



# 1

## Concerning method and the study of political violence

Ah hell. Prophecy's a thankless business, and history has a way of showing us what, in retrospect, are very logical solutions to awful messes ... Things are certainly set up for a class war based on conveniently established lines of demarcation, and I must say that the basic assumption of the present set up is a grade A incitement to violence. (Vonnegut 1999, chap. IX)

When asked about anarchism's association with violence, I often reply by inquiring whether one would ask the same thing of a retail clerk, a stockbroker, a lawyer, a priest, an engineer, a taxpayer, a consumer, a liberal, a conservative – or any other identity attribute associated with mainstream society. Most assuredly, the scale of violence perpetuated by the day-to-day operations of capital and the state is grossly disproportionate to anything in the anarchist lexicon, with upwards of 100 million deaths from wars alone during the twentieth century. I daresay that the sum total of people killed or physically injured by anarchists throughout all of recorded history amounts to little more than a good weekend in the empire ... Are anarchists violent? Sometimes, but more so when they are participating in the casual, invisible, structural violence of modern life than when they are smashing its symbols of oppression. (Amster 2012, 43–44)

An anarchist group has claimed responsibility for an arson attack on North Avon Magistrates' Court ... police are investigating the on-line claims but say they do not have the evidence to link it to other attacks carried out on buildings owned by “establishment” bodies, including the police, the Army and various banks. In a post on the 325.nostate website, people naming themselves as the Informal Anarchist Federation, said: “10 camping gas canisters were enough to devastate the front lobby, with a homemade napalm mixture as the detonator. We chose the early hours to avoid any injuries.” (*The Bristol Post* 2014a)



## Introduction

Throughout the past decade and a half, scholarship focused upon the study of political violence, specifically that which can clearly be labeled as *terrorism*, has rapidly increased (Ranstorp 2007; Silke 2009). With the powerful aftereffects of the 9/11 attacks, interest in those pursuing political, social, and religious objectives through violence found an obvious place in the academy. Largely, this scholarship was dealt with through the fields of Terrorism Studies and Social Movement Studies, as well as interrelated disciplines such as Criminology, Security Studies, and Sociology. While these fields have often overlapped through interdisciplinary pursuits, each has its own epistemological presumptions, methodological tendencies, and canonical truths.

For the study of political violence, and especially clandestine political violence which is the subject herein, one is often positioned at the crossroads between interpreting the subject as a *terrorist* or a *social movement* and, as such, is led towards those corresponding disciplines, literatures, and presumptive groundings. Keeping in mind the poststructuralist assertion that the production of knowledge – especially that which is involved in the formation of political policy – is never a neutral endeavor (Foucault 1980, 98), the collection of evidence and the construction of arguments is inherently the culmination of intentional decisions. When faced with these choices, held up against the subject of post-millennial, anti-authoritarian, insurrectionary networks, such concerns are paramount. Those who choose to pursue study through the literature of Terrorism Studies, are likely to be burdened with not only the state-centric bias of background literature, but also the field's lack of theorization and its focus on *counterterrorism* (della Porta 2013, 282) and other securitization implementations. Those who choose to examine such networks as *social movements*,<sup>1</sup> a field that bases its focus on manifestations of social protest, also face difficulties as this field has often remained apart from *radical* politics within *militant* and *violent* protest, and has a corresponding theorization abyss regarding these borderlands.

Since the end of the twentieth century, an explosion of anti-state networks of clandestine militancy have emerged throughout the world. Through thousands of attacks, revolutionaries have been constantly at war with the status quo, targeting localized manifestations of state and capital in an attempt to create a venue of conflict that can bring about system-level change. Though distributed globally and irregularly active, these networks attack with frequency and vigor, making them a top priority for law enforcement. In one locale, Bristol, England, a city of around half a million residents, insurrectionary anarchist networks have been responsible for “over a hundred offensives dating [from] 2010 [to December 2014]” (Bevan 2014,

pts. 00:44–00:50) according to the lead investigating officer. According to sympathetic activists, this number may be far higher, as those compiling local communiqués were able to locate more than 60 attacks in a two-and-a-half year period (Bevan 2014). These attacks, many of which involve arson, are said to have caused approximately £20 million (~\$31 million) in damage. The vast majority of these attacks have been claimed via online communiqués through anonymous monikers such as the Informal Anarchist Federation (FAI). The FAI moniker has been adopted so frequently that, despite not having a centralized structure or “members,” the entity was declared to be a terrorist organization by the European Union in 2009.

