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# In the Name of Freedom

*A Critical Discourse Analysis of the political discourse in the inaugural speeches of  
George W. Bush and Barack H. Obama from a post-colonial perspective*

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## **Abstract**

In this essay the public discourses of U.S. president Barack Obama and former U.S. president George W. Bush are analysed from a post-colonial perspective using the practice of Critical Discourse Analysis. I have looked into two linguistic features: *pronouns* and *ideologically contested words* and made a qualitative study of the inaugural speeches of the presidents in which they are also compared to each other. My thesis is that there are thoughts and ideas represented in the speeches which have derived from a colonial heritage.

The result of the study shows that there are indeed some connections to a colonial or neo-colonial way of thinking although it is not very clear what direct political consequences comes out of these. What is more explicit, however, is the lack of post-colonial insight in both Bush's and Obama's speech. Between the two Bush stands out as the more direct in his discourse but also the one with least self-criticism. In contrast Obama does beat around the bush a great deal and uses many profound expressions that he has yet to live up to.

**Keywords:** Barack H. Obama, George W. Bush, Inaugural speech, Critical Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics, Post-colonialism, Neo-colonialism

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background and aim

George W. Bush (henceforth also referred to simply as “Bush”) was heavily criticized for his speeches after September 11, 2001, yet he went on to win the presidential election in the United States of America once more. This aroused an interest in me to find out more about his public discourse, and to make this study even more contemporary I have chosen to also look at the language of the current president, Barack H. Obama (henceforth also referred to simply as “Obama”), and compare the two. The comparison is important because they represent two different political interests. The aim of this study is to dissect their use of the language and find any possible colonial<sup>1</sup> connotations therein. I have chosen the somewhat provocative title *In the name of freedom* to pose one of the main interrogatives early on: can you ever own the right to define a word or concept?

## 1.2 Previous research

There has been extensive research made on the public discourse of George W. Bush. See for example the essay *A Call to Arms at the End of History: a Discourse–Historical Analysis of George W. Bush’s Declaration of War on Terror* by Joe Conason (2004) or the book *God’s Politics* by Jim Wallis (2005) where a whole chapter called *Dangerous Religion* has been devoted to dissecting Bush’s discourse. The present study is informed by the work of professors such as Lazar and Lazar; Graham, Keenan and Dowd; Horváth and Merskin.

In the case of Barack H. Obama, not very much about his political discourse has been written to date. Most authors who do write about it seem to dwell on his rhetorical moves or focus on other aspects than ideologically contested words and pronouns which are the variables I have chosen to look at. Consequentially there are somewhat fewer references to secondary sources in my analysis of Obama, though a clear application of Critical Discourse Analysis (see section 3.2) has been employed.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the word *colonial* is used in this essay as a concept, not as a practice (see also section 3.1).

### 1.3 Organization of the present study

The analysis is presented in three phases. First there is an analysis of the public discourse of Bush given in section 4.1. Second the public discourse of Obama is presented in section 4.2. To conclude the analysis there is a comparison between the discourses of the two presidents in section 5.

## 2. Methods and materials

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis

For the purposes of this essay the method of ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’<sup>2</sup> (henceforth also referred to simply as CDA) have been used. CDA is a framework for analyzing texts that grew out of the research of Norman Fairclough in the 1980’s. He stated in his first publication, *Language and Power*, three pillars upon which his research is based; Language, Ideology and Power (Fairclough 1995:3).

It should also be clarified at this early stage that CDA in itself is not an entirely objective scholarship. As professor Teun Van Dijk explains it: “Unlike much other scholarship, CDA does not deny but explicitly defines and defends its own sociopolitical position. That is, CDA is biased – and proud of it” (Van Dijk 2003:96).

Another important aspect of CDA is the order of proceedings in the process of analysis. The first stage is description where formal properties of a text are treated. Second comes the interpretation, which looks at text-interaction relations. Finally there is the explanation, which explores relations between interaction and social context (Fairclough 1995:21,22). Fairclough has defined some key variables for the practice of CDA, of which I intend to focus on two: ideologically contested words and the usage of the pronouns *we* and *you* (Fairclough 1995:92,93). To execute the analysis of these variables a qualitative approach has been used in order to expose how, for example, words can be misinterpreted when employed in different contexts.

Regarding the analysis of *we* and *you* it is important to note that all the pronouns in the English language have a *deictic* feature, which very easily leads to confusion as to what or whom is being referred to. Zupnik writes: “The term ‘deixis’ refers to the ways in which language encodes features of the context of utterance” (1994: 340). When using pronouns in a public discourse one has to be cautious, especially when giving a speech, which is a type of monologue, since then there is no room for questions and explanation.

