

Trinity College

Trinity College Digital Repository

Senior Theses and Projects

Student Scholarship

Spring 2020

The Architecture of Violence: the Reign of Terror and the Character of Bloodshed

Aidan Turek
aidan.turek@trincoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses>



Part of the [Comparative Politics Commons](#), [European History Commons](#), [Intellectual History Commons](#), [Other Political Science Commons](#), [Political History Commons](#), and the [Political Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Turek, Aidan, "The Architecture of Violence: the Reign of Terror and the Character of Bloodshed". Senior Theses, Trinity College, Hartford, CT 2020.
Trinity College Digital Repository, <https://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/theses/848>

The Architecture of Violence:
The Reign of Terror and the Character of Bloodshed

Adv. Reo Matsuzaki

A.P. Turek

Spring, 2020

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Revolutionaries, Theorists, and the Terror	4
I.I Introduction	4
I.II Theory on Revolution: Moore, Skocpol, and Ignoring Violence.....	10
I.III Violence from a Theoretical Standpoint.....	14
I.IV Analysis to Come	22
 Chapter II: The Popular Terror—A Performative Explanation of Violence	 29
IV.I Introduction	29
IV.II Constructing a Performative Theory	32
IV.III Performing the Terror	41
IV.IV Theoretical Conclusions	48
 Chapter III: A Utilitarian Terror— An Instrumental Explanation of Violence.....	 57
II.I Introduction.....	57
II.II Instrumental Theory of Violence.....	58
II.III Origins of Insurrection: A Bottom-up Perspective.....	62
II.IV Suppressing the Rebellion: A Top-down Perspective.....	69
II.V Theoretical Conclusions	77
 Chapter IV: A Terror of Ideas—An Ideological Explanation of Violence	 80
III.I Introduction	80
III.II Violent Ideas	82
III.III Rousseau and the Jacobins.....	87
III.IV The Radicalization of Revolutionary France	92
III.V Institutionalizing Terror: The Fall of Lyon.....	94
III.VI Theoretical Conclusions	100
 Chapter V: The Width, Breadth, and Dimensions of Violence.....	 105
V.I Introduction	105
V.II Presentation of Theories	107
V.III Theoretical Forces in Action: the Case of the Revolutionary Armies	112
V.IV Reconstructing Theory.....	124
V.V Building a Theoretical Synthesis	133
V.VI Synthesis and Theory.....	139

This thesis is dedicated to Professor Reo Matsuzaki. I began writing with more passion than foresight, and it has only been through the careful attentiveness of one superior editor, knowledgeable theorist, and caring teacher, that this thesis was completed at all. At every stage, Professor Matsuzaki has been supporting me in my effort to produce meaningful scholarship. His constant forbearance and kindness have facilitated not just the completion of this thesis, but my maturation as a Trinity student and as a scholar in my own right. Between penetrating critiques and insightful comments is a clear passion on the part of Professor Matsuzaki to see his students succeed. I am proud to have worked with him in completing this paper. I know writing this thesis has taken as much from him as it has for me—and I am certain this is the last time he will agree to have so much historical frippery in a work of political science.

I would also like to thank my parents, who, both in their professional and in private lives, preach the same message—that knowledge is its own reward. It has given me no small amount of pleasure to write about the various Parisian locales I toured with my mother, or to have flipped through the tattered old copy of Tilly's *Vendée* that served as my father's copy when he was my age. Their constant sacrifices are humbling, and I hope this work proves a fair reward for their investment of blood, sweat, tears—and love.

Finally, I would like to thank Mary Tursi, whose intelligence and grace are a constant reminder of what a true scholar looks like. No amount of praise can do justice to her singular drive.

I.

Revolutionaries, Theorists, and the Terror

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.¹

I.

The Terror and its Antecedents

So reads the first words of Charles Dicken’s totemic novelization of the single most influential event in European history—the French Revolution. In the space of a single generation, Europe saw the fall of its strongest monarchy, the birth of the first modern republic, the advent of universal manhood suffrage, the creation of the first bureaucratized centralized advanced polity, the implementation of total war, and the beginning of the largest continental conflict the continent had yet seen. Death came in a thousand forms with a thousand names, from the stalking famines that plagued the peasants of Languedoc, those tens of thousands fallen in battles like Valmy, Neerwinden, Fleurus, Jemappes, and countless others, or those who perished in that most controversial of Revolutionary developments: the Terror. The Reign of Terror lasted barely two years, and yet marked the nadir of not just the Revolution

¹ Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*, pg. 4

but human character itself, a point made all the more poignant by the high ideals, grandiose claims, and democratic and humanitarian intentions with which the Revolution began. It was a period of great and seemingly intractable contradictions. No better recapitulation of the extremes of this period exists than Charles Dickens' words. In his masterful novelization, Dickens provides perhaps the neatest description of the Revolution—it was a time of superlatives.

The French Reign of Terror raged from 1792 to 1794 during the latter half of the French Revolution. Most frequently described as period of mass state violence and repression, the Terror culminated with the execution of its architect Maximilien Robespierre in 1794. After his fall, the Terror as a concept was quickly buried in political polemics from every quarter, obscuring the event in a haze of ideological praise and disparagement. Some of the first to profit from the violence of the Terror were the Thermidorians, those conspirators who, in July 1794, overthrew Robespierre and the Montagnard clique that controlled France; they found their justification for usurpation the ending of 'the Terror,' and began the long—and ongoing—process of manipulating history for their ends. All violence was assigned to the recently beheaded Robespierre, while the numbers of victims was expanded beyond imagination. After the Restoration of the Bourbon monarchy, an alliance of staunch Catholics, aristocratic commentators, and conservative monarchists causally linked the Terror with democracy and the Republic.² Thus began the historiographical debate on the Terror and the Revolution generally. By selecting certain negative or positive aspects, political thinkers, scholars, and laymen alike constructed vastly differing understandings of this period, a reality that confirms the central location of revolutions in political thought.

The Terror was, needless to say, an uncomfortably violent period that cannot be justified by state success as with the American Revolution, whose purpose was questionable at best, and whose explanation was integral to understanding of the French Revolution as a whole.³ As many as sixteen thousand

² Hazan, pgs. 299-303, Sydenham pgs. 42-55, Sutherland pgs. 11-18

³ For evidence of extensive violence in the American Revolution, see Peckham, Howard, *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution*, Bicheno, Hugh, *Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolutionary War*, and Raphael, Ray, *A People's History of the American Revolution*

Frenchmen were executed during the Terror, with perhaps ten times that amount imprisoned and interrogated by Revolutionary Tribunals.⁴ The Terror was justified by its perpetrators as a necessary evil in a time of war, while being denounced by its victims as a senseless bloodletting for the glory of Maximilien Robespierre. In the intervening centuries since the Revolution, countless scholars have used new theories to break down the complex set of events that made up the Terror, and the Revolution writ large—in so doing, they created a fascinating complex of political theory and historiographical thought. Thus, it is necessary when discussing the Reign of Terror to participate in this nuanced and pedigreed debate. To this end, this thesis begins in September of 1792 during the tumultuous period that birthed the First French Republic.

It can be argued that revolutions are the cornerstone of political thought, and the French Revolution the most influential of that enduring field. Revolutions in themselves are compressions of massive social shifts, and thus merit great scholarly interest. Sitting with place of pride as the archetypal revolution is the French, a reputation upheld by modern literature, particularly that on revolutionary developments. Revolutionary theorists form a long and unceasing chain from the French Revolution to the present, from Burke (1791), to the Marxists Mathiez (1924) and Lenin (1915), to Moore (1966) and beyond, each with unique and enduring contributions. Seminal works on revolution, such as Barrington Moore's seminal *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions*, and Crane Brinton's *Anatomy of Revolution*, all use the French Revolution as their first case and the example against which all other revolutions are compared. The valuable contributions made by these scholars came in recognizing macro, societal-level changes and traumas. These scholars focused on material conditions in relation to revolutions, such as changing wages, class hierarchies, and broad economic trends. Collectively, they did much to introduce a 'functionalist' approach to political science.

⁴ For the best quantitative study, see Greer, Table I, pgs.135-143

Functionalism is understood very loosely in this paper as the construction of institutions as a “function” of larger socioeconomic trends; that, for instance, the French Revolution was a product of a rising politically isolated bourgeois fighting against a reigning aristocracy, and the Terror a natural product, or ‘function,’ of that conflict. Related is the theoretical school of structuralism, which explains events through the structures of the state. Terror, in this view, resulted from the institutions of French politics, like the Committee of Public Safety, or the extreme deprivation of the French peasantry. Functionalist-structuralist revolutionary literature finds as its focus, and excels at explaining and extrapolating, the causal macro-historic elements behind revolutions and the processes by which they begin and succeed; for scholars like Skocpol, revolutions are reduced to the successful overthrow of the Ancien Régime in question and the refiguring of internal class relations. It is the *function* that is emphasized, and the *product* of that function that is examined.

Yet the functionalist-structuralist theoretical space is one intensely unwelcoming to the appallingly bloody period that marked the phase immediately after revolutionary ‘success.’ Rather than construct meaningful theoretical contributions on violence, revolutionary scholarship in the functionalist-structuralist tradition rationalizes instances of revolutionary violence, such as the Terror, as both necessary and inevitable. Moore, perhaps the most influential scholar who worked within this theoretical space, wrote of the Terror as a sort of purifying furnace—“if France were to enter the modern world through the democratic door she had to pass through the fires of Revolution, including its violent and radical aspects”—a sentiment shared by the majority of scholars within his field.⁵ Contrary to his conclusion, the Terror was a period of superlatives, in quite a literal fashion. The Reign of Terror is far too violent to be justified by simply necessity, too bloody to be condensed to a single logic of total war as some scholars do.⁶ From 1792 to 1794, France underwent a period of concentrated, organized, and wide-

⁵ Moore, Barrington, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, pg. 105, see also Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, pgs. 185-205

⁶ See O’Kane, pgs. 68-69

reaching violence that took more than 16,000 lives; simply put, a single theoretical lens can only insufficiently explain the complexities of the period.⁷

Furthermore, scholars like Skocpol and Moore's tended to push violence into a confined theoretical space, marking it as merely the consequence of larger socio-political trends. Violence tends to evoke an instinctual repulsion, a reaction that lends itself to understanding violence as irrational and inexplicable. In many respects, the functionalist treatment of violence reveals a basic unwillingness to see violence as anything but an afterthought, an inevitable, if inexplicable, process of revolution. That notion, however compelling, cannot accurately explain violence, much less predict its future shape. Violence, in order to be explained, predicted, and prevented, must first be understood. As historian David Andress writes, "we have supposed repeatedly over the last two hundred years that we live in a world attuned to the benefits of liberal civilization—a world that ended slavery, regulated the human conduct of warfare, created genuine democracy and held out the prospect of universal peace... yet that same world is also the world of the tyrannies of colonial rule, of eugenic experimentation in the name of modernity, of the horrors of the two world wars... *The dawning of this troubled modernity [was] the great upheaval in the political life of nations: the French Revolution.*"⁸ Andress' suggestion is twofold; not only is violence a very real constant in "modern" society, but the obscuring of violence as somehow 'nonmodern' is a self-destructive tendency.

Moreover, by looking back at that immensely influential moment in the history of politics, we can gain insights into the character and use of violence in contexts far beyond late eighteenth century France. Revolutionary theory lacks the explanatory mechanisms that genuine understanding demands. Rather than rely on revolutionary models that are at best insufficient, at worst purposefully ignorant, at explaining the Reign of Terror, we can contextualize, rationalize, and explain that period by utilizing more recent theories on violence developed in the last fifty years.

⁷ Greer, *The Incidence of the Terror During the French Revolution*, pg. 24

⁸ Andress, *The Terror*, pg. 1, italics my own

My thesis, then, is the introduction and application of key non-revolutionary theories of violence—from backgrounds as varied as genocide, civil war, and utopian extremism—to the Reign of Terror. By mapping these theories of violence onto the French case, we can gain insights into the development, purpose, and application of violence. Critical insights concerning violence, involving more modern examples and distinctly non-revolutionary subjects, can be meaningfully applied, contrasted, critiqued, and hopefully revised, through application onto the French Reign of Terror. This new understanding of violence can be easily extended to other instances of societal-level violence throughout history, just as non-revolutionary violence can be applied to this particular historical instance. Moreover, by recognizing the interconnectivity between historical events and political theory—the ‘rules’ versus the ‘evidence’—we can make meta-theoretical conclusions as to how theory is, and ought to be, constructed. Thus, by revisiting the well-trodden academic field of the French Revolution, new and valuable discoveries can be made.

In order to perform this task, this thesis will be presented in the following manner: beginning with a deeper analysis of existing literature on revolutions, the French Revolution, and the Reign of Terror, gaps in theoretical understanding on violence will be revealed. Following this review of revolutionary literature, we can fill theoretical gaps with three broad theoretical schools on violence—performative, instrumental, and ideological, presented in that order. Once we define these schools, we can construct theoretical predictions made therein, and then map those predictions onto the French Revolution. After presenting a historical grounding for these theories, there will follow a conclusion which restates and compares theoretical approaches. The goal of this thesis is not to suggest a ‘correct’ theory on revolutionary violence, but rather to reveal logical explanations for violence—previously understood as irrational and unpredictable—that can then be applied to revolutionary and non-revolutionary instances of violence. This conclusion will include a consideration broadly on the accuracy of the presented theoretical predictions, as well as a reconsideration of the linkages between historiographical and theoretical

developments, with an eye towards building a better synthesis of theories. Working from this nuanced viewpoint, we can extrapolate this theory of violence to events within and beyond revolutionary contexts.

II

Theory on Revolution: Moore, Skocpol, and Ignoring Violence

Revolutions are pivotal events in political history, often marking the end of old patterns of political organization and the erection of new institutions and norms of governance. They have the capacity to compress centuries of political development into brief periods of intense change. For this reason, revolutions have formed a cornerstone of political-scientific thought, a topic of research and thinking without parallel. The French Revolution is the most argued-over revolution within that dense field of revolutionary thought, the veritable lodestone for Western political thought. Despite the pivotal role that the Terror played in the course of the French Revolution, modern political thought has approached this key period obliquely when delving into the subject of that archetypal revolution. As has been mentioned, much of the literature devoted to revolutions, the French in particular, focus on macro-level changes and the origins of political revolution, identifying causal mechanisms that do little, if anything, to shed light onto the form and function violence took during the Reign of Terror, which is seen as more of an unplanned and unnecessary change of course rather than a direct product of the Revolution itself. The goal of this thesis is to fill the gap in revolutionary literature regarding violence, within the specific context of the Reign of Terror, through the use of the vast literature on violence in alternate contexts. Stated in as many words, the largely structuralist-functionalist understanding of revolutions fails to adequately explain the nature of violence in the French Terror, and for that reason I seek to apply, as I do below, non-revolutionary theories on violence to explain the action of that tumultuous period of history.

While the lineage of political scientific work on the French Revolution goes back as far as Edmund Burke's 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, few works can compare with Barrington Moore's 1966 seminal work *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Moore's work, famously reduced to the single phrase "no bourgeois, no democracy," uses a comparative analysis of French, English, and American Revolutions to demonstrate that revolutionary outcomes depended on the interplay of discrete social classes. Moore uses a distinctly class-based lens to examine the topic of revolution. His coverage of the French Revolution thusly focuses on socio-economic preconditions, such as "limited capitalist penetration," the failure of commercial agriculture and entrepreneurship in France with respect to England, and the heavy burdens heaped upon the French peasantry.⁹ In Moore's view, "the peasantry was the arbiter of the Revolution," whose influence would characterize the course of events. While revolutions in England and America had maintained a certain bourgeois control over political developments, this process in France was hijacked by the destitute farmers and laborers whose achievements thus came in the form of ending feudalism and establishing legislation for subsidized foodstuffs.¹⁰ Thus, the Terror was fed by the proletariat, manifested as "a protest against the workings of the market that were producing untold misery and a primitive way of forcing the rich speculators to disgorge hoarded goods."¹¹

The violence of the Terror was simply a response to the capitalistic oppression of the Ancien Régime and early Republican administrations, a necessary element for democracy to come about in France, as democracy would have been—indeed was—impossible in a feudal France.¹² In his analysis, Moore takes one source—Donald Greer's 1935 statistical work—and covers the Terror with just a few pages at the end of just one chapter, content to ignore the dynamics that created and guided that pivotal period in the Revolution. This, it should be noted, in a book 523 pages long, who uses 37 other sources

⁹ Moore, pg. 65, pgs. 75-92

¹⁰ Moore, pg. 77

¹¹ Moore, pg. 102

¹² Moore, pg. 105

for his section on France. Regardless of the validity of his suppositions on the Terror, which is already dubious, his empiricization leaves something wanting. This anemic substantiation is a hallmark of later scholarship which Moore inspired, most notably the theorist Theda Skocpol.

Skocpol's 1979 *States and Social Revolutions* expanded on Moore's class-based theories by comparing revolutions in France, Russia, and China. Heavily quoting Moore, Skocpol theorized that revolutions arise from objective material realities that create groups intent on structural societal changes, often over the control of the means of production. An acute crisis of confidence within the ruling class precipitated the calling of the Estates-General in 1788, whose meeting in 1789 sparked the Revolution.¹³ Skocpol's enduring contribution was in the linking of foreign warfare to revolutionary development. Revising Moore's larger theoretical framework, Skocpol argues that the Terror grew out of the response of the Robespierist government to warfare—that “the chief purpose... of the Montagnard dictatorship was to expand, invigorate, and supply the national armies of France.”¹⁴ In her estimation, the Terror “emerged to meet the crisis of defending the Revolution from its armed enemies at home and abroad,” propelled by popular discontent at worsening economic conditions.¹⁵ The Terror is thus not so much a policy as an aftereffect of creating a centralized war-making state. ‘The Reign Terror’ does not appear in Skocpol's index, as it is instead folded into the foreign conflicts that embroiled France in the period 1792-1794, a fact indicative of her lack of scholarly interest.¹⁶

I would suggest, furthermore, that the weaknesses of the functionalist-structuralist approach to violence runs deeper than the simple fact of neglect. Even in works that directly tackle that subject, the theorization fails just as much as Skocpol or Moore to proffer explanatory generalizable theories.

Rosemary O’Kane, in her work of violence in revolutions, *The Revolutionary Reign of Terror*, states that

¹³ Skocpol, pgs. 64-77

¹⁴ Skocpol, pg. 189, pgs. 185-190

¹⁵ Skocpol, pgs. 188

¹⁶ For further reading, see Goodwin, *No Other Way Out*, Stone, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, O’Kane, *The Revolutionary Reign of Terror*, Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution*, Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*

the Terror was really a struggle for centralization, one whose goal was providing military victory. To argue this, O’Kane draws heavily on Skocpol and Moore, extrapolating their broader theorization to the particulars of revolutionary violence. She argued that the Terror sprang from multiple sources and was perpetuated by the failure of the central government to achieve total control; “Robespierre’s fall from power came for essentially two reasons: failure to fully centralize the means of coercion... [and] failure to adopt a practical economic policy.”¹⁷ Thus, the Terror is reduced to a phantasm of proletarian discontent, one which was somehow both necessary and preventable via centralized control. O’Kane formulation maintains a fetishization of economic standards, constantly referencing rising and falling bread prices in Paris as the be-all and end-all of the Terror, a point not supported by most historians. The development of an ideological dictatorship under Robespierre’s Montagnard party, the construction of a civic religion against a Catholic monopoly, the targeting of aristocrats and “enemies of the Revolution,” all these factors point to a far more nuanced explanation for the Terror than the simple assumption that it was “necessary.”

The notion that violence is “necessary,” even if true, contributes to theories that completely lack predictivity. In other words, stating that the Terror was necessary misses any nuance or logic applied in creating and executing that period of intense violence. This can be seen when speaking more generally on the approach taken by Moore and his colleagues. The functionalist-structuralist theoretical approaches on revolutions downplay the Terror in the French Revolution in much the same manner as violence as a concept is overlooked. For instance, Skocpol’s focus was on changing economic conditions, which created the Terror to solve these issues and ended it when condition failed to improve. O’Kane too sees the Terror in explicitly economic terms, as a political brawl for the monopolization of coercion to remedy the woes of famine and war. No ink is spent examining the state and civilian institutions that allowed the Terror to happen—how it operated, who it targeted, and why. Borrowing James Rule’s words, “all

¹⁷ O’Kane, Rosemary, *The Revolutionary Reign of Terror: The Role of Violence in Political Change*, pg. 81

theories afford some form of explanation, *but not all explanations are theoretical.*¹⁸ Violence traditionally has been explored as *circumstantial* rather than *predictive* terms, as has been seen with Skocpol and O’Kane, a feature of functionalist-structuralist approaches which can be remedied by the application of non-revolutionary theory on violence.

This brief coverage of existing literature demonstrates common elements in what this paper terms “revolutionary theory.” These theories tend towards causal explanations of revolutions, invariably drawing focus away from periods of Terror and the use of violence towards macro-level societal factors. Moreover, these theories are largely functionalist and structuralist, and thus reduce violence to a necessity, a bloody afterthought of a bigger revolutionary process. This tendency fails to see violence as a complex cultural-rational object. Moreover, functionalist-structuralist approaches produce theoretical understandings that are unable to be predictive or useful beyond any necessarily circumstantial point in time. Moore, Skocpol, and their theoretical compatriots justify specific episodes of violence rather than provide tangible and generalizable developments. Rather than proffer a novel theoretical development, scholars of “revolutionary theory” fall into an already established school of historical thought, the circumstantial “argument,” which holds that the Terror was simply a response to events. Indeed, it is not so much an argument as a “just-so” story—the Terror happened because it was necessary—an approach which, far from provoking deep analytical examination, discourages genuine analysis.

III.

Violence from a Theoretical Standpoint

In order to remedy these weaknesses, it is feasible and beneficial to turn towards other theoretical explanations for violence, applied to the particular case of the Reign of Terror. Theory on violence has undergone a renaissance in the last three decades, arising in part as a reaction to functionalist

¹⁸ Rule, *Theories of Civil Violence*, pg. 224, italics my own

and structuralist theories. Rather than address all of the vast literature on violence, I have elected to group the literature on violence into three separate categories, each with particular explanatory characteristics. In order of their presentation, these theories are *the instrumental theory of violence*, *the ideological theory of violence*, and *the performative theory of violence*. Stated briefly, *instrumental* covers the use of violence for strategic ends, while *ideological* violence occurs as the result of ideational forces. Finally, *performative* violence results from the use of violence within socio-cultural contexts. Each theory is distinct, built off of unique scholarship from varying fields of study, and their application is intended to fill that ‘theoretical yearning’ left by existing works. My goal in dividing the literature as so is 1. to make an otherwise daunting amount of scholarship manageable for the purposes of this thesis, and 2. to provide theory that is broad enough to explain the extreme variation in the use of violence in the Reign of Terror and to maintain a single predictive claim.

A.

The Ideological Theory of Violence

The second approach is what I’ve elected to call the ideological theory of violence. Hannah Arendt was one of the first, and one of the most influential, thinkers to theorize on the nature of revolutionary violence. Her work *On Revolution* (1963) builds on the earlier *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), which develops an understanding of states and violence predicated on ideology and the pursuit of ideals. In Arendt’s thinking, it was the ideational force of Nazism and Stalinism that contributed to extreme violence; ideology evolved over time toward more extreme, more total formulations, until any deviation—or potential for deviation—was viewed as unacceptable by the state, and therefore targeted. This notion of radicalized ideals is developed in a revolutionary setting in *On Revolution*.¹⁹ *On*

¹⁹ For further reading, Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*, Eagan, *Maximilien Robespierre: Nationalist Dictator, Klosko, *Jacobins and Utopians**

Revolution takes as its premise that the true nature of revolution was the expression of a single desire—freedom—a goal achieved successfully, if only partially, by the American Revolution. The desire for freedom is constantly being coopted by the totalizing influence of revolutionary violence and reconstruction, which are fundamentally linked, and are justified by the totalized goal of freedom.²⁰

The enduring link between violence and revolution explains the failure of consequent revolutions, the radicalization of the French Revolution, which failed to secure the great American advancement, limited self-governance.²¹ Instead, these same revolutionaries engaged in the heady novelty of revolution, the belief in a new creation. This creates what Arendt names an “irresistible movement,” the overriding desire to see all forms of order and oppression uprooted and reconstructed in the image of the new society and the new man.²² Herein lies Arendt’s great theoretical breakthrough when it came to the Reign of Terror: “the mighty current of the revolution, in the words of Robespierre, was constantly accelerated by “crimes of tyranny,” on one side, by the “progress of liberty,” on the other, which inevitably provoked each other.”²³ Thus, the Terror is the symptomatic expression of a radicalizing and totalizing revolutionary spirit, the single desire for freedom, which, once used to justify the treasonous act of revolution, is quickly devalued to justify base violence and campaigns like the Reign of Terror.

This rich theorization can be easily coupled with Revolutionary rhetoric and existing political theory. In particular, a direct link exists between Arendt’s formulations of totalization and radicalization and the political philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau’s theories, when examined more closely, mesh with ideological violence, in that the state is justified by the single natural course of the will of the people, while any and all forms of resistance are thus unnatural, countered only with the most extreme forms of violence. Working through Rousseau, it is possible to show how his philosophical doctrines informed and guided the words and deeds of many Revolutionary actors tied intimately with the

²⁰ Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 14-15

²¹ Arendt, pg. 16

²² Arendt, pg. 40-52

²³ Arendt, pg. 42

Terror, especially the figures of Maximilien Robespierre and his first lieutenant, the ‘angel of death’ Louis Antoine Saint-Just. Having linked together theories both new and old, it is possible to rationalize revolutionary violence as the result of unique characteristics of the ideology behind that Revolution.

Applying ideological violence to the Terror, we can make several predictions as to how violence should behave. This theory predicts that the violence follows from the increasing ideological extremism inherent in revolutionary movements. As such, violence: 1. should increase over time, 2. should target identifiable targets of the central state ideology (here, aristocrats, more conservative opponents of Robespierriest ideology, and form of political opposition), and 3. should be directed and defined by the central state apparatus (here, the Committee of Public Safety and the Montagnard political party). Ideological violence will appear as the deliberate targeting of individuals not for any particular crime, but for broader political reasons, such as belonging to certain counterrevolutionary groups. Moreover, the theory predicts that violence will only increase in ferocity, independent of actual threat to the revolutionary government.

B.

The Instrumental Theory of Violence

The first theory presented in this paper can be called the instrumental theory of violence. One of the most influential works in this category is Stathis Kalyvas’ *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, which, as the title suggests, tackles internal strife using a rationalist mindset. With a focus on civil wars, Kalyvas develops a central logic that explains the implementation and form of violence initiated by the state: “exactly if, how, when, where, and for whom violence “pays.”²⁴ The state uses violence to destroy resistance, often through killings by state agents, and uses two contrasting techniques: selective and indiscriminate violence. Counterintuitively, Kalyvas argues that violence reaches its peak when territory

²⁴ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil Wars*, pg. 388

is strongly but not totally controlled by incumbent or insurgent forces, owing to the causal mechanism of the supply of information—the market for denunciations. Second, Kalyvas claims that selective violence is used most often when a territory is strongly controlled by incumbent or insurgent forces, while indiscriminate violence peaks when control is contested between groups.²⁵ Indiscriminate violence is necessitated by a lack of information on individual levels of support, and yet there are instances, such as in contested territories, when indiscriminate violence either kills the right people or has the desired effect of discouraging rebellion.

Expanding on Kalyvas' work on the rationale of violence, particularly indiscriminate, is Paul Gregory's 2009 *Terror By Quota*, which documents the logic of Soviet repression from Lenin to Stalin, the "Red Terror." *Terror By Quota* holds that agents of repression in the Soviet Union were essentially rational actors. The aegis under which they operated was, furthermore, rationally conceived of and executed, just within a totalitarian mindset in which enemies are all who actively, passively, or possibly resist the dictatorial interests of the party. To him, a state will seek to secure power using finite resources through loyalty or repression. Thus terror operated under the assumption that it was preferable to convict or execute many innocents to prevent a single criminal walking free. Terror's logic was that "the more difficult it is to identify the guilty, the greater number of innocent victims."²⁶ In a wider sense, then, Gregory meshes with Kalyvas' work on civil war, fitting into the latter's wider model of repression.

While both contribute vastly to the *instrumental theory of violence*, by integrating the work of Samuel Popkin and Charles Tilly, it is possible to understand violence as much as the result of bottom-up actions initiated by individuals. By combing through the Vietnamese peasant, Samuel Popkin, in *The Rational Peasant*, presents the theoretical framework for understanding when, why, and how an individual engages in violence through a "political economy" approach. Popkin dubbed peasants as "political entrepreneurs" who act according to identifiable and predictable impulses that can be

²⁵ Kalyvas, = pgs. 12-13

²⁶ Gregory, *Terror By Quota*, pgs. 220-230

generalized beyond Southeast Asia.²⁷ The peasant, rather than acting according to an imagined collective of the village or opaque cultural morality, pursues short- and long-term investments of resources with an eye towards resource maximization. Involvement in revolutionary violence, thus, results from a clear calculation of goals on the part of the peasant—and resistance to the state is predicated on saving what the peasant already possesses, again a cost-benefit calculation.

Within this view, “the destruction of the peasant’s accustomed institutional context for reducing risks... creates the tensions that mount toward peasant involvement in rebellion and revolution.”²⁸ Moreover, the peasant as a rational actor is susceptible to the free-rider problem; as applied to violence, we can understand that no peasant will rise up to engage in—or to prevent—violence against their neighbors unless there is an apparent benefit that is concomitant.²⁹ Charles Tilly, who works directly with the Reign of Terror, likewise demonstrated how individual actors engage in strategic violence to maximize personal interests, settle local scores, and enact micro-level political change. Looking at highly localized instances of violence in the Vendée, Tilly convincingly shows that violence took place when local counterrevolutionary forces resisted the drives of a tiny pro-Revolutionary elite, who were materially benefitting from political events outside the Vendée.

By integrating both perspectives of individual and state, it is possible to come to a nuanced conclusion regarding instrumental violence. Violence is a tool for furthering state control and personal benefits. A combination of material realities and personal choices determine the extent and targets of violence. Within the instrumental framework, the Reign of Terror can be understood as a policy of both selective and indiscriminate violence aimed at state enemies when possible and innocent citizens when necessary, where local antagonisms and alliances dictate levels of violence and resistance, further shaping violence, all within the unifying rational choice mindset of cost and benefit calculations.

²⁷ Popkin, Samuel, *The Rational Peasant*, pg. 259

²⁸ Popkin, pg. 7

²⁹ Popkin, pgs. 24-27

Mapping the logic of instrumental violence onto the Reign of Terror, we can make several predictions as to how violence will play out. Because violence is a tool for furthering state security, it should be 1. responsive to state threats 2. gauged to level of threat, i.e. a “flexible response,” 3. should target clear opponents of the state (rebels, plotters, conspirators, etc.) and 4. should be carried out both by the state and individual actors. We should see violence as a response to rebellions, where the levels of violence scale with resistance, while those who are the victims of violence are enemies of the state or local actors.

C.

The Performative Theory of Violence

The third and final category, the *performative theory of violence*, is a more eclectic aggregation of postmodernist thought. Rather than participate in the Arendtian frame, scholars and thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Judith Butler recontextualized violence within a complex societal fabric, an interactive and discursive point of cultural conflict. ‘Performative’ theory comes to us from the feminist theorist Judith Butler, who posited that social behavior was a performance, whereby certain actors could make social assertions using common linguistic elements. Societal norms such as gender are better understood as acts rather than categorical definitions. Her original example focused on women, where gender was understood as a performance, while certain actors, by using the performance of femininity or masculinity, could play on and change certain societal norms. ‘Femininity’ was not an inherent quality, but the acting out of a certain broadly understood “script,” one which must be repeatedly performed to a general public in order to actuate what she terms “agential performativity.”³⁰ This process necessarily involves a discourse with cultural norms and the authorities that police them; “Gender,” Butler states, “is

³⁰ Butler, *Performative Agency*, pg. 147-148

prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other, and *the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power.*"³¹

Butler's contributions, while valuable in themselves, can be coupled with the work of famed postmodernist Michel Foucault. Foucault, in his groundbreaking work *Discipline and Punish*, posits that power is expressed through certain discursive languages, and that contestation of power relations occurs through the use of a common narrative. To Foucault, that was violence; through the public and symbolic use of violence, state authority could be enforced as spectacle. It is possible to wed Foucault with Butler through the works of another French postmodernist, Pierre Bourdieu, who introduced to the world "symbolic violence." To Bourdieu, "symbolic violence" represented the use of cultural narratives to reinforce social hierarchies; there are always two groups, one with power and one without, and those in power invariably structure social behaviors to reinforce the existing hierarchy.³²

Through this expedited coverage of very serious bodies of works, the basic theoretical metrics can be established. Central to performative violence is "Performativity" as a concept. Identity is an act, and politics resembles at times a grand theater. "Performativity" is linked to Foucault, who argued that oppression and resistance tend to mirror one another. Bourdieu demonstrated the notion of a divided society where hierarchies of power determine behavior—such as feudalistic France. Bourdieu claims that public actions are guided by positional relationships in societies. Thus, we would predict the use of symbolic violence both by the state and the people, while the common language of accepted norms here means one thing—violence. The Reign of Terror abounds in acts of symbolic violence, which can be both acts of resistance, of repression, and of political theater. Violence can be performed, by both state and non-state actors to assert and argue certain identities and relationships within society, always utilizing the commonly accepted and understood language of violence.