In only a few years, in the city of Bristol alone, the clandestine political networks under examination were responsible for the £18 million arson of a police firearms training center, the burning of UK Border Agency vehicles and personal vehicles belonging to a Mayor and other local politicians, sabotage targeting a local commuter rail service, and the arson of industrial infrastructure, which resulted in a loss of radio and TV service to more than 80,000 homes (Channel 4 News 2013; Malik 2012; 2013). Other Bristol-area targets struck in the last few years include private security company G4S and the zoo. This brief look at Bristol is meant to provide insight as to the *scale* of the subject. The international, insurrectionary milieu – the subject of this book – is deserving of attention even if one only judges them on the basis of their destructive capabilities. Though modern attackers are not successfully assassinating heads of state, as was somewhat commonplace in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, they are dispatching bombs to European Prime Ministers, burning down Mexican Walmarts, and carrying out thousands of costly attacks targeting governmental, financial, commercial, and other sites. Furthermore, since there have been very few arrests of this movement, we know relatively little about the participants. Because of this reality, in order to understand the insurrectionary arsonists, bomb makers, and saboteurs, we must examine their frequent articulations of critique – the communiqué.<sup>2</sup> Despite often failing to do this, the need for such forms of analysis have been expressed in mainstream press reporting, for example this article from *The Bristol Post* which states:

To understand why these attacks are happening, for what reason, and how these individuals identify politically, it's recommended to read their words and statements for clarity. Each attack is by a unique established group of individual/s, with a diversity of anonymous cloaks, presenting varying ideological viewpoints. The beauty of the insurrectionist movement you might say. (2014b)

While these attacks, and the communiqué/claims of responsibility that accompany them, have received nominal attention in the (counter) Terrorism Studies literature, very little focus has been paid to their political

ideology and socio-political critique. Moreover, the interaction between “radical social movements” (Koehler 2014, 2) and their broader contexts (e.g. social, political, ideological) is under researched.

The following introductory chapter will examine a number of key issues of central importance to the book. First it will discuss the object of analysis – the communiqué – as a method for delivering critical analysis typically reserved for more formalized texts. This approach begs the question: “Can one read a claim of responsibility (i.e. a communiqué) in the same formalized manner as one would read *The Communist Manifesto* or *The Federalist Papers*?” This discussion will also survey the available literature that focuses on the study of communiqués, identifying weaknesses and necessary corrections to this reading. Second, this chapter identifies some initial difficulties arising from the study of these objects, specifically problems relating to verifiability, triangulation, determining credible authorship, and the inherent subjectivity in historical interpretation. Finally, this chapter discusses the limitations and scale of the study, establishing two key questions, which are pursued throughout the remaining chapters. These questions aim to guide the reader to evaluate two central claims: (1) Modern insurrectionary networks are informed by, and act to, constitute an “insurrectionary canon,” and (2) Due to the poststructural influence on the modern insurrectionary critique, the milieu will resultantly carry forth an expanded understanding of structural violence and inequality.

## A feminist method for studying violence

While a more complete discussion of ethically-embedded, critical modes of inquiry is pursued at the *conclusion* of this chapter, a brief discussion of ethics is warranted before proceeding. A methodological positioning informed by feminist ethics permeates the proceeding discussions. The feminist methodology and ethic of research (Mies 1983; Cook and Fonow 1986; 1991; Maguire 1987; Harding 1988; Lather 1988; Kirby and Kate 1989; Collins 1991; Reinharz 1992) adds a great deal, including a reading of identity politics, standpoint theory, action-orientated research, and embedded, emotive and sincere participatory involvement. From among these tendencies, this inquiry seeks to maintain a single goal, namely that research generates a reciprocally positive impact for the subject (Oakley 1981), and in this manner, the respondent community is not seen as a vessel containing knowledge to be taken, but rather as a partner in a collaborative endeavor to engage in knowledge building, *not* knowledge production. In the present discussion of insurrectionary anarchism, this involves the construction of knowledge for social action and not further criminalization, and remaining accountable to the community of activists and scholars whom the movement is based around.

