1 Studying how terrorism ends

The Italian case

Introduction

Disengagement from terrorism has, until recently, been relatively under-researched, at least when compared to the vast literature on the origins and causes of political violence (Bjørgo and Horgan 2009a, p. 2; Horgan 2009a, p. 20). As Bjørgo and Horgan (2009a, p. 5) noted, 'the analytical interest has tended to focus on the processes of recruitment and radicalization rather than on disengagement or deradicalization'. In particular, the authors distinguish between 'individual and collective disengagement from terrorism' (p. 4), pointing out that studies on disengagement that focus on the individual level, as opposed to the level of the group, are especially scarce: 'the literature on individual disengagement remains highly underdeveloped' (p. 6). Similarly, Horgan (2009a) claimed that the literature on ending terrorism 'is focused at the level of organizations and networks. There is little within that research about how and why individual terrorists disengage and to what extent, if any, this can be considered a truly individual process' (p. 27). According to Horgan, the dearth of studies on the individual level is puzzling, in view of 'the obvious availability of, and accessibility to, disengaged individuals' (p. 28). In addition, he cited the availability of 'weblogs and other Internet sites' by former terrorists who in many cases seemed 'determined to speak out against their former comrades and leaders and, in some cases, to share their own opinions about what should be done to prevent future involvement by others' (p. 28).

This is not to say, however, that specific case studies on both individual and collective instances of disengagement have been lacking. Indeed, the Italian case has been perhaps one of the most studied cases in the scholarly literature thanks both to the novelty of the Italian state's legislative and penal response to the terrorist threat in the early 1980s and to the availability of individual testimonies by former terrorists. Many of the latter, in fact, became 'dissociated' from terrorism and started to grant interviews to scholars. Between 1981 and 1988, a pioneering programme of study on terrorism was carried out by the Bologna-based Istituto Cattaneo, involving the systematic gathering of primary documentation and roughly 60 interviews with former terrorists, whose transcripts are accessible in the Dote archive of the Institute and have partly been reproduced in a volume edited by Catanzaro and

Manconi and published by il Mulino in 1995, entitled *Storie di lotta armata* ('Stories of the armed struggle'). Most of these interviews were carried out in prison and are extremely valuable for understanding individualized processes of both engagement and disengagement. The Cattaneo research programme led to numerous publications by prominent Italian scholars (Catanzaro 1985, 1990a, 1990b, 1991; della Porta 1984, 1990; della Porta and Pasquino 1983; della Porta and Rossi 1984; Pasquino 1982, 1984), which addressed issues concerning the origins, development and decline of Italian (mainly left-wing) terrorism, often drawing on the above-mentioned interviews with former terrorists collected by the Institute. Other scholars researching terrorism also secured testimonies by some of the protagonists. Thus, a pioneering book by Alison Jamieson (1989), was based in part on a series of interviews by the author with former Red Brigades leader Adriana Faranda.

In the 1990s and 2000s many Italian former terrorists published their own memoirs, in which they offer their own reflections on both collective and individual engagement with terrorism and their subsequent disengagement from it. Apart from their intrinsic value, these memoirs also allow for an interesting comparison with the early interviews carried out under the aegis of the Cattaneo Institute in the 1980s or by scholars like Alison Jamieson. In the case of Adriana Faranda, for instance, there are transcripts of interviews she granted in 1987 and 2001, as well as in a book she published with Silvana Mazzocchi (Mazzocchi and Faranda 1994). This gives invaluable insight into processes of disengagement over the longer period and help us understand whether the former terrorists' stories have evolved and changed over the years or indeed have remained substantially constant. Since disengagement often takes place in parallel with the search for a new identity to replace that of 'terrorist' or 'ex-terrorist', it is possible that the former terrorists' own memoirs, written when they had completed their prison sentences and started a new existence, reconstruct their individual path to disengagement in ways that differ from the stories they told while in prison. Thus far, these recent memoirs have been incorporated in part into della Porta's (2009) contribution to Bjørgo and Horgan's book (2009b), in which she revisited the issue of disengagement in the Italian case, but have not been the object of systematic analysis.

Despite the relative scarcity of studies on disengagement, the scholarly literature has been able to identify the most important factors accounting for both collective and individual disengagement from terrorism. With particular reference to the Italian case there also exist some reasonably well developed interpretations of the end of the terrorist phenomenon, especially in relation to the behaviour of the state and the 'dissociation' of hundreds of former terrorists following their imprisonment. In the next sections we will first consider the more general theoretical and interpretative framework in relation to disengagement, and will then analyse the more specific interpretations of the Italian case.

