

Introduction

Critical Perspectives on Terrorism

PAT LAUDERDALE

Arizona State University, USA

AND

ANNAMARIE OLIVERIO

Arizona State University, USA

Terrorism is a term constructed during the European Enlightenment era and inextricably associated with nation-building. To argue that terrorism has existed for all time is not only imprecise, but also creates serious problems for scholars who try to analyze terrorism systematically. Though the content of each chapter in this book reflects significantly different perspectives, terrorism is in the process of being negotiated and renegotiated within the changing boundaries of territories, nations and states. The research presented here, whether intentionally or not, emanates from this basic assumption. From fear of torture to the commemorative processes of civil society, terrorism is invoked to inspire and mobilize the national soul and (re)establish the sovereignty of political boundaries—states.

When we received the invitation to create this volume on terrorism, we realized that our approach to the study of terrorism would be challenged. Our approach focuses upon how definitions of terrorism and terrorists are created and the impact of those definitions. From the sociological study of law and deviance, we examine the processes that shift the moral boundaries, for example, between normal and deviant action. Under what conditions is deviant or violent action labeled as terrorism rather than war, revolution or protest? Surprisingly, a systematic review of the research on terrorism reveals a paucity of work in this area.

Our approach also stresses the relevance of examining the role of the state in the construction of terrorism and terrorists. For the purpose of this issue, we build on the straightforward view of the state as outlined by Dwight D. Eisenhower, who emphasized the power of the military-industrial complex. As a former President and United States Army general, he was sensitive not only to the inappropriate use of power by the state in effecting change, but also to the ability of the state to evade the checks and balances of government. Of course, now the state has become the military-postindustrial complex and frequently operates through multinational corporations that often are beyond the control of moral or legal regulations. In addition, the state typically uses inappropriate means to maintain or expand its power, domination, and profit. United States Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis recognized the potential terror of institutionalized violence as practiced by the state. The state can legitimate the use of terror as a formal rational practice in the form of collateral damage or saturation

bombing. The state is conceptualized here as the political apparatus that controls or attempts to control society.

Recent research claims that globalization is weakening the state; for example, many suggest that the increasing power of multinational corporations and international nongovernmental organizations is eroding the state's power (Ohmae, 1995; Tanzi and Schuknecht, 1997). It seems premature to comment on this research, except to say that what we may be witnessing is in fact the development of different forms of the global state. Surely, the sociological perspectives on interlocking organizations, including the strength of weak ties, should be useful for future research on this topic.

Some of the scholars whose work is included in this book use a framework similar to ours; however, we also accepted chapters that focus upon the reasons people cross moral boundaries since that perspective can be useful in comparative sociological work. These chapters also challenge other scholars to address the concept of terrorism directly in a meaningful way (Senechal de la Roche, 2004; Stern, 2003).

In the first chapter, Charles Tilly critiques theories on terrorism by Jessica Stern, a 'former superterrorism fellow' in her popular book *Terror in the Name of God*, comparing Stern's definitions of terrorism with those definitions disseminated by the United States government. He suggests that relational explanations of terrorism are more useful than dispositional (or motivational) explanations such as those presented by the government and Stern. Tilly suggests that both the US State Department and Stern define and describe terrorist acts and actors so as to provide pivotal opportunities to think through what it means to explain terror. A relevant point here from Tilly's prior work is that war-making and state-making (as well as protection and extraction) are crucial processes in understanding 'terrorism'. Tilly examines terrorism as a political 'strategy' by those attempting to centralize their power or those attempting to challenge the state in order to gain power and advantage via generalized fear. The symbiotic relationship between the state and terror is evident. Terrorism is not unlike military practices, except that the latter has the advantage of being legitimate.

The next two chapters require us to examine more closely the presentation and representation of terrorism and terrorists, especially in the media. Nachman Ben-Yehuda examines the various relationships between terror and the media, in particular, how the process of presenting terror may

