

## Framing the Wars in the Gulf and in Bosnia: The Rhetorical Definitions of the Western Power Leaders in Action\*

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This article examines the rhetorical action of the Western major powers in defining two important international confrontations, the 1990–91 war against Saddam Hussein in the Gulf and the 1992–95 conflict among the Serbs, Croats and Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The leaders of the United States, Great Britain and France constructed the efforts of the anti-Iraq coalition as a 'just war with a new world order as its goal' but represented the Bosnian strife as a 'cruel and meaningless slaughter that outside forces can do very little about', and thereby selected appropriate policies for dealing with the situations. In their statements in the Gulf, the Iraqi president was made the ultimate enemy, dangerous and evil, who had to be crushed in order to make the world safe again. As to Bosnia, the evanescent enemies left the Western powers bewildered and unwilling to dictate any solutions. Besides framing the conflicts as heroic battles or tragic feuds, the Western leaders employed various metaphors to make the distant events and their policies seem significant and coherent. The apparently harmless and light-hearted comparisons with children's stories, card games, business deals, and sports competitions induced forceful action in the Gulf; by contrast, paralleling the situation with sad dramas, horrible nightmares, violent natural catastrophes, and treacherous morasses made decisive interference impossible in Bosnia. The Gulf metaphors made clear to all the folly of leaving the princess in the lurch, not playing a winning hand, passing up the chance for a great investment, or canceling the Cup Final. In Bosnia, the metaphors made it unthinkable to dash onto the stage to defend the scapegoat, act on the visions of a frightening dream, stand in the way of the whirlwind, or try to cross the quicksand.

### Introduction

Clausewitz's famous dictum, 'war is the continuation of politics by other means', has been interpreted in many ways and used for many ends. Besides serving as the founding principle and justification of shrewd power politics, the thesis also points to the connection between (aggressive) locutions and

deeds: thus, wars are fought not only with arms, but also with words. Official definitions of conflict situations, publicly declared motives, names given to the warring parties, and explanations concerning decisions made in the course of the hostilities – the rhetoric and discourses of war – play as important a role in the progression of events as do the physical acts of belligerency that accompany them. The verbal action gives meaning to the distant motion in the battlefield; it provides a plot to the seemingly disparate incidents, linking them to a coherent context with a familiar conclusion. War rhetoric is an essential part of 'real war'; it

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takes hold of the theater, lays out the campaign, reports on the advances, and assesses the outcome.

This article examines the 'war-words' of the foreign-policy leaders of the three major Western powers – the United States, Great Britain, and France – in two recent international conflicts. It studies how the Western leaders rhetorically framed the measures taken against Iraq in the Gulf in 1990–91 and the bitter civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina from April 1992 to the end of 1995, and how they provided the situations with appropriate categorizations and plans of action. The empirical material is drawn from sources providing extensive verbatim reports of significant foreign-policy speeches; the selection of quotes to illustrate specific points is based on a more thorough inquiry into these data (Kuusisto, 1997)<sup>1</sup>. In addition to looking into the labels, stories and metaphors with which the conflicts were associated, the article considers possible reasons for and consequences of the specific choices of rhetoric.

The analysis is divided into two parts: first, the cognitive processes of name-giving and story-telling are treated both in theory and in relation to the 'just war' of the Gulf and the 'cruel slaughter' of Bosnia. Subsequently, the special genre of naming and making meaningful, the use of metaphors, is discussed, both in general and in terms of a dichotomy: the heroic, harm-

less, and action-inducing versus the frightening, dangerous, and repelling metaphors employed in the two cases.

### Name-Giving and Story-Telling

Contrary to conventional wisdom, the subjects, objects and events of the (social) world are seldom 'just simply there', existing independently of the actors who define them and interpret them and the linguistic practices and conventions which shape them and convey them in history.<sup>2</sup> Facts rarely 'speak for themselves': they need to be explained and named and given meaning before they can be comprehended. Events, actors, and things become events, actors, and things only *after* they have been constituted as such, and after they have been constructed and ordered in human language and speech, placed into a textual context of purposes and roles. Our world is forever being created in and through discourses; it is not 'already there', waiting to be referred to and communicated about by our increasingly accurate symbols.

Questioning and abandoning the so-called realist world-views of unproblematic entities and rules of action, neutral concepts and objective criteria for truth – the discourse operating unreflectively with 'states', 'national interests', 'laws', and 'facts' – has opened up interesting insights and opportunities in the study of world politics. Scholars such as Billig (1995), Campbell (1990, 1992, 1993), and Shapiro (1988, 1992, 1996), have demonstrated how foreign policy can be understood as a realm of creative story-telling and identity production, not the domain of indisputably rational or irrational reactions to outside threats and possibilities. For all three theorists, foreign-policy activities involve drawing symbolic

<sup>1</sup> Primary sources of data include *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, *US Department of State Dispatch*, *Parliamentary Debates of the House of Commons*, *Verbatim Press Releases of the Central Office of Information* and *La Politique Étrangère de la France*. For the purposes of the more thorough analysis (Kuusisto, 1997), all texts dealing with the two conflicts have been read and certain ones chosen for further examination. The methodologies employed throughout the thesis are qualitative; they rely not on frequency measurements and statistical tools but on critical argumentation analysis and the systematic disintegration of powerful narratives – e.g. on the use of rhetorical analysis models developed by Perelman (with Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971), Burke (1969b), and Toulmin (1958).

<sup>2</sup> For politico-linguistic studies oriented in a less positivistic or behavioralistic, more discursive or deconstructionist manner, see for example Der Derian & Shapiro (1989), Hänninen & Palonen (1990), or Shapiro (1984).

boundaries and legitimating the domestic order. Story-tellers and their stories generally enjoy rather wide latitude; moreover, as foreign-policy matters often concern distant countries, little-known cultures, and abstract values, only very few in the audience will normally be able to base their opinions and beliefs on immediate observations and personal experience. Instead, in many important questions, they will have to rely on the labels and narratives (prominent, trustworthy, like-minded, well-informed) of others and on the interpretations they have earlier accepted in similar situations. Even at the end of the 20th century, foreign-policy rhetoric and representations can have awesome power – they can make people believe in crazed Iraqis routinely throwing babies out of incubators (see Ottosen, 1992) or in savage tribes of Serbs planning ritual slaughters in the Balkan mountains (see Brock, 1994) – but being potentially powerful does not mean being random in form or content. Certain elements and designs have greater appeal than others, and certain plots are imposed on new circumstances again and again.

