

FROM PSYCHOLOGY OF TERRORISTS TO PSYCHOLOGY OF TERRORISM

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From psychology of terrorists to psychology of terrorism

De la psychologie des terroristes à la psychologie du terrorisme

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Abstract

Terrorism as an act of violence involves a vast and multi-factorial network of sociopolitical causes. Yet this choice of action corresponds to another form of social violence. As psychologists, we can try to explain the consequences of terrorism, the reasons why terrorist groups always seem able to recruit new people for their purpose. It is also, perhaps, the link between these two issues which is even more interesting to explain. This paper offers a short review of past and contemporary hypotheses and research on terrorism in the field of psychology. More generally, this review considers international terrorism mainly perpetrated by radical Islamist fundamentalists. We will focus here on recent studies proposing that identity and, more specifically, social identity could be

Résumé

Considérer le terrorisme en tant qu'acte de violence nous amène à nous confronter à un vaste réseau de causes multifactorielles et sociopolitiques. Ce choix d'action n'est ni plus ni moins qu'une forme particulière de violence sociale. En tant que psychologues, nous pouvons tenter d'expliquer les conséquences du terrorisme et les raisons pour lesquelles les groupes terroristes semblent toujours en mesure de recruter de nouvelles personnes pour leur cause. C'est aussi d'expliquer les liens entre ces deux questions qui peut s'avérer le plus intéressant. Cet article propose un bref aperçu des hypothèses historiques et contemporaines des recherches sur le terrorisme dans le domaine de la psychologie. Plus généralement, cette revue envisage le terrorisme international principa-

Key-words

Terrorism, terrorist, threat, social identity

Mots-clés

Terrorisme, terroriste, menace, identité sociale

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important factors in terrorism. Within these studies or reports, some point out the importance in contemporary terrorism of the threat that Western countries impute to Muslim and Arab identity. As a conclusion, and in line with other authors, we introduce an integrative analysis framework for a vicious terror circle which begins with fear and threat, leads to the derogation of Muslim population in Western countries, and produces a fertile ground for the recruitment of terrorist sympathizers.

lement causé par des intégristes islamistes radicaux. Nous allons nous concentrer sur des études récentes qui tendent à proposer que l'identité, et notamment l'identité sociale, pourraient être des facteurs importants du terrorisme. Certaines de ces études, ou rapports sur le terrorisme contemporain, font remarquer l'importance de la menace que les pays occidentaux prêtent à l'identité musulmane. Pour conclure et en accord avec d'autres chercheurs nous proposons un cadre d'analyse intégrateur sur un cercle vicieux de la terreur qui débute par de la peur et de la menace conduisant à la discrimination de la population Musulmane dans les pays occidentaux, produisant ainsi un terreau fertile pour le recrutement de sympathisants de la cause terroriste.

Nowadays, terrorism is mostly related by lay perceivers to international terrorism and, more generally, to violent action linked to Jihadism. Indeed, 9/11 has not only changed the world but also deeply increased the salience and threat of terrorism in Western countries. This kind of terrorism is relatively new, though really beginning in the 1980s, and is not representative of terrorist acts around the world. Domestic terrorism rooted on singular, idiosyncratic local situations is still the more deadly one. This issue, as we will see, focuses on international terrorism and provides further specification on terrorism linked to Jihadism. All conclusions must subsequently be read bearing in mind that this paper only considers these specific forms of terrorism without alluding to other forms of terrorism, such as specific terrorist acts of isolated individual (for example, Ted Kaczynski, the Unabomber, a lonely terrorist acting against the “industrial system”), or independence or separatist movements that have sometimes used terrorism (for example, Irish Republican Army – IRA – or Euskadi

ta Askatasuna – ETA) even if some psychological processes described here could fit many terrorist groups.

