The Self as Legitimate Target:
Self-Sacrifice and Self-Determination in Mazzini and Gandhi

> Mourrons pour des idées, d'accord, mais de mort lente.
> – Georges Brassens

In the present pages, I seek to explore certain political and moral dynamics that arise in broad societal struggles against perceived injustice. In particular, I focus on these dynamics within the specific configuration struggles assume when they take the form of national self-determination movements. Such a configuration typically requires devising tactics for non-traditional conflict, in the grey area between legal institutional battles and inter-State war. This requirement in turn brings to the fore the problem of the discursive and organizational practices to be employed in order to mobilize popular participation in the struggle. What is sought for this purpose is, in essence, a reversal of collective political preferences; a shift from the normal, workaday self-regarding individualism, on which the stability of political regimes is generally premised, to an altruistic ethos defined by the willingness to suffer in the interest of collective goals. Taken to its logical extreme, this reversal implies a readiness to question the role of self-preservation as the overarching goal of individuals in politics. Once the members of movements engaged in national self-determination struggles have accepted that their struggle might require employing violence and risking life and limb for the cause, the central issue, both political and moral, for such movements becomes the nature, role, and target of violence: how the struggle should be waged, taking which risks, respecting which limits. By contrasting the approach of two key protagonists of national self-determination struggles, I hope to shed light on the specific dilemmas entailed by the recourse to violence to resist (and overturn) political injustice in extra-institutional contexts.

In these political scenarios, I claim that the notion of the self assumes a peculiar importance for the oppressed group, in two distinct but fundamentally superimposed senses of the term 'self.' On the one hand, the collective self of the group is considered by the movement as a key source of value: it is wounded by institutionalized injustice, and as such it functions as a normative rallying point for the struggle. Self-determination struggles are struggles for restoring the collective self to its rightful place at the centre of the polity. On the other hand, from an operational point of view, the individual, nude selves of the militants are the main power resource in the struggle against injustice; as such they are indispensable for the furthering of the movement. Only by the devotion of individual selfhood to the group's cause can the collective self be vindicated. As a consequence, proponents of self-determination movements can be seen to engage in a double discursive move. On one hand, an intensification of collective self-consciousness, which serves to highlight the intolerability of its compression under the current regime; on the other, an appeal for the full investment of the selves of the militants in the national struggle. But at the same time these two senses of the term, these two levels of selfhood are superimposed and blurred in self-determination discourse: the militants embody, enact, constitute the nation. This leads to striking results. In order to protect something whose value is affirmed and magnified against the authorities' disparagement, a willingness must be elicited to part with it. Violence fatally appears at the confluence of these two senses of self: for the group to live, the individual must be willing ("selflessly") to perish— a dynamic that presents, I claim, non-coincidental parallels with the twin processes of sacralisation and sacrifice.

These themes will be explored with reference to two notable figures in the history of national self-determination struggles, Giuseppe Mazzini and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Their profiles are in many ways similar. Though a few generations apart (Gandhi was not three years of age when Mazzini died, in 1872), both belonged to the period of the apogee of the Nation-State. Both propounded a radical politics of emancipation, and inspired national mobilizations for broad, long lasting, and society-wide campaigns against existing political regimes. Both these movements were ultimately successful, in that they resulted in free and independent countries being born out of the ashes of empires; yet, both men felt a sense of personal failure for the particular form such national projects ended up assuming. Signally, their personal style of politics was comparable, at least inasmuch as both are good examples of the Weberian type of conviction politicians.[1]

The following section will discuss the analytical stakes of independentist political movements; then Mazzini's position will be illustrated, followed by Gandhi's, with an intermediate account on the diffusion of Mazzinian ideas in India. Subsequently, the two political perspectives will be compared from the angle of their religiously heterodox grounding, and then specifically with reference to the concept of sacrifice. In the final section, the question of the pervasiveness of the political, raised by George Orwell with reference to Gandhi's political legacy, will be brought to bear on the self-determination worldview more generally.

The analytical problem: self-determination struggles

At its heart, a politics of self-determination is not routine, workaday politics: it is a politics for exceptional times. It attacks the institutional status quo and defies the sovereign, by calling into question the definition of the bounds of the polity. By contesting the sovereign's right to rule, struggles for self-determination typically challenge the basis of legitimacy and normative power of the legal system. It is important to appreciate how analytically radical the implications of any self-determination claim are, even in such seemingly peaceable contemporary cases as, say, Catalonia. What is at stake is the permanent elimination from all future domestic political interactions of a component (typically, the largest or most powerful component) of the current polity: Vienna is to have no more say in the affairs of Milan, London is to play no further part in decision-making in Calcutta, Madrid is no longer to dictate terms in Barcelona. The sovereign is to be made foreign, to be expelled from the bounds of the newly determined national self. The process is perceived as irreversible. A new polity with a new identity is to be born.

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[1] Cf. Politik als Beruf, in Max Weber, *Gesamtausgabe*, ed. Horst Baier (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1984), vol. I/17.

