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Chapter 5

Early Modern Terrorists and Nineteenth-Century Historians

Johannes Dillinger

Abstract
First, this chapter explores political violence in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era. Even though the term "terrorism" did not exist before the French Revolution, political phenomena that closely resembled various forms of modern day terrorism were known and feared since the fourteenth century. The late Middle Ages and the early modern period witnessed the assassinations of numerous princes. The authorities as well as the populace feared organized gangs of criminals in the pay of rival political or religious leaders. These gangs were said to attack the civilian population using arson and mass poisoning in order to destabilize whole states. The fear of the terrorist "state destroyer" was part and parcel of state building from its very beginning. Secondly, the chapter discusses nineteenth-century historiography about early modern political violence. Nineteenth-century historians refused to interpret early modern political crime as terrorism: they denounced it either as lacking any political concept, or they vindicated it as justifiable resistance.

Keywords Terrorism, History, Historiography, Arson, Poison, Assassination

If the term "terrorism" is supposed to make any sense at all, it is best to restrict its use to societies that have witnessed the rise of the state and the creation of a sphere of politics that can be distinguished from the personal rule of individuals or kinship groups.[1] Therefore, historians of Western terrorism interested in the beginnings of this kind of crime might find it useful to focus their attention on the late Middle Ages and the early modern period. This might be a slightly unusual timeframe: It is part of the legacy of 19th century historiography that we do not look for terrorists in early modern sources. This text will suggest some explanation for this reluctance even to accept the idea of early modern forerunners of terrorism.

Terrorism is an 'unreliable' word. It originated in the aggressive disputes of a political crisis: the polemics of the French Revolution introduced the term "terrorism"

into modern parlance.[2] This does not necessarily mean, however, that the types of violence that are defined as terrorism today did not exist before the 1790s. Therefore, this chapter has a double aim. In the first part, it explores forms of political crime in pre-revolutionary Europe to answer the question whether the specific type of violence called "terrorism" today existed *avant la lettre* and, if so, in what way. We need to bear in mind two points. First, our exploration needs to include various forms of terrorism. Recent events have shown that some governments support terrorist groups (e.g. the Iran-Contra Affair, the GDR's support for the Red Army Faction, or Iran's support for jihadists). Such state-sponsored terrorism can amount to covert warfare. We must look for similar interrelations when we discuss early modern political crime.

Second, all authorities base their struggle against terrorism not simply on "facts," but at least in part on their preconceived worldview or their own angst. Thus, when we deal with early modern political crime we must be wary not to accept the authorities' point of view all too readily. Nervous authorities may have blown the menace of political crime out of proportion.[3]The second part of this chapter aims to find out why nineteenth-century historians who were familiar with the term "terrorism" did not use it to characterize early modern forms of political violence. The answer to this question will help us to understand why it is not common to talk about early modern terrorism and to decide whether this reluctance is justified.

Even thoughthe questionit is questionable whether terrorism existed in early modern Europe as a social phenomenon, we will have to use the term "terrorism." We define terrorism as a form of irregular violence committed by non-state actors that is part of a "bottom-up" fight against a state or structures of statehood, including threats of such violence. This violence has a communicative aspect, i.e. it tries to inflict harm and wants to provoke specific responses from specific audiences; it is instrumental and

symbolic at the same time. Moreover, terrorism has a political aim, even if this political aim is disguised in religious terms – a fight for a theocracy would still be a political fight because theocracies are states. We need to include religiously motivated political crime for two reasons. First, it would be difficult and even misleading to distinguish between the political and the religious sphere in early modern Europe. The political power of the papacy and the prince bishops, the close interrelation between the Protestant churches and states, the political representation of the clergy in most of the estates of Europe, and the military conflicts between factions who chose to identify with certain denominations all suggest that the church(es) and the state(s) of early modern Europe were interwoven. Additionally, the theory and (ritualized) practice of government, as well as the theory and practice of resistance, had obvious religious overtones. Thus, any discussion of tyrannicide that did not include theological arguments would have seemed absurdunsophisticated to most early modern political theorists.[4]

In early modern Europe, the technical preconditions for denominational and political propaganda existed, and the religious leaders and princes knew how to use them. With the Reformation a European reading public had come into existence. A flourishing publishing industry that produced masses of pamphlets and newssheets catered to the needs of that audience. Political violence was a major subject for the early modern press.[5]

There was certainly a lot of political violence to report about. The late Middle Ages and the early modern period were full of violence used by non-state actors in "bottom-up" fights against structures of statehood in order to achieve political aims. There were not only open campaign-like insurrections but alsonumerous assassinations and attempted assassinations of princes: Henry III and Henry IV of France, Gustavus

III of Sweden were all assassinated, while Louis XV of France, Elizabeth I, of England, Oliver Cromwell, Charles II (Rye House Plot), George III, Joseph I of Portugal, prince electors Friedrich IV and Friedrich V of the Palantine and Christian II of Saxony escaped their would-be murderers.[6]

One of the most spectacular political assassinations of the early modern period was that of William I of Orange. After the 1560s, William was one of the leaders of the Netherlands' opposition against the rule of the Spanish Habsburgs. Though less than successful as a military leader, he was the *stadhouder* of the most influential of the rebel provinces, i.e. he acted as the supreme commander and quasi head of state. In 1579, William helped to found the Union of Utrecht, which was to become the sovereign Dutch republic. The uprising of the Netherlands had been accompanied by massive denominational violence; many Catholics who found themselves at a losing end blamed William who had ostentatiously converted to Calvinism. A first attempt on William's life in 1582 failed. Two years later, William was shot by one Balthasar Gérard. This radical Catholic seems to have been motivated by denominational zeal as well as by the fact that Philip II of Spain had put a price on William's head. Gérard was caught red-handed. Much like some modern terrorists he seems to have taken pride in his crime. The assassination of a prince influenced practical politics and had a communicative-propagandistic aspect: the fact that Philip had openly offered a reward for the killing of William was a public denunciation of the Dutch leader as a common criminal.

