

# Preface

## Post-9/11: Thinking Critically, Thinking Dangerously

We live in troubled times and, arguably, in the twenty-first century the very fate of humanity has never been so uncertain. The sources of our troubles are both local and transnational. In such a moment we cannot separate the *study* of politics from *practice*, as “intellectual labor constitutes a social practice.”<sup>1</sup> Conceptual labor is a practice of constructing, reproducing, and performing a particular social imaginary. If successful, conceptual labor produces authoritative accounts of appropriate subjectivities and re/produces particular disciplinary practices, constructions, and ideals. Intellectuals are active agents in this enterprise of re/constructing a particular social imaginary and social order and, in the process simultaneously re/producing the disciplines or specific fields of enquiry as we know them. There is an historical character to intellectual labor,<sup>2</sup> and one of the questions it raises for me is this: What are the roles and responsibilities of the intellectual in the production of a critical theoretical scholarship on Africa in general and Africa and terrorism specifically?

What do I mean by *critical*? There is a basic meaning of critical, as something that is key, fundamental, necessary and indispensable. The other meanings of this term for intellectuals and scholarship are by no means obvious. My own use of *critical* is indebted to Marx who argued that among the tasks we face as intellectuals is necessary engagement in a “ruthless criticism of everything existing” as well as “the self-clarification of struggles and wishes of the age.”<sup>3</sup> This suggests that “we do not accept the world as we find it as being in any sense natural,”<sup>4</sup> given or somehow inevitable. Central to the task of the intellectual is the problematization of the social realities in which we exist and challenging dominant mythologies

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1 William I. Robinson, “What is Critical Globalization Studies? Intellectual Labor and Global Society,” in *Critical Globalization Studies*, eds Richard P. Appelbaum and William I. Robinson (New York: Routledge, 2003), 11.

2 *Ibid.*, 12.

3 Karl Marx’s 1844 letter to Arnold Ruge entitled, “For a Ruthless Criticism of Everything Existing,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972), 7–10.

4 Robinson, “What is Critical Globalization Studies?” 13.

and the ideological content of theories and knowledge, which are put forward as neutral, objective and ‘common sense.’<sup>5</sup>

My own work on political violence and terrorism takes a critical theoretical perspective which has a number of elements.<sup>6</sup> First, it is one that is reflexive and understands that one of the responsibilities of the intellectual is to be self-consciously aware of the relationship between the production of knowledge and its specific historical, political and material conditions, and to engage in an unrelenting critique of processes and social relations that have become normalized or are taken as natural. Related, a critical perspective historicizes, and this historical understanding enables recognition of the temporal and spatial dimensions of a field of enquiry, such as political violence and terrorism. Such a perspective rejects analyses that assume an inevitability or timelessness of a particular configuration of institutional or social power relations. Third a critical perspective seeks to de-center dominant or “common-sense” narratives by taking a standpoint that interrogates issues from “both its epicenter and the margin,”<sup>7</sup> both from the metropolitan center and from the periphery. Among critical social theorists there is a debate about whether to privilege elite or subaltern voices, perspectives and narratives. Susan George, for example, argues that in choosing our subject it is the responsibility of the intellectual to study the rich and powerful rather than, say, the poor and powerless, precisely because they are better able to mask their activities or to generate stories that become part of the dominant narrative and, thus, are more difficult to identify, study, unsettle, and contest.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, other scholars argue we have a responsibility to study voices and perspectives from the margins, the subalterns, and the “exceptions” – those who do not fit the dominant mold and are more likely to be invisible in, if not erase from, the archives. Fourth, a critical perspective is cross-disciplinary, and draws on complementary branches of knowledge production, as well as seeks to breakdown artificial barriers that unduly fragment bodies of knowledge and create disciplinary silos around knowledge production and dissemination. Fifth, a critical perspective has a self-conscious commitment to strategic transformation, and recognizes that social change emerges from social struggles and mobilization. Finally, Foucault argued that any critique of the act of construction itself gives up a construct and, in this sense a critical perspective invariably entails imagining alternative futures.

It is a cliché among critical social theorists to argue that the responsibility of the intellectual is to “speak the truth to power.” Cliché though it may be, it bears repeating. The tactics and strategy of extremist groups such as al-Qaeda

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5 *Ibid.*, 14–15.

