

## FAMILY TERRORISM OR A CONSCIOUS CHOICE

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**Abstract:** *The article is aimed at presenting the connection between the science of psychology and the phenomenon of terrorism. It reveals the importance of personality socialization and the need for a sense of belonging. It also discloses the stages of susceptibility to radicalization at an individual level and at the level of a nuclear family in the stages of personality development. Moreover, it presents the reasons for the emergence of family terrorism and the inculcated belief that martyrdom is of high moral value. It presents martyrdom as a problem that must find its solution before many children become victims of a certain type of terrorism, be it on a religiously motivated basis.*

**Key words:** *terrorism, family terrorism, radicalization, conscious choice, religiously motivated terrorism, personality crisis, stages of personality development, nuclear family, martyrdom*

### INTRODUCTION

The contemporary analyses of the various aspects of modern terrorism are intertwined with the science of Psychology. Psychology describes and attempts to explain the psyche, i.e. the unconscious, consciousness, mental phenomena, processes, properties, states, as well as the social behaviour of a given person. The subject of Psychology is mental life, mental phenomena, and the behaviour of the individual. But not everything in the mental life at a given stage of an individual's development may be available for observation and study. Psychology can also analyse aspects of the behavioural repertoire, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices, emotions, perceptions, thinking, memory, consciousness, will, and spheres of emotional or moral development among many others.

The theory of personality in Psychology is becoming more and more relevant and important, especially in the context of the growing popularity of the 'lone wolf' phenomenon. Terrorism and its manifestations cannot be properly understood without clarification of the basic characteristics of individuals who are prone to terrorist activity. A terrorist is often described as a person who has no personal interests, feelings, or even a name, but is devoted to one passion – the destruction of everything that hampers the achievement of the idea, i.e. the ultimate goal. Terror is a way of life that subjugates a person to itself; it cannot be just a hobby or a pastime because the amateur terrorist will be doomed to failure.

## 1. THE SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF THE TERRORIST.

It is a challenging task to determine the socio-psychological model of the 'typical' terrorist and to define the reasons and mechanisms that turn a normal person into a member of a terrorist group or a 'lone wolf'.

In **Psychology**, there are various theories and models for psychological analysis of the personality, therefore today the generally accepted view is that the dynamics/speed of the mental development of a person is not uniform. Equal in length periods of time can result in changes in the psyche that are different in magnitude. This means that mental development could pass through relatively short time intervals during which the changes in the psyche are relatively significant as new qualities appear, and through relatively long-time intervals during which the psyche is relatively stable since the changes are quantitative and consist of changing only the degree of representation of already existing qualities of the psyche. In other words, the qualities of the psyche and its capabilities change gradually in stages or degrees during the personality growth.

The most acclaimed periodizations of mental development are contradictory to each other. In addition, serious doubts have been expressed about each of them.

Jean Piaget's theory of Cognitive development accounts for four stages in the development of a child and each stage represents a new way of thinking and understanding the world (Piaget, 1936).

Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic theory introduces five stages of human development based on how personality develops over the course of childhood and defines "oral stage", "anal stage", "phallic stage", etc. (Freud, 1991).

Erik Erikson's eight stages of socio-psychological development from infancy to adulthood are based on the emergence of mental qualities that regulate a person's behaviour: trust vs mistrust, autonomy vs shame/doubt, initiative vs guilt, etc. (Erikson, 1963).

**Social psychology** has its own reserved perimeter in the study of a person, focusing on his/her mental properties, processes, and states in interaction with other people. This type of psychology is interested in the motives that determine the group behaviour of people, i.e. their social motivation. Social psychology also deals with how individual, or group behaviour is influenced by the presence and behaviour of others. Thus, social psychology is interested in the mental mechanisms and effects that unfold in group interaction, in internal group dynamics, in interpersonal relations in the group, in the relations between leaders in the group, leadership, etc. Unlike sociology which deals with large social communities, social psychology deals with small social communities, including terrorist groups.

Viewed from the perspective of the individual in society, social psychology analyses social roles, which are defined as sets of realizable qualities of the individual, related to other members of the social group in each social situation. From the point of view of the society, the social role of the person is the set of attitudes and characteristic behaviors expected of an individual who occupies a specific position or performs a particular function in a social context, such as being a spouse or acting as a caregiver for an aging parent. Both perspectives lead to the thesis that social roles are socio-psychological characteristics of personality. All social qualities, abilities, properties, features, and characteristics are determined by different factors: genetic factors, circumstances, experience, and situational factors. All of them determine the social roles that the personality performs in the social world.

