

## **A Reflection on Terrorism and Inequalities**

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# *A Reflection on Terrorism and Inequalities*

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## **Abstract**

The article considers the theme of terrorism, with regard to the social representation of the 'other than selves' in Europe. Foreign fighters and autochthonous jihadists are young radicalized people, often born in Europe. This fact generates processes of stigmatization for migrants and peculiar social groups. The paper discusses, in a sociological perspective with historical references, the presence of non-national social groups in Southern Europe. Mediterranean sea historically was the bridge and the *locus* for encounters. At the same time it was a place of conflicts and wars. However, the presence of the 'strangers' in Europe has for centuries been the root of European cultural diversity.

Keywords: terrorism, inequalities, sociology.

## **1. Terrorism**

Do the 'P 38 boys', late nineteenth century Russian populists, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna militants, the men and women who get themselves blown up in Chechnya, in Israel, at the Saint Denis Stade de France, who kill and get killed at the Bataclan, La Promenade des Angles, have something in common? Terrorism can be practiced by individuals but also by state systems and kamikaze trained, financed and organized into a system to reclaim nationality or political, religious and racial identity, such as the Irish Republican Army or Euskadi Ta Askatasuna, or in anti-colonial groups such as the ones in South Africa or Algeria. The Red Brigades, the Rote Armee Fraktion, the revolutionaries of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries considered

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themselves as armed vanguards that with violent actions were going to induce the masses to revolution or war, like Nečaev in his 'Catechism of the revolutionary', like Abdullah Alzah with Al-Qaeda, like the veterans of the foreign legion and the Palestinian fedayeen.

Why do we kill in the name of an Idea? Why do we challenge the taboo of death for a Cause? At a time when disenchantment with universal values is strong and in which the individual is narcissistically focused on his own ego, the terrorist embodies ideology, sacrifice, absolute values.

His ability to act is typical of the operation of a healer, of an educator, of a moralizer to purify the world, educate the infidels, restore 'the lost order' without doubt or crisis, dominated by a single thought. The terrorist becomes such when he does not recognize the plural aspect of the human being, individual, cultural and does not recognize in the other his share of humanity.

The heroism of the terrorist is guided by a god who promises eternal rewards if he uses all evil to destroy infidels, the unclean, sinners and the corrupt. It is precisely this Infidel, impure sinner, corrupt, who justifies his action and his fundamentalism, giving him the awareness of being on the way of Truth.

Globalization, which has existed since the times of the Roman Empire, is not the problem: the rate at which certain changes happen, technology that quickly changes the lives of people and how they relate impacts with rigid identity systems, causing phenomena of demographic marginalization in Western societies where the elderly have money, power, homes, pensions, social, political and cultural influence, all securities that young people are not given and are not easily conquered. The imbalance of guarantees and power is a powerful factor of marginalization, the outcome of which is a defensive reaction that originates in all demographic areas, in young and elderly, between women and men, in the inhabitants of big cities as well as in small urban centers.

The risk sociologist, Ulrich Beck, as early as the mid-eighties, theorized a world prey to terrorism, climate change, economic crises and unexpected effects of globalization, sometimes in direct conflict with the analysis of Zygmunt Bauman.

The decline of security while the human condition becomes ever more fragile requires a targeted sociological perspective and a new civil ingenuity on the part of the sociologist for a reflexive modernity that defends the individual from the unintended effects of his intentional actions.

'Security' is an issue that pertains to the field of human rights just as much as freedom, which it is structurally linked to, and this applies not only to certain geopolitical areas but to the whole of humanity in its global distribution. Statistical analyses of recent years have shown the growth of

inequalities within countries and between countries, even among the more developed United States or Great Britain, where, humans are increasingly further apart and, though living side by side, simmelianly 'strangers'.

## **2. The inequalities of the future**

Terrorist aim to spread and provoke cultural traumas: 'Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways' (Alexander, 2004: 1)

Increased mobility and circulation of objects and social and cultural subjects indicates that Western societies are very close to the threshold, beyond which the increase of social differentiation can produce a process of disintegration with the emergence of the opposite trend of the violent re-establishment of homogeneity. It is a matter of rethinking the future and returning to our roots to break down the negative aspects of globalization, a sort of cultural sanction that prevents social relations between unequals (rich and poor), fosters indifference, increases the relativism of values.