A short history of terrorism focusing on the last 40 years will make clearer our present object. During the second part of the last century, terrorism in Europe has spread from the extreme left (i.e. *German Rote Armee Fraktion, Brigade Rosse* in Italy) to independence movements (IRA in Ireland, ETA in France and Spain). All these forms of violent actions were local (domestic) and politically driven. At the beginning of the 1970s a new form of international terrorism emerges with the seizure of the Israeli Olympic village by *Black September* terrorists. Radical Islamic fundamentalist terrorism really became visible under its first form in the 1980's (see Post, 2005). This period, ranging from the beginning of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, was characterized by the absence of claim of responsibility, terrorists killing only for God without any interest for the media impact (see the Bombing in Paris in 1986). In the 1990s, a new form emerged that claims responsibility, used media influence and was structured on a Jihadist background. All those changes are rooted in a complex political background, sometimes even going as far as the Cold War with, for example, the American support of Afghan Islamists against USSR (for a overview of this period, see Chaliand & Blin, 2004a). Since then, United States were hit for the first time on their ground and three main attacks struck Paris, London and Madrid. International terrorism or global terrorism is therefore mostly associated to radical Islamic fundamentalists calling for Jihad and to most people directly linked to Islam and Muslims. We do not ignore here that it is a particular form of terrorism; on the contrary, this is the very reason why we believe that this issue is of very crucial importance for psychological research, be it at an individual, social or societal level of analysis, and that it undeniably constitutes a vital challenge for the future.

What terrorism is or which acts are to be qualified as terrorist is a difficult question (Cooper, 2001; Moghaddam & Marsella, 2004). Nevertheless, Moghaddam (Moghaddam & Marsella, 2004) suggests some common points to all terrorists' acts: use of violence, intention to instill fear, directed toward civilians and intended to be a means to induce changes in people's political or

social positions (p. 14). Moreover, defining terrorism is not devoid of political denotation as it implies political stances as to determining the legitimacy, or the lack of legitimacy, of a rebellion which could be characterized either as a justified revolt considering the absence of other available means or as a mere destructive movement designed to kill and produce fear (see Moghaddam & Marsella, 2004, p.13). What terrorism exactly is has also changed over time and place resulting in a complex history in which many different people have served many different goals with many different means (for a complete overview of terrorism history, see Chaliand & Blin, 2004b). Furthermore, people as lay observers have a distorted vision of what terrorism is; in this sense the difficulty to separate terrorism from war particularly illustrates this process. Passini, Palareti, and Battistelli (2009, this issue) offer an insight into people's perception and how it can influence intergroup relations by activating underlying implicit ideologies. For example, they found that "attribution of terrorism to the actions of Arabs and Palestinians against military targets are positively correlated with ethnocentrism, political collocation and trust in TV news". Montiel and Shah (2008) showed that the attribution of the terms "terrorists" or "freedom fighters" is influenced by group status, and more specifically by whether the group judging the target is socially disadvantaged or dominant. Kruglanski, Crenshaw, Post, and Victoroff (2007) explored the consequences of semantic choices on counterterrorism, talking about "counterterrorism metaphors". As Kruglanski and his colleagues noted, the way terrorism is framed and labeled implies many political and social consequences that may result in an "interaction between two communities whose conflict may breed terrorism" (p. 97). Weinstein, Frazier, and Bongar (2009, this issue) also focus on the way terrorists speech is structured depending on their target, adding evidence of the importance of lexical use on each side.

The aim of this paper is to introduce to contemporary research in the field of terrorism. This research follows two main paths led by fundamental drives: causes (both psychological and sociological) and consequences (on people, society and politics). The resolution of the causes-related problem depends on the definition we can give of the terrorist action. Consequences analyses focus on how people perceive, live with and ultimately cope with

terrorism (Silke, 2003b). This considered, the core challenge faced by researchers seems to lie in the understanding of the interaction between these sides of the problem.

The present issue covers these three questions through different entry points and theoretical backgrounds: 1) which factor can lead to choose or support terrorism; 2) how people react to terrorism and with what consequences; and as to the interaction perspective, 3) how terrorism threat shapes attitudes toward immigrants in Europe and related policies.

