

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND CRIME

Vincenzo Ruggiero  
Middlesex University  
London (UK)

### *Summary*

Political violence includes an array of conducts and events that defy unilateral examination. It may be authorized or unauthorized violence, and while the latter is almost always associated with crime, the former is normally deemed an expression of the legitimate monopoly in the use of force characterizing modern societies. There are institutional and anti-institutional forms of political violence, namely violence of the authority and violent expressions of defiance against authority. Both have been the object of analysis by sociologists and criminologists, with some contending that theories of 'common' violence should be applied to the analysis of political violence. It is assumed, for example, that both types of violence possess a goal-directed character: achieving results, extracting something of value from others, or exercising justice by punishing wrongdoers. Other analysts, however, link political violence with social conflict derived from collective grievance around inequality and injustice, thus locating this type of violence within the tradition of social movement analysis and the dynamics of collective action. Conflict theory provides a prime framework for this type of analysis, which focuses on contentious issues, organizational matters and the shaping of identities that lead aggrieved groups to turn to violence. Sociological and criminological theories also offer a rich analytical patrimony that helps focusing on political crime committed by states and their representatives occupying powerful social positions. Many contributions, in this respect, cover atrocities perpetrated by institutional actors and the different forms of conscious, unconscious, personal, cultural, or official, denial accompanying such atrocities. The term political crime, therefore, ends up relating to state crime, political and administrative corruption, and a variety of crimes of the elite normally included under the umbrella definition 'the crimes of the powerful'. Conversely, when the focus moves onto political violence perpetrated by anti-institutional or non-state actors, the term 'terrorism' is usually referred to, a term that is not likely to meet universal acceptance or unquestioned adoption due to the difficulties social scientists find in defining it. In sum, political violence and crime present scholars and practitioners with the same ambiguity that connotes definitions of social behavior and the processes of its criminalization. Such ambiguity becomes clear if, as proposed in the following pages, political violence and crime are examined through multidisciplinary lenses, particularly those offered by social theory, philosophy and criminology.

**Keywords:** political violence, social conflict, state crime, criminalization, terrorism, radicalization, social movements.

### *Protest and Hostility*

In some situations, the possibility of expressing protest by means other than hostility may be very limited. Peaceful means may not be available, and politicized individuals and groups may feel that they will be permanently unavailable. It is true that aggrieved people are always likely to be driven into hostile outbursts, but under certain circumstances it is the institutions themselves that 'invite' people to display hostility (Smelser, 1963). Political violence, from this perspective, is the result of the gradual or sudden closing of legitimate channels of protest. Some situations, therefore, are conducive to collective violence, as they are characterized by precipitating factors which turn dissatisfaction, strain and protest into radical antagonism and violent action. This may happen in contexts as diverse as prison settings and factories, where attempts to achieve goals peacefully are repeatedly frustrated. Moreover, one hostile outburst can often act as a precipitating factor for further outbursts, spreading violent practices across aggrieved social groups.

What is important to note in this analysis is the role played by institutional agencies in the development of political violence from below. The level of institutional violence in the form of repression, and the manner in which it is deployed, affect the degree of hostility. For example, looking at processes of social change generated by industrialization or by deindustrialization, we can observe that both may cause stress, discontent and disorder. However, there is no automatic association between such processes and the radicalization of social conflict. Industrialization and deindustrialization only provide the background for possible disorder, and it is the interactions between groups and between these and the authorities that produce radicalism, rebelliousness, and violent protest (Blumer, 1990). According to this interactionist approach, for instance, state reaction leads to imputations of violence against forms of protest which are not intentionally violent. Think of peaceful demonstrations where participants are either falsely charged and arrested or forced to resort to some improvised form of self-defense. In such cases, participants charged with violent offences would normally claim their innocence and return the imputation to law enforcers, denouncing their abusive and brutal practices. Imputations of unlawfulness, in these cases, are mutually exchanged between the parties, with both referring to a common understanding of what lawful conduct should be. When authorities reaffirm the moral meaning of everyday life (Douglas, 1970), they also reaffirm their power to construct violent labels and apply them ad hoc when necessary. In doing so they use, or abuse, an optimum degree of force, whether physical or ideological.

Following this analytical path, we may reach the conclusion that political violence is caused or is mainly to be equated to institutional violence, thus excluding that rational agents might choose violence as an expression of political dissent. In reality, the choice of engaging in anti-institutional political violence may trigger a process that can be described in the following ideal-typical fashion.

The interaction between aggrieved groups and law enforcers can produce a split between those who see peaceful protest as an integral part of their rights and those who assume that protest is quintessentially violent. Radicalization of protest, then, may produce harsher state repression and unleash a vicious circle of violence-repression-violence-repression (Della Porta, 1995). Minority protest groups begin to perceive, at this stage, that the use of violent means becomes necessary, as these constitute a mere extension of the social conflicts in which

large groups also engage. Some may opt for *armed struggle*, a phrase that hints at a rupture point in a continuum where the existing social conflict is boosted and brought to a superior level. Targets are immediately recognizable symbols, as they are related to specific arenas in which protesters engage.

An escalating process may then lead to a different stage. While concrete achievements are relentlessly dismantled and political space narrowed, violent protest groups may take a relatively independent trajectory. Their action, for instance, can be channeled into the pursuit of a limited range of objectives whose achievement, under normal circumstances, would not require the use of high degrees of violence. In other words, perfectly legitimate goals slowly come to be pursued through illegitimate means. Armed struggle, thus, turns into *armed trade unionism*, while the growth of the armed group, recruitment among activists, and the accumulation of firepower start losing connections with the social issues originally addressed. In a subsequent phase, anti-institutional political violence may evolve into *armed propaganda*, as groups become completely disconnected from the social objectives allegedly inspiring them and devote most of their energies to the accumulation of military strength. Violent acts, at this stage, simply allude to the possibility that the monopoly of the state in the use of force can be challenged and that breaking away from legally accepted forms of contention is necessary. At this stage military episodes, in most cases, are no longer decodable as manifestations of wider social conflicts, but as products of a military group seeking self-promotion. Social dynamics, as points of reference for political action, slowly become redundant, while the armed organization pursues its own reproduction in terms of membership and infrastructures. Targets are no longer chosen on the basis of their significance in relation to social issues, but for their capacity to illustrate the military power of the organization (Ruggiero, 2005a). Political violence, here, aims at strengthening resolve and group cohesion, at conveying an image of determination and potency, and involves an element of spectacular propaganda making it attractive to potential recruits and menacing to chosen enemies.

