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# UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM: AN ALTERNATIVE VIEW AND THE FEAR OF THE PAINFUL TRUTH: HOW POWERFUL NATIONS LEGITIMIZE TERRORISM



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**Understanding Terrorism: An Alternative View and the Fear of the Painful Truth:  
How Powerful Nations Legitimize Terrorism**

**Synopsis:**

Terrorism and counterterrorism have occupied academicians lately as they struggle to identify terrorists and how to stop them. On the contrary, this article argues that powerful nations use terrorists' acts to achieve their ideological and political goals where and when diplomacy fails. In fact, powerful nations have legitimized terrorism for their interest and only cry foul when the oppressed resists the former's calculated cruelty as seen in slavery and colonization. In terrorism we are all guilty.

## **Understanding Terrorism: An Alternative View and the Fear of the Painful Truth: How Powerful Nations Legitimize Terrorism.**

### **Abstract**

Despite human beings' noble achievements on this planet including medicine, technology, physics, and chemistry, there is one characteristic of the human race, which is disturbing and that act is "committing extreme cruelty and violence against its own species" (Smith 2007:41). This cruelty by human beings against themselves stems from many factors including ideology, religion, and racism. These categorizations, as Smith (2011) noted, are unfortunately used to dehumanize the other through societal definitions where one group, the powerful, sees itself as the paragons of civilization against the other, the weak, as barbarians. Terrorism, racism, ideology, and religion are, but some of the variables nations have used and continue to employ to dehumanize others. By and large, powerful societies and nations regularly commit acts of terrorism yet there is the fear on the part of the weaker nations to openly accuse the former of their strategic atrocities. This paper attempts to explain the ambiguities in defining terrorism and argues the painful truth is that powerful nations do utilize terrorism to advance their ideological, religious, and territorial acquisition ambitions while the small nations are blamed and accused as supporting terrorism for resisting the atrocities of the former.

**Key words:** Terrorism, Ideology, Religion, Racism, Powerful Nations, Natives, Weaker Societies, and Dehumanization.

### **Purpose:**

This article argues that nations that claim to be fighting terrorism do commit the same crime; terrorism. An attempt is made in understanding terrorism through definitions, then how weaker groups or nations are accused of supporting terrorism, and how the term terrorism is used to dehumanize the other. Dehumanizing the other is a strategic political tool powerful nations use in achieving their goals. According to Bandura (1998), "once dehumanized, the potential victims are no longer viewed as persons with feelings, hopes, and concerns but as subhuman objects." They are portrayed as senseless satanic individuals. The author noted that "sub humans are regarded as insensitive to maltreatment and capable of being influenced only by harsh methods...Power holders come to devalue those over whom they wield control" (181). The bias coverage of the Western media is discussed regarding how they portray terrorism and military atrocities to the rest of the world.

## **Introduction and Background**

The literature on terrorism tends to focus on recent violence (Heffelfinger, 2005; Dekmejian, 2007; and Harmon et. al., 2011) so are media coverages including political commentators and analysts but what these publications and coverages fail to address is that terrorism is not a recent phenomenon despite the ambiguities in its definitions in the literature. What is discussed in the literature as modern terrorism dates back to the French Revolution between 1789-1799 (Censer, 2014: 383-386) whereas there have been several atrocities or acts of terrorism since creation (Antwi-Boasiako and Hasbun, 2019), which continue to define the very existence of humanity. Our past, directly or indirectly, defines our present situation be it an individual, group, or a nation. As Loewen (2007: 2) noted, “understanding our past is central to our ability to understand ourselves and the world around us.” Unfortunately, one could argue otherwise, the literature on terrorism is one sided, we maintain, as there is a plethora of fear within the oppressed (weaker nations: African countries, Palestinians, and others) to question or militarily confront the oppressors (powerful nations: China, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Israel, and United States of America) who write history (Garcia and Celada, 2012), manipulate facts (Wolf, 1994)<sup>1</sup> and label the oppressed as terrorists. The oppressed nations for example, third world countries and their citizens do not have the economic and military power to confront the oppressors, powerful nations, and those who control them. For example, when the United States of America lied about Iraq under Saddam Hussein accusing him of not only developing but also having weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the very weapons the United States of America and other Western nations possess in abundance.