³¹ Butler, *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*, pg. 1, italics my own

³² Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pg. 653

Finally, we can map out what performative violence will look like on the stage of the French Revolution. We hypothesized that violence: 1. should follow identifiable social standards, 2. should target those of symbolic or larger social value, and 3. should be carried out by those who can strategically use violence to assert or reinforce a social narrative or hierarchy. This type of violence will in action look like groups of citizens organizing together to hold show trials. The victims will be targets whose identities make them more valuable and influential than individual acts—violence will target socially recognizable enemies, counterrevolutionary leadership, not the foot soldiers.

V.

Analysis to Come

This thesis deals heavily with historical sources, and thus draws on the interpretations and reinterpretations made by countless scholars over two centuries. In order to present legible, valid historical evidence, it is necessary to define several items of historical nature that will feature heavily in the rest of this paper. I view this brief historical discourse as necessary in understanding the rest of this thesis, as will be demonstrated by the three points to be covered. First, it must be understood what is meant by ‘the Terror.’ In brief, ‘Terror’ is understood very loosely as the aggregation of violent events inspired by, or inspiring, the revolutionary government of the First French Republic. Second, a clear timeframe must be established within which we can apply the three theoretical approaches presented. This chronology begins earlier than most historical interpretations of the Terror, in September of 1792, and the reasoning for this is established below. Third, a presentation of how historical events will be slotted into my theoretical analyses. Having dispensed with these bulky historical considerations, a real analysis can begin.

A.

Defining Terror

“The Terror” is an unhelpfully vague term, which was used before, during, and after the general period considered genuinely part of that phenomenon, usually mid-1793 to Robespierre’s fall in July of the next year. This thesis deals heavily with the historical record in evidencing theoretical predictions; thus, it is necessary to engage with the vituperative controversies that cloud the historical understanding of the Reign of Terror. The term, in its first post-revolutionary conception, referred to the crimes of Maximilien Robespierre, sometime “dictator” of the Committee of Public Safety. The term “Terror” was used by his enemies, commonly referred to as the Thermidorians, who wanted to defame Robespierre to justify their coup against, and execution of, that erstwhile dictator. Since then, “Terror” as a historical term has undergone intense changes in meaning and import, with revisionists and counter-revisionists alike using—and often abusing—this historical period for their personal ends, be those denouncing revolutions as a whole (like Edmund Burke) or pronouncing the need for new periods of Terror (like Lenin).

Debates as to the unity of policy, of execution, even controversies as to the regard of how many and where people were killed, all make dating ‘the Terror’ a difficult task. To quote one particularly pithy remark, “Historians disagree about the causes, nature, and beginning of the Terror, but they agree that it ended on 9 Thermidor II. Why? Because the politicians who triumphed that day said it did. The deputies who overthrew and executed Robespierre and his closest allies invented the Terror by defining its end.”³³ The purpose of this paper is not to define a particular historical phenomenon but to understand a single very common, yet rarely understood, element of that period: violence. To avoid missing key aspects of the Terror, a deliberately early starting point has been set—the September Massacres at the beginning of September 1792. By choosing the September Massacres and the birth of the French Republic as a starting

³³ Brown, Howard, *Echoes of Terror*. *Réflexions Historiques*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2003, pp. 529–558.

point, my intent is to embrace a single phase—the Republican—of the Revolution. Accepting September 1792 as a starting point, and July 1794 as an appropriate stopping point, we can condense events into a single legible history, one which makes purposeful work feasible.

B.

Overview of the Paper

The course of this paper will follow the chronology of the Reign of Terror, observed in reverse order as the theoretical approaches introduced above. I have elected to begin my study of violence in September of 1792, well before the most common definition of the Reign of Terror. Paris was in a state of terror in the month of September 1792. Just a year before, the King, Louis XVI, his royal consort, Marie Antoinette von Habsburg, his children and a small entourage had been apprehended in an attempted escape at the town of Varennes, becoming a practical prisoner in the Tuileries Palace at the center of Paris. The monarchy slowly imploded while France went to war with its Prussian and Austrian neighbors, ostensibly the invading armies from liberating the captured monarch. On September 2nd, amidst news that the key citadel town of Verdun was committed to a hopeless siege by the Prussians, a convoy of carts carrying prisoners in clerical garb from the center of Paris were waylaid and their contents brought before an impromptu tribunal. Each was judged guilty and summarily beaten to death by the same mob that had seized them from their transports.³⁴ So began a period remembered as the ‘September Massacres,’ which, though lasting only from the 2nd to 6th September, saw 1,200 to 1,500 prisoners killed.³⁵

The September Massacres can best be explained by the performative theory of violence. Performative violence is bottom-up and symbolic, enacted by masses of people operating with little to no central leadership or planning, who engage in violence as an end in itself. Reconceptualization of the

³⁴ Sutherland, pg. 154, Address, pgs. 93-98

³⁵ Address, pg. 104

Massacres is justified by the complexity of the event, its seeming incomprehensibility. As historian David Andress writes, “The direct action taken was not a simple mob attack. From its earliest moments at the Abbaye,³⁶ it demanded the sanction of procedure, and there is every indication that the tribunals were genuinely concerned to determine an individuals’ guilt or innocence.”³⁷ We can reinterpret this violence as the performance of government action that the people of Paris demanded. Because Paris was under immediate military threat, and because the state had failed to properly execute justice on those elements that were either plotting with, or would immediately join the invading armies, the people took action into their own hands. They employed the convincing language of violent justice—a language understood as ‘Terror’—to demonstrate by symbolic spectacle that Paris would not be bowled over, to both the weak state and the internal and external enemies of the revolution. The targets were identified as perfidious foreign agents by countless popular circulars.

The next phase of the Revolution, from roughly fall of 1792 to spring 1793, encompassed a growing sense of crisis within the fledgling Republic.³⁸ On the 14th of January 1793, the King was executed in in a close vote of the National Convention, split largely on Girondin-Montagnard lines. Victory turned to defeat as the Dutch Republic, Great Britain, and Spain enter the war against France. To oppose this mighty alliance of the First Coalition, the French state calls for a ‘Levée en masse,’ the conscription of 300,000 men across the country at the end of February 1793. This Levée sparks open rebellion in the Vendée in the Western region of France, where years of bitter and prolonged fighting ensue.

The Vendée, an area describing roughly four French Departments, pitted a Catholic monarchist peasant force against the Republican government. Long a site of serious regionalism, resentment against Paris and its radical moves—most significantly the gutting of the Catholic church and the execution of the

³⁶ A central Parisian prison

³⁷ Andress, pg. 108

³⁸ For a deeper historical analysis of this period, consider Andress, David. *The Terror*, Mayer, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*, Hazan, *A People’s History of the French Revolution*, and Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*. Further historical references in this section are drawn from these works.

king—had grown to a fever pitch. In mid-March, 1793, as news of the call for recruits reached the isolated towns of the Vendéan bocage, protests in many towns united into a single force, a “Catholic and Royal Army,” whose goal it was to oppose reintegration into the French state and the eventual return of the king. The Vendée Rebellion and its subsequent suppression was an exemplary instance of violence in the Terror, hitting all the major themes of the period—internal strife compounded by foreign intervention, the growing radicalization of the Revolution and its goals, and the crystallization of counterrevolution in certain regions and groups. For these reasons, I have elected to use the Vendée as the focus for an instrumental understanding of violence. The rebellion began largely as local actors engaged in highly strategic violence against state actors, and, as the rebellion progressed the Republican government turned to selective and indiscriminate violence to repress the region. Finally, there is variation in the locations and levels of violence—higher violence in more rebellious parts of the bocage, targeting of specific groups like refractory priests—that follow the logic of instrumental theory.

The next period occurred not long after violence in the Vendée began. In fall of 1793, the Republican government purged itself, sparking the “Federalist” revolts across the south of France. The worsening military situation throughout 1793, compounded by the Vendée insurrection, called for harsher and harsher measures. The Girondin faction was ousted between May 31st and June 2nd by a popular insurrection in Paris. The Girondins’ leaders fled Paris and called for rebellion against the Montagnard-dominated government. Several southern cities join in on this ‘Federalist’ revolt against the centralizing Jacobin state, based out of Bordeaux, Toulon, Marseille, Lyon, and other major centers.

The suppression of the Federalist revolts, in contrast to the Vendée, was characterized by much more wholesale destruction; the Terror had become total. The putting down of the Federalists in the second half of 1793 featured mass-killings, total physical destruction, and the targeting of entire groups as enemies of the state. These factors are epitomized in the smiting of Lyon; Lyon was to be rechristened “Ville Affranchise,” or “freed town,” burned entirely to the ground to act as a deterrent for all those enemies who would challenge Paris. These events can be understood in an Arendtian frame, where the

force of the Revolution itself guides violence according to unshakeable ideals. This new form of Terror can best be understood in an ideological perspective. Violence, as exhibited at Lyon and throughout the Federalist cities, was inspired and directly ordered by a Parisian government dedicated to total Terror. This violence is far more symbolic than practical; people were targeted and killed as explicit enemies of the state rather than actual opposition to the state. The brutal repression that undid the Federalist Revolts provided the basis for formalized totalistic Terror.

The factional strife between Montagnard and Girondin, despite its severity, merely foreshadowed the next factional struggle of the Revolution. The direction of the Revolution now came into question as rival groups emerged around the policy of Terror; a faction centered on the stentorian Georges Danton, the “indulgents,” counselled a rolling back of the more terroristic tendencies of the Revolution, while the “ultra” opposition, led by the notorious dechristianizer Jacques Hébert, who preached violence, violence, and more violence until the Revolution was complete. In the center of these conflicting factions stood the now dominating figure of Maximilien Robespierre, just thirty-five in 1794. Robespierre played both factions off one another, purging first the “ultras” and then the “indulgents,” while simultaneously tightening of the laws of Terror through Laws of 14 Frimaire and 10 and 22 Prairial. Despite violence in the capital, 1794 also saw the final success of the reinvigorated Revolutionary Armies. This last factor removed the immediate need for Terror, despite the threats made by Robespierre in June and early July of 1794 for renewed purges. Fearing these purges, members of the Convention mounted the coup of 9 Thermidor on July 27th, 1794, which ousted Robespierre and his allies on the Committee of Public Safety, the executive body. Robespierre was executed the following day, and the Revolution gradually deradicalized in the following period of the “Thermidorian Reaction.”

Throughout this brief chronology of the Reign of Terror, the true width and breadth of violence can be witnessed. This intense variation justifies an ecumenical approach to understanding the violence of the Terror. By utilizing three distinct understandings of violence, we can gain valuable insights into the style of, and explanations for, violence in the Revolution. After working through each theory in its course,

I intend to conclude with a broader theoretical insight. The conclusion will include the simultaneous application of performative, instrumental, and ideological theories of violence to the case of the Revolutionary Armies. The Armies, which operated for the last year of the Terror, were the frontline of Revolutionary violence, and carried the theories of violence hashed out in the Vendée, in Lyon, and in Paris to the whole of France. By working through three theories within a single historical event, it is possible to recognize the interrelated nature of theory on violence. It is also my intention to explore the limitations of any one theoretical approach with a brief consideration of historiography and theory. This critique further supports a synthesis of theories I present. With this in mind, I will conclude by creating a synthesis of theories that recognizes the complex nature of violence.

II.

The Popular Terror:
A Performative Explanation of Violence

What say you, then,

To times, when half the city shall break out

Full of one passion, vengeance, rage, or fear?

To executions, to a street on fire,

Mobs, riots, or rejoicings?...

For once, the Muse's help will we implore,

And she shall lodge us, wafted on her wings,

Above the press and danger of the crowd.³⁹

I.

Introduction

William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* captures in a single stroke the blood and drama that epitomized the Revolution. It is impossible when considering the events of the French Revolution not to

³⁹ Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, lines 671-684, pg. 121

recognize the grand theatrics at work. History has left us countless moments of intense drama, as when Robespierre, tears forming behind tinted spectacles, asked his fellow Revolutionaries “do you want a revolution without a revolution?” or when that same man was felled after Conventionnel Tallien’s melodramatic dagger-posing. No aspect of the Revolution was more theatrical than the rhetoric around, and use of, violence. As the *sans-culotte* came to epitome of the Revolutionary, so too did blood become the symbol of swift and merciless justice. As the Reign of Terror heightened, the rhetorical discussion of Terror tightened its terminology, began conflating the goals of the new Montagnard Revolutionary clique—liberty, equality, freedom from economic oppression and religious fanaticism—with victory over France’s chimeric enemies, who daily sapped French power from without and within.

That victory, it was argued, could be achieved only through an exacting and unerring justice, which meant identifying and executing all those who stood in the way of the common good. That could mean the aristocrats behind the ‘hunger plots,’ the clergymen behind the Vendéean insurrection, the big merchants who hiked prices and starved Parisians, and those Conventionnels who masqueraded as loyal patriots while taking bribes for political favors. The Terror was as much about this performance of violence, which was itself wrapped in the theatrics of government and political rhetoric, as it was a clear response to internal strife or an outpouring of ideological bloodshed. However, the performance of violence plays deeply on highly variable understandings of the symbology of violence. For that reason, we can understand the performance of violence by observing both mass and elite discourse on violence in the period of the Terror. Through an understanding of the rhetorical and theatrical elements of violence, we can better understand the evolution of the Terror First, we will begin with an overview of the literature on symbolic violence and performative action.

Before parsing the theoretical underpinning of performative theory, it is best to state what is meant by that term. We described instrumental violence as that which occurs as a means to a recognizable end. Violence is pursued as a tool for state control, or general repression, or personal gain, and will occur when the benefits outweigh costs. Ideological violence was defined as violence directed against groups of

people defined by their identities, rather than actions or material status. While those theories can adequately explain targets of violence, predicting the type of violence and how the violence is performed is just as important as the numbers and targets of that violence.

Performative violence should be understood as violence targeting targets whose importance is symbolic, rather than rational or ideological. By this, I mean that the targets carry cultural value, and that moreover the form of violence used against them is defined by cultural norms rather than purely rational or ideological considerations. Thus, violence becomes a “performance” of a societal norm in order to assert a certain political or societal claim, while the targets of that violence are popularly despised figures, whose actual hostility to the state is secondary to their commonly understood role as enemies.

The bulk of this chapter will involve the September Massacres, and will explain the violence of the masses and the symbolic value of public bloodletting. The symbolism of violence, however, was open to the masses as much as it was the elites, and we will examine instances of elite manipulation of the popular cultural mores surrounding violence. To name just one example, we might look at the execution of Marie Antoinette in 1793. Despite being a uniquely unpopular figure, Antoinette was innocent of the pile of allegations made against her person. Yet certain actors, most prominently Jacques Hébert and Jean-Paul Marat, used violence against the symbol of royal inefficacy and corruption to communicate the power of the government and the success of the Revolution. Moreover, we can find ample evidence of this symbolic act of violence through their publications, *Le Pere Duchesne* and *L'Ami du Peuple* respectively. Her execution at the Place de Revolution was attended by throngs of people who cursed and harangued Antoinette in her tumbril. The masses might not have had bread, or safety, or money, or power, but by performing an act of public violence against one, they could implement a symbolic victory over many.

This nuanced aspect of violence will be further explored through an examination of the September Massacres of 1792. In the space of a few days, Paris' prisons were emptied and their contents executed by raging mobs in an act of astounding bloodshed. Reassessing this act of violence through a

performative lens allows us to understand the importance of performing violence, as well as the intersection between politics, the people, and the spectacle of violence.

II.

Constructing a Performative Theory

The term ‘performance’ used in this section borrows heavily from the work done on “performativity” by Judith Butler. Her work on performativity provides a useful theorization of the terms to be used in this thesis. To Butler, social constructs such as gender were better understood as acts rather than categorical definitions. In order to possess a gender or a sexual orientation, a certain broadly understood “script” must be repeatedly performed to a general public in order to actuate what she terms “agential performativity.”⁴⁰ This process necessarily involves a discourse with cultural norms and the authorities that police them. “Gender,” Butler states, “is prompted by obligatory norms to be one gender or the other, and *the reproduction of gender is thus always a negotiation with power.*”⁴¹ That negotiation is defined by the relationship between “subject” and “agent,” where the individual’s actions are mediated via existing power structures that inform and guide behaviors—“A socially produced “agent” whose agency and thought is made possible by a language that precedes that I,” meaning the subject.⁴²

That relationship is not in Butler’s cosmology unidirectional; to demonstrate that point, the author points to the protests in Los Angeles in 2006, where illegal migrants chanted the national anthem in both English and Spanish as a form of resistance. They engaged the rights of a citizen—free speech and free assembly—as a public assertion that those rights should belong to them. Moreover, by singing the national anthem, which symbolizes the nation in which they want to live as citizens, these protestors participated in the cultural act of being American, and thus conferred—or hoped to confer—that status

⁴⁰ Butler, *Performative Agency*, pg. 147-148

⁴¹ Butler, *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*, pg. 1, italics my own

⁴² Butler, *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*, pg. 3

onto themselves. Being American, or at the least being a citizen, was achieved by a public performance of Americanness. Butler stresses both this point as well as the use of Spanish. In Butler's view, "singing in Spanish on the street gives *voice and visibility* to those populations that are regularly disavowed as part of the nation... exposing and opposing those modes of exclusion through which the nation imagines and enforces its own unity."⁴³ By enacting citizenship, the protestors claimed Americanness, becoming what they desired by performing positively and publicly what is expected to be citizenship.

That a political reality can be achieved through performance is applicable to audiences far beyond that example. The act of citizenship speaks to the profoundly performative nature of political acts; participation in democracy in particular is affected via action, as it is performative. Thus, in assessing the nature of performative violence, we must take into account to the relationship between performative action and political hierarchies. In so many words, being a member of a polity involves the performance of, and discourse with, existing powers. Thus, performativity can be expanded into a larger political theory. In the 2015 *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, Butler uses her performative theory to explain the relationship between power and action. Her thesis is that mass action in a democracy is an inherently political act, and yet that act is mediated through the political environment. Thus, "None of us acts without the conditions to act, even though sometimes we must act to install and preserve those very conditions."⁴⁴ This is not the only contradiction posed by Butler that can be applied to this chapter. She later states that "the body politic is posited as a unity it can never be," making the argument that the "will of the people" is, as a matter of course, a construct.⁴⁵

This becomes hugely important as we integrate elites into Butler's model. The act of violence, which can be sold as a public interest, the sovereign will of the people, can then be coopted by elites who thus presume to act in the will of the people. Engaging in the popular performance of violence by elites both legitimates their authority while also monopolizing popular action into an elite-guided exhibition.

⁴³ Butler, *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*, pg. 6, italics my own

⁴⁴ Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, pg. 16

⁴⁵ Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, pg. 4, 14-16

Butler's major thesis in *Notes* involves this paradoxical relationship of performance and forms of performance, which must fundamentally define one another. Thus, "Laying claim to citizenship requires both translation and performative modes of expression... there is no reproduction of the social world that is not at the same time a reproduction of those norms that govern intelligibility of the body in space and time."⁴⁶

These two words—translation and performance—are key in understanding performative violence. Political action requires a translation of norms enforced by authority into popular action, as well as a performance of that action. This is better stated in terms of language; the individual *words* of political action must be defined by existing norms and authority—otherwise the action lacks substance. However, the forming of those *words* of action can be easily reconfigured into novel *sentences*, which appropriate norms to serve the interests of the public engaged in action. In this metaphorical sense, the words of Americanness—singing the national anthem—are reconstituted in a novel sentence—extending citizenship to illegal migrants. Butler goes on to enunciate several more contradictions of democratic popular action that complicate the language of performance. To Butler, "'The people' are not a given population, but are rather constituted by the lines of demarcation that we implicitly or explicitly establish."⁴⁷ In this sense, translation and performance are mediated by the perception of who participates in political action. In other words, the language of performance is spoken by a predetermined few, though that limitation is obvious open to challenge.

Thus presented, Judith Butler has given us the term "performance" and "performativity," which can be understood within the context of this paper as the actualization of identities through political action, where the language and form of the performance is itself influenced by the interchange of performance and the authority to which performances speak. To better grasp this interchange, and understand "translation and performance," we can turn to the extensive scholarship of Michel Foucault.

⁴⁶ Butler, *Performativity, Precarity and Sexual Politics*, pg. 10

⁴⁷ Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, pg. 3

One of his most enduring contributions to scholarship, and the most relevant to Butler's theorization of performance, is his work with the dynamics of power, authority, and society.

Foucault's 1975 *Discipline and Punish* argues that forms of resistance model the discipline imposed by authority. *Discipline* is another one of Foucault's philosophical-historical wanderings, whose overall goal can be stated as the challenging of the monolithic progress of modernity. By examining power dynamics through a history of imprisonment, Foucault argues that the supposed boons of modernity wrought by modernity are delusions; rather, 'discipline and punishment' in the past was a public affair, mediated through popular engagement in executions and the fate of the condemned. This supposed barbarity is reconceptualized by Foucault as allowing public access to the process of violence and authority, whereby the public nature of the exercise of discipline allowed a degree of popular participation—what we might reword as performance. Foucault's introduction is informative of his goals as well as of the nature of punishments in Ancien Régime France.

Foucault starts *Discipline and Punish* with the following anecdote: "On 2 March 1757 Damiens the regicide⁴⁸ was condemned 'to make the *amende honorable* before the main door of the Church of Paris,' ... where, on a scaffold, the flesh will be torn from his breasts, arms, thighs, and calves with red-hot pincers... then his body drawn and quartered by four horses and his limb and body consumed by fire, reduced to his ashes and thrown to the winds."⁴⁹ Foucault is content to continue this historical description for a further five pages, before contrasting it sharply with the seemingly humane doctrines of the "House of Young Prisoners in Paris," which contrasted the brutality of Damien's execution with humane conditions and virtuous care. The author's goal is to explain this "disappearance of torture as a public spectacle... [which] has been attributed too readily... to a process of 'humanization.'"⁵⁰ Foucault rejects this humanization outright; while "the body as the major target of penal repression [has] disappeared," "the public execution I now see as a hearth in which violence bursts again into flame... Punishment,

⁴⁸ Attempted assassin of Louis XV, grandfather of Louis XVI, and last man to be drawn and quartered

⁴⁹ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pg. 3

⁵⁰ Foucault, pg. 7

then, will tend to become the most hidden part of the penal process.”⁵¹ This transformation of the public act of violence and punishment into the hidden act of total and yet invisible imprisonment confers onto society serious changes in the relationship to violence; authority redefines violent resistance as a hidden act, similarly making resistance to that order impossible to witness. Whereas the public torture of Damiens could—and did—inspire public reaction, whether revulsion or compassion, the silent imprisonment of modernity made such a reaction immaterial.

Likewise, Foucault classified the guillotine as affecting this transformation. The act of public execution was sanitized by the swiftness of the act and the mechanical nature of the machine. “Death was reduced to a visible, but instantaneous event,” wrote Foucault, thus curtailing the symbolic meaning of a prisoner’s suffering.⁵² That symbolism plays heavily into Foucault’s argument. For the Ancien Régime, forms of punishment were deliberately tailored to fit the crime of the punished. “The use of ‘symbolic’ torture,” Foucault tells us, involved “forms of executions [that] referred to the nature of the crime,” such as the chopping off of the hand in which Damiens carried his regicidal dagger.⁵³ Furthermore, the symbolism of the event was heightened by what Foucault describes as “theatrics,” describing forms of punishment as not only “poetically just” in form of punishment but deliberately performed with a sequencing of events that furthered the symbolic nature of the act of execution and public violence.⁵⁴ The grand political purpose of the public execution now come into view; the goal of “public execution is to be understood not only as judicial, but also as a political ritual. *It belongs, even in minor cases, to the ceremonies by which power is manifested.*”⁵⁵ It is the supreme act of political domination, the actualization of authority into a single spectacular and synecdochally profound event.

Foucault’s thesis on violence and spectacle can be coupled with Butler’s arguments on performativity. We can reframe the violence of the state as a performance of popular expectations, while

⁵¹ Foucault, pg. 8, 9

⁵² Foucault, pg. 13

⁵³ Foucault, pg. 45

⁵⁴ Foucault, pg. 45-46

⁵⁵ Foucault, pg. 47, italics my own

the profound brutality of the event, its symbolic meaning and theatrics, are all meant to play into the dynamic of popular participation and the exercise of authority. Foucault defines the public execution as “aim[ing] to re-establish, at its extreme point, the dissymmetry between the subject who had dared to violate the law and the all-powerful sovereign who displays his strength,” where the deliberative display of pomp was meant to better communicate the symbolic role of violence to the public audience.⁵⁶

Violence is a public theater in which national justice can be achieved in front of the masses. While this aptly characterizes the elite approach to violence, we can just as directly translate Foucault to the popular side of politics. The performance of symbolic violence, understood explicitly as the realm of the state, is thus a powerful way to participate in a polity through the medium of violence.

To better understand this popular side of violence, we can draw on the scholarship of a colleague of Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, who developed a theory of “symbolic violence.” To Bourdieu, intra-group conflict in society could be explained through the use of culturally accepted norms of contestation, rather than a purely material struggle, as argued by Marxist circles, or through violence and ideology, which follows more with Arendt. Symbolic violence is purely a socio-cultural, non-violent act that utilizes more abstract societal functions. Thus, “Different classes... are engaged in a specifically symbolic struggle to impose the definition of the social world most in conformity with their interests... [symbolic violence is] the power to impose instruments of knowledge and expressions of social reality.”⁵⁷ Society consists of non-atomizable bodies that can be defined in relation to other groups, where the actions of any individual is defined by those relational attitudes—that society “cannot be reduced to a simple aggregate... or to the sum of elements, [but] the system of agents... which, by their existence, [are in] opposition or combination, determining its specific structure at a given moment in time.”⁵⁸

The existence of these categories or groupings is an inherent characteristic of society, wrote Bourdieu—“A vision of the world is a division of the world, based on a fundamental principle of

⁵⁶ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, pg. 48

⁵⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pg. 115

⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *Reproduction Culturelle et Reproduction Sociale*, pg. 161

division... [thus] to bring order is to bring division... this magical act presupposes and produces collective belief.”⁵⁹ Division, being inherent, channels the action of symbolic violence, which is in turn determined by relational attitudes, while the form of violence is dictated by the particulars of that relationship. Thus, every group in a society “is defined by its particular position within [its] field form which it derives *positional properties* which cannot be assimilated to intrinsic properties.”⁶⁰ Those ‘positional properties’ necessarily inform directional energies like symbolic violence, which conforms to the substance of hierarchical power relations in a given society. Thus, Bourdieu summarizes that “the whole social structure is present in the interaction (and therefore the discourse): the material conditions of existence determine discourse... they govern not only the places and times of communication but also the form of the communication.”⁶¹ Rather than dwell further on Bourdieu’s rather esoteric prose, we can look at a demonstration of “symbolic violence.”

One of the most illustrative applications of Bourdieu was on gender, where male norms of the dominant class—the aggregate of which Bourdieu calls “social capital”—were incorporated unconsciously by women in society or exercised by the dominant party onto the weaker. As such, the imposed belief of sexual inferiority—that one should “be a man”—reinforces a social hierarchy via non-violent symbolic means. Reproductive rights are particularly informative of the character of symbolic violence. The dispossession of female agency in human reproduction fundamentally undermines the logic of reproductive rights. Bourdieu scholar Beate Kraus remarked of symbolic violence against women that “Most of the reproductive labor of women is not seen as labor. Pregnancy... is perceived as mere waiting... Women are seen simply as receptacles for the male seed, passive vessels.”⁶² This symbolic reordering of reality lends itself to the argument that women should carry pregnancies until the child can

⁵⁹ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, pg. 210

⁶⁰ Bourdieu, *Reproduction Culturelle et Reproduction Sociale*, pg. 161

⁶¹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, pg. 653

⁶² Bourdieu et. al, *Critical Perspectives*, pg. 163

be born and subsequently adopted—the reconceptualization of labor thus depriving women of any practical agency.

Through this admittedly scant coverage of very serious bodies of works, we have hopefully established some basic theoretical metrics with which we can engage with the French Revolutionary historical discourse. Judith Butler lent us “performativity” as a concept, establishing the relationship between action and identity, positing that in a democratic context there exists a nuanced interplay of popular action and channels of authority—the metaphorical interaction of words and sentences of resistance. We then linked that to Foucault, whose oeuvre established—among other things—that authority tends to define resistance against it. Moreover, public executions in particular play on understandings of symbolism and theatrics; the state can thus use these events as metaphorical actualization of their power through the careful use of popular notions of justice and punishment. To Foucault, these events invited a level of popular involvement that is foreign to modern forms of punishment, but for our purposes we can simply this trend by agreeing that popular audiences were influenced by—and did much to influence—the form and function of violence. While Bourdieu’s emphasis in symbolic violence did not consider acts of explicit violence and bloodshed, some minor tweaking can easily map Bourdieu onto a Revolutionary context.

First, the notion of a divided society, where hierarchies of power determine behavior closely parallels the Ancien Regime and the Revolution. In an abstract sense, the divisions of the Three Estates—clergy, nobility, and everyone else—held significant social clout. At a more practical level, distinctions in class were serious; even after the abolition of noble privileges in 1789, only “active” citizens who contributed a high level in taxes were allowed to vote and take part in the body politic. Thus, with little imagining, we can conceptualize the Revolution as a battle between the nobles in power and the masses without rights. Furthermore, we can merge a Foucauldian sense of languages of power with Bourdieu’s concept of symbolic violence. While the former theorizes that oppression and resistance are modelled on societal norms, much like Bourdieu, the latter claims that these actions are guided as much by positional

relations—relative power and the natural tension between powerful and powerless. Thus, we would predict the use of symbolic violence both by the state and the people, while the common language of accepted norms here means one thing—violence. Violence, understood here as the brutality of the Reign of Terror, is the symbolic violence of Bourdieu merged with the spectacle of Foucault. As such, we would predict societal notions of justice and violence to inform popular and elite actions, which will be enacted according to these stipulations.

With these theoretical contributions in mind, we can return to the original purpose of this chapter. My ‘performative’ violence refers to the employment of violence as a deeply symbolic act, which uses popular understandings of violence, justice, and the role of the state to actualize political identities. Performative violence, to state in clearer terms, involves violence against targets of culturally symbolic importance, while the purpose of the violence is the literal performance of popular political action. Performative violence predictably targets important individuals, while the shape of violence conforms to accepted norms in order to communicate nominally nonviolent goals. We should see violence as a means of assertion, a claim to an idea, a broadly constructed argument, whereby those assertions are given validity and legitimacy by the forms and styles they take. Before diving into the thrilling murders of September 1792, it is necessary to properly break down the overly nebulous and esoteric notion of ‘popular violence.’ Before proceeding, we must understand the cultural milieu with which the Parisian mob was interacting.

III.

Performing the Terror

A.

