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The faces of enmity in international relations. An introduction

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In an essay entitled ‘Inventing the Enemy’, Umberto Eco wrote that, ‘Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth.’ (Eco 2012, 2). First translated into English in 2012, his meditation on the construction of ‘the enemy’ spans a vast expanse of time, geography and culture, informed by numerous literary and philosophical texts from Tacitus, Cicero and Pliny to Sartre and Orwell. By drawing attention to the recurring shapes of the demonized ‘other’, Eco makes a powerful argument that, ‘rather than a real threat highlighting the ways in which these enemies are different from us, the difference itself becomes a symbol of what we find threatening.’ (Eco 2012, 3). Eco was writing these words in the same geopolitical context that has shaped this collection of essays: the aftermath of the attack on the twin towers in 2001 and the unleashing of the subsequent ‘war on terror’ by George Bush Jnr and his ‘coalition of the willing’. Compiled from different disciplinary perspectives, this special section represents a commitment to interrogate deeply-rooted social, cultural and political assumptions about who ‘our’ enemies might be today and why they deserve violence.

The premise of this collection is that existing scholarship on the relationship between representations of the enemy falls mostly within three broad conventions that need revisiting.¹ Firstly, an important body of historical work has documented how European nationalism and colonial expansion, routinely justified by racist representations of ‘the other’, fashioned consent for violence during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Audouin-Rouzeau 2008; Bartov 1998). This perspective has been refined by scholars who argue that identities and logics of othering are not only constructed prior to action but also emanate from war experience (Barkawi 2004; Mariot [2003] 2004; Aradau 2012). Although they depart from different theoretical assumptions, both versions assume the existence of a link between negative representations of the other and violence. The more one demonizes the other, the more violently one behaves.

Parallel to this, another set of authors has made the point that consent for violence does not only take root in negative representations but also in ‘colder’ dynamics of dehumanization such as bureaucratic reasoning, the routinization of violence, ‘techno-strategic’ language, mechanization, and an accounting of what type of damage limitation

may be carried out by destroying the enemy first (Cohn 1987; Peoples 2010; Wasinski 2010). Although it places equal emphasis on the question of representation, this second body of literature partly contradicts the first as it underlines that one does not need to hate or despise one's enemy in order to feel able to kill them. Reification – in the sense of the Frankfurt school of sociology (Honneth 2007) – is sufficient and it is achieved perfectly when one fails to recognize the other as an alter-ego (Enloe 2000; Delori 2014).

A third constellation of research has taken a completely different stance in pointing out that, in some cases, consent for violence is consistent with some extreme forms of identification with the opponent. Joanna Bourke (1999) observed such a phenomenon in her 'intimate history of killing' based on the narratives of war veterans. Far from de-humanizing their opponents, these war veterans pictured the latter as their exact alter-egos. Bourke analyzed this discursive practice as a way of displaying agency, as well as being a consequence of the aesthetization of violence in popular culture and in the mainstream media. When war becomes beautiful, Bourke argues, violence can take place outside of all de-humanizing patterns. René Girard's model of 'mimetic violence' is another illustration. Girard argues that othering is not the driving force of violence. Rather, the latter takes root in the mimesis of desires. It generates a mimesis of appropriation that is likely to escalate in a mimesis of antagonism (Girard 1979).

Some scholars have also investigated the political roots of the representation/violence nexus within the context of contemporary Western wars, arguing, for example, that the discourses of the 'war on terror' and recent 'humanitarian' interventions have constructed the enemy as a *hostis humani generis* (an enemy of mankind) (Devetak 2007; Odyseos and Petito 2007). They have shown that this discourse has influenced military practices by characterizing enemy combatants as 'unlawful combatants', a juridical category that has paved the way to illiberal and violent practices such as torture (Butler 2010), drone assassinations (Allinson 2015; Chamayou 2013; Coyne and Hall 2018), and the policy that consists in denying the status of 'prisoners of war' to captured enemy combatants (Richter-Montpetit 2014). By so doing, these authors have fueled the argument – made by different critiques of political liberalism (Asad 2007; Schmitt ([1932] 2007)) – that 'violence in the name of [liberal] civilization reveals its own barbarism, even as it "justifies" its own violence by presuming the barbaric subhumanity of the other against whom that violence is waged' (Butler 2010, 93).