Feminist methodology seeks to subvert traditional power relationships and ethical pitfalls, and according to one scholar, challenges four concerns otherwise recurrent in field research:

- 1.) The increased salience of race/ethnicity, gender, and class in the research relationship;
- 2.) the objectification of research subjects;
- 3.) the influence of social power on who becomes a research subject; and
- 4.) problematic assumptions in the conventional analytic approaches. (Sprague 2005, 121)

In practice, the following analysis attempts to destabilize the “othering” (Letherby 2003, 20–24; Sprague 2005, 125) of the subject, which tends to portray the researchers’ position as normative. In this manner, it becomes the task of a constructed taxonomy to position urban guerrillas among a wider socio-political movement, and through placement within such a continuum, such “violent” actors can be understood as similarly rational actors choosing to pursue a less popular – albeit illegal – form of protest. This also means that as a researcher, one can position themselves *within the research* as not only an observer, but a participant (Cole 1990, 159–166; Letherby 2003, 8) in the subject community. Such an approach can allow one to “understand the kind of questions that needed answering” (Cole 1990, 162), as well as the process of knowledge construction for the respondent community. This approach is far from mainstream, as most often, political actors adopting counter-state and violent strategies are viewed within the exoticized lens akin to the primitive savage of the colonial, anthropological, village subject. This tendency is (as can be expected) further exaggerated in mainstream journalistic accounts of these movements, which often carry sensationalist headlines such as “Meet the Nihilist-Anarchist Network Bringing Chaos to a Town Near You” (Hanrahan 2013). By de-sensationalizing the violence, and instead focusing on the movement’s political discourse, one hopes to shift the readers’ attention away from the frequency of the bombs, and towards the validity of the critiques.

Furthermore, one of the methods of subverting the pitfalls of traditionally unethical scholarship is to be found in emphasizing the subject’s perspective, and allowing the knowledge holder to determine the research agenda and its analysis (Sprague 2005, 141). This is a contribution of post-1970s feminist methodological battles and a notable aspect of my methodological pursuit. Taken as a whole, a feminist methodological approach to qualitative investigation is adopted precisely because it addresses issues of power within the realm of research (Letherby 2003, 114). It does so in a practically applicable manner aimed at subversion and the development of new methods of investigation that exist as counter forces to traditionalism, knowledge banking, and the expropriation of stories from an *othered* subject. Therefore it is the aim of the proceeding discussion to not borrow the sexy dynamism of insurrection to construct an engaging

argument, but rather to move beyond the discussion of these networks as merely the producers of fires and explosions and instead begin to understand them as social critics, “organic intellectuals” (Gramsci 1971b, 9), and philosophical practitioners.

## Communiqués as political theory

I say to you: that we are in. a battle, and that more than half of this battle is taking place on the battlefield of the media. And that we are in a media battle in a race for the hearts and minds ... And that however far our capabilities reach, they will never be equal to one thousandth of the capabilities of ... that [which] is waging war on us. (al-Zawahiri 2005, 10)

Communiqués are seen as an essential communicative component of insurrectionary attack. Following each incident of political violence – from a broken bank window to an assassinated nanotechnologist – the act is explained, “infused with meaning” (Hodges 2011, 5) via a text meant to expand the discourse on revolutionary struggle. This site, that of the communiqué, demonstrates the social construction of *both* the act (of “terrorism”) and the discourse (*on* “terrorism”). Both the event (i.e. the attack) and the object (i.e. the communiqué) are socially constructed phenomena (Stump and Dixit 2013, 108), serving to apply meaning and context for a wider audience. These explanatory frames discursively embed the act of anti-social violence, and have key functions within the construction of consequent discourses and attacks. To borrow an explanation from the bomb throwers themselves, “through the communiqués that accompany attacks we can begin an open debate on reflections and problems that, even if viewed through different lenses, are certainly focused on the same direction: revolution” (G. Tsakalos et al. 2012, 15). Such “requisite revolutionary discourse ... following[ing] bombings against targets that serve domination” (G. Tsakalos et al. 2012, 11) typically takes the form of a written communiqué posted and circulated through a network of websites. These websites form a repository for the collection of communiqués and the establishment of a corpus. This communiqué corpus constitutes the central “data” for this book and its discussions.

## Surveying communiqué collections

Academic and popular press books dealing specifically with communiqués as subject – often reprinting entire documents – have been sparse,

interdisciplinary, and seemingly on the rise. Notable examples include edited volumes such as *Europe's Red Terrorists: The Fighting Communist Organizations* (Alexander and Pluchinsky 1992), *Speaking Stones: Communiqués from the Intifada Underground* (Mishal and Aharoni 1994), *Our Word Is Our Weapon: Selected Writings of Subcomandante Marcos* (Marcos 2002), *Voices of Terror: Manifestos, Writings and Manuals of Al Qaeda, Hamas ...* (Laqueur 2004), *What Does Al-Qaeda Want?* (Marlin 2004), *Sing a Battle Song: The Revolutionary Poetry, Statements, and Communiqués of the Weather Underground 1970–1974* (Dohrn, Ayers, and Jones 2006), *Earth Liberation Front 1997–2002* (Pickering 2007), the multi-volume series, *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History* (Moncourt and Smith 2009a; 2009b), *Creating a Movement with Teeth a Documentary History of the George Jackson Brigade* (Burton-Rose 2010), *Queer Ultra-violence: A BASH BACK! Anthology* (Eanelli and Baroque 2012), and studies utilizing communiqués comingled with other forms of texts such as *The Road to Martyrs' Square* (Oliver and Steinberg 2006) which documents Palestinian militant culture through communiqués, video transcripts, graffiti, and other ephemera. Additionally, there appears to be an increasing number of studies that apply a linguistic or discursive analysis to politically violent ephemera, such as farewell correspondences from suicide bombers (e.g. S. J. Cohen 2016) and jihadist magazines (e.g. Ingram 2015; Novenario 2016).

