

## HABERMAS' COMMUNICATIVE RATIONALITY AS INDISPENSABLE IN SOLVING THE PROBLEM OF GLOBAL TERRORISM

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DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.23433.67684

### **Abstract**

*This research examines communicative rationality as indispensable for solving the problem of global terrorism. The menace of terrorism has become a global problem and so Habermas' theory of communicative rationality will play a very vital role in this research. This is because the deadly destructions of lives, properties and the world social caused and being caused by terrorist activities has led to the call for a critical examination of terrorism. This research is propelled by the following problems: what is the relation between terrorism and communication, if any? How can communicative rationality help in our quest to solve the problem of global terrorism? This research discovers and argues that terrorism is a form of communication. It is a means of communicating to a third party about perceived grievances, injustices and ills in the society. In other words, it is a failed form of communication as it does not aim at reaching mutual understanding. As a solution, we argued for Habermas' communicative rationality as an indispensable tool in mitigating global terrorism. In order to achieve our set objectives, we employed the method of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, because of the need to interpret Habermas' theory of communicative rationality in the light of global terrorism. This research therefore concludes that the world would be a better place if communicative rationality and dialogical encounter are applied in all their ramifications as against violence of any kind in order to ensure continuous peace and order in man's search for a better society.*

**Keywords:** Communicative Rationality, Terrorism, globalization, violence

### **Introduction**

The rising alarming rate of global terrorism has become a subject of concern in the global village and one of the major impediments to global peace and security. This concern is mainly because of the enablement provided terrorists by the weapons of mass destruction and the instruments of globalization. Now, more than ever, terrorists are more connected, organized, interconnected and have easier access to finance and weapons. The phenomenon of global terrorism came to its height in

the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York, USA. Since then, terrorism has gone global with increasing attacks and sophistication leading to more victims and casualties.

Global terrorism, some scholars have rightly opined, is a form of communication by the terrorists about their grievances and a medium of expressing their disdain for some policies of the state or the world at large. The justification or otherwise of such reasons is outside the scope of this study. The singular question that this research aims to answer is: how can communicative rationality of Habermas help in mitigating the menace of global terrorism? Consequent upon this, this research focuses on exposing and interpreting the concept of communicative rationality with a view of using it as a tool in solving global terrorism.

### **Habermas' Communicative Rationality**

Jurgen Habermas is a prominent German writer and philosopher who is known for his theory of communicative action or rationality. This theory was a reaction to the social problems of his time. Habermas' starting point is his view that man has the ability to communicate, and this attribute is a universal core. The idea of communicative action turns our attention binding energies of language, to the familiar background consensus, the reciprocal extension of trust and the more or less naive readiness for understanding on which we count in our everyday Praxis.<sup>1</sup> Communication is carried through language and the aim of communication is mutual understanding and cooperation. According to Habermas, "we are to be instructed by the voice of reason, in order by comparison of our life with lives of others".<sup>2</sup> For him, the concept of communicative action is the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relation.<sup>3</sup> He believes that the communication between the two partners is like a set of rational discussion stretching between practice and science.<sup>4</sup> Against this backdrop, we can judge and determine the rationality of a speaking and acting subject by how he/she acts as a participant in argumentation. The standard is:

Anyone participating in argument shows his rationality or lack of it by the manner in which he handles and responds to the offering of reason-s for or against claims. If he is "open to argument," he will either acknowledge the force of those reasons or seek to reply to them, either way he will deal with them in a "rational" manner. If he is "deaf to argument," by contrast, he may either ignore contrary reasons or reply to them with dogmatic assertions, and either way he fails to deal with the issues "rationally."<sup>5</sup>

It therefore follows that during argumentation, a participant who is willing to expose himself to criticism and open to rational expressions is the person that behaves well rationally. He exhibits the features of a good communication.

Furthermore, the theory of communicative action is a pragmatics of social interaction and social order. Communicative action aims at mutual understanding through language. Mutual understanding is possible because of man's capacity for reasons. Habermas' theory of communicative action aims at problem-solving and the rational reconstruction of meaning in an objective world. Communicative action brings about social order. It is the cultural anthropology of the everyday practice in the system-life-world contexts. Social interaction guarantees the conceptual framework of mechanical solidarity. Solidarity requires social cohesion and common conscience. According to Joan Ferrante, mechanical solidarity consists of social order and cohesion based on a common conscience or uniform thinking and behavior.<sup>6</sup> Solidarity refers to the cultural ties that bind people together in society. According to Joan Ferrante, social interaction is everyday events in which at least two people communicate and respond through language and symbolic gestures to affect one another's behaviour and thinking.<sup>7</sup> One very fundamental issue of social order is that it brings about social order and transformative dialogue. Social order has become a contemporary issue of global interdependence.

