The Real People: Ethnohuman Speciation at the Intersection of Modern Western Multiculturalism, Human Rights, and 'Islamic' Terrorism

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Abstract

Local ethnic labels for indigenous societies across the world can be translated as 'the people', or 'true' or 'correct' people, with the assumption that while outsiders may look human, such outsiders remain less than real people. This relatively extreme form of ethnocentrism can be illustrated in reference to the Mardu Australian aborigines, the Kulina and Wari of Amazonia, or potentially the Min of Papua New Guinea, revealing much about how diverse societies negotiate concepts of foreignness. Although modern and contemporary understandings for humanity draw from a biological definition of species, ethnohuman speciation remains arguably fundamental to Western and global society through sociopolitical assumptions and biosocial understandings for international law and universal human rights. This chapter explores ethnocentrism associated with ethnohuman speciation specifically when modern Western concepts of multiculturalism and human rights are challenged through anxiety for 'foreign' and 'Islamic' terrorism. Intended impacts involve a more critical and refined understanding of 'multiculturalism,' along with re-examination of debates involving human rights in the context of assumptions for foreign or religiously motivated terrorism.

Keywords

multiculturalism – pluriculturalism – Islamic terrorism – human rights – international law – violence – modernity

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*Western civilization is in a war. We should frankly test every person here who is of a Muslim background and if they believe in Sharia they should be deported... Sharia is incompatible with western civilization.*¹

FORMER US HOUSE SPEAKER NEWT GINGRICH

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*People must not allow themselves to be divided by religion... We cannot give into fear or turn on each other or sacrifice our way of life... It's been a difficult several weeks in the US but the divide that exists isn't between races or religion, it's between people who recognize the common humanity of all people.*²

US PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA

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1 Introduction to Ethnohuman Speciation

In an introductory note for an ethnographic account of the Wari' people, Conklin explains: 'The term *wari*' is the first-person plural pronoun: it means "we, people".³ A similar semantic designation is found among other Amazonian societies, such as the Kulina, also known as the Madiha. Pollock explains that *madiha* is best translated as 'person', despite the successive layers of semantic contrast involved in distinguishing *madiha* from non-*madiha*.⁴ Everett, paying close attention to linguistic practices of the Piraha, observes that: '*Piraha language* was clearly a combination of *xapai* (head) and *tii* (straight), plus the suffix *-si*, which indicates that the word it is attached to is a name or proper noun: "straight head".⁵ While Piraha, referring to a person, might be

1 'Nice attack: Gingrich Wants 'Sharia test' for US Muslims', BBC News, 15 July 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-36806380>

2 Ibid.

3 Beth Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 252.

4 Donald Pollock, 'Personhood and Illness Among the Kulina', *Medical Anthropology Quarterly* 10.3 (1996): 323.

5 Daniel Everett, *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes* (New York: Vintage Books, 2009), 20.

translated as ‘someone who is straight’, ‘*foreigner*’ meant “fork”, as in “fork in the tree branch”. And *foreign language* meant “crooked head”.⁶

Such examples of social prioritization for an ethnic group demonstrated through colloquial ethnic labels are not limited to Amazonia. The Min peoples of Papua New Guinea, sometimes referred to as Mountain Ok peoples, include such individual groups as the *Telefolmin*, *Urapmin*, and *Wopkaimin*. *Min* effectively translates to ‘peoples’,⁷ and when used as a suffix, *-min* establishes various types of peoples. Among the Mardu of Australian aboriginal culture, *mardu* simply means either ‘person’ or ‘one of us’.