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<sup>1</sup> See also *Viet Nam Generation Journal* Online:  
[http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML\\_docs/Texts/Scholarly/Wolf\\_Distortion\\_01.html](http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/sixties/HTML_docs/Texts/Scholarly/Wolf_Distortion_01.html)

In what was described as the turning moment in the media and the political world, Collin Powell, the 65<sup>th</sup> Secretary of State of the United States of America, gave a convincing presentation at the United Nations (UN) Security Council falsely affirming that Iraq has WMD. Even though the UN and its Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, who served from 1997-2006, wanted more time to verify Collin Powell's claim, but the US used this false pretense, ignored international law, the sovereignty of Iraq, and brushed over the UN request for the US not to invade Iraq. In fact, the US president, George W. Bush made a global declaration speaking to Congress on September 21, 2001 warned the rest of the world that "you are either with us (*the US*), or with the terrorists," as he vowed to defeat global terrorism.<sup>2</sup> However, for over a decade from 2003-2017, the US military invaded, slaughtered, and terrorized Iraqis in their own country where thousands of innocent Iraqis lost their lives

(<https://www.statista.com/statistics/269729/documented-civilian-deaths-in-iraq-war-since-2003/>)

without any forceful international condemnation from other powerful nations especially, the West. While no one study can truly account for the number of Iraqi civilian deaths by the illegal US invasion compounded with years of harmful US policy actions dating back to the 1960s not forgetting economic sanctions, Iraqis have been living under the political dictates of the US just as the Palestinians are at the mercy Israel. For example, Crawford and Lutz (2019) noted the direct human death of the various wars after September 2001 (9/11) was over 800,000<sup>3</sup> not considering its after effects on Iraq.

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<sup>2</sup> Bush delivered the speech to unified Congress in the presence of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair: <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-a-2001-09-21-14-bush-66411197/549664.html>

<sup>3</sup> Crawford, Neta C. and Catherine Lutz (2019): *Human Cost of Post 9/11 Wars*. Retrieved from: <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2019/Direct%20War%20Deaths%20COW%20Estimate%20November%2013%202019%20FINAL.pdf>

To the powerful nations in the West especially, George W. Bush, the 43<sup>rd</sup> President of the United States of America (2001-2009) and his counterpart, Tony Blair, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (1997-2007), their aim of invading Iraq was to disarm Saddam Hussein from achieving his ambition to acquiring WMD, change Iraq to become a democratic nation, and to deprive him from supporting terrorism even though the UN insisted that Iraq had no such weapons. Another criminal terrorist activity implemented by powerful European countries that has affected the continent of Africa is the Berlin Conference<sup>4</sup> of 1884 where the African continent was divided by fourteen (14) European countries and the United States of America for the economic and political benefits of these invaders. Without the consultation of any African leaders, chiefs or kings, the Europeans illegally claimed the continent just as the British claimed North America. In both cases the Europeans were the invaders, but they saw themselves as settlers (Kiernan, 2010) and did not recognize the existence and the rights of the natives. The Europeans were exploiters. The Aborigines of Australia and Blacks in South Africa lived under the strategic inhumane policies and terrorist activities under their European invaders. As these criminal activities were going on, there was the fear for the defenseless natives to militarily confront these European exploiters who had weaponry advantage over the natives in Africa and other parts of the world.

### **The Victor Writes and Distorts History**

As the South African songwriter, Zenzile Mariam Makeba, once said, “the conqueror (*s*) writes history, they came, they conquered and they write. You don’t expect the people who came

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<sup>4</sup> The Berlin Conference established the (il)legal claim by Europeans that all of Africa could be occupied by whomever could take it. It also established a process for Europeans to cooperate rather than fight with each other. This cooperation played a huge role in the division and conquest of Africa and created boundaries that have unfortunate existed up till today. <https://kera.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/6031c3a2-ada9-42b4-8045-52006e2a2b07/the-berlin-conference-of-1884-1885/>

to invade us to tell the truth about us.” The songwriter went on to argue that she does “not sing politics. [But]...merely sing the truth,”<sup>5</sup> which is not always embraced by the oppressors. For example, while the power holders in the West and the United States of America may accuse China and other non-Western countries including Russia and North Korea for not respecting human rights for their citizens, these Western countries do not see their actions during the colonial and slavery eras compounded with perennial racism, and social injustices as acts of terrorism and not respecting the human rights of the people they enslaved. Smith (2007) argues the human species is its own worst enemy stating there is an “array of less appealing characteristics [of human beings], the most disturbing of which is our propensity for committing acts of extreme cruelty and violence against our own species” (p. 41), for example, slavery and colonization. This unfortunate characteristic has been well crafted since recorded history and the cruelty is becoming worse with technological advancement in weaponry.

In their book, *Reframing Contemporary Africa: Politics, Economics, and Culture in the Global Era*, edited by Soyinka-Airewele and Edozie, the contributors through different lens concluded that the historical (political, social, and educational) presentation of the continent, Africa, has been manipulated if not distorted, by the colonial invaders and slave masters who wrote African history from their own perceived normalcy or how the other, oppressed, who is always dehumanized by the powerful, ought to behave (100-130) . This is an affirmation that “history, *undeniably*, is written by the victors.”<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to be a minority, especially Black, in any part of the world, except if you are the White-minority as seen in South Africa during the

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<sup>5</sup> One of the impactful quotes from Zenzile Mariam Makaba of South Africa: She was a renowned songwriter and a singer who became a forceful activist rejecting the White minority rule in South Africa: Apartheid: <https://quotefancy.com/quote/1309075/Miriam-Makeba-The-conqueror-writes-history-they-came-they-conquered-and-they-write-You>

<sup>6</sup> In the literature, some have attributed the quote, “history is written by the victors” to Winston Churchill. Matthew Phelan looks at the origin of the quote: <https://slate.com/culture/2019/11/history-is-written-by-the-victors-quote-origin.html>

Apartheid Regime, where the White-minority government tightened its control, determined to control, and kept political power and wealth in White-minority hands (Meredith, 2005:116-137).

