

PROLOGUE

A recent report on terrorism by the U.S. State Department indicated that twenty-five citizens were killed by terrorist acts in 1986. The report concluded that if there is to be peace in the world, terrorism must be eradicated. In the same year, 25,500 U.S. citizens were murdered (about forty-five percent of that total were handgun murders) and more than 50,000 people were killed on highways, forty percent of them due to drunk drivers (Clark 1993, 71). Most people perceive terrorism as more threatening to life, peace, and security than handgun ownership or highway travel. Yet the death rates as a result of terrorism, versus handgun and/or highway deaths, suggest just the opposite. What accounts for the disparity between the perceived threat and the actual threat of terrorism?

One possibility is that the definition of terrorism versus handgun or highway deaths leads to differences in perceived risk (see Zulaika and Douglas 1996). Highway travel and handgun ownership are viewed as normal, everyday occurrences and the risks of either activity are considered to be normal, perhaps expected. Deaths occurring as a result of either handgun ownership or highway travel are, therefore, also viewed as routine, small-scale events.

Most people rarely consider their place of work to be dangerous, even though anything from a fire to carbon monoxide poisoning can occur. So in 1995, when the Oklahoma City Federal Building was bombed killing nearly 200 employees and visitors, the event was front page news and the lead story on television for weeks. Ironically, during these weeks of news stories on the bombing, many more than two hundred people died as a result of car accidents and handgun murders. Even though

interest groups such as the HCI (Handgun Control Inc.) or MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Drivers) and car insurance companies work hard to dramatize the number of handgun and highway accidents yearly, especially as a result of drunk drivers, these efforts do not begin to match the impact of an event defined as terrorism.

Another recent event defined as "terrorist" and heightening the level of fear and hostility toward terrorism in the United States was the dissemination of the Unabomber's publicized text, followed by the arrest of a suspect. The text was published in the same year as the Oklahoma City bombing, even though the Unabomber and the Unabomber's threats have existed for the last twenty years. Most people in the United States were not even aware of the "Unabomber" until 1995.¹ Incongruities in the actual and perceived social harm of terrorism as well as the historical timing or appropriateness for the propaganda of terrorism, should lead us to examine and understand the nature of the construct of terrorism and the conditions under which its perception and perpetuation become a matter of social import.

Why Study Terrorism?

Sociologists, in general, have avoided creating theories or analyses of terrorism, while political scientists have dominated the area (Crelinsten and Schmid 1995; Crenshaw 1995; Bell 1994; Shultz and Schmauder 1994; Wilkinson 1990 and 1986; Schmid and Jongman 1988; Stohl 1988; Gurr 1980; Jenkins 1979 and 1985). The avoidance by sociologists, however, has been for good reason (Gibbs 1989). Aside from the obvious problems associated with the ideological or political biases a definition or conceptualization of terrorism may promote, when we consider the expansive sociological literature on deviance and social control, from Durkheim to Foucault, terrorism can be examined heuristically as a form of deviance and/or social control.

As some researchers in the sociology of deviance have suggested, inherent in definitions of deviance and social control is a latent structure of politicality (see Lauderdale 1980 and Lauderdale and Cruik 1993; Ben-Yehuda 1990; Foucault 1979). It is this

inherent politicality which makes possible the redefinition of an action, for example, from deviant to sick to conventional. The implications of this political approach to the study of deviance are far-reaching when we consider that the "deviants" or "normals" have the political potential to manipulate the definitions of their own and others' behavior. Terrorists and terrorism as a form of deviance and/or social control can be viewed from this interpretive theoretical framework. The old adage: "one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter" is a vulgar illustration of this point. The sociological approach can explicate the point by analyzing terrorism as an important construct in examining social and political processes of change and stability.

While most of the research on terrorism certainly recognizes this activity as an extreme form of coercive politics, knowledge about terrorism would benefit from a broader examination of the construct of terrorism rather than further conceptualizing or refining existing definitions of it. Just as the sociology of deviance has focused its attention on the construct of deviance by recognizing it as a relative rhetorical device that is socially negotiated, and on its various manifestations and their inherent politicality, so terrorism deserves to be examined in a systematic way. The task then becomes not to expose or define who the terrorist of the week is, whether it is the Unabomber threatening national security or the CIA conducting covert actions, but to examine the political processes and practices that maintain, create, and change the definitions of certain action as terrorist. Accordingly, we may be better able to understand the status of terrorism as either an act of deviance, social control, politics, and coercion or understand it in its particular time and place as a social problem (see Crenshaw 1995).