France Under Siege: August & September 1792

The performative theory of violence can be projected onto the September Massacres. In the early days of September 1792, Paris was under threat. The combined forces of Austria and Prussia, operating jointly, had won a series of sieges pending the onset of war in April of 1792, marching ever closer to the capital of the French monarchy—not yet a Republic, though the king was largely discredited after his abortive flight to Varennes. The situation grew increasingly dire; the Austro-Prussian forces had in July issued the “Brunswick Manifesto,” named for the ranking Prussian general, the Duke of Brunswick. It proclaimed that “the inhabitants of the towns and villages who dare to defend themselves... will be punished immediately, according to the severity of the law of war.”⁶³ More pressing for the Parisians was the second half of that manifesto—“the city of Paris and all its inhabitants, without distinction, will be obliged to submit themselves, immediately and without delay,” for failing this, the invading forces “will wreak an exemplary and ever-memorable vengeance, by delivering up the city of Paris to military execution, and total destruction.”⁶⁴ The Manifesto had been announced well before the armies of France’s enemies marched into France, and the initial expedition made slow progress; yet, as the armies neared, the Manifesto was given increasing credibility. 42,000 Prussians, alongside 34,000 Austrian and Hessian soldiers marched into Alsace in mid-July, yet most concerning for the people of France was the force of 4,500 émigré soldiers—manned, officered, and commanded by nobles who had fled France and now hoped to liberate it by force.⁶⁵

⁶³ Andress, pg. 82

⁶⁴ Andress, pg. 82-83

⁶⁵ Tackett, *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*, pg. 208

On August 10th, the Tuileries Palace, which housed the King and his family, was seized by National Guardsmen and irate Parisians. Shortly thereafter, the Legislative Assembly organized a provisional emergency government, at which point Georges Danton, a stentorian speaker and passionate Jacobin, was made Minister of Justice.⁶⁶ Under his auspices, the fledgling Republican government attempted to recuperate the popular violence that had overthrown the monarchy by organizing the swift processing of the slew of royals and nobles engaged in the now defunct monarchy. A special board, the “extraordinary tribunal,” operated with the assistance of the Committee of Vigilance, which, despite later scholarship, managed to arrest a few hundred in August, leaving the prisons far from full.⁶⁷ The bulk of arrests were of refractory priests—those clergymen who refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the state in 1791, whose existence in France was already illegal—as well as a host of Royalist printers, nobles, and flaneurs, such as the princess de Lamballe.

Arrests were progressively ratcheted up, and on the 28th of August the Committee of Vigilance began what were euphemistically referred to as “domiciliary visits,” to locate arms and ammunition for the impending fight for the homeland.⁶⁸ This was condoned, if not supported, by the Legislative Assembly as a whole, the unicameral legislative body that de facto ran France; the President of the Assembly officially declared the homeland in danger, and Danton continued his police action, announcing that “no nation on earth has ever obtained liberty without a struggle. You have traitors in your bosom; well, without them the fight would have been soon over.”⁶⁹ He spoke to a very real fear that was common in France. Since the Insurrection of August 10th, the nation had turned irrevocably towards Republicanism. There remained, however, considerable elements of pro-monarchy Royalists, whose sentiments towards the nascent Republic were tepid at best. Popular publications began to evoke the image of the St. Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 1572, during which Parisian Catholics had slaughtered

⁶⁶ Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*, pg. 623

⁶⁷ Tackett, pg. 202-203

⁶⁸ Schama, pg. 626

⁶⁹ Schama, pg. 628

countless Huguenots in an episode of mass violence.⁷⁰ Journalists such as the militant atheist Jacques Hébert claimed that, had the insurrectionaries of the 10th failed, some 4,000 houses would have been attacked, their residents likely slaughtered.⁷¹ Other pronounced that “the first battle” with the Austro-Prussian onslaught “we shall fight inside the walls of Paris, not outside. All the royal brigands clustering indie this unhappy town will perish in the same day.... The prisons are full of conspirators... see them where they shall be judged.”⁷²

What grandiose conspiracies weren’t published in the news were circulated as rumors; many feared a shadowy cabal of 400 nobles who had fled the Tuileries, and now actively planned counterrevolution.⁷³ These warning were given serious credibility by the news on September 2nd that the great fortress town of Verdun was invested by hostile forces—though by then the fortifications had fallen, and on the very same day a convoy of tumbrils leaving the Abbaye Prison in the heart of Paris was seized by an angry mob.⁷⁴ This day marked the culmination of a month of feverish uncertainty. What had begun with the violent storming of the Tuileries had evolved into the feverish confusion of September 1792. Already, popular opinion along with many political entrepreneurs were calling for justice—a word that meant, implicitly or explicitly, the trial and subsequent execution of those detained for defending the monarchy. In mid-August Maximilien Robespierre—still just one voice among the Jacobin leadership—announced that “the people are resting, but they are not asleep. They demand the punishment of the guilty.”⁷⁵ This view appears to have been supported by others who viewed the Tribunal as ineffectual and insufficient given the dire straits Paris was entering; as early as June 20th, petitioners had been threatening to raid prisons if trails were not expedited.⁷⁶ This is certainly confirmed by those who were put to death by Danton’s court—a Royalist journalist, the director of the king’s budget, and three printers of fake

⁷⁰ Andress, pg. 85

⁷¹ Tackett, pg. 200

⁷² Schama, pg. 630

⁷³ Tackett, pg. 202

⁷⁴ Andress, pg. 95

⁷⁵ Tackett, pg. 203

⁷⁶ Tackett, pg. 208

assignat currency notes, hardly a coup for popular justice in the wake of popular regime change. Aledaide Mareaux, a female diarist of the time, wrote that “since August 10th only three people have been guillotined and the people are outraged. We seem to be sold out by every side!”⁷⁷ Her words were prescient of the violence about to unfold.

B.

A Bloody Week in September

On September 2nd, with news that Longwy had fallen after a suspiciously short siege, and that Verdun was nearing collapse, the Paris Commune—the insurrectionary body that had led the August 10th revolution—copied a circular to all 48 Parisian sections that they must “exercise a prompt justice on the spot against all the conspirators and evil doers in the prisons.”⁷⁸ That same day, a convoy of tumbrils carrying 24 prisoners, many refractory priests, rolled through the center of Paris, its inhabitants wearing mostly clerical clothing, identifying them as refractory priests—and thus allies of the deposed king and the invading armies. They had nearly reached the Abbaye prison, their destination, before being waylaid by a crowd, whereupon the prisoners were presented before a jury of six Committee members of the Commune of Paris⁷⁹ who would judge their crimes. The proceedings were orderly, if preordained; one by one, the 24 were tried, sentenced to death, and sent out to a waiting crowd to be bludgeoned and stabbed to death.⁸⁰ This first bloodletting was indicative of the rest of the Massacres. Groups of Parisians raided prisons across the city, formed impromptu tribunals, who presented charges and considered evidence, and afterwards carried out their bloody business. At some prisons, events moved rather rapidly; at the Carmes Monastery, 115 of 160 detained priests and sundry clergy were killed in the space of a few hours. At the

⁷⁷ Tackett, pg. 203

⁷⁸ Tackett, pg. 211

⁷⁹ These men formed the Communes of Paris, an insurrectionary urban government that had initiated the August 10th actions

⁸⁰ Address, pg. 96-97

Abbaye, perhaps the most populous prison, trials of prisoners lasted a full twenty-four hours, but every prison slaughter featured similar lines, with tribunals, trials, and judgements, which included not an insignificant amount of acquittals among the 1,100 to 1,400 killed in the five days of bloodshed.⁸¹

Under guidance from Communards—officials who represented the Parisian Commune—prison tribunals systematically freed debtors, those arrested for family quarrels, and the majority of imprisoned women.⁸² It is entirely likely that trials the Abbaye prison lasted the longest because of the high number of acquittals—250 of 450 total prisoners.⁸³ Jerome Petion, then the mayor of Paris, noted the strict formality of the trials, with three men conversing with prison registers and summoning prisoners, while ten men formed a tribunal that functioned in front of a public gallery.⁸⁴ He remarked that “the men who judged and those who executed behaved as confidently as if the law had summoned them to fulfill these functions.”⁸⁵ The men and women who formed the amorphous crowds that menaced the prisons of Paris were fairly worthy of Petion’s praise.

Given the speed of events, the sheepishness at owning to nominally illegal events, and a deal of historical distance, it is impossible to say with certainty who the *septembriseurs* were; however, it is most likely that the various ‘Sections’ of Paris, municipal divisions centered on self-governing bodies that formed the Commune of Paris, were organizers and leaders of the Massacres. A survivor of the events at La Force remembered a tribunal of ten individuals, which included “seven... in National Guard uniform, one was a prison clerk, and the other two market porters.”⁸⁶ Formality in proceedings was hardly unique to La Force, and it appears that everywhere the *septembriseurs* gave strict attention to detail. At the most rudimentary—at the rue des Bernardins prison—documentation was checked, and the crowd consulted for a just verdict. Elsewhere there was more elaboration, as at the Salpêtrière prison where formal tribunals

⁸¹ Tackett, pg 211

⁸² Tackett, pg. 212

⁸³ Andress, pg. 104

⁸⁴ Andress, pg. 106

⁸⁵ Hazan, pg. 188

⁸⁶ Andress, pg. 105

weighed evidence against precisely categorized prisoners, with only counterrevolutionary crimes meriting executions.⁸⁷

Moreover, the *septembriseurs* constructed their own formulation for what was deemed ‘counterrevolutionary:’ professional criminals, forgers, and political enemies, approximating the procedures of Danton’s formal governmental tribunal. That last category consisted of several distinct parties, all of whom were tied closely to both the King and the larger monarchical alliance marching on Paris. One group, the imprisoned Swiss Guardsmen—for centuries the mercenaries of European courts who doubted the loyalty of their own nationals—were particularly hated. As the personal bodyguards of the King, they had opened fire on the crowds who marched on the Tuileries Palace to depose the King during the events of August 10th. In doing so, approximately 400 insurgents were killed before the Swiss were overwhelmed.⁸⁸ While many Swiss soldiers were killed in the action, still more were imprisoned awaiting trial, and it was upon them that no small amount of popular furor was released. They were the literal foot soldiers of reaction, of monarchy, of the king, while also being, in a very real sense, a potential fifth column which could at any moment join with the Duke of Brunswick’s force.

Furthermore, the Massacres were propelled by the very insurrectionaries who had stormed the Tuileries and brought down the monarchy; Fabre d’Eglantine, future member of the Committee of Public Safety, wrote that it “was the men of August 10 who broke into the prisons,” and in so doing secured the Revolutionary project they had started.⁸⁹ These men, of apparent guilt, were often the first tried and executed, though even this hated category was not beneath justice, and history leaves us that two such Guardsmen received a reprieve by inventing a tale of their innocence—which was subsequently revealed to be a fabrication, leading to their executions.⁹⁰ Similarly, refractory priests, who formed another contingent of that third category, were popularly hated. One diarist sympathetic with the Montagnards

⁸⁷ Andress, pg. 105

⁸⁸ Tackett, pg. 190

⁸⁹ Tackett, pg. 213

⁹⁰ Andress, pg. 108

wrote of the prompt executions of refractory priests that “the whole wicked race of the refractory clergy has received the fate their deeds deserve. There is reason to believe that the nation will soon be purged of all these traitors.”⁹¹ Having refused to swear an oath of allegiance to the Constitutional Monarchy in 1790 and 1791, they were easily identified with the forces of reaction literally and figuratively arrayed against Paris. And, as we have seen in the Vendée, such figures could and did become the cadre for counterrevolutionary rebellion, inciting and directing anti-revolutionary sentiments the nation over.

By the 6th of September, the Massacre were winding down due to a combination of fatigue and governmental intervention. The last two untouched prisons in Paris were now guarded while officials put an end to the uncontrollable popular rage.⁹² The bloodshed was profound; at not a few locations, such quantities of blood had been spilled that operations had to temporarily cease, while many tribunals stripped the corpses of the executed in order to recuperate the high cost of buying up Paris’ hay to sponge up the pools of blood.⁹³ The September Massacres are largely imagined by these spectacles of violence, while the fall of Robespierre and the Montagnards, perhaps most supportive of the Massacres, ensured that surviving accounts are often exaggerated and critical. The fate of the princess de Lamballe is particularly indicative of this trend: one account reads that the princess

Received a saber blow behind her head... pierced through by saber and pike blows, she was no more than a shapeless thing, red with blood, unrecognizable... On a shaky platform, the corpse was ceremoniously spread out... at the end of a pike was [her] head... [while] another individual held against his chest in one hand the intestines of the victim, and in the other a large knife.⁹⁴

Though the princess de Lamballe’s beheaded specter was an exceptional manifestation of violence, the September Massacres were both bloody and orderly. Far from being a mob action, the Massacres followed general forms and always aped the style of formal court procedures. This creates something of a

⁹¹ Tackett, pg. 213

⁹² Tackett, pgs. 214-216

⁹³ Andress, pg. 111

⁹⁴ Andress, pgs. 93-94

contradiction, as the Massacres were both popular and organized, were bloody and yet not by haste. We can explain this contradiction via a performative theory of violence.

IV.

Conclusions

If we allow ourselves to step back from the undoubtedly gruesome image of the princess de Lamballe's severed head being paraded around on a pike, we might be able to conceptualize this violence. Returning to our performative theory of violence, we predicted several things. Performative violence, to restate, involves violence against targets of culturally symbolic importance, while the purpose of the violence is the literal performance of popular political action, thus involving symbolic styles of violence. Performative violence must be driven by a non-material desire, must target victims of primarily indirect symbolic value, and conform to group expectations on how violence is enacted. We can quite easily explain the violence of the September Massacres using this formulation. First, we might reconsider Bourdieu's earlier instance of societal divisions that inform group action.

Who were the *septembriseurs*? As we have seen, they were mostly members of the many Parisian Sections, the municipal divisions that rose up to form the Commune of Paris. That Commune formed the vanguard of the August 10th insurrectionaries that took down the monarchy, and the presence of Communards at proceedings at the Abbaye, La Force, and elsewhere is indicative of the popular nature of violence. These men and women were provisional members of an illegal government—the Commune—formed to oppose monarchy. Long precluded from engaging in government, the men of the Commune and the women and men active in the Sections were enforcing their right to government by force. The National Legislative Assembly that governed France underneath the constitutional monarch Louis XVI held strict policies on who was a citizen. That body pronounced “active citizens,” who could exclusively engage in political action, were “Frenchmen, aged twenty-five or above, living for at least a year in the

constituency of the primary assembly... neither bankrupt nor insolvent, and above all paying a direct tax of three days; wages.”⁹⁵ This distinguished the “active” from the “passive,” who were definitionally the poor and the disenfranchised. In this sense, we can consider the September Massacres a reaction to, and resistance of, these strict definition of who engages in political action. Thus, according to Bourdieu’s scholarship, we can conceptualize two distinct groups—the state, represented by political elites like Georges Danton and Maximilien Robespierre, and “the people,” i.e. politically active disenfranchised Parisians.

Typifying these upwardly mobile *septembriseurs* was one Stanislas Maillard. Born poor, Maillard was a clerk prior to the Revolution, before he acquired fame and status leading the storming of the Bastille and the women’s march on Versailles. Soon after, he became a captain in the National Guard, the militia of Paris, and subsequently led the events at the Abbaye prison during September.⁹⁶ For Maillard and those of his disenfranchised class, engaging in the Massacres was a way to participate in government. To understand this better, we need merely look at the form of the violence during the events in September. At every prison, violence followed some form of court procedure; at many locations, tribunals were formed, records checked, evidence presented, and a verdict reached. This contrasts starkly with the image of a maddened, blood-hungry mob, one often conjured by writers after the fact. The reality was one of chilling orderliness, a point well represented by historian David Andress;

The September Massacres were brutally pragmatic. After being stripped of any valuables, the condemned were pushed outside the tribunal’s place of judgement, and there waiting were a group of executioners, who struck them down without further ado... The mode of killing itself, with its physical contact and its dramatic bloodshed, was most likely dictated by pragmatic thoughts: arms and ammunition were is gravely short supply.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Hazen, *A People’s History of the French Revolution*, pg. 105, Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from the Rights of Man to Robespierre*, pg. 10-107

⁹⁶ Andress, pg. 105

⁹⁷ Andress, pg. 111

It takes little work to locate the inspiration for this “pragmatic” violence. Remembering back, we are reminded of Danton’s Tribunal, which incompetently struggled to try the glut of dangerous prisoners in the wake of August 10th. Many felt a very real feeling of betrayal as the government that had bravely overthrown Louis at the beginning of August now seemed to be protecting those same criminals who had slaughtered 400 men and women who stormed the Tuileries. The form of violence thus conformed to this norm of Danton’s tribunal; the people performing violence adopted the norms of action that governed popular action, and violence in particular. The choice at the Abbaye to form an impromptu “court,” with a tribunal, registers, and formal proceedings, speaks to the reality that the *septembriseurs* were performing violence according to a clear script. Restating Butler, we can now understand how she maps onto the Revolution: “there is no reproduction of the social world,” she wrote,, “that is not at the same time a reproduction of those norms that govern intelligibility of the body in space and time.” *That* is why the crowds did not simply storm the prisons and hastily murder their contents. The form of violence closely paralleled ‘real’ governmental violence; the goal was to communicate popular participation in government, a point to which we will return.

First, we must look at how violence can be understood as communicative. Repurposing our earlier metaphor, the *words* of performance are all the same—trials and execution of state enemies, a task identical to Danton’s tribunal—but the *sentences* that that violence forms are different. This as an act of popular sovereignty, the participation in state functions of a group traditionally barred from such action. These men and women of the *sans-culotte*, more or less the lower and middle classes of Paris, were barred by law from voting or serving in office, as none qualified as “active citizens.” The earlier involvement by many in the action of August 10th is indicative of a deep-seated desire to join the body politic, to genuinely serve in and alongside the state. As such, the performance of violence in the September Massacres qualified them as citizens, for the *septembriseurs* performed a state action, according to formal guidelines, and against recognizable enemies of the government. The *sentences* of

Butler's performativity must then be the argument that the *septembriseurs* were genuine citizens and not simply disenfranchised "passive" citizens.

It is necessary also to examine violence in a grander perspective. Turning back to Foucault, we can recall that for that scholar, forms of oppression informed resistance, and the grandest form of oppression was violence, and the violence of a public execution. Public executions, wrote Foucault, "to the ceremonies by which power is manifested." This speaks to the symbolic value of violence in Revolutionary France. As Foucault records in *Discipline and Punish*, violence was an everyday reality for Frenchmen, and public executions were common events that served a distinct purpose. Punishment and legal theory in France concentrated on the powers of the sovereign, rather than the rights of the imprisoned; "For a law to be in force in this kingdom," quotes Foucault, "it must necessarily have emanated directly from the sovereign."⁹⁸

Furthermore, "the exercise of the sovereign power in the punishment of crime is one of the essential parts of the administration of justice."⁹⁹ Public executions were both an expression of sovereignty *and* a symbolic spectacle that reinforced that hierarchy of power—a "juridico-political function," to use Foucault's jargon.¹⁰⁰ This meshes with the experience of the average Parisian. To quote Andress again, "Bloodshed held no terrors for the Parisians. Like most other eighteenth-century populations, they had treated the rituals of public execution as a form of spectacle, in which authority enacted itself on the suffering bodies of those who offended it."¹⁰¹ Andress, like Foucault, references the image of Damians, the man responsible for the abortive execution attempt on Louis XV. His public torture succeeded in both "to deploy the pomp of law in public" and to display "the triumph of the law."¹⁰² Thus, we are left with a complicated intersection of violence, spectacle, and power.

⁹⁸ Foucault, pg. 46

⁹⁹ Foucault, pg. 47

¹⁰⁰ Foucault, pg. 48

¹⁰¹ Andress, pg. 103

¹⁰² Foucault, pg. 49

Here we can utilize Bourdieu in conjunction with Foucault. Repurposing his “symbolic violence,” we can understand the violence of public executions as of two natures. First, we have Foucault’s notion that violence is an expression of sovereignty and a performance of justice. Secondly, we have Bourdieu’s concept of group contestation and the language of authority. His scholarship would suggest that public executions are a form of norm oppression onto the dispossessed; the right of the sovereign is to lord over his peons, to take life and to do so publicly. This recontextualizes the public executions of the September Massacres; these were concerted efforts to completely revolutionize sovereignty and power; these events were not simply the claiming of citizenship by the septembriseurs, but an assertion of a distinct form of government using the form of oppression to reassert and redefine sovereignty. The September Massacres were popular sovereignty in its purest form. Looking at the words of the Parisians in the heady days of 1792, we can better grasp this desire for popular sovereignty. In late July, a Sectional Assembly, where passive citizens met to discuss political affairs, one citizen is recorded as having said that “an address made” by certain reactionary elements “declared that a particular class of citizens does not have the authority to assign itself the exclusive right of saving the fatherland... [this class] known in aristocratic terms as passive citizens... must fulfill their obligations to the National Guard, debate in general assemblies... [share] in the sovereignty which belongs to the section.”¹⁰³

What was developing in Paris in the days between the fall of the Bastille and the formation of the Republic on 20th September was this concept of popular sovereignty, conceived not simply as an ideology but as a practical action. Popular sovereignty, like the undocumented migrants desiring citizenship of Butler’s example, is a reality only by performance; it exist as an action as much as it does a concept. The journals of Marat, Robespierre, Hébert, and countless others speak to the heart of this desire for popular sovereignty—as praxis—and thus we can look at the Massacres as an element in the actualization of popular sovereignty. Speaking of the Massacres, a representative of the Commune stated matter-of-factly

¹⁰³ Soboul, *The Sans-Culotte*, pg. 96

that “having taken their revenge, the people also rendered justice.”¹⁰⁴ So the literal performance of violence can be seen as—rather bizarrely—as much a form of civic participation as voting or serving your nation under arms. This was a defensive action to stop invading armies, a point accepted by both state and people; the tribunal was formed to bring to justice the criminals of the monarchical regime *septembriseurs* invited foreign armies to burn Paris to the ground. Thus, by taking up the mantle of justice, the *septembriseurs* argued for their own civic self-worth. Deprived of real agency and any formal channel to communicate their aims, the people of Paris enacted the September Massacres to achieve national aims while convincingly communicating their own involvement in the affairs of state by taking up accepted symbols of state actions—violence.

Thus, we can understand to a degree a popular performative violence. However, it is vital also to consider the role of elites in shaping action and public perceptions. Popular opinion was driven by circulars and journals, as with Jean-Paul Marat’s *L’Ami du Peuple*, (the friend of the people), who spoke of the Swiss Guardsmen, writing “What folly to call for a trial. It has already taken place!”¹⁰⁵ First, we might say something as to what constituted ‘the state,’ for that body changed immeasurably during the course of the Revolution. Louis XVI gave way to the Feuillants, who in turn folded to the Gironde, and then the terminal Montagnard phase. Successive government incorporated to greater and greater extents those who were formerly ‘the people,’ and over time we can clearly see terrorists like the *septembriseurs* become “the state.” Men like Jacques Hébert, who rose from journalist, to insurrectionary, to influential Conventionnel with his own faction, is characteristic of the fluidity between popular violence and state violence.

This makes the tension between state and people in the battle for monopolizing violence all the more important. It was difficult, if not impossible, for many Conventionnels to disavow the popular street violence they themselves had so recently taken part in. The Montagnard, the party most attuned to “the

¹⁰⁴ Soboul, pg. 101

¹⁰⁵ Tackett, pg. 201

people,” eventually cracked down on popular violence. The figures of Jacques Roux and his Enragés, (literally “the enraged ones”) were tried and executed by the state in the late Terror precisely because they represented the popular sovereignty manifested in popular violence; Roux was an existential threat to the capacity for state violence, and as such he was liquidated. Thus, we can not only contextualize the Terror as an internal battle between elite and popular forms of performative violence, but the gradual appropriation of the style of popular violence into something manipulatable by the elites, as exemplified by the behavior of elites in regard to the September Massacres.

Elites, including both Danton and Robespierre, were quick to justify this popular action—conceding that there may have been excesses during the Massacres, the latter ignored “the criminal code,” asking if the storming of the Bastille was illegal. Hardly, for such an act “would be as illegal as liberty itself.” The Massacres were an unfortunate but necessary action, for Robespierre implored with passion, “Do you want a Revolution without a revolution?”¹⁰⁶ Georges Danton remembered the Massacres in a manner wholly similar to Robespierre; “I will say for my part, that had a tribunal been in existence at that time, the people, on whom the blame for those days had so often and cruelly been placed, would not have bloodied them... *let us be terrible instead of the people.*”¹⁰⁷ This can be seen as another shift in the dynamic of sovereignty. Danton’s explicit claim that the state should be responsible for violence asserts—or rather reasserts—the power of elites over justice and public executions. The outpouring of violence was regrettable only in that it circumvented the correct channels of power, i.e. the state, rather than that it was a slight to the concept of justice.

We are left with countless statements by political elites regarding the relationship between state, people, and violence. “Between the people and its enemies, there remains nothing in common but the blade,” intoned the “angel of death” Saint-Just during the trial of Louis XVI.¹⁰⁸ The great theorist and leader of the Terror, Maximilien Robespierre, stated that “The resource of a popular government during a

¹⁰⁶ Jordan, *Maximilien Robespierre: A Revolutionary Career*, pg. 125-126

¹⁰⁷ Edelstein, *The Terror of Natural Rights*, pg. 135

¹⁰⁸ Weber, *Terror and its Discontents*, pg. 69

revolution is simultaneously virtue and terror; virtue, without which Terror is disastrous; terror, without which virtue is impotent.”¹⁰⁹

There is a clear adoption of a Foucauldian sense of violence as a language of state performance—that effective states are terrible in their execution of justice. In a very grand sense, we can consider the Terror a form of monopolizing violence; the killings of the September Massacres clearly made the argument for popular sovereignty, while the fading monarchy and the rising Republic and its executive Committees were well placed to recapture the monopoly on violence. This argument is all the more convincing in light of the proximity between camps. Thus, the Terror as a whole can be conceptualized as the struggle for the common language of legitimate government—violence—by performative actions that asserted and reinforced certain power dynamics by both elites and the masses. Continuing on this point is, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

While performative violence is useful for analyzing otherwise impenetrable events like the bloody days of September 1792, it is necessary to point out the limitations of that behavior. Taking events purely in a performative lens, speaking broadly, takes for granted that certain ideological perspective exist without truly exploring the internal characteristics that underlie societal action. While a scholar could state that “so and so’s actions accorded to a cultural norm, and here’s a newspaper that proves that norm,” we do little to explore the rules of that norm itself, and the wider ideology into which it fits. To give one example, we cannot accept violence meant the same thing for everyone, and we are left with sundry accounts of credentialled Revolutionaries who were disgusted as much by formal executions and informal ones. The rules of violence stems from totalitarian ideologies, and we first need to understand the ideology to understand the norms around violence. None of this is to disprove performative theory, but merely to point out ways in which we can expand and strengthen our theoretical perspectives on violence. Likewise, we might also question who was targeted. There is an apparently ideological bent to who was

¹⁰⁹ Weber, pg. 80

seized and executed in the prisons of Paris. While we can conceptualize who was targeted according to cultural norms—that aristocrats and refractory priests were killed because popular publications linked them with the monarchy, and the monarchy with France’s enemies—it is just as easy to state that these enemies were ideologically determined. Thus the targeting of aristocrats like the princess de Lamballe, for instance, was guided by a deeper proto-ideological goal

Furthermore, we must complicate the performative approach by considering fear. Fear was pervasive in France during the entirety of the Revolution. Fear of deprivation—starvation, material loss, etc.—was joined with bodily harm. We could just as easily explain the events of September as being propelled by fear. There was a clear and present danger in the form of the armies of Prussia and Austria. The actions of the *septembriseurs* were fueled by a defensive desire to eliminate a royalist “fifth column.” Behavior guided by fear can be much more directly explained via the instrumental theory, which can make predictions and statements that answer hysterical actions that are beyond the scope of performative theory. Interpreting the September Massacres as the justified, if unfortunate response to an immediate military threat opens up the conversation to a far broader consideration of instrumental theory and the Reign of Terror, which forms the basis for the coming chapter.

III.

A Utilitarian Terror:

An Instrumental Explanation of Terror

The excommunicatory Priests give new trouble in the Maine and the Loire; La Vendée... Royalist Seigneurs, under this or the other pretext, assemble the simple people of these Cevennes Mountains; men not unused to revolt, and with heart for fighting, could their poor heads be got persuaded. The royalist seigneur harangues—“shall we not testify the, ye brave hearts of the Cevennes; march to the rescue? Holy

Religion; duty to God and the King?”

—Thomas Carlyle on the Vendée¹¹⁰

I.

Introduction

In the west of France sits a hilly and lightly forested region, Vendée, unremarkably bucolic in the manner of much of the European countryside. Almost despite his façade of peaceful anonymity, the fields and pastures of the Vendée were once bloodied battlefields, when the villages that today embody the rural idyll were then aflame in a fierce battle between Revolutionaries and Counterrevolutionaries. War in the Vendée lasted for three long years and witnessed mass brutality in a conflict that penetrated to the core of the Revolution. Governing the carnage, however, were discernable patterns and strategies surrounding the

¹¹⁰ Carlyle, Thomas, *The French Revolution: a History*, pg. 443

use of violence. The intent of this chapter is to explain an exemplary phase of the Reign of Terror through the theory of instrumental violence: the rebellion in the Vendée. From the broad array of scholarship that compose the instrumental approach, two basic categories will be examined—rational choice theories of violence from bottom-up and top-down perspectives. The Vendée represented the Reign of Terror in miniature: a “catholic and royal” counterrevolutionary army rose up to oppose the state and was put down through the extreme violence that characterized the Reign of Terror. Between 1789 and 1793, the Vendée grew into a center of counterrevolutionary resistance, which exploded into violent opposition in the spring of 1793 to be brutally repressed in the following year

In order to demonstrate the utility of the instrumental approach in understanding the Terror, events in the Vendée will be approached chronologically from bottom-up then top-down perspectives. The first half will include an examination of micro-level influences on the individuals of the Vendée—who they were, what they believed, and why they rebelled via the history of the region up to the outbreak of rebellion. This individualistic examination fits neatly into a bottom-up understanding of violence, as well as explaining the application of Terror that forms the second half of this chapter. The following section will then explain the state use of violence in the Vendée using top-down theories. Finally, I will conclude by restating the history and theory, while also examining the limitations of the instrumental approach in explaining the violence of the Vendée.

II.

Instrumental Theory of Violence

The instrumental theory of violence, drawing from the “political economy” or “rational choice” approaches in political science, assumes that political outcomes result from the often-independent actions of individuals who act for their own self-interests who by maximizing benefits while minimizing costs. Instrumental theory of violence work from these basic assumptions and can be divided into two broad

camps: bottom-up and top-down, the key difference being one of actors. Bottom-up instrumentalist explanations for violence focus on the peasant-cum-revolutionary subject, who maximize benefits—personal gain, social participation, for increased reputation, etc.—via participation in revolutionary violence. Top-down explanations hold the state as their subject, where the state seeks to maximize benefits, and engages in violence to those ends. Instrumental theory is particularly useful in demystifying violence. Much of the literature on revolutions, including Moore and Skocpol, conceptualize violence as somehow natural, an emotional or cathartic outburst. Rational choice explicitly challenges these assumptions, making it useful to problematize conventional revolutionary theory.

Among the most important scholars who popularized the instrumental approach in the study of violence was Samuel Popkin, who developed a theory of “political economy” utilized by individual peasants in his 1979 analysis of communist uprisings in Vietnam. The peasantry act according to a “political,” and thus rationally conceived, “economy.” According to Popkin’s bottom-up instrumental approach, peasants pursue short- and long-term investments of resources with an eye towards resource maximization, a constellation of behaviors grounded on political economy. Involvement in revolutionary violence results from a clear calculation of goals on the part of the peasant. Within this view, “the destruction of the peasant’s accustomed institutions... creates the tensions that mount toward peasant involvement in rebellion and revolution.”¹¹¹ Moreover, this implies the peasant as a rational actor is susceptible to the free-rider problem; as applied to violence, we can understand that no peasant will rise up to engage in—or to prevent—violence against their neighbors unless there is an apparent benefit that is concomitant facilitated by “political entrepreneurs” that help such a calculation.¹¹² Popkin’s individual-level work has been expanded and updated in the intervening half century since his book’s publication. Scholars like Scott Straus in *The Order of Genocide* have applied Popkin’s approach to regions as far apart as Hutu-Tutsi massacres in Rwanda to civilian informants for the Gestapo in former East Germany.

¹¹¹ Popkin, *The Rational Peasant*, pg. 7

¹¹² Popkin, pgs. 24-27

Also starting from the same set of instrumentalist assumptions about individual behavior, Stathis Kalyvas, in *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, explains variation in the violent behavior of government actors and rebel groups during civil war: “exactly if, how, when, where, and for whom violence ‘pays.’”¹¹³ The state uses violence to destroy resistance, often through killings, and employs two contrasting techniques: selective and indiscriminate violence. As Kalyvas puts it, “Violence... is most likely where the organizational demand for information meets its individual supply.”¹¹⁴ This mechanism of supply and demand results in several claims. The first claim is that violence reaches its peak when territory is strongly but not totally controlled by incumbent or insurgent forces, owing to the causal mechanism of the supply of information. Second, Kalyvas claims that selective violence is employed by the dominant forces when a territory is strongly controlled by incumbents or insurgents. while indiscriminate violence peaks when control is contested between groups.¹¹⁵ Selective violence is, however, a costly policy which requires high levels of local information. Indiscriminate violence is easier and often occurs as an act of desperation by a weaker side who lacks loyal agents in a region. Contrary to expectations, violence is least likely in areas of contestation, where neither side has a clear advantage. Selective violence in regions of contestation is infeasible, while indiscriminate violence would easily alienate the local population. Thus, Kalyvas predicts higher levels of violence in areas of complete to total control.

