The Era of Propaganda by the Deed

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Contents

Abstract

This chapter traces the ideological genesis of the notion of 'propaganda by the deed', recounts the terrorist wave which it partly inspired in the 1880s–1920s and highlights the contemporary legacies of the concept and its terrorist ramifications. The elaboration of propaganda by the deed as an activist strategy in the last years of the First International is charted, as well as subsequent, narrower reinterpretations of propaganda by the deed focusing on violence as the means to achieve political goals. The four-decade anarchist terrorist wave and its complex links with propaganda by the deed are then examined, highlighting tensions between the systematic characterisation of anarchism as a terrorist movement and actual internal divisions regarding the use of political violence. The third section surveys the explanations for both the rise and eventual decline of political violence, in particular the deployment of policing on a variety of scales as a response to terrorism. The widespread contemporary interest in the era of propaganda by the deed is highlighted, with a focus on academic debates exploring the possible parallels between anarchist terrorism and post-2001 Islamist-inspired attacks.

Introduction

'Our action has to be permanent revolt by the spoken and written word, the sword, dynamite or even sometimes the voting paper [...]. We are consistent: we use a weapon the moment we have to strike as rebels. Everything is good for us which is not legality'.[1] Carlo Cafiero's statement in the Geneva-based, French-language paper *Le Révolté* in December 1880 counts among the most famous definitions of propaganda by the deed in its nineteenth-century anarchist understanding.[2] It captures both the extent of the notion and the numerous misinterpretations to which it has been subjected. It also heralds the *modus operandi* of many attacks during the campaign of anarchist-inspired terrorist 'outrages' which swept across the Western world from the 1880s onwards, and stresses the era-defining connection of the anarchist movement with the dynamite patented by Alfred Nobel in 1867.

The very fact that this famous declaration was published following a great deal of debate and discussion over political violence and anarchist strategy in general, in a paper edited by Peter Kropotkin, a militant and theorist who objected to this specific definition and the very term propaganda by the deed,[3] points to the complex history of the concept, which is one of misinterpretations, radicalisations, appropriations and rewritings. These processes provide the focus of this chapter. Given the extensive scholarly literature generated by propaganda by the deed,[4] this chapter examines the concept's history and its implementations but also its contemporary after-

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[1] Cited in Caroline Cahm, *Kropotkin and the rise of revolutionary socialism, 1872–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 139–140. Translation as cited in the source. Unless otherwise stated, translations from French cited here are my own.

[2] Also often referred to as 'propaganda of the deed'; to this day, the term has remained predominantly but not exclusively associated with anarchism.

[3] Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 103–104.

[4] Most notably Richard Bach Jensen, *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism: An International History 1878–1934* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

lives, charting recent appropriations of the notion in the context of the current terrorist wave.[5] It traces the ideological genesis of the notion of propaganda by the deed, recounts the terrorist 'epidemic'[6] which it partly inspired in the 1880s–1920s and highlights the contemporary legacies of the concept and its terrorist ramifications.

Within the anarchist movement, even at the peak of the terrorist phase (which, with some local variations, mostly occurred in the 1880s–1890s), propaganda by the deed was always a minority creed and pursuit. However, its influence in shaping the movement's fortunes cannot be over-stated: it resulted in a lasting and highly detrimental equation between anarchism and terrorism, leading to the movement's criminalisation and depoliticisation, resulting in turn in intense repression. It also had a profound impact on the societies affected by terrorism, which underwent not only the traumatic experience of mass terror[7] but also a host of era-defining changes in policing and immigration strategies as a consequence.[8] For a brief period in the 1890s, political violence became one of the most polarising issues within the movement, cutting across existing divisions between communist and individualist anarchists, organisationalists and anti-organisationalists, and engaging all quarters of the anarchist movement, from club discussions to the pages of periodicals and influential theoretical works.

This chapter focuses on the ideological genealogy of propaganda by the deed and its reception in the short and long term. The elaboration of propaganda by the deed as an activist strategy in the last years of the First International is charted first, as well as its links with Nihilist violence and subsequent, narrower reinterpretations, which focused on violence as the means to achieve political aims, especially after the 1881 Social Revolutionary Congress in London. The four-decade anarchist terrorist wave and its complex links with theories of propaganda by the deed are then examined, with an emphasis on the tensions between the systematic public characterisation of anarchism as a terrorist movement, and actual divisions regarding the use of political violence among anarchists. The end of the terrorist campaign and the interpretations which have been put forward to explain it are then discussed. The last section provides a critical examination of the recent and ongoing mobilisation of the period of anarchist propaganda by the deed in public and academic discourse, as a perceived historical precedent for the contemporary wave of Islamist terrorism.

Propaganda by the Deed: Genesis and Definitions

The theory of propaganda by the deed initially provided 'a philosophical justification of violence and terrorism',[9] often backed by a clear vision of how the revolution might be achieved. Far from being a proposition of blind destructive violence, as often surmised in the 1890s, propa-

[5] The concept of 'waves of terrorism' is borrowed from David C. Rapoport, 'The Four Waves of Terrorism' in Cronin and Ludes (Eds), *Attacking Terrorism. Elements of a Grand Strategy* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2004), 65.

[6] Jean Maitron, *Ravachol et les anarchistes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), 12.

[7] B. Porter, *Plots and Paranoia: A History of Political Espionage in Britain, 1790–1988* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

[8] R. B. Jensen, 'The Secret Agent, International Policing, and Anarchist Terrorism: 1900–1914', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29 (2015), 735–771.

[9] M. Fleming, 'Propaganda by the deed', in Yonah Alexander and Kenneth Myers (Eds), *Terrorism in Europe (RLE: Terrorism & Insurgency)* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015/1982), 10.

ganda by the deed was conceptualised by its early exponents as a means to an end; however, its enactment marked a gradual departure from these philosophical and strategic underpinnings.

