

MAGICAL ASPECTS OF POLITICAL TERRORISM

One of the most intriguing and painful anomalies of the modern world—so diffused that it has almost become a universal culture—is the incredible number of individuals and groups who kill, torture, burn, kidnap, imprison or merely outrage other people with a clear conscience when a political motive may be alleged. Added to them is the much larger number of people and institutions that tolerate, approve, encourage, praise and even bless that type of behavior when it occurs within a political context. Included in this generic political violence is the kind of behavior that is much more serious and that we may call terrorist, the behavior of those who seek to impose their will through the commission of atrocities that sow a generalized terror or a panic fear, and then to manipulate the reactions these atrocities provoke. Here “private” terrorists, as well as “semi-state” and “state” terrorists¹ commit

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¹ I call “private” terrorists those who function outside the official organizations of the country in which they are active; “semi-state” are those that are tolerated or supported by these; in Latin America these are the *Agrupaciones Anticomunistas Argentinas (3A)*, the *Mano Blanca* in the Caribbean, *ORDEN* and *Union Guerrera*

acts that would not be tolerated in normal, non-political life, and the public that approves this conduct would never accept it if it occurred in everyday life.

I. JUSTIFICATION: THOSE WHO KILL AND THOSE WHO APPLAUD

Another element adds to the sense of curiosity the subject arouses: in most cases of private, semi-state and state terrorism against persons, the victims are not accused of any wrong or responsibility, of any concrete action or omission of which they could be the authors, thereby meriting *a fitting punishment* for a fault committed, according to the traditional Pythagorean concept of justice as a restabilization of equilibrium, nor according to the most primitive concept of sanction as a proportionate compensation for those directly affected. In these cases the imputation, if any, is of presumed intention or private quarrels, mere suspicion or vague accusation that no one bothers to confirm or deny, or, again, simple generic malevolence attributed to the victim.

Even worse, there is often no imputation at all; an individual is attacked through association with a group or category, or through belonging to some especially objectionable social subdivision: capitalists, Jews, middle class, sociologists, landowners, intellectuals, ethnic minorities, communists, and so on. In many other cases person or groups are viewed as enemies that must be exterminated, having no connection with subversives or governments under attack but showing traits derived from socio-cultural ways of life considered by the assassins as opposed, alien, incompatible or simply intolerable. Here it is a matter of murders by association, by categorical hates or by paranoid or maniacal cultural reconstructions. In other cases, the family members of the one suspected of subversion or those of the official personage are killed or imprisoned, when they are not tortured, violated or shot in the presence of their families; or the family members are killed in the

Blanca (UGB) in El Salvador, *Tontons Macoutes* in Haiti, the *Escuadrón de la Muerte* in Brazil. I call "state" the official organisms of terrorism in the populations themselves that function on the lines of the model of political police in totalitarian states. In this characterization the respective ideological legitimacies of the atrocities committed by each kind of terrorism are of little interest.

suspect's place. When homes are invaded relatives, friends or even occasional visitors are taken prisoner, including the defense lawyers and those who show an interest in the suspect's fate. The children of the victims are sent to other people in distant places so as not to involve them with their closest relatives. Other usual procedures by both belligerent parties, documented in numerous Latin-American countries, is the extermination and burning of villages, the removal of entire populations and the annihilation of family groups of up to 10 or 12 people.

In all these cases it is as though a plague were being controlled or a gangrene in the social body were being cut out; it is as though there were an eradication of some entity imagined as an enemy incarnated in one individual presenting an absolute danger, characteristic of that "imagined entity without flesh and bone" as appropriately defined by the psychoanalyst Franco Formari, who conceptualized it as "the Terrorizer".² We clearly see that in all these acts the guilt and responsibility of the victims is disregarded, and even the negative political cost of the operation is ignored.

The maximum in this lack of imputability of the victims occurs when someone is killed, without any imputation whatever, only to instill terror in others. In the case of private terrorists, this involves bombings that exterminate those who are technically called "coincidental groups," that is, the people in an airport or railroad station in some country, those who are visiting an exhibit or are in a hijacked or burning airplane. This is theoretically justified with the slogan common to all species of terrorists: "There are no innocent victims, only allies or enemies," or with that of Dr. George Habash of the PLO in 1968: "There are no neutrals. Everyone is part of the solution or part of the problem." These assassinations without the imputation of the victims are parallel to those of many governments that apply the well-known technique of unpredictability and injustice in their repressive actions in order to instill conformist terror in their own people.