6 Here I draw primarily on Susan George, “If You Want to Be Relevant: Advice to the Academic from a Scholar-Activist,” in *Critical Globalization Studies Reader*, 3, 5; and James Mittelman, “What is Critical Globalization Studies?” in *Critical Globalization Studies*, 24–5.

7 Mittelman, “What Is Critical Globalization Studies?” 25.

8 George, “If You Want to Be Relevant,” 9.

deliberately aim to traumatize, to engender fear and insecurity, and to expose human vulnerability and fragility. Yet, after the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks on the iconic institutions of the United States economic and military power—the twin towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon—it was not only that terrorists' activities were more fully recognized as dangerous activities, but for intellectuals, especially for those within Western academies trying to make sense of these events, critical thinking itself became treacherous.

In the dangerous, unstable in-between moment deemed “before 9/11” and “post-9/11,” James der Derian argued there was very little about it that was “safe to say”<sup>9</sup> without critical theorists being labeled as traitorous and accused of giving aid and comfort to the enemy. The danger of the moment was due both to the violence of terrorism, and what was constructed as the traitorous act of thinking critically and historically about terrorism in general and about the causes and implications of the terrorists' attacks in the United States in particular. The security discourses of 9/11 produced many myths about terrorism, which functioned to displace from memory, at least in the short term, the many historical experiences of terrorism; its contested political, methodological, epistemological and normative dimensions; and the historicity of its relationship to other forms of political violence or even other epochal events of “9/11,” such as September 11 1906 that gave rise to Mohandas Gandhi's Satyagraha or September 11 1973 that witnessed the United States supporting a *coup d'état* against the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende in Chile.

In the post-9/11 moment intellectuals were indispensable to the political and cultural project of legitimizing a military response to the 9/11 attacks. Michael Ignatieff, former professor of history and director of the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard, and now leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, was among the first to suggest that we were in a new state of exception, one which required us to suspend critical political thought altogether because 9/11 was outside the realm of the political. The “apocalyptic nihilism” of the terrorist acts, Ignatieff argued, “takes their action not only out of the realm of politics, but even out of the realm of war itself.”<sup>10</sup> As if heralding the end of political thought itself, Ignatieff depicted the moment in theological terms, and suggested the demands of the terrorist could not be conceived of in terms of politics because what they wanted, ultimately, was to achieve “the violent transformation of an irremediably sinful and unjust world.” After constructing terrorism outside of politics and critical political thought, Ignatieff was left to conclude that the outcome of this epochal and polarized battle—this crusade against evil—was inevitable. “Terror does not express a politics, but a metaphysics,” Ignatieff wrote, “a desire to give

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9 James der Derian, “9.11: Before, After and In Between,” Social Science Research Council, Brooklyn, New York, January 18 2002 [online], <[http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/der\\_derian\\_text\\_only.htm](http://essays.ssrc.org/sept11/essays/der_derian_text_only.htm)>.

10 Michael Ignatieff, “It's War – but it Doesn't have to be Dirty,” *Guardian* (October 1 2001).

ultimate meaning to time and history through ever-escalating acts of violence which culminate in a final battle between good and evil.”<sup>11</sup>

The moment “after 9/11” had profound implications for intellectuals and critical thinking. If political theorists and our thinking seemed stuck in a time warp after 9/11, there also was uncertainty about the nature of the historical and geopolitical space in which we found ourselves, and the duration of a moment that threatened to elude critical scholarly inquiry all together. When the George W. Bush administration launched what it called its “war on terror” it was said to be one without end. This timelessness generated a body of literature on “endless war” that tried to imagine what this could mean. Such a war required a conventional propaganda campaign designed to shape popular perceptions and, in the words of Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama, to “gin up” support through a politics of anger and xenophobia, producing a generalized climate of fear.<sup>12</sup> As feminist social critic Susan Faludi argued in her book *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post-9/11 America*, every crisis entails some form of storytelling to make sense of events and responses to them. For Faludi, the dominant story told in the aftermath of 9/11 invoked a national mythology of American innocence, and of “manly men” emerging to protect weak and vulnerable women both in the United States and in Afghanistan and Iraq.<sup>13</sup>