Finally, when the accumulation of military force, though significant, appears to be insufficient to match that possessed by the institutions, armed propaganda becomes unrealistic. Political activists and social groups in general cannot be offered competitive structures and practices leading to a different social order. Defeat is most likely and social and political gains are replaced with gains in other, less palpable, spheres. The choice of targets can no longer be justified by the specific social goal pursued, but is given a transcendental justification that Camus (1965) terms *historical*. According to Camus, there are some political conflicts emphasizing history, and others emphasizing humanity. The emphasis on history destroys all limits to human action, because history itself becomes the supreme judge of the morality of the action. Violent groups inspired by a sense of historical inevitability appropriate the 'right to punish' from their enemy and, after dressing it with a religious mantle, put punishment at the centre of the universe. The sense of historical inevitability makes violence randomized, limitless: history will vindicate the legitimacy of that violence (Ruggiero, 2006).

### ***Criminology, political violence and war***

Criminological thinking has engaged with contemporary forms of terrorism, testing hypotheses and theories that only recently have been applied to this area of research. Traditionally the domain of political science and international relations, political violence has been studied through the lenses of rational choice theory, while institutional responses to terrorism have been analyzed within the framework of situational crime prevention. Studies have attempted to ascertain whether target hardening and harsher legislation can deter and incapacitate or, on the contrary, are likely to enhance terrorism (Clarke and Newman, 2006; Fahey et al, 2012).

A special issue of the journal *Terrorism and Political Violence* published in 2015 contains a series of articles testing the validity of criminological theories in the analysis of terrorism (Freilich and LaFree, 2015). Jihadi and far-right groups are studied from strain and subcultural perspectives, and support is found for the status frustration hypothesis. The socio-demographic characteristics of jihadi, far-right and far-left extremists are compared using data from the US Extremist Crime Database, suggesting that violence as a result of marginalization may characterize the first two, who experience little success in the legitimate world. Instead, far-left extremists, who often do possess the means to achieve the official goals of the American society (in Merton's terms, money and success), are found to reject such goals and pursue alternative values through the 'deviant adaptation' termed by Merton 'rebellion'.

It may sound paradoxical to examine terrorism, normally sustained by structured and efficient organizations, through social disorganization theory, unless disorganization is understood as a condition of instability and anomie. Looking at terrorist attacks in about one hundred countries from 1981 to 2010, a positive correlation is found between acts of terror and political instability. The special issue of the journal mentioned above also includes research findings relating to victims of terrorism, how their routine activities and lifestyles influence victimization, and how deterrence and situational prevention might work. Learning theories are tested and theories of radicalization formulated, indicating that individuals and groups experience feelings of humiliation and grief due to their identification with populations hurt by dominant countries or, in general, national governments. Surely, the limitations of such studies are to be ascribed partly to the sources utilized, usually official data that may or may not record violent acts as acts of terrorism. Moreover, the possibility of conducting victimization survey or collecting self-report data, successfully practiced in other criminological research, seems unfeasible in this area. However, the most worrying limitation of available studies is the absence in them of any concern around violence exercised by states.

This particular form of political violence provides large material for criminological enquiry, particularly in the research area pertaining to the crimes of the powerful.

A set of conceptualizations of the crimes of the powerful arises from the analysis of the state. Particularly focused on violence, these conceptualizations see the crimes of the powerful as original foundational events, as secular forms of Promethean acts leading to state formation. These acts, it is argued, constitute authorized force and amount to law-making violence. They can be foundational, when they establish new systems and designate a new authority. But they may also amount to law-conserving violence, when they protect the stability of

systems and reinforce authority (Derrida, 1992; Benjamin, 1996). Tilly's (1985) work is, in this respect, well known for its emphasis on the centrality of direct organized force to the process of state-making (Whyte, 2009). The crimes of the powerful, from this perspective, give us a picture of how power is formed and distributed within society and how such distribution can be altered (Geis and Meier, 1977). Pursuing this strand of analysis some scholars have looked at extra-legal activities of the modern state and how these can be located within legal-political theory (Sabuktay, 2009), while other experts of state crime in general have remarked that the core capitalist states remain the greatest source of state-supported harm, violence and injury (Rothe and Ross, 2009; Chambliss, Michalowski and Kramer, 2010).

War, as an extreme form of political violence, has also mobilized analytical efforts by criminologists, not least for the disproportionate character and magnifying effect that it confers on human conflict, social interaction and state responses. Action by state agents, despite attempts to publicly sanitize its manifestations, aims at one, central obsessive task, namely killing. This task is one with its opposite, that is surviving, which signifies triumph over death while inflicting it to others: hence, conduct loses all sense of proportion. Criminologists have studied the relationship between war and crime, focusing on mass victimization and violations of human rights. 'Crime in war and 'war crimes' have become central areas of investigation, and while the former are exemplified by conventional predatory offences, interpersonal violence and illicit market operations, the latter can be included under the rubric of state political violence (Hagan, 2003). Social disorganization can be invoked to explain the dramatic, pervasive increase in criminal activities in situations of war, when it is hard to distinguish between regular armies, paramilitaries, mercenaries and violent gangs. While scarcity may account for the growth of grey or hidden economies, the inflationary effect of violence, in war situations in general, may be mobilized to account for an increase in interpersonal violence. Once made legitimate, violence comes to be viewed as the only effective tool for the protection of one's wellbeing, the achievement of one's goals, or the solution of personal differences. Based on learning theories of crime, such explanations posit the magnifying effect of institutional violence upon social interactions, leading to the devaluation of human life. As for war crimes, techniques of neutralization can be invoked as explanatory devices whereby atrocities committed are psychologically removed. The celebrated analysis of Sykes and Matza (1957) is applied to torture and other war excesses. Denying responsibility for the injury caused, denying that an injury has been caused at all, denying the human worth of the victim, or appealing to higher loyalties, all constitute recognizable devices to evade moral and criminal judgment (Cohen, 2001). On the other hand, it may also be argued that states and their agents need not mobilize neutralizations or justifications because the violence they deploy is not only legitimate, but also associated with supreme values such as patriotism and national identity. Techniques are neutralization, on the contrary, are required when individuals refuse to participate in wars, namely when they find alternative sets of values and conducts which justify their objections to following orders. War is an extreme expression of conventionality, and soldiers do not have to excuse themselves for anything, unless they refuse to kill.

