

COMMENTARY

Political Violence and Behavioral Economics

Vincenzo Ruggiero*

ECONOMISTS HAVE OFTEN PAID VISITS TO THE FIELD OF CRIMINOLOGY, examining the rational logic of offending. According to Gary Becker (1968, 170), crime is an important activity or industry that deserves systematic scientific attention and “a useful theory of criminal behavior can dispense with special theories of anomie, psychological inadequacies, or inheritance of special traits and simply extend the economist’s usual analysis of choice.” Lest readers be repelled by the apparent immorality of an economic framework applied to the analysis of crime, Becker (1968, 209) reminded us that “two important contributors to criminology during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Beccaria and Bentham, explicitly applied an economic calculus.”

Most economists studying crime seek to estimate the social loss it causes and to find the optimal levels of expenditure to minimize it. However, their almost exclusive reliance on rational choice theory, which shapes what they see as predictable individual responses to incentives, has been criticized not least because public policy so designed assumes that human actors always make choices that are in their best interest. As illegal conduct is deemed rational, guided by a thorough examination of costs and benefits, mass incarceration rates and increased harshness are seen as ideal strategies to deter illegal choices (Loughran 2019).

Analyses of political violence are interspersed in the history of criminological thought. At times they are concealed behind other theoretical and practical concerns, but in some cases they are explicit and direct. In Beccaria and Bentham we find notions of sedition and crime against the state, respectively. The positivist school dwells on philanthropic murderers and regicide, while in functionalism we encounter the concept of morbid effervescence associated with violent political actors. Violent militancy is

* VINCENZO RUGGIERO (V.Ruggiero@mdx.ac.uk) is Professor of Sociology at Middlesex University in London. His most recent books include *The Crimes of the Economy* (2013), *Power and Crime* (2015), *Dirty Money* (2017), *Visions of Political Violence* (2020), and *Critical Criminology Today* (2021).

the focus of some Chicago school studies and the classical contributions of conflict theory were followed by analyses of organized hostility elaborated by the new criminologists of the 1970s and 1980s. Labeling and symbolic interactionism have proposed interpretations of group violence linked with political contention, and a criminology of war has emerged in recent decades addressing international conflict and terrorism (Jamieson 2014, McGarry & Walklate 2016, Ruggiero 2006). The approach proposed here is not meant to discard this rich criminological patrimony, but simply to provide an additional analytical angle from which the subject matter can be observed.

The first section of this paper offers a brief account of rational choice theory applied to the study of terrorism and other forms of political violence. A concise enumeration of the principles that constitute behavioral economics forms the second section, followed in the third by an attempt to analyze contemporary terrorism (and responses to it) through some of these principles. The analysis will address three discrete areas, defined below, as the area of radicalization, the area of armed struggle and, finally, the area of terrorism.

Rational Choice and Political Violence

Mass atrocities have been linked to unfair distributions of wealth in situations characterized by harsh competition for land, labor, capital, and, in general, access to well-being (Gilpin 2015). Scarcity, opportunity cost, comparative advantage, and rational choice are among the variables utilized (Anderton & Brauer 2016), leading to suggestions that such atrocities may be prevented through macroeconomic incentives. Rational and strategic behavior is said to also pervade religious terror, leading to suggestions that it incorporates a notion of utility. The pursuit and maximization of one's interests, it is claimed, includes the attainment of nonmaterial goals such as spiritual fulfillment and a glorious afterlife. Utility, on the other hand, is also conceived as solidarity and generosity toward others. In this sense, the rational choice model is said to contain kernels of egotism and altruism that form a dual core and might explain even the conduct of violent actors inspired by religious creed (Nemeth 2017).

This rational choice framework gives central attention to constrained utility maximization, namely the process of obtaining results, under given restrictions, when the highest level of utility cannot be reached. Consequently, terrorists are described as realists in terms of the potential outcomes of their actions, which are configured as a logical political choice among

alternative actions (Purpura 2008). The benefits they pursue include global media exposure, intimidation of the enemy, and clamorous propaganda addressed to potential recruits. Osama Bin Laden may have aimed at “bleeding America to the point of bankruptcy,” but was probably happy that the 9/11 attacks of September 11, 2001 cost New York City alone \$95 billion, while the estimated cost of the war on terror is £4.4 trillion (Antonoglou 2018).

