Policing gand Security

The Problem of Terrorism in the Public Sphere: Habermas and Derrida

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Abstract

This essay seeks to analyze through a comparative approach the current situation regarding the phenomenon of "terrorism" launched by the consequences in the public sphere and in civil liberties. To begin, an analysis and an attempt to determine and define the phenomenon of terrorism is made, within the situation of the conditions of the new politics and moral on a more global level. Conversely, the great complexity of this phenomenon requires the analysis of different perspectives in a more inclusive way. In this context, this study relies on both theoretical and practical approaches to Jurgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida. Support of these two authors in contemporary thought allows us to conduct a fuller and deeper treatment as based on two different perspectives. Habermas seeks initially to conclude that the phenomenon of terrorism in today's time is displayed as a separate phenomenon and a very specific one, given the size that it reaches and the causes that inspire it. He outlines a comparison between Western and Eastern culture, taking into account the specifics of political systems and optics of religion, to discern the differences and the reasons later on. His basic thesis is that terrorism constitutes a threat to freedom in public space and occurs as a result of a blockage or a gap in a communicative situation between two culture or different actors. For this reason he wants to develop a new ethos of tolerance and a greater apperception of public space to make possible freedom as both a personal concept and public concept. Meanwhile Derrida's approach walks in the footsteps of postmodernism where he wants to use the deconstructivist method regarding the analysis and the phenomenon of terrorism. From this perspective unfolds the thought that terrorism in today's time is a crisis of autoimmunity that has been produced, somewhat indirectly, by the West. Consequently, another worldview should be used to reappraise and revise the concepts of civil liberties and the concept of territory. Derrida sees the phenomenon of "terrorism" in a systemic form that emanates from the crisis of the Cold War that has been transformed into a new form of the phenomenon of globalization today, outlining somewhat of a threat to freedom as a collective and public concept.

1. Perspectives on the term "*terrorism*"

The problem of today's terrorism involves the problem of the conceptual advance of the history and role of the individual in relation to the focus of civil liberties. From the middle of the 18th century, with the French and American Revolution, an idea was framed about the equality and freedom between and of people, and as a result of this the latter can create a more active relationship with history, of which they feel responsible too. Only with the Enlightenment and Kant's thought was the freedom and autonomy of any single subject recognized as a moral entity (Kant, 2009) . Consequently, the disclosure of human action itself in freedom shows to us the moral responsibilities from a historical aspect. With Hegel too, the concept of human individuality is seen closely connected with the community, as well in a deep dimension of a collective history (Hegel, 1977) . In this regard, related to the individual relationship with history, two schools of thought progressed: the liberal approach and the Hegelian one. It seems that this distinction is important to be noted in order to distinguish the two different commitments of our philosophers regarding the terrorism issue.

In this regard, although they have significant differences, Habermas and Derrida follow Arendt's idea that political engagement does not constitute an extension of the philosophical activity. Consequently, the analysis of the problem of terrorism has a large impact on the field of the public sphere and civil liberties (Lee, 2009), as both philosophers say that terrorism is an elusive concept that threatens the global political arena and the public sphere of certain states.

Yet on the other hand, nowadays terrorism as a phenomenon is discussed extensively but often interpreted according to paradigms and different areas of interest. In this context, the idea that the term "terrorism" features interpretations and different perspectives is commonly accepted. However, to study this phenomenon, a question of a methodological type can often arise: What is the area that should be studied, through which theory, and in what order? All three of these questions are fundamental to understanding how this phenomenon can be interpreted, which is the interest of the person who interprets it and which interest groups are behind this interpretation. However in this sequence, interpretation by a single focus or under a single model often shrinks unto a methodological dogmatism that does not contain a critical spirit, analyzing this phenomenon in a too simplistic way. In this optic, initially, Habermas believes that terrorism has imposed an acceleration of the need for dialogue between classic international law and the new cosmopolitan order on an international scale. Economic and political globalization has influenced the organization of the nation-state as a territorial state. For this reason, Habermas's criticism and rationality are not an abstract structure but an everyday communicative practice that creates spaces for consensus in the public sphere (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Through them, he states that the phenomenon of terrorism nowadays is displayed as a specific separate phenomenon, given its extensions and its inspirational causes (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Regarding the latter, Habermas believes that basically the phenomenon of terrorism is a product of obstruction or blockage of a particular communicative situation. If communication is defined under the idea that 'either ... or', then grounds for exclusion and violence are easily shown (Habermas & Derrida, 2003).