In brief, the criminology of war deals with war crimes but also with 'war as crime', on how international conflicts are becoming forms of corporate plunder, on torture, illegal invasions by states, and the use of prohibited weapons. Provocative calls for the outright criminalization of war, echoing Kant's plea for perpetual peace, are also found in this literature (Ruggiero, 2005b; Jamieson, 2014; Walklate and McGarry, 2015; McGarry and Walklate, 2016).

The case study below may be significant in that it draws light on both state and non-state political violence.

### ***Case Study: Contemporary International Terrorism***

Currently, political-religious groups raise major concerns. Most of these groups engage in 'pure' political violence, namely random mass violence on civilians (Black, 2004). We find an echo, here, of the historical transcendental justification formulated by Camus. Organizations using 'pure' political violence adopt a concept of collective liability applied to the groups against which they fight. Targets are not precise actors whose conduct is deemed wrongful, but general populations defined by nationality, ethnicity, religious or political creed. Victims are not individuals, but individuals belonging to real or imagined alien groups.

Recent events have led attention away from the search for general causations of anti-institutional political violence and shifted the focus specifically onto radicalized Islamic groups. One of the causes identified is the feeling of 'weakness, irrelevance, marginalization and subordination experienced by Muslim people', combined with the memory of a glorious past of a great transnational civilization (Toscano, 2016: 123). The 'reactionary utopia' of the Caliphate is explained in these terms, namely as the result of frustration determined by the gap between expectations and achievement. The frustration thesis seems to apply to both prevailing models of terrorism: 'the fanatic who is outside any appeal to rationality, and the calculating actor who lacks any capacity for human empathy' (McDonald, 2013: 11). Advocates of the 'new terrorism' model emphasize its pathological aspects, arguing that participants suffer from personality disorder and mental unbalance. On the other hand, terror is also associated with the search for redemption, with protagonists neither 'fanatic' nor 'calculating', but just enacting redemptive violence that transforms and 'saves' at the same time (Weisbrod, 2002).

We may attempt to find in sacred texts the cause of contemporary terrorism. For example, charting the history of the Islamic State since its first incarnation in the seventh century, the following Hadith (a prophesy emanating from the Prophet Muhammad) can be highlighted. Widely accepted among Sunni Islamists, the prophecy states that the history of the *umma* (the Muslim international community) will go through five phases: first, the Prophet himself will rule; then Caliphs will rule according to the Prophet's teachings; then force will be necessary for those teachings to spread; later, coercive rules will be established; finally, the time of Caliphate will return and usher in the end of the world (Kennedy, 2016; Small, 2016). The current phase, we are warned, witnesses the final contest between the forces of faith and the forces of atheism (Fishman, 2016).

Against causations derived from religious texts, the contention can be made that the Quran is replete with suggestions around dialogue, peace and the

development of harmonious interfaith relationships. There are many passages in the Quran that destroy the idea, propagated by some, that non-Muslims are infidels and must be eliminated (Horkuc, 2009; Wills, 2016). Ultimately, it can be argued that not Islam, but religion in general has always played a role in war and terrorist violence, even in advanced secular countries (Buc, 2015; Sacks, 2015; Hassner, 2016).

Non-state violent organizations must, by definition, adopt clandestine structures, although the model with which they present themselves may vary according to contexts and to repressive institutional action (Beck, 2015). In situations where popular support is widespread, terrorist groups may set up dual structures composed of an official, legitimate layer of activists and a hidden nucleus of combatants waging armed attacks. This dual structure seems to survive as far as terrorist organizations maintain strong links with social movements and perceive themselves as representatives of aggrieved groups (Combs, 2013; Martin, 2010). The shift postulated above, that from initial armed struggle culminates into 'historical' violence, should be borne in mind. Lack of support from social groups, who express their contentious politics through visible social movement activity, often determines the collapse of terrorist groups, as shown in the cases of the Red Brigades, the Red Army Fraction, ETA and the IRA (Ruggiero, 2010).

Contemporary terrorist groups have evolved over the last two decades as a result of international events and along with the intensification of institutional responses. In the 1990s, for instance, hard-core militants prevailed in organizations that displayed a high degree of professionalism and role differentiation. The distance between leaders and adherents was kept to a minimum, and all participants were tasked with specific operations that they were well able to carry out due to expertise and appropriate skills. Recruitment was selective and based, among other things, on proven ideological loyalty, military expertise, possession of resources, range of reliable followers, status and available key contacts. The prevailing model was, therefore, one that echoed the old international political organizations, with a central committee dictating the 'line', establishing the goals, identifying possible allies and drawing a short-term as well as a long-term strategy. The latter, of course, was the attainment of power, pursued through the building of strong links among leaders, participants, supporting social groups, and their allies.

This structure, which concentrated members operating according to the principles of 'authoritarian centralism', was eroded as a result of the generalized 'war on terror'. Slowly, it was supplemented with more or less coordinated cellular units associated to the core organization through increasingly weaker links. Attacks by scattered cells started to follow a 'logic' rather than an established 'programme', with copycat action being carried out in diverse and distant contexts. Communication among terrorist cells, in brief, began to revolve around the symbolic nature of the destructive act, a form of signature indicating a common identity. Such terrorist cells, which are still operating now, are devoid of an international reach, but become international thanks to the images they furnish, the imagination they stimulate and the repetitions they encourage. 'Violence increasingly seeks excess and rupture rather than organization and programme' (McDonald, 2013: 168).

