

From Classical Terrorism to ‘Global’ Terrorism

Michel Wieviorka, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France

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From Classical Terrorism to 'Global' Terrorism

Michel Wieviorka, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France

This article examines the history and the development of terrorism as a research subject for social sciences. It gives an impression of how the subject's theoretical remit has changed over the last decades – explicitly taking into account the characteristics of a modern and global world and their impact on current understandings of terrorism. Terrorism is a minor object for the social sciences; it was even long considered “illegitimate” and neglected by researchers. There are several explanations for this, which I think my long experience in research authorizes me to evoke here.¹

Terrorism as an “Illegitimate” Subject for Research

Some of the explanations relate to the very working of the disciplines concerned. As terrorism is not included in the list of the themes classically recognized as important, it has only rarely been listed in the contents of the dictionaries and other traditional publications of the “Encyclopedia,” “Manual,” or “State of the Art” type, and the tendency of academic disciplines to conformism consequently made it somewhat unattractive. Students who chose it as a subject for a thesis would run the risk of setting themselves at a distance from the academic community in their discipline and of being less well placed than others on the academic market; this risk is all the greater as terrorism constitutes a problem at the crossroads of political science, history, sociology, and even law and it is difficult to set it at the center of any one of these disciplines. As far as the recognized researcher – who chose to study it was concerned – which was my situation in the 1980s – there was the risk of becoming over-conspicuous in relation to one's professional circle and of not obtaining the financ-

ing required for one's surveys and, furthermore, of being the focus of all sorts of doubts and misunderstandings. The researchers' peers questioned whether the researcher would not become fascinated by the subject, the public authorities questioned what the actual relationship with the “terrorists” involved was or expected the researcher to turn into a secret service agent, and, finally, the players whom he studied were always liable to endeavor to use to their advantage the relationship which the researcher was attempting to establish with them.

Other explanations concern the phenomenon itself. Terrorism was long considered as sporadic, a stranger to the usual working of societies, ultimately as a curiosity, even if some of its expressions did impress the contemporary public or, thereafter, a few great minds: the Russian populists who fascinated Albert Camus;² the French anarchists at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century; the Macedonian, Armenian, and Bosnian nationalists, and others in the same period; extreme left

¹ The reader is referred to my publications: *Sociétés et terrorisme* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), English translation published by University of Chicago Press, new edition 2004; *Face au terrorisme* (Paris: Liana Lévi, 1995); and with Dominique Wolton, *Terrorisme à la Une* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

² Albert Camus, *L'homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, Coll. Idées, 1951).

groups (and sometimes, but less frequently, extreme right groups) in several societies during the period of post-industrialization beginning in the the 1970s; Palestinian nationalists and also, in the same period, Basque and Irish nationalists, etc. Experiences of this sort have given rise to countless texts, but only rarely have they been considered primarily from the angle of terrorism and with the tools of the social sciences. Apart from news-type texts which tend to be dominated by the quest for the sensational, they have at best given rise to a crop of articles, reports, or books which come under the heading of assessment – a business which flourishes particularly in the United States and especially in Washington, D.C., where the number of “think tanks,” specialized journals, and consultants in this area are legion, not to mention the official and unofficial production of the services specialized in anti-terrorism. Nevertheless, a few respectable researchers, such as the historian Walter Laqueur, have on occasion produced useful texts on terrorism. But on the whole, the best publications, those which genuinely contributed new and serious consideration were, for many years, those which tackled the theme of terrorism but which did not make it their main subject, tending instead to study phenomena of which terrorism was an offshoot, an extreme point, a specific dimension of a more general action – such as a national movement or a political struggle. If, for example, I take the bibliography of my own book, *Sociétés et terrorisme*, I find it easy to check that the references which I found the most useful are of this type. Moreover, given the lack of any great investment in the social sciences, it is perhaps in literature that the most informative texts on terrorism are to be found – one only has to read Dostoyevsky to realize this.

Finally, if terrorism is an “illegitimate” subject it is also certainly because it refers to forms of action which are themselves “illegitimate” and which correspond to methods of political action and repression which are themselves somewhat unsavory. The term “terrorism” is indeed particularly negative, there is nothing noble about it, and it is even used to discredit or to criminalize those to whom it is applied. I only know of one period in which

