

## Politicizing Trauma and Desire in American Cinema: World Trade Center (2006) and The Kingdom (2007)

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**ABSTRACT:** Any understanding of historical trauma today needs to attend to the roles that discourses about and representations of trauma play in struggles over identity and the meanings of the past. The approach this essay has undertaken to investigate is one that makes a reference point of 9/11 as a historical trauma and thereby makes a case for the political significance of violence, terror, civilizational barbarism and colonial desire engendered by this “traumatic” event. This essay focuses mainly on the structural traumatic violence of the image that works in conjunction with the sovereign violence and barbarism of the state and capitalism as a desiring machine. It is in the context of colonialism as a desiring capitalist machine and a group fantasy and empathy that this thesis considers the work of Deleuze, Guattari and Walter Benjamin. As far as the structure is concerned, this essay is split into two sections. The first section aims to investigate the connections between traumatic memory and empathy and between traumatic memory and paranoid investment of social energies as represented in *World Trade Center* (2006) and *The Kingdom* (2007). This fascistic investment of desire impedes the utopian dimension of traumatic memory that has the impulse to imagine a better future. The second section examines the violent physical and historical material procedures of American neocolonialism and its ideological operations as represented in *The Kingdom* (2007). It considers the links between capitalism, colonialism and spatiality as articulated by Deleuze and Guattari.

**KEYWORDS:** Historical trauma, civilisational barbarism, colonial desire, empathy, traumatic memory, capitalism.

### 1 TRAUMA AND COLONIAL DISCOURSE IN *WORLD TRADE CENTER* AND *THE KINGDOM*

#### 1.1 EMPATHIZING AND IDENTIFYING WITH THE VICTOR AND/OR THE VICTIM IN *WORLD TRADE CENTER* AND *THE KINGDOM*

In thesis VII “On the Concept of History” Benjamin Writes--

Consider the darkness and the great cold

In this vale which resounds with misery.

Brecht, *The Threepenny Opera*

To historians who wish to relive an era, Fustel de Coulanges recommends that they blot out everything they know about the later course of history. There is no better way of characterizing the method with which historical materialism has broken. It is a process of empathy whose origin is the indolence of the heart, acedia, which despairs of grasping and holding the genuine historical image as it flares up briefly. Among medieval theologians it was regarded as the root cause of sadness. Flaubert, who was familiar with it,

wrote: "Peu de gens devineront combien il a fallu être triste pour ressusciter Carthage". The nature of this sadness stands out more clearly if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers. Historical materialists know what that means.<sup>1</sup>

Benjamin's most cited thesis VII "On the Concept of History" in trauma theory constellates two dialectic concepts. Empathy and barbarism can be conceived of as a "dialectic image" which generates an aporia, hence a rethinking of the way one should approach traumatic memory and images. Here we may refer to Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical theory of sovereignty and his concept of "bare life"<sup>2</sup>, the reduction of the human individual to mere biological existence, and highlight how trauma is embedded in larger ideological formations. After all, what does identification and empathy with the victim assume? Simply put, it assumes a progressive liberal account of social relations. However, this claim is not as simple as that. With whom are we going to empathize? Is it with the victim or with the victor? How can we discriminate between the victim and the victor? Is there some universal moral and ethic value on which we can constitute empathy and identification? If there is some, is it not articulated and appropriated in a way that makes it tainted and untenable? After all--

There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another.<sup>3</sup>

If so, how can we argue for a certain universal ethics on which we articulate a theory of empathy when history itself resists any? The "moment of danger" arises when the communities of grieving and mourning that quickly formed through the aid of news media and other information networks tended to put aside political analysis in response to a perceived need for empathy and human solidarity. A sense of national identity, or identification with the West, emerged strongly in many intellectuals' responses to 9/11, including those involved in contemporary trauma studies. 9/11 was certainly, in Benjamin's memorable phrase, a "moment of danger" in which the "true image of the past" must be seized from uncritical narratives of progress and homogeneous constructions of historical time. For what is lost in the gradual transformation and increasing centrality of trauma as a concept in cultural criticism is a sense of power and violence that traumatize individuals and populations in the first place.