In the current phase, the development of 'networks of cells' seems to constitute the prevailing trend. The core structure, of course, remains and is now located in specific territories acquired through military force, while peripheral entities are scattered and offer their support in a variety of fashions. Isis is said to adopt Mao's revolutionary warfare strategy, based on the formation of an irregular army. But while for Mao this army relied mainly on peasants, for Isis it avails itself of the expertise of jihadists from previous conflicts mixed with professional soldiers and intelligence personnel (Whiteside, 2016). Isis has conducted dozens of prison breaks, freeing thousands of veterans, while some 20,000 inmates were released between 2008-2010 in rudderless countries afflicted by civil war. This constitutes, perhaps, a major pool of potential recruits, an army born of chaos held by those in command through a vertical apparatus and functional bureaus. This organizational form is copied largely from al Qaeda, is financially self-sufficient, media savvy, and kept together by a strong leadership.

At the same time, small groups of individuals may just plan and execute attacks which seem to be consistent with the strategy of the core organization, with or without its prior assent or post-facto endorsement. Recruitment may spread and attract also young women who are prepared to become spouses of combatants in the regions where the organization rules. New combatants are also recruited from the large repository of aggrieved Muslims resident in most western countries. In brief, it no longer seems that terrorism can be imputed to a single, however loosely, organized group. Along with hierarchical organizations, there are bands of followers who act outside formal structures and 'are motivated by feelings and beliefs widely shared among millions of Muslims worldwide.... The independence of the attacks in Madrid (2004), London (2005) and Mumbai (2008) from Al Qaeda control or direction is a vivid demonstration' (Blum and Heymann, 2010: 162). Among the people imprisoned in the UK between 2001 and 2009 for planning or attempting to undertake terrorist-related violence, the majority had no identifiable links with terrorist-related organizations (Simcox et al, 2010).

Research on how foreign fighters access the battlefield shows that social networks are of paramount importance for joining groups involved in violence (Holman, 2016). It should be borne in mind that individuals eager to join terrorist networks pose serious security risks to insurgent entities. Hence the necessity to filter the recruitment process through mediators or facilitators. These make the process more opaque to law enforcement but, at the same time, guarantee a selection of sort of the would-be recruits. Those who are recruited, however, may not always be total novices or amateurs, as their identity and political inclination may already be well known to law enforcers. Think of 'Jihadi John', a young Briton of Kuwaiti descent who grew up in London, a refugee whose family were granted asylum in the UK. A not untypical London youth, interested in drinking and pop music, he turned into a 'psychopathic sadist and sickening killer' (Anthony, 2016: 34). He became the focus of the secret services because of the extensive jihadi company he kept and, after being put under surveillance for some time, he developed a profound grievance towards the British state (Verkalk, 2016).

Recruitment, in the spreading 'network of cells', may therefore take place in the guise of self-affiliation, with individuals or small groups mimicking the acts



that they presume are consistent with the strategy and practice of the organization they would wish to join. The terrorist organization, in this way, can rely both on its own operative members and on a range of sympathizers scattered around the world. The latter, even when devoid of any practical connection with the 'mother' organization, in effect carry out its policy. Isis, for instance, owes its strength not only to its specific military power, but also to the exemplary nature of its acts that may be replicated by 'lone wolves', who feel legitimized to kill after internalizing the deadly philosophy of the organization (Keatinge and Keen, 2017). An example is the gunman who, in June 2016, killed fifty people and wounded fifty-three more after storming into a gay night club in Orlando, Florida. Omar Mateen was twenty-nine years old and a US citizen of Afghan heritage: he opened fire on partygoers with an AR-15 assault-rifle and handgun. Mateen had never been under surveillance and during the attack he was heard claiming allegiance to Isis (The Guardian, 13 June 2016). Here, hate crime and terrorism combine in the most explosive fashion, suggesting that structures and networks host individuals of varied ideological persuasion and personal motivation.

The trajectory leading to more open networks appears to be confirmed by the declining complexity of terror attacks recorded between 2004 and 2016 (Von Dongen, 2016). Such networks extend to prison institutions, which provide fertile ground for recruitment and opportunities for radicalization (Hamm, 2013). Moreover, in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict there is growing recognition of the value of women's active contribution to the movement. In the past, on the contrary, women would at times be encouraged by their own family to join suicide missions only as a form of 'honor' suicide, or because unmarried. Calls have intensified for a new Palestinian woman – one who is not only the mother, sister or daughter of the martyr, but a martyr herself (Hasso, 2005; Oliver, 2007; Narozhna and Knight, 2016).

Little agency is accorded to individuals who join terrorist organizations, as they are often described as victims of 'grooming' or brain-washing. A study conducted by NATO (2016), for instance, examines hundreds of publications and narratives released by Isis addressed to sympathizers, supporters and potential soldiers. Religious narratives circulated on line attempt to turn people toward 'Caliphate' ideology, as do speeches by influential leaders and interviews with would-be suicide bombers. The organization does not limit the pool of its propaganda targets to potential combatants, but aims at a range of individuals who may provide financial support, medical assistance or help for jihadists and their families. Isis does not directly ask supporters to be ready to participate in missions or engage on the battlefield. However, it makes 'a point of showcasing those who have already decided to fight the enemy and sacrifice their lives in the name of God' (ibid: 13). It should be added that the most powerful propaganda weapon attracting combatants consists of the spectacle of destruction deployed by state responses and the desire for revenge it triggers. Interviews with those charged of cooperating with terrorist organizations reveal that

'People are motivated by taking revenge on those perceived as invaders of Iraq. Their testimonies show that in some cases, people didn't need to be contacted by recruiters to join the organization. They were self-motivated to defend their country against invaders... None of the people interviewed

said that their socio-economic situation played a significant role in motivating them to become foreign terrorist fighters' (ibid: 46-48).

Knowledge about the structure of terrorist networks remains limited, despite the fact that, since September 2001, interest in terrorist research has increased. Many studies are unempirical or anecdotal and some rely upon no evidence at all. While a new book on terrorism is published every six hours (Silke, 2008), the approach of academic publications remains exploratory and documentary. Over the last years, however, research has engaged with measurement issues (LaFree and Ackerman, 2009). The number of statistical studies has increased and large databases have been made available (see 'further readings' below).

