

Language and violence

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The Abstract: This paper will be dealing with the use of violence and its legitimization through manipulation of language by the state in dealing with “the other”. In an attempt to investigate the role played by the state, which monopolizes the use of violence for the sake of civilizing its people, inspired by a documentary titled “where in the World is Osama Bin Laden?”, this paper tries to go beyond spoken and written words to reach a better understanding of this role.

It starts by defining the concept of “violence” and drawing a clear distinction between its meaning and that of other related, but not similar concepts, and specifying the agents of violence, mainly focusing on the state, for the entire paper focuses on its use of violence. Thinking in terms of methodological nationalism, this paper tries to find an answer to how we define ourselves and why do we define anyone outside this “we” circle as “the other” and how, as a result, violence became the means of dealing with “the other”.

It then moves to justifying this “legitimate” use of violence by the state against the other and highlights the important role that language plays in this process. Finally, there is an attempt to understand the usefulness of violence advocated by some against that of the mainstream thinkers and philosophers, accompanied by exploring the role the civil and the global civil society can, and do, play in finding new means of communication and dealing with one another.

It comes to the following conclusion: violence as used by individuals before the formation of the state resembles violence as used by the state apparatus, Civility is a myth. The only difference is in the agents, the targets,

the interests and the domain where violence is practiced. And for that, an informed, aware and active role should be pursued by the civil society, to curb the use of violence either by the state or by any other actor. The outline: I. Introduction II. Body: Defining violence: What does the concept of violence mean?

Making a clear distinction of violence vis a` vis other related concepts
Recognizing the agents of violence Defining the " we" and the " other": The constituents of identity The way we perceive ourselves The way we perceive " the other" Dealing with the " other": The psychological mindset The use of violence as a means of dealing with the other The role of language in legitimizing the use of violence: The manipulation of language The reasons behind the manipulation of language Providing a moral cause Avoiding opposition The means by which language is manipulated

Dehumanization of violence Replacement of direct descriptors by *
euphemistic equivalence The areas where language can be manipulated In the public sphere In the battle field An assessment of the usefulness of violence The role of global and civil society in curbing violence III. Conclusion IV. List of References I. Introduction: " I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does is permanent. " Mahatma Gandhi In an interesting movie called " where in the world is Osama Bin Laden"?

A newly father-to be, fearing that his son comes out to life in such a violent world, decides to set on a mission to track down and kill Osama Bin Laden, the leader of Al Qaida, and the world will thus seize to know violence and will

be a fit place for him to raise his son in. He visits Egypt, Morocco, Israel, Palestinian territories, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. He goes around and talks to people there asking them questions like: where is Bin Laden? What do they think of the Americans?

How do they view terrorism and the war on it? What do they want in life? And questions of that sort. He didn't find Bin Laden, however what he found was that the people in the countries he visited are ordinary people just like himself and the audience. They are not "the barbarians" he once thought them to be, they have no desire or interest in using violence against the United States and its citizens, and their goals in life is for them to secure good living conditions for their children, just as the goals of the American newly father to be.

This movie inspired me to raise a question, to which I sought of an answer through writing this paper. The question is: Why and how does the state monopolize and legitimize, through manipulation of language that enables it to portray such a barbaric and violent image of the other, its use of violence against them? I raised this question because of a simple fact: the state was created to "civilize" people and tame their use of violence, but now I found that this was nothing but a change in the agents of violence, its targets, and the space where it is practiced.

I started exploring different ideas, different opinions, and different studies, that were all concerned with violence, language, manipulation, identity, and other concepts related to my topic. Stances and views varied, but I decided on adopting the following position concerning the topic at hand: The state

manipulates the use of violence because we've willingly subordinated this right to the state; however our consent depends on the manner by which violence is used, for if its illegitimate and goes against our consent, we will no longer continue to support the state apparatus in its actions; that is why, via the manipulation of language, the state creates an exclusive identity to its people, portrays the other as a threat to this identity, demonize him, and thus legitimizes its use of violence when it's used by posing it as an act in response to defend the "we" against the "other". If that is so, this led me to raise other questions related to the usefulness of violence, and our role, as active members in a civil society, be it domestic or global, when it comes to violence. To these questions, and to other ones, I try to find answers as follows. II. Body: A.