While some landmarks in the history of the theory and practice of propaganda by the deed are agreed upon, scholars have put forward different ideological geneses. There is a near consensus regarding the fact that the prime influence for propaganda by the deed is to be found in the writings of Russian revolutionaries between 1869 and 1881, who developed a concept of systematic terrorism within revolutionary strategy. In the words of Alexander Sedlmaier, '[o]riginally coined by Sergei Nechaev and Mikhail Bakunin in 1869 and then developed by the Italian anarchists Errico Malatesta, Carlo Cafiero and Emilio Covelli, it dismissed what the two Russian revolutionaries called "pointless propaganda that keeps neither to time nor to space" in favour of concrete insurrectionary activity'.[10] Caroline Cahm traces the concept further back, to a statement by Neapolitan revolutionary Carlo Pisacane in 1857, in which he rejected 'the propaganda by the idea' in favour of 'cooperating with the material revolution; therefore, conspiracies, plots, attempts, etc.'.[11] The notion then reappeared in the 1870s, and in the course of the decade it materialised into agitation, insurrections and risings. Most notorious was the failed Benevento insurrection led by Malatesta and Cafiero in Southern Italy in April 1877. A month earlier, another early anarchist exponent of propaganda by the deed, Paul Brousse, had led a demonstration in Berne on the anniversary of the Commune on 18 March, carrying a red flag in a bid to raise popular consciousness.[12] In April 1879, Tsar Alexander II escaped an assassination attempt by Alexander Soloviev, only to face another failed attack the very same year, in December, from the group Narodnaya Volya—and eventually, a successful attack by the same group in March 1881. Heads of state in Germany, Spain, Italy and other countries also faced attempts in these years.

However, in these early years, analyses centred on identifying the optimal revolutionary pedagogy, with specific reference to the relationship between the individual and the collective as well as 'ways and means'; thus, attacks might be symbolic acts of rebellion against oppression, intended as actual triggers for a large-scale revolt, or indeed constitutional change (which was the focus of the Russian attacks).[13] The relation between various forms of propaganda was discussed at length: the respective importance and interplay of oral and written propaganda and, on the other hand, actions was another key focus. Was propaganda by the deed a supplement or a substitute for oral and written propaganda? Was it intended to exemplify, incite to action, and educate, as stated by Brousse in a famous article published in the August 1877 *Bulletin de la Federation Jurassienne*? Amidst these discussions, the status of violence was neither central nor clearly defined. The Italian theory of the late 1870s, the most influential among anarchists, was, as Garrison points out, 'a method of insurrection not political assassination'.[14] A very broad acceptance of the term, which extended far beyond political violence, prevailed in the early 1880s, as 'any act of revolt, even when the act was not performed consciously to elicit support for the an-

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[10] A. Sedlmaier, 'The Consuming Visions of Late Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-century Anarchists: Actualising Political Violence Transnationally', *European Review of History: Revue européenne d'histoire*, 14.3 (2007), 283–300. See also Arthur H. Garrison, 'Defining terrorism: philosophy of the bomb, propaganda by deed and change through fear and violence', *Criminal Justice Studies: A Critical Journal of Crime, Law and Society*, 17.3, 259–279, 264–265.

[11] Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 76.

[12] D. Stafford, *From Anarchism to Reformism. A study of the political activities of Paul Brousse within the First International and the French socialist movement 1870–1890* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1971), 76–88.

[13] See Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 123–124.

[14] Garrison, 'Defining Terrorism', 265.

archist cause'.[15] It was echoed in the United States in 1883 by the *Pittsburgh Manifesto* calling for the 'destruction of the existing class rule, by all means, i.e., by energetic, relentless, revolutionary and international action'.[16]

Propaganda by the deed was also linked with another theory of considerable longevity, relative practical indeterminacy and great contentiousness—illegalism. This concept was subsequently most closely connected with early twentieth century French individualist anarchism,[17] but it was also used earlier to refer to the anarchist tolerance of a wide range of unlawful actions as a way of exacting symbolic revenge upon the capitalist order and its champions, as well as undermining it tangibly. Such actions included, for instance, petty theft (theorised in France as *la reprise individuelle*), which was conceptualised as the 'taking back' of possessions of which one had been robbed by the capitalist order. Other, more controversial forms of illegal activities included expropriation and robbery.[18]

These premises changed, and other scenarios radicalised propaganda by the deed during the 1880s. The decade, crucially, saw the transfer from theory to action, starting with the attacks of the late 1870s. Referring to these early attempts in his entry on *Attentats* for the *Encyclopedie Anarchiste* (1911) edited by Sébastien Faure, Max Nettlau described this 'series' of attacks as belonging to the category of 'attacks by contagion'[19]—a dynamic which became ever more pervasive over the next two decades. The year of Tsar Alexander II's death, 1881, was also the year of the London Social Revolutionary congress, which is often regarded as the moment of the official adoption of propaganda by the deed by anarchists. Kropotkin's views, and the movement's mood, had become more radical by then, and the congress famously adopted the resolution that 'the time has come, to shift from the period of assertion to the period of action, and to add to verbal and written propaganda … propaganda by the deed and insurrectional action'; it promoted the benefits of 'technical and chemical sciences' to achieve this aim.[20] These ideas made forays into anarchist circles and publications as the movement grew throughout the 1880s and, after further sporadic acts of violence internationally, the 1890s saw an outburst of attacks across the Western world, thus becoming, in Richard Bach Jensen's words, the 'decade of regicide'.[21] Anarchist-inspired attacks claimed the lives of the French President Carnot (1894), Spanish Prime Minister Cànovas (1897), Austrian Empress Elisabeth of Austria (1898) and Italian King Umberto (1900). In 1901, it was the American president McKinley who died at the hand of the anarchist Leon Czolgosz. Jensen, the author of what is likely to remain the definitive account of propaganda by the deed, has established key facts concerning the actual 'anarchist outrages'; he usefully highlights the uncertainties of the concept, starting with the considerable difficulties in identifying who among these terrorists was actually an anarchist, the role of provocateurs, as well as the anarchists' own initial willingness to take credit for acts of propaganda by the deed. With these caveats, Jensen calculates that 'for the period 1878–1914 (excluding Russia) more than 200 peo-

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[15] Fleming, 'Propaganda', 17.

