A Study of Terrorism through the Looking Glass Approach

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Abstract: Terrorism is nothing but a question of perspective. Thus, sociologists have asserted that terrorism is a social construction. Contrary to the impression fostered by official incidence counts and media reports, terrorism is not a given in the real world but is instead an interpretation of events and their presumed causes. The social construction of terrorism can be studied through the looking glass self conception propounded by C.H. Cooley and Mead in this social-psychological analysis. The paper seeks to examine the role of self conception in the participation of terrorism. The problem that terrorism constantly faces is in explaining its causes. Thus, the following question has been answered: "Whether an individual's self conception as understood from the looking glass self has a role to play in motivating his subscription to a terrorist organization?" The scope of the paper limits itself to the study of psycho-social theories of terrorism to examine the motivation to partake in terrorism using the looking glass self theory. The paper first discusses the characteristics of terrorism and its participants, then discusses the looking glass self theory, following which the theory is applied to see if any correspondence can be drawn between an individual's self image and his participation in terrorism. Psycho-social theories of terrorism are discussed to identify a common element that follows through all these theories which may be explained by the Looking Glass Theory. The paper makes use of secondary resources such as books, journals and websites.
Keywords: Terrorism, Social-Psychology, Looking Glass Self, Theoretical, Motivation for terrorism, Symbolic Interactionism, Cooley and Mead.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has been understudied in sociology and this is owing to the fact that it is difficult to use the concept in a reasonably objective and unbiased way. Its expanse in terms of its operations, objective and ramifications are vast and complex. The phenomenon of terrorizing people through violence is much older than the term 'terrorism' which was coined in the eighteenth century during French Revolution when aristocrats and ordinary citizens came to be chased down by political authorities and guillotined. The twentieth century also saw extensive use of violence to intimidate people and terrorize them as is evident by the Nazi Germany and the Russian Stalin regime. Because terrorism acquires different forms and different objectives each time and its interpretation is heavily propaganda, defining terrorism is extremely hard. Terrorism is therefore, an interpretation more than an objective act. It is often said that 'one person's terrorist is another's freedom fighter', it is also true that people subscribe to terrorism not always out of radical beliefs but for reasons such as for financial gain, for friendships, etc. Likewise, not everyone in a terrorist organization is a radical. It is also possible that someone who was a terrorist can later come to strongly condemn terrorism. For example, Nelson Mandela who is now revered globally for fighting apartheid was considered a terrorist by the South African government. This way, terrorism is nothing but a question of perspective. For example, the Communist Party of India (Maoist) is listed as a terrorist organization, however, such status to the CPI (Maoist) stems from the government's attempt to quell the Maoist ideology that endorses an antagonism for the 'State' and its instrumentalities whilst for the CPI (M), the cause of their organization is noble in that they wish to unearth all the illegitimate actions of the government and bring the government's attention to backwards areas and prompt development. And thus, sociologists have asserted that terrorism is a social construction. "Contrary to the impression fostered by official incidence counts and media reports, terrorism is not a given in the real world but is instead an interpretation of events and their presumed causes."[1] The problem that terrorism constantly faces is in explaining its causes. Thus, the following question has come up for consideration:

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[1]   Austin T. Turk, 'Sociology of Terrorism' (2004) vol. 30 Annual Review of Sociology <www.jstor.org/stable/29737694> accessed on February 3, 2020.

Whether an individual's self conception as understood from the looking glass self   has a role to play in motivating his subscription to a terrorist organization?

The scope of the paper limits itself to the study of psycho-social theories of terrorism to examine the motivation to partake in terrorism using the looking glass self theory. The objective of this paper is to examine if an individual's self conception acts as a motivator to his participation in terrorism. The paper first discusses the characteristics of terrorism and its participants, then discusses the looking glass self theory, following which the theory is applied to see if any correspondence can be drawn between an individual's self image and his participation in terrorism. Psycho-social theories of terrorism are discussed to identify a common element that follows through all these theories which may be explained by the Looking Glass Theory. The paper makes use of secondary resources such as books, journals and websites.