People fleeing war and persecution are so many Nelson Mandelas, so many Andrey Sakharovs for whom we should open the door of our homes and not forget or ignore their experience. But especially the more disadvantaged sectors of society, both economically and culturally, are tenaciously opposed to refugees and migrants who they fear having to contend space and resources with, forgetting the history of Italy and other European countries in the twentieth century marked by labour migration and flights from persecution.

René Girard (1961) states that there was a time in our history when the truth about the identity of all humans was pronounced and no one wanted to say it; instead we focused ever more obsessively on our false differences. Concealment deceives violence and violence targets the 'Different', 'The Stranger', protecting the indigenous community from its fears and its insecurities.

By destroying 'The Stranger' we think to save 'us', as did the Nazis taking on an entire people as a sacrificial victim. It is also necessary to reflect on some human weaknesses such as lust for power that constitute contexts of human action, which is today particularly emphasized by the narcissistic vacuum of values (Cesareo, Vaccarini, 2012), and highlighted by the profiles of the terrorists of Nice, Rouen and Berlin.

*'No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.'* Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995).

The history of the founding countries of the European Community is a history of shared values of inclusion and solidarity, which has created the fabric of the civil society we live in today, and which is changing into fear and insensitivity, meanness and selfishness.

Pareto and Sorokin addressed the processes of differentiation and structural change of social processes in their analyses.

The immigration issue constitutes an analytical field where the dividing line between true and false, right and wrong, good and bad is barely defined.

The Italian municipalities are called on to handle these emergencies, impacting on a structural element of our societies: the bureaucracy that manages the political system and the *res publica*. In this segment of the complex machine of the state, there are some dysfunctions in part aimed at the very survival of the apparatus that responds only partially to the 'rationality and efficiency' criteria as analyzed by Max Weber – such as the modern bureaucracy legitimacy criteria unlike 'caste' or 'mandarins' of Egyptian or Chinese societies.

Robert Merton indicates in organisational dysfunctions the problem of the increasing bureaucratization of modern societies. It depersonalizes the action of the bureaucrat, depriving him of responsibility and increasing the strength of the 'ritual' that undermines the effectiveness of the management of the *res publica*. An actual 'power' is formed within the bureaucratic system which expands, taking root as a 'caste' without political identity but whose actual power is great.

The percentage of the Italian population over 75 years of age is 4,9% while only 0,9% of foreigners fit into this age category on the national territory. In other words, one Italian out of 10 is older than 75. Compared with the foreign population where 1 in 100 exceeds this threshold, the Italian population has aged. And the army of 'retirees' weighs on public budgets. The foreign population contributes to the pension system but, unlike the Italians, receives nearly irrelevant benefits from it. By calculating the average pension income and the increase of foreign employment in our country, it can be argued that foreign workers pay the pensions of 620,000 Italian elderly and contribute 8,6% of the national wealth to the GDP with an increase of 8,7% of companies led by foreigners. Foreign labour represents for our country an added value of about 125 billion euro. As evidence of this data, see the

income and product classifications per capita in the Western world. Heading the list are the countries which have welcomed more immigrants, while Italy finds itself in the thirtieth position.

### 3. The myth of the stranger

In ancient Greece, the stranger was called *xenos*, someone from a different state, but also from the Peloponnesus, a wanderer or a person accepted to become part of a social relationship. The stranger was welcomed as a real guest worthy of respect and regard. The term now takes on an opposite meaning.

In Homer's time, the *xenos*, without rights, was welcomed with respect by establishing a relationship of reciprocity. Giving evidence of this affinity is the custom of *Symbolon*, a stone fragment divided in half delivered to each of the two parts, a gift of exchange as a sign of friendship.

The *xenos* was under the protection of Zeus, considered as a sacred guest to be showered with benevolence.

In the fourteenth book of Homer's *Odyssey*, a passage reveals the sacredness of the *xenos*.

The *xenos*, was welcomed as a guest, the idea of hospitality was encompassed in a single but significant word, '*proxenia*' or '*proxeny*' (from the Greek *pròxenos*, literally 'in front of' or 'in favour of the stranger').

The *proxenia* was a Greek institution which aimed to protect the *xenos*, someone who settled in a different city from his own, as attested by Plato, while recognizing the Barbarians as 'other from oneself'.

In the Latin world, the stranger was called *hostis*, which initially designated the other, a term also used in the *De Officiis* of Cicero, as one who comes from outside, a *peregrinus* from other borders. Later the term acquires a negative value, ending up by representing the *hostis* as a public enemy to be feared, rejected and fought, generating hostile and selfish behaviour patterns.

