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Title:

**Were we terrorists? History, terrorism, and the French Resistance**

Abstract:

This article argues that scholars of historical terrorism should abandon the practice of defining the phenomenon in favour of prioritising past understandings of terrorist violence. Research into the history of terrorism often uses a definition informed by contemporary concerns to reveal previous incidents and outbreaks of terrorism. This approach speaks more to the concerns of the present than those of the past. We must refocus our attention on how people in history understood terrorism, and to whom and to what they applied the term. This approach can open avenues of investigation into neglected or sensitive subjects, with the example of the violence of the French Resistance explored here. Historians have rejected the use of the term 'terrorism' to describe Resistance action, preferring instead to use military or paramilitary terminology. However, Resistance violence was understood in several ways and the resisters' own rejection of the terrorist label was not total.

What links the assassination of Julius Caesar in 44 BCE, the Allied bombing of German cities during the Second World War, and the destruction of the World Trade Center on 11 September 2001? The answer is that all three acts may be understood as terrorism, at least according to the scholarly literature on the subject. The twenty-first-century reader needs little convincing of the fact that Al-Qaeda's hijacking of several passenger jets and their subsequent use as missiles against the Twin Towers and the Pentagon was a terrorist act. To convince the reader that Caesar's assassins and the pilots of the RAF and the USAF were terrorists is a little more difficult.

Much depends on one's definition of terrorism. Violence described as terrorist has taken many forms, and has been committed around the world by an array of groups and individuals. But what *is* terrorism? The answer to this question may seem straightforward: we know terrorism when we see it.<sup>1</sup> However, in the scholarly literature, to arrive at a definition that speaks to all forms of terrorism, not just the most recent occurrences, has proved problematic. Walter Laqueur concluded in 1977 that the search for a definition of terrorism that could account for its many varieties would prove fruitless (Laqueur, 2012). Nevertheless, researchers from many academic disciplines have formulated at least 260 definitions of terrorism (Schmid, 2012; Schmid, 2011; Jackson, 2008). Attempts to arrive at a consensus definition have encountered difficulties. Alex P. Schmid's 2011 twelve-point, 'Revised Academic Consensus Definition of Terrorism', would doubtless prove problematic for some scholars for it allows for the state perpetration of terrorism; the capacity of states to commit terrorism is a bone of contention in the field (Schmid, 2012; Jarvis and Lister, 2014). Furthermore, as Ariel Merari points out, Schmid's analysis of definitions draws largely on the

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to the definition of terrorism, an oft-quoted anecdote in the literature on terrorism recounts the response of US Justice Potter Stewart when in 1964 he was asked to make a ruling based on what constituted 'pornography'. Stewart was unable to define pornography but argued, 'I know it when I see it'; (Laqueur, 2009).

work of Western academics and policy experts; it is likely that non-Western authors have different points of view (Merari, 2016). Despite the proliferation of definitions in the literature, few scholars continue to engage solely in the practice of conceptualising the phenomenon (Jackson, 2008). It is more common for authors to recognise the difficulty in defining terrorism before they appropriate a definition that they find most suitable for their own purposes, with a few tweaks here and there.<sup>2</sup> Ondrej Ditrych is thus correct in his assessment that scholars' lamentations over the difficulty of defining their object have become a meaningless ritual (Ditrych, 2014).

Definitions of terrorism have tended to speak to the concerns of the present. Much research in the field has stemmed from the desire of governments, policy experts, and academics to 'solve' the problem of extremist Islamist terror that confronts us today. Yet historians are now beginning to take a greater interest in terrorism. Martin A. Miller's 2013 *The Foundations of Modern Terrorism*, for example, tackles the history of the subject from the point of view of both sub-state and state terror (Miller, 2013). The 2014 *Routledge History of Terrorism* has become an essential starting point for any student of terrorism (Law, 2014). The essays in this collection examine not only historical examples of terrorist violence but also a number of conceptual challenges, too. Beyond these broad overviews of terrorism, Richard Bach Jensen's *The Battle against Anarchist Terrorism* (2013) offers a comprehensive international account of the campaign against anarchist violence in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Meanwhile, scholars in other fields continue to write histories of the phenomenon: the contributors to the 2004 *Histoire du terrorisme de l'antiquité à Daech* (translated into English in 2007 and further expanded in 2016) were

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Appelbaum writes, 'To the minimal definition of terrorism proposed by Laqueur, "the systematic use of murder, injury, and destruction, or the threat of such acts, aimed at achieving political ends", I am adding another minimal condition: criminality coupled with justifiability", (Appelbaum, 2015).

drawn from the fields of strategic and security studies, psychology, medicine, and ethnology, as well as from history (Chaliand and Blin, 2004).