An endless “war on terror” also required a kind of “magical thinking,”<sup>14</sup> a conceptual sorcery that conjured up “a finite group of evil people who can be physically eliminated.”<sup>15</sup> It required us to accept that there was a discrete population, out there; an irreducible enemy that could be identified, classified, profiled, targeted and destroyed in the name of Western civilization. The characterization of terrorists as “barbarians,” as Bush frequently did, raised a familiar spectral character of history: Terrorists were constructed outside of reason and dialogue, and this left only one strategic recourse, a crusade to effect their absolute destruction. This magical thinking eschewed critical explorations of other more potentially productive questions such as: Why do people resort to such terrorist acts in the first place? What are appropriate political and social responses? What are the roles and responsibilities of the intellectual in moments of political crises? To think these thoughts and to imagine alternative futures to war was, in effect, to think dangerously.

In the moment after 9/11 it became both politically dangerous and intellectually unsafe to try to assess the broader historical and political meaning,

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11 *Ibid.*

12 Tim Reid, “Barack Obama urges Voters to Reject ‘Politics of Fear’ in Face of Resurgent Hillary Clinton,” *TimesOnline* (December 28 2007).

13 Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post 9/11 America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

14 David Keen, “War without End? Magic, Propaganda and the Hidden Functions of Counter-Terrorism,” *Journal of International Development*, 18 (2006), 87, 93–7.

15 *Ibid.*

however shape-shifting, of the terrorist attacks. Critical thinking about historical and contemporary forms of political violence and terrorism—or even the tactics and strategies of the Bush administration—became traitorous acts. This was the rude lesson the musical group, the Dixie Chicks, learned after a March 10 2003 concert in London, England, during which lead singer Natalie Maines said “we don’t want this war, this violence, and we’re ashamed that the President of the United States is from Texas.”<sup>16</sup> This comment made by Maines in the lead-up to the Iraq war led to a rightwing backlash; the group’s members were called unpatriotic, traitors, “Dixie sluts,” and “Saddam’s Angels.” Some radio stations banned the group’s music from playlists and supporters of the war made a public performance out of smashing Dixie Chick CDs. As noted Intellectuals and artists who tried to engage in critical thinking or offer alternative opinions were accused of giving aid and comfort to the enemy. But some intellectuals and artists did take the risk to speak the truth to power. In a democratic society, singer Merle Haggard stated, “I find it an insult for all men and women who fought and died in past wars when almost the majority of America jumped down their [Dixie Chicks] throats for voicing an opinion. It was like a verbal witch-hunt and a lynching.”<sup>17</sup> Haggard went on to write a song that was critical of the media’s reporting on the war; its last line noted, “Politicians do all the talking, soldiers pay the dues/Suddenly the war is over, that’s the news.”<sup>18</sup>

The world after 9/11, Peter McLaren argued, had been “transformed into pure intensity where to seek refuge in the sanctuary of reflection ... [was] to engage in an act of unpardonable treason, where previously silenced realities are now guaranteed never to be heard.”<sup>19</sup> Critical thinking, alternative opinions, appeals to historical understanding became suspect. We had “entered a new, Orwellian world,” John Le Carre argued, “where our personal reliability as comrades in the struggle [against terrorism] is measured by the degree to which we invoke the past to explain the present.”<sup>20</sup> The mere suggestion that we needed to be attentive to the historical context for the 9/11 atrocities was, “by implication to make excuses for them. Anyone who is with us doesn’t do that. Anyone who does is against us.”<sup>21</sup> Historical thinking and understanding, at least that which fell outside the official orthodoxy of 9/11 as unprecedented and the United States as exceptional,

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16 Maines quoted in Betty Clarke, “The Dixie Chicks: Shepherd’s Bush Empire, London,” *Guardian* (March 10 2003).

17 John Gerome, “New Merle Haggard Tune Blasts U.S. Media Coverage of Iraq War,” Associated Press (July 25 2003).

18 *Ibid.*

19 Peter McLaren, “The Dialectics of Terrorism: A Marxist Response to September 11,” *Cultural Studies – Critical Methodologies*, 2, 2 (2002): 170.

