

Chapter 2

Understanding the Changing Context for Terrorism

Abstract This chapter presents an analysis of the construct of terrorism as a phenomenon with historical roots with many contestations, explanations, and understandings. Since the advent of terrorism, the term's use shifted from the *regime de la terreurs* during the French revolution, to anarchist and socio-revolutionary bombers in the nineteenth century, to the Red terror, to anti-colonial struggle, then to the Palestinian struggles in the 1960s, and finally to religious fundamentalism since the 1990s, to date. These episodes and differential motives for terror activities also beckon the question around its justification. Also, the evolution of the term has brought about problems in understanding its causality and conceptualization and by implication in articulating an approach to finding a panacea for wherever and whenever it is witnessed. This chapter argues that the prism through which terrorism can be understood is highly subjective and open to different interpretations for different times and eras.

Keywords Terrorism • Insurgency • Subjectivity • Political violence

2.1 Introduction

A plethora of studies is available on the topical issue of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria (Olaniyan and Asuelime 2014). However, a majority of them have focused fairly and narrowly on the religious causality and military security solution to the menace. The question of a just war in this particular situation has been ignored so far in the literature and this present article hopes to bridge this gap. To situate this present discourse as different from others, the following are considered: the conceptualization and justification of terrorism; the socio-economic arguments on terrorism; and the existing theoretical debates on the Boko Haram phenomenon. To the degree that resort to terrorism appeals either to the perpetrators or the sympathizers, any counter-terrorism would be less effective considering the fact that the populace also plays salient roles in the fight against domestic terrorism even when

they are not the terrorist themselves. Against this backdrop, it is pertinent to investigate if terrorism is justifiable (or has been justified) under certain conditions and what informs such justification. In a different perspective, why do people resort to terroristic violence? Root causes may well be used by some as justification for terrorism, but this too needs to be investigated. In the interim, understanding what essentially constitutes terrorism is perhaps a viable starting point of this inquiry.

2.2 The Definition Problem: The Bermuda Triangle of Terrorism

Although common in academic discourse, terrorism has proven difficult to conceptualize (O'Neill 2002a; Schmid and Jongman 2005) and the mosaic of meanings ascribed to the term have quite often been subjected to dispute from various quarters; thus leading to an ever growing variegated, and sometimes contradictory, definitions of the term. As Krueger and Maleckova (2002, p. 119) had observed, there are “more than 100 diplomatic and academic definitions of terrorism”. Indeed, useful definitions have been proposed among scholars and policy makers alike, with some focusing solely on non-state actors while others incorporate and accentuate state actors alongside non-state actors (Primoratz 2004; Schmid and Jongman 2005; Lizardo 2008; Jackson and Sinclair 2012). However, there is yet no consensus regarding what essentially and precisely constitutes terrorism; hence, the concept is arguably very elusive since what it is usually referred to has surfaced in “so many different forms and under different circumstance” (Weinberg et al. 2004, p. 778).

This definitional conundrum discerningly dubbed the “Bermuda Triangle of terrorism” by Brian Jenkins of the RAND Corporation—one of the first researchers in the field of terrorism—is affirmed by Philip Schlesinger who argues that “no common agreed definition can in principle be reached, because the very process of definition is itself part of a wider test over ideologies or political objectives” (cited in Schmid 2004b, p. 375). To be sure, another expert, Bowyer Bell observed that “the very word terrorism becomes a litmus test for dearly held beliefs, so that a brief conversation on terrorist matters with almost anyone reveals a special world view, an interpretation of the nature of man and a glimpse into a desired future”.

However, one may ask: is the difficulty merely tied to semantics? To answer this O'Neill (2002a, p. 5) noted that the definition problem is not merely semantic; in lieu, it is strongly tied around issues of “taking a position on whether there are limits on the use of violence, relations between the ‘weak’ and the ‘strong’, ethics in international relations, how a population can legitimately resist living under occupation and increasingly, sovereignty”. He maintained that while some states considered defining terrorism to be important given their quest to address the causes, others considered such an attitude as recognizing and justifying terrorism. Hence, the definition impasse is arguably rather political than semantic given its connectedness to “root causes” debate on terrorism (O'Neill 2002a). What is more,

besides its variegated manifestation, terrorism has undergone various semantic transformations from its original *regime de la terreurs* (reign of terror) during the French revolution when it was first used (Schmid 2004a, p. 399). A historical trajectory of the term reveals precisely this trend: its use shifted from the “*regime de la terreurs*” (government by intimidations) during the French revolution, to anarchist and socio-revolutionary bombers in the nineteenth century, to the Red terror, to anti-colonial struggle, then to the Palestinian struggles in the 1960s, and finally to religious fundamentalism since the 1990s, to date (Schmid 2004a). It is instructive to note that the consequence of lack of definition, for instance by the United Nations has elicited the criticism that the organization adopts a double standard towards the phenomenon (O’Neill 2002b, p. 17).

