Orthodox Accounts of Terrorism

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Introduction

Terrorism is essentially a contested concept. The aim of this chapter is to examine the concept of terrorism and explain the existence of the orthodox understanding of terrorism or orthodox terrorism theory. This theory, I suggest, is the principal paradigm and rational positivist approach used – primarily by state governments – to explain political violence. It is essentially a theoretical explanation and understanding of terrorism that is employed to suit hegemonic, liberal or other agendas, while keeping a distinction firmly in place that does not allow for a creeping legitimation of terrorist tactics agendas. It is, I suggest, a discourse based on the legitimacy/illegitimacy dualism that constructs non-state violence as terrorist while state violence is deemed to be legitimate. It is also a subjective understanding of political violence that professes to explain the act of violence from the perspectives of both the instigator and the recipient of the violence.

In this chapter, I suggest that far from the universal and single understanding of political violence that it portrays, orthodox terrorism theory is in fact a theoretically constructed discourse created from key texts in terrorism studies within the discipline of international relations, and its dominance in this field is maintained by its monopoly of state government counter-terrorism and anti-terrorism policies and practice.

1 This chapter builds on a wider study of terrorism that has been published as a monograph by Palgrave Macmillan. I would like to thank Marie Breen-Smyth and the editorial team for their comments on an earlier draft. This chapter represents my own views and any errors are my responsibility.

2 This chapter uses a number of key texts in terrorism studies that laid the foundation for the accepted understanding of terrorism. The author would also like to point out that these texts relate particularly to the discipline of international relations.

3 The argument in this chapter is focused on the problems inherent in the state understanding of terrorism in international relations. It is important to point out that terrorism is also studied in different social science disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and anthropology, and in these fields the orthodox approach is not so dominant.
Although I argue in this chapter for the existence of orthodox terrorism theory as the dominant theoretical approach for explaining terrorism, it is not the only approach. Indeed, following an extensive review of the literature in terrorism studies, it is possible to identify a number of different perspectives on terrorism. Although these are based on different levels of analysis (Franks 2006), it is possible to identify from this survey a general differentiation between approaches, particularly in relation to explaining the causes of terrorism. These are as follows:

1. Orthodox terrorism theory: this is the predominant explanation and understanding of terrorism. It does not engage in a root causes debate as it favours the illegal/illegitimate binary approach to explaining terrorism that mirrors the realist, state-centric understanding. It is the basis for governmental anti-terror and counter-terrorism policies. The key texts that support this explanation of terrorism are provided by Hoffman (1999); Laqueur (1987, 2001); Schmid and Jongman (1988); and Wilkinson (1997, 2000). This academic fraternity has notably increased since 9/11.

2. Radical terrorism theory: this is occasionally apparent in the literature and explains terrorism largely from the perspective of the terrorist. It is a justification for violence and a defence of the root causes that exist predominantly in the structure. It is expressed by writers such as Camus (2000); Fanon (2001); Marx and Engels (1992); and Qutb (2006).

3. Moderate terrorism theory: this is a fast developing sub-field (particularly recently), but is still a limited approach in terrorism studies and attempts to engage with a root causes debate. It is a trend that tries to explain and understand the roots of terrorism in relation to socio-economic and structural as well as political causes, and also includes the developing field of critical terrorism studies. Examples of literature in this field include Berman (2003); Bjørgo (2005); Crenshaw (1995); Della Porta (1992); and Gurr (1970).