In his study of the recurring elements of major societal and historical texts, Alker (1987) demonstrates how all important human stories follow a certain pattern. No matter how objective and scientific our stories aim to be, they contain certain mythic and poetic elements – kings' daughters, dragons and heroes, kidnappings, rescuings and rewards – normally associated with folktales and legends. In a way, Alker picks up the research carried out by Campbell (1949/1993) on data that are clearly fictional (fairytales, mythology, folk legends, dreams, religions, rituals) and moves on to 'factual' material such as historiography and scientific reports. Alker asserts that people want to hear and thus tend to formulate accounts of the life of their society in a specific heroic fairytale manner. These give pattern, meaning and di-

rection to the existence of the community by identifying the decisive moments, the guiding missions, the great individuals and the important victories of the past. Endowed with the context of a noble historic duty and purpose, the domestic problems and foreign battles confronting the society in the present cease to be a messy tangle with no end in sight and gain higher ground – clear roles for 'us' and 'them' are assigned, and the promise of a better future is given.

In addition to the happy-ending stories described by Alker – where heroes triumph over hardships and evil, kings' daughters are released from captivity, and everyone gets what they deserve – there is another pattern that has fascinated narrators from time immemorial: the tragic plot. One of the best students of these great stories where the hero and his cause are destroyed and the innocent suffer and are sacrificed, Burke (1966, 1969a,b), describes the tragic hero as someone both like the average audience (or rather as it likes to picture itself) in that he is basically 'good', and different from it in being prone to dangerous absolutism, excess and vehemence. The destiny of the tragic hero is preordained: he cannot be helped, and he will not turn back. In Burke's analysis, the ultimate tragedy merges the ideas of a brave hero, the sacrificial lamb and the scapegoat; by witnessing the ritualistic slaughter of the hero-victim-villain, the audience experiences grief and pain but also relief and catharsis. The audience identifies with the tragic character and sympathizes with his struggles, yet deep down wants him punished. The tragedy complements the fairytale by providing a logical counterpart to the perfect happy story – the perfect sad story. While the 'successes' of the community can be celebrated by adopting the epic form of narration, the apparent failures and helplessness can be made understandable and even acceptable through the appreciation of tragic agonies and necessities.

Besides constructing coherent, familiar, and moving plots, foreign-policy stories need to assign correct motives to the main characters, to give them the 'right' intentions and reasons for acting the way they did. Mills (1940/1984: 16) defines motives as societally acceptable justifications for present, future, or past programs or acts. Along with other skills and rules and norms of action for various situations, we learn the context-appropriate vocabularies of motive. Mills emphasizes that when we state our motives for a certain deed, we are engaging not in a process whereby some deeper truth about the deed becomes directly verbalized, but in a separate act that has its own rules and consequences. For Mills, motives are societally controlled vocabularies by which the speaker influences both himself and others, coordinates and classifies diverse actions and secures support for his program. Similarly, in discussing the 'access' an agent has to his or her own intentions, Skinner (1988) stresses the importance of socially legitimized and valued principles. According to Skinner, if an agent – a politician, for example – needs to get the audience to accept his actions, he must be able to legitimize them in a certain manner. He may, for instance, have to state the motives and political principles the audience admires and wants to hear, and then go on to connect them to the specific circumstances of his deed. In this way, even though certain publicly pronounced principles may not function as sufficient conditions or real reasons for an agent's moves, he will still be indirectly restricted and controlled by them: he will have to act in a way that can somehow, at least in retrospect, be justified within the socially defined traditions and conventions.

When it comes to stories and names attempting to justify war, and to societally accepted vocabularies for legitimating the killing of other human beings, not just any foreign-making rhetoric is enough. In

today's Western culture,<sup>3</sup> 'defending the indefensible' necessitates representation in terms of stark opposites and extreme terms. Active participation in wars needs to be justified by invoking the specter of dangerous and evil enemies, noble duties, and final purgatory battles (see Aho, 1981, 1994; Harle, 1991; Zur, 1991). The brittle dividing line between 'us' – the good, the virtuous, the law-abiding, the moral – and 'them' – the bad, the wicked, the criminal, the immoral – has to be made clear, and the enemy must be depicted as someone whose destruction and abolishment from 'our' world is necessary if we want to keep our lives orderly and safe. In the West today, wars are not usually seen as symbolic battles fought before a universal God between similar and equally worthy antagonists or as ritualistic combats against the evil in oneself, but as fierce crusades to eliminate the enemies of 'our' God. Thus, our enemy constructs operate for at least three purposes: in addition to providing us with an opponent in the eternal heroic struggle between the forces of light and the forces of darkness, they enhance the stability and feeling of togetherness within our own group, they justify its existence, and help to maintain our individual identities (see also Dalby, 1988; Kristeva, 1992).

