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| Authors | Caoduro, Elena |
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# *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film*. Tony Shaw. Bloomsbury, 2015 (315 pages).

Elena Caoduro

When someone uses the word "terrorism" or "terrorist" usually what first comes to mind is the image of the falling Twin Towers in Manhattan, or the attacks in public places in France and Belgium and the videos of kidnapped hostages in Nigeria recently broadcast by the media. What is often forgotten is that terrorism is not simply a phenomenon of the twenty-first century associated with religious fundamentalism, but is a major global phenomenon that has been present for many decades in different facets; and cinema has always been at the forefront in framing its manifestations. In *Cinematic Terror: A Global History of Terrorism on Film*, Tony Shaw precisely explores different interpretations of political violence and considers the definitions of terrorism provided by filmmakers from Europe, Asia, North America and the Middle East. Different from previous works, which remain focused on national cinemas (for instance, Alan O'Leary's *Tragedia all'italiana: Italian Cinema and Italian Terrorisms 1970–2010*), or specific historical events (such as the anthology *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the "War on Terror"* edited by Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula and Karen Randell), this book questions temporal and geopolitical boundaries and ought to be praised for its new approach to looking at film in relation to terrorism.

Divided into fourteen chapters, *Cinematic Terror* charts the evolution of the representation of terrorism over the twentieth century, avoiding "the 'catalogue-and-digest' style" present in many film histories, and focusing instead on individual films carefully selected for their cultural significance, diverse genres, and availability of production notes and archival material (7). Shaw's methodological approach is fruitful in combining close reading of films, for example *Ashes and Diamonds* (*Popiół i diament*, Andrzej Wajda, 1958) and *State of Siege* (*État de Siège*, Constantin Costa-Gravas, 1973), with an essential consideration of the environment in which these works were produced, distributed and received. The inclusion of primary sources, such as censors' reports, audience responses and interviews with the crew, sheds light on this context and offers the reader a thorough understanding of the chosen case studies. As such, each chapter opens with a brief textual analysis of a scene from the selected film and then continues with a succinct historical contextualisation of the events depicted. Shaw interprets the term "terrorism" as an umbrella notion that groups different forms of political violence. Thus, the book engages with terrorist phenomena as diverse as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the "resistance-terrorism" during the Second World War in Poland (45), the Tupamaro guerrilla in Uruguay, left-wing revolutionary terrorism in the 1970s, the Irish Civil War and ensuing Troubles, the Chechen revolution, and post 9/11 anxieties.

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By charting so many declinations of terrorism, *Cinematic Terror* successfully demonstrates the need to take a long and international look when studying the mutual influences of politics, cinema and public opinion; and confirms the reciprocal attraction for "the spectacular and dramatic" (286), which intertwines moving images and terrorism. The aims of the volume are in fact twofold: demonstrating the global nature of the history of terrorism in cinema, a phenomenon which only initially was Euro-American, and detailing how the depiction of political violence has become a source of entertainment in a difficult balance between propaganda and economic profit. In the following, I will highlight a few chapters that stand out for originality and acumen of analysis, arguably representing the strongest scholarly contribution to an overall solid volume.

The first chapter, "Silent Revolutionaries", deals with the representation of anarchists during cinema's first decades, and links together American and British productions such as Edwin S. Porter's *Execution of Czolgosz, with Panorama of Auburn Prison* (1901) and Alexander Butler's *The Anarchist's Doom* (1913). During the years before the First World War, terrorism, particularly anarchism, was often perceived as pure evil and associated with the arrival of new non-English-speaking immigrants. In his analysis of D. W. Griffith's *The Voice of the Violin* (1909) Shaw underlines the terrorists' lack of backstory and their stereotypical depiction as "a ragtag bunch of bearded firebrands, scruffy workers, mannish women with crazed stares" (14). He concludes that early cinema "effectively *silenced* the terrorists", rarely allowing them a protagonist role and avoiding any explanation of the political reasons behind revolutionary uprisings (23; emphasis in original). Despite the one-dimensional representation, these early examples underline the controversial nature of the issue, but also the magnetic power of the medium to visually—and later aurally—excite and thrill audiences.

Another particularly inspired chapter considers *The Battle of Algiers* (*La battaglia di Algeri,* Gillo Pontecorvo, 1966), the notorious political film screened for counter-terrorism training purposes at the Pentagon and as propaganda in secret meetings of the Irish Republic Army, the Weather Underground and the German Red Army Faction. Drawing on sources about the laborious shooting in Algiers, and the following impasse in finding appropriate distribution in France, Shaw presents this classic film as a manifesto against colonialism and contextualises the Italian-Algerian coproduction within the violent ideological clashes that characterised the Zeitgeist of the 1960s. More interestingly, his analysis provides multiple readings of this newsreel-style epic and charts its ongoing relevance, especially after the US intervention in Iraq as many commentators noted that the torture images from the Abu Ghraib prison bore striking similarities with scenes from *The Battle of Algiers* (101).

