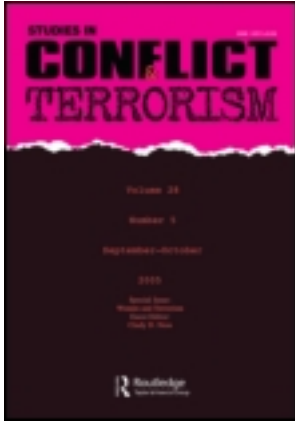


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Interview With a Terrorist by Vocation: A Day Among the Diehard Terrorists, Part II

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Research Note

Interview With a Terrorist by Vocation: A Day Among the Diehard Terrorists, Part II

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The interview that follows was conducted somewhere in Italy with a militant of the Red Brigades recently freed after spending 32 years and 6 months in prison. Taking up the sociological perspective of Max Weber, the author draws a distinction between “professional terrorist” and “vocational terrorist”. The terrorist by vocation differs from the professional terrorist in his profound faith in the mission he feels he must accomplish. He does not try to improve his social status and is not interested in the selfish pursuit of personal well-being. He gives up love, family, children and friendship. When he decides to join a terrorist group, he voluntarily severs any contact with his former life. He is a high school or university graduate and might choose a secure life and a good job but prefers to kill, accepting the risk of dying. The vocational terrorist is the terrorist in his incandescent state.

Terrorist by Vocation: Who Is He?

The central idea of this article draws on Max Weber’s distinction between living “off” politics and living “for” politics.

Those who live off politics derive from politics the material means for their survival. Those who live “for” politics dedicate their lives to a cause in order to satisfy an inner need. Weber writes:

There are two ways of making politics one’s vocation: Either one lives “for” politics or one lives “off” politics. By no means is this contrast an exclusive one. The rule is, rather, that man does both, at least in thought, and certainly he also does both in practice. He who lives “for” politics makes politics his life, in an internal sense. Either he enjoys the naked possession of the power he exerts, or he nourishes his inner balance and self-feeling by the consciousness that his life has meaning in the service of a “cause.” In this internal sense, every sincere man who lives for a cause also lives off this cause. The distinction hence refers

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to a much more substantial aspect of the matter, namely, to the economic. He who strives to make politics a permanent source of income lives “off” politics as a vocation, whereas he who does not do this lives “for” politics.¹

The terrorist by vocation differs from the professional terrorist in his profound faith in the mission he feels he must accomplish.² He does not try to improve his social status and is not interested in the selfish pursuit of personal well-being.³ He gives up love, family, children, and friendship.⁴ When he decides to join a terrorist group, he voluntarily severs any contact with his former life.⁵ In many cases, the educational level of the vocational terrorist is above average for the segment of the population to which he belongs.⁶ He is a high school or university graduate and might choose a secure life and a good job but prefers to kill, accepting the risk of dying.⁷

The vocational terrorist is the terrorist in his incandescent state. He expresses a readiness to die for the group whose survival and preservation is more important than survival or preservation of oneself.⁸ The terrorist by vocation is a man who—as the Greek terrorist Patroklos Tselentis or the Al Qaeda member Zouheir Riabi⁹—wants to risk for all others in a just cause.¹⁰

Poverty, exploitation, and lack of education are scarcely ever the principal causes that impel him to act.¹¹

On May 1992, Xavier Raufer published a lengthy interview with one of the leaders of the Red Brigades who was living far from Italy to avoid arrest. This vocational terrorist—who was the last member of the “Strategic Command,” the Red Brigades’ highest level of authority, to have voted for Aldo Moro’s death on 6 May 1978—explained that daily life in the Red Brigades was based on self-sacrifice in the name of a higher cause. Despite knowing that the chances of dying were high, he had in any case followed the path of individual sacrifice to satisfy an inner need for justice consistent with his ideology.

Pay particular attention to his words:

Membership depended on a criterion which was much more important to the organization: his ability to renounce a normal life, his family, his studies, his friends and sentimental liaisons. And naturally on his moral capacity to take up arms, to embark on the path to revolution without the slightest guarantee that it would be victorious one day and with prison or death as more realistic outcomes. At the time, only someone endowed with powerful idealism, not just ideological convictions, and with an implacable desire to fight injustice to create a new society could be admitted to the organization. I was asked to join the column. This is how a dramatic life started for me.¹²

As the leader of the Red Brigades interviewed by Xavier Raufer, Antonio is a terrorist by vocation. He was recently freed after spending 32 years and 6 months in prison. This Red Brigades member was interviewed by the author between 4 and 7 p.m., somewhere in Italy in [date omitted]. He had graduated from high school, and he entered the Red Brigades in 1977, abandoning his wife and daughter: he was part of the Red Brigades’s leadership during the most violent years of Italian terrorism (Aldo Moro was kidnapped in Rome 16 March 1978).