be characterized as a method of challenging, negotiating and redrawing moral boundaries. Ben-Yehuda brings together the framework from his work on the politics and morality of deviance and from his work on political assassinations, and he applies them to his analysis of terror. A key idea raised in the chapter is that in representing events that could be defined as terror or something else, such as freedom-fighting, under specific conditions moral boundaries shift or new boundaries are constructed. Focusing on the cases of political assassination and execution, he explores the ways in which the protagonists (the ‘terrorists’, media and audience) of an event are involved in this process of negotiating the moral meaning of the event defining the event as terror, or morally acceptable action. Ben-Yehuda views terror as a double-edged sword: it can refer to the violent means and intimidation used by a dominating group such as the state against those under its control, or it can refer to a counter measure used by the state to react to nonstate-initiated terror. His research raises provocative questions. How did the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States change the way the media address terrorist acts? And, are there, for example, significant differences between the Irish Republican Army and Al Qaeda that drive the media to treat those groups differently? Is the Abu Ghraib event an example of an effective use of rhetoric, that is, the portrayal of prisoners being ‘abused’ rather than ‘tortured’, according to US news media? How are terrorist groups using the media to disseminate the message that they are on the side of moral righteousness?

The next piece, by Anna Lisa Tota, investigates events of terrorism as they appear in the media and culture in the context of collective remembering or forgetting. In comparing train explosions in Europe allegedly caused by terrorists, she examines the processes used by civil (and political) society to commemorate or forget events of terrorism. Oftentimes, it was not even clear whether a train station bombing was an act of ‘terrorism’ by a so-called ‘terrorist’ group or an act of organized criminals, who also use terrorist tactics. Tota points out that commemorative rituals are significant to the process of hegemony that Gramsci refers to as a ‘war of position’. The continual remembrance of the victims allows for, among other matters, the healing of victims’ families, the expression (through art, media, speeches, educational projects) of local political outrage and protest against the state for its terror, and the rejection of the strategy of using terror

(by challenge groups or the state) as a tool to achieve and maintain political consensus. When processes of remembering are fragmented, interrupted or silenced, the state prevents an essential element of a democratic society – the ability of citizens to organize and systematically present their ideas, opinions and challenges within a peaceful but effective form. Tota's focus on civil society and its interaction with political society is particularly provocative because these processes are often overlooked or taken for granted; yet they have a significant effect on how citizens, states and the international community reinterpret acts of 'terrorism', hence creating history.

The fourth contribution by Asafa Jalata compares state terrorism in Ethiopia and Sudan in historical context. He argues that from the late 19th century to the present, Ethiopian and Sudanese states have been formed by state terrorism. In both countries, colonial political structures dominated by persons claiming superior ethnic descent have emerged through massive cultural destruction and political violence. He maintains that global connections and state terrorism have been used as the primary political tools in creating and maintaining the confluence of identity, religion, and political power in the two countries. The state in each country depends on external resources and power, as well as on internal state terrorism tactics to maintain its power and position. Ethiopia, with its Christian Abyssinianization depends on the West and Sudan with its Islamic Arabization depends on the Middle East. His analysis suggests that each state is involved in the process of 'ethnic' cleansing, disguised rhetorically as being part of the process of establishing national self-determination and democracy. The definitions and understanding of violence, racialization, and marginalization depend on global connections. Jalata's research suggests that the main rationale for US policymakers' response to the Ethiopian state is to maintain political order and to enlist it in the fight against global terrorism. He concludes, for example, that a major reason why the US state is ineffective in its fight against global terrorism is that it ignores or condones the terrorism of 'friendly' states.

Our next chapter focuses upon the relationship between torture and terrorism. Cohen and Corrado attempt to explain how the utility of torture declines as the state's economy transforms to postindustrial with a liberal-democratic system. Irwin Cohen and Raymond Corrado maintain that until

this transformation occurs, however, state torture is used as a means of social control. With the end of the Cold War, the trend toward declining torture is even more prevalent, because superpowers such as the US and the former Soviet Union are no longer sponsoring or financing states to use torture against ideological dissenters. As the global economy becomes more advanced, Cohen and Corrado suggest that the resulting liberal political states diminish and perhaps obliterate the need for torture. Their research raises critical questions. Do postindustrial, liberal-democratic societies eschew state torture because their monopoly on violence is so sophisticated and efficient (rational in Weberian terms) that large numbers of people can be wiped out in a matter of minutes? Is it possible that as weapons of mass destruction have increased (threatening the global community), individual state torture has decreased? Is it possible that such states do not use state torture unless their interests are threatened, and when they are, the states simply finance other states or organizations (in which the private sector may be competing) to do the dirty work of terror and torture? Many organizations in the private sector have been able to avoid laws outlined in international or even national charters. These companies are not regulated and typically are led by ex-military, former right-wing and left-wing agents. Are we simply witnessing a transformation in the nature of torture with the increased use of the privatization of torture?