On the other hand, the phenomenon of terrorism rises and is feed by the major differences between the mentality of Western and Eastern culture. Given that our social relationships include many different types of action such as violence, manipulation, etc., two important facts need to be emphasized: firstly, the practices of our daily life are based on some certain common conventions, mutual expectations (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Secondly, conflicts arise from disorder or blocking of communication due to misunderstanding as a consequence of lack of sincerity. But the issue appears to be more complicated when the situation unfolds in the order of two different cultures or between different cultural elements as in the case of religions (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). In this perspective, terrorism appears to be true as a disproportion of "forces" not represented by a State but hidden behind their identity by taking the connotations more of a social cultural clash than strictly political or military (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). So in this context, the concept of terrorism as a phenomenon has pushed radical Islam itself to be decentralized, changing the concepts of terrorism and religion by making them seem unimportant in the current situation. Generally and traditionally, the West believes that terrorism is just a desperate expression of religion, simplifying the issue. However, the problem actually lies in the world seen through the mass media which, through their strictly political and economic policies, design sometimes an unrealistic vision of the situation. In this sense, the ability to see beyond the phenomenon of terrorism seems too dim because this phenomenon has been legitimated as a consequence of an extreme polarization. Thus, in order for the problem of terrorism to be fully understood, it is necessary to be distinguished from the phenomenon of religion in itself.

2. The impact on the public sphere

According to and quoting Habermas, "objectively, however, terrorism can be granted political content only if it has politically realistic goals. Otherwise, it is on a par with ordinary criminal activity" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p. 56). So, global terrorism is unlikely to be qualified as continuation of "*politics by other violent means*". But in this respect, terrorism reveals a paradox: while not displaying a real political objective different from global terrorism, it seems to fully delegitimize the state's authority as an entity with clearly defined boundaries. At this point, Habermas believes that terrorism is a phenomenon that puts in crisis the public sphere (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). The latter has a major role in shaping political decisions and arguments inside of democracy. According to him, only an event connected with the public sphere could make relations between democratic states possible (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Consequently, in these new conditions, a new venture is needed to analyze the public sphere and, in particular, terrorism. Nowadays, and due to a dense global network of complex virtual mass communication, these instruments favor the ones who direct them. So it must be understood that the struggle over terrorism constitutes a war related to information production and information manipulation on a global scale. In this regard, actors and stakeholders involved in this situation pay a major role, as well their strategic goals. According to Habermas, this is the reason that, for the sake of the mass media, the critical and rational discussion has disappeared, blocking rational-critical consensus, and where possibly more information becomes the cause for the deterioration of the functions of democracy and civil liberties (Habermas & Derrida, 2003).

3. The problem of religious fundamentalism connected with terrorism

In a broader context, it is important for Habermas that dogmatism not be confused with fundamentalism, as any religious doctrine is based on dogma (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Meanwhile we must distinguish terrorism and religion in itself. Even today, according to him, religion is facing the challenge of its relative position against other religions without relativizing its dogmatic core (Habermas & Derrida, 2003).

Habermas uses a sociological argument stating that in the modern era the religious conscience has changed, as through modernity a religious pluralism has been produced through the acceptance of science and secular law (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). But it seems that an asymmetric aspect stands to believers. To compensate for this asymmetry a political relationship of mutual respect is not enough, as a real epistemic confrontationis required: it is necessary for people to accept the fact that they live in a post-secular society, in a society where the survival of religious communities does not constitutes an archaic remnant but a vital reality, rich with truth to be discovered. Essentially, laic people shall be both agnostic and willing to learn from religion.

Meanwhile, conversely, fundamentalism has nothing to do with an attitude of faith about the way in which we believe or not, or where we believe. Precisely what are seen as linked and connected to each other is religious fundamentalism and terror. However, from a causal perspective, according to Habermas, both symbolize the expression of a communication crisis between cultures amongst a clash of tradition and modernity (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). But if terrorism with religious inspiration displays this latest issue as a dogmatic attitude of faith, then this faith needs to be delegitimized through a political and military authority. Starting from the point of view of modernity, it could easily be noted that this limits the religious phenomenon, or faith in the spiritual dimension, taking it away from the political control of the public sphere. Yet religious paradigms cannot be taken as a single vector to interpret the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism. It should be understood that the religious paradigm in the Western world has been different from that of the Eastern mindset. In the Western religious experience, Westerners not only create a relationship with the secular, but also within religion itself two elements in the service of laicism are shown: holiness and obligation. For example, Christianity with its reform over time focused on the idea of the sanctity of the individual and denied the use of force. Meanwhile regarding religious obligation, Christianity expressed openness to others and unconditional forgiveness. However this does not mean that there is no violence even in the West but the debate spaces through participatory democracy interrupts the cycle of violence that transforms communication disorders into loss of mutual trust which can lead to the interruption