Although we agree that such a political logic of absolute othering is at stake in current Western wars, the authors in this special section contend that the military 'field' (Bourdieu 2013) is not a mere recipient of some external political representations of the enemy. Rather, military practices can also produce original representations of the enemy, which then leak out of the military sphere.

This idea is first introduced in Olsson's essay on the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan. Olsson shows that this war brings together social actors – in particular Western politicians, diplomats and military – who pursue such different goals that they have to remain vague on most issues, including the definition of the enemy. Whereas this ambiguity is mainly functional, it has one important practical consequence. It gives much power and autonomy to the military when fashioning their own imaginary and concrete security practices.

Wasinski and Delori make a similar point in studies on British and French fighter-bomber pilots. Their studies draw upon different empirical material: memoirs written

by pilots in the case of Wasinski, interviews in the case of Delori. However, their conclusions are remarkably convergent. In both cases the representations of the enemy are mediated by technologies such as remote-guidance systems, computer screens and software that help them to decide whether they are authorized to open fire or not. Wasinski shows that these technologies help British fighter pilots elude the question of the political futility of their role. By fixating on the technical aspects of their actions, these men become able to make sense of military operations even once they have lost faith in their broader political purpose. While he agrees with this point, Delori also argues that pilots are immersed in ‘moral technologies’ (Weizman 2012) which effectively materialize the Western fiction of the ‘just’ and ‘civilized’ war. Hence, both studies converge in pointing out that airmen manage to make sense of the violence that they perpetrate by not assessing their action in political terms.

Nina Leonhard’s essay examines these questions through her original analysis of the German *Bundeswehr*, which, since its creation in 1954 has promoted itself as a politically responsible military organization. Two key concepts have played a role in this respect: *Innere Führung* (internal leadership²) and *Staatsbürger in Uniform* (citizens in uniform). Leonhard’s evidence suggests that those soldiers who participated in the war in Afghanistan experienced difficulties in defining themselves through these terms, calling for a ‘normalization’ of their military practices and identities in line with other NATO member states.

The Encounters section further expands the understanding of the military dimension of the social construction of the enemy. It entails an edited account of a panel discussion between four members of Veterans for Peace, entitled ‘Creating enemies: in military training and on the battlefield’.³ The conversation illustrates the point that representations of the enemy are never constructed once and for all. Rather, they are vulnerable and constantly reshaped during action. Indeed, one of the themes discussed by all four veterans is that the intensive indoctrination to which they had been subjected could not be guaranteed to protect them from doubt in situations where they were expected to use lethal force. While they had been trained to see the ‘bad guys’ as evil on the basis of their ‘difference’, whether this was marked by ethnicity, nationality, religion, colour, culture or some spurious idea of criminality, it was the recognition of their enemy’s human qualities that produced a sense of dissonance: ‘where your actions on the ground are not matching up to what you believed in your head’. This meeting with the other as ‘another self’ (Levinas 1984) deeply affected their commitment to use their unique vantage point as former warriors as a platform for radical forms of reparation and rebellion.

From a theoretical perspective, the articles that constitute this section refer us to Judith Butler’s discussion of ‘frames of war’, defined as ‘the ways of selectively carving up experience as essential to the conduct of war’ (2010, 26). This concept remains useful in order to uncover the power operations that are concealed by naturalized representations of the enemy, which consist, for example, in drawing a line between ‘grievable’ and ‘ungrievable lives’. Butler defines the latter as follows: ‘Ungrievable lives are those that cannot be lost, and cannot be destroyed, because they already inhabit a lost and destroyed zone; they are, ontologically, and from the start, already lost and destroyed, which means that when they are destroyed in war, nothing is destroyed’ (Butler 2010, xix). Butler points out that the notion of ‘frame’ is useful in order to grasp how these structures of meaning operate. Frames of war are like photographic

or cinematographic frames: ‘they are always throwing something away, always keeping something out, always de-realizing and de-legitimizing alternative versions of reality, discarded negatives of the official version’ (Butler 2010, xi). The frames’ arbitrariness becomes visible when they are challenged by the victims, by social activists or by the military. Their deconstruction and analysis is a constant challenge for critical scholarship.

Notes

1. This special section brings together papers presented during an international conference which took place in Bordeaux in April 2016. The conference was sponsored by the CNRS (The French National Research Council) and the Initiative d’Excellence of the University of Bordeaux.
2. The official translation is “Leadership Development and Civic Education”.
3. The conference was organized by the organisation Veterans for Peace (VfP) UK in London in November 2016.

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