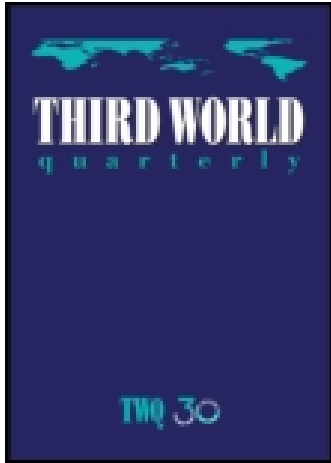


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Publisher: Routledge

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Third World Quarterly

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ctwq20>

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Published online: 27 May 2008.

To cite this article: Michael V Bhatia (2005) Fighting words: naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors, *Third World Quarterly*, 26:1, 5-22, DOI: [10.1080/0143659042000322874](https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000322874)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000322874>

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Fighting words: naming terrorists, bandits, rebels and other violent actors

MICHAEL V BHATIA

ABSTRACT This introductory paper identifies some of the core background themes and theories through which the 'politics of naming' and other forms of discourse conflict can be examined. The focus is on the nature, power, role and function of names, with a final section examining the ethics of naming and examining terrorism. The central unifying theme is the contested relationship between the actual nature of a movement and the name applied, particularly in terms of the attempt to identify the essence or true nature of a movement and how this relates to other dissenting or surrounding factors. Once assigned, the power of a name is such that the process by which the name was selected generally disappears and a series of normative associations, motives and characteristics are attached to the named subject. Indeed, the long historical relationship between the naming of opponents, empire and colonialism, as well as the manner in which the global media frame armed conflict, only provide further reason to doubt the truthfulness of the names assigned, and their ability to address the micro-realities involved in these conflicts and movements.

On 15 May 2003 a new front opened in the conflict between the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The Mayor of Davao City, located on the southern island of Mindanao, argued that President Arroyo should label the MILF terrorists under the belief that: 'They have taken so many lives of innocent civilians, which is inexcusable. No one knows when or where they will strike. It is about time this group should be branded terrorist before they go beyond the bounds of rebellion.' In response, Eid Kabalu, a MILF spokesman, stated that the use of such a label would indicate that the 'government is closing its door to the peace process and [intends to] pursue a military solution', to result in a 'bloodier war'. The degree of weight, and potential offensive power, of this description is further seen in his comment that: 'We have been threatened that we will be pulverized, bombed out of existence and now they're using this terrorist label. We have been threatened enough and nothing can scare us enough.'¹ Implicitly referring to the USA and reflecting wide internal opposition to this

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potential discursive shift, Vice-President Teofisto Guingona asserted that a change in the government's characterisation of the MILF was not 'for the foreigner to do'. A week later, during a state visit by Arroyo to Washington, which coincided with an artillery and air assault against the MILF, President Bush said of Arroyo: 'She's tough when it comes to terror; she fully understands that in the face of terror, you've got to be strong, not weak. The only way to deal with these people is to bring them to justice. You can't talk to them. You can't negotiate with them. You must find them.'² Almost a century earlier, the US military government in the Philippines' response to the first Moro rebellion, occurring from 1901 to 1913, featured distinctly similar accounts of savagery, fanaticism, disorder and banditry.³ With regard to the latter, the November 1902 *Bandolerismo* Statute classified all forms of internal resistance as banditry and labelled any armed group brigands.

For the MILF, as well as for others, words were seen to be of equal power to bombs. While the Philippine government wishes to assign the label terrorist *in anticipation* of the MILF's transformation, the MILF have clearly identified the offensive potential of this description and indicated that the result of such name-calling would be a functional escalation of the conflict. This engagement with the rhetoric continues, both by governments labelled part of the 'axis of evil' and by the Anti-Coalition Forces in Afghanistan (ACF—the new name used by the Coalition/International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to encompass Al-Qaeda, the Taliban and those members of Hizb-i-Islami still following Gulbuddin Hekmatyar). Indeed, in 2004, a poster or 'night-letter' appeared on the wall of an NFO compound in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, declaring:

To the brave Afghanistan Mujahid Nation! The USA, the head of unbelievers and the root of crime. . . attacks the weak Muslim countries to capture them and then creates its own evil government. The supreme leaders, correct Mujahideen, were arrested and titled with different bad names.⁴

A similar complaint was made by Ayatollah Ali Khamene'i, Iran's religious leader, when he argued that the USA and Israel 'are fighting Islam by giving other names to their adversary. For instance, they expand the meaning of terrorism so as to crush liberating movements.'⁵ While the MILF has no connection with Al-Qaeda, the Taliban or Iran, all three of these cases reveal that movements attach significance to words, and that names are core areas of dispute in armed conflict. In this competition over the legitimacy of violent acts, these groups seek to refute or even appropriate the words and names used against them in order to win the hearts, minds and support (either tacit or active) of the population. In the case of the statement by the ACF, rhetorical offence at the proposed maligning of their leadership was quickly followed by a rhetorical offensive of their own: 'If Jihad was obligatory against the Russian forces then is it not obligated against US forces terrorist acts?'⁶ All these examples strongly contradict the old childhood axiom of 'sticks and stones' for, in contemporary armed conflict, 'names' do matter and are seen to 'hurt'. Discourse is thus a tool for armed movements and a battleground and contested space in contemporary conflicts. The politics of

naming is about this contest, examining how names are made, assigned and disputed, and how this contest is affected by a series of global dynamics and events.

