

Verena Erlenbusch-Anderson. *Genealogies of Terrorism: Revolution, State Violence, Empire.* Columbia University Press 2018. 296 pp. \$90.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780231187268); \$30.00 USD (Paperback ISBN 9780231187275).

In her engaging and insightful new book, Erlenbusch-Anderson proposes to employ the genealogical methodology of Michel Foucault to investigate the meaning and significance of terrorism. Borrowing from Foucault, we might say that she has written a history of the role that terrorism plays in our present by writing a genealogy of terrorism from the French Revolution until now. Erlenbusch-Anderson argues that the best way to understand the manifold meanings of terrorism is to attend carefully to its history, which she does in four chapters bookended by an introductory chapter detailing her method and a concluding one defending it, especially against critics who argue that genealogical approaches pay insufficient attention to normative questions. The four historical moments she analyzes are the French and Russian Revolutions, the Algerian War of Independence, and the current (and seemingly interminable) historical moment of the War on Terror in the United States.

The book begins by outlining three general approaches to terrorism studies. The first takes a descriptive approach, delineating various empirical factors that combine in order to designate a specific violent act one of ‘terror.’ This approach may include more critical views that note that attributions of terror are often biased such that, for example, violent acts that would otherwise be deemed acts of terror are called something else (‘mass shootings’) if the perpetrator is deemed a white man (2). These sorts of difficulties favor a second, conceptual approach that deploys strict criteria to distinguish terrorist acts from other acts of violence; if one of these definitions lead to normative judgments, then this approach is a normative one. Although we might distinguish between these approaches, they overlap considerably in practice. Erlenbusch argues that there is another issue that favors her alternative genealogical approach, and that is that these approaches are often question-begging. That is, despite their differences, these approaches often begin by assuming a hidden conception of terrorism that their descriptions end up justifying. ‘In short, when we try to determine what terrorism is, our answers are inevitably shaped by unquestioned and implicit assumptions about what we already recognize as terrorism’ (3).

The shortcoming of these various approaches to terrorism might lead one to wonder how exactly a genealogical approach could overcome them, or even whether an elimination of such implicit assumptions is possible (the hermeneutic approach favored by Hans-Georg Gadamer, for example, would say ‘no’). The key methodological claim of the book is that the genealogical approach makes various implicit assumptions explicit by carefully focusing on the historical conditions under which different conceptions of terrorism emerged. In other words, by carefully attending to the specific historical circumstances attending the emergence of a thing or a concept, we can see it anew as if for the first time. In order to identify what a thing is, we must know its history in meticulous detail. Foucault, following Nietzsche, points out at the beginning of his essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (1970) that ‘genealogy is gray, meticulous, and patiently documentary.’ The critical power of the genealogical method stems from this meticulousness—revealing what has been obscured by common sense or conventional wisdom (‘of course, everyone knows what terror is!’) entails a return to the archives. Consequently, each of the subsequent historical chapters details the emergence of a different type of terrorism through a meticulous reconstruction of an historical moment, beginning with the French Revolution.

Terrorism as a political concept emerges during the French Revolution as a struggle between various revolutionary factions over the questions of political authority and legitimacy. It initially

names a specific regime, that of Maximilien Robespierre and his Jacobin Reign of Terror. Robespierre established a government subsequently characterized as one of terror, one that designated the king as an enemy of the state (36). Erlenbusch-Anderson designates this type of terrorism ‘charismatic terrorism’ because it stems from the rule of a single individual as a means to characterize his government. In addition to classifying Robespierre’s individual regime, his reign gave birth to a type of government, hence the term ‘systematic terrorism.’ Systematic terrorism does not refer to the rule of a single individual but instead to any government that denies basic rights and governs by fear (45). This period witnesses the birth of ‘doxastic terrorism’ once terrorism begins to function as another political philosophy alongside more established ones such as ‘republicanism’ or ‘liberalism.’ Finally, a fourth type of terrorism emerged at this time once people began to identify themselves as terrorists, a development dubbed ‘identarian terrorism’ (22-23). These four senses of terrorism emerged during the French Revolution and mutually reinforced one another (47).

The senses of the term proliferate quickly, though one wonders if the introduction of these terms at the very beginning of the chapter renders this a merely descriptive exercise, one that emerged out of patient genealogical inquiry but then presents this work simply in terms of a classificatory schema. This classificatory schema is not, however, the whole story. The more significant genealogical work occurs as the chapter situates these early conceptions of terror within the broader framework of biopower, economics, and politics inherited largely from Foucault’s work, of which the crisis of political authority precipitated by the French Revolution was an important aspect. Fundamental to these modern transformations at the level of state institutions and the level of power relations is the friend-enemy relation (a term borrowed from Carl Schmitt). This broader framework provides what Erlenbusch-Anderson calls (following Foucault) ‘a grid of intelligibility’ for understanding how these specific figures of terror work in their successive historical iterations. As Erlenbusch-Anderson summarizes it at the beginning of the second chapter, ‘terrorism came into being during the emergence of a biopolitical rationality that deployed mechanisms of social defense to protect the body from its own unhealthy elements. The political injunction to defend the nation against its abnormal and dangerous members justified the exercise of the sovereign right to kill within an economy of biopower’ (55).

