In contrast to the gaping visual spectacle, the choking dust and stench of death that have made the WTC site a local misery would be blown halfway around the world.

On the other hand, the quarantine of the Afghan people (while the most wanted slipped away) was twinned by the management of the anthrax mailings. Recycling old colonial tropes, the rescue operation of

Afghanistan in the name of veiled innocents finds an uncomfortable double in the operational fingerprints of domestic terror in the name of unborn innocents. Rescue narratives of raped lands and women continue to save a foreign and domestic policy of business as usual. While the airborne parcels were touted as humanitarian even as they obstructed other deliveries, the airborne spores seem to have floated into an investigational limbo. The terrorizing of women and abortion clinics by U.S. Christian fundamentalists is not a cause for the “American Nation” to mobilize its surveillance profiling and its antiterror machinery. There, the “axis of evil” discourse is disappeared.

The most publicly pursued lines of conspiracy are not domestic right-wing terrorist networks but unpatriotic academics. The vague insinuations by America’s religious fundamentalists that postmodern relativism lay behind the attacks were quickly aired and dropped. The charges of the American Council of Trustees and Alumni, whose political sponsors are Lynne Cheney and Joe Lieberman, received more sustained attention. The council’s mission is protection of academic freedom, which it sees as threatened from within the academy by avatars of political correctness. This time, political correctness took the form of teach-ins, which to their participants may have seemed like the only beachhead against mindless unanimity available in the fall of 2001. The good trustees’ published list of intellectuals they found unwilling to defend the nation’s civilization would have been considered politically moderate before or after 911.<sup>5</sup> In this case, the emergency for the Left would be that it is elided by the term *liberal*. In publishing its lists of unpatriotic professors, the council claims to be only seeking balance, an invitation to the defamed to clear their names in the court of public opinion.

Such venues can be rather treacherous, as University of South Florida computer scientist Sami al-Arian found out after appearing on Fox network’s *O’Reilly Factor* on September 26, 2001. Professor al-Arian, active in Palestinian politics in the United States, founded an Islamic think tank, the World Islamic Studies Enterprise, Inc., that was investigated and cleared by the FBI as a front for international terror. The show’s host, Bill O’Reilly, aggressively accused al-Arian of terrorist links and concluded by threatening to follow the professor wherever he went.<sup>6</sup> The next day, Dr. al-Arian began receiving death threats at work, and within two months another body of trustees, the board at the University of South Florida, voted twelve to one to fire the tenured professor for disrupting the business of the university. Al-Arian, it seemed, would not survive public access. His case is but the clearest indication that there is a converging encirclement of academia and Islam that not even the clearest speech or

most public access can prize open. With such adversaries, the freedoms in the prison house of language become yet more circumscribed.

At the same time, terror and speech are closer now than during previous witch-hunts of political correctness. The task of the Left is to come up with an antiterror stance that recognizes the issue's complexity and sees that the groups—foreign and domestic—that produce terror are linked to state policies. It is not a question of simply condemning or condoning terror, as a certain level of violence is connected to all manner of politics. The difficult path is to enter a critique of violence that doesn't project the U.S. Left into an already liberated zone, a separate realm outside such entanglements. At issue is violence against progressive mobilizations, not simply how violence is legitimated. Not all resistances to U.S. hegemony are equal.

As a collective operating out of downtown New York City, we will begin with the contradictions closest to home. Our issue opens with a piece by Stefano Harney that refuses the connotations of anarchy and terror that have now become conventional, and rereads late New York through a different political lens. Meena Alexander's poems and reflections in an interview with Lopamudra Basu on the occasions for poetry after 9/11 access an alternate sensorium for processing proximity to disaster. Images from the installation *World Views* by Sandrine Nicoletta and Yigal Nizri provide late perspectives from within the WTC. Far from Ground Zero, Ban Wang explores the durability of the area studies frame and how this bears on the framing of events. Ella Shohat's contribution, written before 9/11, suggests the durability of a global multiculturalist/transnationalist feminist critique of gender studies and area studies confinements. By focusing attention on the misogyny that underwrites terror, Zillah Eisenstein imagines a new feminist international. Muneer Ahmad shows where the present repression of Muslims in the United States joins other racist logics, and Jasbir Puar and Amit Rai link the figure of a monstrous body to the production of docile patriots. Rosalind Morris takes a longer view of the justifications of war in the face of opposition to Islamic universalism. We close the issue with a contribution by Judith Butler, who examines the discursive space under which the Left operates with respect to 9/11, and Fred Moten's close look at how the homogenization of dissent operates in our midst.

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1. *Rambo III* (1988) was set in Afghanistan.
2. Eric Schmitt and James Dao, “A ‘Damaged’ Information Office Is Declared Closed by Rumsfeld,” *New York Times*, February 26, 2002.
3. For more on this point, see, Minoo Moallem, “Whose Fundamentalism?” forthcoming in *Meridians 2* (spring 2002).
4. Ella Shohat, “Taboo Memories, Diasporic Visions: Columbus, Palestine, and Arab-Jews,” in *Performing Hybridity*, ed. May Joseph and Jennifer Natalya Fink (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).
5. The report, “Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America and What Can Be Done about It,” by Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal, can be found at the American Council of Trustees and Alumni Web site, [www.goacta.org/missionframeset.htm](http://www.goacta.org/missionframeset.htm).
6. A transcript of the interview was published in an article on al-Arian by Sharon Walsh, “Blaming the Victim: A University Vows to Fire a Tenured Professor Facing Death Threats in the Wake of September 11,” *Chronicle of Higher Education*, February 8, 2002, A10–13.