

# Does "New" Warfare Result in the Othering of Violent Conflict?

Written by Victoria Bullock

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## Does "New" Warfare Result in the Othering of Violent Conflict?

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VICTORIA BULLOCK, AUG 22 2012

*How can we critically evaluate the validity of the statement that 'taking a new war approach results in the othering of violent conflict and the othering of those that experience it'?*

### Introduction

Before entering into the substance of the question, it is first necessary to briefly outline the new war approach, define what is meant by "othering" and establish who we are talking about when we refer to "those that experience it".

Proponents of the new wars[1] approach argue that the end of the Cold War[2] was marked by a break with the Clausewitzian concept of war (Shaw, 2005:53) characterised by the reduction in intra-state and an increase in inter-state conflict (Munkler, 2002:1). With this shift came changes in the characteristics of violence in the "global era", "notably in terms of "[its] goals, methods of warfare and how [it] was financed" (Kaldor, 1999:6). New-war has been defined both as non-war violence (Cramer, 2006:76) and as a "mix of war, organised crime and large-scale human rights violations" (Kaldor, 1999:11).[3]

In his examination of "normative power Europe" Diez (2005:17) identifies four forms of othering which are useful for our analysis: "representation of the other as different"; "representation of the other as inferior"; "representation of the other as violating universal human rights principles"; and "representation of the other as an existential threat".

'Those that experience it' is interpreted as both the actors and the victims of violent conflict given that in the new wars approach, the boundaries between these groups are frequently presented as blurred (Holsti, 1996:39, Duffield, 2001:13).

This essay will first look for evidence of Diez' (2005:17) othering strategies in the context of the new wars approach concluding that all four elements are present and result in "the othering of violent conflict and those who experience it". It will then compare different new wars writers in order to demonstrate that taking a new wars approach does not *necessarily* result in othering, although this is the exception rather than the rule. To conclude, it will briefly discuss the implications of this othering process.

Another aspect of the question of othering within the new wars debate, which time does not allow us to cover in any further detail, is the idea that the othering of violent conflict is an age-old phenomenon and not only a result of the new wars approach (Kalyvas, 2001:100, Duffield, 2001 in Richards, 2005:9).

**Taking a new war approach results in the othering of violent conflict and the othering of those that experience it'.**

*"Representation of the other as different"*

By using the term *new wars* and by contrasting their characteristics to those of the pre-perestroika era, a clear

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difference between these two kinds of violent conflict is established (Kalyvas, 2001:100). Old wars are portrayed as being about ideology and new wars about identity politics (Kaldor, 1999:6), or even "about nothing at all" (Enzensberger, 1994:77). Old wars were typically state-financed whereas new wars are typically financed through illegal criminal activities and associated with shadow economies (Munkler, 2002:17). Old wars are associated with traditional warfare and new wars with new methods associated with "extreme violence" that goes against established norms (Munkler, 2002:14) .

Frequently old wars are associated with the wars fought in or by western nations and the new wars are associated with wars "fought in what used to be called the Third World" (Holsti, 1996:27, Kaldor, 1999:1). Thus the othering that takes place becomes not just about the difference between old and new wars, but about development and underdevelopment, civilisation and barbarity and 'strong' and 'weak' states (Cramer, 2006:87).

## *Representation of the other as inferior*

Kaldor associates old wars with "forward-" and new wars with "backward-looking political projects" (Kaldor, 1999:7), thus implying that the aims of old war were superior to the goals of new wars. Inferiority is further established through the banalisation of new war and the use of caricature in presenting those who experience it. Holsti (1996:39) contrasts eighteenth century wars, the "sport of princes" which were far removed from the masses with new wars where "the deadly game is played in every home, church....and village". Keegan (1993 in Holsti, 1996:40) employs the use of caricature in his visceral portrayal of new wars as "a vehicle through which the embittered, the dispossessed, the naked of the earth, and the hungry masses.....express their anger, jealousies and pent-up urge to violence". Collier and Hoeffler's greed paradigm (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001), a central component of the new wars argument, feeds into this caricature of new wars perpetrators as thugs and bandits with purely economic motives thus serving to de-politicize and de-legitimize them (Jackson, 2007:124).