Trauma theory, by focusing increasingly on how trauma is transmitted across time, has lost its grasp of the dynamics of group identification and social exclusion that was a central concern of Freud's, Benjamin's and Adorno's theories of historical trauma. What I found invaluable in Benjamin, Adorno and Agamben is the lost copula between trauma transmission and barbarism, between trauma as a structure and trauma as a historical document, between trauma poetics and trauma politics. Ipso facto, in this section I demonstrate how Hollywood appropriated the traumatic events of 9/11 with the position of the victim to generate a form of empathy that serves as a means to avoid guilt and responsibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*. Trans. Harry Zohr. Ed. Hannah Arendt. (NY: Schocken Books, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> See for example Agamben's *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988), Alison Ross's "Introduction". *The Agamben Effect*. *South Atlantic Quarterly*. Vol. 107: 1. (Duke UP, Winter 2008), or Agamben's *The Open Man and Animal*. Trans. Kevin Attell. (California: Stanford UP, 2004)

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 256



Figure 8: World Trade Center<sup>4</sup> (2006)



Figure 9: World Trade Center (2006)



Figure 10: World Trade Center (2006)



Figure 11: World Trade Center (2006)

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<sup>4</sup> World Trade Center. Screenplay by Andrea Berloff. Dir. Oliver Stone. Perf. Nicolas Cage, Maria Bello, Michael Peña, Maggie Gyllenhaal and Michael Shannon. Paramount Pictures, 2006. Film.



Figure 12: *World Trade Center* (2006)



Figure 13: *World Trade Center* (2006)



Figure 14: *World Trade Center* (2006)

In an interview with Giovanna Borradori, Derrida said, “In situations and cultures where the media do not spectacularize the event, the killing of thousands of people in a very short period of time might provoke fewer psychic and political effects than the assassination of a single individual in another country, culture, or nation-state with highly developed media resources.”<sup>5</sup> The influence of media on 9/11 as a historical event is undeniable and logical. The images above are extracted from a newsreel footage in *World Trade Center*. What do these images add to 9/11 as a catastrophic event which took place inside America? In a news footage in *World Trade Center*, a news anchorman says—

<sup>5</sup> Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jaques Derrida*. (London : Chicago UP, 2003), 108-109

I'll leave that to you to determine just how widespread the human loss will be in New York City alone. America has changed today. This is a dark day in this country. It's in bold print in future history books about how America was attacked within its continental borders to devastating effect by terrorists in a coordinated assault using hijacked civilian airliners.

However, it is untenable that "America has changed today" though "It's in bold print in future history books about how America was attacked within its continental borders". The point made here is that 9/11 is a media industry; this is not to say that 9/11 was not a catastrophe in American history. Rather, it is so but one which is directed by a dominated and dominating apparatus. Media now should better be considered as a source of influence and authority. Since discourse plays a vital role in constituting people's realities, the implications for the power and influence of media discourse are clear. Nevertheless, 9/11 events are not only a product of media, but a process; to understand the images above we need to look at both the text itself and the interaction and context that the text is embedded in. The function of the images above is to constitute a community of witnesses that is basically based on empathy and identification. The problematic with these images is that they are embedded in a broader cultural context which puts emphasis on empathy. Nevertheless, empathy assumes a liberal conception of individual agency that cannot adequately account for the political violence that is the cause of so much traumatic experience. The images represent not only the reaction of American community but also the reaction of world communities to 9/11. What the newsreel footage in *World Trade Center* foregrounds is the identification and empathy of the world with America.

The sacralization of 9/11 by media is not the first in history of trauma industry. We have the example of the Holocaust as an industry of event uniqueness. In *The Holocaust Industry*, Norman Finkelstein writes--

At the most basic level, every historical event is unique, if merely by virtue of time and location, and every historical event bears distinctive features as well as features in common with other historical events. The anomaly of The Holocaust is that its uniqueness is held to be absolutely decisive. What other historical event, one might ask, is framed largely for its categorical uniqueness? Typically, distinctive features of The Holocaust are isolated in order to place the event in a category altogether apart. It is never clear, however, why the many common features should be reckoned trivial by comparison.<sup>6</sup>

This is to say that the singularity of the Jewish sufferings adds to the moral and emotional claims that Israel can make on other nations. The Holocaust, which pointed to the peculiar distinctiveness of the Jews, gave Jews the right to consider themselves specially threatened and specially worthy of whatever efforts were necessary for survival. The same thing can be said about 9/11 catastrophe. By conferring total blamelessness on Americans, as the extreme example of the perpetrators of Abu Ghraib demonstrates, 9/11 as a terrorist attack immunizes America from legitimate condemnation. This is the "moment of danger" of appropriating memory Benjamin warns against. The invasion of Iraq is not very far from us. Let's think about the atrocities committed against the civilian population in Iraq, not to mention Afghanistan.

The methodology used here is derived from the Brechtian and Benjaminian sense of shock. What Brecht and Benjamin refuse is the "Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of the emotions through identification with the destiny which rules the hero's life".<sup>7</sup> The method used here is interruption, for one of its aspects is the quote; quoting a text implies interrupting its context. The extraction of the images above from their context and commenting on them is an act of turning the visceral into the cerebral. I now move to the American film *The Kingdom*<sup>8</sup>, directed by Peter Berg and produced in 2007, to examine the way empathy can be produced through the work of editing to serve American political and ideological agenda.

