

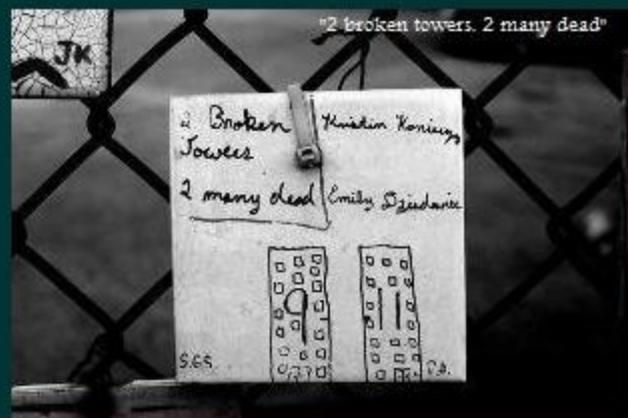


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*Dale Maharidge
and Michael Williamson's 'Homeland':
de-constructing the rhetoric of consensus
in the aftermath of September 11th attacks*

by Cinzia Schiavini

Two days before Christmas 2001, I drove west over the George Washington Bridge, into Homeland America. Fifteen weeks had passed since I'd stood on my uptown rooftop and watched the second tower fall, the clouds billowing over lower Manhattan. That day my gaze was drawn beyond the New Jersey Palisades; I wondered about the middle of the country. I knew that a genie had been uncorked. I of course had no idea what the genie would do (Maharidge 2004: xli).

Recounting September 11th, its meanings and consequences on American social texture not through the representation of the wounded city, but through its absence. In the aftermath of an event that embodied the attack to the "centre" – of the nation, of the globalized capital and the First World power – there have not been many narratives that resisted the impetus to fill that geographical and symbolic void with words or images of the Towers' fall, and rather chose to examine its reverberations on the margins of the country. Writer Dale Maharidge and photographer Michael Williamson's *Homeland* takes a ground-level view of the impact of 9/11 events and the



government's policies of the following two years by exploring the lives of ordinary people in the heartland of the country.

"Go where no one is going" has always been the motto of their "Star Trek journalism" (Maharidge 2004: 183), that previously stemmed from the scenarios of homelessness and (agricultural) poverty: while their first work, *Journey to Nowhere* (1985) depicted the effects of de-industrialization on the Rust Belt working class, *And Their Children After Them. The Legacy of 'Let Us Now Praise Famous Men'* (1989) retraced the footsteps of Agee and Evans' reportage on the world of the Alabama sharecroppers in the Great Depression forty years later, during the economic downturn that marked the shift from the industrial to the post-industrial economy.

In *Homeland* too, Maharidge's words and Williamson's images re-affirm both the bonds to the documentary tradition of the previous decades and the urge to redefine the shifting landscapes of the margins: from the Rust Belt to Tennessee and to Chicago's South Side, the writer and the photographer investigate and document geographical areas plunged by decades in the economic recession and social tensions, and try to interpret their response to American rhetoric and politics after the terrorists' attacks.

Homeland examines in particular the manipulative use of 9/11 and the subsequent call for patriotism made by the government officials in order to strengthen the consent and support the (foreign) aggressive and (domestic) repressive political turn. By focusing on the social peripheries, both rural and urban, the text dissects the hegemonic discourse on 9/11 through a narrative made of the "voices of the others" – where "otherness" crosses the boundaries of ethnicity and thrust its roots in a long standing economic and social unease. Political discourse of the post 9/11 is depicted by Maharidge as the attempt to sew once again together a nation long split in two along class lines: "The coast and some who dwell there are another America apart from the rotting barns and dead Main Streets in the middle: two halves of a society, each unknown to the other – one comprised of the Visibles, the other the Invisibles" (Maharidge 2004: 66) – these last including 13,5 million American children living in poverty.