Whether self-assigned to represent ethnocentric values and worldview, imposed by foreigners through pre-emptive and premature misunderstanding, or some combination of both, the allocation of a local ethnic label which corresponds to a concept of ‘real’ or ‘correct’ people is what I term *ethnohuman speciation*, referring to cultural limits assumed for personhood. In cases where such an ethnic label follows linguistic competency, the term would be refined to *linguistic ethnohuman speciation*. Even under modern conditions where the definition of species is governed by overtly biological terms, the concept of ethnohuman speciation remains valid in the sense that biology is always influenced by cultural factors for interpretation, making all biologies ethnobiologies. Despite a great deal of power, influence, and reliance on scientific methodology, modern Western concepts of biology and biomedicine are ultimately still viewed and understood through a cultural lens.⁸

2 The Debate for Who Is Human in Biological Anthropology

Despite a clear biological definition for humanity, where all 7.4 billion people currently on Earth are considered ‘people’, there is still a great deal of debate concerning who actually should be considered as one of these people. This debate is focused in biological anthropology on the origins of *Homo sapiens*, with particular attention to whether modern humans should be termed *Homo sapiens sapiens* and differentiated from earlier *Homo sapiens* or not. In particular, through growing DNA analysis and archaeological evidence, it is generally

6 Ibid., 20.

7 MacKenzie, Maureen MacKenzie, *Androgynous Objects: String Bags and Gender in Central New Guinea* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 31.

8 Atwood D. Gaines and Robbie Davis-Floyd, ‘Biomedicine’, *Encyclopaedia of Medical Anthropology*, ed. Melvin Ember and Carol Ember, (Dordrecht, the Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publications, 2004).

understood that Neanderthals must have been capable of successful fertile reproduction with modern humans, making the biological label *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*. The question of why it matters may be a more important question than the uncertain taxonomic category of Neanderthals. I argue that ethnohuman speciation, even on an assumed biological level, is highly revealing of core cultural attitudes and ethnocentric values. Particularly when drawing from assumptions of universal biology, ethnohuman speciation offers a particularly important window for critical analysis when applied to modern society in the context of international law and universal human rights.

3 The Extremities of Ethnocentrism and Cultural Relativism

As core tenets of cultural anthropology, cultural determinism and cultural relativism are particularly challenged by any proposition for universal human rights. In a 1947 declaration by the American Anthropology Association, based primarily in reference to these core tenets, it was reasoned that

Standards and values are relative to the culture from which they derive so that any attempt to formulate postulates that grow out of the beliefs or moral codes of one culture must to that extent detract from the applicability of any Declaration of Human Rights to mankind as a whole.⁹

In essence, it was remarked that respect for individuality can only come through respect for cultural difference which underlies such individuality (cultural determinism), and no consistent metric for evaluating culture and ethics for human rights can be universally applied. So it is with little surprise that the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁰ which includes such components as the right to join trade unions (Article 23) or to have periodic holidays and leisure time (Article 24), is often seen to hold bias towards the industrialized capitalist world, and to be of much less relevance to indigenous societies. Both the preamble and first several articles centre on fundamental US American ideals involving 'freedom of speech and faith and freedom from fear and want', first articulated by US President Franklin D Roosevelt in the 1941 State of the Union address, colloquially referred to as the 'four freedoms'. These

9 American Anthropology Association (AAA), *The 1947 Statement on Human Rights* (Arlington, VA: AAA Publications, 1947).

10 United Nations (UN), *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York, NY: UN Publications, 1948).

first articles involve deliberately vague and malleable language in reference to 'freedom', 'liberty', 'slavery', 'dignity', and 'security of person'.

The core of the UN Declaration of Human Rights arguably lies in Article 5, that 'No one shall be subject to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment', and Article 6: 'Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law'. These two articles, in reference to inhuman treatment and personhood before the law, are directly relevant to the topic of ethnohuman speciation and suspension of otherwise assumed human rights based on ethnohuman or personhood exclusion.

The act of limiting personhood status, particularly through ethnohuman assumptions, is the ultimate act of ethnocentrism and boundary line for cultural relativism: to assume cultural inclusion is equal to *human* inclusion is to prioritize one world view at the expense of all others, drawing from the hegemonic support of presumed biological difference. Since biology assumes universal laws and applicability, such an act conveniently solves the paradox of universal human rights, allowing them to be universally relevant albeit on a selective basis. Such a process is likely to be an integral component to how diverse societies negotiate 'foreignness'.