Institutional responses to violent political actors can alter the cost of their engagement in attacks. Anderton and Carter (2006), for instance, posit that deterrence and benevolence have a different dissuasive strength. The former raises the cost of terrorism (as Becker would suggest) by imposing harsh penalties or implementing confrontational practices. The latter, by contrast, may lower the cost of alternative political activities that renounce violence. Moreover, if we see the terror choice as one of the consequences of the limited political space offered to dissent, then expanding the availability of legitimate political opportunities may therefore reduce terror (Ruggiero 2020).

A critique of rational choice theory is found in schools of thought that are grouped under structuralism and constructivism and that position persons as not just independent actors making independent decisions but as products of the social conditions in which they live. They also construct their own knowledge: reality is determined by experiences. In general terms, rational choice theory appears to ignore exogenous factors as well as historical, cultural, and social externalities. Personal experience, impulsiveness, and feelings of injustice that shape rage and revenge do not lend themselves to economic calculus. Moreover, a rational choice framework fails to consider the flawed cognitive processes that characterize decision-making.

Behavioral Economics

Homo economicus is presumably capable of processing unlimited information, achieving deep self-understanding, maximizing utility, and never deviating from the pursuit of egoistic interest. Behavioral economics evicts this central character of rational choice theory from the scene, depicting human beings as computationally inferior and morally superior to this fictional actor. Behavioral economics argues that we are neither totally successful in collecting meaningful information nor totally apt at making self-interested choices (Haldar 2018, Thaler 2015). We possess a prosocial kernel, we have passions and, at times, our self-respect and morality are more powerful motivators than material gain (Bowles 2017, Sandel 2013).

Based on findings mostly derived from experiments, behavioral economics highlights how our decisions are not merely guided by rational calculation but are influenced by social and psychological factors (Baddeley 2017). Intuitive and empirical accounts of decision-making are therefore offered, proving that our rationality is selective as well as bounded. We are constrained by a lack of mathematical skills and relevant information, so that our choices are often the result of cognitive short-cuts known as heuristic biases (Simon 1955, 1978). Our rationality is also situational or ecological, in the sense that it adapts to precise circumstances (Smith 2003) and is practical in that decisions require swiftness and simplicity (Gigerenzer 2014). In fact, we may even decide not to decide, remaining in inert areas and sticking to the status quo: when making such sticky choices, presumably, we consider the costs of making decisions too high (Leibenstein 1976). In brief, behavioral economics investigates what motivates decision-making, how we judge or misjudge risk, and how emotions lead us to choose (Baddeley 2017). Our beliefs may be biased or distorted, or they may feed overconfidence, wishful thinking, or willful blindness. Optimistic beliefs, however, can also encourage groupthink and team morale. Beliefs, in brief, are affected by context, can lead to poor decisions, and may have material as well as psychological costs.

Motivations can be intrinsic and extrinsic; that is, they can originate from an internal drive or from external pressure. The former exemplify choices that enhance our self-respect or professional pride, or are consistent with our moral, religious, or political values. The latter are those that defeat our reluctance to act in exchange for social approval. Extrinsic motivations can crowd out intrinsic motivations (Frey & Jegen 2001), as in the well-known experiment conducted in a nursery, where a fine was introduced for parents arriving late to collect their children. The result was that more parents started arriving late: payment turned out to be demotivating, as parents interpreted the fine less as a deterrent than as a price (Gneezy & Rustichini 2000). Similarly, when researchers investigated the effect of introducing payments for blood donors, they recorded the unpredicted effect that payments lowered rather than raised people's willingness to donate: "[o]ne explanation could be that the extrinsic motivation from monetary payments undermined donors' intrinsic motivation to be good citizens" (Baddeley 2017, 12).

Because choices are inspired by others whom we elect as reference points and mirror what we think others' choices would be, herd behavior is based on assumptions that other people hold more information about the effects of decisions than we do. This may result in a negative externality when the assumption is incorrect. The safeguarding of reputation is therefore another

motivator of conduct, although herd behavior and quick decision-making may prove deleterious in this respect. An overload of information, for instance, often leads to economizing on time and cognitive effort, thus compelling us to make quick choices (heuristics) that may end up damaging rather than safeguarding our reputation.