When a terrorist bomb detonates inside an American oil company housing compound in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, killing many Americans and Saudis in the process, an international incident is ignited. While diplomats slowly debate equations of territorialism, FBI Special Agent Ronald Fleury quickly assembles an elite team and negotiates a secret five-day trip into Saudi Arabia to locate the terrorist behind the bombing. Upon landing in Saudi kingdom, however, Fleury and his team discover Saudi authorities suspicious and unwelcoming of American interlopers into what they consider a local matter. Hamstrung by protocol, the FBI agents find their expertise worthless without the trust of their Saudi counterparts, who want to locate the "terrorist" in their homeland on their own terms. Fleury's crew finds a partner in Saudi Colonel Al-Ghazi, who helps them

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<sup>6</sup> Norman G. Finkelstein, *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*. (London: Verso, 2000), 24

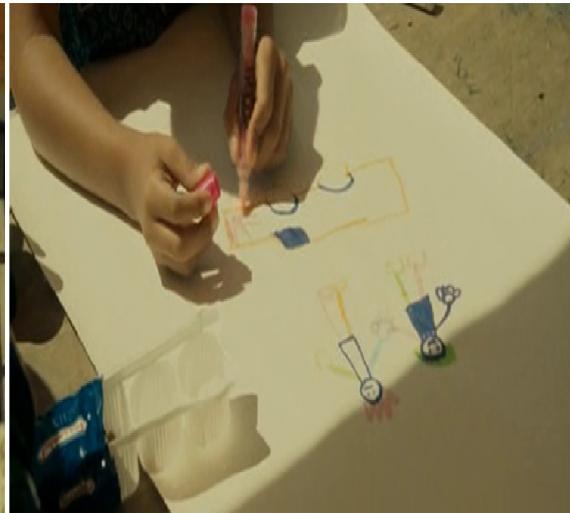
<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht*. Trans. Anna Bostock. (London: verso, 1998), 18

<sup>8</sup> *The Kingdom*. Dir. Peter Berg. Perf. Jamie Foxx, Chris Cooper, Jennifer Garner, Jason Bateman, Ashraf Barhom, Ali Suliman. Screenplay by Matthew Michael Carnahan. 2007, Universal Pictures. Film

navigate royal politics and unlock the secrets of the crime scene and the workings of a terrorist cell bent on further destruction. With these “unlikely” allies sharing a propulsive commitment to crack the case, the team is led to the killer's front door in a blistering and bloody confrontation which ended in Abu Hamza’s and Colonel Al-Ghazi’s deaths.



*Figure 15: Shot 1, The Kingdom (2007)*



*Figure 16: Shot 2, The Kingdom (2007)*



*Figure 17: Shot 3, The Kingdom (2007)*



*Figure 18: Shot 4, The Kingdom (2007)*



Figure 19: Shot 5, *The Kingdom* (2007)



I said keep watching the field.

Figure 20: Shot 6, *The Kingdom* (2007)



Figure 21: Shot 7, *The Kingdom* (2007)



Figure 22: Shot 8, *The Kingdom* (2007)



There is no God but Allah,  
and Mohammed is his messenger.

Figure 23: Shot 9, *The Kingdom* (2007)



There is no God but Allah,  
and Mohammed is his messenger.

Figure 24: Shot 10, *The Kingdom* (2007)



Figure 25: Shot 11, *The Kingdom* (2007)      Figure 26: Shot 12, *The Kingdom* (2007)

Appropriating memories to sustain an order of discourse is done through a process of dividing labour. The role of Hollywood is not to aestheticize or even to politicize art, because art had been already politicised. Appropriating memories is itself art, because, after all, there is no such memory as ‘it really was’. Memories are not somewhere in the distance, waiting to be relived either in our imagination, in Derrida’s “mystic writing pad”, or to be recreated through photography by a “camera lucida”. As the images above from *The Kingdom* demonstrate, tendentious use of the camera is not at all innocent. With whom are the audience in general going to empathize, whether consciously or unconsciously? This is not a difficult question to answer “if one asks with whom the adherents of historicism actually empathize. The answer is inevitable: with the victor. And all rulers are the heirs of those who conquered before them. Hence, empathy with the victor invariably benefits the rulers”. If we take into consideration the way images are ordered to produce a coherent narrative that makes the audience empathize with the victor in *The Kingdom*, we will begin to refuse, in Brechtian sense, the Aristotelian catharsis, the purging of the emotions through identification with the destiny which rules the hero's life and adventure. This is the dialogue interchanged at the Clark Griffith Elementary School, Washington, D.C in *The Kingdom*--

**Kevin Fleury:** And this is the skateboard that my Grandma Ruth gave to me. This is my fish Jaws. And he's a really neat fish. And this is the day that my daddy says is the happiest day of his life.

