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Metaphorical constructions of/for American military expansionism: the contemporary Manifest Destiny

Hassen Zriba

Department of English Studies, University of Gafsa, Tunisia

Abstract

When the famous Monroe Doctrine was first introduced in December 1823, it was largely considered as the genesis of American imperialist tendencies. It seemed that the United States moved from its isolationist policies into a new continental and then global spaces for which the nation had to change its character and equip itself with new tools to meet those foreign and un-experienced spaces. One important strategy has been to employ a reservoir of ideological and metaphorical tools in order to legitimate and justify the nation's new ambitions of expansionism. The rhetoric of Manifest Destiny has been arguably used (maybe abused) as a justification of American geographical and spatial expansion. In this article, I argue that contemporary American militarism is justified by using some metaphors of space in order to fulfil American Manifest Destiny. Such destiny is one of propagating democracy and freedom at a global scale while fighting global terrorism and dictatorships. I propose to analyse the metaphorical constructions of the "free and democratic familiar space" (homeland) versus "terrorist and totalitarian strange spaces" (anti-home) in two prominent speeches of two republican American presidents; George Bush in 1991 and George Walker Bush in 2001. The first speech concerns the first Gulf war while the second is about the "war on terrorism". I suggest that both presidents idealized America as beacon of freedom while constructing the "enemy" metaphorically as inhabiting aggressive spaces.

Key words: Manifest Destiny; metaphor; expansionism; rhetoric.

1- Introduction:

This article is organized around three major sections. In the first part, I will try to identify the importance and relevance of Critical Metaphor Analysis (CMA) to political discourse. Then, CMA will be used as a tool to analyze the ideological discourses of first the 1991 speech of George Bush, the father. Secondly, I will focus on George Walker Bush speech delivered few days after the events of 9/11. Metaphors in general and those of spatiality in particular, were paramount in the two famous speeches of the two American presidents.

The first speech was a declaration of war against Iraq in what came to be called the Second Gulf War whereas the second speech was largely a justification and a vindication (proof) of a new preventive war against what widely is defined as "global terrorism".

2-Critical Metaphor Analysis:

The concept of metaphor has long been deemed as crucial on the political rhetoric. Cognitivist considerations of metaphor show how the concept is not a mere rhetorical and ornamental literary device used exclusively to embellish literary writings for aesthetic purpose. Metaphor has been critically broached by a number of philosophers and linguists. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson wrote an influential book entitled *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) in which they suggested that metaphors not only make our thoughts more vivid and interesting but they actually structure our perceptions and

understanding of our existence. Lakoff and Johnson distinguished three types of metaphors: the structural metaphor, the orientational metaphor and the ontological metaphor. The first occurs when “a concept is structured metaphorically in terms of another” (p 14). For instance, “He attacked every weak point in my argument.” This metaphor is structurally constructed by an underlying conceptual metaphor “argument is war”. The orientational metaphor stresses the spatial orientation of a concept. In an example like “he is high-minded », the metaphor highlights directional and orientational features “high, low, up, down”. Finally, we have ontological metaphor which casts attitudes, views, opinions ideas and emotions as entities. For instance, when we say “freedom prevails”, we conceive the idea of freedom as an existent entity that can be quantified and identified.

Thus, metaphors are a part and a parcel of humans’ perception and conceptualization of their experiences. The notion of space is also so closely related to that of metaphor. The concept of American “Manifest Destiny” is a case in point. It is both an orientational and ontological metaphor. Ontologically, it represents the idea of “destiny” as a measurable and identifiable entity. It is even modified by the modifier “manifest”. Orientationally, “Manifest Destiny” is a future-oriented concept in that it visualizes American behavior as being progressive and heading ahead the “here” and the “now”. “Manifest Destiny” is thus a destination towards which America is heading. It turns out to be a path of glory and constant pride. In this spatial metaphorical representation of American behavior towards other nations, America holds a central position while others are likely to be at the margin. Paul Chilton shows how both the center and the periphery can be discursively and metaphorically constructed. He wrote:

“Social groups, and in particular sovereign states, involve the spatial source domain rooted in the experience of containment and boundary-setting. Social entities have 'a centre', 'insiders' and 'outsiders', people 'on the margins', etc. Such systematic lexical patterns appear to be grounded in essentially spatial experience.” (2004: 52).

