



Between Representation and the ‘Real’: the Remaking of Terrorism in Modernity

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Abstract

Terrorism Studies have long been dominated by the language of security studies. This domination obscures our understanding of terrorism as a social process constructed through discourse and inter-subjective practices. This research will examine the processes of representing and remaking terrorism in self-consciousness, systemic rationalities of sovereign state and modernity itself, by which to illuminate the distortion, alienation and mistranslation between the interpretation of terrorism and the ‘reality’ of terrorism. To this end, it will critically engage with existing literature about academic understanding of terrorism and re-categorize it into three dominant modes—mythic mode, objectification mode and re-subjectification mode. Then it will demonstrate and examine the gap between different modes of representation of terrorism and the acts of terrorism by investigating the ways in which the phenomenon of terrorism is reconstructed through modern subjectivity and mistranslated in political systemic representation of terrorism. This research will conclude by illuminating the basic trend behind the perception of terrorism; that is, the subjectivity presented in the individual understanding of terrorist threat is increasingly eroded, subordinated and dominated by the social systemic interpretation of terrorism in modernity.

Keywords: *Critical terrorism studies, Modernity, Subjectivity, Systemic rationality, Representation*

1. Introduction

Modernity as the context of terrorism examined in this research is always staged as representation, a work of imagination¹. In this age of representation, the immediacy of the really real is promised by what appears in contrast to be the mere abstractions of structure, subjectivity, text, plan, or idea, which makes a distinctive imagination of the real². This myth of modernity is the context in which the topic of representation and reality of terrorism becomes the primary

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¹ Mitchell, T. ‘The Stage of Modernity,’ in Mitchell T (ed.), *Questions of Modernity* (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 1-34.

² Ibid. 17-8.



concern of this work, and this is why I have put the ‘real’ under commas in the title.

To re-think the ‘real’ of terrorism in modernity, this research will examine the processes of representing and remaking terrorism, by which to illuminate the distortion, alienation and mistranslation between the interpretation of terrorism and the ‘reality’ of terrorism. To this end, the research is divided into two sections. In the first section, it will critically engage with existing literature about academic understanding of terrorism and re-categorize it into three dominant modes—mythic mode, objectification mode and re-subjectification mode. This categorization is based on the basic distinction of dispositions indicated in the existing academic analysis of terrorism. That is, whether terrorism has been analyzed within a framework of split between subject and object. The second section will demonstrate and examine the gap between different modes of representation of terrorism and the acts of terrorism. This section will be divided into two parts—Part I will draw on two cases to investigate how the phenomenon of terrorism is reshaped and reconstructed as individual subjective representation; Part II will show how the ways in which the nature of terrorism is distorted and mistranslated in political systemic representation of terrorism. To elaborate the problems in political systemic representation of terrorism, Part II will discuss three strategies of representing terrorism by state—making terrorism as pure political argument, constructing terrorism as rhetoric opposite of political discursive structure, and sovereign denial of control predicament. The research will conclude by illuminating the basic trend behind the perception of terrorism; that is, the subjectivity presented in the individual understanding of terrorist threat is increasingly eroded, subordinated and dominated by the social systemic interpretation of terrorism in modernity.

This paper uses a qualitative method, which not only synthesizes the extant literature on terrorism and identifies the gaps in knowledge that the existing terrorism study addresses, but also attempts to provide a new theoretical perspective to the development of terrorism studies.



2. Literature Review

This section is a theoretical review of the existing literature exploring how terrorism is perceived by its audience and how its nature is revealed or remade in this process of individual and social perception. To this end, the section will first categorize the perceptual characteristics on terrorist phenomenon in existing academic literature into three modes—mythic mode, objectification mode and re-subjectification mode of terrorism. This categorization is my own and its aim is to render the hidden chain of discourse embedded in the academic understanding of the phenomenon of terrorism visible. By manifesting the dominant discourse underpinning the theorization of terrorism it will present the larger picture of how terrorism is perceived or construed at individual and social level in existing terrorism studies, the foundational structural characteristics of perception on terrorist threat, as well as the kind of knowledge concerning the different modes of revealing or reconstituting about the very existence of terrorism. Questions will be raised based on this introspection and mediation about the way in which terrorism is understood and constructed in academic writing of terrorism research. That is, what fundamentally causes the particular perceptual tendencies in the conceptions of terrorism, and how this perceptual structure remakes or re-constitutes the phenomenon of terrorism?

2.1. The Linguistic Origin of Categorization

The linguistic origin of the word terror can be derived from Latin *terror*, from *terrere*, ‘to fill with fear, frighten’, akin to the Greek *trein*, ‘to flee from fear’³. Terror is thus revealed as a state of intense fright, of stark fear⁴. Terrorism comes from Latin *terror*, but it is more commonly understood from specific sense of government intimidation during the Reign of Terror in France (1793-1794). In other words, terrorism appears to be a systematic use of terror as a means in policy or to achieve certain other political aims. Therefore, from etymological dimension and semantic changes in terror, terrorism can be described either as an existential experience of subject or an object instrumentalized and reserved for certain political change.

³ Verene, D P. ‘International terrorism and the Human Condition’, *The Pluralist* 2, no. 3 (2007), 3.

⁴ Ibid.



Terrorism as an existential experience is inherent in subjectivity, reflecting and creating ontological meaning for the very existence of subject. Terrorism as means for political change reflects a split between subject and object, and terrorism in this dichotomizing structure is objectified as technique or tool. The first semantic tendency that depicts terrorism as a subjectivity is presented in two sets of literature, myth-based ancient text and contemporary academic literature of terrorism studies. The research will describe mythological expression of terrorism as mythic mode of terrorism, and the modern subjectivity of terrorism in contemporary terrorism research as a re-subjectification mode of terrorism. The research will use objectification mode of terrorism to describe terrorism as a product of objectifying process in existing literature of terrorism studies⁵. The following discussion will examine how three modes in terrorism and counterterrorism literature is classified and labeled as such, and through which to find the remaining questions in the existing literature.

2.2. Mythic Mode

In the mythic understanding of terror, terror is the most primordial passions of the soul, which connects the human to the divine⁶. Bestioni, the giant offspring of the sons of Noah, is without human custom but 'humanized by the sudden appearance of lightning in the thunderous sky, caused by the drying out of the earth after the Flood'⁷. In this primal scene adopted from the biblical phenomenon of universal flood by Giambattista Vico, humanity is formed from the experience of unprecedented fear and terror incited within the giants. Therefore, terror in mythological literature is understood from within the subjectivity or the existential experience of the subject, producing ontological and foundational social meanings from this feeling of

⁵ This categorization is not a historical classification, which means it is not based on chronological sequence. For instance, the second tendency of understanding terrorism, the mode of objectification, can also be traced back to the rich examples in ancient India. Chanakya (b.280BC) as adviser to Indian ruler Chandragupta suggested many clandestine methods to subdue enemies through use of terror; He also suggested that "agents costumed as demon-serpents and flesh-eating tigers should terrorise civilians to lure the enemy king outside the city walls to perform rites of appeasement, whereupon he should be ambushed and killed" (Law, R., 2009. *Terrorism: A History*, Cambridge: Polity). Thus, the defining point to differentiate these three modes in existing literature is to identify whether terrorism is seen as object or means to the subject.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.



terror. Ansell-Pearson⁸ argues that recognition of the terror of existence leads Greeks to invent art in order to experience life as an aesthetic phenomenon in which human beings transcends a merely individual nature. In Homeric epics, heroes always encounter the dilemma of conflicting values: the importance of heroic achievement measured against comfort and pleasure; and all of this in the midst of mortality and terror⁹. The terror of war and hostility, and noble value of warriors are structured together with reciprocal force¹⁰. In Homeric world, concealing truth is a capacious virtue for success in certain contexts of practice in the face of terror, danger and threat¹¹. Terror in Greek mythological literature is primarily expressed as an intrinsic meaning for subjectivity, and an existential condition for the production of Greek values.