**Miss Ross:** Can you tell us about that day, Mr. Fleury?

**FBI Special Agent Ronald Fleury:** Yeah. You guys want to hear it? You want to hear the story? Do you want to hear about that day? Well, I'll tell you what. This is December and we were at the hospital all day and most of the night. And we was waiting on this little man to come out. And then all of a sudden the doctor showed up and said, 'He's not coming out.' 'We got to go in and get him.' Like a search team, right? So what she did was...You sure I can tell this story? Yeah, go ahead. So what happened was, is they took a tiny little knife then cut right underneath the belly button, and they opened her up and then took her hands and stuck them all the way in her belly and disappeared. And she was in there just rustling and rumbling and looking for something. Then she started pulling and pulling and pulling and pulling and she was pulling, and all of a sudden she stopped! Then she looked at me and said, 'Mr. Fleury, are you ready to have your world rocked?' And I said, 'Well, I guess so.' And so she starts pulling and pulling and all of a sudden a head popped out. And I looked down and I said, 'Kevin!' And then he looked back at me and he said...Daddy! Daddy! Yeah. And that was...That was the happiest day of my life.

**GIRL:** Say that again!

What Deleuze and Guattari say, in *Anti-Oedipus*, on the concept of “deterretorialization” of desire in relation to family is worth quoting at some length--

The family becomes the subaggregate to which the whole of the social field is applied. Since each person has his own private father and mother, it is a distributive subaggregate that simulates for each person the collective whole of social persons and that closes off his domain and scrambles his images. Everything is reduced to the father-mother-child triangle, which reverberates the answer "daddy-mommy" every time it is stimulated by the images of capital. In short, Oedipus arrives: it is born in the capitalist system of the application of first-order social images to the private familial images of the second order. It is the aggregate of destination that corresponds to an

aggregate of departure that is socially determined. It is our intimate colonial formation that corresponds to the form of social sovereignty. We are all little colonies and it is Oedipus that colonizes us. When the family ceases to be a unit of production and of reproduction, when the conjunction again finds in the family the meaning of a simple unit of consumption, it is father mother that we consume. In the aggregate of departure there is the boss, the foreman, the priest, the tax collector, the cop, the soldier, the worker, all the machines and territorialities, all the social images of our society; but in the aggregate of destination, in the end, there is no longer anyone but daddy, mommy, and me, the despotic sign inherited by daddy, the residual territoriality assumed by mommy, and the divided, split, castrated ego.<sup>9</sup>

The dialogue interchanged, at the Clark Griffith Elementary School, Washington, D.C, between Roland Fleury, Miss Ross and his son Kevin evinces the role the family or the “Oedipal triangle”, the father-mother-child triangle, has in decoding flows and reterritorializing the deterritorializing flows. Oedipus is this displaced or deterritorialized limit where desire is oriented. We should understand that the family corresponds to all capitalism’s efforts to social reterritorialization. The shot-sequence and the dialogue above provide us with what we may call, in the wording of Benjamin, “a dialectic image”, a “monad”, or a “constellation”. The constellation of the images together with dialogue presents a comparison between Abu Hamza al-Masri and his unnamed son, on one side, and Ronald Fleury and his son Kevin on the other. What kind of comparison do the dialogue and the images try to establish through editing that is itself governed by an order of discourse which is not only a sequel of an orientalist and “cultural strength” as Said argues in Both *Orientalism*<sup>10</sup> and *Culture and Imperialism*<sup>11</sup>, but also of an economic and capitalist strength?

Simply put, the family of Kevin is a civilized and human family, whereas the family of Abu Hamza, and because of Abu Hamza, is barbaric and terroristic. Kevin is in Washington, D.C, and Abu Hamza’s son is in Riyadh in the far desert, watching a well-planned terroristic attack on the American oil company housing compound in Riyadh through binoculars. The distance in place is also a distance in origin, race, and time. As the images show, Kevin is raised in a civilized society represented by Clark Griffith Elementary School, Miss Ross, his classmates, his father, etc. whereas the son of Abu Hamza is raised in a hostile and barbaric environment. Speaking about *The Falling Man*<sup>12</sup>, the photographer Richard Drew describes the camera as “a filter” between himself and the events he is photographing. Drew says, ‘I see this not as this person’s death but as part of his life. There is no blood. There is no guts. It is just a person falling’. Can Abu Hamza’s binoculars function here as “a filter” between his son and the events he is watching? Are these events, for both Abu Hamza and his son, about just people dying there in the housing compound in Riyadh? For whom the people are just bare lives, for al-Qaeda or for the United States of America?