Historical work has largely adopted the long-established method of defining the phenomenon before looking for it in history. Even when a new definition of terrorism is not proffered, an attempt to reduce the various definitions to a handful of essential components is attempted, with differing results.<sup>3</sup> Yet if many researchers have asked ‘how can we define terrorism?’, fewer have posed the question, ‘*should* we define terrorism?’ The practice of defining an object entails certain problems that too few scholars in the field of terrorism studies recognise in their work. As Kevin Passmore writes, ‘historians must define the boundaries of their object of study, but they must remember that they *choose* these limits from many possibilities. Since their object does not exist prior to studying it, it can have no essential quality’ (Passmore, 2013). Scholars of terrorism – including historians - frequently arrive at a definition of their subject in the present and project this definition back through history. The inherent assumption is that terrorism is an objective phenomenon that can be observed in any time and place if only we have the right tools to do so; we in the present will know terrorism when we see it in the past. Johannes Dillinger, for example, uses a definition of terrorism ‘widely accepted by criminologists and law enforcement agencies’ to characterise early modern arsonists as terrorists. Dillinger recognises the anachronism in his approach but argues that it could help to reveal the ‘true scope of terrorism and terrorist scares as historical phenomena’ (Dillinger, 2006). This approach prioritises presentist notions of terrorism when the concern of historians should be to illuminate and explore the

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<sup>3</sup> Ariel Merari claims that, ‘[t]here are three common elements in the definitions [of terrorism]: (1) the use of violence; (2) political objectives; and (3) the intention of sowing fear in a target population’ (Merari, 2016). On the other hand, Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Bernhard Blumenau determine that the three features of terrorism are ‘a) the use or threat of violence; b) the victims of terrorist acts are often chosen at random to cause an impact; c) the intention to create psychological effects beyond the immediate targets; and d) a political change (normally by groups that lack influence or power) is expected to follow the act’ (Hanhimäki and Blumenau, 2013).

understandings and attitudes of the past. Too few historians of terrorism recognise both the essentialism in their definitions and the ahistorical nature of a method that perceives terrorist history stretching far back into the mists of time, before even the word itself was first spoken.

Historians must abandon the practice of defining terrorism. To define and to label is an act that too often permits the voice of the present to drown out that of the past and we cannot count on the fact that people in the past recognised terrorism as we do today. We must take our lead instead from the ways in which historical actors understood terrorism and to whom and to what they applied the term. This approach will free us not only from essentialism but also from the moral quandary that can obstruct historical inquiry. Such is the power of the word ‘terrorist’ to undermine and delegitimise its object that to apply it to historical groups who fought for a just cause is controversial. Consequently, acts of violence have gone unexamined or reframed to fit a more palatable definition at the expense of enquiry into historical understandings of terrorism. With this in mind, this article re-examines understandings of terrorism in wartime France, when both the Occupier and the Resistance used violence labelled ‘terrorist’.

## I

‘Terrorism’ as a term was first used – and in a positive sense - to describe the French Revolution’s *régime de la terreur* that would weed out and eliminate counter-revolutionaries. Following the fall of Maximilien Robespierre in July 1794, the aims and methods of terrorism were discredited. A year later, Anglo-Irish writer and politician Edmund Burke’s polemic against the Revolution and ‘those Hell hounds called Terrorists’ ensured that terrorism was thenceforth understood, in English as in French, as a heinous crime (Hoffman, 2006; Laqueur, 2012; Townshend, 2002).