The interview with Antonio touched on different topics, but I would like to summarize those parts of his testimony that are the most important for the purposes of my research into vocational terrorists.

Antonio explained that there is no personal advantage to entering the Red Brigades. Becoming a Red Brigades member means living in fear of dying. It means choosing a life without loved ones, without pleasure, without entertainment, without sex. Antonio, despite having had the opportunity to lead a relatively serene life, had opted to join the Red Brigades.

During the interview, Antonio repeatedly used the word “sacrifice” to describe his choice of life. This reference to “sacrifice” occurs often when vocational terrorists speak about their daily lives. With the language and mentality typical of the terrorist by vocation, a red terrorist interviewed by Donatella Della Porta recalls that, with her entry into the Red Brigades, she underwent “a profound change and upheaval in my life, in the sense that I, devoting myself practically body and soul to this type of commitment spiritually linked to my comrades on the run, to this idea of our lives overturned, had a series of virtual pictures before my eyes: the need, the legitimacy, the justice and, if you want, also the beauty of that type of sacrificial gesture.”¹³

Antonio is proud of his sacrificial gesture. After spending 32 years and 6 months in prison, he goes on firmly believing in his revolutionary ideology.

Antonio’s Childhood

Antonio shakes my hand and greets me with a smile. We sit down at a small bar table. Antonio orders a cup of coffee and I have a soft drink. We both appear relaxed, but it soon becomes clear that we are involved in a fencing match. As Erving Goffman taught, when a person acts in public he or she has multiple reasons for attempting to control the impressions they receive of the situation.¹⁴ Antonio is determined to give a positive image of himself, as the e-mail he sends me after our meeting, which is reproduced at the end of this chapter, shows. I am equally determined to understand this diehard terrorist who claims to believe in murder as a political means in freeing the world of capitalism and private property.

Antonio presents himself as a man who is respectful of others’ ideas and open to dialogue, and from his very first words it is clear that he wishes to overturn the prevailing idea that terrorists are violent, intolerant people. Antonio is, in fact, engaged in a public battle to obtain political and cultural recognition for the history of the Red Brigades, whom he calls “freedom fighters”: “I’m glad about this meeting. My book was published a few weeks ago and I’m trying to find out what other comrades think about it. Thanks for reading the book.”

I thank him in return for having accepted my invitation, and after chatting for a while to break the ice I ask him to tell me something about his childhood.

Antonio was born to humble parents in a suburb of [place omitted], but avoids telling me what their jobs were and adds that since childhood he has hated injustice and social inequalities. I note that he is using a different language to that which he uses in his book, where he glorifies violence and describes how as a teenager he was animated by the desire to crush the wealthy youths he calls “pieces of shit.” What he felt for these young people was hatred, contempt, and a desire for revenge.

These are the words used in the book:

In our streets there was hate, or maybe it was just contempt. From our point of view, at our young age us kids could afford to despise. We thought we had plenty of time to deal with those arrogant upstarts who flaunted the money they carried rolled up in their pockets so you couldn’t help seeing it, who lorded it over the neighbourhood, hand in glove with the parish priest and a few pimps.

We didn't know how or when, but we were sure that sooner or later we would crush them like dry shit. We could swallow the odd bitter pill, we had time, we had so much time on our side, and sooner or later . . .

Antonio's mother also hated injustice: "Even when I was arrested, my mother never re-proached me. I think she always shared my choices."

