

## **'Holy' Language, Power and Representation of Terror**

*'Terrorism', 'jihad', 'islamists', 'extremists', 'western values', 'feminism', 'libertarianism', 'the islamic world', 'the traditional', 'the west', 'the modern', 'clash of civilisations' - 'holy terror.'*

-only words.

The above terms sound quite familiar, in my ears. Often enough have they been thrown around in the media, politics, and even academic debates, that one can assume most people nowadays feel the same, and probably also have a more or less clear picture of what they represent.

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-only words?

Words that even without the context of me placing them together, hold strong ideological meaning. Words that stand for something, make one think of something, feel something.

*-Angry, afraid, belonging, protective, proud, panic, hate, scared.-*

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of this, one finds few places in which the ways of giving meaning and representation, to these and other words, are discussed outside of cultural-studies; where the works of Stuart Hall on Power and Representation, as well as Edward Said's exposure of orientalism- as the West's lens to look at the 'other' and justify their oppressive and exploitative ways have lead to a critical engagement with language as a mechanism of power.

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But, on a random note, Aldous Huxley once wrote: that they don't only "play an enormous part in our lives", but "are therefore deserving of the closest study." (ZITATION!!!!!!)

So, what do you say, let's analyse this clash-of-civilizations discourse and the language of *holy terror*? Okay, but for the sake of going the less treaded way, and having a semi- public say, lets

have this discussion in a semi- academic and creative way. So we can pick at the western-academic discourse and its vocabulary of power, within this minute, this hour.

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How does one label a violent act of terror as 'holy' ? Does the labeling of such an act as 'holy terror' impact the way that one thinks about it? And if so then how does it influence one's thoughts? And maybe, even more importantly, who gets to label, and is thereby doing the influencing?

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-a discourse ?

In 1995 Stuart Hall published his work 'the west and the rest- discourses and power'. In it Hall defines a discourse as "a group of statements which provide a way of talking about - i.e. representing- a particular kind of knowledge on a topic" (Hall 1995, 201). Leading to an understanding that: language, whether it is verbal or visual, constitutes a system of representation embedded within contemporary discourses, and is therefore never free of biases.

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-discursive formations.

Using the example, of how "Palestinians fighting to regain land in the Westbank from Israel"- when labeled and thought of as *terrorists*, "in effect become *terrorists*" because we "act on that *knowledge*" and end up treating "them as such", Hall demonstrates "how the language (discourse) has real effects in practice" (ibid, 203). Pointing out that discourses enable certain constructions of a topic, while limiting others (ibid, 201). Hall argues, that knowledge of the

Israel/Palestine issue “is produced by” the “competing discourses” of *freedom fighter* vs. *terrorist* and is “linked to a contestation over power...which will” end up deciding “the ‘truth’” (ibid, 203). What becomes apparent is that discourses “always operate in relation to power”, and lie embedded within “the way power circulates and is contested” (ibid, 205).

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-a truth?

Hall states that discourse essentially functions in the same manner as ideology, the difference being that: “The question of whether a discourse is true,.. is less important than whether it” effectively moderates “relations of power- in practice” (ibid). Since, the labeling an act of violence, such as 9/11, as *holy terror* effectively ends up only leaving room for “religio-cultural-based” explanations, thusly limiting a more complex engagement with the issue, which would take into account socio-economic, political, and historical factors- it is most definitely part of an effective discourse. (Abu Lughod 2002, 784). Abu Lughod argues, that the *cultural framing* of incidents such as 9/11, or the Taliban’s rise to power actually recreates the dichotomy of *West vs. The Rest* and thereby prevents “the serious exploration of the roots and nature of human suffering...” (ibid).

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-a “‘regime of truth’”

Is the term Hall used to define and describe effective discourses (Hall 1995, 205). The *west vs. the rest - clash of civilizations - holy terror discourse* transformed *regime of truth*, and the vocabulary it uses to establish itself, needs to be contested if we want to have a genuine discussion as a global society. Furthermore, we all need to start paying attention to the *discourses* we follow and which *regimes of truths* we uphold, and begin to question what we believe to know.

Bibliography

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