

[Sociological Analysis of Terrorism and its Core Causes]

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Abstract:

The objective of this study is to sociologically investigate the phenomenon of terrorism and its core causes. The first section is mainly devoted to the long-debated question of what terrorism is. The following sections concentrate on critically assessing the core causes of terrorism. Individual physiology and will be explored, followed by a delineation of the structural causes of terrorism—mainly economic conditions and poverty. The study employs a methodology based on secondary data and applies the sociological imagination to highlight gaps and weaknesses in the literature.

Key words: Terrorism, Radicalisation, Structural theory, Sociological imagination.

[التحليل الاجتماعي للإرهاب وأسبابه الأساسية]

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة ظاهرة الإرهاب وأسبابها الأساسية من الناحية الاجتماعية. القسم الأول مخصص بشكل أساسي للسؤال الذي طال النقاش حول ماهية الإرهاب. تركز الأقسام التالية على التقييم النقدي للأسباب الأساسية للإرهاب. وسيتم استكشاف علم وظائف الأعضاء الفردية، يليه تحديد الأسباب الهيكلية للإرهاب - الظروف الاقتصادية والفقر بشكل رئيسي. تستخدم الدراسة منهجية تعتمد على البيانات الثانوية وتطبق الخيال السوسيولوجي لتسليط الضوء على الفجوات ونقاط الضعف في الأدبيات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإرهاب، التطرف، النظرية البنوية، الخيال السوسيولوجي.

Introduction:

Since its emergence in the nineteenth century, sociology has been directed at investigating why social phenomena exist (Sawyer, 2002). Searching for the causes of social phenomena was introduced by the founding father of sociology, Emile Durkheim (Smelser, 2006). Durkheim believed that ‘A given effect always has a single corresponding cause’ (Cited in Smelser, 2006: p.1). However, critics have challenged Durkheim’s proposal of a single cause to explain social phenomena (Smelser, 2007). Many social phenomena, such as terrorism, can be best understood by investigating the multiplicity of causes that led to them. According to Crenshaw (1981), research on terrorism is structured to address three key questions: ‘why terrorism occurs, how the process of terrorism works, and what its social and political effects are’ (Crenshaw, 1981: p.379). This study aims to address these questions by examining the nature of what causes terrorism and attempting to address why such acts occur. Investigating the root causes of terrorism requires critically analysing the causal relationship between psychological, social, economic, political and demographic elements and the occurrence of radical terror activities (Musgrave, 2015). Terror attacks occur for a wide range of reasons, such as supporting an ideology, achieving political change or nationalism (Greer and Bell, 2017). According to Musgrave (2015), there are a number of factors highlighted as the main root causes of terrorism, including poverty, social inequality, exclusion and psychological elements that are seen in the ‘new wave’ of religious terrorism.

However, one might claim that the discussion of terrorism is an insignificant task. The number of people who tragically died in the World Trade Centre attack on 11 September 2001 to half the year of 2017, with the 7/7 London attack and Manchester arena bombing included, is five people per year (Greer and Bell, 2017). Compared to other causes of death in the UK, for example, car accidents, the number is significantly higher at 2,500 deaths annually (Greer and Bell, 2017). Nevertheless, despite what the figures show, terrorism is the most dangerous social phenomenon, and it requires wide investigation. Researching the nature of terrorism and its causes is fundamental for a number of reasons. Terrorism is a significant issue as it has extensive implications for many sectors of life, include damaging the sense of security in public spaces, threatening social institutions, taking the lives of innocent people and weakening community relations (Greer and Bell, 2017). Similarly, Mesquita (2008) argues that terrorism has high costs from damaging various infrastructures and wasting tax money to pay to the victims’ families (P.5).

There are a number of rationalities in the analytical study of terrorism, mainly the investigation of its root causes. Critically understanding why terror attacks occur might have a positive relationship with addressing the factors that lead to such acts (Musgrave, 2015). By addressing the root causes that drive someone to radicalisation, it may become easier to understand why terrorists conduct their acts, and the process of predicting and eliminating the threat before it flourishes becomes accessible (Mugrave, 2015). Critics (Crenshaw, 1981; Ross, 1993; Musgrave, 2015) illustrate the increased need for literature that analytically investigates the root causes of terrorism as most studies are descriptive in nature. Similarly, there are widely diverse root causes of terrorism that demand extensive exploration.

However, Newman (2006) states that the 'root causes can never form the whole picture' (Newman, 2006, p. 756). The attempt to categorise terrorism and its root causes is problematic and challenging. The difficulty of classifying certain root causes of terrorism begins with the enduring academic debate of what constitutes terrorism (Musgrave, 2015). Therefore, the first section of this study will be devoted to addressing the question of what terrorism is. The next section will highlight the physiological causes of terrorism mainly examine the issue of radicalisation. Finally, the structural factors of terrorism will be discussed primarily poverty.