A central place in psychology is occupied by the question of the identity of the person. Self-identification has two main aspects:

**Personal identity**, which represents self-identification through one's own qualities: physical, volitional, intellectual, emotional, and **social identity**, in which a person defines him/herself through belonging to real and virtual social communities. Identity formation, according to Erik Erikson, is an extremely long period, especially in adolescence and youth. Then the striving for social identity appears in full force, including self-evaluation and self-awareness of oneself as a part of society, respectively as a member of certain social groups.

The well-known test of T. McPartland and M. Kuhn (1954) for personal identification and identification of the contents of the self-concept include many indicators from the social sphere. The research itself shows that a person, answering the question "Who am I?" or "What am I?" rather identifies him/herself as belonging to different groups than looking into one's own mental qualities.

Social identity, on the other hand, is multiple, since a person simultaneously perceives oneself a member of different groups. When identifying him/herself socially, one is included not only in the opposition "I – others", but also in a series of social binary oppositions: "we – them", "similar to us – different from us", "ours – theirs".

People make decisions on both minor and major issues which are based on social situations that influence their behaviour. Human cognition is completely rational since everyone strives to do everything possible to be right. People are always trying to understand their own social world and to make it better. Aristotle said, "Man is by nature a social animal" who lives in an environment saturated with messages and providing a rich opportunity for decision-making. The place that a given social group occupies in society determines the character of the set of social relations. These social relations, affected by interpersonal relations, influence the person and his/her attitude

to social phenomena, and it is precisely how the interaction between person and social group is expressed (Nikova, 2010).

The way in which members of a group fulfil their role in the group, the character, functions, and specificity of each member's role, determine the prestige and authority of a person among other members. Thus, the person also strengthens his/her sense of belonging to this group. A sense of belonging is the individual's awareness of how he or she is positioned as part of one or more groups or communities. Everyone takes as reference or role models those human groups that directly influence their characteristics and perception of oneself. Depending on how many traits one shares with members of a particular group, they are more likely to identify with it seeing those characteristics as evidence that they are part of something larger. Group size does not matter. A sense of belonging can be formed in any group, and what really matters is the traits an individual shares with its members. The best example is the family, with which, however small, everyone shares both physical and behavioural traits in addition to the common existence and emotional and economic dependence. Family is the first group with which we establish contact, and it is key to our survival and cultural development; therefore, it is the first community with which we develop a sense of belonging. As we grow up, we are exposed to contacts with different groups, such as neighbours on the same street, classmates, other children with similar interests, and all kinds of different social groups that shape our identity and could awaken feelings of belonging.

Any social group can give us a sense of belonging as long as we identify with it and share some characteristic. This feeling is as complex a phenomenon as the social groups and identities that can emerge from them. Our sense of belonging is not limited to the family, city, or country we were born in, but also to other types of social groups related to culture, socioeconomic class, sports teams, race, religion, profession, hobbies, and more. There are many different social groups that can build a sense of belonging to a greater or lesser degree, such as:

- cultural, e.g. Catalan, Basque, Scottish, Spanish;
- sports team, e.g. Arsenal, Napoli, Levski, CSKA;
- singer/band fan: Belieber, AC/DC;
- religion: Christians, Jews, Muslims;
- political ideology: communist, socialist, liberal, etc.

The type of group projects a certain opinion, for example, if the group, to which we feel a sense of belonging, is small, we tend to say that we were lucky to be part of a select and exclusive group, while if the group is large, we tend to be thankful that we are in such an important community. Therefore, when someone comments on the limitation of the group we belong to, we become defensive instead of being convinced.

The loss of sense of belonging to a given group is also the main driver facilitating manipulation, radicalization, and the attraction of a person to terrorist organizations and groups.

A socio-psychological model of a given terrorist group can be based on two aspects:

- social situation of the members of the terrorist organization.
- psychological model of behaviour of the members of the terrorist organization.

If we analyse the social status of terrorists, we will find that some of them are wealthy, while others have lived in poverty.

Members of terrorist organizations also differ in terms of their family background – some are representatives of the high society of their homeland, while others come from the lower class.

Regarding the socialization of members of terrorist organizations in Western society, there is also conflicting data – some were well integrated into the Western society, others felt rejected by it. The worrying new trend is observed, i.e. intervention of external to the family forces. When trying to understand how a given individual undertakes extreme actions and commits a terrorist act, we must also track that person's steps.