However, scholars have determined that the history of terrorism – or what *they* consider to be terrorism – stretches back further than 1793. Andrew Sinclair perceives terrorism in the mythical stories of Achilles and Hector (Sinclair, 2003). Randall D. Law's 2009 *Terrorism: A History* is more specific: the first act of historical terrorism occurred in 647 BCE when Assyrian emperor Assurnasirpla II terrorised the city of Susa. The Assyrians' brutal murder of the Susa rebels was, according to Law, the 'first time in recorded history' that violence had been used to send a message; the communicative function of this violence thus marks it out as terrorist (Law, 2009). Steven Pinker, on the other hand, locates the origins of terrorism some 700 years later in the murderous campaign of the Sicarii assassins in Judea (Pinker, 2011). Other scholars are less specific with their dating of terrorism: for Pamala L. Griset and Sue Mahan, 'to study the history of terrorism is to study the history of human civilization', while Gérard Chaliand and Arnaud Blin determine that terrorism 'is probably as old as war itself' (Griset and Mahan, 2003; Chaliand and Blin, 2016).

From these beginnings, scholars have identified terrorism during the ancient, medieval, and early modern periods. Between the seventh and thirteenth centuries the Thugs went on a murderous rampage, inspired by a reinterpretation of Hinduism and killing hundreds of thousands of people through strangulation. Meanwhile, the Assassins posed a threat to the Turkish Seljuk empire in Persia and Syria between 1090 and 1275 (Hoffman, 2006; Rapoport, 2012 (Chaliand and Blin, 2016). The lay reader may be struck by the discovery that familiar instances of violence were in fact acts of terrorism; the 1605 Gunpowder Plot was an instance of 'religious terrorism' (Griset and Mahan, 2003).

The problem with the examples given above is that contemporaries could not possibly have conceived of such violence as terrorism for the simple fact that the concept, not to mention the word, did not exist. Only through imposing our own understandings of terrorism onto the past can we distinguish these 'terrorists before the letter' or, to put it another way,

the terrorists-without-knowing-it. This approach is ahistorical and can lead to instances of tortuous reasoning. Robert Appelbaum's study of what he defines as terrorism in early modern England, Scotland, and France, explains how terrorism could exist before its name: 'If you can think terrorism, with or without a word to identify it, then you can think about and with it and at the same time support, revile, or defy it; you can do it or defend against it or stand aghast at what it has done; you can speculate about it and morally respond to its intrusions into the political life of a society' (Appelbaum, 2015).

To claim that terrorism can be identified in history before the coining of the term is to deny the political and cultural significance and impact of the word. To label an act of violence, a group, or an individual 'terrorist' is a political act designed to influence the audience. The labelling relies on a framework of ideas, values, and meanings associated with the term at a given moment in time. Consequently, terrorism is not as old as civilisation itself; it is as old as the discourse that invented it and from which it draws its meaning (Ditrych, 2014). This discourse is not fixed; it is multifaceted and subject to prevalent national and international influences. The discourse of terrorism may therefore change but the phenomenon of terrorism cannot exist without it; there is no 'terrorism before the letter'.

Study of terrorism in the modern era has not escaped the presentism of its ancient, medieval, and early modern counterparts. Michael Burleigh's 2008 cultural history of terrorist violence begins in 1858 with the establishment of the Irish Fenians, the first of several groups that Burleigh identifies as most relevant to understanding contemporary terrorism (Burleigh, 2008). Meanwhile, John Merriman's 2009 *The Dynamite Club* explains how French anarchist Emile Henry, 'ignited the age of modern terror', with his 1894 bombing of a Parisian restaurant (Merriman, 2009). Conversely, Bruce Hoffman dates 'modern, international terrorism', to 22 July 1968, when gunmen from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine hijacked an El Al passenger flight from Rome to Tel Aviv. From



that moment, Hoffman claims, terrorists operated beyond the borders of a particular state, seeking to strike their enemy's assets, installations, and populations wherever they were around the world (Hoffman, 2006).

Since the attacks in New York City on 11 September 2001, the notion of a 'new' terrorism has emerged. Peter R. Neumann argues that terrorism after 9/11 assumed a novel form because it was perpetrated by transnational networks, inspired by religion, and seeking 'mass-casualty attacks against civilians' with 'excessive violence'. Its 'old' counterpart – which was committed by nationalist or Marxist groups against 'legitimate targets' according to the 'rules of engagement' – was less terrifying (Neumann, 2009). Texts that do not refer explicitly to new terrorism betray the influence of the concept, implying that today's terrorism is more deadly than its antecedents. The timeline at the beginning of Rosemary HT O'Kane's 2007 *Terrorism* lists thirteen incidents of terrorism committed around the globe in 2006 alone, compared to just one terrorist act during the 1890s (anarchist Emile Henry's 1894 bombing of the Café Terminus in Paris). O'Kane, however, does not include in the chronology the numerous anarchist attacks committed throughout Europe during the 1880s and 1890s, nor does it include the 1886 Chicago Haymarket bombing or the 1901 assassination of US President William McKinley, all of which were doubtless terrifying to contemporaries (O'Kane, 2007).