The prevailing idea that “a person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter” (Primoratz 2004, p. ix) is another salient factor underscoring the difficulty with labeling certain acts as terrorism as opposed to other acts.¹ The divided opinion apropos that fits the label of terrorists carries within itself both conceptual import as well as justification challenges as far as the perception of terrorism is concerned. This contention arguably informed Comb’s view (cited in Moten 2010, p. 37) that the term is basically ascribed to “those whose political objectives one finds objectionable”. Meanwhile, Weinberg et al. (2004, p. 778) argues that person(s) to whom the term is ascribed often find it as an accusation and “seeks to turn the tables on their accusers by labeling them as the ‘real terrorist’”. Indeed, as a concept that “skates a thin line, hardly visible, between crime and war”. Terrorism is difficult to construe from a purely value-neutral perspective (Weinberg 2005, p. 2). A recent study by Bayo (2013, p. 106) argues that “terrorism is being defined in relation to one’s class position, social background, and as emotional responses expressed by those affected ‘victims’ or those who are being victimized from a particular act of terror at one time or the other”.

Inferably, the definition of terrorism among scholars has become largely subjective depending on what aspect of the act the definer is focusing: the *objectives* or the *means* towards achieving those objectives. The merits of the means perspective, as Schmid (2004b) rightly observed is that it offers a narrow(er) and precise definition of terrorism, given that it includes less than it excludes; hence more resistive to objections and more appealing to terrorism scholars. The notion of illegitimate use of force is one oft cited central characteristic of the acts of terrorism in definitions that accentuates the *means*. According to such definitions, terrorism is reduced to the actions of non-state actors only: the state is exonerated from the act. Defending such view, Wight (cited in Jackson and Sinclair 2012, p. 57) charges that “what most people mean when they refer to terror are forms of non-state violence, and those that confuse the issues of ‘state terror’ with terrorism needs to defend

¹Menachem Begin, the leader of Irgun (Lehi’ Zionist rival) in post-war Palestine was the first to refer to his followers as “freedom fighters” rather than terrorists against the backdrop of the naming game that characterizes the notion of terrorism. Meanwhile, the concept of freedom fighter became trendy thereby complicating the understanding of terrorism especially during the epoch referred to by Rapoport’s “second-wave”.

their accounts by providing more theoretically nuanced version of both the state and terrorism”. Based on the Weberian notion of state, with its accents on state legitimacy regarding the monopoly of the use of force, Wight (2009, p. 101) simply contends that if the notion of illegitimate force forms part of the definition of terrorism, “then the concept of ‘state terrorism’ is a contradiction of term”. In other words, he jettisons the idea of state terrorism because the state’s use of force is legitimate as opposed to the non-state’s use of force.

However, other scholars seem to be in acquiescent that the state cannot be exonerated from the acts of terrorism simply for the above reason (Teichman 1989; Primoratz 1990; Alex 2004; Baur 2004; Arowolo 2013). For instance, Baur (2004) introduced the concept of “pro-establishment terrorists” to counter such views that reduce terrorism to only actions by non-state actors. He posits that states can be, and have actually been, guilty of terrorism. Hitler, Idi Amin, Stalin, Saddam Husain and sons, and Mussolini are some of the state leaders he associated with “pro-establishment terrorism”. In fact, based on the *means* criteria, states and non-state actors label each other as terrorist, not necessarily because of the other’s use of lethal violence in attempting to attain particular political goals but simply because one views the other’s acts as illegitimate (Coady 2004b; Lizardo 2008). This circle of debate must have prompted Ross (1993, p. 326) to the conclusion that academic study of terrorism is “descriptively rich but analytically barren”.

In his recent “*Frameworks for Conceptualizing Terrorism*” Schmid (2004a, p. 179) identified various framework according to which terrorism has been conceived, namely terrorism as: (1) crime,² (2) politics, (3) warfare, (5) propaganda, (6) religion. Considering the first category, he argues that “most if not all activities commonly perpetrated by terrorists, are considered illegal if not always illegitimate by the international community” (Schmid 2004a, p. 179). Meanwhile, he further noted that despite the criminal nature of terrorism as commonly expressed as in the form of indiscriminate bombings, armed assaults on civilians, focused assassinations, kidnappings, hostage-taking, and hijacking, there is most often a political underpinning to such actions. In corroboration, Coady (2004b, p. 41) stresses the broad and fuzzy border between merely criminal and fully political. He notes that “criminal activities can become involved with the political, even in the matter of violence, as happened with the criminal drug lords in Colombia some years ago—and groups whose rationale is basically political may indulge in ordinary criminal activities, such as bank-robbery, to finance their operations” (2004b, p. 41).