Psychology of terrorist and psychology of terrorism: A short overview of the theories

First theories that came out from psychology were issued from clinical psychology and psychiatry (for overviews, see McCauley & Stout, 2004; Silke, 2003a). They aimed to find elements of personality or pathologies from which a terrorist personality could arise. In this sense, psychoanalytic theory such as the frustration-aggression or narcissic failure hypotheses, have unsuccessfully tried to find a “pathology of terrorist” (for a complete review, see Horgan, 2003). Silke (1998) notes that no evidence can be found that terrorists are mentally disturbed and Post (2005) unambiguously summarizes the reject of this old idea according to which terrorists could just be mad men:

“Indeed, it is not going too far to assert that terrorists are psychologically ‘normal’ in the sense of not being clinically psychotic. They are neither depressed, severely emotionally disturbed, nor are they crazed fanatics. Indeed, terrorist groups and organizations screen out emotionally unstable individuals. They represent a security risk.” (pp. 195-196).

Other theories focus on the social causes of terrorism: poverty, education, ideology, religion, etc. Again, no strong evidence emerges from this hypothesis (for a review, see Stout, 2004).

Drawing on the same ascertainments, another and more goal-oriented conceptual distinction has been made by Kruglanski and Fishman (2006b) between terrorism apprehended as a syndrome and terrorism apprehended as a tool. They noted that historically, terrorism was a syndrome with origins firstly identified as

personal deviations and, later, as “external root causes”. They proposed that another understanding is possible by thinking about terrorist and terrorism as two separate entities, more specifically by focusing on terrorism as a means to achieve certain goals, taking a top-down perspective. Although most often a not really efficient tool, this perspective enables considering that “any social agent may become a ‘terrorist’” (p. 211) and apprehending terrorism as a social tool, not so different from others – even if morally different – which psychology can study for it lies within the scope of common psychological processes.

Psychology of terrorist does not exist: it is only a common psychology or a psychology of common people related to a societal object called terrorism and where “terrorism *as such* represents a psychologically coherent concept” as Kruglanski and Fishman (2006a) put it. More interesting then is the psychology of terrorism as a tool to reach political, social and psychological goals. In addition, terrorist’s psychological structure is embedded within the terrorism psychology, i.e., which psychological goals could be served by being part of a terrorist movement or believing that terrorism is a good means for political action.

Because terrorism *per se* seems not to be a rational means to achieve political ends (Abrahms, 2008), psychologists can propose other hypotheses as to why people still get involved in violent acts, bearing in mind that political and economical factors also play a role in terrorism. Psychology of terrorist relies on how individuals can at some points of their life choose terrorism as a way to express their ideology, their opinion or their struggle. Psychology of terrorism discusses the social psychological variables that underlie the terrorism phenomenon and the consequences of terrorist acts for people and political opinions. The two sides of the coin are undoubtedly very much linked but we think that difference is relevant to better understand research on terrorism.

How people slither from common political struggle to terrorism

Even if terrorists are not mad men, still some men or women choose to be terrorist and other do not, whichever their environment. Some psychological factors should then be at play in the path to violence. Deschesne (2009, this issue) explores possible psychological factors that could explain how people slip from struggle into violence. More precisely, by experimentally assessing some findings on terrorism and youth violence bounds (Even-Chen & Itzhaky, 2007), Deschesne examines the relation between personal experience and the link between struggle and violence. Interestingly, no definitive evidence that personal history or internal psychological factors are the best explaining factors for terrorism emerges from this analysis. It seems, as far as we know, that such factors can only be complementary motives that explain singular acts and therefore that are of no relevance to explain how terrorism can find terrorists on a larger scale.

Existential motives

Terrorism could not only rely on specific psychological processes but on shared psychological processes, like suggested by Motyl and Pyszczynski (2009, this issue). They point out that fear of dying could be one of the driving factors of terrorism because one consequence of making mortality salient is the defense of one's own worldview against the source of the threat, i.e., against the group to which the terrorist belongs. Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon (1997) proposed the Terror Management Theory to explain some behaviors and cognitions in light of the existential fear of dying. Facing the terror of the idea of our death, we reinforce the definition of our worldview and strongly defend the values it promotes (Greenberg et al., 1990; Rosenblatt, Greenberg, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Lyon, 1989) even with aggression (McGregor et al., 1998). Doing this, we also increase our self-esteem, positively related to our worldview, to counter the feeling of being mortal (Harmon-Jones et al., 1997). More recently, research has shown the effect of attachment as another possible buffer (Cox, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Abdollahi, & Solomon,