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<sup>2</sup> See also section 3.2.

Finally one of the important features of CDA is the conception of knowledge. Jäger puts forth five central issues based on a theory of Foucault.

- what knowledge (valid at a certain place at a certain time) consists of;
  - how this valid knowledge evolves;
  - how it is passed on;
  - what function it has for the constitution of subjects and the shaping of society and
  - what impact this knowledge has on the overall development of society.
- (Jäger 2003:32-33)

Based on the quote above the conclusion that one must draw is that it is important to apply a critical stance towards how knowledge is presented as a commonly accepted truth.

## 2.2 Different notions of Colonialism

Another important method and terminology I have employed is that of post-colonial studies. It is important to mention that I see the this field as an intersectional<sup>3</sup> study. This means that it consists of several different power aspects that cannot be separated from one another. For instance, one cannot study the impact of sexism in a post-colonial society such as South Africa if one does not also look at how this has been affected by, for example, racism and economic discrimination without missing the influence one field of research has on the other.<sup>4</sup>

In this essay the words *colonialism*, *neo-colonialism* and *post-colonialism* are used to analyze the aspect of power in the public discourses of Obama and Bush. My position is that all these three concepts are closely connected although it is in the field of post-colonialism where most work is being done today.

Colonialism is defined as the notion that the ideals or culture of one country are sovereign to another and therefore it has the right to take over the political power of the supposed weaker country. "...colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question" (Mohanty 1988:61).

Neo-colonialism on the other hand is typically manifested by the external influence on the economic system and politics of a country that is seemingly independent (Nkrumah 1965:ix). This

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<sup>3</sup> The term intersectional comes from the idea of intersectionality which is a field of study developed within gender studies by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1994).

<sup>4</sup> For further reading on intersectional post-colonial studies see *Feminism without borders* by Mohanty, Chandra T. (2003).

does not necessarily mean that the domination or suppression of heterogeneity has disappeared or is weakened but rather that it becomes less apparent to the observer.

Post-colonialism is the study of how the colonial ideas and schools of thought persist in independent countries. It also examines what traces from the colonial era are left in indigenous cultures. Central concepts within the field of post-colonialism are the dichotomies *center/periphery*, *we/they*, *self/other*, etc. These concepts are used in the analysis of the two speeches.

In the following quote by Hall there are examples of both the dichotomy *self/other*, *les autres*, and what I see as the intersectionality of the field (Hall speaks of relations between different subjects and domination).

“...racisms [...] dehistoricize – translating historically specific structures into the timeless language of nature; decomposing classes into individuals and recomposing those disaggregated individuals into the reconstructed unities, the great coherences, of new ideological “subjects”. It translates “classes” into “blacks” and “whites”, economic groups into “peoples”, solid forces into “races”. This is the process of constituting new “historical subjects” for ideological discourses. [...] This is not an external function, operative only against those whom it disposes or disarticulates (renders silent). It is also pertinent for the dominated subjects – those subordinated ethnic groups or “races” which live their relation to their real conditions of existence, and to the domination of the dominant classes, in and through the imaginary representations of a racist interpellation, and who come to experience themselves as “the inferior”, *les autres*.” (Hall 1996:57)

## 2.3 Material

In order to evaluate the political discourses of Barack Obama and George W. Bush, I have chosen to look at two inaugural speeches. Obama's speech was delivered the 20th of January 2009, Bush's on the 20th of January 2005 (which was his second inaugural speech). The reason I have chosen these speeches is that they were both given after the events of September 11, 2001 and that they share the form of the presidential inaugural address, thus making them as similar as possible and minimizing the possible contextual causes for misinterpretations.

### 3. Analysis

#### 3.1 George W. Bush, Second Inaugural Address

##### 3.1.1 *We and You*

In the second inaugural speech by George W. Bush, there are a lot of cases of unclear deixis. Bush tends to use *we* as to justify his choices by intertwining other people and groups in his own discourse, or in the words of Graham, Keenan & Dowd “the identity of people and nation is presumed, and the national [anthropomorph] emerges immediately” (Graham, Keenan & Dowd 2004:208).

This usage of *we* is ubiquitous in the speech. It becomes most apparent in phrases such as “We are led, by events and common sense, to one conclusion” (Bush 2:L17<sup>5</sup>). But it is also clear that there are differences between the different usages of *we*. When referring to the encouragement of reform in government it is evident that it is an exclusive *we*, namely Bush's administration (Bush 3:L15).

