

Islam and Terrorism: A Sceptical Consideration

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Abstract

“Without argument and clarification, there is strictly no philosophy”

(Kwasi wiredu; philosophy and an African Culture, 1980: 47)

It is the thrust of this paper to engage in the hot boiling debate as to whether terrorism is an offshoot of the Islamic Religion or not. This paper in the light of the above quotation by Wiredu, raises arguments and sought clarifications. Some of the arguments advanced would better be appreciated as rhetorical questions which are not devoid of philosophical underpinning. They include: what is Islamic religion? What do we mean by terrorism? In what sense is terrorism, actually terrorism? When the Muslim Quran talks about Jihad, what does it mean? In what context can the concept of Jihad be embraced? Is Islamic religion synonymous with terrorism or is it the case that the word. Terrorism” is a modern-day concoction by Man? What does it mean to say that someone is a terrorist? And can there be situations in which this seemingly ‘bipolar’ concept of Terrorism be validly justified? Why (if any) do we have multifarious interpretations to a particular Terrorist action? It is against this backdrop that we hope to unleash all our philosophical arsenals on the deluding as well as the eluding concepts of the Islamic faith and Terrorism. We, therefore, engaged in some critical analysis, examination and a re-examination of the concept, context and content of Terrorism in the light of Islamic Religion. This is the thesis of the paper. The method employed to achieve our research objective is a combination of analysis, criticality and dialectics.

Keywords: Islam, Religion, Terrorism & Scepticism.

Introduction

The present topic: is 'Islam and Terrorism'. This is a conjunctive statement. The first reaction is that the topic already suggests multifarious interpretations. To accept the topic as it commits the fallacy of Amphiboly because it is not clear in what sense we are to proceed with the argument. Is it in the sense of conceiving Islamic religion as having affinity with terrorism or in the sense of terrorism being rooted in Islamic religion? It is on these premise that we say that the above topic is misleading. The above topic can also lead one to an inductive leap or hasty conclusion that Islam and terrorism are twin evils, which to the present writer's mind is not free from prejudice, reductions, impositions and suppositions which all stem from human whims and caprices.

It is, therefore, from the foregoing that it is argued without mincing words that the above is insinuating. Insinuating because it supposes that there can be straight forward counter – argument that is clear cut while it then sends us to the misguided problems of Islamophobia. Normally, in our attempt to do justice to the above, we are expected to betray our religious inclinations. A Christian who is writing, this paper (if he is a true disciple) must (ought to) be very judgemental and narrow minded as he would probably commence his argument by saying that Islamic Religion should not be considered as such from any standpoint and that Christianity is the only religion through which anyone can gain eternal salvation as posited by Apostle Paul in the Bible from which he could draw countless premises. The Muslim and Islamic fundamentalist on the other hand, is bound to defend his religion just like his Christian counterpart with his own literary premises which could prove inexhaustible. What happens at the end is that we would have only succeeded in engaging in fruitless intellectual exercise.

What then should be the most appropriate approach to this topic under discussion? Since philosophy is a rigorous enterprise which, in the words of Late Prof. Peter Bodunrin, is considered to thrive on mutual criticism' to which Mesembe .I. Edet alluded when he asserted that:

The aim of philosophy is the inculcation of ability of clear, logical and critical analysis of concepts and issues, the avoidance of emotional or parochial indoctrination or superstitious and irrational thinking and the development of the habit of seeking rational satisfactory answers to recurring life problems. (Edet, 5).

It is against this backdrop that we hope to employ such philosophical tools of exposition, critical analysis and evaluations, logicity, systematicity, etc in our discourse of the topic. To achieve this, we hope to be empathic not sympathetic in our exposition and evaluation of the tenets of Islamic religion and whether or not it has a relationship with what we now know as terrorism which is a global concern among world leading nations as it has threatened their peaceful co existence.

It is no gainsaying the fact that terrorism has in today's world become the foremost challenge plaguing the global peace of most (if not all) nations as it has bedevilled the various socio – economic and political landscape of both developing and developed countries like the United States of America, Britain, Japan etc. This dangerous pandemic has eaten deep into the fabrics of societal and religious organisations thus causing a distortion in the ontological equilibrium of human coexistence which could be said to subsist in John S. Mbiti's imperative: 'I am, because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am'.