Section 1: The definition of terrorism

This section is an attempt to investigate the long-debated question of what terrorism is. When thinking of the word 'terrorism', the first thing to cross many minds is a picture of the events of 9/11 and the Twin Towers on fire. Other events and images include the events of 7/7, suicide bombers, plane hijackings and the killing of many innocent civilians. What is puzzling here is how we can all distinguish what terrorism look like very easily when we see it in the news. However, when attempting to define the concept, it become very problematic, and most terrorism studies, even those from the United Nations, fail to come up with an agreed-upon definition. Even after trying to define terrorism, terrorism studies may be affected by the biases that exist in academia. For example, most terrorism studies are largely funded by governments and state institutions, which makes research teams lean towards government concerns and support for state agendas (Silk, 2006; Musgrave, 2015). However, defining terrorism is a crucial first step: after comprehensively elucidating the meaning of the social phenomenon, the root causes of why young individuals go down the path of terrorism and radicalisation can be fully investigated.

The definition of terrorism has been widely debated by academics, policy makers and governments due to its ambiguity and complexity (Beck and Miner, 2013). Uncountable publications have been mainly devoted to defining the concept of terrorism (Beck and Miner, 2013). According to Perry (2004), terrorism has over 22 different definitions introduced by the American government alone. Some authors (Bergesen, 2007; Goodwin, 2006; Tilly, 2004) have identified terrorism by investigating similarities in the actions and targets of terrorist organisations. Critics of this method state that it is a crucial step to define terrorism after categorising who is considered a terrorist actor first (Gibbs, 1989; Lizardo, 2008). According to Hoffman (2006), terrorism occurs everywhere and is conducted by everyone: individuals, organisations and states.

Historically, for over two thousand years, terrorism has been used by state and political actors to obtain their desired objectives (Gibbs, 1989; Bergesen and Lizardo, 2004). The term ‘terror’ was first introduced to Western political vocabularies during the French revolution, specifically in 1793-94 (Garrison, 2004). Modern terrorism is believed to have begun with the Reign of Terror during the French revolution in the eighteenth century (Bergesen and Lizardo, 2004). During the Reign of Terror, it is estimated that more than 17,000 people were legally executed, while illegal executions are estimated to be over 23,000 individuals (Garrison, 2004). Maximilien Robespierre, the father of modern terrorism, justified the use of terror during the French revolution by stating in 1794 that ‘Terror is vital’ and ‘Terror is nothing other than justice’ (Cited in Garrison, 2004: p.260).

To achieve their required justice, Robespierre and the Jacobins, the most famous revolutionary political club during the French revolution, believed that terrorism was a crucial tool for building a nation-state. French revolutionaries identified terror as a valuable method for changing society that ought to be used to fight tyrants and any form of oppression or injustice to ultimately achieve a utopian society. Terrorism is defined by Hoffman (1998) as ‘the deliberate creation and exploitation of fear through violence or the threat of violence in the pursuit of political change’ (p.43). Under this definition, terrorism is believed to be a state-organised strategy invented by powerful state actors to attain their political and ideological goals by applying force and violence (Mayer, 2000; Tilly, 2004).

Most terrorism studies are disproportionately concentrated on non-state terrorism, even though the state first began using terror for its own benefits (Ramsay, 2015; Jackson, 2008). Ramsay (2015) argues that the state identifies itself as a legitimate actor that has the complete right to apply force and violence as

it has a rational reason to do so. Meanwhile, if human agents are involved in such activities, most explanations would declare that they are mentally damaged or insane. What makes some forms of terrorism and political violence acceptable and other not? How are ‘death squads’ and the strategic bombing of civilians lawful if they are performed by state actors that are not thought to be deviant or mad (Ramsay, 2015)? When illustrating examples throughout history, a legitimate state is the one who killed 6 million Jews, and another legitimate state is one that dropped two atomic bombs on Japanese cities when the war was clearly heading to an end (Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005). A contemporary example of the use of terror by nation-states is highlighted in the Iraq war and the targeted bombing of civilian areas to psychologically impact them and destroy their infrastructure (Ramsay, 2015).

Critics argue from sociological point of view that terrorism has been socially constructed and mediated by powerful governments as a form of threats and deviance for the purpose of social control and hegemony (Beck and Miner, 2013; Deflem, 2004; Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005). Hegemonizing language, culture and politics by creating common national symbols, memories and myths through various channels, including education and mass media, is one of the main processes of nation-state building (Smelser, 2007). For example, the American war on terror is argued to be a controlling tool that has hidden agendas, such as maintaining and spreading American hegemony (Johnson, 2007; Wallerstein, 2004). Therefore, the language and symbols of terrorism and the classification of so-called terrorists is manipulated by the state and the mass media to achieve the state’s strategic and ideological interests (Guild, 2008; Jackson, 2005; Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005; Pokalova, 2010).