Text and Context: Italy and the U.S. as Sites of Struggle

According to most historical interpretations, violence has always existed, in varying degrees, within and among people. History repeatedly records and attempts to explain this phenomenon, usually in terms of winners and losers. All societies possess culturally constructed and socially organized processes

for remembering and forgetting the past (see Geertz 1981). Symbolic forms, including narratives and stories, express the past and relate it in complex ways to present-day social interests. As such, they produce multiple, often conflicting, versions of the past and, at particular historical moments, may become sites of intense struggle. Such a historical moment appears to be present in a number of modern nation-states all over the world.

Incidents defined as terrorism often provide the script for historical interpretations of national identity and political sovereignty. The intense public fear of and hostility to terrorism produced by infrequent but dramatic incidents involves a complex process including interest group politics, the state, and the practices of a mass-mediated society: a process which has been explicated by Gramsci using the concept of hegemony (Gramsci 1971). For Gramsci, hegemony is produced via the practices of "institutions and organizations whose task it is to influence common sense" (Augelli and Murphy 1988, 24). Institutions such as education, media, and government organizations are involved in a process of generating information that appears simple and devoid of any intrinsic political problems or philosophical critiques. Teachers, for example, will often endlessly repeat certain simplified concepts to children until those concepts become part of a common, normal, "taken-for-granted" understanding.

Another practice involves the creation and implementation of political policies promoting socially accepted conventions combined with different and new interpretations. For example, Gramsci notes numerous instances from his own Italian society of state legislation that combined conventional Catholic conceptions (existing for centuries) with new Fascist programs (Caldwell 1986). Thus, hegemony, according to Gramsci, while referring to a dominant ideology, does not necessarily refer to a repressive process. Religious leaders, educators, government agents, legal and medical experts, researchers, and the media all partake in practices of disseminating and promoting certain dominant, paradigmatic interpretations of reality. And, of course, language and text as the vehicle by which to communicate and disseminate information is an inextricable part of this process of producing hegemony.

The Italian social and political milieu provided the empirical backdrop for Gramsci's theoretical formulation of hegemony. One of the most central and seemingly irreconcilable paradoxes that led Gramsci to develop the concept of hegemony was the unquestioned acceptance of a fascist, elitist regime by the largely peasant Southern Italian region during the twenties and thirties. This fundamental paradox spawned a number of contributing paradoxes, some of which juxtaposed Italian aestheticized representations of reality among literature, arts, theater, and public, national media (Gramsci 1966). The economic strife of the Southern Italian region, the needs as defined by the people, could not have logically predicted their allegiance to an elitist political system (Augelli and Murphy 1988; Mouffe 1979). Yet, some fifty years later, history would be fated to repeat itself, albeit under different circumstances.²

By the seventies, the Italian Communist Party had secured itself enough parliamentary seats to be a close second to the coalition, democratic government, composed of the Christian Democrats and Socialists. This time was also when "terrorist" activity was at its highest. Italy was in a constant state of "crisis" (*in crise*), which was a code expression for the combination of high unemployment, inflation, overpopulation, government instability, depleting natural resources, and violence plaguing the country. As the situation appeared to worsen, the communists would gain more votes and popularity. No one predicted the sudden decline of the communists at the height of their popularity, following the Red Brigades' "terrorist" action. And no one predicted Italy's adjustment to the stability of instability of its government. Yet, as Gramsci had noted many years earlier, Italian political culture (hegemony) thrived on paradox, as it provided the basis for competing interpretations of reality. And terrorist acts, rather than being viewed as a threat to the government, to the state, provided the catalysts for larger political changes. What had been considered a state of "crisis" in the seventies came to be perceived as a normal state of affairs for Italy, and incidents defined as terrorism provided a barometer for political change.

In the United States, great attention is devoted to the representation of national history, especially in the midst of its cur-

rent cultural struggles; for example, attempts to commemorate the end of World War II have produced international controversies between the United States and various European societies as well as Japan. Attempts to commemorate the people involved in violent events such as war and terrorism via movies, documentaries, tourist attractions, and written and oral texts, have also produced a number of national and international struggles among these and other nation-states attempting to define their (multi)national heritages (see Goldberg 1994).