The goal of redrawing the boundaries of the polity so as to exclude one of its parts signals a stance of radical estrangement, that is to say a fundamental severing of the political bond. In fact, self-determination movements' attitude towards the governments from which they are attempting to break free already mimics the inter-State relations they intend to establish once they succeed, claiming equal sovereignty and no *a priori* assumption of common interests. However, what lends inter-State relations their specific configuration, and to some extent also their stability, is (or, at least in the golden age of the State, was) the possibility ultimately to settle disputes by resorting to warfare. Herein lies the discordance between the tone self-determination movements adopt and the balance of means typically to be found in self-determination struggles. Few if any such conflicts have been fought with pitched battles and regular armies, according to the canon of the European *guerre en forme*, if for no other reason than that the machinery of an existing State is pitched against one that is at best *in statu nascendi*. Even as paradigmatic a case as the American War of Independence was fought more often than not by non-traditional means. If a struggle for self-determination cannot be fought like a regular war, its political form can be understood as an *Ersatz*, a replacement or substitute for armed conflict: its tactics fall in a grey area between workaday interest politics and all-out warfare. The State most often cannot be challenged directly, in the field: thus, its basic functioning must be disrupted, to the point that its fundamental claim to its subjects' allegiance, the moral basis of its rule, i.e. the provision of security and order, can be called into question.[2]

The Hobbesian logic that underlies State sovereignty stresses the paramount importance of the monopoly of legitimate violence. However, if the normal working of civil society and everyday life is sufficiently degraded, security-only rather than security-first can appear as a rather threadbare and questionable achievement: ultimately, the wielding of government responsibility will be felt as a burden rather than a source of strength. In order to field this challenge, however, a self-determination movement must be able to defy two aspects of sovereignty: the State's capacity for deterrence through force, and the righteousness of the punishment it metes out. Such a challenge must be collective, not limited to isolated, individual cases, if it is to be politically relevant. Therefore, all leaders of self-determination movements are faced with the problem that, as we shall see, preoccupied Mazzini and Gandhi: how to persuade (for there is no institutional infrastructure able to coerce) large numbers of individuals to do what the State forbids (or refuse to do what the State orders), and credibly to affirm, when they are punished for it, that they are being unjustly treated.

Mazzini's politics of self-determination

Mazzini's political doctrines and revolutionary strategy can best be understood with reference to certain characteristics of the Italian context. First of all, it must be remarked that in Mazzini's program the fight for national unification was intimately connected with subversion of the regional status quo and with a radical democratic agenda; his failures were in no small part related to the immanent tensions between these goals. Mazzini antagonized a series of social groups that could otherwise have coalesced around the more limited agenda of ending Austria's role in the Peninsula by his insistence on liquidating the regional Courts and massively broadening political participation in a new unified fatherland. As a consequence, the Mazzinian movement was not broad-based enough to conceive of itself as involving the whole population. On the contrary, it was consciously the affair of a minority (albeit numbering in the tens of thousands), and as such it rested on a voluntarism of action.[3] "Il segreto della potenza è nella volontà," was a typical expression of the endorsement of this condition by the nationalist vanguard.[4]

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[2] Faisal Devji, *The Impossible Indian: Gandhi and the Temptation of Violence* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 153.

The importance attributed to action[5] and the necessity of employing militant minorities led Mazzini into difficult terrain with regards to the nature of the collective entity in whose name action took place, the 'People.' Its centrality in his political thought easily morphed into the centrality, indeed the pre-eminence, of the revolutionary vanguard.[6] This outcome was facilitated by the fact that Mazzini did not conceive of the People as a sovereign subject with absolute freedom of action in the political realm. On the contrary, the principles structuring the optimal form of political life were transcendent, not in the power of individuals or groups to alter. A proper appreciation of this fact, according to Mazzini, was necessary to avoid the modern malaise of the plurality of opinions, leading to conflicts that were insoluble without recourse to force, since their ultimate grounds for validity appeared equally arbitrary.[7]

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[3] An approach that Gramsci would later stigmatize in the *Prison Notebooks* as typical of Italian politics.

[4] "The secret of power is in the will," cit. in Giovanni Belardelli, *Mazzini* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2010), 33.

[5] In the famous critic Francesco De Sanctis' formulation, Mazzini placed "action at the basis of national thought:" Ibid., 74.

[6] Ibid., 46.

[7] Ibid., 42.

Within these general parameters of Mazzini's political worldview, three elements of his revolutionary strategy will hold our attention: conspiracy, guerrilla warfare, and exemplary action.

It is generally held that Mazzini's political activity, beginning with the founding of Giovine Italia in the early 1830s, represented a clean break with the classic, elitist tradition of conspiracy and tyrannicide. Mazzini proposed a public political manifesto and mass membership –or what we would consider the basic building blocks of a modern political party– only resorting to clandestine operations out of tactical necessity. While this position was clear-cut in theory, the vagaries of the empirical political situation present an often murkier picture. Radical democrats in the Italian Risorgimento were beset by lingering temptations of political assassination, from early cases such as Antonio Gallenga's plot against Carlo Alberto of Sardinia in 1833 to Felice Orsini's attempt on Louis Napoleon's life in 1858 that nearly scuttled Cavour's diplomacy. Nor was such a tactic always limited to Heads of State, as, for instance, the wave of assassinations of civil servants and pro-papal sympathizers in the Romagna in the early 1840s attests.[8] The question of the rightfulness of political homicide became a burning topic of debate within Giovine Italia beginning with the Gallenga episode,[9] and Mazzini could seldom be brought to express opposition on moral grounds, in terms other than its lack of expediency. Thus tyrannicide remained in the background of Mazzinian political action, in a moral limbo, its (attempted) perpetrators benevolently reprimanded as men whose love of country had misled them.

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[8] Franco Della Peruta, *Mazzini e i rivoluzionari italiani. Il partito d'azione, 1830-1845* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1974), 377.

[9] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 56.