[16] Cited by Candace Falk, *Emma Goldman: A Documentary History of the American Years Made for America*, vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 15.

[17] E. Armand, 'Illégalisme' in Sébastien Faure (Ed), *L'Encylopédie anarchiste*, vol. 1, accessed 6 August 2017, http://www.encyclopedie-anarchiste.org/Encyclopedie%20Anarchiste.pdf.

[18] P. Di Paola, *The Knights Errant of Anarchy. London and the Italian Anarchist Diaspora (1880–1917)*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 63–78.

[19] M. Nettlau, 'Attentats', in Faure, Encyclopédie anarchiste.

[20] Cited in Jean Maitron, *Ravachol*, 11–12.

[21] Jensen, *The Battle against anarchist terrorism*, 31.

ple died and over 750 were injured as a result of real or alleged anarchist attacks throughout the globe'[22]—a relatively small figure given its public impact.

In addition to contextual issues such as the availability of dynamite and the logic of contagion highlighted above, the progress of propaganda by the deed stems from complex factors. David Rapoport highlights two key reasons at the origin of this wave of terror: 'the transformation in communication and transportation patterns' and 'doctrine or culture'.[23] Examining the latter specifically, Marie Fleming sees the appeal of propaganda by the deed in the fact that 'it appeared to point the direction of resolving the paradox of a non-authoritarian revolution' and was also 'a logical extension of a deep-seated belief in the importance of rebellion'.[24] Put very simply, terrorism seemed to promise immediate change. Thus, in her study on Russian Nihilism, Claudia Verhoeven insists on the fact that terrorism is bound up with modernity: it marks

> the emergence of a new political subject. True, this is a subject who seeks, via violence, to generate fear and advance change [...] What matters especially in terms of modernity, is that by doing so, this subject desires to act in a historically meaningful manner, and does this without delay and without mediation [...] a subject that directly experiences and seeks to intervene in the historical process.[25]

As examined below, anarchist terrorism and its reception were indeed intertwined with modernity—the economic modernity of the industrial and urban world, of new communication systems, along with the subjective experience of modernity. It was also rooted in a sense of profound economic injustice, which prompted the demand for radical change: thus, for Sedlmaier, 'various transnational influences and a keen vision of future relations of production and consumption led to an apology for terror', in a society where access, or denial of access, to consumption drew sharp social divisions.[26] Writing about Emile Henry, who engineered the 1894 Café Terminus attack in Paris, John Merriman summarises the overwhelming sense of alienation behind anarchist terrorism, even though Henry himself was a well-educated young bourgeois rather than a 'marginal criminal' or a 'poor devil' like many other perpetrators[27]: 'He blamed capitalism, religion, the army, and the state for the plight of the underclass, who struggled to get by as the rich lived it up. In the city of lights, Emile Henry felt dislocated, alienated, and angry. It made him a perfect recruit for anarchism'.[28]

In addition to such recurring characteristics, another point of note is the complexity of motives and local political situations underpinning acts of propaganda by the deed but also determining their public perception and the way authorities tackled them. The example of India points to the widespread tendency to exaggerate the anarchist threat and use it to tarnish other subversive movements. Thus, European anarchism was one source of influence for terrorism in Bengal and elsewhere in colonial India; the movement drew upon 'indigenous resistance to colonial rule, and Hindu religious imagery, as well as European anarchist, nationalist, and socialist

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[22] Ibid., 36.

[23] Rapoport, 'Four Waves', 48–49.

[24] Cahm, *Kropotkin*, 12.

[25] C. Verhoeven, *The Odd Man Karakozov. Imperial Russia, Modernity, and the Birth of Terrorism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 6.

[26] Sedlmaier, 'Consuming Visions', 293.

[27] J. Merriman, *The Dynamite Club* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2009), 163.

[28] Ibid., 4.

movements'.[29] Indian nationalists were part of a diasporic network stretching 'from London to Calcutta and Paris',[30] and were influenced by European movements of national liberation and Kropotkin's ideas, which contributed to the evolution of militancy into political violence in the early twentieth century, with 'a program of targeted assassination, bombings, sabotage, and [...] social banditry to obtain weapons and funds'.[31] However, the nationalists of Swadeshi were labelled as propagandists by the deed and, inaccurately, as 'anarchists'—a label they fought because of its criminal and pejorative associations. Propaganda by the deed was also connected with periods of increased labour protest (most notably in Latin American contexts as well as in the United States). In Britain, there was a tendency 'to confuse the external Fenian threat with internal social protest',[32] and in turn, to conflate both with anarchism. In the Spanish context, James Yeoman has pointed out that acts of anarchist violence such as rural uprisings were often borrowed from other repertoires, so that while they were interpreted as anarchist gestures, this was not a fully explanatory framework.[33] Indeed, '[i]n nineteenth-century Spain labour conflict, strikes and protests were often accompanied by attacks on individuals and property and small explosions, almost as a matter of course'.[34] The role of provocateurs in instigating attacks, notably in Britain, has also been documented.[35] In other words, acts of perceived propaganda by the deed were heavily localised and, to some extent, constructed and manipulated for political purposes.