In romanticising old wars (Cramer, 2006:79) and banalising new wars, the superiority of old wars and those (mainly from developed nations) that experienced them and the inferiority of new wars and those (mainly from developing nations) that experience them is clearly established, resulting in the othering of the latter group.

## *Representing the other as violating universal principles*

The methods of old wars, it is claimed, were grounded within norms and conventions, in contrast, the methods of new wars are portrayed as flouting those 'rules' (Holsti, 1996:27, Kaldor, 1999:8, Munkler, 2002:31). Kaldor explains that the extreme violence of the new wars (systematic rapes and murder, ethnic cleansing, forced famines or siege, etc.) "fall[s] within the definition of genocide contained within the 1948 Geneva Convention" (Kaldor, 1999:100), thus associating new wars with the violation of international law.

I would argue that an extension of this form of othering within the new wars approach is a representation of the other as something which is beyond comprehension particularly when it comes to representing the methods of violence used. The portrayal of the extreme violence of the new wars as senseless, undisciplined and inhuman (Kalyvas, 2001:102) finds parallels in the new barbarism literature[4]. The "typically unrecognised link" between new wars and new barbarism (and "neo-classical economic theories of conflict[5]) (Cramer, 2006:137) is highlighted by Marchal and Messiant (2006:24). Kaplan's "new barbarism thesis" "*The Coming Anarchy* (Richards 1996:xv), describes the "new kind of war" as "intense savagery" (Kaplan, 1996:7). According to Cramer "the border drawn by the idea of barbarism is a classic mechanism of displacement" (Cramer, 2006:28) thus the aspects of the new wars approach that overlap with new barbarism "[result] in the othering of violent conflict and those that experience it".

## *Representation of the other as an existential threat*

This happens in the new wars literature through the presentation of the new kind of violent conflict as anarchic retrograde and incomprehensible presenting a threat to the global world order. Enzensberger (1994:14) describes new wars as "chaos". For Kaldor (1999:5) they are "part of a process which is more or less a reversal of the processes through which modern states evolved". Newman (2004:176) confirms that "the social and economic

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context of new wars is characterized by weak or failed states". Thus the new wars are firmly situated within the wider context of threat to world order posed by 'failed' or 'weak' states (Rotberg, 2004:1).

Analysis of the new wars approach in the context of Diez' (2005:17) four othering strategies, has facilitated a presentation of the arguments that support the view that, "taking a new wars approach results in the othering of violent conflict and those that experience it". I will now examine the view that taking a new wars approach does not *necessarily* result in the othering of armed conflict and those that experience it by comparing the approach of three different new wars writers.

*The new wars approach does not necessarily result in the othering of violent conflict and those that experience it*

Newman (2004:174) infers that not "all new wars analyses hold exactly the same lines of argument". It is by looking closely at some of the differences within the new wars analyses that we can find arguments to support the view that "taking a new wars approach does not [*necessarily*] result in the othering of violent conflict and those that experience it", or that the "othering of violent conflict and those that experience" takes place to a greater or lesser degree in different texts. Comparing, the work of Enzensberger, Kaldor and Duffield provides a useful illustration.

Enzensberger tends to rely heavily on the use of caricature, generalisation and stressing the incomprehensible and anarchic nature of new wars (Enzensberger, 1994:14). For him the perpetrators of new wars are "marauding mobs" (Enzensberger, 1994:14) without ideology or intelligence: he refers to perpetrators as "autistic" (Enzensberger, 1994:20). One important aspect of Enzensberger's argument is that he does not make a distinction between the developed and underdeveloped world, preferring to equate non-war violence in the developed world with violent conflict in the developing world, referring in the same page to "German thugs and arsonists" and the war in Kashmir. Despite apparently not discriminating between the developed and the underdeveloped world, by grouping together long-standing complex struggles in Indonesia, Kashmir and the wars in former Yugoslavia with "the ghetto kid who wants a pair of designer training shoes enough he will kill for them" (Enzensberger, 1994:39) serves to totally undermine today's civil wars. This total banalisation and rejection of any rationality or purpose to new wars is an example of the most extreme form of othering of violent conflict and those that experience it.