2008; Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005; Weise et al., 2008). Schimel et al. (1999) found that mortality salience increases the disliking of non-stereotypical others, i.e., of the outgroup. More specifically, Das and her colleagues (Das, Bushman, Bezemer, Kerkhof, & Vermeulen, 2009) have also given some evidence that media depiction of terrorism results in an increase of prejudice against outgroups due to terror management processes. This theory posits that we defend our own worldview, i.e., a part of our social identity, as well as our self-esteem as buffers against the fear of death. As previously mentioned this may lead to derogating outgroups in order to maintain a positive identity and protect one's own worldview.

Kruglanski, Chen, Dechesne, Fishman and Orehek (2009; see also Kruglanski & Fishman, 2006a) also suggested that motives for suicidal bombing should be understood within a personal significance framework. Kruglanski and his colleagues built a conception suggesting an integrated approach to motives for becoming a terrorist. According to this model, individuals are searching for meaning and sense to their life and commitment into very tied groups like terrorist organizations fills this need of being part of something, making worth their living and eventually serving as a buffer against personal trauma.

The pathways to terrorism

Finally, as soon as we accept the idea that terrorist functioning is “normal” and not pathological, that they are not just mad men, but men like others, as ideologically complex and multisided than other people, that there are not simply seeking personal vengeance, nor wanting to commit suicide, and also that terrorism is not a “syndrome” of which causes lie in poverty or poor education, and that the means used in terrorism are not so different from some war means, we can deconstruct the concept of terrorism and ask how psychology can explain the choice of violence, being a terrorist being not an explanation any more, neither terrorism being a particular entity that follows different rules from other social objects (Victoroff, 2005). The next step is to try to understand what makes some people share terrorist ideology and sometimes join terrorist groups, last step in the

“staircase to terrorism” suggested by Moghaddam (2006; 2007). More socio-psychologically driven, three main models are the ziggurat of zealotry, the already mentioned staircase of terrorism described by Moghaddam (2007), McCauley’s Pyramidal model (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2008) and the ziggurat of zealotry mentioned by Dechesne (2009, this issue). The process described by all models is a slow one, starting with an easy social or political commitment to end with a full commitment to an extreme ideology. This recruitment pathway has been clearly described in online strategy of terrorist groups who always begin interactions with recruits with a non-violent, social identity salient, and safe relation (Guadagno, Lankford, Muscanell, Okdie, & McCallum, 2010, this issue). The underlying question is to understand the path from commitment and struggle to violence, i.e., how people in general and of course potential terrorists, go one step further, switching from peaceful struggle to violent actions.

All the three models are very similar in the sense that they imply several levels at the end of which one will finally form a part of a terrorist movement. Even the ideological or religious dimension of terrorist motives remain complex. As noted by Esposito and Mogahed (2008), Muslims claims are often related to their identity in a complex and changing world, and their worldview sometimes matches the anti-globalization perspective and attitudes (for the reject of occidental neo-liberal value and an all-american model, see Arkoun, 2006; and more specifically, Barber, 2003; Frégosi, 2006). Such an ideology is therefore not so far from some other anti-globalization groups, the difference being that other factors direct the actions that are used. Religion does not provide either a so clear explanation, and in-depth interviews carried out by Stern (2003) have revealed the complexity of the relation between creeds and terrorism, concluding that “terrorism we are fighting is a seductive idea, not as military target”, and that the reason found to fight is because “international institutions like the IMF, the World Bank and the United Nation are imposing capitalism and secular ideas” (p.283). In light of those studies the ideological background for terrorism becomes more subtle and more politically intricate, far away from the “axis of evil” used as a general label to mark out a socially easy to understand target.