There is in figure 22, shot 4 in the above image-sequence two words relevant to our analysis here and which can be explained by a detour through Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of family ‘deterritorialization’ of desire. In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari write--

The father is first in relation to the child, but only because what is first is the social investment in relation to the familial investment, the investment of the social field in which the father, the child, and the family as a subaggregate are at one and the same time immersed.<sup>13</sup>

It is the concept of “the family as a subaggregate” which makes of a child like Kevin or Abu Hamza’s a social investment, because, after all, the family is the productive machine or apparatus through which societies distribute their values and norms. The two words are “family” and “laws” and between them there is Kevin. What can we make of them in this analysis? First, they are not there coincidentally. Following Benjamin, no image can claim finality for itself. For I think that there is something traceable in this image. Kevin is an investment of the family which is itself an object of the investment of desire in society. Through their families Kevin and Abu Hamza’s grasp, underneath the triad of father-mother-child, the

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<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem and Helen Lane. (MN: MN UP, 1983), 265

<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said. *Orientalism*. NY: Penguin, 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Edward W. Said. *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> *The Falling Man*. Dir. Henry Singer. Eds. Alan Mackay and Ben Stark. Produced by Henry Singer. Darlow Smithson, 2006. Documentary.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 276

economic, financial, social, and cultural problems. Their sense of belonging or the desire to belong to a “superior” and “civilized” or a “barbaric” and “inferior” race is ordained as an ‘idée fixe’ at that age. ‘There is no document of civilization which is not at the same time a document of barbarism. And just as such a document is not free of barbarism, barbarism taints also the manner in which it was transmitted from one owner to another’.

## 1.2 RELATING COLONIAL DISCOURSE AND DESIRE IN *THE KINGDOM* (2007)

In *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*, Robert J. C. Young writes--

It is in the context of the widespread idea of the Empire *as machine* that I want to consider the work of Deleuze and Guattari; they offer, I suggest, not something that could be described as an alternative to Said’s paradigm, but a related though different way of thinking about some of the operation of colonialism, particularly *not just as a form of fantasy but also as a form of ambivalent desire*. In the first place, *the Anti-Oedipus has the advantage of decentring colonial analysis away from the East towards a more global surface*. It also redirects our attention towards two obvious but important points *that tend to get lost in today’s emphasis on discursive constructions—the role of capitalism as the determining motor of colonialism, and the material violence involved in the process of colonization*. The attraction of Deleuze and Guattari’s argument from a theoretical point of view is similarly the way in which philosophy, psychoanalysis, anthropology, geography, economics *et al.* are all brought together in one interactive economy and shown to be implicated in capitalism’s colonizing operations.<sup>14</sup>

As Robert Young noted in this book, Deleuze and Guattari’s *Anti-Oedipus* is virtually absent from discussions of postcolonial studies. For Robert Young, this may be due to its complexity. What I want to do here in this section is to formulate a copula between trauma and neocolonialism, between desire and Orientalism, and between Orientalism and capitalism. Colonial discourse analysis began as an academic discipline with the publication of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* in 1978. In *Orientalism*, Said explicates the relation between representations used in literary texts, travel accounts, memoirs and academic studies across a range of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences, and the diverse ideological practices of colonialism. *Orientalism* provides evidence of the complicity between politics and knowledge.

The colonial Western expansion into the East was doubtless determined by economic factors, but, for Said, Orientalism was not simply determined by such factors. For Said, it is difficult to reduce the cultural into the economic. Texts about the Orient “can create not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it”<sup>15</sup>. Simply put, the Orient is itself an Orientalist concept. However, as Robert C. Young puts it--

After all, if Orientalist discourse is a form of Western fantasy that can say nothing about actuality, while at the same time its determining cultural pressure means that those in the West cannot but use it, then any obligation to address the reality of the historical conditions of colonialism can be safely discarded. Such colonial-discourse analysis has meant that we have learnt a lot about the fantasmatics of colonial discourse, but at the same time it has by definition tended to discourage analysts from inquiring in detail about the actual conditions such discourse was framed to describe, analyze or control.<sup>16</sup>

There is in *The kingdom* (2007) by Peter Berg what can help us understand the violent physical and historical material procedures of neocolonialism and its ideological operations. I based my analysis of this movie on Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts of “territorialization” and “deterritorialization” because they, as Robert Young writes it, “have produced a theory of capitalism to which the operation of colonialism as a form of writing geography is central”<sup>17</sup>. Like capitalism which works as a “territorial writing machine”, colonialism or neocolonialism, two sides of the same coin of exploitation, decodes or deterritorializes the territory and cultural space of an indigenous society and then reinscribes or reterritorializes it according to the needs of the apparatuses of the occupying power.