Philip was as good as his word: he gave Gérard's family a country estate in the Franche Comté. The France Comté officially belonged to the territorial conglomerate of the Habsburg Netherlands, just as did the provinces that had rejected Spanish overlordship and had just formed the Union of Utrecht. When Philip presented the murderer's family

with an estate in the Franche Comté, he thus implicitly suggested that he could still deal with the Netherlands as he saw fit. The murder and the reward were part and parcel of a complex, public political communication. Additionally, Philip ordered public rejoicing when news of William's death arrived. Pope Gregory XIII had a *Te Deum* sung to celebrate the assassination of the *stadhouder*.

Was Gérard a state-sponsored terrorist? He clearly hoped to be rewarded by Philip. However, there is neither reliable proof for him ever having had contact with Spanish officials before the attack, nor good evidence for some Spanish conspiracy behind him. It seems safe to assume that Gérard was a bounty-hunting volunteer for whom the royal promise of a reward and his Catholic background had been sufficient to induce him to kill.[7]

The Gunpowder Plot of 1605—a conspiracy of Catholic renegades including Guy Fawkes to blow up king James I and his parliament—is even better known than William's assassination. This is partly due to the massive propagandistic effort made by the authorities as well as by the supporters of the alleged conspirators. After the execution of a Jesuit who had supposedly orchestrated the Gunpowder Plot, radical Catholics tried to establish a cult of relics with the monk as a would-be saint in its center. James I, meanwhile, tried to turn the failure of the Gunpowder Plot into a propagandistic victory for himself. He ordered his subjects to celebrate the anniversary of his escape from the conspirators. Guy Fawkes Day might thus be one of the oldest political holidays still celebrated today.[8]

Pre-modern political criminals did not only attack princes, however. As a matter of fact, the fear of politically motivated attacks on the civilian population was a salient feature of medieval and early modern history. Contemporaries believed that a great number of undeclared wars went on. Raids on rival princes, financial support for their

enemies, or payments for military leaders attacking an adversary were customary. Sometimes, princes engaging in covert wars supposedly used terrorist tactics. Such tactics aimed at maximum civilian casualties not unlike modern terrorism. They were said to take two forms: arson, which could destroy whole towns, and mass poisoning, which allegedly spread epidemics. I am rather reluctant to accept what the sources have to say about these terrorist crimes at face value, but will explain my skeptical attitude later on.

Historians interested in epidemics allegedly spread by mass poisoning have rightly focused on the time of the Black Death. The most prominent victims of the idea that epidemics could be caused by poisoning were Jews. The accusation that Jews poisoned wells to spread the plague led to a rapid and drastic deterioration of Jewish-Christian relations all over late medieval Europe and eventually to pogroms. In the late Middle Ages, mostly Anti-Semites used this argument.[9] The idea that one could use poison to spread an epidemic was much older though. It dates back to the fifth century BCE, when Athenians blamed the Spartans for the plague that depopulated their town.[10] In 810 CE rumor had it that an enemy of Charlemagne had sent emissaries into the Frankish Empire. They supposedly caused a contagious disease among the cattle by poisoning the livestock.[11] In 1321 France witnessed a wave of attacks on lepers. It was said that the lepers had tried to spread their disease using poison. They supposedly planned to bring down the political and social order of Europe and were said to be in league with Muslim rulers. On the basis of this conspiracy theory hundreds of lepers were killed. The local authorities confiscated their belongings.[12]

Even the Black Death was explained in political terms. In 1348, the authorities of Narbonne arrested vagabonds who were said to be English spies who had been sent to France in order to bring the plague. The English in turn blamed the Flemish. The

physician Guy de Chauliac wrote that the poor and the aristocracy accused each other of willfully spreading the plague.[13]

Medieval and early modern medicine had a number of competing theories about the way contagious diseases spread. Willful poisoning was one of them. The authorities hunted alleged plague spreaders in the sixteenth century in Geneva, 1564 and 1628 in Lyon, and all through Northern Italy from the fourteenth until the seventeenth centuries. Alessandro Manzoni used this idea in his novel *I promessi Sposi* (1827). The "untori," the salve makers, allegedly spread the plague by putting a certain salve on walls and church doors. Whoever touched this unguent contracted the disease. In the seventeenth century, authorities in Southern Germany were worried that vagrants disguised as Italian fruit vendors spread plague poison. Even in the nineteenth century there were still rumors that the cholera had been caused by poison.[14] There were a number of trials against plague spreaders. Doctors, nurses, cleaners and gravediggers who profited from the epidemic were accused of willfully causing it.[15]

Mass poisoning was supposed to have a political aspect: foreign princes allegedly paid vagabonds to bring poison into the lands of their political or denominational adversaries. In a way, these vagabonds were the soldiers of a covert war or state-sponsored terrorists; the plague poison was a biological weapon. Who exactly was supposed to pull the strings of these terrorist conspiracies remained largely unclear. As these itinerant poisoners were allegedly paid for their crimes, their motive was greed.[16]