Defining violence: In this section my aim is to clarify what the concept of Violence means, and who has the right to practice it, before I further investigate why we resort to violence in dealing with others and how states and their apparatuses make use of such thing. 1. What does the concept of violence mean? Violence is an extremely wide and complex phenomenon. Defining it is not an exact science but a matter of judgment. Notions of what is acceptable and unacceptable in terms of behavior and what constitutes harm, are culturally influenced and constantly under review as values and social norms evolve, domestically and internationally.

Besides, there are many possible ways to define violence, depending on who is defining it, for what purpose, and depending on one's political orientations and ideological beliefs. Generally speaking, the World Health Organization

defines violence as: “ The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation. ” In this sense, we could distinguish between so many kinds of violence; ...accumulated violence, cultured violence, self-protective violence, the violence of aggression, the violence of competition, the violence of trying to be somebody, the violence of trying to discipline oneself according to a pattern, trying to become somebody, trying to suppress and bully oneself, brutalize oneself, in order to be non-violent... ” 2. Making a clear distinction of violence vis a` vis other related concepts: It is very important, though, to make a clear distinction between violence and other related concepts to be able to apprehend what violence means. Such keywords include power, strength, force and authority.

According to how Hannah Arendt puts it, power is related to the “ ability” to act “ in consent”, thus its existence depends on the group providing such consent, in other words, it depends on legitimacy; Strength is a natural endowment and an inherent property; Force indicates the energy itself that later manifests physically through an act of violence; And authority entails recognition either to a person or to an office; it requires neither coercion nor persuasion. Violence on the other hand is distinguished by its “ instrumental” character; it denotes the physical manifestation itself. . Recognizing the agents of violence: There are many agents of violence; formal and informal, institutionalized and un-institutionalized, state, and non-state agents. However, our only concern in this paper shall be the state and the state

apparatus institutionalizing, legitimizing and practicing violence. Typically described in normative terms as a vital necessity of modern life, the nation-state has employed violence to accomplish questionable ends. Its apparatus is charged with committing unprecedented barbarism.

Examples of disasters brought about by the nation-state are the extermination of indigenous peoples in colonized territories by "civilizing" nations, the Nazi genocidal "holocaust" of Jews, and most recently the "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and so on. Thus from postcolonial perspective, the nation-state and its ideology of nationalism are alleged to have become the chief source of violence and conflict since the French Revolution. In the same vein, Marx regarded the state as an instrument of violence at the command of the ruling class; but the actual power of the ruling class did not consist of, nor rely on violence.

It was defined by the role the ruling class played in society, or more exactly, by its role in the process of production. B. Defining the "we" and the "other": In this section I try exploring how identity defragments, divides and thus paves the road for violence to occur. 1. Identity and its constituents: In pre-modern societies, identity was mainly related to affiliations, both in the private and in the public space. Identity depended on the place attributed to each individual by his birth, his lineage or his group. Later on it involved the Legal recognition.

However a person was not only a legal or civic entity, but also a moral being with an individual soul. That is why under the influence of postmodernism and debates over multiculturalism, the late 1980s and 1990s found

historians, anthropologists, and most of all humanities scholars relying heavily on “ identity” as they explored the cultural politics of race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, citizenship, and other social categories. “ Identity” is presently used in two linked senses, which may be termed “ social” and personal”.

In the former sense, an “ identity” refers simply to a social category, a set of persons marked by a label and distinguished by rules deciding membership and characteristic features or attributes. In the second sense of personal identity, an identity is some distinguishing characteristic (or characteristics) that a person takes a special pride in or views as socially consequential but more-or-less unchangeable. It is the social sense of identity that would be of use in this paper; namely the national identity, that denotes the depiction of a country as a whole, encompassing its culture, traditions, language, and politics.

It must be noted here that a sense of conflicting identities may result from the presence of multiple identities for the same individual, but the issue of concern here is the “ inter-conflicting identities” rather than the internal conflicts related to identity. 2. The way we perceive ourselves: Since identities are necessarily the product of the society in which we live and our relationship with others, there is therefore a desire and a need to identify with a nation or group; to take up a “ collective identity”, an example of which would be the “ national Identity”, that is described by some as a “ self-aware” ethnicity.

This way, identity provides a link between individuals and the world in which they live i. e. their state. 3. The way we perceive “ the other”: The individual defines himself, but he also needs “ significant others” to acknowledge this definition. This is the base of the ethic of “ authenticity. ” Identity, however, implies definition by negation, inclusion based on exclusion for a “ we” to be present, there has to be an “ other” outside this “ we” circle.