This is what have led critical thinkers into the investigation, reflection and evaluation of the origin of terrorism as they have all gone back to the drawing board in order to seek out the ontological offshoot of this societal malady. Some from their supposed findings have theorized that terrorism is a twin evil with Islamic religion. Others have traced it to be a part of human nature as Thomas Hobbes did in his classical book, *The Leviathan*. To some still, Terrorism is a social milieu which is chorused in the thrive to assume superiority and power. Worst still, to some antagonists of Islam, they consider Terrorism as an offshoot of Islam while the Muslim adherents have averred that there is no such relationship between terrorism and Islam. This multifarious as well as confusing interpretation is what prompted a writer to argue that Terrorism is in his opinion "a hydra headed phenomenon", whether this is the case or not we shall discover in subsequent paragraph. However, it is believed that the writer may not be far from the truth, hence the debate continues!

In order to do justice to the above topic on 'Islam and Terrorism', it is germane that we at this juncture attempt a clarification by casting a bird's eye – view to the major concepts that informs the thesis of this paper. The purpose is to clear ambiguity and thus provide a platform upon which we can better philosophize, it is premised upon this fact that we shall ask the question: **What is terrorism?**

The above question no doubt enjoys multifarious interpretations. It seems to be asking for a 'one sentence; definition by assuming that what terrorism is can be given in the form of one sentence answer. But obviously, it is not the case that we can give an answer to the question in a brief phrase. An attempt to derive a satisfactory explanation of the nature and meaning of terrorism is a very rigorous and difficult task to embark on. In fact, it is a task far more difficult than that encountered in finding an explanation for some physical phenomena. (*Filosofia Theoretic 133*).

Some of the critical questions that may ensue in our attempt to provide a univocal definition of terrorism could include: When is terrorism? What or who is the sole interpreter of the concept of terrorism? What yardstick can we use to examine or weigh the concept of terrorism? To what extent do we conceive an act to be or not to be terrorism? How do we reconcile situations in which an action could be or will be considered as terrorism on the one hand and Patriotic on the other hand, if viewed from different stand points? If we from the foregoing attempt to answer the above questions we would discover to our amazement that whatever definition we give to the concept of 'terrorism' will as a matter of necessity fall short of a unanimous commitments or consensus. Nonetheless, it is important that we consider some few definitions posited by scholars and philosophers in order to have a standpoint or frame of reference.

According to the Chambers Dictionary, 2000, terrorism is an organised system of violence and intimidation, especially for political ends, the state of fear and submission caused by this. In the same vein, the Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language (1992) sees terrorism as 'the policy of using acts inspiring terror as a method of ruling or of conducting political opposition.

The above definition by Chambers, implies that the *Conditio sine-qua-non* for any action to pass as terrorism, such action must; (1) be organised (2) have an atom of violence and intimidation (3) have an element of coercion. If this definition by Chambers is to be taken *strict senso*, then, the question that readily comes to mind is; are all terrorist actions painstaking and meticulously organised? Should we therefore show with such naivety those actions thus perpetrated by some irrational beings who in the guise of combating the incessant production and invention of weapons for mass destruction, attack other individuals and

neighbouring countries with the 'weapons' of starvation and economic recessions, kill the leaders of these nations and unleash terror on such disadvantaged nations due to their self-aggrandisement, prejudice and ambivalent interest which is geared towards self-preservation.

We, therefore, from the above premise argue that the definition advanced by Chambers appear too lopsided and it suggests the fallacy of Argumentum ad Baculum (An appeal to force). In addition to this, the definition put forward by Webster's Comprehensive Dictionary did not escape the 'waterloo' as it tends to imply that such acts of terrorism are and must always be politically engineered and nothing less. We argue, therefore, that this definition is too reductionistic, parochial and fallacious in the sense that it commits the fallacy of petition principii, that is, it begs the question. The reason being that it contains itself in the definition hence, it is a circular argument. Having exposed the supposed loopholes inherent in the above definitions on terrorism, the question: 'How then should we or ought we to define terrorism?' is not out of place. For it is in this sense that we hope to integrate, harmonize or synthesize the above two respective standpoints in order to provide what we may call a working definition for this paper which will be more encompassing and accommodating but not redundant.