Fire was another of the recurring nightmares of pre-modern Europe. Early modern towns were mostly built from timber and straw. Thus, they were extremely vulnerable to conflagration. Contemporaries often interpreted fires as the result of arson. The feudal warriors of the Middle Ages had used fire as a weapon in their wars

and arson still played a minor role in early modern warfare. Arsonist attacks were said to be part and parcel of undeclared wars that went on in peacetime. Contemporaries distinguished between two kinds of arsonists. There was the *incendiarius ordinarius* – the common arsonist – who simply wanted to damage the property of one particular person. It was quite common that some disgruntled maidservant or farm hand laid fire in the house of her or his master. There was, however, a second kind of arsonist: the *incendiarius famosus* or *seditiosus*. This type wanted to burn down whole villages and whole cities. The arson was meant to inflict the greatest possible damage on "innocent civilians," totally irrespective of individual victims, a trait often thought to be typical of terrorist attacks.[17] Arsonists were said to be organized much like poisoners: all were supposedly vagrants and in the pay of some foreign potentate.

Contemporaries were convinced that organized arson had a political motive. In 1524, a devastating fire in Troyes was blamed on vagabonds who were said to work for the emperor. These arsonists were allegedly the vanguard of a secret incendiary army that had been ordered to destroy French cities. At the imperial diet at Regensburg in 1540, the Protestant estates demanded that emperor Charles V should take action against a Catholic conspiracy. This conspiracy supposedly planned to eradicate the new church by burning whole regions to the ground: a savage combination of instrumental and symbolic violence that sent a clear message to any prince who considered converting to Protestantism. Radical Catholics among the German princes and the pope himself allegedly pulled the strings of this arsonist plot. In German Habsburg countries there were rumors about arsonist attacks organized by the Hussites in the 1420s, by the Venetians in early sixteenth century, and finally by the Turks from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. Some princes who had been forced out of their territories supposedly planned the military retaking of their respective lands with the help of

itinerant arsonists. After the devastating fire of London, British cities took measures against vagrants. The homeless were suspected to be arsonists in the pay of Catholics or Quakers. In the seventeenth century, Polish organized criminals were said to offer the "services" of tramps as incendiaries to political or religious leaders who wanted to engage in covert warfare.[18]

The most prominent examples of politically motivated arson as a "weapon of mass destruction" are attacks connected with the *Bundschuh* upheavals, the *Grande Peur*, and the 'Captain Swing' protests. In the early sixteenth century there were rumors all over southwest Germany about a series of peasant rebellions: the *Bundschuh* upheavals. The peasants were said to have enlisted the help of vagabonds as arsonists who were to spread fear and chaos before the attack of the peasants. The leaders of the peasant rebels thus played the role of the foreign potentate who hired arsonists. The *Bundschuh* never really struck but a number of suspects were arrested.[19]

During the so-called *Grande Peur* of 1789 the rural population in France feared a pact between the nobility and the homeless poor. These vagrants – called *brigands* - were to raise fires, destroy crops, and spread fear and chaos in order to stop the revolutionary movement. The rumors provoked a violent response: numerous villages took up arms and attacked nobles, a number of manors went up in flames. The peasants made a point of burning their feudal contracts.[20]

During the English 'Captain Swing' protests of the 1830s it was rumored that Irish itinerant workers were paid by wealthy Jews from the cities to commit arson, whereas the adherents of 'Captain Swing' insisted that they did not cooperate with the fire raisers.[21]

Arson and poison could be blamed on the same individuals. In 1546, Johann Friedrich I of Saxony and Philipp of Hessen issued a warrant for arsonists and

poisoners who were allegedly in the pay of the pope. In France, the Huguenots were rumored to be poisoners and incendiaries during the 1560s. In 1557 the authorities of Lyon asked Geneva for assistance in their search for a Spaniard. This resourceful criminal was supposed to have a box full of poisonous powder and apples that emitted flames, apparently some kind of firebombs.[22]

What were the alleged motives of the political criminals of the early modern period? The assassins fell into two categories: mercenaries who worked for a rival prince and the exponents of religious or social groups who tried to defend their standing in society. Anckarström who killed Gustav III was an aristocrat who saw the king as an enemy of the nobility. Religion was more important as a motive for political murder, however. François Ravaillac who killed Henry IV was a radical Catholic who mistrusted the Huguenot convert on the throne. The plotters of the Gunpowder Plot were Catholic renegades and English nobles with a dislike for the Scotsman on the English throne.[23]

The arsonists and poisoners had supposedly the same motive: greed. The criminals were said to belong to gangs in the pay of foreign governments. The vagabonds did not have a political agenda of their own, but torched cities or poisoned towns because a foreign potentate paid them to do so. Today, we would probably call this concept state-sponsored terrorism.[24]

> Up to this point, we have contended ourselves with a survey of the source materials without questioning the reliability of the sources. We need to beIt is esssential to be very critical about these sources for organized arson and mass poisoningsfor WHAT, however. No serious historian would take the anti-Semitic narratives of the times of the Black Death at face value anymore. Apart from a few exceptions, the historiography has been very skeptical about the plague

spreaders.[25] There are virtually no statements of the suspects that were not made under torture or the threat of torture. There are few witness accounts who spoke in favor of the defendants. It is difficult to accept that certain individuals spread a highly contagious disease they themselves were not immune from simply in order to make money or in order to obey the command of some prince. The magical elements of the plague narratives—some of the plague spreader were supposed to be in league with the devil—did nothing to enhance their credibility.