Apartheid in South Africa was not only about *legalized* racism but also strategic terrorism, as the powerful White-minority government ill-treated the defenseless Black majority (Johnson and Martin, 1989) who had clandestine support from Israel and the United States even though these countries presented guises of hatred of the apartheid regime during day time. The maltreatment of Blacks was not a singularity in South Africa but a global common practice everywhere people of European descent invaded and imposed their cultures, beliefs, religion, and languages on the natives as social injustice and legal discrimination were strategically institutionalized and implemented (Ageel, 2016: Fausto, 1999).

For example, in the United States of America, those injustices were against the enslaved Blacks and the original owners<sup>7</sup> of the land; the natives (*Indians*<sup>8</sup>), Canada (*First Nation*), Brazil (Brasileiros), and Australia (*Aborigines*) were at the mercy of their exploiters. The natives were, in all these areas, tortured, terrorized, and most instances killed in addition to pushing or segregating them into reservations or tribal camps. These reservations were established by the European occupiers for “Native Americans to live on as white (*invaders*) settlers took over their land...and were forced onto reservations” (<https://slate.com/culture/2019/11/history-is-written-by-the-victors-quote-origin.html>). To fully fathom the truth about terrorism one must also

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<sup>7</sup> The European invaders regularly remove the natives from their lands as the Europeans occupy the new found lands. The natives, American Indians, were forceful ejected through violence, and in a few cases the natives had no choice but mutually agreed to move and relocate on their own lands as directed by the Europeans through shabby treaties. This approach, force removals, by the Europeans as expected caused many problems such as the Indian tribes losing means of livelihood by being subjected to defined areas. The Brotherton Indian Reservation was the first known reservation established in Southern New Jersey, in August 1758 where the natives were confined to.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkins, D., and H. Stark (2011). *American Indian Politics and the American Political System*. (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.



understand and accept the colonial and slavery past of the invaders whom the literature refers to as “settlers” (Kiernam, 2010: 36).

In terrorism, the perpetrators are not likely to accept their atrocities as they do not see their acts as criminal. Like cancer, the global metastasizing of terrorism is not a new phenomenon as nations and societies have used this criminal route to gain political, military, and economic power. In fact, nations have used terrorism for territorial dominance where lands from natives have been taken away from them by invading groups as seen in the United States, Canada, Australia, Brazil, and other parts of the world including Africa (Wilkins and Stark, 2011; Fausto, 1999). The literature on terrorism and racism is enormous and continues to grow but a critical examination of world political history shows that the societies or groups that are terrorized or racially discriminated against are always in the minorities, defenseless, and their stories are not told as the invaders or occupiers continue to muzzle the oppressed through enslavement and exploitation for their resources (Ageel, 2016 and 1989).

These two variables, terrorism, and racism, have been used as weapons by powerful nations and societies to silence weaker nations, societies, and groups. Undeniably, there is the fear in the media, political arena, global institutions, and the academic literature to question or criticize Western powerful nations such as the United States of America, Great Britain, Germany, Israel, and France for justifying their atrocities in the name of fighting terrorism, the very crime these powerful societies and nations have used for centuries to suppress natives and minorities. It might not be adequately appropriate to use historical actions to judge the present; however, the present is defined by what happened in the past and it is the activities of the present that will define the future. In fact, nations have hidden under the pretense of political ideology to create divisions among societies. Whereas there are many forms of governance, the concept of

democratic governance has rightly dominated the globe. Nevertheless, the oppressors never used democratic routes for their invasions, territorial acquisitions, and minority oppression. Did Africans vote to be enslaved? Or when did the natives in North America (Canada and US) vote to agree that their land must be taken by the European exploiters. But for anyone to fully comprehend the causes of terrorism, as Loewen (2007) noted, understanding our past is paramount therefore to know the importance of our history. Terrorism is not an isolated political tool, which has become an end to gaining power, putting fear into enemies, the weak, minorities, and show of political control. We must understand our past to show the progress we have all achieved but the struggle for equal justice for all must be continued unabated for a better future.