the players have sometimes used this term to describe themselves without the slightest qualms: that of Russian populism and its Socialist Revolutionary extensions, such as Vera Zasulich who wounded a Russian officer known for his brutality towards detainees. She declared to the jury (who moreover acquitted her): “I am not a criminal, I’m a terrorist.” Or again, twenty years later, Boris Savinkov – one of the Socialist Revolutionary leaders in the Russia of the beginning of the twentieth century – who wrote the extremely interesting *Memoirs of a Terrorist*.³ The ill repute which is associated with the use of the term “terrorism” turns it into a common-sense category which it is not easy to transform into a sociological category. It is all the more difficult to effect a transformation of this type given that the very image of the terrorist is usually that of the barbarian, the madman, or the pathological personality – which various apparently scientific pieces of work periodically labor in vain to prove. To speak of terrorism in different terms, for example to seek meaning behind the apparent madness, involves at the outset coming up against a consensus which massively rejects any attempt to understand in this area – in common parlance, endeavoring to understand and explain terrorism is said to be a way of justifying it. However, in colloquiums and specialized publications it is frequently stated that it is impossible to resolve an inescapable difficulty, namely that those who are terrorists in the eyes of some are freedom fighters or resistance fighters in the eyes of others. But in fact this is just one more way of not approaching the phenomenon scientifically and of refraining from offering a satisfactory definition.

The move from everyday vocabulary to a scientific concept is an extremely delicate operation here and one which implies a capacity for distancing and reflexivity which it is difficult to promote. Indeed, at least until the 1990s, terrorism was characterized by the fact that it only hit the headlines occasionally. Outside periods of intense terrorist activity there was no social or political demand for it to be studied and researchers were not encouraged to take an interest in it. In periods when bombs were exploding, or when there were numerous attacks, hijacking of planes or

³ Cf. his memoirs, Boris Savinkov, *Memoirs of a terrorist*.

kidnappings, the researcher was approached by the media, or even by political leaders, and enjoined to explain what was at stake, *hic et nunc*, and therefore to act as an expert much more than to suggest that a degree of distance be taken, to analyze the long-term processes which may have led to this extreme violence or to reflect on the scope of the term “terrorism.” Moreover, the anti-terrorist action of public authorities, usually accompanied by a high degree of media exposure, encouraged the proliferation of expert competences, not all strictly serious, which resulted in scholarly production being drowned in a sea of a usually mediocre specialized literature and of being discredited – in this respect, bad money drove out the good. Journalists surfing on the wave of the news; consultants informed by secret service agents; lawyers, magistrates, and political personalities all of whom were fairly manipulative and themselves working in a closed circuit obtaining their information from journalists and consultants; essayists carried along by ideology more than by the concern to produce documented, in-depth knowledge, etc.: all sorts of actors contributed to making of “terrorism” an object which appeared to belong to people other than social science researchers.

All this can only go to reinforce the idea that, ultimately, in matters of terrorism, those who know do not speak and those who speak do not know. This remark can be extended by another which is dependent on the very functions of anti-terrorist discourse: as I observed during a research visit to Washington, D.C., in the mid-1980s, anti-terrorism is in fact a set of proposals which are the outcome of the interaction of all sorts of players, pressure groups, government agencies, the media, etc., whose interests are not restricted, and this is the least one can say, to the battle against this special form of violence alone. Understanding what is said about terrorism and the way in which it should be countered in a given society may be, consequently, a way of seeking to understand how this

society functions, much more than an analysis of terrorism properly speaking.⁴

2. The Concept of Terrorism

But today terrorism seems to be established on a long-term basis as a danger and, frequently, as a reality which is sufficiently important to justify systematic consideration in which the social sciences must fully participate. It is acknowledged that in confronting a challenge of this sort it ceases to be a minor or an “illegitimate” subject. Now it in no way suffices to advance serious and well-documented historical analyses: it is essential to go to the core of the theoretical difficulties which hinder its understanding and to formulate the concept.

Formulation of the concept must enable us to go beyond the insoluble difficulty which consists in relativizing in advance any judgment about a “terrorist” experience by bearing in mind that, in opposition to those who hold this view, there are those who refute this perception and, on the contrary, place value on violence. In fact, this aporia functions by combining two defining elements which it is urgent to separate analytically even if it means articulating them at a later stage in the approach specific to terrorist experiences. Terrorism must be approached from the angle of the methods to which it resorts, on the one hand, and on the other, from that of the meaning which it is endeavoring to express, but also, as we shall see, subvert.

In the first instance, terrorism falls within the sphere of instrumental action; it can be defined as the implementation of tools and resources whose costs are modest in relation to the effects expected by its promoter. As this, terrorism frequently faces states that rely on military and police forces while it will itself use only cheap, easily accessible tools that it can find within the market and the civil society, and that usually belong to very narrow repertoires. Each organization has its own tools, which will appear as

⁴ Michel Wieviorka, “Defining and Implementing Foreign Policy: the US Experience in Anti-Terrorism,” in *The 1988–1989 Annual on Terrorism*, ed. Yonah Alexander and H Foxman (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1990), 71–201; cf. also Michel Wieviorka, “France Faced with Terrorism,” *Terrorism* 14 (3): 157–70.