Orthodox Terrorism Theory

Orthodox terrorism theory, as I have argued above, is essentially an understanding of terrorism employed to suit hegemonic agendas that constructs non-state violence as terrorist while state violence is deemed to be legitimate. The subjective nature of this approach to terrorism professes to explain the act of violence from the perspectives of both the instigator and recipient of the violence, be it a terrorist group against a state or, indeed, vice versa. However, this theory tends to concentrate on acts of anti-state violence and views this as illegitimate violence against the established authority or state, not necessarily violence by the state. Whilst state terrorism is included in this theory, it is primarily seen as state-sponsored or proxy terrorism carried out by illiberal states (Hoffman 1999, 185–96; Wilkinson 2000, 62–9). Orthodox terrorism theory is essentially a Western model of understanding terrorism rooted in Western freedoms, the rule of law and the liberal
democratic Westphalian state (O’Sullivan and Herman 1991, 44). By employing this legitimising discourse, the state is able to avoid engaging in a ‘root causes’ debate on terrorism, as this might legitimise non-state violence – at least in rhetorical terms. Terrorism is therefore employed as a pejorative term by hegemonic actors to make a moral justification of their claim to legitimacy and moral condemnation of their opponents, thus allowing the legitimate use of state violence and avoiding the necessity for negotiation and compromise. Although this suits the monopoly of state power, it is a problem not just for approaching and dealing with terrorism by the symptomatic management of the violence, but also for enacting long-term solutions that attempt to solve the root causes.

This orthodox understanding of terrorism is monopolised by state governments and forms the basis of anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism policies. As a result of this monopoly – which is also perhaps an indication of how co-opted academia can become – the orthodox understanding also dominates terrorism studies. According to the study of terrorism in the international relations literature, and in particular those scholars focusing on it from the perspective of the state, terrorism is thus defined (relative to the legitimacy of state governance) as an illegal and illegitimate act (Hoffman 1999, 30), as a specific method of political violence against the state, such as hijacking or bombing or as acts of violence against civilians protected by the state (Wilkinson 2000, 17). As a result, the study of terrorism has become, in quarters associated mainly with states and governments and indeed academia, preoccupied with explaining what actually constitutes terrorism, how it functions and ultimately how to counter it. This has been to the clear detriment of examining why it actually occurs – particularly when it appears to challenge state power.

In the current security climate, orthodox terrorism theory has been imbued with further potency because of the growing political pressure to establish an accepted single definition of terrorism. This was a recommendation of the UN High-Level Panel Report, which suggested that a single definition be adopted, one that can be enshrined in law to institute a general scientific theory of terrorism. The purpose of this, it seems, is to institute a common governmental and international basis on which to approach and deal with terrorism. Orthodox terrorism theory, it seems, looks to provide this service by offering a lens through which the state can explain terrorism, particularly in relation to state security.

In order to create a conceptual point of departure for examining the predominant state understanding of the phenomena of terrorism, the theory of orthodox terrorism discourse has been constructed from a thorough examination of the literature in terrorism studies (Franks 2006). This theory of terrorism comprises a number of

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4 The US Department of Defence definition.
5 The United Nations defines terrorism in relation to international conventions, see www.un.org.
6 Terrorism is defined as violence against civilians.
7 Although the UN High-Level Panel did come up with a definition of terrorism, it was not adopted in the World Summit document. See UN High-Level Panel Report, www.un.org/secureworld [accessed 1 July 2012].
common themes that re-occur throughout the terrorism literature. Although it can be argued that this technique conflates the understanding of terrorism and creates a ‘straw man’,8 nevertheless, in order to endeavour to understand a phenomenon in international relations, an attempt needs to be made to construct a conceptual framework through which the theory, and indeed the practice of the phenomenon, can then be unpacked and examined. Orthodox terrorism theory is just such a conceptual theory and can be constructed around three re-occurring themes – or suggested functions of terrorism – that are found in the literature of orthodox terrorism theory. These are; functional, symbolic and tactical (Bowyer Bell 1978, 50).

The functional pillar of orthodox terrorism theory relates to the belief that terrorism is intended to ‘provoke a response [by the state] to further the [terrorist] cause by strategic manipulation’ (Bowyer Bell 1978, 51). This is a central concept and suggests that the aim of the act of terrorism is to force a reaction – hopefully an overreaction – by the established power centre, governing authority or state against the instigators, their supporters and even the population in general. Rubenstein calls this ‘heroic terrorism’ and suggests that the aim is to ‘provoke intense indiscriminate state repression in order to deprive the government of legitimacy and radicalise the masses’ (Rubenstein 1987, 161).