‘One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter’—the phrase clearly vies with Mao’s ‘the guerrilla must move amongst the people as a fish swims in the sea’ and ‘political power grows out of the barrel of a gun’ as that most commonly associated with insurgencies and civil wars. Thus, for the layperson, the variability of interpretation—the potential that a portrayal is biased—is immediately associated with how groups and acts are described. The purpose of the discursive conflict is to attain a victory of interpretation and ensure that a particular viewpoint triumphs. While the counter-arguments of the MILF and ACF rarely echo outside their immediate locality, it does indicate that there are strong (and richly nuanced) contests over words occurring within these conflict areas. The above accounts reveal that the ‘Global War on Terror’ has occurred not only on the various battlefields defined by the Bush administration (from Afghanistan to Iraq, Georgia and the Philippines), but on web- and editorial pages, in the halls of the UN General Assembly, and on streets and in cafés around the world. As a result, it appears that the Bush administration is not only engaged in a physical war (involving military interventions, seizures and assassinations, interrogations and surveillance, and financial targeting) but also in a dispute over discourse. The pronouncement of a ‘war on terror’ has forced many to verbally negotiate and assert who they are, who they are allied with, and who they are against. Moreover, this is the new dominant framework in which both governments and non-state armed movements present their acts. Indeed, a transnational element has again been transplanted onto a series of pre-existing local disputes, as occurred during the Cold War. From Uzbekistan to Colombia, from the Philippines to Algeria, the conflict over ‘names’ and ‘naming’ is becoming furious.

The articles in this issue seek to provide insight into the contemporary and historical conflict between movements and governments over names—the labels and descriptions given to actors, motives, events, ideologies and places. In doing so, the involved authors have employed a variety of approaches. Although 9/11 and the language of terrorism (of acts and agents) serves as an immediate introductory core, many have sought to broaden the inquiry, situating each conflict in relation to the previous words used by and against former colonial authorities, and in relation to former descriptions such as bandit, criminal, subversive, rebel and any number of different local euphemisms or dysphemisms. Some contrast external perceptions of a movement with how the group views and understands itself, as occurs in the articles on Al-Qaeda, Hizbullah and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, while others examine how individual soldiers relate to their opponents and ‘targets’ on the battlefield, as is the focus of the article on Israeli snipers and the Al-Aqsa intifada. A series of other articles extends the examination to how naming affects attempts at political reconciliation and peace negotiations, as is the case with the contributions on Sri Lanka and Chechnya.

The goal of this introductory article is to serve as a review essay and identify some of the core background themes and theories through which the 'politics of naming' and other forms of discourse conflict can be examined. It is divided into three sections: nature, power, and role; function; and ethics. The central unifying theme is the relationship between the actual nature of a movement and the name applied, particularly in terms of the attempt to identify the essence or true nature of a movement and how this relates to other dissenting or surrounding factors. Once assigned, the power of a name is such that the process by which the name was selected generally disappears and a series of normative associations, motives and characteristics are attached to the named subject. By naming, this subject becomes known in a manner which may permit certain forms of inquiry and engagement, while forbidding or excluding others. No doubt such simplifications allow people to both engage with and understand a complex world. However, the need for simplicity can be rapidly appropriated and taken advantage of by those with their own political agenda. Indeed, the long historical relationship between the naming of opponents, empire and colonialism, as well as the manner in which the current global media frames armed conflict, only provide further reason to doubt the truthfulness of the names assigned. Many governments, both in the West and those subject to internal armed contest, cannot be relied upon responsibly and ethically to name their opponents. Again, in the case of the MILF, both President Arroyo and President Bush have sought to associate, amalgamate and compress the MILF with the Abu Sayyaf group and Jemaah Islamiyah, constantly arguing that the MILF needs to 'reject terror' (although it has yet to accept it) and referring to its bases as 'terrorist lairs' and terrorist training camps.⁷

Most authors in this volume are not confident of the ability of any particularly label or interpretive lens to adequately encompass the purpose, activities, local relevance or ideology of a given movement. Far too often complex local variations, motives, histories and inter-relationships are lost in the application of meta-narratives or dominant academic approaches to understanding and assessing conflict. In the case of the former each conflict is seen through whatever classificatory lens has recently been adopted to categorise, label and aggregate violence in the outside world, whether as evidence of communist expansion or Islamic fundamentalism. In the case of the latter, far too often, names, words and discourse are viewed as objective representations of fact in much policy-oriented research on conflict, with those works examining and challenging vocabulary typically consigned to the realm of critical theory. In contrast, the following introduction, as well as the other articles in this issue, is an attempt to show how naming and discourse is immediately relevant to conflicts and conflict resolution.