²The use of the term crime, however, requires its own clarification as its conceptualization varies considerably across time and cultural spaces and is more often dependent on the scope of a particular legal framework. Meanwhile, Schmid’s conception of crime herein has to do with “the intentional commission of an act usually deemed socially harmful or dangerous and specifically defined, prohibited and punishable under the criminal law” (Schmid 2004, p. 179). Questions regarding the intrinsic values of an act deemed as crime by a particular state can, however, be raised concerning this definition. For instance, the distinction between ‘*mala prohibita*’ (wrong merely because it is prohibited by statute) and ‘*mala per se*’ (wrong or evil in itself’), that exists, for instance in the Roman legal traditions further complicates the understanding of terrorism as crime.

But beyond this criminal dimension the clear political motivation of terrorism is also widely acknowledged (Schmid and Jongman 2005). For instance, the report of the Policy Working Group on the UN and Terrorism maintained that “terrorism is, in most cases, essentially a political act. It is meant to inflict dramatic and deadly injury on civilians and to create an atmosphere of fear, generally for political or ideological (whether secular or religious) purposes” (Schmid 2004b, p. 214). Hence an understanding of terrorism within the broader context of political conflict is, according to Schmid (2004b), necessary in view of the reality of globalization, state interdependence, and the growing internationalization of terrorism itself. The convergence of the political and criminal aspects of terrorism begets the notion of “political crime.”³

The foregoing debate underscores a very common problem not just with attaining a standard definition for terrorism but also with any other particular term based on the tenuousness of language itself. As Schmid and Jongman (2005, p. 6) pointed out, “the question of definition of a term like terrorism cannot be detached from the question of who is the defining agency”. Ferdinand De Saussure, the renowned postmodernist linguist, is of a similar view when he maintained that meanings are arbitrarily bestowed on persons and things, hence the concept, “terrorist” is only a perception imposed on someone that does not necessarily describe any intrinsic truth about the person (Desbruslais 2009, p. 19). Schmid and Jongman (2005, p. 6) corroborates this view by maintaining that “in many, even in most situations, the adoption of a standard meaning is just a matter of convenience”. Little wonder terrorism is wildly viewed as a “contested concept” particularly among scholars and policy makers as most definitions are coloured by “political ideology, location and perspective” (Moten 2010, p. 36).

To put all the foregoing in perspective in order to identify this division of opinions over the nature of terrorism, let us look at extant definitions of terrorism. According to the U.S. State Department, terrorism constitutes “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents, usually intended to influence an audience” (Richardson 2011, p. 17). Similarly, terrorism was defined as “a type of political violence that intentionally targets civilians (non-combatants) in a ruthlessly destructive, often unpredictable manner, employing horrific violence against unsuspecting civilians, as well as combatants, in order to inspire fear and create panic which, in turn, advances the terrorist’s political and religious agenda” (Sterba and French 2003, p. 140). It suffices, however, to note that when it comes to who is a “non-combatant” and what we mean by “politically motivated” there are as many definitions as there are definers (Burgoon 2006, p. 178).

³This occurs when an act is considered ‘criminal’ but its motive or intent is deemed ‘political’ (Schmid 2004, p. 179).

According to the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Terrorism, Article 2 of the draft Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism, any person commits an offence within the meaning of this Convention if that person, by any means, unlawfully and intentionally, causes:

(a) death or serious bodily injury to any person; or (b) serious damage to public or private property, including a place of public use, a state or government facility, a public transportation system, an infrastructure facility or the environment; or (c) damage to property, places, facilities, Resulting or likely to result in major economic loss, when the purpose of the conduct, by its nature or context, is to intimidate a population or to compel a government or an international organization to do or abstain from doing any act (cited in Schmid 2004b, p. 199).

These definitions fall under two of the four categories of definitions of terrorism that were systematically identified by Alex Schmid (Weinberg et al. 2004). Similarly, according to Schmid's widely used academic definition,⁴ "terrorism is

an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-)clandestine individual group or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, whereby—in contrast to assassination—the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims or violence are generally chosen randomly (target of opportunity) or selectively (representation or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message generator" (cited in Weinberg et al. 2004, p. 3).

These value-laden definitions of terrorism such as Schmid's and the state-centric definition of terrorism such as the U.S. State Department, lead us to ask a further philosophical question: why do non-states participate as actors? In other words, one may ask: what motivates or justifies terrorism perpetrated against the state? The two fundamental but related issues, namely: the conceptualization and justification of terrorism are central to a philosophical investigation of terrorism (Primoratz 1990). While the first issue is not an exclusive perverse of philosophy—as indicated by the various attempts to define terrorism by government departments and scholars from various fields—the second is. Hence, the cliché that one man's terrorist is another's freedom fighter is not only pivoted on the problem of conceptualization of terrorism, but also its justification. Meanwhile, before delving properly into moral argument on the justification of terrorism it is pertinent to assay the nature of terrorism from both historical and contemporary bird-eye view. This would show why and how certain terrorists seem to have justified their acts in human history.