The alternative form of action that appeared to escape the moral quandaries of conspiracy, terror, and political assassination was guerrilla warfare.[10] Two Mazzinian texts are specifically relevant: the second draft of the "General Instruction for Members" of Giovine Italia, of July 1831,[11] where guerra per bande (as guerrilla warfare was known to the military science of the Risorgimento generation) is first mentioned, and "Rules for the Conduct of Guerrilla Bands",[12] of the following year, in which the tactical implications of this mode of struggle are spelt out. The main element of interest in these texts is the emphasis placed on the need for the guerrillas to behave, as much as possible, as regular armed forces. Otherwise put, guerrillas must practice the 'European Way of War' with relation to the norms of jus in bello such as proportionality, discrimination between combatants and non-combatants, and so forth.

In part, this approach can be seen as an instance of a general tendency, common to the long nineteenth century in Europe, which conceived of guerrilla warfare as a less honourable means of fighting; its use should be minimized, being unworthy of any group not forced to employ it by extreme circumstances. However, the attempt to 'play by the rules' of the received military norms was very much an asymmetrical concession for a self-determination movement such as the Italian Risorgimento. In all the abortive attempts that took place over nearly half a century of struggle, the authorities consistently dealt with the insurgents as common criminals, refusing to recognize their status as belligerents. Therefore, the tactical interpretation of the movement's cleaving to the norms of the guerre en forme as an attempt to secure the favour of neutral third parties in European public opinion can hardly appear satisfactory, for it so clearly failed the test of a cost-benefit analysis.

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[10] For a broad overview on the topic, see Piero Pieri, *Storia militare del Risorgimento; guerre e insurrezioni.* (Torino: Einaudi, 1962).

[11] "Istruzione generale agli affratellati:" cf. the analysis by Franco Della Peruta in Stefania Bonanni, ed., *Pensiero e azione: Mazzini nel movimento democratico italiano e internazionale. Atti del LXII Congresso di storia del Risorgimento italiano, Genova, 8-12 dicembre 2004* (Roma: Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento italiano, 2006), 35.

[12] Translated in Giuseppe Mazzini, *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations: Giuseppe Mazzini's Writings on Democracy, Nation Building, and International Relations*, ed. Stefano Recchia and Nadia Urbinati (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 111–6.

Such a choice, however, becomes intelligible once it is considered within the context of exemplary action. The struggle for national self-determination thus understood was no longer a question of mere efficacy, for it also enacted a broad plan of communicative action. If the spectacle of patriots offering their lives for the fatherland was an integral aspect of the movement, the importance of success in each singular event that composed the struggle could be devalued. What truly mattered was the on-going narrative of emancipation and the magnanimous generosity of its leading characters. Thus, Mazzini's idea of a 'chain of sacrifice' linking all those who had fallen for Italian unity was also a way to transcend the debate over the futility of heroic death (while defusing criticism for tactical blunders).[13]

Furthermore, exemplary action exalted the political role of active minorities. Their revolutionary initiatives gave shape to the political community they envisaged, in a typically voluntarist mode. Furthermore, in the absence of freedom of speech the reiteration of insurrectional attempts was seen as the only available method for popular education, alerting the masses to the fact that there were patriots willing to die for their freedom.[14] The Mazzini-inspired revolutionary Carlo Pisacane is a paradigmatic case, with his call for educazione coi fatti (education through deeds).[15]

The content of the message delivered by active minorities through exemplary action was essentially one of continuing destabilization, in response to an unacceptable status quo. Hence, violence had a central expressive role, signalling the intolerability of political oppression.[16] Mazzini's ideas in this sense were extremely clear: from the earliest years of his political engagement, and throughout his career, he conceived of Italian youth as a full-fledged political resource,[17] to be employed unsparingly against Austria and absolutism. While such a course of action was undoubtedly costly in terms of human life, and therefore only a second-best solution in the abstract,[18] it was necessary and unavoidable in the concrete Italian context. The sacrifice that was demanded of Italian patriots was to be an act of courage, combativeness, and defiance.[19]

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[13] Roberto Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte 'utile.' Il sacrificio patriottico nel Risorgimento," in *La morte per la patria: la celebrazione dei caduti dal Risorgimento alla Repubblica*, by Oliver Janz and L. Klinkhammer (Roma: Donzelli, 2008), 14.

[14] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 66.

[15] Luciano Russi in Luigi Ambrosoli et al., *Il Movimento nazionale e il 1848*, Storia della società italiana 15 (Milano: Teti, 1986), 358.

In order for exemplary action to be a meaningful mode of struggle, however, it needed to be coupled with a 'strategy of memory,' a cult of fallen heroes. It was in this endeavour that Mazzini left his most durable imprint on the Risorgimento. Mazzini was the only intellectual who, from the 1830s onwards, was capable of creating a coherent commemorative discourse on patriotic sacrifice, surmounting internal divisions within the Italian émigré community.[20] Perhaps the classic instance of Mazzini's strategy of memory is the Bandiera brothers,[21] who were executed in Cosenza in 1844 after a failed attempt to provoke a peasant revolt in the Kingdom of Naples. In his eulogy, all the more poignant because of previous tactical disagreements, Mazzini praises the brothers' sacrifice, exalts the sanctity of their cause, and derives from it a confirmation of the reasonableness of the patriots' demands and of their actions (otherwise –Mazzini asks– why would they be continually repeated?).[22] The moral to be drawn is encapsulated in the aphorism: "L'angelo del martirio è fratello dell'angelo della vittoria."[23]

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[16] In a way, the necessity of patriotic martyrdom for the cause was analogous to the need States face in international law to enact reprisals in order to assert that a norm in international law has been violated.
[17] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 18.
[18] "Weakness only nurtures martyrdom; and while martyrdom is often sacred for the individual who pursues the good, it is absurd for nations who actually have the power and courage to realize the good": Mazzini, *A Cosmopolitanism of Nations*, 138.
[19] Lucy Riall, "'I martiri nostri son tutti risorti!'. Garibaldi, i garibaldini e il culto della morte eroica nel Risorgimento," in *La morte per la patria*, 28.
[20] Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte utile," 13.
[21] Riall, "I martiri nostri son tutti risorti," 26.