However, it is enough to situate any one of these acts within a politically significant context for them to be justified in the eyes

² Fornari, Franco, *Psicoanálisis de la Guerra*, Mexico, Siglo XXI, 1972, p. 10. The original Italian edition is by Feltrinelli, 1966.

of the perpetrators themselves and those of many apparently honest and moral people.

There are other facts in addition to those already given, concurring with them in giving today's terrorism a new shade, one that demands that the question be viewed from a new angle. In Latin America I know hundreds of cases in which the barbaric tortures employed are not connected to any interrogation nor are they used to obtain any information. There are hundreds of other cases in which the aberrant and perverse ways of killing and treating the corpses are very far from the concrete and pragmatic objective of eliminating a person. All these cases arouse only repugnance and reversals in opinion internally and internationally, leading to opposition to those who are the agents, and obtain no political benefit whatsoever.

In Europe something is apparently occurring that suggests this same line, when violence is used for such vague and undefined political reasoning that two psychoanalysts writing in France under the pseudonym of André Stéphane have written: "This is not a matter of revolution. It is a massacre for trifles."³

This is the most curious aspect of the complicated and painful subject that clamors for interpretation: that actions and deeds (or better, misdeeds) are justified by a political content that is losing its meaning as well as by those that never had one.

The context of properly specified politics is the field of the instrumental and procedural, of pragmatism and the utilitarian; it is the field proper to rational actions toward an agreed end (*Zweckrationalen*) according to the classification of Max Weber, the one in which actions are deliberately confronted with each other with a result in view. The most appropriate means are selected to reach certain concrete and defined ends that are considered to be useful and suitable to advance the cause of each or the objectives and interests of each side.⁴ Now, the majority of the violent acts that we are considering lack this kind of rationally-faced concrete finality, these characteristics of instrumental direction that are

³ Stéphane, André, *L'Univers Contestationnaire*, Paris, Payot, 1969, p. 201.

⁴ I do not refer to the principles of legitimacy but to the modes of political and economical actions. See Bryan R. Wilson, "Instrumental and Procedural Values of the Economy", in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Sept., 1979, p. 273.

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proper to the political. Many governmental acts of terrorism are committed that are completely removed from the finalities of social control and penal sanctions, of reform programs and national reconciliation. Not only do they lack the political ends that are recognizable as useful for its objectives but in most cases they damage the government that carries them out. Thus it is that Hannah Arendt arrived at the confirmation that in these cases "terror increases in proportion as opposition decreases." Among private terrorist movements, also, failures have repeatedly been documented, involvements in situations almost inevitably fatal, to the point that many authors who have studied terrorism, from the 19th-century Italian criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, to today's Kenneth Keniston in North America, speak of suicidal tendencies, conscious or unconscious, as proper to these movements. The difficulty in defining the political objectives of the people who practice both terrorisms is easily verified. This is as true of those who want to destroy the existing order as it is of those who want to maintain it. Nevertheless, they are always categorical about what they want to destroy.

Specialized professional observers working on the detection and analysis of terrorism for security agencies are beginning to notice this characteristic of apoliticism, but their measurements are concerned with description rather than theoretical meaning. In a recent study, three assessors of the Counterintelligence Directorate of the United States Air Force analyze symptoms and procedures among terrorist movements in different parts of the world. In each case they show nihilistic tendencies using violence and destruction for their own sakes, as well as the elevation of terrorism as an end in itself. In some groups, terrorists tell us, "Destruction is seen as a good in itself because it rids the world of what ails it." They cite the case of the first terrorist group in Germany that appeared in 1970, the SPK, organized by the Heidelberg psychiatrist Dr. Wolfgang Huber and his wife, who convinced their mentally-ill patients that "it was society that made them ill, and in order for them to be cured the cause had to be destroyed, that is, society itself."⁵ Likewise in Argentina, in November 1971, a group

⁵ Russell, Charles A., Banker, L. J. and Miller, B. H., "Out-inventing the Terrorists", in Yonah Alexander, David Carlton and Paul Wilkinson (eds.), *Terrorism: Theory and Practice*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1979, pp. 31 and 21.

of dissident psychoanalysts (EPFSO, *Escuela de Psicología Freudiana y Socioanalítica*) was created that maintained “the incidence of class struggle in psychic disturbances” and proposed “the need to modify this by a revolutionary change that can only arise from political struggle.”⁶ This line of thought was widely diffused in the Third World countries through books by the Algerian Franz Fanon, a follower of Sorel on this subject, concerning the curative and purifying virtues of assassination for redeeming the “psychology of the oppressed” among the colonized Negroes by killing the white colonizer.⁷ In all that I have briefly pointed out we see how political justification is yielding to a magic justification.