⁴In general—academic definitions of terrorism are privileged over supposed political ones because of the tendency of the former towards value-neutrality, thereby enhancing a non-double standard justification of terrorism, if possible. However, academic definitions have quite some limitations ranging from complexity due to use of jargon to policy irrelevance due to its blurring of the distinction between terrorism by state actors and terrorism by non-state actors (Onapajo and Uzodike 2012, p. 339).

2.3 Perspectives on Terrorism: A Historical Trajectory

As evidently a contested concept, what constitutes terrorism seems primarily to be a function of how it is defined. Meanwhile, a glance at both historical and contemporary trends illuminates various global instances of acts that have widely been termed as terrorism. From a historical perspective, Rapoport (2004, pp. 46–61) identified four waves of modern terrorism in a linear form, namely the Anarchist wave, the Anti-colonial wave, New Left Wave, and Religious wave. He dubbed the “first wave” as the anarchist wave and ties its motivation to the failure of democratic reform agendas across Europe during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He argues that anarchists attempted the abolishment of the government. Its fundamental tactics were more of individual terrorism and were primarily characterized by the assassination of key government officials as redolent of the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 in Russia. This wave, which began in Russia in the 1880s extended to the Balkans and Asia as well as Western Europe.

Then there was the second wave, the “anti-colonial wave”, around the 1920s. As the name implies, this wave of terrorism was primarily characterized by national self-determination in opposition to the oppressive yoke of colonialism. The Irish rebellion of 1919 against the English is illustrative. The rebel’s grievances, like the preceding wave, were directed “against the representatives of England such as police, soldiers, judges and government officials, in an effort to make the cost of maintaining continued occupation too high” (Moten 2010, pp. 39–40). Essentially, such terrorism was employed to crush the government by non-states groups. For instance, Jewish terrorist groups such the IrgunZvaiLeumi and the “Stern Gang” also known as the Lehi, an acronym for *LohameiHerutYisrael* which means Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, endorsed the use of terror to force the British out of Palestine (Garrison 2004, p. 267). Interestingly, these groups fundamentally believed they were “struggling against government terror” (Moten 2010, p. 40); hence, their hit-and-run terrorist tactics were directed at the security arm of the government, such as the police (very much like the Boko Haram’s tactics).

The third wave, that is, the New Left Wave took its inspiration from the distrust in the existing democratic system. Again like the preceding “waves”, the New Left wave contended against the imperialism of the west; and thus was characterized by nationalism and radicalism. It employed tactics such as hostage-taking, kidnapping, and assassination against its targets. Groups such as the Italian Red Brigades, The West German Red Army faction (RAF), and The Japanese Red Army, who all saw themselves as “vanguard of the Third World” are prominent examples during these waves (Moten 2010, p. 40).

The last phase which arguably stretches to the present era, the religious wave, surfaced in 1979 and is characterized by the clamour for religious state. It was indeed about religious self-determination. According to Moten (2010, p. 40), “Islam is at the heart of this wave although the Sikhs have sought religious state in Punjab”. Besides, Christians and Jews were not exempt. This wave is essentially characterized by religious fundamentalism, whereby brutal violence, slaughter of

infidels, and the violation of human rights were given a sacred character by those who considered themselves to be a “true believer” (Schmid 2004b).⁵ Schmid argues that “such a reframing of inhuman acts in the terrorist’s mind to heroic deeds constitutes a “defense” or “neutralization-mechanism”, which turns an actual murder into a perceived sacrifice” (Schmid 2004b).⁶

The Iranian revolution of 1979 is arguably a primary precipitant factor of modern religious fundamentalism. One of the distinguished characteristics of this wave is the commonness of a suicide bomb. The notable group in this era includes the Tamil Tigers, who according to Moten (2010, p. 41) used more suicide bombers than anyone else between 1983 and 2000. Terrorism in this wave was more frequent and violent as casualties and infrastructure damage skyrocketed. Influenced by the dramatic advancement in science and technology, the last two waves of terrorism employed various advanced tactics of terrorism such as hijacking of commercial airliners; the use of guns and bombs in attacks as well as the use of sophisticated encryption software for secrecy. While terrorism during its initial stages as can be discerned from the above were predominantly within particular nations, it subsequently assumed a more international scope—particularly during the religious wave. The transnational nature of the major religion such as Islam and Christianity arguably explains this latter dimension. Accordingly, three types of terrorism can be found in the literature, namely domestic terrorism, international terrorism, and transnational terrorism.

In trying to understand terrorism, different perspectives have been identified. One such perspective is the social and behavioural perspective, which links terrorism to “social, economic, political and other environment factors” (Moten 2010, p. 45). In lieu of restricting terrorism to a given religion or even region, this perspective associates terrorism with “root causes” such as social economic inequality and political deprivation. Terrorist groups with religious façades like the Al Qaeda are seen basically as offshoots of “internal and international forces”. Such groups are believed to have been nudged by the perceived sense of injustice perpetrated against them by “others” and are motivated thus to revenge through terroristic means. For instance, a study by Marari in 1985 reveals how “those Palestinian suicide bombers often have at least a relative or close friend who was killed or injured by Israelis” (cited in Moten 2010, p. 46).