2.3. Objectification Mode

When terror as internal source of meaning production in the mythological interpretation is first translated into French *terrorisme* (1798) the nature of terror is changed significantly. Terrorism, in the context of Reign of Terror was used to ‘delegitimize and discredit political opponents, through demonization and exaggerated accounts of the atrocities committed by revolutionaries’¹². Therefore, terrorism is transformed from its semantic archetype as a productive form of subjectivity to a political tactics, a tool, an object, a pejorative term describing or imposing dehumanized labels on particular groups thereby legitimating the elimination of them. The semantic transformation from terror to terrorism is deeply embedded in an objectifying and externalizing process, in which terrorism as a form of systematic use of terror converts terror from a particular ontological or existential experience into objective existence, an identifiable enemy of humanity, a visible, manageable, calculable and measureable object in modern political science. Edmund Burke in his writing *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ‘sought to discredit the revolutionaries’ policies and principles by

⁸ Ansell-Pearson, K. *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker: The Perfect Nihilist* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1994), 65.

⁹ Hatab, L. *Nietzsche's On the Genealogy of Morality: An Introduction*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 54.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cameron G & Goldstein J D, ‘The Ontology of Modern Terrorism: Hegel, Terrorism Studies, and Dynamics of Violence,’ *The Journal of National and Social Philosophy* 6, no.1 (2010), 62.



portraying them as enemies of humanity—inhuman brutes who abandoned reason and politics in favor of destruction and terror'¹³. Therefore, terrorism in its early portrait in modern political writing is externalized from the dominant political community with particular identifiable properties such as irrationality, inhumanity and destruction. This essentialization approach in modern political literature about terrorists and revolutionaries does not merely split terrorism as an object or an exogenous entity from 'us', the subject, but also polarizes this imaginary opposition and differentiation. The moral judgment made through the categorization and polarization between human and inhuman, rational and irrational erects boundary which makes terrorism 'other' for 'us'.

The objectification, territorialization and polarization embedded in the narrative of early modern writings of terrorism culminate in the dominant contemporary literature on terrorism. Bruce Hoffman identifies terrorism as primarily a subnational group or non-state entity¹⁴. Twenty years before Bruce Hoffman's definition, Walter Laqueur had accepted the notion of 'terrorism from above' and its severer material and social destruction than 'terrorism from below', as he clarified that state terrorism was not his focus¹⁵. The consequence of this conceptual practice is that terrorism is understood and studied solely as violence carried out by non-state groups, and terrorism by state remains invisible in dominant discourse of terrorism studies. 'When state is examined, it is usually limited to descriptions of "state-sponsored terrorism" by so-called "rogue states"¹⁶. 'Objective' database on terrorism such as Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism and Terrorism Incident Database was established to assist the construction of positivist model and scientific basis of terrorism studies¹⁷. These conceptual practices and positivist methods on data collection systematically objectify, delegitimize and identify terrorism as the opposite of sovereign state and enemy of legitimating

¹³ Messer, P.G. 'Feel the Terror: Edmund Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France' in Land I (ed.), *Enemies of Humanity: The Nineteenth Century War on Terrorism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

¹⁴ Hoffman, B. 'Current Research on Terrorism and Low-intensity Conflict,' *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 15, no.1 (1992), 25–37.

¹⁵ Laqueur, W., *Terrorism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1977), 6

¹⁶ Jackson, R. 'Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Political Terrorism,' in Gunning J et al (ed.), *Critical Terrorism Studies: A New Research Agenda*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), 70.

¹⁷ RAND. 'RAND-MIP Terrorism Incident Database Project' (2006), accessed 15 May 2013, <www.rand.org/ise/projects/terrorismdatabase/index.html>.



power. In addition, Mishal and Rosenthal¹⁸ argue that terrorism is ‘one of the most significant threats to the Western world in general and US national security in particular’. Marc Sageman makes similar argument that ‘terrorism threatens the world, driven by networks of fanatics determined to inflict maximum civilian and economic damages on distant targets in pursuit of their extremist goals’¹⁹. Based on these perspectives, terrorism has been portrayed as an external threat, and isolated as a sign of anti-democracy, barbarism and immoral. The externalization and polarization is intensified when the terrorism research concentrates on particular organization and religion. For instance, Jessica Stern²⁰ asserts that ‘by September 11, 2001, between 70,000 and 110,000 radical Muslims had graduated from Al Qaeda training camps’. The source of terrorism threat has been concretized and isolated as a clash between two antagonistic camps of religions, i.e., Christian versus Muslim; western versus eastern, and democracy versus authoritarianism. The Muslim extremists identified as the ‘real’ threat to western civilization and political legitimacy are further demonized, as Stern argues²¹, ‘religious terrorist groups are more violent than their secular counterparts and are probably more likely to use weapons of mass destruction’. In addition to construct terrorism as visible threat, contemporary literature on terrorism also ‘promote the view that the root and causes of terrorism lie in individual psychological deviance, and religious or ideological extremism engendered through processes of “radicalization”’²². For example, John Horgan²³, in a review of terrorist personality literature, points out that psychopathy was the feature most commonly associated with terrorists. In the words of Andrew Silke²⁴, ‘in the early 1970s. . .it was widely believed that terrorists suffered from personality disorders and that there would be an exceptionally high number of clinical psychopaths, narcissists and paranoids in the ranks of the average terrorist group’. The approach adopted by the literature on terrorist personality resembles the medical

¹⁸ Mishal, S and Rosenthal M. ‘Al Qaeda as a Dune Organization: Toward a Typology of Islamic Terrorist Organizations.’ *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28 (2005), 276.

¹⁹ Sageman, M. *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), vii.

²⁰ Stern, J. *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 260.

²¹ Ibid. xxxii

²² Jackson, R. ‘Knowledge, Power and Politics in the Study of Political Terrorism,’ 72

²³ Horgan, J. ‘The Search for the Terrorist Personality,’ in Silke A (ed.), *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and its Consequences* (West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2003).

²⁴ Silke, A. ‘Becoming a Terrorist,’ in Silke A (ed.), *Terrorists, Victims and Society: Psychological Perspectives on Terrorism and Its Consequences*, (West Sussex, England: John Wiley & Sons, 2003), 30.



model of psychopathology in portraying terrorism as a kind of disease with identifiable etiological properties²⁵. This approach of medicalization affirms and rationalizes the claims of opposition between ‘us’ and terrorism as a heterogeneous threat to our boundary of legitimating humanity, demarcating and delegitimizing terrorists from the modern conception of human as rational being. Therefore, the objectification mode in understanding the phenomenon of terrorism based on existing literature about the nature of terrorism is to externalize and demarcate terrorism from the position of ‘us’, followed by diagnosing terrorism as immoral and morbid, and by so doing it ultimately eradicates the subjectivity of terrorism. In this sense, objectification model is also a paradigm of de-humanization of terrorism.

To dehumanize terrorism and construe it as chaotic, dangerous and destructive object threatening social identity and regularity reduces terrorism into a security issue. Bounded by realist security discourse, the perceptual model of objectification is to produce etic knowledge, perceiving and re-making the nature of terrorism through the eyes of dominant political power and the every interest of sovereign control. This etic structure of knowledge production forms a prism which refracts, more fundamentally, fabricates the nature of terrorism by interpretation based on interest of external condition. The re-subjectification mode of understanding terrorism in existing literature revitalizes the subjectivity of terrorism, presenting a blending between emic and etic knowledge. For example, in *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*²⁶, Gunaratna attempts to ‘unearth terrorists’ motivation²⁷, explaining terrorism as a religious construction at the expense of its political and socio-economic motivation. Nonetheless Gunaratna asserts that he interviews ‘almost all the leaders of the Kashmiri *Muhajidin*’²⁸ and ‘spent several hundred hours interviewing over 200 terrorists including Al Qaeda members in more than fifteen countries in Asia (including Central Asia), Africa, the Middle East and Western Europe’²⁹. The underlying intention of this assertion is to establish the legitimacy of

²⁵ Fishman, S & Kruglanski, AW. ‘The Psychology of Terrorism: “Syndrome” Versus “Tool” Perspectives,’ *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 2 (2006), 194.