<sup>14</sup> Robert C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 158. (Emphasis added)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 94

<sup>16</sup> Young, 152

<sup>17</sup> Young, 161

The opening scene of the film explains, through a timeline sequence, the origins of U.S.-Saudi diplomatic relations and how the discovery of energy resources has transformed the Middle East. It portrays the conflicts that have arisen since the late 1940s for the ownership of the oil industry, including the Persian Gulf War in Iraq and al-Qaeda's growing network of terrorism. Eventually, it explains the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the fact that the majority of the hijackers were Saudis. These are the indistinct radio transmissions of the opening scene of *The Kingdom*--

**Narrator 1:** After capturing most of the Arabian Peninsula with the help of the Wahhabi Islamic warriors, Ibn Saud establishes the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

**Narrator 2:** The Wahhabis were fiercely anti-Western. They want to go back in time to a pure Islam that wasn't threatened by the West.

**Saudi Ruler:** It was by chance that we discovered oil. We were looking for water.

**Narrator 3:** Despite criticism of foreign presence in the Kingdom, the King allows commercial oil production to begin.

**Female Narrator 1:** The result is the first union between Saudi Arabia and the United States.

**Narrator 4:** To accommodate the workforce the first Western housing compounds are created.

**Newscaster 1:** The strict Islamic laws enforced outside of these walls do not apply inside.

**Newscaster 2:** West and East came together in Egypt when President Roosevelt and Ibn Saud, King of Arabia...

**James Baker:** *They want America present there in the kingdom because we are their security.* (Emphasis added)

**Narrator 5:** The Saudi elite became notorious big spenders and lost credibility and respect among religious conservatives.

**Narrator 6:** In response to the U.S. Support of Israel in the Arab-Israeli War, Wahhabi Muslims pressured the Saudi monarchy to stop pumping oil.

**Narrator 7:** Those who control the flow of oil hold the Western world hostage.

**Female Narrator 2:** Prices quadruple.

**Narrator 8:** *Oil was an American national security priority.* (Emphasis added)

**Narrator 9:** *The embargo redefined the balance of power between the oil consumers and oil producers.* (Emphasis added)

**Reporter 1:** Iraq's battle-trained army swept across Kuwait's borders at first light.

**Reporter 2:** As a Saudi national, Osama bin Laden offered his services to the Royals.

**Reporter 3:** He told them he could bring his army from Afghanistan to repel the Iraqi invaders from Kuwait.

**Narrator 10:** *But the Saudis had a better offer. A half-million troops from the United States. His offer rejected, Osama took to the streets and mosques to denounce the U.S., the Royal Family and their unholy alliance.* (Emphasis added)

**Female Narrator 3:** Osama bin Laden this week again lashed out at the Saudi Royal Family.

**Saudi Official:** We were tracking bin Laden since the early '90s. We stripped him of his citizenship.

**Man:** *When it became clear that 15 of the 19 were Saudis, that was a disaster. A total disaster. Because bin Laden, at that moment, had made, in the minds of Americans, Saudi Arabia into an enemy.* (Emphasis added)

We are with you to get to...The perpetrators of this cowardly attack.

How dare they say they are Muslim!

**Narrator 11:** This is a nation where tradition and modernity are in violent collision.

**Reporter 4:** The Al Qaeda is thought to have been behind the bombing. A team of F.B.I. Agents prepares to investigate the attack in Saudi Arabia.

**Female Narrator 3:** The latest terrorist attacks showcase the great division between the pro-U.S. Monarchy and the extremist Wahhabi militants within the kingdom.

What is the relevance of Oedipus to our analysis here? We should understand that Oedipus is not simply the psychological structure through which all humans pass to mental, sexual and social maturity. Oedipus is also the means through which the flow of desire is encoded and--

“inscribed within the artificial reterritorializations of repressive social structure —the family, the party, the nation, the law, the educational system, the hospital, psychoanalysis itself. The disruptive effect of the colonial space upon the claims of psychoanalysis, by demonstrating that the Oedipus complex is not universal outside the operations of capitalism, but is significant for the theory in providing the basis of the proof that Oedipus consists of a limit-case and therefore a form of ideological reterritorialization”<sup>18</sup>.

The colonial subject is a construct of internalized cultural and political forms that condition their psychic reality and determine their social experience.

Following Robert C. Young, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “territorialization” is particularly important in the context of colonialism and involves three implications. It should be stressed here that for Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialisation can be physical, mental or spiritual. Deterritorialization constitutes the edge cutting of an assemblage. First, colonialism above all is the physical appropriation and exploitation of land for the interests of another culture. Cultural colonization was not just a discursive process but a seizure of cultural space, and imperialism is but one side of colonialism, another one is the colonialism of ‘commerce and cultivation’. Secondly, the State is frequently regarded as a territorial indicator of the arrival of “civilization” over “primitivism” or “barbarism”. Colonialism, after all, thrives on appropriation and enclosure of land and territory. Territory for Deleuze and Guattari is an experiential concept that has no fixed subject or object. In other words, territory is an empty signifier that resists representation. Territory is subject to movement and inscription. It is an outcome of processes of “deterritorialisation” and “reterritorialisation”. Simply put, it is subject to different types of colonialism as well as imperialism. The third implication of “territorialization” and the most pertinent to our analysis here is the violence of both the colonizer and the colonized which is emanated from colonialism. “Here capitalism is”, writes Robert Young, “the destroyer of signification, the reducer of everything to a Jakobsonian system of equivalences, to commodification through the power of money [...] *Commerce, by reducing everything in a society to a system of universal equivalency, to a value measured in terms of something else, thus performs an operation of cultural decoding that works according to the linguistic form of metaphor.*”<sup>19</sup>