These facts and tendencies for the characteristics outlined above require a more scientific clarification than they have received up until now, because this kind of social action and movement eludes the usual explanations that have been given to the public.

II. INTERPRETATION: WHAT IS IT THAT LEADS SOME PEOPLE TO WANT TO TERRORIZE OTHERS?

A feeling of impotence as to theory regarding terrorism is spreading among the most alert sectors of the scientific community, a realization that the current theories—with all their conjectures—do not suffice to account for the phenomenon, which because of its multifaceted complexity escapes all attempts to fit it into the rigid framework of current scientific models.⁸

⁶ Declarations published in the newspaper “La Opinión” of Buenos Aires, Apr. 10, 1974, p. 14.

⁷ For lack of imagination, it did not occur to Fanon to recommend the creation of an *Orden Honorífica* for these *purificados* like the *Blutorden* in Nazi Germany for those who had killed enemies during the 1923 putsch and the presentation of a dagger to each one, like those received by members of the *Allgemeine SS* after their first assassination. Apparently, the magic of the Nordic whites was more ostentatious and probably superior.

⁸ See the Final Report of the Interdisciplinary Meeting of Experts on the Study of the Causes of Violence convoked by Unesco in Paris, Nov. 12, 1975 and published in the volume *La Violence et ses causes*, Paris, Unesco, 1980, especially the study by the eminent social psychologist Otto Klineberg; Part II of the publication by Alexander, Carlton and Wilkinson (eds.), *op. cit.*; Ch. 5 of *Terrorism: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, by Y. Alexander and J. M. Finger, New York, John Jay Press, 1979; Ch. 10 of *Corporative Revolutionary Movements*, by Thomas Greene, New York, 1974; the exhaustive analysis in two volumes by H.

I believe that this inadequacy is primarily due to an insufficient definition and delimitation of the social object under study, in this case political terrorism, as defined above, that Anglosaxon bibliography treats as an aspect of social conflict and that continental European bibliography treats in conjunction with political violence in general. Neither grasps both currents, the large qualitative gaps between social conflict and violence on the one hand and political terrorism on the other.

The flaws in current theories as to how to envisage the social objective are more recognized. Most critics agree that the interpretive and explicative sterility of the models that apply to the study of this social fact arises from their determinist and "physicalist" postulates, as well as from the tendency of these models to reductionism. Thus, to explain terrorism we have an entire range of physical and mathematical, psychological, biological and zoological reductionisms in a veritable riot of analogies springing from the epistemological level or jurisdictions with no foundation or validity. It is similar to the way experiments made on rats in a laboratory or on some varieties of monkeys are transferred without alteration to the context of human social behavior (when among the same species of anthropoids there are distinct behaviors). It is as though mechanical or biological extrapolations are made.

In this second aspect sociology appears to be drawing away from the definitive orientation that Emile Durkheim gave us: that social facts (such as terrorism) can only be explained by other social facts, thus maintaining their own specificity "so as not to be denaturalized,"⁹ which in modern terminology means that social events and occurrences have their own objective reality that must be compared with methodologies, models and theorizations that are adequate for the objective reality that is proper to them.

Following the wise counsel of the master, we must leave aside for the moment the interpretations and explanations of terrorism (even though they are valid on the psychological and socio-

Rummel, *Understanding Conflict and War*. Jessie Bernard, an important figure in sociology, gave the first alert in 1957 in her contribution to the Unesco publication *The Nature of Conflict*, Paris, Unesco, 1957. See also Th. Abel in *International Social Science Journal*, Vol. XXXI, p. 225, n. 2.

⁹ Durkheim, Emile, *Règles de la méthode sociologique*, Preface to the 2nd ed., Ch. 5 and Conclusion.

psychological level) and confront the question on the motivational side of terrorist actions in order to concentrate on the orientation of the actions, on the definitions of the situation that the participants formulate or that define the subcultures or counter-cultures to which they belong and on the beliefs and values that they have interiorized.