Yonah Alexander and Dennis Pluchinsky's book provides one of the more comprehensive approaches to the examination of communiqués. Alexander and Pluchinsky (1992, x) focus on nine European "fighting communist organizations [FCOs]," and in speaking to their book's limitations note:

This book was not designed to be an all-inclusive, detailed study of the European FCOs. To the authors' knowledge, no such study exists. The intent was to compile a brief collection of documents (attack communiqués, ideological tracts, interviews, policy statements, etc.) ... so that the reader can obtain a general understanding of how these groups think and view the world about them.

While the aforementioned books contain very valuable exhibitions of primary source materials, with exceedingly few exceptions, the communiqués are not *analyzed* thoroughly and are often simply *presented*. The texts are far more descriptive in nature, not analytical. Typically the volumes are nearly entirely the words of the non-state actor with a brief introductory frame written by an editor. While some are careful to discuss the texts in relation to actual events (e.g. Moncourt and Smith 2009a; 2009b; Burton-Rose 2010), the texts themselves are rarely the focus. In none of the volumes surveyed is the political critique of the non-state actor held up as legitimate theory to be evaluated. Instead, it is often showcased in an exotic manner,

or in the case of Laqueur's edited volume, displayed as the writings of various "terrorists."

Additional books cataloging the political writings of individual practitioners of political violence are quite common, such as those containing the words of Islamist figureheads Osama bin Laden (2005) and Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah (2007), Marxist guerrilla leader Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1997), the Red Army Faction's Ulrike Meinhof (2008), "New Afrikan" militants Jalil Muntaqim (2002), Kuwasi Balagoon (2003), and Russell Maroon Shoatz (2013), anarcho-primitivist "Unabomber" Theodore Kaczynski (2010d), and Animal Liberation Front activists Walter Bond (2011) and Rod Coronado (2011). In these person-specific compilations, the original (and translated) works are presented with very little commentary and often no analysis. There are also frequent personal narratives, memoirs, autoethnographies, and autobiographies from individual actors that often portray life events but exclude formal political statements. Examples from the revolutionary left include those by North American militants Ann Hansen (2002) and David Gilbert (2011), West German urban guerrilla Bommi Baumann (2002), 1960s student protest leaders and Weathermen Mark Rudd (2010) and Bill Ayers (2009), American Indian Movement political prisoner Leonard Peltier (2000), Palestinian airplane hijacker Lelia Khaled (1973), Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla María Eugenia Vásquez Perdomo (2005), and Black Panther Assata Shakur (2001), as well as a semi-autobiographical, first-hand account from Basque ethnonationalist militants (Agirre 1975), Italian Red Brigade militants (Giorgio 2003), and Americans who joined Spanish Republicans to challenge fascism in the 1930s (Orwell 1980; Bailey 1993). Many more have been published digitally, including autobiographical accounts of 1996 Olympic Park bomber Eric Rudolph (2015) and American-born jihadi leader Omar Hammami (2012).

Communiqués as political texts are an under-theorized site for critical inquiry. Despite their prominence in the ephemera of clandestine networks of political violence, their compilation, interpretation, and analysis has been lacking. Some scholars (e.g. Harrison 2013) have focused on the development of methodologies for interpreting the ideological predilections of political manifestos. Though these works are instructive in a general sense, their focus on *ideology* and *parties* make them ill-suited for discussing anti-ideological, anti-political (i.e. those that reject politics as a method of social change) movements. Insurrectionary theorists posit that the foundational basis, whether anarchist or other, is never stoic or fixed but rather a "non-essentialist, non-ideology" (Rodríguez 2011b) enacted diversely by diverse actors. This makes demarcating what *is* and *is not* "insurrectionary" a difficult taxonomic task. In Sarah Harrison's (2013, 55–56) study, the author focused on the discourse of right-wing political parties, identifying the frequency of select words and coding these keywords for thematic analysis.