of communication. "The spiral of violence begins as a spiral of distorted communication that leads through the spiral of uncontrolled reciprocal mistrust, to the breakdown of communication. If violence thus begins with a distortion in communication, after it has erupted it is possible to know what has gone wrong and what needs to be repaired" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p.37). In this respect, tolerance exists as a condition of universalism, as claimed by today's democratic and pluralist societies. We are aware that distinction between church and state is one of the achievements of our European civilisation, but this difference cannot be made once and for all, as the lines are always in constant redefinition, and because of this conflicts occur. However, if we resolve conflict throught tolerance, then we must also understand that we need respect, because tolerance is a passive virtue while respect is active. Tolerance can often be indifference while respect includes gratitude to another (Derrida, 1995). Tolerance can coexist with inequality while respect cannot. Derrida's thesis about the identity of the self and other, European and foreign cultures, begin here (Derrida, 1995). He thinks that cathegory of identity in fondamental in the social and cultural environment in which self and others are resolved in an interactive relationship (Derrida, 1995). Often, this will define the individuals and the cultures towards other. Therefore, cultures are not seen as isolated but as a fabric of relationships and exchanges that exist between them, forming an architecture of communication and dialogue.

4. Terrorism as a distorted communication

According to Habermas's reasoning, "objectively, however, terrorism can be granted political content only if it has politically realistic goals. Otherwise, it is on a par with ordinary criminal activity" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p. 56). But what is illegal violence? What constitutes violence? Habermas says that violence exists in every society, even in the West, where it's shown through the symptoms of discrimination, marginalization etc (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). But the fact of why violence is not out of control in Western societies is mainly because of the special way of communication where the coordinated action is based on a solid foundation of convention, cultural truths and reciprocal expectations. It is displayed harmoniously because there are "mutual symmetric conditions" of the position perspective (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). But if it does not happen, the speaker and the listener become strangers to one another and indifferent to the act of communication. This moment represents the origin of the communication disorder where terrorism constitutes the most egregious and extreme situation. But democracy has institutions that resolve the conflict.

On the other hand, globalization sparks and multiplies this spiral of communicative disorders. By intensifying communication, globalization imposes and divides the world into good and bad. In this regard, globalization from a perspective can be interpreted as a communicative pathology that intersects the debate about the clash of civilizations. However Habermas sees the nature of conflict in a deep economic dimension. In this optic, to cure terrorism, the West must work on two fronts: in its self-representation, which in the eyes of developing countries do not submit to a form of imperialism and 2) to try not to shrink democracy in a marketing strategy (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). This last feature is a strong alibi for terrorism on religious grounds in their origins. The main vector that can give assistance in this regard is the reason as a conversion option for a transparent and non-manipulative communication.

5. Terrorism as a modernity and self-immunity problem

For Derrida, terrorism is a symptom of traumatic internal elements associated with the experience of modernity, where the focus is always directed towards the future (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). For him, terrorism constitutes a symptom, a separation between religion and secular dimensions (Habermas & Derrida, 2003).

On the other hand, if the phenomenon of terrorism is interpreted not as a counterpoint to a global project, but against a local project then various terrorist acts could also symbolize a perception. It may appear as a synonym of an autoimmune crisis that the system should predict and prevent. Given this perspective, at some point, it seems that the Western world has often given indirectly 'its help' in the form of terrorism since it helped in building and equipping the techniques and practical knowledge of the individuals who participate in these events. Regarding this empirical fact, Derrida interprets " terrorism as a symptom of an autoimmune crisis'' (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p. 140). This autoimmune syndrome develops in three moments: first an autoimmune crisis as the West itself indirectly instructed the people involved in the terrorism acts (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Secondly, the phenomenon of terrorism is supported more by the future than by the present or the past because terrorism constitutes a collective process of the trauma that is expected to come. It is a symbolically constructed trauma in the public sphere which, according to Derrida, should be dismantled and studied (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Thirdly, the fight against terrorism stabilizes and legitimizes terrorism itself. As a result, not surprisingly, in the form of terrorism today we see the use of a type of political theology (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). In fact the latter is extremely important in the so-called fundamentalist Islam as it has a catalytic role, while in the west the word "secular/laic" means trying to demythologize order, the state, techniquerationality, etc. Consequently it seems that the respective polarity between Islamic terrorism and the West appears inverted. In fact "polar presentation is a logic dichotomy that excludes true and other alternative option while the phenomenon of terrorism itself has indirectly dismantled all categories and classical distinctions of political philosophy which already need to be understood as the difference" (Choat, 2010, p.132). The distinction between national and international field, between the army and the police, civil war and the interstate war, war and terrorism. Thus for Derridan the phenomenon of terrorism itself has produced and is producing a semantic inconsistency between concepts, undermining the very concept of barrier (territorial) and boundary (conceptual)