When there are no discourses that create evil enemies and articulate correct motives for war, there can be no widely supported direct engagement in foreign conflicts. In situations where convincing enemies seem hard to find, where there appear to be several

<sup>3</sup> Even though 'Western culture' obviously comprises numerous subcultures – a variety of political and intellectual styles, philosophical notions and religious preferences – the three countries here studied have a long history together and share many fundamental beliefs (for the unifying features and the subcultures of 'the Western culture' see Galtung, 1980, 1993). The United States, Great Britain, and France have similar political and economic systems; they possess a mutual interest in the development of several international institutions; and most of their citizens are embedded in the cultural environment of Indo-European languages, Greco-Roman rationales, and Judeo-Christian religions.

separate enemies, or where potential enemies are presented as only partially evil and have a role as victims as well, keeping at a distance – watching the tragedy sympathetically but from afar – is the right response. Just as the definitions indicating strong chances of a successful salvation quest encourage participation, so does the rhetoric of uncertain threats and impossible missions warn of the dangers of outside interference.<sup>4</sup> Since the diagnosis already implies much of the treatment, constructing the original conditions is not a matter of ‘mere’ linguistic form. Early decisions in naming and explaining will determine the range of possibilities for bringing the situation to an end. Because we have no direct, immediate, and incontrovertible access to ‘reality’, all of our facts first have to be found and designated. Foreign-policy stories turn originally ambiguous circumstances into something relevant to us; in the discourses treating far-away events and actors, necessary duties and as well as obstacles to action are formed out of formerly insignificant elements.

In the conflicts in the Gulf and in Bosnia, the leaders of the three Western major powers were directed both by the discursive traditions of their communities and by their own strategic aims. On the one hand, they had to operate within the culturally approved standards of proper war rhetoric; on the other hand, they needed to legitimize specific moves (or inaction, or the right to choose) to their audiences and to themselves. They cannot be regarded as free actors totally in control of the situation – they were tied by social norms, operating in view of their electorate, advised by their political allies, criticized by the opposition, pressed by the media, and often surprised by some of the consequences of their acts – but neither

were they passive mouthpieces of Eternal Stories or helpless puppets in the hands of the true players of international power games. The Western leaders had power, visions, and interests, and most of these found rhetorical expression. By voicing the official policies of their governments in the Gulf and in Bosnia, they made the world meaningful for their audiences, they took part in shaping Western war discourses and determined the destinies of thousands of people.

### *Just War For a New World Order*

By mid-January 1991, the foreign-policy leaders of the three major Western powers seemed to have reached an understanding of the nature and importance of the Iraqi attack on Kuwait. In their speeches and statements, they depicted the event both as a threat to the freedom and security of each individual nation and as a menace to international law and the proper order of the society of states:

The terrible crimes and tortures committed by Saddam’s henchmen against the innocent people of Kuwait are an affront to mankind and a challenge to the freedom of all. (Bush, 16 January 1991)

The response of the international community to the Iraqi aggression has been remarkable and unprecedented: nobody wants to live in Saddam’s anarchic world. (Hurd, 16 January 1991)

Il faut que vous en soyez sûrs: protéger le droit dans le Golfe, au Moyen-Orient, aussi loin de nous qu’ils semblent sur une carte géographique, c’est protéger notre pays. (Mitterrand, 16 January 1991)

The Western leaders wanted to make sure the public understood that they did not see this aggression as just another case of violent changing of the guard in a Third World country, an incident that would first be widely condemned and then forgotten. The far-off and, to most Westerners, unfamiliar country of Kuwait was suddenly defined as the ultimate test case for international justice

<sup>4</sup> This does not, of course, mean that there exist no convincing justifications for any type of humanitarian mission. It simply indicates that it is hard to argue for massive military intervention without first indicating clear strategic objectives and definite evil enemies.

and security and the whole post-Cold War world order. This firm stand had to be justified and proper frameworks selected before the enemy could be engaged. The complicated task of defining anew a distant situation – of turning a recent recipient of Western support into a ‘mad dog’, an autocratic Muslim oil monarchy into something whose defense was to ‘chart the future of the world for the next 100 years’, and a violation of established borders in the Middle East into a clear breach of international law automatically entailing a multinational military response – was accomplished by invoking the fairytale of the classic just war that sought a better future for mankind as its goal:

The war in the Gulf is not a Christian war, a Jewish war, or a Moslem war; it is a just war. And it is a war in which good will prevail. (Bush, 28 January 1991)

... this is a just war by any count. (Major, 17 January 1991)

D’abord la certitude de légitimité. Elle ne fait ici aucun doute. ... Le droit est d’un côté et l’agression de l’autre. (Rocard, 16 January 1991)

We’re beginning a new era. This new era can be full of promise, an age of freedom, a time of peace for all peoples. (Bush, 8 August 1990)

For what is now at stake is our collective security and our hopes, with the end of the Cold War, of building a safer, more peaceful world. (Hurd, 16 January 1991)

Les résolutions adoptées par les Nations Unies, que nous avons votées, représentent à mes yeux la garantie suprême d’un ordre mondial fondé sur le droit des peuples à disposer d’eux-mêmes. (Mitterrand, 16 January 1991)

The concepts of just war and new world order gave the actions of the anti-Iraq coalition coherence, significance, and justification.<sup>5</sup> The whole familiar, heroic story of

<sup>5</sup> There were some discordant notes in the coalition rhetoric. The Arab League countries made an early effort at peaceful resolution; and the three major Western allies, the

good versus evil, right versus wrong, and order versus disorder was activated in the Western statements and imposed on the specific circumstances of the Gulf conflict. Implicit was the message that when just wars are fought, one has not only the right but also the duty and obligation to join the battle against the perpetrators; and the idea that there can be no goal more worth dying for than a peaceful, just, and egalitarian future for all states and nations was forcefully pushed through. In the Gulf, the leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and France were able to proclaim the ‘right’, societally acceptable motives for engaging in foreign combat and to point to a simple plan for reaching the desired result. They managed to name the events in a way that shifted the burden of proof over to the opponents of active military engagement; being against a crusade so virtuous called for substantial justifications indeed.