Behavioral economics applied to the analysis of crime utilizes, among its explanatory tools, prospect theory and dual process decision-making (Pogarsky et al. 2017). Prospect theory replaces the utility function with the value function and, although retaining the notion that decision-making for gains is related to the perception of risk, it expresses a different view of losses. In brief, risk preference is asymmetric, in the sense that “people tend to be risk averse for gains, but risk seeking when facing losses” (Pogarsky et al. 2017, 5). As for the dual process characterizing decision-making, it is argued that offending behavior (like all behavior) is guided by both rational and irrational elements, and that the underlying reasoning is both hot and cold. The former is intuitive, automatic, and fast, designating an affective mode of reasoning derived from emotions such as fear and anger. The latter is deliberative and slow, indicating a relatively rational process leading to action and linked with expected outcomes (Kahneman 2011). Hot reasoning provides instantaneous answers, or shortcuts, to questions about risk, such as the likelihood of apprehension and punishment (Pogarsky et al. 2017). A final concept derived from behavioral economics that will help the analysis of political violence is nudging (Thaler & Sunstein 2009), understood for our purposes as the enacting of a policy that might influence the choice of political actors. As we shall see, this concept will not be applied to those who already act violently but those who do not (or do not yet) do so.

Radicalization

The process of radicalization is often delinked from a cost-benefit calculus. At times it may entail a purely tentative form of decision-making, namely an awareness that the choice being made is reversible. Radicalization does not necessarily lead to immediate violent action, as it may result in taking distance from official political contention, or even exiting the world rather than striving to change it. Radicalization can foster feelings of revenge, which is one of the motivating factors for human violence. It may also trigger murderous fantasy or homicidal ideation, which remain, however, at the inchoate stage (Eisner 2017). Commonly, it provides identification with groups engaged in contentious politics whose long-term goal is a radically changed social system. For this reason, radicalization cannot be examined

against the framework of conventional economics, for instance through expected utility theory. Ideologically, radical preferences do not entail the weighing of future risk nor of immediate costs. Radicalization characterizing sympathizers, for instance, when limited to the personal process of shaping a political identity, only requires abstract loyalty. It does not rely on mathematical skills in predicting future satisfaction or happiness; rather, it is informed by the positive feeling of belonging to a community, a network of us that is morally superior to the horde of them.

Radicalization begins with questioning conventional narratives of conflict, the set of principles and constructs that justify and support the supremacy of certain groups and their right to privilege. Such narratives provide abstract definitions of liberty, and at the same time, by claiming neutrality and abstention from choice, in fact they make a partisan choice, built on enmity toward others. Radicalization offers the possibility of unveiling the power relations embedded in dominant claims and official lies. The cognitive aspects of this process revolve around the gathering and ordering of information and events in a logical whole, resulting in the abandonment of ineffective politics and the rejection of ritualistic contentious action stifled by the democratic routine and reflected in the painless coexistence of radically opposed views. The radicalized share dreamy ideas and hopes, while pursuing an imaginary nobility through potential subversion. Revenge ideations do take shape but they do not prompt aggressive action.

Radicalization cannot, as suggested by Sartre (1938/2011), be equated to conspiracy, although like conspiracy it may amount to a temporary ideological choice that can always be reversed. It is not fed by whispering, by sharing little mysteries and inventing implausible dangers, nor does it spread because of the limited risks it implies. Beneath radicalization there is no individual computation of costs and benefits, as the consequences of a radical choice will also depend on future events occurring in the world around us. In this respect, behavioral economics posits that we rejoice in some decisions and regret others, but rejoicing and regretting will only affect us when the future will tell us how much pleasure or displeasure our choices have produced. Regret theory, in brief, delinks happiness from our calculated choices and preferences, allowing us to assess our decisions retrospectively, that is, after we are faced with a situation that, by making decisions, we have created.

Armed Struggle

Not all political violence is confined within the bounds of fantasy and limited to nonaggressive opinion. Armed struggle possesses a guiding framework

that prefigures specific objectives and inscribes action into a sociopolitical trajectory. The program followed by armed struggle is part of a cognitive map of sorts that locates actors and their experiences of conflict within a meaningful whole. Those engaged express values and harbor shared beliefs, which may prefigure a completely new social system and in doing so establish definite battle lines. The spread of beliefs is crucial for the development of armed struggle, while communication preparing people for action is normally expressed through an informal exchange of views or through organized propaganda and agitation. What is important here is the power of the transmitted images and beliefs, along with the effectiveness of the established communication machinery. For this reason, those engaged in armed struggle are under the constant pressure to calibrate their objectives with those that mobilize social movements so that these can provide sympathy, support, or even recruits. National liberation struggles are examples of armed struggles, as are other violent conflicts around the distribution of material and symbolic resources and between competing political ideologies.