a kind of signature in the eyes of specialists in charge of identifying the authors of an attack. The notion of “terrorist methods” cannot be understood as a list of techniques, since they vary from one case to another. It can only mean a huge disproportion, an important asymmetry, since mobilizing limited resources will enable the terrorists to deal with political powers that master powerful resources. With a few hand arms or a few kilos of explosives, for example, a terrorist group can destabilize a regime, put an end to a governing power, and in short obtain results out of all proportion to the means used. This first part of the definition of terrorism has the merit of stressing its highly rational character. In this instance, the actor is capable of elaborating a strategy, of calculating, of equipping himself with tools which are within his reach and, if need be, of putting a state which is infinitely more powerful than he is in difficulty. He almost appears to be more intelligent in this respect than the authorities he confronts. Thus, while for years American strategists were working out very sophisticated approaches and imagining particularly elaborate scenarios of nuclear, chemical, or bacteriological terrorism, the perpetrators of the attacks on September 11, 2001 (9/11 as it is now known in the United States) boarded commercial aeroplanes after having acquired elementary skills in flying, their only arms being simple penknives or cutters.

Instrumental rationality is not foreign to the world of terrorists. But we still have to introduce here a recent element which complicates analysis of this dimension of the phenomenon: the increase in suicide attacks. For when the terrorist does more than risk his life, when he gives it, without reserve, and when that is at least partly due to a personal decision, it then becomes difficult to speak of a modest investment out of all proportion to the expected results. In this instance, rationality can no longer be the object of a calculation of the cost/benefit type, except if we consider that the choice of suicide operations and the decision of who will be the martyr are attributable not to those

who are going to commit suicide but to the leaders of the organizations who either manipulate or instrumentalize people who are prepared to kill themselves. Now, even if the vast majority of Islamist suicide operations imply an organized process,⁵ research, and we shall come back to this point, precludes us from systematically and exclusively postulating this scenario of absence of autonomy and meaning for the person who is going to commit suicide.

This brings us straight to the second constituent dimension of terrorism, which is its relationship to meaning. As a very specific kind of political violence, the political dimensions of terrorism are permanently fueled or invaded by other logics where meaning is lost or overloaded by new elements, religious for instance. This leads violence to be either infrapolitical (and then dominated by economic or purely criminal goals), or to be metapolitical (and then dominated by religious goals, including life after death). The approaches which reduce the phenomenon to its dimensions of instrumental violence alone, of means therefore at the service of an end, must never allow us to forget that, from the point of view of the protagonist, the terrorist act is meaningful. Whether the actors express themselves or not, their action is imbued with meaning for them. The characteristic of these meanings is that they are always different from what they would be if they were not implemented violently. In terrorism, the resort to violence is always associated with distortions or deviations when compared with the meaning of the same action without the use of arms, explosives, etc.

In some cases what strikes the researcher first and foremost is the loss of meaning purely and simply, with the terrorist acting because the meaning escapes him and he wishes to maintain it artificially. Thus, for example, in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s there was a wave of extreme left terrorism in which the only issue was the working-class movement even though the latter was declining and losing its historical centrality and the workers no longer

⁵ Cf. for example Robert Pape, who suggests the figure of 95 percent in *The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism*. And, by the same author, the book often quoted *Dying to Win: The Strategic Logic of Suicide Terrorism* (2005).

recognized themselves in the slightest in this violence. The greater the gulf between the figure of reference – the working-class movement – and the discourse claiming to represent this figure at the highest revolutionary level, the greater the limitless violence of the bearers of this discourse. This loss of meaning can lead to the nihilism of the “devils” so well described by Dostoyevsky. Though we do have to be careful here and not apply this schema too rapidly to the facts: the philosopher André Glucksman (2002) was mistaken in interpreting the 9/11 attacks in the light of this model, because, in this instance, the violence was not so much lacking in meaning as simply overflowing with it.

In other cases, what we see is the impossibility of continuing to reconcile elements of meaning which could formerly function together without great difficulty. Thus ETA, the organization for independence in the Basque country, emerged under Franco and expressed the shared hopes of those who wished to liberate the (Basque) nation from the oppression of Franco, to end the political dictatorship, and to express the expectations of a working class which was powerful at the time but severely repressed. At the time, the violence of ETA was limited and primarily symbolic. Then democracy was reinstated, the Basque nation obtained a considerable measure of autonomy and deindustrialization ended the centrality of working-class struggles. It was at this point that the violence of ETA took a genuinely terrorist turn which at times knew no limits; it was the only way of maintaining alive the myth of an action which spoke at one and the same time in the name of an oppressed nation, a working class with no voice and mobilization against the repression of the Spanish state which was said to be democratic merely in appearance.

