

## COMABTING TERRORISM WITH PHILOSOPHICAL MODELS

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### **Abstract**

*It is a fact that all over the world, terrorism is progressing in an uninterrupted tempo though with different approach and modes of operation. In many cases, it has been attributed to conflicting religious ideologies and Nigeria has had her own fair-share in the menace. When one takes a look at the propaganda message of some of these terrorist groups, one needs not go too far in asserting that the target of their attack is the supposed "enemy", who in most cases are the guiltless and all efforts to nip it in the bud have been futile. While the motif of terrorist attack in Nigeria remains weird, one can effortlessly deduce that there appears to be a conflict in the integration process especially in Nigeria between two world-views; secularism and religiosity which fundamentally has ushered in a trend of radicalization and the eventual degeneration into what we see today and since Nigeria is a state still going through a process of secularization, these conflicts are inexorable. Thus, this paper focuses on trying to answer some questions that arise regarding terrorism in Nigeria and how philosophical models can be used to achieve the ultimate war against terrorism. This paper therefore concludes that, since the causes and consequences of terrorism are essentially human, learning about terrorists' impulses, objectives and pattern of behavior will allow for the implementation of a human-centered approach to terrorism and a reconstruction of the conditions that make communication possible and effective and permits at the same time, the distortions and defects of communication that might impede such dialogue and in order to strengthen the current nation-state approach in the overall response to terrorism.*

**Keywords:** Secularization, Dialogue, Integration, Terrorism, Democracy, Philosophical Models

**Introduction:**

The world has witnessed several events of war but the catastrophic experience of the 9/11 seems to be the turning point in the history of terrorism in the world. This is because, it ushered in a tendency of radicalization and justification for subsequent counter wars on the one hand and a reflection of a world that was going through a process of secularization and the conflicts of integration of two world views; secularism and religiosity for both Arabs and Western side on the other. Few years after the cold war, Primoratz (130) wrote his work: *What is Terrorism?* And almost thirty years after, most of the views articulated are unarguably relevant to today's discussions.

It is a fact that all over the world today, terrorism is progressing in an uninterrupted and tempo and rhythm though with different colorations. In many cases, it may take a different trail from what has been theorized and these new versions have to a large extent been dented with religious imprints, ideologies and fundamentalism which has made it a global phenomenon we know today. Primoratz challenges the principle that terrorism hits with indiscriminate violence; to some extent this principle is true, but is not absolutely true. When an attack is planned, all of the options and strategies are taken into consideration in order to achieve the objective in the most striking way and with the lowest cost for the terrorists themselves so, is Primoratz's argument still valid that people are randomly targeted? (131). According to Primoratz, they are targeted randomly only in so far as they are part of the directly targeted group. There are two basic targets in the terrorism strategy, the direct but secondary target and the indirect but primary target.

Given that direct and indirect target may coincide, the people who are designated as secondary target are considered innocent, while those who represent the primary but indirect target may or may not be innocent in the eyes of the terrorists. This distinction is essential to understand the phenomenon's dynamics. There might be the case in which an attack is carried out targeting an innocent group with the final aim to put pressure on the indirect and non-innocent target. What is the sense in which the direct victims are innocent? They have done nothing to cause the suffering, injustice or deprivation that forced terrorists to use that criminal methodology (131). Some terrorists are not bothered by that, some others are. A good example of this is that today, we are facing most of the times attacks in which the innocence component is completely excluded by terrorists. Just take a look of any of the *Boko-Haram*, *ISWAP* and the *ISIS* propaganda message. The target of the suggested attack is the enemy in the case of the *ISIS* not a random innocent one while in the case of the *Boko Haram* and *Bandits* the reverse is the case. Thus, this paper focuses on trying to answer some questions that arise regarding terrorism in Nigeria and how

Jacque Derrida's philosophical model can be used to achieve the ultimate war against terrorism

### **Understanding the Philosophy of Terrorism and Terrorist Motivation**

Defining terrorism is not an easy task. The phenomenon is constantly in evolution and since it deals either with religion, territorial rights or politics there is no room for universal consensus on its definition. As a matter of fact, there is not a single, all-encompassing, legally binding, definition of terrorism in criminal law. This might be due to the fact that when terrorism developed into the phenomenon we know today, the world was facing a shift from a colonial order toward a new order. Terrorism -or at least what former colonial powers defined as terrorism- was an instrument of self-determination, so it goes without saying that throughout the past centuries a sort of blurriness over a common line loomed.