Benjamin Valentino, who specializes in the study of genocide, complements the aforementioned instrumental approaches by providing a top-down explanation of violence. Reacting to the commonplace understandings of the Rwandan Genocide, which often resorted to “ancient ethnic hatreds” to explain violence, Valentino, in his 2004 *Final Solutions*, states that “an understanding of mass killing must begin with the specific goals and strategies of high political and military leaders, not with broad social or

¹¹³ Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, pg. 388

¹¹⁴ Kalyvas, pg. 13

¹¹⁵ Kalyvas, pgs. 12-13. For application of Kalyvas’ framework, see Daniel Krmaric, *Varieties of Civil War and Mass Killings*; Alexander Downes in *Targeting of Civilians in Civil War*.

political factors.”¹¹⁶ To this end, Valentino has pioneered a theoretical understanding of violence from the perspective of the perpetrators, wherein mass-killings are strategic measures, intended to achieve set goals, and only after “cheaper” options are exhausted.¹¹⁷ While Valentino elaborates six grouping of mass killings along two axes, only two theories, “counterguerrilla” and “mass terror” categorized as “coercive violence” are salient to the Reign of Terror.¹¹⁸ This “coercive violence” is in essence war by others means applied to undermine or obliterate civil opposition; as Valentino puts it, “Scholars have increasingly come to recognize that large-scale violence against civilians during interstate and civil wars is neither arbitrary, unintended, nor distinct from the central logic of war itself.”¹¹⁹ Valentino’s theory, that mass-killings are means to certain instrumental ends, is supported by a wealth of recent literature, most notably Cederman and Vogt in *Dynamics and Logic of Civil War*, Schwartz and Straus’ *What Drives Violence Against Civilians in Civil War*.

It is necessary to restate that these theories deal not with revolutions per se, but rather civil war, genocide, mass purges, and other forms of violence against and from civilian populations. Moreover, it would be unfair to state that the specific instrumentalist theories outlined above are the only ones that exist in the broader rational choice tradition. The purpose of this chapter is merely to map these approaches to the Reign of Terror. By focusing on the Vendée, it is possible to reintegrate many of the elements common to instrumentalist scholars. The Vendée was a civil war which saw the mass uprising of peasants, along with several notable massacres initiated by both sides. As such, the Vendée is a perfect moment in the broader Terror to examine, and in the coming pages the basics of instrumentalist theory will be applied to this period.

¹¹⁶ Valentino, *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*, pg. 2

¹¹⁷ Valentino, pgs. 66-67

¹¹⁸ Valentino, pgs. 81-88

¹¹⁹ Valentino, *Why We Kill: The Political Science of Political Violence against Civilians*, pg. 94

III.

The Origins of Insurrection:

A Bottom-up Analysis

The Vendée, an area of some 830 square miles, comprising four new Departments and three Ancien Régime provinces, was long a region of discontent.¹²⁰ The Vendée was rural, largely agricultural, and relatively sparse in terms of population, defined in opposition to the surrounding plains and river valleys of the Loire. These regions—Charente-Inferieur, Loire-Inferiuer, or the Gironde—featured large centers of rapidly expanding trade, like Nantes and Bordeaux. The largest town of the Vendée was Cholet, with just 6,000 inhabitants, while the vast majority of the Vendée’s inhabitants worked the land.¹²¹ There was a more or less harmonious relationship between the land’s nobility. The Vendéan nobility tended to be poor relative their neighbors, far removed from the debaucheries of Versailles, and highly invested in the land, all qualities seconded by their neighbors of the Third Estate. These peasants of the Vendée were generously described as “narrowly circumscribed, strongly patriarchal, uninformed and suspicious of life outside the parish,” in one historian’s words.¹²² The most striking feature of the land was the role of religion, a factor drawn on by every account of the rebellion.

The religiosity of the Vendée was made clear to Paris by a report made in 1791: “religion, that is to say religion as the masses conceive it to be, had become their strongest, indeed their only moral discipline,” and “the imposition of the Oath of the clergy was the first occasion of unrest.”¹²³ This Oath, a reference to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy of 1790, mandated formal oaths of loyalty to the new constitutional monarchy on the part of all Catholic prelates. Those that took the oath became Constitutional priests, strongly opposed by more conservative priests, whose Holy Father had condemned

¹²⁰ Mayer, Arno, *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*, pg. 326, Tilly, Charles, *The Vendée*, pgs. 2-15

¹²¹ Paret, *Internal War and Pacification: The Vendée, 1789-1796*, pgs. 4-6

¹²² Paret, pg. 7

¹²³ Paret, pg. 7

the Oath. Those who refused the oath became “refractory” priests, who continued preaching sermons that very often decried the atheistic tendencies of the fledgling Revolution. Just a tenth of clergymen in the Vendée went along with the Oath, compared to roughly 55% in the rest of France, a signifier of events to come.¹²⁴ Replacements for non-juring refractory priests would be chosen by active citizens, increasingly non-noble men of means, a factor further distancing the new Constitutional clergy from the trusted men of old.¹²⁵ Recognizing the threat posed by counterrevolutionary priests, the Legislative Assembly ordered in August of 1792 the imprisonment, exile, or deportation of all non-juring, non-constitutional refractory priests.¹²⁶ Those refractory priests that refused began leading illegal masses in hiding.¹²⁷ The refractory priesthood acted as fomenters of rebellion, whose sermons became informal forums for agitation. The quiet country priesthood was quickly becoming a counterrevolutionary cadre. They “preached and practiced subversion” wherever they went, in organizing counterrevolution, in stymying the decrees of Paris, in preventing the collection of taxes.¹²⁸ Indeed, there exists a strong causal tie between level of non-juring priests and the intensity of counterrevolution.¹²⁹ Between the overthrow, trial, and execution of Louis XVI in 1792, the gradual seizure and nationalization of church lands, and the disastrous foreign wars France was now engaged in, these refractory priests had much to rail against.

It was this latter factor that played directly into the sparking of the rebellion itself. The *Levée en masse*, the conscription of 300,000 to oppose the encroaching armies of Austria and Prussia, was the final straw, and set off demonstrations which coalesced into rebellion. Prior to this point, volunteers had composed the Republic’s armies. Thus the most ardent Revolutionaries of the Vendée were self-selectively removed from the region, further decreasing support in the Vendée.¹³⁰ Those volunteers came almost exclusively from urban centers. Rural populations were less involved with the Revolution,

¹²⁴ Mayer, *The Furies*, pg. 328

¹²⁵ Tilly, *The Vendée*, pg. 233

¹²⁶ Paret, pg. 16

¹²⁷ Paret, pg. 14

¹²⁸ Tilly, pg. 256

¹²⁹ Tilly, pg. 241

¹³⁰ Tilly, pg. 18

particularly in the Vendée.¹³¹ This draining of revolutionary patriots compounded the problem for Republicans. Few remained who were loyal to Paris, making them easy targets for resentful peasants. The melodrama is captured well by one historian, who wrote that “the scattering of [Constitutional] priests—of apostates—were captives in their own parishes in which they came to incarnate the ungodly forces falling on the true church and religion from outside.” This was in stark contrast to the refractory clergy, who could rely on their parishioners for safety, blending seamlessly into the countryside.¹³²

That the countryside proved so solidly counterrevolutionary in loyalty can be explained by larger societal trends. In a sociological examination of the Vendée, Charles Tilly notes several patterns that informed and shaped the coming rebellion. Noting the high correlation between urban populations, a rising bourgeois class, and revolutionary support, Tilly argues that the Vendée represented a complex mix of intermingling factors that fed directly into the outcome of the rebellion.¹³³ Urbanization and early industrialization had just begun to shape the preindustrial subsistence farming that characterized most of the region; in the major ports of Nantes and Bordeaux, as well as in smaller interior locales like Cholet, Niort, and Fontenay, small rural industries had developed along with their own populations of laborers. The Vendée, however, lagged well behind both national and neighboring provinces in the extent of urbanization, with around 10% of its population residing in cities, against figures of 30% or higher for the plain regions that surrounded the Vendéan bocage.¹³⁴ Those urban populations of the Vendée, however small, engendered no small amount of distain from the peasantry. This becomes apparent in the enlistment patterns for national service. The more urbanized districts within the Vendée provided much higher enlistments for National Guard service during the Revolution, while the composition of those units favored the bourgeois residents of the few towns of the Vendée. In the district of Cholet, for instance, 28 of 38 total volunteers came from the district capital, while just three of those recruits worked on the

¹³¹ Tilly, pg. 279-293

¹³² Mayer, pg. 328

¹³³ Tilly, pg. 29-34

¹³⁴ Tilly, pg. 45

land.¹³⁵ In that same town of Cholet, the bourgeois, which made up less than a tenth of the population, regularly accrued between half and three quarters of all offices, further evidence of the alliance of men of means and the revolution.¹³⁶ The linkage between bourgeois-urban and the revolution also worked in reverse; it was almost exclusively those wealthy actors that served as state representatives during the dissolution of church lands. The Republic had nationalized all church lands, and introduced a currency, the Assignant, collateralized on the sale of that land. By far the largest group buying up those lands was the bourgeois, who profited handsomely, while the lower classes could do nothing but sit and watch.¹³⁷

The gulf between loyal revolutionaries and the ornery peasantry of the Vendée was only furthered by the *Levée en masse*. State functionaries—public officials, national guardsmen, constitutional priests—were exempt from conscription, and thus the draft lotteries chose from a pool of 18 to 40-year-old men who held nothing but ire for the government that was conscripting them.¹³⁸ The arrest of those determined to resist the draft sparked the first inklings of the rebellion on the 10th and 11th of March 1793. By this time, there existed a well-connected network of refractory priests that had been driven underground for nearly a year, communicating with their flocks via “night sermons” away from the grasp of the hated state.¹³⁹ Primed by these ideological cadres, the peasants of the Vendée responded to the draft calls with coordinated violence, as in Machecoul.

The Massacre at Machecoul epitomizes the bottom-up elements of violence in the Vendée. On the 11th of March 1793, a crowd chanting anti-draft slogans were fired upon by National Guardsmen, who were subsequently overwhelmed by the crowd. 26 Guardsmen were murdered, while the townsfolk burned the conscription office formerly guarded by the slain soldiers.¹⁴⁰ Building on their success, the crowd over the next two days rounded up Revolutionary elements, including the Constitutional priest of

¹³⁵ Tilly, pg. 190

¹³⁶ Tilly, pg. 270, table pg. 271

¹³⁷ Tilly, pg. 230-231

¹³⁸ Mayer, pg. 329

¹³⁹ Paret, pg. 14

¹⁴⁰ Andress, pg. 191

Machecoul, along with 18 other town notables, all of whom were summarily executed.¹⁴¹ This was not random slaughter, but a coordinated attack on identifiably hostile members of the village who threatened their practical and ideological concerns. The events at Machecoul, moreover, were repeated in the coming days across the Vendée: at Cholet on the 14th, Chantonay on the 19th, as well as in smaller hamlets like Chanzeaux and La Romagne.¹⁴² Having addressed the major components that created the Vendée, we can accurately fit them into our theories on violence.

Violence at Machecoul can be explained in the instrumental theory using Samuel Popkin's scholarship. Four factors inform the use of violence. The first is a sense of obligation to their fellow villagers, which motivates the first movers. Secondly, violence pays in a pure cost-benefit analysis for those who follow. Thirdly, because selective incentives will be withheld otherwise, and finally because the action of resistance becomes less costly as more and more revolt.¹⁴³ Each of the four factors was present in the villager's revolt at Machecoul. They felt a strong ethical opposition to the entire project of the Revolution, while hatred of that movement could be condensed into the self-serving actions of the few Republican officials—who were themselves exempt from the draft they imposed. This, in turn, fed into the second explanation. By destroying the conscription office and killing or turning out those who could draft them, the villagers prevented their being conscripted, a clear practical boon. Thirdly, the refractory priests that informed peasant actions decreed affiliation with the Republican government as damnable—in other words, if the villagers failed to participate, they wouldn't be saved by God.¹⁴⁴ Finally, it would become clear that participation in the massacre mutually reinforced further activities in the Vendée. As has been stated, resistance quickly grew from beyond Machecoul to encompass all of the Vendée, even

¹⁴¹ Andress, pg. 194, Mayer, pg. 330, Tilly, pg. 312

¹⁴² Mayer, pg. 331, Tilly, pg. 313

¹⁴³ Popkin, pg. 254-56. For this fourth prediction, see also Kuran, Timur. "Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989." *World Politics*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1991, pp. 7–48

¹⁴⁴ Paret, pg. 15

beyond it. Cholet fell to some 10,000 rebels, just three days after Machecoul was convulsed by violence.¹⁴⁵

Popkin also identified the fundamental role of “political entrepreneurs” to peasant movements. To him, “the importance of the leader as a political entrepreneur—someone willing to invest his own time and resources to coordinate the inputs of others in order to produce collective action or collective goods—cannot be underestimated.”¹⁴⁶ The refractory clergy strongly resembles Popkin’s “entrepreneurs”; they possessed local credibility without parallel, in addition to operating as local leaders who had already been operating covertly against the state for nearly a year. They constructed the justifications for violence while manifesting selective incentives that made such actions highly desirable. “Clergymen,” one historian notes, “summoned the faithful to rebel at the same time that they were swept along by them... they sacralized and justified the resort to violence in defense of religion and monarchy, and they became the conscious and the chaplains of the “Catholic and Royal Army.””¹⁴⁷

Stathis Kalyvas’ considerations on civil strife can be integrated to better explain the role of explicit violence in the Vendée. The brewing civil war in the region, where anti-government sentiments had been coalescing into outright counterrevolution since the Revolution began, set off a process of brutalization common to civil strife. Among other effects, Kalyvas notes that civil war breaks down the psychosocial barriers that maintain norms of order, empowers those who benefit from war and violence, in addition to making those actors more prominent and powerful. Finally, civil conflict drastically lowers the cost of violent action.¹⁴⁸ Each of those elements is apparent in the Vendée. The common fabric of life in the Vendée—patriarchal, parochial, agricultural—was under threat from both the rising tide of urbanization beginning to reshape centers like Cholet as well as the more immediate Revolution. The laws of the Revolution had caused significant disruption in the Vendée, with local leaders, the refractory clergy

¹⁴⁵ Mayer, pg. 330

¹⁴⁶ Popkin, pg. 259

¹⁴⁷ Mayer, pg. 331

¹⁴⁸ Kalyvas, pgs. 56-58

and nobles, being physically outlawed or deported, all while a new class of enterprising bourgeois were making serious gains from the collapse of the traditional hierarchy, seizing government offices and profiting off the nationalization of church lands. To Kalyvas, “civil war destroys social hierarchies that effectively act as social control,” leading directly to violent outcomes.¹⁴⁹ The collapse of the Vendéan hierarchy had the effect of priming Machecoul, like other villages in the Vendée, for violence: the norms that kept order were falling apart, while those who had kept order in previous decades—the clergy—now preached violent opposition. These factors fed together to vastly lower the cost of violence, stoked by active ideologues intimately tied with their parishioners. Thus, massacre was not an outpouring of emotion on the part of irrational peasants, but a coordinated assault on broad social changes wrought by the Republic. Via the killing of identified representatives of the Republic, the Vendéan peasantry could directly and effectively challenge the Revolution.

The pivotal role of elites with strong local legitimacy is a theme also present in Scott Straus’ research into the Rwandan Genocide. In his interviews with the *genocidaires* of Rwanda, Straus noted two common justifications for violence salient to this case: the logic of war and collective identity.¹⁵⁰ To the *genocidaires*, ethnic cleansing was part of a war, a war in which there were no bystanders, no civilians—only enemies and friends, where it was either kill or be killed. Straus distilled this behavior, writing that “men killed because they thought they were in combat... [their] task was: attack first.”¹⁵¹ Collective identity, meaning the clear differentiation of friend from foe, is another shared theme. Refractory priests needed to do little work to convince the residents of the Vendée that the staunchly Republican, pro-revolutionary bourgeois minority stood against their Catholic and monarchist beliefs. In Straus’ words, “narratives... substitute[ed] for the individual,” meaning that grander stories about revolution and counterrevolution supplant ties between individual villagers, making violence a much more likely outcome.

¹⁴⁹ Kalyvas, pg. 57

¹⁵⁰ Straus, Scott, *The Order of Genocide*, pgs. 172-174

¹⁵¹ Straus, pg. 172

What occurred at Machecoul was hardly an irrational outpouring, but the genuine belief that war was needed between two monolithic and antagonistic foes. The ruination, perceived or actual, wrought by the Revolution came to a head with the conscription of the Vendéans into armies they would gladly fight against. The creation of clear Republican and counterrevolutionary camps, feeding off regional and local differences, as well as long-standing class distinction, allowed the easy identification of the Vendée's foes. This aggregation of individual grievances, reinforced and propagated by 'entrepreneurial' refractory priests, finally flamed into open resistance—the rebellion of the Vendée.

IV.

Suppressing the Vendée:

A Top-down Perspective

The Massacre of Machecoul, on the 11th of March 1793, inaugurated rebellion in the Vendée. The insurgents continued this pattern as they coalesced into a single force, given the title the “Catholic and Royal Army,” not yet under any central command. Soon, the rest of the Vendée would be convulsed by popular rebellions as the local inhabitants rose up against agents of the Revolution.¹⁵² While a consideration of local-level tensions helps illustrate a bottom-up understanding of violence, the suppression of that rebellion illuminates within an instrumental approach the logic of violence from the perspective of the state. There were two distinct phases of the Vendée: a bungled military response followed by the ruthless application of terror to the Vendée. Violence rose from the outbreak of the rebellion in spring 1793, reaching a crescendo in the dead of winter that same year as the region was burned to the ground and its inhabitants departed or slaughtered. The change in policy, as well as the waxing and waning of violence, corresponds with explicit state policy as the government reacted to events

¹⁵² Mayer, pg. 330

in the Vendée. In order to map this evolution, and to understand the changing logic of violence, we must understand the general course of events.

France in 1793 was governed by the National Convention. To the Convention, this rebellion could not have come at a worse time, with Prussian and Austrian armies nearing Paris. The rebellion, conceived explicitly as it was as monarchist and staunchly Catholic, was nothing less than an existential threat to the state. The Convention considered the rebellion from its very inception as a foreign plot, manifesting itself via counterrevolutionary elements long despised by the state.¹⁵³ Thus, the Vendée would be viewed as a national crisis that demanded serious exertion. Second, the state labored with scant information. The National Convention in Paris was a unicameral body. The Convention's decrees required only a standing majority vote and became immediate laws of the land. Paris, however, was far from the Vendée. Patterns of control in civil war can be predicted by prewar preferences and existing military resources, with the latter being far more influential.¹⁵⁴ The state had drained soldiers from the region for military campaigns elsewhere, leaving as few as 800 soldiers guarding coastal installations against a feared English invasion, while the previous section demonstrates the strong counterrevolutionary sentiments that dominated the Vendée, especially inland.¹⁵⁵ This lack of control owed much to France's foreign wars, as well as limiting the flow of information to Paris. As such, these factors combined to allow prewar sentiments to come to the fore in open rebellion.

The initial response of the state was minimal. Thus far, the Vendée, a not particularly important region, had no impact on Paris, and only the loss of communications from Nantes caused any consternation. Responding to this, the state applied only minimal forces to avoid an expensive investment in the region at a time of intense foreign wars. Local commanders acted to immediately suppress the rebellion by sending their existing forces into the Vendée, with disastrous consequences. A Republican column of 2,300 men under Louis Henri François de Marcé was routed by the rebels with the loss of

¹⁵³ Palmer, *Twelve Who Ruled*, pg. 210

¹⁵⁴ Kalyvas, pg. 112

¹⁵⁵ Paret, pgs. 26-27

nearly all soldiers at Chantonnay.¹⁵⁶ The Convention responded to this defeat by decree. The Law of March 19th was quickly promulgated, and it allowed summary execution for any and all armed rebels within a day of capture. Maximilien Robespierre, ascendant star of the Revolution, intoned that at issue in the Vendée was “not simply military blunder[s]... but the conduct of the struggle against tyranny, and hence the very why and wherefore of the Revolution.”¹⁵⁷ The recognition that the Vendée posed a serious threat led to the harsh policies of March. However, at this stage the Law of March was more rhetorical than purposive—the state could offer little more substantive than words. A look at the statistics of the Terror reveal this point quite clearly. Executions rose from less than a hundred in March to 210 in April, with 175 concentrated in the West, where the Vendée is located. Yet that figure drops down to pre-April figures for the rest of the Summer, rising again only in October and November of 1793.¹⁵⁸ This corresponds to the varying levels of force employed to suppress the rebellion.

In April 1793, 20,000 men in three columns invaded the Vendée, though their lack of central organization led to their eventual defeat in detail by highly motivated rebels with extensive knowledge of their lands.¹⁵⁹ The state responded in June of 1793 by sending 30,000 troops to occupy the Vendée, coinciding with the highpoint of rebel fortunes with the capture of Samur. Samur, which lay just beyond the ruddy bocage, was a major coup for the Vendéans, leading to the capture of cannons and munitions sufficient for their next venture: the siege of Nantes. That city was encircled by 45,000 Vendéans, against a defense of only around 12,000.¹⁶⁰ Nantes, however, did not yield to the rebels, who began a retreat at the end of June after the death of their leader, the former wagoner Jacques Cathelineau. A period of attrition then ensued, during which neither side gained the initiative. The state had bargained on the weakness and disorganization of the rebels and had miscalculated. In the half-year that had gone by, Paris was prepared to send only the militiamen of the National Guard who failed to end the rebellion. More

¹⁵⁶ Paret, pgs. 25-26

¹⁵⁷ Mayer, pg. 334

¹⁵⁸ Greer, pg. 112, table pg. 113

¹⁵⁹ Paret, pg.26

¹⁶⁰ Paret, pg.41

force, and more violence, would be necessary to see the rebellion put down, beginning the next phase of the rebellion: the systematic application of the Terror.

In August 1793, Paris sent 12,000 regulars of Armée de Mayence along with General Jean Antoine Rossignol, who echoed the new severity that the state took in its action. To Rossignol, the Vendée was “a war of brigands, and we must all be brigands ourselves; at this time we must forget all military rules; we must fall in mass on these villains.”¹⁶¹ This brutal sentiment was formalized in the Decree of August 1st. Practical military concerns—the formation of engineer detachments and light infantry brigades, for instance—were paired in Articles IV and V with new counterinsurgency practices. Provisions of combustible materials, to be used in the physical destruction of the bocage, were also furnished in Article VI and VII, while crops and livestock of the rebels were to be seized or burned. The remaining Articles mandated the expulsion of all relatives of active rebels and the immediate confiscation of their properties.¹⁶²

These policies were to be enforced by Jean-Baptiste Carrier, a member of the Convention, who established himself in the city of Nantes.¹⁶³ From there, he directed a scorched earth policy executed by a new fiercer General, Louis Marie Turreau. Turreau, who rose through the ranks of the National Guard, promulgated the *colonnes infernales*, (hell columns) so named for their brutal methods. Militarily, the situation quickly improved. At Cholet in mid-October 1793, the Vendéans were defeated, after which began their flight to capture a port to join with an émigré force of exiled French nobles, a pursuit which ended in Battle of Savenay at the close of 1793. While this ended large-scale military operations, small-scale resistance in the Vendée persisted, with smaller rebellions in 1813, 1814, and 1815.¹⁶⁴ Genuine pacification would require occupation of the Vendée proper, the rough and foreboding environs of bocage and village—and the use of profound violence to open that realm.

¹⁶¹ Paret, pg. 46

¹⁶² Paret, pgs. 46-47

¹⁶³ Mayer, pgs. 350-351

¹⁶⁴ Mayer, pg. 350

In December 1793, Turreau set forth with his *colonnes infernales* to isolate rebel holdouts, deport any remaining inhabitants, confiscate all foodstuffs, and disarm all civilians in the Departments surrounding the zone of insurrection.¹⁶⁵ The *colonnes infernales* marched towards the coast in a “stroll through the Vendée... setting fire to everything” in Turreau’s words.¹⁶⁶ The encounter at Les Echaubrognes, a hamlet three miles from the former Vendéan capital of Cholet, is typical; the town, General Boucret reported to Turreau, “no longer exists, not a single house remains... Nothing has escaped the vengeance of the nation; at the moment of writing I am having fourteen women shot who were denounced to me... In a tree trunk two soldiers found a non-juring priest. I had him shot.”¹⁶⁷ Les Echaubrognes shared its fate with many similar villages, like Montbert, which, in early February 1794 was captured and 72 shot, half of whom were women. A second *colonnes* passed through shortly thereafter, killing another 20.¹⁶⁸ This was a winter of destruction. Two Conventionnels reported to Paris that “we are convinced that the Vendéan war will be finished only when there will no longer be a single inhabitant in this miserable land.”¹⁶⁹

We can explain Terror in the Vendée through instrumental theory. As put by Kalyvas, the application of indiscriminate violence is purposeful, for two main reasons. Kalyvas first differentiates between selective and indiscriminate violence; the former occurs when guilty parties can be found, the latter when guilt is assumed without any real evidence, as with the shooting of fourteen women in Les Echaubrognes. Indiscriminate violence occurs when “selection criteria are rough” or “precise information is unavailable.”¹⁷⁰ The Vendée exemplifies this scarcity: state penetration—never very deep—was completely cut off by insurgent massacres and purges. Moreover, loyal citizens and noncombatants had already been forcibly removed from the region. The orders for these deportations held that “none but rebels will remain in the insurgent territory, who then can be destroyed more easily, without confusing

¹⁶⁵ Paret, pg. 55

¹⁶⁶ Mayer, pg. 353

¹⁶⁷ Paret, pgs. 55-56

¹⁶⁸ Address, pg. 249

¹⁶⁹ Address, pg. 250

¹⁷⁰ Kalyvas, pg.148

them with innocent citizens.”¹⁷¹ Thus, the Vendée had become a free fire zone, where simple existence implied rebel affiliation and justified immediate execution. Yet there was another element present in Terror: deterrence. In this view, indiscriminate violence would “shape civilian behavior indirectly through association... if the ‘guilty’ cannot be identified and arrested, then violence ought to target innocent people that are *somehow* associated with them.”¹⁷² Working along similar lines, Schwartz and Straus found the same logic in the Guatemalan civil war; local state forces viewed civilian populations as “completely loyal to the insurgency... folded into the category of ‘internal enemy,’” and thus liable to be targeted, as much to deter future rebel converts as to destroy rebel soldiers.¹⁷³ The actions of the *colonnes* in towns like Montbert served to destroy *the* willingness to rebel, as much as to kill real rebels.

Likewise, the trajectory of killings fits Kalyvas’ model: as contested zones gradually moved to state-controlled as Turreau’s men marched into the Vendée, violence should increase as collaboration and denunciations become rewarding goals.¹⁷⁴ That prediction holds true; around 80% (2,894 of 3,548) of executions carried out in the region of the Vendée occurred in the months of December and January 1793-94, perfectly lining up with the simultaneous intervention of Turreau’s hell columns.¹⁷⁵ As Turreau’s soldiers came to control towns like Cholet, larger and larger numbers of “rebels” were turned out to detention centers like the outlying town of Nantes—control facilitated violence. Recent scholarship on civil war seems to confirm this terroristic strategy. Jean-Baptiste Carrier in Nantes, and his General Turreau in the field, were “draining the sea,” a counterinsurgency strategy with as much history as efficacy, dating back to Antiquity.¹⁷⁶ Daniel Krmaric qualifies the logic of mass killings in civil war by introducing two counter variables that make mass killings untenable: the desire to protect the civilian population and the nature of counterinsurgency warfare.¹⁷⁷ To scholars like Krmaric, counterinsurgency

¹⁷¹ Paret, pg. 57

¹⁷² Kalyvas, pg. 150

¹⁷³ Schwartz and Straus, *What Drives Violence Against Civilians in Civil War?*, pg. 230

¹⁷⁴ Kalyvas, pgs. 118-124

¹⁷⁵ Greer, pg. 66

¹⁷⁶ Krmaric, *Varieties of Civil War and Mass Killing*, pg. 20

¹⁷⁷ Krmaric, pgs. 21-23

conflicts involve a level of civilian involvement and violence which is uncommon to conventional warfare. Whereas the traditional locus of conflict is where two armies meet, in counterinsurgency warfare, the battlefield is the village, the civilian nucleus itself. Neither concern weighed heavily on the French Republic's treatment of the Vendée. The state had already removed noncombatants, meaning civilian casualties were not an object of concern, while the generals in command were all conventionally trained, both reasons for pursuing a strategy of "draining the sea."¹⁷⁸ The results of that strategy should be clear enough: the people of the Vendée were collectively punished for their rebellion both to deter future rebellion on their part as to cow the rest of France into compliance.

Other scholars of violence support Kalyvas' contributions. Benjamin Valentino identifies three key tactics of counterinsurgency operations connected to mass killings, each of which is present in the Vendée.¹⁷⁹ The first is "counterterror." The public and explicitly gruesome executions of rebels or rebel sympathizers deters future participation or collaboration. In this sense, we can recontextualize the brutal murder of the townswomen in Montbert as an effective means of deterring future collaboration. Second, the forced resettlement of populations is also tied with mass-death. Again, the tactics of Turreau in forcibly removing rebel families comes to mind, tied with the utter chaos produced by these mass removals. Nantes, Carrier's base of operations, had swelled with at least 20,000 suspected rebels, all of whom were liable to summary execution; prisons flooded, disease ran rampant, while provisioning the townspeople—much less the glut of rebels—became a major concern. With little left in his arsenal, Carrier tersely told Paris that he "had decided to resort to the firing squad as a useful and expedient method" of solving the overcrowding of Nantes.¹⁸⁰ The third tactic is scorched-earth warfare.¹⁸¹ With little further explanation, we can look back to see the decree of August 1st that mandated physical destruction in the bocage in addition to its material wasting—the bureaucrats attached to the *colonnes*

¹⁷⁸ Mayer, pgs. 347-349, Paret pgs. 32-35

¹⁷⁹ Valentino, *Final Solutions*, pgs. 81-86

¹⁸⁰ Mayer, pgs. 341-343, quote on pg. 343

¹⁸¹ Valentino, pgs. 200-205

reported with chilling clarity that 46,694 farm animals, 153,000 bales of hay, and 111,000 pounds of farm equipment had been confiscated and removed from the region.¹⁸² This tactic of denial warfare is well attested in literature on violence, with various authors noting the correlation between civil war, denial warfare, and the mass murder of civilians.¹⁸³

Additionally, Terror in the Vendée coincided with the Federalist revolts, led by disaffected Conventionnels, and thus the harsh punishment of the Vendée could serve as an example to future and current insurrections throughout France. We might also consider the fact that indiscriminate violence is “cheap.” Lacking effective means of control over an impenetrable countryside, locked in a parochial mindset, while the political masters in Paris demanded immediate action, indiscriminate violence proffered a quick, if dirty, solution for the Republican forces. Jean-Baptiste Carrier, Conventionnel on mission to the Vendée, and overseeing Turreau’s *colonnes infernales*, was “baffled and troubled by the scope, complexity, and urgency of the problems in his realm, [and] he was inclined to use violence to control events that had spun out of control.”¹⁸⁴ This correspondence demonstrates well the logic found within Alexander Downes’ research in *Targeting Civilians in Civil War*. Theorizing on civilian casualties, Downes claims that “desperation”—that is the perception of peril and existential threat—makes civilian victimization more acceptable. Downes provides the example of Imperial Germany’s unrestricted submarine campaign, a strategy of denial and explicit targeting of civilians that bears a resemblance to the Vendée and the systematic seizure of all foodstuffs from the region.¹⁸⁵ In both cases, the threat of defeat, both proximate and catastrophic, justified the targeting of civilians.