Against the "state of exception" that the government aimed at creating, first culturally and then socially in order to increase its power,¹ Maharidge and Williamson's purpose is to re-inscribe the events of September 11 in the flow of historical and

¹ No doubt that media language and content have been deeply affected by the 9/11 events. And since culture do not only reproduces discourses, but co-produces them, the ways arts, be they visual or literary, have depicted the tragedy cast light on the relation between the private and public spheres, between the audience's emotional response and its wilful manipulation. Many critics noted for example the "death of irony" that followed the Twin Towers' attack in fictional series, some of which incorporated the drama of 9/11 in the plot of ordinary lives (24 or *Law & Order*). By depicting a "state of exception", these cultural products have thus suggested that the disrespect of criminals' rights and dignity can become necessary to prevent the loss of innocent lives.



economic continuum that has shaped domestic and foreign politics during the last century of American imperialism. Their first step is to focus on the construction of the meaning of terror and terror attacks and the following counter-actions as strategic elements in the manipulation of the public opinion and its emotional response. Their investigation shows the extent to which the war on terror becomes within the national boundaries also a war *for* terror, a permanent state of tension aimed at controlling and repressing (sometimes with the active involvement of private citizens) the most varied manifestation of dissent.

In Maharidge and Williamson's footsteps, this essay deals with the deconstruction of the discursive and cultural strategies of the "state of exception" employed by the hegemonic discourse and with the dialectics between domestic and international politics. The analysis focuses in particular on four elements: the concepts of "Ground Zero" and "Homeland" and their use as lexical and symbolic catalysts of nationalism; the forms and the erasure of dissent; the commodification of 9/11 and the "War on Terror"; and the relation between the national rhetoric and the transnational economy of the last two decades.

REFRAMING WORDS: FROM "GROUND ZERO" TO "HOMELAND"

The resort to the "state of exception" has a long history in American experience, from Thomas Paine's *The American Crisis* (1776-1783) onward. America's fall from innocence has always relied on the pattern of a continuing negotiation between traumatic events that supposedly stop the flow of time and the return to a primeval state of unity through a response matching the power of such ruptures. As Stuart Croft makes clear in his *Culture, Crisis, and America's War on Terror* (2006: 6), 9/11 is only the latest of the historical traumas accentuating the pre-existing anxieties in American society that hegemonic culture has used to create unity and consent (Nardin, 2006).

The transformation of the trauma into a cohesive catalyst always implies the use of symbolic elements, be they visual (images), lexical (words), or abstract (ideas). Among the symbols with multiple meanings, whose significance has been radically re-contextualized after (and sometimes even before) the attacks, two in particular deserve close analysis: Ground Zero and Homeland – the first being in Maharidge's account and in Williamson's images the invisible (save once) centre, the latter the ideological and geographical reverberation of the former and the core of the reportage.

As Amy Kaplan notes, both Ground Zero and Homeland are evocative spatial metaphors, words that "produce meanings – and preclude other meanings – both for the events that have come to be known as 9/11 and for the changing images of US nationhood and its relation to the world outside it" (2003: 82). Ground Zero, as a



proper name, refers to the one-block site in downtown Manhattan previously occupied by the World Trade Center towers; but it also entered in the American sociolect as a synonym first the wounded city, then of the terrorists' attacks and their consequences.

Due mainly to the highly evocative power of the Twin Towers in American imagination, Ground Zero has unquestionably become the core of United States imagination of disasters. A striking architectural work and the symbol of capitalism, the World Trade Centre was one of the most effective synthesis of the "society of the spectacle" – this latter being, in Guy Debord's famous aphorism, "capital accumulated to the point where it becomes image".² However, in the transformation of the Twin Towers into the symbol of 9/11, another declination of the spectacle itself has played a key role: that is, the ceaseless re-consumption of their fall (with their unquestionable titillation to voyeurism) made possible by the abundance of photographic and video-recording testimonies.