The function of Mazzini's strategy of memory was twofold. On the one hand, the ultimate fate of a martyr could be taken as a guarantee of the purity of his motives. Therefore, different political strategies could retrospectively be blended within a common celebration of sacrifice[24] (which also increased the cohesion of the democratic camp).[25] On the other, martyrology provided a teleological narrative of the self-determination struggle that escaped the pure aestheticism of 'la bella morte.'[26] Thus, what was developed was a functional memory, as a spur to action.[27] In order to achieve this effect from a rhetorical point of view the structural characteristics of the Christian cult of the saints were incorporated into a secular, patriotic, and romantic aesthetics.[28] An emotional climax was obtained through the political use of religious keywords, adding martyrdom to glory.[29]

Mazzini's legacy in South Asia

Mazzini's doctrines were far from unknown in India at the turn of the twentieth century; as early as the 1920s Benedetto Croce could remark in passing on Mazzini's influence on Indian nationalism.[30] In more recent decades, a historiographical literature has developed, both in South Asia and in Europe, to retrace Mazzini's reception in the Subcontinent.[31] One scholar has gone so far as to claim that he was "the most truly admired foreign public moralist and political thinker in South Asia between 1850 and 1910."[32]

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[22] Cf. the discussion in Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte utile," 18.

[23] "The angel of martyrdom is the brother of the angel of victory:" Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 108.

[24] Cf. e.g. Mazzini's judgment of Santarosa: Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte utile," 17.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 14.

[27] Ibid., 20.

[28] Riall, "I martiri nostri son tutti risorti," 26.

[29] Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte utile," 11.

[30] Benedetto Croce, *Storia d'Italia Dal 1871 Al 1915* (Napoli: Bibliopolis, 2004), 34.

It is not arduous to account for Mazzini's appeal. From a purely logistical point of view, for instance, given Mazzini's lasting ties with England and its intellectual establishment, his writings were comparatively accessible to the nationalist Indian elites. Moreover, in the cultural panorama of the fin de siècle, in which European nationalist thought increasingly tended to assume the guise of social Darwinism, Mazzini's religion of humanity was a welcome alternative, especially given the limited appeal of a racialised account of national groups and their destinies for a colonial audience.[33]

From a political point of view, certain positions, such as his support for the Mutiny of 1857 against 'perfidious Albion'[34] or his principled opposition to monarchy,[35] were bound to incur the sympathy of nationalist Indians. Personal, idiosyncratic aspects such as Mazzini's belief in reincarnation certainly were of no hindrance.[36] However, I would claim that two features of his political-religious doctrine above all proved decisive for Mazzini's fortunes in India: the emphasis on devotion to the cause beyond personal interest and the emphasis on the primacy of duties over rights as a form of popular mobilization.[37] Both evoked elective affinities with elements deeply entrenched in traditional Indian worldviews. His eminent personality, moral rigor, ethics of sacrifice, and the consistency between his thoughts and deeds could then elicit the admiration even of those who did not necessarily agree with all aspects of his message.

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[31] Gita Srivastava, *Mazzini and His Impact on the Indian National Movement* (Allahabad: Chugh Publications, 1982); Giorgio Borsa and Paolo Beonio Brocchieri, eds., *Garibaldi, Mazzini e il Risorgimento nel Risveglio dell'Asia e dell'Africa* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1984); G. Flora, "The Changing Perceptions of Mazzini within the Indian National Movement," *Indian Historical Review* 19 (1992): 52–68; Fabrizio De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini: Democratic Nationalism, Self-Rule, and Non-Violence," in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, ed. C. A. Bayly and Eugenio F. Biagini, Proceedings of the British Academy 152 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 375–398; C. A. Bayly, "Liberalism at Large: Mazzini and Nineteenth-Century Indian Thought," in *Giuseppe Mazzini and the Globalization of Democratic Nationalism, 1830-1920*, ed. C. A Bayly and Eugenio F. Biagini, Proceedings of the British Academy 152 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 355–374.

[32] Bayly, "Liberalism at Large," 355.

[33] Cf. Markus Daechsel, "Scientism and Its Discontents: The Indo-Muslim 'Fascism' of Inayatullah Khan Al-Mashriqi," *Modern Intellectual History* 3, no. 3 (November 2006): 462–6.

[34] Gita Srivastava in Bonanni, *Pensiero e azione*, 518.

[35] Bayly, "Liberalism at Large," 366.

[36] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 78.

Hence, Lala Lajpat Rai, a Punjabi notable and independence activist, in his biography of Mazzini could claim him as the "highest example of sacrifice,"[38] while a leading Bengali moderate, Surendranath Banerjea, could state: "The life of Mazzini teaches us in the most striking manner the great duty of self-sacrifice […]. Let us learn to forget self before the interests of the Fatherland."[39] The trope of the comparability of the plight of India and pre-unitary Italy became widespread, making an appearance even in Jawaharlal Nehru's autobiography, Meri Kahani.[40]

Interest in Mazzini and Italy was in no way a purely theoretical or historical matter. Mazzini's political influence was greater than his intellectual influence in South Asia.[41] As national consciousness waxed in the Subcontinent, local elites looked to Mazzini for practical inspiration on the path towards self-determination. For instance, the revolutionary Vinayak Damodar Savarkar in 1904 set up the Young India secret society, whose name itself recalls Giovine Italia.[42] Three years later he also translated Mazzini's autobiography into his native Marathi.[43]

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[37] It is rather interesting to note that such arguments had a counter-revolutionary origin, coming to Mazzini from Bonald and Maistre, through the intermediary of Saint-Simon: Ibid., 81.
[38] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 379.
[39] Srivastava in Bonanni, *Pensiero e azione*, 519.
[40] Srivastava in ibid., 524.
[41] Bayly, "Liberalism at Large," 357.
[42] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 380.
[43] Srivastava in Bonanni, *Pensiero e azione*, 522.