How reliable are our sources concerning arson? Most historians who have dealt with the arsonist gangs have accepted them as real. This interpretation is open to doubt. The confessions of alleged arsonists all followed the same pattern. A vagrant accidentally met a person who presented himself as the agent of some foreign potentate. This person was a total stranger or even a foreigner the tramp had never met before. The agent offered the vagabond a sum of money for raising fire in a certain region. Nothing was said about the time or place of the attack. The would-be arsonist was paid immediately by the stranger and left to his own devices. The arsonists claimed to have been paid for raising fires somewhere in a territory or kingdom. They seemed to be equally happy to torch a village or a city, a monastery, a castle, or a barn.[26] It is difficult to picture any organizational structures of the arsonists' groups. Some of the sources mention "officers" of the incendiaries. However, the question of who invested these officers with what powers remains unanswered. What the sources do reveal is the amazing flexibility of the arsonists' gangs. Groups allegedly formed and dispersed at will. There were hardly any fixed meeting places. This almost complete lack of organizational structures strongly suggests that arsonists' confessions had no basis in reality outside of the courtroom. The suggestion that foreign powers paid vagabonds in advance for dangerous and criminal acts without any effective means of control is

highly questionable. It is even more implausible that the vagabonds after receiving their payment committed arson just in order to "fulfill their contracts."[27]

Mercenaries and the organized arsonists as they appear in court records had not much in common. Most mercenaries knew the recruitment officer who contacted them or at least the military leader they agreed to fight for. Before they joined the ranks of the respective army they did not receive any pay at all aside from a small sum that enabled them to come to the mustering place. Compared to the mercenary system, the arsonist conspiracy with its lack of organization and freely spent cash makes no sense.[28]

Thus, the sources do not convincingly prove that the conspiracies of arsonists and poisoners existed. Rather, they demonstrate that uncritical and nervous authorities with their alarmism catered to the needs of the public. The early modern fantasies about political criminals who targeted civilians became real enough in the nineteenth and twentieth century, e.g. Fenian Dynamite Campaign (1881-1885), the Oktoberfest Bombing (1980), or the attacks on 9/11. It is as if modern radicals unwittingly imitated the imaginary political criminals of early modern Europe. Even though arsonists and incendiaries were imaginary threats, the fear of political crime had very real consequences. Measures against alleged political conspiracies directly promoted state building and the acceptance of administrative authority. The fight against the threat of political criminals, assassins as well as arsonists or poisoners, called for new surveillance and security agencies. The fear of political criminals contributed to the emergence of security measures to protect the prince and helped to remove the princes from the public eye. It contributed to the increasing remoteness of the rulers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries that was interspersed with rare, well-planned, and elaborate public appearances.[29]

The fight against arsonists and poisoners promoted quarantine and fire fighting. Investigations against supposedly itinerant political criminals demanded the quick exchange of information between state institutions and authorities that in turn needed a high degree of professionalization and organization.[30] The fear of the state destroyer contributed greatly to the process of state building. Thus, the fear of political crime accompanied the modern state from its very beginning, or rather, the fear of terrorism accompanied the modern state from its very beginning.

Many of the early modern terrorists – the imaginary even more than the real ones – acted on behalf of some secular or ecclesiastic prince. The concept of the terrorist as an idealist gone wrong is a romantic illusion as far as the early modern period is concerned. hey expected or were supposed to expect a reward from their alleged employers. There was a parallel between the image of the military man and the terrorist. The early modern period imagined political criminals like mercenaries who were primarily interested in their pay and had little personal stake in the conflict they fought. Modernity seems to imagine political criminals as soldiers who identify with country or government. It would be misleading to put too much stress on the point that early modern terrorists (supposedly) worked for some authority, however. There are examples to the contrary. Notable groups of early modern political criminals like the Gunpowder Plotters, the Rye House conspirators, or the adherents of the *Bundschuh* acted – or were said to act - on their own behalf.

As far as terrorism is concerned, the early modern – modern divide is thus partly a divide between imaginary and real crimes. Attempts on the lives of early modern princes were real enough; the religious/political motifs behind them are evident. The attacks on the civilian population carried out by organized gangs of arsonists and poisoners were in all likelihood imaginary, much like witchcraft or Jewish ritual

murder. These political fantasies and conspiracy theories must not be dismissed by historians as irrelevant fancies, however: The consequences they had in the legal and administrative sphere of state building processes were real. The terrorist fantasies provoked the authorities to severe measures, especially against the homeless, that cost the lives of hundreds of innocent people.[31] We have to acknowledge that terrorism as an imaginary concept was known since the late Middle Ages even though it found no equivalent in the actual behavior of criminals. Still, the imaginary – real divide does not justify a strict separation between modern terrorism and early modern political crime.

