

Religious terrorism and the media | essay



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When the term “terrorism” is mentioned to any individual, the term is most likely to be associated with Islamic terrorist groups such as ISIS or Al-Qaida. Although there is an assumption that religious terrorism is confined to one religion as that is what is being portrayed the most within academic readings and news media, however, the notion of that belief is false. Many religious terrorist attacks have been made throughout history on behalf of a religions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Hinduism. However, due to the media presenting most terrorist attacks made by popularized terrorist groups such as ISIS and Al-Qaida, it can overshadow other religious terrorist acts that have occurred and may be assumed that religious terrorism is confined to one religion.

Within society, the use of media has a major influence as it connects society with current events that happen internationally. However, with the way the media has been structured, only the most interesting news events that occur presents itself to audiences as other current events are overshadowed or set aside equally presenting itself amongst other news. In *Religious conflicts in today's mass media* (luhas, 2013) the article analyzes the media coverage of religious conflict with the intent to discover how religious conflicts are portrayed within the media. Throughout the investigation, luhas (2013, p. 373) found that social groups have shown that they rely on the information presented by the media as it concerns their well-being within society.

Knowing media is being used as a prime source for information on current events, journalists adapt news stories by using vocabulary and syntax that are influenced by several sources such as their public audience, mass culture, and the pressure of unknown events to appeal more to audience

(luhas, 2013, p.). By using vocabulary that is influenced by society to adhere to their needs, it manipulates the audiences' perception of the events around them to adhere to the reality and truth of the events that occur (luhas, 2013, p. 373). By contorting the truth about the conflicts that occur, it can personally affect an individuals' attitude when viewing a violent news story such as terrorist propaganda. A study was conducted to measure anxiety levels amongst participants, who were religious and non-religious, while watching various forms of terrorism media footage as they were split into an experimental and a control group (Slone, 2000, p. 512). Two groups were created as to observe the difference of anxiety-levels between both groups. The experimental group was showed footage of terrorism campaigns that could inflict their well-being, while the control group also viewed terrorism media footage, but in context that did not affect their lives (Slone, 2000, p. 513-514). Results of study concluded that anxiety-levels for participant who viewed the experimental footage and were non-religious appeared to be higher than those who viewed the control group footage as there was no differences shown in anxiety-levels (Slone, 2000, p. 515-516). Concluding from the study and the media tactic of using vocabulary to appeal to audiences, with viewing media stories of terrorism that could possibly effect society and the use of contorting the reality of the current events the combination of the two distorts the individual's perception of the violent actions that occur and need to be educated about these events in order to understand the events that are occurring. Nonetheless, the relationship between the media and terrorist organizations can be seen as symbiotic as both groups can benefit from the others work.

As media has the main source for terrorist organizations in modern day society, the objective to be on mass media is by gaining publicity and the legitimacy as the media brings attention to their followers and sympathizers (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 52). With the use of media in terrorist organizations the connection between the two can be seen as a symbiotic relationship as both are dependent on each other as they both gain resources they need from the others actions (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 52). With the known fact that terrorist organizations have a need to be on prime-time television to gain publicity and awareness to their followers and sympathizers, the media gains news coverage from this unusual relationship. The field of media coverage is a competitive market as each media station is wanting to be the first to cover any major news story (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 54). With that being said, the media will respond to any terrorist propaganda as it will be automatically deemed bad news (Wilkinson, 1997, p. 54-55). However, although media will cover terrorist acts when it occurs, ultimately terrorist attacks can be overshadowed by other terrorist attacks that were made by other popularized terrorist organizations that are more appealing to media stations and audiences.

When relating terrorism to a certain society, some may never assume that terrorism would be seen in North America, especially in America. However, religious terrorism is relevant within the United States as it is most often known as domestic terrorism, although this particular type of terrorism it can be linked to religious ideologies as it gives the acts of terrorism a legitimacy for their actions (Sharpe, 2000, p. 605). The Identity Christian movement is a form of Christianity that follows and outgrows the White supremacy

philosophy as it is composed of several components that leads to the belief that the White race is superior than other minorities with their evidence found within their own creation of the origin story of how humanity was created and within the Bible (Sharpe, 2000, p. 606). Organizations that adhere to the White supremacy philosophy includes neo-Nazis and the Ku Klux Klan, in which, they target several social groups such as homosexuals, African Americans, Jews, Hispanics, and Asians (Sharpe, 2000, p. 604). Although there is evidence that religious ideologies come into conflict with domestic terrorism, government officials will not refer domestic terrorism as religious terrorism as acts of violence that target religions and ethnic minorities are considered hate crimes as opposed to terrorist attacks against the targeted groups. The Identity Christian movement consists of biblical context and theories that allow the White supremacist followers to engage in violent acts on the behalf of their religious belief that the White race will restore humanity to its former glory.

Another religious terrorist group known as the Aum Shinrikyo was known to be a religious organization in Japan that based their teachings and doctrines on Buddhism and Hinduism that were also involved with violent acts such as murdering and kidnapping citizens (Metraux, 1995, p. 1140). The terrorist organization had a rapid growth with having initially 10, 000 members in 1987 and expanding operations in 1992 in countries such as the United States, Russia, and Sri Lanka (Metraux, 1995, p. 1140). Although the religious group is seen as a cult rather than a terrorist group, the Aum Shinrikyo appealed to individuals as their religious intent was to relieve suffering and poverty within Japan but moved their intent as they grew to the

“ need of self-awareness in a control-oriented society” (Metraux, 1995, p. 1141). Although the teaching of Aum Shinrikyo can be seen as helpful to members as Buddhism concepts are used in the organization, the terrorist group, however, made violent plans using the resources they had within the group such as scientists to create a gas 5, 000 times stronger than sarin gas (Metraux, 1995, p. 1153). With no evidence to prove that the leaders of Aum Shinrikyo were involved in planning such violent acts, the perception to society was that Aum Shinrikyo was “ an authentic religious organization” (Metraux, 1995, p. 1154) despite the evidence of the intent to cause harm to Japan society.

The conclusions that religious terrorism can be used on behalf of any religion can be seen as it has been done on by the Identity Christian movement and Aum Shinrikyo. However, analyzing tactics the media such as altering media stories to appeal more to audiences and to display a sense of safety within society, in relation to domestic terrorism within North America. The notion that the media has a position is creating the perspective that religious terrorism is confined to one religion.

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