Those involved in armed struggle embrace a commitment that sets them apart from other fighters and from those violating the law for private gains, unless gains are instrumental for the continuation of the fight and the advancement of the cause. Commonly, armed struggle involves violence against state actors or elite individuals, namely persons deemed individually responsible for the injustice suffered by fighters and those they purport to represent (for example, a class or an ethnic group). This type of violence may appear as the result of rational choice but is more accurately described as the outcome of the dual process of decision-making as elaborated by behavioral economics. The combatants, on the one hand, are confident that their rationally planned attacks will ignite support and participation by sectors of the society in which they operate, while on the other hand they reveal hot reasoning through the shortcuts that simultaneously lead them to action. As politically dissatisfied individuals, they release accumulated anger while dressing it as a strategic means to produce expected utility; as Sloterdijk (2016) would contend, they draw from the deposit of rage they find in social movements as if the latter were banks. Their use of force is perfectly congruent with the view that social change is usually brought about violently within the inevitable course of history.

There are key emotional factors that accompany the choice to join armed struggle. There are intentional emotions, emotions directed at cognitively explicable objects and ideas; in other words, emotions that are sensitive to reason. Thus, armed struggle can become an option if it is included among

the forms through which one's social group has traditionally expressed its demands for change. In brief, the emotional aspect of joining armed organizations is rationalized through the fact that armed struggle belongs to the social group's repertoire of action. On the other hand, there is affect, a nonintentional emotion deemed to possess a presubjective, visceral nature that is nonlinear, autonomous, anomalous, indeterminate, and unpredictable: in a word, affect disrupts fixed or conventional meanings. Armed struggle may also contain this type of emotion.

Social movements and armed struggle are also propelled by living memory, the practical knowledge of historical events, of mindsets and beliefs belonging to one's social groups and political traditions. Living memory for participants in contentious politics resembles the practical knowledge that characterizes craftsmanship and art work (Stiegler 2017). Like every painter who sums up the history of painting (Deleuze 2004), we might say that political activists (violent or not) recapitulate the history of the fight carried out by the social group they claim to represent.

Behavioral economics focuses on a key dimension of decisions by examining attitudes toward time. Patience and impatience are determined by our time preference and behavioral economics suggests that we are patient when pursuing long-term tasks but highly impatient when aiming at immediate outcomes (O'Donoghue & Rabin 2001). This time inconsistency, when armed organizations are concerned, leads to shortcuts favoring violent action, namely a form of present bias paradoxically originating from the past. Violence in pursuit of social change persists in theory and practice as imitation of past heroes, or as celebration of historical victories. Struggles often leap into the past, appropriating principles and concrete modalities of action that can give the optimistic impression of political continuity (Benjamin 1942/1992). The leap into the past is meant to keep the collective memory alive and to revive a repertoire of action that proved effective, although the imitation of that repertoire in a totally different context may prove disastrous.

Random Killing

Adopting a narrow working definition, we can propose that contemporary terrorism consists in the deliberate killing of innocent people, of noncombatants at random. This type of political violence is deemed unresponsive to incentives, uninterested in narrow self-interest, and devoid of rational expectation. In more detail, sympathizers are seen as only slightly deviating

from economic calculus, their commitment being marginal and occasional. Active terrorists, on the other hand, are said to stray from narrow self-interest and rational expectations while, finally, suicidal terrorists are described as aloof from both (Caplan 2006).

Other analyses focus on processes of radicalization in preexisting political movements (della Porta 1995), on the sense of identity the former share with the latter, or on the self-consideration of those involved as members of a broader oppressed and humiliated community (de la Corte Ibáñez 2014). In the vast literature available we find studies on the relationship between terrorism and social exclusion (Walklate & Mythen 2016), terrorism and wealth (Krueger 2007), terrorism and levels of education (Gambetta & Hertog 2016), terrorism and religion (Juergensmeyer 2000, 2017), and much more. Individual psychological factors have been investigated by Moghadam (2005), while interpretations describing terrorism as a significance quest (Victoroff & Kruglanski 2009) are supplemented by those linking it to feelings of “weakness, irrelevance, marginalization and subordination experienced by Muslim people,” combined with the memory of the glorious past of a great transnational civilization (Toscano 2016, 123). Some authors have studied the formation and shape of networks (Sageman 2008, 2017), while others have associated the invasion of Muslim countries with the emergence of organized violent resistance (Gerges 2015, Lynch 2015), and yet others have pinpointed how labeling processes and Islamophobia end up enhancing radicalization (Abbas & Awan 2015, Ahmed 2015, Khan 2016, Ruggiero 2017).