The rush to memorialise the event, building narratives that intertwine private and public experience in order to bring together those who were made felt threatened by the attacks, led not only to the feeling of community deriving from a common loss (and the subsequent manipulation from grief to patriotism), but also to an increase of the invisibility of the other dramas outside the institutionalised one-block perimeter of grief. From the journalistic Jim Dwyer's *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers* (2005) to Don De Lillo's *Falling Man* (2007) and other fictional and non-fictional works, many are the narratives which have focused almost exclusively on the events in New York City. In this overproduction of images, words are easily torn out of the lexicon of warfare, their original meaning erased. In this common forgetfulness, only few people noticed that, whereas the 9/11 attacks were being repeatedly compared to Pearl Harbour (Riffin 2004), the term "Ground Zero" was coined and referred to the havoc of Hiroshima and Nagasaki (Redfield 2009: 23). The fact that "Ground Zero" calls up the ghost of the first atomic bombs, and thus United States' part of agent, rather than victim, of mass destruction, is a contradiction many preferred not to linger on, and has been unveiled only recently, in a new stage of American foreign relations.³

Like "Ground Zero", "Homeland" too is a term deeply embedded in political and academic discourse, and it has made a dramatic comeback since 1990. As Richard

² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), quoted in Retort, "Afflicted Powers. The State, the Spectacle and September 11", *New Left Review* 27, May-June 2004, pp. 14.

³ "Hiroshima: Ground Zero 1945", an exhibition at the *International Centre of Photography* (May 20th - August 29th, 2011) of sixty prints drawn from an archive of more than seven hundred photographs taken by United States soldiers on November 1945, do not only testify the effects of the atomic devastation through the (top secret) work of the *United States Strategic Bombing Survey*, but directly creates a parallel between the since now opposed fronts. It is significant that these documents, found by chance in 2000, have been made public only eleven years later, after the end of Bush administration.



Nostrand explains (2001), "homeland" is an umbrella-term usually founded on the relation between a specific group of people, often racially homogeneous, their identity, a place they feel they are bonded to (due to past times), and the control (or the will of control) of that place over time. By stressing the sense of native origins, birthplace, common bloodlines and racial and ethnic homogeneity, the term "homeland" has often come to identify an aspiration more than a reality, a wishful thinking or nostalgia (as in the case of the trauma of uprooting or broken connections to the past). Historically however the term has been employed in two very specific historical contexts in modern history: first, during the Weimar Republic in Germany, from the end of World War I to Hitler's ascent in 1933 – when the concept of *Heimat* evoked a military glorious and economically prosperous past the nationalists aspired to return to (Wickham 1999). More recently, "homeland" was given an even more negative racist connotation when it was used by South-African regime in 1969 as a synonym of "racial purity". Building the very idea of citizenship on nativist ground, homeland implies then a process of re-ethnicising political affiliation, that has been historically coded, as Maskovsky and Cunningham note, "as both white and Christian." (Maskovsky 2009: 188)

In a nation of immigrants like the United States, the term used to refer either to Native American cultures and regions, or to the home-countries left by immigrants and by those African slaves deported in the American colonies. "Homeland" defined then not the *here*, but the *elsewhere* – be it in time (Native tribes before their displacement) or in space (the home-countries on the other side of the Atlantic ocean). The significance of the term began to change at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when "homeland" was used to define the regions (like Appalachia or the Middle West) people of no special ethnicity derived an affiliation with, based on their dwelling in those areas, and on the (often artificial) common traditions and cultural memories they shared (Shapiro 1977). By stressing a mythic past engrained in the land, "homeland" opposed from here onward to the traditional boundless and mobile image of American nationhood, and became the antithesis to the notion of "Nation of Futurity" that had since then shaped its social and political vision (Collins 2007).

Its reactionary connotation further increased during the last two decades, mainly as a response to the disruptive effects on American society of the transnational economic turn after the 1994 N.A.F.T.A. agreements. In order to cement, at least ideologically, the national borders (increasingly mined by the flow of people, capitals and goods), the representatives of the Government evoked more and more a "homeland" resembling those of the European past, based on the sense of loyalty and belonging to the whole country, with an increasing emphasis on the symbols and landmarks of nationhood and peoplehood.