Although terrorism is a hydra-headed phenomenon, it can be defined as any action, consciously, or unconsciously, intended towards engendering strife, conflict, violence, fear, intimidation and submission by another, either for economic, socio – political, material or personal benefits, interest and ends which if successfully perpetrated could cause a distortion in our peaceful global existence of not just the victim but on the society at large. This definition is to my mind more encompassing as it attempts to include actions done with the intention to harm another either directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. It also exposes those actions perpetuated in the guise of fostering a supposed peace treaty across nations which is though couched on ethnicity, racism, reductions, personal or collective interest. Besides, harping on the narrative of 'organization' as a large scale violent act of the type under review must not be a principal criterion, especially where the pragmatic relevance of the 'end justifies the means' is invoked.

What is Islam?

Jones A. Toronto, in the article 'Islam', avers that 'Islam is an Arabic word which literally means submission or surrender, and a Muslim, therefore, is a person who submits or surrenders'. In the same vein he opines that:

The etymological root of Islam (s-l-m) is associated with ideas of peace (salaam) and wellbeing (salaama), and the implication in a religious context is that a person who submits his or her will completely to the worship of the one God, Allah, finds peace, safety and salvation. For both etymological and theological reasons, then, Muslims commonly speak of Islam as 'the religion of peace'.

If we are to go by the above etymological definition, we could say that Islam unequivocally suggests or preaches peace. But is this the case in practice especially in our contemporary times? Does the Islamic etymological interpretation as 'a religion of peace' not betray the antithesis of war as informal in the notion of the 'Jihad'? Infact, what does the phrase 'Submit his or her will' mean in practise, or used by Toronto? Does it not suggest some atoms of dogmatism and psychological determination that denies man of his rational choice and freewill condemning him to that of a robotic committed to the service of a supposed 'will of God' of which we can seldom prove his existence on the basis of experience?

Moreso, is the Muslim aware that, to a substantial majority of people across the world, especially to those of the opposite religion (Christianity), the Islamic evangelisation of peace and moderation is to them a mere propaganda and a conscious preface while they practice violence and mayhem, all in the guise of a Holy War (Jihad)? In line with the above, Toronto argues that 'it is a source of great consternation and bewilderment to Muslims, therefore to learn that in the minds of many throughout the world, Islam has come to represent the antithesis of peace.

He further opines that;

Misconceptions and stereotypes are widespread and have contributed to the spirit of 'Islamaphobia' among westerners. Surveys in many different countries indicate that historic attitudes of hostility, suspicion and prejudice between the Christian West regarded as violent, greedy, malevolent, oppressive to women, rich and dishonest. Recent events such as evolutions,

death sentences, warfare and terrorist activities carried out by Muslims extremists groups in the middle east, Europe and the United States have reinforced in the public's mind these associations (Toronto, 213).

To quickly react to the last argument by Toronto A. James, we therefore seek a clarification through the question: is Toronto not ethnocentrically committed and biased when he cited examples from terrorist activities carried out by a mere handful of Islamic extremists against the likes of Europe and the United States? No doubt, America is allegedly considered as the world power. Wouldn't any attempt to rid them from such corridors of power where they have been decorated with material, economic and socio-political blessings attract a global concern and interest? Come to think of it, isn't the issue of America being the 'world power' an act of intimidation and subjugation of other nations which lie within the purview of our earlier definition of terrorism? What do we say about America in union with Britain's invasion of Iraq under the guise that Iraq was in possession of biochemical weapons of mass destruction? Records have it that after such merciless invasion of Iraq by the duo of America and Britain it was discovered that there was no such thing as weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. To this, USA and Britain tendered an apology to the international community that their actions were misguided by the CIA (Criminal Investigation Agency). Again, another case in point is former President Barack Obama's approved invasion of Libya and the concomitant effect of that decision in contemporary Libya. But what we did not know which of course they refused to confess to was that the intention behind their dastardly act was to cripple the Iraqi Governments' tenacity of purpose in building a Gold city which would attract world attention and bring about economic development in Iraq. The consequence of this action is that the injuries gotten from those attacks by the duo of America and Britain still remains at large and inerasable thereby forming Iraqi's historical misfortunes, which would probably be passed to their upcoming generations.