What so different then from what was described for hate groups in America? Young men, seeking answers and friendship, are recruited by hate groups. Researchers, mostly through ethnographical studies, have brought to light two underlying motives for joining hate groups, mainly search for affiliation, friendship and social bounds, and search for meaning and answers in life (Aho, 1990; Blee, 2002; Ezekiel, 1995), and excluded other factors like poverty or pathology. Even the idea that Western societies are morally declining looks the same, only the chosen enemy is different. The studies on terrorism we reported show indeed very similar motives, adding evidence that terrorism is a group phenomenon in the psychological sense, based on processes very similar to other group forming.

Consequences of terrorism

Consequences of terrorism spread on several levels. On the individual level, we question the impact of being confronted to terrorist acts. Research often rises from countries in which such violent acts are frequent and interfere in everyday life; as it is not our purpose here, we will not go into more details. On the social level, we can deal with two main issues: how international terrorism perception influences the way we see people that are related to terrorism and what its consequences on political choices are. The main idea developed here is that fears and threats created by terrorism can be attributed to Muslims as a group, or Arabs (people often make no or almost no difference between these two labels; see Morales-Marente, Moya, Palacios, & Willis, 2009, this issue) and may result in derogating Muslims in general. For example, just after 9/11, observers noted an increase of stereotype thought as well as violent acts against North Africans and Muslims (Breslau, 2001; Human Rights Watch, 2002). Oswald (2005) showed that personal fear of terrorism is directly related to anti Arabs prejudice. Indeed, if some outgroup derogation is powered by terrorism, Muslims in European countries (as well as in the United States) will be the first target of this derogation. Moreover, threat and fear of terrorism have been proven to be factors for which people tend to wish that “them”, i.e., Arabs and/

or Muslims, should go away from their country (Skitka, Bauman, Aramovich, & Morgan, 2006).

Going back to a general level, it seems quite natural for humans to stick to the group in front of a threat, mainly because they suddenly have a super ordinate goal as labeled by Sherif (1958) which is to make the threat disappear. Some studies also show increases in group cohesiveness in case of threat (Mulder & Stemerding, 1963; Pepitone & Kleiner, 1957). This cohesiveness makes also salient ingroup and outgroup relations, reactivating what characterizes individuals' group and therefore possibly increasing the ingroup bias (Dion, 1973). More recently, some authors showed that sticking to one's group is a rational behavior to fight a threat (for example, Baumeister & Leary, 1995) or, within TMT framework, that people are more willing to engage in social interactions when facing death threat (Taubman-Ben-Ari, Findler, & Mikulincer, 2002). On a political level, Huddy, Feldman, and Weber (2006) showed the importance of attachment (and need for security) in political attitudes using terrorism as a threat. In circumstances of terrorism threat, people tend to focus on their ingroup and to be more willing to exclude the outgroup. This process could in turn be a threat to the outgroup identity, and even more if this group is a minority already with a bad stereotype. We can argue that restoring their identity could be one major motive for people to join terrorist groups or for having sympathy for them. Pyszczynski, Solomon, and Greenberg applied their theory to 9/11 aftermath (2003) to propose an overview of the consequences mortality salience could have on behavior, attitudes and political choices. They described how people increased their feeling of being Americans and sharing similar values, increased their stereotyping (particularly on Muslims and North Africans) and also their bigotry. With the feeling of threat, people generally seem to undergo an increase in national identity that may foster anti-immigrant attitudes as well as support for coercive political options (Huddy, Feldman, Capelos, & Provost, 2002; Henderson-King, Henderson-King, & Hathaway, 2009, this issue).

As mentioned before, terrorist acts induce the potential of an uncontrollable and violent death, which creates a possibly overwhel-

ming situation of threat. As pointed out by Jost, Napier, Thorisdottir, Gosling, Palfai, and Ostafin (2007), there is undoubtedly a strong correlation between fear of death and system threat in terrorist acts (see note 1, p. 1005) but the link between what a threat produces and what the consequences of mortality salience are remains unclear and discussed between mortality salience researchers and others. Mortality salience appears also when participants are reminded of terrorist acts (Landau et al., 2004, Study 2) in a very similar manner as the usual prime. Besides, mortality salience can be used as a deep threat induction like proposed by Lavine, Lodge, and Freitas (2005). Moreover, based on the Integrated Threat Theory (Stephan & Stephan, 2000), when a group of immigrants is perceived as a potential real or symbolic threat, people tend to judge them more negatively (Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan, & Martin, 2005). Doosje, Zimmermann, Küper, Zick, and Meertens (2009, this issue) also showed that perception of terrorism threat leads both to outgroup derogation and to the choice of anti-immigration policies.