A comprehensive review of the literature on the subject matter is beyond the remit of this article. Rather, it may be worth focusing on some specific aspects of that literature that lend themselves to a behavioral economic analysis. One such aspect indicates that contemporary international terrorists are often led by resentment born of the humiliation suffered by people to whom they feel close. This form of distant suffering (Boltanski 1999) was investigated by McDonald (2018, 29), who found that radicalization can stem from “shocking images of injured Palestinians, fathers holding children with limbs that have been blasted off, dead bodies in rubble.”

Bombers can be described as devoted actors who feel that it is their duty to defend their identities and their cherished values irrespective of the costs incurred. Devoid of instrumental rationality, such actors regard their preferences as nonnegotiable (Atran 2017). They avoid calculus and disregard consequences while pursuing group cohesion: “Identity fusion occurs when personal and group identities collapse into a unique identity to generate a

collective sense of invincibility and special destiny” (Atran 2017, 70). Pure rationality cannot therefore give a complete account of suicide missions, and motivations can be delinked from consequences. Emotions related to pain, personal loss, humiliation, hate, or revenge can play a decisive motivational role (Ricolfi 2005).

To sum up, terrorists do deviate from the pursuit of egoistic interests, they do possess a prosocial kernel along with passion and, at times, they experience self-respect and morality as more powerful motivators than material gain. As behavioral economics would posit, actors are risk seeking when faced with loss; in this case, loss refers to dignity, respect, and reputation. Rationality is bounded, situational, or ecological, as it adapts to circumstances and feelings, while motivations can be both intrinsic and extrinsic. Terrorists feel that their choice enhances their self-respect and is consistent with their values, while they also perceive that the choice they make will be met with approval, at least among the groups they elect as reference points.

Because terrorists are characterized by both present and future biases, they emphasize the future gains their action will produce. While responding to Islamophobia as a way of gaining dignity and reputation, their firepower is unlikely to match that of their enemies, and potential recruits or reference groups are not promised immediate gains, but gains in more remote, impalpable spheres. Their justification becomes transcendental, what Camus (1965) defined as historical, in that history itself is turned into the supreme judge of the morality of action. The sense of historical inevitability makes violence randomized, limitless: history will vindicate the legitimacy of that violence (Ruggiero 2006).

Of course, terrorists believe in the future, but in a prophetic future, not one prefigured by mathematical computation. However, what they lose now (dignity) is more important than what they will gain later (heaven). Behavioral economic analysis is again useful here, as the choice of terror involves “trading off costs and benefits that occur at different points in time;” in brief, an intertemporal choice tends to devalue the outcomes that will manifest themselves in the future (Loughran 2019, 745).

Nudges

The intertemporal nature of terrorists’ choice may also prove impervious to nudges, namely strategies that encourage conformity (Pogarsky & Herman 2019). Unless arrest and punishment are immediate, their cost will be undervalued as future penalty, incomparable with present benefit. Moreover,

terrorists being punished, once released, will tend to reduce their perceived risk of further arrest and punishment, thus reflecting the gambler's fallacy. In other words, they will believe that unpleasant events (imprisonment), once occurred, are unlikely to recur: chances even out (Pogarsky et al. 2017).

Terrorists, in the main, are hot thinkers and, if nudges are intended to turn them into cool ones, they must enhance the appreciation of adverse consequences by inflating perceptions of risk. However, terrorism, particularly suicidal terror, is a radical dissociation from the very notion of risk: it is self-inflicted death, a choice of autonomy that challenges the power of authorities legitimately entrusted to inflict death.

Behavioral economics reveals that the perception of risk changes according to the number of people who share risky conduct. For instance, as the number of accomplices in a joint criminal activity increases, participants judge the risk of arrest to be lower than the benefit gained by that activity. The costs of crime, however, include not only formal legal sanctions, but also self-imposed costs such as feelings of disapproval, shame, embarrassment, and guilt. These may be low too, particularly if the reference points chosen by offenders are socially and culturally contiguous to them. For this reason, nudging violent political actors (involved in armed struggle or terrorism) into conformist conduct may require a dramatic reduction of the pool of accomplices or sympathizers they actually have or imagine they have.