Identity, mainly national identity in this case, has been constantly charged of being racist and exclusive, and sometimes even demonizing the other. That is why governments in boosting nationhood and asserting the Nation’s identity are, whether they recognize it or not, advocating more exclusion and hostility in perceiving the other. C. Dealing with the “ other”: What gives rise to violence? Are identities really to be blamed? Or does the problem lie in their manipulation which results in violence being deployed when we deal with different identities? 1. The psychological mindset:

To Krishnamurti “...The source of violence is the ‘ me’, the ego, the self, which expresses itself in division, in trying to become or be somebody which divides itself as the ‘ me’ and the ‘ not me’; the ‘ me’ that identifies with the family or not with the family, with the community or not with the community and so on.. ” . However this doesn’t require that all human beings respond to difference in a violent manner, for it hasn’t been proven that the human nature is in itself violent, and it is believed by many that violence is bred from social interactions.

An interesting idea of how violence is a societal creation can be found in the writings of Amartya Sen concerning colonialism. Sen talks about the social

memory that colonialism, which is in itself an act of violence, has shaped. General psychological attitude towards the subject people often generated a strong sense of humiliation and imposition of perceived inferiority, one which the subject tries to overcome through hostility and supporting acts of violence against the humiliator.

Franz Fanon also subscribes to such a view on colonialism, and sees that it is healthy to use violence to get rid of colonialism, which is again, an act of violence in itself to begin with. 2. The use of violence as a means of dealing with the other: "... Violence in postcolonial discourse is thus deployed to suppress difference or negate multiple " others" not subsumed within totalities such as nation, class, gender, etc..." Everything that man has put to another man, belief, dogma, rituals, my country, your country, your god and my god, my opinion, your opinion, my ideal.

All those help to divide human beings and therefore breed violence. This is due to our tendency of adopting a spaceless and timeless conception of culture, which is linked either to the identity or to the belief system of the others; a form of stereotyping if you might say. Thus Violence is embedded in the dialectic of identity and Otherness. This is something that governments not only understand, but try to make use of to achieve its interests. D. The role of language in legitimizing the use of violence by the state: 1. The manipulation of language:

According to George Orwell, " Political language is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind. " Therefore those who are charged with committing violence

on behalf of the state will adopt language designed to obscure from themselves or the people, the reality of what violence they do on their behalf. Generally speaking, Language is an instrument for expressing and not for concealing or preventing thought. However it is an instrument which we shape for our own purposes as well.

And as Hegel puts it, when we think, we think in language against language, which implies that selective language will lead to selective ideas formed and advocated. This is why language itself, the very medium of non-violence and of mutual recognition, involves unconditional violence. This manipulation of language involves: "... enhancing the power, moral superiority and credibility of the speaker(s), and discrediting dissidents, while vilifying the others, the enemy; the use of emotional appeals; and adducing seemingly irrefutable proofs of one's beliefs and reasons... By manipulating the language, the government wishes to alter the public's way of thinking. This can be done, psychologists theorize, because the words that are available for the purpose of communicating thought tend to influence the way people think. The linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf was a firm believer in this link between thought and language, and he theorized that " different languages impose different conceptions of reality". Habermas also pondered upon the role which language plays in masking political interests with apparently sophisticated terms.

This distortion of communication and misuse of concepts, in his opinion, might be the reason that has brought about violence in the first place as a manifestation to such distorted communication. a) The reasons behind the

manipulation of language: The reasons why language can and does get manipulated by the apparatus of the state when it comes to violence are many, and they vary according to the situation. But mainly because Violence absorbs power, and lessens authority when it's used, that is why providing a justification for the use of violence and legitimizing it is important.

Here, it might be useful to distinguish between " justification" and " legitimization"; (i) Providing a moral cause; Justification: We find the state using terms like " national security", " defensive war", " maintaing peace and security", " spreading democracy", etc. But the use of such terms is supported by good reasons and arguments; it is consistent and attempts to place such ideas at the core of its concerns. This way, the state is attempting to " justify" its use of violence, i. e. roves it has good reasons for using it, which is closely linked to the following reason; (ii) Avoiding opposition; Legitimization: When these moral causes succeed in convincing the public, through its appeal to fundamental values and claims, appeals to the emotions of the masses, and its reliance on ungrounded cultural prejudices and inconsistent doctrines, the state manages to " legitimizes" as well as " justifies" its use of violence, i. e. the state not only has good reasons why it is using violence, but it managed to convince the masses with these reasons as well.

