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WHAT IS TERRORISM

Understanding the dark night of Paris 2015

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December 2015

Terrorism sadly plunged Europe and the World into mourning. A couple of jihadists perpetrated simultaneous attacks in different points of Paris by Friday 13 of 2015. These coordinated attacks resulted in 137 fatalities and more than 400 wounded. Similar to 9/11, this event not only shocked the Western social imaginary, but also called into question the internal security methods to prevent such attacks. Despite widely deployed technology for surveillance, terrorism remains a scourge for the West. In this context, some questions have surfaced. What is terrorism? What are the steps to follow to prevent terrorist attacks? How can nation-states make this world a safer place?

The recent proliferation of newspapers, magazines, and TV programs covering the problem of terrorism seems to be far from reaching coherent answers to the above questions. Although many policy makers, officials, and international experts devote considerable efforts to describe the situation, the socio-cultural factors that determine terrorism are often left out. A good start, may a necessary beginning, is to ask what is terrorism?

The pervasive roles played by globalization and the war on terror have revealed a cynical dynamic. Liberal markets facilitate the circulations of goods and trade but constraining the mobilities of Workforce, which travel to centre in quest of better opportunities. Capital replicates worldwide producing serious asymmetries which pave the ways for the rise of resentment (Powell 2010). The state of conflicts produced by capitalism represents a fertile ground for terrorism to recruit new comrades. However, a linear correlation between poverty and terrorism has recently come under scrutiny (Enders & Hoover, 2012). Though interesting studies have been advanced on the economic nature of terrorism (Enders & Sandler 2011), they fail to explain the way economic theories conceive of pleasure and wealth maximization.

In *The Economics of Justice,* Richard Posner acknowledges that utilitarianism as it was formulated by Jeremy Bentham engenders two types of monstrousness. If society is based on the maximization of pleasure for all their members, we must assume that torture is a good option to enhance security. One type of monstrosity arises whenever we valorize peoples by the degree of pleasure they develop instead by effects of their decisions. Suppose that A is very fond of killing animals, and B is prone to feed them. Following utilitarianism, A is a better person than B irrespective of ethical conduct. A second type of monstrousness is these types of societies where the collectivity leads to the sacrifice of innocent persons on the altar of social need (Posner 1983).

In a seminal work, David Altheide offers a radical critique on the criteria used by journalism to select what news is published. American and British newspapers are prone to cover news related to crime and terrorism as if both were determined by the same factors. Terrorists are portrayed as the main *Threat for West*, while local crime is disciplined by the cultural values of society. Local offenders, after all, are framed as individuals who have adapted to society

whereas terrorists had no such luck. Terrorists are treated as psychopaths whose behavior still remains irreversible (Altheide, 2009). This explains not only their degree of "dangerousness", but also how the law is orchestrated as an apparatus of repression.   The liberal scholar, Michael Ignatieff (2013), declared that terrorism is the lesser evil in view of the dangers democratic societies face. One of the troublesome aspects of democracy in its struggle against terrorism, is how can we ethically see torture. Ignatieff argues that "the war on terror" is the lesser evil. The West should devote all its resources to eradicate terrorism, and of course, in this process torture should be limited to legal controls (Skoll 2008). This suggests that the current meaning of terrorism should be at least revisited.

People feel extreme fright whenever events are going beyond their control. This is exactly what happens with terrorism. No matter that states enhance their security homeland, nobody knows when and how the next attack will take form (Altheide 2009; Sunstein, 2002a; 2002b; Skoll 2007). It is unfortunate that ethnographers who are interested in getting a hold of terrorists face serious legal problems not only because terrorism is an illegal activity, but is globally repudiated. This seems the reason why today the research, as M. Sageman (2014) anticipated, reached a stage of stagnation. In recently published paper, he argues that mass media concentrates the opinions of many "pseudo-analysts" who create a barrage of speculation, biased ideas, or commentaries that feed back the policies of governments. Instead of expanding the current understanding of this issue, it increases the ethnocentrism of the West. The lack of valuable investigation relates to the impossibilities of making contact with terrorists, since they are considered maniacs, demons, or psychopaths almost impossible to re-educate. As Richard Bernstein (2013) puts it, if terrorists are stereotyped as evil-doers or demons, why question them. As formulated this question has no response. However, psychology teaches that terrorism is a human activity,

performed by people who embrace radical tactics at a specific time of their lives. Since all we are all potential terrorists, research should explore the factors that determine how the terrorist mind is formed. Demonization is contrary to understanding.