Another aspect of Habermas' theory is that it encompasses the idea of deliberative democracy. Communicative action therefore depends on the use of language oriented to mutual understanding.<sup>8</sup> It is good to note that the concept of the deliberative democracy has to do with the political public sphere. Deliberative democracy connotes the idea of public discussion. According to Iain Mackenzie, the plight of contemporary liberal democracies has been and continues to be a source of concern for democratic theorists in political philosophy.<sup>9</sup> The Habermasian perspective reflects the fact that in communicative action, beyond the function of achieving understanding, language plays the role of coordinating the goal directed activities of different subjects, as well as the role of a medium in the socialization of these very subjects.<sup>10</sup>

Deliberative democracy reflects on human rights, the right of political participation, the right of communication and it is a model of democratic setting that tends to overcome all failings of the purely representative model. According to Iain Mackenzie, Habermas describes conversation where everyone involved is concerned to reach an understanding with one another as communicative action.<sup>11</sup>

One important distinction that must be made for a proper understanding of the instant theory under study is the difference between strategic and communicative action. Strategic action is a division of instrumental action. Instrumental action essentially is action intended to achieve a definite pragmatic goal. It is utility in nature. Hence it follows the means-end line of rationality. That is, the thinking that takes into cognizance the most efficient and effective means to achieve a given goal. Instrumental action most often involves only an individual, that is, a rational being. Slightly differently, strategic action is that division of instrumental action where the defined goal(s) concern other people and their expressions. In contrast, communicative action, according to Habermas, "intends to achieve mutual understanding. Thus, in contrast to strategic action narrowly, or even instrumental action more generally, communicative action does not follow the means-end rationality. Instead, it encompasses an epistemic rationality of rhetoric and persuasion that follows what Habermas calls a universal pragmatics."<sup>12</sup>

In a nutshell, Habermas communicative action seeks to build a society based on common understanding, consensus and cooperation rather than strategic action in pursuit of personal goals. This is possible given human capacity for rationality and communication. Hence, communicative action "is action based upon this deliberative process, where two or more individuals interact and coordinate their action based upon agreed interpretations of the situation."<sup>13</sup> For Habermas, "reason can be defended only by way of critique of reason".<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, according to Habermas, the theory of communicative action has three interrelated concerns. 1. To develop a concept of rationality that is no longer tied to and limited by, the subjectivistic and individualistic premises of modern philosophy and social theory.<sup>15</sup> 2. To construct a two-level concept of society that integrates the life world and system paradigms. 3. Finally, to sketch out against this background a critical theory of modernity which analyzes and accounts for its pathologies in a way that suggests a redirection rather than an abandonment of the project of enlightenment?

Hermeneutically, Habermas' response to the decline of the paradigm of consciousness is an explicit shift to the paradigm of language not language as a syntactic or semantic system, but to language in use or speech.<sup>16</sup> Thus, he develops the categorical framework and normative foundations of his theory in the form of a general theory of communicative action. For him, if we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activity of its members and that this coordination is established through communication and in certain spheres of life, through communication aimed at reaching agreement. Then, the

reproduction of the species also requires satisfying the condition of rationality inherent in communicative action. He went to argue that our ability to communicate has a universal core-basic structure and fundamental rules that all subjects master in learning to speak a language. For him, communicative competence is not just a matter of being able to produce grammatical sentences. This is because in speaking, we relate to the world about us, to other subjects, to our own intentions, feelings, and desires. For him, in each of these dimensions, we are claims, even if usually only implicitly, concerning the validity of what we are saying, or presupposing claims for instance regarding the truth of what we say in relation to the objective world or claims concerning rightness, appropriateness, or legitimacy of our speech acts in relation to the shared values and norms of our social life world or claims to sincerity or authenticity in regard to the manifest expressions of our intentions and feelings. It is in fact to the experience of achieving mutual understanding in communication that is free from coercion that Habermas looks in developing his idea of rationality. The key to his notion of reaching understanding (*Verständigung*) is the possibility of using reasons of grounds to gain intersubjective recognition for criticizable validity claims. Thus, for him, communicative action requires an interpretation that is rational in approach.<sup>17</sup> For Habermas, an assertion can be called rational only if the speaker satisfies the conditions necessary to achieve the illocutionary goal of reaching an understanding about something in the world with at least one other participant in communication. This means that rational expressions have the character of meaningful actions intelligible in their context, through which the actor relates to something in the objective world.