²⁶ Gunaratna, R. *Inside AL Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* (London: Hurst & Company, 2002).

²⁷ Ahmad, I. ‘Is there an Ethics of Terrorism? Islam, Globalization, Militancy,’ *Journal of South Asia Studies* XXXIII, no. 3 (2010), 489.

²⁸ Gunaratna, R. *Inside AL Qaeda: Global Network of Terror*, 1.

²⁹ *Ibid.* vii-viii.



the research by blending the analysis of terrorism from external religious interpretation with the opinions and experience from inside the terrorist groups³⁰.

2.4. Re-subjectification Mode

The subjectivity of terrorism is recovered as key to understand and grasp the nature of the phenomenon of terrorism in re-subjectification mode. The contemporary literature on terrorism studies revitalizes the subjectivity of terrorism by re-theorizing globalization through great events that ‘stand at the threshold of modern age and determine its character’³¹. The invention of the telescope marks a fundamental transformation in people’s relation to their surroundings, by which people start to ‘handle nature from a point in the universe outside the earth and thereby viewing earth as but one more object within that frame’³². Ahmad echoes this observation in discovering the source of globalization. ‘it is the atom bomb and the moon landing, the later enabling viewing of the globe as an object from elsewhere, which fashioned the concept of a globe linking people—regardless of their ethnicities, religions and geographies-together’³³. Therefore, in globalization, universality as new standpoint of modern subjectivity destroys territoriality of identity while the geopolitical boundaries are still erected through conception of nation-states, ethnicities and religions. The co-existence of de-territorialization of identity in globalization and territorial rationality bounded in modern geopolitical reality transmute terrorism from space-defined security problems into ‘a conceptual-ethical challenge’³⁴. Terrorism in globalization is re-interpreted as a new form of subjectivity emerging through the common humanity and suicidal humanity, and portrayed as ‘sublime ideals of courage and sacrifice, and in so doing manifest humanity as an active agent rather than a mere victim of the ongoing onslaught of dehumanization’³⁵. This subjectivity recovering process or re-humanization in existing literature also comes from historical and cultural investigation of

³⁰ Guanaratna in his *Inside Al Qaeda: Global Network of Terror* eventually externalizes the motivation of terrorism. Therefore, although there is intention in his work to integrate inside knowledge with outside explanation, the external viewpoint on terrorism still dominates his analysis.

³¹ Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 248.

³² Villa, D R. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), 190.

³³ Ahmad, I. ‘Is there an Ethics of Terrorism? Islam, Globalization, Militancy,’ 495.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 494.

³⁵ *Ibid.* 497.



terrorism. In Claudia Verhoeven's *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism*³⁶, she focuses on investigation of Dmitry Karakozov's attempted assassination of Alexander II in 1866³⁷ to explore the birth of modern subjectivity of terrorism. Verhoeven argues that Dmitry Karakozov's desire to assassinate Alexander II not as a particular individual but as a generic head of a political system marks the emergence of a new, modern political subjectivity³⁸. A modern subjectivity through particular mode of political action seeks to directly experience and intervene in the historical process³⁹. This new subjectivity is expressed through the form of terrorism under the condition of blocked development, that is, as Verhoeven explained⁴⁰, the onset of modernity creates the 'conditions for the coming of a historically conscious and politically sovereign subject', but when this subject's desire to act in accordance with its nature is blocked, terrorism can emerge'. Therefore, according to this observation, the re-subjectification mode in terrorism studies does not assume that there is subjectivity inherent in terrorism with certain identifiable properties, rather terrorists as historically conscious subject take particular form of political action as the unique means to represent their political subjectivity in different historical background. The re-subjectification mode of terrorism, or in other terms, terrorism as a way of representation of certain political subjectivity, also can be found in existing literature about radicalization process of terrorism. Moghaddam⁴¹ draws on the approach of cognitive development to construct a staircase model to illuminate the formation of terrorist subjectivity at individual level. From perception of fraternal deprivation, to perceived absence of procedural justice, to the displacement of aggression onto out-groups, to moral disengagement and re-engagement, and ultimately to the

³⁶ Verhoeven, C. *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (NY: Cornell University Press, 2009).

³⁷ Dmitry Vladimirovich Karakozov was the first Russian revolutionary to make an attempt on the life of a tsar. In the spring of 1866, Karakozov arrived in St Petersburg to assassinate Alexander II. But Alexander II survived that assassination attempt. 'Long related to the margins of history...Karakozov's act has been dismissed as precipitate, the man himself as suicidal, irrational, and deranged' (Morrissey 2011 p.215). Verhoeven attempts to 'restore this case to its rightful place at the very birth of modern terrorism' (ibid).

³⁸ Morrissey, S K. 'Terrorism, Modernity, and the Question of Origins,' *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History* 12, no. 1 (2011), 215.

³⁹ Verhoeven, C. *The Odd Man Karakozov: Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism*, 6.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 7.

⁴¹ Moghaddam, F M. 'The Staircase to Terrorism: A Psychological Exploration', *American Psychologist* 60, no. 2 (2005), 161-169.



actual conduct of terrorist activities, the alternative options to redress or overcome individual negative emotions are constantly narrowed to the point in which terrorism becomes the unique legitimate solution, or a means to rescue the internal world.⁴² Moghaddam's research illuminates the particular developmental trajectory of the subjectivity of terrorism. According to Fishman and Kruglanski research⁴³, the self-understanding and identity of terrorists are constituted by a complex interaction between their personality traits such as cognitive style and sensation seeking, and situational conditions such as poverty, oppression, and relative deprivation.

To sum up, the three dominant modes of interpretation of terrorism are neither chronological nor historically concomitant stages but structurally complementary tendencies of understanding phenomenon of terrorism. The mythological representation of terror does not assume the split of terror from the knowing subject; rather, terror is experienced more as an ontological shock, as the fundamental source of existential and social meaning production. However, in the objectification mode, when terror is employed in a systematic way for political change, it becomes a political technique, a form of political manipulation. In this way, terror is transformed into terrorism, which is objectified, externalized and territorialized as the 'other' or an exogenous threat against 'us', the dominant or normalizing social existence. Thus, terror in this understanding of terrorism is moving outward as an inhuman object opposed to the subject. In contrast, re-subjectification mode attempts to revive the subjectivity of terrorism, i.e., re-humanizing terrorists through re-interpreting the human condition under globalization. Therefore, re-subjectification mode can be seen as an inward looking model of perception from external structural changes, in which the ontological and existential meanings of terrorism is retrieved at the center of understanding of the phenomenon. Based on above critical summary of existing literature about how people perceive the phenomenon of terrorism, it is worth asking what is the basic trend beyond those different and even contrasting modes of understanding? A structural reversal, or something else? More importantly, how those modes of perception influence people's understanding of the nature of terrorism? Is the 'real' of terrorism hidden

⁴² Ibid. 162-166.

