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Title: Transforming Violence: The Iraq war and the Rhetoric of Conscientious Objection

Abstract:

In this paper I will analyze, explicate, and articulate the discourses and texts emerging from the recent conscientious objectors resistance to the Iraq war effort. Specifically, I will look at speeches, tracts, statements, slogans, and interviews formulated by a variety of objectors to grasp, if any, a patterned construction of discursive spaces of resistance. The theoretical horizon for the interpretation will be the work of Girard on violence and its effects on forming communities. Particularly, I want to explore how, using Girardian theory, one can better understand how the actors within the struggle against violence articulate their visceral experience of this violence and its life-changing, life-transforming potential. The experience of raw violence is intelligible and real and its intelligibility is articulated in a variety of rhetorical styles and mediums. I will explore these rhetorical styles, mediums, and spaces used by the objectors and within their concrete contexts? For example, an objector made the statement that they were “putting down their weapons and picking up their humanity.” I will ask what this type of rhetorical device tells us about how the objector conceptualizes the connection between non-violent resistance and the constitution of our communal humanity. How is “humanity” itself constructed, to what or to whom is it contrasted, to gain its specific sense. In other words, what is considered “inhuman” if the maintenance of one’s “humanity” lay in “putting down ones weapons”. It is my contention that Girardian theory can throw a great deal of light on this construction. Further, I will ask how the various discursive mediums that were utilized as forms of resistance accomplished the task of witnessing to the *truth of the victim*. The questions mentioned above will be placed within a social, economic, and political context to reveal what is at stake in the articulation of various discourses. Ultimately, I want to allow the objectors to talk, to tell their story, and in so doing cast light on the power of non-violent resistance to transform lives and communities.