

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF TRUTH IN THE WAR ON TERROR DISCOURSE

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On June 16, 2004, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks (a.k.a. the 9/11 Commission) released Staff Statement No. 15, a preliminary report which noted that no "collaborative relationship" existed between Iraq and al-Qaeda (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States 2004: 5). The explicit assertion in this statement seemingly refuted a Bush administration rationale for war against Iraq: the notion that Iraq (thought to have possessed WMD) was a grave threat to the United States because it was allied with al Qaeda. At stake in the ensuing media coverage and public discourse was a struggle over the 'truth', inseparable from issues of power and political credibility.

Michel Foucault (1980) notes that

truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. [...] Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true... (131).

In outlining five traits that characterize the political economy of truth, Foucault (1980) points out that dominant apparatuses, such as the media, play a vital role in the production and transmission of 'truth.' To the media could be added the considerable clout of the White House, whose access to the media allows its perspective to gain wide currency in, what Pierre Bourdieu (1996) calls, the "circular circulation of information" (22). Another important trait pointed out by Foucault (1980) is the issue of ideological struggle, and enmeshed in this struggle is the very status of 'truth' (131).

Thus, Foucault (1980) posits the following proposition concerning truth and power:

'Truth' is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it. A 'régime' of truth. (133)

I take this proposition as the starting point for the current analysis in order to examine the circulation of a 'truth' in American politics associated with what I call the War on Terror Discourse (WoTD). The goal is to critically analyze micro-level discursive interaction in order to illuminate the production and reproduction of macro-level cultural understandings--namely, the identification of Iraq and al Qaeda as an enemy alliance.

This paper specifically examines an interview of Vice-President Dick Cheney by Gloria Berger on CNBC's Capital Report. The interview took place on June 17, 2004, the day after the 9/11

Commission released Staff Statement No. 15. Despite the 9/11 Commission's refutation of the notion that *contacts* led to a general *collaborative relationship* between Iraq and al Qaeda, a large part of the discursive work done by Cheney in the interview challenges those findings and reinforces the *adequation* (Bucholtz and Hall 2004) of Iraq and al Qaeda (Hodges 2004). Cheney achieves this by first erasing the distinction made in Staff Statement No. 15 between contacts and collaboration so that the notion of contacts effectively entails collaboration. Cheney's *categorization of the issue* then acts as a platform for the further *adequation* of Iraq and al Qaeda where the enumeration of contacts is used to signify collaboration. Throughout the interview, Cheney builds credibility by leveraging *symbolic capital* (Bourdieu and Thompson 1991) to legitimize the administration's perspective as more valid than contradictory elements of Staff Statement No. 15. The result is the production and reproduction of a key element of the War on Terror Discourse -- the notion of an Iraq/al Qaeda alliance -- and the further positioning of this identity as a credible and valid truth claim in American political discourse.

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