Laqueur calls this ‘the terrorist theory of provocation’ and suggests that it is intended to produce state repression, draconian measures and thus ultimately undermine the ‘liberal’ façade (Laqueur 1987, 25–7). Furthermore, acts of terrorism are seen as attempts to demonstrate the unsuitability of the incumbent authority to govern and by exposing its ‘true’ nature, the terrorists endeavour to wrest legitimacy from the state and bestow it upon their own cause. The intention of the terrorists (according to orthodox terrorism theory) is to undermine the security of the population by demonstrating that the state is unable to provide adequate protection and therefore to force the population to turn to alternative sources, such as the instigators of the terrorist violence, to provide security and alternative governance. Examples of this understanding are suggested historically in the post-Second World War anti-colonial conflicts in Cyprus, Aden and Algeria, more recently in Northern Ireland, Spain and the Balkans, and currently in Chechnya, Kashmir, Nepal, Afghanistan and Iraq.

A second re-occurring theme contained in the literature of orthodox terrorism theory is the symbolic nature of terrorism. This function of terrorism is arguably the basis of orthodox terrorism theory, which, according to Hoffman, has its origins in the earliest forms of nineteenth-century terrorism and is encapsulated in Carlo Pisacane’s ‘theory of propaganda by deed’9 (Hoffman 1999, 17). Orthodox terrorism theory uses this concept of symbolism to explain an act of terrorist violence as being

8 Many times when I have presented this work I have received this straw man critique. The first instance was from Professor Vivienne Jabri at Kings College, London, during my PhD Viva in December 2004.

9 Pisacane suggested that ideas result from deeds and that violence was necessary not only to draw attention to or generate publicity for a cause, but also ultimately to inform, educate and rally the masses.
highly symbolic and an attempt to terrorise, intimidate and strike fear into those against whom the violence is directed – the targets (even if they are not the actual physical recipients of the violence, they are nevertheless affected, or terrorised, by it). Obviously, the actual targets of the act and the wider audience that witnesses it are directly affected by it. The orthodox explanation of the symbolic value of terrorism is regarded as ‘coercive intimidation’ or ‘pure terrorism’, which is ‘the systematic use of murder and destruction or the threat of, to terrorise individuals, groups, communities and governments into conceding to terrorist demands’ (Wilkinson 1977, 46). Classically, the conventional philosophy of terrorism is as a symbolic act, intended to affect more than just the target of the violence. As Sun Tzu suggested in The Art of War, the aim is to ‘kill one and frighten ten thousand’ (Sun Tzu 1963, 76).

Whilst much of the literature on orthodox terrorism theory supports these psychological implications, it also emphasises the communicative aspects of symbolic violence. The orthodox discourse suggests that acts of terrorism are committed in order to publicise and internationalise a political aim, thereby demonstrating the high propaganda and publicity value that can be gained from acts of terrorist violence. This understanding is particularly clear from analysis in terrorism studies of the ‘hijacking period’ in the 1960s and 1970s when Palestinian groups such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) attempted to internationalise the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This concept is encapsulated by describing ‘terrorism as theatre’ (Hoffman 1999, 132).

This understanding of terrorism applies equally to the state, which is known to generate the symbolic terrorism of fear and intimidation against its own domestic population in order to ensure political loyalty and compliance to authority. Wilkinson suggests that terrorism can be categorised depending on where it occurs; thus, domestic or internal terrorism is confined within a single state or region while international terrorism is an attack carried out across international frontiers (Hoffman 1999, 67; Wilkinson 2000, 15).

Nevertheless, regardless of the location of violence, both the psychology of fear and the role of publicity contained in the symbolic nature of orthodox terrorism theory demonstrate quite graphically the significance of media and communications in propagating the psychological implications of the terrorist message to an even wider audience (Alexander and Latter 1990; Hoffman 1999, 131; Wilkinson 2000, 174).

The third component of orthodox terrorism theory is tactical. This can be understood in two ways. The first is as a limited means to achieve short-term gains, such as the exchange of hijack hostages for prisoners or a bank robbery to fund the procurement of arms. The second is as a tactical part of a long-term strategic initiative. This has its roots in the theories of revolution and guerrilla warfare11

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10 Much of the literature on orthodox terrorism theory suggests that the historical roots of terrorism existed in the French Revolution of 1789 when the ideology of the Revolution and the power of the new government was enforced and consolidated by the so-called ‘Reign of Terror’ which was enacted on the population.