### **Fear of the Truth: Blaming the other of a crime we commit**

There are at least two schools of thought when it comes to the United States' involvement in slavery. In fact, the literature documents that slavery was a chronological global trade including the Arabs, the rulers in both far and near East, Europe, and the Romans who tortured and killed slaves seeking freedom (Azumah, 2014). One school of thought argues that the United States was not the originators as a nation involved in slavery but rather only continued what the Dutch, the Portuguese, the Germans, and the British left over in Africa since the territory was a British colony. The second school maintains it was rather the African Kings, Chiefs, and Tribal leaders who sold their own people to the Americans. Writing for the *NewAmerica Magazine*, Behrendt (2017) opines that: "Slavery was integral to Roman civilization, yet those yearning for freedom struggled against oppression despite the odds and the repercussions. After the revolt of the slaves under Spartacus, at least 6,000 slaves who had fought for their freedom were put to death by crucifixion in a bloody and public display of state power and depravity" (33). The United States of America needed labor for its cotton and tobacco plantations hence the cheap African labor

where the enslaved were considered mere tradeable properties that could be disposed of anytime at the will of the slave masters.

Other ways tyrannies and empires dispose of their properties (slaves) was after a “Defeat in war left the captive devoid of legitimate connection to society. The conqueror was therefore fully within the law, able to dispose of captives in any way desired, either through slaughter, or later, the living death of slavery” (34). The public execution and torture of slaves was a way to inform the captured to abide by their masters’ orders or face the inhumane consequence of the power of the oppressors. For example, in the US, lynching was a popular route in disposing the slave who resist their masters’ orders. This brutality, according to Post (1998: 25-30), was a psychological oppression for the slaves who were alive. Modern observers single out the United States of America as being responsible for the great evil of slavery. In fact, some studies see slavery as the original sin of the United States of America but as Ponds (2013) and Wallis (2017) noted the original sin of the United States of America was the slaughtering of Native Americans and racism. Wallis argues that “racism originates in domination and provides the social rational and philosophical justification for debasing, degrading, and doing violence to people on the basis of color” adding that racism like slavery is brutal and institutional and the “original purpose of racism was to justify slavery and its enormous economic benefit” (191). Politics unfortunately, has become the enemy of the truth as power determines everything political both domestic and international. Hence the struggle for weaker nations to acquire nuclear and other weapons in the name of self-defense. The current trending theory in politics is the zero-sum game where the interest of any powerful nation trumps that of the weak. For example, the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003 and that of Russia invading Ukraine in February, 2022 show how powerful nations dictate the global political order (Handel, 1990). Weaker nations are constantly terrorized but

powerful nations do not see their atrocities and policies including sanctions as acts of terrorism hence the importance of understanding the term.

### **Understanding Terrorism: The Ambiguities**

Understanding and defining terrorism are very complicated since there is lack of consensus and objectivity in the definition of terrorism in the literature (Martin, 2013; Lynch, 2013; Corbin, 2017). The question is who defines terrorism and under what condition(s)? It is not clear if powerful nations such as the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Israel, and others would openly accept that they sponsor and engage in terrorism to promote their political ideologies, economic agenda, and self-interest. Attempt is made here to look at some selected definitions in the literature to better understand the concept of terrorism. But first, do the secretly nocturnal activities of groups like the *Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)* of the United States, *Mossad* of Israel, *General Directorate for External Security (DGSE)* of France, *Secret Intelligence Service (MI6)* of Great Britain and such groups in Germany, Italy, Russia<sup>9</sup> engage in terrorism? The answer is NO for the fear of one being labeled as an enemy of these powerful nations. But the reality is that these groups, CIA, DGSE, MI6 and Mossad, given their clandestine activities, which are well financially funded by their various governments, do commit acts of terrorism. As Perkins (2004:19) noted, the European invaders have a way of dehumanizing the natives, as he writes, “those eighteenth-century colonists who believed that the Indians fighting to defend their lands were servants of the devil.” Here, Perkins is arguing that the weaker natives who were defending their homeland were rather labelled terrorists while the European invaders saw nothing wrong with their barbarism and inhuman actions in North

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<sup>9</sup> Every country has a secret group that operates in the interest of that country by way of collecting intelligent materials for the security of that nation: See the list of countries and their secret groups (<https://foreignpolicy.com/2008/01/21/the-list-the-worlds-top-spy-agencies/>).

America, Australia, Brazil, and Africa. In discussing how terrorism is defined by agencies in the United States, Writer (2002) points out that the definitions never situate the government as the possible terrorist, only as a possible victim of terrorist acts. “Privilege is manifest in the definition of who is a terrorist, for whomever holds the power proclaims the right to name who is or is not a terrorist, especially in the media. It is important to remember Oliver North's well-known statement that ‘one person's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter.’ Ultimately, no universal definition of terrorism exists” (320). As the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) leader, Mohammed Abdel Rahman Abdel Raouf al-Qudwa al-Husseini (Yasir Arafat) also echoed when he fought Israel's occupation until his death in November 11, 2014, he refused to be labelled by Israel and the West as a terrorist. To him, he was a freedom fighter who wanted justice and equal rights for the people of Palestine in the occupied territories.