One definition proposed by academic commentator Paul Wilkinson is that terrorism is the systematic use of coercive intimidation, usually to service political ends. It is used to create and exploit a climate of fear among a wider target group than the immediate victims of the violence, and to publicize a cause, as well as to coerce a target to acceding to the terrorists' claims (Wilkinson 12–13). Here, there seems to be a clear focus on the political nature of terrorism. By contrast, the United Nations Security Council in Resolution 1566 of October 2004, condemning terrorist acts, adopts more of a criminal perspective with no explicit mention of political objectives and also co-opts definitions in international agreements on terrorism:

Criminal acts, including those against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act, which constitutes offenses within the scope of and as defined in the international conventions and protocols relating to terrorism (Wilkinson 2).

Terrorists are motivated by political objectives, and while criminals employ violence (often similar to that of terrorists like kidnapping, murder, arson) to achieve their ends, their motivation is quite different from that of terrorists, because criminals commonly act solely to secure a material gain. As discussed later, the United States regards terrorism not as criminal activity but as a "form of war" and "as a threat to national security" (Whittaker 262). On this basis, many in the Western world have accepted the premise that terrorism and national liberation are located on two opposite ends of a spectrum legitimizing the use of violence. The struggle for "national liberation" is, allegedly, located on the positive and justified end of the violence spectrum, while terrorism is its unjust and negative polar opposite. For instance, when Algeria obtained independence in 1962, the *Front de Liberation Nationale*,

which was indeed considered as a terrorist entity by the French during the occupation, was in charge of ruling the provisional government. The provisional government remained in charge for more than 30 years. But some have argued that within this framework, it would be impossible for a specific organization to be considered both a terrorist group and a national liberation movement, as Senator Henry Jackson claims: “The thought that one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter is unacceptable. Freedom fighters or revolutionaries do not blow up buses with non-combatants; terrorists and murderers do. Freedom fighters do not kidnap and slaughter students, terrorists and murders do...” (As cited in Netanyahu 18).

There is little basis for the claim that “freedom fighters” cannot carry out acts of terrorism and murder. This approach unintentionally plays into the hands of terrorists, who claim that since they are acting to expel who they consider to be a foreign occupier, they cannot also be considered terrorists. However, many freedom fighters in modern history committed crimes and purposely targeted innocent civilians. The difference between “terrorism” and “freedom fighting” is not a subjective distinction based on the observer’s point of view.

Not having a single, all-encompassing and legally binding definition of terrorism does not suggest that there is not any commonly shared definition at all. Actually, the lack of definition makes room for many different opinions. In fact, if on the one hand a commonly shared political definition has not been achieved so far, on the other hand philosophy carries out several solid reasoning. Carl Wellman for instance, in his paper “On Terrorism itself” defines terrorism as “the use or attempted use of terror as a means of coercion” (250). This is an early and general definition of the phenomenon, but it contains various interesting sparks, in spite of a weakness that is immediately clear: the use of the root terror to define the phenomenon terrorism. Wellman introduces the idea of using terror in order to achieve an objective. According to this principle a terrorist does not use violence for its own sake, but with a specific aim, which is to coerce someone to do something. The second interesting point is that in this definition the difference between using terror or threatening to use terror doesn’t affect the question of the presence or absence of terrorism, meaning that terrorism has a potential effectiveness. It goes without saying that if it has a potential effectiveness, a more accurate definition would also cover the threat of using violence which is the core policy of the modern terrorism. In his work, Wellman remarks the fact that violence often enters the picture and that “the ethic of terrorism is not just a mere footnote to the ethic of violence, because violence is not essential to terrorism, in fact, most acts of terrorism are not violent”(252). He adduces three counterexamples to explain this last concept. Since terrorism is effective potentially and since terrorism does not necessary imply violence, also a judge sentencing a criminal to death in order to prevent other potential criminals from breaking the law, or the systematic use of blackmail as a means of intimidation, but also the threat of flunking any student who hands in his paper after the due date has to be