Responses to Propaganda by the Deed: Moral Panics and the Criminalisation of Anarchism

Anarchist-inspired terrorist attacks were intended to be spectacular in the most literal sense; this was implicit in the very notion of propaganda by the deed, whichever definition was adopted. As summarised by Karine Salomé in her study on acts of political violence in nineteenth-century France, 'political attacks always appeared as a sudden irruption of violence … imply[ing] a profound disruption in the intelligibility of things and contribut[ing] to the dissolution of landmarks, to the confusion of roles and statuses, causing intense reactions mixing uncertainty and apprehension, fear and dread, stupefaction and horror'.[36] Neville Bolt, who has written on propaganda by the deed in a wider sense (including acts of Fenian terrorism), has identified three aspects which underpin this spectacular dimension and sees terrorism as situated 'in a tension between: 1) an operational act of political violence; 2) a performance ritual for individuals or a political

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[29] M. Silvestri, 'The Bomb, Bhadralok, Bhagavad Gita, and Dan Breen: Terrorism in Bengal and Its Relation to the European Experience', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21.1–27 (2009).

[30] M. Ramnath, *Decolonizing Anarchism: An Antiauthoritarian History of India's Liberation* (Oakland: AK Press, 2011), 45–47.

[31] Ibid., 48.

[32] B. Arnett Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Late Victorian Novel* (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 6.

[33] J. Yeoman, *Print Culture and the Formation of the Anarchist Movement in Spain, 1890–1915* (PhD. Diss., University of Sheffield, 2016).

[34] Ibid., 53.

[35] Di Paola, *Knights Errant*, 19; Constance Bantman, *The French Anarchists in London, 1880–1914* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013).

[36] Karine Salomé, *L'Ouragan homicide, L'attentat politique en France au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Champ Vallon, 2011), 14.

group, therefore a spectacle or even merely rite of passage; and 3) an act of communicating a message directed at a local or wider population'.[37]

This ritualistic and spectacular dimension was remarkable in both the performance of acts of propaganda by the deed and their reception. In addition to the targeting of high-profile or highly symbolical victims, perpetrators capitalised on the shock thus created and sought to extend it further. In the 1890s, it was common for terrorists to publicise their ideological intentions through official declarations during court cases; Emile Henry's speech or Ravachol's statements following their arrests were translated and widely circulated in anarchist periodicals,[38] while faked 'relics', which had allegedly belonged to anarchist terrorists, were sold lucratively among international exiles in London.[39] The dramatic staging of attacks and the punishments they brought about played a significant part in the cult of anarchist terrorists and the martyrdom and emulation that followed. In the more complex 1887 Chicago attack, the eight anarchists who were sentenced and, for four of them, executed for having allegedly thrown a bomb during the May Day demonstration, quickly became known as the 'Haymarket martyrs'. As Yeoman underlines, terrorism often went hand in hand with martyrdom in anarchist culture, which in turn was a central cultural and identity-defining feature.[40] Gabriel also points out that 'anarchists […] were the first nonreligiously grounded group to develop public witnessing and martyrdom into a central means of propagandizing', seeing this as 'one of anarchism's chief legacies to the culture of the radical Left'.[41] Gabriel analyses how anarchists thus 'turned the power of punishment to their advantage', seizing the opportunity 'to evangelize the masses in their political faith'.[42] In return, however, for the crowds terrorised by the irruption of anarchist violence, the sentencing and public execution of perpetrators provided an important form of catharsis.

While they were fervently received by anarchists, at least initially, violent acts and the rituals which accompanied them had a major impact on civilian populations. Thus, alongside the theoretical formulation of propaganda by the deed, the 1881 London congress also witnessed the creation of the so-called Black International, which was the lynchpin of the conspiratorial perception of anarchism for a long time, through the belief in a malevolent international organisation of anarchists. The era of propaganda by the deed and the moral panic associated with it can be construed as symptoms of societies faced with rapid urbanisation, modernisation and growing interconnectedness, with increasingly glaring socioeconomic inequalities.[43] The moral panic triggered by anarchism was profound and multifaceted; it fed on anxieties caused by technological modernity and the progress of the labour movement, a *fin-de-siècle* obsession with the ideas of decadence, irrationality, immorality and redemptive violence, as well as fears of racial

[37] Neville Bolt, 'Propaganda of the Deed and the Irish Brotherhood. From the Politics of 'Shock and Awe' to the 'Imagined Political Community'', *RUSI*, vol. 153, n. 1, 48–54, 48.

[38] Maitron, *Ravachol et les anarchistes*, 42–73; Merriman, *Dynamite*, 185–188.

[39] C. Malato, *Les Joyeusetés de l'exil* (Paris: Acratie, 1985/1897), 133–143.

[40] Yeoman, 'Print Culture'.

[41] Elun Gabriel, 'Performing Persecution: Witnessing and Martyrdom in the Anarchist Tradition', *Radical History Review* 98 (2007), 34–62, 36.

[42] Ibid., 55.