In yet other cases violence is associated with an overload of meaning in which the actors attribute a religious, meta-political meaning to their political and social expectations – this is the case, to which we shall return, in instances of terrorism linked to radical Islamism. On occasion, the terrorist act includes, or liberates, dimensions of gratuitous violence or sadism which have nothing to do with the meanings of the action and which have no import of an instrumental type – for example when the guards of people who have been kidnapped, and who will be liber-

ated in return for the payment of a ransom, indulge in humiliating and cruel practices.

Violence seems to be more instrumental and there is less justification to talk in terms of terrorism when meaning is not entirely lost or is closer to what it would be without resort to violence. Terrorism therefore appears in all its conceptual purity when, on the contrary, it no longer maintains the slightest link with the real world, or with a social, national, cultural, or political figure of reference which might be recognizable in its actions. The notion of “pure” terrorism may appear strange. It is true that in reality the phenomenon is political. But the concept, in its pure form, is no longer political. In fact this concept is related to the extreme aspect of the phenomenon, when the logics of releasing or overloading meaning reach their ultimate conclusion, cease to have any relationship to reality, when violence becomes its own end. At that stage, terrorism is the just a question of military or police repression towards groups that have no other legitimacy than the one they themselves decide to have. But in real life the phenomenon is usually “impure,” it manages to maintain some contact – even if very limited – with a population it refers to, a social reality, some sympathy or comprehension within the people. Therefore it is this practical “impurity” that makes it political.

Terrorism is in keeping with its concept in extreme – perhaps even exceptional – cases in which only its perpetrator is capable of conferring a legitimate meaning to its action and in which no figure of reference whatsoever can be recognized. In all other cases it is “impure,” imperfect, and incomplete. When al Qaeda organized the 9/11 attacks, it aroused revulsion throughout the world, but also guarded approbation amongst the Muslim masses in some countries: in these instances we cannot speak of “pure” terrorism. When the Italian Red Brigades killed employers or political leaders in the name of a working-class proletariat which rejected their violence and when, apart from their members, they had no symbolic or ideological recognition, they became genuinely terrorist – it is moreover at that point that they weaken and become vulnerable to the repression which will put an end to this experience.

3. Classical Terrorism

As a historical reality, terrorism is like many other social or political phenomena: it has undergone considerable transformations since the period between 1960 and 1980. To be more precise, it has moved from the classical era to the global era. Some observers challenge this image of distinct change or break. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, for example, while not minimizing the innovations brought in by radical Islamism which has, in his words, “replaced the omniscient and all powerful Central Committee by a flexible network,” insists on recalling that “modern terrorism is a European invention dating from the nineteenth century... In recent years,” he points out, “its main source of inspiration has been the extreme left terrorism of the 1960s and 1970s” (Enzensberger 2006, 29f.). He considers that the techniques of the Islamists, their symbols, the style of their communiqués, etc., borrow on a wide scale from the extreme left groups of the past. One might add, to go for a moment in his direction, that the practice of suicide is not a novelty in terrorism. The terrorists of the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century took risks which verged on suicide in approaching their target with a bomb, a pistol, or a knife. Bobby Sands in 1981, other members of the (Irish) IRA, Ulrike Meinhof in 1976, Andreas Baader in 1977, and other members of the (German) Red Army Faction all committed suicide in prison – although it is true that their gestures did not involve the deaths of anyone other than themselves.

The fact remains that Enzensberger himself, a few lines later in the book quoted above, weakens the thesis of historical continuity by noting that the Islamist terrorists “are in reality pure products of the globalized world which they are fighting” and that “in comparison to their predecessors, they have gone considerably further, not only in the techniques which they use but in their use of the media” (ibid., 31). While it would be absurd to postulate an absolute break, it nevertheless does seem to us more relevant to insist on the elements of a move from one era to another, rather than those which indicate a degree of continuity. This move can be observed in material terms by analyzing the forms and the meanings which terrorism assumed yesterday and by comparing them with present-day forms and meanings. It also involves the considerable changes in the categories

which we can now use in considering this phenomenon. In the period 1960 – 1980 terrorism came in the main within the province of the analytical framework of the nation-state and its extension, international relations. Within the nation-state – or, at least, the sovereign state – it corresponded to three major registers. It could be on the extreme left, the extreme right, or nationalist and in favor of independence.