⁴³ Fishman, S & Kruglanski, AW. 'The Psychology of Terrorism: "Syndrome" Versus "Tool" Perspectives,' *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 2 (2006), 193-215.



from our view under those particular ways of understanding as manifest in existing literature on terrorism? If so, how?⁴⁴

3. Remaking Terrorism: From Individual Subjectivity to Political Systemic Representation

The section aims to answer two questions generated from the observation on existing literature on terrorism: what is the main trend beyond different modes of interpretation about terrorism, and how do they influence people's understanding of the nature of terrorism. By examining the way in which terrorism is constructed through modernizing process of subjectivity and institutional rationalities, this section will reveal the gap of representation of terrorism in modernity and the 'reality' of terrorism. To this end, it will be divided into two parts—Part I will demonstrate the distance between representation and categorization of terrorism by individual subjectivity, and terrorism as fact; Part II will elaborate the remaking of terrorism through political systemic representation⁴⁵. Two cases will be discussed and examined in Part I to show how terrorism is re-created, mistranslated or distorted by subjectivity. Three strategies of political systemic representation of terrorism will be elaborated in Part II to demonstrate the way in which terrorism is manipulated, fabricated and manufactured by modern institutional rationalities. Concomitantly, it will explain the subjectivity presented in the individual understanding of terrorist threat as being increasingly eroded, subordinated and dominated by the political systemic interpretation of terrorism in modernity. It will demonstrate this deepening process of subordination of individual subjectivity in perceiving terrorist problem as a transformation of representation from individual subjectivity to systemic rationalities.

3.1. Part I: Distance Between Terrorism Categorized by Subjectivity and Terrorism as Fact

⁴⁴ This survey of literature is purposive, not exhaustive. Given the booming industry that terrorism has become—one new book on terrorism is being published every six hours (Silke 2008 p.28)—my selection of literature is admittedly limited and purposive to the argument I make in this research.

⁴⁵ Systemic representation means collective form of representation about terrorism vis-à-vis the individual representation of terrorism or the representation through self-consciousness. The terrorism studies from the dimension of social representation focus on the structure and dynamics of collective/cultural thinking, and particularly the social construction of reality (Hewer & Taylor 2007 p.206). The political systemic representation is a way to understand how the interpretation of terrorist event by the state or media results in the dissemination of a 'processed' version of reality, which ultimately reinforces the collective understanding of community (ibid).



First, terrorism has been submerged into the particular patterns of self-consciousness in modernity, becoming a product of objectification and externalization of subjectivity. Modernity is viewed by Heidegger as an age of the autonomous subject and boundless human self-assertion, which dissolves ground of truth into inauthenticity⁴⁶. This inauthenticity results from Descartes's appeal to self-consciousness of the subject as one indubitable point, that which is firmly fixed, which makes it the ground of truth. This re-grounding of everything through self-consciousness remakes the 'real' through subjective representation. As Heidegger points out, the unique nature of this remaking process is: 'I am as one representing, but that my representation decides about the being present of everything that is represented' and about presence of what is meant in it; thus, everything referred back as to the unshakeable ground is the full essence of representation itself⁴⁷ (Heidegger 1979 p.114). Therefore, reality is subjectified, or in other words, submerged into the stream of consciousness, becoming a product of objectifying and externalizing of the subject. The phenomenon of terrorism in this modern epistemological structure is reduced into individual subjective representation or in other words the objectifying and externalizing process of self-consciousness. The remaking of new 'truth' or 'genuine' knowledge about the nature of terrorism is not completed by its reduction into subjective representation in self-consciousness; rather it is also created by 'an "objective" ordering of representations'⁴⁸. This 'objective' ordering as active agent to re-create the nature of terrorism is embedded in certain patterns of subjectivity as ultimate point of reference in approaching the terrorism problem. Splitting, polarization, territorialization between us and the imaginary other are typical patterns or tactics of representation emerging from consciousness of the self to re-constitute the 'objective' understanding of terrorism. These patterns in subjective representation of terrorism translate terrorism into something calculable, manageable, measurable and controllable in modern political science and public realm of society. Therefore, the evil of terrorism is not inherent in action of terror but constructed through its representation in the human minds as demonized existence or concrete threat to our individual and social

⁴⁶ Villa, D R. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, 175.

⁴⁷ Heidegger, M. *Nietzsche*, Krell D F (ed.) (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 114.

⁴⁸ Villa, D R. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, 194.



identity. Those techniques of nature-remaking in individual self-consciousness enable individual and society to target and expel the threat, and thus to re-securing and re-affirming the self and the certainty of self-consciousness. Hence, to approach terrorism using those techniques or patterns of representation from self-consciousness is at the same time to distance the subject from the nature of terrorism. In this sense, individual representation of terrorism in self-consciousness leads to the inauthenticity of terrorism.

Second, the dislocation between subjective categorization of terrorism and terrorism as fact leads to excessive interpretation which imposes non-empirical elements upon the understanding of terrorism. The interpretive techniques in subjective representation of terrorism such as polarization, exaggeration and demonization are used to form the rhetorical dimensions of terrorism discourse, leading to disastrous reality making power. In Richard Jackson's⁴⁹ examination of post-9/11 discursive investment in the war on terrorism, the public interpretation of terrorism is manipulated to create a myth of exceptional grievance that legitimates and perpetuate American as primary victims of terrorism. By demarcating and categorizing America and her potential target in the War on Terror into victims and perpetrators, civilization and barbarism, democracy and evil, the realities of terrorism is concealed and represented by the excessive and distorted interpretations. According to Copjec⁵⁰, categorization of numbers always creates 'objects' that fall within them, but there are real objects that are not reducible to any category. Thus, there are two different objects, i.e., object logically projected by particular categorization, and object in reality. According to this observation, terrorism is a prime instance of the power to constitute the phenomenon⁵¹. The actual evidence might be missing, yet people still infer its reality from the traces left by the interpretations given by their audiences⁵². Therefore, the desire or motivation of terrorism is inferred through rhetoric of public discourse; in other words, the manipulation of interpretation. Terrorism in reality, in contrast to its rhetoric

⁴⁹ Jackson, R. *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ Copjec, J. *Read my Desire: Lacan against the Historicists* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press 1994), 171.

⁵¹ Douglass, W A & Zulaika J. 'The Terrorist Subject: Terrorism Studies and the Absent Subjectivity,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008), 31.

⁵² Ibid



construction, is irreducible to any single political and scientific category. Hence, there is dislocation or mismatch between categorization used in perceiving the problem of terrorism and terrorism in reality, between terrorism as a political label and as an objective phenomenon of history and political conflict, between terrorism as signifier and signified. In other words, ‘there is a gap, between the evidence and that which the evidence establishes, which means there is something that is not visible in the evidence’⁵³. Social understanding of terrorism is formed on this dislocation or gap. The impotence of social categorizing and representing the real of terrorism confronts society with ever-present threat of terror. To suture the gap a supplementary element is ADDED to the LACK of a signifier that could close the field⁵⁴. In so doing the ‘lack’ turns into ‘excess’ and thereby interpretation establishes the evidence’s meanings⁵⁵. This excessive interpretation imposes non-empirical elements upon people’s understanding of terrorism, which ultimately distorts the nature of terrorism. In what follows I present two examples of how subjective representation and categorization of terrorism produce the inauthenticity of phenomenon of terrorism.

⁵³ Copjec, J. *Read my Desire: Lacan against the Historicists*, 176.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 174.

⁵⁵ Douglass, W A & Zulaika J. ‘The Terrorist Subject: Terrorism Studies and the Absent Subjectivity,’ 32.