However, since the aim of this paper is to participate in the debate as to whether there is a relationship between Islamic religion and terrorism, we shall critically examine from an empathic standpoint the major tenets of Islamic religion; what Islam says about terrorism and in what sense the concept of a Jihad is used in the Koran. Other issues like Islamic view of terrorism and suicide bombing will also be discussed without being too judgemental and

casting of aspersions from the goggler of prejudice and ethnocentric colourations, but to provide room for fair hearing from a critical perspective.

Islam and Terrorism

Why are most Muslims fundamentalists and terrorists? Dr. Zakir Naik in an attempt to answer this big question as posited in his paper (article) titled 'Islam and Terrorism, asserted that;

The above question is often hurled at Muslims, either directly or indirectly, during any discussion on religion and worldly affairs. Muslims stereotypes are perpetuated in every form of the media accompanied by gross misinformation about Islam and Muslims. Infact, such information and false propaganda often leads to discrimination and acts of violence against Muslims. A case in point is the anti Muslim campaign in the American media following the Oklahoma bomb blast, where the press was quick to declare a middle Eastern conspiracy' behind the attack. The culprit was later identified as a soldier from the American armed forces.

Dr. Naik's argument is that we should not be too quick to conclude on matters as we shall end up victims of the fallacy of hasty generalisation which stems from our arrogant obnoxious ideologies and dogmatism. We are motivated to toe the line of the classical philosophers of the skeptic school of thought who have argued for 'the suspension of judgement' and to carefully weigh the pros and cons of an argument before we decide on a conclusion.

However, Dr. Naik attempted to show the difference between one who is a true fundamentalist and who is a terrorist. In his analysis of these two concepts, he asserted that;

A fundamentalist is someone who follows and adheres to the fundamentals of the doctrine or theory he is following... For instance, for a person to be a good mathematician, he should know, follow and practice the fundamentals of mathematics.

He further avers that 'one cannot paint all fundamentalists with the same brush: one cannot categorize all fundamentalists as either good or bad. Such a categorization of any fundamentalist will be dependent upon the field or activity in which he is a fundamentalist. To further expatiate on what he meant by the above distinctions, Dr. Naik posited thus:

I am a fundamentalist Muslim who, by the grace of Allah, knows, follows and strives to practise the fundamentals of Islam. A true Muslim does not shy away from being a fundamentalist. I am proud to be a fundamentalist Muslim because I know that the fundamentals of Islam are beneficial to humanity and the whole world. There is not a single fundamental of Islam that causes harm or is against the interest of the human voice as a whole. Many people harbour misconceptions about Islam and consider several teachings of Islam to be unfair and improper. This is due to insufficient and incorrect knowledge of Islam. If one critically analyses the teachings of Islam with an open mind, one cannot escape the fact that Islam is full of benefits both at the individual and collective levels.

The above long quotation from Dr. Zaik Naik goes to suggest that Islam or the Islamic religion is one which affirms peaceful coexistence of man both individually and collectively. This is in harmony with the etymological derivation of Islam as ‘a Religion of Peace’. Should we be justified to argue against this background that the etymological definition of Islam as a ‘religion of Peace’ is but a mere theoretically concocted concept which goes to negate the practical conception of Islam that is to say ‘Islam is in theory’ a religion of peace in peace, a religion of war’? Will this assertion be fair based on the premise that major terrorist attacks is today one perpetrated necessarily by a Muslim, also is the fact that even the etymological definitions of most concepts do limp? Taking a cue from the Islamic doctrine of Jihad contained in the Qur’an to which every Islamic fundamentalist must necessarily follow if we are to go by Dr. Naik’s definition of fundamentalism and the true Islamic fundamentalist. Why should we not term every Islamic fundamentalist who carries out a Jihad, a terrorist? Is Jihad itself not a violent action which goes to fall within the purview of our earlier definition of terrorism? If according to Islam, Jihad does not pass for what we should consider to be terrorism, the question that readily comes to mind is: In what sense then is the Jihad different from terrorism as we know it if at all there is a clear cut difference?