3-Manifest Destiny:

The Manifest Destiny is a notion coined by the American Journalist John L. O'Sullivan in 1845 to justify the annexation of Texas and Oregon. O'Sullivan wrote that “...by the right of our manifest destiny to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us” (in McCrisken, 2002: 68). Thus American manifest destiny was divinely granted to Americans In order to spread their hegemony over other lands and peoples. Such hegemony, goes the narrative, is one that propagates the values of liberty and prevents counter-values of despotism and now terrorism from gaining currency.

Historian William E. Weeks has shown that three principal themes were usually invoked upon by advocates of Manifest Destiny: 1.the virtue of the American people and their institutions; 2. the mission to spread these institutions, thereby redeeming and remaking the world in the image of the U.S.; and 3. the destiny under God to accomplish this work. (Wikipedia). To recapitulate, manifest destiny was a divine mission to model the North America, then the Americas and then all the world in the image of the United States. It has been a sacred mission and destiny that America and the Americans are committed and “born to attain”.

4- Analysis of Case Studies:

This section detects and analyzes the various metaphors of space employed by two American presidents to convey their messages in a way that metaphorically construct America and its enemies in binary mutually exclusive categories. By metaphors of space, I mean not only physical space or what we can call place, but also temporal dimension of space. Paul Chilton explains this double meaning of space when he stated that metaphors of spatiality are not only confined to the physical tangible places. They can also include temporal spaces. The first speech was delivered by George Bush in January

16, 1991. It was a frank declaration of war against the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq. The speech of the president comprises 1498 words. Below is a diagram that quantitatively shows my analysis of the different functions of the speech.

