RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS OF THE PHENOMENON OF INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM - ISSUES, CHALLENGES AND WEAKNESSES

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For over 30 years, a word with apocalyptic implications invaded the social imaginary. Since the Revolution in Iran in 1979, the attention of the public and that of the scientists have been directed towards Islam and the fundamentalist movements. The phenomenon culminated with the events of September 11, 2001 and March 11, 2004 which showed the financial, logistic and military strength of international terrorism and the destructive effects it can have on the global society.

After that, terrorism has intensified and diversified as a continuous spiral. New terrorist organizations appeared, as well as new methods of action and new forms of collaboration between these organizations that assist each other.

This subject incites because of the singular way in which this phenomenon manifests itself and due to its strong implications on individual relations, national and international, at a social, political, and economic level and other issues.

Since the media describe in detail each terrorist incident, there is a perception that the phenomenon is relatively easy to study. This journey is extremely risky, however, due to the numerous variables involved, which can move it in a direction different from that originally set.

- Do we fight enemies that we have invented or created?
- What is the dynamics of the violence leading terrorism and the fight against it?
- How do we explain Islam and Al Qaeda?
- In this confrontation do we change them and their lifestyle for better or for worse? What kind of phenomenon is terrorism?
- What problems and conflicts cause and sustain it?
- What allows it to extend to such a large scale?

Terrorism first of all frightens. Its acts are considered monstrous in scope and in size. Moreover, the number of road accident victims, of natural disasters and pandemics exceeds the number of victims of terrorism. And yet, terrorism induces profound changes in society, incommensurable with the acts themselves. Secondly, terrorists are considered monsters, lunatic, human pathology. But in the media we have situations where they recruit ordinary people and more, turn to ethical considerations, such as injustice, the attack against their own families and the society they belong to in order to justify their actions. Also, the only thing that attracts our attention is the criminal nature of the terrorist acts, although it is difficult to call them so because they amount to more than committing criminal acts, and the impact of their actions is much higher.

In this article we intend to point a number of issues to be considered in any approach to understanding the phenomenon of terror carried out both at specialists and the general public. In this regard, in the first part of the article we identify a number of difficulties arising in the intent of catching the meaning of the concept of "international terrorism". Next we examine the analytical and empirical problems that arise in this approach from a critical perspective. We conclude by presenting the contributions brought by the sociological research to the understanding of the terrorist phenomenon.

Conceptual challenges

A hypothesis on the nature of terrorism should give solutions to the problems that the phenomenon involved, not to mention any of them. If we start from the idea that terrorism is a particular form of crime, the question arises: Why and when crimes take the form of terrorism? We appreciate that the difference between crime and a terrorist act lies not in the reason, the means used, the nature of the victims or the effects of its actions. The difference lies in a mechanism that turns murder into "something else". Crime becomes a terrorist act by a transformation mechanism. This mechanism metamorphoses terrorist actions from acts of murder to morally laudable acts. The crime is reconfigured in a morally praiseworthy act and the criminal becomes a hero or a saint.

Therefore, we hold that terrorism is a "transubstantiated" crime.[1] The hypothesis mentioned above should be extended to the identification of the difficulties arising in the concept and to the explanation of the transubstantiation mechanism. First, the attempt to capture the significance of this concept traps all those who are preparing for this journey. Etymologically, the term "terrorism" is derived from the word "terror", expressing "a state of fear that frightens, disturbs and even paralyzes."[2] In our attempt to avoid any confusion, we intend to show that "terror" and "terrorism" are not synonyms. While an act of terror that occurs does not automatically lead to terrorism and expresses a psychological phenomenon, terrorism is intrinsically linked to terror because it seeks to break certain psychological and emotional mechanisms. Terrorism affects both individuals and society in many aspects of economic, social, psychological and political nature.