In *The Kingdom* there is Al Rahmah American Compound in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, that indicates an act of territorialization, or of deterritorialization of what is already territorialized. Saudi Arabia is a kingdom which is governed by strict Islamic laws; if I can put it in this way, it is a state which resisted, through Wahabism, the Western anti-Oedipus laws in favor of a Wahabi strictly conservative anti-Oedipus beliefs. As the narrator two in the radio transmissions of the opening scene of *The Kingdom* puts it “the Wahhabis were fiercely anti-Western. They want to go back in time to a pure Islam that wasn't threatened by the West”. However, as the narrator three says, “despite criticism of foreign presence in the Kingdom, the King allows commercial oil production to begin”, because “Oil was an American national security priority”.

The American appropriation of Saudi Arabian territory led to a violent reaction embodied in the “terroristic” attacks on Al Rahmah compound in *The Kingdom*. Though the attacks are barbaric, it is difficult to describe them as “terroristic”. In the wording of Robert Young, “terrorism would be an extreme example of a political activity whose deeds are designed to resist interpretation as much as to assert power”<sup>20</sup>. Terrorism as a desiring machine provides a means of articulating the physically and psychically inscribed violence on the territories and peoples subject to colonial or neocolonial violence. In *The Kingdom*, at U.S. Department of Justice, Ellis Leach, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, says —in the presence of the F.B.I Director Robert grace, Special Agent Ronald Fleury, Special Agent Janet Mayes, Attorney General Gideon Young, Deputy National Security Advisor Maricella Canavesio--

I met with Prince Thamer at the Saudi embassy fifteen minutes after I heard this morning's news. After speaking with Thamer, I advised we withhold additional US personnel because a big part of the religious justification for these bombs is the presence of current US personnel. More boots on Saudi soil make an already combustible situation more so.

<sup>18</sup> Young, 162

<sup>19</sup> Young, 164

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 163

Maricella Canavesio replied, “My two cents: The Saudis haven't asked for FBI help. Sounds like they've done just the opposite. If we force the issue, that could further anger an utterly important ally that shares a 1000-mile long border with Iraq”.

A statement like the above is misleading. It is a camouflage that does not harmonize with the context of the attacks in Al Rahma compound. It is parochial to regard such attacks, which affected mainly the American civilian people living in the compound, as a reaction against “the presence of current US personnel”. To reduce the impetus of such attacks to more or less boots on Saudi soil, and a justification to religion leaves the issue of “deterritorialization” of territory and desire unquestioned. The first aspect of “deterritorialization” in *The Kingdom* is the compound itself.

**“Narrator Four:** To accommodate the workforce the first Western housing compounds are created”.

**“Newscaster One:** The strict Islamic laws enforced outside of these walls do not apply inside”.

The existence of the American housing compound on Saudi soil aims to deterritorialize the Saudi territory as territorialized by the Wahabi sectarianism. What we should emphasize here is that the process of deterritorialization via the axiomatic of capitalism occurs piecemeal. The King’s concession to commercial oil production to begin is an event that broke with the past and inaugurated a new field of social, economic, and political or legal possibilities. When a territory is constituted inside another, connections appear and others disappear. These capital-based connections affect both culture and land. They conjugate territories and decode earlier forms of production. This process of decoding results in physical violence and barbarism as represented in *The Kingdom*.

**“Narrator 11:** This is a nation where tradition and modernity are in violent collision”.

This “violent collision” between tradition and modernity is the outcome of capitalist deterritorialization of earlier forms of production and consumption. It is this shift from looking for water to looking for oil that changed almost everything in the Kingdom. As a Saudi ruler puts it in the Radio transmissions above, “It was by chance that we discovered oil. We were looking for water”. The war is between capitals, not between cultures. Cultural reductionism is deceptive, for “oil was” and still is “an American” and not a Saudi “national security priority”. It is not a sense of what Edward Said refers to, in *Orientalism*, as “cultural strength” that is fortified here, rather, it is the economic strength of the America capitalist desire machine that is much more relevant here. The problematic with this process of capital deterritorialization is whether it is positive or negative. This is quite a poser. We can pose here, following Deleuze and Guattari, that this process of deterritorialization inheres in a territory as its transformative vector; hence, it is tied to the very possibility of change immanent to a given territory.