Terror as a political concept emerges out of the matrix of the French Revolution and the Terror it spawned, so it makes sense that the concept’s next transformation would occur in the context of the Russian Revolution that sees terror become a tool to comprehend class warfare. Foucault inspires this analysis in his conception of the early modern discourse of race, in which races were understood as cultural groups ‘united by language, religion, geographic origin or custom’ (57). In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, French and English nobility used the discourse of race to call into question claims of sovereign right, and it was later transformed into a revolutionary discourse of class struggle by thinkers such as Karl Marx. Politics comes to be understood as war between classes (57). This strategic logic of terrorism as class warfare provides the basis for Lenin’s later claim that the state apparatus will remain necessary until the bourgeoisie is completely suppressed, hence the proletarian state would remain necessary on a provisional basis until it had completely consolidated power (85).

The fourth chapter turns to terror in its colonial aspect by focusing on the Algerian war for independence. It begins with the nineteenth century French colonization of Algeria and Alexis de Tocqueville’s observations on this project. In both the British and the French context, colonies served as a way to regulate the social body. Therefore, we can only understand biopower and its specific ways of regulating populations once we understand the imperial contexts within which these forms

of power were articulated. Tocqueville provides a defense of these early efforts to regulate the population of the French state by functionally governing settler colonies as penal colonies. He justifies this colonial government by relying up a biological racism that deems the colonized as racially inferior to the French colonizer and subjects them to forms of disciplinary power including surveillance and a strict separation between the spaces of the colonizer and colonized (96-104). This establishes a form of colonial rule in which Algerians were subject to all the duties of citizenship with none of its attendant rights (105).

The Algerian resistance to French rule gives rise to two further conceptual elaborations: that of criminal terrorism, which sees terrorism as a legal matter, and polemic terrorism, which sees it as a question of war (113). The French saw terrorism as a systematic use of violence to create disorder—the sort of killing of noncombatants that has become one of the hallmarks of the contemporary understanding of terrorism. The resistance to French rule in part relied upon a resistance to this colonial understanding of terrorism as illegitimate violence that sought to spread fear (a definition with origins in various conceptions of terror theorized during the French Revolution and the Terror). Instead, members of the Algerian Front de Libération Nationale framed their resistance in terms of self-defense and a response to colonial terrorism (123).

The fifth chapter looks at the current epoch of terror, one characterized by terror in its synthetic form. Erlenbusch-Anderson begins this chapter by considering the legacy of the Algerian revolution. It provided inspiration and a theoretical framework for understanding struggles against settler colonialism from the Palestinian struggle in the Middle East to the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa, and Black Power movements in the United States. At the same time that the governments of Israel, South Africa, and the United States sought to learn from the French counter-terrorism efforts in Algeria, particularly their use of torture and surveillance. Erlenbusch-Anderson goes further and argues that the United States War on Terror represents a synthesis of all the previous forms within the context of the neoconservative end of history claims and claims for executive primacy made by the George W. Bush Administration (135-143). Synthetic terrorism becomes ‘a technique of U.S. foreign policy’ during the years 1987-1993, “‘which emerged as the effect of a political rationality whose main concern was the protection of national interests against Soviet-style communism and totalitarianism’ (147). During a subsequent period leading up to 9/11, the United States began to see itself fighting a war against terrorism. While the field of battle shifts from the Soviet despisers of American values to nonstate actors in the Middle East, the ideological claims remain the same: they are our enemies because they hate our values and our way of life (147).

The book concludes with a sketch of a political theory of terrorism that would take the form of the genealogy practiced in the book rather than a normative critique that would give us guidance about which concepts to favor over others. While I am convinced by Erlenbusch-Anderson’s case for genealogy as a form of critical discourse, I do have a couple of worries that I will articulate by way of conclusion. First, I worry that the discussion of the synthetic terrorism in the context of the United States’ Global War on Terror might be too Hegelian: is it really the case that synthetic terrorism combines the previous forms of charismatic, systemic, doxastic and others coalesce into a new form? How does this claim avoid succumbing to the same triumphalist end of history claim trumpeted by Fukuyama and the other Neoconservatives at the end of the Cold War? At the very least, more work here is warranted. I am also curious about the deployments of the concept of terrorism that were marginalized or omitted in this genealogy of terrorism. For example, what about the anarchist discourses around terror in Europe and the United States at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries? How might this anarchist discourse of terrorism change the genealogy of terrorism presented here? Despite these questions, Erlenbusch-Anderson has written an

excellent book that puts Foucault's thought to work on a topic that has not received the philosophical attention that it deserves.

Corey McCall, Elmira College