Collective and individual disengagement from terrorism

According to Horgan, the most effective model for analysing processes of disengagement is a multi-level one; that is to say, one that 'would integrate individual, group, network, organizational, social movement and cultural levels of analysis' (2009a, p. 18). The group and individual levels, therefore, constitute two of the building blocks of a multi-layered model, where the analysis has the advantage of combining psychological insights with a sociological and contextual approach.

In terms of group behaviour, Cronin (2009, p. 8) identified six patterns in the decline of terrorist campaigns, each of which also takes into account contextual and external factors as well as internal group dynamics. The six patterns are: (1) the capture or killing of a group's leader, or 'decapitation'; (2) negotiations leading to a legitimate political process; (3) achieving the aims of the group; (4) failure, especially through the implosion or marginalization of the group; (5) successful repression of the group; (6) transition to other forms of violence. Of all these patterns, the one that depends primarily on an internal group dynamic is the fourth. As Cronin specifies, there are numerous ways in which terrorism defeats itself, ranging from the inability to attract a new generation of activists to loss of operational control, in-fighting, and finally, exit. Conversely, a terrorist group may simply become increasingly marginal and isolated from its sympathizers as well as unable to communicate with the wider public, which makes it even more prone to mistakes. Cronin makes it clear that all the factors leading to implosion or marginalization lie at the intersection between collective and individual behaviour. In-fighting, for instance, or indeed disagreements over strategic and tactical goals, can lead to disaffection on the part of individual members which in turn accelerates the process of implosion or disintegration.

Focusing on processes of individual disengagement, which he acknowledges can be as complex and prolonged as those leading to participation, Horgan argues that the main factors are either 'psychological' or 'physical' and that they often impact on each other. Among the former, he prioritizes feelings of personal disillusionment, due to unfulfilled expectations, or to disagreement over tactical or strategic issues, as well as feelings of being 'burnt-out'. It is also important to consider the 'changing personal priorities' of individual terrorists, such as wanting to lead a different kind of life (2009a, p. 22). Among the latter he cites voluntary and involuntary exit from the movement or voluntary/involuntary movement into another role (e.g. a supporting role or a political role). As he argues, 'arrest, imprisonment, and obviously death, represent the most dramatic kinds of physical disengagement' (p. 25). Physical disengagement can lead to psychological disengagement and vice versa, thus imprisonment can foster disillusionment and a critical rethinking of one's own violent past. However, Horgan warns against viewing imprisonment as a pathway towards disengagement. He cites the example of the IRA, for which 'imprisonment carried with it opportunities for continued involvement and engagement,' not least through 'ongoing political radicalization and training within the prison system' (p. 26).

In another study, Horgan also emphasizes the important role played by narratives in both engagement and disengagement processes. On the one hand, both active and former terrorists rely on self-narratives in order to sustain their convictions, but their self-narratives will differ substantially (2009b, p. 158). According to Horgan, 'if we are to effectively explore the feasibility of terrorist

de-radicalization, we would do well to explore how explanatory styles develop and change'. One possible way of doing this would be

> to compare explanatory styles in members of the same movement who are at different phases of their involvement (becoming radicalized, disengaged, etc.), as well as to correlate specific ideological narratives associated with terrorist groups with the explanatory styles of its members.
>
> (2009b, p. 158)

In this book, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 6, the self-narratives of former terrorists are paid particular attention and a systematic comparison is carried out between the explanatory styles of those who have fully dissociated from terrorism, and those who have not.

Horgan concludes by stressing that the individual level of analysis is relevant in terms of policy-making, since 'identifying the reasons individuals come to disengage from terrorism, as well as how they do this, may have significant potential in the development of strategies aimed at identifying vulnerabilities in terrorist networks' (2009a, p. 29). Specifically, such strategies could 'promote and facilitate disengagement at particular junctures (both role-specific and phase-specific) at all levels of the terrorist movement' (2009a, p. 29).