One significant theme emerging from the volume is the uniqueness of the representation of perpetrators; there are stereotypical figures explored in Chapter Two with *Sabotage* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1936) and Chapter Seven with *Operation Thunderbolt* (Menahem Golan, 1977), but, on the whole, psychopathic bombers or disillusioned skyjackers are not the only conventional images. Shaw illustrates a diverse panorama; over the course of the twentieth century the figure of the terrorist appears as a multifaceted freedom fighter, victim of the state, serial killer and middle-class narcissist. This latter occurrence is examined in Chapter Eight with the analysis of Rainer Werner Fassbinder's *The Third Generation* (*Die dritte Generation*, 1979), a film despised by West German audiences at the time, but nowadays considered an avant-garde masterpiece. Fassbinder's film is situated within a genealogy of provocative works that combine laughter and tears in order to offend and alienate but also to make audiences reflect. Shaw interestingly connects it with

Kazuhiko Hasegawa's *The Man Who Stole the Sun* (*Taiyō o Nusunda Otoko*, 1979), a Japanese film dealing with nuclear fear, and the "jihad satire" of *Four Lions* (Chris Morris, 2010), arguing that comedy is perhaps the best genre at capturing the idiosyncrasies of terrorism (161–2).

The anti-establishment message explored by filmmakers such as Pontecorvo and Fassbinder is further dissected in Chapter Ten, "Bollywood's Communalists", which concentrates instead on Mani Ratnam's *Bombay* (*Bumbai*, 1995). In this case, the use of violence is highly criticised when death strikes a family during the Muslim-Hindu riots in Mumbai. As well as briefly explaining the reasons for the sporadic treatment of terrorism in Indian cinema before the 1990s, Shaw unveils the difficult production and reception of such a poignant film: death threats to cast and crew, boycotted screenings and political pressures. The controversies sparked by the depiction of bigotry and religious intolerance in *Bombay* mark, for the author, a new phase in cinematic terror: the resurgence of religious terrorism across different national cinemas and the emergence of the blockbuster terrorist film which exploits violent episodes (202). According to the author, *Bombay* seems a precursor of production trends in the depiction of terrorism in the new millennium. Nonetheless, it remains unique for showing the perils of religious terrorism emerging from within a country and not from outside factions.

These new developments in the representation of terrorism in the twenty-first century are discussed in the final chapter of *Cinematic Terror*: "YouTube Monsters". Rather that choosing a more explicit case study, such as *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006), Shaw opts to tackle contemporary cinema's treatment of terrorism in a more allegorical way, namely analysing Matt Reeves's *Cloverfield* (2008), a monster film which borrows tropes of the sci-fi, horror and disaster movie to reveal the chaos following the 9/11 attacks. The author pays particular attention to the use of 9/11 iconography and the fake amateurish aesthetics of the film, arguing that that the low-lit and shaky camerawork reminds us of the many videos shot with mobiles' cameras in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy in New York City (266). Shaw's analysis is at its best when tracing the "afterlife" of the film, a recurrent motif that the author adopts to conclude his chapters. In this case, Shaw charts the transmedial success of *Cloverfield*: DVD sales, awards, spin-offs and marketing tie-ins, but more interestingly the various imitating videos published online. Eventually these fan-made videos "had the effect of simultaneously broadening the film's narrative and articulating it with larger discourses of terrorism and national security" (279). *Cloverfield* represents a smart choice as it works as a media spectacle despite showing an incommensurable tragedy, thus illuminating how 9/11 is still influencing US public imagination.

To conclude, the strength of this book lies in the reconsideration of less discussed geopolitical regions across the globe and the different historical manifestations of terrorism over the decades. Although crossnational comparisons and thematic parallels could have been further explored in the Introduction and Conclusion of the book, Shaw succeeded in producing a highly readable and informative volume. His approach offers a new heterogeneous vision of cinematic terrorism, inclusive of non-Western films, popular film genres and political cinema, and confirms the topicality of the issue since the early days of the medium. *Cinematic Terror* hence represents not only a stimulating read for film scholars and experts of cultural history and terrorism, but its practical subdivision into fourteen chapters, each dealing with an individual film and a sociohistorical context, also makes it useful teaching material.

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**Elena Caoduro** is Lecturer in Media Arts at the University of Bedfordshire. She coedited "Mondo-Pop: Rethinking Genre Beyond Hollywood", a special issue of *Frames Cinema Journal* (2014), and is now writing a monograph on left-wing terrorism in postmillennial German and Italian cinema.