Joining the Red Brigades: A Mission to Accomplish

After finishing high school, Antonio held various jobs before obtaining a position in the State Railways. He became a Red Brigades member and went into hiding in 1977.¹⁵ Without giving any explanation, he abandoned his daughter, wife, and all his loved ones. It was a radical choice, which he describes in these words:

Abandoning all my nearest and dearest was a painful decision, but I felt I had a mission to accomplish. I was not alone. Many of us felt we had to do something that was more important than our individual lives. The fight to destroy the injustices of bourgeois society was more important than my life itself. When you join the Red Brigades, you start a new life and you have to give up many things. I went into hiding at a time when there was a lot of blood being spilt. Between 1977 and 1980, the battle between the government and the Red Brigades was violent. Becoming a Red Brigades member in a context like that required great self-denial and an iron discipline. The little things that used to fill up your life were no longer possible. Leaving behind all my loved ones was painful but I've never regretted it because sacrificing yourself for the revolution was the right thing to do. When you have to do something that is so important for others you can't think about what's easiest for yourself. If you ask yourself what's in it for you, you'll never be a Red Brigades member. I made that decision because I felt it was right to take that direction. A direction I've never stopped believing in.

I ask Antonio to tell me about his day-to-day life in the Red Brigades. I explain to him that I am interested in the daily routine, in the small things and not the most dramatic events like the killing of Aldo Moro's escort (16 March 1978), which was in fact organized when Antonio was one of the leaders of the Red Brigades.

Antonio takes the initiative and tries to steer the interview in his own direction. He says that capitalism has created a monstrous society and that, in his day, the injustices were enormous: "You can't write the history of the Red Brigades without taking that context into account." He dwells on the exploitation and poverty that still today dominate the world. I do not interrupt him, because I can see that he needs to talk. He needs to communicate the anger and idealistic motivations that led him to become a Red Brigades member: "The Italy of the sixties was a country rife with injustice, where the weak were continually crushed by the strong." I nod my head and say that, despite not having lived through those years, I have studied the inequalities and social injustices that accompanied capitalist development after the war. I try to display a minimum of human warmth and communicate through my gestures, head movements and facial expressions that I know very well that people like him did not join the Red Brigades out of personal interest.

Daily Life in the Red Brigades

When his words begin to lose some of their intensity, I ask Antonio to speak about daily life in the Red Brigades. Antonio indulges me, saying, "If you want to understand how life works in the Red Brigades, you have to understand what fear is. There's a continuous risk of being recognized on the street. The fear of being arrested, of being tailed, of finding yourself involved in a shootout, it's always with you. I always had a gun on me. If you realize you are being followed you can use the gun to shoot at the police car. Not to kill, to escape. Shoot and run. You scare the police and gain a few precious seconds to slip down some alley and get away. Of course, it can always go wrong. The police can shoot you before you manage to pull your gun out."

While Antonio is speaking, I remember that this account of the role of fear in the daily life of the Red Brigades was also present in his book.

Antonio wrote:

Months and months of hiding out teach you to carefully scrutinize the city and every detail that might affect your safety. You walk out of a doorway and carefully observe the people in the street, trying to understand the reasons for their being there and for their behaviour. You walk down the crowded sidewalk and try to act as casually as you can. When you walk into a bar you cast a questioning look at everybody inside and, if the reasons for their presence there don't convince you, you change bar. Your knees start trembling when you bump into a familiar face. Will he have recognised me? And what will he think? Shall I try to chase after him and act out a normal encounter, or quickly walk away? I once bumped into a comrade while I was at the tram stop. She saw me dressed up, unusually, the way respectable people dress. I was struggling for breath and awkwardly mumbled some inanities. She was much more relaxed and chatty. I think she had understood what was going on. She handled the encounter with more self-possession than me. You must always be aware of who is walking behind you, who is walking towards you, who is looking at you and who deliberately looks away. If for any reason you catch someone's attention, try to avoid their gaze. When someone stares at you insistently you start panicking. What does he want? When you get into a taxi you look around and try to figure out if anybody else is getting into a taxi at the same time. [If you are worried about being tailed] you take your time talking to the driver or pretending to look for something in your bag so the other taxi has to set off first. Living underground, you learn to respect fear.

I am extremely interested in the question of fear, because it helps focus on one aspect of the terrorist by vocation: the sacrificial gesture, renunciation, the choice of a life without affection and without pleasure to satisfy a spiritual need.

I ask Antonio to go on with his story about the role of fear in his life in the Red Brigades. He says,

You have to learn to live with fear. But you have to learn to live with loneliness too. When a man feels in danger, he can always count on the affection of his loved ones. A member of the Red Brigades can't. In the Red Brigades it was forbidden to visit your girlfriend, wife or daughter. You couldn't even phone them. Some comrades were arrested as they were heading for a date with their

girlfriends. The first thing the police do is wait outside your girlfriend's house. If you have a girlfriend, you can be sure that the police will follow her to see where she goes. There are some sentimental weaknesses that you can't allow yourself, otherwise you endanger the lives of other comrades. It can also happen that the police, rather than arrest you immediately, tail you for weeks so you lead them back to your group. These are mistakes that you cannot let happen. The rules in the Red Brigades are clear and must be followed. No one is forced to become a Red Brigades member.