'New' terrorism has proved a difficult theory to dislodge given that media and government alike have presented the threat of twenty-first century terrorism as unprecedented in its scale, brutality, and evil (Duyvestyn, 2012). There has been an 'avalanche of studies' on Islamic terrorism during 2000-2007 at the expense of work on the manifestations of the phenomenon prior to the 1960s; only one in 50 articles published examined historical acts of terrorism (Silke, 2009; Ranstorp, 2009). Even works on historical terrorism can suffer from

short-sightedness, perceiving the object of their research as somehow less dangerous than the ‘hyperterrorists’ of today (Brunelle and Finley-Crowwhite, 2010).

To write the history of terrorism – and avoid the problems inherent to the definitional process - we must refocus our attention on historical discourses of terrorism. In this respect, Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass’s 1996 *Terror and Taboo* is salutary. In this book, Zulaika and Douglass deconstruct the discourse of terrorism that emerged in the West during the 1970s, arguing that it, ‘becomes more relevant to examine the nature of the behaviour labelled “terrorism”, as well as the labelling process itself, rather than to focus upon the ostensible “face value” of particular terrorist events and episodes’ (Zulaika and Douglass, 1996). Their method may be applied to other periods and subjects in the field of terrorism studies. Several recent works have taken this path. Lisa Stampnitzky’s excellent 2013 *Disciplining Terror* examines the ‘invention’ of the terrorism expert and terrorism studies as an academic discipline after the 1970s. While Stampnitzky’s focus is not on historical terrorism, historians should pay attention to her argument that ‘the concept of terrorism is socially constructed’ (Stampnitzky, 2013). The search for its ‘true meaning’ is not her concern and nor should it be the historian’s.

Ondrej Ditrych’s 2014 *Tracing the Discourses of Terrorism* rejects the exercise of defining terrorism, ‘[which endows] it with a certain essential and eternal substance’. Working on the basis that ‘[t]here is no terrorism beyond the discourse of terrorism’, Ditrych examines how states constructed this discourse and its real-world effects on global politics (Ditrych, 2014). We should add that non-state actors also produce a discourse of terrorism that is constructed according to a political, social, and cultural context, thus contributing to historical understandings. Ditrych’s approach might be attributed to what Richard Jackson has called the ‘literary turn’ in terrorism studies. Accordingly, ‘terrorism’ is a ‘cultural construct’ and a ‘social fact’, an ‘empty signifier’ that can be understood only according to

‘the way in which it is discursively constructed through language and social practices’, in a given context (Jackson, 2015). The method used in Jackson’s 2007 article on the construction of Islamic terrorism in the press and academia is instructive (Jackson, 2007). Analysis of how the word was understood and deployed can reveal much about a society precisely because ‘terrorism’ is so bound up with temporal political and cultural meaning; it is a repository for a diverse set of concerns and ‘a fable of the sinister times in which we live’ (Zulaika and Douglass, 1996).

## II

In the history of terrorism, the Second World War presents something of a lacuna. Histories generally make only cursory references to the wartime ‘terrorism’ of the Nazi state and resistance groups (for example see Laqueur, 2012; Miller, 2013; Chaliand and Blin, 2016). On the other hand, Heinz-Gerhard Haupt and Klaus Weinhauer’s essay on terrorism incorporates the partisans of the Second World War into a discussion of anti-colonial terrorism between the 1920s and the 1990s. Haupt and Weinhauer suggest that wartime resistance practices exerted a major influence on post-war forms of political violence, particularly in blurring the boundary between civilian and combatant (Haupt and Weinhauer, 2011).