When it comes to defining who *we* refers to, Bush makes it very clear in many places that he is speaking of the *Americans* (Bush 3:L21, 5:L25, 5:L6), which has to be understood as the citizens of the U.S.A<sup>6</sup>. At one point he then proceeds to use the word *America* juxtaposed in two sentences, first with the function of direct object and second as the subject in a subordinate clause where *we* was the subject of the main clause (Bush 5:L28,30). Here it seems that Bush wants to create a feeling of togetherness under one national identity. It is also interesting that at this point he also chooses to emphasize himself and use the pronoun *I* as the active subject of the phrase in which he introduces the *we* of the American people (Bush 5:L27). Perhaps this is meant as a reaffirmation of his role as the leader.

Another aspect of the usage of pronouns is the construction of binary communications that “represent the world as a place of polar opposites ” (Coe et al 2004:234). This way of describing the world was particularly practiced by Bush after the events of September 11, 2001 (Coe et al

<sup>5</sup> Reference to George W. Bush Second Inaugural Address, Appendix 1, signaling page number and line number following the style [page number]:L[line number]. This pattern will be used throughout the essay. When referring to Obama's speech, Appendix 2, I will simply change the name of the reference to *Obama*.

<sup>6</sup> I frequently use citizens of the U.S.A. instead of Americans. This is due to that I find the latter to be confusing since America is a continent much larger than the U.S. and to me a person from Bolivia or a Nicaragua would also be Americans.



2004:234 and Merskin 2004:157). I provide below two examples of how these binary concepts are presented in his second inaugural speech.

First there is the sentence “When you stand for your liberty, we will stand with you“ (Bush 3:L27). Here Bush draws on the idea of the United States as the granter for freedom and that the rest of the world is either with it or against it. This becomes evident in the following paragraph where he states that “The concerted effort of free nations to promote democracy is a prelude to our enemies’ defeat“ (Bush 4:L6-7). This sentence also contributes to the construction of the enemy as *the other*. All in all, one might see it as a softer version of the infamous quote “Either you are with us or you are with the terrorists” (Bush quoted in Merskin 2004:170). One explanation of the reasons for using this rhetoric is given by Merskin:

Nations “need” enemies. Governments use the idea of a common enemy as a method of social control, of reinforcing values of the dominant system, and of garnering participation in the maintenance of those beliefs (Keen, 1986; Spillman & Spillman, 1997). As a hegemonic device, a common enemy can serve to distract attention and divert aggression and energy toward a common threat. In addition, a common enemy is important in organizing evolutionary-based survival strategies that rely on perceptual and behavioral patterns that are a fundamental part of human nature. ” (Merskin 2004:159)

Second Bush uses *fire* as a metaphor for freedom (which I will return to in section 4.1.2) and then proclaims that “ It warms those who feel its power, it burns those who fight its progress...” (Bush 4:L13-14). This is a scary picture that again divides the world in two at the same time as, in a cunning manner, it also separates the negative connotations of the word fire from the positive.

Moreover it is notable that Bush's construction of 'self' and 'other' has been commented on by several writers. Graham, Keenan & Dowd, for example write about Bush's “elastic definition of an evil Other” (Graham, Keenan & Dowd 2004:213):

The elasticity of Bush’s evil Other definition lies primarily in the pejoratives evil and terrorism, and in the negative relationship that the evil Other has in respect of what America stands for. Bush expands the number of these plastic abstractions and fills them with specificities later in the post-9/11 political milieu, eventually turning 11 September into a world-historical opportunity to reshape the entirety of human affairs. (Graham, Keenan & Down 2004:213)

Following the thoughts of Graham, Keenan & Dowd in 2004 it can be said that seven years later, the “plastic abstractions” have been turned into a stone cold reality for many people who are affiliated or living together with those falling into the definition of *the other*. For example, in 2010 there were 172 civilians casualties in Afghanistan, according to official sources, involving Pro-Government forces, of which the U.S. Army participates (UNAMA and AIHRC 2010:35).

### 3.1.2 Ideologically contested words & concepts

The concept of universality recurs throughout Bush's speech. This is evident in such expressions as “force of history” (Bush 2:L14). When speaking of “concentrated work of generations” (Bush 3:L6) it also expresses a will to legitimize the actions of Bush and his administration by interpreting history in a way that favours them. The claim to universality becomes even more evident in the statement: “Eventually the call of freedom comes to every mind and every soul” (Bush 3:L23-24). This is a huge claim which can possibly be seen as a colonial mission of converting people to the right ideals of freedom.