11 Guerrilla warfare is defined as ‘a series of operations by irregular forces, depending on mobility and surprise aimed at harassing a regular army’ (Chaliand 1987, 12).
(Chaliand 1987, 12) by proponents such as Mao Tse-Tung\(^{12}\) and Carlos Marighela\(^{13}\) (Marighela 1971), who suggested that acts of terrorism should be part of the wider struggle for revolution or an initial stage preceding popular revolt. Schmid and Jongman define this phenomenon as ‘the insurgency context of terrorism’ (Schmid and Jongman 1988, 7).\(^{14}\)

### A Discourse of Terrorism

Orthodox terrorism theory is employed by the state to describe acts of terrorist violence and is based upon the assumptions discussed above. It is also interesting to note that by adopting this theory of terrorism, assumptions are made about the nature of the terrorist actor. Crenshaw investigates this and develops ‘strategic choice theory’, which she argues is a representation of the perpetrator of the act of violence as a rational actor, who has calculated the implications and has made a rational choice among alternatives as part of strategic reasoning (Crenshaw 1992b, 8). This suggests that acts of terrorist violence, whilst appearing to be indiscriminate and random, and the behaviour of mad and crazed individuals, are in fact – according to the understanding provided by orthodox terrorism theory – tactical parts of a carefully planned and calculated strategy to influence decision-making and effect political change.

In this rational understanding, orthodox terrorism theory is rooted in the social contract between the governed and the elites, according to the liberal values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Rational states, elites and citizens conform to and legitimise these norms, forming a social contract, and actors that deviate from this contract and act outside the boundaries are seen as terrorists. This constructs the classic positivist binary of in-group/out-group based upon state sovereignty and legality, and offers legitimacy to those who operate within these liberal values. Orthodox terrorism theory is thus a state-centric discourse created to enforce this social contract based on the legitimacy/illegitimacy dualism that constructs non-state violence as terrorist while state violence is deemed to be legitimate.

The above components of orthodox terrorism theory also help to construct the state definitions of terrorism and clearly illustrate the existence and dominance of this homogeneous and coherent theory of terrorism. Consider, for example, the

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\(^{12}\) Mao developed a strategy of protracted war in three stages: the enemy’s strategic offensive and the revolutionaries’ strategic defensive; the enemies’ strategic consolidation and the revolutionaries’ preparation for a counter-offensive; and the revolutionaries’ strategic retreat (Wilkinson 2000, 11).

\(^{13}\) Marighela’s strategy was to convert a political crisis into an armed struggle by violent acts that force the government to transform the political situation into a military one.

\(^{14}\) Insurgency can be defined as ‘a rebellion or rising against the government in power or civil authorities’ (Wilkinson 2000, 2).
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US Department of Defence definition of terrorism as the ‘unlawful use of force or violence against individuals or property to coerce and intimidate governments to accept political, religious or ideological objectives’. Schmid and Jongman suggest that terrorism is:

a method of combat in which random or symbolic victims serve as instrumental targets of violence. These instrumental victims share group or class characteristics, which form the basis for the victimisation. Other members of that group or class are put in a chronic state of fear (terror) ... The purpose of which is to change attitudes or behaviour favouring the interests of the user of method of combat. (Schmid and Jongman 1988, 2)

This particular definition of terrorism was produced after an exhaustive survey of academics and practitioners in the field, has consequently had a profound influence on the general understanding of terrorism and certainly helps support orthodox terrorism theory.

Orthodox terrorism theory is a discourse in that it does not necessarily represent the ‘truth’ about terrorism but exists as a Foucauldian ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault 1985, 122) to provide an explanation of the violence. In the Coxian sense, it is just a theory, the purpose of which is to explain terrorism for the benefit of the state whereby it confirms the state’s monopoly of legitimacy and therefore violence. It carefully helps to explain how terrorism works and what it is intended to achieve, but does little to explain why it occurs. This is perhaps the purpose for which terrorism discourse was designed – to provide an explanation of political violence that can allow the state the arbitrary use of force without any requirement for a ‘root causes’ debate whilst maintaining the integrity of the state. In this role, orthodox terrorism discourse serves the security needs of the Westphalian state particularly well.