Dumont, Yzerbyt, Wigboldus, and Gordijn (2003) showed making people believe that they belong to the same group as Americans after 9/11 increased their feeling of threat and related behaviors. American themselves were more willing to support George W. Bush after being reminded of their mortality or of 9/11 (Landau et al., 2004). In the same vein, when confronted to terrorism, people tend to look at a controlled society through system justification, increasing their belief that every group deserves its place in society (Ullrich & Cohrs, 2007); this fills the same function as the ingroup bias and worldview defense, that is coping with threat (Jost, Hunyady, Stroebe, & Hewstone, 2002). Exposure to terrorism may also have a direct relation with the derogation of the target outgroup (Canetti-Nisim, Halperin, Sharvit, & Hobfoll, 2009). Recent findings (Bassett, 2010) also show a similar trend that mortality salience has a direct link with illegal immigrants derogation, these being less liked in the mortality salience condition. Only the priming with tolerance as a core value in a mortality salience condition can result in less reject of the outgroup (Greenberg, Simon, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Chatel, 1992, Study 1), although reminding that tolerance is part of their worldview also results in less derogation of the outgroup (Study 2).

Moreover, threat tends to produce an homogenization of the threatening group (see for example Corneille, Yzerbyt, Rogier, & Buidin, 2001; Rothgerber, 1997), and an attribution of terrorism responsibility to the out-group in general (for example the Islamic world; see Doosje, Zebel, Scheermeijer, & Mathyi, 2007). For this reason, Muslims are considered on the whole as a threat and tend to trigger aggressive prejudices against them. Fischer, Greitemeyer, and Kastenmüller (2007) have shown that German participants of their study tend to find Muslims “more religious, more aggressive, more strongly identified with their religion and more accepting of terrorism than Christians” (p.376). As an experimental evidence of Muslim derogation through simple symbols of their identity, i.e., the “turban”, Unkelbach and his colleagues showed, using the “shooter paradigm” drawn from Payne and his colleagues (Payne, 2001; Payne, Lambert, & Jacoby, 2002), that people tend to shoot more often on targets wearing these symbolic clothes (Unkelbach, Forgas, & Denson, 2008; Unkelbach, Goldenberg, Müller, Sobbe, & Spannaus, 2009, this issue).

As a consequence of the ingroup bias, threat and, specifically, threat of having no control over a situation – which is the basis of terrorists acts (Sullivan, Landau, & Rothschild, 2010) – lead afterwards to the search of an enemy that can endorse responsibility for the threat. The feeling of control loss has been described as a possible more general process underlying the mortality salience effect (Fritsche, Jonas, & Fankhänel, 2008) that increase personal uncertainties or uncertainty perception (McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001; van den Bos, Poortvliet, Maas, Miedema, & van den Ham, 2005). Personal threat is also a factor in judging either hawk or doves Muslims, people being in a situation of less personal control judging more negatively outgroup doves, in this case, Muslims who do not support terrorism (Fritsche, Koranyi, Beyer, Jonas, & Fleischmann, 2009, this issue). A low perceived control may also result in attribution of more power or influence to an enemy (Sullivan et al., 2010), possibly increasing the “us vs. them” statement or making easier the acceptance of a “war of terror” as a “conceptual construction” (Kruglanski et al., 2007)