Currently, in the United States, institutional representations of historical events that developed during the nineteenth century and played a constitutive role in the formation of nation-states continue to exist. Nation-states often employ narration, drama, and stories to represent the present as the outcome of the pasts they construct. "It is the state which first presents a subject-matter that is not only adapted to the prose of History but involves the production of such History in the very progress of its own being" (Hegel 1970, 83). But the protagonists in this production are not only the obvious state agents and publicly funded organizations. Private museums, exhibitions, memorials, monuments to heroes, theme parks, historical films, and made-for-television mini-series provide visual (mis)representations of part of a nation's past (see Goldberg 1993, in particular page 160). In essence, history as construed and produced by professional researchers or scholars has become only one of many possible discourses on the past, and it has a limited hold on popular memory. Despite scholars' best attempts and intentions, unarguably in contemporary societies, the media are at the heart of the production of history. Violence represented as terrorism provides the dramatic script.

Events and the Production of Meaning

The collective remembering or forgetting of events, and the production of meaning, emerges from a complex process. The process becomes more evident in comparing two countries such as Italy and the United States, both typically represented as Western, technologically advanced societies.

Italy

One of the most decisive moments in Italian history, and the site of intense struggle, came in 1978 when Italian politician Aldo Moro was kidnapped, held hostage for fifty-five days, and then killed by the Red Brigades. Despite hundreds of violent confrontations with the Red Brigades, until that particular event, Italians had maintained a fairly indifferent attitude toward defining or describing this sort of violence by terms stronger than “extremism, subversivism, *squadrisimo* [gangs] and *stragismo* [slaughterings]” (della Porta 1995, 106). It was viewed as just one more form of crisis in an already crisis-ridden political reality. As Wagner-Pacifici (1986, 2) notes about the Moro affair: “Its time (fifty-five days) and its spaces (newspaper pages, television screens, radio amplifiers, courtrooms, piazzas, walls) contained and encouraged competing interpretations and forms of discourse.” Even piazzas and walls seemed to reflect popularized perceptions of media representations. Thus, this event provided the impetus for explanations of terrorism that were broad, encompassing the whole terrorist phenomenon.

This broad, competitive practice of political discussion and moral interpretation of the Moro affair by the Italian media reflected a certain social precedent regarding the public understanding of terrorism and the state responses to it. The process of socially negotiating the meaning and the actors of terrorism became a matter of overt public, political participation. Consequently, the interpretations presented during the unfolding and aftermath of the event actually gave the event its shape and meaning. By giving overt credit to certain interpretations while pronouncing others as faulty, the political, moral, and aesthetic meaning or quality of the interpretation was changed (Wagner-Pacifici 1986). Politics and power, for a brief historical moment, were socially recognized in the way Foucault (1979) recognizes them: as involved in the production of truth. As a result, the actors in the Moro affair while receiving an enormous amount of media attention, contributed to their own systematic demise as their interpretations of events were publicly falsified.

While no entity or group of persons emerged as the clear

winner in the Moro affair, what has become clear years later is the ability of the Italian state to, in a sense, absorb the so-called problem of terrorism and go on to define other social problems as the "real" cause of the unending Italian crisis. Despite numerous emergency laws, "special security" and counter-terrorist formations, repressive government action was for the most part ineffective. Such measures were deemed by the government itself as denying civil rights and ultimately as unconstitutional (della Porta 1995). Wagner-Pacifici (1986) analogously compares the ending of the Moro affair to a "mass suicide." The Red Brigades did not provide the catalyst for a massive class and ethnic struggle in Italy (as they had planned) through their most dramatic, systematic operation; rather, they provided a catharsis. Any such operations thereafter were anticlimactic. The very influential Communist Party became guilty by association. Despite the party's best attempts to dissociate from the Red Brigades, they were in the end viewed as a radical faction of the Communist party.³ As Ben-Yehuda (1990, 15) notes, "a successful and enforceable social construction of a particular label of deviance depends on the ability of one or more groups to use or generate enough power so as to enforce their definition and version of morality on others." Neither the Red Brigades nor the Communist Party were successful at popularizing their interpretation of reality.

As for the state of the government, it was compromised by default. The government appeared to collapse in an immediate sense, and new leaders were elected. If there was any victor, it was compromise, which emerged as a de facto, assumed practice of the state, strengthening its structures in spite of its elected officials (Di Palma 1977).

But the story of "terrorism" in Italy goes beyond the Red Brigades, defined as Italy's notorious domestic terrorists, and includes "transnational" terrorists from the Middle East, Northern Africa, the Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe. Most of the media and government attention focused on the latter two areas, because left-wing terrorism was considered to be the greatest threat at this time and because of supposed connections with the Red Brigades. Yet groups, including the Armenians,

Libyans, and Palestinians, with ethnic ties to various Italian communities were also active during this time for their own national interests (Pisano 1987). Their violent activities did not become an issue for the media or government until the early eighties, and even then Italy was depicted more as a third-party battleground than a directly threatened national entity. Indeed, the kidnapping of American General James Dozier (which lasted about forty days), the killing of American diplomat Leamon Hunt, and the killing of Lando Conti, a mayor from Florence, did not have the same political impact as the Moro kidnapping. These latter actions, also conducted by the Red Brigades, were meant to be a direct attack against Italian/American and Italian/Israeli state relations. But by this time such action was anticlimactic and viewed as more of a Middle East/United States problem than an Italian one, despite the infamous actors of terrorism, the Red Brigades.