[43] Constance Bantman, 'Terrorism and Its Policing: Anarchists and the Era of Propaganda by the Deed, 1870s–1914', in Paul Knepper and Anja Johansen (Eds), *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Crime and Criminal Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 199.

and civilisational decline.[44] Propaganda by the deed's connection with modernity and the moral panics it engendered, especially on a new transnational scale, are an essential aspect of the cultural history of anarchism. As pointed out by Sarah Cole, 'dynamite violence added a potent new element to the modern imaginary',[45] and propaganda by the deed and dynamite functioned as metaphors, not only for the perceived madness and explosive temperament of the anarchists but also for 'unbridled political and cultural chaos' and their refraction in some aspects of contemporary cultural and literary production.[46]

Migration and the development of faster communications were crucial components in the conspiratorial imagination associated with anarchism. The rise of the yellow, sensationalist press, carried by increased popular literacy rates, fanned public fears. Learned discourses also contributed to the notion of anarchism as a crime, in particular with Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso's 1894 study *Gli Anarchici*, which claimed to establish the anthropometric bases of the congenital criminality and innate fanaticism which Lombroso saw as inherent in anarchism. Such ideas went on to inform press, legal, political and diplomatic discourses on anarchism. Attacks generated their own lexicon too, and words like 'ravacholiser', 'dynamitard' and 'bombiste', while testifying to the French origins of propaganda by the deed, circulated internationally. A thriving print production both condemned and publicised 'the anarchist peril': the 'dynamite novel' became a genre in its own right, which occasionally presented a nuanced depiction of anarchist circles and ideology.[47] Essays on anarchism were another genre, ranging from 'scientific' writings such as Lombroso's to sociological explorations of anarchist circles and their crimes, for instance, Michael J. Schaack's *Anarchy and Anarchists: A History of the Red Terror and the Social Revolution in America and Europe* (1889) and Flor O'Squarr's *Les Coulisses de l'anarchie* (1892). This profusion of writings shows the cultural impact of anarchism, and underpinned the lasting if erroneous identification of anarchism with terrorism. It was also 'both commercially and politically motivated. The desire to boost newspaper sales often went hand in hand with the wish to discredit genuine labour movements'.[48]

Among anarchists and their sympathisers, positions on anarchist violence varied widely and changed quickly, as acts of violence appeared to alienate the popular supporters anarchists had sought to win over. The common response to acts of propaganda by the deed among the anarchists was a refusal to condemn popular violence. As we have seen, Kropotkin expressed reservations at a very early stage. For his disciple Jean Grave, the claim that 'the end justifies the means' was dangerous, and ends and means should always be consistent, 'under pain of producing the exact contrary of one's expectations'.[49] Johann Most in the London- and then New York-based *Freiheit* had been a leading and inflammatory exponent of propaganda by the deed (and was famously sentenced for it in 1881), but by 1888 he 'lamented the anarchist's prevailing image as a knife-wielding bomb thrower though he had helped to create that image'.[50] Instead, Most now ad-

[44] Porter, *Plots and paranoia*; D. Ó Donghaile, *Blasted Literature. Victorian Political Fiction and the Shock of Modernism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), 4–11.

[45] Sarah Cole, 'Dynamite Violence and Literary Culture', *Modernism/ Modernity*, XVI.2 (2009), 301–328, 301.

[46] Ó Donghaile, *Blasted Literature*, 7.

[47] Melchiori, *Terrorism in the Late-Victorian Novel*.

[48] Ibid., 44.

[49] J. Grave, 'Means and Ends' (1893), cited in Robert Graham (Ed), *Anarchism. A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, vol. 1 (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 156–157.

[50] T. Goyens, 'Johann Most and the German Anarchists', in Tom Goyens (Ed), *Radical Gotham. Anarchism in New York City from Schwab's saloon to Occupy Wall Street* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 21.

vocated print- and oratory-based propaganda.[51] It was the 1893 Liceo attack in Barcelona which led New York and London-based Jewish organiser Saul Yanovsky to turn his back on individual acts of violence and advocate instead libertarian socialism.[52] As late as 1929, while defining anarchism as 'the very reverse of violence', Alexander Berkman stated that '*under certain conditions* a man may have to resort to violence'.[53] Nonetheless, this was not a mainstream position, as propaganda by the deed was mostly—if not unanimously—rejected by anarchists from the mid-1890s onwards.

The End of the Anarchist Terrorist Wave

The 1890s represented the peak of anarchist-inspired attacks, but acts of propaganda by the deed occurred long after. In 1920, the Italian anarchist Mario Buda was the most likely suspect for the detonation of a bomb in Manhattan's Wall Street, which killed 38 people and injured many more. In Spain alone,

> anarchists were responsible for an attempt on Prime Minister Antonio Maura (Barcelona, 1904), several attempts on King Alfonso XIII (Madrid, 1902; Paris 1905; Madrid 1906; Madrid 1913) and the successful assassination of Prime Minister José Canalejas (Madrid, 1912). Those responsible for these attacks briefly attracted the attention of the anarchist press, however none of them gained the notoriety of their predecessors of the 1890s, nor were they martyred.[54]

Anarchist violence gradually subsided. This section surveys the explanations for both the rise and eventual decline of political violence, interrogating in particular the deployment of policing on a variety of scales as a response to terrorism.

As summarised in a recent overview of propaganda by the deed, '[b]etween its emergence in the 1870s and the beginning of the First World War, the public perception of the anarchist movement as well as the theoretical and legal frameworks used to comprehend and control it underwent a dual process of criminalization and internationalization'.[55] Indeed, the dominant and most visible approach for public authorities to tackle anarchism—and one of the key legacies of the anarchist terrorist campaign—was the development and coordination of sophisticated and increasingly uniform policing systems, on a variety of scales and with various degrees of secrecy. In the wake of Germany's 1878 Anti-Socialist Laws, many countries passed laws to contain anarchism and revolutionary movements; these took the form of controls on immigration and laws allowing the deportation of foreigners perceived as dangerous, bans on the use of explosives and laws censoring radical political groups. Anarchists found themselves under constant surveillance and subject to arbitrary arrest. As early as the 1880s, national police forces implemented increasingly uniform identification and recording methods to keep checks on anarchists, including when they crossed borders. These measures and the broader anti-anarchist legal apparatus often encountered resistance, thus making anarchists become catalysts for debates on civil

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[51] Ibid.