To understand the relationship between institutional and anti-institutional political violence or, to put it differently, between terror and the war on terror, requires the examination of how specific regimes are conducive to violent conflict.

### **Failed Democracies**

Ninety-three per cent of all terrorist attacks between 1989 and 2014 occurred in countries with high levels of state sponsored terror – extra-judicial deaths, torture and imprisonment without trial. Over ninety per cent of all terrorism deaths occurred in countries engaged in violent conflicts and in OECD member nations with poorer performance in the sphere of respect for human rights (START, 2016). Meanwhile, torture has become an accepted practice in the fight against terror (Cohn, 2017).

The idea of democracy is being championed across the world, with some fifty new countries embracing this type of political system between 1974 and 2011 (Freedom House, 2016). Simultaneously, however, dissatisfaction has grown due to the perceived incapacity of democracy to deal with collective problems. Among the traits that distinguish democratic systems is their capacity to respond to challenges or, in other words, their ability to deal with contentious politics. Democracies, in brief, can be classified on the basis of the elasticity of their structures and the degree to which they encourage political processes and social dynamism leading to change (Ruggiero and Montagna, 2008).

This classification was proposed by some among the very founders of classical political thought, with Machiavelli (1970), for instance, identifying as corrupt those systems which proved unable to deal with tumults and other forms of troubling dissent. Contention, including violent contention, Machiavelli argued, causes no harm, particularly when the elite, through changes in social arrangements and legislation, defeats the corrupt elements within itself. Livy's history suggests that the absence of corruption was the reason why the numerous tumults that took place in Rome 'did no harm, but, on the contrary, were an advantage to that republic' (Bull, 2016: 35).

Democracies can claim that they are concerned with the pursuit of harmony and public wellbeing, but as Dewey (1954) argued, they can hardly claim that their acts are always socially beneficial. For instance, one the most regular activities of democracies is waging war.

‘Even the most bellicose of militarists will hardly contend that all wars have been socially helpful, or deny that some have been so destructive of social values that it would have been infinitely better if they had not been waged’ (ibid: 14).

Democratic political acts, therefore, may be presented as socially beneficial, even when their anti-social nature prevails. This is why citizens, Dewey warned, should be cautious in identifying their community and its interests with politically organized institutions and theirs.

‘Anxious Dictators and Wavering Democracies’ was the title of a recent report published by Freedom House (2016). In the report, the US and Europe were described as struggling to cope with international events, particularly unresolved regional conflicts. Their role in exacerbating such conflicts was not explicitly mentioned, although both their action and inaction were said to have ‘generated unprecedented numbers of refugees and incubated terrorist groups that inspired or organized attacks on targets abroad’ (ibid: 1). ‘Wavering democracies’ were accused of responding to such issues through the development of populist campaigns and the adoption of security measures that run counter the core values of free societies. Displaying lack of self-confidence, democracies were said to fuel xenophobic feelings, creating a climate in which attacks of facilities hosting refugees, the erection of fences and the creation of draconian laws become legitimized.

‘In effect, the European establishment’s inability to manage these new challenges – on top of the lingering economic woes that began nearly a decade ago – gave fresh impetus to those who have questioned the European project and the liberal, universal values that it represents’ (ibid: 2).

Intolerant policies were implemented in the name of patriotism and the draconian measures adopted against the ‘intruders’ were echoed by violent strategies of law enforcement and crowd control against all dissenters.

Recent invasions, illegal wars, torture, kidnappings, the use of prohibited weapons and the killing of civilians have been perpetrated in the name of freedom. Similarly, the mercenary-state partnerships and their destructive activities have been justified through the benefit they are bound to produce for the establishment of global liberty. With drones and homicide missions, democracies can assassinate people on the secret orders of heads of state, and ‘for a highly targeted death (say, a gang chief) there are on average nine collateral victims’ (Badiou, 2016: 60). More than collateral damage, these assassinations amount to deterrence addressed to entire populations.

The failure of democracies signals a crisis of hegemony, whereby rules are suspended or eliminated, and open ‘wars of manoeuvre’ are waged against internal and external enemies (Jessop, 2016). The process triggers the creation of ‘deep states’, namely hidden auxiliary power networks impervious to popular scrutiny. Democracy, in this way, arms itself with the very forces that threaten it (Todorov, 2014). Openness, moderation and temperance are replaced by excess, hubris and feelings of omnipotence, while freedom and free enterprise intertwine with military missions which, rather than engaging in the arduous

task of establishing states, simply destroy states (Badiou, 2016). The enjoyment of rights is polarized, setting freedom of enterprise against freedom to remedy entrepreneurial social harm, freedom to establish political agendas against freedom to oppose them, freedom to engage in war against freedom to demonstrate against it.

The failure of democracy takes on the nature of an auto-immune disorder that threatens the life of contemporary societies and the legal systems that underwrite them. The war on terror is, therefore, akin to slow suicide, as societies attempting to protect themselves, in fact, destroy the defensive mechanisms that are supposed to guarantee their survival. 'Repression – whether it be through the police, the military, or the economy – ends up producing and regenerating the very thing it seeks to disarm' (Derrida, 2003: 99). Failed democracies, in brief, contribute to the radicalization of dissent and the spreading of extremism.

Purely structural approaches to the study of radicalization are insufficient to explain the process: 'It is erroneous to presume that material deprivation works in a simple and/or straightforward manner in relation to the propensity to commit violence' (Walklate and Mythen, 2016: 338). True, radicalization takes place when a considerable cultural and relational distance, along with severe forms of inequality and injustice, exist between the parties involved. But to claim that inequality and social injustice are the main causes of terrorism neglects the fact that there is no terrorism in the fifty countries listed by the United Nations as the poorest and least developed. As Sen (2015: 165) has argued,

'The simple thesis linking poverty with violence is empirically much too crude both because the linkage of poverty and crime is far from universally observed, and because there are other social factors... Calcutta is not only one of the poorest cities in India – and indeed in the world – it so happens that it also has a very low crime rate' (ibid: 165).