The claim that terrorism is a contested concept has already become a cliché. This is one of the most controversial concepts in the political lexicon whether it is viewed as a subjective process, as a moral judgement or as a war of words. The ambivalent nature of terrorism is not a discovery of the 21st century. The political concept of "terror" was first articulated with reference to the "terror regime" (1793-1794) practiced by the French Government. Paradoxically, terrorism was associated with ideals of virtue. Thus, the revolutionary M. Robespierre calls for the virtue without which terror is evil and terror "without which virtue is powerless" and proclaimed: "Terror means justice, it is prompt, severe and inflexible, and therefore it derives from virtue".[3] In the 19th century, the term identified leftist groups (anarchists, socialists, trade unions) considered a challenge to the capitalist order. For example, the Russian revolutionary organization Narodnaya Volya (People's Will, January 1878 - March 1881) was considered not only a challenge to the tsarist regime, but a global movement that threatened the entire global civilization:

"Exactly 100 years ago I heard the same call. An anarchist assassinated in September 1901 President William McKinley, which prompted the new President Theodore Roosevelt to call on a global crusade to exterminate terrorism ... 'Anarchy is a crime against humanity and all should unite against anarchism. Its crimes should be regarded as crimes against the standards established by treaties between civilized powers'."[4]

The meaning of the word has changed in the 1930s, when it was less used to refer to revolutionary movements and more to describe the practice of mass repression used by totalitarian countries and by the dictators, against citizens. A similar transformation occurred

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[1] S. N. Balagangadhara; J. De Roover, 2009, "The Saint, The Criminal and The Terrorist", <u>The Journal of Political Philosophy</u>, 17:1, p. 2, http://www3.interscience.wiley.com (October, 22, 2009).

[2] Gh. Arădăvoaicei; D. Iliescu, 1997, <u>Terorism, antiterorism, contraterorism</u>, Oradea: Ed. Antet, p. 9.

[3] Ibidem, pp. 12-13

[4] D. C. Rapoport, 2003, "The Four Waves of Rebel Terror and September 11", p. 36 în C.W. Kegley Jr (ed.), <u>The New Global Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, and Controls</u>, Upper Saddle River NJ: Prentice Hall.

during the Cold War when the leftist groups and progressive movements of national liberation were considered terrorist or representatives of the Soviet Union.

The recent definition formulated by the U.S. State Department aimed at "terrorism as violence premeditated, politically motivated, directed against non-combatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine state agencies, with the purpose of influencing the public." Such attempts to characterize terrorism as the unlawful use of force or violence by subnational groups and non-state actors against non-combatant targets, in order to intimidate or coerce a government or civilian population to achieve political or social objectives, capture many features of the phenomenon, but fail as assumptions of the distinct nature of the phenomenon.

A number of similar acts come to support this idea: the massacres committed by the Nijvel groups in Belgium in 1982-1985, the armed attack in Washington DC in 2002, the massacre at Virginia Tech in 2007, when a South-Korean student killed 33 people on campus and many others.

Therefore, given the uncertain ontological status, the need to determine what legitimizes an act as violence or not, what a political purpose means, which are the real intentions of a clandestine person, how can innocence be measured, all these introduce a subjectivity field in the discursive field. Thus, we can say that, in practice, what leads an action to be considered terrorist violence are not the inherent features of the violence itself, but a private group that provides political and cultural legitimacy. According to the researchers A. Schmid and A. Yongman: "The nature of terrorism is not inherent in the violent act itself. The same act [...] may be terrorist or not, depending on the intent and circumstances."[5] Terrorism is therefore a social fact, rather than a crude reality, whose political and cultural significance is determined by a symbolic name, a social agreement and a wide range of intersubjective practices.