I ask Antonio to tell me about how a person who cannot see their family and friends goes about their daily life:

I always hung around with the same people. I only saw the comrades from the column. Very often, the life of a militant living underground comes down to talking with three or four companions at the most, to whom you are forbidden to reveal your real name. We all knew each other by our *noms de guerre*. What's more, you couldn't tell them anything about your past life or your loved ones. If a comrade was arrested, maybe even tortured, he might pass on what you'd told him to the police, who then had information to find out your true identity. And you know very well that they did torture people.

When the police are hunting you down, you can be on your own for days on end. You hide out and don't talk to anyone. The police couldn't work out how we managed to hide so well. We had our tricks. I've taken the train from Rome to Milan at midnight many times. When I couldn't go home at night because I was afraid that the police were after me, I would sleep on the train. I would arrive at the station in Milan and then straightaway take the train to Rome. It was a great way to hide, but I had to stop because some informer grassed about it and the police started searching the trains at night. Sleeping on the train had become dangerous.

Antonio's Daily Life in Its Simplest Details

I ask Antonio how his day was organized, from waking up until the time he went to sleep. I keep asking him to describe his daily life in its simplest details: "In the morning I had the alarm set very early, around six. It is important to move about the city in the morning hours when the city is crowded and full of traffic. The traffic and commotion are useful for hiding better. In the evening we never went out, except in exceptional cases. Sometimes I went to the movies alone, but always during the day. There weren't any diversions."

I ask Antonio to tell me what he did in the morning when he went out of the front door of his house:

I did investigations. Investigations were my main job. Doing investigations means gathering information about the life of the person who is to be targeted. You have to tail them and observe them, although it is not always possible. You have to find out where they live or where their office is. If you can't get the information from some comrade, you have to find a way to get hold of it. You can use newspapers, but you don't always find what you need. So you have to invent a way to gather information. Reconstructing the crimes of an important person who you're always seeing on TV is easy. It's more complicated, though,

when it comes to understanding the role of a little-known person. For example, I used to get hold of police magazines that contained news about promotions. You know those magazines full of pictures of the police? You always find some article that says that a certain person has been promoted or got a medal, a transfer or a new job. The *carabinieri* and the police have their own magazines. I used to buy them from the newsagent. We also had a lot of informants. When I was on trial, the judges were amazed because they couldn't understand how we collected such detailed information about our victims. I didn't answer, of course, but I can tell you that plumbers and labourers were vital to the Red Brigades. A plumber, a painter, a builder enters your house and can describe everything in detail. Maybe the plumber has to do a job that takes a few days and can give you plenty of information about timetables and the family of the man you're investigating. He tells you the license plate of the car, the wife's job, what time [your target] goes out to take their children to school. The plumber and the labourer can tell you if a building has two entrances, if there's a caretaker . . .

Antonio is talking about exactly the things that interest me. Being convinced that the sacrificial act of vocational terrorists emerges clearly even from study of those moments of everyday life which might seem least important, I ask Antonio to go on with his description. How did they do the shopping? How did they procure cars? Where did they get the money to pay the rent? Who did he speak to when he felt lonely? What about sex?

Sex in the Red Brigades is like in prison: it doesn't exist. There were some exceptions, of course, but it is obvious that when you live in hiding you can't have a woman. Sometimes two comrades get together, but it didn't happen often. Particularly because the Red Brigades tried to discourage love affairs within the organization. The problem of sex was brought up several times by my comrades. Giving up sex was a sacrifice, especially for the younger people. The organization gave me a salary. From this point of view, we were all equal. Every Red Brigades militant who had gone underground was entitled to the same salary as a metalworker.

We stole the cars and the license plates. We spent part of our day moving the cars from one parking lot to another. You can't keep a stolen car in the same place for too long, otherwise someone might recognize it or notice it.

Solitude Problems

I ask Antonio how he dealt with the moments of solitude. He answers in the tone of someone who does not wish to dwell on the question: "When you feel lonely, like I said, you can't just pick up the phone and have a chat with a friend, your daughter or your mother. You can't go out for dinner with your wife. The whole life of a member living underground is dedicated to fighting for the cause you believe in, but also to protecting the Organization [the Red Brigades] which, in the end, is all you have. I know of cases of comrades who haven't managed to cope with that kind of life. The underground life is hard, I understand that, but if you decide to leave you have to discuss it with the others first."