The demographic and economic determinants of terrorism constitute another perspective of terrorism. This perspective situates terrorism within the link between

⁵It suffices to acknowledge that the activities of the groups such as: the Hindu Thugs in South Asia (2500 years); The Jewish Zealots-Sicarii (more than 1900 years ago); Islamic Assassins about 900 years reveal, contrary to the common perception, that religious fundamentalism is hardly a modern phenomenon (Schmid 2004b). All of them are arguably precursors of some contemporary fundamentalist terrorists.

⁶It is arguably this perception that promoted the sixteenth century French philosopher, Blaise Pascal to say that “Men never do evil so openly and contentedly as when they do it from religious conviction”, while Karl Marx referred to terrorists as “dangerous dreamers of the absolute” (Schmid 2004b, p. 211).

economic and demographic factors such as high-fertility, high-growth regions in most non-western, particularly, Muslim societies. The bone of contention here is that such natural endowment hardly translates into a good standard of living for the members of such societies considering for instance, the large number of unemployed youths that might be found in such societies (Moten 2010, p. 47). This situation facilitates a “revolution of rising frustrations” as people are forced by poverty, hopelessness, and a sense of frustration to join extremist organizations (Moten 2010, p. 47). The aforementioned author explains that the situation is worsened if the established governments are authoritarian and illiberal as characterized by some Muslim majority countries. In lieu of responding to frustration of the population, the government in these societies tends to repress opposition movements by not providing them a non-violent means of voicing out their grievances. Hence radicalism and terrorism becomes a more convenient means by which they believe they can change the status quo.

However, some American policy makers disagree with the preceding view. Terrorist organizations such as the Al Qaeda are considered by them as essentially linked with the Islamic religion, that is, “Islam and Muslims, unlike secular institutions, are inclined towards violence” (Moten 2010, p. 48). This prevailing western perspective largely bifurcates the world into secular (the West) and religious (Muslim world)—with the former perceived as the peace lover while the latter is seen as the vanguard of violence. Samuel Huntington’s (1996) “Clash of Civilization” appears to have provided the justification for such belief, given his assertion that “Islam has bloody borders and Muslim states have a high propensity to resort to violence” (Huntington 1996, p. 258). Huntington’s thesis “provided needed justification for the U.S. and the West to stretch out their military in the Muslim world” (Moten 2010, p. 49). However, Cavanaugh (2007, p. 9) noted that the persistence of this dichotomy in the west has been mainly due to its ideological and political usefulness, as it “serves to silence representatives of certain kinds of faiths in the public sphere”.

The U.S. has championed the cause of identifying and naming of terrorist organizations around the world as well as states sponsoring terrorism, which include Syria, Cuba, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Iran (Moten 2010, p. 50). Interestingly, therefore, experts in terrorism studies, according to Moten (2010, p. 10) “believe that the States Department list of states’ sponsors of terrorism is merely a political tool used by the U.S. in order to impose sanctions” (Moten 2010, p. 10). Not surprisingly, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in the name of ridding the world of safe havens for terrorist groups is seen by Johnson (2004, pp. 74–85) as mainly driven instead by the economic motives such as oil and interest in domestic politics. Moten (2010, p. 52) corroborates the above view when he argues that “the Afghanistan attack and the Taliban overthrow were carried out not because they were harboring Al Qaeda but because they were not cooperating with the oil consortium, led by the US Company Unocal, to allow a pipeline across their country from central Asian oil fields”.

Contrary to the U.S. perspective, there is the “Muslim Perspective” which stems from and is a reaction against the U.S.-led war against terror (Moten 2010). This

perspective is averse to what it sees as the West-centric perspective of terrorism which paints Muslims as terrorism-tolerant, and solely as a means of fighting the West. The Muslim perspective challenges the view that “terrorism is automatically attributed to the killing of any westerner but not the murder of civilians’ *en masses* in Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan, or the horror perpetrated in Abu-Ghraib in the name of freedom and democracy” (Moten 2010, p. 53). Yet it is obvious that Muslims condemn acts of terrorism. Hence, the Muslim perspective basically sees the West as the chief architect of terrorism. “Washington’s actions in the Muslim world in general are seen by many Muslims as evidence of collaboration with regimes that compromise Islamic values and oppress their citizens” (Moten 2010, p. 53). It is against this backdrop that charismatic leaders like Bin Ladin in his 1996 *fatwa* (religious edicts) called upon his Muslim brothers to fight against the “invading enemy”, namely America and Israel. Unsurprisingly, the 9/11 attacks were greeted with cheers and celebration as an open form of moral heroism among certain groups of people in the Arab world, the same act that was considered as unmitigated evil among America (Kraemer 2004). Following this is another salient dimension, namely the divergence regarding the moral status of terrorist attacks, a topical issue for the philosophical perspective on terrorism (Baur 2004; Kraemer 2004; Primoratz 2004; Schwenkenbecher 2012).