Cumulatively, these factors—the turn to indiscriminate violence, the increase of violence with control, the logic of “draining the sea,” denial warfare, and deterrence—develop by rational choice scholars help explain just why violence developed as it did. Given the threat inherent in a monarchical

¹⁸² Paret, pg. 56

¹⁸³ Downes, pg. 30-31, Krcmaric, pg. 19-20, Straus, pgs. 162-165, see also Cederman and Vogt, *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War*

¹⁸⁴ Mayer, pg. 345

¹⁸⁵ Downes, *Targeting Civilians in Civil War*, pg. 31

counterrevolutionary army in the rear of France's losing war in the east, the Vendée represented a serious threat to the state. The initial response was to send in piecemeal National Guard militiamen, who were quickly overcome by the trained and motivated rebels. Beginning in the last third of 1793, the state began to turn to terror to achieve its ends; under the political chief, Jean-Baptiste Carrier, and his military counterpart, Louis Marie Turreau, a systematic targeting of civilians, as part of a larger strategy of counterinsurgency, was initiated. The result was the mass application of terror to the Vendée. That strategy, while utterly inhumane, was executed according to a logical calculation, and pursued as a means to the end of state security. As such, the Terror in the Vendée can be explain by instrumental theory.

V.

Theoretical Conclusions

The Vendée was a region convulsed by profound violence, torn apart by the brutality of civil war and the extremism of the Reign of Terror. The intensity of that violence can be understood as the interplay of rational actors utilizing violence as a tool. This applies to the individual as well as to the state, with both parties engaging in instrumental violence according to decipherable objectives. A consideration of the causes underlying the rebellion well describes the style of violence for individual actors. The longstanding isolation of the region, combined with relative poverty and intense religiosity, fed into larger sociological trends. Those trends had produced a rising bourgeois, at once more mobile, more powerful, and more revolutionary than any other class in the Vendée. The creation of distinct Republican and counterrevolutionary camps was fed by the refractory clergymen of the Vendée, who acted as "political entrepreneurs" by coordinating, inspiring, and provoking rebellion. The outcome of violence also fits neatly into instrumental theory's predictions. At Machecoul, a group of villagers, in an effort to avoid being drafted to fight for a nation they despised, killed conscription officers, burned their facilities, and killed Republicans and the Constitutional priest of the town. This mob violence had identifiable

objectives which were furthered by the application of violence, matching instrumental predictions. That style of violence, moreover, mapped onto the other villages of the Vendée, in which an army, the “catholic and royal,” formed to carry on the violent war started at Machecoul.

Paris, reacting to the growing crisis in the Vendée, and dealing with simultaneous foreign invasion, initially applied only minimal force and engaged in much rhetoric. The failure of that strategy led to the formation of Terror, carried out as a set policy and executed by direct government representatives like Carrier. Civilians were explicitly targeted as counterrevolutionary elements, their houses burned, their crops seized, and their families deported, imprisoned, or summarily shot. This represented instrumental terror, i.e. violence for the purpose of control—to coerce collaboration by indiscriminate killing. Carrier’s prisons swelled as the victims of terror rolled in during the winter of 1793, while Turreau gleefully reported back to Paris of his shooting of the men and women of the Vendée. His goal was reprisal and deterrence, where the failure to overcome the rebel militarily could be remedied by “draining the sea” that they inhabited. This violence occurred against a backdrop of internal political strife—the fall of the Girondins and the “Indulgent”-“Ultra” split—and the simultaneous incursion of France’s belligerent neighbors; in the Vendée, indiscriminate violence was a cheap and easy solution, enacted by politically-motivated men, to end a problem which had to be solved with thrift and expedience.

Violence in the Vendée was characterized by more than purely instrumental factors, however, and certain performative elements complicate a straight instrumental reading. From the very start of the rebellion at Machecoul, local actors united around communal acts of violence against symbolic enemies. In addition to seizing tools and livestock, direct violence against civilians in the Vendée was a way to symbolically “hit back” against the counterrevolution. The killing of Machecoul’s Constitutional priest was inspired by the desire to assert a religious heterodoxy. His execution was a spectacle, a way to perform the traditionalist reactionary opinions of the villagers. Moreover, the soldiers of the “catholic and royal army” joined for highly performative reasons. Participation in the counterrevolutionary army was a direct way to participate in the act of supporting the king and the church. The zeal with which Republican

officers reported the shooting of women and priests speaks to a desire to appear ultra-revolutionary—violence was a way to demonstrate one’s revolutionary credentials, and the Vendée, a backwards and counterrevolutionary region, was in need of a “lesson.” Murders like that at Vermenton were deliberately symbolic, achieving nothing more than the theatrics of Revolutionary Terror. Killing was an assertion of the power of the Revolution, a way for an individual National Guard soldier to feel as though he were contributing to victory.

A nuanced understanding of violence in the Vendée can also integrate certain ideological elements of violence. Why the peasants of the Vendée Department, and not those of Mayenne or the Orne, rebelled against the Paris government a question deeper than the somewhat reductionist equation of “religion plus conscription,” a problem which scholars of the Vendée like Charles Tilly recognized, but could little explain.¹⁸⁶ The use of “Terror” was not practical, nor was it the only strategy that could have been employed. Generals on the ground recommended radically different counterinsurgency strategies, most notably Jean-Baptiste Kléber.¹⁸⁷ These tactics were shunned for ideological reasons. The choice of Terror, over these sounder and arguably more effective strategies, as well as its continuation after the rebels had been largely defeated owes in part to the profound role of the logic of performative violence, discussed in the preceding chapter, as well as the ideological explanation of violence discussed in the coming chapter.

¹⁸⁶ Tilly, pg. 2-13

¹⁸⁷ Mayer, pg. 352

IV.

The Terror of Ideas:

An Ideological Explanation of Violence

There was a public-house in the Rue du Paon which was called a café... It was there that often, almost secretly, met certain men, so powerful and so constantly watched that they hesitated to peak with one another in public... On the 28th of June, 1793, three men were seated about a table in this back chamber. The first of these as pale, young, grave, with thin lips and a cold glance. He had a nervous movement in his cheek, which must have made it difficult for him to smile... The first of these men was named Robespierre; the second, Danton; the third, Marat. They were alone in the room. Before Danton was set a glass and dusty wine-bottle... before Marat a cup of coffee, before Robespierre only papers.¹⁸⁸

I.

Introduction

With these lines, Victor Hugo, famed author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, portrays the three men at the heart of the French state during the height of the Terror, 1793, and thus the title, *Ninety-Three*. At the heart of the Reign of Terror was the man with no time for libations, contrasted with the epicurean Georges Danton and the hardworking fanatic Jean-Paul Marat, sipping on his blackened coffee—for Robespierre, only the grim business of state. The reader will forgive this brief

¹⁸⁸ Hugo, Victor. *Ninety-Three*, pg. 113-114

literary diversion; the Reign of Terror was a melodrama, and in light of the intense, and very often personal violence at the heart of these events, the gentler words of the novelist are helpful. Robespierre was a man at the heart of the Terror, whose thoughts and deeds proved fundamental in shaping mass ideological violence. An introduction to the figure of Robespierre is helpful in piecing together the fundamental role of ideas and ideology in the French Revolution.

The ideological theory of violence describes mass violence as the inevitable policy of the regime in power, rather than a general policy for security or as the result of mob action. By locating particular elements of the Revolutionary ideology—such as radical egalitarianism—we can understand the preponderance of violence in the Terror. In this chapter, I make two substantive predictions from the theoretical perspective of ideological violence: first, that violence should target groups for their inherent character rather than their actual or potential threat to the state. In other words, we should see violence against groups or similar populations rather than distinct individuals. Second, violence should increase as the state becomes more radical, more totalitarian, and grows closer to the ambition of reforming reality around ideological tenets.

In the previous chapters, violence has been explored through a performative perspective, where bloodshed is the result of a larger political drama involving cultural scripts and societal assertions. Additionally, violence has been examined using the instrumental approach, which understands violence as a tool for furthering state or individual goals. This third theoretical approach on ideological violence draws very heavily on scholarship devoted to ideology from two main sources. The first is the basis provided by Hannah Arendt, particularly her scholarship on the regimes of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Her central thesis was that revolutions, by nature of their being transformative social movements, tend towards radicalization that can become totalitarian. That totalitarianism leads inexorably to violence against the enemies of the state generated by ideology. The second component consists of the ideology preached and practiced by the Revolutionaries themselves, as well as a basic understanding of their source material, pointedly the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in particular his *Social Contract*. The notion of a

“general will” was among Rousseau’s most important theoretical contributions. The “general will” provided the ideational framework on which the Jacobin government of 1793-1794 was built, and served as a total and uncompromisable *raison d’être* of the state which justified new heights of mass guillotining in Paris and the remainder of France. Having walked through these two bases of scholarship, we can begin with an examination of the historical evidencing for my predictions on the shape and patterns of violence. Then, a deeper case study, the bloody suppression of Lyon, will be used to demonstrate the capacity of the ideological theory to explain revolutionary violence. What then follows will be a conclusion and a consideration of competing theories.

II.

Violent Ideas

Writing in the early 1960s, Arendt’s *On Revolution* tackles what she views as regressive and mechanistic Marxist dogma on revolutions. The dominant view of revolutions conflated political and economic freedoms, promoting the notion that liberty and other societal freedoms are subsumed by material goods. Under the Marxist formulation then, material wealth is equated to civil liberties. In Arendt’s view, political change, at its broadest level the ultimate goal of a revolution, is justified by a central concept of political freedom. However, given that political freedom is more a philosophical term rather than a concrete set of policies, the articulation of that core freedom often develops a violent inertia of its own. Political freedom is used to justify not simply the overthrow of the former state, but the total transformation of society, wherein nothing is justified or justifiable but that which is free. In her view, the only truly successful revolution was the American—not because it encompassed more societal upheaval, but because it struck the perfect balance between radicalizing revolutionary forces and a more conservative counteracting provincial influence. This contrasts profoundly with the French Revolutionary

experience, where the central radicalizing force monopolized influence on the Revolution, creating what Arendt dubbed an “irresistible movement,” which developed an egalitarian economic logic of its own.¹⁸⁹

Arendt agrees with the assessment that the core tenet of mass poverty engendered a battle for necessities—food chief among them—which distracted from, then completely displaced, pretensions of constitutional freedom. What resulted was, in her words, the “abdication of freedom before the dictates of necessity.”¹⁹⁰ Moreover, that necessity is easily translated into violence—against the aristocrats, then the rich, and finally, the “enemies of the state.” Tellingly, it was the fall and subsequent purge of the constitutionally-minded Gironde in 1793 and the shift to Jacobin hegemony that legitimized the relief of popular suffering as the singular mission of the state, and the solving of the “social question” as the state’s *raison d’être*.¹⁹¹ This truthful scenario is summarized succinctly by Arendt when she writes:

The direction of the French Revolution was deflected almost from its beginning from this course of foundation through the immediacy of suffering; it was determined by the exigencies of liberation not from tyranny but from necessity, and it was actuated by the limitless immensity of both the people’s misery and the pity this misery inspired. The lawlessness of the “all is permitted” sprang here still from the sentiments of the heart whose very boundlessness helped in the unleashing of a stream of boundless violence.¹⁹²

At the core of this ideology of boundless violence was Maximilien Robespierre, so eloquently reimagined by Hugo, the sometime ‘dictator’ of the French state who held unrivalled personal influence. Arendt quotes that central figure, writing “the mighty current of the revolution, in the words of Robespierre, was constantly accelerated by “crimes of tyranny,” on one side, by the “progress of liberty,” on the other, which inevitably provoked each other.”¹⁹³ Arendt makes a meaningful point when she wrote

¹⁸⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 40-52

¹⁹⁰ Arendt, pg. 55

¹⁹¹ Arendt, pg. 70

¹⁹² Arendt, pg. 87

¹⁹³ Arendt, pg. 42

that the foundational period of revolutions—the early proclaiming of freedoms, like the Declaration of Independence or the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen—are really of secondary importance next to the final goal of rebellion. Though the French Revolution began to end tyranny, by its close the goal as ending inequality. In this second and far more radical phase, “the turmoil of liberation has so frequently defeated the revolution.”¹⁹⁴ Yet the seeds of destruction were sown in those initial phases; while the American Constitution, the founding document of future political developments, was designed to indicate governmental limitations, the French used the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen as a starting point, not endpoint, a statement of intent which would in time be extended not just to every Frenchmen, but every person on earth.¹⁹⁵ This point aided the transition of the Revolution from the freedoms contained in the Declaration in 1789 to the right to cheap bread promised by the General Maximums of 1793. A negative end—freedom, or a lack of tyranny—became a positive goal—the possession of material wealth sufficient to escape poverty.

In summary, we can say that *On Revolutions* argues two key points: one, that the French Revolution shifted its purpose from freedom from tyranny to freedom from want, and two, that the egalitarian core of the Revolution became increasingly total and consuming as the governmental theories of J.J. Rousseau were applied to the Revolutionary instance. Arendt’s *On Revolutions* ends with the fascinating, if somewhat esoteric, notion that the “revolutionary spirit” was captured from the Americans by the French—“the only revolutionary tradition of any consequence”—whose particular interpretation was that revolutions were meant to uplift the poor, a task more easily achieved by mass violence than by lofty ideals:

¹⁹⁴ Arendt, pg. 140

¹⁹⁵ Arendt, pgs. 145-149

Forever haunted... by the specter of the vast masses of the poor for whom every revolution is bound to liberate, [revolutionaries] seize invariably, and perhaps inevitably, upon the most violent events in the French Revolution, hoping against hope that violence would conquer poverty.¹⁹⁶

Arendt here merely touches on the role of violence in the French case, though this quotation leads us naturally to *Origins of Totalitarianism*, where Arendt better details this use of violence—terror—for the ends of the state.

In the third section of her sprawling discourse *Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt wrote of what happens when a movement espousing a totalitarian ideology comes to power. 1951's *Totalitarianism*, written a decade before *On Revolution*, folds neatly into Arendt's views on revolutionary movements. Fundamental to totalitarianism is its totality, the complete transformation of political institutions to fit within a single ideology. Distinct from tyranny, which seeks to divide the political elite from a depoliticized *hoi polloi*, totalitarianism is the complete destruction of the basic human conditions, the end goal being the creation of a wholly politicized being. Whereas normal tyrannies punished those who actively resisted political monopolization, totalitarianism sees the very existence of independence from central ideology as a threat—existence apart from the ideological society is resistance in itself.¹⁹⁷ The new system of totalitarian society is predicated not on what Arendt names the "*consensus iuris*," a Ciceronian callback representing the aggregation of positive human laws that enumerate specific rights, but the "*ius naturale*," natural law, to which all are bound. In this totalitarian reality, then, the individual, indeed society in general, exists for the sole execution of natural law: "when the Nazis talked about the law of nature or when the Bolsheviks talk about the law of history, neither nature nor history is any longer a stabilizing source of authority for the actions of mortal men; *they are movements in themselves*."¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Arendt, *On Revolution*, pgs. 223-224

¹⁹⁷ Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, pgs. 460-463

¹⁹⁸ Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 463, italics my own

Thus, Arendt defines totalitarian ideologies as actualizing this natural law: 1. They must “claim total explanation,” that goes beyond the description of reality to enlighten us of the impending endpoint to the “natural” flow of history, 2. They must indoctrinate their disciples to “emancipate thought from experience and reality,” and 3. They must achieve this emancipation through total methods of terror. Achieving the mobilization of society for the fulfillment of natural law requires the use of terror due to two reasons according to Arendt. Terror means on the one hand, the isolation of citizens via the coopting of all non-ideological forms of socialization, the creation of a political “desert,” in which the only oasis is the ideology.¹⁹⁹ The secondary goal is the creation of an “iron band,” which drives citizens towards that single oasis, pushing and prodding them, though not towards the ideology per se. Rather, the goal is to blend ideology, which implies choice, with reality, such that ideological conquest is achieved solely through life in a totalitarian regime.²⁰⁰

As a whole, four predictions on revolutionary violence can be extrapolated from Arendt’s work on totalitarianism and ideology. First, she proposes that revolutions, by their nature, tend towards radicalization. Second, that radicalization has a definite form: economic policies justified not by the rule of law, but by the natural law of necessity. Third, Arendt introduces totalitarianism as a distinct force of nature; in that ideological regimes, such as France in the Terror, exist to execute a natural manifest destiny. Fourth, that destiny is brought about by the conflation of reality and ideology through an ‘iron band’ that forces people into the ideological worldview. Having informed ourselves on the basics of Arendtian thought on ideology, we can now apply this theoretical framework to the raw material of Revolutionary ideology and the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau

¹⁹⁹ Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 475

²⁰⁰ Arendt, pgs. 471-474

III.

Rousseau and the Jacobins

The mandate of the Jacobin “dictatorship” of 1793-94 headed by Maximilien Robespierre was predicated on a theory of state built largely on the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose hugely influential *Social Contract* was something of a bible for the men of the Montagne.²⁰¹ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a Genevan adopted—with serious reservations—by the French monarchy was the godfather of the revolutionary project. His work not only informed the revolutionary generation of France, but radically shifted the notion of good governance. By briefly considering Rousseau’s ideas, set against the words of the revolutionaries themselves, we can understand just what *ideology* meant for those in power. This understanding is fundamental in understanding how violence played out. Chief among Revolutionaries, the architect of the Terror, Maximilien Robespierre, had a particular affection for Rousseau, whose *Social Contract* he carried about with him whenever he went to the Green Room of the Tuileries where the Committee of Public Safety met.²⁰² “Robespierre’s utterances,” notes one historian, “are punctuated by echoes of Rousseau, paraphrases of Rousseau, quotations from Rousseau, imitations of Rousseau, all of which reveal his familiarity with the entire range of his mentor’s writings.”²⁰³ Indeed, Robespierre himself would write that “by the elevation of his soul and the grandeur of his character Rousseau [has become] the teacher of the human race.... Ah! If only he had been witness *to this Revolution of which he was the precursor.*”²⁰⁴

Rousseau’s theory of state was based on a return to the natural order of man, prior to the corruption by the edifices of modernity; as his *Social Contract* famously begins, “Man was born free, and everywhere he is in chains.”²⁰⁵ The core tenet of Rousseau’s ideal state was the *volonté générale*, the

²⁰¹ Arendt, pg. 73

²⁰² Andress, pg. 225

²⁰³ Jordan, *Maximilien Robespierre: Revolutionary Career*, pg. 31

²⁰⁴ Jordan, pg. 31, italics my own

²⁰⁵ Rousseau, trans. Dunn, *Social Contract*, pg. 156

‘general will,’ the common interest of the people and most basic principle of state. Rather than govern by virtue of constitutional limitations, the French ruled via the general will. The Revolutionary state was “supported by the most sacred of all laws, the welfare of the people; and by the clearest of all titles, necessity,” to quote Robespierre.²⁰⁶ The General Maximums, a bundle of laws enforcing a cap on basic necessities like bread, was in turn predicated on basic egalitarian principles. “The aid indispensable to him who lacks the necessities,” Robespierre stated on a different occasion, “is a debt of him who has a superfluity... it is up to the law to determine the manner in which this debt should be paid.”²⁰⁷ Yet the real thrust of the Jacobin government, and Robespierre’s own cherished project, was one of national regeneration, the recreation of enslaved Frenchmen into freed citizens. Rousseau stated in no uncertain terms that “It is necessary to deprive man of his native powers in order to endow him with some which are alien to him, and of which he cannot make use without the aid of other people.”²⁰⁸ People must be forced to be free, and it is the right—indeed the duty—of the state to *make* people free.

The process of making people free tends towards the use of violence, and because general will cannot err in itself, the state has the exclusive right to enforce the people’s self-interest. “Men always desire their own good,” noted Rousseau, “but do not always discern it; the people are never corrupted, though often deceived, and it is only then that they seem to will what is evil.”²⁰⁹ Thus, “it is [for] the leaders of republics to frame the institutions, and afterward it is [those] institutions which model the leaders of republics.”²¹⁰ As such, the leadership of the ideal state needs to express the general will, while simultaneously preventing the “deceiving” of his people away from that true course. More succinctly, by “distrusting the character of the mass of people, Jacobins argue that the minority, who know the truth, must convey it to the majority.”²¹¹ In Rousseau’s own writing, as Arendt comments, that “will” is only truly expressed in matters of foreign policy, most evidently when foreign wars are involved; it is then that

²⁰⁶ Jordan, pg. 173

²⁰⁷ Jordan, pg. 153

²⁰⁸ Rousseau, pg. 181

²⁰⁹ Rousseau, pg. 172

²¹⁰ Rousseau, pg. 181

²¹¹ Klosko, *Jacobins and Utopians*, pg. 93

all are united against a common foe, where any action can be justified by the total and existential threat often posed by foreign conflicts.²¹² Rousseau's example of foreign wars was prescient, for France would be engaged in total war against nearly the whole of Europe. These foreign conflicts invariably merged with domestic strife, where foreign and domestic enemies could be the same person or group. Thus, for the Revolutionary leadership who ostensibly represented the 'general will,' declaring who was friend or foe was an exercise in imagining a community—and executing those who gainsay the supreme will of the people.

This paradoxical conflict between the masses who legitimate the minority in power, and that minority which disenfranchises those 'ignorant' of the general will helps inform the ideology of the Jacobin state. In Robespierre's eloquent speeches, this conflict is just beneath the surface. In a speech on February 5th, 1794, Robespierre outlined the Rousseauian state he was endeavoring to construct:

What is the end at which we aim? The peaceable enjoyment of liberty and equality; the reign of that eternal justice, the laws of which *are not written on marble or stone, but on the hearts of all men*, even that of the slave who forgets them and the tyrant who denies them. [...] We want in a word *to fulfill the course of nature, to accomplish the destiny of mankind, to make good the promise of philosophy...*²¹³

Very apparently, the architect of the French Revolutionary state of the Reign of Terror, Robespierre, adopted Rousseau's belief that the people can be misled, and that it was the leader's role to guide his flock away from this deception. This reflects, to a great extent, Arendt's aforementioned idea "iron band," in that the Revolutionary regime defines what is acceptable and what is not, in terms of speech, belief, and even dress, and in the process, increasingly conflating ideology with reality. Moreover, the enacting of this utopian state would be "to fulfill the course of nature," a totalistic notion that perfectly captures Arendt's ideas in *Totalitarianism*. Finally, Robespierre makes clear that the state needs not express itself

²¹² Arendt, *On Revolution*, pg. 70-75

²¹³ Klosko, pg. 99, italics my own

in laws or constitutions; rather, the legitimacy of the state is based on what all men know—liberty, justice, or that illusive object, virtue.

Using this ideological grounding, it was extremely easy for the state during the Terror to distinguish enemies of the state from true patriots; “There are two types of people in France, the one is the mass of citizens, pure and simple, moved by justice and lovers of liberty... The other is the collection of factions and intriguers,” who deserve nothing more than death.²¹⁴ That principle is made clearer by an address entitled “On the Necessity of Declaring the Government Revolutionary until Peace,” made on behalf of the Committee by its youngest member, Louis Antoine de Saint-Just. It read “the republic will only be founded when the will of the sovereign will have curbed the monarchical minority and will reign over it by the right of conquest... *it is necessary to govern by iron those who cannot be governed by justice... [for] all the enemies of the republic are in its government.*”²¹⁵ From these passages, three principles are clearly discernable: the government must be revolutionary—and thus free of constitutional constraints—that that government will be victorious only when the enemies of the Revolution are vanquished, and that those enemies are internal. The state of the first point could enact the other two goals through only one fashion: terror. As Robespierre put it:

If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once *virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless.*²¹⁶

The French state ruled by the general will, but to perfect the people—to force them to be free, as Rousseau had advocated—took the supreme force of terror. In other words, terror was a necessity both to overcome internal enemies and to reshape the people in a virtuous image. Again, we can look to Robespierre’s words:

²¹⁴ Klosko, pg. 104

²¹⁵ Jordan, pg. 172, italics my own

²¹⁶ Klosko, pg. 104, bold original, italics my own

Terror is nothing other than justice, prompt, sever, inflexible; it is therefore an emanation of virtue; it is not so much a particular principle as a consequence of the general principle of democracy applied to the most pressing needs of our country.²¹⁷

In this sense, ‘justice’ can be understood as death to the enemies of France—that is—those who oppose the general will by being slaves of the old monarchical powers. The existential struggle between the basest monarchical tyrants and the sublime virtuous republicans necessitates the marriage of terror and virtue; the more terrible, the more virtuous.

Having briefly taken in the heady words of the revolutionaries Robespierre and Saint-Just, it is apparent that Rousseau’s influence predominates. Government rested on the general will. But that will was not expressed by “the people,” for, while the general will never erred, the people could—and regularly did. It was the responsibility of the governors to ensure the virtue of the political leaders, for the general will proscribed the moral rebirth of the nation as its ultimate purpose. In the revolutionary context, which carried with it the threat of existential doom, producing liberty—and, more often, punishing tyranny—was achieved through terror. For the Revolutionaries, that meant “swift justice,” or in other words finding and eliminating enemies of the state. This nebulous concept of “the enemy of the state” was indeed applied fervently; treason accounted for some 60,000 arrests, which were over 9/10ths of the total.²¹⁸ Many were victims of their own existence—refractory clergy, the nobility, even rich merchants, were all targeted for their social status, rather than actual crimes. Thus, in considering the Terror as a whole, we can contextualize violence as the expression of that essential nature of the Jacobin ideology: the general will and its discontents.

²¹⁷ Klosko, pg. 105

²¹⁸ Greer, pgs. 71-76, Appendix I-III

IV.

The Radicalization of Revolutionary France

In order to ground these broad ideological strokes, it is helpful to understand the radicalizing and totalizing trend of the French state during the Reign of Terror. Two popular insurrectionary events gave the Revolution its ideological patina. These events were characterized by mass participation—particularly in Paris—and resulted in changes in government or state policy according to popular demands. After the fall of the monarchy and the declaration of the Republic in September 1792, a loose coalition of members formed around a common political party, the “Gironde.”²¹⁹ This faction influenced policies of the state in the aftermath of the insurrection of 10th August 1792, bringing France into open war with Prussia and Austria, then Spain, and finally Great Britain. Their ideological counter was the Montagnard, or the “mountain,” whose representatives hailed from the Jacobin club and opposed foreign wars as a distraction from the enemies at home. A combination of factors, including the abysmal course of France’s wars, the defection of Girondin hero General Dumouriez, and the highly unpopular opposition to Louis XVI’s execution, drew the ire of the Parisian public. The first insurrection occurred on 31st May-2nd June 1793, when forces of the Commune of Paris surrounded and effectively besieged the National Convention and demanded the purging of the Gironde from the Convention.²²⁰ Acceding to these demands, the government was reformed under the auspices of the now ascendant Montagnard, who immediately proceeded to indict, arrest, and execute their former Conventionnels.

For the summer of 1793, the Montagnard faction dominated the Convention, while its members guided executive policy in the Committee of Public Safety, created just that spring. This summer was dominated by the formation and execution of a Montagnard platform, which culminated in the Constitution of 1793. The summer of 1793, however, was largely concerned with military affairs. The conflict in the Vendée was already blazing in the West, while the South erupted in the Federalist Revolts,

²¹⁹ Andress, pgs. 74-77

²²⁰ Tackett, pg. 288

led by the remnants of the Girondin, all while the armies of Great Britain, Prussia, and Austria successfully menaced the East.

Here we begin to merge a historical narrative with the larger theoretical framework presented by Arendt. Consumed by internecine and international conflicts, the Convention approved measures of centralization aimed foremost at military victory.²²¹ The Levée en masse was decreed in August of 1793 to counter a multitude of threats, calling for every unmarried able-bodied man to take up arms, while significant stock was placed in arms manufacturing, with Paris—not surprisingly—as the epicenter of these arms factories. In time, conditions would improve on the frontlines, with the suppression of the Vendée and the eventual turning of the foreign forces occupying France’s northeast. Yet military affairs encouraged and accelerated both the centralization of power—centered on the Committee of Public Safety—and the use of violence. As has been seen in the Vendée, brutality and outright slaughter were justified by military necessity, merging objective military goals with totalizing ideological forces.

The military push was paralleled by a concern for material conditions. The Jacobin hegemony came about with a mandate to solve the issues of food prices and to hunt down those “conspirators” blamed for price gouging. In May 1793, the Law of the Maximum established the “General Maximum,” caps on basic goods prices matched by limits on earned income.²²² Later that same year, the Law of Suspects, which ordered the arrest of “suspect” persons—a deliberately vague term that included first refractory clergy and aristocrats, and eventually anyone harboring anti-revolutionary sentiments—was expanded to include those who violated the General Maximum. The punishment, naturally, was death.²²³ This policy, as with others, were meant to satisfy the demands of the *sans-culotte*, the stereotypical workingman of France, and to prevent the recurrence of the insurrection of August and May. The spirit of Jacobin ideology, however, went beyond individual policies. The aim of Robespierre’s faction was the regeneration of France, the birth of a genuine republic. This sentiment is perfectly captured by the

²²¹ Hazan, pgs. 262-266

²²² Hazan, pgs. 283-285

²²³ Andress, pgs. 211-213

Constitution of 1793. This document called for universal manhood suffrage, sweeping democratization of the French polity, and a radical policy of wealth redistribution.²²⁴

On the 4th September, 1793, a crowd assembled outside the Hotel de Ville, where the city government of Paris was based, and presented a petition. “For the last two months we have suffered in silence, in the hope that it would come to an end, but on the contrary, the evil is increasing each day... therefore [we] ask you to attend to the steps that public safety demands.”²²⁵ Led by the most radical faction of the Jacobins, the Hébertists (and their leader Jacques Hébert) demanded immediate action to remedy the poverty of the *sans-culotte* and to end the internal menace that maintained their suffering. On the 5th, they surrounded the Convention, where one unnamed speaker, to thunderous applause, announced that “it is time to terrify all conspirators... place terror on the order of the day! Let the sword of the law fall on all the guilty parties!”²²⁶ It was at this point that the Convention, cowed by yet another show of popular force, enacted Terror as an explicit policy, while also formally legislating the Law of Suspects and General Maximum as official policy of the entirety of France. This began the most repressive phase of the Reign of Terror. It became illegal to oppose the Revolution—whether through arms or words—as the Law of Suspects was imposed on the people of France. Lyon would soon discover the price of rebellion in this ideological period of the Terror.

V.

Institutionalizing Terror: The Fall of Lyon

On the dreary afternoon of October 2nd, 1793, a coach presented itself at the village of Sainte-Foy. It bore five Conventionnels, all of them representatives on mission with immense authority, along with a single wheelchair-bound figure—Georges Couthon, the thirty-eight-year-old member of the Committee of Public Safety. Their mission at Sainte-Foy was simple: eradicate the rebel stronghold that France’s

²²⁴ Andress, pgs. 191-193

²²⁵ Hazan, pg. 280

²²⁶ Hazan, pg. 283

second city, Lyon, had become, by any means necessary. The Committee gave him unparalleled authority, their commission reading simply “Let them perish, let the national power, deploying in a terrible manner, wave over this criminal city the sword which too long has threatened guilty heads.”²²⁷ In time, Couthon would be joined by Collot d’Herbois, a fiery ex-actor totally dedicated to his own unique brand of popular egalitarianism. To this end, he ordered that “national too, otherwise known as the holy guillotine,” to be erected in the center of Lyon.²²⁸ What would follow was the destruction of the city and the murder of its inhabitants.

The wholesale violence described epitomizes the brutality of the Federalist Revolts, whose capital as the great interior city, Lyon. The “Federalist Revolts” were a series of rebellions led by members of the ‘Gironde’ faction, so named for the geographic origin of its leaders in the Gironde. The term ‘Federalism’ refers to the decentralized theory of government pushed by the mostly provincial Girondin deputies, contrasted to the Paris-centric centralism of the Jacobins. After the insurrection of May 31st-June 2nd, 1793, the Girondin were systematically purged by the Jacobin faction in the Convention, an event which sparked the Federalist Revolts across France. Major centers of provincial power rose up in reaction to the capitulation of the Convention to the Parisian mob. In short order, Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Lyon went into open rebellion against Paris by the first week of June 1793.²²⁹ There, the Representative on mission, Joseph Chalier, was besieged by Federalist resistance. After two hours of battle, he was captured and imprisoned, marking the beginning of the rebellion in Lyon.²³⁰ That city, in many respects the second city of France with a population of 150,000, served as a home base for the Girondin leadership. Put under ineffectual house arrest in Paris, many Girondins managed to escape the capital, after which point they travelled to the south and west of France to join Federalist cities.