In her book *Imperial reckoning: The untold story of Britain's gulag in Kenya*, Elkins (2005) documents strategic oppression of the *Mau Mau* of Kenya but the British colonial invaders (31-61) did not see themselves as terrorists. In what Elkins describes as domestic terrorism, the author also noted that “the colonial government ordered their homes destroyed and detained them and their children in barbed-wire villages that dotted the countryside.” At the end of the day, the British tortured and “starvation would claim their lives of tens of thousands of these rural people” (234). There is an *Akan* proverb,<sup>10</sup> which says when you point one finger at your enemy accusing the enemy of wrong doing the rest of your fingers point to you for committing the same crime. Meaning one might be guilty of the very crimes one complains about others. It is better therefore to sample some definitions of terrorism as different countries

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<sup>10</sup> Akan is the principal native language of the Akan people of Ghana, Africa, spoken over much of the southern half of Ghana and there are different dialects within the Akan language. The proverbs are wise sayings. It is believed that the individual who uses proverbs in his or her speech is wise and well-educated evidence of being eloquent and a good public speaker and thinker (<https://www.adinkrasymbols.org/pages/the-50-most-important-akan-proverbs/>).

that engaged in slavery and colonization continue to accuse others of terrorism to see if the proverb has any validity. These powerful countries preach about human rights but the slaves and the oppressed as noted by Fausto (1999) had no freedom and their rights were not part of the human equation. Fausto maintains that these slaves who were at the mercy of their masters and were considered properties and not human beings (see also Allan and Hickey, 2012 and Azumah, 2014). In fact, since the first generation of slaves could not speak the languages (English, Portuguese, French, Spanish and Arabic) of their masters they were not considered humans but mere properties that could be traded through the barter system and exchanged for goods or sold for money. In all instances, the slaves were dehumanized and not able to speak one's master's language making the slave a sub-human in the eyes of the oppressor.

### **Examining some Definitions of Terrorism**

To the British, terrorism is “the use or threat, for the purpose of advancing a political, religious or ideological cause, of action which involves serious violence against any person or property” (Whitaker, 2001:1). So will the British accept that centuries of colonizing others in America, Africa, India, Australia, and other parts of the world must be seen as calculated strategic terrorism? Based on their own definition provided above, the British government has been sponsoring and benefiting from terrorism and continues to do that through its military institution and economic sanctions. The Germans have a completely different definition for terrorism. They, according to Martin (2006), see terrorism as an “enduringly conducted struggle for political goals, which are intended to be achieved by means of assaults on the life and property of other persons, especially by means of severe crimes.” Martin goes on to state that the European Interior Ministers opine terrorism is “the use, or the threatened use, by a cohesive group of persons of violence to effect political aims” (46). In his article, *Political terrorism:*

*Historical antecedents and contemporary trends*, Gurr (1989) describes terrorism as the use of unexpected violence to intimidate or coerce people in the pursuit of political or social objectives. The United States of America as a country is not buried in one definition of terrorism but rather as a matter of policy develops its own definitions from time to time and these vary from one agency to another (Antwi-Boasiako, 2010; Martin, 2006). Among the several definitions used by the United States of America, including its Department of Defense, opines terrorism as “the unlawful use of, or threatened use, of force or violence against individuals or property to coerce and intimidate governments or societies, often to achieve political, religious, or ideological objectives” (Martin 2006:47). Given its own definitions provided above how should the Native Americans or enslaved Blacks view the United States government? Or as President George W. Bush who invaded Iraq in 2003 admitted in 2022 that his invasion of Iraq was “unjustified and brutal”<sup>11</sup> and it was illegal. If the cruelty of slavery and the territorial invasion by Europeans on continental America and Africa is not terrorism, then what is it? Can these countries seriously and honestly talk about human rights and equality for all as their leaders’ owned slaves and considered them as properties whom they profited from?

Enders and Sanders (2012: 4), see terrorism as “the premeditated use, or threat to use, violence by individuals or sub nationals and (*nations*) to obtain political or social objectives through the intimidation of a large audience beyond that of the immediate victims.” Their definition tends to focus more on the socio-economic consequences and how the public views both the oppressor and victims of terrorism (Getmansky and Zeitsoff, 2014; Peffley et al., 2015; and Hirsch-Hoefler et al., 2016) as seen between developed and developing nations such as the

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<sup>11</sup> Since 2003, those who did not support America and coalition of the willing’s invasion of Iraq as a powerful nation flexing its muscle against a weaker nation, Iraqi, but nineteen (19) years later the one who lead the invasion, George W. Bush, admitted that his action was “unjustified and brutal.” As he put it, he meant to say the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/19/george-bush-iraq-ukraine-war-speech/>