The identification of who is considered to be a terrorist actor is constructed by governments and the media (Sayyid, 2010; Pokalova, 2010; Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005). Mass media and political actors play a major role in generating a climate of fear that produces a fictional enemy of certain groups, for example, the Muslim population. The media’s role in shaping public opinions of terrorism is substantial as more than 70% of Western populations state that they learn about Islam and Muslims from the media (Allen, 2012). Literature (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Bowling and Phillips, 2007) states that the construction of the Muslim population in the West as a risk and a potential terrorist is mainly driven by the negative coverage of Western media. Following the events of 9/11, the news related to the Muslim population increased in the Western media by 270% (Allen, 2012). Most news and stories are directed to the description of the Muslim population in the West as a threat and a risk to Western identity (Kaplan, 2006). Some authors (Jackson, 2011; Allen, 2012) have pointed out that the concept of terrorism has

been introduced by powerful actors, namely the state, to gather public attention to violence activities conducted by organisations that hold opposites values to them. As Weinberg (2005) puts it, 'it is clear that so-called terrorism is the logical and just resistance of the people against state terrorism, capitalism, racism, sexism and imperialism' (p.1).

Victims subjected to forms of injustice are classified as perpetrators by government officials who use the term 'terrorism' as a semantic technique to conceal the cruelty of the state's actions. Along the same lines, the label of terrorism is applied by the state to discredit the actions of people who uses violence to transform unequal social structures such as capitalism, racism and imperialism (Weinberg and Eubank, 2008). According to Beck and Miner (2013), the designation of individuals and organisations as terrorist is influenced by the relationship between the government and the home countries of those organisations.

Likewise, the classification of terrorism is affected by the profiles and ideologies of violent organisations, which leads to some groups being viewed as more terrorist than others (Beck and Miner, 2013). For example, the American government's designation of terrorism shows that Islamic organisations are 2.5 times more likely to be classified as terrorist compared to far-right and leftist organisations (Beck and Miner, 2013). As a result, it become 'common sense' to associate most terror activities with Islamic radicalism. The 'common sense' principle in the identification of terrorist actors is highly associated to the Gramscian analysis of the concept of hegemony or 'war of positions' (Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005). Hegemony or 'war of positions' is defined as a social process that shapes and constructs identity by powerful actors who control the modes of production and imposing cultural means of how the world is viewed (Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005). The construction of the meaning of the social world is shaped by several societal channels and institutions, including mass media, education and the church. For instance, following an explosion at the Oklahoma City Federal Building that was perpetrated by far-right actors, the state and media reports immediately linked the attack to Islamic fundamentalists (Oliverio and Lauderdale, 2005).

It has been illustrated that the designation of terrorism in the United Kingdom and the European Union are highly dependent on the United States' vision of who is categorised as a terrorist (Beck and Miner, 2013). Consequently, the hegemonic process of identifying Muslims as radical and fundamentalist is seen in most Western democratic countries (Fekete, 2004; Jackson, 2011). Muslim youth are viewed as the enemy within this criminalised community that often is associated with terrorism (Dwyer et al.,

2008). Following the shocking events of 7/7, the United Kingdom increased the perceived threat of Islamic radicalisation from strategic danger to a threat to values, freedom and the British way of life (Fekete, 2004; Jackson, 2011). This led to the implementation of number of policies and strategies aiming to prevent the radicalisation of British Muslim youth as radicalisation has been identified as one of the key causes of the new wave of terrorism (Awan, 2012; Jackson, 2011; Kundnani, 2012).

Section 2: Radicalisation and the individual causes of terrorism

The aftermath of 9/11 yielded extensive research on terrorism, its causes and practices to counter terrorism (Coppock and McGovern, 2014). To understand the nature of terrorism and its causes, many government-funded programmes staffed by advisers, analysts and scholars have emerged (Kundnani, 2012). Widespread terrorism studies have been mainly focused on terrorism and investigating its causes from the state's perspective. There are studies (Breen-Smyth, 2009; Jackson, 2011; Miller and Mills, 2009) to suggest that most scholars of terrorism have a collaborative relationship with the state and counterterrorism agencies. As Miller and Mills (2009) argues, terrorism studies often suppress the fact that they are sponsored by the state, its agencies and military services. The emergence of the academic treatment of terrorism itself is believed to be politically motivated by Western governments to justify their actions (Jackson, 2009). Terrorism studies provide moral legitimisation of the state's ill-treatment of individuals and groups, including foreign invasions, the use of torture, internment camps and invasions of civil liberty (Jackson, 2009). Similarly, Miller and Mills (2009) argues that the extensive studies of terrorism prior to 9/11 were used as a central strategy that served US power and justified its intervention under the umbrella of the 'war on terror'.

Moreover, one of the core goals of terrorism studies sponsored by the state is to provide a valuable scientific basis to examine the root causes of terrorism. Assessing the main causes of terrorism refers to the process of scientifically investigating causality in the relationship between political, economic, demographic and social factors and terror activities (Musgrave, 2015). Other causal factors of terrorism include economic hardship, social inequality, exclusion, state failure and religious radicalism that are shown in the new wave of terrorism (Crenshaw, 1981; Ross, 1993; Musgrave, 2015).

The new wave of terrorism is designated as the political form of terrorism driven by Islamic ideologies. Compared to the old wave of terrorism that was motivated by communism, fascism and nationalism, the new wave is claimed to be more violent and evil (Kundnani, 2012). Western governments acknowledge

the new wave as a significantly dangerous form of terrorism as it is based on ideological motivation rather than political and economic conditions (Kundnani, 2012). Critics argue that ideology is not the main driver of the new wave of terrorism (Kundnani, 2012). Other social and political factors play a major role in the emergence of the new wave of Islamic activism, including the conflict of Palestine and Israel, the Iraq and Afghanistan war and the war on terror.