However, as Michael Conzen underlines, "Loyalty is not simply the existence of a generalized group 'sense of place' or 'love of place'. It is rather an imperative to defend



the territory because by so doing, and at times only by so doing, is one able to defend the culture itself" (Nostrand 2001: 254). Although the term was already part of the rhetoric of the Democratic years, in the transition from Clinton to Bush presidency "homeland" became more and more equated with a vulnerable domestic space in need of protection, an uncanny nation that had to root its sense of identity while opposing to an external, menacing enemy. This re-coding of the term was particularly poignant in a moment when, due to the permeability of the national borders by the fluxes of globalization, no-one feels to live at safe distance from conflicts any more. As Kaplan notes,

Although homeland security may strive to cordon off the nation as a domestic space from external foreign threats, it is actually about breaking down the boundaries between inside and outside, about seeing the homeland in a state of constant emergency from threats within and without. [...] Homeland security depends on a radical insecurity, where the home itself serves as the battleground. [...] Homeland security calls for a vast new intrusions of government, military, and intelligence forces, not just to secure the homeland from external threats, but to become an integral part of the workings of home, a home in continual state of emergency (2003: 90).

It was then not by chance that "homeland" (together with the discursive shift from "national defence" to "homeland security") became a recurrent term in the 1990s to justify the multi-front role of the US armies abroad: the relation between securing the homeland and enforcing national power abroad has been the *leitmotif* of the political rhetoric from the Kuwait invasion onward (*Ibid.*: 87), culminating (and *not* originating) in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. After Ground Zero, however, the dividing line between "us" and "them" cut even more across both domestic and international peripheries – in a reconfiguration of spaces of risks as a network of circuits connecting the permeable borders and the cities (un-American and havens for minority groups) that allegedly required an even stricter surveillance and control of dissent.⁴

THE SILENCE OF THE OTHERS: CONSENT AND DISSENT AFTER 9/11

⁴ As Conzen notes, in the United States the display of patriotism has been particularly evident in the rural areas: "As a class of space, cities are poor locales in which to seek homeland dynamics, except as articulation points for the political mobilization of cultural self-determination in the surrounding region. [...] But as often, cities have been, and are, tools of empire and subjugation, key venues for challenging the homeland sentiment among subordinate peoples with the symbols and institutions of the dominating culture" (Nostrand 2001: 257).



The lexical convergence between American and German concept of “Homeland” mirrors deeper and more disquieting parallels between the two nations and their histories. As far as the strengthening of consent in social practices, Maharidge underlines how signs of patriotic affiliation were subject to a rapid increase after both the fall of the towers and the fire of the Reichstag. The imperative call for consensus had, as a consequence, the eradication of dissent, that after 9/11 coupled with different forms of militarization of every-day life. Together with acts of unity under the common grief, this state of surveillance ended up eroding what had been until that moment uncontested civil liberties, both in the private and in the public sphere – so that, as Maharidge remarks, “being united meant not talking to certain people [...] being united meant not asking any questions” (Maharidge 2004: 76).

The loyalty to one’s country based on the subversion of its ideological premises is not an exception in history: as Chris Hedges notes in his highly acclaimed *War is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*,

In wartime the state seeks to destroy its own culture. It is only when this destruction has been completed that the state can begin to exterminate the culture of its opponents. In times of conflict authentic culture is subversive. As the cause championed by the state comes to define national identity, as the myth of war entices a nation to glory and sacrifice, those who question the value of the cause and the veracity of the myths are branded internal enemies (2003: 62)

One of the most important right is the freedom of speech. *Homeland* first one third is devoted to the sixteen-years-old student Katie Sierra’s struggle in the small town of Sissonville, where she was both denied by the school principal the permission to form an anarchy club and suspended for wearing clothes with handwritten messages objecting to U.S militarism, racism and homophobia. Despite the initial lack of media coverage, Katie became via Internet the symbol of the many protesters removed from their positions or fired because of their dissenting views about US policy. Her taking a stand is significant not in the act itself, but when compared to the general silence: as Maharidge notes, “Katie spoke out in the face of tremendous adversity. It’s shocking that in a country as huge as America, so many who should have been speaking out were silent during the first post 9/11 years” (2004: 62) – including Democratic leaders and Republican moderates.