Nineteenth-century historians did not share our skeptical standpoint. They knew about political crime in the late Middle Ages and the early modern period and wrote about assassinations and attacks on the civilian population. Most of them accepted the sources at face value. They believed that the conspiracies of arsonists had existed, even though they were somewhat skeptical concerning the poisoners. Some historians treated the *Grande Peur* with skepticism. They suggested, however, that the rumors themselves had been spread purposefully to cause political unrest. But generally historians of the nineteenth century did not think in terms of the divide between imaginary and real political crimes. They accepted that there had been organized political criminals in pre-modern Europe, but they did not compare them to the political criminals of their own time. The historians of the nineteenth century did not use the term "terrorism" when they talked about political crime in pre-revolutionary Europe, but separated the political violence in Europe before the end of the eighteenth century categorically from the political violence after the revolution. Why?

The revolutions of the late eighteenth century were indeed a formidable caesura. They changed the ways the (pre-revolutionary and the revolutionary) past was

perceived.[32] This explanation is too general, however. Moreover, not all historians of the nineteenth century accepted the idea that 1789 was a complete break with tradition. Most prominently Leopold von Ranke, the founding father of modern historiography, saw history as a continuum. The main object of the uninterrupted evolution was the state. Therefore, the very concept of a historical study of organized political crime would be problematic in Ranke's historiography. A history of political criminals let alone a comparison between pre-modern and modern terrorists would have been alien to Ranke and his followers.[33]

We need to have a closer look at actual historical writings. What did historians of the nineteenth century say about political criminals? In what ways did they construct the political crime of the early modern period as different from the terrorism of their own time?

I would like to focus on the treatment of three of the most prominent political crimes of the early modern period in the historiography of the nineteenth century: the the *Bundschuh* arson, the Gunpowder Plot, and the *Grande Peur.* Thuswe have one example each from German, English and French history, from the sixteenth, the seventeenth, and the eighteenth centuries, one assassination and two attacks on the civilian population. All three crimes fit the definition of terrorism: a form of violence committed by non-state actors that has a communicative aspect and serves a political aim. The historians chosen represent a number of different schools. They were influential in their respective fields or had a clear stance in the historical debate. All of them participated in the political debates of their time. Some – like Louis Blanc or Friedrich Engels – are better known today for their political activities than for their historical research. Included are socialists as well as liberal and conservative authors. How then did they interpret these incidences of early modern political crime?

Several authors denied that pre-modern political crime was political. Schreiber, a former priest and liberal Nationalist, Bechstein, a moderate Nationalist who distanced himself from the liberal ideas of 1848, Avé-Lallemont, a conservative historian and police administrator, and Michelet, an ardent republican and adherent of the 1848 revolution with strong anti-Catholic leanings, wrote about the *Bundschuh* and the *brigands* of the *Grande Peur*.[34] All of them saw the perpetrators simply as criminals. The arsonists did not have any motive for their crimes, but followed their innate anti-social tendencies. Funck-Brentano, a moderate monarchist and adherent of the *Nationalisme Intégrale*, claimed that the threat of the *brigands* had been real. He depicted them as primitive riffraff who attacked villages and even Paris in order to pilfer. Camille Desmoulins, Funck-Brentano claimed in a wild flight of fancy, had personally encouraged this rabble.[35] Avé-Lallemant stressed that the arsonists belonged to a criminal class. In the early sixteenth century, in the context of political rebellions, this criminal class had given birth to all forms of organized crime. Both the criminal class and the mob were according to Avé-Lallemant still active in his own time and had hardly changed. New political developments made no impression on this underclass, which Avé-Lallemant regarded as apolitical. His concept had a lot in common with Marx' idea of the Lumpenproletariat. However, Avé-Lallemant's argument had racist overtones: he stressed the alleged Jewish influence in organized crime. Historian and SS officer Günther Franz echoed Avé-Lallemant's ideas in the 1930s: he denounced the itinerant poor as "inferior" persons with innate criminal tendencies. Interestingly, Franz as well as Michelet were not content to see the peasant rebels of the *Bundschuh* or nobles who paid the brigands as driving forces behind the political crimes, but speculated about foreign powers that financed the attacks.[36]

Wilhelm Zimmermann – who sympathized with peasant rebels just as he sympathized with the 1848 revolution – accepted the idea of early modern political violence as a form of organized crime. He emphasized that the organization of the lowest stratum of society was like a guild, however. Crime was a profession rather than a personal predisposition. Zimmermann did his best to downplay the role arsonists had supposedly played in peasant insurrections, because he did not want the heroic but futile fight of German peasants tainted with the odium of organized crime. As organized crime, early modern political violence could not have anything in common with the revolutionary violence of 1848.[37]

Friedrich Engels also saw the vagabond arsonists as members of an organized rural underworld. He described them with benevolent anthropological interest and acknowledged the strength of their organization. However, he did not see them as revolutionaries. Engels was at pains to stress that the arsonists had never really belonged to the peasant rebels.[38]

Other British and French authors sided with the political criminals more openly. Louis Blanc, one of the founding fathers of French socialism, and Jean Jaurès, together with Clemenceau his most important follower and later on one of the leaders of the *Parti Socialiste Français*, pointed out that the political violence had been provoked by appalling social circumstances. Blanc for one characterized the *Grande Peur* as a delusion. However, he saw the famine, the stories about arsonists, and the ensuing disorder of the French countryside in 1789 as the provocation needed to awaken "l'enthousiasme de la liberté.". The rumors about the nobility's pact with the *brigands* led to the abolition of feudalism.[39] Jaurès was less skeptical. Despite his pacifist convictions, he did not hesitate to acknowledge the arsonist vagabonds as a "mouvement du prolétariat rural."[40] The idea of the terrorist as a social criminal is still

widespread. In this context did nineteenth century historians suggest a connection between political criminals of the early modern period and those of their own time. They did not say so in so many words, however.