I ask Antonio if it was possible to freely leave the Red Brigades.

As far as I know, if a comrade wanted to leave, they could. But first he had to talk with others and agree on some pretty complicated things that had to be sorted

out. You couldn't leave the Red Brigades overnight. The reason is simple. If you leave the Red Brigades after you've lived in my house for several months, I no longer feel safe in that house. If you make a mistake, if you get found out, or perhaps tell somebody something, my life is in danger. Before letting a comrade go, several things had to be sorted out for a question of security. For example, we needed to find a new house. The comrade who leaves can't know where the remaining Brigades members live. At the beginning, when things with the state were not so violent, you could leave the Red Brigades relatively easily. It got complicated when things with the state got more violent. I was in the Red Brigades from 1977 to 1980. During those years you could easily get killed. The police went to the houses of comrades during the night and fired machine guns. You know that there were massacres of our comrades. Just think about the massacre in Via Fracchia in Genova, for example.¹⁶ In that house there were four comrades who were sleeping. Have you seen the pictures? Some of them were killed while they were still in their underpants. The police had found that safehouse thanks to a grass. When people found out about the grasses, nobody felt safe anymore and leaving the Red Brigades created a lot of problems.

Satisfying an Inner Need

I ask Antonio to describe his arrest:

"I was arrested while I was calmly talking to a comrade in a bar in [place omitted]. We were sitting at a table outside, around 11 in the morning. I was sipping a cappuccino. It was a beautiful day. Near the tables there were some plants in big pots. Suddenly, a group of plainclothes policemen jump out with their guns in their hands. Straight after, more police jump out behind me. I was surrounded." Antonio is at pains to tell me that he had always closely followed the rules of secrecy and is convinced that he was discovered thanks to a grass. I ask him to go on with the story of his arrest.

They put me in handcuffs and put a hood over my head to stop me from seeing where we were going. Then the car set off with its sirens going. The car stopped and they took me into a small room. They took my picture, they took my fingerprints, measured my height, weight and the circumference of my skull. I was in the hands of a special unit of the *carabinieri*. I wasn't tortured, as other comrades were, but they held me for seven days in a dark basement without anyone knowing where I was. The special laws against terrorism permitted it. During that time I thought of the comrades who were still free and I hoped I hadn't left any incriminating documents lying around that might lead to more arrests. I started thinking about my mother, my daughter, my wife. I thought that they would find out I was in the Red Brigades from the newspapers and the TV. I went three days without eating. Then the police started to give me one meal a day. At night they banged something metal against the door to wake me up. Every now and then they'd shout that they'd do me in if I didn't talk. I was constantly watched through a peephole. The room I was in had no windows or air-vents. There was no toilet and I wasn't allowed out to go to the bathroom. There was only a plastic bucket to urinate in.

Antonio tells me that his decision to enter the Red Brigades took form during the protest movement of 1977: "I was willing to risk my life to smash the state, institutions,

capitalism, property, the family, the church. Three years later I was in prison, cut off from everything that was happening outside. And yet, I continued to struggle. I wanted to get back to the fight, and after a few weeks I started to plan my escape. With the help of some comrades, I managed to saw through the bars of a grating that were then put back in place with glue and putty to avoid suspicion. One Sunday afternoon in mid-June, I gave a yank and the grate came away in my hands, giving me a way out onto the cornice of the building.”

Antonio attempted to escape with a partner who, however, proved not to be very agile: “After putting the grate on the floor, we climbed onto the building’s ledge. We took a rope made out of sheets and we tied one end of the rope to a window to lower ourselves towards the perimeter wall. To the other end of the rope, instead, we had attached a plastic bag filled with salt. Unfortunately, the first throw failed and the bag fell back, banging into the wall. The second attempt was successful, though. My partner managed to get down, but he was slow and it took him too long to reach the ground. When I started climbing down, the guard began to shoot. We had been found out. After a few minutes, the police had hold of me.”

