Other Terrorisms, Psychology, and Media

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During the Marcos dictatorship in the Philippines, relatives of political prisoners wore T-shirts emblazoned with the words "Who is the real terrorist?" After September 11, 2001, as talk about terrorism takes center stage on global discourse, we pose a similar question: What is terrorism? Carrying the query further, we ask the following: Does Post's (this issue) discussion of terrorism render full meaning to the term and include an exhaustive list of terrorist typologies? We think not.

We note that the cognitive processes of naming, meaning, and categorization are context-dependent, and—intentionally or unintentionally—laden with social values, motives, and interests carried by the society from which they emerge (Duncan, 1968; Forgas, 1981; Moscovici, 1981; Tajfel & Forgas, 1981). We contend that Post's implied meaning and categorization of terrorism remain incomplete, reflecting only social cognitions emanating from a U.S. view of geopolitics. We write this piece to expand the meaning and categories of terrorism. We likewise point out that global mass media abets the propagation of culture-bounded, incomplete views of the meaning and categories of terrorism.

A dictionary definition views terror as "extreme fear" and terrorism as "the use of violence and threats of violence especially for political purposes" (Hornby, 1989, p. 1326). Although Post's identification of terrorist acts and typologies covers a sizable range of political violence, we posit that his list remains incomplete because it leaves out two fundamental aspects of terrorism: global structural violence and U.S.-legitimized acts of terror.

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EXPANDED MEANINGS AND
CATEGORIES OF TERRORISM

First, the meaning of fear-creating political violence focuses on episodic direct harmfulness and leaves out structural invisible violence. Structural violence refers to unequal social systems that prevent huge numbers of collectivities from satisfying basic human needs (Christie, 1997; Galtung, 1980, 1996). Massive deprivations thrive underneath a layer of elite control. We posit that in this golden age of globalization, international economic and cultural configurations are controlled by Western powers, especially the United States. We likewise think that control over international economic and cultural configurations help maintain the superior political status of the United States in the global community.

Material inequalities and cultural domination prevent large populations in various parts of the world from accessing basic human needs for survival, and defining one's collective identity. Such large-scale deprivations generate "extreme fear" in pluralities of people unable to satisfy their physical-survival needs, and who sense that they may be losing their generations-old language, religion, and other cultural vitalities. Beyond the terrifying effects of structural violence, there exists a tie-up between systemic inequalities and direct acts of so-called terrorism. Some so-called terrorist acts that hit beyond national borders are carried out allegedly because of social resentments—perhaps even collective rage—that stem from perceived political, economic, and cultural global inequalities. With the September 11, 2001, tragedy in mind, leaders at the recent United Nations International Conference on Financing for Development in Mexico warned that there was a direct link between poverty, especially in the poor countries, and violence. The world's poorest areas are, it was said, "the breeding ground for violence and despair" ("Reduce Poverty," 2002).

We raise a second point to expand Post's ideas. Tajfel & Forgas (1981) pointed out one type of error in the process of social categorization—when an item which was a member of a given category was excluded from it. We posit that U.S.-supported terrorism is one category of terrorism, yet Post's article excludes U.S.-legitimized violent acts as part of the terrorist discourse. In expanding the Post typology of terrorisms, we propose a reexamination of the meaning of state-supported terrorism. Post claims that state-supported terrorism exists when states act through terrorist groups, under the decision making of the state leadership. He cites as examples Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Sudan, North Korea, and Cuba. If one were to cluster these societies, they would fall into two categories: Islamic and communist states. We expand the implied meaning and imagery of state terrorism, citing Post's technical definition, to U.S.-supported military attacks, that create terrifying fear among civilian populations, under the decision making of the U.S. state leadership.

From the view of a significant number of citizens in the Majority World, the U.S. state uses terroristic violence for its own political goals. Such violence may take var-

ied forms. We cite a few examples that occurred in the six months before this writing: aerial carpet bombings in Afghanistan, formal or informal support of Israel's armed offensives against Palestine, and U.S. troop deployment on the Philippine island of Mindanao. The armed intrusion of a world power into the everyday lives of populations in weaker states sows very great fear and intense resentments among a civilian citizenry victimized by these foreign military attacks.

We expand the categorization of terrorism in the Post article to present a broader view of politically-motivated violence. Widening the boundaries of terrorist-related categories to include U.S.-associated terrorisms may help explain intense social resentments in other parts of the world, against the United States and its allies. For example, in many parts of the Majority World, the United States is believed to have backed terrorist groups and helped undermine legitimate governments in Latin America, the Middle East, and Asia (Oberg, 2002; Pilger, 2002; Roy, 2001). We also contend that Israel, a close U.S. ally, likewise practices state terrorism as illustrated by its bellicose attitude toward the occupied Palestinians (Boyle, 2001; Hensman, 2002).

Historical narratives show that both the United States and Israel played major roles in organizing the so-called freedom-fighting groups that eventually turned against them, and were consequently categorized as terrorists. Let us look at the story of Hamas, an extremist Islamic group in Palestine. According to U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer, the Israel government supported the creation of Hamas, as an instrument by which Israel could weaken the nationalist movement led by Palestine Liberation Organization Chair Yasser Arafat (Andromidas, 2002). Today, Israel categorizes the Hamas as terroristic. Similarly, in the 1980s, Afghanistan's Taliban maintained positive relations with successive U.S. administrations that splurged billions of dollars supporting Mujaheddin fighters against the Moscow-backed regime in Kabul (Symonds, 2001).We assume that in the 1980s, the U.S. state categorized the warring Taliban as an armed group of freedom fighters, not terrorists.