The process of competition and compromise among competing interpretations led to a ritualistic demise of the construct of terrorism. Indeed, since the Moro affair, even though numerous bombings, killings, and hostage takings have occurred in Italy, fewer and fewer have been officially defined as terrorism, nor have the Red Brigades been credited for such actions despite their continuing existence (compare with della Porta 1995; Pisano 1987). Terrorism, as a category of deviance, as a way of knowing, as a social problem, as a perceived threat against the stability of the nation-state, transcended all political boundaries of knowing, unravelled itself, and sealed its own doom.

The United States

At the present historical moment, the United States may be viewed as a site of intense discursive struggle over the construction and interpretation of its national past. Groups defined as subordinate, including racial, gender-based, religious, and issue-driven interest groups are challenging dominant representations of history. These include on-going challenges posed by American Indians reacting to the Columbus Day historical rendition and recent race riots in Los Angeles, reminding the public that thirty years after the second Civil Rights movement,

African Americans are still not treated equally or fairly by government social control agents and agencies (Inverarity *et al.* 1983). As a complex society, the United States is rich with different social groupings and diverse people. Maintaining the production of the past as a monolith is becoming increasingly difficult in a society where multiple and oftentimes conflicting versions of the past exist simultaneously in place and space. And while these larger struggles provide an index of hegemonic crisis in the United States, terrorism is once again pictured as the real crisis, the ostensible real threat to the stability of the nation-state, the real enemy of national peace and security.⁴

Events of the recent past, including the New York Trade Center bombing, the Oklahoma City federal building explosion, the Unabomber attacks, or the Amtrack derailing, are events deserving of indignant responses, but their definition and interpretation by the media and the state as homogeneous "terrorist" events are grossly misleading. As in Italy thirty years ago, where the world of terrorism was little more than a bewildering state of affairs in an already crisis-ridden society until the Moro affair, the United States appears to be undergoing its own struggle with the world (or word) of terrorism in the midst of a much broader and increasingly dangerous and violent social milieu.

These "waves" of social unrest and instability in the United States are not without historical precedent. As Erikson (1966) notes, for example, in the comparatively smaller, more homogeneous world of the Puritans in colonial America, the encroaching heterogeneity, including different ethnicities, religious worldviews, and gender roles, led to increasing threats and challenges to the dominant order. These and related external crises led to the witch hunts, which in the end were unsuccessful at preventing major political, economic, social turmoil and change. Another historical period famous for social unrest was the 1960s. This era of struggle saw the emergence of the counterculture movement: the hippies, yippies, and Black Panthers within the social milieu of the Vietnam War. When the war ended, the United States paid a price in economic and political terms, much of which was blamed on the remanent "flower children" (who by this time were already a wilting species) for their

questioning of traditional structures and institutions such as gender roles, family structures, racism, and sexual preference (see Inverarity *et al.* 1983). Then, in 1995, we observed the reemergence of national scapegoating or "witch hunt" with regard to "terrorism," as U.S. President Clinton outlined his systematic, aggressive stand against it, which included executing the "terrorists." He stated on national television that "If this is not a crime for which capital punishment is called, I don't know what is." As the United States is involved in larger social struggles challenging hegemonic ideas concerning its national past, pride, and actions, events defined as "terrorist" appear to recur. The state turns to creating policies that expand its own visible means of violence, in order to name and justify its eradication of what it defines as the "real" destabilizing influence, the terrorists, in the name of restoring peace and stability (see Erikson 1966; Durkheim 1948).

The naming of "terrorist" activity captivated and overwhelmed the media and academic research after the Vietnam War, and in the 1990s we witness its reemergence. Terrorism may also be examined, in part, from a framework similar to the witch hunts, or the scapegoating of the counterculture. While the United States is currently the discursive site of major struggles involving its national and international identity, the focus is shifted to terrorism as the cause of social unrest. Yet there is another dimension to terrorism that warrants a more useful theoretical analysis.