²²⁷ Palmer, pg. 153, 154

²²⁸ Palmer, pg. 163

²²⁹ Andress, pg. 183

²³⁰ Israel, *Revolutionary Ideas*, pg. 445, Mayer, pg. 200

The loss of Lyon put France in a perilous situation; Lyon, a manufacturing capital astride the confluence of the Rhône and Saône rivers, was the supply center for the French forces in the Alps, while the route to Paris lay perfectly undefended, while Lyon had led another dozen Departments into revolt along with it. The Convention, now firmly under the Jacobin boot, first began by reconnoitering these new hostile centers of power. Robert Lindet was dispatched from Paris, arriving on the 8th of June. He found no warm welcome. Lyon had already disarmed politically dubious units of their National Guard, while meanwhile preparing an army of its own to “march against the rebels opposing the national will” in Paris, Lindet reported.²³¹ Failing to reach a compromise, Lindet withdrew, and on July 12th, Lyon was officially declared to be in a state of rebellion. Five days later, Chalier, the imprisoned Jacobin representative, was executed in an act of defiance to Paris. By now, Paris had redeployed the Alpine Army under the hero of Valmy, Francois Christoph Kellermann, and on August 9th, 1793 Lyon was besieged. To coordinate the coming battle, Paris dispatched representative of impeccable revolutionary credentials, their stated mission being to “unmask and executed” the Lyonnaise threat, to “avenge the memory of their innocent victims.”²³²

It was with this auspicious mission that Couthon and Collot d’Herbois were sent to Lyon. Immediately Couthon summoned Kellermann for a council of war; Kellerman, who had been leading the siege in the previous month, suggested waiting for its eventual surrender pending starvation. This was immediately rejected, as Paris demanded blood. Lyon would pay the price for its treachery in full. An assault was ordered within a week, and after some feeble resistance, Lyon fell on October 9th.²³³ The violence was only just now beginning. The population was divided into three sections—those who bore arms when captured, those who had served the Federalist government, and those who had bene “misled,” to quote Couthon’s generous formulation. His directions were straightforward: “culprits of the first class

²³¹ Andress, pg. 187

²³² Mayer, pg. 201

²³³ Palmer, pg. 155

were to be guillotined, those of the second shot, and those of the third released after recanting their errors.”²³⁴

But it was at this point that the Terror went beyond any rationalization, beyond the use of violence to quell rebellion. The Convention, under the guidance of the Committee of Public Safety, enacted on the 12th of October an order that read

- I. The city of Lyon should be destroyed. Every habitation of the rich shall be demolished; there shall remain only the homes of the poor, the houses of patriots who have been led astray...
- II. The name of Lyon shall be effaced from the list of cities of the Republic. The collection of houses left standing shall henceforth bear the name of Ville-Affranchise²³⁵
- III. On the ruins of Lyon shall be raised a column attesting to posterity the crimes and the punishments of the royalists of the city, with this inscription:
Lyons made war on Liberty.
*Lyons is no more.*²³⁶

These orders left little to the imagination. On October 26th, 1793, Couthon held a ceremony in the Place Bellecour, the graceful center of the Lyonnaise elite. Couthon, whose legs were paralyzed by meningitis, was ferried about on a riser by four *sans-culottes* to the Place, whereupon he gave a short speech, which concluded “May this terrible example strike fear into future generations... The French nation.... knows how to abhor crime and punish rebellion.”²³⁷ With that, he brought a hammer down on the foundations of an urban mansion, inaugurating the razing of the city. He did not enjoy his position for long; recalled in November to deal with events in Paris, Couthon would be replaced in November by an even more

²³⁴ Palmer, pg. 155

²³⁵ Translated as “the Liberated City”

²³⁶ Palmer, pg. 156

²³⁷ Address, pg. 210

extreme terrorist, the Committee member Collot d'Herbois whom we met earlier. The violence now reached its climax.

The Federalists of Lyon were largely bourgeois, property or business owners, contrasting their proletarian foes, who were mostly Jacobins, and who were employed as laborers in Lyon's huge silk-making works. From the outset, the violence of Lyon was characterized by aspects of class warfare, a point readily taken up by Collot. Couthon's hammer blow was not a symbolic protest. Rather, he had begun a long and bloody campaign against the 'enemies of the Revolution,' who now came to represent the monied classes. Collot d'Herbois, who had earlier called for the execution of bearers of fake news, and who had earnestly called for the mass murder of all Parisian prisoners by explosives, was now guiding the carnage of Lyon. His stated enemies were the "aristocracy of merchants," a class that Collot suspected could be the whole city.²³⁸

He quickly expedited trials by forgiving the 60,000 laborers of Lyon, proposing instead their deportation and resettlement to the rest of France where they could be observed; however, his resources were more modest, and his violence more profound. As one historian notes, "The cause for which Collot d'Herbois labored was the struggle against the bourgeoisie.... Lyons offered a good field of operations, for at Lyon the lines of economic class were clear."²³⁹ Collot, something of a proto-socialist, quickly established a Temporary Commission for Republican Surveillance tasked with seizing a "revolutionary tax" from those who earned more than 10,000 livres. These funds would be distributed to the laboring masses of Lyon. This Commission was also charged with the close observance of political development in the city. The Commission eagerly recruited proletarian informants who could report on their erstwhile masters to the Commission, who diligently collected lists of names and enabling mass executions.²⁴⁰ The air was charged with elements of class warfare. This egalitarianism folded neatly into the larger economic goals of the Revolution. Those who opposed the Revolutionary program, or those who had even the

²³⁸ Palmer, pg. 160

²³⁹ Palmer, pg. 166

²⁴⁰ Address, pg. 236

slightest affiliation with the Federalist revolts, were liable to execution. Likewise, those who hoarded food were to be executed under the new Law of General Maximums. Needless to state that there were ample reasons to be executed in Lyon in the fall of 1793. The terrorist Collot was averaging now around twenty executions a day, though he found that number wholly insufficient.²⁴¹

The violence had to be stepped up; on November 23rd, Collot declared Lyon to be “in a state of revolutionary war... The justice of the entire people must strike down its enemies all at once, and we shall forge their thunderbolt.”²⁴² That thunderbolt was the mass execution of prisoners. The Temporary Commission ordered the general of the recently arrived Revolutionary Army, Ronsin, to march out 60 Girondin prisoners to the plain of Broteaux. Linked together by chains, they were shot at point blank range by Ronsin’s cannon on December 4th. The next day, the method was repeated on 211 prisoners, though the result was less than satisfying. Mass mutilation, rather than death, appeared to be the consequence, leaving a heap of bleeding and pathetic bodies, the bulk of who had to be finished off by Revolutionary Army soldiers with guns and sabers. Reporting to Paris, the Temporary Commission allowed that “This method has not had the execution that one could have desired... other more sure means” were to be used henceforth.²⁴³ The executions reached their peak towards the end of 1793, with Collot declaring a bloody victory to the Convention on December 24th, at which point 1,600 homes had been demolished and over 2,000 had been killed.²⁴⁴ Speaking of the carnage, the Representative on Mission Fouché, who had replaced Collot, pronounced that “Our mission here is difficult and painful. Only an ardent love of country can console and reward the man who... thinks, acts, and lives only in the people... [who] sees nothing but the Republic that will rise in posterity on the graves of the conspirators.”²⁴⁵ The scope and nature of the violence at Lyon was profound, executed for expressly ideological purposes to fulfill the “general will” upon an entire city.

²⁴¹ Palmer, pg. 166

²⁴² Address, pg. 237

²⁴³ Address, pg. 237

²⁴⁴ Israel, pg. 537

²⁴⁵ Palmer, pg. 175

VI.

Theoretical Conclusions

The violence was horrendous, not just in its numbers, but in its form. The figure of Collot d'Herbois was hardly unique for his extremist views or penchant for terrorism. The violence at Lyon can be characterized as ideological. The targets of violence, as has been seen, were not individuals but classes, targeted for their character, not their actions. Lyon was the perceived den of the "aristocracy of merchants," which meant the Girondin supporters who had perverted the Revolution with their corrupting wealth. Lyon also held the nucleus of the *sans-culotte*, the literal and figurative proletarian caricature of the Revolutionary, who had long been "oppressed" by their Girondin masters. In the Vendée, we witnessed a war of Catholic monarchists against the Revolution, a war fought by partisans on both sides, a guerrilla war. Oppression at Lyon shares much in common with the Vendéean experience. As an ideological rebellion motivated by the same resistance to Parisian extremism as the Vendée, the Federalists were quite similar. Likewise, their attempts to create a Federalist army parallel the construction of the "catholic and royal Army" that for so long challenged French forces. Just like Vendée, Lyon was punished for its rebellion.

And yet it is here that the similarities begin to differ. Lyon offered no serious resistance—indeed, no Federalist stronghold did, and Lyon fell in just a few days. After its surrender in October, the city offered no real resistance beyond the perceived internal threat of "enemies of the people." The violence enacted by Couthon and his comrade Collot d'Herbois could not have been motivated by a military threat that could be repressed by violence, for the Federalist war was over. And yet the violence enacted on Lyon was far more profound, characterized by extremism rather than logical strategy. To explain such events as the slaughter at Brotteaux, we can use the ideological explanation of violence.

Ideological violence emanates from normative ideas on how society should look. Hannah Arendt argued that certain aspects of revolutions tend naturally towards radicalization. This radicalization, as in

France, manifested as egalitarianism and appeared as “class warfare.” Likewise, totalitarian regimes, like the Robespierrist state, viewed violence as the inevitable product of the laws of nature. The only fate for those who oppose the course of nature is extinction. Then, turning to Rousseau, we examined the totalizing ideology of the Revolutionaries. For figures like Robespierre, violence represented a justified response to internal opposition. As there could be but one will of the people, all who opposed it were enemies of the state, and those enemies had necessarily to be killed. Epitomized in the figure of Collot d’Herbois and his proto-socialism, the Revolution had turned into a faux-class struggle. The Federalist Revolt was credited to the “aristocracy of merchants,” who were, by virtue of their class, hostile to the regime. The ideological theory of violence predicts that violence will be justified by a normative view of the world—that there should be neither rich nor poor, for instance—and that that view is backed by violence. Thus, the victims of violence will be defined by class, rather than any other defining characteristic, which is what was observed in Lyon.

Of the over 2,000 that died in Lyon, 56% were middle class, 8% were nobles, along with the 25% that were artisans.²⁴⁶ Thus, over three quarters of the Lyonnaise victims were bourgeois, successful, and monied, exactly the class so blatantly despised by the terrorist Collot. Lyon, which had been a major silk manufacturing site, possessed a large laboring class, with at least 30,000 involved in silk production, while the other half of the “reliable 60,000” identified by Couthon were engaged in other industries.²⁴⁷ These figures are especially stark when compared to the revolt in the Vendée. According to the figures compiled by Donald Greer, victims of violence in the Vendée were consistently peasants. 52% were classified as peasants, with 17% being artisans, and just 6% and 5% were from the lower and upper middle classes respectively.²⁴⁸

The crowds that were felled by the Revolutionary “thunderbolt” were selected for their class credentials, which had become a shorthand for revolutionary reliability. None of this should be surprising.

²⁴⁶ Greer, pg. 103

²⁴⁷ Greer, pg. 102

²⁴⁸ Greer, pg. 101

Lyon had a history of class conflict. Chalier, whom we mentioned earlier, was a member of a Jacobin fringe that had captured power earlier in 1793, and had contributed to a sense of egalitarian struggle in the city. The working class was highly politically motivated, a fact that led directly to the successful operation of the Temporary Commission for Republican Surveillance. Of the Revolution as a whole, we can see these numbers born out. Despite making up just 1.6% of the population, the nobility made up a third of all executions during the Terror.²⁴⁹ The bourgeois, who dominated the Lyonnaise economy, made up an increasing share of executions, from 16% in June 1793 to over half by the year's end.²⁵⁰ The class targeting in Lyon was hardly a one-off affair, as the Revolution had become a total war against all enemies of the state—and that meant those with wealth who opposed the “General Will.”

We might also consider the chronology of violence at Lyon. While violence in the Vendée trailed off after the defeat at Granville in October 1793, violence only increased over time in Lyon. Masses of fresh prisoners were brought before overworked Tribunals to be delivered to eternity, while the soldiers of the brutal Vendée war were transferred out of the region and towards Lyon. In the space of the two months of December and January 1793-94, almost a quarter of the 16,000 killed during the terror were executed.²⁵¹ The bulk of those figures—over 80% by Greer's calculation—occurred in the Vendée or Lyons in February 1794, with that figure dropping to 59% by March.²⁵² Yet, in the Vendée, where the rebellion had been successfully quelled, executions dramatically dropped off as 1794 proceeded. The vast majority of that 59% were Lyonnaise prisoners, a city that offered no practical threat to Paris. Violence was not correlated with the relative threat posed by Lyon. In these respects, violence at Lyon can be understood and explained from the ideological perspective.

It is also feasible to explain violence through a performative lens. The outpouring of violence at Lyon included a sea of militiamen in the National Guard. These men had joined to defend the Revolution

²⁴⁹ Greer, pg. 106-107

²⁵⁰ Greer, pg. 166, Table VII

²⁵¹ Greer, pg. 111

²⁵² Greer, pg. 115

and display their patriotism in a highly public setting. Thus, they could directly perform their loyalty to the cause by exacting violence against the popularly despised and ideologically condemned Girondin bourgeoisie of Lyon. The massacres at Brotteaux in particular parallel the September Massacres already discussed in this paper. The National Guard purposefully chose a public execution using brutal methods in order to create a spectacle. Furthermore, clear social roles existed, in the form of pro-Revolutionary factions, like the Jacobins of Lyon or the National Guard, who could target noted counterrevolutionary elements, like the owners of Lyon's silk manufacturers. Thus, the shop owner of Lyon could be killed in an act of performative violence for the same reasons as the refractory priest in the September Massacres. Violence was a performance of the Revolution, and the use of symbolically rich targets like the hated Girondin could prove that the Revolution was winning. Moreover, Lyon, as the exemplar of counterrevolution, could be destroyed in its whole in one grand and violent spectacle.

While it is certainly feasible to present Lyon as an instance of such violence, it is important to also include the instrumentalist perspective. Though the Federalist Revolts in Lyon were easier to repress than the Vendée, the loss of the city was still a tremendous blow. Lyon was not simply a very populous city with past ties to the governing Jacobins, but the decisive point of embarkation for campaigns against France's enemies in the Alps. France in 1793 was preoccupied with foreign conflicts and could offer only a partial commitment of resources to the campaign—meaning no long-term occupation was feasible. Paris, as has been seen, wanted a swift resolution to the rebellion. Thus, ensuring Lyon would never again threaten military campaigns was a logical goal. The purges that took place targeted the social base for the anti-Revolutionary Girondin faction, and in this sense encapsulates the instrumental approach. Because Lyon's fall had brought so many prisoners into Republican hands, there existed serious overcrowding of prisons and a dangerously slow judicial process. Thus, the gruesome slaughters at Brotteaux can be rationalized to a point as the only solution to the glut of prisoners brought in. The wide-scale resistance offered by Lyon also meant that distinguishing who had done what during the Federalist Revolt was secondary, as nearly all could be assumed as guilty. Furthermore, by using extreme force at Lyon, the

government in Paris could potentially deter other uprisings. Using Lyon as a clear example to other rebels could legitimate Paris' power over the provinces, and as such some degree of violence at Lyon can be seen as ideological. That each historical instance can be understood through a multitude of theories naturally suggests that a synthesis of theories might be beneficial. In the concluding chapter, we will explore the idea that a single event can be explained simultaneously by the three theories.

V.

The Width, Breadth, and Dimensions of Violence

I.

Introduction

The French Revolution was an historical event of immense complexity and import. It is that inherent complexity that inspires such rich discourse on the subject, and that same complexity which makes projecting theories across the period so difficult. Scholarship on the Revolution possesses its own history that demonstrates a clear evolution as various interpretations of the Revolution are formulated, argued, and overturned. Given the highly discursive elements that characterize the Revolution, research on the Reign of Terror is just as, if not more controversial than the Revolution itself; the Terror can and has been used to support any number of theoretical conclusions. It was, in the moment, the sublime enactment of truly revolutionary government on the enemies of the people of France. Immediately after the Thermidorian Reaction and the fall of Robespierre, it became an embarrassing moment of excess, a statement of Revolutionary failure which evolved, with the restoration of monarchy in 1815, into positive demonstration of the woes wrought by democracy. From then on, the Terror came to represent many things to many groups, from Marxist-Leninist vanguard theories to the ultra-Catholic Bourbonist monarchists that strove for a return in the 19th and 20th centuries to the days of the Ancien Regime.

Needless to say, the study of revolutions as political movements is just as valid a field of study as it was a century ago; as political events, revolutions uniquely possess the capacity for compressing radically different political motives and outcomes within a single chain of events. Whether investigating cause, course, or effect, the study of revolutions is deeply revealing of many political truths of today.

Indeed, scholars are currently involved sifting through the aftermath of the Arab Spring revolutions, while the research done over the revolutions that liberated the world from Communism thirty years ago is ongoing. We could look even further back, to the revolutions of '68 or '56 in Europe, or the many anticolonial revolutions, or even the revolutions that birthed the United States and the Central and South American nations. Thus the French Revolution, which might deservedly be called the archetypal revolution, plays a singular and central role in informing the entire field of revolutionary scholarship, which itself reaches out far afield.

Yet, despite the great importance both of the French Revolution and the Reign of Terror, classic 'revolutionary' theory in the past fifty years has tended towards unsatisfactory explanations for the latter; the focus was invariably on the moment of revolution, rather than its playing out. To conclude this thesis, we will conclude with the following. First, we will restate the theoretical context of 'revolutionary' theory on violence, identifying the shortcomings that inspired this work. Next, the three theories will be recapitulated in order of presentation, with a brief but productive comparison of the theoretical predictions made by each. In the third section, the case of the Revolutionary Armies will be used to demonstrate that the three theories of performative, instrumental, and ideological violence can be used to describe the same historical event. Working from this, there will follow a meta-critique of theory; through a historiographical diversion, I will pose how individual theories tend towards insufficient explanatory capacity. In the terminal section of the conclusion, I will present my solution to this problem by introducing a synthesis of theories, arrived at through a condensed quantitative analysis, ending with how that theory might be applied beyond the Reign of Terror.

II.

Revolutionary, Performative, Instrumental, and Ideological Theories

Barrington Moore's indelible legacy for the field of political science is beyond dispute. His theories inform and guide—if with revisions and improvements—the scholars of today. His 1966 *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* was a landmark work that set the standard for future revolutionary theory. His work largely embodied a functionalist Weltanschauung; to Moore, revolutions were products, outcomes, of distinct social groups defined by objective material conditions. Violence in revolution was thus a “function” of the process of revolution. For France to democratize—a trend which must naturally follow the development of its bourgeoisie—then it must pass through what Moore termed “the fires of Revolution, including its violent and radical aspects.”²⁵³ Violence was merely the inevitable outcome of material inequalities, just as democratizing revolution was the product of the rising bourgeoisie. Moreover, element of war and centralization are seen as playing into, in some undefined way, the violence of the Terror. Theda Skocpol, a functionalist disciple of Moore, wrote in her 1979 *States and Social Revolution* that again it was social classes which defined revolution, and in turn revolutionary violence. On top of abundant rural poverty, Skocpol draws on the need for a centralized martial effort on the part of the late Revolutionary government, which in turn meant the implementation of Terror to project state power and win the wars the French government was fighting.²⁵⁴ Again, we are given that violence is a function of objective material conditions, a necessity mandated by the need for central democratic governance. This theory was brought into its richest definition by Rosemary O’Kane, who reduced the Terror to nothing more than an effort to centralize the new government, and the fall of Robespierre the failure of the government to gain a monopoly on violence.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Moore, pg. 105

²⁵⁴ Skocpol, pgs. 185-190

²⁵⁵ O’Kane, pgs.78-84

This revolutionary theory of violence was found to be lacking on several accounts. First, the forms of violence are completely ignored as uninteresting; there is not systematic exploration of what revolutionary violence looked like in action. The lack of clear structures within violence makes predicting the form and course of revolutionary violence all but impossible; the mere assumption that violence will occur does nothing to inform one of how many victims of revolutionary terror there will be, nor does it provide any framework through which we understand how violence plays out. Rather than take the rather circumstantial functionalist-structuralist argument, we have in this paper walked through three distinct but interrelated theories on revolutionary violence as applied to that archetypal revolution—the French. These theories have identified both trajectories for violence as well as forms and targets thereof, and as such do a far better job at explaining revolutionary violence than the unhelpfully direct revolutionary theory. These three arguments, in order of appearance, were performative, instrumental, and ideological violence

The first theory presented was termed the performative theory of violence. In order to construct this theory, we looked first to Judith Butler’s theory of “performativity.” To Butler, political action can be defined as the performance of societal roles which define identity. Performance of an identity can moreover challenge societal hierarchies by redefining characteristics of that identity or performances from disenfranchised groups. To map this onto violence, we brought in Michel Foucault, who gave us that the forms of societal contention are informed by forms of oppression, which for him was expressed by violence, specifically that of public executions. Violence was a means by which the state could display a legitimating monopoly on violence, while invoking the symbolically rich theme of executions. To this, we appended Pierre Bourdieu, whose contribution to this paper concerns the notion of “symbolic violence.” Bourdieu understood symbolic violence as the enforcement of societal hierarchies, which correlates also to opposition to those hierarchies. Thus, condensing these perspectives into the framework of performative violence, the following predictions are that performative violence involves targets of cultural or symbolic value, against whom violence is enacted to assert larger societal claims on

hierarchies of power. In performative violence, the shape of violence conforms to socially meaningful forms in order to communicate those social assertions.

To evidence *performative theory*, we turned to the September Massacres which provides a clear-cut manifestation of these predictions. The Massacres involved the mass performance of violence by politically disenfranchised passive citizens, who used specific forms of violence to communicate the societal assertion that they too could participate in the state. Moreover, we saw violence being channeled, if not challenged, by political elites, who used the same performative language of violence to appropriate popular participation; their goal was to affirm the violence in order to enforce a state monopoly on said violence. Returning to our three metrics, we can clearly see a cause for performative violence: the exclusion of a mass of politically-active Parisians from genuine affairs of state was coupled with the presence of popular enemies who were supposed to be executed by the state. The course of events followed performative theory in that strict guidelines were adhered to when violence was performed, the implicit goal being recognition of popular participation. Furthermore, we see the targets of performative violence as popular villains, the enemies of the state and the people, whose swift demise was a socially understood good.

Instrumental theory relied heavily on rational choice theory, which holds that political outcomes are determined by individual actors who make constant cost-benefit analyses that inform their actions. We used the scholarship of Stathis Kalyvas, Samuel Popkin, Benjamin Valentino, and others to map instrumental theory onto revolutionary contexts. Revolutions hinge on individual involvement in them, and, working with Popkin, we determined that engagement in revolutions must accrue some objective benefit for the individual, often facilitated by political entrepreneurs. Kalyvas expanded this to violence, predicting violence in areas where the cost-benefit analysis favors it. Selective or indiscriminate approaches to violence were employed by the state in areas of contestation. Valentino expanded upon this insight to cover the use of genocidal violence to instill terror and inaction. From this theoretical basis, we defined instrumental violence as such: revolutionary violence will occur as a result of both governmental

policy or individual cost-benefit and will target identifiable elements whose violent demise profits some individual or group of individuals.

To evidence *instrumental theory*, we mapped it onto the Rebellion in the Vendée. Anti-revolutionary elements—the rural peasantry of the Vendée as well as disenfranchised non-Republican bourgeoisie—were inspired by itinerant priests who acted covertly to encourage counterrevolution. Responding to an apparent threat in the form of the Levée en masse, which would conscript the least revolutionary elements of the Vendée, the townsfolk of Machecoul rose up and slaughtered the Republican Guardsmen and the Constitutional priest, both pro-state groups threatening the local religious order. This expanded into violence across the Vendée in a collective act of preemptive violence. The state, which had few resources and needed economization of force, employed the most brutal measures possible to end the insurrection through terror. Thus we can see the flow from selective, to indiscriminate, to selective violence as an ebb and flow responding to events on the ground, while individual acts of violence peaked when state control was at its weakest, at the outbreak of the Vendée rebellion. The targets of violence also confirm instrumental theory; bottom-up targets were powerful Republican and anti-Catholic elements of society, whose very existence threatened the classic rural Catholic way of life in the Vendée, while those victims of state violence were clear military targets, or civilians targeted to undermine the military effort by denying resources and inspiring fear of reprisal. Thus, in terms of cause, course, and casualties, instrumental theory is evidenced by the Vendée.

The final theoretical approach was the most straightforward: *ideological violence*. As defined in this paper, ideological violence predicted revolutionary violence as the result of both the process of revolution and totalitarianization as well as the product of distinct ideological tenets. Revolutions possess characteristics that tend towards radicalization, which coupled with the ideology espoused by the central philosopher of the French Revolution, Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau called for strict governance according to the principle of an indivisible general will, and that enemies must necessarily be purged from the body politic for the realization of the general will. Moreover, this theory of government was presented

as natural—a return to the true state of man—which in turn lent itself to the totalizing elements drawn out by Arendt. Thus, the observable predictions of ideological violence are as follows: violence occurs as the result of revolutionary and ideational demands which produce a discourse of society which is total and natural, where the state is legitimated by natural, and all elements who oppose the state must be removed from society. Thus, victims of ideological violence will be targeted for identity rather than action as society gradually develops enemies of the state which must be removed by mass violence.

We mapped this onto the suppression of Lyon by first walking through the radicalization of the Revolution and the adoption of totalizing economic language, which accorded to Arendt's theories as defined by Rousseauian thought. Then, we examined Lyon: a southern city in rebellion against the Jacobin-dominated state in Paris. Lyon was systematically destroyed, and its people were placed along two categories: there were the poor, who could be made into good revolutionaries, and the rich, who had oppressed the former group and taken arms against the Revolution—for them there was only death. Moreover, the form of death was simply mass executions enacted merely to reach the natural conclusion of that violence, a Lyon rid of class enemies. Thus, Lyon demonstrates the three categories identified in the ideological theory of violence. The cause of violence was Parisian radicalization, expressed in terms of a violent class war. The course of violence followed an upward trend as more and more of those captured in Lyon were killed; the progress of killing tended towards the most dead in the shortest period of time. Likewise, the casualties of that violence were by and large artisans and merchants of Lyon's former silk industry, whose very livelihoods and wealth defined them as enemies of the Revolution.

III.

Theoretical Forces in Action:

The Case of the Revolutionary Armies

In order to better grasp our theories, as well as to see if they work positively together, it would be helpful to examine a case which displays aspects of all three. The case to be examined is that of the Revolutionary armies. By a streamlined analysis of one final instance of the Reign of Terror, we can comprehend not only how our theories work in action, but also how each possesses characteristic weaknesses and strengths that interact with one another. Processing our three theories simultaneously should allow a more nuanced and meaningful analysis which ideally will allow for a synthesis of theoretical explanations. Simply put, while each of the theories can be worked out within their own distinct historical boundaries, by demonstrating that all three can work together at once, it will become clear that any one theoretical explanation of the Terror is insufficient. First, however, it is necessary to delve once more into the history of the Terror.

The Revolution in 1793 was under threat; beset by enemies within and without, the National Convention, operating with the executive Committees of General Security and Public Safety, enacted to secure revolutionary gains by force. The Vendée roiled, while the Federalist revolts continued to sap strength from the south and southwest, while to the east the armies of continental Europe—including Great Britain, the Dutch, Prussian, and Austria, continued to threaten the borders of France. This national crisis would be solved by a massive national mobilization, the formation of popular “‘Armées Revolutionnaire,’ (Revolutionary armies),” that would physically enact the will of Paris. The bold social program outlined in the Constitution of 1793, just ratified by 90% of Conventionnels, had called for sweeping reforms while making grand promises of popular government.²⁵⁶ What was needed more than ever was a force to enforce these grand schemes of social reform, to physically represent the Montagnard

²⁵⁶ Tackett, pgs. 299-300

state by implementing price maximums, by arresting counterrevolutionary elements, by implementing Jacobin, and thus pro-Paris, governance throughout France. The implementation of that force came apace with the day the Terror was made the official policy of the state.

On September 4th, 1793, amidst the controversial trial of Marie Antoinette, the last vestige of monarchy and a figure of hatred par excellence, the Communes of Paris organized and marched on the Convention. In another display of that bastion of popular sovereignty, the Communes, led by the perennial leftist agitator Jacques Hébert, announced their concerns in the Convention through the procurator of Paris Pierre Chaumette: “new seigneurs, no less cruel, avid, or insolent than the old,” he pronounced, were “speculating on public misery,” desiring “to shut off the wellsprings of abundance, and to tyrannize the destroyers of tyranny.”²⁵⁷ He demanded that a paramilitary militia, staffed by only resolute Republicans, be formed to enact revolutionary governance on those elements who still clung to the old ways, for “we now have open war between the rich and the poor... we must stop them—we must crush them ourselves and we have the means at hand!”²⁵⁸ This would be the Revolutionary Armies, simultaneously popularizing, democratizing, and totalizing the efforts of the state, which correspondingly mean the enforcement of Terror. To formalize Chaumette’s initiative, the greatest orator of the Revolution, Georges Danton, took the stand:

We must know how to profit from the sublime elan of the people who press in around us. I know that when the people present their needs, when they offer to march against their enemies, we must take only the measures they themselves present: for it is the genius of the nation that had dictated them.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁷ Address, pg. 205

²⁵⁸ Cobb, pg. 35

²⁵⁹ Address, pg. 208

Drowned in a sea of applause so great as to be deafening, the Convention resolutely supported the formation of the Revolutionary Armies. Their goal was defined succinctly by Bertrand Barère, who was the most likely originator of the electrifying summation—“Terror must be made the order of the day.”²⁶⁰

At once, we see characteristics of instrumental and performative violence in the formation of the Revolutionary Armies. Chaumette was proposing a formal instrumental use of Terror for clear material ends; violence would be employed as a tool in order to secure the material needs of Paris. Couched in the language of class war was a simple premise: capitalize on the common patriotism of Parisians by organizing a force in their own defense. Clearly, Chaumette was driven by circumstances of deprivation and starvation, factors that had manifested at the fall of the Bastille, or in the mobs that created the Republic. Chaumette’s intention was as much to help the Revolution as to stop counterrevolution, and by providing for Paris, the Convention could provide for its own safety.

Yet clearly, Chaumette’s speech is also steeped in ideological rhetoric. The use of clear terms of class war speak to the heart of the Arendtian-Rousseauian conception of ideology. The natural outcome must, necessarily, be the victory of the people, the Revolution, which can only be furthered by “tyrannizing the destroyers of tyranny.” Moreover, the declaration that “terror” is the order of the day clearly indicates the totalitarian state of affairs inhabited by the Convention and its representatives. Their struggle was total, just as Arendt argued about totality in ideological violence. And yet, almost despite this ideological trapping, we can find performative components of the Armies. The evocation of “the sublime elan of the people” is not pure rhetoric; it opens up the public demonstration of virtue and patriotism by common participation in violence, via the Armies. Thus, the symbolically laden Revolutionary Armies are also a locus for revolutionary performativity. One could defend the homeland and the people by serving in the most publicized wing of the armed Revolution, and the benefits came in their public assertion of popular sovereignty—the people, in defeating the counterrevolution, could affirm

²⁶⁰ Tackett, pg. 299

their power. All three theories can be identified in just this formative part of the Armies, and as the narrative unfolds, more and more instances of the theories working in conjunction will become clear.

The Ministry of the Army was tasked with forming some sort of popular militia, though there existed serious doubts concerning a free-wheeling body of hyped-up *sans-culotte* with the power to summarily execute anyone they encountered.²⁶¹ The great historian of the Armies, Richard Cobb, begins his work on the matter by stating that “these revolutionaries, whose battles were fought within the popular societies and in the pulpits of former churches, were no ordinary soldiers... theirs was a war fought less by cannon and gunshot than by the word an judicial terror.”²⁶² Cobb’s statement can be understood as *performative violence*—the battles being one of popular political participation, rather than formal clashes of regular forces.

This political overtone is apparent in the leadership as well. What is apparent is the highly civilian nature of much of the service, the cannoneers in particular, which inevitably contributed to the performance of the Armies as a political tool. Moreover, we might also note the care given to social class in listing its soldier; very apparently, the elements of Chaumette’s “class war” were being taken very seriously, and not a few covert aristocrats were ejected from the cavalry, the most suspect wing. Thus, performative and ideological forces are at play; because these officers are of the lower classes, their participation in the Armies in a leadership function indicates that it was conceived of as a popular force—one of “the people,” in quite a literal sense. This also ensures certain ideological elements, for the proletarian nature of the force means the actions of the Armies will tend towards the class warfare mentioned above.