Clearly, the privatization of torture has led to an increase in human rights abuses (Huggins 2004). There is significant concern over the increasing delegation of responsibilities in Iraq, specifically the delegation of the oversight of Abu Ghraib Prison to nonstate actors, primarily private contractors. Currently, two private military contractors are being investigated for their role in torture allegations at the Abu Ghraib prison. These private organizations lack guidelines, necessary supervision, and accountability (Singer 2003). Furthermore, they often employ nonstate actors who perform functions formerly conducted by the military. It could be argued that this development can also be referred to as state sponsored terrorism, that is, if states finance others to carry out the terror or torture. Has this been the case in Russia? Israel? Great Britain? And, are the recent revelations in Bosnia and Serbia confined only to the military?

The last two chapters propose suggestions for future research on terrorism. Bergesen and Han suggest examining different waves and cycles

of 'terrorism' throughout history, as well as measuring different stages of internationalization of different individual 'terrorist' groups. They attempt to avoid essentialist concepts by presenting a methodological technique that can measure different degrees of being international. They suggest, for example, that forms of terrorism challenging the state reflect the society out of which they emerge; thus, a more global society (including more global state forms) produces more global terrorist groups, even within states. Nonetheless, the definition of 'terrorism' the authors choose to adopt comes from the US State Department. Bergesen and Han's strategy should remind us that one of the reasons the European 'terrorist' groups from the 1970s and 1980s, such as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, the Red Brigades, and the Irish Republican Army, were (and continue to be) difficult to suppress by using state-sanctioned force is their interconnectedness. Relatively easy mobility from country to country made the different cells elusive and they could work with each other effectively. In these cases, nationality was less of a consideration than ideology, and leftists helped leftists of different countries (Soviets included), fascists helped fascists, and Catholics helped Catholics. The respective states responded to the groups as national entities. Adopting more internationalized strategies that involved both civil and political society made the states more effective at marginalizing such groups. Bergesen and Han also raise fundamental questions about the relationship between anarchists and terrorists. Have assassinations that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries mutated into (or been reconfigured as) the global terrorist activities conducted by groups such as Al Qaeda today? Have assassinations declined since the early 19th century, in contrast to those of Yitzhak Rabin, Indira Gandhi, and the multiple assassinations in Chechnya? Under what conditions can some anarchists be classified as a subcategory of terrorists? To what extent is the 'wave' of terror we are experiencing today due to technological advancements, for example, global targets having become more accessible? In addition to raising such crucial questions, the chapter provides a useful summary and analysis of theories that characterize the 'new generation' of terror, including the ostensible rise in religiously-based terrorism, network systems, variations in claims of responsibility, and globally diverse targets.

The final chapter, which we (Oliverio and Lauderdale) contributed, examines the conditions whereby acts of deviance or social control are

defined as terrorism. Researchers have the formidable task of dissociating terrorism from its polemical construct to explicate terrorist action in a more neutral, precise, and systematic way. But the diverse manifestations of terrorism inhibit researchers from discovering its logic and coherence from which to derive significant generalizations; hence, superficial stereotypes and categories still tend to dominate the literature. We suggest that future research on terrorism as an analytical concept is most heuristic when examined with respect to its symbiotic relationship to the state. Though many acts can be defined as terrorism throughout history, the term emerged from the state during the Enlightenment era. It is a term inextricably connected to domination, hierarchy, and patriarchy. The relatively scant research on women and terrorism, for example, reveals this premise. Thus, we suggest a focus upon a systematic, political analysis of the definitions of terrorism and the production of hegemony in the art of statecraft.

Now for a few concluding comments on this volume. For heuristic reasons we suggest that the strategy of terror can be seen as integral to war-making and state-making. The state-making strategy has some roots in the systematic killings by the Jacobin tribunals (similar to modern day death squads or the macabre actions of secret police) that defined terror as 'nothing but justice, prompt, severe, inflexible: it is thus as emanation of virtue'. The English usage of the term terrorism and control of territory emerged in response to this French reign of terror, exemplified in Edmund Burke's work where he called the French revolutionaries 'zealots, fanatics, and terrorists'. Burke's polemical strategy was to define terrorism as 'violence from below' and as has modern author Jessica Stern, he defined terrorism as the product of radical thought and action. He used the term terrorism to show the masses's depravity and consequently their inability to construct or control state structures. He also used the term 'terrorism' to define philosophies examining alternative ideas, such as those of Voltaire and Rousseau. Ironically, the strategy of terror as integral to war-making and state-making and strategy of terror as polemic are symbiotic. They essentially were used in the process of nation-state building during the period defined by western historians as the Enlightenment. More than 200 years later, following Edmund Burke uncritically, many researchers are simply collecting updated data for a political construct that emerged and was coined by the undemocratic English gentry and aristocracy.