Mazzini's legacy in the Subcontinent did not rest upon a hegemonic interpretation: Young India, for instance, was also the name of a newspaper Gandhi edited.[44] Savarkar's figure, however, is important here because Gandhi's direct engagement with Mazzini first took shape in the context of an exchange with Savarkar over the role of violence in the Indian independence struggle. During the Swadeshi movement,[45] terrorism as a tactic of struggle became a topic of the most burning urgency.[46] By the early twentieth century, there were of course in Europe many alternative ideological models to Mazzinianism for the justification of political violence, from Russian narodniki to French anarchists, Irish Fenians, and even suffragettes. Mazzini's moral prestige grounded in his non-materialist convictions, however, made for a particularly authoritative endorsement of revolutionary violence in India. In order to oppose such a reading, Gandhi's chief theoretical work, Hind Swaraj, devotes its fifteenth chapter to a defence of the spiritual aspect of Mazzini's thought.[47] The bellicose elements of Mazzini's doctrine are attributed (albeit in a philologically dubious fashion) to Garibaldi, and as a consequence Gandhi devises a new Mazzinianism, essentially shorn of its revolutionary aspects.[48] In this way, Gandhi could claim to identify with the core of Mazzini's teachings. Interestingly, the experience of post-unitary Italy was presented as a cautionary tale,[49] the inevitable outcome of a self-determination struggle carried out according to Garibaldi's (and Cavour's) model, rather than Mazzini's.

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[44] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 395.

[45] Gianni Sofri, *Gandhi and India*, trans. Janet Sethre Paxia (Moreton-in-Marsh: Windrush Press, 1999), 47–49.

[46] Bayly, "Liberalism at Large," 358.

[47] Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj and Other Writings*, ed. Anthony Parel, Cambridge Texts in Modern Politics (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 75–8.

[48] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 378.

[49] Ibid., 390.

Gandhi's politics of self-determination

The tactical debates of the early years of the century are even more important for the concrete conditions of the Indian self-determination struggle than they were for Risorgimento Italy. The constitutive entwining of means and ends, which is so often considered the distinctive trait of Gandhi's political thought, can in fact be seen at work more widely in the debates in and around the Indian National Congress from the turn of the century onwards. This was the case because the means of struggle necessarily raised the decisive question of which polity was to be founded once British rule was toppled: who was an Indian, where India was, with what borders, and what national character— Metternich's quip about mere geographic expressions fit late-nineteenth-century India at least as well as it did pre-unitary Italy. Without claiming to reduce Gandhi's doctrine to its narrowly political message, the effort here will be to account for it in terms of self-determination struggles, in relation to the concrete realities of the Indian situation, but also with reference to the tradition of similar European movements from which it manifestly drew inspiration.

To speak of Gandhian tactics is to speak of satyagraha (lit. truth-force), the non-violent means of provoking confrontation with authority in order to highlight the injustice of its norms and procedures. These pages are hardly the appropriate venue for a comprehensive discussion of satyagraha, or even of its relation with modernity, in terms of mass scale, modern communications, confrontation with complex governmental bureaucracies, or the vexed question of whether audience is crucial for transforming moral action into political statement. Instead, for present purposes only three elements will hold our attention: the principled anti-institutionalism of Gandhi's political activity, the relationship it entertained with other varieties of discipline of the self (such as asceticism), and finally its fraught relation with humanitarianism.

It is the common lot of national self-determination movements to operate, at least in their infancy, outside the confines of State-like institutions; this is why, perhaps, it has not been sufficiently remarked that Gandhi's political attitude in fact contained a profound anti-institutional penchant as a matter of principle, not merely as a circumstantial necessity. Indeed, his entire political outlook focused on individual moral and political activity, beyond the ambit of the State. In this sense, it is not unwarranted to claim that Gandhi's thought developed into a form of political anarchism.[50]

From a theoretical point of view, such a development can be seen most clearly with regards to the concept of sovereignty. If sovereignty is in its starkest form the power of life and death over the sovereign's subjects, the practice of satyagraha, by inviting bodily harm (and, at the extreme, the risk of death), splits the concept of sovereignty down the middle. As previously discussed, it performs the key act of defiance by challenging both the deterrent power of the State and the normative foundation of its acts of retribution. By separating killing from dying, it takes sovereignty over suffering away from the State and transforms it into an attribute of individuals.[51] At the same time, such a process contains inherent safeguards against the spiralling of violence. Thus, for instance, in a speech made in 1916 Gandhi could blame the militants of his time for degrading the truly sovereign act of dying by killing to achieve it.[52]

Such a form of political action required an uncommon level of fortitude in its practitioners. Indeed, it appears as the secular equivalent of a religion of virtuosos, to use Max Weber's terminology.[53] For Gandhi, as for Mazzini, the question of active minorities became politically salient. However, in the Indian context the notion of minority was inextricably linked with the question of communalism. Therefore, Gandhi performed a doubly audacious move by claiming that the moral characteristics required in the ideal satyagrahi were most closely approximated by elements of the lived experience of religious, linguistic, ethnic, or caste minorities "inured to corporate suffering."[54] This was the case because "only minority sacrifice [had] the potential to change history: even when violent, a minority [bore] full responsibility for its injustice, while the violence of the majority has the negative form of cowardice."[55]

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[50] As Faisal Devji states: "Since Gandhi was partial to anarchy as much as he was devoted to God, we should perhaps recognize in his demand that the British leave India to God or anarchy a literal rather than metaphorical desire." Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 151–2. I follow many aspects of Devji's analysis throughout this section.
[51] Ibid., 6.
[52] Ibid.