Hence, it can be deduced according to him that only responsible persons can be rational. Well-grounded assertions and efficient actions, for Habermas, are certainly a sign of rationality, we do characterize as rational speaking and acting subjects who as far as it lies within their power avoid errors in regard to facts and means and relations. In context of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he or she is able to put forward an assertion and when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in the light of legitimate expectations.<sup>18</sup> We even call someone rational if he makes known a desire or an intention, expresses a feeling or a mood, shares a secret, confesses a deed, etc, and is then able to assure critics in regard to the revealed experience by drawing practical consequences from it and behaving consistently thereafter.

The rationality inherent in this practice is seen in the fact that a communicatively achieved agreement must be based in the end on reasons. Also, the rationality of

those who participate in this communicative practice is determined by whether, if necessary, they could, under suitable circumstances provide reasons for their expressions.

Thus, the rationality proper to the communicative practice of argumentation as a court of appeal that makes it possible to continue communicative action with other means when disagreements can no longer be repaid with everyday routines and yet are not to be settled by the direct or strategic use of force. He stated clearly that for the above reason that he believed that the concept of communicative rationality, which refers to an unclarified systematic interconnection of universal claims, can be adequately explicated only in terms of a theory of argumentation.

Thus, for him, we call a person rational who in the cognitive-instrumental sphere expresses reasonable opinions and acts efficiently; but this rationality remains accidental if it is not coupled with the ability to learn from mistakes, from the refutation of hypotheses and from the failure of interventions. For Habermas, we call persons rational when they can justify their actions with reference to existing normative contexts.

This means that anyone who systematically deceives himself about himself behaves irrationally but one who is capable of letting himself be enlightened about his irrationality possesses not only the rationality of a subject who is competent to judge facts and who acts in a purposive-rational way who is morally judicious and practically reliable and who evaluates with sensitivity and is aesthetically open minded; he also possesses the power to behave reflectively in relation to his subjectivity and to see through the irrational limitation to which his cognitive moral practical and aesthetic practical expressions are subject. Therefore, we call a person rational if he is ready to come to an understanding and reacts to disturbances by reflecting on linguistic rules.

Supporting the Habermasian's view, Peter Winch asserts that languages are linguistically articulated worldviews and correspondingly structured forms of life. Thus, communicative actors can achieve an understanding only by way of taking yes/no positions on criticizable validity claims. All of us according to Habermas make use of speech without which we would hardly be human. More than anything else, the concept of communicative action according to Habermas refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations whether by verbal or by extra verbal means.<sup>19</sup> The concept of communicative action according to Habermas presupposes language as the medium for a kind of reaching understanding, in the course of which

participants, through relating to a world, reciprocally raise validity claims that can be accepted or contested.

Hence, communicative action always requires an interpretation that is rational in approach. Communicative action equally has to do with processes of reaching understanding aimed at an agreement that meets the conditions of rationally motivated assent to the content of an utterance. Communicatively achieved agreement, for Habermas, has a rational basis, it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing the decisions of the opponents.

Going further, Habermas says that agreement can indeed be objectively obtained by force, but what comes to pass manifestly through outside influence or the use of violence cannot count subjectively as agreement.<sup>20</sup> Agreement for him rests on common convictions. Thus, for him, the speech act of one person succeeds only if the other accepts the offer contained in it by taking (however implicitly) a yes or no position on validity claim that is in principle criticizable. Reaching understanding according to Habermas is the inherent telos of human speech.

On the other hand, he says that we are regarding the communicative acts with the help of which speakers and hearers come to an understanding about something as mechanism for coordinating actions. Finally, while discussing about communicative rationality; he defines Philosophy to be the conscious effort to knit all our knowledge and insight into a linguistic structure in which all things are called by their right names. Therefore, communicative rationality according to Habermas refers primarily to the use of knowledge in language and action, rather than to a property of knowledge. While in sociology, communicative action is cooperative action undertaken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation.