II. TERRORISM AND ITS CAUSES

The cause for terrorism comes from the decision to use 'terrorism' as an indirect method to achieve a political goal. What makes people lose their normal inhibitions about using violence and rationalize the use of violence in the form of terrorism? There are alternative means by which one may achieve a political goal and thus, to decide to choose terrorism one must have to be *willing* to use terrorism. The willingness is expressed by the participant's *belief that terrorism is justified*. This belief is further buttressed by the belief that the goals being pursued outweigh the lives of the victims. If there is a sense of urgency concerning the goal being sought, then even that shall act as an impetus for terrorism. The decision to use terrorism may transpire on account of the following three reasons:

a)   Groups may believe that they cannot achieve their political goals save by means of terrorism owing to various factors i.e., they're unable obtain significant resources such as military strengths, financial sponsors, or popular support;

b)   groups may believe that they are not making satisfactory success in achieving their political goals using means other than terrorism and thus, they don't wish to continue;

c)   groups may use terrorism to obtain popular support in order to make available other additional resources such as funding, gathering recruits, etc.

Terrorists have a propensity to wear the guise of deprivation, to demonstrate themselves as the saviours of the oppressed, they consider themselves as the 'self-appointed champions' of the oppressed, often explained in psychology as the 'messiah complex'[2]. These saviours of the weak indulge in terrorism without contemplating whether or not terrorism is in the best interest of the community they represent. Sociologically, there is seen to be no correlation between terrorism and deprivation. Root conditions such as ideologies, forms of governments, specific goals, climate of violence, etc. don't cause terrorism because many groups in similar positions of deprivations have turned against terrorism. These conditions may play catalyst functions in facilitating terrorism, but do not cause it. Conditions cannot be used to justify terrorism, because people exercise *choice* in deciding their method of struggle, violent or non-violent.

Most leaders and commentators promote the view that terrorists are irrational and that they are inherently evil but this is done to gain political advantages, so as to show, that discussion and negotiation with terrorists is of no use because they are 'tactless', or 'crazed killers' or 'psychopaths'. Contrary to this politically motivated view, the truth is that terrorists are rational. So much rational that terrorism entails some degree of skills and even education. The decision to use terrorism is not a result of snap jugdments, it is a conscious process of decision making. They use terrorism as a tool based on a computation of the circumstances and available methods (to achieve their goals). Although the underlying logic may be bad and the information on the basis of which the decision to use terrorism was arrived at may be inaccurate, yet terrorists are rational. They are not spontaneous or sporadic acts of violence.

Terrorism, being a matter of interpretation, always involve non-state actors as perpetrators albeit, a new form of terrorism has emerged in recent times called 'state sponsored terrorism'. State sponsored terrorism contemplates the State's covert support of non-state actors to partake in terrorism.

The violence or the threat of violence that is postulated by a terrorist attack is *intentional*, *unlawful* and *symbolic*. This violence or threat of violence used by terrorists are aimed at third parties i.e., non-combatants and property. The target groups are third parties-

(i) terrorist attacks are used as means to gather attention from third parties;

(ii) to arouse emotions in the third parties or the representatives of the third parties;

(iii) the arousal of emotions evoke responses to the attack;

(iv) third parties decide how to respond to the attack; and

(v) third parties actually do take action (or might not) terrorists seek for the former.

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[2] Harbouring a desire to redeem others, or to save others, they suffer from delusions of grandiose.

To elicit the sought response, they use 'mechanisms'. These mechanisms comprise of the use of coercing, intimidating, provoking, stimulating, influencing, inspiring enthusiasm in supporters so they will increase their donations and will volunteer for to participate. They use terrorist attacks to stimulate the interests of people to learn about the goals of the terrorists, and translate sympathy into support; influence the media to focus on the terrorists' goals instead of their atrocities; coerce the government into granting concessions; provoke rage in a community so that such community commits counter-atrocities to bring the targeted community closer to the terrorists' level of depravity.

Terrorists have political goals such as national liberation, separatism, racism, changing particular government policies; if they have cross-national goals, then such goals would entail changing political system world-wide; if they have a domestic goal, then such goals would entail changing a political system in a given country; or sometimes terrorism is also aimed at preventing change to a political system.