In Western speeches on the Gulf conflict, identity reproduction was accomplished both by embracing the role of the savior and by attributing everything terrible and disgusting to the nature of the adversary. The insecurity caused by the collapse of the Cold War order with its fixed patterns of interaction, and the anxiety related to persistent doubts about the self and others, could now be brushed aside by standing up against the Iraqi president. With his long history of wicked deeds and his insolent attitude, Saddam Hussein was a perfect enemy for the Western leaders:

While the international community tries to build on the successful ending of the Cold War, Saddam Hussein seems hell-bent on the revival of hot war. He marries his old-style

French probably most in earnest, also tried the diplomatic route. In addition, several important individuals and groups voiced objections to going to war against Iraq. The official ‘just war’ explanation was, however, formulated right together with the initial responses to the occupation. It became a frame of reference for all the following discourses and finally determined the outcome of the conflict.

contempt for civilized rules with modern destructive methods: chemical and biological weapons, ballistic missiles, and – if he could – nuclear weapons. (Baker, 29 October 1990)

But Saddam Hussein has chosen war. . . . sanctions made life harder for Saddam's people but he was not a man to be influenced by their suffering. . . . Saddam Hussein has rejected all appeals, he has defied the United Nations, he has increased his force in Kuwait, he has tortured and killed those who opposed him, he has tried to wipe Kuwait off the very map of the Middle East. (Major, 17 January 1991)

Le Président Saddam Hussein est resté muré dans son intransigeance et muet, exposant son pays et son peuple au malheurs de la guerre. Il portera devant l'histoire cette très grave responsabilité. (Dumas, 17 January 1991)

Depending on the requirements of the context in question, Saddam Hussein was depicted either as a crazed killer or a clever gambler, a coward in hiding or a dictator whose courage to defy the world verged on madness, a swindler who did not deserve to be negotiated with, or a leader with whom one could still try to reason<sup>6</sup> – but always as a convincing and evil enemy. Besides embodying everything that was sick and mean, President Hussein provided an imminent threat. According to statements issued by the major powers, stopping the man 'with the sixth largest army in the world' and nuclear aspirations would be no easy job. On the contrary, it called for the concerted effort of the members of the Western military alliance and other responsible countries. The enemy constructions of the Gulf dispelled the need to ponder deeply the proper course of action for the international community to take. Since negotiating and compromising with someone akin to the Devil himself was futile as well as extremely risky, the only solution to the problem posed by Saddam Hussein

<sup>6</sup> On the enemy images of President Hussein, see also Vesterinen (1993); on typical inconsistencies within enemy images, Silverstein (1989).

lay in absolute, unyielding, forceful coercion. What could be achieved by fighting the Iraqi leader involved much more than a single person or state; for a fragile moment, the principle of order was restored and 'our' existence acquired positive meaning.

### *Cruel and Meaningless Slaughter*

Some two years after the proud and confident statements defining the war against Saddam Hussein, the rhetoric of the Western leaders in Bosnia bore witness to their helplessness, confusion, and unwillingness to meddle with difficult international crisis situations. In Bosnia, the US, British, and French leaders spent several years trying to avoid active engagement in events on the ground and direct commitment to the execution of any peace plan. Western foreign-policy stories explaining the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina stressed the complexity of the particular scene and activities, the paucity of acceptable and durable solutions, and the awkward position of outside powers:

I am appalled by what has happened there; I am saddened; I am sickened. And I know that our ability to do anything about it is somewhat limited. (Clinton, 24 March 1993)

I do not think that flamboyant gestures are of help at this time. There is a need for care, caution and co-ordination . . . (Major, 13 July 1992)

La première mesure qui me paraît s'imposer est de donner autorité au plan Vance–Owen dont on peut dire qu'il n'est pas parfait – la répartition en dix provinces de la Bosnie est une affaire délicate – mais nous ne connaissons rien de mieux. (Mitterrand, 16 March 1993)

Whereas the complicated history of the Gulf region and the contradictory claims of the original parties to the conflict were swiftly set straight by the labels, definitions, and explanations provided by Western leaders, the intricate mix of ethnic, cultural, religious, economic, and political problems in relations among the Southern Slavs left the

great powers bewildered and quarrelsome among themselves. Unlike in the Gulf, a military solution carried out by Western ground forces was ruled out from the start by the leaders of all three countries, and the promises and threats that the international community made during the almost four years of harsh fighting mostly proved empty.<sup>7</sup> All the same, the public demanded that the confusion also be explained and the numerous problems placed in the correct context. The Western leaders found themselves obliged to assert repeatedly that, even in theory, there was not much that 'we' could do and that the Balkan brawl contained hardly any noble meaning or higher purpose. Despite the absence of miracle solutions and strong coalition unity, a certain type of consensus was reached and the Western story of the Bosnian war acquired a plot after all. Instead of being constructed as a fairytale that offered a chance for heroic intervention, Bosnia was depicted as a tragedy, a muddled, cruel, and meaningless slaughter that outside forces could do very little about:

... but it is inter-ethnic conflict; it is massively mixed up. ... It's going to take time. And that's tragic, and it's horrible. ... It is difficult to explain, but this war is not rational. There is no rationality at all about ethnic conflict. (Eagleburger, 28 August 1992)

Let me just say what is complicated about it. There plainly is a civil war in Bosnia that is,

<sup>7</sup> If we hold that linguistic practices create reality, the claim that 'real' differences between the two conflicts determined the Western reactions is insufficient. The 'fact' that one was a clear case of illegal aggression and the other a complex case of rebellion, civil war, and state succession was not immediately apparent and had no automatic and direct consequences. Most of the violent confrontations going on in the world do not daily receive any sort of forceful definitions from the Western leaders; some cases of blatant aggression are not punished; and not all difficult civil wars are left to the local parties to fight out. Being critical of the 'intrinsic differences' claim does not, however, lead to adherence to the 'essentially same' position. The most important feature 'originally shared' by the two conflicts was probably that, for the majority in the Western audience, both conflicts had to be actively interpreted before they could become meaningful.

among other things, a fight primarily between the Serbs and the Muslims but also involving the Croatians. It is complicated by the fact that Serbia, a separate country, has intervened in it, and complicated by the fact that ... (Clinton, 11 May 1993)

I have always disliked as pretentious the phrase 'a new world order'. ... I have never found the phrase 'something must be done' to be a phrase which carries any conviction in places such as the House or Government. (Hurd, 20 April 1993)

We cannot be everywhere and do everything, and there is no question of Britain or any other country becoming the policeman of the world. (Hurd, 23 February 1993)