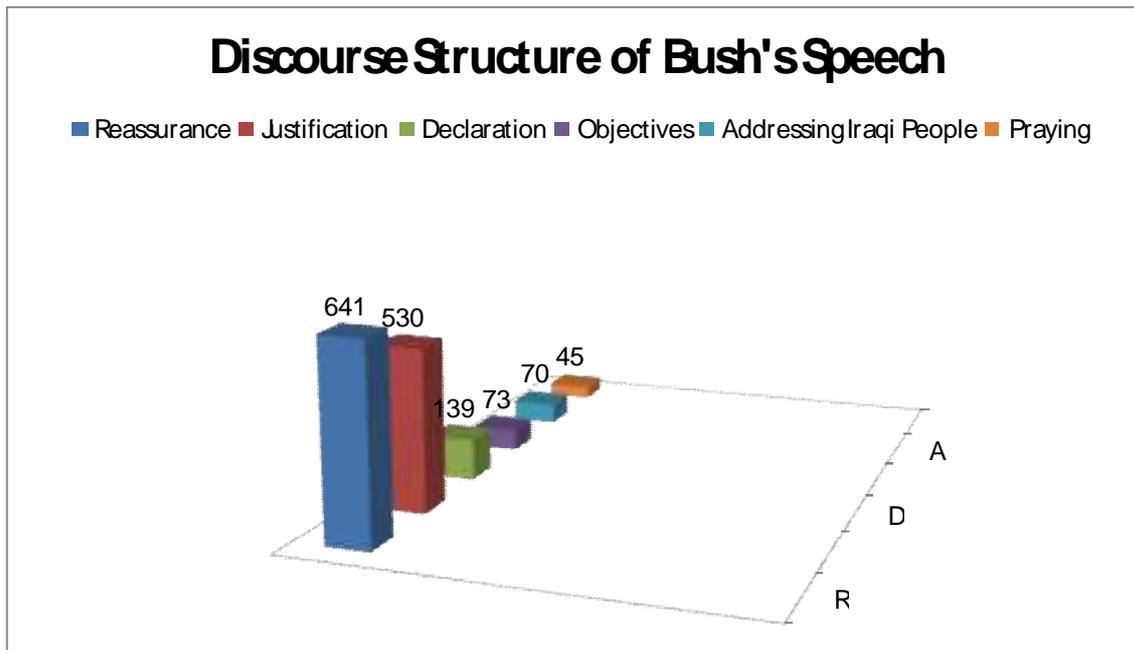


Chart 1: Discourse structure of George Bush's Speech.

The diagram shows a statistical distribution of Bush speech's words according to their functions. Accordingly, I argue that the speech of George Bush is predominantly apologetic. He laid a great emphasis on justifying the decision of the American involvement in the war as well as reassuring the American people about the outcome of such war. Such reassurance is also meant to encourage the allies of the United States. As seen in the above stated graph, Bush's speech was basically intended to be consumed by the American audience. My quantitative analysis of the corpus reveals that Bush was obsessed with the way Americans were going to decode his speech. He even anticipated the reaction of those who would read his decision oppositionally. Bush rhetorically asked: "Some may ask: Why act now? Why not wait? The answer is clear: The world could wait no longer". Perhaps, this anticipatory defensive discourse discloses the extent of opposition that Bush faced both at home and internationally. There was indeed increasing rejection of the war against Iraq. For instance, an estimated 500,000 Americans participated in antiwar protests and demonstrations. Mark Van Ells wrote that « While many Americans shouted the slogan "support the troops," others offered an alternative cry, "no blood for oil." » (Van Ells, 1999). Consequently, George Bush was engaged in creating a wide internal consensus over the necessity to wage that war. Bush's speech is composed of 1498 words, 1171 of them are dedicated to justifying the war and reassuring Americans and their allies. Thus 78% of his speech is devoted to such two domestically-oriented functions. What is crucial to Bush administration is the electoral weight of Americans. Aware of the Vietnam War psychological legacy on Americans, Bush was careful not to repeat the same experience. His goal was thus to finish off any fears of the Gulf War. He declared that: "this will not be another Vietnam". He affirmed: "We will not fail". That is a self-confidence discourse par excellence. He employed a number of discursive and metaphorical tools to achieve such aim. Bush resorted to the rhetorical technique of repetition. He used the phrase "While the world waited, Saddam Hussein..." four times as topical sentences of four different paragraphs so that to draw the attention of his audience to the danger of Saddam's regime. He wanted to bombard the audience with harms Saddam allegedly did. In the reassurance discursive section, the American president, referred to American heritage and values of optimism and determination. He referred to famous American characters and personalities like Tom Paine, Marine Lieutenant General Walter Boomer and Army lieutenant Jackie Jones. He justified such reference:

“I have called upon Hollywood and Walter and J.P. and Jackie and all their courageous comrades-in-arms to do what must be done”.

Metaphorically, Bush constructed the war as a struggle between the free world and Saddam Hussein. He declared that the free nations were “standing shoulder to shoulder against Saddam Hussein”. The war was unavoidable. The Secretary-General of the United Nations went to the Gulf “with peace in his heart” just to turn back with no solution. Thus, the Iraqi intervention in Kuwait was metaphorically represented as a brutal violation of international and humanitarian law and order. Iraq is reduced to Saddam and lost its identity as a country. When the conflict is referred to, it is one between a free global space led by the United States versus a despotic local space led by one man’s dictation. The reference to Iraqi president by name occurred 22 times. It was also referred to cataphorically and anaphorically 17 times. Iraqi space is totally condensed in the person of Saddam, thus, the conceptual metaphor that emerges from this over-reference to Saddam is that “Saddam is Iraq”. This stands in contrast to the familiar American space in which democracy prevails and peaceful cooperative culture has the upper hand. Two conceptual metaphors can be deduced from the above analysis of Bush’s speech: “Saddam is Iraq” and “America is the Americans”. The two metaphors represent Iraq as despotic totalitarian and America as democratic pluralist.