This is a fundamental principle of interpretation and understanding that has been set aside in sociological theory because of the influx of reductionisms of all kinds. As Talcott Parsons wrote: "The most basic theorem of the theory of action seems to me to be that the *structure* of the systems of actions *consists* of institutionalized and/or internalized norms of cultural significance. That this is not an obvious proposition for good judgment is substantiated by the broad and complex history of conductist theories and other reductionist theories of human behavior."¹⁰

If, as a point of departure, we want to give a phenomenological description of the groups dedicated to political terrorism, state-supported or not, free from prejudices, disguised evaluations and disparaging reductionisms, the first thing we must say is that these groups constitute what is called in sociology "active groupings" or those presenting a higher potential of political activity than other groups. Thus it is that in everyday political parlance the members are called "activists." They function in that way because they have a higher level of involvement and awareness than the politically passive public. For this reason, in the political vocabulary they are known as "dedicated" or "committed." Their group actions are more intense since the actions of their members are unified, due to the fact that they share the same postulates, holding what is termed a "community of assumptions."¹¹ These postulates remain unaltered and intolerant of any innovation or revision. Furthermore, these group actions are more intense because in dealing with reality, the members manipulate broader and more inclusive, tighter and more rigid, contexts. The usual psycho-social theory on the subject, from Maslow who invented the term "the authorita-

¹⁰ Talcott Parsons, T., "The Point of View of the Author" in *The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons*, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1961, p. 342 (underlined in the original).

¹¹ See Amitai Etzioni, *The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes*, New York, Free Press, 1969, Ch. 8, 10 and 15.

rian character structure” in 1943 and the classic of sociology, *The Authoritarian Personality*, by Adorno and his collaborators, has, until the most recent studies, verified empirically that this type of person has an incredible intolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty and a strong tendency to perceive moral questions as dichotomized absolutes.¹² In one of the best investigations on the subject, conducted in Indianapolis in 1956, James Martin found in this kind of personality what he calls a tendency to superstition and mysticism, or an appetite—that Frenkel Brunswick terms gullibility—for accepting romantic and mystical explanations of the facts that absorb his attention (in our case, political) and “explanations based on forces and influences far beyond human comprehension”; he concludes by saying that “the myths that sustain (these persons) take on the form of superstitions.”¹³

All this points to the definitive importance that beliefs hold in the orientation of these persons and groups. In his classic study on revolutionary unionism in Great Britain, the sociologist Edward Shils, seeing that the concepts of the usual scientific theories did not serve, was obliged to coin the concept of “belief-possessed” persons.¹⁴ In these cases, certain beliefs possess the man and manipulate him from the exterior, disindividualizing him and depersonalizing him with respect to himself and with respect to other men who, for him, cease to be other and distinct individuals.¹⁵

The decisions of these persons, groups and movements are accepted intensely and profoundly, because they imply a major

¹² Maslow, Abraham, “The Authoritarian Character Structure”, *Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. XVIII, 1943, p. 402; Else Frenkel Brunswick, “Dynamic and Cognitive Personality Organization”, in T. W. Adorno and others, *The Authoritarian Personality*, New York, Norton, 1968, Part II, Ch. 12.

¹³ Martin, James, *The Tolerant Personality*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1964, pp 66-69.

¹⁴ Shils, Edward, “Primordial, Personal, Sacred and Civil Ties”, *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. VIII, no. 2, 1957. In his analysis of revolutionary movements, Smelser speaks of the “value-oriented” beliefs that motivate the behavior of revolutionary “value-oriented movements”. Neil Smelser, *Theory of Collective Behavior*, London, Routledge, 1962, pp 120, 313 and 338.

¹⁵ Concerning these objectual relationships between people and the manipulations and damage to which they give rise, see José Enrique Miguens, *La Otra Versión: Mitos, Magia e Ilusión Revolucionaria*, Buenos Aires, Plus Ultra, 1978, pp. 68-70, 113 and 123-24.

conviction and consciousness. So it will be that in the recruitment of people for whatever kind of terrorist group, state-supported or not, the first concern is brainwashing according to their definitions of the situation and conceptions of earlier reality, the attribution of new meanings to the actions that substitute former actions and the introduction of indisputable beliefs and integral contextual explanations, such as the redirection and concentration of all psychic energies up to a differentiated and defined target through a clear characterization of the “enemy.”

On both sides of the categorization of terrorist movements, that of the dissidents and that of the suppressors, the attitude toward the social order is reciprocally inverted: all that is *order* for one is *chaos* for the other. By definition, both sides reject any possibility of modification, reform or improvement of the proposed “order” defended by the other that has been raised to an absolute, indisputable for the one and impenetrable, threatening and incomprehensible for the other. Both reject on principle any possibility of a peaceful change.