Case one: Libyan terrorism as a non-empirical interpretation of the Gulf of Sidra Incident

In August of 1987, US Tomcat fighter aircraft shot down two Libyan Su-22s over the Gulf of Sirte in Libyan territorial water, 60 miles from the Libyan coast⁵⁶. After the shoot-out over the Mediterranean, security arrangements for the US president were tightened⁵⁷. Raymond W. Copson⁵⁸ of the Foreign Affairs and National Defense Division reported in a governmental brief: ‘there was speculation in the press that these arrangements might be related to the threat of a (possible) Libyan-sponsored assassination attempt in retaliation for the Gulf of Sirte Incident. The speculation seemed to be confirmed in early December, when press reports indicated that the US intelligence officials had received information from an unnamed non-American source with first-hand knowledge of Libyan plans indicating that a Libyan assassination team, including Libyan and other Middle Eastern Nationals as well as an East German might have entered the United States from Canada over the November 30 weekend...’. However, no proof of Libyan hit-team was forthcoming from the US administration⁵⁹. The media cited in the official report as source of evidence to give credibility to the Libyan hit-team caper are also unable to deliver sufficient evidence. As Jeff Gralnick, executive producer of A.B.C.’s World News Tonight stated: ‘No news organization had any finite proof at all’⁶⁰. However, the networks still attempted to create and impose a sensational image of Libyan terrorism with distortions and conflicting details on the lack of evidence. For example, two assassins were reported to have entered the US from Canada and Mexico, which indicates there are two teams⁶¹. A.B.C reported that team included three Libyans, two Iranians, no Syrians, one Palestinian, one East German, and one Lebanese; C.B.S. reported *no* Libyans, three Iranians,

⁵⁶ The Gulf of Sidra Incident is a highly controversial case not merely because of the legal and geopolitical dispute on the Gulf of Sidra (see for example Blum 1986) but also, more importantly, the complexities of Libyan-U.S. relation (see Perdue 1989). In spite of those highly contested aspects, my aim is to demonstrate how the US government relies on ad hominem arguments that shift its argument away from merits of logic and evidence to national chauvinism, so as to institute the category of Libyan terrorism.

⁵⁷ Perdue, W D. *Terrorism and the State: A Critique of Domination Through Fear* (New York: Preager, 1989), 52.

⁵⁸ Copson, R W ‘Libyan: U.S. Relations,’ *Issue Brief*, Number IB81152, (Washington, D.C: Library of Congress Congressional Research Service, 1982), 96.

⁵⁹ Perdue, W D. *Terrorism and the State: A Critique of Domination Through Fear*, 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Weisman, J. ‘Why American TV is so Vulnerable to Foreign Disinformation’, *TV Guide*, (12 June, 1982), 5-16.



one East German, no Syrians, one Palestinian and one Lebanese⁶². Those conflicting and unconfirmed details manufacture a sensational tale of Libyan terrorism, objectify and concretize the threat to the US society from the imaginary source of terror, and thus justify the US military action against Qaddafi and his regime. The whole thing about Qaddafi sponsored assassination and terrorist threat was a complete fabrication⁶³. This fabrication in form of objectification and exaggeration underpins the subjective representation of terrorism, filling Libyan terrorism label with territoriality, ethnicity, immorality and concretized horror. To differentiate and separate ‘them’ from ‘us’ means to erect or realize and legitimate the border for the audience of this fabricated terror against imaginary threat. More fundamentally, although actual evidence of terrorist threat is wanting, it can be inferred and produced from distorted interpretation and fabricated details. Those unjustifiable speculations about Libyan terrorist motivation and action are indeed a non-empirical addition or a signifier without signified in realities. The excess of interpreting Libyan threat forms a deceptive cocoon for the lack of actual evidence of the threat, which leads to a superabundance of signifier to the signified in the real. This excess or non-empirical addition re-creates its own subjectified or categorized terrorism that cannot be referred back to the existence in actualities. This terrorist label thus is itself devoid of content, that is, it is zero⁶⁴. But it is this zero, this non-empirical addition or excess in signifying, enables newsmaker ‘to play a key role in the marshaling of crucial public support⁶⁵. And, it is this remaking power of language, this non-reality, which justifies political and military intervention and assassination by the US, and creates terrorism as exogenous threat to our legitimating boundary of humanity.

⁶² Perdue, W D. *Terrorism and the State: A Critique of Domination Through Fear*, 53.

⁶³ Hersh, S. ‘Target Qaddafi,’ *New York Times Magazine* (2 Feb, 1987), accessed 9/5/2013, <<http://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/22/magazine/target-qaddafi.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>>.

⁶⁴ Douglass, W A & Zulaika J. ‘The Terrorist Subject: Terrorism Studies and the Absent Subjectivity,’ *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 1, no. 1 (2008), 31.

⁶⁵ Perdue, W D. *Terrorism and the State: A Critique of Domination Through Fear*, 53.



Case two: reconstructing Jihad through binary language

The dislocation of subjective representation of terrorism and the nature of terrorism manifests in the binary language used to describe Jihad and emergence of Taliban. Asad⁶⁶ observed that in contrast to the earlier violent groups in Europe who are all operating within the framework of nation-state and were therefore insider, ‘the present adversaries (Muslim terrorists) are outsider—even when they are citizens of the liberal democratic state or inhabitants of its governed territories’. The violence of Islamic groups is incomprehensible precisely because it is not embedded in a historical narrative and is thereby seen as irrational threat⁶⁷. Therefore, Islamic terrorism is portrayed as a clash of civilization, which is constructed in a binary language—Islam versus western, outsider versus insider, and irrational versus rational. The antagonistic categorization is extended into the interpretation of jihad that is always seen as the religious ideology behind terrorism. Jihad is understood as a culturally distinctive expression of Muslim intolerance and arrogance towards non-Muslims⁶⁸. ‘With the decline of Islamic civilization and the triumph of West, Islamist violence came to represent a fanatical resentment against modernity’ (ibid). This subjective representation reframes the nature of jihad as ideological source of terrorism into an oversimplified binary structure, that is, a conflict of Muslim against non-Muslim, of pre-modern against modernity, of religious against infidels. Demarcating and polarizing interpretation of terrorism leads to the fragmentation and distortion of the source of terrorism. Representing jihad in an assumed clash of civilization between two antagonistic and exclusive categories ignores not merely the rich history of mutual borrowings and continuous interactions among Christians, Jews, and Muslims but also the fact that the very identity of a people as European (or Islamic) depends on the definition of a highly selective civilizational heritage⁶⁹. In addition, the distance between the actual making of terrorism and subjective making of terrorism is also manifested through scrutinizing the formation of jihads in Afghanistan. The modern state of Afghanistan was created in 1893 as a

⁶⁶ Asad, T. *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 9.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 10.



buffer state between the Russia Empire and British Empire. With the proliferation of tribal groups from different language and ethnic groups there is little sense of national identity in Afghanistan⁷⁰. Jihad was drawn by mullahs as rallying call to first resist the British invasion and later the terror campaigns instituted by Russia's national Security Council. Therefore, jihadism presumed to be as source of terrorism is not an ideological identity which is firmly fixed or inherent in religious tradition of Muslim as source of violence or radicalization, but rather a spontaneous form uniting diversified identities against external threat. The actual radicalization is more complicated and produced in a field of competing political interests between the US, Soviet Union, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Afghan extremist groups were initially supported by the US as a tool to set a bear trap for Soviet Union. But the US government, from the beginning, had adopted a hand-off policy which left the day-to-day operations and direct contact with mujahedeen groups to Pakistan's Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI). Pakistani motivation and interests often differed from those of the US government, particular in respect to its support of the more extremist mujahedeen groups⁷¹, consequently, there is a proliferation and amplification of the extremist groups and radical mood among Afghan rebels. As CIA station chief reported: 'they were all brutal, fierce, bloodthirsty, and basically fundamentalist'⁷². In this sense, terrorism is neither a separate entity from 'us', nor inherently evil made by particular ideology; rather it is a process of radicalization cultivated and amplified in the battle ground of conflicting and competing interests and motivations. Fundamentalist ideology is further internalized through indoctrination. The chain of *madrassas* along Afghan-Pakistan border co-funded by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan educated students with crude Deobandi and Wahhabi teachings, which were not only anti-Soviet but also anti-Shia. The ideological indoctrination from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and financial support from the US facilitated the process of radicalization, contributing to the emergence of Taliban. Taliban in this sense is a mixed and vague identity produced by this complex historical web of conflict and competing interest. Therefore, the subjective representation or interpretation in demarcation discourse does

⁷⁰ Murphy, E. *Making of Terrorism in Pakistan: Historical and Social Roots of Extremism* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 101.