Before and after the Catholic Relief Act of 1829, English authors – Protestants and Catholics alike – condemned the oppression of Catholicism in early modern England. They admitted that Catholics had been provoked beyond control before a minority decided to strike back. Thus, they did not simply condemn the Gunpowder Plot as treason and attempted assassination.[41] The radical William Cobbett supported the Reform Bill of 1832 and Catholic Emancipation. He found the plotters' resistance justifiable.[42] A number of authors, the most prominent being the Jesuit John Gerard echoed the suspicions voiced in the early seventeenth century: they claimed that the government had known about the Gunpowder Plot and suggested that it had been a government plot to discredit Catholics.[43]

Even authors who admitted the possibility of the existence of a Catholic plot felt that the Guy Fawkes Day celebrations were an insult to the English Catholic minority. In 1851, a series of letters published in *The Times* after Guy Fawkes Day provoked an angry reaction from Catholics who maintained the only point of the festivities was to vilify their church. An anonymous author published several sources of the Gunpowder Plot together with excerpts from works of established historians. Thus, he tried to prove that only a "few ruthless and gloomy fanatics" had been responsible for the assassination attempt. Polemics against English Catholics and their alleged tendency to undermine the government were, the author claimed, just another form of religious persecution. This was not the only continuity the contemporaries saw: the harassment of Catholics still went on.[44]

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Well before the Oxford Movement and Newman's conversion heralded the renaissance of English Catholicism, various authors, most notably Protestant clergymen, called for the abolition of Guy Fawkes Day in the name of Christian tolerance.[48] The public regarded the plotters more leniently after the Gordon Riots had made anti-Catholic prejudice unacceptable. Thus, the discussion about the Gunpowder Plot was a debate about religious tolerance and the role of the Anglican Church in nineteenth century Britain.[49] This religious discourse marginalized the relevance of the Gunpower Plot for politics in Hanoverian and Victorian Great Britain. The nineteenth century authors did not see the Catholic conspirators of the seventeenth century and the Fennians of their own time as parallels.

A number of French authors, among them the conservative nationalists Conny and Forestié, as well as the liberal Thiers—the historian of the Revolution who was to become the father of the Third Republic—entertained similar ideas about the rumors around the *brigands*. There had been no conspiracy of the aristocracy and the homeless, but there had been a conspiracy to start rumors about this unlikely coalition. Conny blamed the duke of Orléans for the *Grande Peur*, which he saw as a "grande conspiration contre la liberté."[50] Much like the ultra-conservative Barruel, Forestié suspected the Freemasons behind the revolutionaries. They spread the rumors about arsonists in order to justify the armament of the people and an ever more ruthless policy of the revolutionaries. In this context, Forestie even used the word "*terroriste*" in order to claim that the Terror of the revolutionary regime had begun several years before 1793.[51] Thiers refrained from answering the question of who had started the rumors – he thought Mirabeau, Sièyes, and the duke of Orléans equally suspicious. The conspiracy theories surrounding today's terrorism is by no means a new phenomenon.

All authors agreed that the rumors about the arsonists had galvanized the French countryside into revolutionary action. As Thiers put it: The rumor of political crime had been a "a strategic trick that made the revolution of the 14th of July all-encompassing by provoking the armament of the nation."[52]

The results of are clear. The historians of the nineteenth century compared no social movement—violent or non-violent—of their time to the political criminals of the early modern era. They had a strong tendency to explain political crime as either not political or as not criminal. The criminal underclass Avé-Lallemont and others described had no political agenda. They were simply interested in material gain and followed an innate tendency to do harm. Other nineteenth century historians did not characterize the political criminals of the early modern period as criminals. From their point of view their demands had been entirely justified and addressed typical problems of the early modern period: denominational discrimination and the economic and political suppression of the peasantry. These problems were not the problems of the nineteenth century anymore; at least the urban reading public of Western and Central Europe would not see them as such. All authors agreed that the Catholic Emancipation in Britain ended the political oppression of Christian minorities. Some might even have argued that the era of the rule of Christianity was over: in enlightened bourgeois society in France, England and the US and in socialist circles there was hardly any room for denominational conflict anymore. If such conflicts did take place, they were solved through political means.[53]

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries had to learn the hard way that religious tensions can still lead to violent political controversies. We have lost the nineteenth-century optimism that religious matters have become private matters, and we are closer to the early modern point of view, which accepted that religious attitudes have serious

political implications, than to the standpoint of nineteenth-century historians. Historians of the nineteenth century found it difficult to relate political criminals of the early modern period to those of their own time, because these criminals had fought for aims no terrorist stood up for anymore. With the exception of the Irish famine, after 1820 the great crises of agricultural production were over; the countryside did not starve any longer. The vestiges of the peasants' feudal obligations vanished in a largely peaceful process until the middle of the nineteenth century.[54]

The political criminals of pre-modern Europe had fought against problems of their time. That did not make them champions of modernity, however. Neither the criminals, nor their alleged employers were the vanguard of the Enlightenment or nineteenth-century society: the answers they gave to the problems of their times, the aims they fought for with criminal and violent means, were those of pre-modern Europe. They did not demand religious tolerance in general but only the improvement of the situation of their denomination; they did not call for a new economic system, but only for a fairer treatment of peasants.