In sum, diminished support for violent political actors may turn into enhanced perception of apprehension risk. Rather than the increased severity of formal sanction, which possesses limited deterrence force, diminished social support may redirect choice. Previous studies on how individuals change their beliefs or behaviors suggest that change constitutes an attempt by an individual to fit in with a larger group. It is prompted by fear of ridicule and is the result of what is known as normative influence. Change due to informational evidence is thus effected when individuals think that others are better informed than they are (Carley 2013).

Nudging violent political actors into less destructive conduct, therefore, requires that potential supporters, including the social groups they purport to represent and with which they attempt to liaise, become purveyors of disapproval and shaming. Declining respect for the choices made by violent political actors draws a new line that marks right from wrong. As behavioral economics contends, reputation survives when we are wrong while others like us are wrong too: “[r]eputations fare better if we are conventionally wrong than if we are unconventionally right” (Baddeley 2017, 30). In turn,

violent political actors will no longer be able to claim that their mistakes are common mistakes.

The use of shaming in criminology mainly refers to an external collective and informal sanction addressed to wrongdoers who pay reputational costs for their conduct and are thus nudged into desisting from prohibited conduct (Braithwaite 1989). By contrast, in the analysis above, the notions of shaming and reputation incorporate an injunction rather than a prohibition, namely the moral command to act, as inertia is the source of shame. If violent political actors are led by a bond of shame (Ginzburg 2019) resulting from their wounded collective honor, they can be nudged into less devastating conduct when the social groups they purport to represent impose on them and their actions a supplementary, superior portion of shaming and higher reputational costs.

Conclusion

Behavioral economics challenges the mainstream assumption of rationality, offering evidence that people at times act irrationally through examples of behavioral paradoxes. There are many nonutility-maximizing behaviors, namely conduct that is not explainable by traditional models of rational choice. Although such behaviors are widespread, they are curiously referred to as anomalies. People routinely give to charity, smoke cigarettes that they know are bad for them, and invest their money in relatively lower long-run returns: departure from rationality is systematic (Camerer et al. 2003).

This article has proposed an analysis of political violence through some of the major concepts elaborated by behavioral economics, suggesting that violent action is based on emotions, affect, and memory. It is guided by present bias and hot reasoning; it is insensitive to cost and uninterested in narrow self-interest. As the result of resentment, humiliation, and distant suffering, its motivations are delinked from consequences. Self-respect and morality are powerful motivators and loss of dignity is a more powerful trigger than future political gains. Political violence is intended to enhance reputation and be met with approval by sympathetic groups.

Violent political organizations feed on the routine hostility harbored by disaffected groups who are offered an organizational structure and a rationale, a potential or dreamlike prospect, so that their uncoordinated hostility can slowly be turned into military action. Radicalization, armed struggle, and terrorism thrive on what they perceive as empathy and support emanating from communities seen as reference points, hence their unselfish choices

and heuristics. Their selective rationality leads to sticky choices based on emotions such as fear and anger, rather than probabilistic inferences, hence their propensity to risk seeking. They make mistakes, misjudge risk, face cognitive restrictions, and access insufficient information.

The groups and communities that, at least in their perception, ideologically support them play the role of imaginary peers who in other illegal contexts would exercise a situational influence: “Peers can affect decision-making through their mere presence as well as through the active involvement as instigators, conversational partners and co-offenders” (Hoeben & Thomas 2019, 759). In the analysis above peers are communities of reference whose presence augments tolerance of risk. In response to the different forms of political violence examined, the notion of nudging has been applied to such communities, suggesting that shaming and disapproval emanating from these imaginary peers may alter the decision-making logic of those involved.

Future research into political violence will have to pay attention to emotions, the swirl of passions that animates political life. Social movement scholars have shown us how anger, indignation, fear, and love are significant components of protest, thus modifying approaches focused on structural, rationalistic, and organizational aspects. What we learn from social movement studies is that objectively given interests are not the only motivations to engage in contentious action, as such action is always inspired by beliefs and understandings, collective identities, and the sentiments attached to them. Similarly, political violence requires analyses centered on how actors connect the emotions that orient their thoughts, perceptions, and judgments: emotions such as shame, guilt, and pride are particularly pervasive as motivators. So are indignation, compassion, and fear (Goodwin et al. 2001).

The search for dignity and a sense of agency accompanies political action, including its violent variants, which are rarely the result of cool assessments of costs and benefits and the probabilities of success. In the words of Nussbaum (2013, 146), political emotions revolve around empathy understood not as a mere emotional contagion, but as “entering into the predicament of another.” Future research may have to unravel the tangle that binds compassionate feeling with destructive outcome.

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