III. LOOKING GLASS SELF

The underlying principle that characterizes symbolic interactionist theories is the idea that the self is constructed by a social process i.e., the conception of one's self emerges as a product of social interactions. Cooley's Looking Glass effect also corresponds with this view. However, there are many self construction theories that provided for different ways by which an individual's self-identity is constructed. For instance, there are role identity theories which posit that individuals have multiple identities on the basis of the different roles they play. Among the theories that emphasize the social and cultural contexts for self construction, there lies the Looking Glass Self theory. The looking glass self expounds that one's self-perceptions are an internalization of the perceptions of the views of others. This process occurs in three stages:
a)   we imagine how one might appear to others;
b)   we imagine others' perception about ourselves based on the imagined appearance;
c)   eventually, we develop our self-identity through the imagined perceptions of others'.

Cooley argues that in imagining what we must be appearing like to others, a primal point of reference for identification is required. He argued that this referral point of identity is produced by persons who influence us and thus, by persons who we regard as "ascendant" over us. While being influenced, we deem those individuals as influential who we believe treat us with importance, we are likely to adopt the perception of the individual by whom we are influenced as our own referral point in imagining how we might appear to others. According to Cooley, there is no struggle between imitating that referral perception or in exercising choice in deciding whether or not to use such perception as the referral perception or not. He believed that regardless of whether or not there was imitation or emulation, or the exercise of choice, the fact remains that this is an active process of learning and analyzing this referral perception and confirming the same by his own actions.

Mead, however, made a distinction between emulating a referral perception of another and conforming to it. Mead held that, only that part of the self-identity was a product of the internalized perceptions of others which was called, "me". The "I" identity, on the other hand, was that part of the identity which was subject to self-reflecting upon the expected self-appraisals of the "me" and deciding the reaction to the "me" i.e., in deciding whether to conform or reject these expected self-appraisals.

To conclude, "to the extent that we correctly understand how we are seen by others, our own self-conceptions will be internalizations of others' conceptions of us."[3]

IV. THE 'LOOKING GLASS SELF' APPROACH IN DETERMINING MOTIVATION TO PARTICIPATE IN TERRORISM

Attaching causality to terrorism relates to understanding the motivation for terrorism. Motivation, from a perspective to prevent terrorism, is important because "the type of perpetrator you are dealing with varies if an attack is motivated by personal grievance, political grievance or ideology."[4] Personal grievance is defined as

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[3] King To-Yeung and John Levi Martin, 'The Looking Glass Self: An Empirical Test and Elaboration' (2003) 81(3) Social Forces <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3598178> accessed on 17 February 2020.

[4] Jan Leenaars and Alastair Reed, 'Understanding Lone Wolves: Towards A Theoretical Framework for Comparative Analysis' (2016 International Centre for Counter-Terrorism) <https://icct.nl/publication/understanding-lone-wolves-towards-a-theoretical-framework-for-comparative-analysis/> accessed 20 February 2020.

"the perceived mistreatment of the individual by loved ones or the government."[5] Political grievance is defined as "the perceived mistreatment of people that the individual identifies with."[6] The most operative word from the above two definitions would essentially be '*perceived mistreatment*'. Perceived mistreatment can be explained as the perceptions individuals hold about their treatment in society by other individuals. Many psycho-social theories of terrorism comport with this view. The '**Drive Theory: The Frustration and Aggression Hypothesis**' and the '**Relative Deprivation Theory of Terrorism**' posit that frustration as a psychological state of mind results in aggression, and the underlying cause of this frustration is argued to be social, economic, political deprivation. Both the theories argue that when a section of people are deprived and even blocked from relieving their deprivation or strengthening their position in society, by the established system ruled by the majority section of people, they feel frustration which diffuses into aggression, violence and terrorism. Terrorism becomes an outlet for frustration. This frustration is not only descriptive of an individual's state of mind but also of the prevailing conditions in the society. Thus, theories such as the aforesaid contemplate terrorism as reactionary i.e., a reaction to the social-economic and political deprivation of certain groups. This view runs contrary to the view on terrorism which holds that root conditions such as ideologies, forms of governments, specific goals, climate of violence, etc. don't cause terrorism because many groups in similar positions of deprivations have turned against terrorism. However, most studies on terrorism in the past two decades have documented that there has been a correlation between socio-political deprivation and terrorism, the former being identified as the 'cause' and the latter as its 'effect', this view has been affirmed by certain instances of terrorist activities through the 1990s. [7]