A policy report by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, published in 2010 (ICSR 2010), also argues that government programmes and policies aimed at facilitating collective and/or individual disengagement can have a wider impact upon terrorist campaigns, helping to bring them to an end, but only 'as long as the political momentum is no longer with the insurgents and other external conditions are conducive' (p. 60). In short, 'individual disengagement and deradicalization programmes ... complement, rather than substitute other instruments in the fight against terrorism' (p. 60). As far as the nature of these programmes is concerned, the report specifically identifies prisons as crucial sites for both radicalization and deradicalization. In terms of the latter, it argues that

> prisons have on many occasions been incubators for peaceful change and transformation ... [and] have made significant contributions towards reversing the process of radicalization and undermining terrorist campaigns on the outside. Prisons, in other words, have served as engines for positive change whose impact has been felt far beyond the prison walls.
>
> (ICSR 2010, p. 8)

Due to prisons' crucial role, the report emphasizes that the most effective state programmes are those that target the prison system.

It is worth analysing in more detail the pivotal role played by both imprisonment and prison systems and practices in fostering processes of radicalization and deradicalization, not least because, as will be seen in the course of this book, these are crucial factors in understanding how Italian terrorism ended. The ICSR policy report stresses that

> prisons have played an enormous role in the narratives of every radical and militant movement in the modern period. [They] have all regarded their comrades' imprisonment as *traumatic turning points in the histories of their movements*. The prisoners and the way they were treated came to be focal points for their groups' campaigns, and they significantly influenced their supporters' attitudes towards violence, and the state.
>
> (ICSR 2010, p. 7)

In addition, prisons are sites in which it can be relatively easy for imprisoned terrorists to recruit new members and to continue to engage in the struggle. Indeed, it is often the case that terrorist groups treat their imprisoned comrades as an integral part of their operational structures and expect them to behave accordingly. As the ICSR report (p. 15) highlights, forms of behaviour involving imprisoned terrorists typically range from refusing to cooperate with the prison authorities to contributing to the development of their group's ideology and strategy; from engaging in protests and media campaigns against real or presumed maltreatment or torture to participating in violent campaigns, notably to try and escape from prison. This type of behaviour tends to go hand-in-hand with a prison system which emphasizes security at the expense of rehabilitation programmes, relies on poorly trained or inadequate staff and operates in overcrowded and badly organized jails. In extreme cases, this can lead to a situation in which the imprisoned terrorists in effect achieve control of a particular prison, as happened in the notorious Maze prison in Northern Ireland.

Conversely, prisons can facilitate both collective and individual disengagement. The former takes place when imprisoned terrorists realize that their group is losing support, or the state is achieving military success in combating terrorism, so that they activate to bring all violent activities to an end, favouring negotiated settlements. Such instances tend to happen when 'most of the group – including its leadership – is incarcerated and their command and control structures have remained largely intact' (ICSR 2010, p. 41). However, another requisite is a government approach sensitive to changing attitudes among terrorists, ready to open channels of communication with their leaders, and capable of providing 'the right mix of sanctions and inducements' to bring the process to successful completion (p. 41).

Individual disengagement also requires a mixture of 'push' and 'pull' factors; that is to say, there has to be both an initial change of attitudes on the part of a terrorist and a government-supported programme aimed at encouraging individuals to sever their links to a terrorist group and renounce violence. The ICSR report stresses that there is no single programme that can be applied to all situations; rather each programme has to fit the specific context to which it is applied. Having said this, important inducements include the possibility for prisoners to re-establish close relations with their families and to engage in a dialogue with civil society, for instance by opening up the prisons to outside interlocutors and organizations. The aim is both to expose the terrorists to social networks capable of counteracting the influence of their previous comrades and

to facilitate their re-integration into society. 'Material' inducements, such as more lenient sentences, are also important but 'do not seem to be decisive on their own' (p. 57).

Ending terrorism in Italy: contextual factors

As mentioned above, the Italian case has been studied by a variety of scholars over the years and has given rise to a number of interpretations regarding the causes and modalities of the origins, development and decline of (mainly left-wing) terrorism. In this section the main accounts of why and how terrorism ended in Italy will be reviewed with reference to both collective and individual processes of disengagement.

As concerns contextual factors, in line with the previously examined literature, specific studies on Italy highlight the way in which successful state repression and the imprisonment of growing numbers of terrorists triggered a sense of disillusionment among many of them. In short, what Horgan defines as both 'physical' and 'psychological' disengagement came forcefully into play. Yet the latter might have remained latent or indeed led to despair and despondency, with high suicide/homicide rates in the prisons and desperate guerrilla actions by those still at large, rather than to the abandonment of violence. Both types of violent reactions were in fact witnessed in Italy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Much attention has therefore been paid to the response of the Italian state in the early 1980s, when it laid the ground for imprisoned terrorists to openly and officially renounce violence and declare an end to the 'armed struggle', in so doing taking advantage of an innovative programme for early release, and social re-integration.