Nevertheless, despite the parsimony that orthodox terrorism theory provides for the study of terrorism, it seems to be doing little to generate policies and practices that actually reduce the appearance of violence; indeed, it may well be exacerbating it, which in some instances may well be the devious objective. The orthodox understanding of terrorism makes the violence a global security problem and a growing concern, particularly in relation to the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Terrorism in this context is also of wider concern in the development debate, as Duffield (2001) has pointed out. Therefore, is orthodox terrorism theory really the best approach for explaining and thus dealing with the roots of this type of violence or is it a discourse that is in some way manipulated to achieve an end result? In the next section I seek to illustrate how orthodox terrorism theory is employed in practice in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

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Israel and Palestine and Orthodox Terrorism Discourse

Orthodox terrorism theory is based on two principal assumptions. First is the primacy of state legitimacy. This suggests that the state is both unequivocally morally and legally right, compared to the terrorist actor, who is indisputably wrong. Second, the terrorist is considered a rational actor. According to orthodox terrorism discourse, the terrorist is acting outside the law and is punishable without recourse to reasons, circumstances or root causes. The terrorist is also acting to accomplish a particular aim or tactical goal that is part of a wider strategic plan into which the use of terrorism fits in order to achieve a desired political agenda. Ultimately, by employing this discourse, the state is actually incapable of engaging in a root causes debate and examining (publicly at least) why the violence might be occurring, as this would bestow some form of legitimacy on the terrorists and their cause, thus legitimating their violence and potentially that of any other group who might decide to oppose the state. Instances of terrorist violence are understood by the conventional terrorism discourse as part of a wider strategic plan to destabilise and undermine the political position of the state. This is apparent when acts of terrorism are seen in comparison to acts of violence, which take place within war or conflict, as it is a considered element of war to kill the enemy and not part of any particular coercion strategy.

Israel employs terrorism discourse to understand the conflict with the Palestinians because it allows it to locate the violence in an internal state security problem and external border dispute, instead of civil war, ethnic, separatist or independence conflict. It also views the conflict as ‘internal’, meaning between the Israeli state and individual Palestinian groups, and is made distinct from any ‘external’ conflict that may exist between Israel and the wider Arab world. So, whilst the roots of terrorism are not explored, they are also often separated from any understanding of potential causes of the conflict with the Palestinians. Terrorism is also seen as the act of extremists and is divorced from the wider understanding of the conflict. It is seen as ‘unacceptable and not part of the conflict’. This is probably due to the way that Israel sees attacks by Palestinian ‘terrorists’ against Israeli ‘innocents’ as impossible to understand and therefore unequivocally condemns them as wrong without looking for the potential reasons why they are occurring. This allows Israel to employ the full power of state machinery in the form of legal and military means to deal with the illegal security problem; this is the mainstay of Israeli counter-terrorist and anti-terrorist policies and actions, and was certainly used by Israel to justify the war against Gaza in 2009.

The orthodox understanding of terrorism benefits the power and authority of the state government and consequently the discourse of Zionism, which is focused on maintaining an ethnically homogeneous Jewish state. Whilst it is true to say that most state governments in general employ terrorism theory to maintain the security of the state, due to the precarious ethnographic nature of the Israeli situation, it is

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16 Interview with Ilan Libovitch, MK Shinui, Knesset: Jerusalem, 1 April 2003.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
even more useful for Israel as it can employ orthodox terrorism theory to discredit, delegitimise and consequently ignore any claims the Palestinians have against the Israeli state.