Antonio’s Tolerant Face

My interview with Antonio lasts more than three hours. Shortly before saying goodbye, I ask him what crimes he had committed to have been sentenced to prison for so long. My question causes him visible embarrassment. For the first time since the beginning of the interview, he stops looking me in the eye and uses the tone of voice and facial expressions of those who wish to convince the public that the question is unimportant and is not worth discussing. Antonio says he does not know why he was convicted. More precisely, he says “I don’t know the exact reason for which I was convicted. You know how judges think. . . . Since I was a member of the Red Brigades, they convicted me. I wasn’t convicted of a specific crime. ”

When I get home, I send this e-mail to Antonio:

Dear Antonio,

How are you? Thank you very much for the chat yesterday afternoon; I enjoyed it very much. I look forward to hearing if there will be other presentations of your book so that I can attend.

Warm regards,
Alessandro

Antonio responds with an e-mail that confirms the image he wishes to give of himself, that of a tolerant man, open to dialogue and respectful of others’ ideas:

Hi Alessandro,

An exchange of ideas and experiences between people is always valuable and a pleasure. Best wishes for your work and your future.

Of course I’ll let you know the date of the next presentation of my book in [place omitted].

Best regards,
Antonio

Not a Conclusion

As Xavier Raufer pointed out, during the years 1982–1986, most incarcerated Red Brigades militants, including the founders of the organization like Renato Curcio, Mario Moretti, and so on spent a lot of time reflecting. They concluded that a historical cycle had come

to a close that went well beyond the history of the Red Brigades itself.¹⁷ Antonio stated that he shared Curcio's point of view but this not means that terrorists by vocation left the political scene.

While the Red Brigades struggled to rebuild themselves in 1999 (assassination of Massimo D'Antona), 2002 (assassination of Marco Biagi), 2003 (assassination of Emanuele Petri), the vocational terrorists of the Informal Anarchist Federation (IAF) was managing to create an international network, beginning with cells in Greece. The acronym IAF made its first appearance on 28 December 2003, in Bologna, when Romano Prodi, the then-president of the European Commission, received a package containing a book, *Pleasure*, by the poet Gabriele D'Annunzio. The book caught fire without causing any damage.¹⁸ The same day, another letter bomb was sent from Bologna—but intercepted in Frankfurt—to Claude Trichet, then-president of the European Central Bank.

From December 2003 to December 2011 the terrorists by vocation of the IAF carried out five terrorist campaigns against:

1. The European Union (parcel bombs to Prodi and Trichet, 28 December 2003). In the letter claiming responsibility that was sent to the *La Repubblica* newspaper, the terrorists by vocation of the IAF claimed to be acting against the attempt to approve a Constitution of the European Union that, in their opinion, would limit the freedom of individuals.
2. The immigration policies of the Italian government (parcel bomb to the Milan headquarters of the Lega Nord on 26 March 2010¹⁹). The package contained a leaflet from the IAF accusing the Lega Nord Political Party of being responsible for the CIE or Centres for Identification and Expulsion, which have the task of accommodating illegal aliens awaiting expulsion from Italy. The IAF flyer stated that Roberto Maroni—a high-ranking member of the Lega Nord Party and Minister of the Interior under the Berlusconi government—was “accomplice” to the violence committed in the CIEs.
3. The repression of anarchist terrorism (parcel bombs to embassies of Switzerland, Chile, and Greece in 23 December 2010²⁰). The enclosed letter was signed by a cell named “Lambros Fountas” after a Greek anarchist killed in Athens in March 2010 during a firefight with the police.²¹ The IAF wanted to punish Switzerland for its imprisonment of the anarchist Marco Camenish (1952), convicted of murder. Chile, instead, was the country where the anarchist Mauricio Morales had died after the explosion of his backpack bomb (Santiago, Chile, May 2009).
4. The proliferation of nuclear power plants (parcel bomb against Swissnuclear, 31 March 2011²²).
5. Parcel bombs to Equitalia, 8 December 2011.²³ Equitalia is the Italian agency responsible for the collection of taxes. The same day, an explosive package was delivered to the President of Deutsche Bank, Josef Ackermann, in Frankfurt, but was intercepted.

The Informal Anarchist Federation most recent attack is the intentional wounding of the managing director of Ansaldo Nucleare, Roberto Adinolfi, who was shot in the leg on 7 May 2012, in Genoa, by a group calling itself “Olga” in honor of the imprisoned Greek anarchist Olga Oikonomidou.