There is a general consensus, therefore, that terrorism declined in the first half of the 1980s when the state managed to respond to it with both decisive surveillance and military actions and legislation offering material inducements in the form of early release from prison in exchange for collaboration on the part of individual terrorists. Two successive laws, passed in 1980 and 1982 (the latter known as 'repentance law'), established that those terrorists who collaborated with the magistrates in their investigations and identified one or more accomplices would have their sentences substantially reduced. The 1982 law also envisaged reductions in sentences for those terrorists who confessed their own crimes but did not collaborate with investigations. In 1987 a new law (known as 'dissociation law') established that more lenient sentences would also be applied to those former terrorists who genuinely dissociated from political violence, even though they did not reveal anything about their own or their accomplices' deeds.

The Italian legislation of the 1980s, which will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, is generally hailed as an example of good practice that other countries ought to take into account in their own anti-terrorist strategies (Crenshaw 1991; della Porta 1992, 2009; Jamieson 1989; Stortoni-Wortmann 2000; Weinberg and Eubank 1987). As Weinberg and Eubank (1987, p. 131) put it, '[The Italian] strategy is one that policy-makers in other nations confronted by terrorist threats might well study with benefit'. It is deemed to have been more effective than early 1970s legislation aimed at increasing security and introducing repressive measures, such as the widespread use of preventive arrest and detention or increased sentences to be spent in special prisons under harsh regimes. Hence the combined success, in the 1980s, of counter-intelligence and incentive-led legislation is at times contrasted with the relative failure of an earlier counter-terrorist approach. However, such a comparison is complicated by the fact that various scholars lend credence to the hypothesis that state actions against terrorism in Italy in the 1970s tended to be inconsistent and ambiguous, possibly because it suited some political groups and sections of the state to let political violence develop (della Porta 1992; De Lutiis 1991, Galli 2007a; Pasquino 1990). In terms of right-wing terrorism, as we saw in the Introduction, there are numerous elements, including judicial findings and sentences, which indicate that parts of the state connived in protecting and shielding suspected perpetrators and indeed even in abetting a so-called strategy of tension which relied upon bombing massacres. As regards left-wing terrorism, there are persisting doubts concerning the state's presumed weakness in allowing the Red Brigades to re-form following the capture of the historic leaders Renato Curcio and Alberto Franceschini in 1974, and above all in relation to the state's handling of the Moro kidnapping in 1978. For these reasons it seems more appropriate to limit the analysis to the post-Moro period, when the actions of the state appear to have been genuinely informed by a desire to curtail all terrorist activities and put an end to a widespread culture of political violence.

It is also important to note that the Italian anti-terrorist legislation of the 1980s is generally deemed to have been a success in accelerating the end of terrorism but it was, and continues to be, criticized from a moral standpoint, not least because it put political considerations before justice. As Jamieson stated: 'the legal code no longer represents a moral concept of justice but ... a flexible instrument to be bartered over' (1989, p. 198). She added that as a consequence of this legislation the judges had become to a large extent 'distributors of premiums' (p. 199) and that the law favoured the terrorist leaders, often guilty of serious crimes, considerably more than their followers, due to the fact that the former knew a lot more and had more to barter over in court than the latter. It is also the case that the law (especially the 1987 dissociation law) was opposed by the associations of the relatives of the victims of bombing massacres whose members expressed the fear that, by reducing the length of sentences also to those terrorists who dissociated without contributing to clarify past terrorist events, it would hinder the search for the truth (De Lutiis 1990, pp. 178–9). As will be discussed in Part II, many of the relatives of the victims continue to hold fast to their conviction that the state facilitated an early release of 'dissociated' terrorists in the knowledge that it would also prevent its own ambiguous behaviour towards – even connivance with – terrorism from being exposed and revealed. The enduring legacy political terrorism has left in Italy can therefore be traced back at least in part to the incentive-led legislation of the 1980s.