Furthermore, most academic studies that investigate the causes of the new wave of terrorism driven by religious extremism are directed at examining the social, cultural and psychological aspects that constitute the mindset of terrorist actors rather than the wider conditions influencing them (Kundnani, 2012). Critics argue that the exclusive focus on the micro-process driven by individualistic elements of social, cultural and psychological factors as the direct causes of terrorism instead of measuring the macro-structural context of wider political settings of terrorism acts provides rational scientific justification for state policy to view some groups, especially Muslims, as indicators of risk and radicalisation (Moghaddam, 2005; Sageman, 2008; Wiktorowicz, 2005). A disproportionate number of terrorism studies have leaned towards the explanation of terrorism as caused by personal psychological abnormalities as well as religious and ideological extremism, referred to as the process of radicalisation (Jackson, 2009). To eradicate Islamic fundamentalism and save Western values and ideologies, the use of complete force and surveillance has been justified by scientists who investigate terrorism. Social science has provided the required knowledge that is beneficial for government and political actors to increase securitisation of Muslim individuals categorised as risky (Jackson, 2009).

Radicalisation's use in the academic literature prior to 2001 was limited and informal, and descriptions of political radicalism in general were not exclusively linked to Muslims (Kundnani, 2012). Three years after the 9/11 attack, radicalisation had become mainly a description of Muslims and served as an explanatory idea of the core causes of the new wave of terrorism. Radicalisation is a problematic term, and a number of criticisms have been levelled against it. One of the key arguments against the concept of radicalisation is the vagueness that surrounds the meaning of the term (Richards, 2011). Some critics (Hoskins and O'Loughlin, 2007) argue that radicalisation is a mythical term invented by the media and state security agencies to spread propaganda that legitimises policies of securitisation. While the argument of radicalisation as a myth is interesting and persuasive, it is not the main purpose of this study. Radicalisation will be defined for this research simply as the process of becoming an extremist. Kundnani (2012) describes radicalisation as the process of 'what goes on before the bomb go off' (p.5).

Radicalisation refers to the psychological and theological process by which the radicalised persons transitions to supporting violence extremism and potentially joining terrorist organisations (Kundnani, 2012; Heath-Kelly, 2013).

Similarly, radicalisation is claimed to be linked to individuals' social networks and group and peer pressure that might encourage the use of violence as a response to a perceived injustice (HM Government, 2014). For example, there is the theory of a 'bunch of guys' introduced in Understanding Terror Networks by Sageman (2004), one of the most influential American clinical psychiatrists and a former CIA officer (Kundnani, 2012). Sageman's theory of a 'bunch of guys' states that the radicalisation of young people is highly motivated by their social networks, peer groups, friendships and kinship relations (Coppock and McGovern, 2014). In Sageman's words, 'joining the global Islamist terrorism social movement was based to a great degree on friendship and kinship' (Kundnani, 2012: P. 28). To form his theory, Sageman collected biographical data from open-source material such as court transcripts, official government integrations, the media and other online sources about over 170 members of radical Islamic groups—as he named it, 'the global Salafi jihadists' (Cottee, 2013; Heath-Kelly, 2013). Sageman's analysis concluded that nearly 66% of Muslim who engaged in radicalism did so with their friends or relatives who were already involved in terrorism (Cottee, 2013). By the time they joined their childhood friends in supporting extremists' views regarding a society that disadvantaged and excluded them, they had become a 'bunch of guys' with a shared religious identity that might lead to violent, radical acts.

However, the theory of a 'bunch of guys' has been highly criticised for many reasons. The methodology of Sageman's study has been criticised by Hoffman (2006) for not elaborating 'how his collection of data conforms to the scientific standards of academic inquiry that he finds so lacking in the work of most terrorism scholars' (p.138). Similarly, one of the key limitations that marks Sageman's theory as inadequate is the neglect of the structural elements, such as economic and political factors, that are possible causes of terrorism (Cottee, 2013; Kundnani, 2012). Sageman claims that structural conditions play an insignificant role in directly causing involvement in radical violence activities. His theoretical approach stresses the idea that social networks are the main factor that generates terrorism. Wide structural conditions such as alienation and exclusion are only relevant if interpreted from the terrorist's gaze as a condition of a common struggle (Kundnani, 2012). In Sageman's view, embracing structural

analysis in the discussion of the root causes of terrorism is insufficient as it does not answer the issue of ‘specificity’ (Cottee, 2013).

‘Specificity’ for Sageman is ‘the most critical question about terrorism’ (Cottee, 2013) as it raises the question of why specific individual join radical Islamic movements while others do not. This is especially puzzling if they all come from the same social and structural environments (Kundnani, 2013). There are millions of people who are living in the same social structures, but only a tiny number decide to follow the path to terrorism (Kundani, 2013). A similar question has been highlighted by Wiktorowicz, who followed the same theological and social-psychological approach to radicalisation (Heath-Kelly, 2013). Wiktorowicz designed his model based on ethnographical studies of an Islamic radical group located in the United Kingdom called al-Muhajiroun (Kundani, 2013). His study was supported by the American government to understand the possibility of the radicalisation of the Muslim population, especially young people in the United Kingdom (Kundani, 2013). Both Wiktorowicz and Sageman’s studies emphasised the role of socialisation in the creation of networks with common meanings and struggles in relation to the process of radicalisation. Similarly, their arguments dismiss the consideration of structural elements and choose an individualistic approach as the main causes of terrorism.