[52] K. Zimmer, 'Saul Yanovsky and Yiddish Anarchism on the Lower East Side', in *Radical Gotham*, 37.

[53] Alexander Berkman, *A. B. C. of Anarchism* (London: Freedom Press, 1977 (1929), 3.

[54] Yeoman, 'Print Culture and the Formation', 87.

[55] Bantman, 'Terrorism', 192.

liberties. In Britain, for instance, proposed restrictions on immigration and asylum which made much of the 'anarchist peril' were repeatedly defeated in the name of the defence of the country's tradition of asylum; it was only in 1905 that an 'Aliens' Act' was adopted.[56] Other countries, for instance, Germany, promoted all-out repression of anarchist ideas and their proponents, advocating, for instance, the death penalty to punish attacks on heads of state, an idea supported by Russia, Austria and the Ottoman Empire.[57]

International cooperation was a key area of development. In the 1890s, there was much talk of 'anarchist registers' supposedly storing anthropometric data about anarchists, although it seems that methods of communication across national polices were still quite rudimentary, and numerous diplomatic frictions are recorded. The reliance on provocateurs and infiltrated spies resulted in tensions at various levels (including on the streets where these individuals conducted their work) and a few memorable fiascos while occasionally fulfilling the prime objective of disrupting anarchist activism.[58] International police cooperation was in place from the 1880s; Bertillon's *portrait parlé* was used to facilitate information exchange, alongside other identification systems, for instance, across Latin America, where Bertillon's methods were hybridised.[59] Such processes were, however, controversial and not always reliable. The late 1890s saw a further effort towards international coordination and information exchange, with an international conference held in Rome in November–December 1898, and initiated by Italy in the aftermath of the assassination of Elisabeth of Austria. The final report, adopted by 20 of the 21 participating countries—Britain refused to sign—formalised existing practices and planned the creation of a central authority in each country to centralise and exchange information about anarchists.[60] In practice, however, the protocol did not produce significant change, and another international meeting was convened in 1902 by the United States and Russia following the death of President McKinley. In 1904, a confidential Protocol was signed in Saint Petersburg. These two Protocols, despite their practical limitations and failure to engage key countries (Britain and the United States did not sign in 1904), were landmarks since they brought about unprecedented coordination between national police forces which, as a result of the great anarchist scare, underwent a process of modernisation, centralisation and professionalisation. Thus, for instance, a lesser role was devolved to informers in intelligence gathering after 1900, whereas this had been the lynchpin of the surveillance system previously.[61] Nonetheless, even though these first steps towards cooperation have been identified as precursors of Interpol and subsequent counter-terrorism efforts, Rapoport also points out that they failed because 'the interests of states pulled them in different directions', and attributes the end of the anarchist terrorist wave to a 'dampened enthusiasm for the strategy of

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[56] Paul Knepper, *The Invention of International Crime. A Global Issue in the Making, 1881–1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 128–158.

[57] L. Keller, 'Beyond the "people's community": the anarchist movement from the *fin de siècle* to the First World War in Germany', in Matthew S. Adams and Ruth Kinna (Eds), *Anarchism 1914–18. Internationalism, anti-militarism and war* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017), 95–113.

[58] See, for instance, Di Paola, *The Knights Errant*, 122–156.

[59] Mercedes García Ferrari and Diego Galeano, 'Police, anthropometry, and fingerprinting: the transnational history of identification systems from Rio de la Plata to Brazil', *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos*, v.23, suppl., 2016.

[60] Richard Bach Jensen, 'The International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 and the Origins of Interpol', *Journal of Contemporary History* 16.2 (1981), 15–46.

[61] Jensen, *The Secret agent*.

assassination' following the experience of the war, rather than a more profound ideological or socio-political transformation.[62]

Alongside the transformation of national and international policing, historians have emphasised the second, possibly more effective, approach to ending terrorism, which consisted in addressing the conditions which produced terrorism, through political reform (and the attending development of parliamentary socialism), and the institutionalisation of trade unions. Thus, even as Germany was at the forefront of the repression of terrorism and socialism, Left liberals blamed the 1878 Laws and police repression for creating a German anarchist movement, and argued that a return to the rule of law and respect for the freedom of speech would eliminate anarchist terrorism.[63] A similar explanation has been given for the failure of anarchism to take root in Britain despite the strengths of exilic anarchism, especially in London, based on the argument that political liberalism and the legal trade union movement prevented the growth of a libertarian movement.[64] Sedlmaier also points to 'the defusing potential of "well-being for all"',[65] which saw most anarchists turn their backs on individual acts of terrorism and embrace 'a theory of a more thorough socialisation, which included the distribution of goods'.[66] Jensen summarises:

> Anarchist militancy was intimately tied up with the "social question," the social problems, injustices and grievances of the nineteenth century working class population, both rural and urban. When a significant amelioration of the social question occurred through a combination of political and economic action and reforms, improvements in the economy, and anarchist absorption into the labor movement, [...] the problem of anarchist terrorism diminished dramatically.[67]

As early as the 1880s, some anarchists started pointing out the risk of marginalisation which resulted from propaganda by the deed; in the following years, two influential alternatives gained ground within the movement internationally, as ways of bringing about revolutionary change without violence, based on the understanding that it would take more than attacks to replace the existing structures of oppression and win over the masses: anarcho-syndicalism and revolutionary syndicalism and educationalism. In terms of militant strategy, this change of direction may first appear as a rejection of anarchist violence, through processes of institutionalisation, unionisation and the commitment to act within the boundaries of legality, although it may also be argued that the endorsement of violence percolated into subsequent political practices, such as sabotage and the general strike, which carried a more militant conception of labour activism, with a clear anarchist legacy.