It is clear that in the wake of history and his own discourse of universality, Bush also perceives a dichotomy between right and wrong, where he wants to stand on the side of the oppressed: “The moral choice between oppression, which is always wrong, and freedom, which is eternally right” (Bush 3:L11-12). But in his eagerness to be on 'the side of good', he does not consider that being oppressed also suggests a lack of power over oneself which in itself can be very demeaning.

Both the definition of the word *freedom* as well as the right to define it must be seen as central in the speech. Lazar & Lazar comment on this theme: “If America is aligned with freedom, then (following the logic of binarism) the adversary cannot also be associated with it. [...] Indeed, the discourse upholds a clear dichotomy between those who love freedom and others who are said to hate it...” (Lazar & Lazar 2004:8). Bush claims that “[f]reedom, by its nature, must be chosen, and defended by citizens, and sustained by the rule of law and the protection of minorities” (Bush 3:L1-2). This is a statement that can definitely be contested philosophically since the “the rule of law” or other norms that we create are precisely what creates limits for freedom. “Laws limit human autonomy by restricting freedom” in the words of Kenneth Himma (2009).

Bush also moralizes over the tyranny of other regimes and passes judgement on them for nurturing a *mortal threat* (Bush p.2 line 14). It is assumed that at least the citizens of the U.S.A. are included as those being threatened but exactly against whom else the threat is being made remains very unclear. This causes the feeling of a universal threat that is omnipotent and directed against everyone.

It also becomes evident in the same paragraph (Bush 2:L11-16) that when other countries make a statement, it is an *ideology* but when the U.S.A. declares its policy on something, it is merely clarifying something that is already known. This has been commented on by Sims:

It is conventional . . . to believe that one's opponent has an ideology, but that one's own side does not. Only the enemy are [sic] nasty ideologues, whereas we stand for the cause of freedom, justice, human rights, etc. From this perspective, liberal democracy is not an ideology so much as an ideal state of affairs. (Sims quoted in Lazar & Lazar 2004:9)

The word *tolerant* is also introduced at the end of the above mentioned paragraph (Bush 2:L15). Being tolerant is a concept which rhymes badly with the discourse of freedom and liberty that Bush is trying to convey since it presupposes a hierarchical power relation between the subject and the object. The person being tolerant is setting the norms, or the rules if you prefer, and the person being tolerated is forced to comply with these norms or else she would not be tolerated. The concept of tolerance is also central in the construction of the other since it is built upon the dichotomy between norm and divergent.

Van Dijk writes: "The power of dominant groups may be integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits and even quite general consensus, and thus take the form of what Gramsci called "hegemony"" (Van Dijk 2001:355, see also Gramsci 1971 for the original use of the term). With this in mind, when Bush mentions the "power of our ideals" it can be seen as a pure Anglo-American hegemonial perspective on power<sup>7</sup>, which of course would be a significant marker of a colonial discourse as well (Bush 3:L22).

In page 2, line 7 of Bush's speech there is an interesting use of word-order and passive voice. The negation of the first sentence appears between the verb *define* and the preposition *by*,

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<sup>7</sup> Anglo-american hegemonies are referred to within many different fields where there exist this type of cultural bias. See for example essays referring to the Anglo-American free-trade hegemony (Shohat 1992:104) and the Anglo-American hegemony in human geography (Aalbers & Rossi 2007:1).

thus creating an emphasis on the subject that follows. This is a very subtle way of saying that history defines our duties. This is one way for Bush to diminish his own responsibility as a statesman to speak truthfully and clearly to the people whom he represents. Instead he proposes that history should liberate him (an idea that interestingly enough is very reminiscent of a famous quote by a well-known Cuban president<sup>8</sup>).

Another important concept is *common sense*. This is a notion that is very hard to define because whatever the context is, it always presupposes a certain knowledge. Bush uses this exact wording when referring to the importance of the survival and expansion of liberty. (Bush 2:L17) Bush makes it clear that he is not willing to discuss what the conditions are for human freedom, not even when speaking of another culture on the other side of the earth. This means that he also attaches a moral value to the knowledge implied by *common sense* which can clearly be interpreted as a colonial imposition of a paradigm on liberty and freedom.

When talking about “the *expansion* of freedom” (Bush 2:L19, my italization) it is not clear how this will happen. Probably a lot of people understand this as a justification of the war efforts of the U.S. Military, which can be seen as a colonial effort of securing the natural resources of another country's territory for use in the U.S.A.