The '**Narcissistic Rage Theory of Terrorism**' postulates that a narcissistic injury[8] causes narcissistic rage. A fractured sense of self is produced in children who are victims of massive abuse, they're imbibed with a sense of fear and in order to tolerate such fear, they superimpose an inflated identity of the self or the 'grandiose self' which devalues others, over a fragile self-esteem based on hatred, violence and sensitivity. The narcissist perceives threat to the superimposed grandiose self and what ensues this narcissistic injury is the narcissistic rage, when the narcissist loses control over their emotions. And this rage demonstrates itself in varying expressions, either active aggression or passive aggression. Terrorists are inclined to justify aggression and violence as a consequence of perceived boundless superiority of their personality, which manifests in the 'cause' for which they believe in, and that, everyone else is inferior to them and thus, a resulting disregard to the lives of their victims. It can be best summarized as thus-

"Profound narcissistic disappointment-her failure to live up to the standards of behavior required by her ego ideal-led her to a terrorist identity. Radical political action provided powerful psychological rewards, such as the acquisition of a new positive identity."[9]

The '**Social Learning and Cognitive Theory**', explains terrorism as a behaviour. This behaviour is not only elicited by psychological factors but also by environmental factors. The theory argues that an individual's observational learning (people witness a certain behaviour and imitate that behaviour) of the communicative environment around them shapes their resulting behaviour. The theory uses three models to explain observational learning i.e., (i) Live Model which is a "demonstration of person's expected behaviour"; (ii) Verbal Model provides "instruction for the certain behaviour" i.e., how to perform a certain behaviour; and (iii) Symbolic Model "is about fictional characters which represents actions through media." [10] And thus, social learning transpires in a social context characterized by 'reciprocal determinism'[11] According to the theory,

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[5] *Ibid.*

[6] *Ibid.*

[7] Ishrat Abbasi, Dr.Mukesh Kumar Khatwani, Dr.Hidayat Ali Soomr, 'A Review Of Psycho-Social Theories Of Terrorism' (2017) 51(2) The Grassroots Journal <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322896417_A_REVIEW_OF_PSYCHO-SOCIAL_THEORIES_OF_TERRORISM> accessed on 20 February 2020.

[8] Narcissistic individuals have an undying craving to seek attention and be constantly admired, where such an individual is unable to satiate their need to be perfect and admired because of a judgment or a critique aimed at them, it is called 'narcissistic injury'.

[9] Martha Crenshaw, 'The Psychology of Terrorism: An Agenda for the 21st Century' (2000) 21(2) International Society of Political Psychology <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3791798> accessed on 17 February 2020.

[10] *Ibid,* (n 7).

[11] This refers to the dynamic and reciprocal interaction of person, environment , and behavior.

people regulate behaviour through control such as punishment and reinforcement such as encouragement of certain behaviour. Thus, it can be seen that learning a consequence of a behaviour can decide the motivation to either conduct such behaviour or not to conduct such behaviour. In effect, there is argued to be an interplay of 'social learning' and 'social cognition'. People make internal perception of their social or communicative environment through the process of cognition and then develop intention for a specific behaviour based on the behaviour they've learnt. Martha Crenshaw, an expert on terrorism studies, believes that terrorists base their activities on a perception of the world around them driven by prejudice rather than an unbiased understanding. They interpret the political and social world based on their personal experiences and memories, signifying that through personal experiences terrorists come to learn patterns or social behaviour and the decision to use terrorism is espoused by their interpretation of these personal experience in the larger backdrop of the social and political climate of which they were or continue to be a part of. Albert Bandurra (the inventor of the social learning and cognitive theory) has examined the reasons why control and reinforcement mechanisms which are responsible for the self-regulatory behaviour in individuals which usually serve to restrain violence get disengaged.   Note the following observation that is made:

"...when reprehensible conduct can be reconstrued as justifiable, its detrimental effects minimized or distorted, and the victim blamed or devalued. In terms of causal agency, he also noted a tendency to displace responsibility on to the enemy or diffuse it within the group."[12]

All the above discussed psycho-social theories on terrorism may seem irrelevant to our discussion of the looking glass self and its proposed linkage to studying and understanding terrorism, here is why, the above review of some psycho-social theories of terrorism is important to the looking glass self:

The commonality that has been drawn and repeatedly emphasized in all psycho-social theories of terrorism is '*perceived mistreatment*', '*perceived threat*', and '*perceived interpretations*', 'from' and 'of' the social environment. This directly corresponds to the postulates of the looking glass self. The looking glass self[13] expounds that one's self-perceptions are an internalization of the perceptions of the views of others.