Over time, the state has been given the legitimate means of coercion and violence, and what often changes is the degree to which it is used. When it is unpredictable but also seen as legitimate, it is worse for the victims, for their 'terror' will potentially go unnoticed for a very long time. Is this the case with Nazi Germany or other tyrannical regimes? In this book, Jalata notes that some colonizers used the sword and the Koran to commodify human beings. This practice is strikingly similar to Vine Deloria, Jr's observation that those who colonized the United States began with the sword and the Bible (Deloria, 1992). There is more than irony in the recent slogan that American Indians have been fighting terrorism since 1492. The state typically has more resources to carry out killings as well as to maintain the covert nature of their actions, at least in terms of the state-sponsored rhetoric. In some instances, 'clandestine, subnational groups' have also been encouraged and supported by a state. In Latin America, numerous 'subnational, clandestine groups' were sponsored by the US state and the former Soviet state to undermine, threaten and destroy legitimate governments. The contras in Central America and the mujahedeen in Afghanistan during the 1980s are infamous examples. Less obvious examples include the state's use and encouragement of 'vigilantes' such as the Esquadrao da Morte in Brazil, the Anti-Communist Alliance (Triple A) in Argentina, the social controls of the Northern Irish Protestants or even the Ku Klux Klan in the US during most of the last century. In some instances, law enforcement has worked clandestinely with such groups. Indeed, some states consider the actions of these 'nonstate' actors useful to their own purposes of eliminating dissent and maintaining control. In general, mercenaries and assassins throughout history have been hired by a state to carry out its dirty work.

In the US, we often do not learn of the machinations of the state unless there is a revelation in the form of a crisis. And, typically, the activities are presented as apt but isolated events. The relatively recent events that reveal these cracks in the hegemonic facade include Watergate, Iran-Contra, possibly the role of Henry Kissinger in foreign policy matters, and the mistreatment of prisoners in Iraq and Guantanamo. Of course, these activities also were connected to the global state and attempts to dominate by raw power in the pursuit of profit at the expense of justice.

We continue to find ourselves in a world that reflects a tension between the hegemonic facade of the state and the contingent fragmentary quality of postcolonial life. A comparative, critical sociological approach can provide a window into the souls of all people struggling for self-determination, equality and freedom. In this spirit, we present this work and ask you, the reader, to engage us in an open and critical analysis of terrorism.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We appreciate the support of Marie Provine and the School of Justice and Social Inquiry as well as the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Office for Scholarly Journals at Arizona State University. Victoria Hay, Director of the Office, provided us with essential and often invaluable comments. Robert Covington and Kerri Flanagan who are editorial assistants in the Center also contributed to the editing. We are especially appreciative of the significant editing work by Robert. We also are indebted to the referees who provided reviews on all of the chapters. In particular, we thank Francine Banner for her unfailing and precise work in helping us carry this book from its inception to the final details. The collection is much better because of her substantive and technical help. She was kind yet firm with everyone involved in the process, while maintaining a keen eye on the many facets of justice.

REFERENCES

- Deloria, V., Jr (1992) *God is Red*, 2nd edn. Golden, CO: North American Press.
- Huggins, Martha K. (2004) 'Torture 101'. Presented at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, June 28, Washington, DC. Retrieved November 19, 2004 (<http://www.aaas.org/news/releases/2004/0625tortureHuggins.pdf>).
- Ohmae, K. (1995) *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies*. New York: McKinsey & Company.
- Senechal de la Roche, R. (ed.) (2004) 'Theories of Terrorism: A Symposium', *Sociological Theory* 22: 1–105.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TERRORISM

- Singer, P.W. (2003) *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Stern, J. (2003) *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Tanzi, V. and Schuknecht, L. (1997) 'Reconsidering the Fiscal Role of Government: The International Perspective', *The American Economic Review* 87: 164–8.