### **The Concept of Global Terrorism**

Terrorism is difficult to conceptualize as there is no known generally acceptable definition of the word. This is because of the emotive nature of the word and the often-quoted maxim that “one man’s terrorism is another man’s freedom fighter.” That said, etymologically, terrorism comes from the French word *terrorisme*. It initially emerged as a descriptor for the actions of French revolutionaries against their domestic enemies from 1793-1794. *Terrorisme* in turn comes from the Latin *terrere* meaning to frighten. As a concept, terrorism has remained a controversial

word for scholars and governments to define. It is a concept that has varying meanings and perspectives. There are over 150 definitions of terrorism in literature. But, the often and most quoted definitions are the ones given by Carsten Bockstette. In his words: "Terrorism is defined as political violence in an asymmetrical conflict that is designed to induce terror and psychic fear (sometimes indiscriminate) through the violent victimization and destruction of noncombatant targets (sometimes iconic symbols). Such acts are meant to send a message from an illicit clandestine organization." Hoffman in his writing observes the following features of terrorism: Terrorism is ineluctably political in aims and motives; violent, or, equally important, threatens violence; designated to have far-reaching psychological repercussions beyond the immediate victim or target; conducted by an organization with an identifiable chain of command or conspiratorial cell structure (whose members wear no uniform or identifying insignia); and perpetrated by a sub national group or non-state entry.<sup>21</sup>

The above definitions have revealed some features that are peculiar to terrorism. In every occurrence of terrorism, there must be some terrifying act(s). It is the fear that some unacceptable consequence(s) will take place except the person or government the terrorist is trying to compel acts as demanded. Furthermore, terrorism is a concept that is politically, ideologically and religiously charged and an act that influences an audience beyond the immediate victim(s). according to Euro forum Study Guide, terrorist activities are:

Intentional acts, which may seriously damage a country or an international organization, intimidating a population, compelling a Government or an international organization to perform or abstain from performing any act, seriously destabilizing or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organization.<sup>22</sup>

In a nutshell, we adopt that global terrorism is "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate government or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological."<sup>23</sup> Global terrorism is terrorism carried out in the global arena, or put differently, terrorism that has become internationalized.

## **Understanding Terrorism as a Form of Communication**

To understand the place of communicative action in solving the problem of terrorism, it is important we first understand terrorism as a form of communication. Terrorism by its nature is a means of achieving other ends or goals. For example, the Islamist terrorist groups like Boko Haram, ISIS etc. aim to establish an Islamic caliphate in their areas of operation. Some other groups aim at showing their grievances and displeasures about a policy, a government through terrorist acts. So basically, terrorist acts are intentionally communicative. This common element in terrorism is what Mohsen calls "the rhetorical use of violence."<sup>24</sup> For Mohsen, terrorist acts are methods of communicating and persuading. In his words, "terrorism could be defined as the process of delivering a message through the use of symbolic acts, in the form of violence, to create a change on the part of the receiver's political behavior."<sup>25</sup> Also Crelinsten argues that "when we say that violence is the language of the inarticulate, what we mean is that violence is a form of communication used by those who cannot express what they feel in words or written tracts and publications, so they "act it out" in violent ways.

So, violence by the state or non-state actor can be conceived as a form of communication that coexists with other forms of communication, sometimes used in concert with them and sometimes used in their stead."<sup>26</sup> According to Hannah Arendt, some form of violence may sometimes be justifiable but may not be legitimate. Writing on the instrumental nature of terrorism, Martha Crenshaw argues that "There is an emerging consensus that suicide attacks are instrumental in a strategic form from the perspective of a sponsoring organization...They serve the political interest of identifiable actors, most of whom are non-state opposing well-armed states. This method is mechanically simple and tactically efficient,"<sup>27</sup>

Another aspect of the communicative nature of terrorism is the relationship between terrorism and the media. The media is an important tool in terrorist network. Hence, some scholars have rightly opined that the media is the oxygen of terrorists. By publishing and giving publicity to terrorist acts, the media becomes instrumental to achieving the terrorists' goals and objectives. Recall that one aim of terrorism is to create huge fear among a target audience and they can't achieve that without media coverage and publicity. Thus, this relationship with the media creates another form of communication.

### **Communicative Rationality as a Tool in Solving Global Terrorism**

Having argued and acknowledged that terrorism is a form of communication, it seems that it fails the Habermasian text of communicative action or rationality. Specifically, by drawing on Habermas' distinction between strategic and communicative action, we find that communicative action, even when it is directed towards achieving a strategic aim, still depends on mutual understanding. Hence, Habermas' model of communication is imperatively needed in order to close up the gap that terrorism creates. Simply put, the application of communicative action would help to mitigate terrorism.