It is usual to exclude wartime resistance movements from histories of terrorism both on scientific grounds – they do not conform to such-or-such a definition of terrorism – and on moral grounds – the justness of anti-Nazi violence cannot be compared to the unjust and illegitimate violence of terrorism (Pedersen and Holm, 1998). Caoimhe Nic Dháibhéid has thus termed the subject of terrorism during wartime ‘vexatious’. Dháibhéid is aware of the potential for controversy with her inclusion of French resister Jean Garcin’s memoir, *We Were Terrorists*, in her 2017 collection of biographies, *Terrorist Histories*. Such is her

concern that Dháibhéid explains away Garcin's terrorism with the fact that his actions (and those of the French Resistance) have since 'accrued something of a degree of acceptability, whether by virtue of the passage of time or the perceived justification of the motivation'. This position leads to the problematic conclusion that Garcin's acts were 'political violence', defined as 'terrorism that has "worked"' (Dháibhéid, 2017).

The violence of the French resistance is a blind spot in the historiography of the Dark Years. Research has taken two paths. Firstly, work has focused on violence perpetrated *against* resisters, rather than violence inflicted *by* resisters (Piketty, 2008). To some extent, this focus stems from the quality and content of the available sources. The difficulty with which some former resisters related acts of violence means that their testimonies and memoirs tend either to exclude such happenings or to recount them in a perfunctory or euphemistic manner. Furthermore, some post-war interviews with resisters who referred to violent incidents were redacted and possibly even destroyed (Piketty, 2008; René-Bazin, 2010). Conversely, the desires of certain individuals and groups to shore up morale during the war (not to mention their own resistance credentials after it) prompted exaggeration of violence and even its invention (Liaigre, 2015). In his 2015 *Fighters in the Shadows*, Robert Gildea recounts an incident from the archives of resistance fighter Albert Ouzoulias in which a communist commando attacked 'a German parade goose-stepping along the Champs-Élysées'. However, Roger Bourderon finds no evidence to corroborate Ouzoulias's story (Gildea, 2015; Bourderon, 2012). Franck Liaigre, author of an excellent 2015 study of the communist Francs-Tireurs et Partisans (FTP), is therefore wary of resistance testimonies, hitherto considered 'sacred' and 'incontestable', for he finds them to be 'often vague, even wrong, guided by political or ideological considerations or the desire to honour the memory of lost resisters' (Liaigre, 2015). Liaigre's study instead draws on the archives of Vichy's

police forces, the richness of which he attributes to the unfortunate reality that, once caught, resisters talked.

Secondly, historians have tended to classify the resistance's armed struggle according to military or paramilitary categories such as 'urban guerrilla', 'partisan warfare', 'subversive warfare', and 'civil war'. The use of the term terrorism to describe resistance violence is rejected out of hand because this violence was neither indiscriminate nor directed at civilians (Marco *et al*, 2006; Wieviorka, 2005; Bédarida, 1996). Olivier Wieviorka goes so far as to describe the resistance strategy as 'counterterrorism' against the terrorist regimes of Vichy and the Nazi occupier (Wieviorka, 2016). Ultimately, it is difficult to escape the moral question inherent to examining the resistance and its violence. Historians have thus sought to use any label but 'terrorism' (Merari, 2016).

Both the Vichy regime and the Nazis denounced resisters as terrorists. While we could dismiss this label as propaganda (which it surely was), in doing so we would fail to consider contemporary understandings of wartime terrorism and what they may reveal to us. It was under the Vichy regime that the term "terrorism" first appeared in French law. On 5 June 1943, Marshall Pétain's regime established special sections within appeal courts for the trial of crimes that promoted or encouraged, "terrorism, communism, anarchy, social or national subversion," or, "rebellion against the established social order", punishable by forced labour or death ("Loi no. 318 du 5 juin 1943," 1943). Vichy's Minister of Justice Maurice Gabode stated that in the context of growing resistance violence the threat of civil war was real; he thus sought to ensure that magistrates came down hard on "terrorists" (Sansico, 2016). In January 1944, the crimes of assassination, murder, attempted assassination and attempted murder, and acts that would "promote terrorist activities" were rendered liable for court martial ("Loi no. 38 du 20 janvier 1944," 1944). The law now provided for the immediate execution of people caught in the process of committing such a crime or in cases

where the culpability of the suspect was plain. Vichy's laws did not define terrorism and the application of the term remained at the discretion of the authorities.

