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Terrorists, Historical or Fictional:
Different Perspectives on the Politics of Fear

Alan Moore and David Lloyd's *V for Vendetta* is arguably the most famous graphic narrative dealing with the deeds or misdeeds of a fictional terrorist; published in short episodes on *Warrior* magazine from 1982 to 1985, the series was left unfinished for three years after the magazine closed; it was subsequently republished as a 10 issue series by DC Comics from 1988 to 1989. A remarkable detail is V's use of gelignite for his bombings, a high explosive used by irregular or paramilitary groups such as the Irish Republican Army and, less frequently, by British loyalists – this an other tell – tale particulars reveal how much this dystopian and to a certain extent science – fictional comic was rooted in its historical time and space.

In a time in which terrorism is usually presented by the media as one of the greatest threats to the safety of western societies (and a devastating presence in the rest of the world), when Al – Qaeda and then Daesh have spread fear on the western world, one cannot help thinking that comics have often dealt with the politics of terror, but with very different approaches and from very different political or moral stances. This essay aims at analyzing these approaches and stances by focusing on a trio of European comics depicting acts of terrorism, regardless of their being historical or fictional.

The discussion will start with a reading of *V for Vendetta* with will highlight its anachronistic aspects (positing V as the reincarnation of the late – 19th – Century anarchists and focusing on the symbolic subtext which propels the narrative by opposing the terrorist and the authoritarian Norsefire regime as the embodiments of two abstract principles, disorder and order respectively), but will also point out some episodes that foreshadow 21st Century Islamist terrorism –which is not fictional at all.

V for Vendetta will be read against Frank Miller's controversial *Holy Terror* (2011), a graphic novel where a costumed vigilante named The Fixer battles an Islamist terrorist organization, a work Miller conceived after 9-11 and subsequently distanced himself from. While *V for Vendetta* has been hailed as one of Moore's masterpieces and became immensely popular also thanks to the homonymous movie, *Holy Terror* is currently out of print and has been somewhat disowned by his author. And yet by superimposing these two comics we may better understand what happens when the issue of terrorism is tackled in the context of superhero fictions.

Then there will be an analysis of Davodeau and Collombat's *Cher pays de notre enfance* (2015), a French graphic reportage dealing with the terrorist action of the SAC, or Service d'Action Civile, the armed branch of the Gaullist party, to show how comics may deal with the historical deeds of a terrorist organization which did not aim at overthrowing a government, but at strengthening its control of the country, and keeping it in power – one remarkable difference being that while Moore and Lloyd's series has a single terrorist fighting against the powers that be, here we have a collective entity struggling to fight those who are *not* in power. The essay will eventually deal with Francesco Barilli and Matteo Fenoglio's *Piazza della Loggia* (2018), an ambitious and large – sized mix of graphic reportage and graphic historiography, dealing with the 1974 Fascist bombing in Brescia, and painstaking reconstructing its historical background and the investigation that slowly led to the identification of the terrorists and their arrest (investigations which were repeatedly sabotaged by the Italian secret services and

police forces). Italian Fascist terrorist organizations played a role much similar to that of SAC in France, and the reconstruction of the Brescia bombing has striking similarities with Davodeau and Collombat's reportage.

The two graphic essays will provide a radically different approach to terrorism from that offered by the superhero comics, and yet both approaches may yield interesting insights about the representation of terrorism in mass culture.