Another conceptual metaphor can also be identified; that of family metaphor. Bush constructed the conceptual metaphor “international community is a family” when he said: “it is our hope that Iraq will live as a peaceful and cooperative member of the family of nations”. He added “let Iraq itself rejoin the family of peace-loving nations”. This metaphor employs the disciplinary corrective discourse and casts Iraq as a stubborn child that needed punishment from his mother (in this case America) in order to comply with the acceptable norms of behavior. In brief, the above detected metaphors play a paramount role to construct the American enemy (Iraq) as an inferior and backward entity. “Saddam is Iraq” metaphor and “international community is a family” metaphor represent the spaces of the “other” as primitive and deviant from the norm.

Now I scrutinize the speech of George Walker Bush which was delivered in September, 20, 2001. It was delivered in front of the Congress, and with the presence of the then British Prime Minister Tony Blair. The following chart represents the thematic distribution of functions graphically.

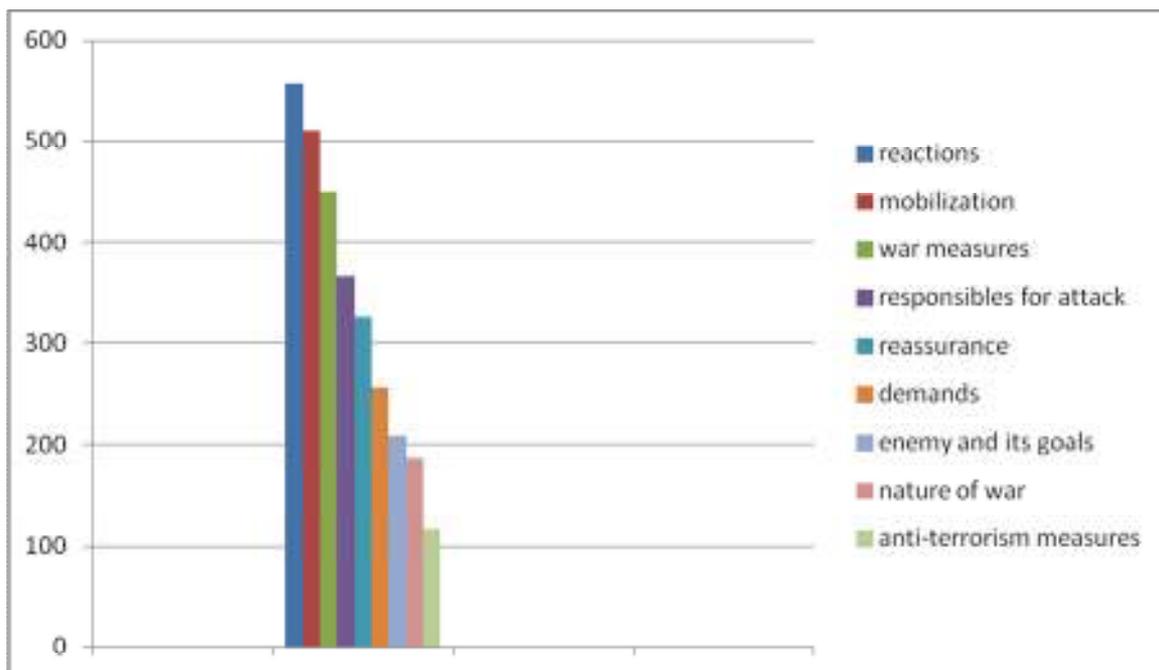


Chart2: Discourse structure of George Walker Bush’s Speech

My thematic analysis of the historic speech of George Walker Bush revealed that the Bush administration was so determined to wage a furious war on “global terrorism”. Noticeably, Bush devoted the lion’s share of his speech to the reactions of Americans and the world after the September, 11 attacks and the intended war measures at local and global levels. Second in order, comes the theme of mobilizing American efforts and raising their spirits in order to meet the expected hardships of the war. However, just like the speech of his father a decade earlier, Bush did not forget to assure the Americans and tell them that failure is not the destiny of the Americans their allies. Yet he affirmed that the war would be long and every effort was needed. Rhetorically, he repeated the phrase “We will come together” five times to emphasize the need of unifying all Americans and forgetting their specific cleavages. Thus, “Republicans and Democrats joined together on the steps of this Capitol singing "God Bless America.", he affirmed.

Generally speaking, the speech was intended to mobilize Americans to get ready for a long and constant war against “terrorism”. Thus, the declared aim of the American president is to legitimize his resolve to wage the war while at the same time to delegitimize the enemy and cast him and the spaces which he inhabits as hostile and alien. As Paul Chilton argued, the use of metaphors is one strategy to conceptualize reality and act upon it. Bush invokes conceptual metaphors that serve his targets. For instance, he conceptualizes American as a concrete entity that feels a danger and acts to defend freedom. He said: “we are a country awakened to danger and called to defend freedom”. The use of ontological metaphors that represent America as a living and feeling entity along with the representation of the concept of freedom as an existent entity helps the audience to feel more concretely the danger that the nation faces. Later in his speech, Bush employs another more direct metaphor when he declared that: “and night