2.4 Justification of Terrorism

The preceding perspectives indeed underscore the cliché that “one person’s terrorist is another person’s freedom fighter” (Primoratz 2004); hence raising the question: how are we to morally assess terrorism?⁷ On the one hand, many scholars seem to acquiesce that terrorism is *prima facie* morally repugnant, irrespective of the agent(s) or the victim(s) as well as the “how” of its execution (Coady 1985; Primoratz 1990; Coady 2004a; Jollimore 2007). For instance, Primoratz (2004, p. xix) argues “in general, but especially in the present worldwide terrorism alert, the moral prohibition of terrorism ought to be understood and endorsed as absolute.” Similarly, Schmid (2004a, p. 379) is of the view, while the above cliché “undoubtedly reflects a political praxis its moral relativism is highly unsatisfactory from an ethical and intellectual point of view”.

⁷The Israeli-Palestinian long standing conflicts represent a persuasive example of the subjectivity hovering around the debates on terrorism, in terms of its moral and conceptual implications. While to outsiders both parties are committing acts of terrorism, the involved parties not only denied such allegation but also ironically blame the others for perpetuating terroristic acts against them by simply justifying their own use of violence as not terroristic (Primoratz 2004, p. ix). Interestingly, this same conflict has quite some resonance with some Christian-Muslim conflict in various parts of the globe including Nigeria, where Boko Haram have made allusion to America’s support of Israeli in marginalizing the Palestinian community (or the Muslim world) as one of their grievances against the West.

The view that “terrorism is *prima facie* wrong” (Coady 2004a, p. 83) is quite often based on the traditional Just War theory⁸ under the *jus in bello*, which underscores the principle of discrimination between military and civilian targets and refraining from harming innocent civilians, is useful in this regard (Primoratz 2004, p. 25). Essentially terrorism is herein seen as violence, against civilian, noncombatants, and the innocents. It is instructive to note that attaining unanimity on the notion of non-combatants is polemical as there are as many definitions thereof as there are definers (Burgoon 2006, p. 178). Besides using the same notion of non-combatants or innocent as reference frame, one may also ask: are innocent or non-combatants not killed in war? Meanwhile, to answer this, Schmid (2004b, p. 204) differentiated between collateral but unintentional damage to civilians and intentional attacks on civilians, referring to war and most contemporary terrorism, respectively, while inferring that “terrorism is a counter value, rather than a counter-force tactic, since civilians not involved in combat are the prime target” (Schmid 2004b, p. 204).

Nonetheless, there is also the view that terrorism under grave reason might be justifiable.⁹ Different aspects of terrorism are underscored in justifying the phenomenon. For instance, according to Kraemer (2004) non-consequentialist ethicists prioritize the motive rather than the goal in their moral assessment of terrorism. Considered as a sole weapon available to the political powerless, terrorism, from the perspective of the insurgent groups, may not only be seen as a necessary but also a justifiable means of expressing—if not addressing their grievances against the perception of inequality and oppression.¹⁰ It is instructive to note that such perception may not solely be among the terrorists but also even among the populace. To be sure, a survey conducted in Jordan, Morocco, Pakistan, and Turkey by Krueger (2007, pp. 24–25) to determine their view regarding the justifiability of terrorist attacks against America and other Westerners in Iraq, reveals that a high percentage, particularly of those with a higher level of education in these countries strongly justified terrorism (see also Schmid and Jongman 2005, p. 24).

It must be underscored that the West, and in particular, the U.S., is widely believed to have been unjust to the Muslim world (Moten 2010). Accordingly, terrorists might not only justify their action against these enemies as a form of vengeance but also due to the shared justification among the populace, which

⁸The Just War tradition has two phases: the *just ad bellum* and *jus in bello*. The former designates the conditions under which resorting to war is justifiable while the latter focuses on the methods by which such war should be conducted. Besides the Just War theory, other perspectives on the justification or condemnation of terrorism can be gleaned from the utilitarian tradition and the so-called realist tradition (Coady 2004, p. 42).

⁹Given the severity of the Nazi threats during World War II, the terror Bombing of German cities has been deemed legitimate to some extent. Similarly the terroristic elimination of Hitler is applauded along the same lines. These views are anchored in the act utilitarian, which emphasizes the ‘rule of thumb’ that overrules moral constraint in certain situation where the outcome of an act generates more happiness than sorrow.

¹⁰Considered from the perspective of an attempt to address grievance and inequality Schmid noted that the weapon of terrorism is indeed a very powerful weapon for the powerless.

themselves might not necessarily be terrorists. Based on this view, the need to understand the terrorist perception of the enemy is essential to understanding the justification they offer for their acts. This justification ground tends quite often to be on non-religious ground; hence, its religious façade is a mere decoy.

