Lone Wolves: 
Updating the Concept of Enemy 
in the Social Media Age

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ABSTRACT

Some recent events raise new questions concerning the evolution of global terrorism, especially the Boston Marathon’s bombing (15th April, 2013) and the Woolwich killing (22nd May, 2013). Differently from Al Qaeda traditional strategy of random attacks causing mass murders, these two episodes seem to belong to so called “lone wolves” category. The aim of this paper is to explore whether this definition really fits to the brutal episodes. The author takes a critical look at recent attempts to reduce both the events to the responsibility of loners: The author will argue that the Tsarnaev brothers and the killers of the innocent soldier in Woolwich update not only the global terrorism dynamics, but also the category of enemy, in the social media age.

Keywords: Dehumanization, Enemy, Lone Wolves, Ordinariness, Terrorism

PREMISE

Global terrorism disabled the meaning of enemy through many of classical categorical frames of political philosophy are grounded. Since a war is not clearly declared by global perpetrators, they are unable to precise who the foes are in the strict sense of the word – as adversaries to defeat, in order to protect a nation. Furthermore, ordinariness seems the main trait of global terrorism, at least since 9/11, when middle-class good guys, educated at university, Phd in some cases, turned into death hijackers. All the theoretical efforts to sketch valuable profiles of bombers clash against a blurring identity that, on a metaphysical ground, deals strictly with the loss of personal identity. An intimate impoverishment that belongs to the lack of sensing provided by a voluntary detach from the world-of-life (the Husserlian Lebenswelt, in a phenomenological perspective). As this premise is given, some recent events raise new questions concerning the evolution of global terrorism. I especially refer to the Boston Marathon’s bombing (15th April, 2013) and the Woolwich killing (22nd May, 2013).

Differently from Al Qaeda traditional strategy of random attacks causing mass murders, these two episodes seem to belong to so called “lone wolves” category. The attacks bring to light self-made suspected perpetrators (the brothers Tamerlan and Dzokhar Tsarnaev in Boston; Michael Adebolajo in Woolwich), more than organized groups of terrorists. What I’m going to discuss in the following paragraphs is whether the definition of loners really fits
to the Tsarnaevs and Adebolajo and his alleged accomplice Adebowale or, by contrast, their attacks only update a more common script of global terrorism. My aim is to explore how terrorism, in taking its strategies to a new stage, is going to change the concept of enemy in the social media age. I’ll briefly reflect about perpetrators’ ordinariness and origin of dehumanization, in which are resumed my previous investigations, then I’ll turn to examine 1) the identity of the Tsarnaev brothers at the light of their social media postings and 2) the way Michael Adebolajo tried to justify himself in front of the TV camera.

ORDINARINESS, NOT PATHOLOGY

The profile of global terrorists is a question for philosophy, since 9/11, especially because it brings to surface the phenomenology of dehumanization. How is possible – in brief – that ordinary people might kill innocent victims without being hurt? In recent years American scholar Nancy Hartevelt Kobrin explored, with a sensitive approach, the condition of Islamic terrorists, in particular suicide terrorists in terms of the schizoid-label (DSM-IV, 1994). Her investigation applies a psychoanalytic theory and relates the terrorists’ behavior to the frame of the so called Early mother. More precisely, Hartevelt Kobrin assumes that, at the very heart of suicide terrorism the relation between mother and child (who grew up as a terrorist) is activated. The attack represents the maternal link that can be said responsible of the “schizoid character type” of bombers. She also notices that the term schizoid “is used clinically to describe such characteristics as distancing from avoiding, and orbiting around people rather than relating to them directly” (Kobrin, 2010: p. 39). Moving from psychoanalytic suggestions (she quotes the working paper “Engineers of Jihad”, by Diego Gambetta and Steffen Hertog), the author concludes that “much work need to be done” in this theoretical field so strictly related to anthropology.

What I consider of relevant interest in Hartevelt Korbín’s theory is the intuition of the role played by the intimate closure of a Jihad bomb maker. She finely sketched how relevant is the relation to the world of life in the peculiar dehumanization that affects terrorism and brings them to evildoing. However, the question of a schizoid behavior that the scholar raises “and perhaps even autism” cannot be reduced – I argue – to the dyadic relation to the mother, although we consider a culture where “the female is devalued and denigrated”. As stated, I agree with Hartevelt Korbín when she points out that the intimate impoverishment of suicide bombers gives shape to their attitude to kill innocent civilians. Nevertheless, we cannot take for granted that the “banality of suicide terrorism” belongs primarily to a cultural-affective background. Deadly declarations of radical hate against Western countries and Western culture do not seem enough to originate an unlimited violence. The doctrine of Al Qaeda becomes an effective instrument of death after a complex process of assimilation and socialization in subversive groups. Nothing to do with a “brainstorming” as I’m going to discuss in the following paragraph.

HOW IDEOLOGY WORKS ON TERRORISTS’ WRONGDOING

My doctoral research (Fisogni, 2009) evidences that the logical dimension of ideology does not prevail on the self-determination of those who join the so called Al Qaeda groups, unless the indoctrination, so crucial for a wide number of Nazi functionaries, does not play the marginal contributions to plan successfully the attack. On the contrary, volition is required when someone decides to join the group and intention operates all along the “career” of a terrorist. Hannah Arendt assumed in The Origins of Totalitarianism that not everybody, in the Nazi SS, knew the final goal of the operations. More frequently, every agent was informed about only a specific task of the global process.
Measures for Ensuring Data Protection and Citizen Privacy Against the Threat of Crime and Terrorism: The European Response
www.igi-global.com/chapter/measures-ensuring-data-protection-citizen/7481?camid=4v1a