Most vital to our considerations, however, was the Revolutionary Army soldier himself. It was these men who elected their officers and gave ideological credence to their activities. The bulk were ages thirty to forty-five, with a few sexagenarians among them—necessarily, as any younger soul was liable to

²⁶¹ Palmer, pgs. 47-48

²⁶² Cobb, pg. 1

conscription in the proper armies of Revolutionary France. The men tended to have families, with a high proportion with sons serving in uniform, making service in the Revolutionary Armies a fitting parallel to the sacrifice of their sons or brothers.²⁶³ The men of the Armies were even more proletarian than their officer, with significant proportions being provisioners of food—bakers and shopkeepers mostly—who were naturally the most sensitive to the food crises that provoked the Revolutionary Armies' formation.²⁶⁴ The 'uniform' preferred was as much a costume as a formal dress; the mustache prevailed over other facial hair stylings, while hair was worn deliberately loose and purposefully disorderly. For the bulk of 'Revolutionnaires' who served with the Armies, their role as a revolutionary militia was a positive way to better the Republic. This opinion was expressed by one man upon his enlistment, who told his municipal authorities that "wishing to be of use to my country, I thought I would present myself to you... My decision to join this corps come not from the pay... but because it will allow me to serve my country."²⁶⁵ Service in the Armies is defined by those involved as a public good, a symbolic manner to assert both passive citizenship and active patriotism. The desire to publicly perform the act of citizenship led many into the Armies, while that same motivation informed and propelled more violent revolutionary behaviors, like the destruction of church properties.

The actual performance of the Armies was somewhat erratic owing to the inherently decentralized "army of the people." Partisans of popular sovereignty responded to exasperated villagers that "in times of revolution there were no laws, only people, which was sovereign," though one can wonder if such a statement of political belief reassured those victims of the 'tax of war' exacted by the Armies.²⁶⁶ In terms of actual performance, the Revolutionary Armies concerned themselves primarily with food supplies and the enforcement of the Law of Maximums, which controlled prices and punished hoarding with death. This expresses an objectively instrumental role, i.e. violence as a tool, to secure

²⁶³ Cobb, pgs. 130-132

²⁶⁴ Cobb, pg. 155

²⁶⁵ Cobb, pg. 138

²⁶⁶ Cobb, pg. 135

material goods. In the Paris basin—the political heart of the Revolution—the Armies were used in a garrison function to defend grain stores along major rivers. The major highways on which food supplies travelled were also defended to prevent predation and thievery.²⁶⁷ Ever present was the tension between local authorities of the various municipalities patrolled by the Armies and the soldiers themselves, who often bore a deep resentment for the farmers on whom their hunger and that of their families was blamed.

Apart from the supplying of food, however, was the very real achievement of the Armies in terms of repression. While many citizens were cowed into cooperation, there were very real instances of resistance and repression. As at Mions, the reputation of the Armies often preceded them, and Revolutionary propaganda reflected far more the sentiments of Chaumette and others that launched the Armies than their actual quotidian performance. This reputation was not entirely undeserved; charged as they were by patriotic fervor, the Revolutionary Armies drove through the villages of France in search of political enemies—not only hoarders and ornery peasants but aristocrats and itinerant priests as well. The bulk of arrests occurred in the Paris supply zone where 360 persons were arrested, reflecting the primarily subsistence-focused efforts of the Armies.²⁶⁸ Amidst a smattering of farmers accused of hoarding, deserters hiding themselves in their home towns, and other elements, were the most common victims: refractory priests. In this respect, ideological and instrumental violence are at the fore; spreading terror by the use of class warfare was the stated objective of at least some Revolutionaries, while the strategic use of terror to reduce resistance is a rational and strategic tactic identified by Gregory and other scholars.

The refractory clergymen, as discussed in the chapter on instrumental violence, were priests who refused to take swear an oath to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, passed in 1790 and implemented in 1791. Opposed by Louis XVI as well as the dominant Catholic figure, the Pope, the Civil Constitution served as a rallying point for counterrevolutionaries of all stripes, from devout Catholics, to monarchists, to those opposing a Parisian dictatorship. Because they held a powerful position in the hierarchies of

²⁶⁷ Cobb, pg. 255

²⁶⁸ Cobb, pg. 323

village life, refractory clergy who refused to take the oath easily became focal points of resistance, and their capture by Revolutionary Armies was often followed by the arrests of many other conspirators and sympathizers. At Fourqueux, for instance, the attempted arrest of a refractory priest led to the local Revolutionary Army contingent being chased from the city by an angry mob, whose consequent repression led to the arrest of the entire town.²⁶⁹ This instance of instrumental violence indeed closely resembles that of the Vendée, and further evidences the presence of such forces.

While repression in the Parisian basin focused on economic targets, operations in the area around Lyon was far more pronounced in its ideological nature. The greater part of arrests in the local towns were of the rich farmers, while the tone of class war was stronger still when the Armies marched through Lyon itself. It was in Lyon that the hated “mercantile aristocracy” identified by Collot d’Herbois would be expunged, while the *sans-culotte* sympathizers received little in the way of amnesty; Collot’s plan was the removal and resettlement of some 60,000 workers, while the remaining hundred thousand would be thoroughly purged.²⁷⁰ As has been seen in preceding chapters, the roughly 1,800 executed at Lyon during the Jacobin repression were largely elements of the Lyonnaise bourgeoisie, the former silk merchants and shop owners, now thoroughly identified as class enemies and counterrevolutionaries.²⁷¹ Thus, we can pair the targeting of priests with this ideological instance of violence, which embodies the class war envisioned by Chaumette. This was violence used against groups deemed counterrevolutionary—not for their actions, but for their identities as members of an enemy class.

An equally informative aspect of ideology in the Armies is dechristianization. The historical record leaves us with many instances of Revolutionary Army soldiers engaging, both informally on an individual level, and as an organized body, in the sometimes-violent act of dechristianization. Anti-Catholic sentiment was a largely popular phenomenon, one that fed off of the official curbing of independent Catholic power that produced refractory priests. Yet by 1793 anti-Catholicism had devolved

²⁶⁹ Cobb, pg. 328

²⁷⁰ Palmer, pg. 157, pg. 165

²⁷¹ Address, pg. 235-237, Greer, pg.

in some circles into dechristianization, characterized by a deep superstition of all things religious. In October 1793 at the commune of Mennecy in the Brie region, the town systematically excised its religious leadership with four orders: 1. the dispensing with of parish priests, 2. the sale of the presbytery, 3. the conversion of the town church into a popular meeting-place for the local Jacobins, and 4. the renaming of the town to Mennecy-Marat, after the assassinated agitator Jean-Paul Marat.²⁷² Many hundreds of other towns enacted similar policies in a largely popular action to curb Catholic influences and raise up the new Revolutionary faith. Clearly, performative violence is present in these actions, as the villagers spontaneously acted according to the established Revolutionary script. By playing the part of good godless Frenchmen, the people Mennecy-Marat could gain recognition and societal status for their positive displays of patriotism, and it is easy to look towards other instances of popular demonstrations to show that Mennecy-Marat was hardly alone in its actions.

These acts of coordinated violence against religion, however, were rare outbursts rather than any centrally-organized mission. One of the most violent forces, the Army sent south to suppress Lyon, carried out its own campaign of dechristianization—yet their authority extended only to their marching route, barely penetrating beyond the major highway south from Paris.²⁷³ The mission of dechristianization on the part of Revolutionary Armies, historian of the Armies Richard Cobb summarizes, manifested in events that were “isolated... spectacular rather than important... The *revolutionnaires* [members of the armies] were sometimes victims of a reputation for violence and ferocity which had been specifically manufactured to terrify the country people.”²⁷⁴ Moreover, there are serious indications that the iconoclasm of dechristianization was more a group activity than a spontaneous upsurge of atheistic violence; crowds of soldiers, not always sober, would engage in a certain ‘one-upmanship,’ using the performance of dechristianization to display positive patriotism, dispel doubts of loyalty, and bond with comrades-in-arms. Once again, we can easily classify this behavior as performative.

²⁷² Hazan, pgs. 305-308

²⁷³ Cobb, pg. 462

²⁷⁴ Cobb, pg. 459

Of a similar breed were the personal squabbles in which the Revolutionary Armies engaged. Because the Armies worked off of local informants, village denouncements, and usually scant but menacing language from their political masters in Paris of local affairs, the Revolutionary Armies regularly became the tools by which local conflicts were resolved. One particularly insightful event involves the village of Vermenton, with its 2,000 inhabitants. While the struggle was portrayed theatrically at Lyon, other found the battles more prosaic: “the words ‘federalist’ and ‘patriot’ were mere fronts” for some, “behind which lay the realities of personal hatreds and family rivalries... many calling themselves patriots simply did so because a hated neighbor had declared himself a Federalist.”²⁷⁵ The former mayor of Vermenton, Dathé, had waged a personal campaign for a year against the group of citizens, who ousted him from office in 1792, and had to this end petitioned local Jacobin clubs, representatives in Lyon, and even Maximilien Robespierre to get rid of the current leadership.

In October 1793 the first detachments arrived in Vermenton, primed to expect a counterrevolutionary hive. Presented by Dathé with apparent evidence of his rival’s guilt, the detachment was plied with drink by a team of stereotypical *san-culotte*, as well as the flamboyant ‘*mère Duchesne*,’²⁷⁶ a window and partisan of Dathé. With this encouragement, the Army detachment attempted to arrest and deport those counterrevolutionary elements identified by Dathé but met the justified opposition of the townsfolk instead. The trio of “counterrevolutionaries” had to be removed by force to be tried by a Revolutionary Tribunal. While in prison, it was revealed that Dathé had manufactured evidence and facilitated the unjustified arrests of citizens Girault, Souflot, and Legry, and the three were released in early 1794. Shortly after the fall of Robespierre during the Thermidorian Reaction, the trio exacted their revenge, denouncing Dathé as a hardcore Jacobin and sending *mère Duchesne* and her daughter to jail.²⁷⁷ This anecdote shares many similarities with the localized conflicts at Macechoul and elsewhere in the Vendée. These, and many other examples during the Revolution shows that individual quarrels could

²⁷⁵ Cobb, pg. 344

²⁷⁶ Referencing the famous character from Jacques Hébert’s journal, *Père Duchesne*

²⁷⁷ Cobb, pgs. 344-350

easily escalate to larger instances of violence. The plotting of the citizens of Vermenton was exacerbated by the arrival of Revolutionary Armies; the paucity of local informants meant violence could easily be manipulated to serve individual ends. As such, we have with Vermenton a perfect demonstration of the logic of instrumental violence, where individual villagers used violence to further personal benefits.

The Revolutionary Armies enjoyed a brief but colorful existence, and not long after the return of normalcy to Vermenton, the Armies that had marched through them would come under serious scrutiny and be abolished. In the spring of 1794, at the height of the Terror, the Revolutionary Army general Charles-Philippe Ronsin was arrested as part of a ‘military plot’ against the Robespierre government.²⁷⁸ None of the charges made against Ronsin—that he was a would-be Cromwell waiting to seize power through a military coup—were truthful, and yet him and his army stood as an existential threat to the project undertaken by the Committee of Public Safety to centralize systems of repression. Free-wheeling organizations of overzealous revolutionaries was not what Paris needed as it grew closer and closer to monopolizing violence, and Ronsin stood in the path of their internal victory. Executed in March 1794 were not only Ronsin, but the other members of the radical populist faction organized around Hébert—Anacharsis Clootz, assistant minister of war Vincent, and Hébert himself.²⁷⁹ Formally operating for just half a year, the Revolutionary Armies were significant for several reasons, and their choice as exemplars of the Terror is not incidental.

The Revolutionary Armies were characterized by a revolutionary elan that colored their actions. The ensuing violence can be explained using the performative theory of violence. We predicted the performance of violence according to popular narratives against targets with symbolic value. Indeed, the Armies played heavily upon performance. The mustachioed *sans-culotte* joined the Armies in droves in order to perform the Revolution; participation was highly prized as a way to further the Revolution, “not from the pay,” to quote our earlier soldier, “but... to serve my country.” In a manner similar to the

²⁷⁸ Cobb, pg. 567

²⁷⁹ Palmer, pg. 292

September Massacres, joining the Revolutionary Armies was an effective and affective way to *be* revolutionary.

The statistics on enrollment shows very similar class compositions as those who raided prisons in the Massacres: the urban poor, clinging fiercely to their right to state participation, made up the Armies, informing their Revolutionary character and attachment to popular performativity. In instances of dechristianization, it should be clear that the physical destruction of sundry statues was as much a show of patriotism than an effective way to fight the counterrevolution. The Armies, in their very form, fed off of performative actions; organized around group coherence, the Armies, like other armed forces, were built around group identities, and the Armies were permanently linked with the Revolution. In a very real sense, then, the Revolutionary Armies allowed patriotic Frenchmen to fight the Revolutionary war. The Revolutionary Armies, for these reasons, allowed a very literal actualization of the Revolution, while also ensuring the same themes of popular sovereignty that appeared in earlier events was maintained as a key tenet in the Revolutionary constellation.

The Revolutionary Armies were the manifestation of the Terror, the most active physical form of the period. They were the policemen of the new regime, imbued not only with the formal political mandate of ensuring Revolutionary orthodoxy, but also as literal soldiers in the war against the counterrevolution and its independent evils—the starvation of monarchy, the subversion of the priesthood, the superstitions of Catholicism. In them, we can observe the three major theories of violence presented in this paper in action. From the instrumental theory of violence, we see individuals engaging in violence against objectively valuable targets to further their own good, and the state using violence as a means of repression. To the first point, we saw the incentives of joining the Armies: a feeling of belonging and participation melded with the very real and tangible desire to provide food for one's family.

Likewise, the preponderance of men with relations—sons and brothers mostly—in the formal armies on the frontiers indicates the prevalence of support for the state. Likewise, Revolutionary Army

soldiers often used violence or the threat of violence to satisfy their own ends, requiring room and board for their units, or getting engaged in the sort of internal conflicts that characterized Vermenton. To the second point, it is easy to understand the state's objective in forming the Revolutionary Armies. Vital was the protection of food supplies, for both Paris and armies in the field, and the Armies' actions were concentrated on that subsistence objective. Also, in their pursuit of refractory priests, the Armies removed all hostile elements organizing counterrevolution in the countryside. Yet the goal of the Armies was also to instill terror: in the words of Chaumette, the entire purpose of the Armies was "to tyrannize the destroyers of tyranny." The very presence of soldiers of the Revolution—not to mention their use of violence—did much to terrorize any elements still threatening counterrevolutionary action.

Our third and final theory, the *ideological theory of violence*, is also present in the Revolutionary Armies example. The physical appearance of the armies was a deliberate evocation of *sans-culottism* the notion of popular sovereignty and the victory of the poor over the rich. The targets of violence were very often ideological: rich farmers, merchants, those who spoke ill of the Revolution. But most telling is the fact of dechristianization; the targeting of priests, as well as the destruction of symbols of Christianity, were intended as serious blows to the edifice of Catholicism, while the repurposing of these as "temples of reason" were, like the renaming of Mennecy to Marat, the enactment of Revolutionary orthodoxy. All elements of the old order were to be destroyed as a matter of course, while those arrested by the Armies tended to be guilty of counterrevolutionary *identities*, as much as counterrevolutionary *action*. Refractory priests were easily and actively linked to the old regime, and their constant targeting reflects a deep commitment on the part of the Armies to fulfilling the natural course of the victory of the poor irreligious *sans-culotte*, which was the goal of the Revolution.

Thus, it is quite feasible to see the Revolutionary Armies as the perfect amalgamation of our theories on violence. The historical importance of the Armies, moreover, means these theories should hold true for the Reign of Terror as a whole. Because the Revolutionary Armies were the physical manifestation of the Terror, and because they were organized popularly with elite leadership, because

they were to enforce both state policy on food as well as the informal “religion” of the Revolution, the Armies capture nearly every aspect of the Terror in general. We set out at the beginning of this paper with an admittedly simple premise—to complicate the existing theories of revolutionary violence. This was achieved by introducing three distinct but related theories of what explains violence—performative, instrumental, and ideological understandings of revolutionary violence. As was demonstrated by the paper thus far, these three theories can accurately explain distinct aspects of the Reign of Terror. It is, however, possible to construct a rough theoretical hierarchy of theories as pertains to explaining violence. In other words, while each of these theories might explain certain events particularly well, it is both possible and useful to construct a synthesis of theories to explain the whole of the Terror and revolutionary violence.

V.

Reconstructing Theory

The case of the Revolutionary Armies makes two things clear. First, if it is possible for three theories to coexist and interact within a single historical event, it is possible—indeed probable, as I demonstrate shortly—that the entirety of the Terror can be explained by combining multiple theories. This brings about a second point: if the three theoretical approaches of performative, instrumental, and ideological violence are present in the Reign of Terror, it is possible to identify in what relation, and to what extent each theory can explain violence within a theoretical synthesis. Before engaging in this exercise, however, it is important to clarify, given the inherently historical nature of this project, how the process of history writing and theory formation interact with one another in order to appreciate the inherent limitations of the ensuing analysis. In order to make this larger meta-theoretical point, we will identify the flaws within ideological theory to the Revolutionary Armies case, from which more general conclusions can be made. By looking into the deeper flaws of one particular theory, we can telescope

outward to make broad points about how all theory can possess certain flaws. There are two problematic facets of individual theoretical approaches, considered first on a historical, and then theoretical, basis.

A.

Historical Context

The ideological theory of violence relies heavily on a developed and well-understood set of ideals. In the chapter on ideological violence, the killings at Lyon were used to show the prevalence of ideological considerations in the Terror. It was the language of class war, merged with the Revolutionary ideals of equality, liberty, and terror to enemies, that directly informed the shape of violence. Thus, we saw the targeting of Lyonnaise silk merchants, the prompt execution of any *sans-culotte* who served with Federalist rebels, and the physical destruction of the symbols of wealth, starting with the wealthy Place Bellecouer. However, while it is clear with Lyon that ideology inspired waves of violence, it is impossible to generalize the Lyonnaise case across the entire Terror, precisely because the clear principles at play in Lyon did not exist for other examples of violence. *There was no single ideology of the Terror as a whole*, and the violence at Lyon was the direct result of the presence of Revolutionary Radicals, who were exceptionally violent ideological extremists. George Couthon, a moderate proponent of violence, was in control of Lyon's repression at the outset. Couthon was returning from a mission to his home province, Puy de Dôme, in the same south-central region as Lyon itself. While there, Couthon enacted Terror of a wholly different tone. In Puy de Dôme, a region that had joined the Federalist rebellion of Lyon, just 15 individuals—those who held government offices and who declared rebellion—were arrested. Of the 15, just two were sentenced to death, with the other 13 being acquitted by a special Revolutionary Tribunal convened by Couthon to mete out “soft” terror.²⁸⁰ Couthon was a member of the Committee of Public

²⁸⁰ Palmer, pg. 141, for further information on Couthon's mission, Palmer, pgs. 130-149

Safety, a coequal with Robespierre and the villain of Lyon Collot d’Herbois, and thus held equal sway in determining the Revolutionary orthodoxy. Yet his actions spoke to a wholly different notion of violence.

Moreover, Couthon was just as committed to the larger Revolutionary project, further complicating the causal link of ideology and violence. While in the Puy de Dôme, he excised a “Revolutionary tax” of all persons with fortunes more than 40,000 livres, which was to be distributed to the indigent and homeless, as well as veterans. Couthon was also avidly anti-Catholic and reveled in the closure of the central church and abolition of all priestly titles still remaining in the region. In a pronouncement to the entire province, Couthon stated “that the reason and philosophy which today enlighten France and will soon govern the world, after breaking the scepters of kings should likewise strike unto death the monster of fanaticism... dissipate those images of superstition which hold peoples in error.”²⁸¹ Clearly, there are ideological overtones, and yet that ideology led to two deaths, not two thousand. When Couthon was then ordered to oversee the destruction of Lyon, he took his moderate use of violence with him. Working with the same Revolutionary Tribunal, it is entirely likely the Terror would have looked totally different in Lyon, had Couthon not been withdrawn just a month after his arrival in the city in November of 1793.²⁸²

His replacement, Collot d’Herbois, another member of the Committee of Public Safety, was a spiteful and bitter man, a failed actor who bore class hatred with a deeply personal fervor. The extent of violence was indelibly shaped by his personal presence. Collot acted quite independently of Robespierre and the other members of the Committee of Public Safety, and his consistent radicalism eventually made him an enemy to Robespierre, who despised his destructive populism—including his brutal repression of Lyon.²⁸³ Listening to the appeals of the Lyonnaise for an end to terroristic governance, Robespierre would order Collot’s arrest along with the other radicals of the Hébertist faction—a group that also included the Conventionnel Jean-Baptiste Carrier, the man responsible for the “revolutionary baptisms,” the murder of

²⁸¹ Palmer, pg. 144

²⁸² Palmer, pg. 159

²⁸³ Address, pgs. 236-237

prisoners at Nantes during the repression of the Vendée.²⁸⁴ In this manner, the extreme violence of Lyon was not the result of a single revolutionary ideology, but was rather the enactment of a minority view of the “natural” course of the Revolution that directly contrasted with other revolutionary elites. The lack of any united ideology, and the extreme variations within an ideology—between Couthon and Collot, for instance—should demonstrate the limitations of a single theoretical approach to understanding violence.

We can extend this critique of the singular use of a theory to the Revolutionary Armies. Dechristianization, seen in abundance during the patrols of the Armies, was also an action informed by personal preference rather than a central ideological dogma. Robespierre, for one, was staunchly against the destructive dechristianization of France. Robespierre linked dechristianization, not without reason, to the radicals like Hébert, who were guilty of unnecessarily stirring up the peasantry. Revolutionary ideology was not so much a strict set of religious principles, but a deeply interpretive and often contradictory body. Thus, the dechristianization of the Revolutionary Armies cannot be totally credited to ideological tenets, as there was no one doctrine of the Revolution when it came to religion—there was no single authority which could decide on the ideological orthodoxy to be violently enforced. Moreover, even if one claims that all of the Committee were equally revolutionary in nature, their approaches to violence could not have been more distinct—further limiting the broad use of a single theoretical approach like ideological violence. Thus, while an ideological approach to violence is useful in explaining certain instances of violence, projecting that theory outside of these contexts is impossible.

This leads us to a larger conclusion, not just about the ideological explanation. It is impossible to stretch any one theory over the entirety of the Terror—or really any historical event—because projecting a singular theoretical approach will inevitably run up against historical events that do not comply with said theoretical predictions. But this historical point belies a deeper critique, and again it is expressed best by ideological theory, though is applicable to both instrumental and performative theories as well. The

²⁸⁴ Address, pg. 290

process by which political scientific theory is proposed invariably tends to project contemporary events backwards in time. By delving into the historiographical background underlying a theory's construction—in the case of ideological theory, the historical context within which Arendt formulated her arguments on revolutionary ideologies—it is possible to view how theory is made, and thus how a synthesis of theories is both beneficial and necessary to explain the Terror and other instances of violence.

B.

Historiographical Context

We should not be so surprised at the limitations of the ideological explanation when we look towards the scholarship that undergird the theory. Hannah Arendt, the lodestone of theory on authoritarianism and totalitarianism, had Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in mind when she developed her views on revolutionary ideologies in the decades after the Second World War. Her use of terms like the “iron band” refer directly to the case of the Third Reich, which she termed the first truly totalitarian state. Arendt's desire to project modern regimes backwards in time cannot solely be explained away as a historiographical miscarriage. Historians were just as liable to view history through the lens of current events, and Arendt's contemporaries in French Revolutionary history displayed the same prejudice for grandiose ideational explanations. François Furet, one of the most influential French historians of the 20th century, inhabited the same theoretical and temporal space as Hannah Arendt, whose works he both read and cited.²⁸⁵ Furet, who left the French Communist Party after the invasion of Hungary in 1956, etched out his own space on the rich tradition of French Revolutionary historiography. Historiography—the history of history—is a field which parallels the development of theories in other fields, including political science. Looking at historiography, it becomes clearer how the individual

²⁸⁵ The History of an Illusion: The Survival of the Radical Impulse in an Age of Capitalism, Furet, pg. 705

theories presented in this paper incarnate their own strengths and weaknesses by reflecting the unique historical periods in which they were devised.

To illustrate this point, we can start with the basics of the historiography on the French Revolution. The first historical theorists of the Revolution inhabited the counterrevolutionary revisionist Europe that was realized after the end of Robespierre. Critics like Edmund Burke, Hippolyte Taine, and others were quick to posit that the violence of the Revolution was a natural outcome of democratic experimentation, for the dangerous notions of republicanism and equality could only ever result in societal breakdown. The Terror was merely what occurred when the poor and unenlightened got involved in politics, and this stood as the traditional explanation for the Revolution up until the advent of Marxism. While Karl Marx only touched on the French Revolution in the course of his scholarship, his disciples transformed the understanding of the Revolution. To the historians of the new age, class conflict was at the center of revolutionary violence, and the works of Georges Lefebvre, Albert Mathiez, and Albert Soboul emphasized the dialectic nature of the Terror. Lefebvre summarized the Revolution as “the culmination of a long economic and social evolution which has made the bourgeoisie the master of the world.”²⁸⁶ The Terror was easily rationalized as an appropriate response to the accumulation of power and influence of the bourgeoisie and the noble, and the Marxist interpretation prevailed for the better part of a century, and became the “social interpretation” of the Revolution, focusing heavily on class conflict and mass movements.

Sociologists and political scientists, such as Moore, Skocpol, and O’Kane, who analyzed the French Revolution from the Marxist perspective, in turn drew upon the historians of the “social interpretation”—particularly Soboul’s work on the *sans-culotte* and George Rudé’s *The Crowd in the French Revolution*, as well as Richard Cobb’s case study of the Revolutionary Armies from earlier. As such, a long pedigree of Marxist history contributed to class-based social scientific theories on revolutions

²⁸⁶ Lefebvre, *The Coming of the French Revolution*, (Paris: 1939), pg. 339

in general, and the French in particular. Thus, we can already see how particular contemporary considerations—here the predominance of Marxist theories—influences how the past is presented in theory. Compression and condensation are necessary in order to make broader political scientific theories stick, a fact indicated by the next wave of historical and political scholarship.

The field of French Revolutionary history underwent a revolution of its own in the post-World War II period, beginning with non-French scholarship like that of Alfred Cobban. This novel interpretation of the Revolution centered on the pivotal figure of Francois Furet, who directly attacked the social interpretation as well as the circumstantial thesis presented in earlier works, stating directly that “the Revolution cannot be reduced to circumstances.”²⁸⁷ Furet argued that the radicalization of the Revolution had by 1792 ensured the Terror, for the ideology of popular sovereignty and the supremacy of the ‘general will’ brooked no opposition—the Terror sprang from a “set of ideas [that] predated the circumstances... [thus the Terror was] a demand based on political convictions and beliefs.”²⁸⁸ It was not coincidental, however, that Furet arrived at this conclusion in the developing political world of the 1950s and 60s. As put by Michael Christofferson, author of *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s*, “when one follows Furet’s career... one conclusion clearly emerges: Furet always closely intertwined his historical work with contemporary politics.”²⁸⁹ Furet was part of a general historical revisionism taking place in postwar Europe, alongside such historians as Ernst Nolte,²⁹⁰ who ignited the “Historikerstreit” Holocaust debates in Germany.²⁹¹ Furet had been a member of the French Communist Party until the invasion of Hungary in 1956, after which point he drifted to the right and became deeply critical of his former beliefs. Thus, “by projecting selected characteristics of French communism during the Cold War onto the French Revolution, Furet... connect[ed] his historical

²⁸⁷ Francois Furet, “Terror,” *The French Revolution in Social and Political Perspective*. Ed. Peter Jones. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996, pg. 463

²⁸⁸ Francois Furet, “Terror,” *The French Revolution in Social and Political Perspective*. Ed. Peter Jones. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996, pgs. 463, 451

²⁸⁹ Christofferson, pg. 257

²⁹⁰ For further information about the politics of German historiography, see A.P. Turek, *The Architect of Myth and Misery: Albert Speer and the Long Shadow of the Third Reich*

²⁹¹ Finchelstein, *From Fascism to Populism in History*, pg. 47

and memorial revisionism,” overturning the “social interpretation” with his own personal revisionist outlook.²⁹² In reconstructing the historical record around an ideological framework, Furet, as noted above, engaged in the same broad project as Hannah Arendt. *Origins of Totalitarianism* and *On Revolution* sprang directly from the traumatic experiences of the Second World War and the Cold War, but Arendt projected backwards, rephrasing the Terror as the totalitarian product of the same egalitarian logic that birthed the Soviet Union. Indeed, Furet appears to have avidly backed Arendt’s theoretical revisionism, and commented directly on her scholarship, *Origins of Totalitarianism* in particular.²⁹³

We should not be so surprised that the theoretical underpinnings of the ideological theory of violence are rooted in the dubious academic project of projecting contemporary political realities backwards in time. The difficulties encountered earlier in this chapter make clear this underlying issue. The question of dechristianization is exemplary of this larger point. We cannot credit the violence of religion engaged in by the Revolutionary Armies to some larger ideological script, for there was no central set of ideas, nor one single leader who could promote a certain ideological outlook. Quite the opposite, for as we saw Robespierre was an avowed opponent of such violent dechristianization, and while Robespierre intoned against such actions in Paris, his colleague Georges Couthon eagerly nationalized church lands and beheaded saintly statues in the Puy de Dôme.²⁹⁴ This does not force us away from ideological theory in the particular, however. The Reign of Terror was an undoubtedly complex sum of events and trends, though it lasted for barely two years. As was stated at the outset of this paper, we should logically expect nuanced themes like violence and complex events like the Terror to defy easy singular categorization. In other words, it is possible, if not probable, for multiple theories to be equally applicable at the same time, and for one theory to explain one set of events better than another—that has been the whole design of this project in selecting individual and distinct events of the Terror.

²⁹² Christofferson, pg. 257

²⁹³ Michael Mosher, *On the Originality of Francois Furet: A Commemorative Note*, pg. 396, note 9

²⁹⁴ Palmer, pgs. 142-144

The fact that certain elements of the ideological approach, or any other, attempt to understand history through a more contemporary perspective does not make earlier points any less valid, and, even while prejudices exist in a theoretical approach, it does not discount the empirical validity of the cases selected. Rephrased, the fact that an instrumental approach cannot explain the September Massacres does not make it any less valid as pertains to the Vendée. Rather, this historiographical discourse leads naturally to an attempt to reach a theoretical synthesis that simultaneously explains varying aspects of violence throughout the Reign of Terror. In the first chapter on theory, the September Massacres were used to demonstrate how popular scripts and public displays explained the raids on prisons and summary executions of many hundreds. Violence was enacted as part of a social discourse, where clear claims were legitimated by a public performance: thus, performative violence. In the Vendée, we witnessed a region in rebellion, where local actors waged war against a state which prohibited their religion, appropriated their lands, and conscripted them for its wars. The state for its part undertook to systematically root out opposition. Violence was characteristically rational in its form, and we were right to call it instrumental violence: violence as a means to an end. Finally, in looking at the suppression of Lyon, we witnessed many hundreds shot dead or guillotined as part of a general campaign against “Federalist” rebels, the rich were pitted against the poor, and physical destruction accompanied the enforcing of Rousseauian ideals. Violence occurred as the result of notional ideas on the world according to an ideology: thus, ideological violence.

Furthermore, the same event can be explained by performative, instrumental, and ideological theories simultaneously. The Revolutionary Armies exemplified aspects of all three theories, positively demonstrating that the Terror can be explained by these theories in concert. The Revolutionary Armies, by combining multiple theories within a single event, demonstrate the logic of applying multiple approaches to multiple events. Because each theoretical approach maintains a level of explanatory capacity and validity, it is necessary to integrate them together in order to create a broader and more nuanced understanding of violence. Thus in the terminal phase of this thesis, I will attempt to construct a

synthesis of our the theories —a synthesis that articulates how the three theories may be effectively combined to create a theoretical understanding of revolutionary violence with the most explanatory and predictive power while also turning to a genuinely quantitative frame to demonstrate the power of a theoretical synthesis.

IV.

Building a Theoretical Synthesis

The Reign of Terror can be explained by a theoretical synthesis, that layers the ideological onto the performative with a base of the instrumental: Terror was a state policy enforced as a solution to internal rebellion and external invasions; it was a key instrument of enforcing state power, but terror came also to legitimate the Revolutionary state. Terror developed into a performance of state functioning, where violence equated to state potency, thus violence developed an inertia of its own. This legitimation, however, could only occur within the ideological lens of Rousseauian political thought, which informed both elite and popular conceptions of violence and state performance. In other words, for any instance of violence to be considered instrumental, it is necessary to first consider the ideological precedents for determining friend and foe, victim and victimizer. Moreover, any instrumental understanding of violence must also incorporate performative elements, which invariably shape how violence is enacted. No theory in itself can adequately and extensively explain violence, and because all three are present at once, all three must be considered as *interrelated and inseparable*. In order to further demonstrate how this synthesis works, we can briefly turn to a quantitative analysis of violence in the Terror.