By far the most widespread expression of extreme left terrorism was played out in Italy, but it was also to be found in numerous other societies in varying stages of industrialization: West Germany with the Red Army Faction and the Revolutionary Cells, France with *Action Directe*, Japan with its Red Army, Belgium with the Revolutionary Communist Cells, Greece, Portugal, etc.). It was the outcome of what I termed, at the time, an *inversion* in which the perpetrators of violence, in a deviation of post-68 leftism, took over the categories of Marxism-Leninism to subvert them in the name of a working-class proletariat which they in no way represented. In each instance terrorism challenged the authority of the state, even if in some cases the state had endeavored to become international and to establish itself in a space other than national, and even if it did denounce American imperialism in no uncertain terms. Extreme right terrorism, which was less widespread, was also prompted by projects to take over the state, often associated with the presence in the machinery of the states concerned of sectors which were themselves open to projects of this type. Finally, still internal to sovereign states, terrorism could be the mode of action of nationalist movements wishing to force the independence of a nation, where it might also be a question for them of awakening by means of violence. In Europe, the Basque and Irish movements were thus characterized by their resort to the armed struggle and by comparable forms of organization with, in particular, the same type of tensions between bellicose “military” rationales and “political” rationales which were more open to negotiation.

Elsewhere, international terrorism was in the main carried out by actors claiming to adhere to the Palestinian cause, whether it be at the center – for example with the killing of Israeli athletes carried out by El Fatah in 1972 in the Olympic village in Munich – or on the periphery with, in these

instance, the intervention of groups possibly manipulated by state “sponsors” (Syria, Libya, Iraq) endeavoring to weaken the central rationale of the PLO and to prevent any negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In some respects, the terrorism of the ASALA (Secret Army for the Liberation of Armenia) resembled that of the Palestinian groups on which it was modeled in particular as, like them, it found in Lebanon in crisis a territory propitious to its short-lived prosperity.

The specificity of classical terrorism, that of the period between 1960 and 1980, is that it unfolded in a “Westphalian” world, as some political analysts call it today – a world which it was possible and legitimate to approach in terms of the categories of what Ulrich Beck (2006) calls “methodological nationalism.” Terrorism originated within societies which are themselves established within states; it conveyed political and ideological deviations which referred to projects for taking power at state level or for the construction of a state; and it was conveyed by an avant-garde who saw themselves as being the direction of history, the working class, and the nation. In counterpart, the campaign against terrorism was an affair in which each of the states concerned became involved for itself – which did not exclude appeals to international solidarity. Classical terrorism was conceived of and described as being primarily a danger threatening states, their order, and possibly, their territorial integrity.

4. 'Global' Terrorism

The 9/11 attacks revealed what could in fact be glimpsed almost ten years previously: the entry into the ‘global’ era of terrorism. This era had been inaugurated by various episodes bearing the mark of radical Islamism with, in particular, the first attempted Islamist attack in New York in 1993, even then aimed at the World Trade Center towers, or again the hijacking of an Air France plane in Algiers in December 1994 by Islamists who planned to crash the plane on Paris – a hijacking which was followed a few months later by a series of attacks in France falling within the same ‘global’ rationale since international dimensions (the extension of the Algerian Islamist struggle outside Algerian national space) were combined with dimensions internal to French society (crisis in the *banlieues*, social exclusion, and the transformation of the experience of racism into violence).

It is even possible to go further back in time to find the first signs of ‘global’ terrorism in the attacks using a suicide bomber in a delivery truck which destroyed the American Embassy in Beirut (April 1983) and then the barracks of the French contingent of the multinational force in Lebanon and the local headquarters of the United States Marines (October 1983): many believe that these were the first actions of the Hezbollah, a movement which described itself as planning an Islamist revolution throughout the region, which also intended to destroy the state of Israel and which, from then on, was capable of mobilizing people destined to kill themselves in their action.

Whatever the case may be, the ‘globalization’ of terrorism was demonstrated in spectacular fashion by the 9/11 attacks. “Globalization” means that the phenomenon can no longer be thought of in the categories of “methodological nationalism” as it blurs the classical frontiers between rationales which are internal to sovereign states and the external or international rationales. The perpetrators of the 9/11 attack circulated in what had become a global space, their career paths took them from the society in which they were born, in this instance Saudi Arabia and Egypt, to other societies, Sudan, Pakistan and Afghanistan where they met, were formed and trained, creating links of solidarity which again fanned out to form networks all over the world and in which they had the advantage of total freedom of action in the state of the Taliban, which they subjugated. They were at ease in several countries in Europe – in Germany, where some of them attended university; in the England of “Londonistan” and its mosques, where the most radical opinions were expressed freely; and in the French *banlieues*. These players, contrary to popular opinion, were not the spokespersons of an actual, to some extent traditional, community from which they issued forth expressing directly the expectations of the community; on the contrary, they were the products of rootlessness and were far from a community of this type; they were the products of a *transnational neo-umma*, to use the words of Farhad Khosrokhavar (2002), of an imaginary community which tended to be constructed in the poorer areas of the major ‘global’ cities in the modern world rather than in traditional rural areas. There were rationales in their action which mirrored the most modern possible capitalism – Bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, was even said to have committed the offense of “insider dealing” by

speculating on the stock exchange on the consequences of the attacks which his organization was preparing.