The problem now is whether terrorism should be tackled through the violent nature of the acts or the nature of the actors who commit these acts. Many researchers in the field follow the practice of the States and that of the international organizations in addressing terrorism, solely from the perspective of this phenomenon as violence of non-state actors, preferring to use the name of "repression" for similar actions of states. On the other hand in an objective interpretation of the characteristics of violence committed by states, they can and sometimes do commit state terrorism, but the topic is avoided in their work by the phenomenon's researchers. In this regard, William Laquer says that states made more victims and caused greater damage than the other type of terrorism, but does not study this issue.[6]

The mechanism of transubstantiation

Asserting that the mechanism of terrorism transforms crime into morally exemplary acts, leads to the question: How does terrorism transform crime into examples of morality? A possible answer would be that terrorism makes every criminal action a sui generis act, which cannot be compared to other acts. Crime is transubstantiated in "acts taken to the duty's limit".[7] They are not mandatory, and the failure of such actions would not make the person that has committed them an immoral. Moreover, terrorism mechanism calls for a moral community, for its moral and ethical concepts and uses the existing distinctions between good-bad, right-wrong, moral and immoral, etc. Relying on this distinction they systematically reconsider the immoral elements of their acts, representing them as facts situated at the duty's limit.

The community should therefore judge as moral and at the same time at the duty's limit acts which are actually immoral and criminal. Community should therefore appreciate the intellectual and moral position one and the same act at the same time, immoral and at the debt limit.

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[5] Idem, 1988, <u>Political Terrorism:A New Guide to Actors, Authors, Concepts, Databases, Theories and Literature</u>, Oxford: North Holland, p. 101.

[6] W. Laqueur, 1979, <u>Terrorism</u>, Boston: Little Brown, p. 6.

[7] D. Heyd, 1982, <u>Supererogation: Its Status in Ethical Theory</u>, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Therefore, the mechanism turns people into criminals or moral saints of the community to which they belong. But this is practically impossible: from the same point of view, an act can't be both immoral and at the duty's limit. If a moral community would accept this, it would disintegrate and would cease to exist. In conclusion, we can say that terrorism undermines the foundations of its original community, turns against it and even destroys it.

How does the terrorist resolve the tension between him and his moral community? This problem of inconsistency between what he is doing and its moral fundamentals is transformed into an external opposition between the empirical community to which he is attached at a certain moment (and which becomes the relevant moral community for him) and the rest of the world: the external opposition between "us the moral" and "them the immoral".

Analytical and empirical issues

Closely related to the subversive nature of terrorism is the trans-evaluation of the language.[8] Terrorists define themselves as "martyrs", "freedom fighters" who engage in "battles" and "self-defense operations" in which they execute the "enemies of the people." Criticism in recent studies is that this self-defining was accepted both by the supporters and especially by the opponents of terrorism. Terrorists are treated as special people with special status, different from ordinary criminals, which does nothing but encourage them further in their actions. A subversion is thus produced by the subversion of their moral and legal codes. By the endless debate on the question whether some religions or political theories encourages terrorism or not, we accept the legitimacy of the terrorist argument.

By identifying terrorists as "religious" or "fundamentalists" we simply to adopt their own description, that, to the detriment of our fundamental notions of human rights and in favor of discrimination between people of other "religions" or regions, rather than distinguish between good-bad, moral and immoral, etc. We agree with them and always talk about "terrorist acts", rather than say that they are in fact criminal acts. Another criticism of approaches designed to understand terrorism refers to the over-dimensioning of the terrorism. The identification of the way the social construction of the terrorist threat is realized and the identification of the political economy that produces it, is an important objective of our work.

The question that occurs is why and by who is the terrorist threat over dimensioned?

A number of authors argue that the larger purpose is to show that terrorism is so strong (armed conflict is justified as a preventive measure) and threatening (possession of weapons of mass destruction) that there is no other solution than the reaction force.[9] Peter Bruck in his "Crisis as Specular: Tabloid News and the Politics of Outrage" used the term "spectacular" to describe periods of crisis in society in which violence show was used to validate the fears of consumers of media, programming their feelings in times of political uncertainty. Extrapolating, we can formulate the idea that the fears generated by terrorism are examples of false consciousness of the public and can be understood as the self-created agenda of government agencies. The tendency of exaggerating the terrorist threat is an indicator of the moral and social panic deliberately created to justify the actions of the states.