Soyons la aussi lucides et sans hypocrisie. Que pourrait être cette phase militaire? Une intervention massive terrestre? Tout le monde l'exclut, ce serait un nouveau Vietnam ou un nouvel Afganistan. (Juppé, 21 April 1993)

C'est difficile, bien entendu, nous sommes confrontés à un drame d'une horrible complexité. ... Il faut donc regarder les choses en face et sans faire preuve d'un optimisme excessif parce que rien n'est simple, rien n'est clair. (Juppé, 18 May 1993)

The hostilities in Bosnia were represented as something terrible and paralyzing, chaotic and strange, as a mysterious ethnic feud with a dreadful logic which left almost no room for well-meaning attempts to interfere.<sup>8</sup> According to Western statements, the meaning and coherence of the Bosnian conflict and the outside reactions came from the irrational and primitive nature of the main actors and events. To become significantly

<sup>8</sup> In the Western discourses on Bosnia, 'competing explanations' received more prominence than was the case in the Gulf. The general public, the media and certain intellectuals were often rather critical of official decisions regarding Bosnia, and the leaders of the major powers themselves sometimes shifted between 'there's nothing substantial we can do' and the 'we can and must do more' positions. Moreover, it can be argued (see Fierke, 1996) that around August–September 1995 there came a change in Western rhetorical and other action concerning Bosnia. Still, for at least three and a half years, the rhetoric of confusion and paralysis dominated official statements, and the sporadic attempts at a 'tougher' line merely added to the puzzlement.

involved in something as 'senseless' as the Bosnian war was explained as being very dangerous, as well as most probably futile. In the opinion of the Western leaders, noble intentions were not a good enough reason for getting caught up in a prolonged, incomprehensible, and bloody tribal battle where both the identity and ambitions of the enemy and the precise strategic objective of one's own side were unclear. The Muslims, Serbs, and Croats were all driven by their dark destinies and primordial hatreds; they were brave and innocent in their suffering, yet cruel and merciless in their revenge. The speeches of the major-power leaders affirmed to the public that delivering humanitarian aid, watching over the no-fly zones and safe havens and offering negotiation opportunities was the best possible plan for third (or fourth) parties to adopt in Bosnia. No purpose could be served by making foolhardy charges into the massacre or by randomly choosing sides in the messy situation.

Despite the obvious potential inherent in the formerly pro-Nazi Croats, the still-Communist Serbs and the Muslims of a foreign creed and culture, the official Western discourse on the Bosnian war never singled out any clear and evil adversary. From early on, it was the Serbs that were judged most guilty of the horrors of war in Bosnia, but the fact that also the other parties had committed gross violations of human rights and held UN resolutions and ceasefire agreements in contempt made the tone of the statements differ markedly from the righteous fury of the Gulf:

They [true friends of the peoples of the former Yugoslavia] are aware, in particular, that the people of Serbia were one of World War II's principal victims, and they sympathize with their suffering. . . . But it is Serbs, alas, who are the most guilty today. . . . (Eagleburger, 26 August 1992)

We believe that the main pressures still need to be applied against Serbia and Montenegro.

That is not because other participants in the fighting – either the Croats or the Bosnian Muslims – are free from blame for some of the suffering, but . . . (Hurd, 25 September 1992)

La France a toujours dit que la responsabilité la plus grande incombait aux Serbes. Il est caricatural de dire: 'Voilà les bons, voici, les méchants.' Tout est mêlé en Yougoslavie, c'est bien ce qui fait la complexité du problème. (Dumas, 16 August 1992)

In Bosnia, the Western major-power leaders were not able to lay all that was ugly, brutal, and disgusting in the world on the shoulders of the enemy and fully enjoy the positive contrast with themselves. Instead, they had to live with dispersed problems, evanescent foes, and battered self-esteem. On the other hand, the lack of credible adversaries – the 'small devils' of Bosnia were never constituted as true threats to mankind and international peace – legitimated keeping at a distance and not getting involved. Besides representing only one of the at least three identifiable groups of wrong-doers, 'the Serbs' were also problematic enemies in other ways: their rights in Bosnia could not be dismissed as easily as Saddam Hussein's claims on Kuwait, and it was difficult to categorize them as a separate single actor. Western explanatory stories warned of the dangers of assuming the role of Don Quixote, of tilting at windmills and shadows and ghosts and changing images. Having no genuine enemies in Bosnia influenced not only the mode of conflict resolution, but also the process of US, British, and French identity reproduction. Because 'our' real danger, mission and reason for being were not connected to a war in Bosnia, they had to be sought elsewhere, in other foreign contexts.

### **Imaginative Rationality**

In their *The Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff & Johnson (1980) claim that the human conceptual system is fundamentally metaphori-

cal in nature. People go through life understanding one kind of a thing – often a concept or event that is abstract or new – in terms of another – a discernible and familiar illustration. We try to organize our experiences by means of prototypes and categories, since treating every novel occurrence as a unique class of its own, as something totally different and separate from everything else, would soon exceed our comprehension capacities and paralyze our ability to function in the world. Lakoff & Johnson maintain that we constantly seek coherence and resemblances and order by using various types of metaphors, and that metaphors are capable of uniting reason (categorization, entailment, inference) and imagination (innovative association) in the formation of imaginative rationality. They place metaphors somewhere between (myths of) purely subjective, unapproachable, and intuitive experience, and objective, independent, and shared reality; they regard metaphors as roads to rational personal truths. For Lakoff, metaphors are inherent, forever present, and indispensable (Lakoff & Turner, 1989: xi); in addition, they form an important part of the foundation of his experientialist theory of truth (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: 147–194) and experiential realism (Lakoff, 1987).