However, there is also the over-deterritorialization of a territory which blocks the movement of earlier forms of deterritorialization, in this context Wahabism, and which results in barbarism and “terrorism”. Over-deterritorialization manifests itself in the way globalization constitutes itself as a system of values on the scale of Western modernity which has no equivalent in any other cultures. In the wording of Jean Baudrillard--

What globalizes first is the market, the profusion of exchanges and of all products, the perpetual flow of money. Culturally, it is the promiscuity of all signs and all values or, in other words, pornography. For the global diffusion of anything and everything over the networks *is* pornography.... At the end of this process, there is no longer any difference between the global and the universal. The universal itself is global; democracy and human rights circulate just like any other global product—like oil or capital.<sup>21</sup>

Let’s go back to the discussion in U.S. Department of Justice--

**Roland Fleury:** This isn't Terrorism, ma'am. It's just Serial Murder.

**Maricella Canavesio:** What's the distinction?

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*. Trans. Chris Turner. (London: Verso, 2002), 89-90.

**Ronald Fleury:** To call this massacre an act of terrorism... that implies a specific political agenda. To me, these killings are so futile and unbalanced that they feel utterly sociopathic- more like Charles Manson than Osama Bin Laden...

**Janet Mayes:** Al Qaeda lost the first phase of this war, so a new, zero-sum phase has begun: if you won't join us, we'll let loose the truly talented Murderers... Abu Hamza. He will kill so many of you that the resulting humiliation of the Saudi Royal Family will cause an exodus, a rebellion, both. Because the Royal Family simply cannot protect you or yours any longer.

**Roland Fleury:** When she says talented, she's not talking about the walking-bombs who can sneak past any and all security, nor the hijackers tough enough to take an airliner. We're talking about the Man who teaches them how...

**Janet Mayes:** The operational commander who organizes, trains, plans, encourages. That is who we're fighting.

**Roland Fleury:** If we don't get inside Saudi Arabia within 36 hours, there is no chance we catch the killer responsible for Al-Rahmah. None.

**Ellis Leach:** Okay. I believe it all. So doesn't your team in that country represent the kind of target one of these `Masters' would die for? Trade ten of their own for one of you?

**Roland Fleury:** To not engage these criminals out of fear for our personal safety is just another way of saying 'uncle'. I'll say it another way: Evidence starts to go cold after twenty four hours. If we can't get in now, we will not find the man or men responsible for this crime. We couldn't do it at Khobar; we couldn't do it in Yemen; we have barely scratched the surface in Iraq. And we are on verge of not doing it here. They are getting stronger, we are getting weaker. I just lost a very good friend and I would very much like to go and do my job.

**Gideon Young:** That was spirited... let's all thank God Special Agent Fleury doesn't make policy decisions. He'd turn the FBI into Patton's Third Army.

The debate over the nature of the attacks is not our concern here. Whether such attacks should be classified as "terroristic" or not is another problematic which goes beyond the scope of this essay. What is pertinent to our analysis here is whether these attacks can be regarded as acts of political resistance. We cannot deny that resurgence of social or political resistance can incorporate different investments. Nevertheless, this does not justify the fictional massacres of civilians in Al Rahmah housing compound. It is appropriate here to highlight that *The Kingdom* is inspired by bombings at the Riyadh compound on May 12, 2003 and the Khobar housing complex on June 26, 1996, in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In the wording of Baudrillard--

This resurgence can assume aspects which, from the standpoint of enlightened thinking, seem violent, anomalous, irrational—ethnic, religious and linguistic collective forms, but also emotionally disturbed or neurotic individual forms. It would be a mistake to co as populist, archaic, or even terroristic. Everything that constitutes an event today does so against this abstract universality—including Islam's antagonism to Western values (it is because it is the most vehement contestation of those values that it is enemy number one today).<sup>22</sup>

Though contemporary trauma studies addresses the specific communities that are created through the collective experience of, or collective relation to, traumatic events, it has lost its grasp of the dynamics of group identification and social exclusion that was a central concern of Sigmund Freud's, Walter Benjamin's and Theodor Adorno's theories of historical trauma. This became clearer after 9/11, when accounts of the collective experience of "trauma" suffered by the American public did little to contextualize the event historically or politically. What arises from this oblivion in the context of 9/11 is the rise of a new rhetoric of Manichean allegories of good versus evil, civilization versus

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 95

barbarism, and “us” versus “them”. These theorists suggest an understanding of historical trauma that more fully acknowledges the role of both technological mediation and unconscious fantasy in shaping collective experience and identity in modern Western societies. Their works present us with tools for a critique of contemporary trauma theory and suggests possible directions for further research.

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