As I argued above, orthodox terrorism theory can be explained using a basic typology involving three conceptions of terrorism: functional terrorism, symbolic terrorism and tactical terrorism. Functional terrorism is the basis for the theory that terrorist groups employ acts of terrorism in order to provoke a response from the state, such as inciting ruthless reprisals. Laqueur calls this generalisation the ‘mainspring of terrorism’ and suggests that ‘Seldom have terrorists assumed they could seize power but instead rely on a strategy of provocation ... which is intended to trigger intended events’ (Laqueur 2001, 37). This theory is used by Israel to explain and justify its actions against Palestinian terrorism. For example, Israel was able to explain the rocket attacks by Hamas as murderous acts of terror and thus conduct a major military offensive against Gaza in the summer of 2007.19 If the orthodox theory of terrorism is correct and the Palestinians’ strategic intention is to elicit a harsh response from Israel, then their tactics have worked. Conversely, if Israel is manipulating terrorist theory to suggest that its actions are what the Palestinians intend but instead is forced to respond in order to ‘fight terrorism’, then either the Israelis are ignoring the lessons of orthodox terrorism theory, which advocate a measured response to terrorism, or they are free-riding on the orthodox terrorism discourse in order to destroy their political opponents. This contradiction was illustrated in an unprecedented statement by an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) Lieutenant-General, who stated: ‘In our tactical decisions we are operating contrary to our strategic interest, as it [our hard-line tactics] increases hatred for Israel and strengthens the terror organisations.’20

The second pillar of terrorism theory, symbolic terrorism, suggests that terrorism is employed as a method or psychological weapon to coerce, intimidate, threaten, kill, and ultimately terrorise a particular target group. By this rationale, the attacks undertaken by Palestinian groups, especially inside Israel, are calculated to terrorise society. This is how terrorism is understood by Israel. For example, Hoffman suggests that ‘the [Palestinian] suicide terrorists intend to make [Israeli] people paranoid and xenophobic and fearful of venturing outside their homes ... in order to compel the enemy’s societies’ acquiescence to their demands’ (Hoffman 2003, 44). This delegitimises the actions of the Palestinians and allows the Israeli society and government to openly condemn the Palestinians and suggest that they will not give in to the illegal and illegitimate demands of ‘killers’ and ‘murderers’. As an Israeli politician suggested, the Palestinian use of terrorism ‘broke the rules of the game’.21 Israel is then able to exploit this understanding by publicly suggesting that the aim of the terrorist is to illegally attempt to threaten, coerce and terrorise. This enables the state to justify the adoption of tough counter-terrorism measures that pointedly refuse to acquiesce to terrorism in any way. This argument is found

20 The Guardian Weekly, 6–12 November 2003, p. 3.
21 Interview with Yulie Tamir, MK Labour-Menad, Knesset: Jerusalem, 1 April 2003.
in orthodox terrorism theory and is expounded by Wilkinson as the ‘hardline approach’, and relates to a set of key elements that refuse negotiations, concessions, special status or deals (Wilkinson 2000, 94–5).

The orthodox discourse is not only a way for Israel to approach the problem of terrorism and deal with the violence generated by the Palestinians. It is also a useful method to publicly delegitimise and demonise them, whilst simultaneously explaining to the public – who ultimately bear the brunt of terrorism – that the state counter- and anti-terrorism policy is a legitimate course of action.

The last concept that helps explain terrorism theory – tactical terrorism – or terrorism employed to achieve short-term tactical gains or specific objectives is attributed by Israel to the proliferation of international terrorism in the form of hijacks, hostage taking and sabotage by Palestinian groups that is largely intended to generate international public opinion for the Palestinian political cause against Israel, as well as to raise funds and secure prisoner releases (Morris 2000, 204).

However, tactical terrorism can also imply the use of the methods of terrorism as a strategic weapons system, employed for example by groups with limited means and resources. Terrorist bombings have been described as the ‘poor man’s air force’, and Hoffman, in reference to Palestinian suicide bombers, suggested they were the ‘ultimate smart bomb’ (Hoffman 2001, 40). Yet Israel does not see the attacks by the Palestinians as acts of retaliation for its own anti-terrorist actions, nor does it understand them in terms of asymmetric conflict. They are viewed through orthodox terrorism theory as unlawful acts designed specifically to achieve a particular tactical goal with the effect of illegally influencing the political situation. They are not seen as defence, revenge, the manifestation of vented frustrations or anger or the final desperate acts of a subjugated people. Instead, these acts of violence are tactical components of a wider, calculated and rational plan to illegally influence Israeli state policies. Terrorism for Israel is ‘using immoral or unjust means of coercion, forcing decisions not according to power but according to emotional stress and fear’.