Kaldor also sometimes tends towards generalisation, caricature and incomprehension, she refers to "thugish, neophyte politicians" (Kaldor, 1999:1) and a "bewildering array of military and paramilitary forces" (Kaldor, 1999:47). However, she goes on to provide a detailed explanation of the origins and political grievances of all these groups (Kaldor 1999:47-49). Kaldor also rejects the claims of Van Creveld and Kaplan (Kaplan, 1994:7) that the new wars are a return to primitivism, explaining that they are rational "in the sense that they apply rational thinking to the aims of war and refuse normative constraints" (Kaldor, 1999:100). Kaldor criticises the simplistic view that new wars are the result of "pent-up urge to violence" (Keegan, 1993 in Holsti 1996:40) or "ancient hatreds" as Kaplan and Van Creveld (Kaplan, 1994:7) again claim (Kaldor, 1999:35). Kaldor provides a nuanced explanation of the Bosnian conflict, detailing its political goals and demonstrating its rationality (Shaw, 2000:173). It is by expounding the rational explanations for the Bosnian conflict that Kaldor softens the effect of othering present elsewhere in her text.

Duffield (2001) on the other hand does not use caricature, generalisation or portray new wars as anarchy. His detached and neutral analysis of the new wars invests them with a clear rationality. He demonstrates that the new wars are not "expressions of breakdown or chaos" or "peripheral aberration" but rather represent "the contested integration of stratified markets and populations into the global economy" and "a process of social transformation" (Duffield, 2001:14). His presentation of the new wars as a symptom of a global phenomenon in which all nations, developing and developed play their part rejects the association of the new wars with the 'Third World' and represents an inclusive approach that does not result in the othering of violent conflict and those that experience it. In this way Duffield's stance comes closer to anthropological explanations of violence by writers such as Richards who, in his detailed study of the war in Sierra Leone, stresses "[t]he challenge is to understand that 'we' and 'they' made this bungled world of....violence *together*" (Richards, 1996:xvii).

## Conclusion

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Duffield's (2001) analysis demonstrates that taking a new wars approach does not *necessarily* result in the othering of violent conflict and those who experience it. However the numerous examples of othering in the work of other new wars theorists, (as highlighted in section two) does suggest that Duffield is the exception rather than the rule and leads to the conclusion that, in most cases, "taking a new wars approach results in the othering of violent conflict and those that experience it".

Having established that othering is a characteristic of new wars, it is interesting to briefly analyse what purpose this othering serves. Through the "othering of violent conflict and those that experience it", the new wars paradigm presents modern-day violent conflict, those that experience it and, by extension, the states where it takes place as an existential threat which, in the context of international relations security discourse, justifies the use of "extraordinary measures" (Buzan *et al*, 1998:21). In this sense the new wars approach and its othering of violent conflict feeds into the "War on Terror" (Dexter, 2007) and also allowed the North to impose its "humanitarian" or "liberal" peace on the South (Richards, 2005:9), (Jackson 2007:124).

Therefore through the othering process the new wars approach constructs a justification for western intervention whether it be in the form of peace-keeping -the new *mission civilisatrice* (Paris,2002), international administration or the increasing donor focus on the good governance agenda. In this way, new wars are an important part of the increasing merger of the development and security agendas.

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[1] New wars are also referred to in the literature as privatized or informal wars, 'post-modern' (although this term also encapsulates virtual and cyberspace war) and 'degenerate warfare' (Kaldor, 1999:2) and wars of the 'third kind' (Holsti, 1996:20).

[2] Some also refer to 1945 as the turning point (Holsti, 1996:20).

[3] It is worth noting that there is extensive discussion about whether the distinction between old and new wars and their characteristics is a valid distinction (see Newman, 2004, Cramer, 2006:76-80, Kalyvas, 2001).

[4] Barker describes new barbarism as new racism (Duffield, 2001:109).

[5] Collier and Hoeffler's greed theory (Collier and Hoeffler, 2001).

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