To answer these heart throbbing questions, Dr. Zakir Naik asserts that: Every Muslim should be a terrorist’. A terrorist according to him is a person who causes terror. In his (Naik’s) analysis, ‘the moment a robber sees a policeman, he is terrified. A policeman is a terrorist for

the anti-social elements of the society, such as thieves, decoits and rapists. According to Dr. Naik,

Whenever such an antisocial element sees a Muslim, he should be terrified. It is true that the word 'terrorist' is generally used for a person who causes terror among the common people. But a true Muslim should only be a terrorist to selective people, i.e. anti-social elements, and not to the common innocent people. Infact, a Muslim should be a source of peace for innocent people.

In his *Boko Haram: Reality or Ruse*, Kamil Olowogbobo reinforces this conception where he avers that many a Muslim scholars are critical of formal western education for being culturally insensitive, agnostic, imperialistic, etc (5).

From the foregoing, there appears to be a problem as we have discovered, why Dr. Naik affirms that all Muslims are terrorists but further goes to say that his idea of terrorism is seen in the light of being antagonistic to anti-social elements. Does this conception of terrorism according to Dr. Naik go to justify the relativity of truth and that there is no objective conception of terrorism? Dr. Naik's argument goes to suggest that terrorism can be channelled positively when it is used to curb the menace of robbery, human trafficking etcetera.

Our confusion therefore will be that, how and why should the same concept appear elusive by attempting to suggest both evil and good? This indeed must of necessity be a Hermeneutic problem, that is, the problem of interpretation and linguistic entailment which negates the axiom of reasoning that 'a thing cannot be and not be at the same time, hence it becomes a contradiction.

When should terrorism be seen in its ontological nature? And what is the yardstick for determining what could pass as terrorism. It is, therefore, germane that we understand that we live in a world where different actions can be conceptualized from different standpoints. For instance, alluding to Dr. Naik's stipulative conception of terrorism, one could argue that different labels can be given to the same action. An act can be seen as 'terrorism' on the one hand, and as 'patriotism' on the other hand. It all depends on who is saying what. Records have it that before India achieved independence from British rule, some freedom fighters of

India who did not subscribe to non violence were labelled as terrorists by the British Government while these same individuals were lauded by Indians or patriots for the same activity. Thus, two different labels have been given to the same people for the same set of actions.

According to the Holy Qur'an:

If anyone killed a person not in retaliation of murder or (and) to spread mischief in the land. It would be as if he killed all human kind, and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the life of all human kind.

(Qur'an 5:32)

The foregoing goes to prove that Islam preaches peace where peace is necessary and 'war where it is necessary. Hence, the concept of Jihad is only applicable when one, say an Islamic fundamentalist, kills or injures another with the aim of curbing mischief and corruption. But if we are to pry critically into the above like a 'godgly' we would see the above as scoring intention and situational ethics of Joseph Fletcher as tenable. However, we could argue in the same vein that even the Juded – Christian religion at some point affirms the philosophy of an eye for an eye as the book of Luke 19 verse 27 asserts:

All those my enemies, who do not wish that I should rule over them, bring them and slay them before me. (Holy Bible).

We, however, do not deny that there are some Islamic sects who in the guise of Islamic religious belief perpetrate mayhem through suicide bombing, vandalisation, production and invention of Biochemical weapons for mass destruction etc without a reasonable logic behind these inimal actions. Such sects are in the light of this paper seen as Islamic extremists.