The Italian chief of police, Antonio Manganelli, has stated that the terrorists of the IAF are preparing to move from woundings to murders, and added that anarchist terrorism by vocation is, today, the greatest threat to internal security (25 May 2012).²⁴

The terrorists by vocation of the IAF stated to act in order to satisfy an inner need. The words with which they claimed responsibility for the attack on Roberto Adinolfi are very clear.

These are the typical words of the terrorists by vocation:

If we had been realists, we would not have chosen to face so many risks, we would live our lives producing, consuming, perhaps getting angry. We are madmen who love freedom and will never give up revolution, the complete destruction of the state and its violence. In our anarchist and nihilist revolt there is the hope of a future without borders, wars, social classes, economics, the exploited and the exploiters. The possibility of realising this dream is like a glow of light in the darkness for us. Dim as it may be, this glow is always worth trying for, at any cost: the quality of our lives will always be enriched.

The Italian and international historical and political context are now completely different from the time the Red Brigades were most active, yet the terrorists by vocation returned to shoot again.

Taking up the sociological perspective of Max Weber,²⁵ Clifford Geertz,²⁶ and Raymond Boudon,²⁷ the intent of this article is specifically not to be objective but to be subjective.²⁸ As Jon Elster would say: "To understand how [terrorists] act and interact, we first have to understand how their minds work."²⁹ Man is a machine designed for believing.³⁰ The vocational terrorist is the most perfect of these machines.

Every human has a profound need to believe, and terrorists are men and women like the rest of us³¹: they are distinguished by the depth of their faith,³² and not by their need to believe. There are no individual psychological traits that distinguish terrorists from the general population.³³ The outstanding common characteristic of terrorists is their normality.³⁴ Vocational terrorists have not a background of mental illness.³⁵

We cannot understand the meaning of an act if we do not understand what is in the individual's mind at the moment in which they act.³⁶ This implies that a sociological explanation necessitates us putting ourselves in the terrorist's shoes.³⁷ It means looking at the world through their eyes, motivations, and aims.³⁸

To succeed in this endeavor we must take the way in which vocational terrorists define reality very seriously,³⁹ and not start out with the prejudice that their ideologies are the result of human irrationality or of ignorance.⁴⁰

Notes

1. Max Weber, *Politics as a Vocation*, in Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Translated, Edited, and with an Introduction by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 84.

2. Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward, "Terrorist (E)motives: The Existential Attractions of Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 12 (2011), p. 973.

3. Megan K. McBride, "The Logic of Terrorism: Existential Anxiety, the Search for Meaning, and Terrorist Ideology," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4 (2011), p. 561.

4. Alison Jamieson, "Identity and Morality in the Italian Red Brigades," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 4 (1990), pp. 508, 513, 514.

5. Alison Jamieson, "Entry, Discipline and Exit in the Italian Red Brigades," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1 (1990), pp. 1–20.

6. Alan B. Krueger, *What Makes a Terrorist. Economics and the Roots of Terrorism* (Princeton, NJ and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 6.

7. Alessandro Orsini, "Poverty, Ideology and Terrorism: The STAM Bond," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 35(10) (2012), pp. 665–692.

8. Robert S. Barrett, "Interviews with Killers: Six Types of Combatants and Their Motivations for Joining Deadly Groups," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34(10) (2011), p. 755.

9. Zouheir Riabi, was an Al Qaeda–affiliated Tunisian network that operated out of the Milan area in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Zouheir was reportedly died in a massive shootout with Tunisian forces that occurred outside of Tunis in January 2007. Cf. Lorenzo Vidino, "The Buccinasco Pentiti. A Unique Case Study of Radicalization," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 3 (2011), pp. 398–418. Zouheir Riabi is an example of a "vocational terrorist."

10. George Kassimeris, "Why Greek Terrorists Give Up: Analyzing Individual Exit from the Revolutionary Organization 17 November," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 34(7) (2011), p. 559.

11. Martha Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," *Comparative Politics* 13 (July 1981), p. 383.

12. Xavier Raufer, "The Red Brigades: Farewell to Arms," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 16(4) (1993), pp. 317–318.

13. The testimony of a Red Brigades terrorist to D. Della Porta, *Il terrorismo rosso* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1990), p. 174.

14. Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956), p. 8. In Goffman's own words: "To summarize, then, I assume that when an individual appears before others he will have many motives for trying to control the impression they receive of the situation."

15. Brigades members are divided between regulars and irregulars. The Brigades regulars live underground and dedicate their entire life to the revolution. Not being full-time revolutionaries, the Brigades irregulars, instead, lead a double life.