In the same sentence Bush also speaks of “the protection of minorities” (Bush 3:L2). The word *protection* in this particular context objectifies, diminishes and strengthens the image of a weak *other* in the need of help (a help that the U.S.A. can provide) (Bush 3:L1-2) .

The phrase *vital interests* suggests that if these interests were not defended, the U.S.A. would be forced to succumb to external powers or cease to exist as a nation, in other words it would die (Bush 2:L20). Using the word *vital*, with this kind of strong connotation, may be another way of justifying the war effort of the U.S.A. for both the citizens of the country and the rest of the world.

There are many religious references in the speech and this is reflected in the choice of words as well. The words *repose* and *sabbatical* (Bush 2:L9) can be seen both as references to the celebration of the sabbath as well as the image of the calm before the storm.

There is also the violent image of fire, the *untamed* fire, which appears at two distinct places in the speech (Bush 2:L10 and 4:L13). With the greatest probability this is a reference to vengeance for September 11, 2001. This is suggested by Bush first introducing the word in a historical context (“a day of fire”) followed by the phrase “we have lit a fire *as well*” (Bush 2:L10 and 4:L13 my italization).

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<sup>8</sup> *History Will Absolve Me* is the concluding sentence and subsequent title of a four-hour speech made by [Fidel Castro](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_Will_Absolve_Me) on 16 October 1953 ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_Will\\_Absolve\\_Me](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_Will_Absolve_Me)).

To conclude the analysis of Bush's speech there is a radical thought presented in page 2, line 23: “no one is fit to be a master, and no one deserves to be a slave”. *No Masters* is an expression more commonly found in anarchist slogans<sup>9</sup>, but when Bush proceeds to speak of “our nation’s security” he does not reflect on what this implies for those who are not included (Bush 2:L25). Again he constructs a dichotomy between center and periphery, the U.S.A. as the saviour of liberty, and other nations as the victims of tyranny that need to be rescued.

## 3.2 Barack H. Obama, Inaugural address

### 3.2.1 We and You

When looking at Obama's speech it becomes obvious that he also tends to use the dichotomy between *we* and *you* in a certain manner. There are a lot of adjectives to describe the *we* referring to the citizens of the United States of America, or the *American people* (Obama 5:L20), for example *young* (Obama 2:L26), *prosperous* and *powerful* (Obama 3:L10). There are several occasions of unclear agency which can be seen as a result of him using the pronoun *we* very frequently. He sometimes also uses the very efficient substantive *America* instead of a pronoun.

When speaking of the common defense, Obama proclaims that “...we reject as false the choice between our safety and our ideals. (...) Those ideals still light the world, and we will not give them up for expedience sake” (Obama 4:L7-11). Here there is a case of unclear agency; the *we* that is active and expressing an opinion in the phrase relates back to “our common defense”. This is a reference to the preamble of the U.S. Constitution in which *our* must be interpreted as *of the people*. It cannot, however, be claimed that it is the opinion of the people that is being presented, rather the opinion of Obama and his administration. This is a rhetoric that clearly employs an unclear agency to present one's ideas as a commonly accepted truth.

Secondly there is the rejection of a choice between safety and ideals (Obama 4:L7). Here the possessive pronoun *our* again changes the nature of *us* in the sentence to refer clearly to the people, but the main point here is that it is presupposed that there was an intention or at least a proposal that there was a decision to be made, a proposal that safety and ideals were the extremes of a dichotomy,

<sup>9</sup> See for example the book *No Gods, No Masters* by Daniel Guerin (1998).

suggesting that the options are to succumb or to fight. The opposite of this scenario, that Obama puts forth, would be a sovereign and arbitrary state. This implies that the role of the U.S.A as world police is justified and that the discourse of freedom in the U.S.A is untouchable. This may be seen as a colonial discourse since it does not relate to the multitude<sup>10</sup> of the society of the U.S.A nor the possibility of other ideals to “light the world” simultaneously or instead of the ones mentioned.

Obama is very restrained in his usage of *you* or *they*. At one point he refers to *earlier generations* and what can be learnt about power from the clashes with fascism and communism (Obama 4:L16). In this paragraph he makes a historical presupposition that the way in which the U.S.A. has used its power was prudent and fair because of its cause: “[O]ur security emanates from the justness of our cause” (Obama 4:L19). However, this is not certain and rather calls for criticism than advocating the politics that is being conveyed.