Similar studies have been coordinated by the Manifesto Research Group/Comparative Manifestos Project (2014) which has conducted “quantitative content analyses of parties’ election programmes from more than 50 countries covering all free, democratic elections since 1945.”

Not all acts of political violence – clandestine or otherwise – are claimed via a written communication. Some are claimed via video releases, audio transmissions, graffiti, or telephone calls, and still others are unclaimed. Research suggests that only approximately 14% of terrorist attacks occurring in the period 1998–2004 were followed by claims of responsibility, and that the rate is declining – with 61% of attacks claimed in the 1970s and 40% in the 1980s (Wright 2011). The issuing of communiqués following acts of violence is often dependent on the *modus operandi* of the movement (A. M. Hoffman 2010). Animal Liberation Front (ALF) and Earth Liberation Front (ELF) attacks are nearly universally claimed via a written communiqué – in approximately 93% of attacks (Loadenthal 2010, 89 (chart 3.3)) – which are then compiled and circulated by aboveground support networks such as *Bite Back Magazine*, the North American Animal Liberation Press Office, and the international, translation, and counter-information network “of the new generation [of] incendiary anarchy and global anti-civilization attack” (K. Cohen et al. 2014, 251) embodied in websites such as 325.nostate, War on Society, and others. Comparatively, in attacks by Palestinian paramilitary organizations (1968–2004), 56% were claimed (A. M. Hoffman 2010, 621), while in other conflicts, especially those where non-state factions are less competitive in their battles for supporters, the rate is often much lower. In Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) and affiliated attacks, since the paramilitary is seen as having fewer competitors than the various Palestinian factions, attacks in England (1973–1998) were claimed in less than 15% of cases (A. M. Hoffman 2010, 624). This has led some to conclude that anonymous, unclaimed attacks are actually the norm (Abrahms and Conrad 2016, 2), which is *not* the dominant trend in attacks by insurrectionary anarchists under discussion.

In examining the post-millennial clandestine attack networks that drew inspiration and modeling from the millennial anti-globalization, counter-summit protests, it is no surprise that the militant edges of this movement are communiqué-rich sources. In a lengthy piece of strategic writing authored by anonymous individuals “somewhere in the [American] Mid-West” and affiliated with the direct action network Anti-Racist Action, the authors instruct:

It is important that all ... [militant street] actions be followed with a comprehensive communiqué ... This communiqué should discuss the action in terms of why it occurred, why specific conflicts/tactics developed and how this immediate struggle is connected with the broader Anarchist movement towards a liberated and creative world ... Such

communiqués are important in regards to reaching out to the broader populace, as well as in debunking the demonization of our activities as can be expected to emanate out of the corporate press. (G-MAC and People Within The ARA 2002, 220–221)

This commentary speaks to the reliance on communiqués as a speech act, and specifically as a means to self-report, spread propaganda, and challenge divergent accounts from media and liberal/sectarian sources. What explains the underground attackers' preference for reporting via communiqués? Maybe it is that the communiqué structures a particular speech device and, in doing so, facilitates direct communication between a previously silenced entity (i.e. the attacker) and an often-curious recipient (i.e. the public).

## The challenges of collecting communiqués

On a practical level, the collection of communiqués allowed for the construction of an approximated incident-based dataset: a historical recounting of the politics of direct attack as told through the broken windows, slashed tires, and burnt storefronts so eloquently rationalized through the texts. The construction of such a dataset begins with the development of strict in-group/out-group rules for inclusion and exclusion. The construction of this rule set requires a more generalized familiarity with the content hosted on the website network surveyed. In discussing the analysis and mapping of “radical violence in social media,” researchers from the Swedish Defense Research Agency make the same observation, writing, “in order to develop relevant keywords that actually indicate radicalism, an in-depth knowledge of the milieu in question is required” (K. Cohen et al. 2014, 251). After familiarizing myself with its content over the course of years of reading,<sup>3</sup> broad parameters are established, tested, and then refined and recorded in a decision tree. Only incidents that were claimed via a communiqué and posted to the surveyed hubs were included. Similarly, communiqués that did not *claim responsibility* but offered more general critique, theory or debate were excluded.

This was by no means an easy task. The nature of clandestine, decentralized, and internationally-dispersed cells offers methodological challenges beyond simply the frequent inability to triangulate data and reach respondents to follow. In their discussion of the Revolutionary Cells (RZ) – a German, moniker-driven, direct action network operating between the 1970s and 1990s – Moncourt and Smith (2009b, 2:221) discuss similar problems stating:

The Revolutionary Cell [RZ] seemed unstoppable in 1982, but tabulating their activity poses a methodological problem, as anybody could carry