**The changing concept of terrorism since the 19th century**

Understanding Society (M0536)

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This sociology essay investigates the meaning of the terrorism and how the concept of terrorism has changed since the 19th century.

According to Roberts (2002), the first meaning of terrorism was “system or rule of terror”, which represented the violence of the government during the French Revolution. During the 19th century, terrorism went through a transformation and since then it has been associated with non-governmental groups. However, as Roberts stated, “one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter” seems to be an aspect of terrorism, which is always actual. Nowadays, the meaning of terrorism is close to that of war. Its description is, any action (by non-state organisation) that is intended to kill or harm civilians in order to persuade a government or an international organisation to do or restrain from doing any act (Panyarachun et al., 2004 cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1043).

Rapoport (2004, pp. 61-73) identified four waves (cycle of activity in a given period) of modern terrorism. The 19th century terrorism can be identified as the first wave or the 'anarchist' wave of terrorism and it lasted until the First World War. The second wave was the 'anticolonial' wave; terrorists were fighting against colonial powers' withdrawal to establish their own postcolonial state. The third wave was called the 'New Left Wave' and it was stimulated by the Vietnam War. As in the first wave, radicalism and nationalism were combined in the third wave, evidenced by the struggles of Basques (ETA), Armenians (ASALA), Corsicans (FNLC), Kurds (ARGK) and Irish (IRA). A lot of kidnapping, hijackings and killing have been done by the third-wave terrorists. The IRA and its various splinter organisations, for example, assassinated the British ambassador of Ireland (1976) and Lord Mountbatten (1979) and attempted to kill prime ministers Thatcher (1984) and Major (1991). Islam is in the hearth of the fourth wave, which is called the 'religious' wave. The fourth wave started in 1979, when the Iranian Revolution occurred. The Soviets invaded Afghanistan and terrorism started to spread globally. The largest fourth-wave organisation was Bin Laden's al-Qaeda.

Rapoport (2004, pp. 46-60) noted that women in the second wave were restricted to the role of messengers and scouts, but in the third wave they became leaders and fighters. The rights of women started to be asserted more strenuously in the general society. Cook argues that women who participate in terrorist groups still view themselves as largely supplementary rather than equal (Cook, 2005, cited in Auchter, 2012, p. 131). According to Auchter (2012, p. 126) women in terrorism are usually presented as victims of the male-dominated system of terrorism. It is often assumed that women participate in violence because a man in their family was killed. There is no man left to avenge his death, so she needs to take the role of the man. Also, there is a view that female terrorists proclaim their activity through resistance to gender norms, by participating in an activity previously reserved for men.

It is possible to make a distinction between old and new terrorism (Laqueur, 2000 cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1043). Old style of terrorism was dominant during the twentieth century and it is still present. It is often associated with the rise of nationalism and it is often linked to nations without states. This old type of terrorism is usually local because its ambitions are local and its use of violence is relatively limited. But old style terrorists were often campaigning for strength and they had external support. For example, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), and Basque separatists (ETA) in Spain were supported by a lot of countries in varying degrees (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, pp. 1043-1044).

Global networking of the new-style terrorism is made possible by the development of communications technology – in line with Castells’s ideas of an emerging network society –that have been driven by globalisation (Sageman 2004 cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1044). New terrorism is often linked to the fundamentalist Islamist network of al-Qaeda, although it is not limited to it. Within al-Qaeda, local groups have a high level of autonomy. This organisational structure may suggest that al-Qaeda have a shared idea or ideology with similarly shared tactics and methods (Burke 2004, cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1044).

Roberts (2002) suggested that the global network of Al-Qaida had a huge effect on the concept of terrorism. They fought against the western dominance, especially in Muslim countries. Their aims were vague and apocalyptic, so there were no alternatives for compromise or negotiation. On 11th September 2001 they hijacked four commercial aeroplanes in the USA (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1041). Targets were chosen to strike symbolically at the heart of American economic, military and political power. There were many more attacks for which Al-Qaida claimed responsibility. Since 2001 Al-Qaida has suffered serious setbacks. In 2011 US Special Forces killed Bin Laden, but the Al-Qaida network is still active.

The twenty-first-century terrorists operate, armed with global reach, internet access, mobile communications and cheap international travel (Pollard, 2006, p. 236). The increase of weapons of mass destruction based on biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear technologies can be a global threat by terrorists (Intriligator, 2006, p. 69).

With weapons such as computer viruses, Trojan horses, logical bombs and denial-of-service attacks a single individual can theoretically cause serious IT attacks on specific information systems which affect important infrastructures (Nicander, 2006, pp. 87-97). Nicander added that terrorists can also do psychological operations with media manipulation and perception attacks. There are no borders in cyberspace, anonymous IT attacks can occur from anywhere and anytime.

According to Pollard (2006, pp. 235-252) in recent times, cyberspace has been a front in the global war on terrorism. New technologies and different strategies such as data mining, aggregation, and pattern recognition tools can help us defend cyberspace from attacks. However, these networks are unable to work until they are permitted by public policies and laws. How to respond to cyber-attacks is a problematic question, especially if one is responding with conventional military force.

Media can also shape the perception of terrorism. Television has an immediacy effect, which can report terrorist attacks to the world mass audience immediately as in the terrorist attacks in the USA in September 2001 (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 777). However, when mass media promote terrorism, they can spread fear. Media can be also used to spread propaganda and they can be a tool for social control.