Israelis and the Palestinians since the 1940s, the US invasion of Iraq and Iraqis in 2003, or Russia invading Ukraine in 2022. Religion, ideology, slavery, colonialization, and racism, have also inspired terrorism for example, the Christian Crusades<sup>12</sup> from 1095 to 1291 (Malkiel, 2001), al Qaeda and/or ISIS<sup>13</sup> or separatist movements including extremist political ideologues (Shughart, 2006). Schmid and Jongman (2006) provide hundreds of definitions of terrorism but the authors admit the search for an adequate globally acceptable definition is ambiguous as “consensus on an adequate social science definition of terrorism as a tactic and as a doctrine is still lacking...” (1). In their attempt to define terrorism, the authors settled in explaining what could be the best definitions by identifying and examining various variables and concluded that the problem with the definitions is “that anti-Communist write on terrorism in Communist regimes and that leftish authors write on terrorism in capitalist societies (*which*) produces such distortions...” (75).

The same argument could be made as developed countries write and label weaker developing countries as supporting and harboring terrorism while the weak and oppressed see the oppressors as legitimizing terrorism through their military institutions and financially well-sponsored agencies like the CIA, DGSE, MI6, and Mossad. So, no matter how one tries to see terrorism, the definition of the term, we argue and maintain, has been gradually embroidered. Despite the attempts to identify a common and may be an agreeable definition, Hoffman, (1998, 15) maintains that terrorism is “planned, calculated, and indeed systematic act,” therefore slavery and colonialization that went on for centuries clearly become variables in the terrorism equation,

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<sup>12</sup> See the different times (first through fourth) the crusaders in the name of Jesus Christ slaughters Jews, Muslims, and others through the orders a Roman Catholic Priest, Pope Urban II The so-called Shepherds of the Cross massacred teenagers and burned their way across Europe all in the name of religion: <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/crusades>

<sup>13</sup> There is uncertainty about the genesis of ISIS but many political commentators and the literature affirm that this group was or is the off spring of al Qaeda: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state>



where the United States, United Kingdom, France, Portugal, Spain, and the Arabs calculated their criminal activities in enslaving and colonizing other human beings to build their economies. However, no one should dream that the colonial and slave masters will accept their institutionalization of terrorism for centuries even though as Hoffman puts it, terrorism is “designed to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target” (43), therefore one cannot ignore the impact of slavery, dehumanization, and colonization as calculated acts of terrorism, which vastly benefited the oppressors as they continue to reap the benefits of their crimes.

Conceptualizing or circumscribing terrorism as the “unlawful use of violence,” for example, forces one to classify as terrorists the Americans who rebelled against the lawfully constituted government of King George III of England. The simple fearful but truthful answer is YES: As groups like the *Mau Mau* of Kenya, the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa, ISIS, Taliban, and Hamas have been labeled as terrorist groups for resisting the atrocities of legally constitutional governments including foreign invaders. As Hoffman noted, the concept remains unavoidably subjective, especially so in the case of anticolonial terror. Resorting to legalisms is not particularly helpful but as mentioned earlier, it’s the victor that writes history, which makes it difficult for the oppressed to refute inaccurate information that the former, oppressor, may provide (<https://slate.com/culture/2019/11/history-is-written-by-the-victors-quote-origin.html>). Regardless of how one sees the Arabs (Wallis, 2014) and Europeans, they killed, tortured, dehumanized, and crushed the natives in the name of civilization and religion. For example, while the British, Japanese, and France sought to build bases in the Philippines, the 25<sup>th</sup> US President, William McKinley, argued that America’s occupation was essential and

necessary since the invasion would Christianize and civilize the Filipinos among other things (Millis, 1988).

### **Crushing Natives in the name of Civilization, Colonization.**

The power of oral history has always been the encyclopedia and data bank (repository) of traditional societies (Starecheski, 2014) who could not document their life styles as the European invaders dehumanized them and saw the natives as the other. The invaders wrote stories about natives from their own perspective of how the other ought to live and behave. Oral stories however come in different forms and understandings as one might exaggerate or completely forget some of the achievements of their ancestors. The author looks at the social effectiveness of history, which foreigners, invaders may not know (187-190). However, the fact remains that bodies of indigenous people were forced into the so-called civilization by their Europeans invaders in Canada, and the United States of America which forced the natives to forgo their traditional and religious practices to accept Christianity through the Roman Catholic Church. The indigenous people in Canada have not been treated as equals as was also seen in the United States of America, Australia, South American countries including Brazil, and other parts of the world where Europeans did criminally colonized natives.