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[62] Rapoport, 'Four waves', 52.

[63] Elun Gabriel, 'The Left Liberal Critique of Anarchism in Imperial Germany', *German Studies Review*, 33.2 (2010), 331–350.

[64] F. Bédarida, 'Sur l'anarchisme en Angleterre', in François Bédarida (Ed), *Mélanges d'histoire sociale offerts à Jean Maitron* (Paris: Les Editions Ouvrières, 1971), 11–25.

[65] Sedlmaier, 'The consuming visions', 292.

[66] Ibid., 291.

[67] R. B. Jensen, 'Nineteenth Century Anarchist Terrorism: How Comparable to the Terrorism of al-Qaeda?', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20.4 (2008), 589–596, 592–593.

Propaganda by the Deed and Its Afterlives

On 23 May 2017, in response to the terrorist attack in Manchester, Britain, on the previous night, the bestselling novelist Robert Harris tweeted a photo of the final paragraph of Joseph Conrad's 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*—itself a fictional rewriting of the 1894 Greenwich anarchist-inspired bomb plot—with the caption '"Frail, insignificant, shabby, miserable..." J Conrad's brilliant description of his fictional suicide bomber, 1907'. The message was retweeted over 400 times in the next 48 hours—a relatively inconsequential figure in view of the surge in Twitter and social media activity typically generated by terrorist events, but nonetheless a telling testimony to the enduring relevance of nineteenth-century events as a lexicon for discussing contemporary terrorism. What has been remarkable in this respect is the currency of this reference across both academic and public discourses, especially in the English-speaking world. The contemporary interest in the era of propaganda by the deed across a wide range of quarters—ranging from TV producers[68] and the press to academics and policy experts, to name a few—is highlighted in this section, with a focus on the long-running academic debate exploring the possible parallels between anarchist terrorism and the post-2001 wave of Islamist-inspired attacks. Another interesting line of investigation (which cannot be explored in-depth here) has been the study of the mobilisation of the stereotypical tropes attached to anarchists to castigate contemporary activists engaged in alterglobalisation protests and the global justice movement since 1999: thus, Aksel Corlu has examined the 'resurrection of an old, well-known image, with the anarchist as the irrational, wild-haired, bearded, bright-eyed bomb-carrier and immediate menace to society' to portray contemporary anarchist activists.[69]

The discussion and mobilisation of the anarchist reference in mass media and popular culture since September 2001 has been remarkable. Most recently, they have provided the source material for filmic adaptations: a BBC adaptation of Conrad's *Secret Agent* (2016) and the French film, *Les Anarchistes* (2015), about a provocateur infiltrated in individualist illegalist circles.[70] Within academia, propaganda by the deed and anarchist political violence in general have attracted less attention among scholars specialising in anarchism than among experts from other fields, who have examined the era of propaganda by the deed in the context of more general studies on terrorism.[71] In other words, the history of anarchist political violence has not been a focal point of interest for scholars of anarchism, although propaganda by the deed and its consequences do remain a central part of most histories of anarchism, for instance, as a cause of exile and long-term disorganisation. Two notable exceptions are Richard Bach Jensen and Timothy Messer-Kruse, who has written two revisionist books on the Haymarket explosion and subsequent trial.[72] As a result of perceived similarities with current events, pre-First World War transnational anarchist

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[68] See, for instance, the 2016 TV adaptation of Joseph Conrad's novel *Secret Agent* by the BBC and the Channel 4 documentary *The Enemy Within* (2009), which compared the aims and activities of nineteenth-century revolutionary anarchists and contemporary radical jihadists.

[69] Aksel Corlu, 'The disreputable phoenix: A transnational history of propaganda by the deed' (PhD Diss. Binghamton University, 2011), 154.

[70] For further comments on these two films, see C. Bantman, 'Why anarchy (on screen) is so fashionable right now', *The Conversation* (2016).

[71] For instance, Michael Burleigh, *Blood and Rage. A Cultural History of Terrorism* (London: Harper Collins, 2007).

[72] Timothy Messer-Kruse, *The Trial of the Haymarket Anarchists: Terrorism and Justice in the Gilded Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); *The Haymarket Conspiracy: Transatlantic Anarchist Networks* (Champagne-Urbana: University Press of Illinois, 2012).

networks have been studied as an early example of the post-2001 wave of terrorism. In the aftermath of the 2005 London attacks, the history of the city as a destination of refuge for suspected terrorists has generated a great deal of commentary, across the ideological spectrum. Research has also centred on the themes of immigration and asylum in conjunction with terrorism, with some commentators arguing that the main parallels between both terrorist episodes lie less in the perpetrators' ideology and *modus operandi* than in the reception and instrumentalisation of these events to stigmatise foreigners and bring restrictions on civil liberties.[73] Another related argument is that anarchist-inspired terrorism was born out of poverty and social exclusion, which provides another parallel between the two waves.[74]

Looking beyond the reception and impact of terrorism, is it appropriate to see any meaningful point of comparison for contemporary acts of terrorism in the anarchist precedent? This has formed the subject of a lively academic debate, which started in 2008, when James Gelvin, a specialist in Middle Eastern studies, published an article 'situat[ing] al-Qaeda and similar jihadi movements within the category of anarchism', which 'challenge[d] the central pillar of the terrorology paradigm: the notion that terrorism is useful as an independent unit of analysis'.[75] Gelvin argued that anarchism and Jihadi terrorism shared a preference for 'action over ideology' that both relied on 'a highly decentralized structure built upon semi-autonomous cells' and represented an external, comprehensive treat to 'the system'. In both cases, according to Gelvin, the terrorists sought to defend a culture perceived to be under attack. This prompted a series of replies, some of which focused on aspects not directly related to anarchism and sought other relevant analogies.[76] Others, however, scrutinised the validity of the comparison drawn by Gelvin. George Esenwein, a specialist of Spanish anarchism, pinpointed the vague definition of anarchism put forward by Gelvin, and his failure to contextualise violence within the movement, thus overstating the comparison and downplaying the 'ideological gulf which separates anarchism from militant jihadism'.[77] Nonetheless Esenwein acknowledged three notable commonalities between anarchist and jihadist terrorists: their disproportionate impact in light of their actual numbers, the fact that they gained notoriety through sensational acts of violence and their reception as 'the harbingers of an era of chaos and uncertainty'. Richard Bach Jensen critiqued the argument from the perspective of the history of anarchist terrorism; he emphasised the anarchists' rejection of religion, which is at the core of the Jihadist project, contrasted Jihadism's 'nostalgi[a]