Going back to the contextual factors accounting for disengagement, a few scholars argue that a reform of the Italian prison system and innovative ways of handling the terrorists in prison, implemented in the 1980s in parallel with the anti-terrorist legislation, also greatly facilitated a process of disengagement. Thus della Porta stresses that the introduction of 'homogeneous areas' in Italian prisons, where all 'repented' or 'dissociated' terrorists were transferred upon request and were held together at a safe distance from their previous hard-line comrades, contributed to extending the phenomenon of dissociation (2009, p. 71). Before these areas were introduced, individual terrorists who were undergoing a process of 'psychological' disengagement were physically at risk of being killed by their comrades. Indeed, the Italian prisons witnessed a number of killings by fellow comrades of imprisoned terrorists who were rightly or wrongly suspected of defecting. According to della Porta, who cites a testimony by a former terrorist, the initial request for the creation of *aree omogenee* ('homogenous areas') came from some of the terrorists themselves (2009, p. 71).

A recent study on the history of the Italian prison system by De Vito (2009) also stresses the key role played by the introduction of *aree omogenee* in 1983, but further argues that it went hand-in-hand with a deliberate policy of facilitating contacts and exchanges between the imprisoned terrorists detained in these areas and the outside world (p. 110). Thus, politicians, university professors, representatives of voluntary associations, both Catholic and lay, were allowed into the prisons to take part in meetings and workshops as well as engage in political debates with the terrorists (p. 110). This novel approach to the prison system was made possible by a newly appointed general director, Nicolò Amato, who was personally convinced that there was a need in the country for a new phase of 'social pacification' (p. 109). Amato's approach was later vindicated by the introduction of new legislation which aimed at reforming the prison system. Known as the Gozzini law, from the name of its proponent, it was approved by parliament in 1986. Thanks to this law, prisoners, including dissociated terrorists, were able to enjoy work and holiday permits as well as a regime of semi-freedom after a certain number of years in full detention (pp. 11–14). Indeed, according to De Vito, the prison regime applied to the dissociated detained in the *aree omogenee* had a direct influence in convincing Gozzini of the need for a comprehensive revision of the prison system (p. 111).

Finally, until very recently few studies referred to the important part played by the Catholic Church and by some of its representatives in promoting disengagement from terrorism and influencing public policy in this area. Indeed, David Nelken (2005, p. 234) has highlighted the importance of the Catholic Church in conditioning penal policy and rightly indicated that this was an area which needed 'much more extensive analysis'. This scholarly gap has since been partly filled by two books written by Anna Chiara Valle (2006, 2008), who has been able to retrace the role of chaplains and nuns in lending a sympathetic ear to the terrorists in the prisons. They often constituted the only contacts imprisoned terrorists had with other human beings apart from their inmates or the guards, and were particularly well placed both to detect any personal changes of sentiments on the part of the terrorists and promote possible 'conversions' among them. In addition, when they detected widespread feelings of disillusionment among imprisoned terrorists, they were able to report them to their superiors, thereby contributing towards sensitizing the Church and, through it, the political and governing class, to what was going on inside the prisons. Valle also reconstructs the role played by prominent Church personalities, such as Milan-based Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, who chose to spend a few days in the city's San Vittore prison talking to the imprisoned terrorists, listening to what they had to say and signalling his commitment to a dialogue. It is not a coincidence that, in a famous episode marking a significant case of collective disengagement, in June 1984, the terrorist group *Prima Linea* had most of its weapons delivered to the residence of the Cardinal, as opposed to handing them over to the police or the magistrates.

Ending terrorism in Italy: individual and group-level factors

Moving from general explanations at the 'contextual' level to specific analyses of the group and individual levels, a number of studies have highlighted the crucial role played by in-fighting between groups. Thus Jamieson (1990a, p. 516) wrote that 'even before the state's counter attack became properly effective, infighting and competition set the decline in motion'. In-fighting was closely linked, in her view, to strategic mistakes made by the main terrorist organizations. In the case of the Red Brigades, the main mistake consisted in the assassination of Aldo Moro on 9 May 1978. As she stated (1990b, p. 12), 'the Moro kidnap set in motion the fragmentation of the whole revolutionary left, essentially divided over the level at which the state should be attacked'. Moro's killing was compounded the following year by the assassination of Guido Rossa, a Communist Party factory worker who had denounced a fellow worker for distributing BR propaganda material. In the same year, the main rival of the Red Brigades, *Prima Linea*, killed judge Emilio Alessandrini. Both actions, according to Jamieson, contributed to a loss of popular support for these two organizations and to individual disengagement on the part of disaffected members. Furthermore, splinter groups started to be set up and disagreements also emerged between imprisoned terrorists on the one hand and the terrorists operating in society on the other (Jamieson 1990a, p. 518).