Writer (2002) explains that terrorism has been a historical constant in the United States of America, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack was not new in the US. However, through media reports of the attacks, many news outlets focused on how the events were the first time another had attacked on American soil, however, Writer points out that this leaves out a significant portion of what has taken place historically in the United States. “Forgotten or ignored are the United States' colonization, deculturalization, and oppression of indigenous peoples through acts of terrorism. For over 500 years, terrorist acts have been carried out yet

erased from the consciousness of the non-Native United States population and its forms of media” (320). The author provides the example of the Sand Creek Massacre on November 29, 1864, where United States Colonel Chivington along with a group of nearly 700 volunteer men brutally attacked and tortured a peaceful village made up of primarily Native American women and children. Most of the men of that village had been given permission by another United States military officer to be allowed to hunt buffalo in a different area and so they were not in the village at the time of the attack. The question is why should an invader tell the land owners, natives, what to do? While Chivington altered the official accounts of the massacre to state they were engaged in battle with warriors, accounts by several of those at the village, Native Americans, showed the event as a horrific attack. When confronted, Chivington responded that he had a right to kill and when he returned to the city of Denver, Colorado, he was seen as a hero who won victory over hostiles: Native Americans. Writer explains how the massacre clearly falls under the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) definition of terrorism, but that it “has been excised or glossed over in the collective and selective memory of the United States to protect and perpetuate the master’s narrative affirming the “victor writes” history argument. Justification of this massacre and others like it has been made in order to foster the ideas of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’” (323).

### **Racism, Terrorism, and the Other**

What a particular country commonly refers to as terrorism is something developed in relation to the cultural, political, and representational elements of that country. These elements come together to form a category of “terrorist other” where that terrorist other falls lower on the racialized hierarchy of that country. Dutta (2004) argues that following the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States of America that the division between who is seen as a

terrorist and who is seen as a victim has become increasingly binary with the terrorist more barbarian and the victim more civilized. The terrorist is the barbarian other and thus actions taken against the terrorist by the civilized victims (invaders) are seen as justified. This categorization of the terrorist as 'other' thus justifies action by those who claim victimhood against the terrorist. Barbour and Jones (2013) explain how this can be used not just against those labeled as terrorist other outside of a country, but against minority groups within a country. Barbour and Jones conducted an examination of the tropes used in the media after riots took place in Xinjiang, China in 2009.

The rioting was done by a minority group of Chinese. The authors explain that three representational tropes were used by the Chinese media, the criminal, the terrorist, and the outsider. The use of the tropes aided in justifying the violent response against rioters by the Chinese government where the government was seen as the culturally superior and legally supported entity whereas the rioters were given identities that were not legitimate and thus fell below the Chinese government. The tropes are used to define particular identity groups in such a way as to create an us-them, 'othering' categorization. With the terrorist trope, the terrorist is seen as a threat to the civilized world however, this trope, like the others, is a socio-political construct that can change over time. "By connecting the events in Xinjiang with the global war on terror, a discourse imbued with the fear of an evil and irrational other, it furthered the perception of disorder and chaos, which required the intrusion of the Chinese security apparatus into Xinjiang" (Barbour & Jones, 2013: 96). Using the terrorist trope provides the state with a justification to its actions by claiming they are upholding the sovereignty of the state against the terrorist other. This is common denominator powerful nations use to crush weaker and smaller states.

Corbin (2017) explains that in the United States of America there are two common narratives (terrorists are always brown/Muslim; terrorists are never white) surrounding terrorism, which can be better understood using a critical race theory lens. With the first narrative, Corbin explains that Muslims are falsely categorized as the “dangerous other” and linked to a stereotype of terrorist while White, Christians, even when engaged in activities that fall under the definition of terrorism, are less likely to be labeled as such. Critical race theory can help understand the first narrative using an unconscious bias approach whereas the second narrative can be understood using a privilege approach. The concepts of discrimination and privilege create a racial hierarchy in defining a terrorist. Corbin explains: “Even if I use violence within the United States to intimidate a civilian population, odds are I will not be called a terrorist. Rather than immediately becoming a demonized ‘other,’ I would remain an individual, albeit a deeply troubled one. The dehumanization of the Muslim perpetrator happens in an instant. The White Christian perpetrator, on the other hand, always retains his humanity” (466-7); mentally disturbed at best. The latter category is seen as a lone wolf taking a one-time action rather than part of a larger terrorist group thus allowing the White perpetrators the privilege of not having to be profiled as terrorists within society and not having to condemn other acts of terroristic violence committed by others seen as part of their group.

For example, on January 6, 2021, in the United States of America, a group of protestors, mostly Whites, storm the US Capitol where the 2020 presidential election results were being certified to officially declare the Democrat candidate, Joseph R. Biden, as the winner, when the incumbent, President Donald Trump vowed not to concede to the November 3<sup>rd</sup> 2020 elections. Representative Andrew S. Clyde (R-Georgia) described the protestors as normal tourists visiting the US Capitol. But Joseph Biden, the presidential candidate at the time and Representative

Brian Higgins both Democrats referred to the rioters as domestic terrorists. The events of January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021 at the US Capitol cement the problem of defining terrorism<sup>14</sup> and its associated ambiguities to affirm that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter. The media have also contributed immensely in the definition conundrum.