Another perspective on this dilemma was expressed by Robert Goodin in his "What's wrong with terrorism" in which he advances the idea of the existence within the public opinion of a wrong perception of "politics of fear"[10]. Specifically, while the media uses that fear to build scenarios and media events, political elites manipulate this fear for social control and the

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[8] L. E. Lomasky, 1991, "The political significance of terrorism", p. 86 în R. G. Frey şi C. W. Morris (eds), Violence, Terrorism, and Justice, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[9] M. Bremer-Maerli, 2003, "The Real Weapons of Mass Destruction: Nuclear, Biological, and Chemical Warfare in the era of Terrorism and 'Rogue' States (The Norwegian Atlantic Committee), http://www.dnak.org, (November, 23, 2009).

[10] R. Goodin, 2006, What's Wrong with Terrorism?, Cambridge: Polity Press.

development of partisan economic and social interests. The author argues that social fear not occur naturally, but deliberately created and supported by powerful systemic forces for profit, prestige, self-seeking. Along with the military, there are listed other actors interested in maintaining and over-dimensioning of the terrorist threat: pharmaceutical companies, private security firms, local councils and politicians to invest in monitoring services and even journalists, commentators, experts who construct their prestigious careers.

The idea that appears is that of a symbiotic relationship and, perhaps, an unconscious form of coordination between terrorism and counterterrorism. All these actors involved are held responsible for the moral evil of terrorism. This situation requires what anthropologists would call "The exorcism of demonic power of the story of the terrorist threat."[11] This view should not be ignored in our own research and on the contrary, it should be taken for analysis because it raises serious problems.

Another criticism recently brought to the study of terrorist phenomenon relates to their foundation more on media and official sources, to the prejudice of the ethnographic research of the phenomenon in the ethnographic context of the knowledge of the societies these movements come from. Another hypothesis to be subjected to careful and rigorous analysis is the relationship between international terrorism and Muslim society.

How contemporary or classical Islamic theology contribute to the meaning of terrorism as a modern Islamic movement? The answer to this question is extremely laborious, requiring many hours and many pages for his presentation. In the following we will stop only to a very brief statement of our point of view. Most of the new terrorist organizations are religiously motivated organizations, most of which are Islamic organizations. Since 1980, analysts have argued that Islam is suffering an identity crisis, the shift of the Islamic civilization to the Modernity leaving the Muslims with a deep sense of alienation and injustice. Muslims around the world talk about their company's decline. They know that something bad is happening, but do not know why.

The creation of Pakistan and Israel, the expulsion of Palestinians, the Revolution in Iran, the armed civil war in Algeria, Afghanistan, Central Asia has displaced and killed millions of people, divided communities and destroyed families. These events led to the siege mentality and a belligerent and highly polarized political discourse. A large percentage of refugees in the world come from the Muslim world. Fields of refugees are places that inspired the anger and despair. Among the many religious based terrorist groups, Islamic fundamentalism is highlighted by the use of extreme violence, thereby constituting a threat to all religions - Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu. It aims at all costs to prevent the modernization and liberalization of the Muslim world. Most times even the Islamic countries' populations are victims of terror and violence.

The myth of preventing at all costs the modernization and liberalization of the Muslim world where democracy is more pronounced where the democracy is suffering, or in closed societies, where traditional tyrannies (Saudi Arabia) or secular (Syria, Iran) take advantage of the lack of information and the credulity of the masses. All these are meant to build the image of America inhuman, mercantile, possessed by the god of money, and always aggressive imperialist. The anti-American myth proposes a scale of value opposite to the existing board and says it cannot accept the modernity. These perceptions shape a tradition of exclusion, which is justified by the myth of the warrior who defends an aggressed identity.

Within the Muslim world, the tension began with the seizure of power in Iran by Ayatollah Khomeini (1979). He will send his message, supporting the return to Islam.