Neither the monopoly of the state nor the attempts of insurgents to pose their message by means of violence, terrorism should be defined as a dialectics of hate in which case both parties are involved in an atmosphere of conflict and violence. Nation-states exert considerable power over populations (sometimes violating essential human rights), but the problem lies in the fact that terrorists are indeed hidden within the population. Beyond their technologies, nation-states are unable to forecast when and where the next attack will be. Under some conditions, torture plays a crucial role by interrogating some suspects. However, terror cells work disconnected from other cells, which means that tortured persons have no idea or key information that can be used by state to protect society. The concept of normalcy of terror is one of the troubling aspects that should be discussed by specialists and pundits (Howie, 2011).

Beyond the responsibilities of religion, terrorism justifies violent actions against vulnerable persons using discourses that lead toward self-victimization. In so doing, religion serves as an excuse but never as the real reason behind it. James Piazza commented that it is common terrorists groups once participated in democratic processes to some extent but were forced to go underground for many reasons. Political atomization conjoined to weaker partyocracies is one of the key factors that pave the way for the rise of terrorism. The focus placed by some scholars on poverty or psychological frustration does not explain at a macro-sociological level the influence of politics in the configuration of the necessary instability that sooner or later leads to terrorism. Whenever groups are

pressed to clandestine action because of a lack of democratic channels, terrorism rises as an option (Piazza 2007; 2008).

Over recent decades, some voices emerged to find commonalities or shared lines of actions in different terror organizations which range from the IRA to Al-Qaeda. At first blush, no matter than their religion, culture, or class, a psychological profile may be addressed.

We may use psychology to delineate two contrasting profiles: *offenders and terrorists.* While the former signal a disordered, deviant behavior to social rules, the later one emulates a law-abiding attitude to the extent of sacrifice of their lives. Let´s clarify first that criminals deny their crimes, but this happens because they belong or want to belong to society. The same does not apply to terrorists, who are rewarded by captivating the attention of society. Terrorists often adopt their reactions in view of a mythical struggle against injustice or some other broader targets such as "Westernization," Rationality," or Mass Consumption. Re-channeling their hatred towards a much deeper process of victimization, the discourse of terrorism lacks from any rational basis. Nonetheless, once questioned, they vindicate their crimes by alluding to higher positive ideals such as freedom, the struggle against injustice, or the restoration of a lost moral order. Far from being considered as evil-doers, they perceive themselves as "disinterested" freedom fighters. In inculcating terrorists, terror groups employ a sentiment of radicalization, which was widely studied by McCauley & S. Moskalenko (2008; 2011) & Moskalenko & McCauley (2009). For these psychologists, radicalization corresponds with a system of beliefs which are products of history or certain bad personal experiences. However, terrorists are fewer than those who can share the same sentiment of disappointment, experts add. What is important is that this process of radicalization only prospers in small groups, where interactions with others seem to be reduced to the leaders`

viewpoints. The smaller the group, the more there are possibilities to be efficiently indoctrinated. Any individual act of dissidence is rapidly suffocated by leaders and other comrades-in-arms. In parallel, candidates are recruited following personal contacts or by taking advantage of some connections between relatives. These like-minded cells have successfully enhanced an internal cohesion which is forged by the creation of an external moral hazard. Since a process like this is not built overnight, no less true is that the absence of law in some peripheral zones represents a fertile ground to the formation of terrorists. That candidates are recruited following peer self-esteem criteria, or social status has been validated by some social scientists such as Wood & Gannon (2013) who recently drew attention to the influence of peers to perform deviant behaviors or become offenders. Criminology has left behind the role played by social interaction in the formation of criminal minds, as well as the limitations enviroment present for some profiles. Those people who aim at pleasing others are more sensible to acceptance by their peers than others. Behaviour follows the collective values of group. Depending on what these values are, individuals can help or harm others (Zimbardo, 2007). In his updated version of the book, *The Lucifer Effects,* Phillip Zimbardo shows how good people can torture or do appalling things to others. We are prone to imagine we are special to balance our day to day frustrations and psychological deprivations. This not only enhances our ego, but develops an attachment to rules. Although we live as though respecting the law, behaviour changes according to new leaderships. The moral limitations of what we can or not do, depends on the rules of in-groups, not our decisions. Good peoples inserted in the incorrect groups can act the same as their peers. To understand evil-doers we have to distance ourselves from the classic definitions where they are defined as agents who rationally opt to behave bad, harming others without any type of remorse. Our human nature is changed

by the social rules and contexts in which we move. From the Stanford prison experiments to Abu Ghraib, Zimbardo adds, it is confirmed empirically that people (far from being good or bad) are influenced by powerful situational forces. Once the Other is demonized, actions are ethically justified no matter how terrible they are (Zimbardo 2007).