Actors of this type are highly flexible. Functioning in networks, they know how to connect and disconnect themselves without difficulty and, instrumental rationality being to the fore, they use the most advanced communication technologies, beginning with the Internet. Their terrorism is also 'global' by definition and is not restricted to a single state in which it would be a question of taking power, or separating therefrom. Their aims are indeed global and go even further than the context of the world in which we live, to be projected into the next. Having broken with the traditional forms of community life, their Islamism, inseparable from the notion of *jihad* – the holy war – transcends national frontiers and aims – including through martyrdom and therefore through sacred death – at destroying the West which at one and the same time fascinates them and excludes and despises Islam and the Muslims.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, were not the first expression of this terrorism perpetrated by transnational actors and probably to be transcended in future, but a climactic moment, an extreme case. For thereafter, numerous attacks were made in the name of al Qaeda, or at least associated with this organization, but without presenting the same transnational purity, in other words, mixing world level dimensions with others, more classically established in the context of the state targeted. Moreover it is to these hybrid expressions, which conjugate world and supranational aspects with aspects which are internal to the states concerned that the idea of globalization of terrorism best applies. Whether it be a question of the attacks in Riyadh, Casablanca, and Istanbul in 2003, of those in Madrid (March 2004), or yet again in London (July 2005), on each occasion, and along lines which vary from one experience to another, the actors combine the two dimensions which constitute 'global' terrorism. On one hand at least some of them are at one and the same time to some extent immersed in the society in which they act, and are then subjected to rationales of social exclusion and contempt and express a strong sense of not finding their place in this society, or else they express their rejection of its international policies. On the other hand they are bear-

ers of transnational, religious rationales and if need be are connected to global networks. They are therefore simultaneously part of an imaginary community of believers with no material basis and of a real community, for example of Moroccan immigrants (in Spain) or Pakistanis (in England), or yet again of the impoverished masses living in the most deprived areas of Casablanca and Istanbul. Their action is neither solely internal and classical nor solely transnational, it is both at once. This moreover is why the answers to 'global' terrorism themselves combine the two dimensions, one being military ensuring defense in relation to the outside world and the other involving policing and internal security.

But is 'global' terrorism really new? In the past, terrorists could have transnational trajectories and appear to be far from having solid roots in the national society they come from. For instance, the three Japanese terrorists who killed twenty-six persons at the airport in Lod, Israel, on May 30, 1972, were acting in name of the Palestinian cause – nothing to do with Japan. And the German activists belonging to terrorist organizations that joined Palestinian extremist groups or collaborated with "sponsor states" (i.e. Iraq, Syria, Libya) during the seventies did not relate their acts to Germany. There was some transnationalism, and some networking then too. But what was at stake was international support for a national cause, and not 'global' action. And networks, which many experts considered to be organized from communist countries, could exist only due to the will or tolerance of some states.

However, in some cases of "global terrorism" the transnational dimension itself is weak, even non-existent, and terrorist action is mainly restricted to its classical dimensions. The suicide attacks by the Palestinians against targets in Israel are of this type. The practice of martyrdom is an innovation in Palestinian action and the latter only recently became Islamist. But above all, this violence proceeds directly from a specific community – the populations in the territories placed under the control of the Palestinian Authority – and the references to Islam remain subordinate to the national struggle. The transnational dimensions of the action are of little import and, while it is possible to speak of terrorism, it must be clearly understood that the latter remains classical and not global.

'Global' terrorism unfolds in a space which is therefore bounded by two poles. At one extremity, it is purely transnational – this was the case with the September 11, 2001, attacks; and at the other extremity, it is classical, at least as far as its framework of reference is concerned – this is the case with the Palestinian attacks in Israeli territory.

Is this 'global' terrorism the monopoly of radical Islamism? It is true that terrorist players other than Muslim do exist today in the world and that many armed movements, be they nationalist, ethnic, or the product of another religion (Hinduism, for example), do resort thereto. But radical Islamism is the only one to combine global, metapolitical aims and a possible foothold within a sovereign state in various parts of the world. As a result, this leaves less space for violent actors other than Islamist, as was seen in spectacular fashion in Spain: the terrible attacks on March 11, 2004, in Madrid (191 persons killed) were in the first instance attributed by the government to ETA before it became clear that they were the work of North African migrants. Not only did José Maria Aznar's *Partido Popular* lose the elections which took place a few days later for having wrongly accused ETA, but the Basque separatist organization found itself in a way the victim of Islamist terrorism, forced as they also were to refute such extreme violence. Henceforth their legitimacy to resort to arms or explosives was weakened. For this reason it has been said that al Qaeda, by its intervention in Spain, could signify the beginning of the historical decline of ETA.