In Maharidge analysis censorship had two main targets: the school system and the media network. As far as school is concerned, students’ denial of the freedom of speech couples with the control over the lessons’ contents, with teachers and professors fired for their anti-patriotic stands.⁵

⁵ Analogous forms of control characterized the years of the Civil Rights Movement – as the history of John Tinker and his parents’ fight against racial discrimination in 1965 testifies (Maharidge 2004: 47).



The second context where the erasure of dissent was carried out systematically was the mass media: *Daily Courier* journalist Dan Gutherie was fired after his attacks on G. W. Bush; Dave D. contract was cancelled after his interview to Democrat Barbara Lee during his *Street Knowledge* radio show, while Bill Mahler TV show *Politically Incorrect* was stopped after his open criticism to US military attacks. Even Maharidge's difficulties in finding an editor for *Homeland*, briefly hinted at in the narrative (due to the "islamism" of the book) is the last of many episodes testifying how, as Molly Ivins later noted in a talk to journalism students at Columbia University, "it was suddenly as if the American press [...] were taking a page from King Louis XIV sycophantic court" (*Ibid.*: 18).

Forms of control and repression reported by *Homeland's* interviewees include FBI visits under the guise of seeking terrorism-related information or for the individuals' political affiliation, and automatic detention of immigrants coming from those countries where Al-Qaeda is supposed to have more sympathizers. The *summa* and symbol of this repressive policy came to be the Patriot Act, passed in October 2001, on the waves of the emotional impact of 9/11, that vastly expanded wire-tapping authority in order to monitor individuals and groups, the government power to detain anyone any time, and authorized the government to obtain personal information from every source, permit FBI agents to obtain a search warrant easily or to break into a home without any warrant. The paradoxes of guaranteeing citizens' safety without *de facto* getting in the way of the interests of economic powers are unveiled by Maharidge in relation to the weapons industry and policy: whereas the Patriot Act allowed to check even the readings in the libraries, it denied the permit to keep records of gun purchase for more than twenty-four hours (an Ashcroft's order, to please the National Rifle Association), although the FBI investigation found matches between terrorists and gun purchasing in the US. However, rather than an anomaly of the system, Maharidge shows how the laws of the market and private economic interests are not opposed to, but deeply entangled with the nationalistic rhetoric, since the strengthening of consent relies on the use of marketable goods.

FROM CONSENT TO CONSUMPTION

Strategies for consent and belonging have always been based on signs, be they visual, written, auditory – often with a shifty, malleable meaning. As predictable, the media played a key role in the call up for unity: after 9/11, many radio stations transmitted at least once a day the national anthem and other patriotic music and



censored anti-war lyrics, while movies considered “unpatriotic” by the majors were not distributed.

The signs of consent permeated not only the media, but the practices of everyday life as well: from photographs to bumper stickers, cartoons and ribs, the explosion of signs after 9/11 has, according to Maharidge, no precedents in American history. The most recurrent symbol has been since then the American flag: Williamson’s photographs frame it everywhere, on the wall of a police department in West Virginia, on decals (one stating that “Sikh Americans Join All Americans In Prayer”, the other praising that “God, guns & guts made America, let’s keep all three”); painted on the door of a farmer’s truck; on the top of a van covered with homophobic and racist signs touring in Washington, DC; in the salt flats of Utah; in rally supporting the war in Iraq; on the wall of a veteran hall in Tennessee; held by babies during the Flag Day (and by their toys too) and even on bath-towels on the beach.