Here are some examples of the dissident side. In a book having influence on these circles, *Violencia, Revolución y Cambio Cultural en Latinoamérica*, the North American John Gerassi pretentiously writes “...it is for this that the honest man today must consider the liberal and tolerant person as a true enemy of mankind.” This idea is taken up in a proclamation by the *Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo* of Argentina: “There is no third position between exploiters and exploited. Either one is with the people against the exploiters and oppressors or one is with them against the people.” Fabrizio Ojeda (leader of the *Frente de Liberación Venezolano* and executed in 1966) said in his book, *Hacia el Poder Revolucionario*: “Only two politics exist in the world, one revolutionary and the other reactionary... There are two forces: patriotic and progressive revolutionaries and neo-Colonial reactionaries.” Finally, a document entitled *A los pueblos de América Latina* that is representative for the groups it contains—the Tupamaros of Uruguay, the MIR of Chile, the ELN of Bolivia and the ERP of Argentina—says, “the most subtle enemies and dangers” for the revolutionary forces are nationalism and reform. “Reform rejects the just and necessary revolutionary violence in actions.”¹⁶

¹⁶ I cannot include the bibliographical references for all quotations, because these publications and similar ones have disappeared from Argentine libraries. [The present article was written before October 1983. *Editor's note*].

The same totalist attitude and complete conviction appears in the groups, movements and agencies of state or semi-state terrorism. Hundreds of documents could be found in support of state terrorism, the persecutor and “defender of order.” There are none for semi-state terrorism, because it takes action and makes no declarations, but to support my affirmation I believe an acute observation by the essayist Eric Hoffer in his splendid book, *The True Believer*, is sufficient: “An implacable and persistent persecution (by an active mass movement) can only come from a fanatic conviction.”¹⁷ In both kinds of terrorism we are therefore dealing with actions, beliefs and values that affect the whole man and society and do so in a radical way, in the sense of reaching the roots of life; we are dealing with the conviction on the part of all those involved that they must assume a total commitment on this subject and ultimate and indisputable beliefs that are also non-renounceable and non-negotiable. Here it is obviously a matter of what Durkheim called “*la vie sérieuse*” in *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, or social life that has all the characteristics of religiosity.

When we analyze the orientation of social actions, leaving aside psychological motives, it becomes clear that in this kind of action we are dealing with normative orientations of a religious and not a secular nature. A specialist on the subject, Richard Fenn, adopting the viewpoint of the theory of action, distinguishes secular actions from religious ones in this way: the former are significant for the whole man and society as a whole, the latter are not; religious actions are directed toward “ultimate” goals that must have priority over all other goals, whereas secular ones are not. Religious actions within the field of politics are characterized by broad fields of high intensity and transcendency with regard to the social system as a whole. When these political actions envisage goals, they are always “ultimate”; secular actions on the other hand envisage proximate goals and are primarily oriented toward instrumental and consumer values.¹⁸

¹⁷ Hoffer, Eric, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, New York, Harper, 1951, n. 87.

¹⁸ Fenn, Richard, “The Secularization of Values: an Analytical Framework for the Study of Secularization”, in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 114-124. The concepts of ultimate and proximate goals and of instrumental and consumer values are often found in North American sociology.

When social groups and movements such as those of terrorists have an organization of beliefs, values and norms with these characteristics, they tend toward a crystalization of behavior within what is technically called specific “cultural logic” and “models of decision.”¹⁹ I cannot go further into all the characteristics of this curious cultural logic and justification of acts that terrorist groups and movements exploit, but I may point out, in order to help interpret them, that here also similarities appear with the logic of religious thought as given in a fine synthesis by Durkheim: “What seems above all to characterize the logic of religious thought is a natural inclination to intemperate thought as well as to strong contrasts. It is willfully excessive in both cases. When it compares it confuses, when it distinguishes it opposes. It does not know nuances and measure; it looks for extremes.”²⁰ These are the same characteristics that most recent authors have pointed out in forms of magic and mythical thought.

Cassirer (placing himself exclusively on the cognitive plane) verifies the same traits of confusion and opposition in mythical-magical thought and establishes, on one hand, the law of concrecence of mythical thought or the tendency to fuse the heterogeneous and to confuse the whole with its parts and, on the other hand, the embodiment of forces and powers, locating them in persons or objects.

According to this curious logic of concrecence, that of those who take the part for the whole (*pars pro toto*), a simple personnel manager of a factory is Capitalism; a modest rural policeman is Oppression. By killing them, the activist eliminates the evil forces or neutralizes them, just as a person is made to disappear by ritually burning his fingernails or his hair.