More generally, if we consider classical terrorism, that of the 1960s and 1970s, one may have an image of a form of fragmentation. The rationales of yesteryear were indeed political, obsessed, it was said, by taking state power or by the setting up of a new state. In the present-day world terrorist action has either become more than political, overdetermined by its dimensions of sacred world-level struggle, with no possible negotiation – radical Islamism reigns here, it is metapolitical – or else less than political, concerned in these instances with economic profit, as is the case, for example, of many of the guerrilla movements in Latin America, which become infrapolitical forces. This does not prevent nationalist, or comparable, movements from continuing to exist, still liable to resort, classically, to

terrorism, but necessarily restricted and reduced to their local-level issues.

5. The Subjectivity of the Victims and of the Actors

In the classical age, no great concern was shown for the victims of terrorism other than to hastily lament them. A count was made of the dead but the number of wounded and traumatized was in the main unknown. Hardly anything in the way of either immediate or long-term care was provided. After an attack or a hijacking, once the emotional effects had settled there was very little recognition for those whom extreme violence had left in pain, destitute and often alone. Terrorism was primarily a problem for the state concerned, for its politics and its diplomacy, to the extent that in the name of reasons of state, it often happened, especially in matters of international terrorism and including in the most advanced democracies, that it was impossible to obtain the completion of serious inquiries and that the courts really and truly fulfill their role. In the words of Françoise Rudetzki, the founder of the NGO SOS Attentats-SOS Terrorisme:

Twelve years after the hijacking of the Airbus 300 [in Algiers in December 1994, already referred to above] we still do not know the true perpetrators or who ordered the operation... I know it and I check it on each occasion, reasons of state prevent any inquiry. Even for the dreadful attacks in 1986 the "henchmen," Tunisian mercenaries, have been judged, whereas those who gave the orders, the Iranians who are really responsible, have never been judged (Rudetzki 2006, 14f.).

But today, thanks precisely to the mobilization of people like Françoise Rudetzki, who created her association in 1983 after the attack at the Grand Véfour Restaurant in Paris, in which she was gravely wounded, the victims are beginning to be recognized and compensated by a fund set up by law (this is the situation in France), taken care of at once, including their psychological suffering, and the courts are under greater pressure from public opinion than in the past to carry out inquiries to completion. Now, as Françoise Rudetzki very rightly observes, "recognition by the courts is essential to enable the victims to reconstruct themselves. The trial is the last phase in the process which will enable them to emerge from the status of vic-

tim, which is painful, uncomfortable, and where sometimes people are made to feel they are to blame" (ibid., 15).

This evolution is part of a much wider tendency of present-day societies to take an interest in individuals, in subjects whose physical or intellectual integrity is affected by violence individually or collectively, in the present or in the past, which has marked them for life. It constitutes the first dimension of the dramatic entry of the subject into any consideration and analysis of terrorism.

The second dimension is related to the terrorists themselves. Classically, as we have seen, their subjectivity is usually ignored by the analysis which either reduces this aspect to their calculations and their instrumental rationality, or else strives to show the pathological nature of the terrorist personality. In my work in the 1980s I had begun to criticize this tendency seriously and even suggested a reversal of the conventional discourse. It is the prolonged experience of illegality, of living amongst themselves in small exclusive groups, of the practice of the armed struggle, and of the right which they assume to dispose of the lives of others that shapes the potential terrorist personality. This is not so much a point of departure and therefore an explanatory element of violent action but instead a culmination, the consequence of deviations which have resulted in the practice of violence. But the present-day generalization of suicide attacks forces us to go much further in our consideration of the subjectivity of terrorist actors even if numerous specialists strive to prioritize the categories of instrumental, calculated, tactical action in Islamist suicide attacks.⁶ This mode of approach may be relevant if it is a question of the organizations implied but ceases to be so when it is a question of individuals; it is difficult to perceive the nature of the cost/benefit calculation they might be envisaging.