In failed democracies, the young immigrants do not join terrorist networks out of existential vacuum or mere marginalization, but from resentment born of the humiliation suffered by people to which they feel close. While their parents chose where to live and partly maintained the culture of their country of origin, the young distanced themselves from that culture without acquiring a new one: 'the danger that ruins life in the poor districts is not Islam or multiculturalism... it is deculturation' (Todorov, 2014: 168). 'Deculturation' is one of the characteristics of failed democracies, which are based on a winner-take-all logic whereby the losers are left with no place to occupy. Becoming extremist, in this situation, amounts to 'pure and simple regression that offers a mixture of sacrificial and criminal heroism' (Badiou, 2016: 56). Failed democracies, while wreaking destruction, encourage revenge, which is formalized through the mythology of tradition, as it is often the case in liberation struggles. The parallel may be illuminating.

The history of anti-colonization gives several examples of how national struggles aim at liberating peoples from external oppressors as well as from the internal effects of that oppression. Traditional local elites in colonies were formed of individuals who mediated foreign rule, negotiated or accommodated demands, 'making the best of a difficult and often humiliating relationship'

(Walzer, 2015: 2). These elites offering liberation were likely to be regarded with suspicion, and forced to accept nationalist claims.

Even Gandhi was deeply opposed to many aspects of Hindu culture, especially the fate of the untouchables. He was assassinated by someone committed to a more literal, or more traditional, or perhaps more radically nationalist version of Hinduism' (ibid: 4).

Liberation entails forms of traditionalism, and the achievement of independence may witness the growth of anti-modernization sentiments as a weapon against the oppressor. While Fanon (1965) was celebrating the birth of the 'new Algerian', fundamentalism was already beginning its political counterrevolution. Religion was used by leaders as a tool for their immediate purpose: creating political unity in the anticolonial struggle, but resentment brewed among groups of people who disliked 'those secularizing and modernizing elites, with their foreign ideas, their patronizing attitudes, and their big projects' (Walzer, 2015: 26). Real liberators, in sum, were expected to set past and future glory against present humiliation, and to display their 'alterity' from the enemy in the form of the martyrdom they were prepared to endure. The struggle, therefore, was not simply inspired by the desire of independence, but also by the necessity to destroy the ancient enemy, the members of alien faiths, the infidels.

Terrorism and state-sponsored terrorism are linked in this causal chain that exhibits feud-like elements of vengeance, each side answering random violence with random violence. Failed democracies create drastic ruptures and impose on their enemies a redefinition of themselves along with a radical reshaping of their strategy. This process is similar to that accompanying the criminalization of social movements, that leads in equal measure to some participants abandoning the fight and some choosing clandestine action. A scale shift is thus produced, whereby ascending violence is met with harsher exemplary punishments and spectacular retaliation. In response, violent groups launch yet higher levels of threats and deploy more spectacular violence (Tilly, 2004).

Failed democracies and the radicalized others activate their respective hidden networks and tools, the former choosing illegal forms of annihilation of the enemy, the latter mobilizing the fragmented groups and identities forced to a clandestine existence. Repression may push dissent underground, but may fail to destroy the informal networks and the social relationships through which identities are structured. Extreme repression, moreover, reduces the variety of points of reference for aggrieved groups, selecting the most extreme among them. This is when state agents can blend elements of warfare with those of criminal justice, thus responding to the radicalization they have created. Although at times radical violence may appear to be an unpredictable outburst or unexplainable explosion, it possesses a 'geometrical precision'. It occurs when the social geometry of a conflict is violent.

'Every form of violence has its own structure, whether a beating structure, dueling structure, lynching structure, feuding structure, genocide structure – or terrorist structure. Structures kill and maim, not individuals or collectivities' (Black, 2004: 15).

## ***Review of Some Classical Literature***

Violent conflict has been an object of study in criminology since the very inception of the discipline. Before the word 'terrorism' gained common usage, early criminologists dealt with both institutional and anti-institutional violence. Classical criminology, particularly the work of Cesare Beccaria (1965) and Jeremy Bentham (1967), regarded political violence as a breach of the social contract binding citizens and authority together. The focus of Beccaria, however, was on 'state savagery' and, at the same time, on 'crimes of sedition'. He linked institutional violence (torture, capital punishment, assassinations and other forms of state violence) with violent outbursts directed against the state. From a contemporary perspective, we can summarize his thought as follows: excessive state violence provokes violent responses by non-state agents (Beccaria, 1965).

Positivist criminologists studied regicides, romantic murderers and violent anarchists and looked at social and psychological causes of political violence. While in general they thought that violent action against the system retained an 'evolutive' character, in the sense that it accelerated social change, when faced with specific forms of terrorist acts they judged those acts as the exploits of monomaniac individuals who would be violent even if not inspired by political beliefs. Their distinction between rebellion and revolution was, in this respect, crucial. The former, in their view, was conduct caused by insanity, moral madness, narcissistic martyrdom or suicidal drive. The latter was seen as an evolutionary process which, without necessarily resorting to violence, aimed at producing social change and improved social justice. It is noteworthy that this school of thought formulated a notion of 'suicide missions' well before these became common currency in the present times, as they described anarchists who assassinated aristocrats in the middle of the streets as individuals whose principal aim was an 'honourable death' or 'indirect suicide' (Lombroso 1894; Lombroso and Laschi, 1890).

An excess of integration in a system of values was identified by Emile Durkheim as one of the causes leading to suicide. However, it is from his study of homicide that significant pointers can be gleaned for an analysis of political violence and terrorism. Durkheim associated the rise of homicide to the growth of those collective sentiments obsessively focused on social entities such as the group, the family, or the state. The feelings that lie at the base of the cult of such entities may be in themselves conducive to murder. When the family, the group, the state, or for that matter a political idea or a religious belief, appear to be the supreme good, their importance transcends the sympathy and compassion due to the individual or people in general. Like some forms of suicide, terrorism and political violence in general may be the result of excessive integration in a creed, an identity, or of a strong form of binding to a set of moral values (Durkheim, 1996).