From a nineteenth-century point of view, such aims were seriously deficient. The historians explained that the motivation and the aims of arsonists, poisoners, and assassins had been socioeconomic or religious in character. Thus, the political criminals of the early modern period did not have a political agenda. They lacked political awareness. Anarchism and nationalism as the great driving forces behind nineteenth-century terrorism were alien to the mindset of all political criminals of the early modern period. The arsonist gangs of the *Bundschuh* or the *Grande Peur* were said to spread chaos, but nobody claimed that they pursued the end of all government as a positive aim. The aims attributed to the anarchist as the prototype of the nineteenth century

terrorist and to the early modern political criminals were so different that they obscured the basic similarities between both groups.[55]

Moreover, nineteenth-century authors found it difficult to relate the assassins, arsonists, and poisoners of the early modern period to their own time as the idea of the nation seemed to have escaped the criminals.[56] Even though Zimmermann presented the German peasant rebels as early nationalists, he did not claim that their alleged arsonist helpers had a similar program or any program at all.[57] Without the idea of the nation, without distinct plans for an alternative economic or religious life, the political criminals of the early modern period seemed to be very different from those of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary era.

In conclusion, we might thus say that the nineteenth century perceived pre-modern political crime as essentially lacking a specific, genuinely political idea. The nineteenth century expected political criminals to be motivated by some specific political or philosophical concept. Simply put: They expected an idea. For Hegel and Fichte and their numerous followers the state provided political and moral ideas, embodied them and realized them. A political conflict made sense only if it was a conflict about political ideas.[58] Political criminals would have distinct political ideas of their own concerning the purpose of the state – e.g. militant Marxists - or they would claim that the state itself contradicted the idea of personal freedom – e.g. anarchists.[59] Early modern political criminals had no such concepts. From a philosophy-oriented nineteenth century point of view it was thus questionable whether they were political at all.

As nineteenth century historians concentrated on the idea behind the violence, the content, they neglected the violence itself, the form. Thus, the historians overlooked the obvious similarities between early modern and modern political violence, early

modern and modern terrorism. The historians depicted their crimes as integral parts of a cultural system ruled by religion and by the peasant economy, not by political ideas, that is to say by a cultural system which had hardly anything to do with the historians' own time, with 'modernity.' Terrorism became a phenomenon without history.

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[2] Johannes Dillinger, *Terrorismus* (Freiburg i. B.: Herder, 2008), 9. See also the chapter by Ronen Steinberg in this volume.

[3] Daniel Byman, *Deadly Connections. States that Sponsor Terrorism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); see also Ray Cline and Yonah Alexander, *Terrorism as State Sponsored Covert Warfare* (Fairfax: Hero, 1986); Philipp Sarasin, *"Anthrax." Bioterror als Phantasma* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp. 2004); Noam Chomsky*, 9 – 11* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2001); John Collins and Ross Glover, *Collateral Language. A User's Guide to America's New War* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

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[17] Roberts, "Arson" no pages here?; Johannes Dillinger, "Organized Arson as a Political Crime," *Crime, History and Societies*, 10 (2006), 101-121.

[18] Dillinger, "Organized," 102-103.

[19] Johannes Dillinger, "Freiburgs Bundschuh," *Zeitschrift für historische Forschung* 32 (2005): 407-435; less skeptical Rolf Köhn, "Der Bundschuh von 1517," in Peter Blickle and Thomas Adam, eds., *Bundschuh* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2004), 122-138.

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[21] Eric Hobsbawm, *Captain Swing* (2d edition New York: Norton, 1975), 239-241.

[22] *Des Churfuersten zu Sachssen etc. Vnd Landgrauen zu Hessen etc. Offen Ausschreiben Der Mordbrenner vnd Vorgiffter halben: Die vom AntiChrist dem Babst zu Rom abgefertiget Deudschland mit Mordtbrandt vnd vorgifftung zubeschedigen* (Wittenberg: Rhau, 1546); Naphy, *Plagues*, 174; Roberts, "Arson," 24; Johannes Dillinger, "Terrorists and Witches: Popular Ideas of Evil in the Early Modern Period," in *History of European Ideas*, 30 (2004), 167-182, 176.

[23] Ford, *Political*, 160-167, 188-189, 192-198, 205-206; Gardar Sahlberg, *Den Aristokratiska Ligan* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1969); Roland Mousnier, *L'Assassinat de Henry IV* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

[24] Dillinger, "Organized," 112-113.

[25] See Dillinger, "Organized," 109, 114; Dillinger, "Terrorists," 170-171, 180-181. An exception is Naphy's monograph, see Naphy, *Plagues*, 197-201.

[26] Dillinger, "Organized"; Roberts, "Arson." Scribner argued against the reliability of the sources concerning organized arson but did not draw the conclusion,

Bob Scribner, "The Mordbrenner Fear in Sixteenth-Century Germany," in Richard Evans, ed., *The German Underworld* (London: Routlege, 1988), 29-56.

[27] Dillinger, „Organized," 105-106.

[28] Reinhard Baumann, *Landsknechte* (Munich: Beck, 1994).

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[30] Werfring, i, 128-132, 152-153; Dillinger, "Organized," 114-118; for the legal debate see Garleff Timcke, *Der Straftatbestand der Brandstiftung in seiner Entwicklung durch die Wissenschaft des Gemeinen Strafrechts* (Göttingen: Unpublished thesis 1965).