There is no quantitative source more comprehensive, more total, and more influential in the historical corpus of the Terror than Donald Greer's 1935 *Incidence of the Terror in the French Revolution*. In just 132 pages, Greer summarizes the width and breadth of the Terror, compressing events into a series of useful tables. Of importance to his study are incidences of geography, vocation, social, and

chronology. Despite having been written almost a century ago, Greer's data has been used by sources as disparate as O'Kane's Marxist take to David Andress' succinct revisionist history of the Terror. And yet, his conclusion makes clear very apparent trends in two key aspects: in terms of space and time, geography and chronology.

It is easy to elaborate on the geographic incidence of the Terror. Violence is clearly concentrated in a few areas—the West, the South, Paris, and the border with present-day Belgium. The concentration is rather staggering: of 87 total Departments, the roughly equal administrative divisions of Revolutionary France, six saw no executions whatsoever. A further 31 experienced from 1 to 10 executions, while 14 more saw between 10 and 25, including the aforementioned Puy de Dôme. In only five Departments were there more than 1,000 deaths—17% of Departments accounted for 70% of deaths (or 11,569 of 16,594).²⁹⁵ Of those five, four were sites of conflict, while the fifth was Paris itself. The conclusion drawn is rather intuitive; as Greer states, “It is an inescapable fact that the Terror struck hardest in the regions of civil war.”²⁹⁶ Taken collectively, the conflicts in the Vendée account for close to half of all the victims of the Terror.

The three provinces that formed the military district of the Vendée—those being Loire-Inferieure, Maine-et-Loire, and Vendée proper—accounted for 42% of all executed in the Terror, with the single region of Loire-Inferieure responsible for 3,548 deaths. That Department, it should be noted, included the town of Machecoul, where the inaugural massacre of Republican officials sparked the rebellion, in addition to the city of Nantes, which was besieged by Vendéan forces before being saved, while also being the city where the Conventionnel Carrier drowned countless prisoners.²⁹⁷ Of the total dead recorded by Greer—16,594—we can attribute 10,510 deaths, or two-thirds, to violence in the areas of rebellion. This figure discounts regions bordering areas in rebellion, which would only increase the proportion of deaths from areas in revolt. As was seen in the Vendée, the armies of the Catholic and Royal Army

²⁹⁵ Greer, pgs. 38-39, table III

²⁹⁶ Greer, pg. 40

²⁹⁷ Greer, pg. 65

marched well out of their home Department towards Granville, in the Manche.²⁹⁸ Clear concentrations exist around the Vendée, around the Rhone Department with Lyon, and the south and west, which held the Federalist strongholds of Bordeaux and Toulon.

Thus, the clear geographic incidence of violence strongly suggests an *instrumental explanation* for violence. As Greer himself concludes, the areas of intense violence “duplicate the map of counterrevolution,” while indictments centered on crimes of treason and rebellion.²⁹⁹ This leaves us with “irrefutable evidence that the Terror was employed to crush rebellion and to quell opposition to the Revolution.”³⁰⁰ We can substantiate Greer’s provisional conclusion with our own detailed account of the functioning of instrumental violence. The geographic incidence strongly suggests the strategic use of violence to minimize and control rebellion, a claim strengthened by the mechanisms of violence we identified in the chapter on the Vendée. As discussed in that chapter, the chronological incidence supports such a conclusion; the peak of executions occurred as the Federalist and Vendéan rebellions reached their peaks and were consequently repressed. Lyon, which fell in October 1793, marks the beginning of a rise in executions which continued with the failure of the Vendée rebels at Nantes and Granville. Mass imprisonment in the fall of 1793 was naturally followed by mass executions as the winter ensued, like those witnessed outside Lyon. Greer states that “almost half of executions occurred during these months, 6,500 [of 7,000] in Lyon... and the territory of the Vendée war.”³⁰¹ Thus, we can state fairly conclusively that the Terror was a weapon, an instrument of state power selectively employed in the areas that threatened the Republic most. There is an apparent rational logic to where and when violence occurs, and that is perfectly encapsulated in the instrumental theory of violence—and yet this geographic incidence of violence was determined not so much by instrumental factors, as ideological ones. It was the avowedly

²⁹⁸ Greer, pg. 67

²⁹⁹ Greer, pg. 123

³⁰⁰ Greer, pg. 124

³⁰¹ Greer, pg. 115

anti-religious nature of the Paris government that led the Vendée to rebel, while its centralizing tendencies sparked the Federalist Revolts.

The chronological incidence speaks to the more complex nature of violence and further compels us to go beyond the instrumental approach. The Reign of Terror did not cease when the Vendée was pacified, nor when Lyon fell, nor when the Coalition Armies were pushed from France after the Battle of Fleurus in June of 1794. The victory over counterrevolution that had first justified the Terror had been achieved, and though executions dropped after December 1793, they stayed at a proportionally higher level than ever before.³⁰² This can be explained by injecting the performative explanation of violence into the analysis; we can augment an instrumental explanation with the realization that violence was maintained as a public performance to ensure Revolutionary legitimacy. Violence was not just a tool to be used and then shelved; the performance of violence in the Vendée and other regions was demanded by many in Paris as a positive recourse, a practical response to fight France's enemies, and thus violence became an object of state, indispensable and inseparable from the goals of the Revolution. As the great scholar on the Revolutionary masses Albert Soboul wrote, "The *sans-culotte* considered violence to be the ultimate recourse for those who refused to answer the call of unity.... The struggle against the aristocracy would not have been possible without it."³⁰³ The Terror, once used and justified as a necessity, could only be justified by its continued use, for only final victory could make the bloodshed worthwhile. Greer briefly remarks that "perhaps... the Convention, after having adopted terrorism as an expedient in the spring of 1793... made it a permanent policy... [because of] the menacing agitation of the Parisian *sans-culotte*, who left no alternative."³⁰⁴

As has been seen, violence was understood by the populace as a clear goal of the state, and mass violence against the Revolution's internal enemies was the avowed policy of a notable few. This includes political elites like Marat, agitator and author, Jacques Hébert, head of the radical leftist wing of the

³⁰² Greer, pg. 113

³⁰³ Soboul, pg. 158

³⁰⁴ Greer, pg. 114

Jacobins, and George Roux, considered the leader of the populist demonstrators known as the “Enragés,” the “enraged ones.” As in the September Massacres, the body of the people not only accepted violence as a necessity—a purely instrumental understanding—but as a positive good, a way to progress the Revolution. Thus, we can explain why the Terror was expanded beyond a purely strategic objective and why violence was so harsh. The Terror was a means for the state to legitimate itself and prevent another anarchic action as the September Massacres. We can fit in Carrier’s “Revolutionary baptisms,” the mass-drownings in Nantes, as a way to make violence more spectacular, more public, as well as more efficient, perfectly satisfying the public performative and state instrumental objectives.

However, it is important to state here that performative violence is a necessary, though not sufficient explanation. Performative theory rests on the execution of internal enemies; had there been no Federalist revolt in Lyon, there would not have been such tragic violence. In the September Massacres, the petty criminals were released, while symbolic targets—like priests and nobles—were systematically targeted. The form of violence is thus dictated by larger social norms, and to explain those we must turn to the ideological theory of violence. As in the September Massacres, the targets of violence held particular value, were publicly credited with more counterrevolutionary “weight” than simple thieves. We can add nuance to this fact by considering the ideological underpinnings of such a conclusion. The ultimate goal of the Revolution was ideological, in the pure sense that those who fought the rebellion were not accepted within the Revolutionary paradigm. The successive strictures on clergymen, nobles, then the rich clearly led to the long-lasting resistance to the state from these groups. At a very basic level, ideological violence is a product of some notional Revolutionary objective—for the French, namely the creation of an equal populace free from domination from king or church. Not only does this nuclear ideology create allies and enemies, it creates the discursive framework around those elements that in turn contribute to both performative and instrumental violence. In short, refractory priests were targeted for ideological reasons: resistance to the state doctrine on faith. They then become centers for counterrevolution, and, in turn, targets for republican hatred.

It is incorrect, however, to see all violence as stemming from ideology. Simply put, there was no “plan” for the Terror on the part of the Jacobins. Robespierre had himself opposed the death penalty as a young provincial lawyer.³⁰⁵ But we need only turn to the victims of the Terror to dissuade ourselves from the broad ideological claims of Furet and others. As Greer shows, the victims of the Terror were, by and large, enemies of the Revolution. There is no clear trend of nobles or the rich being executed, predictions which would follow from a Jacobin “plot” for a Stalinist de-kulakization. Nobles accounted for just 8.5% of all executions, while the clergy made up just 6.5%. The bulk of executions were of the working class and the peasants (31.25% and 28% respectively)—the foot soldiers of rebellion in the Vendée, the privates of the Federalist armies.³⁰⁶ These represent proportional levels of executions, a far cry from the genocide of the rich that would follow from a strict Arendtian understanding of the Terror. As Greer concludes, “The social incidence of death sentences, even when related to contemporary demography, are irreconcilable with the theories of social selection.”³⁰⁷ Furthermore, Greer notes that violence extended beyond Thermidor and the fall of Robespierre. Napoleon, two decades after the Terror, had to contend with rebellion in the Vendée, distracting his efforts at Waterloo.

Thus, it is impossible to credit violence to any one ideology. Rather than take ideology as the ultimate source of revolutionary violence, we should contextualize it to a very particular place—that of informing very particular targets of violence. Ideological violence predicts the excessive instances of violence, the drownings at Nantes or mass-shootings at Lyon, rather than the scope of events, for it is clear that the Terror was not applied to every Frenchman. Yet in enacting ideological violence, we are forced to recognize the deeply performative aspects that maintained violence even after any immediate instrumental justification was absent. While it should be apparent that no one theory can justly comprehend violence in the Reign of Terror, we can conclude that a synthesis of theories produces a far

³⁰⁵ Jordan, pg. 17

³⁰⁶ Greer, pg. 166

³⁰⁷ Greer, pg. 124

better understanding of violence—which invariably displays elements of performative, instrumental, and ideological explanation of violence.

V.

Synthesis and Theory

As has been argued in this concluding chapter, the Reign of Terror encompassed a host of brutal events. Explaining the Terror has been the task of historians and political scientists since the Revolution began. This paper began with a simple premise. The doctrine of political scientists like Theda Skocpol posited that revolutionary violence was a simple affair that occurred as a result of social conflict. The objective material conditions that birthed revolutions also contributed to violence, whether from class conflict or from the attempted centralization of the state as O’Kane argued. This was found to be insufficient; neither predictive, nor descriptive, nor causally substantiated, this “revolutionary theory of violence” was wholly rejected. In its place, we turned to three alternative theories of violence—performative, instrumental, and ideological. By working through particular events in the Terror, it was shown that each has a certain explanatory capacity. In a simple sense, then, this paper has been a success; “revolutionary theory” was rejected, and alternative theories provided for and evidenced

The intent of this terminal phase was to expand beyond that. As was shown in the case of ideological theory, the historiography of the Revolution ties in closely with the theories of the realm of political science. In order to expand beyond this existential limitation, I have walked through a synthesis of theories, the aim being to bridge theoretical weaknesses with a broad coalition of ideas. This synthesis argues that the Reign of Terror can be explained by all three theories, presented in a certain order. Violence occurred first according to instrumental theory—as a tool against the internal enemies of the Revolution. This simplistic logic was expanded by adding a performative element—that violence continued and was expanded because it legitimated the state as a performance of power. Finally, we

qualify this by stating that this performative aspect must accord to an ideological logic—that the symbolism and targets of performative violence are derived from ideology. We have observed how these theories interact with one another, and this nuanced conclusion will hopefully avoid the pitfalls of earlier theories by providing an explanation for not just certain events of the Terror—or any other instance of grand bloodshed—but by giving a comprehensive answer for the shape, style, and substance of mass violence.

We can bear this conclusion out by a brief but rich discussion of how this theoretical synthesis works may be applied to other instances of violence. We will first examine an event closest to the Reign of Terror—Stalin’s ‘Great Terror,’ the purges within the 1930s Soviet Union. This event best resembles the production of our theoretical synthesis, with clear ideological and performative aspects built atop an instrumental basis. Working away from this, we will examine the horrors of the Rwandan Genocide, where instrumental and performative aspects are strongly expressed. Finally, we will end with the actions of the United States in South Vietnam during Operation Phoenix, where the core of instrumental theory is displayed.

The Stalinist purges were the second great “Terror” in history, initiated in 1934 after the suspicious death of Joseph Stalin’s associate Sergei Kirov. Over the course of four years, Stalin and his agents would have 1.5 million Soviets imprisoned, with 700,000 executed.³⁰⁸ As presented by Stalin’s biographer Simon Sebag Montefiore:

Stalin, assisted by Yezhov [head of the Soviet secret police], shaped the febrile fears of war with Poland and Germany and the very real dangers of the Spanish Civil War, the inexplicable industrial failures caused by Soviet incompetence, and the resistance of the regional “princes”

³⁰⁸ Montefiore, pg. 229

[regional strongmen] into a web of conspiracies that dovetailed with the paranoiac soul... [of] Stalin.³⁰⁹

On a practical level, the Great Terror was instrumental; Stalin used mass violence as a means of increasing his own control, confronting internal enemies, and ensuring mass loyalty. Paul Gregory's 2009 *Terror By Quota*, holds that agents of repression in the Soviet Union were rational actors, while the aegis under which they operated was rationally conceived of and executed, just within a totalitarian mindset in which enemies are all who actively, passively, or possibly resist the dictatorial interests of the party. Gregory writes that "in political economy, "rational" means taking actions that optimize stated objectives or goals, moral or immoral."³¹⁰ The dictator, here Lenin, Stalin, and their secret police, seek to secure power using finite resources through loyalty or repression. Total loyalty and total repression are both impossible demands, particularly given that the Bolsheviks in the initial period of the Russian Revolution were an elite minority. Thus, Soviet terror operated under the assumption that it was preferable to convict or execute many innocents to prevent a single criminal walking free; hence, "the more difficult it is to identify the guilty, the greater number of innocent victims".³¹¹ This contributed to the development of mandatory conviction minimums for each Soviet region, which led to a culture of "overbidding," or convicting even more than mandated.

There were also certain performative elements within the Great Terror that served to increase its violence. The NKVD, the Soviet secret police, relied on local informants to report "wreckers" who were responsible for undermining local productivity. Aside from material rewards, reporting one's neighbors was an effective and direct way to express loyalty to Stalin, and this trend is true for all those involved in the Terror, from the masses to the elites. For agents of the Terror especially, overkilling was a way to impress the dictator and improve professional prospects. As Montefiore informs us, "The magnates [of

³⁰⁹ Montefiore, pg. 207

³¹⁰ Gregory, *Terror By Quota*, pg. 10, quote from pg. 268

³¹¹ Gregory, *Terror By Quota*, pgs. 220-230

the Terror] enthusiastically, recklessly, almost joyfully killed, and they usually killed more than they were asked to.”³¹²

Of course, the predominating aspect of the Great Terror was ideological violence. Stalin premised the mass killings on the completion of an ideological task. The purges were meant to excise the last remnants of “social fascism” that was undermining Communism from within. The targets were guilty by virtue of their identities—the rich peasants called kulaks, the religious and independent clergymen left over in Russia, and the nationalist Polish, German, Tatar, and other ethnicities within the Soviet sphere. Always, the Terror was conceived of with ideological terms, hose completion was ideologically termed; the victims were guilty of opposing the course of history, which was the victory of Soviet Communism over its enemies without and within. Thus, we can fold together all three elements of our theoretical synthesis, presenting them, moreover, in a manner similar to the Reign of Terror. In this, we see that a practical instrumental explanation can be fitted with aspects of performative violence, while an overarching ideological grounding made violence much more brutal.

The Rwandan Genocide is an event similar to the Great Terror only insofar as both involve the horrific slaughter of thousands of people. For roughly four months in 1994, between half a million and a million Tutsi ethnics minorities were slaughtered by the majority Hutu in the small African nation of Rwanda.³¹³ Amidst a long-running civil war, the unexplained death of then Rwandan President Habyarimana sparked a mass slaughter by Hutu power groups of the Tutsis, an ethnic group favored by the former German and Belgian colonial overlords. Again, we can contextualize violence as largely instrumental; the Tutsi were a minority group in Rwanda, who had enjoyed power and prominence, yet the Hutu-backed presidency of Juvenal Habyarimana threatened to upend that order. His death, linked with the invasion of the Tutsi-backed Rwandan Patriotic Front, prompted Hutu extremists to call for the mass killing of suspect Tutsis in country. The Hutu, long dispossessed materially and politically, turned

³¹² Montefiore, pg. 231

³¹³ Power, pgs. 388-389, Gourevitch, pgs. 29-30

against their Tutsi countrymen in order to secure some semblance of security, as the Hutu and Tutsi had been in ethnic conflict since the colonial era.³¹⁴

While starting from an instrumentalist base, we can also interpret the shape and style of violence as largely performative, especially given the facts of the case. The genocide was popularly achieved, with countless *genocidaires* taking up arms—often little more than machetes sharpened to a point—without formal organization. As journalist Phillip Gourevitch, who spent years interviewing victims and perpetrators, wrote, “Genocide, after all, is an exercise in community building... [because] killing Tutsis was a political tradition in postcolonial Rwanda; it brought people together.”³¹⁵ Certain elite actors, such as President Habyarimana’s widow, used local radio to agitate locals into a froth of genocidal indignation, painting killing Tutsis as the only way to save hearth and home, while also building a sense of national unity. In this very real sense, mass killing was as Gourevitch says, a group building activity. Participation was public, and publicly symbolic in a manner that matches our theoretical predictions; commonplace was the public display of corpses as monuments, indicators of personal pride as much as displays of genocidal success.

And yet certain ideological aspects cannot be ignored. The killings were premised by elites as the playing out of an ancient ethnic feud between ‘Hamites,’ i.e. racially superior Hutus, and Tutsi ‘Negroes,’ to use the racist terminology of the time. “Hutu Power” *genocidaires* compiled elaborate lists of Tutsi to be slaughtered, indicating a level of complexity and planning that closely resembles the Soviet purges.³¹⁶ Moreover, at the most basic level, the distinction between Tutsi and Hutu was necessarily constructed—and thus ideological, not dissimilar to the separation of “loyal” and “disloyal” Revolutionaries in occupied Lyon. As in every other instance, ideological elements inform and frame violence, determining hostile and friendly camps, and justifying violence between such groups.

³¹⁴ Power, pgs. 335-345

³¹⁵ Gourevitch, pgs. 95-96

³¹⁶ Power, pgs. 327-32

For a final consideration, it is helpful to turn to a wholly different shade of violence in a completely different context. *Phuong Hoang*, meaning “all-seeing bird” in Vietnamese (though translated as the Phoenix Program), was an initiative launched by the Central Intelligence Agency in coordination with MACV, the American military mission in South Vietnam. The goal was the liquidation of communist agents and active members of the Vietcong, the guerrilla force that opposed the United States in Vietnam during its involvement from 1965-1972.³¹⁷ Conceived by CIA director William Colby as “a program of consolidating intelligence and exploitation efforts against... key individuals,” the Phoenix Program was a coordinated scheme of covert assassinations with the aim of killing off Vietcong leadership at the ground level.³¹⁸ Purposely built around systematized interrogations and record-keeping, the program accounted for some 15,000 arrests at its height in 1968 in the wake of the Tet Offensive. Of these, 15% were executed, 13% switched sides, and a further 72% captured and interrogated.³¹⁹ Other sources point to a far higher figure of killed, as many as 20,000 in total, though hard numbers are difficult to determine given the secrecy of the entire project.³²⁰

Owing to the decisively private nature of the campaign, less humane tactics were open to use, unlike other publicized massacres as that at My Lai. For the Phoenix Program, “anyone killed in a skirmish [could be classified] as a member of the Vietcong... they frequently tortured villagers on no more evidence than the accusation of a neighbor.”³²¹ This allowed for a strategy of concentrated killings while generating general terror. It was a campaign of strategic murder initiated in secret by a coalition of CIA and South Vietnamese intelligence forces, with the aim of destroying the Vietcong at their roots. This was instrumental terror in its purest form; the Phoenix Program “combined political, economic, and

³¹⁷ Sorley, pg. 64

³¹⁸ Sorley, pg. 67

³¹⁹ Sorley, pg. 144

³²⁰ Sheehan, pg. 733

³²¹ Karnow, pg. 617

cultural schemes with espionage warfare in order to eliminate the infrastructure of the revolution,” again to quote Colby.³²²

This is immediately reflective of the sort of violence predicted by Kalyvas, whom we discussed regarding instrumental violence. The strategic use of assassinations and murder was joined to a general fearmongering, one exacerbated by the extralegal methods employed. Death squads, operating with local intelligence, could and did extricate Vietcong cadres, and posed a serious threat to the entire guerrilla campaign. Violence was used as a tool to fight a counterinsurgency campaign, and strategic violence—involving public arrests with private executions, including the CIA’s own “disappearances”—invoked a general feeling of terror amongst the populace, which was entirely intentional, and apparently quite effective.³²³

Despite this seemingly straightforward case of systemic violence as the result of a coordinated military campaign, however, it is necessary to consider ideological aspects as well. Clearly, in determining friendly and hostile camps, larger ideological narratives came into play—there would be no Phoenix Program without Communists and Americans, and that distinction was an ideological one. Moreover, the Phoenix Program operated almost entirely in rural regions, as farmers were assumed to be the most sympathetic to the communist cause. This was, again, an ideological choice, quite like the decision to use excessive violence in the Vendée—and not other regions—because the Revolutionaries assumed that violence sprang from there in particular. Furthermore, in the execution of violence, performative elements were inevitable. Namely, the Phoenix Program’s local South Vietnamese operatives undertook to “teach” their backwards countrymen the new and “modern” ways of the cities. In a fashion similar to the Revolutionary Armies, Phoenix Program operatives played the role of all-powerful agents whose mission was to guide villagers towards the light of democratic capitalism. This sort of behavior generally tended to represent an urban-rural, pro- and anti-American dynamic within

³²² Sorley, pg. 147

³²³ Karnow, pg. 618, Sorley, pg. 144

Vietnamese society and colored the performance of the entire operation.³²⁴ Thus, the shape and style of violence as pertains the Phoenix Program requires the complexity of performative, ideological, and instrumental aspects.

Speaking generally—and not a little glibly—it is the tendency of the political scientist to reduce history into a few choice assets from which a theory can be built, whereas the historian is quick to point out how every sundry fact must be included to the point that nothing constructive can be achieved. This thesis has, hopefully, done something to overcome these disciplinary stereotypes by engaging not only with theory or history as immutable and distinct objects but by engaging in the very real discourse between the two fields. The critique leveled at the beginning of this work against the “revolutionary” understanding of violence is a criticism which can also be made regarding any school of thought. Through a historiographical diversion, it has been demonstrated that the historical hard evidence—the facts of the case—are themselves subject to revision and rethinking, a process that invariably flows into the construction of political theory.

By stepping back from dogmatic assertions of theoretical truth, or historical constancy, it can be seen that how we construct thought is worth reconsideration. Rather than adopt uniform theoretical orthodoxies, it is far more productive to take up the much more difficult, but invariably more productive eclectic approach to political theory. The broad groupings used in this paper—performative, instrumental, and ideological, are useful in that they give a far broader perspective in terms of theoretical basis. The case of the Reign of Terror is the perfect historical foil for a nuanced theoretical approach, as the Terror produced, and continues to produce, no shortage of varying interpretations, inspiring endless political commandments—running the gamut from Marxist proponents of class warfare, to ultramonarchists bemoaning the day that democracy won out over the king. The eclectic use of theory in this paper

³²⁴ Karnow, pg. 619

deconstructs not just our understanding of violence in the Reign of Terror, but how theory can more effectively utilize the historical record.

Because the course of human history births political theory, and political theory in its turn shapes history and how we view it, the proximity of past event and theory in this paper should be entirely natural. Any eclecticism in theory is entirely justified by the inherent complexities of the subject: violence. Through a theoretical synthesis of performative, instrumental, and ideological violence, the Reign of Terror can be distilled and understood, in terms both of individual events and as a broad period of human history. From this single event, we can begin to map a synthesis of theories onto various and variously differing scenes and settings, maintaining the nuanced approach that has been built in this paper.

It is impossible to conclude this paper without more fitting words than my own. On the 26th of July, 1794, during the month of Thermidor, Maximilien Robespierre gave his final speech before the Convention in which he announced his most threatening imposition. Inveighing against his fellow representatives, he announced that “there exists a conspiracy against the public liberty... in the very bosom of the Convention.”³²⁵ Promising a purging of the Convention, that body decided he and the Committee had gone far enough; in short order, he was publicly denounced, his arrest ordered shortly after Robespierre departed with his colleagues and allies Saint Just and Couthon. Holed up in the Hotel de Ville, Robespierre and his company made their last stand, and were abandoned by the people they professed to defend. Unassisted by the militias of Paris which he himself had repressed, Robespierre attempted suicide—he failed, blowing off his jaw in one final poetic and pathetic silencing of the Revolution’s controversial chief. Barely conscious, his head bandaged to keep his jaw in place, Robespierre was marched to the guillotine. Bereft of any music or fanfare, the swift blade of the guillotine fell upon his head, whose consequent presentation left one final and “indescribably horrible spectacle.”³²⁶

³²⁵ Address, pg. 333

³²⁶ Address, pg. 344

It is, not unfittingly, violence that characterizes the long arc of the Revolution, that surrounded deeds inspired by the highest morals and the basest conspiracies; violence, which by its existence justified yet more violence. For Robespierre's death did nothing to end the bloodshed, not in France, nor the remainder of Europe. The Reign of Terror subsided, and was taken up by the White Terror, the victims of the former becoming the perpetrators of the latter. There was not peace in the Vendée, nor with the nations of Europe, for another two decades. Violence, of course, is hardly limited to this time and place; in places and times as distant as Vietnam and central Africa, it is violence that persists, violence which continues unabated. In no uncertain terms, violence is the broadening shadow cast by the brilliant light of "human progress"—for all the advancement of liberty, democracy, and equality, we must also recognize the incomprehensibly immense totality of human violence. It is our collective cancer to comprehend and to cure. In understanding violence, we grasp at the unexamined, horrid, and perverse half of the human existence, for it is from our highest ideals that this darkest of behaviors springs. It is the intimate relationship between violence and justice, between evil and good, which is at the core of not simply the Reign of Terror, not even the Revolution, but the human experience itself. It is thusly that we go into the uncertain future with the haunting words of the architect of violence, Maximilien Robespierre, in equal measure as a grim warning and inspiration to avoid such calamities:

If the spring of popular government in time of peace is virtue, the springs of popular government in revolution are at once virtue and terror: virtue, without which terror is fatal; terror, without which virtue is powerless.³²⁷

³²⁷ Klosko, *Jacobins and Utopians*, pg. 104

Works Cited

Andress, David. *The Terror*. (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005).

Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. (London: Penguin Classics, 2006).

Arendt, Hannah. *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. (New York: Random House, 1951).

Bicheno, Hugh. *Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolutionary War*. (New York: Harper-Collins, 2010).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Reproduction Culturelle et Reproduction Social*. *Social Science Information*, 10(2), 45–79. (1971).

Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Logic of Practice*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1990).

Brinton, Crane. *The Anatomy of Revolution*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

Brown, Howard. *Echoes of the Terror*. “Réflexions Historiques,” Vol. 29, No. 3, Violence and the French Revolution (Fall 2003)

Butler, Judith. *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2018).

Butler, Judith. *Performative Agency*, *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3:2, (2010).

Butler, Judith. *Performativity, Precarity, and Sexual Politics*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

Carlyle, Thomas. *The French Revolution: A History*. (London: Penguin Books, 2002).

Cederman, L.E., and Vogt, M. *Dynamics and Logics of Civil War*. “*Journal of Conflict Resolution*,” Vol. 61(9), (2016).

Christofferson, Michael. *French Intellectuals Against the Left: The Antitotalitarian Moment of the 1970s*. (New York: Berghahn Books, 2004).

Cobb, Richard. *The People's Armies*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).

Dickens, Charles. *A Tale of Two Cities*. (New York: Dover Publications, 2011).

Downes, Alexander. *Targeting of Civilians in War*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

Eagan, James Michael. *Maximilien Robespierre: Nationalist Dictator*. (London: Octagon Press, 1978).

Edelstein, Dan. *The Terror of Natural Right: Republicanism, the Cult of Nature, and the French Revolution*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2009).

Finchelstein, Federico. *From Fascism to Populism in History*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017).

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995)

Furet, Francois. *Terror*. "The French Revolution in Social and Political Perspective." Ed. Peter Jones. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996).

Goodwin, Jeff. *No Other Way Out: States and Revolutionary Movements, 1945-1991*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

Gourevitch, Philip. *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will be Killed with Our Families: Stories from Rwanda*. (London: Picador, 1999).

Greer, Donald. *Incidence of the Terror During the French Revolution*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1935).

Gregory, Paul. *Terror by Quota: State Security from Lenin to Stalin (an Archival Study)*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

Hazan, Eric. *A People's History of the French Revolution*. (London: Verso Press, 2014).

Hugo, Victor, trans. Robert Louis Stevenson. *1793*. (New York: Bigelow-Smith Company, 1907).

Israel, Jonathan. *Revolutionary Ideas: An Intellectual History of the French Revolution from The Rights of Man to Robespierre*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Jordan, David. *The Revolutionary Career of Maximilien Robespierre*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

Kalyvas, Stathis. *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

Klosko, George. *Jacobins and Utopians: The Political Theory of Fundamental Moral Reform*. (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003).

Krmaric, D. J., *Varieties of civil war and mass killing: Reassessing the relationship between guerrilla warfare and civilian victimization*. "Journal of Peace Research," Vol. 55(1), (2018).

Kuran, Timur. *Now Out of Never: The Element of Surprise in the East European Revolution of 1989*. "World Politics," vol. 44, no. 1, (1991).

Lefebvre, Georges, and R. R. PALMER. *The Coming of the French Revolution*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

Lipuma, Edward, Postone, Moishe, and Calhoun, Craig. *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives*. (Cambridge: Polity Publisher, 1993).

Mayer, Arno. *The Furies: Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Millet, Allan. *Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps*. (New York: The Free Press, 1991).

Montefiore, Simon Sebag. *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*. (London: Penguin Books, 2005).

Moore, Barrington. *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993).

Mosher, Michael. *On the originality of Francois Furet: a commemorative note*. "Political Theory," vol. 26, no. 3 (1998).

O'Kane, Rosemary. *The Revolutionary Reign of Terror: The Role of Violence in Political Change*. (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1991).

Palmer, R.R. *Twelve Who Ruled: The Year of the Terror in the French Revolution*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941).

Paret, Peter. *Internal War and Pacification: the Vendée, 1789-1796*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961).

Peckham, Howard. *The Toll of Independence: Engagements and Battle Casualties of the American Revolution*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

Popkin, Samuel. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

Power, Samantha. *A Problem from Hell*. (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

Raphael, Ray, *A People's History of the American Revolution*. (New York: The New Press, 2016).

Rousseau, Jean-Jacques, trans. Dunn, Susan. *The Social Contract: The First and Second Discourses*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

Rude, George. *The Crowd in the French Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967).

Rule, James. *Theories of Civil Violence*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Schama, Simon. *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

Schwartz, R. A., and Straus, S. *What drives violence against civilians in civil war? Evidence from Guatemala's conflict archives*. "Journal of Peace Research," Vol. 55(2), (2018).

Sheehan, Neil. *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1989).

Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

Soboul, Albert. *The Sans-Culottes*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Sorely, Lewis. *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam*. (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 2007).

Stone, Bailey. *The Anatomy of Revolution Revisited: A Comparative Analysis of England, France, and Russia*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Straus, Scott. *The Order of Genocide: Race, Power, and War in Rwanda*. (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2008).

Sutherland, Donald. *France, 1789-1815: Revolution and Counterrevolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

Sydenham, J.M. *The French Revolution*. (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1985).

Tackett, Timothy. *The Coming of the Terror in the French Revolution*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015).

Tilly, Charles. *The Vendée*. (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1964).

Valentino, Benjamin. *Final Solutions: Mass Killing and Genocide in the 20th Century*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Valentino, Benjamin. *Why We Kill: The Political Science of Political Violence Against Civilians*. "Annual Review of Political Science," Vol. 17, (2014).

Weber, Caroline. *Terror and Its discontents: Suspect Words in Revolutionary France*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Wordsworth, William. *The Prelude*. (London: Penguin Books, 1996).