Two spokesmen for the restoration of rhetoric,<sup>9</sup> Burke and Perelman, join Lakoff in identifying the metaphor as a device deserving special attention. For Burke (1969a: 503–517), the metaphor is the first of the four master figures of speech, a perspective on reality, a point of view carried over from one realm to another. He defines the metaphor as a tool for seeing something in terms of something else, as a dimension or angle that improves the picture of the whole. For Perelman (Perelman & Olbrechts-

Tyteca, 1971: 398–405), metaphors are condensed analogies that facilitate the development and extension of thought and serve as elements of proof. In his analysis (Perelman, 1982: 114–125), metaphors have a central place in human world-views, cultures, and mental constructs: by positing a similarity between two relations existing in different realms, metaphors can add to our understanding of deep philosophical problems and complex phenomena. The difference between the realms linked by a metaphor has to be a difference in nature and order, not simply one of degree. Perelman emphasizes that metaphors connect separate spheres – everyday routines and perennial moral questions, the simple and the problematic, the ordinary and the spiritual.

Both Burke and Perelman stress the same two points as Lakoff does: metaphors are more than poetic decorations or linguistic ornamentation; and metaphors unite different *kinds* of things. All these scholars seem to agree on yet a third point: in addition to creating order, meaning, and new realities in our lives, metaphors are restrictive and selective by nature. Lakoff & Johnson (e.g. 1980: 92) show how metaphorical organizing, reasoning, and imagination always suppress those aspects of the situation that do not fit into the logic of the chosen association. Each metaphor highlights those aspects of the event that match with its structure and progression and plays down those features that are more difficult to incorporate in the particular explanation. Also in Burke's and Perelman's deliberations, metaphors discriminate and have limited appropriateness. Burke explains that bringing out 'the thissness of a that and the thatness of a this', employing the 'perspective process' (Burke, 1969a: 503–504), is a heuristic and experimental method, a tentative approach to the innumerable aspects of a character's reality, a shift of realm producing various degrees of incongruity. Perelman affirms (in Perelman, 1982:

<sup>9</sup> For an analysis of the founding fathers of the new rhetoric, Burke, Perelman and Toulmin, see Summa (1996).

114–125; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1971: 375–398) that each explanatory association highlights or emphasizes a different aspect of the theme and leaves others in the shadows. In the case of naming foreign-policy conflicts, metaphors form a special class of explanations by referring to the events not simply as some type of violent confrontation – just wars or cruel slaughters – but by borrowing the logic and terms of the definition from a radically different area of human action, such as games, sports, dreams, or theater, and underlining the similarities between the two phenomena.

### *Storybooks, Games, Business and Sports*

In the statements of the foreign-policy leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and France, the war in the Gulf was portrayed as a thrilling adventure in a book of fairytales, as a case of gambling or playing a board game, as doing business by buying and selling, and as an exciting game of baseball or a relay race:

The recent challenge could not have been clearer. Saddam Hussein was the villain; Kuwait the victim. To the aid of this small country came nations from North America and Europe, from Asia and South America, from Africa and the Arab world – all united against aggression. (Bush, 6 March 1991)

La réaction dans le monde entier a été immédiate et d'une ampleur à la mesure du forfait et l'enjeu. (Dumas, 21 August 1990)

If you appease a bully you pay for it later and you often pay more dearly. (Major, 17 January 1991)

On the diplomatic track, the UN Security Council has (...) On the military track, we and some 27 other countries (...) We're not in the game just to play one inning and then go home. We cannot be short of breath for the long haul. (Baker, 29 October 1990)

The Western metaphors drew a parallel between the Gulf War and some everyday incidents and acts that were neither dangerous nor problematic in any deeper sense. They

brought the complicated and violent conflict into the sphere of the well-known, harmless, and even the light-hearted. The Gulf metaphors appealed both to the very common human desire to be able to make rational calculations, profitable decisions, and wise judgements – as in drawing up a strategy for a game or a business meeting – and to the emotions of the audience, to its desire to see the story end happily and the children sigh with relief ... 'and they lived happily ever after ...'. Choosing these particular metaphors highlighted the gallant, vigorous, and controllable aspects of war while downplaying the misery, pain, and turbulence often associated with deadly quarrels. Furthermore, the Western choice of metaphors tied the progression of the conflict to a logic of answering back and accepting the challenge, a logic that could not easily be reversed into negotiating or giving the enemy a second chance.

Each Western metaphor had its specific function in framing the conflict. The *heroic storybook metaphor* activated an image of children curling up under their blankets, begging to hear tales about strange monsters, brave princes, frail princesses, and missions fraught with danger. Fairytales take place in enchanted forests, underground worlds, and far-away galaxies, in surroundings where flying on magic carpets, receiving supernatural powers from curious potions, and using wonder-weapons against three-headed dragons all seem matters of course. In storybooks, heroes can recover from fatal injuries, victims never fail to be innocent and pure, and dangerous beasts will not rest until they have been eliminated for good. If the story gets too scary, the book can always be shut and put aside. By using the storybook metaphor, the Western leaders depicted the war in the Gulf both as vitally important and as not quite true. Destroying Saddam Hussein definitely had to be taken seriously, and yet there was also an air of fiction and

the supernatural – talk about ghoulish enemies, wondrous surgical missiles, and invincible soldiers – about the whole conflict. The fairytale plot made the roles of the actors and the nature of the assignment clear and absolute: proper princes do not cut deals with the dragon or ask the kidnapped victim to agree to concessions. The storybook template gave the Western powers a feeling of joyful omnipotence, coupled with a discharge from ‘real’ liability.

The *game metaphor*, too, evoked an atmosphere of excitement and enjoyment. Losing and winning in a game of cards or Monopoly may be important events for the players at the time, but they are rarely something terribly grave or disastrous in a permanent way. Suspense, fear, and taking risks are all fun in the world of games; moreover, in card games, one can often first ‘lose all’ and then begin all over again. Though games are mere play, the ability to play cleverly is a skill worthy of respect. Thus, taking foolish risks and trying to bluff in a situation where the other players know your cards disturbs the whole company; an intelligent player also knows when it is time to give up. The players of a game move pieces, counters, or chessmen on a cardboard terrain; the money they risk is usually colored paper; and the stakes involved are never human lives. By imposing the structure of a game on the Gulf conflict, the US, British, and French leaders transferred the action to the sphere of gambling, of calling and marching tin soldiers. The leaders of the major powers indicated that in the game in the Gulf, Saddam Hussein defied all rules of fair play, made stupid moves, and took foolish risks. The coalition, by contrast, played both cautiously and fair-and-square; it knew that the stakes were high and was loath to lose a single chessman. The notion of games also delimited the Gulf conflict temporally: Saddam Hussein was responsible for the first move, and the coalition victory put a sure end to the game.