Above, the fundamental understandings of the socio-psychological development of the personality have been discussed. But the underlying reasons and the correlations between them have not been considered, together with their impact on radicalization of the entire family. What follows is an attempt to investigate whether family terrorism exists or is a myth.

## **2. FAMILY TERRORISM: MYTH OR REALITY?**

Indonesia has seen a series of terrorist attacks in recent years with some footage from the scene showing the attack carried out by a family of five, including an eight-year-old child. Four of the adult terrorists died on the spot, and the child survived with serious injuries. *"The family's eight-year-old girl survived the attack and was taken to hospital, while her mother, father and two brothers died in the blast,"* national police chief Tito Karnavian said (Ebinghauzen, 2015).

In another case, this type of terrorist act was repeated, but it escalated into a multi-pronged terrorist attack that took place in three churches, in which many civilians were injured and killed. The police data on the perpetrators of the attacks again show the participation of an entire family of six members, with three minors. The mother together with her two daughters aged 9 and 12, who were wearing belts with explosives, blew themselves up in one of the churches. The father blew himself up in another church, and their two sons, aged 16 and 18, hit the third church. The special services announced that the Jamaah Ansharut Daulah group, linked to the Islamic

State (IS) terrorist organization, was behind the blasts, and the family was among hundreds of Indonesians who had returned from Syria. These bombings were the bloodiest in Indonesia in more than decades. The Southeast Asian country has long suffered from Islamic extremism, including the 2002 Bali bombings that killed 202 people – most of them foreign tourists – in the biggest terrorist attack in the country’s history. Since 2015, twenty women and fifteen children have taken part in terrorism activity in Indonesia (Temby, 2020).

The big question is: What motivated the entire family to commit the terrorist act? Was their choice conscious or guided by external influence? An interesting fact is also the different ages of the participants – 9, 12, 16, 18 years old and their parents. Another fact is the different gender – girls and boys became suicide attackers. The question whether they were radicalized at the same time or in different places and committed a single act or whether the radicalization took place within the family remains unanswered. What is known as a fact is that there are many training camps for terrorists, where male and female terrorists are separated by gender and age. Which was the driving force for the terrorist’s acts: the way of life or the faith? In order to analyze the driving force, I suggest it is necessary to introduce the concept of the **invisible choice**. In my understanding, this is the choice which remains unclear to researchers and analysts, but it influences a person to decide to commit a certain act. Were these Indonesian children aware of the act they were committing, or were they used as a cover-up? Many questions with few answers, but the reason is the complexity of the psyche. There are many reasons that can push a person to terrorism. The way of life, i.e. so-called ‘lifestyle’, is one of them, because it clearly reflects the moral values and worldview of each person.

Choice can be conscious or unconscious. When it is conscious, we take actions with a certain goal, and vice versa – when there are no such goals, our choice becomes unconscious. Searching for meaning and choosing awareness means looking outside ourselves. Before making a choice, you can ask yourself: “Is this good for me?” and “What will be the consequences of this action of mine?” If you are satisfied with the answers to the questions – act! Maybe these families found the right answer, or maybe it was shown to them.

More and more young people are caught up in the propaganda of terrorism. Islamic State continues to recruit like-minded people all over the world. More and more young people from Germany, Britain, Southeast Asia (the hotbed of new Islamists) and many other places are responding to jihadists’ call. Despite the measures taken against radicalization and extremism, terrorists always find loopholes to stultify all programmes and to recruit like-minded. Almost all countries have special programmes for de-radicalisation, counter-extremism, and counter-terrorism. These

programmes, however, are mainly aimed at already radicalized people serving, for example, sentences in places of deprivation. With their help, the authorities hope to ‘reverse’ the radical attitudes of the target groups, including social support for their families. Many experts, however, remain sceptical because they point out that, for example, Indonesians who go to fight in Syria, are mainly people who have previously gone through de-radicalization programmes (Ebinghauzen, 2015).

Another point of view for the reasons for involving entire families in committing a terrorist act analyses the deliberate radicalization of adolescents as rooted in the nuclear family. The personality theories of Freud, Jung, Rogers, Eysenck, etc. do not provide a clear explanation, but they provide guidelines for the study of terrorism. Unfortunately, personality psychology is not an exact science as biology or chemistry where there is a structure of knowledge. By analysing the personality development, we could find the key to the transformation of the person from an ordinary person to a terrorist. The question to be answered is whether the members of the families who have committed terrorist acts were aware of their actions.