While the two studies offer valuable individualistic analyses, following exclusively theological and social-psychological models in the dissection of the causes of terrorism is problematic. One of the main issues with the individualistic model is the stereotypical assumptions of who could be involved in radical ideologies and terrorism. Consequently, the entire Muslim population, especially the young, is constructed as ‘risky’ and potential extremists by policing agencies (Sian, 2015; Thomas, 2009). Policing agencies have directed their attention to follow risk-driven analytical studies that claim to predict who might be a future terrorist. Kundnani (2013) states that the nature of risk has been introduced to justify governmental intervention techniques such as screening, high policing and increasing surveillance. Intensive mass surveillance of the Muslim population by counterterrorism policies has been encouraged by scientific explanations that are motivated by theological and social-psychological approaches to terrorism (Kundani, 2013).

Similarly, the Muslim population has been singled out by counterterrorism policy as the only threat while other forms of extremism have been dismissed. For example, in the UK Muslim population,

students are closely monitored by counterterrorism policies, presumably to prevent any suspicious or unusual behaviour, even relatives' visits from abroad (Sian, 2015). As a result of the high securitisation process, a climate of fear, religious discrimination, Islamophobia and a disproportionate invasion of private human life have been reinforced (Sian, 2015; Kundani, 2013).

However, setting a specific profile to identify who might become a terrorist is a vague process. As Richards (2011) puts it,

We don't know—nor, it appears, are we ever likely to know—why some young men resort to violent extremism and others do not. Nor, it seems, has there been any consistent notion of what is meant by 'radicalization', with the last five years providing a legacy of confusion as to what forms of 'radicalization' should be the focus of a counterterrorism strategy. (p.143)

Thus, authority's system of profiling and categorising the Muslim population for the purpose of spotting signs of radicalisation is a failure as the practice of law enforcement is based on discrimination, racial profiling and imposing restrictions on certain populations. According to Miller (2010), only 1% of those who were monitored and stopped by secret agencies were involved in terrorism-related offences. Critics (Miller et al., 2000; Bowling and Phillips, 2007) argue that disadvantaged minorities are mainly targeted because of their visible racial, ethnic or religious identities.

Therefore, Sageman and Wiktorowicz's individualistic approaches to terrorism are sociologically weak and misleading. First, they both fail to provide a clear definition of what radicalisation and terrorism refer to. Their analyses might manage to illustrate how radical ideologies circulate through socialisation processes, but their research fails to address the core questions of why terrorism occurs in the first place. Classic studies (Crenshaw, 1981; Ross, 1993) that investigate the causality of terrorism argue for addressing the complete picture of the root causes of terrorism by discussing the role of structural factors such as poverty, social inequality and exclusion. Bowling and Phillips (2007) state that the 'best way to understand terrorism is to examine the social, economic, political, and religious conditions and philosophies existing at a particular time and place' (p.10). Similarly, Black (2004) argues that terrorism can be fully understood by investigating both psychological and structural factors. Terrorism cannot be

simply explained as caused by individual abnormalities or even involvement in ideological radicalism. There are wider structural factors that significantly shape individual ways of thinking and making choices.

Section 3: The structural model of terrorism

Terrorism is a social phenomenon that can be fully investigated when examining the social structure of society in which terrorism exists (Richardson, 2006). The discussion of terrorism is a similar process to any kind of criminal action that cannot be separated from assessing both individual characteristics and social structures (Black, 2004). The argument is not that there are similarities between abuse or any criminal behaviour and terrorism. However, all these social phenomena can be best examined via both personal and structural factors. The interpersonal issues of radical thoughts, anger and humiliation are highly associated with a wider social structure of unfortunate circumstances. According to Krueger and Maleckova (2003), individuals' involvement in various criminal activities is associated with their economic backgrounds.

The main question to address in this section is whether economic deprivation can be set as one of the root causes that leads to radical mobilisation (Mesquita, 2008).

3.1 Economic theory—poverty and terrorism

Economic circumstances are the most debated and contested root causes of terrorism (Musgrave, 2015). The discussion of economic deprivation in relation to terrorism ought to draw on other causes, including lack of education, distribution of wealth, ethnic inequality and wide social causes. Thus, by understanding economic factors, a wide range of root causes of terrorism can be addressed (Musgrave, 2015). The argument of the economic theory is simple: the lack of basic living conditions such as lack of food, poverty and a sense of misery leads to depression, grievance and extreme responses, including terrorism (Smelser, 2007; Musgrave, 2015). Zadise et al. (2007) argues that high levels of radicalisation have been observed in minority groups who suffer from economic discrimination and disadvantages in income, employment opportunities, housing and access to social services. Similarly, some critics (Githens-Mazer, 2008; Zadise et al., 2007) argue that participation in political violence is directly caused by deprivation, economic hardship and alienation. The linkage of poverty to involvement in terror activities has been widely discussed in literature investigating the root causes of terrorism (Garrison,

2014; Smelser, 2007; Porta, 1995; Sutton and Vertigans, 2006; Horgan and Boyle, 2008; Weinberg and Eubank, 2008; Barnes, 2005; Musgrave, 2015; Mesquita, 2008).