Although some crimes are demonized in view of their impact on victims, less attention is given to the role played by self-esteem and status in the formation of gangs. This raises a more than interesting question: is love the emotion liable for hurting others? With this in mind, Wilson, Bradford, and Lemanski (2013) observed that social interactions are of paramount importance to expand the current understanding of terrorism. Some groups develop a bad image of society, which can be crystallized into deviant behavior. At time of recruiting new candidates, people become engaged by emotional factors, such as friendship, the need to be accepted by peers, and even by recommendations of relatives or a girlfriend. Not only are many terrorists educated in Western societies, but also they are citizens of those societies they eventually attack. Anyone, given certain conditions, might adopt radical goals. As Korstanje (2015) noted, terrorism and democracy seem to be inextricably intertwined. One of the pillars of terrorism is based not only on how much fear they can instill in populations, but also in the hope of extortion directed towards nation-state. During 19th century Europe faced one of the most serious crises in its history. It triggered forced migration of the impoverished workforce towards peripheral countries such as United States, Australia, Brazil, and Argentina where those economies experienced a sudden growth. However, the conditions of work in these hosting nations were far from optimal. European migrants were subject to long hours of work and otherwise exploited by the owners of capital. Some of these newcomers adopted ideologies coming from socialism and anarchism. In their struggles to gain better working

conditions some planned bombings against government officials and notorious industrialists and their property. These anarchists were labeled as terrorists, and were promptly jailed and deported. However, the core of their ideological discourse remained in the organization of anarcho-syndicalists, a more moderate group that adopted the ideals of anarchism to be materialized in improvements for workforce. A few of their claims were finally accepted by the elite, and unions gained the right to strike in furtherance of improved wages and working conditions. Thus disciplined into forms of leisure consumption, terrorism became settled into the core of Westernization. Not only the fear, which is a touchstone, lingers in the heart of our civilization but also interesting commonalities between the strike, unionization, and terrorism converge. From that moment on, cultural industries such as tourism, museums, or various cultural entertainments, as the case of Paris evinced, become targets for international terrorism. As Korstanje argues, we have to consider the thesis that tourism is terrorism by other means. These intersections are based on three common factors: *surprise, the instrumentalization of the Other, and extortion.* At a first glance, the latter two are appeals to sudden blows against State where citizens are unethically hosted. The surprise factor supports state in accepting claims that otherwise would be neglected. In so doing, the Other is not only instrumentalized as a means to achieve goals, but disseminates a message of terror to society. The point of entry in this discussion seems to be that mass media plays a vital role by amplifying the effects of terrorism in post-industrial societies (Howie 2012; Eid 2014). *In Witnesses To Terror* Luke Howie (2012) noted, terrorists do not seek to destroy entire civilizations, but by the introduction of fear they seek to dismantle the interests of state. Despite its complex algorithms and mathematical models, one of the frightful dilemmas of the West consists of the incapacities to forecast the next attack. Starting from the belief that the *innocent* is harmed to show the

impossibility of the state to protect ordinary people, the credibility and legitimacy of officialdom plummets. It seems worth discussing whether terrorists channel their hate against particular or broader targets. In fact, victims are aleatory; they are selected to cause a psychological shock to society, and terrorists do not have previous knowledge of their victims they will kill. The targets are things are symbolic and abstract like Capitalism, Democracy or Secularism. Following secular logics more associated to means-ends models than religious pursuits, *the discourse of terrorism* feeds back from perceived global injustices that have taken place in the past and which nourishes a mythical archetype. Normally, terrorists are co-active and prone to minimize the risks whenever the safety of community is in jeopardy. Terrorists are ordinary people who at some moment of their lives were subject to radicalization that isolated them from society. In this vein, one should not lose sight of the fact that terrorists are indifferent to other´s suffering for two main reasons. First, they consider their goals as superior to personal life or any other individual desires. Second, the Other is used as a means to fulfill the own objectives. The question whether others are instrumentalized explains why terrorists are insensible to their pain. Whenever, they (terrorists) feel that states are not handling their claims, extortion surfaces as the necessary instrument to impose their agenda. On this point, terrorists, union leaders and businessmen are not so different. Beyond the fear, a more than interesting approach is to discuss is to how much the pillars of terrorism are *rationality and extortion*.