The Pan-Islamic character of the Revolution will be introduced in the Iranian Constitution which states that all Muslims form one nation (Ummah) and that his regime has a duty to achieve the unity of Islamic nations: "Iran will support the revolution in all the Islamic countries."[12]

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[11] J. Zulaika, W. Douglass, 1996, Terror and Taboo: The Follies, Fables, and Faces of Terrorism, London: Routledge.
[12] W. Dietl, 1984, Holy War, NewYork: MacMillan, p. 281

Since the beginning of the Revolution, terrorism was considered a legitimate tool in the war declared by Islam against the West. It is held in the name of Allah, this justifying all forms of terrorism: "Terror strikes at the hearts of enemies, it is not only one end, it's the end itself."[13]The Islamic Revolution was doomed to failure because of rejection by the wider Muslim world to this branch Islamic Shia. Values of Islam reject these terrorist acts as being aggressive and not martyrdom. Islam is often the one who justifies suicidal terrorism, the religion is only excuse for the objectives. The concept of "religious terrorism" establishes a causal link between Islamic doctrine and terrorist violence, and outlines a vision of the threat of indiscriminate and excessive "Islam". By locating sources of contemporary terrorism in religious extremism, rather than in response to the power exerted by Western powers, the speech is deflected towards de-politicizing, de-contextualizing and de-historicizing grievances and counter-hegemonic struggles.

This concept of operation also worked for the representation of Muslims as a "suspect community", to increase Islamophobia and the abuse of Muslim minorities (Pakistan, Egypt, China, Uzbekistan) and to undermine the dialogue to resolve the conflict. On the other hand, the counterterrorism discourse served to legitimize Islamic terrorism in many international projects: regime change in countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, the expansion of military presence in new regions such as Central Asia, the control of strategic resources (oil) and more.

Attempts at sociological theorizing of terrorism

A trans-disciplinary approach to the phenomenon of international terrorism helps us understand more clearly this phenomenon in terms of causes, intentions, how the event manifests, and its implications. The sociological approach supports the complete "picture" created before. To achieve this goal we will stop at a number of valuable researches of some authors who tried to theorize terrorism at a sociological level. Such research has been conducted by Charles Tilly[14] who states that terrorism is an act with intent dominated by multiple sources and different degrees of coercion skills, without a causal coherence. Donald Black[15] argues that terrorism should be understood as a "civil self-helping" expressed in the form of violent acts, ordered by a constellation of multi-dimensional and structural forces. Starting from the theory of the collective action, Anthony Oberschall[16] states that terrorism should be seen as a form of collective action, coordinated across four dimensions: dissatisfaction, injustice based on doctrine, organizational capacity and political opportunities. Albert J. Bergesen and Omar Lizardo[17] provide a "globo-logic" model of terrorism.

Under this model, the international terrorism is a product of the global system dynamics, a reaction to modernization, industrialization and globalization, based on the following conditions: hegemonic decline of powerful states, globalization, colonial and imperial competition and the origin of terrorist actions in semi -peripheral areas of the global system. Jeffrey C. Alexander[18] argues that terrorism and the response to it has important symbolic dimensions, to be understood in terms of the cultural codes' structure.

The conclusions of this research help us to shape a theory of terrorism.

Anti-hegemonic Terrorism will be our concern below.

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[13] Ibidem, p. 290

[14] C. Tilly, 2004, "Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists", Sociological Theory 22 (1): 5-13.- http://www3.interscience.wiley.com (November, 15, 2009)

[15] D. Black, 2004, "The Geometry of Terrorism", Sociological Theory 22 (1): 14-25, http://www3.interscience.wiley.com (November, 15, 2009)

[16] A. Oberschall, 2004, "Explaining Terrorism: The Contribution of Collective Action Theory", Sociological Theory 22 (1): 26-37, http://www3.interscience.wiley.com (November, 15, 2009)

[17] A.J. Bergeson; O. Lizardo, 2004, "International Terrorism and the World-System", *Sociological Theory* 22(1): 38-52, http://www3.interscience.wiley.com (November, 15, 2009)

[18] J. Alexander, 2004, "From the Depths of Despair: Performance, Counterperformance, and 'September 11", Sociological Theory 22 (1): 88-105, http://www3.interscience.wiley.com (November, 15, 2009)

The idea of protecting the powerless from the evil is an essence of the concept of social justice. The oldest code of laws in human history, the Code of Hammurabi, shows that the role of the judiciary was to protect the powerless in society. It also includes the idea of control of the powerful in their relationship with the powerless.