Thus the logic of the embodiment of the forces of good and evil leads automatically to the identification of any evil, of any social problem with such and such a person or group, attributing to them evil powers, ubiquitous and omnipotent; these persons must be

¹⁹ See the foreword to the major work by Benjamin Nelson, “Rationales, Rationalizations and Revolutions,” in *Journal for the Study of Religions*, Vol. VIII, no. 2, pp. 157-177.

²⁰ Durkheim, Émile, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, p. 340, quoted by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Le totémisme aujourd’hui*, Paris, Presses Universitaires, 1968, p. 138.

conjured so that the evil disappears. Some examples of this logic of terrorism may be seen in the report commissioned by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in Russia on state terrorism, ordered by Stalin and compiled by the Soviet historian Medvedev. A Pravda article of February 2, 1937 says: "We know that assembly lines do not stop by themselves, that machines do not break themselves, that boilers do not explode by themselves. Someone's hand is behind each of those *deeds* [*sic*]." A party functionary in Siberia declares: "When accidents and errors begin to appear in a factory, the first thing to look for is an enemy."²¹ In this kind of magic thought the important thing for efficiency is to conjure the enemy hidden within; it is not to provide better answers.

Evil may be incarnated not only in persons but also in books and theories. The declaration of the president of the Chamber of Commerce of Argentina in a public conference in 1979 that "Keynes' theory is demonic" is not a rarity. From that to burning the books that contain the theory is only a step and an easy one to take.

However, mythical-magical thought not only shows a certain kind of knowledge and social definition of reality but also implies a justification of behaviors that exist within this curious view of the world, as has been pointed out by authors who have studied the subject in politics, from Malinowski until today.²² In some way, this mythical thought grants its referents of real life a larger meaning, a truer reality than the one common mortals perceive. This conviction cannot be reduced to contradictory experiences and reasoning of non-initiates.

For this kind of political thought, life in society is full of signs, indications, auguries and omens, as terrifying as they are reassuring. Any event is given a deep meaning, is seen as full of suggestiveness and as a revealer of occult intentions by the others, by the ordinary and the non-initiates, such as we are. The Italian critic Umberto Eco humorously calls this kind of reasoning "*cogitus interruptus*," as is the case with a madman who "shows us a box

²¹ Medvedev, Roy A., *Let History Judge: the Origins and Consequence of Stalinism*, New York, Knopf, 1971, p. 351 (my underlining).

²² Among the most recent, Berger and Luckmann, *La Construcción Social de la Realidad*, Buenos Aires, Amorrortu, 1968, Part II, Ch. 2, "Legitimación".

of matches, looks at one for a long time and says, 'You see? There are seven...'; watching us significantly hoping we catch the occult meaning of that irrefutable sign."²³ As with any magical belief, any experience, positive or negative, is a confirmation and ratification of conviction; it is impossible to weaken it empirically.

All this puts us within a highly emotional social context that some confuse with irrationality. "The world of myth is a dramatic world of action, force, power struggle, in any phenomenon... nothing is seen but the collision of these powers. Mythical perception is always found imbued with these emotive qualities. Everything that is seen or heard is surrounded by a special atmosphere, an atmosphere of happiness, sorrow, anguish, excitement, exaltation or prostration. It is impossible to speak of things as dead or indifferent matter. All objects are beneficial or malignant, friendly or hostile, familiar or strange, fascinating and attractive or menacing and repellent."²⁴ Durkheim also spoke of "collective agitation", of orgiastic frenzy and of "hieromania" or sacred madness to refer to certain political events, especially the Reign of Terror during the French Revolution.

Summing up, we may say that terrorist phenomena develop within, and constitute, a certain "social reality" defined by all the participants, whether they are activists or justifiers and passive supporters; whether they actively take part in or are sympathizers with terrorism. This social reality defines and marks the confines of a way of life and the meanings of a magico-sacred nature that are proper to it. Here we are "beyond Good and Evil."²⁵

III. DELIMITATION AND EXORCISM: THE SEDUCTION OF THE MAGICAL AMBIENCE

Modern semanticists such as A.J. Greimas distinguish between a practical and a mythical language within language. The first is used

²³ Eco, Umberto, *Apocalípticos e Integrados*, Barcelona, Lumen, 1968, p. 384.

²⁴ Cassirer, Ernest, *Antropología Filosófica*, Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1945, pp. 147-48.

