Postmodern Openings

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Investigations on the Sociological Issue of Terrorism

Book review at the volume *Sociologia terorismului*. Author Maria-Cristina Aboboaie. **Iaşi, România: Lumen Publishing House, 2014**

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Abstract

Maria Cristina Aboboaie's volume called Sociologia terorismului and published in 2014 at Lumen Publishing House aims to pave the way to such approach with sociological specificity, of the terrorism phenomenon itself, and also of the profound speech generated by the phenomenon of counter-terrorism.

The sociological perspective on terrorism comes to complete the one of national security, that will outline a vision on the dynamic of the phenomenon, both in its extension and intension.

Due to many acceptations that this phenomenon presents, the author of the volume requires a terminology clarification to explain the reader on the complex meanings of the terrorist phenomenon in the current world.

Keywords: *book review, sociology, terrorism, social phenomenon, counter-terrorism, religious terrorism.*

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Introduction

Je suis Charlie! The issue of terrorism has again become topical along with the attacks that shook the public opinion in the first days of 2015. The attacks from the humoristic Charlie Hebdo newspaper headquarters made the entire world become aware of the danger of (religious) intolerance and the scarcity of freedom threatened by any form of fundamentarism. Je suis Charlie! was a cry of revolt from France in the first place, and of the entire world in front of the brutal violation of the right to life in the name of the defence of supposedly spiritual values. The anti-terrorist war is a reality today, which brings us to the barbarism of the suicidal attacks and the irreconcilable nature of any form of state of right, of the suppression of terrorism in CIA prisons – secrets such as the ones that were organized including in our country – or public and extremely visible, such as those from Guantanamo Bay and Abhu Graib. The phenomenon of terrorism has passed from the area of security studies to the one of communicational construction of insecurity and society of risk. From this very sociological perspective on the phenomenon of terrorism it is asked to deconstruct the narrations referring to the war of the civilizations, the irreconcilability between the occidental democratic values to the ones specific to the Arab world.

Some considerations on the volume "Sociologia terorismului"

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The sociological perspective on terrorism comes to complete the one of national security, that will outline a vision on the dynamic of the phenomenon, both in its extension and intension.

Due to many acceptations that this phenomenon presents, the author of the volume requires a terminology clarification to explain the reader on the complex meanings of the terrorist phenomenon in the current world. The author (Aboboaie, 2014) presents terrorism from the perspective of the theory of values of terrorism (Rapoport, 2004) that he classifies as being anarchist, anticolonial, the value of "New Right" and the religious tide (Aboboaie, 2014).

The anarchist model introduces the idea of "propaganda through death" as a form of transmitting the political message and structuration in the networks of the anarchist groups.

The anticolonial wave is marked by the beginning of the "supranational organizing" of the terrorist groups and the use of terrorism as sensational news (Aboboaie, 2014), and the institution of a public communication of terror, or as we say, a transformation of terror in a metadiscourse practice. Religious terrorism reiterates the suicidal, anarchist practices in the context of an initial support regarded both from the former Soviet Union and from the United States (Aboboaie, 2014). Support from super-powers allows terrorist movements to develop from the level of paramilitary small groups to those of international networks with parastatal nature.

The author aims to understand the dynamics of transforming terrorism into a social phenomenon starting from its origins, the dynamic of its escalation in relation to other forms of political violence, as well as diachronic forms of manifesting terrorism (Aboboaie, 2014). Cristina Aboboaie draws attention that there is no intrinsic essence of the concept of terrorism, being rather a construct that reflect the interests of those that have formulated it (Aboboaie, 2014), a true manta of our times, taking the negative sense that communism once had (Herbst, 2003).

Appropriating the acception of Ronald Reagan (1986), the author shows that in return for the definitions of communism that are associated by the political instances of different insurgent movements, it must be taken into account the fact that the representatives of the groups themselves are self-defined as freedom fighters, revolutionaries and martyrs, considering that certain political causes have a noble enough nature to justify non-statal violence (Yasser Arafat, cf. Aboboaie, 2014). In argumenting her own thesis, the author refers to the different attempts of defining terrorism starting from the one given by the League of Nations in 1937, to the one provided in the Comprehensive Convention on international terrorism (1996), the one given by the American Defence Department (2010), the one of the Framework Decision of the Council of European Union (2002) etc.

The definition of terrorism from the Romanian legislation contained in Law no. 534/2004 on preventing and combating terrorism is not neglected. To the current definitions in the international normative

framework, the author brings a series of particular definitions from the scientific literature, which circumscribe the understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of sociology and political sciences. Terrorism as political practice is seen as an artefact of the French revolution resulted in the "terror regime" in France of the years 1793-1794 (Aboboaie, 2014).

The author mentions the practices of using the political terror since the time of the Roman Empire, both in the framework of certain contesting groups, and of national liberation, such as the one of the Zealots, and the one of using state terror in repressing contesting movements and the practice of war.

The term "state terrorism" has become synonymous with the Jacobin regime which has proposed the establishment of terror as legal instrument of state terror. The author shows that terror has become, in the Jacobin period of time, both a practice and a legislation and principle. Robes Pierre is the first convicted for terrorism, defined as excessive and arbitrary state violence, although terror as political practice and instrument of governing was approved by the National Convention, political instance emanated by the French revolution (Aboboaie, 2014). The author draws attention to the fact that terrorist movements of the XIX-th century had their origin in the idea of French revolution in 1789. Liberty, equality and fraternity were imposed to Europe through guillotine, making state terrorism spread from Russia to the entire Western Europe, Balkans and Asia. The author explains the ideological fundaments of terrorism as anarchy, originated in the work of Bakunin and Kropotin, placing terrorism as a form of fight against state inequity. Privatization of anarchic terrorism as a form of recourse to violence as a channel of transmitting the political message.