[31] The "hundreds" referred to here are a very conservative estimate. More research on alleged plague spreaders and arsonists is needed before we can say anything conclusive about the real number of victims of early modern terrorist scare.

[32] Reinhard Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1979), 32-34.

[33] Rudolf Vierhaus, "Die Idee der Kontinuität im historiographischen Werk Leopold von Rankes," in Wolfgang J. Mommsen, ed., *Leopold von Ranke und die moderne Geschichtswissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1988), 166-175; Peter Blickle, "Ranke als Gegenrevolutionär," in ibid., 189-200.

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[35] Frantz Funck-Brentano*, Legends of the Bastille* (London: Downey, 1899), 240-255.

[36] Günther Franz, *Der deutsche Bauernkrieg* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1933), 131; Michelet, *Histoire*, 1, 301.

[37] Wilhelm Zimmermann, *Der große deutsche Bauernkrieg*, reprint of the abridged 11th edition 1891 with additional material from the 2nd edition 1856 (Ostberlin: Dietz, 1989), 51-61, 130-131.

[38] Friedrich Engels, "Der deutsche Bauernkrieg," in Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke* (Ostberlin: Dietz, 1960-1968), 7, 327-413, 362-371.

[39] Louis Blanc, *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, 12 vols. (Paris: Langlois et Leelereq, 1847-1869), 1, 476-484.

[40] Jean Jaurès, *Historie Socialiste 1789-1900*, 4 vols. (Paris: J. Rouff, 1901-1908), 1, 27 ; see also Édouard Forestié, *La Grande Peur de 1789* (Montauban: Masson, 1910), 145.

[41] See for example David Jardine, *A Narrartive of the Gunpowder Plot* (London: J. Murray, 1857); John Lingard, *The History of England from the First Invasion of the Romans to the Accession of William and Mary*, 10 vols. 2nd edition (London: Dolman, 1849) vol. 7, 37-98; Samuel R. Gardiner, *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War*, 10 vols. (London: Longmans, Green, & Co. 1883) vol. 1, 201-204, 223-231, 235-285; or the short account aimed at a mass audience Anonymous, *The Fifth of November Plot* (London: Richards, 1938). See also the short historiographical survey in Sharpe, *Remember*, 127-135.

[42] William Cobbett, *A History of the Protestant Reformation in England and Ireland*, 2 vols. (London: The Author, 1829), 1, 353-359. Cobbett observed that in some English villages the figure burned on the 5th of November had been called 'Tom Paine' instead of 'Guy Fawkes' for several years. However, Cobbett himself did not

compare the revolutionary to the early modern political criminal, William Cobbett, "To the Bishop of Landaff" *Cobbett's Political Register* 35 (1820), 717-775, 736-737.

[43] John Gerard, *The Condition of the Catholics under James I* (London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1872); see also P.P. Jones, *An Account of the Gunpowder Plot. Addressed to his Fellow Protestants* (Taunton: R.T., 1827). Gerard had a brief public debate with the historian Gardiner: John Gerard, *What was the Gunpowder Plot?* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine & Co., 1897); Samuel R. Gardiner, *What the Gunpowder Plot was* (London: Longmans 1897); John Gerard, *The Gunpowder Plot and the Gunpowder Plotters, in Reply to Professor Gardiner* (London: Harper & Brothers, 1897).

[44] Vindicator, *A True Account of the Gunpowder Plot, extracted from Dr Lingard's History of England and Dodd's Church History*, (London: C. Dolman, 1851) especially VIII-X.

[47] Vindicator, *A True Account of the Gunpowder Plot, extracted from Dr Lingard's History of England and Dodd's Church History*, (London: C. Dolman, 1851) especially VIII-X.

[48] Jones, *Account,* 2, 6; Anonymous, i, 7.

[49] Sharpe, *Remember*, 45-66, 112-114.

[50] Félix de Conny, *Histoire de la Révolution de France*, 4 vols. (Paris : Méquignon, 1834), 1, 281-283.

[51] Forestié, *Peur,* 156-159, 170-175.

[52] Louis Adolphe Thiers, *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, 2 vols. (Bruxelles: Soc. de Libr., 1845), 1, 140 [my translation].

[53] Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[54] John Walter and Roger Schofield (eds.), *Famine, Disease and Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1989); Massimo Montanari, *Der Hunger und der Überfluß* (Munich: Beck,1999).

[55] Peter Marshall, *Demanding the Impossible. A History of Anarchism* (London: HarperCollins, 1992).

[56] Guy Hermet, *Histoire des Nations et du Nationalisme en Europe* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1996).

[57] Zimmermann, *Bauernkrieg*, 7-9, 126-156, 802-806.

[58] Ido Geiger, "Hegel's Critique of Kant's Practical Philosophy: Moral Motivation and the Founding of the Modern State," *Internationales Jahrbuch des deutschen Idealismus*, 2 (2004) 121-149; Walter Pauly, "Hegel und die Frage nach dem Staat," in *Staat*, 39 (2000), 381-396; Werner Schneider, "Der Zwingherr zur Freiheit und das deutsche Urvolk: J.G. Fichtes philosophischer und politischer Absolutismus, in Ulrich Herrmann, ed., *Volk, Nation, Vaterland* (Hamburg: Publisher ? 1996), 222-243.

[59] Cf. Marshall, *Demanding*, 3-50.