

# The State of Injustice

## *The Politics of Terrorism and the Production of Order*<sup>1</sup>

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### ABSTRACT

The construct of terrorism, as it is used in contemporary research and media texts, emerges from 18th- and 19th-century orthodox assumptions of man, nation-state, and political sovereignty. In this paper, terrorism is examined as a discursive process in the art of statecraft from a sociological, comparative perspective. The discursive processes of two ostensible cultures of terrorism are compared: the United States and Italy. The analysis reveals the inextricable link between terrorism, statecraft, and the production of domination, injustice, and social order. It is a practice that privileges rhetorical language over direct experience. The value of analyzing terrorism as the product of a historically produced political discourse rather than as an essential human expression is that it has the potential to be replaced by a more heuristic construct.

### Introduction

THE MODERN STATE appears to be indispensable to economic development, social security, and liberty as well as life and death through its creation and control of violence via increasingly sophisticated forms of weaponry and surveillance. Yet, relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to the relationship between the politics of the state, the politics of terrorism, and the production of injustice in the world (Durkheim, 1948; Weber, 1958; Marx, 1967; Gramsci, 1971; Foucault, 1972, 1979; Tilly, 1985). Terrorism is currently defined and widely understood as a particular type of politically motivated violence challenging the authority of the state and spreading fear among innocent victims. Terrorism is blamed for the senseless killing of humans, the wasting of energy and money, and the destabilizing of economies and governments. Terrorism is often considered to be the “cause” of worldwide instability (Wilkinson, 1990; Eitzen and Zinn, 1994). The media bombard our senses and sensibilities with daily reports on various forms of violent

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crime threatening society's sense of morality and justice; yet, violence defined as terrorism is viewed as particularly horrific.

The contemporary conceptual understanding of terrorism emerged during the late 18th and 19th century. It therefore includes the historical and philosophical referents of that time such as orthodox assumptions of "man," nation-state, and political sovereignty (Stehr, 1994). Despite the obvious anachronism of the late 18th- and 19th-century intellectual thought about the state, these views continue to dominate in contemporary knowledge and politics related to terrorism. Carnoy (1984, p. 4) notes that: "the issue of the State has become much more complex, and with this increased complexity, we need theories that deal with it adequately and accurately." Some sociologists have attempted to more precisely define and overcome some of the conceptual problems as well as ideological biases related to research on terrorism. In his theoretical conceptualization of terrorism, for example, Gibbs (1989, p. 333) suggests that terrorism should not be equated or misunderstood with "terror" that he defines as the state's use of this tactic and conceptually distinct from terrorism. While Gibbs (1989) presents a compelling argument for the development of a theory of terrorism in terms of control, his analysis does not consider the rhetorical component of terrorism inextricably related to the state, the art of statecraft and the production of injustice.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a broader, comparative sociological interpretation of terrorism and the production of injustice by integrating specific definitions and discursive understandings of terrorism within larger political processes of statecraft, hegemony, and social order. Terrorism needs to be examined theoretically as a form of complex social control that occurs as a result of the relations of domination produced in societies whose structures, institutions, and organizations privilege hierarchy, stratification, and control. Terrorism can therefore be analyzed as a political construct; one that is most relevant to social theory as a discursive or theoretical practice, a substantive component in the art of statecraft (compare Ben-Yehuda, 1990, 1992). Viewed in this way, the central question to be examined in this paper regarding terrorism and the production of injustice is: Under what conditions is terrorism and index of a deeper hegemonic crisis, rather than the cause of it? The first part provides a theoretical background and approach examining terrorism as a historical, rhetorical, and politically produced phenomenon. The second part compares the discursive processes of two states, the United States and Italy, their ostensible cultures of terrorism, and how the above theoretical approach can be used to develop a comparative, sociological interpretation of injustice and hegemonic crises.

While the United States is currently struggling to enforce an orthodox definition and perception of terrorism, Italy has been viewed by the United States as notorious for negotiating the meaning of terrorist action. The discursive process of each state represents the state at (1) different historical moments of discursive struggle over the definition of terrorism, and (2) different geographical contexts affecting the