⁷¹ Ibid. 108.

⁷² Ibid. 109.



not grasp this complex web of interaction and conflict on which jihad or terrorism is formed.

3.2. Part II: Remaking Terrorism through Political Systemic Representation

Part I has demonstrated the way in which terrorism is mistranslated, distorted or even re-created by subjectivity. Part II will move our analytical focus from individual subjective representation of terrorism to social systemic representation of terrorism. Instead of interpreting the representation of terrorism on individual subjectivity, this part will first explain how terrorism is objectified, re-shaped or produced by the technicizing and universalizing processes of modernity. Sovereign state is institutionalized presence of these processes of modernity. Part II will specify and discuss three typical strategies of systemic representation of terrorism used by state to justify its own rationalities and interests. The subject position of individual subjectivity in representing terrorism in modernizing process is gradually eroded, dominated and replaced by the rationality of modern political system.

The nature of terrorist phenomenon is re-shaped and manufactured by the technicizing process of modernity. In Strauss's *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays*⁷³, the first wave of modernity is marked by the reduction of moral and political problem into technical problem, which on the one hand dissolves all pre-understanding about existence, and reconstructs the center of politics as a technical problem of controllability and manageability on the other. In this technicizing process, man presumed as maker of everything is seen as capable of developing particular tactics on socio- and politico-psychological dimensions to conquer the immanent disturbing and disruptive elements of self. The techniques used to manage the disruptive elements of self in modernity involve the identification, externalization, objectification and moralization. As Strauss argued⁷⁴, knowing is kind of making. Those techniques help constitute a particular knowing process to re-shape and manufacture the nature of the disruptive elements. Terrorism can be seen as such a disturbing and disruptive factor in society because of its threat to not merely the regularity on which the social operation is based

⁷³ Strauss, L. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays*, Gildin H (ed.) (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1989).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 88.



but also the very consciousness of routine on which the self-identity is formed. The consciousness of routine, in Giddens' view⁷⁵, is the origin of self-identity through the learning of what is not-me, the constructing of other, and the cultivating of a sense of being through non-being. Therefore, to restore the ontological security of social self it is essential to conquer the problem of terrorism through conquering our understanding of terrorism. To this end, terrorism as a source of internal or existential anxiety is externalized as an object opposing 'me', as evil, irrationality and disorder, as something exogenous and antagonistic to 'us'. The boundary of routine and regularity on which the legitimacy of political society is built is re-drawn by reframing our knowing of terrorism, in other words, by systemically expelling terrorism as heterogeneity or foreign body to our political society. The nature of terrorism is re-constructed through this systematic reframing of the understanding of terrorism in modernity. Terrorism as internal crisis of the identity in modern political society is suspended and then replaced as an imaginary enemy in remoteness.

Moreover, terrorism is also produced by the separation from the universal community of modernity. Gavin Cameron and Joshua D. Goldstein state: 'modernity's animating principle is prior to ideological content and it is indeed the pre-condition for the development of any truly modern ideologies by establishing the modern relation of individuals to the world'⁷⁶. Hence, instead of understanding terrorism as a concrete ideological pursuance, the primary task is to see how modernity self-consciously produces relational criteria for a new world, in which terrorism is transformed from an ideological category to an ontological category⁷⁷. Modern membership as one such relational criteria produced by Rousseau's conception of general will is not something externally conferred but internally produced⁷⁸. It is the membership, more fundamentally, the act of will rather than the empirical shared content or common essence that dictates the possibilities of community. Concomitantly, this formation of community, the

⁷⁵ Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 43-44.

⁷⁶ Cameron G & Goldstein J D, 'The Ontology of Modern Terrorism: Hegel, Terrorism Studies, and Dynamics of Violence,' *The Journal of National and Social Philosophy* 6, no.1 (2010), 71.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 60, 71.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 72.



process of willing together and pure universality determines and validates the subjectivity of individual. Thus a paradox emerges from the mutuality of individual will and community; that is, the modern community begins foundationally with being commonly willed by individual subjectivity, but when community becomes the absolute truth of individual subjectivity then individual loses his or her validity to act against the community. The immanent consequence of this contradiction is an ideational rather than ideological destruction of the validity of any particularity in existent world⁷⁹. In this way, the new shape of earthly violence of modernity 'let nothing break loose to become a free object standing over against it'⁸⁰. In other words, modern political society under the guise of universal laws is marked by its sheer negativity, the impossibility to create or preserve independent and meaningful values. Terrorism with its will to reshape the world and fully realize the common values from within is both inside (rediscovering common values and principles) and outside (posing existential threat to individual and social identity) of community. This dual role of terrorism makes it not object of society but abject of society. As a social abject, it is inside of me but what excludes me, what disturbs my identity, system and order⁸¹. Therefore, terrorism is perceived as heterogeneous and antagonistic to universal community. Terrorism label is produced from its particularity, whether its act or effect, which constitutes its separation from the universal political community. In other words, the 'real' of terrorism is constituted not merely through individual subjective representation but more fundamentally in the very logic of totalized process of modernity. The nature of terrorism is remade and recognized through its separation from the dominant community of modernity. Terrorism is thus construed and represented in the systemic exclusion by universal community in modernity.

Sovereign state and mass media are institutional presence of technicizing and universalizing processes of modernity. The technicizing and universalizing processes of modernity are embedded in the particular strategies developed by the modern political

⁷⁹ Ibid. 77.

⁸⁰ Hegel, G W F. *Philosophy of Spirit*, Miller A V (trans.) (New York: Oxford University Press 1977), 588.

⁸¹ Kristeva, J. 'Approaching Abjection,' *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 1-2, 4.



institutions. Thus, to further elaborate my point that a) terrorism is re-shaped by the technological nature of modernity to conquer and control reality, b) terrorism is produced by its separation from universal community in modernity, it is worth investigating the particular strategies of representation of terrorism used by modern state. Below will present three strategies of representing terrorism by modern political and communication institutions, and illuminate how these strategies ultimately reinforce and legitimate the modern rationalities and predispositions underpinning the state.

Strategy one: terrorism as pure political argument

The US administration uses terrorism as an argument or a more 'legitimate' justification for its policy commitment. As observed by Friedman⁸², people see threats as more legitimate justification or persuasive argument for policies than ideological ends. Therefore, policymakers in the US justify their policies, whether to promote liberty or serve bureaucratic interests, with an argument about security even if this justification does not match the motivation of security⁸³. Driven by this political mentality, one strategy used by the US government to enact policy change is to repackage policies, particularly new ones, as security project⁸⁴. Terrorism is manipulated in the US politics to create a sense of crises or a form of alarm to ensure the support and compliance from other players in executive branch of bureaucracy and Congress. Iraq war is a prominent example using counterterrorism as a pretext or justification. But the main reason for the war seems to have been to spread liberalism in the Middle East⁸⁵. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick also used the September 11 tragedy to call for fast-track negotiating authority to assist President Bush expedite the North American Free Trade Act (NAFTA) into a Free Trade Area of the Americas⁸⁶. Trade, Robert Zoellick⁸⁷ said in *The*

⁸² Friedman, B H. 'Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security,' *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no.1 (2011), 30-77.

⁸³ Friedman, B H. 'Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security,' *Political Science Quarterly* 126, no.1 (2011), 30-77.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ McClellan, S. *What Happened: Inside the Bush White House and Washington's Culture of Deception* (New York: Public Affairs Books, 2008), 128-9; Harlow, B & Tenet., G. *At the Center of the Storm: My Time at the CIA* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 321.