This way the monopoly of the state over the use of violence cant not to be questioned, threatened or shared by others. b) The means by which language is manipulated: (i) Dehumanization of violence: " Terrorists, Fundamentalist, Extremists, Seditonists, Rebel, Communists..." These and

other terms perform the role of the “ distancing of humanity”, but they also are designed for other purposes. These terms have persuasive power to allow the directors of violence to feel comfortable with the human destruction for which they are opting.

It suggests that those toward whom the state directs its violence are either irrational (and thus diplomacy or persuasion are impossible) or have objectives (“ the destruction of the people’s way of life”). (ii) Replacement of direct descriptors by “ euphemistic equivalence”: Euphemism is an expression intended by the speaker to be less offensive, disturbing, or troubling to the listener than the word or phrase it replaces. So for instance we call it “ collateral damage” when it means unintentional killing or damage; bystander deaths and injuries.

But because collateral damage sounds less troubling, and more likely for the people to accept than “ unintentional killing or damage”, it is used by the state to justify sometimes the results of its use of violence and what it has brought about. That is why we find government officials and politicians talking about just wars, liberation, war on terror, national security, and so forth, instead of just explicitly mentioning the truth behind their use of violence against others. c) The areas where language can be manipulated: (i) In the public sphere:

The heart of the terms used in the public sphere is ideological or political otherness, where the use of language is indirect and emotionally distancing. The state apparatus does all it can to deny that the violence of conflict is occurring, suggesting that “ areas” are being secured rather than people

killed, that violence is being prevented rather than initiated by its actions and that its ends are always just rather than self-serving. (ii) In the battle field: The heart of the terms used for the “ enemy” on the battlefield arise primarily from the racial, ethnic or personal otherness of the opponent.

There is no place for the persuasive or the justificatory on the battlefield; the situation on the battlefield is understood as follows: “ kill or be killed”. The requirement of the manipulation of language at the point of conflict is therefore to reinforce hatred and distance so that violence can be pursued without real threat to the mental health of the soldier, which would be in danger if the humanity of the opponent were fully absorbed. Thus in the field, language will serve to dehumanize the other while in the public sphere the language will be designed to convince us that our violence toward others is justified.

That is why the “ National identity” card and related usage of language are used by the state to legitimize its actions within a delimited territory, to insure mobilization and coordination of policy. E. An assessment of the usefulness of violence: I have tried to expose how the state makes use of identity, difference and language to pursue its interests through deploying violence against “ the other”. But does it follow that this process performed by the state is an evil one, or can it be a useful one with good coming out of it?

In a series of lectures at the College de France in the 1970s, Michel Foucault put forward the interesting hypothesis that history is actually the history of violence. Foucault’s ideas on history indicate that we do not enjoy

democratic privileges due to some divine decree: rather, they are the product of successful wars and civil struggles; the result of "successful violence". The pioneers of Post-colonialism like Edward Said, Franz Fanon, among others, concerned themselves with the social and cultural effect of colonization.

Fanon looked at violence in positive terms. His engagement with decolonizing violence was a form of a strategic response of subjugated peoples to the inhumane violence of colonial racism and imperial subjugation. Fanon was very clear in his message, the struggle for power in colonized states will be resolved only through violent struggle, because the colonized states were created and are maintained by the use of violence or the threat of violence, it is a necessity that it will take violence to reverse these power relationships.

However, according to Edward Said's reading of Fanon's "liberationist" critique, nationalism is always a tool of the hegemonic oppressor and holds no socially emancipatory potential. This leads us to the following conclusion, that violence is the mediation that enables state power to prevail, for good or for bad. It cannot be eliminated by counter-violence that simply inverts it. The state's hierarchical structure is made possible because of this institutionalized violence that privileges the hegemony of a bloc of classes over competing blocs and their alternative programs.

But hegemony is always underwritten by coercion. Thus as Max Weber puts it, the state monopoly of legitimate violence would be used to defend private property and promote the overseas interests of the domestic business class.

An opinion which is also shared by Marx and Engels who defines violence as the accelerator of economic development. These are not only the world of theories, but a truth backed up by evidence. This evidence can be tracked down as far as the nation-state itself wasn't still created.

However since I am interested in investigation the use of violence by the nation state, then if we look at the colonial experience, the two world wars, the cold war and the war on terror, we will know that the state did not use violence as it should have done. I will not use the term "misused", but I would rather question the ends to which the state has deployed violence, and I will question the justifications and arguments it gave to legitimize its actions.