The power of naming: nature, truth and transmission

To name is to identify an object, remove it from the unknown, and then assign to it a set of characteristics, motives, values and behaviours.⁸ Names can fulfil a similar role as narratives, images, euphemisms and analogies. All

serve as a natural reaction to surplus and abundant information, with the use of these and other 'knowledge structures' to 'order, interpret, and simplify'. For the recipient or audience, names, much like analogies, 'help define the nature of the situation confronting the individual', 'help assess the stakes' and 'provide prescriptions', which are then evaluated in terms of 'their chances of success' and 'their moral rightness'.⁹ For Plato, names should be assessed according to their 'quality of showing the nature of the thing named', and it is thus necessary to 'learn from the truth both the truth itself and whether the image is properly made'.¹⁰ However, while determining the basis for assessing names, Plato remains sceptical that any name could meet these criteria, for they are but imitations and partial reflections of a form. In the end the relationship between the name provided and the 'true' character of that described is often tenuous. A name may provide truth to an extent, and perhaps even *a* truth, but it cannot reveal the complete 'truth' of an object by encompassing all aspects and facets of that identified. As Talcott Parsons argues in his examination of selectivity, the assigned name may be selectively true, but may 'not constitute a balanced account of the available truth'.¹¹ While a name may reflect the core or essential qualities of an object, some aspects of the character will remain outside the descriptive boundaries of the name applied. A search for an essential truth may ultimately divert the analyst, reader or politician away from the truths hidden in a discarded periphery.

The actual ability to name, and to have that name accepted by an audience, holds great power. The authority of the 'name-giver'—the individual seen to have this linguistic power by Plato in his dialogue *Cratylus*—will determine just how natural these names, words and narratives are viewed by an audience or reader. Dale Spender, in her feminist examination of naming, argues that:

Those who name the world have the privilege of highlighting their own experiences—and thereby identify what they consider important. Thus, groups that have a marginal status are denied the vocabulary to define (and express) their own experiences. . . Naming is the means whereby we attempt to order and structure the chaos and flux of existence which would otherwise be an undifferentiated mass. By assigning names we impose a pattern. . . which allows us to manipulate the world.¹²

A type of 'word magic' results, aligning the 'verbal symbol' not only with the 'non-verbal fact' but also with 'quantities, good and evil, that are believed to inhere in the relevant aspects of the world to which the word refers'.¹³ By doing so, these magic words serve 'to conjure away the coding of the narrative situation' and 'naturalize the subsequent narrative by feigning to make it the outcome of some natural circumstance and thus. . . disinaugurating it'.¹⁴ Descriptions, and the argument sequences that support them, will appear to be based on a thorough assessment of the available choices. Each name will come with a surrounding set of associations, natures, motives and intents. This results from the fact that most names are not developed independently, but drawn or 'borrowed' from other areas.¹⁵ A name will

place emphasis on certain aspects and characteristics of an object, while neglecting or omitting other key areas. In the end these names can be ‘infectious’, created to spread quickly or strongly adhere to the group thus created, proving hard to shake off and determining the boundaries and key reference points of future debates and discussions.¹⁶

Recent studies of the media—both a name-giver and a primary mechanism through which names and narratives are transmitted to the public—provide further grounds for critically engaging with ‘naming’, particularly when this occurs with reference to or within a broader environment of war and conflict. Shaw argues that ‘news media generally take their cue from national governments and international organizations and follow their strategic directions’, and that ‘only rarely do they contest or modify them’.¹⁷ Frame analysis has revealed how most news organisations typically favour certain interpretations, determining what aspects are ‘important and what may be ignored, what is subject to debate and what is beyond question, what is true and false’.¹⁸ Moreover, the way a story is sequenced (or the manner in which authors, journalists or academics ‘unfold and order the elements of their accounts’) ‘influence individual assessments of violence as right, wrong or something in between’.¹⁹ As revealed in a study of media reporting of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, ‘the process of news gathering puts reporters in certain places, gives them access to some sources and not others, predisposes them to certain concepts and certain ways of perceiving the world, and leads them to create a world congruent with their culture’.²⁰ As a result, journalists will recognise what their editors will and will not print, with the involved correspondents often unaware of the ‘forces constraining them...determining not only which stories are covered but how they are framed’.²¹ A form of self-censorship occurs at the foreign bureaus or field offices, where dissenting information or contradictory interpretations are removed by harried journalists in order to save themselves either time or exasperation. Most of these observations were previously made by Goebbels, perhaps the Master of All Lies, when he argued that:

Enemy countries keep on talking as though we had discovered propaganda, or at least made it into the devil’s tool which many people consider it to be. [However]...Even *The Times*, the most democratic paper in the world, makes propaganda in that it deliberately gives prominence to certain facts, emphasizes the importance of others by writing leaders or commentaries about them, and only handles others marginally or not at all.²²

All of these factors reveal the manner in which the names assigned to certain groups are both acquired by media organisations and then transmitted to the public. Dissenting information is filtered out, removed by either conditioned reporters in the field or as a result of narrative frames or sequences. A decision is made to focus (sometimes exclusively) on a proposed essence of a story or group, with event-based reporting (on attacks, protests and other violent incidents) obscuring other aspects of an armed movement. However, as will be proposed in the following section, critical media studies have

tended to over-emphasise both the pervasiveness and the hegemonic influence of the trends identified.

Nevertheless, any account of a strict hegemony of naming needs to be conditioned by the following. To the disdain of some conservative writers in the USA, certain segments of the media (namely the BBC) are decidedly reluctant to use the term 'terrorist', referring only to terrorist attacks and instead labelling these perpetrators as 'militants' or 'rebels'.²³ Moreover, the media 'line' or 'frame' is not always static, and is capable of shifting over the course of a crisis and representing the parties in a different manner at different times, again depending 'largely upon the representative activities of Western civil society institutions, including media' and 'on the intersection of their needs and demands with the interests, beliefs and agendas of groups in Western society'.²⁴

Finally, examinations of discourse assign almost uncontested 'symbolic power' to the West and to national governments. Indeed, too much of critical theory, particularly in media studies and post-colonial approaches, focuses on the impact of dominant, Western or hegemonic actors, while neglecting both variation as well as the role, power and impact of either opposing or resisting groups. Discourse is surely a tool of government and reflects dominant ideologies, but these are certainly subject to competition, resistance and interpretation, particularly on the internet. Non-state groups—as exemplified by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas—are both capable and actively engaged in this dispute over terms. Indeed, those labelled barbarians, savages, bandits, criminals, subversives and terrorists are increasingly able to 'speak' on the world stage, and many are listening. While many of these counter-arguments may not be passively received by all Western readers, only rarely appearing in truncated form on media programmes, an active search by the curious can quickly produce these results on the web, whether produced locally or by supporters in a diaspora. While the USA may have enormous influence on the global media (even now challenged by the rise of Al-Jazeera, where an alternative news channel is accused of being tied to the acts and movements it broadcasts), deficiencies in its tactical conduct of psychological operations have led some US military observers to conclude that the "DOD is not well-prepared or well-positioned to successfully battle for hearts and minds", with local 'competitors on par with or even arguably more sophisticated than the US'.²⁵

As a result, even the most powerful state may find its attempts at 'discourse dominance' undermined at any number of different levels, as even the more remote armed movements are adapting to and utilising the revolution in information technology. From the former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda to contemporary Afghanistan and Iraq, web pages, newspapers and television and radio broadcasts have been used to spread rumours and facts regarding both local 'others' and international military forces.²⁶ In internal conflicts images and names are used to depersonalise opponents and create fertile ground for intercommunal violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Rumours circulate concerning impending attacks or political conspiracies. Offensive action is taken in the name of defence and centuries of coexistence

are erased by memories of past wrongs. These locally dominant actors thus use their information resources to polarise internal discourse, quieting dissenting views and defining parameters, thus ensuring that any local debate or contest occurs on their terms. With regard to information action against international forces, in Somalia, Mohammad Farah Aideed's use of 'radio and vehicle-mounted loudspeakers to accuse UNOSOM of atrocities against women and children sparked the 1993 attack on the Pakistani contingent, and was considered so threatening that the UN Security Council authorised action against those behind the propaganda.'²⁷ It should also be remembered that the revolt in Najaf by the Mahdi army of Moqtada al-Sadr was partly sparked by the Coalition authority's decision to close its newspaper, *al-Hawza*, which was accused of inciting anti-Coalition activity.

The functions of naming: gathering supporters and justifying acts

In this introduction naming is seen to fulfil two primary functions: to recruit supporters by propagating a discourse of belonging and opposition; and to justify action through labelling. An appeal to an audience is founded on a desire first to affirm an identity and to delineate an in-group from an out-group and second to recruit supporters. The role and function of 'the enemy' and 'the other', as further related to the designation of inside from outside, has been thoroughly examined and entrenched in international relations theory and other areas of the social sciences, perhaps to the point of redundancy.²⁸ For David Campbell, 'the boundaries of a state's identity are secured by the representation of danger integral to foreign policy', with 'a notion of what "we" are...intrinsic to an understanding of what "we" fear'.²⁹ Others argue that the key to understanding Europe's colonial period lies in the methods used and discourses developed to separate the coloniser from the colonised, or the agent from the subject of intervention.³⁰ In the absence of such words, imperialism and intervention lose their moral compass.³¹