We base the analysis of the stages that family members may have gone through on Freud’s theory, who made the greatest contributions to defining the terms ‘conscious’ and ‘unconscious’.

The unconscious is seen as the abode of our true selves, as the answer to our problems, or as some deep psychic well that connects us to the universe. It is where automated processes and instincts do their work.

The unconscious is the exact opposite of the conscious mind. Our conscious mind gives us the freedom to choose between the possibilities provided to us. Consciousness is personal, it is ours alone. Everything we think, feel, sense, perceive and do is phenomenological, i.e. it is not based on external reality, but on our subjective view of the world, which may be quite different from the common one. Therefore, in order to understand people, we need to understand them “from the inside”, and this fact makes the psychology of personality much more difficult than the physical sciences.

Presenting the theories of the conscious mind and the unconscious, we must also consider the stages of personality development, because the key to the radicalization of families might be there. Based on biology, we can consider at least three stages of development – fetus (embryonic development (or embryonic period), child and adult. In addition, we can also indicate three transitional stages: childhood, youth, and old age.

However, according to Erikson (1963), the psychological development of a person goes through 8 stages from birth to death.

- Birth to 12–18 months – Trust vs. mistrust.
- 18 months to 3 years – Autonomy vs. shame & doubt.
- 3 to 5 years (preschool age) – Initiative vs guilt.
- 5 to 12 years (School age) – Industry vs. inferiority

- 12 to 18 years (Adolescence) – Identity vs. confusion.
- 18 to 40 years (Early adulthood) – Intimacy vs. isolation.
- 40 to 65 years (Adulthood) – Generativity vs. stagnation.
- Over 65 years (Old age) Integrity vs. despair.

Each stage influences personal development. In search for the reason for radicalization of the adolescent family members involved in the attack, who were different ages – 9, 12, 16, 18 years old, we will analyse the stages, in which the children of the terrorist family fall by age. They fall into two of these eight stages – school age and adolescence. This fact explains the easier promotion of a certain ideology and upbringing in the family, as a hidden sequence of radicalization and easier continuity of a given cause by the children themselves in the family.

The first two children are of school age when they discover their own interests and realize that they are different from others as individuals. There is a desire to show that they can do things the right way. The problem is whether they can cope with the world around them. If they receive the necessary recognition from relatives and friends, they become diligent and motivated to succeed. However, if they receive a lot of negative feedback, they start to feel inferior and lose motivation. Family support is the key. If the goals of the parents are directed towards "Jihad", then they use the moment and show the right path to Allah. Feelings at this age are extremely important. The feeling of sadness that the world is not as it should be, coupled with the idea that one cannot change this situation, predisposes the individual to terrorist activity. Then the need to change the personality appears but accompanied by a reluctance for this to happen. Grief also occurs – a final stage, which can turn into depression as an extreme form of unrealistic sadness lasting long after the situation that initially provoked it has occurred. Accumulation of these feelings results in anger. Anger is similar to sadness because the world is not as it should be. But there is also the idea that one needs to change things. When one acts out of anger, it turns into aggression. If it goes into the subtype of anger - unrealistic anger - it leads to hostility that can harm the person and others. When there is awareness, there is also emotion, or at least an emotional tone, as the existentialists point out.

The other two children aged 16 and 18 had already passed through the previous stage and they complement their desires to carry out a terrorist activity while strengthening the motivating factors of their stage. Discovering or losing their individuality, they begin to search for their role. Here lies the key to this stage, because if parents force them to follow their way of life and thinking, they may do that following the role models which have been established in the family.

The vision of 'family terrorism' may be chilling, but it should not surprise us. More than ten years ago, US military intelligence officials in Iraq

found out that when a close family member had already been involved in the preparation or execution of a terrorist activity, this was the strongest motivating factor in determining whether someone would engage in militant extremist activity, be it Islamic or other. There are also cases of so-called ‘insiders’ in the security forces that are supposed to fight against terrorism. People who are part of these forces, are influenced by their family and resort to committing a terrorist act against their own organization inside the operating environment (army, police units, government agencies, etc.).

According to a study by the US New America research institute, more than a quarter of Western fighters have a family connection to jihad through relatives or some family connection to other jihadists who had already carried out terrorist attacks. The study also has found that three-quarters of Western fighters with family ties to jihad had a relative who had also been involved in terrorism (Burke, 2015).