Nonetheless, the stage theory developed by Mark Juergensmeyer (cited in Schmid 2004b, p. 212) also shows the need to look at the world through the eyes of terrorists acting on religious impetus in order to understand their sensed justification. For the terrorist, especially those with religious motivation, the world is bifurcated into the forces of evil and forces of good, which are responsible for the problems and solutions respectively. The terrorist believes himself to be working towards enthroning the good force in society, believed to be dominated by forces of the evil in secularism. The “us” verses “them” dichotomy strongly propels the terrorists to believe that “perpetrating acts of terrorism is one of several ways to symbolically express power over oppressive forces and regain some nobility in the perpetrator’s personal life”. With such premonitions, the dastardly acts of destroying the perceived “oppressive force” are not only seen as noble but necessary towards the promotion of the good force (Schmid 2004b, p. 212).

To this end discrimination of the innocents and civilians is only a matter of secondary concern for the terrorists. Hence, the *jus in belum* restraint becomes unimportant, since in as much as the terrorist(s) are averse to the killing of the innocent, it is not possible, given its clandestine nature. Moreover, the very perception of the notion of “innocent” or “civilian” by the terrorist is hardly in tandem with the meaning of the same term under the *Just War* theory. To be sure, believing themselves to be fighting against an “unjust” system, namely the secular government, the terrorist would hardly consider the killing of the so-called innocent/civilian/non-combatant as unjustifiable in addressing their grievance considering that the latter sustain the “unjust” system. For instance, since the entire America elects the congress, what seems to matter to terrorists such as Bin Laden and his followers is vengeance against the entire nation, in which case he argues “we do not have to differentiate between military or civilian. As far as we are concerned [Americans] are all targets” (Schmid 2004a, p. 384). In the words of Bin Ladin:

The American people should remember that they pay taxes to their government, they elect their president, their government manufactures arms and gives them to Israel and Israel uses them to massacre Palestinians. The American Congress endorses all government measures and this proves that the entire American is responsible for the atrocities perpetrated against Muslims (cited in Kinyon 2004, p. 3).

By implication “many acts of violence which we consider ‘immoral’ as a means to achieving an end, are, in the view of the religious or ideologically motivated terrorist, justified by the absolute end for which the terrorist purports to fight” (Schmid 2004b). This same logic can be said to apply to the perception of the Nigerian government by the Boko Haram. Further complicating this issue is the fact the discrimination of non-combatants and civilians according to *Just war* canon is hardly attainable, even under a conventional war situation by the military. Hence,

Schmid (2004b) argues that “to the extent that some wars have become more terroristic—targeting predominantly civilians than military opponents—the moral difference between the conduct of soldiers and terrorists has grown smaller”. The question then that can be asked is: Given the deleterious impacts of terrorism, should the latter be justified under certain circumstances? Citing Yasser Arafat, Primoratz (2004, p. 5) opines that “no degree of oppression and no level of desperation can ever justify the killing of innocent civilians”. While there may be compelling views that would justify resort to violence and terrorism in order to address grievances, it appears quite often that two wrongs hardly make a right. Arguably, one’s definition of terrorism consequently is influenced by where one stands in this justification debate. However, one wants to define terrorism, there is obvious benefit in addressing grievances through other means than through terrors.

Considering the group under study—Boko Haram—definitions that underscore terrorism by non-state actors, such as the above should be more favoured in this study. According to such definitions, terrorism is wrong due to its targets of non-combatants and unintended victims, based on appeal to Just War theory, which strictly requires the discrimination of non-combatants and civilians. Indeed, as Primoratz (2004, p. xii) noted that “we might sometimes have much sympathy with a people fighting to get the occupying power off their back, but still objects if its fighter seeks to achieve their goals by attacking the enemy civilian rather than the military”. Schmid (2004b, p. 211) further accentuated this view by arguing that “neither religion, nor any other lofty cause, can be accepted as a license to kill with impunity and a good conscience”.

In addressing the problem of terrorism, going by the Just War theory, it is easy to condemn terrorism as evil from the perspective of the “condemner” but it is a different story altogether from the perspective of the “condemned”. The latter, based on the belief that they are fighting against what they deemed as an unjust system—as in the case of Boko Haram—do not consider their actions evil. Thus, an important “initial steps of fighting terrorism is arguably to comprehend the terrorist point of view towards the world, humanity, and their justification of their violent methods” (Ozsoy 2007, p. 56). Accordingly, as Ozsoy aptly maintains, “it is unreasonable to expect to solve the problem of terrors through military and political precautions because military sanctions will be retaliated against with more severe violence and triggers a vicious cycle” (Ozsoy 2007, p. 56). Meanwhile, as noted earlier there is hardly a single cause for terrorism; but considering the focus of this study, what follows are the scholarly debates on the link between social-economic factors and terrorism in light of the root cause analysis.