20 John Le Carre, “A War we Cannot Win,” *The Nation*, 273, 16 (2001): 15–17.

21 *Ibid.*

became criminal, subversive, unpatriotic, and even against Western civilization.<sup>22</sup> This looking-glass school of thought “teaches us to suffer reality, not to change it; to forget the past, not learn from it; to accept the future, not invent it.”<sup>23</sup> In such a world, it was not surprising that in defense of the discourse of the “war on terror,” the American Council of Trustees and Alumni called upon universities to defend (Western) civilization but, paradoxically, functioned to produce the academy as, “halls of criminal learning, impotence, amnesia and spaces where approaches to ‘resignation are required courses.’”<sup>24</sup>

At the same time as the academy was caught in the double-speak of claiming an openness to learning while censoring dissent, the United States was caught in the double-speak of supporting free speech as it used visas as a tool to harass and exclude artists and scholars with competing points of view. During the Cold War it was routine for renowned left-wing intellectuals and artists, among them British novelist Doris Lessing, Chilean poet Pablo Neruda and Colombian novelist Gabriel A. García Márquez, to be denied entry to the United States.<sup>25</sup> The list of intellectuals harassed for no other reason than that they were critical of the Bush administration’s policies in the “war on terror” or more invidious, because they were Muslim, is too long to enumerate. They include Swiss professor at Oxford University Tariq Ramadan, Turkish sociologist and journalist Haluk Gerger, Basque historian Iñaki Egaña, and former Sandinista minister of health and human rights activist Dora Maria Tellez. African Muslim intellectuals have not been spared, as the experiences of Kenyan-born political scientist Ali A. Mazrui, the Albert Schweitzer professor and director of the State University of New York-Binghamton’s Institute of Global Studies, and South African political scientist and deputy vice-chancellor of the University of Johannesburg Adam Habib attest. Mazrui was detained at Miami International Airport for seven hours on August 3 2003, and was interrogated on his views on jihad, branches of Islam, and terrorism and whether during his trip to Trinidad he spoke with any radical Islamists.<sup>26</sup> Habib was detained on October 21 2006 at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York, where he was interrogated about terrorists for seven hours and then deported back to South Africa, denying him a chance to speak at the American Association of University Professors conference as well as scheduled meetings with the World

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22 Jerry I. Martin and Anne D. Neal, “Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America, and What Can Be Done About It,” Washington, D.C., American Council of Trustees and Alumni, November 2001; and Wendy Brown, *Regulating Aversion; Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006).

23 McLaren, “The Dialectics of Terrorism,” 170.

24 See Eduardo Galeano, *Upside Down: A Primer for the Looking-Glass World* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000), 8.

25 Editorial, “Visas and Speech,” *New York Times* online (September 17 2009).

26 Caryle Murphy, “Intense Airport Scrutiny Angers Muslim Travelers,” *Washington Post* online (September 14 2003).

Bank, the Center for Disease Control and the National Institute of Health.<sup>27</sup> Subsequently Habib's wife Fatima and their children, eight-year-old Zidaan and eleven-year-old Irfan, had their visas revoked and were banned from entering the United States, where the children had been accepted to participate in the People to People Ambassador Program, first established by President Dwight Eisenhower to promote global understanding. The Department of Homeland Security offered vague claims about "terrorism-related" concerns to justify the detention and deportation of Habib, but only after national and international scrutiny raised questions.<sup>28</sup> The American Civil Liberties Union joined with various academic and professional associations on behalf of these intellectuals and filed a lawsuit against using visas for "ideological exclusions."<sup>29</sup>

In such a politically and conceptually polarized universe, as post-9/11 became, it was risky to try and historicize the events, even in terms of the moment deemed past—the moment "before 9/11." Yet it is precisely in times of crisis and terror when critical thinking becomes dangerous. The responsibility of the intellectual, in fact everyone, is to become "something of a conspirator" and, so, "to play detective."<sup>30</sup> In moments of forbidden thought the role and responsibility of the critical intellectual is to, "uncover what is *dangerous* to think and to say."<sup>31</sup> This includes naming the fact that those most likely to be heard are intellectuals whose words and writings can be mobilized to authorize the war. To say this is to recognize the inextricable link between culture and imperialism, and the role intellectuals play<sup>32</sup> in crafting any project of hegemony—but also any mobilization of a counter-hegemonic movement and narrative. No scholars better articulated this connection than Congolese intellectuals Valentin Y. Mudimbe and Achilles Mbembe,<sup>33</sup> and

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27 "ACLU Rebukes U.S. Government for Failing to Act on Visa Request of S. African Scholar: U.S. Policy of Ideological Exclusion Harms Citizens, ACLU Says," American Civil Liberties Union, October 10, 2007 [online] <<http://www.aclu.org/safefree/general/31291prs20070810.html>>; Jeremy Gordin, "No Explosive Skeletons in his Family Closet," *Independent Online* (South Africa, November 11 2007); Neil MacFarquhar, "Lawsuit Over Visa for Muslim Academic," *New York Times* (November 15 2007).