considered as terrorism, even if is non-violent. Although this theory may not be convincing, non-violent terrorism does indeed exist and is particularly effective. A hacker attack on the centralized system that controls energy supply carried out by any activist group in order to coerce a politician to insert a particular topic in a Country's political agenda is a clear example of non-violent terrorism that fits Wellman's definition.

The definition of terrorism stated by Virginia Held can be reduced to an "action, usually sudden, predictably and coercively inflicting injury upon or damage harming a person" (64), which explicitly links and limits the violence and terrorism to the physical person. However, the damage resulted by a terrorist act can affect a property, which could harm consequently the well-being of a person. This harm is produced by making the assumption that the mere intention of executing the act of harming a property was made with the intention of damaging the person.

The definition proposed by C.A.J Coady instead seems to cover such a scenario: for him terrorism is "the organized use of violence to attack non-combatant (innocents in a special sense) or their propriety for political purposes"(Coady, 2004: 39). According to this definition, damages to properties are included, but there are some elements that seem not to fit the analytical effort we have made up until now (39). Coady deliberately omits the threat of violence. "The threat to do x is generally not itself an instance of doing x, and in the present case the threat to do an act of violence is not itself an act of violence, no matter how disturbing it may be" (6). Coady leaves the fear component out intentionally from his definition because he is convinced that the aim of an act of terrorism is to coerce someone to do something and most of the times perpetrators have intended to spread anger rather than fear. An angry population would react faster than a scared population so he declares to "prefer a definition that left out the fear reference, though its incorporation would still catch a good deal that (he) would count as terrorism"(6). Even though one of the strategies of ISIS is to induce hatred of Muslims on the part of non-Muslim westerners, the choice is questionable and since as stated before the core policy of modern terrorism is to induce fear to achieve an objective, leaving the fear component out is a weakness of this definition. The author himself sometimes encompass this limit of his definition by using the verb *to target* instead of *to attack* (2002: 9); using the verb to target might also imply the fact that there is a threat more than the certainty of an attack.

### **Moral Issues: Is Terrorism Distinctively Wrong?**

To answer this question, we can follow on of two paths. The first is to consider terrorism as unconventional and asymmetric war and consider unconventional and asymmetric war as proper war or just war. The second is to consider terrorism as something different from war; it could be, in some instances, criminal activity; it could be, in some others, an extreme political act; it could be an act inspired by religious fundamentalist goals. It goes without saying that to answer the question

whether terrorism is distinctively wrong or not, the way we conceive of terrorism affects the way we structure our reasoning. If terrorism is considered strictly related to the use of terror against the innocent, the issue could be couched in the same terms as standard arguments in the field of the “ethics of killing in war”. This would imply to follow a well-structured path, making our task considerably easier. If terrorism is considered as a unique phenomenon, things might be trickier and existing philosophical arguments might help us only partially.

One main finding that can be drawn from philosophical and psychological analysis of the profiles of most terrorists and their activities is that terrorists are not mentally ill, or ignorant, nor even brave. Even if their mind-set may express or convey the impression of being almost pathological, it is essential to keep in mind that we are dealing with men and their actions and what drives them and the tactical ways these activities are carried out have a motive and in most cases are premeditated. As reiterated by Daanish Mustafa (32), since terrorism “is innately human in its causes and consequences”, learning about terrorists’ motivations, intentions and pattern of behavior will allow for the implementation of a human-centered approach to terrorism, to reinforce the effectiveness of the current nation-state approach in the global response to terrorism.