⁸⁶ Rampton, S., Fall. 'Terrorism as Pretext', *P R Watch*, (2001), pp.8, <<http://www.prwatch.org/prwissues/2001Q4/terror.html>>.

⁸⁷ Zoellick, R B. "Countering Terror with Trade", *The Washington Post*, (20 Sep.2001).



Washington Post, is about more than economic sufficiency, it promotes the values at the heart of this protracted struggle against international terrorists who attack international finance, globalization and the United State. Another example is that terrorism is used as pretext to push Bush's energy plan, including proposal to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This systemic representation of terrorism based on institutional motivation and constant searches for enemy, then, produces the public fear to sell policy, which does not merely intensify the fear itself but also conceal its cause. Terrorism is processed by the political logic of the US administration thereby being alienated from its social and historical realities and recreated as an argument rather than evidence for the political change. The establishment of Homeland Security is an institutionalized way to objectify terrorism and potentially increase 'the incentives to herald the terrorist threat to the United States'⁸⁸. The justification of the institutional existence relies on magnification and intensification of the fear. Therefore, to preserve the mission of the institution is to preserve, even promote, the sense of threat⁸⁹.

Strategy two: terrorism as rhetoric construction through political discursive structure

Turkish government adopts a biased political discursive structure to presume the existence of separatist terrorism of Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) at a rhetoric level. Security related to the recognition of national identity is always the core element in the political discursive structure of any polity. In the Turkish case, 'national security' is defined by National Security Council (NSC) as the 'preservation and protection against the collective internal and external threats to the constitutional order of the state, its national existence, integrity, all of its political, social, cultural and economic interests and contractual rights in the international arena'⁹⁰. This conception constructs a political discursive structure in which the state is granted with supreme validity and individual is robbed of any valid claim that she or he can make against the regime. The use of expressions such as 'national existence', 'integrity' or 'constitutional order of the state' narrows the understanding of security, validity and identity,

⁸⁸ Friedman, B H. 'Managing Fear: The Politics of Homeland Security,' 92.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 93.

⁹⁰ Arslan, Z. "Government" in Cizre, Ü (ed.), *Almanac Turkey 2005. Security sector democratic oversight* (Istanbul: TESEV/DCAF, 26–35 2006), 26.



making some political options logical and legitimate whereas others evil and threatening. The naming of the 'other' is conditioned by this biased structure⁹¹. Based on this political rhetoric strategy, Turkish Land Forces Commander, General Basbug, defines separatist terrorism as ethnic nationalists aiming to destroy the Turkish state and the unitary structure of Turkey⁹². The nature of separatist terrorism of Turkey is produced on a rhetoric level by distancing it from the given language of legitimacy and validity such as unity, constitutional order or unitary structure of Turkey. In other words, the labeling of the political dissident group as separatist terrorists reflects the binary structure of concepts, in which any concept contains its significance as well as its opposite⁹³. Separatist terrorism in Turkey exists as rhetoric opposite of the dominant discursive validity such as national integrity, unitary structure and sovereignty. By constructing PKK as an opposite of political discursive legitimacy in Turkey, it is transformed to terrorist organization in Turkish political system. The differentiation process in terrorism labeling does not end here; there is also a concern with separating the terrorists from the average Kurds and externalizing the label to outside actors such as the Kurdish President of Iraq and the president of the autonomous Kurdish region in the north of the country⁹⁴. The separation and externalization make PKK an external threat to the sovereign order of Turkey, which reinforces the opposing position of PKK against dominant discursiveness of political validity. The labeling of terrorism in Turkish case reflects how discursive structure of dominant political system colonizes the understanding of terrorism and re-constitutes the nature of the phenomenon.

Strategy three: sovereign denial of control predicament

The final strategy of systemic representation of terrorism is operated through the sovereign denial of control predicament. According to Garland⁹⁵, one of the foundational myths of sovereign state is that it is capable of providing security, law and order, and the crime control

⁹¹ Barrinha, A. 'The Political Importance of Labeling: Terrorism and Turkey's Discourse on the PKK,' *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 4, no. 2 (2011), 166.

⁹² Turkish Weekly. 'Turkey Cries for her Losses in Sirnak', *Journal of Turkish Weekly* (11 June, 2007), accessed 03/8/2007, <<http://turkishweekly.net/>>.

⁹³ Jackson, R. *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counterterrorism*, 21.

⁹⁴ Barrinha, A. 'The Political Importance of Labeling: Terrorism and Turkey's Discourse on the PKK,' 172-3.

⁹⁵ Garland, D. 'The Limits of the Sovereign State: Strategies of Crime Control in Contemporary Society,' *British Journal of Criminology* 36, no. 4 (1996), 445-71.



within its territorial boundaries. The predicament of control for modern state limits its role as a primary provider of security and crime control. The decentralization and fragmentation of terrorist threat produce the unprecedented predicament of sovereign control, that is, the looser operational connections and more polycentric Islamist terrorism make it harder for intelligence to uncover exploitable links⁹⁶. A single penetration of a conventional or pyramid type of organization can lead to the deconstruction of the whole, whereas fragmented operation units present no single opportunity for state to destroy a significant portion of the resistance⁹⁷. Therefore, the decentralized terrorism has been more adaptable, flexible, versatile, robust and resilient in the face of attack, increasing its ability to defy counterleadership targeting and absorb a number of attacks on its distributed nodes⁹⁸. This control predicament of sovereign state over terrorist threat results in government to 'hysterical denial of this predicament', that is, to symbolically reassert the myth of sovereign control with ultra-punitive and exclusionary policies of harsher sentences⁹⁹. Terrorists who challenge the limits of sovereign state is pathologized and demonized in the sovereign reassertion of crime control. However, the nature of terrorist threat to de-legitimate sovereign control is not because it is inherent more evil or pathological but rather it is embedded in heterogeneous form of power with the sovereign state. The fluid and decentralized form of terrorism privilege it with 'power of rapid movement, across, over and under many apparent regions, disappearing and then reappearing, transmuting their form...unexpectedly and chaotically¹⁰⁰.' This nature of new terrorism, the fluid and dispersed power, constitutes the real source of predicament of sovereign control. But the approach adopted by the state to combat this threat and re-legitimate its role of primary provider of security is to increase its prohibitive and punitive power such as harsher policy and sentence against terrorists. Therefore, the representation of terrorism through harsher punishment, or in other words, the hard power of state as a form of hysterical denial of sovereign failure

⁹⁶ Pillar, P R. 'Counterterrorism after Al Qaeda,' *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (2004), 104.

⁹⁷ Beam, L. 'Leaderless Resistance,' *The Seditonist*, (1992) accessed 04/08/11, <<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~satran/PoliSci 06/Wk 11-1 Terrorism Networks leaderless-resistance.pdf>>.

⁹⁸ Sageman, M. *Understanding Terror Networks* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004), 12-3.

⁹⁹ Brown, D & Gray, J. "'Devils and Dust': Extending the 'Uncivil Politics of Law and Order' to the 'War on Terror'," in *Counter-Terrorism and the Post-Democratic State*, Hocking J and Lewis C (ed.) (Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar 2007), 153-171.

¹⁰⁰ Urry J, 'The global complexities of September 11th' *Theory, Culture and Society* 19 (2002) 65.



mismatches the actual presentation of terrorism as new form of power.