Over the past decade in the West portrayals of localised disorder have been seen to play a key role in the constitution of an 'international community' based on a concept of order.³² With the breakdown of concepts such as East and West after the Cold War, new mental geographical divisions have emerged, dividing a 'tame' from a 'wild' and 'violent' world.³³ According to Michael Ignatieff, media representations of civil conflict fortified a belief that 'they're all crazy', reproducing 'that reassuring imperial dichotomy between the virtue, moderation, and reasonableness held to exist in the West and the fanaticism and unreason of the East'.³⁴ The naming of peoples, territories and phenomena are all part of this attempt to recruit and indicate allies and opponents, as well as to demarcate similarity from difference. During certain periods difference is immediately equated with opposition. For example, in Greece in the fifth century, 'the idea of the barbarian' (with *barbaros* meaning 'not speaking Greek') helped 'to foster a sense of community between the allied states' of the Delian League against the Persian Empire.³⁵ Since then, 'the space of the barbarian [has served to delineate]...the limits of the

political community', with 'the figure of the barbarian—either alone or in a horde—act[ing] as the “constitutive outside” of the *polis*’.³⁶

All this is part of a struggle for the sympathy and support of an audience. Yet, as mentioned before, the audience to which each actor is playing varies, even within the same conflict. While the Bush administration's Manichean rhetoric of good versus evil, of murderers and terrorists, of 'with us' or 'against us,' and of a clash between civilisation and its opponents, may appeal to broad segments of the US public, it has served to alienate many both within the country and in the rest of the world. Another example is provided by Northern Ireland in the early 1980s, where Richard Clutterbuck argued that: 'in presenting a story to local, national or world media, a Provisional Sinn Fein spokesman has always had to bear in mind some nine different audiences [from the actual IRA to rival groups, the British public and the Irish diaspora], each with different perceptions, different reactions and different influences on events'.³⁷ Different words assume dominance at different times, with the word choice selected according to the power assigned at different levels (local, national, international). Some groups or governments appeal to historical imagery of former rebel and revolutionary movements, harnessing a rich mythology of the ideologies and reasons behind their actions, situating themselves in terms of the past in order to again attain the affinity and support of the population. Others play directly to broader international actors, placing what may be a local conflict in terms of a larger international conflict system, and thereby receiving financial, military and diplomatic support. As previously occurred during the Cold War, and as evident in John Russell's contribution on Chechnya in this issue, certain states have quickly adopted and adapted to US terrorist rhetoric to describe their own internal opponents. It is decidedly in the interest of some quasi-authoritarian governments to over-emphasise the militant Islamist character of their opposition, in the hope of US assistance or a *carte blanche* for repression, as may be the case in Uzbekistan, Egypt and Algeria. The goal here is to make local conflicts and armed movements appear as either one big Al-Qaeda or as a series of small Al-Qaedas united in purpose, and as all part of or directly linked to those who attacked the USA on 9/11. As a result, in its 2002 *Annual Report*, Amnesty International proposed that 'in the name of combating “terrorism”, governments [have] stepped up the repression of their political opponents, detained people arbitrarily, and introduced sweeping and often discriminatory laws that undermined the very foundations of international human rights and humanitarian law'.³⁸ This observation has certainly proven true when viewing President Vladimir Putin's response to the Beslan school massacre, which was soon followed by a decree dictating the further consolidation of presidential powers and the extension of his authority over regional governors and the electoral system.

Beyond the creation of allies through the adoption of a shared rhetoric of belonging, the struggle over representation is directly a struggle over the legitimacy of violent acts. Indeed, a site, territory or people are first

colonised by words and names before being physically occupied by soldiers, trading companies and statesmen. This particularly occurs when there is a need to argue for defensive action, justify intervention abroad, or delegitimise internal opponents. From St Augustine to Walzer, self-defence is proposed as one requirement for the pursuit of a just war. As a result, naming plays a role in the following assessments: who is the victim and who is the perpetrator? Who is in the right, who is in the wrong, and who is to be blamed?