Therefore, the origins of terrorism and political violence are reflected in the unequal power between opposite poles in their fight for the foundations of symbolic, economic, ideological, political and social relations. The term "hegemony", first used by Anthony Gramsci – "Letters from prison" (1955), was used in the analysis of ideological and cultural leadership imposed by the dominant interests of the society. According to him, the power of invisibility comes from its cultural hegemony, in contrast to the economic power; political or legislative are more exposed. When hegemonic power is exposed, the result is often the emergence of movements that change anti-hegemonic dominant power bases. In light of these ideas, we can say that terrorism is a counter-hegemonic response to the control of a hegemonic power.

The anti-hegemonic nature of terrorism was illustrated by "validating ideologies" formulated by Mark Juergensmeyer.[19] In the analysis made to terrorism, he argues that individuals involved in terrorist actions think that their actions their actions were supported not only by their followers, but also by the vision that already live in a violent world. Since their communities are under siege, their acts are nothing but a response to violence exerted on them. Since counter-hegemonic movements have no access to institutional resources and to the channels owned by hegemonic systems, they must find alternative, usually violent means to engage in the action of changing the existing power relations.

Since these facilities are outside the societal systems, the validation of ideology helps mobilize the anti-hegemonic movements and the motivation to participate in illegitimate acts as the terrorist ones. Terrorist violence is motivated by doctrinal ideas regarding the fear of the increasing globalization and Westernization of the Arab world.

Max Weber in his analysis of the "routine's charisma" captures an endemic problem of the social issues. [20]This issue is based on the fact that the feelings of a group and its commitment to political leaders are not charismatic enough to support the sustainability of social movements. Weber argues that an emotional or charismatic group with fundamentals may have a strong and enthusiastic consistency, but such a combination is inevitably transient and requires high energy consumption to motivate and retain them. As the group increases or at the loss of the leader, other foundations have to be found to mobilize and ensure its cohesion. Weber talks about one of the most used strategies: institutionalization and streamlining formal group called the installation of the routine. But formal institutionalization often leads to increased dependency on resources, which redirects the original goals of social movement.[21] Since institutionalization brings the association and dependence of conventional political processes, the routine process encounters "an emotional spark" between the dominant interests and those of counterbalancing.

The routine process comes to share social movement in two parts: those motivated by the convincing "spark" of the emotional effervescence, who fear the effects of institutionalization and the potential co-opt that might result and the those who have institutionalization as a target and leave behind the effervescent strategies (by protests, demonstrations, etc.) for fear that it would affect their legitimacy and access to resources. The paradox that exists between the emphasis on disruptive tactics, or the organizational routine can divide a movement and can do it even more aggressive.

[19] M. Juergensmeyer, 2003, <u>Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence</u>, Third Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.

[20] M. Weber, 1978 [1921], <u>Economy and Society, Volumes 1 and 2</u>, Berkeley: University of California Press.

[21] F. F. Piven; R.A. Cloward, 1979, <u>Poor People's Movements': Why They Succeed and How They Fail</u>, NewYork: Vintage Books.

We consider that terrorist groups are strong reactions to the inefficiency of the institutionalization of anti-hegemonic movements. In Weberian language, terrorist groups are components of charismatic social movements. They are often incited by an emotional reaction against the domination and against the perceived threats at way of life. Starting from another Weberian concept, the legitimacy of state, Randall Collins introduces the idea of the dynamics of "power-prestige".[22] According to his conception of the legitimacy of state is a direct and positive function of the geopolitical level of the binomial power-prestige. All the states are part of an international system, in which the high military power, achieve a high degree of prestige. Participation in international conflicts has important consequences on the binomial, and thus on its geopolitical legitimacy. Conflict is therefore a means by which a state can assert power and increase its prestige.