One perceives in the collaborationist press an understanding of terrorism as an un-French act committed at the behest of a hostile foreign government. In December 1941, Paul Marion's General Secretariat for Information, argued that terrorism threatened peace, the internal unity of the country, and the rebirth of France. The counter-terrorist struggle was thus framed as the patriotic duty of all French against foreigners and traitors directed from Moscow or London ("Pour sauvegarder l'avenir de la France," 1941). Nevertheless, collaborators understood resistance terrorism in complex ways. In March 1944, a senior official in Vichy's paramilitary police force, the Milice, noted with some dissatisfaction that officers tended to distinguish between 'good' and 'bad' terrorists; the former were likely Gaullists, the latter communists (Azéma, 1990).

The relationship between resisters and terrorism was complex, too. In a 2003 interview, former resister Raymond Aubrac asked the questions, "Were the resisters terrorists because they fought in illegality? Was their combat legitimate because it was illegal?" The interview took place in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, at a time when "terrorism" had taken on a renewed sense of illegitimacy. However, Aubrac, who understood a clear difference between the indiscriminate violence of the Occupier and the guerrilla of the resistance movements, did not reject the term: "I am proud to have been baptised a 'terrorist' by my enemies" (Aubrac, 2003).

During the Dark Years, few resisters accepted the term as readily as Aubrac did in 2003. One finds in the clandestine press a concerted campaign to combat Vichy's accusation of terrorism against the resistance movements. Resisters understood the power of the word to smear its target. Vichy's propaganda was "an evil all the more contagious for it plays above all *with words*" ("Pour le maquis... contre le terrorisme," n.d). It was feared that Vichy's

campaign was gaining traction with members of the public. With details of “terrorist” crimes published daily in the press, “terrorism” was a frightening spectre about which everyone was speaking, whether they had witnessed an incident of violence or not (“Pour le maquis,” n.d). The Conseil National de la Résistance (CNR) was concerned enough to issue a statement denying that resistance actions constituted terrorism (“La campagne contre le ‘terrorisme’,” 1943).

Given the perceived potency of Vichy’s propaganda resistance groups sought to combat the regime’s rhetoric. A group in Marseille urged readers to challenge Vichy’s terrorism discourse wherever they encountered it, “in conversations, on the train, in queues, at the cinema, etc” (*L’aube de la Liberté*, 1944). The underground press threw the enemy’s words back at him, labelling the actions of both the *Etat français* and the German Occupier as terrorist (*Coup d’oeil sur la presse libre*, 1944). Such discourse perhaps reflected the fact that some movements rejected the use of violence. Even the communist party, which would later endorse guerrilla warfare against the Occupier, did not admit responsibility for its attacks until summer 1942. Until that point the party had described certain acts of violent resistance (such as the August 1941 killing of German soldier Moser by Pierre Georges in a Parisian Metro station) as either a response to German provocation or the result of internecine conflict between collaborators (Wieviorka, 2013; Liaigre, 2015). Resistance groups worked to reframe their own violence in a more palatable fashion, as military operations. Attacks were described as “*authentic acts of war*” committed by an elite of soldiers and “all French worthy of the name” (“Le fait de la résistance,” 1943; “Nous, les terroristes.,” 1943). According to the CNR’s statement in November 1943, resisters were not terrorists but “courageous patriots who harass the Occupier’s troops, destroy his munitions dumps, obstruct his war production and punish his accomplices” (“La campagne contre le ‘terrorisme’,” 1943). Emma Kathryn Kuby has suggested that the effort to frame resistance violence as a

‘combat operation’, was rooted in a male desire to reclaim a semblance of masculinity after the defeat of 1940. Extra-legal violence took on an aura of legitimacy as long as it was committed in the name of masculine values such as justice, rather than the feminised passions of hatred and rage (Kuby, 2011). A gendered history of resistance violence awaits to be written. At this point, however, we may point to similar gendered understandings of acceptable and unacceptable violence in interwar France and earlier (Millington, 2014). Contrary to Vichy’s portrayal of the resisters as bandits operating in the shadows, the groups attempted to legitimise their violence by framing it as precise and surgical, aimed solely at the Nazis and their French lackeys.