While the seeds of the moral righteousness of the satyagrahi could be found in minorities defined by ascriptive or quasi-ascriptive traits, the full-fledged personality of the self-determination activist could be developed in anyone (and such a transformation entailed in essence a transcendence of previous allegiances).[56] The type of physical courage necessary for participating in non-violent action needed to be cultivated through a strenuous and ongoing exercise regime of self-fashioning and self-purification.[57] In this aspect, Gandhi's doctrine, while drawing on traditional Indian sources, closely mirrored the ascetic practices the West had first experienced with certain schools of philosophy in Antiquity.[58] Such action on the self was the necessary precursor of any program for national self-purification, for it raised the critical question of the basis for self-respect.[59] This was symbolized by the double meaning of the term *Swaraj*: government of the self as well as self-government.[60] In this context, the much-misunderstood 'constructive program,' including khadi (the production of home-spun cloth), as well as the ashram observances Gandhi devised for his closest followers, may be read as elements in a global project of self-disciplining centring on the notion of self-reliance in preparation for the self-determination struggle, rather than as traditionalist fantasies.[61]

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[53] Cf. Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, ed. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1978), 447–50, 538–40.

[54] Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 133.

[55] Ibid., 58–9.

[56] The palingenetic nature of this commitment is perhaps best captured by an early anecdote, when Gandhi in South Africa exhorted Indians to "rebel" against themselves: cit. in Bhikhu Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), 60.

[57] Cf. Manfred B. Steger, *Gandhi's Dilemma: Nonviolent Principles and Nationalist Power* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), chap. 5.

[58] Cf. Richard Sorabji, *Gandhi and the Stoics: Modern Experiments on Ancient Values* (Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 2012).

Such rigorous training was seen as necessary for confronting the terrible intimacy of face-to-face, pre-modern violence, which was the habitual setting of satyagraha in British India. Gandhi's political action required physical proximity to operate, and thus placed particular emphasis on direct dealings, and was conversely very suspicious of mediation.[62] The most forceful challenge to this way of conceptualizing direct political engagement (or one at least that was perceived as particularly grave by Gandhi himself) was the extreme disembodiment of violence represented by the atomic bomb: by radically separating perpetrators and sufferers, nuclear war brought the meaninglessness of violence to its ultimate conclusions, denying it any role whatsoever in the making of a moral subject.[63]

The ascetic physical and moral training considered necessary for participation in non-violent action, combined with the martial vocabulary of courage, endurance, and militancy in which its discourse was couched,[64] are congruent with another major characteristic of Gandhi's political activity, namely its incompatibility with traditional versions of humanitarianism. While pacifist movements or non-governmental organizations such as the International Red Cross motivate their rejection of violence on the basis of a claim about the universal value of 'bare life,' irrespective of the views and commitments of those to whom these lives belong, Gandhi was always clear that "his movement had nothing to do with avoiding violence" in the abstract.[65] Courting arrest and other forms of government reprisal was an integral part of the process of struggle: it was the targeting of this violence, not its minimization, that underwrote the claim to moral superiority of satyagraha.

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[59] Parekh, *Gandhi's Political Philosophy*, 60.

[60] On this, cf. the very interesting Ananya Vajpeyi, *Righteous Republic : The Political Foundations of Modern India* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1–48.

[61] On this part of Gandhi's thought, considered from an anthropological perspective, see the thought-provoking study by Joseph S. Alter, *Gandhi's Body: Sex, Diet, and the Politics of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000); the author stresses the experimental origin of Gandhi's views on hygiene, alternative medicine, nutrition, and so forth (and hence their relative independence from 'traditional' sources), as well as their immediately political significance in the face of colonial social policies.

[62] Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 181.

[63] Ibid., 148.

What Gandhi proposed to the movements he led in South Africa and later in India was not a strategy for victims: courage was absolutely central, so that, as he never tired of claiming, he advocated a mode of action for the strong, not the weak—a principled choice, not an obligation imposed by the conditions of the struggle.[66] This position was compatible with a lack of sentimentality.[67] Indeed, Gandhi was wary of affect as the sole motivator for engagement, for instance in his suspicion of charity.[68] The basis for this position was a questioning of the moral standing of victimhood. For Gandhi, the mere fact of innocent suffering, if undergone involuntarily, was of no particular ethical significance per se: only the voluntary acceptance of suffering was historically transformative, and thus heroic.[69]

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[64] E.g. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Non-Violence in Peace & War*, ed. Mahadev Desai (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1942), 352–4, 386–7; Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)* (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001), 57–8, 64–6, 86, 87–8, 91, and so forth.

[65] Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 7.

[66] Cf. for instance "The Doctrine of the Sword," reprinted in Stephen Eric Bronner, *Twentieth Century Political Theory: A Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2005), 265–7.

[67] "Far from being an Indian Dr. Pangloss, the Mahatma was as unsentimental a moralist as there could be:" Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 132.

[68] He believed charity to be compromised by the very psychological mechanism that made it, in essence, the mirror image of revenge: Ibid., 111.