Some individuals’ attitudes or perceptions may also influence the judgment of the outgroup. While Bar-Tal offered relevant insights

to help understand why fear seems to be overwhelming hope within a conflict involving many terrorist acts (Bar-Tal, 2001; Bar-Tal, & Vertzberger, 1997; Bar-Tal, Zafran, & Almog, 2000; Jarymowicz & Bar-Tal, 2006), Morales-Marente and colleagues (2009, this issue) identified the effect of Social Dominance Orientation (Pratto, Lemieux, Glasford, & Henry, 2003; Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), political opinions, and perception of hopes and fear on the judgment of the outgroup. Authoritarianism can also interact with terrorism threat to induce more coercive policies and support for war (Cohrs, Kielmann, Maes, & Moschner, 2005; Cohrs, Maes, Moschner, & Kielmann, 2003) as well as derogation of the outgroup perceived as accountable for terrorism, Arabs in this case, but also other unrelated groups like Jews (Echebarria-Echabe & Fernandez-Guede, 2006).

Finally, terrorism could, even partially, grow on the ground of “terrible group relations” to borrow a title from Victoroff (in press). Fabick (2004) believes that one of the possibilities for an effective counterterrorism strategy is to change the usual discrimination process based on a “us vs. them” statement, also suggesting that social identity and outgroup derogation may be a breeding ground for terrorism.

Threat and Social identity: A terror-identity vicious circle?

As Post (2005) wrote, we believe that “it is not individual psychology, but group, organizational and social psychology, with a particular emphasis on ‘collective identity’, that provides the most powerful lens to understand terrorist psychology and behavior” (p. 196). Abrahms (2008) noted that international terrorism was not an effective strategy to achieve political goals, suggesting though that on the other hand, it was quite effective as a response to social solidarity needs. In the same vein, the Putnam theory of social capital (Putnam, 2000) suggested that in some populations, being part of a terrorist movement fills a hole in the social environment. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) could be one major hypothesis explaining some choices of violence. It posits that one part of people’s self

“derives from their membership in social group (or groups)” (Tajfel, 1981). Links between Social Identity Theory, self-esteem and the ingroup bias have been largely discussed (for a review, see Hogg & Abrams, 1990). Others see in social identity a way of going beyond the notion of “war to terrorism” (Kruglanski, Crenshaw, Post, & Victoroff, 2008) or a promising and challenging investigation path when joined to TMT (Niesta, Fritsche, & Jonas, 2008).

The building of a social network as part of an identity structure is the main thesis of Sageman (2004). Where lies the cause of terrorism can therefore be found in group membership as shown by Doosje et al. (2007). McCauley and Moskaleiko (2008) stressed the importance of threat perception and group identity as core factors that can explain the choice of violent struggle. Smith (2008) studied terrorist documents and found that they often reported needs of affiliation, and search of a group to belong to. This need to belong is even stronger when group ideology becomes more extreme (Post, 1987). Tausch, Spears, and Christ (2009, this issue) show that British Muslims may react differently to terrorism when different identities are made salient to them (i.e., different national and religious identities), suggesting that alternative social identities may lessen sympathy to terrorists. Nevertheless, one of the goals that seems fulfilled by terrorism sympathy is social bounds. Social affiliation is described by Sageman (2004) as a major issue in joining the Jihad. Sageman rejects the idea of systematical brainwashing of believers in Mosque and argue that “social bonds predating formal recruitment into the Jihad” (p. 115). He suggests that there are “bunch of guys” that joined to find social bounds and that they will first encounter extremist ideas and only find terrorism if at a certain point they find an entry point into a terrorist group.

Potential terrorists would be driven to violence by a deep negative identity that undergoes within the social structure of the group (social capital hypothesis; Putnam, 2000) and produces negative emotions that could lead to a lethal coping strategy. That could be particularly true for immigrants populations in Europe that are, for the observers, a recruiting ground for most of the terrorists linked to international Jihadism. Post and Sheffer

(2007) report that “it is estimated that some 80 percent of new recruits to the global Salafi Jihad are children and grandchildren of Muslim emigrants who have felt alienated from their host cultures” (p. 101). This point is also noted by Taarnby (2005) in a report on Jihadist recruitment in Europe. He focused on European groups and found that the recruitment of potential Jihadists often begins with a search for an identity and a collective identity within groups of young men. Drawing on similar yet non identical theoretical backgrounds, Smith (2008) notes that in a various number of terrorist groups, the affiliation motives are very strong. Social identity is strongly related to group memberships that are positively perceived. Therefore, if some young people “missed the community of their friends and family” (Sageman, 2004), they will seek a new community able to help them in creating new social networks and more social capital as would say Putnam (2000). Furthermore, the strong collective identity provided by terrorists groups seems to answer the needs of some people experiencing a certain lack of identity and meanings in their life (Taylor & Louis, 2004)