Similarly, della Porta (2009, pp. 77–8) refers to a process of 'internal fractionalization' due to conflicts over ideological or strategic issues which extended to imprisoned terrorists. In turn, this process led to the increasing recourse to violent and brutal actions, which started to target group members themselves and alienated both supporters and activists (pp. 76–7). As Catanzaro (1990b, p. 243) remarked such actions led to 'a contradiction between the "ideals" which had motivated the armed struggle at individual level, and the practice of many groups'. Another important factor, linked to state repression, consisted in growing feelings among activists and sympathizers of the 'inefficiency of the armed struggle' (della Porta 2009, p. 73). In the short run, such feelings led to defections, while in the longer run they also impacted on the ability of terrorist

groups to recruit new members. Group in-fighting and personal disillusionment, therefore, are deemed to have played an important role in the Italian case.

At the individual level there were also feelings of being 'burnt out', in line with Horgan's interpretation. Della Porta (2009, p. 80), for instance, recalls how the testimonies of former terrorists revealed that they felt 'a sense of relief over the arrest that interrupted an activity which had been too intense'. Similarly, Catanzaro (1990b, pp. 232–3) refers to the difficult existence of terrorists operating in clandestine conditions, which generated doubts among many of them regarding the personal price to pay for taking part in the armed struggle. In addition, he points out that the growing need to generate money in order to self-finance resulted in more and more armed robberies being carried out, which in turn resulted in feelings of disillusionment and loss of identity (1990b, p. 234). Paradoxically, however, Catanzaro links these factors to a process of successful recruitment of activists into clandestine groups once state repression in Italy became more effective. That is to say, it was an 'excess of clandestinity', rather than a shortage of new recruits, that led to organizational problems and a need to resort to robberies (p. 230). Weinberg and Eubank (1987) argue instead that a clandestine existence failed to live up to the expectations of many young terrorists, turning out to be boring rather than exciting (p. 129).

The crucial role played by imprisonment in accounting for individual processes of disengagement in Italy is emphasized by most scholars, even though, in contrast to state repressive and legislative measures, it is not analysed in any great detail. According to Jamieson (1990a, 1990b), imprisonment, especially for Red Brigades' members, at first marked a strengthening of group identity and a determination to continue the struggle behind bars. The latter 'consisted of thinking up escape plans, discussing and analysing strategy and making tactical proposals for submission to the external group to which they felt inextricably bound' (1990b, p. 17). Later, successful state actions against terrorism and prison conditions combined to instil a sense of disillusionment and defeatism among imprisoned terrorists:

> In the early 1980s, as revolutionary spirit gradually dimmed into hopeless defeat, hatred and distrust flourished in the prison community. Twenty-year-olds locked in dark cells in total isolation for weeks on end and facing the prospect of a lifetime in prison began to pour out all they knew.
>
> (1990b, p. 17)

This process, according to Jamieson, went hand-in-hand with a loss of group identity:

> As long as a terrorist remains within the protective identity of the group to which he belongs and has faith, he has the moral courage to withstand the hardships of clandestinity or prison.
>
> [...]
>
> But if the group identity falls away he is forced to assume his individuality, see himself as a murderer, and is left alone with his guilt.
>
> (1990b, pp. 18–19)

Similarly, della Porta (2009, p. 76) points to the prospect of long prison sentences, accompanied by the realization of political defeat, as a psychological factor accounting for disengagement. De Lutiis (1990, p. 180) also argues that the prospect of a long prison detention, coupled with a perception of irreversible crisis and defeat, led many imprisoned terrorists towards disengagement and dissociation. In addition, in his view, changing personal priorities, such as the desire to start a new life and to establish new affective relationships, also played a part, together with a process of inner reflection leading to a reassertion of individual subjectivity (pp. 181–7). The importance of treating the terrorists as individuals is also stressed by Weinberg and Eubank (1987, p. 131), who argue that 'when treated as individuals, when the terrorists were offered the opportunity to repent or disassociate, they were prepared to betray their comrades in exchange for a return to a normal life'.