fell on a different world, a world where freedom itself is under attack.” This time American space is not only the representative of freedom, but it is freedom itself. Thus, America is freedom that defends freedom. Bush goes on to set up a binary opposition between American space and the enemy’s spaces. The hostile space is identified as Afghanistan. He represents Afghani people and way of life as the anti-thesis of American ideals and values. Contrarily, America was constructed as “a democratically elected government” and “Their leaders are self-appointed”. If America is the freedom and the land of opportunity, in Afghanistan: “[W]omen are not allowed to attend school. You can be jailed for owning a television. Religion can be practiced only as their leaders dictate. A man can be jailed in Afghanistan if his beard is not long enough.” The dichotomy of the “US” and the “THEY” is operationalized to give the anticipated clash an ideological cultural dimensions. The other is essentialized and cast as brutal, violent and undemocratic. The “US” represents freedom while the “THEY” represents fear, and “Freedom and fear are at war”. Such metaphorical and ideology-loaded discourses are further stressed when Bush refers to the classical and historical struggles between the Americans and their enemies. He affirmed that “Freedom and fear, justice and cruelty, have always been at war, and we know that God is not neutral between them.” What is clear from such discourse is that the American president draws upon past American war experiences and also invokes the idea that God sides with freedom and justice. Thus God backs America and its causes. Being resolved to fight terrorism “where it grows”, along with belief that God is always with America, Bush clearly employs the traditional rhetoric and discourse of Manifest Destiny.

5-Conclusion and Findings:

To conclude, the notion of Manifest Destiny has always been present in the American political rhetoric and behavior. From the days of the American frontier, the imperial Monroe Doctrine to Kennedy’s “New frontier” and the current discourses of Pax Americana and American century, Manifest Destiny has been the engine and the guidance of American relations with foreign peoples and spaces. Metaphors of space have been skillfully deployed by various American presidents to construct themselves and their nation in favorable and positive images vis-à-vis the others. The two speeches analyzed above employ the same set of space metaphors and activate the same ideological assumptions of the Manifest Destiny to

legitimize American military interventionism and expansionism. The notion of Manifest Destiny itself is the central organizing metaphor of space of American discourses of interventionism. As suggested above, Manifest Destiny is mapped spatially and temporally. It is an ontological metaphor in that it is conceptualized as an existent entity as well as an orientational metaphor since designates a certain destination both in space and time. The expansionist propensities of the Manifest Destiny were achieved on the ground by the colonization of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively. The causes were the same and so have been the outcomes.

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