The other way of sovereign denial of control predicament is to eliminate the uncertain sign of terror, which also leads to distorted representation of terrorism. Terrorism is the systematic use of terror to create a climate of fear on target population, thus it is essentially a manipulation of mental state of fear or being terrorized. In this sense, the real danger of terrorism as an unlawful or de-legitimate form of violence against sovereign power is not manifested in its immediate material damage but its power to generate an epistemologically disruptive effect on the target population. As Arquilla and Ronfeldt argued¹⁰¹, terrorist threat is fundamentally epistemological, which tends to be about disruption more than destruction. For instance, drawing on global media as its amplifier a single attack of terrorism with very limited damages will create a much broader atmosphere of horror at regional or even global level. Horror is the ‘perception of the precariousness of human identity, to the perception that it may be lost or invaded’¹⁰². The traumatic images of terrorist attack disseminated through media are bound up with an uncertainty or anxiety concerning the meaning of objects or attitudes¹⁰³. The anxiety or insecurity on the ontological level of the audience is fundamentally diffuse, free-floating, lacking a specific object¹⁰⁴. This disruptive effect or uncertainty on the psychological and ontological level of the general population produces even more threats than the fluid form of terrorist violence to the role of sovereign state as primary provider of security to its population. Even if government can symbolically re-demonstrate its capability to control through a range of ultra-punitive and exclusionary policies of harsher and mandatory sentences, it fails to control the psychological uncertainty and insecurity of the amplified terrorist signs. Hence, in every society various techniques are developed that are intended to fix the floating chain of signified in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs¹⁰⁵. In other words,

¹⁰¹ Arquilla, J & Ronfeldt, D. ‘Chapter 1 - The Advent of Netwar (revisited),’ in Arquilla J & Ronfeldt, D (ed.), *Networks and Netwars: The Future of Terror, Crime, and Militancy* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand, 2001). Also, available at <<http://www.rand.org/publications/MR/MR1382/MR1382.ch1.pdf>>.

¹⁰² Asad, T. *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 68.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 30.

¹⁰⁴ Giddens, A. *Modernity and Self-identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity, 1991), 44.

¹⁰⁵ Barthes, R. ‘Rhetoric of the Image’, *Image, Music, Text*, Heath S (Ed and trans.) (New York: Hill and Wang 1977), 39.



society attempts to fix, or in more accurate terms, create the meaning beneath the uncertain signs of terrorism, thereby restoring the meaning of community and securing the identity of individuals. The technique used to eliminate uncertainty or manufacture a new one by sovereign power is embedded in the form of official hermeneutics. Official hermeneutics is an official form of pre-supposition that ‘what appears on the surface is not the truth and seeks to control what lies beneath – through interpretation it converts absences into signs’¹⁰⁶. For instance, Ford Hood shooting in 2009 appeared to be a typical case of lone-wolf terrorism. The shooting creates highly disruptive and chaotic effect, which produces a fear in American society about the internal crisis of military system and American political community. But following the investigation by FBI, government attempts to establish the evidence to prove the external affiliation of Nidal to Islamic Jihadi movement through his contact with US-born militant Moslem cleric Anwar al-Awlaki. Therefore, the mortal threat from Islamic extremist and jihadi ideology, and its presence in American community, emerge as the ultimate reading of event, which overlooks the actual cause and course of Nidal’s radicalization.

Last but not least, in re-subjectification mode of terrorism, instead of being transformed from a negative agent re-constructed by individual consciousness or sovereign discourse to a positive or creative agent, terrorism is instrumentalized and integrated into the surviving logic of the world in modernity. In the above analysis of this section, terrorism, whether it is represented by individual consciousness or sovereign state, appears to be a negative phenomenon manipulated or given by ‘us’. The objectification mode is the typical technique used in the distorted representation of terrorism by individual or state. However, the re-subjectification mode of terrorism seems to revitalize the subjectivity of terrorists so that eliminating the problem of inauthenticity of terrorism. However, by scrutinizing the modern global conditions and terrorism, the operation of world system¹⁰⁷ is no longer built on rejecting and re-constituting of terrorism but the very existence of the subjectivity of terrorism. The

¹⁰⁶ Asad, T. *On Suicide Bombing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 31.

¹⁰⁷ World system refers to the dominant political rationality of international political system in the context of globalization rather than a socioeconomic system that encompasses all of globe. The paper has argued that states attempt to fabricate the ‘real’ of terrorism to legitimate its sovereign power. Here it will argue that the working of world system in globalization depends on the subjectivity of terrorism.



universal standpoint of modern science underlines the necessity of taking up a position outside the world and thus viewing the earth as object within the frame of universe. The withdrawal from terrestrial proximity contained in the discovery of the global as a whole places the representing subject at an infinitely vaster imaginary distance from the earth¹⁰⁸. The fruit of this project of earth alienation—of the desire to dispose of the earth from the outside—is nuclear weapon¹⁰⁹. This earth alienation or in other terms, de-worldly rationalization, and its fatal consequences constitute the context in which common humanity and suicidal humanity are emerged. The humanity in this globalization has been deprived of any possible certainty, of any firm ground for knowledge of or action upon the world¹¹⁰. The terrorism in this globalization process is revived of its subjectivity as rescuing power to this internal crisis of humanity by sacrifice. ‘They [terrorists] simply wish to reshape it [the world] from within; not by destroying common values and principles but by constantly striving to fully realize them’¹¹¹. Al-Qaeda’s terror, in this sense, is driven by the impulse to truly universalize the security so that it can be enjoyed by everyone or by no one¹¹². The action of suicide bomber is thus a sacrifice to fully realize the shared humanity and ethical politics of the world. Terrorism is not sheer opposite or separate from common humanity any more but an inevitable part of it, without which people are blocked possibilities for full realization of existing shared value of public common world, and retrieval of the firm ground of humanity. The subjectivity of terrorism is integrated into the very logic of survival of the world in modernity. The real of terrorism is instrumentalized for the self-preservation of self-destructive system of the world politics.

¹⁰⁸ Arendt, H. *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 264.

¹⁰⁹ Kateb, G. *Hannah Arendt: Politics, Conscience, Evil* (Totowa, J.J.: Rowman & Allanheld, 1983).

¹¹⁰ Villa, D R. *Arendt and Heidegger: The Fate of the Political*, 193.

¹¹¹ Ahmad, I. ‘Is there an Ethics of Terrorism? Islam, Globalization, Militancy,’ *Journal of South Asia Studies* XXXIII, no. 3 (2010), 495.

¹¹² *Ibid.* 496.



4. Conclusion

The research essay has examined the problems in the processes of representing and remaking terrorism through individual subjectivity and systemic rationality of modernity so as to analyze and to describe the distortion, alienation and mistranslation between the interpretation of terrorism and the 'reality' of terrorism. From individual representation of terrorism through self-consciousness and subjective categorization to systemic representation of terrorism by modernizing process and sovereign state, the subject position of individual perception of terrorism is eroded and subordinated by the institution-or process-dominant perception from state and society in modernity. Compared with the representation of terrorism through self-consciousness in which man is creator of everything, the interpretation of terrorism by political or social systems is dominated by the rationality embedded in political or social system. There is a constant decline of the subject position of individual self-consciousness for terrorist phenomenon. Concomitantly, there is a domination of institutional rationality, of the process of modernity in representing the problem of terrorism.

Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass write: 'only through the intervention of one's own desire can analysis interpret what "terrorism" is telling us. The terrorist's desire, the terrorist's real, can only be understood through the analyst's desire'¹¹³. The aim of this essay was to catch this real of terrorism by exploring the desire deep inside the appearance of its interpretation. The essay demonstrated the complexities of the nature of terrorism, and the significance of the way to approach terrorism as symbolic interaction. The aim of critical terrorism studies, to cite Jackson¹¹⁴ (2007 p.246), is to understand terrorism 'as a social process constructed through language, discourse and inter-subjective practices'. In line with this framework of critical terrorism studies this essay also aspired for a more thorough and democratic understanding of terrorism. It is up to the reader to judge if my attempt has been effective.

¹¹³ Douglass, W A & Zulaika J. 'The Terrorist Subject: Terrorism Studies and the Absent Subjectivity,' 32.

¹¹⁴ Jackson, R. 'The Core Commitments of Critical Terrorism Studies,' *European Political Science* 6, no. 3 (2007), 246.



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