²⁵ The differences between the spheres of magic and religion that allow me to include terrorism as a social phenomenon in the first, cannot be explained, but they may be seen in my work "Lo sagrado y lo subversivo: Consideraciones sobre la relación entre la magia y la violencia política," in *Escritos de Filosofía*, Buenos Aires, Academia Nacional de Ciencias.

for scientific and technical matters and for daily life. The second is used axiologically and ideologically or has a special application to other milieus in the social context and meanings that we have called magico-sacred.

For this reason we may properly say that this social milieu is organized and structured within a discourse of a magical nature, with all the rules of coherence and all the logico-causal-significative connections (in the meaning given by Sorokin) belonging to this milieu. These rules and connections can be detected in an empirical analysis and make up an organized field of meanings, a *Sinnzusammenhänge*, in the conceptualization of Max Weber, who called it “magic order.”²⁶ This system of meanings, this magic order is what defines the situation for terrorist actions from the point of view of the participant but also forms a socially constructed reality, if we see it from the point of view of the observer.

Basically, the three kinds of terrorists, private, semi-state or state and their respective followers who approve, applaud and bless them, all orient and organize their activities within this magical discourse and within this system of meanings. The magical ambience of a society, therefore, is constituted of certain specific systems of meanings, a certain type of social action directed by them, certain sets of beliefs and values and all the individuals, terrorists or their supporters, who make up a specific field of social reality, distinct from other fields of reality within the same society.

Described in this way, this particular milieu seems to suffer from a rhetorical permissiveness proper to these times of structural, linguistic and semantic concepts or to be a sophist subtlety in the Husserlian or Lacanian style. Nevertheless, but with a different vocabulary, the same was said 250 years ago, in 1795, by the Neapolitan Gianbattista Vico in his *Prima Scienza Nuova*, based on the same understanding of this kind of social reality and systematizing similar experiences regarding the language of men and their behavior.

²⁶ Weber, Max, *Economía y sociedad*, Vol. II, Part IV, 10, *La Religión de la India*, Ch. 10, *La Ética Económica de las religiones Mundiales*; and T. Parsons, Introduction to *Sociology of Religion* by Weber (North American edition, omitted in the British).

Vico speaks diachronically of two stages or historical moments that occur in societies, calling them “stage of heroes” and “stage of men,” a concept that we can also apply synchronically to fringes or milieus within the same society. If we succeed in following his complicated style and his semi-fantastic approach to knowledge, as Benedetto Croce will later call it,²⁷ we can grasp the regularities and connections of this socially constructed reality.²⁸ It suffices to translate “stages” as “sub-cultures” or “counter-cultures”.

In the heroic stage, he tells us, people speak in “symbolic or mythical language,” in “sacred languages” founded on the “wisdom of omens” or propheticizing auguries, basing their political action on historical prophecies, laic fatalism or secularized eschatology derived from “original archaic wisdom.” These movements, like all terrorist movements, are oriented toward “heroic undertakings... through ensigns or military insignia that are the armed expression of the cities” and understand each other through “the language of arms.” Their governments and aspirants to political power are of the “heroic” type, charismatic demigods: leaders, liberators, saviors, *condottieri*, restorers or reorganizers “who arouse the mob of destitute men, pulling them by their ears.” Because of that, says Vico, they govern “with orders and commands and not with laws.” Those subject to them or to their atrocities live in uncertainty, with the permanent, deliberately provoked feeling of arbitrariness, since the “laws are of a nature hidden from the common people, whose rights are therefore unpredictable and concealed.”

In these societies or social contexts, the law of force prevails; within them “people live like wild animals, in the bestial communion of wild animals.” The activists “treat men like wild beasts,” persecuting, killing or terrorizing ferociously those who refuse to be subjugated by the ideologies and myths of each terrorist species.²⁹ Those who try to maintain their independence, creativity

²⁷ Croce, Benedetto, *La Filosofia di Gianbattista Vico*, Bari, Laterza, 1947, Ch. 2 and 5.

²⁸ We must remember that for Vico truth is constructed by man and is interpreted through language and symbols.

²⁹ Vico is not the first to point this out: Machiavelli did so earlier with the mythical figure of the centaur Chiron, the master of this kind of politics, the relationship of all this caste of half-man and half-beast with the god Pan “who has

or tolerance are converted into enemies shared by all species of terrorists—the only case of agreement among the latter—and must be persecuted by all of them as “the worst enemies of mankind,” as proposed by John Gerassi.