Throughout his vast bibliography, Zygmunt Bauman has analyzed to what extent the logic of instrumentality remains rooted in the ideology of capitalism. The West valorizes security over other cultural values, and that means that people (consumers) debate between the fear of abandonment and the need to belong. Those persons who harmonize a comfortable life-style paradoxically need the

technological background to protect their home. At the same time, it serves as a sign of distinction with respect to others who are unable to consume, and the derived sentiment of fear is rechanneled towards mass consumption. Unlike animals, humans develop "a type of derivate fear" which is socially constructed. Because this sentiment has the possibility to transcend the boundaries of time and space, it makes more terrible and diffuse than a real threat. Our imagination is our staunch enemy. Doubtless, the Titanic symbolizes what would happen with Western civilization if the radicalized Other is not accepted. This luxurious cruise that embodied the pride of civilized nations met a simple iceberg. The inflation of risk that leads to paranoia facilitates a much deeper process of securitization which permeates the social environment. The vulnerability of humankind is neglected in view of an allegory of consumption, where the maximization of happiness persists. Our terror of death is rooted in the logic of market (Bauman, 2001; 2006; 2013).

Therefore, the West is trapped between the wall and the deep blue sea. How can it prevent what is in its essential core? One of the quandaries of policy makers is to anticipate when the next attack will take place. The sentiment of panic is based on the randomness of terrorist targets, which suggests anyone anywhere can be harmed by them. Last but not least, this fear leads to the abolition of personal and individual rights, which prompts an emergency state of surveillance where government imposes on citizens, policies which they otherwise would never accept. After 9/11, the interpretation of courts on the existent labor laws weakened the power of trade unions in favor of Capital. Wole Soyinka leapfrogged to the economic effects of terrorism in domestic politics of developed nations. Soyinka believes the world has faced extreme situations of panic before 9/11 ranging from Nazism and the Second World War to nuclear weapon testing. One of the aspects of global power that facilitates this feeling of

uncertainty seems to be the lack of a visible rivalry once the USSR collapsed. The political terror promulgated by states diminishes the dignity of enemies. These practices are rooted inside a territory but paved the way for a new form of terrorism which ended in the World Trade Center attacks. It is incorrect to see 9/11 as the beginning of a new fear but as the latest demonstration of the power of an empire over the rest of the world. Mass communications mould our ways of perceiving terrorism even facilitating the conditions towards a new state of war (Soyinka, 2005).

This happens simply because terrorism wakes up a hermeneutic dialectics of hate that enable some xenophobic reactions, or even Islamo-phobia well documented as scholars as Sayyid (2014). Recent humanitarian crisis in Syriah showed not only how European hospitality can be activated to help others, but also showed the limits of this restricted hospitality whenever ISIS fighters are infiltrated. The sad events of Paris in this dark Friday reveal "the end of hospitality" is an inescapable reality. This is the reason why ISIS and Al-Baghdadi declared the "jihad" to modern leisure spaces as tourist destinations, museums or spaces of recreation at modern capitals. The question whether terrorist cells targeted for important persons over more than 40 years has set the pace to a new way of making terrorism where attacks are perpetrated on ordinary citizens, mobile travelers such as tourists, journalists or businessmen. This represents a much more interesting issue which merits investigation. To some extent, New York, Atocha in Spain, London Bombing, and now Paris appeals to our current Eurocentric discourse around security. If states still delineate the world into safe and unsafe boundaries, the probabilities ISIS expanding are higher. Paradoxically, because we over-valorize security as the privileged place to be, terrorists can more easily plan their attacks. However, here some clarification is needed.

Whereas fear is the means to create instability in the system, the touchstone of terrorism is associated with "*the instrumentalization of the Other´s suffering*".

Acknowledgement.

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