4 **The Ideology of Human Rights: Ethnohuman Speciation versus Personhood**

While the concept of 'personhood' emphasizes human agency, ethnohuman speciation draws overtly from the biological perspective, despite acknowledging that biological perspectives are culturally mediated. This remains a critical distinction in the context of human rights, given an assumed biological or universal basis.

Donovan emphasizes that natural law theory, which identifies higher authority than civil law to be found in universal laws of biology, is the basis for human rights.¹¹ Moreover, he articulates that the 'human rights idea emerged from the ashes of natural theory',¹² meaning that the declarations emerging after World War II were an effort to 'modernize' natural law theory. While natural law assumed divine laws to be interpreted from nature, human rights identified a biological scope for ethical accountability without needing to identify an underlying divine force. In this sense, biology became the universal signifier itself, allowing for the legal ethical secularization of an otherwise religious philosophy.

11 James M. Donovan, *Legal Anthropology: An Introduction* (Lanham: Altamira Press, 2008).

12 *Ibid.*, 200.

5 Human Rights within Multicultural and Pluricultural Systems

Societies which support not just multicultural, but a *pluricultural* system, meaning that assimilation is not desired and ethnic differences are valued and supported on account of being different, have both advantages and disadvantages in terms of managing diversity and upholding human rights. Multicultural systems, while prizing diversity, hold foundational components which anchor society and encourage assimilation in even higher regard. Such a model reflects diversity which still holds core beliefs, values, and ideals in common. One such core value in Western society is that of human rights, and the potential to abrogate human rights based on a loss of humanity.

The potential to maintain detailed and selective human rights largely dissipates within a pluricultural system, where a greater balance of power between cultural factions prevents any one worldview from dominating and projecting its values over others. However the greatest tragedy in debates between universal human rights being positivist and biased in multicultural systems and effectively absent in pluricultural systems is the assumption that human rights must be articulated and enforced in order to be universal. The idea that human rights should be defined and supported by a particular worldview betrays the philosophical origins of such a concept traced back to assumptions for natural law.

Some may argue that there are inherent limits to pluriculturalism, and that limit, in a word, may be 'terrorism'. The binary construction of the 'terrorist' concept warrants some discussion, in that it represents the epitome of 'the other', 'inhumanity', and 'evil'.

6 Three Assumptions for Anti-Modern Terrorism

Despite a name and conventional definition which suggests that 'terrorism' occurs when violent conflict targets unsuspecting civilian populations, creating 'terror' in the populace on account of being unaccustomed and unprepared for such violence, the degree to which such violence occurs on an international scale and through state military action renders such a definition almost useless. In addition, the division between 'military' and 'civilian' is certainly not always transferrable cross-culturally, and the idea of a clear-cut division is almost certainly limited to highly industrialized social contexts.

A more useful definition of terrorism examines its tenuous association with cultural modernity. Just as fundamental religious movements are necessarily products of modernity, in that a *return* to fundamental conditions is perceived

as more desirable than an uncertain and didactic present, understandings of terrorism cannot be separated from conditions of modernity. Mamdani defines terrorism as political violence 'that does not fit the story of progress'.¹³ Understood more broadly, terrorism is violence which is anti-modern, or at least non-supportive of a particular modernist agenda.