The relationship between the names applied and the decision to practice restricted or unrestricted warfare is immediately apparent. For the Romans the designation of a population as *homo sacer* permitted a self-designated ‘civilised’ society to use ‘all necessary means’ in the pursuit of conquest, including those viewed as being too brutal for general use.³⁹ Those preaching wars against others within the Islamic community, by Muslims against other Muslims, have taken inspiration from Ibn Taimiyya’s 14th century use of the concept of *takfir* (calling a Muslim a non-Muslim) against the Mongols, which was rejuvenated by Abdel Salam Faraj and the *al-Jihad* group in their designation of Anwar Sadat as ‘pharaoh’ and their subsequent decision to assassinate him.⁴⁰

From the Romans to the British Empire and the present period of United Nations-sanctioned territorial administration, the construction of a savage, lawless or unordered subject is a noted prerequisite of intervention. Not only is this process of creating a subject necessary for legitimising intervention, but it is also used to further delineate the occupier’s identity (and conception of self), to normatively situate the tactics applied and to differentiate these from local methods.⁴¹ Descriptions of an opponent are used to emphasise the benefit that would result from the imposition of an imperial order. Any suffering caused by the newly arrived actor is thus dismissed as incomparable to the disorder previously present. Internally, for a state and the associated media, ‘referring to their opponents as “subversive elements”, “terrorists”, “extremists”, and “bandits”’ is an attempt at ‘denying the legality of their opponents and emphasizing the need to maintain law and order’.⁴² As the identification of the ‘core purpose’ of the violent act ‘constitutes the *substance* of violence’s legitimacy’ (emphasis in original), the desire here is to assert immediately that violence against the state is not legitimate, well founded or justified, but driven by subsidiary and less noble motives.⁴³ An occupation’s or empire’s designation of an internal resistance as ‘bandits’ serves to demonstrate their control over territory and deny their opponent legitimacy, indicating that ‘economic’ interests and desires (greed and plunder) are the dominant purpose for armed action. This is seen in the Romans’ repeated use of the term *latrocinium* during their conquest of Europe, in the French characterisation of Spanish insurgents during the Napoleonic invasion, and again in the above-mentioned Bandolerismo Statute.⁴⁴

In the end the description or ‘reduction’ of a revolutionary movement to that of an insurgency removes the political or anti-occupation core of its actions, relegating it to a position of lawlessness and proposing it as an agent of disorder.⁴⁵ There is no doubt that the contest over naming is only

heightened by the believed ‘irregularity’ of these forms of warfare. However, as Gray points out, ‘what can be called “option purity” in style among military choices is rare,’ with even by most ‘regular’ and ‘conventional of European state armed forces, engaging in various forms of irregular warfare during World War II.’⁴⁶ Again, as earlier revealed by Parsons and as echoed by many of the authors in this issue, aspects of the assigned description may be selectively true but, as a whole, the name will not embrace all or even the dominant aspects of a movement. Once an act or an attack is classified as criminal or terrorist in nature, the term has a habit of then being used to describe both the group itself and then all the acts which that group engages in, even when they attack military targets. Moreover, even if certain actors or movements within a conflict do engage in acts of terrorism, the actions of the few are consistently used to characterise the experience, beliefs and intentions of the many.

The ethics of naming: contests in media and academia

Since 9/11 many have struggled to find the appropriate words and narrative frames to describe the current global crisis. However, the previous two sections have introduced aspects of ‘naming’ that should induce reservations as to Plato’s dilemma of the relationship between the name used and the true nature of that described. As demonstrated by the Greek propagation of the term ‘barbarian’, an announcement or identification of evil is thus closely intertwined with a political project occurring within a society, as ‘these alter-drives...are required for the stabilization of an identity’.⁴⁷ Particularly in periods of conflict, one assigns virtue to one’s own identity and decisions, and draws on a series of negative traits to describe an opponent, relating to greed, irrationality, demonic nature or the absence of civilisation. History provides little additional succour for those seeking examples of intellectual rigour and moderation in the selection of the words used to describe opposing groups, instead providing numerous cases where the idea of a savage, criminal or fanatic opponent was constructed to legitimate empire or intervention. Even World War II, that pre-eminent example of a just war, involved the racist dehumanisation not just of the Japanese Empire but of the Japanese people, as detailed by Robert Ivie in his contribution on trends in American discourse.

The absence of an international definition of ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist’, which has been under debate in the UN General Assembly since the 1972 Olympic massacre of Israeli athletes in Munich, only further complicates attempts to provide a foundation in international law for the terms used. During these debates, while there has been some compromise and consensus as to what constitutes a terrorist act (such as hijacking, for example), the overall project has been complicated by tense differences over issues of occupation, liberation movements and state-terrorism.⁴⁸ Outside the General Assembly unilateral and bilateral initiatives do not appear to be faring any better, as demonstrated by the attempts of the European Union and the US State Department to create a list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations or

Specially Designated Global Terrorists. As demonstrated by Joanne Mariner, the identification of a group by the State Department as ‘terrorist’ is often driven by arbitrary political influences, with the inclusion of three Basque groups (Batasuna, Euskal Herritarrok and Herri Batasuna) and of a little known separatist group in Xinjiang province apparently traded for Spain’s support for and China’s acquiescence in the war in Iraq, respectively.⁴⁹ The interaction between political interest and the naming of armed actors, combined with the fact that states tend to overlook the brutal acts of their allies, limits the degree to which governments can be relied on to represent opponents accurately and impartially.