MASS MEDIA HELP SHAPE THE PUBLIC'S INCOMPLETE COGNITIONS OF TERRORISM

The use of meanings and categories of terrorism constructed by the leading world power continues, aided by international mass media. Social scientists point out the power of media in shaping public meanings (Berg & Boguslaw, 1985; Howitt, 1982; Murdock, 1974). In relation to terrorism, media create images of Islam-associated terrorism in the collective minds of the public-at-large. Ordinary citizens of the world rarely encounter terrorism in their personal lives. The meeting between terrorism and large populations occurs through mass media. Hence, it is not the raw nature of terrorism that is impressed on the minds of the public, but the image of terrorism as filtered by mass media.

The social influence of media intensifies during high-arousal historical moments, such as the months following September 11, 2001. In a series of classical experiments, Schachter (1978) showed that emotional states can be manipulated by social means, more particularly, by cognitive cues available in the context of a highly-aroused individual. We posit that the September 11, 2001, air attacks on key U.S. buildings created an atmosphere of high arousal among Western populations, especially the U.S. Mass media's consequential coverage of related events and issues—like, for example, the U.S.-declared war on terrorism—intensified, labeled, and rigidified generalized-arousal as feelings of anti-Muslim, Arab terrorism.

Media shape the public image of terrorism through selective attention and support of existing beliefs. Selective attention refers to the power of media to choose particular information, and leave out others, among the zillions of information bytes available (Sampson, 1971). Whatever the media focus on will be the part of the meaning of terrorism that will reach the minds of the public-at-large. Media support of existing beliefs can take the form of depicting stereotypical racial roles and dominant political themes (Harris, 1989; Sampson, 1971). We posit that mass media portray U.S.-supported terrorism as righteous and nonterroristic acts, in support of Operation Enduring Justice. Media news reporting also tends to portray Muslims and Arabs as fundamentally extremist.[1] These media misrepresentations[2] create two types of consequences: (a) They lend legitimacy and urgency to the arguments that the Muslims must be given a hard lesson, politically and militarily; and (b) they radicalize moderate Muslim individuals and groups to the degree that they eventually resort to violence, as they perceive themselves as victims of injustice and oppression.

Mass media's linking of terrorism with Muslim and Arab peoples smears the image of Muslims and Arabs worldwide. With media's management of post-September 11 reports, acts of terror committed by a small number of individuals have been generalized to large populations of political, cultural, or religious communities. That is why Muslim political leaders, such as Malaysia's deputy Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi (2002), expressed unhappiness over the callous linking of terrorism with Islam. Media distortion alienates Muslims from the

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[1]The bias arises not only in news media but also in fictional forms, such as "Superman," "Tarzan," "Back to the Future," "True Lies," and "Raiders of the Lost Ark" (Wingfield & Karaman, n.d.).

[2]Islamic religious traditions are pregnant with messages of peace. Yet nonviolent Islamic themes remain excluded from many Western discourses. As an illustrative example, Post's (this issue) citation of Ayatollah Khomeini's radical intepretation of the Koran excludes the peace-related narratives in Islam. For instance, the Koran says, "And if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people" (Surat (Verse) 5: 32, Ali, 1991, p. 257). Further, Post's excerpt of Khomeini's Quranic interpretation stands incomplete, as the missing portion conveys a meaning of Islam that only permits violence in an act of self-defence and a fight for justice: "And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter… " (AbuSulayman, 1994, p. 94).

global community (Noor, 2002), and consequently pushes moderate quarters of the Islam community to more radical political postures. Perhaps this phenomenon partly explains why a survey conducted recently by the Gallup Poll organization in Muslim countries of Pakistan, Iran, Indonesia, Turkey, Lebanon, Morocco, Kuwait, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia found that the majority of their residents "have an unfavourable opinion of the United States because they believe it is ruthless and arrogant" ("Muslims Dislike America," 2002).

PEACE PSYCHOLOGY AND AN EXPANDED TERRORIST DISCOURSE

Questioning the meaning and categorization of terrorism emerging from a recognized global power poses challenges to peace psychologists. On a practical level, psychologists have ably and generously given mentally-therapeutic aid to victims of so-called terrorist attacks. In addition, peace psychologists may want to explore ways of engaging in collaborative active-nonviolent projects across the Western-Islamic conflictual divide, to address root causes of social resentments.

On a conceptual level, fundamental meanings and categorizations of terrorism can be expanded to include varied views beyond the social cognitions of one's society. For example, can peace psychologists begin to explore mental and cultural aspects of Islamic traditions that are supportive of active nonviolence? As the Post article ably identified motivations and constraints of non-U.S. terrorisms, can peace psychologists likewise explain motivations and constraints of political terrorisms legitimized by the U.S. government? Furthermore, can future articles, statements, and researches on terrorism allocate equal resources and verbal space to curbing U.S.-initiated terrorisms? Only when U.S.-legitimized terrorisms are addressed with equal attention as Islam and communist terrorist-associated categories, can the cycle of terrifying violence simmer down globally.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Cristina Jayme Montiel, Psychology Professor at the Ateneo de Manila University, received the Outstanding Service Award of the Division of Peace Psychology, American Psychological Association, and the Most Distinguished Contribution award from the Psychologists for Social Responsibility. During the Marcos regime, she chaired Lingap Bilanggo (Care for Prisoners), a social movement for the general amnesty of all Filipino political prisoners.

Mustafa K. Anuar is Associate Professor and Former Dean of the School of Communication at Universiti Sains Malaysia. His research interests include popular culture, information and communication technology, media representation, and human rights. In 1995 he received the British High Commissioner's Chevening Award.

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