In an article 'martyrdom in Islam versus suicide Bombing (2007), Salafi Manhaj argues that:

Perhaps the first most important thing to direct the readers' attention to is the difference between an act of war which involves a suicide (such as suicide bombing) and an act of war which is apparently suicidal (such is a lone warrior charging the ranks of the enemy in the near – certain knowledge that he will be killed in the process). No scholar disputes the praise worthiness of the second type of act. It is only the first type of act, the

predetermined, intentional taking of ones own life in a clear act of suicide which remains a subject of contention (www.icrc.org).

Salafi Manhaj attempts to show from the above quote that, there are some actions which are inherently bad in themselves as they are also condemned in the Islamic scripture and by foremost scholars. He further argues in the same vein that bombings and all other Bomb-related ills are not ontologically Islamic, His submission is that:

The contention that the term 'suicide bombing' is one invented by Zionist to vilify Muslims, and should therefore be abandoned is rather weak, and self-defeating. Suicide bombings themselves are the invention of non-Muslims. For a long while, the only nominally Muslim groups that utilized the tactic were the heretical Rawaafid. It is only very recently that some so-called Sunni Muslims have become famous for suicide bombing. Infact, prior to the suicide bombing of our time, there is no precedent whatsoever in the history of Islam of the Sunni Muslim being praised for wilfully taking his or her own life on or off the battlefield.

He further opines that:

As to the permissibility of suicide bombings specifically, the scholars have differed. The majority of senior orthodox Sunni scholars, such as Imam Ibn Uthaymeen, hold suicide bombing to be haram (i.e. forbidden) in absolute terms because the tactic rests upon something which is itself haram in absolute terms (i.e. suicide).

What the author attempts to buttress is the notion that suicide bombing can both be justified and condemned. In situational ethics in which an individual is fighting for the course of Allah; if such individual kills or is killed in the process such would be unequivocally justified in the Islamic religion. To further buttress the above, the Qur'an states:

'Verily, Allah has purchased from the believers their selves and their wealth, in return for Heaven being theirs. They fight in the path of Allah and they kill and are killed' (At-Tawbah 9:111).

According to Salafi Manhaj, the implication of the above verse is that these fundamentalists will kill (the enemy) and are killed (by the enemy) in order for such acts of suicide bombing to be justified. So the battlefield martyr, according to the Islamic texts and consensus of the scholars, is the one who fights and then dies by other than his own hand. It is this type of death (suicide) that is arguably justified in Islamic faith. Such a person is rather considered as a patriot rather than as a terrorist.

Conclusion

Our critical submission is that Islamic religion does not connote terrorism in the sense of causing harm to another, deliberately as we have laboured to explain. Also, is the fact that there is no direct relationship between Islam and terrorism as our topic suggests. Islam, therefore, frowns at the use of Biochemical weapons of mass destructions to kill or destroy another's life or property (Oloso 2010).

However, those sects of Muslims who kill and perpetrate mayhem in our society through the use of nuclear weapons should not be considered as true Muslims as we have argued earlier. They should thus be seen in the light of being 'Terrorist' to not just the non-Muslims but also to the Islamic faithfuls and fundamentalists who channel their actions towards the good of the society and human co-dependence and existence.

It is, therefore, on this note that we wish to advise all those who have become dogmatically enslaved with the erroneous belief that Islam is a religion of war or that every act of terrorism which threatens human co-existence must have stemmed from Islamic religious/faithfuls. To understand Islamic tenets therefore, we must purge our minds from such preconceived prejudices against Islamic religion and all Muslims.

There is no two individuals who are the same in all respects. There is no singular religion that is in itself free from criticisms. In a religion like Christianity for instance, there are some sects of so-called Christians whose lifestyle stands to impede the actual general notion, tenets and belief system which the faithful disciples hold tenaciously as contained in the Holy Bible. We hereby recommend that such acts of prejudice, ethnocentrism, cultural, religious, sociological and ideological colourations be thrown to the dustbin in order for us to critically appraise the nature of Islamic religion as a religion of peace. This can only be achieved through

'bracketing' of one's mind as posited by Edmund Husserl. In summary, therefore, we say, without mincing words, that Islamic religion has no affinity with terrorism.

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