Like “homeland”, the flag too has come to signify less and less a strictly affirmative belonging to a place, and more and more an antagonist attitude toward the “other”, be it within or outside the national boundaries. Maharidge locates the continuity of the fractious nature of the flag backward in time: first in the Confederate flags, still weaving in the village of Sissonville, “a manifestation of unity against a hostile world” (2004: 10) – where the hostile world is not the foreign, but the rest of the country. And then in the United States flag itself, now an emblem of the white minority, opposed to ethnic groups: like in the white rallies in the poor neighbourhoods of Chicago during the celebration of the first anniversary of the Towers’ fall (which, in Maharidge’s description, resembles Nazi assemblies), where the “stars and stripes” is used as a nationalistic symbol testifying not common beliefs, but the common (white) race. “The white people can wave the American flag. The Mexicans, their flag. And I want to have my flag” (*Ibid.*: 99), says a young American-Palestinian immigrant to the author, thus implicitly denouncing the exclusionary significance of the national emblem in the post 9/11 world.

Used as shields against the racists’ anger, in order to avoid being the target of discrimination, flags abound in ethnic neighbourhood and communities too – another common trait with the German *Heimat*, as a woman of Indian descent, who grew up in Germany, underlined: “she too felt compelled to put a flag in her window, out of fear, to show she was not ‘other’. She’d conformed to the will of the masses. To her, that is what most made it Weimar. She was living in her own personal Weimar” (*Ibid.*: 158). However, as sign of membership, the flag is not a self-sustaining symbol that leads to automatic acceptance, but must be validated by a collective recognition. This is an occurrence that did not happen so often to many immigrants, nor even to some whites: the abundance of flags on the car of Katie Sierra’s mother did not prevent her being attacked and spit on by students because of her daughter’s political beliefs.



Apart from the inclusive/exclusive effects, signs of patriotism have another, significant corollary that casts light on the deep ambivalences of the national rhetoric in times of economic depression. Due to the highly emotional interaction, fuelled by the nationalistic ideology, among the members of the homeland (that are both citizens and consumers, culturally and materially) in times of crisis, patriotism became more and more intertwined with consumerism. From the "God Bless America/support our troops/I drive a Suv" quoted by Maharidge in the preface, to the flags and T-shirts with patriotic logos, the author shows how the "back to normalcy" invoked by President Bush equated patriotism with consumption. "The station manager urges me to go out and shop. That's how we can be patriotic. Buy Buy Buy. Want that computer? Go out and change it. Show the terrorists they can't win. Buy Buy Buy. Show the world we are strong." (*Ibid.*: 139).

Demonstrating the love for the home-country by turning into compulsive consumers means, to a certain extent, also the objectifying and consumption of violence in its many forms, from the 9/11 tragedy to the wars. Both, as Maharidge suggests, have been turned into marketable goods: not only the transformation of Ground Zero into a tourist site (with its merchandising), but, even more important, the increase in sales of many products related to the warfare that speculate on people's fears: protective equipments for chemical attacks, parachutes to jump from crumbling buildings, pills against radiations have been sold in large quantities after 9/11 not only in New York, but in many other American cities.

"Buying the war" as a way to exorcise it leads also to the reproduction of war scenarios at home: this explains the rapid increase in sales (3,000 per month) of the Hummer 2 SUV, the expensive (50,000\$ to 100,000\$) civilian version of a tank patterned after the military vehicle used in the Gulf war and the Iraqi war, and deftly marketed by employing a war-like lexicon and images meant to evoke strength and protection. Even dissent can be marketed: in Sissonville (the centre of Katy Miller's campaign for her freedom of speech) students are allowed to wear pre-printed shirts with unpatriotic political messages, while only the handmade ones are prohibited.

The connection between the war and the market is so permeating that, in a probably unintentional *faux pas* of the government, war was shamelessly compared to a product. The launch of the campaign against Saddam Hussein after the summer holidays of 2002 was motivated by the fact that, as Andrew Card (George W. Bush's Chief of Staff) explained, "From a marketing point of view, you don't introduce new products in August" (*Ibid.*: 141). As *Homeland* shows, this rhetorical overlapping reveals the consolidation of a political vision moulded on the laws of the market – a vision that is, ultimately, the real culprit of American allegedly racial and religious conflicts.