However it is noteworthy that he makes the effort to be inclusive in his description of the American people, mentioning Muslims and non-believers (Obama 4:L29-30). Cady expresses her opinion on the matter in the following manner: “Muslims have for centuries been seen as the menacing “other” in the formation of Western identity, this has been rekindled in the aftermath of September 11, with revealing episodes during the [presidential election] campaign when charges that Obama was a Muslim were hurled as slurs” (Cady 2009:13-14).

In spite of restraining himself from a dualistic vocabulary, Obama uses a forceful tone when he actually speaks about *they*, referring to foreign leaders “who seek to sow conflict” as well as “the people of poor nations” (Obama 5:L3,8). He says that these leaders “are on the wrong side of history” and that they have a clenched fist, supposedly meaning that they are posing a threat (Obama 5:L6-7). One becomes quite curious as to who these leaders actually are, but no matter what the answer to that question might be, there is an image of *the other* that is posed by Obama implying that he himself and his administration run free from “corruption and deceit and the silencing of dissent”, the misdeeds of which he accuses *the other* (Obama 5:L5).

There are also more occasions when Obama uses *they* to refer to the past, honoring the fallen soldiers in previous wars now buried at Arlington cemetery: “They saw America as bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than all the differences of birth or wealth or faction” and “We honor them not only because they are the guardians of our liberty, but because they embody the spirit of service -- a willingness to find meaning in something greater than themselves” (Obama 3:L8-9 and 5:L16-17). This is a type of rhetoric that clashes somewhat in

<sup>10</sup> *The Multitude* is a political term first used by Machiavelli and later revived by Spinoza and Negri. “Multitude is the term Spinoza uses to describe the collective social subject that is unified inasmuch as it manifests common desires through common social behaviour” (Negri 1991:xv).

comparison to the vision of *they* or *the other* in relation to foreign policy, as described above. These quotes rather imply a vision of a greater unity and a collective meaning of existence, however it is not an inclusive vision. Both quotes refer to the personnel of the U.S. Army, the first one partly and the second one entirely, which acts in the interest of the nation-state. This is the entity that in this case draws the line between the self and *the other*.

All in all it must be said that the construction of the dichotomy between *we* and *they* primarily lies in the imagery of a very potent and righteous subject; The United States of America.

### 3.2.2 Ideologically contested words & concepts

Obama has his own discourse on freedom. Perhaps the most articulate example of this is in the third to last line in the speech where he talks about the “great gift of freedom” (Obama 6:L18). The word *freedom* is used sparingly, no more than 3 times in the entire speech; *liberty* twice and *free* also twice, but in spite of this there are a lot of markers that indicate the importance of this concept. For example it is somehow present as well in the very beginning of the speech when Obama talks about “the ideals of our forebears” (Obama 2:L9) as well as in the end as mentioned above. Another important marker is the remark about “the God-given promise that all are equal, all are free...” (Obama 2:L28-29) which refers to the very purpose of the occasion. At the same time this quote can also be seen as a religious call towards the listener (either as an attempt to be inclusive or a way to call upon more people to accept the power of god).

The word *America* is also of great importance in this speech. The description of the country as “bigger than the sum of our individual ambitions, greater than the differences” is a rhetorical marker supposedly intending to create the image of a collective identity (Obama 3:L8-9). The usage of *America* in a pronoun-like manner, which I mentioned earlier is part of this rhetoric and this is also reversed in some instances, for example when the pronoun *us* becomes an allusion to the nation-state in the following quote:

For us, they packed up their few worldly possessions and traveled across oceans in search of a new life. For us, they toiled in sweatshops, and settled the West, endured the lash of the whip, and plowed the hard earth. For us, they fought and died in places like Concord and Gettysburg, Normandy and Khe Sahn. (Obama 3:L3-6)

In this paragraph the colonial discourse is also evident. Obama presents it as if it were the people who were subservient in the colonial process, those who did the hard work of fighting the

unknown and establishing a new society with new paradigms, who built the U.S.A. Already in the first two words the tone of this is set. The phrase “[f]or us...” can also be seen to indicate that it was for the sake of ideals or “freedom” people chose to emigrate, which would be in itself a very one-sided way of looking at it.

Another interesting word is *history*. Obama makes quite a few allusions to historical events but does not give a clear vision of what their purpose is. One occasion is when speaking about the “wrong side of history” (Obama 5:L6). It is understood by this expression that there is a right side of history, and by association that is the side of Obama. This rhetoric is also apparent in expressions such as: “those ideals still light the world”, where the word still becomes a marker of an infinite understanding of time (Obama 4:L10). Since there has been no mentioning of when these ideals began to “light the world” it is presupposed that they always have<sup>11</sup>. Everybody knows this is not the case and again the colonial connotations are inherent.