In the first instance, the issue is one of rejection of an elementary sociology. Contrary to the commonly held belief, most radical Islamists, those who best personify the image of 'global' terrorism and who are ready to give their lives, do not necessarily come from the most socially deprived circles, they are not all underprivileged, some also belong to the educated middle classes. They are Muslims – on occasion converts – who know the West as a result of living, or of having lived there or, at the very least, from having been confronted with it, if only through the media. They do not constitute a homogeneous set of people, and while they may share important features – the very pronounced sense of humiliation which must be ended, hatred of Jews, the conviction of being at war with the West – it is nevertheless possible to distinguish, on the basis of the subjectivity of each individual, several major types of actors. Thus, Farhad Khosrokhavar, a researcher who is outstandingly well-qualified since he has studied young Muslims in the French *banlieues* (suburbs), as well as Muslim detainees in British prisons and elsewhere in Europe, revolutionary Iran, and Islam in various countries of the Middle East, suggests that we distinguish four types of *jihadists* which he names Islamo-nihilist, Islamo-plethorist, Islamo-individualist, and Islamo-fundamentalist.⁷ In an earlier book Farhad Khosrokhavar was concerned with: "how to understand this drive until death of groups of men who kill themselves and also target the death of others" (id., 331). His explanation is as follows: the move to 'global' martyrdom takes place primarily in situations where the big city and the loss of bearings creates a sense of loss of self and of disarray amongst the migrants and enhances the project of a world-level form of Islam in which the difficulty of participating in modernity and the feeling of being faced with a sharp rejection of Islam combine in an explosive mixture of revolt and hatred.

⁶ "Suicide bombing is the signature tactic of the fourth or 'religious wave' of modern terrorism" read the opening lines of the editor's preface to an important book on the subject, "No contemporary terrorist method is more important to understand" (Pedahzur 2006, XV).

⁷ Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Quand Al Qaïda parle: Témoignages derrière les barreaux* (Paris: Gras-

set, 2006). The "Islamist-nihilist" is an individual without roots, "in search of an Islam which will provide an existential answer to the sense of misfortune which overcomes him" (ibid., 332); the "Islamist-plethorist" has a "much greater religious foundation," he is educated, and gives "a religious meaning to all his acts" in his life (ibid., 334–35); the "Islamist-individualist" would like to be fulfilled as a believer and as an individual and

challenges the West which deprives him of the possibility of this type of fulfillment; finally, the "Islamist-fundamentalist" comes from a neo-communitarian group which has provided him with "a closed conception of the religious" (ibid., 344), he turns from fundamentalism, usually a factor of reassurance, to terrorism as a result of radicalization which is due to humiliation or to repression.

From the moment one adopts this type of approach, the terrorist constructs his subjectivity as he lives an unusual experience, a path which brings him face to face with the 'globalized' world as described by Saskia Sassen (2001), which reinforces the justification of our use of the term 'global' in describing it. Marc Sageman, who established a corpus of biographical data on 172 participants in the Salafi jihad, also stresses the diasporic nature of this experience (84 percent joined the jihad in a country other than the one in which they were born). He notes that they are on the whole educated, many of them being trained in technical subjects (medicine, architecture, engineering, information technology, and business); three-quarters of them are in the "professions" (physicists, lawyers, engineers, teachers) or are "semi-professionals" (businessmen, information technologists, etc.), and very few have had a genuine religious education. In the words of this psychiatrist who was for long associated with the CIA, it is "this combination of technical education and lack of religious sophistication that made them vulnerable to an extreme interpretation of Islam" (Sageman 2006, 127). Marc Sageman, in a manner fairly comparable to the work of Khosrokhavar, sets out a typology of trajectories which lead to jihad, in which he distinguishes seven types. Here too, the actors are defined in terms of their subjectivity, their endeavors to construct themselves as actors and to give meaning to their experience. Like Khosrokhavar he also asks the question: "how do they come to a point at which they wish to kill ordinary people and themselves at the same time?" He stresses the social dynamics at work in the small groups of jihadists, their sense of moral superiority, and their belief in a collective future. He speaks of a change in values – from the secular to the religious, from the immediate to the long term, from traditional morality to a new morality and, there again, to the overpowering hatred of the Jews.

Approaches of this type tackle the question of subjectivation and desubjectivation, a dialectic which leads to terrorism and martyrdom; they give us a view of the sources of commitment and the existential meaning assumed by belief, the extent of anti-Semitism and of the demonization of the West. The terrorist is neither reduced to some sort of social role, possibly even an essence, nor to his calculations, decisive as these may be. Nor is he reduced

to the indoctrination or manipulation implemented by the organization which sends him to his death, as if he had no personal reason for acting – as if he was not a subject. To understand his action we are invited to take an interest in him as a subject, to endeavor to know and to understand his intentions, his representations, and his religiosity.

The sociology of 'global' terrorism thus creates a relation between what, at first sight, may seem extremely distant: on one hand, the major transformations in the world, transnational rationales and the way in which they link up with rationales which are more restricted because they are rooted within the framework of a state; and, on the other hand, the subjectivity of the actors which borders on the most intimate, their most private personal experiences, their dreams and their despair. But the creation of this relation, which is not unlike a balancing act, is possible and necessary quite simply because the subjectivity of the actors – the way in which they mentally construct themselves, produce their personal and collective imaginary world – owes a great deal to their exposure to the most 'global' modernity, to their belonging but also to their peregrinations in the universe of globalization which simultaneously fascinates and rejects them.

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