Ben-Yehuda (1990, 3) examines complex societies in terms of "symbolic moral universes," or different and changing cultures within a larger "moral order" or state. He notes that: "the legitimization of power should be thought of in terms of a moral order that in turn defines the societal boundaries of different symbolic-moral universes." He further defines "direct and explicit acts that either challenge the social order or the abuse of power and morality by those in the centers" as "political deviance." Terrorist action may be broadly viewed in this way. Closer analysis, an analysis that considers terrorism as a "relative rhetoric" (also part of Ben-Yehuda's theory), views terrorism as a construct of the state or larger moral order. Terrorism

may be viewed as an active part of statecraft in constituting nation-states and their continued sovereign stability. The question regarding the U.S. experience then becomes under what conditions is terrorism an index of, rather than the cause of or an explanation for, a deeper hegemonic crisis?

The Argument

It seems obvious enough that in all societies remembering and forgetting the past are culturally constructed and socially organized processes expressed through symbolic forms and displays and related in complex ways to present social interests (Geertz 1981). To examine these constructive processes, forms, and interests in a mass-mediated society as they produce different versions of reality is less obvious and less straightforward, however. An analysis of this sort defies most traditional approaches to research in the social sciences. Most approaches in the social sciences, for example, examine questions or interpretations about issues and incidents *a posteriori* for the purposes of arriving at some universal truths or generalizations. Consequently, contextual analyses are often rejected as relativistic or transitory and lacking in explanatory power. The present argument not only attempts to bring these two perspectives together in an analysis of terrorism, but also shows the futility of rejecting either perspective at the expense of the other.

As the producers of information and knowledge in the United States grapple once again with how to use the term "terrorism," and their focus becomes defining terrorism as groups or persons who are considered to be especially threatening to the site of legitimate violence, the state, it may be wise to examine how the discourse of terrorism has at other times, and regarding other incidents, been socially and politically negotiated and constructed. Consider the processes of political and rhetorical negotiation in two crucial incidents, the *Achille Lauro* affair and TWA hijacking and their unfolding drama(s) in two sites of interpretive struggle. This study provides an examination of the *Achille Lauro* and TWA incidents as a reference for how the unfolding drama(s) of recent and future outbreaks of

violence may be defined, constructed, and understood.

Unlike many earlier works on terrorism, the focus of inquiry in this study is not to more clearly define terrorism in terms of different state interpretations. Rather, its analytical eye centers on the discourse or rhetoric of terrorism surrounding two specific incidents, the *Achille Lauro* affair (1985) and the TWA (1985) hijacking. It also focuses upon two different discourses of terrorism surrounding these two incidents—U.S. and Italian. Each discourse re-presents the state. As this study shows, the term, terrorism, does not even exist in the regional dialects of the latter country despite its existence in the state language. This study argues that the representational practices of the texts not only shaped definitions, knowledge, and public perceptions bearing on these events themselves but also contextualized (both geographically and historically) the roles their countries were playing in international politics. The term, terrorism, allowed for the specific construction of ideological and political boundaries. It further discusses how these representational practices were complemented by technological practices, such as simulation and speed, that allowed highly complex communications networks to collect, store, organize, and instantly transmit these representations over great distances.

As a plethora of social science experts conducting research on terrorism are dredged up to further define or refine the concept of terrorism, it is imperative to remember that the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, the killing of two CIA agents just outside the agency's headquarters, or the bombing in Oklahoma City are not the only outbreaks of violence in the United States that have invoked terror, thereby being terrorist in nature. On the contrary, violent activity occurs daily, at different levels of analysis, from the private home to the public organization, especially within technologically advanced societies. And if we examine the development of the concept of terrorism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, we further note that the fundamental controlling apparatus of the state (as the site of legitimate violence) is based largely on terrorism. Yet, if we continue to accept what most social scientific knowledge about terrorism has taught us, it will continue to be not only a

misunderstood phenomenon but also a particularly unnerving form of violence, seemingly impervious to any form of social control.

A number of premises form the basis of my inquiry into the state of terrorism. These premises integrate promising directions for analyses derived in part from critical, symbolic interaction, and neo-functionalist perspectives with contextual analysis, the analysis of text and discourse:

1. Inherent in constructions and definitions of terrorism is a latent structure of politicality that allows for practices that maintain, create, and change its definition (or the definition of certain action as terrorist) to some other label;
2. Societies possess culturally constructed and socially organized processes for remembering and forgetting the past and defining the present. Modern, complex societies often produce multiple versions of the past and at particular historical moments, they may become sites of intense struggle;
3. The United States is currently undergoing a particular historical moment of intense struggle and hegemonic crisis; terrorism, a term developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to represent the interests of the nation-state and its sovereignty becomes a focus of discursive struggle;
4. In Italy, terrorism as a site of discursive struggle for monolithic representations has seen its twilight, privileging heterogeneous understandings that the state views as secondary and unthreatening to its essential identity, structure, and survival;
5. Terrorism may be viewed as a relative rhetoric intrinsic to the process or art of statecraft. It is a discursive practice in the constitution of nation-states and their continued sovereign stability and expansion.