The *business metaphor* gave the war in the Gulf clear material reasons and goals. Buying and selling valuable goods requires careful cost–benefit analyses; and investments are made in order to get profit, either right away or in the long term. When you buy something, you are entitled to get your money’s worth and to inspect the quality of the merchandise. Because prices fluctuate, finding the best time for making a deal is important, and you should constantly keep an eye on your competitors. In the realm of business, very few moves are made at random – the theories of economics give the actors directions and explanations. In the Gulf, following the logic of the business metaphor, the Western leaders sought to assure the somewhat hesitant ‘investors’ that they were about to make an excellent deal: investing in the freedom of Kuwait would bring both immediate benefits and long-term stability to the international (market) scene. The costs of not interfering were bound to be higher than the price of involvement. The Iraqi president had thought he could get Kuwait cheap; it was in the interest of the rest of the world to prove him wrong while this still could be done with a reasonable outlay. The business metaphor made it natural to buy peace and order through killing and dying in the Gulf. The metaphor overrode the human dimension of the ‘costs’ and the moral questions relating to the ‘deal’ and made everything computable and rational.

The Western *sports metaphor* invoked definitions and expectations common among spectators of ball games, marathon races, or wrestling matches. In the field of sports, it is teams and competitions, equipment and training, and prizes and victory parties that structure thoughts and physical performance. Skiing and playing tennis are wholesome recreational activities, and watching the world’s top athletes compete on TV provides an opportunity to see the physically most fit and mentally most

concentrated young men and women from all nations in action. The sports metaphor employed in the speeches of the US, British, and French leaders in the Gulf turned the violent conflict into a basketball match between the coalition dream-team and the arrogant challenger, Iraq. The Iraqi team was powerful and dangerous – but its strength was raw strength, cheating and juggling, drawing in spectators. By contrast, the strength of the coalition derived from careful training, intelligent moves, and honest designs. Whereas the coalition was backed by expert coaches, ardent supporters, and technically advanced gear, the average Iraqi player was poorly trained and motivated, badly equipped and eventually deserted by both the team leader and the home crowd. The message carried by the Western sports metaphor was clear and demanding: the Gulf War was a contest where the West could not back down. The sports metaphor urged active engagement and applauding the winners; neither the audience nor the players wanted to have the game called off or settled off the court.

*Dramas, Nightmares, Natural Catastrophes and Morasses*

What then of Bosnia? In statements made by the leaders of the major Western powers, the killing and dying in Bosnia were likened to tragic plots played out on theater stages, horrible nightmares of the dark hours, sudden and violent natural catastrophes, and treacherous swamps and quagmires:

... parce que les choses sont tellement complexes, tellement douloureuses et tellement affreuses dans cette tragédie ... Face à un tel drame, il faut procéder pas à pas. ... Cela va être très long, très difficile ... (Juppé, 8 September 1993)

... the terrible violence shattering the lives of innocent men, women and children in Bosnia. The aggressors and extremists pursue a policy, a vile policy, of ethnic cleansing, deliberately murdering innocent civilians ...

This is, without a doubt, a true humanitarian nightmare. (Bush, 6 August 1992)

When Yugoslavia erupted, the United Kingdom did not hang back. We sent in an emergency aid programme ... In the past few days, fighting flared up again in Tusla ... (Major, 29 March 1995)

There has been understandable concern that the sending of more British troops to Bosnia could have the result of bogging us further down in the Balkan morass. (Rifkind, 31 May 1995)

The metaphorical associations in speeches on Bosnia did not transfer the conflict to the realm of harmless and sportive everyday incidents: they located it among special and dangerous events, in unusual and uncontrollable surroundings. Western metaphors for the war in Bosnia all had to do with action which one cannot or should not affect from the outside – something that must follow its own course. And all aroused feelings of terror, fear, or mournful sympathy. According to these Western metaphors, there was in Bosnia no room for rational calculations or happy endings for the sake of the children; instead, one had to settle for pity, combined with vigilant avoidance of the fate of the main actors. Official Western metaphors underlined the brutality, senselessness, and desolation of war, while concealing any aspects of the situation that might have prompted chivalrous rescue missions or high-spirited attempts to fight for the forces of good. The rationale of the Bosnian metaphors was linked to waiting and seeing, offering advice, and providing some first aid.

In Bosnia as in the Gulf, each Western metaphor evoked its own set of characteristic images and rules of behavior. The *theater metaphor* introduced a setting of actors and audiences, stages and auditoriums, performances and reviews into the battlefields of Bosnia. Night after night, the Western public could follow a classic tragedy where

everyone – the good and the bad, the bystanders and the heroes – met a lamentable end. In theaters, plays usually proceed according to scripts written well in advance; roles and plots have been carefully tailored to fit each other and to satisfy the expectations of the onlookers, even when the story is sad and violent. By metaphorically transferring the tragic theater scene to Bosnia, the Western leaders sought to reassure their slightly anxious publics that, yes, it was perfectly all right to sit back and watch the Bosnian actors play out their cruel and shocking parts. Leaping onto the stage in order to prevent the sacrifice of the innocent would only mess up the whole performance and ruin everybody's evening. Leaders of the major powers explained that the Bosnian arena was, after all, a traditional stage for grim acts and that the Bosnians were extremely talented tragic performers with long experience. The theater metaphor attempted to show how external influence was of marginal importance to the spectacle in Bosnia; the harsh destiny of the Balkan peoples might, at best, become a lesson for future generations of Bosnians – as well as providing the West with a cathartic viewing experience.