The key feature to distinguish violence as anti-modern, apart from the base assumptions which act as frameworks to understand terrorism from the popularist point of view, involves rights to violence. According to Weber, a prerequisite for statehood, and in turn modernity, is the condition of state authority holding monopoly over all forms of ethical violence: while an individual may commit a violent act, such an act must be criminalized and not presented as ethical outside of endorsement from state authority.¹⁴

As an act which is both incongruous and antithetical to an established notion of progress and a modern worldview, terrorism is predisposed to be understood through specific paradigms of social discourse. Following terrorism as anti-modern violence, the social discourses or base assumptions which shape popular interpretation should be recognized as follows: 1) inexplicably evil, 2) foreign other, and 3) religious. These assumptions, while potentially contradictory, do not function as a checklist, but rather as a conceptual resort repertoire which are apt to shape and emerge from patterns of social discourse.

Since terrorism cannot or should not be understood from an established perspective of progress or modernity, the simplest way in which it *can* be understood is through the polarized concept of 'evil'. Representing the first of the base assumptions, the connotation of evil serves a dual purpose: first, an exceedingly simply archetypal narrative is established and, second, inherent to this reductive narrative, significant disincentive discourages any deeper analysis or understanding. Evil is often assumed to be irreducible, simply explained only by itself within a dichotomous framework. More importantly, to understand evil is to connect or potentially support evil, as Nietzsche reminds through the allegory of fighting with monsters. In short, assumptions for 'evil' or 'danger' facilitate reductive reasoning, and such assumptions simultaneously dissuade further exploration by way of historical reasoning. Thus, terrorism inspired by evil not only cannot be explained, but *should not be explained*. Emphasis to 'evil' or 'moral perversion' obscures ability to critically analyse the link between cultural aspects of modernity and political violence. Western

13 Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Random House Inc., 2004), 4.

14 Max Weber, 'Politics as Vocation', *Weber's Rationalism and Modern Society*, trans. and eds. Tony Waters and Dagmar Waters (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 129–198.

aversion to exploring motivations of Nazi genocide is just one example of such moral-political resistance.

If there is any reductive reasoning which can rival discourses of 'evil', it is that of 'foreign'. It should not be any surprise that labels of 'foreign' are often accompanied by fear and negativity. The sociological process of 'othering', of projecting diametric opposition onto people 'foreign', has overtly moral tones in that 'others' are everything which 'we' do not want to see in ourselves. Given intimate understanding and insight into our own actions, most people tend to see their own behaviour as rational, justified, and morally 'good'. This further exemplifies the idea of moral legitimacy through understanding; 'foreign' discourse is one other attempt to hinder such legitimacy and understanding.

Finally, given that terrorism is rooted in modernity yet constructed as violence which is anti-modern, and that since the Enlightenment society has preferred to view its primary defining feature as secularization as opposed to Nietzsche's governmental monopoly on violence, any assumption of diametric opposition to modernity should have an overtly religious base. The more overt the religious condition, or the more fundamental, the sharper emerges the contrast.

To be gleaned from this is that, rather than terrorism being anti-modern violence which is evil, religiously fundamental, and foreign, I simply suggest that anti-modern violence which can be construed as evil, religiously fundamental, and foreign is then labelled as terrorism. When violence fits the racial and ideological profile of terrorism, namely having Islamic affiliation in a non-Islamic society, it is popular social discourse which makes the connection to 'terrorism'. It does not matter whether news media labels it as such or not: as long as the key elements and assumptions are in place, popular discourse will do the rest.

7 **Bigotry of the 'Terrorist' Label/The Terrorist Label as Ethnic Slur**

Just as racial slurs operate as bigotry by connecting minority and foreign identities with underlying political inequalities, so too does the 'terrorist' label operate on bigotry of projecting and enforcing a foreign 'other' minority both in terms of ethnic affiliation and degree of overt religious practice. In addition to functioning as a racial slur, emphasizing more of a 'foreign' religious identity than an ethnic one, the 'terrorist' label also a criminalizing label. What makes the 'terrorist' label particularly dangerous is that it functions as a foreign slur and an incriminating label simultaneously: the criminal connotation acts to justify the prejudicial politics of othering. The label is presumed to be

attributed strictly to perpetrators of particular action, yet the guilt which is assumed, based on inherent degree of difference of the perpetrator, belittles the role of any adjudication. The assumption of difference, of othering, is so great, that arguably such perpetrators are beyond the scope of 'human', at least in terms of practice observed by human rights application.