[69] Ibid., 144.

The most extreme application of the 'ahimsa [non-violence] of the strong' that Gandhi proposed appeared in the context of the politics of the National-Socialist regime in Germany, the waging of the Second World War, and the Final Solution. Gandhi perceived these mass outbreaks of violence to be a critical test of his convictions, above and beyond the national self-determination struggle in which he was engaged. Satyagraha, if it was indeed the morally superior alternative for action in the pursuit of justice it claimed to be, could not be limited to a subset of cases: "allowing exceptions to the moral rule only ended up making morality itself into an exception, one whose limited scope was henceforth to be determined by the immorality of war."[70] This approach dictated Gandhi's position on institutionalized anti-Semitism in the Third Reich, and his appeal to German Jews to wage satyagraha against it. An article, significantly entitled "The Jewish Question," which appeared in Harijan on 27 May 1939 (thus a few months before the invasion of Poland), is worth citing at some length:

> "I can conceive the necessity of the immolation of hundreds, if not thousands, to appease the hunger of dictators who have no belief in ahimsa. Indeed the maxim is that ahimsa is the most efficacious in front of the greatest himsa [violence]. Its quality is really tested only in such cases. Sufferers need not see the result during their lifetime. They must have faith that if their cult survives, the result is a certainty. The method of violence gives no greater guarantee than that of non-violence. It gives infinitely less. For the faith of the votary of ahimsa is lacking."[71]

The advice to German Jews that they proactively seek out the persecution of the Nazi State, so that their plight may succeed in melting the hearts of their tormentors, clearly highlights the moral stakes and utter anti-consequentialism of a political and ethical doctrine that refused to resort to violence, while eschewing the notion of victimhood.

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[70] Ibid., 129.

[71] Ibid., 143–4.

Grounding politics in (heterodox) religion

The analysis so far has aimed to highlight certain similarities in the doctrines underlying Mazzini's and Gandhi's calls to political action, similarities which cluster around the notion of an anti-utilitarian devotion to the cause. In this section and the following one, the search for parallels will be pushed further, highlighting the theological substratum from which they sprung, the religious origin of duty in both Mazzini and Gandhi.[72] However, such political mobilization of religion required in both cases a measure of heterodoxy, for, in the words of the previously cited S. Banerjea, Italy and India were alike in being profoundly religious societies where organized religion had become corrupt and worldly.[73]

We have already described the elements in Mazzini's rhetoric that effected a sacralisation of politics in extra-institutional contexts,[74] an existential stance that stressed the religious character of revolution[75] and conceived of politics as the regeneration of man.[76] If one considers Mazzini's more systematic treatment of his 'religione dell'avvenire' [religion of the future], however, one is struck by what can only be termed a 'popular theocracy.'[77] There is a decisive break with the Enlightenment and Freemason tradition of Deism[78] (for in Mazzini's Theism God is a personal Being who is actively present in history), and an absolute lack of any mediation between Dio e popolo. In his passion for unity, Mazzini could even come to advocate a fusion of Church and State, bearing some resemblances to Conciliarism[79] (while safeguarding a de facto liberal –though curiously-termed– 'freedom of heresy').[80] However, the general anti-Christian animus is apparent,[81] for there is no conception of original sin in the religione dell'avvenire, and redemption is this-worldly.[82] As many coeval religions of humanity, it has a marked historicist dimension.[83] Its main element of pathos thus resides in the idea of national mission, which becomes the historical point of encounter between divine intentionality and popular choice.[84]

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[72] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 385.

[73] Cit. in Bayly, "Liberalism at Large," 359.

[74] Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte utile," 12.

[75] Franco Della Peruta in Bonanni, *Pensiero e azione*, 44.

[76] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 24.

[77] Ibid., 41.

[78] On this key point I follow the interpretation of Parodi: Giovanni Parodi, *La religiosità di Mazzini* (Cremona: P.A.C.E., 1978).

The religious foundation of Gandhi's worldview is too well known to need restating, as is his syncretism in melding elements of Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity and Hinduism together.[85] However, Gandhi's resultant religion of humanity was not historicist like Mazzini's: the rhetoric of progress, secular in Mazzini, is spiritual in Gandhi.[86] His use of the idea of tradition, nonetheless, was eclectic and modernizing:[87] his sources were widely drawn and heterogeneous, from the radical Christianity of Leo Tolstoy[88] to a very personal reinterpretation of the Sanskrit classics, such as the Bhagavad Gita. The hermeneutic debate on the Gita is of particular interest. The text eventually became somewhat of a fetish of the satyagraha movement (for instance, militants were issued a copy to carry along with them in the great Salt March of 1930),[89] but such an appropriation was in no way a foregone conclusion. At the turn of the century, much attention was devoted to the exegesis of the text and its ultimate significance, both in the East[90] and in the West,[91] with widely differing outcomes. In particular, the notion of dharma (moral law) was a topic of fierce debate between Gandhi and Savarkar in their interpretations of the Gita:[92] was it to be understood as non-violence and passive resistance, or as the duty to kill for one's religion?[93]

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[79] Cf. the letter to Lamennais of 1834: Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 83.
[80] Ibid., 84.
[81] Ibid., 13.
[82] Ibid., 77.
[83] Bayly, "Liberalism at Large," 363.
[84] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 74.
[85] Cf. for instance Akeel Bilgrami's entry ("Gandhi's religion and its relation to his politics") in Judith M. Brown and Anthony Parel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Gandhi* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
[86] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 391.
[87] Ibid., 392.
[88] Cf. e.g. Pier Cesare Bori and Gianni Sofri, *Gandhi e Tolstoj : un carteggio e dintorni* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1985).

