

## IAF SPACE EDUCATION AND OUTREACH SYMPOSIUM (E1)

## Space for All: Decolonial Practices in Space (2)

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STUDIES IN MARTIAN RHETORIC: THE MARS ONE SAGA THROUGH THE TELESCOPE OF  
NARRATIVE PERSUASION**Abstract**

This paper updates a 2014 IAC presentation analyzing Mars One's use of spectacular narratives in space mission discourse, which obscured technical complexities required for a Mars mission. Mars One capitalized on media representation of space exploration contexts, to recruit astronaut candidates for a proposed live broadcast of the construction of a permanent Mars habitat. The project recruited "citizen astronauts" participating in a reality TV series in which they would live the rest of their lives there. Of course it is now obvious that the fundamental goal of Mars One's engagement strategies was, in reality, fundraising. Yet, the allure of interplanetary expansion and science fiction tropes persist in space mission narratives. The 2014 analysis highlighted such discourse as tool of persuasion linked to grand narratives of colonial expansion and identification with the embodied experience of viewing reality TV or perilous activities. In revisiting this topic, the role of authority and the emotional resonance these narratives are intended to create will be examined. This topic also illustrates the socio-cultural trends have influencing discourse on media and critical theory. For instance, the Sokal affair, through clandestine parody, revealed elitism among decolonial theorists, leading to skepticism towards an established arbiter of meaning. Technoscientific cognitive activity is also susceptible to appeals to authority and using technical jargon to enhance legitimacy. The cognitive dissonance of knowing information is unlikely to be true and yet "wanting to believe" is one way a fault line in rationality can be produced via certainty by repression. Repeated social and psychological experiments demonstrate that unless people are specifically trained to recognize biases, they are prone to be persuaded by speech perceived as authoritative, in any discipline. All of this results in a misconception that scientific language inherently signifies accuracy and reliability, leading to the neglect of the socio-political contexts in which knowledge is produced. For the adoption of a decolonial framework in the space industry, there is an urgent need for critical engagement with language, authority, and knowledge production. At the exact time when proposed space projects increasingly use intricate narrative manipulation, science outreach and communications have adopted an emotive "story telling" stylistic bombast. It is critical that all such types of communication are analysed as media objects, not just as scientific and technological professional discourses. This paper will propose particular interrogations of technoscientific narratives, to make visible some common mechanisms by which an emotional response occurs.