Whether attributable to active deceit or laziness, the majority of ‘name-givers’ in the media and politics have not restrained their naming practices. The declaration of a ‘war on terror’—on an act rather than one specific group—left the enterprise tantalisingly open to any number of interpretations or appropriations, with the terminology used by the Bush administration so polarising that contradictory information was discarded as irrelevant. Strangely, the advent of round-the-clock news has only reduced the depth of news coverage on external conflicts, producing not an informative exposition of conflict dynamics but a constant stream of flash images and simplifications. Actual news programming is interspersed with incendiary political talk shows which, while discussing the ‘war on terror’, actively silence and dismiss those that disagree with the rhetoric used. This bears a striking resemblance to Balfour’s description of propaganda, which he sees as seeking ‘to avoid or limit such [critical] discussion and secure instead the acceptance of certain interpretations without exposing them to it, to cajole rather than to convince’, and which is particularly successful when ‘arousing so emotional an atmosphere [through the use of ‘highly-coloured, value-impregnated language’] and investing its favoured interpretations with such prestige that only an insignificant fraction of the public will consider any alternative’.⁵⁰ As a consequence, the micro-histories of many of today’s conflicts become hidden. Complex local variations, motives, histories and interrelationships are consistently played down in favour of meta-narratives and grand interpretations.⁵¹ Each conflict is seen through whatever classificatory lens has been recently adopted to aggregate violence in the outside world. This aggregation is one of Plato’s complaints in the *Statesman*, where the visitor criticises

the way that most people carve things up, taking the Greek race away as one, separate from all the rest, and tie all the other races together, which are unlimited in number, which don’t mix with one another, and don’t share the same language—calling this collection by the single appellation ‘barbarian.’ Because of this single appellation, they expect it to be a single family or class too.⁵²

A different form of the ‘politics of naming’ also emerged after 9/11. Some commentators (on the web and on talk-shows) focused partly on the identification of ‘terrorist-sympathising’ academics—those who do not show significant amounts of moral clarity and fail to defend the

righteousness of American civilisation. Although much of this initial storm has now largely passed, the post-9/11 landscape featured a number of attacks on the proposed left-leaning nature of American academia. Lynne Cheney, the wife of the Vice-President and the head of the Council of Trustees and Alumni, sponsored a report entitled *Defending Civilization: How Our Universities Are Failing America*, which criticised academics as insufficiently supporting the USA, accusing them of giving ‘comfort to its adversaries’ by critically examining the history of US involvement in the region or seeking to understand the history, logic and evolution of both local and global Islamic militant groups. Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum formed *CampusWatch* to list those academics viewed as understating the ‘Islamist threat’, resisting the characterisation of the majority of Muslims according to the actions of an extreme few, and otherwise situating the growth of Islamic radicalism in relation to the authoritarian political environments from which they emerge.⁵³ While this dispute can be situated within the current cultural clash occurring between the American right and the left, such disdain reveals a deeper source of disquiet, with both the political and religious right long viewing humanism and moral relativism as ideologies of distaste and disgust, both of which have occasionally assumed a position as the primary sources of the continued degradation of society. By questioning judgement, the academic is seen to be problematically interposing the grey of representation between the black and white of good and evil.

As a consequence, as argued by Der Derian, the current media environment is characterised by ‘exceptional ahirostaticity’, whereby ‘explanation is identified as exoneration’.⁵⁴ This is revealed by David Brooks of the *New York Times*, in a column that followed the Beslan attack, where he argued that:

Dissertations will be written about the euphemisms the media used to describe these murderers. They were called ‘separatists’ and ‘hostage-takers...Three years after Sept 11, many are still apparently unable to talk about this evil. They still try to rationalize terror. What drives the terrorists to do this? What are they trying to achieve?...This death cult has no reason and is beyond negotiation. This is what makes it so frightening. This is what causes so many to engage in a sort of mental diversion. They don’t want to confront this horror.’⁵⁵

Here, an attempt to situate an act in terms of the context of specific conflict is denounced as transgressive. Even if driven by a desire to inform, any attempts to move beyond condemnation are proposed as being a result of confusion or betraying an absence of moral clarity. The Beslan massacre can thus not be discussed in relation to the first and second Chechen wars, or in terms of the interplay between Russian policy and the tensions and power-plays between various Chechen factions. Once a terror attack occurs, it is held that all such historiography should be consigned to the proverbial scrap heap. It now becomes a matter of a pure ‘evil’, with no history or reason. As a result, it would appear that the academic, and particularly the area specialist,

is being issued with a stern admonishment. Many would seek to place these conflicts firmly in the realm of the undiscussed and undisputed. In the name of defending democracy, freedom and civilisation, some of these authors would appear to encourage silence and the end of critique or thoughtful examination.