(Habermas & Derrida, 2003). "A frontier, however, with neither front nor conf rontation, one that in comprehension does not run into head on since it does not take the form of a solid front: it escapes, remains evasive, open, undecided, indeterminable" (Lee, 2009, p.90-91). Thus, the essence of the emergence of terrorism in modern times as a non-state threat and anonymous, turns down the relationship between "terrain" and "territory" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). Through global technology, the terror generated from the constant possibility of terrorism rejects the old classic model of a state-nation. This is because the very concept of sovereignty of a value or a set of values cannot be identified as a mark with its corresponding image as they do most of the territories, as they are defined and described emphatically. Thus, the contemporary global space overturns the traditional geopolitical landscape. The boundary between war and terrorism is never precise as it does not have to be considered as a concept, but avulnerable area affected by the opportunism of different interests of various interest groups (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). For this reason, often the fight against terrorism takes the nuances of the clash of civilizations, culture and the respective values and as a result of this, we need to understand the legitimate crisis of this phenomenon in order to create atheoretical and moral arsenal in order to fight this phenomenon by resolving as well the communication crisis that this phenomenon creates and that is created by this phenomenon (Habermas & Derrida, 2003).

6. The role of the mass media and the deconstruction of terrorism

The question is: "What would a terrorist act be without the broadcast media?". Here appears a modernist typology where the relationship between terror and media brings as a consequence the propaganda within the public sphere of images with the scope to terrorize the civilian population but also to comfort it. This constitutes a visible sign of a perverse autoimmunity. But, if we consider for example September 11th as an event or a big event, then the philosophical concept of the event needs to be analyzed as well. In this optic, the concept of Heidegger of "event" helps us. According to Derrida, "the event is made up of the "thing" itself (that which happens or comes) and the impression (itself at once "spontaneous" and controlled") that is given, left, or made by the so-called 'thing' " (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p.89). But the impression is formed when a preexisting system gives it force to exist, and this is managedby a group of "machineries", such as language, communication, image, etc. As a consequence, impressions need to be distinguished from interpretation. Regarding this, "the event is what comes and, in coming, comes to surprise me, to surprise and to suspend comprehension: the event is first of all that which I do not first of all comprehend. Better, the event is first of all that I do not comprehend. It consists in that, that I do not comprehend: that which I do not comprehend and first of all that I do not comprehend, the fact that I do not comprehend: my incomprehension" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p.90). In the meanwhile, the term "big", seeking to represent the size or weight of the event, should not be considered as a quantitative evaluation, matter of scale. In this regard, even if recent terrorism symbolized or marked by this event (the collapse of the Twin Towers) occurred in a bygone era, it now should not be treated as such because it is an event open to the future (Habermas & Derrida, 2003).

On the other hand, according to Derrida, the violence that erupted is not simply a result of the war with an enemy which can be identified (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). What makes hardly perceptible and conceptual "global terrorism" is related to the fact that it is not directed to a specific state, so it has not a territorial definition. To understand global terrorism we firstly must understand the strategies and the relationship of forces. Even when talking about a "terrorist state", it is not a simple matter of the occupation of a territory, but it regards the assurance of power and political control. So that which is seen strategically, from a legitimation procedure, shows that terrorisms reveal as a response to a situation which continues to grow. As a result, terrorism acts to produce a psychological effect (conscious or not) and the symbolic and symptomatic response can take many deviations (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). But the quality or intensity of emotions evoked is not always in proportion to the number of victims and the extent of damage. In situations where the mass media does not represent and shows the terror act as a spectacular one, the latter causes less trauma or political consequences than the murder of one individual in another country with developed media sources, as in the West. In this way, starting from the complex degree of occurrence and action of the phenomenon of terrorism it requires a new outlook to analyze, as well to doubt the idea that there is an essence connected with this phenomenon. In this track, Derrida thinks that the deconstruction of the phenomenon term "terrorism" is the only political response to the course of action (Habermas & Derrida, 2003). According to him, "not only does war entail the intimidation of civilians, and thus elements of terrorism, but no rigorous separation can be drawn between different kinds of terrorism, such as national and international, local and global" (Habermas & Derrida, 2003, p.XIII). Refusing to attribute to the term "terrorism" certain properties, such as that this phenomenon was a term-monad, it should be designed as an action plan and an unstable event, an open event, always fluid and with flexible boundaries to be determined occasionally and critically.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of terrorism is very complex. In today's situation it appears sophisticated because it acts tactically while putting into crisis classical structures of the state legitimacy and civil rights. Meanwhile the relationship with religious elements and the role that the media perform complicates the situation giving an unclear idea of what constitutes the phenomenon of terrorism. From this perspective, although habermas and Derrida have different viewpoints concerning this phenomenon (Habermas sees terrorism as a consequence of a distort communication and Derrida as an autoimmune crisis of the West), they agree with the conclusion that terrorism poses a very fluid situation. It cannot be physically defined as a territory as it presents itself

more as an open situation with changing borders, causing us to question the situation of freedom in the public sphere as an individual and collective concept. For this reason, Habermas and Derrida invite us to greater tolerance in the public sphere and constant criticism against this phenomenon

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