The roots of the culture of difference and mistrust, however, are also found in Ancient Greek thought and secretly in the paradigm of the barbarian, someone who was not Greek.

The barbarian is someone who is alien to Greek civilization, uncouth, uncultured, sometimes also defined as someone who stammers because of his 'different' language.

Ancient Rome conquered the world with weapons and the 'invention' of law, integrating the stranger and holding people of different languages and cultures together. Romulus, the founder, was descended from the Trojan Aeneas. The Roman community had its origin from a mixture of different

peoples with different cultures, as evidenced by the rape of the Sabine women. Ethnicity mattered less than politics.

The Roman Empire ruled from the Atlantic coast to Mesopotamia, from the forests of Scotland and Germany to the Egyptian desert, several languages and cultures merged with it. Rome granted Roman citizenship, *cives romanus*, with advantages of that were not only practical but also social and psychological, of identity, of belonging. There were tensions and conflicts but the cultural unification was very strong. Unlike the Greeks who regarded as Barbarian everything that was not Greek, the Romans, due to their mixed blood origins, had a 'mimetic' relation with the other: from the first brides kidnapped by force in Sabina, to the opening of the *asilum* where they gathered all those who were seeking hospitality.

Even the slaves, if freed, became freedmen known as *liberti* and acquired Roman citizenship while in Greece the freed slaves became *meteci*, cohabiting but not fellow citizens.

Polybius writes that the Romans were ready to change their habits and customs and adopt those of others if they were better: weapons from the Samnites, insignia from the Etruscans, the laws from the Greeks Lycurgus and Solon.

In 40 A.D. the emperor Claudius proposed granting the possibility of becoming senators or magistrates to the Gauls. This proposal found many opponents, but Tacitus argued that Athens and Sparta died from having kept out foreigners from the city government. While Romulus, who founded Rome, treated the same peoples as enemies before and as citizens later. In 198 A.D., Septimius Severus was emperor and he was from Septis Magna in Libya. In 212 A.D., the emperor Caracalla, Antoninus, granted Roman citizenship to all inhabitants of the empire except for the *dediticii*, those who had opposed the Roman conquest.

Caesar gave the so-called barbarians, Gauls and Spaniards, a chance to become Senators. One of the strong points of great ancient societies, as well as modern ones, was the immigrant's ambition for integration and recognition. Imperial Rome and the United States, Australia and New Zealand, gave and give everyone an equal chance with the rules which we will return to in this paper.

The concept of *Mare Nostrum*, an expression which indicated the Mediterranean, fully expresses the Roman concept that considers these waters as a sort of 'home pool', changing the concept of 'community by the sea' or 'Mediterranean' civilization from Greek culture.

The Romans, with great imperial roads, facilitated access to existing ports and fortified them, they built new ones and around the maritime landings, thriving urban centres grew up that needed to adopt *ad hoc* legal systems.

The central power entrusted a *Magister portus* with the assignment and the responsibility of monitoring the movement of goods and of ensuring the protection of the infrastructure of the seaports for the transit of goods, not to mention the Maritime Republics until 1865, year of the establishment of the of the Port Authority Corps. Trade, commerce, the migration of individuals because of movements related to them have opened the chapter of the major changes related to the theme of cultural diversity.

This *excursus* shows that cultural diversity takes on multiple and unstable meanings. It aims for a sharing of the benefits of individual cultures of the world, the relationships and exchanges that link different populations. Cultural differences are the object of the loss of the 'universal' sense of humanity and cause of different conflicts. Globalization has expanded the patterns of interaction between cultures, giving rise to identity conflicts that may develop into real armed conflict. Accepting diversity, metabolizing it interculturally without claim for dominion, pertains to the *interaction* process which regards exchange, reciprocity and solidarity among peoples. We note the importance of shared values, ways of life, and symbolic representations to which relate individuals and society, their relationships with each other, the recognition of their habits, their traditions. As Sorokin (1937) observed, scholars of social phenomena who have sought to explain the transformations of an integrated system using factors that are only symptoms or effects of it, have not been able to grasp the true nature of change in a system of this kind. Radical systemic change is a challenge that awaits the world in the coming decades and which we already glimpse profound and important signs of. The analysis of terrorism find in sociologists the most reliable interpreters.

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