The Plan

My intention in this study is to explore, examine, and expand on research that explicates the processes and practices of discourse involved in normalizing or naturalizing the meaning

of terrorism (see Zulaika and Douglas 1996; Wagner-Pacifici 1986; de Lauretis 1985). Examining these constructive processes, forms, and interests in a mass-mediated society as they produce different versions of reality is less distinct. The methodological framework must lead to an interpretive analysis that can explicate often elusive practices of language under certain social and historical conditions.⁵

While most previous research on terrorism has attempted to construct, redefine, refine, and elaborate upon a variety of existing conceptualizations and models and interpretive frameworks for its analysis, this study does not. Such research has been very useful and successful at fixing a meaning to terrorism by defining its causes, consequences, communities, and countermeasures. Crelinsten and Schmid (1995, 3) list some of the various motives of academics for conducting (or not conducting) empirical research on political torture, a manifestation of "terrorism." Whatever the motivation, and despite an extensive body of knowledge on terrorism, it would appear that especially in the United States, terrorist activity is ostensibly on the rise rather than in decline.

Perhaps the apparent rise of terrorism today in the United States has more to do with the nature of the dominant and available information produced, including definitions, conceptualizations, models, and typical scientific paradigms. In *Wayward Puritans*, Erikson (1966, 22) suggests that "men who fear witches soon find themselves surrounded by them; men who become jealous of private property soon encounter eager thieves." Following Erikson's logic, it stands to reason that men who fear "terrorists" soon find themselves surrounded by them.

This is not to say that incidents such as the bombing of a federal building or the Unabomber's actions are not worthy of condemnation. Or that the violence at Waco and Ruby Ridge is not worth further investigation. But under what conditions are these incidents and actions defined as "terrorism" instead of something else such as political violence or simply murder? And what are the practices by which such meaning is fixed and viewed as normal?

The premise that interpretation—the imposition of con-

cepts, models, and frameworks—is intimately and actively involved in fixing the meaning of terrorism, publicly acknowledged as real and true, is my analytical point of departure. The process of fixing meaning where meaning is intrinsically among the contested political states, is one of the phenomena to be examined. My interest, then, is not to decide which definitions, discourses, or state interpretations of terrorism are better or more reflective of “truth” and provide empirical support for them. To do so would be implicitly to proffer a promise: a promise that my research would work to settle and discipline ambiguities and paradoxes regarding the discourse of terror by constructing (or improving upon) new and powerful boundaries or truths. I make no such promise. To do so would also implicitly sustain a certain fixed nature regarding theory and analysis, thus depriving theory and analysis of their ability to be “reflective,” to ask “how” such theories became constructed in the first place (Mills 1959). My own practice in this exploration of discourse is, paradoxically, an interpretive one. Thus, interpretation as a play of power in providing meaning, a meaning in which the author and the reader may be considered as occupying the same sovereign standpoint, the same center of interpretation, is a primary analytical concern. The tensions and paradoxes emerging from my analysis, rather than being looked upon as troubling, are invited and valued, as they open up possibilities for further analysis.

The latter statement, not surprisingly, may present a conundrum with respect to the present text: how does one treat the text that describes the phenomenon? In general, any text that makes “paradox” one of its central analytical themes should itself be openly examined for the paradoxes it suggests. With respect to the research provided by this text, however, it is one thing to claim that the interpreter shapes others’ apprehension of events. It is another thing to credibly demonstrate this process. The juxtaposition of the textual and contextual approaches becomes essential to studying terrorism in the art of statecraft.

In this research, terrorism and the state are assumed to be symbiotically related. Thus, the discourse of terrorism is inextrica-

bly related to the art of statecraft (see Tilly 1985). Of analytical significance are the conditions under which modes of subjectivity—the state and its relation to terror—become modes of objectivity, i.e., the production of hegemony (Foucault 1979; Gramsci 1971).

One of the ways in which modes of subjectivity become modes of objectivity is via the text. My examination will focus on texts spawned by the *Achille Lauro* and TWA incidents—texts that were involved in the process of shaping public knowledge about terrorism in both Italy and the United States. As both societies use and are used by the media, whether it pertains to news, scholarly works, or government reports, these texts must be considered as discursive resources available in both locations.