Imbedded in Habermas' theory is the "discourse principle". This principle essentially states that "a rule of action or choice is justified, and thus valid, only if all those affected by the rule or choice could accept it in a reasonable discourse."<sup>28</sup> This principle sums up Habermas' argumentation theory for the justification of technical-pragmatic claims about the choice of effective means for achieving a given goal. Examining terrorism through the lens of this principle, it is clear that terrorism cannot be justified because there is no way all who are affected by it could accept it in a reasonable discourse.

Granted that terrorists have reasons for carrying out their activities, we posit that no matter the argument in support of such violent acts, it is a known fact that violence cannot permanently solve political or social problems. Instead, it worsens the already bad situation by leading to loss of lives and properties thereby making a bad situation worse. Hence, Lawrence C. Hamilton and James D. Hamilton affirm that, "terrorism is usually unsuccessful in bringing about the social changes sought by the terrorists, and it has a good chance of making those changes far more difficult to attain and so many case studies abound in our world about terrorists' attacks that have been counterproductive. Thus, the best option is through nonviolent methods of conflict resolution." This is what Habermas' communicative values attempts to accomplish. So, without such consciousness of shared responsibility and mutual understanding, the terrorists will never manage to see in democratic procedures the means for joint problem-solving.

Terrorist groups are often isolated groups working against the interests of the majority of the state; this is in conflict with the spirit of dialogue, tolerance, sharing and associated living. Hence, Habermas pushes for a form of deliberative democracy, in as much as it brings to the open the free political deliberation on conflicting interests. Through deliberations, conflicts are discussed and resolved. This deliberative method of problem solving will go a long way in solving the problem of terrorism in the world.

Implied in Habermas theory is the notion of dialogue and consensus, which is based on human dignity and respect for the other. This is the opposite of the activities of terrorist groups. The use of unlawful violence, which has led to the death of thousands of persons, is against the concept and spirit of dialogue. In fact, it shows the lack of respect for human dignity. Terrorism is a manifestation of the unwillingness of terrorists to follow the path of dialogue: this unwillingness to dialogue is against humanistic tendencies.

Thus, to solve the problem of global terrorism, dialogue must be employed as a means of resolving conflicts. There must be a genuine respect for other members of the society and genuine interest in deliberative discourse in respect of our differences in terms of religion, tribe and race. In line with this, Richard Rorty suggests that democracy consists of "the ability to see more and more traditional differences - tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like - as unimportant, and the ability to think of people widely different from ourselves as included in the range of us."<sup>29</sup> This respect for others is a communitarian virtue that springs from mutual interest as opposed to self-centeredness that is characteristic of terrorist organizations.

By a way of recapitulation, communicative action within the context of terrorism should be seen as a means and not an end in itself. It is a means to some more ultimate end; that the achievement of a more humane and peaceful society that all human beings irrespective of culture, race or colour can live as one. This last important is very imperative because of the religiously charged nature of terrorism.

## **Conclusion**

In sum, global terrorism has become an increasing source of worry to the international community. This is in part due to the devastating nature of terrorists' activities which are strongly propelled by the tools of globalization. Beyond the killings and bombings which are signature features of terrorism, we discovered that terrorism is a form of communication; it is a means of letting a government, state or organization know about a perceived grievance (s), injustice or bad policy. However, we argued that none of the above-mentioned reasons are good enough to justify the killings and maiming of human beings.

Essentially that was the reason Hannah Arendt advocated that violence sometimes may be justifiable but it never will be legitimate.<sup>30</sup> Be that as it may appear,

terrorism therefore is a failure of communication. It is our recommendation that to mitigate global terrorism, there is the need to incorporate Habermas' theory of communicative rationality into our value system. Simply put, the values of communication, consensus, dialogue, tolerance and value for human life and dignity are to be enthroned in our society. Achieving mutual understanding in communication is very paramount. Let us remember according to Jurgen Habermas that communicative action is cooperative action undertaken by individuals based upon mutual deliberation and argumentation.

So, this research paper concludes that the world will be a better place if Habermas' communicative rationality and dialogical encounter are applied in its ramifications against violence of any kind in order to combat global terrorism which has eaten deep into the fabric of peace and stability of the world.

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