Reported to the model of state legitimacy, terrorism represents a unique situation. Although the victims of terrorist attacks gain the global community's sympathy and legitimacy for the global community further action, the attacked state's prestige and geo-political power are compromised because the attacks reflect its vulnerabilities. On the other side of the conflict, people who are successfully committing terrorist attacks obtain power-prestige because of the illegitimate use of violence. We conclude that terrorist attacks want to draw the hegemonic power's attention and to generate external legitimacy within the networks who share common interests.

Another important concept for understanding the phenomenon of terrorism and to which we refer to is that of the dynamics of the rituals and their ability to produce social integration. We consider the central idea of solidarity theory developed by Emile Durkheim[23] that group life is organized in the form of collective representation catalyzed by emotional effervescences. Organizing groups at a high level of social cohesion is a direct function of social rituals that are the "cult" of the societies and that constitute not only the base of the religious life's organization but also of the structure of group life in any society.[24]

The great sociologist builds his solidarity theory on two key concepts: "positive cult", representing the system of cultural representations which outline the normative and behavioral code and "negative cult" including cultural taboos, prohibitions and requirements from which the people should abstain if they want to maintain the status of group members. While the positive cult signifies the moral force of the group, with the role of integration and mobilization of individuals on the basis of common faith, the negative cult social forms the basis of the social sanctions and of the legal institutions of the group.

The E. Durkheim's theory reveals a new dimension to understanding terrorism. In addition to their violent nature, terrorist acts also include symbolic elements. These are violations of the cultural symbols of the attacked societies. In this sense, a terrorist strategy is effective to the extent that its targets have a significant symbolic value. A symbolic attack would not achieve the goals if it won't undermine the symbolic foundations of the structure of his victims' culture.

As the language of the great sociologist reveals, terrorism is a ritual act that intentionally violates the negative structure of the cult of the attacked group and pursues weakening the group's solidarity by compromising its sacred values. But as the events have shown, a terrorist attack against the negative structure of worship contributes to strengthening the positive structure of the victimized group's cult, strengthening its legitimacy and internal solidarity. The terrorist act actually meet two social functions: on the one hand it is a symbolic act that supports the solidarity and commitment among individuals who share interests and, on the other hand, increases solidarity among those affected. The result is polarized into two warring groups with higher levels of internalized solidarity and legitimacy.

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[22] R. Collins, 1986, Weberian Sociological Theory, New York: Cambridge University Press
[23] E. Durkheim, 2001, Diviziunea muncii sociale, București: Editura Albatros
[24] Idem, Formele elementare ale vieții religioase, 1995, Iași: Editura Polirom

In conclusion we can say that the definitions and concepts of international terrorism are not objective and impartial, but "buildings" that reflect the ideas and, more importantly, the interests of those who elaborate it. As both a political and social process, terrorism is also a communication process. In this regard, Bruce Hoffman argues: "On a point, at least everyone agrees": terrorism "is a pejorative term. It is a word that has intrinsic negative connotations, generally applied to the enemies and our opponents or those who agree or not, otherwise preferring to ignore them... Therefore, the decision to appoint someone or an organization 'terrorist' is inevitably subjective, largely depending on the sympathy or antipathy shown to the person / group / their causes".[25]

This idea is older, as expressed by anthropologist Sir Edmund Leach since 1977. Sir Edmund Leach was among the first scientists who criticized the abuse carried on the label "terrorist". Starting from this idea, it was right to claim that the greatest threat to world peace today is terrorism, not its behavior, but the word itself, meaning that people tend to believe that it makes sense to use and abuse it, relating it to any hate, as a way of avoiding rational argument and, frequently, excusing themselves for their own immoral and illegal behaviour. Indeed, terrorism is a term too subjective and too challenged to capture a phenomenon in a universal and objective way, especially since many players on the international stage resort to violence to achieve political ends. It is also imperative to recognize our interests and strategic objectives involved in any construction on the terrorist phenomenon.

All these issues, challenges and weaknesses support the accuracy, rigor and objectivity of any research on international terrorism.

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