As I have argued above, there are a number of reasons for the Israeli employment and practice of orthodox terrorism discourse. They are all linked, it seems, to state security, which is the main application for the orthodox approach. In fact, it can be seen as the raison d’être for terrorism studies, especially in the construction of state policy. The employment of the orthodox discourse by Israel is completely understandable, because, according to this doctrine, Israel, founded upon the discourse of Zionism, must remain an ethnically homogeneous and racially dominant Jewish state at all costs. The political, social and cultural dominance of Jewish identity is a vital core value for the existence of the Israeli state. As Marc Ellis argues, a civil war currently exists in which Jews fight to maintain their separation from the ‘other’, as only then can the essence of their Jewish identity be maintained (Ellis 1997, 58). It is vital, when considering the existence of the Israeli state and its relationship with the Palestinians, not to overlook the immense importance for the Israeli government in maintaining a pure Jewish state – that is, an Israeli state with an overwhelmingly ethnic Jewish majority in the population. Ethnic Jewish
security is integral to Zionism and the existence of a state because it is ostensibly an identity-based nationalist discourse and is deeply founded and enshrined in the Jewish national psyche. As the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, has argued, ‘a distinguishing feature of Jews raised in Israel is the absence of the sense of personal insecurity and whilst Israel itself may come under personal attack the sense of being a Jew does not’ (Netanyahu 1993, 370).

The threat to the Jewish ethnic security of the Israeli state is particularly real as the Palestinians represent a political, social, cultural and ethnic challenge to the whole fabric of the society and the existence of its ethnic homogeneity. As Gershon Baskin suggested, the implications of annexation (of the West Bank and Gaza) would amount to ‘Jewish national suicide’, as the eventual assimilation of a population bigger than that of the Israeli Jews would mean the loss of Jewish national identity.23 The Palestinian-Israeli conflict is viewed primarily by Israel as an identity conflict and principally by the Zionist discourse as a fight for the survival of the Jewish people, hence the absence of a root causes debate and the lack of understanding of the causes of the conflict in relation to the claims of the Palestinians. In Israeli terms, the conflict is understandably about the security needs of Israeli and particularly of the Jewish people. This is, above all, the protection and security of ethnic Jewish identity enshrined in the existence of the state of Israel: ‘The conflict [with the Palestinians] is the interface between competing identities, which is not only an identity struggle but also a personal struggle.’24 Orthodox terrorism theory is a vital theoretical tool employed by the Israeli state in this struggle. Nevertheless, serious problems exist for this approach.

Conclusion

This chapter is intended to introduce orthodox accounts of terrorism and is a theoretical study designed to examine orthodox terrorism theory as a theoretical framework grounded in the case study of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The aim has been to unpack the notion of orthodox terrorism theory, explain how it is constructed and examine how this approach or discourse is employed and what problems arise from using this understanding. As the arguments above have demonstrated, orthodox terrorism theory essentially becomes a critique of the state government’s ‘orthodox’ approach to terrorism, which, I have argued, is the predominant discourse that is used to explain, understand and deal with terrorism. It is a theory supported by a substantial body of scholarly literature that is designed and employed to legitimise the violence used by the state to enforce its political will whilst simultaneously delegitimising the use of political violence by opposition movements or organisations. It is created and employed to deal with terrorism from the perspective of state security, without any recognisable form

24 Interview with Yulie Tamir, MK Labour-Menad, Knesset: Jerusalem, 1 April 2003.
of ‘root causes’ debate in order to legitimise governmental anti-terrorism and counter-terrorism policies and actions.

Whilst this has obvious advantages for states when ‘dealing’ with terrorism, it is an increasingly problematic approach, not only because it fails to tackle the root causes but also because it actually serves to exacerbate the conflict and violence. Furthermore, as the international profile of terrorism has grown immeasurably since 9/11 and following ten years of the ‘war on terror’, the ignominious withdrawal from Iraq and the increasingly bloody conflict in Afghanistan, questions are being increasingly asked if this realist, state-centric and positivist approach to terrorism (and especially al-Qaeda) is the right one.