Certainly, upon a glance, we can note that these texts reveal different aesthetics and different dispositions. Their cultural descendancies informed by different social and historical contexts are obvious. When differences can be observed between the two societies in the way an incident is represented, however, what becomes important is not the banal reification of those differences but how they are produced and sustained as differences. The social and historical conditions under which certain practices or *modi operandi* are sustained, as well as the different *modi operandi* themselves, become of crucial analytical significance. The ways in which some actions come to be regarded as terrorist is the focus, vis-à-vis the successful crediting or discrediting of interpretations, the suppression of certain interpretations and the highlighting of others, the ideological direction of certain interpretations, as well as the overall perspective of the public and its participation and/or celebration of the process of statecraft.

My purpose, however, is not to confirm the differences between the two societies, as if certain cultural imperatives stand above and dictate the workings of the societies themselves. Nor do I intend to assert that the strategies involved in the definition of terrorism are not interchangeable or shared in the interpretation of other events in these societies. Rather, the focus is on the practical production of social and political constructions of terrorism. Such a focus is useful for questioning and expanding existing theories on terrorism. In larger measure,

though, its value is in enabling the questioning and reconsideration of political processes crucial to democracy, namely the celebration of differences, diversity, and open debate.

Because my aim is to investigate how the rhetorical strategies in the discourse of terrorism are produced, sustained, transformed, or suppressed, as well as the practical, political action such rhetoric prescribes, a semiotic approach is heuristic. In a semiotic analysis, language is usually analyzed as a sign system within the typical, taken-for-granted, grammatical-linguistic categories of words, sentences, phrases. As a sign system, it may take several sentences to interpret a particular meaning, or meaning may be interpreted from those words and phrases that are left out, silenced, or repressed (Namaste 1993; Armstrong 1985; Merrell 1985; Eco 1979; Barthes 1977; Nilsen 1977; Saussure 1916). Such an analysis looks beyond the meaning contained within the limits of the categories and rules defined by linguistics, and attempts to interpret the meaning contained within the forms, orders, and structures in which they are presented. It is sensitive to the politics of writing, including the author in authority. And few constructs are as misunderstood as terrorism in their "meaning potential," the inextricable link between knowledge and the production of power via the detailed descriptions, categorizations, and hierarchical organizations of contemporary society (Ben-Yehuda 1996; Namaste 1993). Thus, distinctions between terror and rhetoric and the institutions that support such distinctions must necessarily be considered. A semiological approach allows the researcher to be less concerned with the text's objectivity, reliability, or "honesty." White (1987, 192) aptly writes that one is able to examine its

ideological aspect less as a product . . . than as a process. It permits us more precisely, to regard ideology as a process by which different kinds of meaning are produced and reproduced by the establishment of a mental set towards the world in which certain sign systems are privileged as necessary, even natural, ways of recognizing a "meaning" in things and others are suppressed, ignored, or hidden in the very process of representing a world to consciousness.

Such a process occurs within all types of writing, whether literary, poetic, or scientific (see Gusfield 1976). The rhetoric of science, for example, utilizes a specific sign system or code for that which it attempts to represent, and such a process indeed affects how we read these texts. White (1973, 27) has also argued that:

[T]he ethical moment of a historical work [is] reflected in the mode of ideological implication by which an aesthetic perception (the emplotment) and a cognitive operation (the argument) can be combined so as to derive prescriptive statements from what may appear to be purely descriptive or analytical ones.

Semiology focuses attention on the layers of meaning that may be embodied in a simple set of representations. The signifier, or word(s) in the case of this research, and the signified, the mental picture or meaning indicated by the signifier, produce a sign that is the association or relationship established between them. While some relationships may be very direct, others are considerably more complex because of their arbitrariness. As a sign system, semiology is sensitive to the political meaning(s) and paradoxes of social practice that often elude traditional scientific approaches. Signs can communicate latent and manifest meanings as well as define moral values and generate feelings and attitudes in the reader. If we are to study the "latent structure of politicality" inherent in definitions of terrorism, that rhetorical structure allowing for its reconstruction, suppression, or even demise (both rhetorically and practically), such an approach is essential (Lauderdale 1980).