It is therefore clear that terrorists, by attracting attention by using ruthless violence, can assert their dominance and demand to people by proposing some sort of nascent and primitive gratification of a truce and ceasefire if these demands are met. The employment of such ruthless and ferocious force does not rely on features that can be countered by addressing ideological determinants, but by leveraging on one’s desire for power and superficial recognition as the ostensible reward on the one hand, and on the other, with the promise of better prospects for economic and social advancement in the form of amnesty in as in the case with Nigeria (particularly common among young and disadvantaged individuals), in this situation, the terrorist’s self-esteem and ego is heightened but in turn, this creates a chain of interminable and incessant crave and irrepressible demands because of the earlier conciliation and compromise which is why it has been very problematic to encompass terrorist activities in Nigeria

The activities of the terrorists resulting from contemporary religious fanatics which seems to be a different phenomenon when compared with traditional understanding of terrorism is another essential observation considering the recent mishaps in Nigeria. The religious brand of terrorism has so many distinctive features that, in my estimation, is difficult to label it as traditional terrorism. By traditional terrorism here, we mean the phenomenon falling under confines and the definition by Primoratz as the deliberate use of violence, or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating them, or other people, into a course they otherwise would not take (32). The first point likely to be emphasized is the meaning of “innocent” which according to Primoratz demands clarification. As envisioned, “innocent” means innocent in the eyes of the terrorists (33). If this conception is true in

general, in the specific case of the religious terrorism, this might not be true. The whole terroristic stratagem is based, so far, on targeting innocent people to create a certain type of outrage and anger in both the public opinion (supposed innocent) and the decision makers (non-innocent). The more these sentiments are triggered, the more the strategy is efficacious. This principle is still valid, except for the fact that, as seen in their philosophy, the people targeted are not innocent in their eyes and the distinction between primary and secondary target (which is the second point to clarify) is not as important as before. Given that direct and indirect target may coincide, the people who are designated as secondary target are considered innocent, while those who represent the primary but indirect target may or may not be innocent in the eyes of the terrorists. This clarification is crucial in understanding the phenomenon's dynamics and undercurrents. There might be the case in which an attack is carried out targeting an innocent group with the ultimate goal of putting pressure on the indirect and unintended but non-innocent target.

### **Philosophical Model in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*...**

Giovanni's *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas* is built around the suspicious language and the concepts used in philosophy and everyday life especially when referring to terrorism which both Habermas and Derrida agreed upon. Thus, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas* is their testimony to call for a unified philosophical response to the apparent terrorism being witnessed in the world today. As such, they reflect on terrorism and show how political thinking (what they designate and exclude) is useful in understanding the origin and reactions towards terrorist violence. This is why it becomes the most crucial demand for philosophers in the contemporary time to regard terror and terrorism because. This idea suits Hegel's speculated relation between history and philosophy and Russell' idea that by engaging in philosophy, one automatically engages in the effort to reckon with its time: in this sense, one is not a political activist but a social critic. Thus, Giovanni see philosophy confronted with the task of grasping with its own time (Giovanni iv).

Terrorism to them is an indefinable concept. This is because to them, the French "resistant" were labeled terrorists by the Germans during World War II so this analysis is from a different perspective—a perspective that is deeply rooted in National Liberation Movement. In this light, 'terrorism' is positive and a constructive one and it is opposed to the kind of terrorism as manifested on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent ones because such act of terrorism is deprived of any political content (Giovanni 1). Habermas consequently, on such basis fervently denounces the "war against terrorism" designation because it gives political legitimization to terrorism and at the same time, reflects an "overreaction" against an unknown enemy. Perhaps Habermas believes that two wrong can never make a right or in the words of Nietzsche that "whoever fights monster should see to it that in the process, he does not become a monster" (62)