However, the resistance’s rejection of the terrorist label was not total; several groups were unafraid to publicise the violence of their action. *Libération* was willing to claim responsibility for “terrorist” attacks: “[Vichy’s] publicity does not displease us. In “terrorism”, there is terror: [the terror] that we inspire.” Nevertheless, the newspaper was still careful to frame the violence as “legal,” and part of an “underground war” for liberation (“‘Terrorisme’ et insurrection nationale,” 1943). According to the founder of *Défense de la France*, Philippe Viannay, in 1943 the desperation of the hour presented a choice for all French: to fight or to desert one’s duty as a Frenchman. “Against those who refuse to fight,” he continued, “we will use, if necessary, TERROR.” This terror involved the assassination of collaborators and police officers. As for the *mouchards* (informers), “A FRENCHMAN WHO SELLS OUT ANOTHER FRENCHMAN DESERVES TO BE TORTURED” (Indomitius [Philippe Viannay], 1943). *Combat* followed a similar line. The so-called “terrorists” were nothing of the sort; in fact, legality rested with them as the “upholders of the law.” Those who were executed in “terrorist” attacks were simply paying for their crimes against France (“Terroristes? Non: Justiciers!,” 1943). Terrorism was thus understood as a crime visited upon France from abroad. It was both the violence of French traitors in the pay



of Moscow or London, and French traitors operating at the behest of Vichy and Berlin.

Whichever side one was on, war could be waged in the name of France; terrorism could not.

This may have significant implications for the framing of the terrorist threat in the post-war years, not to mention current French debates about citizenship, immigration, and terrorism.

There are grounds, therefore, to revisit the subject of terrorism in wartime France.

We must do so not from the starting point of a definition of terrorism. We must analyse the use of the term in its context, the meanings and representations that it signified, and the contest over its application as a label. To do so is not to brand the resistance as terrorist but to take seriously the attitudes and beliefs of contemporaries and to seek to explain these. This is even more important given that Vichy's propaganda campaign was to some extent successful: twenty-five years after the Liberation former resisters complained that their neighbours considered them still to be little better than bandits and terrorists (Johnston, 1975). To ascribe a military character to resistance violence is to believe only the self-representation of resisters. In fact, their violence was understood in a multitude of ways. For some French, the resistance did indeed practice terrorism.

### III

To write the history of terrorism is to reconstruct the representations and meanings of the phenomenon in the past. Past understandings of terrorism are evident in the official documents of states and the private and public discussions of cabinets and law-making bodies; all reveal implicit and explicit knowledge of what terrorism was thought to be at the time. The historic press is an invaluable source because, as today, newspapers spilled much ink over terrorism (Jackson *et al*, 2011). The media recreated terrorist acts for public consumption, placing the event in its perceived historical context (usually as the latest in a series of supposedly linked attacks) and explaining it according to prevailing attitudes to, and

understandings of, terrorism and other attendant matters (Mannoni and Bonardi, 2003).

Cultural productions such as novels and films further help to reconstruct popular attitudes to terrorism (Laqueur, 1977). Each text must be ‘examined for the labels, assumptions, narratives, predicates, metaphors, inferences and arguments they deployed and the kinds of existing cultural-political narratives and pre-existing texts they drew upon’ (Jackson, 2007). To whom, to what, and to what end did people in the past apply the terms terrorism and terrorist? Which groups or individuals escaped the label? What values and assumptions did the term contain? In what contexts was it deployed? These are but a few questions that historians may begin with. We must be prepared for the disappointing discovery that past societies disagreed as much as our own over the definition of terrorism. This was as true of the instruments of state as of individual citizens (Saul, 2006). The sites and the stakes of such contests must be examined.

Two problems may arise from the approach to historical terrorism outlined above. Firstly, we must confront the contentious matter of state terrorism. To foreground past understandings is to appreciate that state violence may be understood as terrorist only when historical actors perceived it to be such. The results may disappoint those scholars who desire to reveal the hypocrisy of Western states whose use of the term terrorism is founded on politics and ideology. However, historians can investigate, too, how states have controlled the discourse of terrorism and against whom they employed it.

Secondly, we may encounter terrorism where we do not wish to see it. As Dháibhéid writes, ‘the term “terrorist” has accrued a nigh-inescapable value judgement’; to use it is to blacken, to tarnish, and to undermine (Dháibhéid, 2017). The power of the state to influence perceptions of terrorism means that people in the past may have applied the term to groups which, today, we would not consider (nor dare consider) to be terrorist. The historian may escape such value judgements with a focus on historic discourses of the phenomenon; this

approach opens avenues of investigation that may previously have been left unexamined. We cannot of course escape the understandings of terrorism of the age in which we live (the ‘know it when we see it’ factor). However, we should remember that historical actors likewise knew terrorism when they saw it.

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