“America's birth” is another marker of time in the speech with even clearer colonial connotations, since the continent, the territory and the people living there existed before both Columbus and the Mayflower arrived (Obama 6:L7).

When speaking of history it is easy to digress into the field of religion. Christianity has a given place as the normative faith in Obama's speech, although he points out the the U.S.A. is a nation of many different religions (leaving out some minorities, while including others) (Obama 4:L29-30). An example of the pole-position of Christianity is the direct reference to the Holy Bible, named by Obama as *Scripture* (Obama 2:L26).

## 4. Comparison

### 4.1 God and biblical themes

Both Obama and Bush use a language which can easily be associated with the Christian faith. Interestingly enough, only Obama makes a direct reference to the Holy Bible when saying that “time has come to set aside childish things” (Obama 2:L26). Other than that, the references to God, God's will and God's promises, cannot exclusively be tied to Christianity, rather these references are

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<sup>11</sup> This type of thought also relates to the well-known book *The End of History and the Last Man* by Francis Fukuyama (1992).



applicable to various faiths that recognize the existence of one God<sup>12</sup>. They are both eager to point this out by mentioning that the U.S.A. is a country of many faiths (Bush 5:L12 and Obama 4:L30).

## 4.2 Freedom

Freedom is in my opinion the keyword in both these speeches and a concept that is definitely ideologically contested.

Obama uses this word sparingly, as mentioned earlier, but nonetheless it is the crown jewel in his speech when he comes to his *grande finale*: “we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations” (Obama 6:L18-19). Obama also uses related words such as *liberty* and *opportunity* (Obama 5:L16, 4:L4). All in all *freedom* must be seen as a central concept in the speech.

In contrast to Obama's restrained use of the freedom concept, Bush uses a great part of his speech to describe what is freedom and what is not. But the actual value put into the word remains more or less the same. For example there is the common belief in the “expansion of freedom” (Bush 2:L19 , Obama 4:L1) and also they both see a bond between *freedom* and *prosperity* (Bush 5:L6-7, Obama 3:L2). Freedom is also used by Bush, similarly to Obama, as the final goal of all efforts. It is also the last word in Bush's speech, pointing out the way forward just as Obama later has done.

In spite of the differences in the rhetoric between these two discourses on freedom, there is a very clear similarity which leads one to the same interpretation of the concept of freedom. This view can be called by many names, Hunter calls it “cultural conservative” and proceeds to explain what someone with an opposite view might think: “Where the cultural conservatives tend to define freedom economically (as individual economic initiative) and justice socially (as righteous living), progressives tend to define freedom socially (as individual rights) and justice economically (as equity)” (Hunter quoted in Horváth 2009:48). Based on this observation one can also see the connection between the “cultural conservative” view on freedom and the colonial heritage since it does not bear in mind the power relations that create limits for individual economic initiatives, for example.

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<sup>12</sup> In contrast to my opinion Wang emphasizes the connection to Christianity in Obama's inaugural speech: “We know most Western people are godly Christian. These prayers, direct and indirect speeches from Bible and the Christian stories can all help the speaker to win the sympathy and supporting of audience” (Wang 2010:261).

### 4.3 War

Perhaps the most evident component in the speech of a newly elected president for a country in conflict is to speak about the war, even though Obama strategically avoids this subject.

In the case of Bush, it is clear that in his second inaugural speech he still uses the events of September 11, 2001 to justify the presence of U.S. troops abroad. He says that it is his “most solemn duty [...] to protect this nation and its people from further attacks ” (Bush 3:L9). Although Bush proclaims that it is the aim of the U.S.A. “to seek and support the growth of democratic movements and institutions ” not primarily by arms (Bush 2:L27-29), he also glorifies those who have died in battle: “A few Americans have accepted the hardest duties in this cause - [...] the dangerous and *necessary* work of fighting our enemies. Some have shown their devotion to our country in deaths that honored their whole lives – and we will always honor their names and their sacrifice” (Bush 4:L16-19 my italics). It is implied that Bush sees the U.S. war effort as a unavoidable and pre-emptive operation in the name of freedom. It is also notable that more than half<sup>13</sup> of Bush's speech deals with the issue of war in one way or another.