Subsequent criminological analysis focused on collective conflicts, describing societies composed of competing groups and contrasting value systems. Political violence, from the perspective of conflict theory, is interpreted as the outcome of struggles for the attainment of material and ideological power (Quinney, 1971, 1977; Taylor, 1981; Turk, 1982; Vold et al, 1998).

Finally, symbolic interactionism examined the relational dynamics that produce harmony or conflict, in other words, how interacting individuals and groups determine their mutual conduct. From this perspective, state and non-state entities engage in acts of terror when both feel that they have no space left for peaceful interaction.

In the previous pages, aspects of these perspectives can be detected.

### **Further readings**

Agnew, R. (2010), 'A General Strain Theory of Terrorism', *Theoretical Criminology* 14: 131–153;

Ahmed, S. (2015), 'The "Emotionalization" of the "War on Terror": Counterterrorism, Fear, Risk, Insecurity and Helplessness', *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 15: 545-560.

Balibar, E. (2015), *Violence and Civility*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Bouhana, N. and Wikstrom, P-O. (2010), 'Theorizing Terrorism: A Scoping Study', *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, 2: 9–79.

Deflem, M. (ed) (2004), *Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism: Criminological Perspectives*, New York: Elsevier.

De Lint, W. and Kassa, W. (2015), 'Evaluating US Counterterrorism Policy: Failure, Fraud, or Fruitful Spectacle?' *Critical Criminology*, 23: 3490-369.

Fisk, A.P. and Rai, T.S. (2015), *Virtuous Violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Forst, B., Greene, J.R. and Lunch, J.P. (2011), *Criminologists on Terrorism and Homeland Security*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Juergensmeyer, M (2003), *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley: University of California Press.

LaFree, G., Dugan, L. and Korte, R. (2009), 'The Impact of British Counterterrorist Strategies on Political Violence in Northern Ireland: Comparing Deterrence and Backlash Models', *Criminology* 47 (2009): 501–530;

LaFree, G., Dugan, L. and Miller, E. (2015), *Putting Terrorism in Context: Lessons Learned from the Global Terrorism Database*, London and New York: Routledge.

Lum, C. and Kennedy, L. (2012), *Evidence-Based Counterterrorism Policy*, New York: Springer.

Matusitz, J. (2013), *Terrorism & Communication*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

McCauley, C. and Moskalenko, S. (2011), *Friction: How Radicalization Happens to Them and Us*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Miller, M.A. (2013), *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stern, J. (2004), *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*, New York: Harper.

Tilly, C. (2004), 'Terror, Terrorism, Terrorists', *Sociological Theory*, 22- 5-13.

Increased research funding has contributed to the creation, maintenance and enhancement of databases on terrorist events, perpetrators and organizations, marking a significant increase in the number of quantitative studies. These include:

- American Terrorism Study
- Extremist Crime Database
- Global Terrorism Database
- International Terrorism: Attributes of Terrorist Events
- Rand Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism
- Minorities at Risk Organizational Behaviour
- Maryland University Database

## ***References***

Anthony, A. (2016), 'The Isis Monster Made in Britain', *The Observer*, 14 February: 34.

Badiou, A. (2016), *Our Wound Is Not So Recent*, Cambridge: Polity.

Beccaria, C. (1965 [1765]), *Dei delitti e delle pene*, Turin: Utet.

Beck, C.J. (2015), *Radicals, Revolutionaries and Terrorists*, Cambridge: Polity.

Benjamin, W. (1996), 'Critique of Violence', in *Selected Writings*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Bentham, J. (1967 [1776]). *A Fragment of Government. With an Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Black, D. (2004), 'The Geometry of Terrorism', *Sociological Theory*, 22: 14–25.

Blum, G. and Heymann, P.B. (2010), *Laws, Outlaws and Terrorists*, Cambridge: MIT Press.



- Blumer, H. (1990), *Industrialization as an Agent of Social Change*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Buc, P. (2015), *Holy Wars, Martyrdom and Terror*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Bull, M. (2016), 'Softening Up the State', *New Left Review*, 100: 33-51.
- Camus, A. (1965), 'L'homme revolté', in *Essais*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Chambliss, W., Michalowski, R. and Kramer, R. (eds) (2010), *State Crime in the Global Age*, Cullompton: Willan.
- Clarke, R.V. and Newman, G.R. (2006), *Outsmarting the Terrorists*, Westport: Greenwood.
- Cohen, S. (2001), *States of Denial. Knowing about Atrocities and Suffering*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Cohn, M. (2017), 'State-Sponsored Torture in the Age of Terror', <http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/39175-state-sanctioned-torture-in-the-age-of-trump> (accessed 24 January).
- Combs, L. (2013), *Terrorism in the Twenty-First Century*, London: Pearson.
- Della Porta, D. (2013), *Can Democracy Be Saved?*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Derrida, J. (1992), 'Force of Law. The Mystical Foundation of Authority', in Cornell, D. et al (eds), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, London: Routledge.
- Derrida, J. (2003), 'Autoimmunity: Real and Symbolic Suicides', in G. Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Habermas and Derrida*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dewey, J. (1954), *The Public and Its Problems*, Columbus: Ohio University Press.
- Douglas, J.D. (ed) (1970), *Deviance and Respectability*, New York: Basic Books.
- Durkheim, E. (1996), *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, London: Routledge.
- Fahey, S., LaFree, G., Dugan, L. and Piquero, A. (2012), 'A Situational Model for Distinguishing Terrorist and Non-Terrorist Aerial Hijackings, 1948 to 2007', *Justice Quarterly*, 29: 573-595.
- Fanon, F. (1965), *Studies in a Dying Colonialism*, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Fishman, B.H. (2016), *The Master Plan: ISIS, al-Qaeda, and the Jihadi Strategy for Final Victory*, London: Yale University Press.

Freedom House (2016), *Anxious Dictators, Wavering Democracies: Global Freedom under Pressure*, Washington: Freedom House.

Freilich, J.D. and LaFree, G. (2015), 'Criminology Theory and Terrorism: Introduction to the Special Issue', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 27: 1-8.

Geis, G. and Meier, R. (eds) (1977), *White-Collar Crime: Offences in Business, Politics and the Professions*, New York: Free Press.