And if the state is such a questionable agent of violence, and if already its monopoly of it has been breached by informal, outlawed or legitimate non-state actors, this means that we are in a serious need of not only questioning, but reviewing the concept of violence, its use and its agents. For this, scholars like Heba Raouf and Mary Kaldor think that there is a powerful case for questioning the state's monopoly of "legitimate" violence, and suggest placing the use of force by the state under greater constraints, not only that, but to take over the "civilizing role" that the state has failed to achieve. F.

The role of global and civil society in curbing violence: The prospects of peace are dependent upon the institutionalization of traditions of dialogue. And it is precisely here that civil society agents can play a vital role by bringing people together and invoking understandings that are common

across difference. Basically, humankind has been rendered “civil” because violence was tamed. And violence was tamed because states had acquired, as Max Weber argued, a monopoly of violence; the modern state replaces violence by order and authority and firmly controlled the production and reproduction of violence.

But this has been fundamentally challenged by the pervasive violence that infiltrates all corners of a globalised world; all controls and all norms that prescribe when the use of violence is permitted and for what reasons have been lifted. “.. The employment of violence at any time and at any place sends a powerful message, no one agent howsoever powerful this agent may be, can control the use of violence, or penalize the perpetrator of violence.

Violence has escaped all restraints, all monitors, and all notions of where the use of violence is legitimate and where it is illegitimate, where it is sanctioned and where it is not sanctioned. Today there is no recognized owner of violence, the adversary is unrecognizable, the goals are unclear, and the site where violence will be consumed is unknown... ” Therefore, civil societies are caught between two kinds of violence; that employed by trans-state and sub-state agents, and the violence of the state.

A way out and a means to counter such violence appears to be in the development of a culture of civility. This happens when members of the civil society address the phenomenon of violence, intolerance and even hate, as the notion of civil society is based upon a peaceful world which is marked by the spirit of dialogue, negotiation, compromise, and coordination. This dialogue means recognizing the “other” in a conversation, and validating his

moral standing. Thus civil society is important because the values of civil society encourage dialogue.

But the limits of civil society have to be understood. And one of these limits is institutionalized violence within the state that has led to the breakdown of dialogue, thus making civility and toleration mere dreams. On a wider level, the Global Civil Society would have the mission of recapturing the power of language, regaining its “civilizing” role, providing a forum for deliberative democracy, re-rooting legitimacy in civil society, and highlighting the importance of the “politics of presence” rather than the “politics of representation”.

III. Conclusion: A lot of theoretical debates and concepts could lead us to talking about violence and boil down to it, because violence is too wide a subject, too complex and debatable a concept that is intertwined and tangled in our everyday life affairs. The attempt of this paper was to try to investigate and explore the conditions that are responsible, if not single handedly, but to a great extent, for setting the conditions for violence to be practiced.

I didn't involve myself in questions related to human nature, and whether violence is something innate or socially created, I rather tried exploring it from the “we” and the “other” point of view, that can and does have both innate and social roots. With such conditions set for violence, it's only a matter of who practices it. I picked the state as an agent of violence, and tried to highlight why and how it manipulates language when it uses violence to achieve its interests.

The conclusion I reached was unfortunately the one I had in mind when I first started thinking about this topic. Violence did not disappear with the rise of the nation-state, it only took different forms, sometimes even more devastating than it used to be before its use was subordinated to the state, and it penetrated different domains and corners in our life. Different situations came to being, different language was used, different arguments and different debates, but the fact remained: violence did not disappear, it was not curbed, and the state did not “civilize” the people.

That is where and why our role comes. Not that I advocate the complete incompetence of the state in achieving its “civilizing” mission, but I do believe that we, as citizens, as individuals and as human beings, should engage in this process as well, not because we are bound by a social contract to do so, but because we are part of this process, we can stop, alter, change, direct and correct its path when we feel it has gone out of its lane. Our engagement should take different forms and be on different levels.

On one level and in one form it can be through monitoring the manipulation of language conducted by the state apparatus, on another one it can be protesting against it when it fails in curbing the use of violence, it can be in the form of raising awareness and spreading a culture of negotiation, communication and tolerance, trying to understand one another, instead of dealing with those outside the designated “acceptable” identities, as the other, and the list can go on and on forever. That is our mission as citizens of the nation-state, and as citizens of the world.

Because after all, as Spurlock concluded in his movie “ where in the world is Osama Bin Laden? ”, we are not so different after all, and our similarities are more than our differences. We just have to understand and tolerate both. IV.

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