16. Antonio is referring to the killing of four Red Brigades members that took place in Via Fracchia in Genoa on 28 March 1980. The police raided the apartment and killed Lorenzo Betassa, Piero Panciarelli, Annamaria Ludmann, and Riccardo Dura. The police have always claimed to have ordered the Red Brigades members to open the door and surrender. In the face of their refusal, they broke down the door and, according to the police version, a Red Brigades member fired first, shooting Marshal Rinaldo Benà in the eye, this reaction leading to the shooting that took the lives of four Red Brigades members. See Giorgio Bocca, *Noi terroristi, dodici anni di lotta armata ricostruiti e discussi con i protagonisti* (Milan: Garzanti, 1985).

17. Xavier Raufer, "The Red Brigades: Farewell to Arms," p. 324.

18. Massimo Franco, "Messaggio da non sottovalutare. A Bologna una scia di terrorismo," *Corriere della Sera*, 28 December 2003.

19. Redazione Online, "IAF Letter Claiming Responsibility," *la Repubblica*, 27 March 2010.

20. Redazione Online, "Pacchi bomba a Roma contro le ambasciate di Svizzera e Cile," *il Sole 24 Ore*, 23 December 2010.

21. Redazione Online, "Pacchi bomba alle ambasciate, due feriti. Rivendicazione degli anarchici," *la Repubblica*, 23 December 2010.

22. Redazione Online, "Bomba alla federazione nucleare svizzera," *Corriere della Sera*, 31 March 2011.

23. Redazione Online, "Pacco bomba esplose in agenzia Equitalia," *la Repubblica*, 9 December 2011.

24. Lucio Di Marzi, "Terrorismo, Manganelli: il FAI? Minaccia Reale," *il Giornale*, 25 May 2012.

25. Max Weber, *Economia e società* (Turin: Edizioni di Comunità, 1999, vol. I), p. 13. On the causal power of mental representations in Max Weber's sociology, cf. Anthony Giddens, *Capitalismo e teoria sociale. Marx, Durkheim, Weber* (Milan: il Saggiatore, 1975), p. 253.

26. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 203.

27. Raymond Boudon, *L'ideologia Origine dei Pregiudizi* (Turin: Einaudi, 1991), p. 135. An excellent introduction to Boudon's sociological perspective is Enzo Di Nuoscio, *Le ragioni degli individui. L'individualismo metodologico di Raymond Boudon* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 1996).

28. Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist. The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to al Qaeda* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 9.
29. Jon Elster, *Explaining Social Behavior. More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 67.
30. Paolo Legrenzi, *Credere* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2008), p. 13.
31. Simon Cottee and Keith Hayward, "Terrorist (E)motives: The Existential Attractions of Terrorism," p. 986.
32. McBride, "The Logic of Terrorism," pp. 560–581.
33. John Horgan, *The Psychology of Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
34. Crenshaw, "The Causes of Terrorism," p. 390.
35. Ariel Merari, Ilan Diamant, Arie Bibi, Yoav Broshi, and Giora Zakin, "Personality Characteristics of 'Self Martyrs'/'Suicide Bombers' and Organizers of Suicide Attacks," *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1 (2009), p. 98.
36. Raymond Boudon, *Theories of Social Change. A Critical Appraisal* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 38.
37. As Raymond Boudon wrote: "For Weber, to understand an individual action is to acquire sufficient means of obtaining information to understand the action of an observed subject as soon as they can conclude that in the same situation it is quite probable that they too would act in the same way. This kind of comprehension is therefore not an immediate datum and does not imply that we can see right into what other people do." Raymond Boudon, *Theories of Social Change. A Critical Appraisal*, cit., p. 31.
38. As Bruce Hoffman wrote: "All terrorist groups seek targets that are rewarding from their point of view and employ tactics that are consonant with their overriding political aims". Cf. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), p. 229.
39. M. Silber and A. Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: The Homegrown Threat* (New York: New York City Police Department, 2007). According to Silber and Bhatt's model, radicalization can be segmented along four phases: the pre-radicalization phase; the self-identification phase; the indoctrination phase; and finally, the jihadization phase. For an Introduction to Silber and Bhatt's model, see Anne Aly and Jason-Leigh Striegher, "Examining the Role of Religion in Radicalization to Violent Islamist Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 12 (2012), pp. 849–862.
40. John Horgan, *Walking Away From Terrorism. Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), p. XIX.