In light of the above and given the current circumstances, as Michel Foucault argued, it may be better to ‘conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things’.⁵⁶ The question then becomes whether an ethics of naming can be negotiated at this critical period, and how we can minimise the verbal violence done to these situations. Some would stipulate ‘honesty’ or ‘sincerity’ as a fundamental prerequisite—whereby those involved agree not to employ rhetoric or deception, but instead to mutually examine the assumptions upon which their arguments are founded. For Termes, the honest use of words is fundamental to the pursuit of a just war. As a consequence, a key component of his criteria for assessing a ‘just’ war is that ‘we must name what we do honestly and press language to its limits of directness and clarity. We cannot fight a Just War if we call our enemies anything other than human; we cannot fight a Just War if we call civilians anything other than civilians.’⁵⁷ Similarly, given the historical predisposition towards identifying that which is different as evil, Connolly argues that: ‘we must strive to relieve its effects by emphasizing the constructed, contestable, contingent, and relational character of established identities, encouraging negotiations of identity and difference to proceed with a more refined sensibility of the limits of claims to self-sufficiency’.⁵⁸ However, it is likely that both Termes and Connolly would be seen as yet another example of academic relativism, with few of the accusatory commentators listed above likely to subscribe to their conditions or proposals. The lines between the moralists—or those seeking to assess a group or act in terms of its immediate objective relation to good/evil—and ethicists—those overwhelmingly concerned with subjective influences on these descriptions and designations—are remarkably fortified. The first group (moralists) does not appear to have any generalisable methods of neutral inquiry, while the second group (ethicists) struggles to develop approaches to moral assessment beyond an ethics of examination. As a result, the potential for developing any consensus on an ethics of naming appears remarkably limited.

Conclusion

Who are they—those ragtag soldiers in the mountains, enclaves, jungles or urban ghettos? What do they want? What drives them—both individually and as a group? And then, why do they hate ‘us’? These questions linger beneath most academic and journalistic debates as to the nature of insurgencies and armed movements. And so both academic, media and policy personalities inscribe the combatant with a series of motives and characteristics, as being driven by greed, grievance or fanaticism. Rarely is the combatant’s decision attributed to a complex array of factors and

events. A view of the reason for a conflict or insurgency will then shape the policy adapted. In the punitive 'hard' approach, which is driven by a concept of a rational fanatic, if you punish their families enough for an individual's acts, they will stop. In the 'soft' approach, which is based on a concept of economic interest, if you address the underlying grievances and make a positive change in the socioeconomic conditions in an area, the insurgency or armed movement will wither away, losing support from the population. An accusation of terrorism will tend to obfuscate whether occupation or forms of structural violence are present. Quickly the barbarism of the acts themselves is assigned to the character of the actor. For the USA, now in Iraq or Afghanistan, every case of rebellion and kidnapping spurs no further inquiries as to the American approach in the country. Instead, each act is further evidence of the fundamental brutality of the opponent, and is used to further cement their otherness, their savagery. This perception of the opponent further buttresses an image of righteous action, obscuring the violent and less than pure elements of one's own action. A heroic or patriotic mythology is created that covers up examples of war profiteering and brutality. As a result, the sins of a government or its soldiers become excusable thanks both to practical factors (a consequence of extreme conditions, such as insurgency, overwork or distance from home) and in comparison to the greater evil of the opponent.

This introduction and this special issue are less a definitive accounting of the role of discourse in this conflict than an attempt to begin a conversation and exchange. Most importantly, it is necessary to further examine the intents of the agents propagating these names. Are they (whether in the media or in politics) aware of any inconsistencies between the name applied and the nature of the subject? Do they radicalise their own descriptions in order to appeal to and recruit a larger audience, in the belief that simplicity is a stronger pull than context? Second, there is a continued need to develop lines of inquiry that avoid describing a one-way process of government versus insurgent, examining the verbal tools and strategies of both governments and non-state movements as they compete for legitimacy. As mentioned, the global discourse is no longer one where a singular hegemon or state is able to dictate one name, and have this universally followed and used by its intended audience. Finally, in a book version of this issue likely to be released in 2005 or 2006, I would like to broaden the included cases, and encourage any readers involved in research on a related conflict or area to approach the editor. Additional invited contributions would focus on Northern Ireland, Egypt, Colombia, West Africa, Kashmir, post-Saddam Iraq and the *fedayeen*, and the relationship between the naming of internal opponents by the Dutch and the Suharto government in Indonesia. I am also interested in the dimensions of the perception of the USA and Israel in the Muslim world (in terms of interests, conspiracies and the relationship with anti-semitic traditions), and in whether the West's focus on 'why do they hate us?' obscures the existence of nuanced views in the Islamic and Arab world.

Notes

The author would like to thank Shahid Qadir, Thomas Rath, Stina Torjesen, Anthony McDermott, Nicole Evans and Andrew March for their assistance and advice. Dr Michael Schroeder generously provided the title for this article.

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