The *nightmare metaphor* was meant to lead the Western audience away from daily routines of work and leisure and into the dark world of dreams, hallucinations, and strange visions. In nightmares, absurd and terrible things can happen; ordinary rules of time and place and justice need not apply; and the dreamer often has no control over or even understanding of what is happening. After a nightmare, one wakes up dripping with sweat, heart pounding, possibly screaming in terror – but in the safety of one's own bedroom. Even though experiences in nightmares may be related to problems encountered in waking hours, the connection is seldom unambiguous and easy to work out. As mere reflections or illusions,

troubling dreams are best ignored. The leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and France pointed out that the events in Bosnia, just as in dreams, seemed to lack all normal rules and limits: the actors routinely said one thing and did another; coalitions and front-lines changed overnight; and thousands of civilians were slaughtered for no apparent purpose. The observer found new kinds of horrors lurking behind every door, and all his efforts to stop the agony ran down the drain. The Western nightmare metaphor also shifted the focus of attention away from the dream characters of Bosnia and towards the Western powers themselves: in the light of the metaphor, *they* were the ones who needed therapy and consolation, or simply to forget.

The *natural catastrophe metaphor* brought to mind snow-storms, destructive floods, earthquakes, forest fires, and volcanic eruptions – tremendous forces that no one can prepare adequately for or halt at will. Natural catastrophes strike indiscriminately; they are fierce and unreasoning. However, in today's world, they have become more predictable, understandable, and regular: earthquakes and floods still mercilessly destroy everything in their way, but the earthquake-prone areas and rivers disposed to flooding have been rather thoroughly charted and studied. Thus, the proper way to react to natural catastrophes is to help their victims – to deliver food, medicine, blankets, and tents to the emergency area – not to try to fight the landslide bare-handed, or to seek to intimidate the evil spirits of the volcano. In speaking about the flames and surges of the Bosnian conflict, the Western leaders made the suffering of the civilians and soldiers look like a huge, staggering accident, something that had come out of the blue and swept everyone off their feet. True, the Bosnians had chosen to live in dangerous terrain where catastrophes took place periodically, but their pain and wretchedness after

the latest upheaval were on the whole not deserved and could not be disregarded by the dutiful Western powers. The Western leaders stated that, as the metaphor suggested, what the Bosnians needed were nourishment and shelter, water and electricity – not more of the weapons and ammunition that were responsible for unleashing the flood in the first place.

The *morass metaphor* converted Bosnia and its surroundings into something the wayfarer should avoid at all costs. Swamps, quagmires, and marshes are deceptive and deadly: from a distance, the soft, almost fluffy, land may well look like a beautiful place to set up camp or to walk across, but the harmless appearance hides drowning, suffocation, and excruciating demise. Morasses are often associated with the mystical or supernatural. Will-o'-the-wisps lure unsuspecting passers-by, horse-size hounds assault lost wanderers, and dreadful voices call out from under the peat, marsh-gas, and water. Trying to help a person claimed by a morass requires great caution; the chances that the rescuers will fall into the same trap are fearfully strong. The Western leaders used the morass metaphor to slow down enthusiasm for intervening in the action on the ground in Bosnia. They explained that the Balkan morass, having been treacherous ground for hundreds – or even thousands – of years, could easily devour an indefinite number of new soldiers. They admitted that it was, in principle, noble to want to reach out one's hand to a drowning person – but then they immediately pointed out how dashing headlong into disaster would not remedy the Bosnian wrongs or save anyone. By exploiting the knowledge people have about morasses, marshes, and quicksands, the Western leaders stressed how it would be suicidal to plunge into Bosnia. Voices entreating interference in Bosnia came from poisonous marsh vapors and carried with them the stamp of death.

## Conclusion

Both in the Gulf some seven years ago and in Bosnia for almost four years, the leaders of the three major Western powers found it necessary to spend considerable amounts of time and energy to explain to themselves and to their various audiences exactly what was happening. In order to legitimize the existence of their nations and to justify the Western role in the two conflicts, they had to frame the foreign situations in a convincing way. In the Gulf, it was the story of the just war with a new world order as its goal that gave the coalition action meaning and directed the expectations of the public towards the final purgatory battle. With metaphors like 'war as a storybook fairytale', 'war as a game', 'war as a business transaction', and 'war as a sports event', the original definition of the situation was reinforced and the range of solutions to the Iraqi aggression delimited. In Bosnia, by contrast, the official Western rhetoric supported a policy of avoiding any direct involvement in the hostilities. A senseless and barbaric slaughter where not one of the parties is free of the stain of guilt and blame – the staged tragedy, the nightmare, the natural catastrophe, and the morass – that is 'by definition' something that outside forces can do very little about.

On the other hand, despite their selective and restrictive nature, these Western conflict definitions and narrative frames did not construct versions of reality that were essentially more faulty and less true than other human descriptions of the world and the events and actors in it. Even though the explanations and stories relating to the Gulf left scant space for negotiations, flexibility or compromise, and even though it was purposefulness, devotion to principles, and commitment to punishing the guilty that were put aside in Bosnia, the rhetorical constructions of these two conflicts did not amount to unforeseen perversion and deceit. Rather, they should be seen as bearing

witness to the price of maintaining consistency, order and meaning in our lives. Alternative definitions – ones that focusing on for example the inequities of the Gulf status quo and the bravery of Saddam Hussein or the Western mistakes in former Yugoslavia and the clearly identifiable local culprits – were no more accurate and objective than the official Western definitions, nor did they represent real options for the West.

In a world of partial and uncertain truths, every interpretation will be simply one suggestion among many, a limited perspective and an insecure tale. Instead of searching for 'better' – unambiguous, factual – names and frames for violent conflicts, research on war rhetoric should aim at critically deconstructing *all* persuasive explanations and heightening the general awareness of the power of linguistic practices. Even if we cannot impose 'correct' form on the unruly reality of international relations, we can at least carefully compare the competing bids, their implications and principles of operation.

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