Hagan, J. (2003), *Justice in the Balkans: Prosecuting War Crime in the Hague Tribunal*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hamm, M.S. (2013), *The Spectacular Few. Prisoner Radicalization and the Evolving Terrorist Threat*, New York: New York University Press.

Hassner, R.E. (2016), *Religion on the Battlefield*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Hasso, F.H. (2005), 'Discursive and Political Deployments of Palestinian Women Suicide Bombers', *Feminist Review*, 81: 23-51.

Holman, T. (2016), 'Gonna Get Myself Connected: The Role of Facilitation in Foreign Fighter Mobilizations', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10 (2): 2-23.

Horkuc, H. (2009), *Said Nursi: Makers of Islamic Civilization*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jamieson, R. (ed) (2014), *The Criminology of War*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Jessop, B. (2016), *The State. Past Present Future*, Cambridge: Polity.

Keatinge, T. and Keen, F. (2017), *Lone-Actor and Small Cell Terrorist Attacks*, London: Royal United Services Institute.

Kennedy, H. (2016), *The Caliphate*, Harmondsworth: Pelican

LaFree, G. and Ackerman, G. (2009), 'The Empirical Study of Terrorism: Social and Legal Research', *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*: 347-374;

Lombroso, C. (1894)], *Gli anarchici*, Turin: Bocca.

Lombroso, C. and Laschi, R. (1890), *Il delitto politico e le rivoluzioni*, Turin: Bocca.

Machiavelli, N. (1970), *The Discourses*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Martin, G. (2010), *Understanding Terrorism. Challenges, Perspectives and Issues*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- McDonald, K. (2013), *Our Violent World. Terrorism in Society*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- McGarry, R. and Walklate, S. (eds) (2016), *The Palgrave Handbook of Criminology and War*, London Palgrave.
- Narozhna, T. and Knight, W.A. (2016). *Female Suicide Bombings. A Critical Gender Approach*, Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- NATO (2016), *Daesh Recruitment. How the Group Attracts Supporters*, Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence.
- Oliver, K. (2007), *Women as Weapons of War*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Quinney, R. (1971), *The Problem of Crime*, New York: Dodd, Brown and Co.
- Quinney, R. (1977), *Class, State and Crime: On The Theory and Practice of Criminal Justice*, New York: McKay.
- Rothe, D.L. and Ross, J.I. (eds) (2009), 'State Crime', special issue of *Critical Criminology*, 17.
- Ruggiero, V. (2005a), 'Brigate Rosse: Violence, Criminology and Social Movement Theory', *Crime, Law & Social Change*, 43: 289-307.
- Ruggiero, V. (2005b), 'Criminalizing War: Criminology as Ceasefire', *Social & Legal Studies*, 14 (2): 239-257.
- Ruggiero, V. (2006), *Understanding Political Violence*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Ruggiero, V. (2010), 'Armed Struggle in Italy: The Limits to Criminology in the Analysis of Political Violence', *British Journal of Criminology*, 50 (4): 708-724.
- Ruggiero, V. and Montagna, N. (2008), *Social Movements: A Reader*, London: Routledge.
- Sabuktay, A. (2009), 'Locating Extra-Legal Activities of the Modern State in Legal-Political Theory: Weber, Habermas, Kelsen, Schmitt and Turk', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 51: 511-530.
- Sacks, J. (2015), *Not in God's Name. Confronting Religious Violence*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Sen, A. (2015), *The Country of First Boys and Other Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Silke, A. (2008), 'Holy Warriors: Exploring the Psychological Processes of Jihadi Radicalization', *European Journal of Criminology*, 5: 99-123.

Simcox, R., Stuart, H. and Houriya, A. (2010), *Islamist Terrorism: The British Connections*, London: Centre for Social Cohesion.

Small, T. (2016), 'Wars of Religion', *Times Literary Supplement*, 23 September, Middle East Special Feature: 1-12.

Smelser, N.J. (1963), *Theory of Collective Behavior*, New York: The Free Press.

START (Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism), (2016), *Global Terrorism Index*, Baltimore: University of Maryland.

Sykes, G. and Matza, D. (1957), 'Techniques of Neutralization: A Theory of Delinquency', *American Sociological Review*, 22: 664-670.

Taylor, I. (1981), *Law and Order: Arguments for Socialism*, London: Macmillan.

Tilly, C. (1985), 'War Making and State Making as Organized Crime', in Evans, P.B., Rueschmeer, D. and Skocpol, T. (eds), *Bringing the State Back In*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tilly, C. (2004), *Social Movements*, Boulder: Paradigm.

Todorov, T. (2014), *The Inner Enemies of Democracy*, Cambridge: Polity.

Toscano, R. (2016), 'Il tempo della paura', *Micro Mega*, 2: 119-128.

Turk, A.T. (1982), *Political Criminality: The Defiance and Defence of Authority*, London: Sage.

Verkalk, R. (2016), *Jihadi John: The Making of a Terrorist*, London: Oneworld.

Vold, G.B., Bernard, T.J. and Snipes, J.B. (1998), *Theoretical Criminology*, New York: Oxford University Press.

von Dongen, T. (2016), 'Measuring the Complexity of Terror Attacks', paper presented at the European Society of Criminology Conference, University of Munster, 21-14 September.

Walklate, S. and McGarry, R. (eds) (2015), *Criminology and War. Transgressing the Borders*, London and New York: Routledge.

Walklate, S. and Mythen, G. (2016), 'Fractured Lives, Splintered Knowledge: Making Criminological Sense of the January, 2015 Terrorist Attack in Paris', *Critical Criminology*, 24: 333-346.

Walzer, M. (2015), *The Paradox of Liberation. Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Weisbrod, B. (2002), 'Fundamentalist Violence: Political Violence and Political Religion in Modern Conflict', *International Social Science Journal*, 54: 499-508.

Whiteside, C. (2016), 'New Masters of Revolutionary Warfare: The Islamic State Movement (2002-2016)', *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10: 6-20.

Whyte, D. (ed) (2009), *Crimes of the Powerful: A Reader*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Wills, G. (2016), 'My Koran Problem', *New York Review of Books*, 16-19.

**Funding has been received from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement N. 700688.**