Following terrorist acts, people present both a strong will to protect themselves and a desire for knowing who is accountable for what happened, this situation resulting in more stereotyping and rejection of the North African and Muslims groups (Staub, 2007). The first people that could be derogated will be the immigrants as they are still in the integration process and especially salient. Within the German population Muslims are perceived as more supporting terrorism than Christian although self-report do not reveal any difference (Fischer et al., 2007). Muslims as a social group seem to have suffered from terrorist acts of a very small part of it and are now seen as potential terrorists and more religiously fanatic than in other religion; yet this does not match the facts as pointed out by Esposito and Mogahed (2008).

This question relies on what we can call the social identity hypothesis and we will refer here to the terror vicious circle that happened mostly in European countries because of their large Muslim communities. Overall terrorism generates an increased hatred against Muslims from the local population, increasing stereotyping and derogation that in return produce a turning

towards the Muslim identity. This offers the possibility for religious and political leaders to make Jihad a component of this Muslim identity along with the rejection of all occidental values. It must remain clear that this is *not* a systematic and automatic process but is a non-negligible possibility.

Conclusion

We have mainly focused here on international terrorism because of the threat for the world peace. We believe that psychological processes described in this review can still be applied to domestic terrorism even if motives, methods and people can be very different. We do not ignore the particular political context on which breeds each form of terrorism, only do we focus on some psychological processes that allow the switch between personal meanings, social and political commitments and terrorism.

As acknowledged by all researchers, terrorism is indeed a very complicated social object to study. As Doise (1986) put it, several levels of analysis are required to understand social objects, from intra-personal to ideological levels, and through both inter-personal and positional levels. But we also have to study terrorism like all other complex social objects, by exploring the underlying processes ranging from individual to social and societal issues, all being deeply interconnected. In this case, some evidence tends to show that some individuals are more inclined to go into violence because of psychological traits or of a particular history while other studies show that on a social level, identity and political decisions can also built the ground for terrorist act.

We suggested, along with numbers of scholars (for example, Arciszewski & Verliac, 2007; Fritsche et al., 2008; Motyl & Pyszczynski, 2009, this issue; Taarnby, 2005) that the situation of Muslim immigrants is linked to the perception of terrorism threat and therefore related to Muslim identities in Western countries. These relations create the basis for a vicious circle of terror. In fact, Muslim are threatened in their identity and following the same processes already described, enhance their ingroup value, even going to extremes, to be able to cope with this threat. As described a long time ago by Allport (1954/1979) in his ground-

breaking book, going back to the basis of prejudice reduction could certainly be one of the strong means to lower the efficiency of terrorist recruitments.

This problem of identity is very vivid as we can easily observe with the discussion on law projects on Burqa in France and Belgium, the law against Mosque's minaret in Switzerland in 2009 and the recent issue of Muslim Hijab at school in Spain (del Barrio, 2010). This situation, a "us *vs.* them" statement, may end as an intractable conflict as described by Bar-Tal (1998, 2000), each side or group perceiving the other as a threat in an endless and dangerous circle. The problem of terrorism is therefore embedded in a complex social and political trade-off that has still to be resolved and on which many works and actions have to be done, promoting, like suggested by Motyl and Pyszczynski (2009, this issue), "a sense of our shared humanity". Moreover, politicians may find some interest in using fears and threat to implement "risk-reduction policies with little regard to countervailing dangers" or to distract people from other more risky problems (Stern, 2004), possibly using emotions to increase those fears and threat (Mandel & Vartanian, 2010, this issue). The melting of psychological, social and political aspect of terrorism thus creates a challenging agenda for research as well as a puzzling issue for counter-terrorism actions.

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