ECONOMY, PATRIOTISM AND WAR

Whereas most of the understanding of the consequences of 9/11 (and the first part of the text itself) has revolved primarily around the tension between national security and civil liberties (including the protection of the freedoms that United States constitution affirms to guarantee to foreigners), *Homeland's* ultimate attempt is to show how the nationalist, xenophobic responses to 9/11 events have been the output of a social and economic distress ideologically manipulated and diverted in order to heal the growing rifts in the domestic social texture.

As Joel Blau notes in his *Illusions of Prosperity*, "equating economic and political freedom, Americans have long associated markets with democracy" (1999: xi). Several paradoxes arise in a post 9/11 when "freedom" is more and more the synonym not of rights, but of the allowance to choose among different products on sale (Maharidge 2004: 142) – the first being that a huge part of the citizens' power to consume has been severely impaired by many years of economic recession.

The scenario Maharidge and Williamson move in is that of a country split in two,

two distinct Americas, one in the exclusive preserves of California's Silicon Valley and Manhattan's Upper West Side, the other in the country's middle - in unheralded and wounded towns with names like Celina, Girard, and Lusk. The first country was living as if the 1990s boom would never cease. The second country was languishing, as if locked in a 1930s Great Depression time warp (*Ibid.*: xlii).

Most of Williamson's photographs frame dilapidated houses, shattered windows, rainy and grey suburbs inhabited by people who look like survivors, rather than citizens. As the authors explored at length in their previous works, the ongoing impoverishment of the working class and the increasing gap between the rich and the poor have been mainly the result of the neoliberal policies from the Seventies onward – clearly antecedent to 9/11: "Before that day we were already a nation in which executives burned shareholders' money on \$ 2 million toga birthday parties, while men and women who worked Wal-Mart jobs pinched pennies and still ended up begging for charity food for their children at month's end" (*Ibid.*: xliii). While on the one hand the United States was marketed as a fast growing and increasingly richer society where the old economy was replaced by a new one based on intellectual property, stock options and bonuses (and where a journalist of the *Washington Post* dared to write that "if you are relatively young today and you don't become a millionaire by the time you retire, you have few excuses" – (*Ibid.*: 66), Maharidge documents a large number of people either unemployed, or whose wages have been cut dramatically with the shift from a unionised secondary-sector to a de-regulated economy of services. The "more at less" marketing strategy, that apparently meant to favour the working and middle-class Americans as consumers, has deeply damaged



them as workers. This has created, in Maharidge's words, a "Brazilianization of America – a growing Third World amid the First World" (*Ibid.*: 154) extending, according to the authors' survey, for more than eight hundred miles in the centre of the continent, from the Rust Belt to the Appalachian countries, as well as in suburban and ethnically heterogeneous neighbourhoods. The degrading social citizenship of this huge part of American population has then been the consequence of a country organized around corporate priorities, an "imperial homeland" (Maskovsky 2009: 4), whose domestic economic reverberations ended up being very different from the ones depicted by the hegemonic discourse.

The short-circuit generated by economic distress on the one hand and nationalist rhetoric on the other is the focal point of *Homeland* analysis: Maharidge documents how religious crusades and battles between fundamentalisms, xenophobia and the rise of ultra-conservative movements (that found rich soil among poor whites in particular) have worked as catalysts of anger generating in poor standards of living: "Everywhere I turned in Chicago, I witnessed anger. Nancy, Jim, and Patrick were among several dozens whites with similar stories. The ones I heard were depressingly repetitive. Prick the anger which on the surface may be pro-war and anti-Arab, and one hears of ruined 401Ks, health problems, lost work." (Maharidge 2004: 106)