Poverty has been highlighted by politicians, policy makers and the media as one of the root causes of terrorism following the events of 9/11 (Musgrave, 2015). Generally, associating the increase of criminality in society to economic suffering and class oppression is the central argument of political leftists, unlike conservative who argue that lack of morality and individual psychology are the main cause of criminal activities (Smelser, 2007). In relation to terrorism, leftist liberal parties in the US and most Western European countries have deep concerns about social inequality, poverty and other economic suffering as a major driver of radicalisation that must be addressed by counterterrorism policies (Horgan and Boyle, 2008). As US Secretary of State John Kerry stated in 2014,

And so we have a huge common interest in dealing with this issue of poverty,
which in many cases is the root cause of terrorism or even the root cause of
the disenfranchisement of millions of people on this planet. (Musgrave,
2015, p.106)

Terrorism, especially politically motivated violence, is highly linked to the index of economic inequalities (Porta, 1995). Poverty, low-paid jobs and income inequality can cause socio-economic consequences, include high crime rates, conflict and radicalisation (Estrada et al., 2019; Neumark and Wascher, 2002). Poverty is measured, according to Piazza (2006), by certain barometers, including 'per capita income, literacy, life expectancy, more equal distribution of wealth, growth of GDP, stable prices, employment opportunities, and food security' (p.170). Critics (Smelser, 2007; Porta, 1995; Mesquita, 2008) show that economic exclusion and lack of access to market opportunities, as well as increased unemployment, are highly linked to individual participation in radical actions. For example, some authors (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; Bowling and Phillips, 2007) who investigate the status of socio-economic conditions of the Muslim community in the UK illustrate that British Muslims live in the most deprived areas.

A report published by the Equality and Human Rights Commission (2017) illustrates that East Asian working age adults are the most disadvantaged population in the labour market. Compared to their white

counterparts, the East Asian population faces high unemployment rates and earns lower hourly rates (Brown et al., 2017). For example, the percentage of the East Asian population in the lowest-earning occupations is more than 20%, compared to less than 7% for the white population (Brown et al., 2017). The linkage between poor performance in the labour market and terrorism has been highlighted by critics (Sutton and Vertigans, 2004) who argue that many British young people who join radical groups are unemployed or come from low-income backgrounds. A cross-national study was conducted to examine the correlation between economic conditions and the contribution of people to international radical activities (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). The study provides examples from several countries, include Palestine and Lebanon, where young people are more likely to join terrorist groups when they come from deprived living conditions (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003) as the families of young people who might be killed, injured or imprisoned get material assistance and economic aid (Garrison, 2014).

However, other critics (Drakos and Gofas, 2006; Krueger, 2007; Krueger and Laitin, 2003; Weinberg and Eubank, 2008) argue that economic theory as a root cause of terrorism is a weak argument. In Krueger's (2007) words, 'there is not much question that poverty has little to do with terrorism' (p.5). Krueger and Laitin (2003) point out that there is a lack of evidence for the association of poverty as a generating cause of terrorism. Similarly, Drakos and Gofas (2006) highlight that there is a negative correlation between economic deprivation and involvement in radical activities. For example, a study conducted by Krueger and Maleckova (2003) that aims to investigate the correlation between poverty, education and terrorism highlights a crucial result. Their research illustrates that there is no significant correlation between deprivation, low educational attainment and unemployment and involvement in or support of radical activities (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). Unemployed individuals are less likely to be involved in or support radical activities compared to their employed counterparts (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). As they put it,

If poverty was the wellspring of support for terrorism, one would have expected the unemployed to be more supportive of armed attacks than merchants and professionals, not less. (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003, p.127)

Similarly, in relation to education, the study did not show a correlation between not having a degree above elementary school and involvement in or support of radical activities. In fact, the percentage of people with education above a secondary degree who support political violence such as armed attacks

are 68% (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). A difference of 5% is shown in comparison to people with only elementary school degrees who support radical political violence (Krueger and Maleckova, 2003). According to Weinberg and Eubank (2008), poverty as a root causes of terrorism is weak and cannot be generalised. It is true that some terrorists might come from poor and deprived backgrounds, but other terrorists do not. Similarly, some terrorists come from discriminated and disadvantaged ethnic backgrounds, but others do not (Weinberg and Eubank, 2008). A study conducted by Krueger and Maleckova (2003) shows that leaders of radical Islamic groups such as Hezbollah and Hamas come from well-off economic backgrounds and are well educated. Likewise, Sageman's (2004) biographical study of 170 members of radical Islamic groups shows that most of them come from upper- or middle-class backgrounds, are well educated and have well-paid professional occupations. For example, most Al-Qaeda leaders did not suffer from low socio-economic conditions and instead came from wealthy backgrounds (Sutton and Vertigans, 2006). Bin Laden was a multimillionaire, and his deputy, Zawahiri, is a surgeon (Sutton and Vertigans, 2006). Likewise, most 9/11 hijackers were raised in middle class families rather than poor or working-class families (Musgrave, 2015). One of the hijackers, Muhammed Atta, is believed to have come from a wealthy Egyptian family and received a high level of education. Bin Laden rejected the materialistic Western explanation of terrorism:

They [Western commentators] claim that this blessed awakening and the people reverting to Islam are due to economic factors. This is not so. (Sutton and Vertigans, 2006, p.5)

Economic factors of terrorists' countries of origin or the ethnic identities of terrorist organisations might be contributing factors to radical movements (Sutton and Vertigans, 2006). People involved in radical activities might not be the disadvantaged, the poor, the uneducated or the isolated (Wintrobe, 2006; Knoke, 1990). As Taspinar (2009) states, 'most terrorists are neither poor nor uneducated' (p.75). According to Wintrobe (2006), most who participate in radical activities are better than the average of the mainstream. They are motivated by a sense of grievance and injustice for the poor in their countries or their ethnic groups (Wintrobe, 2006; Knoke, 1990). Krueger and Laitin (2008) point out that 'Individuals can become terrorists because of poverty in their country, even if they are themselves not impoverished' (p.22).

This idea is known as the Robin Hood model of terrorism, in which radicalised persons might not come from deprived living conditions but are driven by a sense of solidarity to support their worse-off cohort.

Historically, people who participate in terrorism activities comes from different economic backgrounds. Examples include the Weather Underground Organisation (WUO) that operates in the United States and the far-left movement that was established in West Germany during the 1960s and 1970s. Members of the movement were mainly young, middle class people who aimed to stand up for the poor and oppressed (Donatella, 1995). Mesquita (2008, p.5) argues that radical organisations are more likely to recruit people from well-off socio-economic backgrounds as the highly educated and people from good economic conditions are more valuable and useful for the organisations (Mesquita, 2008). Middle class people are also beneficial for radical organisations for their technological support and management strategies (Donatella, 1995). According to Mesquita (2008), most terrorist organisations require the use of deprived individuals and the poor as foot soldiers who are willing to get their hands dirty to achieve the command of those who are managing the organisations, who usually come from wealthy and upper-class backgrounds. Similarly, Mesquita (2008) argues that the significance of people from economically poor backgrounds is their ability to obey orders.

Furthermore, poverty as a root causes of terrorism has been highly rejected by Piazza (2006). According to Sutton and Vertigans (2006), terrorism cannot be simply explained as caused by poor material conditions and economic grievances. Terrorism is more linked to repression, isolation and inequalities other than poverty (Musgrave, 2015). As O’Neil argues, ‘Terrorism is thus often linked to a sense of injustice and impotence rather than sheer poverty’ (O’Neill, 2002, p.22). Piazza (2006) points out that sharp economic and social divisions have been embedded in the system over time by political leaders and parties. In Piazza’s (2006) view, social divisions are a better explanation for terrorism than the thesis of poverty. For example, both Al-Qaeda and the Irish Republican Army speak for groups who suffer from wide forms of injustice, oppression, social inequality, exclusion, alienation and discrimination (Barnes, 2005).

3.2 Social theory and terrorism

Exclusion is a central concept in the field of sociology that has been examined by classical sociologists, including Weber and Durkheim (Newell, 2019). Max Weber is one of the first sociologists to mainly concentrate on discussions of exclusion. Exclusion has been defined by Weber as a ‘form of social closure’ (Newell, 2019). Similarly, the theory of exclusion is highlighted in the Durkheimian perspective that observes the world as a homogeneous unit in which the individual exists and is connected to a wider community that shares a set of social ties and common values (Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 2012). According

to Bigo (2002), the process of exclusion is based on a sense of fear or perceived threat of some groups as a danger to the 'homogeneity of the people' (P.18). Exclusion has been described as a condition constructed by the elite in society to limit the access of certain groups to social services, communities and full citizenship. The excluded groups are separated from the larger society and its fundamental values by restricting their participation in the social and political arena. Likewise, the excluded groups are denied a fixed national identity, and their belonging and loyalty are questioned (p.10). Some authors (Crenshaw, 1981; Ross, 1993) argue that terrorism is more likely to appear in societies that have a high level of social and political exclusion of minority groups. As Crenshaw (1981) puts it,

ethnic minorities...that are discriminated against by the majority population develop a solidarity that based on the sense of grievance towards the state and the mainstream society. (P.81)

Thus, members who suffer from exclusion and who are detached from the rest of society find their own way of belonging. Their belonging might be adopting other values that include involvement in various kinds of abnormal behaviour, such as drugs, radical political activism and, in some extreme cases, terrorism (Hörnqvist and Flyghed, 2012). The shared feeling of injustice, grievance and prejudice allows the group to form a collective identity and a greater sense of alienation from wider society.