De Lutiis distinguishes between extreme-right and extreme-left terrorists, arguing that many of the former underwent a growing realization, when imprisoned, that in many cases neo-fascist activists had been responsible for bombing attacks and/or had been manipulated by external actors, such as the secret services (1990, pp. 189–99). The refusal of this type of terrorism among imprisoned right-wing activists contributed to their disengagement. De Lutiis also points out that imprisonment brought together members of left- and right-wing terrorist groups, who in many cases started to revisit and discard those ideological and stereotypical representations of the 'other', which had played an important part in promoting political violence in Italy (p. 193).

A similar argument is put forward by Weinberg and Eubank (1987) in relation to prison officers. As they state, with reference to the experience of repented terrorist Patrizio Peci:

> After his arrest, Peci, at least, reports being surprised by his feelings towards his captors
>
> [...]
>
> [T]his revolutionary enemy of the Italian state reported developing a sense of identification with the officers who held him in custody. As he perceived them, they turned out to be young and thoughtful men, such as he saw himself, not the sadists he had expected or imagined them to be.
>
> (p. 129)

Interestingly, De Lutiis (1990, p. 187) refers to specific 'variables linked to arrest – tortures, privations and blackmail', which in his view, together with a perception of defeat, played an important role in accounting for psychological

disengagement. This is a somewhat contentious issue, since other scholars regard harsh repression in prison as counter-productive and likely to cement the terrorists' collective identity. Thus della Porta and De Vito, as we saw, linked dissociation in Italy to the more lenient legislation and innovative prison system of the early 1980s, as opposed to any harsh treatment meted out to imprisoned terrorists.

Finally, according to De Vito (2009, p. 111), the imprisoned terrorists who dissociated from their past actions had a significant role in bringing about prison reform. However, it is unclear whether De Vito refers simply to the legislators being influenced by the presence of these terrorists in the prisons, or whether the latter actively exchanged views and engaged in a dialogue, or even in negotiations, with the legislators. This is clearly an important issue that needs further examination.

Conclusion

Scholars have taken into consideration a wide variety of factors when accounting for the end of terrorism in Italy, often basing their interpretations on first-hand testimonies by former terrorists themselves. At the contextual level, the main factors that explain the decline of terrorism are deemed to be effective anti-terrorist units, an enlightened incentive-led legislation and an equally innovative treatment of terrorists in the prisons. At the group and individual levels, the three factors that stand out as the most important are in-fighting, disillusionment due to increasingly brutal terrorist actions or perceived defeat, and personal reflection accompanied by a reassertion of subjectivity following imprisonment.

While in no way disagreeing with the analyses put forward by authoritative scholars of terrorism, we believe that there is scope for revisiting the factors accounting for the end of political violence in Italy, with a view to integrating existing interpretations with new perspectives and insights. With specific reference to contextual factors, namely the introduction of new legislation and a new approach to the prison system, it seems to us important to bring to light the political and institutional process that led to these decisions, as well as the tensions and challenges underpinning such a process. In addition, the role of individual policy-makers and civil servants in determining a change of direction in the dominant anti-terrorist strategy needs to be taken into account, thus reasserting the importance of agency in the state's own response.

As concerns group and individual level analysis, we believe there is a need to explore further the process of disengagement, with particular reference to imprisoned terrorists. It seems important to understand better the mental, psychological and relational changes that many of them undertook once in prison, which gradually led them from an uncompromising position of open confrontation and determination to continue the struggle behind bars (and here we agree fully with Jamieson's interpretation) to a position of openly pressing (even negotiating) for prison reform and lenient legislation.

In our own analysis, we also intend to pay particular attention to the role of the Church as concerns both the process leading to the 'repentance' and 'dissociation'

laws and the process of disengagement following imprisonment. As mentioned above, the role of the Church has until recently been neglected in the literature concerning the end of terrorism in Italy, even though recent studies by Valle (2006, 2008) have partially filled this gap. We also intend to pay attention to the role played by the imprisoned terrorists themselves in contributing to, and indeed negotiating for, prison reforms and new legislation. This is another aspect that has been neglected in the literature yet which, as argued above, needs further examination.

In the light of these considerations, the following two chapters examine in detail the political and legislative process leading to the 'repentance' and 'dissociation' laws (Chapter 2), as well as to the reform of the prison system (Chapter 3). This is followed by a chapter in which, thanks to new original interviews with former left- and right-wing terrorists, we re-examine the process of disengagement at both group and individual levels, with an explicit focus on the period of imprisonment.