If the problem of terrorism is to be effectively understood and ultimately resolved, perhaps a new agenda for research is required, one that contains a much more holistic, multi-level and multi-dimensional approach to terrorism and one that allows the problem to be examined and explained from wider perspectives. This ontological shift would emancipate the study of terrorism from the chains of the political legitimacy debate and allow it access to other analytical tools, such as those provided by conflict studies, which provide a much more comprehensive understanding of the roots of terrorism and also provide a greater number of potential alternative pathways for resolving violence (Franks 2006).

However, the emphasis of this new agenda would need to come from state governments. If they intend to actually resolve the violence, they would need to move outside the orthodox terrorism discourse and bestow some form of legitimacy on the claims of the actors using terrorism. It would then be possible to engage in a ‘root causes’ debate to deal with the deep political and socio-economic reasons that are generating the cause of the violence. This is the development of a ‘peace process’ and is the established procedure – albeit an often very protracted one – for conflict transformation. This process of transition of understanding the violence, from terrorism to conflict to peace, would equate to a discourse shift from the ‘management’ of violence – through the orthodox understanding – to engaging with terrorists as legitimate actors in a more moderate approach in order to seek conflict resolution. Although this clearly contradicts the rationale and ‘teaching’ of orthodox terrorism theory, such as recognising and negotiating with terrorists as legitimate actors in a more moderate approach in order to seek conflict resolution. Although this clearly contradicts the rationale and ‘teaching’ of orthodox terrorism theory, such as recognising and negotiating with terrorists, successful examples of these processes do exist, such as Northern Ireland, Nepal and Peru, and indeed most conflicts have an established peace process. It is also interesting to note that debate is currently in progress as to whether negotiations should be held directly with the Taliban in Afghanistan in order to end the violence there.

During this transition process, there is a change in the lexicon. Terrorist actors are no longer referred to as terrorists; instead, they are called militants or fighters in value-neutral conflict language and are engaged in negotiations as legitimate actors and in some instances pardoned for ‘terrorist crimes’ that they were once tried and imprisoned for (this is particularly damning for the orthodox approach, which stresses the criminality of terrorism – indeed, upon release, many ‘terrorist’ leaders have even become elected politicians). Furthermore, there is also progress in dealing with the political and socio-economic structural problems. So what
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changed? And why not adopt this agenda for dealing with terrorism from the beginning of the violence?

Questions that arise from this argument, such as when the transition occurs and why it happens, are probably the subjects of another study (Richmond and Franks 2009). Yet it illustrates clearly the unsuitability of the orthodox approach to terrorism because it questions how this shift occurs, given that orthodox terrorism theory gives no quarter to actors using violence. It also prompts a number of other uncomfortable questions, such as whether a peace process is a sign of victory for terrorists in an orthodox understanding. Does this show orthodox terrorism theory to be a flawed approach because – on closer examination – it is actually incapable of dealing with terrorism? Moreover, whilst the orthodox approach is being employed, can terrorism as illegal violence ever be eradicated?

The critical examination of orthodox terrorism theory contained in this study suggests that this might indeed be the case. The need now is to move beyond orthodox terrorism theory into a new agenda for terrorism research. This is vital for the survival of terrorism studies in the post-Westphalian and globalised world where the emphasis is shifting from state-centric to homocentric causes of conflict. A new research agenda is needed, one that accepts and engages the socio-economic and structural roots as well as the political causes of the violence. This means that terrorism can be studied contextually (instead of generically) according to individual and specific case studies and as part of a wider ‘root causes’ of conflict approach, where terrorism is seen as a further expression of violence alongside other forms of conflict. The new agenda needs to move away from the orthodox understanding completely, no longer considering acts of violence to be about political coercion or terrorising (functional, symbolic and tactical) but seen purely as acts of conflict in the context of conflict. These causes of conflict need to be centred on the individual and seen through human rights and human security issues. Ultimately, these developments, and a new agenda for research, may lead to a far deeper socio-economic and cultural understanding of the root causes of terrorism than the state and, indeed, orthodox terrorism theory can ever hope to provide and to which the state can ultimately respond.

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