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[73] See in particular the radio programme with Jean Garrigues, 'La Troisième République et la violence anarchiste: libertés ou sécurité?', Concordance des Temps, France Culture (2016), available at https://www.franceculture.fr/emissions/concordance-des-temps-la-troisieme-republique-et-la-violence-anarchiste-libertes-ou.

[74] T. Armitage, 'Commentary', *New Statesman*, 8 August 2005; Anon., 'For jihadist, read anarchist', *The Economist*, 18 August 2005. M. Collyer, 'Secret Agents: Anarchists, Islamists and Responses to Politically Active Refugees in London', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28.2 (2005), 278–303; A. Taylor, 'London bombings and alien panics', Chartist, Nov–Dec. 2005; E. Aydinly, 'Before Jihadists there were anarchists', Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, 31.10 (2008), 903–923; R. B. Jensen, 'The International Campaign against Anarchist Terrorism, 1880–1930s', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 21.1 (2009), 89–109.

[75] J. L. Gelvin, 'Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian's Reply to Terrorology', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20.4 (2008), 563–581.

[76] J. Kelsay, 'Al-Qaida as a Muslim (Religio-Political) Movement Remarks on James L. Gelvin's "Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian's Reply to Terrorology"', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20.4 (2008), 601–605. L. Binder, 'Comment on Gelvin's Essay on Al-Qaeda and Anarchism', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20.4 (2008), 582–588; Binder, for instance, challenged Gelvin's use of a Western definition of anarchism and terrorism to comprehend Islamic concepts.

[77] G. Esenwein, 'Comments on James L. Gelvin's "Al-Qaeda and Anarchism: A Historian's Reply to Terrorology"', *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 20.4 (2008), 597–600, 599.

for an idealized past'[78] with the anarchists' willingness to embrace modernity and challenged the claim that anarchists, like contemporary terrorists, embraced violence for the sake of violence. Nonetheless, Jensen also acknowledged similarities, for instance, in 'the worldwide scope and styles of violence' characterising both movements[79]—two features which do indeed tend to underpin many comparisons.

Conclusion

In a 2015 contribution to *The Guardian*, the columnist Jeff Sparrow mused on an explosion carried out by the anarchist Daniel Maloney just outside Melbourne in 1898, and concluded that '[w]hat we would now call the anarchist terrorism of the 1890s has been largely forgotten'.[80] In the light of the present survey, this statement ought to be qualified, as anarchist propaganda by the deed has not only remained a thriving area of research but also emerged as a key historical point of comparison for the contemporary wave of terrorism, spanning a wide ideological and disciplinary spectrum. Contemporary parallels cannot but lurk in the background of any contemporary study on anarchist terrorism, if only because of the central place of propaganda by the deed in the genesis of modern terrorism. Will—and should—the anarchist moment remain such a central historical reference in contemporary discourses on terrorism?

First of all, the efficacy and relevance of the analogy must be questioned. As the current wave of terrorism has continued and claimed more lives in more places through new modes of attacks, it has also developed its own repertoire of response and become its own frame of reference, thus backgrounding the anarchist reference. Discussing the response to terrorist attacks in France, the historian Gilles Ferragu stated that 'every attack replaces the other in memory' which, despite the relevance of historical perspectives in showing the persistence of terrorist attacks in France and the cyclical nature of terrorist campaigns, suggests that the ongoing wave of attacks has now become its own frame of reference. In other words, transnational and translocal identification now prevails over historical recall as the key frame of reference.

Second, the impact of these discourses on the perception of anarchism must also be assessed. This resurrection of the history of propaganda by the deed testifies to the ongoing identification of anarchism with political violence, especially outside specialised academic debates—a highly damaging and reductionist stereotype. Of course, anarchist political violence is an important strand within the history and theory of anarchism, far beyond the long nineteenth century. As discussed here, it also represents a pivotal moment in the history of modern states and international collaboration. Nonetheless, is also remarkable—and somewhat ironical—that the scholarly and public interest in the history of anarchist-inspired political violence has coincided with a flurry of research activity into anarchist ideas and organisation, brought on by the transnational turn, the emergence of the global justice movement and the appearance of a new generation of anarchist scholars questioning the anarchist canon. This, in contrast, highlights how limited the focus on political violence is. It is also distorted, in light of the tradition of pacifism, resistance

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[78] Jensen, 'Nineteenth Century', 591.

[79] Ibid., 593.

[80] Jeff Sparrow, 'In the end, we forget the anarchists, bombers and "lone wolves". But the hysteria they provoke stays with us', *Guardian*, 2 January 2015.

to violence and educationalism within anarchism, which is just as much of a red thread in the history of the movement[81]—albeit perhaps a slightly less sensationalist one.

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[81] See, for instance, Matthew S. Adams, 'Art, education, and revolution: Herbert Read and the reorientation of British anarchism', *History of European Ideas*, 39.5 (2012), 709–728.

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