It is important, however, to note that this study compares two separate incidents (nearly the same sort of event and occurring at nearly the same time), rather than alternative interpretations of the same incident, for substantive theoretical reasons. Typically, the process of deconstruction in a semiotic analysis involves the comparison of what is signified with alternative "paradigms" not chosen. The "natural" comparison would be between such paradigms in Italy and the United States as alternative interpretations of the same incident. Yet this study also

examines the intellectual descendancy and theoretical orientation of the present construct of terrorism, explicitly demonstrating its inextricable link to statecraft in ensuring the sovereignty and authority of the nation-state. Trans World Airlines (TWA) is a U.S. airline corporation. The *Achille Lauro* is an Italian ship. Passengers from many different nation-states were being transported by each of these carriers, including Italian and U.S. citizens. Even though the seizure of each of these carriers was defined as an international event or threat, the retaliatory responses were still the responsibility of the respective nation-states. Each nation-state responded differently to structurally similar attacks. This difference provides examples of the "signified" (the dominant definition of terrorism as used in the United States) as compared to alternatives not chosen (the desuetude of the term in Italy). The same terms or signifiers, with the potential for similar representations, are signified differently—in accordance with different state (political) interests.

Having said all this, it hardly seems appropriate to refer to a "method" of analyzing discourse or to my method of analysis as though the method stands above the analysis as a neutral, apolitical medium with which to grasp and report upon the external world. As this is an interpretive work in and of itself, the question of method becomes an integral part of how the analysis unfolds, one that itself is open to debate and critique. The theme of having a method, an apolitical, neutral method, in certain respects is among the practices examined in the politics of these texts. To be sure, my analysis of the discourses surrounding the *Achille Lauro*/TWA events takes seriously certain metaphors that are viewed as participating in the fixing of meaning on terrorism, and that are drawn upon not only in the texts to be analyzed but also in my text. To be sure, too, the metaphor of "method" is among the metaphors analyzed. But my analytical plan in this study does not claim a method of its own; it does not defer to a putative authoritative ground that can arbitrarily constrain the meanings determined in this study.

As many of the texts on the *Achille Lauro* and TWA incidents from both sides of the Atlantic appear to exploit the notion of terrorism as "theater," this metaphor appeared appropriate as

a way of thematizing my interrogations of these texts. Not only does this metaphor emerge from the texts themselves, but it invites questions that cut across a variety of disciplinary fields.⁶ In understanding the rhetoric of terror and/or the terror of rhetoric, I also exploit the aesthetic dimensions of the theater typically used in both societies to emphasize certain aspects of the "terrorist" phenomenon. The "theater" form, therefore, gives shape not only to the typical descriptions and explanations of terrorism in both societies but also to the content and the political agendas implied therein. Thus, for representation reasons, the analysis will take on the various features and codes of a theater or stage production such as plot, characterization, theme(s), props and stunts, and the audience-actor relationship (compare with Wagner-Pacifci 1986). By analyzing the discourse of terrorism within the aesthetic/theatrical reality it is generally granted and by applying the line of reasoning inherent in a semiological/textual orientation, we can explore how and the conditions under which various theatrical metaphors, structural codes, literary genres, and narrative modes are reflected in texts, as well as what effect these have on the public's response both to the text itself and the ideological context in the text.

Also, my selection of mass-mediated materials in addition to more specialized research texts reflects interest in exploring how discourse understanding and significant knowledge is grounded and disseminated beyond academic settings (see Ericson, Baranek, and Chan 1991; deLauretis 1985; Eco 1979; Avalle 1970). The general availability of texts from prominent magazines, newspapers, government reports, and academic writings guided the selection of texts to be analyzed in this study. Texts from newspapers such as *Avanti* and *Corriere della Sera*, for example, were selected as much because they represent two of the major political party protagonists involved in the Italian theater of terrorism, because of high circulation rates and availability. Most of the texts are available from public or university libraries in the United States and Italy; however, many of the government transcripts were made available to me through the Consolato Generale d'Italia in the United States. Also, the

Catholic Church, especially in Italy, was of invaluable help. Unlike libraries where smaller newspapers are not saved and catalogued, the Church provides elaborate cataloguing systems for them (dating from the early seventies), stored on microfilm and fiche. Furthermore, because most of the Italian texts (with the exception of Cassese 1989 and Judges of Genoa transcripts 1985) were not translated, I provide my own translations to facilitate the analysis.⁷

In general, the discourse of terrorism as exemplified in mass media texts will be analyzed in terms of their political practice, as a rhetorical form of power politics. Media discourse that endeavors to construct, define, and conceptualize reality is engaged in the active interpretation, production, normalization, and resistance of modes of imposed order, modes of structuring social existence. The various strategies of discourse discussed in this study will be viewed as viable, subjective, linguistic strategies by which social and political practice is disciplined, normalized, and perpetuated within society. Accordingly, we may explore the practical, political production of reality through the "conventional" language we hear and read daily in the media and, in the case of this study, the social reality constituting terrorism and violence in society (White 1987; Gramsci 1966).