There is limited literature investigating the role that exclusion and discrimination play in causing terror activities (Choi and Pizza). The theoretical framework of social and political exclusion as a root cause of terrorism has been based on the numerous studies of Gurr (2000). Gurr (2000) illustrates that the social and political exclusion of ethnic groups leads to rebellion, riots, civil war and terrorism. Similarly, some critics (Regan and Norton, 2005; Bonneuil and Ariat, 2000; Choi and Pizza, 2016) argue that civil war, riots and political violence are constructed around these basic principles of social inclusion and equal political representation. Applying Gurr's basic theory of exclusion, grievance and group identity involving terrorism has been examined by Fox (2000). Fox (2000) illustrates that extremist organisations can easily manipulate those who are seen as disadvantaged or marginalised. As Choi and Pizza (2016) argue, radical organisations use existing feelings of injustice and grievance in minority groups to radicalise the young population in an attempt to tackle prejudice and unfairness. Similarly, extremist organisations use the sense of injustice felt by minority groups to justify terror actions.

One of the key questions that ought to be resolved is why terror violence is used to change an undesired situation rather than civil movement (Choi and Pizza, 2016). To change unequal conditions, radical

organisations tend to be autonomous groups that take individualistic actions against a government that is greatly despised (Choi and Pizza, 2016). They believe that their ethnic, religious, racial, tribal or linguistic groups have been failed by the state (Choi and Pizza, 2016). Therefore, rather than working under the power of governments by starting an insurgency movement and applying their demands, terrorist organisations choose to be independent, self-governing groups that apply violence to address their grievances. Terrorism is chosen as it is viewed by excluded groups as the most cost-effective approach compared to civil movements or riots (Choi and Pizza, 2016).

Social and political exclusion is a core driving cause of terrorism (Choi and Pizza, 2016). Some authors (Zadise et al., 2007) argue that the main cause of Islamic radicalisation is a sense of alienation and exclusion. A study conducted by Choi and Pizza (2016) analyses data gathered from Ethnic Power Relations and concludes that countries with a high level of social and political exclusion are expected to have high levels of terrorism (Samata, 2018). Likewise, Klausen (2005) conducted a survey study highlighting that radicalisation and support for fundamental radical movements in the Muslim population in Western Europe are highly associated with socio-economic and political exclusion. Exclusion from participation in decision-making processes or access to equal labour market opportunities reinforces feelings of alienation, anger and frustration. For example, the Muslim population in the UK is constructed as alien and deviant. This goes along with existing exclusionary practices and institutional racism mainly surrounding counterterrorism policies.

Groups that are deemed to be risky are subjected to high levels of exclusion, including detention, deportation, monitoring (especially at airports) and stop-and-search. According to the Ministry of Justice (2009), the Asian population is stopped and searched most by police authorities for suspicious behaviour, at a rate of 60 stop-and-searches per 1,000 individuals. The number is around ten times higher than the rate for the white population, which is only 6 per 1,000 (Ministry of Justice, 2009). Likewise, Bowling and Phillips (2007) declare that the East Asian population is three times more likely to be stopped and searched compared to white people. The British Muslim population is viewed in the UK as a risk to British values, identity and way of life. Awan (2015) argues that alienation and exclusion of the Muslim population can be observed in many Western European countries:

Muslims in Europe, facing apparent or real discrimination and socio-economic disadvantage, can find in terrorism a ‘value system,’ community and an apparently just cause. (HM Government, 2011, cited in Awan, 2015. p: 13)

Therefore, many Western European governments, as well as the US, have implanted counterterrorism policies that aim to address exclusion, marginalisation and discrimination (Choi and Pizza, 2016; Awan, 2015). If exclusion is seen as a direct cause of terrorism, does that mean policies of inclusion and increased democratic values decrease terrorism? Limited evidence appears when examining the relationship between ethnic exclusion and terrorism (Samata, 2018). Weinberg (1991) argues that there is a weak connection between terrorism and the condition of being socially and politically excluded.

Conclusion

This study has been mainly directed at critically examining the concept of terrorism and its root causes. The first sections were mainly devoted to comprehensively exploring the definition of terrorism. Terrorism is defined as a social phenomenon that applies violence to achieve a desired goal. It can be conducted by individuals and organisations, as well as the state. A brief historical background that highlighted the emergence of terrorism as a state tool of changing society during the French revolution was explored. Similarly, other examples of state terrorism were given, including the Holocaust and the bombing of Japanese cities in World War II and the contemporary violent tactics during the Iraq war. Similarly, terrorism has been identified as a tool of power and hegemony.

The second section concentrated on the discussion of the root causes of terrorism, mainly the psychological/individualistic approach, radicalisation and the structural model of terrorism. Terrorism is argued as being the consequence of multiple causations rather than a single cause. Terrorism cannot be explained simply as the result of individual physiological abnormalities or involvement in radical religious ideologies. Wider structural factors play a major role in terrorism. Social, economic, psychological and political factors all contribute to the process of radicalisation. However, terrorism and its core causes are still a mystery, despite the significant efforts of state officials, intelligence services and immeasurable research. This study highlights a number of sociological weakness and gaps in the literature that attempts to make sense of terrorism.

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