Giddens and Sutton (2013, pp. 1042-1043) suggested that the phenomenon of terrorising people through violence is obviously older than the term 'terrorism'. Social scientists disagree about the definition and usefulness of this concept. It is often used in a subjective and biased way. It is also characteristic that people who were terrorist at one point, later they turn against terror as strongly as they practised it. For example, the early history of the State of Israel was marked by terrorist activity, but in the 21st century Israel considers terrorists as an enemy and they consider themselves as part of the international 'war on terror'. On the other hand, I believe, this statement is to some extent incorrect and biased, because the enemy is often wrongly labelled as a 'terrorist'. Also the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza was a violent action and the counter-violence of the Palestinians was by some means legitimate and justified (Roberts, 2002). In addition, there is a question whether violence practised by a state can be called 'state terrorism' or is this contradiction in terms (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1043).

New terrorism has a different organisational structure from the old one. Mary Kaldor found that there are similarities between the structure of new terrorist groups and international non-governmental organisations (cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1045). The similarity is that both have a mission and commitment that allow a relatively loose global organisation (Glasius et al., 2002, cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013 p. 1045).

Sutton and Vertigans (2006, cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013 p. 1045) is arguing that al-Qaeda show many organisational similarities with the new social movements (NSMs) of the 1970s and 1980s. Especially, its loose forms of organisational and transnational networks. The difference is that while NSMs use symbolic, non-violent direct actions, al-Qaeda have used symbolic violence to further its cause.

According to Giddens and Sutton (2013, p. 1045), the new terrorism has global ambitions. They want to establish a global rule of Islam. There is a tension between their modernist and anti-modernist world-view, because they use modern communication in order to criticise modernity and they try to reverse what they see as a 'moral degeneracy of Western society'. While the violence used by old-style terrorists is limited, the new terrorism is more ruthless, however, there are some cases when the two overlap (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 1045).

There is a debate whether terrorism can be tackled through conventional warfare. For this reason many sociologists and political scientists question the concept of a 'war on terrorism' (Rogers 2008, cited in Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p.1046). The conventional military approach in Iraq was used against new forms of warfare and terrorism, but it has expanded to a long-lasting bloody post-violence situation (Giddens and Sutton, 2013p. 1046). If we consider the Marxist theory of conflict, it gives a different explanation for the invasion of Iraq. According to this theory, the reason of the invasion was economic. It was an attempt to secure the oil supply for the USA and its allies. The Marxist conflict theory is often applied to cross-national conflicts (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p.1028). Conflict theory is used to understand social structures and to explain how society works. It highlights the importance of social division and concentrates on issues of power, inequality and competitive struggle. It examines the tension between the dominant and the disadvantaged group and tries to understand how relationships of control are established and maintained (Giddens and Sutton, 2013, p. 21).

According to Heartfield (2003, p. 279), terror groups often appealed to Marxist expressions of struggle, they disdained the mass of working-class people, blaming them for their failure to rise up against capitalism. However, political terrorism in Europe was conspiratorial and it was against mass political mobilisation. There are many explanations for the causes of terrorism. Economic theories suggest that terrorism is linked to poverty and people turn toward terrorism when they lack economic opportunity (Piazza, 2006, cited in Helfstein, 2011, pp. 2-3).

According to Krueger and Malečková (2003 cited in Helfstein, 2011, p. 3), social factors, especially social capital can act as both restraint and catalyst for terrorism. There is a complicated relationship between social forces and terrorism. Empirical studies tried to identify a relationship between economics and terrorism, but there is no consistent story. If there is a relationship, it is inconsistent and appears relatively weak; poverty is not a strong motivation for violence against neighbours and civilians. The welfare enhancing impact of social capital is not a one-way street towards reduction of terrorism (Helfstein, 2011, pp. 1-3). Another explanation focuses on political factors, when aggrieved individuals become terrorists when faced with an unresponsive or repressive government (Chenoweth, 2010, cited in Helfstein, 2011, p. 3). Theories, based on demographic factors, suggest that population size, geography, ethnic or religious divisions in society promote terrorism (Basuchoudhary and Shughart II, 2010, cited in Helfstein, 2011, p. 3). Individual or psychological theories point to personal characteristics motivating people to carry out terrorist attacks (Victoroff 2005, cited in Helfstein, 2011, p. 3). Religious doctrines can also motivate terrorist activities. Terrorism is deeply rooted in our world, where technology and doctrine play vital roles. According to Max Weber, the modern doctrine reflects inclination to rationalise activity, which is a distinctive feature of modern life. Democratic ideas also shape terrorist activities in different ways, suggested by the facts that nationalism and separatism are the most frequently espoused causes (Rapoport, 2004, p. 65).

According to Roberts (2002), UN General Assembly are making a big effort to prohibit terrorism, but there are disagreements regarding some of the conventions. Their application to particular facts and the labelling of individuals or movements as 'terrorist' are still complicated and doubtful. But the September 11 attack significantly changed debates about terrorism. After September 11, none of the 189 member states opposed to the USA's right to take military action in Afghanistan. However, there are concerns about the US and international actions against terrorist.

All concepts related to terrorism, such as 'state terrorism' and 'war on terror' are subtle and vague. The meaning of terrorism has constantly changed in accordance with historical events and global changes. Global terrorism could be considered as a side effect of globalisation, which is affected by social divisions and capitalism, where communication technology development and the media have further implications. How to deal with the new style of terrorism and cyber-terrorism is a difficult question. In my judgment, many of these uncertainties regarding terrorism give room for misconception and labelling. It can be deliberately misused by any dominant country to exercise power on disadvantaged countries without legal consequences. Other than that, disadvantaged countries often do not have any legal instrument to answer, so they normally use counter-violence. Consequently, this increases the 'war on terror' and the violent peacekeeping of dominant countries.

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