8 The Point of Human Rights If They Can Be Stripped Away

Despite being a vocal proponent of human rights as articulated in the UN Declaration, the US has adapted numerous 'enhanced interrogation techniques' including destination sites for forced extraordinary rendition in locations throughout the world, involving numerous countries where human rights may be less monitored than within the US. In response to controversy involving human rights abuse in US-led 'Global War on Terror', former CIA Director Cofer Black infamously stated, 'All you need to know is that there was a before 9/11 and an after 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves came off'. The same idea was reiterated by former US Vice-President Dick Cheney in that, post 9/11, 'we have to work... the dark side, if you will'. In a 2005 edition of *Newsweek*, former US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld emphasized, 'Al Qaeda and Taliban individuals under the control of the Department of Defence are not entitled to prisoner-of-war status for purposes of the Geneva Convention of 1949'.

Given that Islamic militants accused of terrorism are routinely denied human rights and, more importantly, are often assumed by popular US discourse *not to have* human rights, the primary question emerges: what is the point of human rights if they can be abrogated, withheld, or stripped away? The answer can only be found in the politics of ethnohuman speciation, the fact that there are indeed cultural and political bounds for how we would like to imagine humanity.

9 The Ultimate Crime and Threat Involving Terrorism

Under modernity, individuals and individuality is to be protected, and the holding of rights pertains to that individuality. Yet violence, which may readily be interpreted as an individual form of expression, potentially part of a spectrum including violent language in many non-Western societies, certainly cannot be granted as a form of freedom. The greatest crime of terrorism is the violation of state monopoly on violence: making the assumption that ideological violence can be justified on an individual level. If the greatest crime of terrorism

involves taking life in a way which challenges the core element of modernity, the greatest threat involves potential for ideological corruption.

Travel writer Robert Young Pelton, writing at the height of the US Bush administration's declaration for the Global War on Terror, offers a forthright assessment of terrorism by stating that

Terrorism is the most feared foe of established democracies because it forces them to subvert the clean ideals that they pride themselves on. It creates a police state, a state of fear, harsh punishments, and tight controls. Does terrorism work? You bet.¹⁵

The greatest danger of terrorism arguably lies in its potential to subvert and disregard stated ideals associated with human rights.

10 A New Model for Human Rights and Ethnohuman Speciation

In conclusion, I do not argue for any radical change in understandings for human rights, nor any new appreciation for ethnohuman speciation. All I wish to convey is the illogic of supporting human rights while continuing to strip them away when politically convenient to do so. Inherent to their articulation at the end of WWII, human rights cannot be given up, or otherwise lost on account of any action, crime, ill-will, or political misdeed. To support a concept of human rights that can be lost is to simply deny humanity on an individual or cultural basis, enforcing a politically motivated category of ethnohuman speciation. The danger of this should be readily apparent, yet is worth spelling out: just as the *Homo Sacer* of Ancient Rome, so carefully described by Agamben,¹⁶ can be killed with impunity as someone lying outside of the law, so too can anyone deemed 'less than human' be killed with impunity in the eyes of those supporting such a distinction. It is exactly when people are described using non-human metaphors such as cockroaches, filth in society, or metastatic cancer which must be removed from society, that the spectre of genocide truly looms.

The true irony is that such a genocide, which simultaneously adheres both to a concept of human rights and ethnohuman speciation as a way to selectively deny such rights, is intensified by modern and multicultural construction, by

15 Robert Young Pelton, *The World's Most Dangerous Places*, 5th ed. (New York: Tembo LLC Inc., 2003), 289.

16 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

the ethical conviction that as a result of a political choice or misdeed the right to being 'human' has been given-up, and therefore such less-than-humans can and should be killed with impunity.

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