Anarchism as private terrorism was primarily done through political assassinations. Private terrorism – managed by radical movements – has interfered with the state one by financing terrorist movements, both by the states, publicly, as the help given to paramilitary movements, and indirectly, through different secret agencies. The anarchist movements proposed to use terrorism as political instrument of imposing a just and equitable society for the oppressed classes. A second wave was the one of colonial terrorism (Aboboaie, 2014). This aimed to privatize terror with the purpose of applying the principle of self-determination of the populations under colonial rule. State terrorism

is replaced by insurgent movements, the purpose of terror is, on the one hand, expressing the political message through radical acts, and on the other side, increasing the cost of colonial administration up to the level where it becomes unprofitable to continue the colonial policy.

The terrorism of right of fascist politics is considered as being based on the instinctual violence against public system, especially regarding police, with the purpose of state incapacity. The fascist period corresponds to a terrorism of state exercised against its own citizens from the totalitarian state. The soviet system is based on institutionalized terror related to the monarchist ideals connected to class emancipation. The terrorism of the new right is based on the sensational news and communicating terror as factor of political and media pressure.

State terrorism aims, especially, the financial support and arming of terrorist movements. This wave is doubled by a terrorism of minorities: ecoterrorism, transforming women into leaders and fighters, and taking hostages as a form of private terrorism (Aboboaie, 2014). The fact that terrorism represents a radical political communication, being reflected in the targets chosen with special symbolic value.

The terrorism of the fourth wave, the religious one, is originated in the practices of anarchist terrorism, the leaders of the terrorist organizations being instructed, at least partially, in the former Soviet Union – for groups that acted at least against Israel, such as the organization for liberating Palestine.

Other terrorist groups, being based in Afghanistan, were supported by the United States in the Guerilla War brought against the Soviet Union on Afghan soil. These movements have become independent, constituting in movements of the radical Islam. Cristina Aboboaie makes an excellent analysis of the social types of terrorism, including state terrorism and the one state-subsidized (private). There are reviewed the methods of significant social action for the international terrorism, from political assassinations, kidnappings and hostage-taking, bombings, hijackings, until unconventional methods represented by mass-destruction weapons: biological, chemical, radiological and nuclear, and last but not least, cyber terrorism. The latter one, for example, is analysed by the author from the perspective of the theory of risk society proposed by Ulrich Beck (Ronald, Rohozinski, 2010). A wide analysis space is reserved to Islamic fundamentalism and international terrorism. The author makes an analysis on the responsibility of religion for

violence and the relationship between religion and violence. Cristina Aboboaie considers important to identify the context and environment in which one religion or the other supports peace or war (Aboboaie, 2014). Religious wars are being reviewed, from crusades to fratricide fights. The author adheres to the opinion of Alan Krueger as to no religion has the monopole on terrorism, but also that in few occasions, religion constitutes the direct cause of conflicts, but it has a determining role in prolonging and deepening hostile attitudes (Popovski, Reichberg, Turner, 2009). Religious violence is placed in connection to the institution of a dichotomy between us and the others. Therefore religion is a solution to the alienation, providing the nursery for recruiting new members of the terrorist organizations (Aboboaie, 2014). Religious extremism and its role in terrorist activities can be understood based on the instrumentalist approach, in the sense of religious beliefs to justify and propagate the group's agenda, and regarding a social-ideological approach which considers religious extremism as the reaction of certain elites or communities disappointed in the processes of modernization, westernization and secularization. In the analysis of the volume, we cannot disregard the research material regarding the risk on Romanian security, and the perspectives regarding their combating, included in the national strategy of security. In the author's opinion, our country doesn't face a terrorist phenomenon of domestic motivation, but also threats derived from the evolution of international terrorism, among which the establishment of cells and nuclei of external terrorist groups, propaganda activities and proselytism, as well as fund raising for financing international terrorist activities (Aboboaie, 2014). There are mentioned 19 victims, Romanians killed in the New York terrorist attacks (September 11, 2001), Madrid (March 11, 2004) and London (July 7, 2005).

The volume raises the issue of the relationship between the culture of security and terrorist risk. The very sociological approach involves shaping an objective vision in the debate regarding the prevention and combat of terrorism in Romania. The excellent review regarding the international literature dedicated to terrorism corresponds, in the second part of the paper, a thorough review on the Romanian literature.

The author reviews the Romanian literature in the field, formulating a series of relevant conclusions, among which those that the

majority of the contributions regarding the phenomenon come from the field of military sciences, and also of the constabulary academic environment, while there are a series of concerns regarding the development of the research regarding terrorism from the legal perspective, and the nascendi stage of social research on the phenomenon, especially from religious perspective (Aboboaie, 2014).

Instead of conclusions

Some of the conclusions of the research aim at a certain coherence regarding the institutional public communication on the terrorist phenomenon, a considerable difference of perception between the level of preparedness in the state and social institutions regarding the terrorist phenomenon approach.

The author highlights the predominance of the military dimension of the national system of combat and terrorist prevention at the expense of constituting a culture of security at the level of the citizens and community.

In our opinion, the paper is topical and manages, through the contributions brought to clarify the sociological perspective on the terrorist phenomenon. The paper can bring such a contribution to the development of a security strategy to take into account both the military dimension, and the development of a culture of security among citizens.

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Biodata

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