### **Media Coverage and Terrorism: Trumpeting the Views of Powerful Governments.**

In international politics, power is everything. Despite the simplistic nature of this statement, it has been the backbone of many nations, if not all, that is why there is struggle for nuclear power, where once acquired a nation could not be easily run over by other powers. For example, no nation will like to face the United States of America, Russia, China, and other nuclear power nations. Nevertheless, non-nuclear countries such as Libya, Iraq, Afghanistan, and other African countries can easily be attacked by the former with little or no resistance. With advancement in technology and the internet, the control of the traditional media and their trained reporters do not have an absolute control of the news and events as they happen in other parts of the world any more. The globe as an entity, Kamlipour (1997) argues, constantly undergoes a process of evolution. He maintains that mass media activities affect every aspect of humanity. Despite this advancement and easy accessibility of the news from any part of the world, Kamlipour is of the view that, "in general, the American public often has very little knowledge of the Middle East; hence the constant barrage of disasters, coups, uprisings, conflicts, and terrorist activities, reported routinely by the US media, fosters a gross mis-impression of the Middle Eastern peoples and cultures" (xx). We, on the other hand, look at how the Western media portray non-western countries as the other, which has contributed to biasness in their reporting of international issues including economic, the military, terrorism, and war (Dimitrova,

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<sup>14</sup> This is a clear example how difficult it is in the literature to accept a common and workable definition for the term terrorism: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/07/us/politics/jan-6-terrorism-explainer.html>

2006). But one may argue that media reporters, like every human being, unconsciously have feelings and probably thoughts, which influence their behavior (reporting). In defense of Western reporters and borrowing from Rufus Miles, “Where you stand depends on where you sit” meaning one’s position in a “job can affect how one will look upon a certain event or solution.”<sup>15</sup>

As Robinson et al (2005) noted, the media have escaped vigorous academic scrutiny regarding how they cover wars. But one must understand that the Western media, like their counterparts in the non-Western world operate under the concept of the Mile’s Law; therefore, objectivity becomes subjective. The media have remotely achieved a status “capable of shaping the foreign policies of Western government” (591). However, the role of the media in covering wars and terrorism will forever remain controversial as objectivity remains subjective in conflict interpretations using the Israeli/Palestinian conflict as an example. The subjectivity of the media is based on how reports “create psychological images of the other or the unknown” (Malek and Wiegand 1997: 201). Western media coverage on the other reflect Western ideology, culture, and worldview regarding how the other ought to behave even in times of crises. This ideological righteousness from the West has influenced its reporters on how they cover international issues especially wars and terrorism. With such psychological template any attempt to criticize the West is seen as unpatriotic especially those “who questioned the wisdom of military endeavors” (Robinson et al., 2005:953).

We looked specifically, using television as our only medium, at how the Western media covered the Iraq War in 2003 and the Ukraine War in 2022 where in both cases, a powerful nation with nuclear weapons attacked a weaker nation: (US-Iraq and Russia-Ukraine). Our

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<sup>15</sup> “Miles’s Law,” as it is attributed to Rufus Miles a former US government official <http://www.bibleanswer.com/stand-sit.htm>. One’s stance on an issue reflects that person’s belief on the issue. The proper interpretation of any issue could be seen through the Mile’s Law.

interest was focused on how the Western media portray events in both wars to the world. In Iraqi, the media not only portrayed the military might of the United States, Britain, and their allies for invading Iraq but these Iraqis and other foreign militants who supported Iraq and resisted the invaders were considered terrorists (DeFronzo 2010): A label that has been splashed on Palestinians who for over half a century lived under the military atrocities of Israel. The Western media portrayal and suffering of the Iraqis and Palestinians civilians is not conspicuously vividly aired as seen in Ukraine where resisters are commended as heroes defending their land.

## **Conclusion**

It is still disturbing and unfortunate as Smith (2007) noted that despite human achievements and technological advancement, humans continue to struggle to live together as one race. Apart from our biological skin colors, which no one has control over, humans have further created divisions among themselves based on geographical location, ideology, religion, and language, which have resulted in committing cruelty against each other. Sadly, this systematic violence, terrorism, has eclipsed the goodness in humanity as we are fearful of the other. Every attempt to define terrorism for global acceptance is a conundrum as powerful nations have elected themselves to define who a terrorist is. Nevertheless, even among the Western countries the various definitions of terrorism lack consensus. No matter how one tries to define terrorism, the term has been gradually embroidered. Despite the attempts to identify a common and agreeable definition, terrorism is “planned, calculated, and indeed systematic act” Hoffman, (1998:15). Powerful nations support terrorism through economic sanctions, military aids to their allies, and direct invasion of weaker nations and societies: Colonization and slavery. The nuclear equipped nations judge weaker nations by their actions but judge themselves on their



intentions. The invasion of native lands by Europeans continues to have harsh economic impact on these natives yet the exploiters do not see their invasions as acts of terrorism. As nations see the other as a terrorist, media coverage has also influenced foreign policies of powerful nations as they factor in the televised images of the other.

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