Terrorism as a self-evident notion manifests the vulnerability of democracy in the face of terror and probably more importantly, the suicidal temptation of the “auto-immunity” in the human right declaration which is very evident in the modern democracy (Giovanni 22). Thus, the outbreak of terrorism as a failure of communication, of dialogue: the relation between the government and the masses and is mediated by violence. This Habermas calls “communication pathology,” because the spiral of violence begins as a spiral of distorted communication that leads through the spiral of uncontrolled reciprocal mistrust, to the breakdown of communication (23). Simply put, he sees violence as the resultant effect of lack of communication and dialogue in democracy. Again, he highlights the fact that globalization is another phenomenon that plays an important role in the outburst of terrorist attack; this is because, it accentuates the already growing imbalance between the rich and the poor countries as well as the individuals. Thus, the ‘victims’ of this situation continue to get poorer in the process and always resort to violence as the only alternative to their outcry; this is because there is a break in the dialogue (non-communication) between the rich and the poor and this break in dialogue has a direct consequence on the use of violence: “recourse to violence is thus often presented as the only “response” to a deaf ear” (26). But from that standpoint, the ideas of universal freedom and tolerance that form the hope of democracy are shattered.

Since religion and violence are today intrinsically linked and intertwined, Derrida also accuses religion as one of the potent forces of terrorism through extreme fundamentalism and fanaticism. This is because religious fundamentalism explicitly rejects secularization and modernity and rejecting the Enlightenment’s separation of political power from religious beliefs. (24). Thus, certain acts of terrorism reach as far as a critical reassessment of the validity of “Enlightenment projects and ideals” (24). In this sense, philosophy is therefore called to “arms” in order to make a distinction between religiosity with rationality and religiosity with emotion. The battle line has to be drawn between the use of emotion and reason in religion; between political and democratic theologies and religious confrontation which Huntington referred to as “clash of civilization” and it is the duty of philosophy to draw this battle line. Thus, philosophy in time of terror is a reflection on the figure of the philosopher’s responsibility to enlighten the public or the international public sphere to reflect in a responsible way on the question of terrorism and demand accountability from those in-charge of public discourse especially where effective language and dialogue is hampered. The philosopher analyses and suggests to rethink the relationship between the philosophical heritages (justice, freedom, hospitality and tolerance) and the current structure of the changing politic and juridical system.



### Summary and Conclusion

As Giovanni states in the introduction to the book, “this book is a story of a Philosopher in a time of terror; it’s about submitting to philosophical analysis ‘the most urgent questions regarding terror and terrorism’” and if several arguments are prone to critique and controversy especially in our approach towards terrorism, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* in many ways, is extremely relevant in the Nigerian context where effective dialogue on the cause of terrorism and the need to promote what he calls a “living together” spirit in order to effectively curtail the excesses of terrorism. As Giovanni clearly explains: “Habermas assumption has been that we learn who we are as autonomous agents from our relations with others. The most basic among these relations is the act of communicating through language” (Giovanni 16).

In Nigeria the fanatical religious dependability and political vulnerability have made our case more volatile and unprecedented, and where reasonable dialogue would have served as a potent tool in scrutinizing religious and doctrinal radicalism and intemperance and political resistance, we are left with no choice than fierceness and violence- the eventual effect of which is terrorism. Thus, the collective effort of “war on terror” against a diffuse and intangible enemy would have been solved with philosophical models of hospitality, tolerance and cosmopolitanism which make possible a broader discussion (dialogue) which both Habermas and Derrida proposed. In this perspective, Habermas emphasized the model of “deliberative democracy” based on the participation of the civil society and a consensus between and among rational citizens. Habermas (Habermas, 144).

Thus, there is a call for a reconstruction of the conditions that make communication possible and effective and permits at the same time, the distortions and defects of communication that might impede such dialogue. In this dialogue about terrorism, Derrida believes that language is vital in ensuring that these cracks are filled in order to avoid suspicions. Derrida claims that the deconstruction of the concept terrorism is the only politically responsible approach to terrorism and as Habermas opines, there is need to denounce the designation of “war against terrorism” because such only gives political legitimation to terrorism (Giovanni 152). Undoubtedly, these philosophical models will unwrap a space for evaluating the possible and indispensable contribution that philosophy can make in disapprovingly analyzing an exact topical incident. Because, as noted above the outbreak of terrorism mainly is as a result of communication distortion and inadequate dialogue process which Derrida apparently calls the failure of the world hospitality model.

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