The following period, or the one in confrontation with the former, speaking synchronically, is for Vico the “state of men” or of “republics,” in which people agree politically by means of “epistolary languages” or through expression common to all, one that functions not through symbols or submission to heroic undertaking but through meanings established through common accord, within societies of peace, love and harmony, in which the “principle of Liberty for all” prevails and in which the government is “by law and not by force.” In this case, Vico informs us, peoples govern “by agreement and with a common sentiment.”

The norms of each of these orders that, following Max Weber, we may term “magic order and ethical order” are established respectively in this way: “the natural right of heroic people is in supremacy of strength,” that is, through superiority of strength over the adversary. However, the people “realizing the vanity of heroism, want to examine its usefulness;” they thus arrive by themselves at the “natural right of human beings—as Ulpiano said—which is equality” In this normative, “equity prevails” and “violence and arms are converted into laws.”³⁰

In this ethical and rational social context people cease being mythical heroes and cease being wild animals to become men and women. They become no more, and no less, than human beings.

However, the magical ambience considered empirically has a permanent tendency to expansion, to diffusion within the social body and at the same time a centrifugal and absorbing characteristic that, at the risk of being literary, I will qualify as a tendency to the magic attraction and seduction of other fringes or social contexts. Speaking sociologically, this would be the inverse process

the character of discordant natures. This caste does not build cities nor found nations, because those of natural discordance are the first outlines of tyrants,” Vol. III, p. 188, 180-181.

³⁰ All the transcriptions I have put between quotation marks are taken verbatim from Gianbattista Vico, *Ciencia Nueva*, Mexico, El Colegio de México, 1941. Book II, Ch. 7 and 44; Book III, Ch. 30 and 34; Book IV, Ch. 9, 10 and 11; Table of popular traditions and Table of general discoveries.

of “demagification” (*Entzauberung*) within modern European society, admirably described by Max Weber. It would be what I have qualified elsewhere as a “process of remagification” of a society.³¹

The magico-sacred order and the ethico-rational order confront each other in all societies, each one fighting for its own position, its definitions and its rules or regularities of meaning and coherence, in order to orient the actions of those who are within its sphere. In its difficult process of ethical rationalization, Hebrew mosaicism and propheticism and, later, its continuation, Christianity, had to struggle for thousands of years against the permanent seduction of the magical and its power of absorption, qualified in those epochs as idolatry, attempting to ransom mankind from the domination of myths, deification and adoration of temporal powers or power, or from what we today would call the sacralization of the political.³² In their day, the Greeks did the same in their struggle against the sophistic-magic discourse in their politics. Michel Foucault describes the moment splendidly: “The efficacious argument, the ritual argument, the argument charged with powers and dangers gradually became ordered in a division between a true argument and a false one.”³³ Plato himself, in *Politics*, points out to us the difficulty of the task: “However difficult it is, we must make a difference between the wisest magicians among all the sophists and political truth... Many of these men resemble lions, centaurs [*sic*] and other similar beasts; a larger number resemble satyrs or weak but extremely clever animals.”³⁴

Terrorism of any kind, following in the steps of Pan, is of “discordant nature” in the two meanings of the term and continues to impose panic and terror, paralyzing men and societies; but that terror and the feeling of power that it implies, given that it occurs in the ambience of sacred magic, has, beyond the power of terrorizing, the power to fascinate and rouse collective agitation and emotions that alienate men, that rob them of their substance and change them, through powers that are superior to them, into people possessed. Thus they are deprived of their freedom of choice and

³² Cox, Harvey, *The Secular City: A Celebration of its Liberties and an Invitation to Its Discipline*, New York, Macmillan, 1965, Part I, Ch. 1, “The Biblical Sense of Secularization,” or Part II, Ch. 7, “The Church as Cultural Exorcist”.

³³ Foucault, Michel, *L'Ordre du Discours*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 64.

³⁴ Plato, *Politics*.

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their feeling of responsibility, in exchange for the sensation of feeling superior to other men.

In all historical societies and cultures there is a permanent tendency to fall into irresponsibility, into depersonalization, into fatalism; to fall under the command of that which in rabbinical theology at the time of St. Paul was called "dominions and powers." These are the forces that paralyze and prostitute human liberty, the forces of all kinds that seek to manipulate and dominate men and women, determining their actions from the outside and treating them as objects so as to obtain their surrender and submission.

Especially so are the magico-mythical cultural forces that promise to change men into supermen or demigods "beyond Good and Evil," but which, in fact, convert them into wild beasts.

This fascination for infernal dominions and powers, this attraction toward the abyss of dehumanization, is what we must exorcize in our civilization. It is enough to call them by their name.

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