Not only the emphasis on security and the targeting of immigrants have been the way to direct attention away from unemployment, annihilation of welfare and health programs, and the conspicuous shift of many from the working class to the underclass. That same emphasis, coupled with the wide-spreading of nationalism, has been the way to substitute the lack of social and economic power lost by many, with an ideal power allegedly gained by identifying with the ideals and symbols of the rapacious politics of their own nation state – without realising that it was precisely that politics the main cause of distress,

By the winter of 2002, when we talked, I had begun to view what was going on in the country as nationalism - one could often substitute the word 'nationalism' where the word 'patriotism' was being used. One can define nationalism in many ways, and John saw a foundation in economic distress. 'Basically, being the have-nots in society, they gain some sense of security out of an authoritarianism in their local culture' (*Ibid.*: 51).

However, whether the resurrection of the "homeland" ideology has been aimed both at creating a shared and exclusionary feeling of cultural belonging and political membership, and at forcing a counteraction to the crisis with acts of pride and loyalty to the home-country,⁶ it has also ended up by exposing, in Maharidge's perusal, the

⁶ Including the demission to their own rights – like welfare, in name of that same rhetoric of pride.



paradoxes of such a rhetoric. The exacerbation of the class distances, the increase of unemployment, the scarcity of well-paid jobs, together with the lack of prospects for the youngest allow to think that in the present, and even more in the future, less and less people can and will be able to fit under the safe roof of the home-land. One of the best examples described by Maharidge is Charlie, the sixteen-years old boy that, together with many others who hate Arabs and other racial minorities, marched on the local mosque in suburban Chicago after 9/11,

Charlie and his friends are lost suburban kids who know their place in a service economy – a place far below the bottom rung on the ladder of success. Charlie might not be the brightest kid, but he knew his future. [...] Charlie's parents had hung on somehow during the three-decade onslaught waged upon them, and they raised a son who is about to begin his adult life defeated. Now Charlie without-a-future was with us – a whole army of Wal-Mart Charlies – friends that fuck, with HATE on their fists. *We Sell for Less. Always*. Charlie is a product, manufactured by those who live up in Kenilworth and Winnetka on the shores of Lake Michigan, over in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, on Manhattan's Upper East Side, out in the Woodside hills overlooking the glittering Silicon Valley (*Ibid.*: 108).

In these political and economic scenarios, the resurgence of "homeland" can be seen as sadly ironic in a period when more and more people are going to become *homeless*. The nationalistic rhetoric and the fact that not everybody can fit under the common refuge of the homeland is nevertheless functional to a different type of economic network - transnational rather than national, capable of absorbing the redundancies that the same forces of globalization generated,

The morning of 9/11, I stood on my Manhattan rooftop wondering about the genie being unleashed. Now here was Charlie, eager for any excuse to stomp someone, something, anything. He was hitting Arabs that Christmas season, but Charlie later exercised his best option: about a year after we met, he joined the U.S. Military (*Ibid.*: 108).

The evocative power of "homeland" continues to rely on the skilful concealing of the consequences of American new imperialism (Harvey 2003), both abroad and at home. Here anger, harvested through patriotism and war scenarios, creates both domestic consent (and surveillance) and workforce for the battlefields. To the soldiers, "homeland" becomes again a far away place to "come home to", rather than to live in; a territorial fortification excluding, rather than including, its weakest members.

Homeland can in this sense be read as a narrative of resistance: first, against a consumption of images and stories that would isolate 9/11 from historical flow and prevent the emergence of the intricate web of connections linking politics, culture and economy. Second, by resisting all the dichotomies that hegemonic discourse has



created in order to rouse uncritical affiliation, be they religious, racial, cultural or political. From the local of Kate Sierra's struggle to the global of international wars, and then backwards, toward the domestic effects of the transnational economy, the American "homeland" depicted by the text is a highly controversial signifier, that by subverting the same founding premises of the national ideology forgets how, as Benjamin Franklin wrote (and Maharidge reminds us), "Those who would give up essential liberty to purchase a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety" (1834: 99).

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