Theories that direct socio-political deprivation as the cause of terrorism, also involve the deprived group's perception of mistreatment from the established socio-political system. The group's deprivation of social strength is perceived as mistreatment. Thus, it appears that in explaining terrorism where causality is attached to deprivation, there must be a perceived mistreatment which manifests in the form of deprivation. What is transpiring here would appear to be that, a group comes to perceive itself as essentially deprived based on what the group believes is the perception of the society as a whole on the group's identity. Soon, these perceptions of what the group believes is the mainstream perception becomes internalized by its endorsed imagery of being deprived. Further, group's perceptions which are an internalization of the perceptions of the views of others is affirmed when there exists in fact, the material deprivation of social and political resources.

The Narcissistic Theory, having larger psychological connotations than sociological, is difficult to be explained by the looking glass self, although it is not entirely impossible. The fractured or the low self-esteem owing to a childhood trauma is resultant of the child's internalization of the perceptions of the views of their abusers. Some children with trauma are filled with an overwhelming feeling of self-loathe because of the worthless and devalued manner in which they were abused, they adopt the perception of their abusers while evaluating themselves. This low-self esteem is covered up by the mind's unconscious by imbibing within themselves a grandiose self, followed by a narcissistic rage towards everyone whom they perceive as threat to this cover-up and grandiose self-image. Therefore, it appears that a narcissist's self-image of grandiose has been induced by what the narcissist internalizes to be the abuser's perceptions of the narcissist.

The Social Learning and the Cognitive Theory, also uses the process of internalizing the perceptions of others, as derived from the social environment, which in turn direct his behaviour and the effect of such behaviour is reflective of his self.   The process of social behavioural learning acts as the source of accumulating perceptions of others and the social cognition process serves as the process by which the individual makes their own interpretations of the accumulated perceptions of others.

It can be concluded that, the looking glass self approach can be utilized in explaining terrorism, for motivation is an important aspect of terrorism and individual's own self-conception driven by social factors underlies the psycho-social causes for terrorism. It is clear that the study of terrorism should be based on a model that integrates the individual, group and society.

V. CONCLUSION

The looking glass effect can be utilized as an approach to understanding terrorism, however it is unclear if the conception of 'self' affects motivation for terrorism. The looking glass self approach in explaining

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[12] *Ibid,* (n 9).

[13] As explained in section 3.

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motivation for terrorism is based on the understanding of only some psycho-social theories and not all. This has to do with the 'event-driven' nature of terrorism. For instance, there has emerged a form terrorism that is not based on the ideological divisions or the old form of terrorism which sought to achieve short term political power through national liberation or secession. This new terrorism use religious imperatives and believe that they're only responsible to the deity and not to some political ideology or political objective. This new terrorism makes use of weapons of mass destruction and are even willing to commit suicide; and aims at mass casualties unlike, the old form of terrorism which only aimed at communicating a specific symbolic message. In old terrorism, the operations had defined constituencies however, as observed in the new terrorism the operations are diffused and decentralized. The new terrorism is harder to decipher because its participants don't even require to have direct personal interaction with other member and the leaders of the group, instead they're united by common experience and inspiration alone. Thus, in recent times, lone wolf actors have been found to have indulged in terrorism without having any physical links with the terrorist organization, only an emotional linkage to it. Moreover, the study of terrorism lacks any extensive primary data which is based on the individual socio-demographic and psychological backgrounds of those engaged in terrorism. Another problem is that social-psychological theories of terrorism are more often than not speculative analysis based on the available secondary resources and are not obtained from a small number of cases which are too case-specific, so generalizations are hard to make.

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