28 Adam Habib, "Banned: Why a South African is Going to Court in the U.S.," Huffington Post online (September 25 2007).

29 Editorial, "Visas and Speech;" and "Habib wins Court Battle," *Independent Online* (South Africa, December 9 2008).

30 Walter Benjamin quoted in James der Derian, "9.11: Before, After and In Between."

31 der Derian, "9.11: Before, After and In Between."

32 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage 1994); and Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage 1996).

33 Valentin Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1988) and *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington I.N.: Indiana University Press, 1994); and Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley C.A.: University of California Press, 2001) and "What is Postcolonial

the late Palestinian intellectual Edward W. Said,<sup>34</sup> each of whom recognized the need to deconstruct Western discursive hegemony, which is inextricably linked to Western imperialism and power. Mudimbe's epistemological critique of Western discourses and the alibi they offer for the production and inequitable treatment of racial and cultural others,<sup>35</sup> as well as Mbembe's critique of the violence of certain concepts of reason and the contradictions of Western moral philosophy and humanism given the alibi they offered for the sacrifice of colonial others<sup>36</sup>—these works anticipate the pivotal role that was to be played by intellectuals in constructing the “war on terror” others. In an interview one month after 9/11, Said suggested one of the terrifying aspects about the official responses to it was that we had entered a moment when, “if you start to speak about this as something that can be understood historically—without any sympathy—you are going to be thought of as unpatriotic, and you are going to be forbidden. It's very dangerous.”<sup>37</sup> Said argued that in moments of the forbidden and dangerous, it was incumbent on each citizen to do the important civic work that is necessary to understand the world in which we live. Central to this challenge is thinking critically and historically about terrorism, 9/11 and African in/securities.

Discourses are “practices that systematically form the object of which they speak.”<sup>38</sup> This book's essays are concerned with how Africa is interpellated into the post-9/11 narratives and discourses on political violence and terrorism. How do discourses on political violence on terrorism in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States objectify, form, and perform Africa, particularly in the moment we have come to know as “post-9/11” and the “war on terror”? The book's methodology is genealogical. As such, the essays foreground knowledge that is local, subaltern and from peripheral regions; that is discontinuous and disruptive to progressive notions of history; and that may even be characterized as “illegitimate”<sup>39</sup> from the standpoint of conventional terrorism studies. It explores the social forces, the intellectuals and social movements that both produce and

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Thinking: An Interview with Achilles Mbembe,” *Eurozone* (September 1 2008) [online] <<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2008-01-09-mbembe-en.html>>.

34 See, Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, “The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa,” *Research in African Literatures*, 36, 3 (Fall 2005): 2. See also, Melanie Newton, “Reflections on Edward Said: A Caribbean Perspective,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 23, 1–2 (2003), 6–7.

35 See esp. Mudimbe's *The Idea of Africa*.

36 See esp. Mbembe's “What is Postcolonial Thinking.”

37 Edward Said, Interview with David Barsamian, *The Progressive* (November 2001), <<http://www.progressive.org>>.

38 Michel Foucault, “Orders of Discourse,” *Social Science Information*, 10, 2 (1971): 7–30. Also, Michel Foucault, “Politics and the Study of Discourses,” trans. Colin Gordon, in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Millers (Chicago I.L.: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 53–72.

39 Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures.” In: *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 83–8.

delimit notions of security and well being on the African continent in specific ways. *Securing Africa: Post-9/11 Discourses on Terrorism* invites us to think critically, even dangerously, about the implications for Africa of the moments and mobilizations that flowed from “9/11” and the “war on terror,” and what potential, if any, such moments and mobilizations hold for securing Africa.

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