2.4.1 Between Socio-Economic Factors and Terrorism

The nexus between terrorism and socio-economic variables such as inequality, poverty, social or political exclusion, and low education inter alia has been shown to be rather complicated and inconclusive both from the perspective of the

individual and the collective (Piazza 2011, p. 340). If anything, there has been a divided opinion over the relationship between the two as some empirical findings based on various contexts seem to disconfirm the view that poverty causes terrorism. For instance, studies based on cross-national data analysis has not compellingly shown that underdeveloped countries by virtue of their dismal socio-economic standings—measured by macro-economic indicators—are necessarily more likely to produce terrorists than their middle or high-income counterparts (Abadie 2006; Piazza 2006; Dreher and Gassebner 2008). In fact, according to Krueger (2007) the view that there is a link between socio-economic condition and terrorism is entirely based “on faith” rather than on “scientific evidence”, as some empirical findings suggest that no relationship exists between poverty, education, and terrorism.

Hence, Schmid and Jongman (2005, pp. 6–7) maintained that “a range of socio-economic indicators—illiteracy, infant mortality and gross domestic product per capita—are unrelated to whether people involved in terrorism. Indeed, if anything, measure of economic deprivation has the opposite effects than the popular stereotypes would predict in the country level analyses”. Basically, a range of empirical studies suggest that terrorists are not necessarily likely to emerge from poor socio-economic background (Krueger and Maleckova 2002; Berrebi 2007). This view is also supported by the fact that perpetrators of 9/11 were “middle-class, educated misanthropes led by a rich religious fanatic” (Burgoon 2006, p. 177).

Meanwhile, other studies seem to offer different observations apropos the nexus between terrorism and poor socio-economic factors (Nagel 1974; Berrebi 2003; Li and Schaub 2004; Blomberg and Rosendorff 2006; Burgoon 2006; Piazza 2006; Bandyopadhyay and Younas 2011; Piazza 2011). For instance, using a pooled time-series analysis, Li and Schaub (2004) found that developing countries are more susceptible to international terrorist attacks than their economically developed OECD counterparts. The variance in terms of socio-economic conditions in these two categories of countries is non-negligible in terms of how they discourage or encourage terrorism. Similarly, Bravo and Dias (2006) also underscores the negative correlation between terrorist incidences and the level of development based on geopolitical factors in Eurasia. Bravo and Dias (2006) seem to acquiesce with the hypothesis that socio-economic variable are crucial, among other factors, to terrorism by demonstrating that a “number of terrorist incidents is negatively associated with the level of development, the literacy level and ethnic fractionalization”.

In the same vein, higher level of economic inequality is noted to be positively correlated with terrorism, according to Lai (2007) while Burgoon (2006) for his part underscores the importance of social welfare spending in the reduction of international terrorist attacks—a view that is pivoted on the socioeconomic determinants of terrorism. In fact, as far as policy oriented study such as that of Burgoon (2006) is concerned:

social welfare policies—including social security, unemployment, and health and education spending—affect preferences and capacities of social actors in ways that, on balance, discourage terrorism: by reducing poverty, inequality, and socioeconomic insecurity, thereby diminishing incentives to commit or tolerate terrorism, and by weakening extremist political and religious organizations and practice that provide economic and cognitive security where public safety nets are lacking.

From the perspective of international terrorism target, Blomberg and Rosendorff (2006) demonstrated that nationals are less probable to launch terrorist attacks abroad to the degree that their income levels increased. Meanwhile they also observed that higher income levels, democratic, and economically opened countries are more likely to be targets of international terrorism.

2.5 Conclusion

Inferably, there is a lack of consensus among scholars regarding the role of socio-economic indicators in the emergence of persistence of terrorism; and other studies have adopted a middle ground regarding the forgoing disagreement over the role of socio-economic in the emergence of terrorism. This general lack of consensus as identified above is not inconsequential. According to Piazza (2011, p. 340) these ambiguities has “left terrorism studies unable to articulate a clear counter-terrorism policy recommendation”. While linking socio-economic factors to “religious terrorism”¹¹ might further seem to be a quantum leap, it appears that such is not necessarily malapropos. As Schmid (2004b, p. 212) rightly observed:

Additional factors need to exist in order to fuse religion with political violence. Poverty of the people (not necessarily of the terrorist who identifies with them), social injustice and state repression are often listed as prime causes of insurgent terrorism. They can drive people to migration, revolt, crime, suicide or religious fervour. The terrorist temptation is often a combination of some or all of these. The migration is to paradise, the revolt is against the status quo, the method used is normally considered criminal, suicide preceded by murder is one of the means and religion offers a justification.

The implication of the above—namely the divided opinion over the role of socio-economic factors in the rise of terrorism. Also, the evolution of term creates problems for the understanding its universally acceptable causality and conceptualization. By implication this also becomes a quagmire in an attempt to finding an approach or panacea for wherever and whenever such social and security phenomenon as terrorism is prevalent. This is also due to its subjectivity and differential interpretations across time and space.

¹¹This has to do mainly with fundamentalist terrorism that employ religion as its basis; for example, groups such as Boko Haram.

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