Obama's references to war, both in the present as well as in the past, are even more subtle and he only mentions once the actual war the U.S.A. is fighting in Afghanistan (Obama 2:L11-12). For him the war is not the central tool to gain confidence from listeners and voters, as it is for Bush, but merely one of many difficult tasks which need to be handled. Probably this is due to the fact that Bush started the war during his administration and consequently one must assume that Obama wants to distance himself from this decision.

### 4.4 Construction of *the other*

The construction of *the other* is something that can be found in the speeches of both the presidents and perhaps one of the strongest markers of a neo-colonial discourse. Since the *we* in both speeches often refers to the U.S.A. as a singular subject it increases the level of exclusion since there are many persons living there that do not see themselves primarily as citizens of the U.S.A., or *Americans* if you prefer the wording of the two presidents (an example of this is the Chicanos<sup>14</sup>). “The 'locality' of national culture is neither unified nor unitary in relation to itself, nor must it be seen simply as 'other' in relation to what is outside and beyond it” (Bhabha 1990:4). Furthermore it

<sup>13</sup> In my opinion Bush begins to speak of war on page 2, line 8 (“standing watch on distant borders” and he remains within that thematic until page 4, line 24 (“Make the choice to serve in a cause larger than your wants [...] – and in your days you will add not just to the wealth of our country, but to its character.”

<sup>14</sup> Chicanos are people in the U.S.A. of a Mexican-American heritage who have been colonized twice, first by the Spanish conquistadors and second by the English settlers (Ashcroft 2001:11).

can be argued that the construction of the exclusive *we* and *the other* stands as an advocacy of a post-colonial oppression since it disregards the rights and morals of the people that are invisible to you. These other people only exist in the *periphery*, both geographically and mentally.

There are two very different images of the other in each of the two speeches. The imagery of Bush can be seen as more forceful. This is especially due to the way in which he uses the word *enemy* (Bush 4:L6,7,18).

The fact that it is Bush that makes the slightly daring and polarizing comments while Obama tries to smooth over these divides might be due to Bush's religious convictions. Bush is known for his strong connections to the conservative right-wing, a relationship that has been analyzed by preacher and theologian Jim Wallis.

George Bush reports a life-changing conversion, around the age of forty, from being a nominal Christian to a born-again believer—a personal transformation that ended his drinking problems, solidified his family life, and gave him a sense of direction. [...] Close friends say that after 9/11, Bush found “his mission in life.” The self-help Methodist slowly became a messianic Calvinist, promoting America's mission to “rid the world of evil.” (Wallis 2005:139)

As mentioned above, Obama is more restrained in his choice of words and seems to be more sensible to the tense political connotations there are to these types of dichotomies. However he does not divert from the same dualistic view as Bush, in which the U.S.A. remains the righteous protector of *freedom* and *ideals*.

To conclude this section it can be said that the direction of criticism in the speeches is one significant difference between the two. Bush dedicates a large portion of his speech to criticizing the other and its actions, while Obama mainly focuses on domestic affairs, even introducing some self-criticism when speaking of “our collective failure” (Obama 2:L13).

## 5. Conclusions

In my opinion it is clear that there are colonial currents in the discourses of the two presidents, disguised, however, in two very different packages. For even though they to some extent share the same dualistic view of the world, the same discourse on freedom, the penchant for Christianity and the glorification of the United States of America, it is also possible to argue that Obama's message is one of peace and dignity while Bush seems fixated by the prospects of revenge.

It would be absurd to say that the colonial thoughts that are reproduced in these speeches is an indication that the U.S.A. would actually have plans to colonize another country. It is however my firm point of view that this country is employing itself of a neo-colonial attitude towards other nations to secure natural resources and military supremacy<sup>15</sup>. The first to provide for its own citizens, in a post-colonial globalized society where owner-relationships are askew and no nation, company or individual is safe in the wake of a fluctuating market calling the shots, and the second to make sure no one will question their right to maintain this attitude.

As president of the United States of America it is not strange that one tries to be inclusive in one's discourse. After all there are votes to be won in the coming elections. Strangely enough Bush's rather forceful construction of *the other*, which he does not try to hide, won a lot of sympathy. However, the fact that Obama won the last election indicates that this sympathy has shifted. But in one aspect they both fail to be inclusive, and that is when it comes to themselves. Bhabha writes: "The 'other' is never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse, when we *think* we speak most intimately and indigenously 'between ourselves'" (1990:4).

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<sup>15</sup> This view is based upon the book *Interventions* by Noam Chomsky in which he explains the relationship between military supremacy and control over natural resources (Chomsky 2007:8).

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