Another study - by Penn State University - found that the contacts of 120 suspected "lone wolf" terrorists who grew up in different ideological and religious backgrounds, knew about them and their commitment to a particular extremist ideology. In a staggering 64 percent of cases, family members knew of the person's intent because he had told them and encouraged him to engage in terrorist-related activity (Burke, 2015).

“Recruiting is essentially done by people who are your equals. What really matters are kinship and friendship, not so much religion or place or anything else. It's a strong group phenomenon,” says Belgian specialist Rick Colset, who studies militant extremist networks around the world (Burke, 2015).

The participation of children from the families of terrorists and the reasons for their cold-blooded participation in active fighting or assassinations is a hot research topic. The reasons are strictly individual, but they can be grouped into:

- personal religious motivation;
- voluntary surrender of children to terrorist organizations at an early age by their own parents due to poverty or other reasons;
- children threatened with starvation or studying in madrassas financially supported by radical terrorist organizations and radical political parties;
- children born in the families of terrorists;
- children forcibly taken from their families and trained in terrorism.

According to P. Singer<sup>1</sup>, there is still no well-defined model for assessing why children are martyred: by force or by choice? He gives the example of a 14-year-old boy who took an active part in military fights with the US army in the summer of 2004 in the city of Najaf in Iraq. Personality

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<sup>1</sup> „The New Children of Terror“ is a chapter in *The Making of a Terrorist*, James Forest, ed. (Praeger, 2005)

development of this teenage boy was distorted by his parents who motivated him to become part of an organization and sacrifice himself for a 'higher purpose'. The boy's beliefs are extremely radical, because according to him the goal, i.e. a place in the paradise with Allah, justifies his actions. This is evidence not of voluntary, but of forced incorporation into a terrorist organization, because parents purposefully distort their child's consciousness. The child had heard from a very young age that his self-sacrifice would be a holy deed and he would receive great rewards for it. Children from radical Islam regions usually grow up in an extreme poverty. For them, the promise that if they fight in the name of Allah and give their lives as live bombs, they will become martyrs, is the motivating factor. If such thinking is stimulated by the parents who deliberately incite their child to terrorism, the child, unconsciously accepts the immoral (i.e. killing of innocent people) as natural and of high moral value.

In today's countering of radicalization and terrorism, the major problem is how to deal with children who are victims of the process of radicalization. When talking about children, one usually underlines their innocence, kindness, naivety, and lack of prejudice. In the eyes of the terrorist, however, children are nothing more than a means to achieve the goals of the organization.

According to "Voice of America", the description of the children-fighters (the so-called "Lions of the Caliphate") is as follows:

- their age is approximately from 8 to 15 years.
- their number is between 1100 and 2000 children.
- approximately 700 of these children were born on the territory of the Caliphate.
- they are direct witnesses of military actions, executions, and various types of physical punishment, which has resulted in psychological trauma.
- some of them have gone through military and ideological training.
- many of them are imprisoned in refugee camps after being captured.
- many of them die in the first months of their lives;
- over 600 of them are either victims of kidnapping and violent radicalization or have voluntarily joined the ranks of the organization.

Summarizing different points of view and theories, we can conclude that there are two main reasons for the emergence and existence of family terrorism:

**1/ conscious choice** – the adolescent passes through different stages of personality development and his/her parents or other social groups influence their thoughts, feelings, and emotions; or

**2/ unconscious choice** – when the consciousness is distorted by pathological changes that cause brain disorders, which in turn can lead to

manifestations as a result of unconscious processes and actions, i.e. the adolescent is used by their parents as a means to achieve their goals.

## CONCLUSION

It is important to stress that some of the children and young people who fall victims to radicalization and carry out terrorist activity on a religious basis, are not religious yet or are not Muslim. Parents deprive them of their own right to choose their religion and thrust them into a world of manipulation and lies. This world presents faith not as the center of religious vision, but as martyrdom, i.e. sacrifice by killing people of the other religion. It is a blind faith in a manipulated environment where there is only one 'proper' opinion and one way of 'proper' thinking. Thus, the opportunity to develop personality and critical thinking is lost. Children need to develop in a family environment in which they grow and socialize with peers. In terrorist organizations, however, the average age at which children are incited or taken from their families for terrorist activity or are turned into fighters by their own parents, is 8-9 years. The young age at which children begin to be manipulated and taught hatred and cruelty is unacceptable from legal and moral point of view. The inculcated thinking that martyr status, achieved as a result of suicidal killing of innocent people, has the highest moral value is the most serious problem that must find its solution before more children become victims of terrorism.

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