Politics and self-sacrifice

Both Mazzini and Gandhi believed in an ethical approach to public life and engagement, distancing themselves from the materialist power politics of their age. Both ultimately drew the justification for their political stance from their spiritual and religious beliefs. However, in order to discipline the potentially unbounded flowering of violence outside the institutional confines of the State, both had to make recourse to a notion of self-sacrifice as a spectacular (but self-limiting) climax to the self-determination struggle.[94]

Their sacrificial perspective is apparent, beginning with their self-portrayal. Throughout his years in exile, Mazzini studiously cultivated an image meant visually to embody the sufferings of the homeland; in an era in which national heroes were expected to be melancholic individuals, doomed to defeat,[95] he developed to the utmost his 'calling for unhappiness,' enacting a public existence devoted to sacrifice.[96] Similarly, the instances of Gandhi's devotion to the national cause and willingness to suffer personally for it are legion.[97] Parallel strategies of presentation of the self can be found, for instance, in their garb (Gandhi's khadi, discussed above, was matched by the black Mazzini wore throughout most of his life in mourning for the fatherland's plight). Of even more consequence was the parallel rejection of standard family ties, with Mazzini's refusal to marry mirrored by Gandhi's vow of brahmacharya (celibacy), both very visible and symbolic personal choices for societies where family played a central moral role.[98]

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[89] Dipesh Chakrabarty and Rochona Majumdar, "Gandhi's Gita and Politics as Such," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 02 (July 2010): 337.

[90] Andrew Sartori, "The Transfiguration of Duty in Aurobindo's Essays on the Gita," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 02 (July 2010): 319–334; C. A. Bayly, "India, the Bhagavad Gita and the World," *Modern Intellectual History* 7, no. 02 (July 2010): 275–295.

[91] Consider Max Weber's discussion of the importance of the *Gita* in *Politik als Beruf*, where it is seen as a welcome alternative to the ethical universalism of the West.

[92] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 381–2.

[93] Ibid., 384.

[94] The perspective on sacrificial politics developed by René Girard has a bearing on the analysis presented in this section: the issue, much too complex to develop in this context, is reserved for a separate treatment.

The self-sacrificial perspective contributed to the construction of the persona of the charismatic leader; it was also intimately entwined with the social history of suicide in the nineteenth century. For Mazzini's age, the 'ultimate sacrifice' was inscribed within the romantic cult of the individual. In the Italian context, it was Mazzini's signal contribution to add to the Jacobin mix of religious passion and classical dignity an attraction for death and sacrifice of self:[99] death became an act of rebellion and defiance.[100] For Gandhi, operating in the early days of the twentieth century, sacrifice for the cause could not be couched in such naïvely heroic terms, if for no other reason than the existence of a new psychological and sociological literature[101] aimed at revealing the supra-individual determinants of the phenomenon. In the age of neurasthenia, the lionization of altruistic devotion to a political cause was a much trickier discursive proposition. Perhaps for this reason Gandhi voiced this part of his political message in the terms of texts such as the Gita, rather than on the model of contemporary European movements.

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[95] Riall, "I martiri nostri son tutti risorti," 40.
[96] Belardelli, *Mazzini*, 97.
[97] Cf. as paradigmatic the article "When I am arrested," reprinted in Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, 223–5.
[98] On celibacy as a patent departure from instrumental rationality, see Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 100.
[99] Riall, "I martiri nostri son tutti risorti," 26.
[100] Nowhere is this more evident than in the veritable cult Mazzini established in memory of his comrade Jacopo Ruffini, who took his own life in prison in 1833 after writing on his cell wall in his own blood "Ecco la mia risposta. Lascio la mia vendetta ai fratelli" (Here is my answer. I leave my revenge to the brothers), cit. in Balzani, "Alla ricerca della morte utile," 10.

In either case, however, self-sacrifice was intended to carry a moral message, to become martyrdom. For Mazzini, the function of bearing witness was explicit from his very first organic political text.[102] Gandhi could also celebrate the sacrifice of non-violent activists, viewing their martyrdom as cementing the political community.[103] However, with regards to Gandhi it should be noted that he was particularly interested in the aspect of redirection of 'untamed' non-State violence, and the paradoxes that ensued with regard to the valuation of life.[104] In this sense Gandhi's view of sacrifice fits his rigorism and transcendence of humanitarianism, as discussed above. For Mazzini, such a redirection of violence followed a clearer international-law analogy: the self was one of the legitimate targets the members of Giovine Italia were permitted to strike in the Ersatz war against the oppressors of the fatherland. While the elimination of political rivals (especially through assassinations and terrorism) rested on questionable ground, the self-sacrifice of patriotic militants was a morally pure form of violence.

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[101] Cf. e.g. Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Der Selbstmord Als Soziale Massenerscheinung Der Modernen Zivilisation* (München: Philosophia Verlag, 1982); also, of course, Émile Durkheim, *Le suicide: étude de sociologie* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2007).

[102] "La cause la plus sainte et la plus forte est celle qui a fait le plus de martyres: le sang a coulé; mais chaque goutte pèse dans la balance: chaque goutte de sang a gagné des milliers d'hommes à la cause de la liberté et les roses de l'espérance fleurissent plus belles là où le sang des braves a fécondé le terrain" (The most sacred and strongest cause is the one that produced the most martyrs; blood has been shed, but each drop weighs in the balance: each drop of blood has won thousands of men to the cause of liberty, and the roses of hope flower in all their beauty where the blood of the brave has rendered the soil fruitful): De l'Espagne en 1829 considérée par rapport à la France, cit. by Franco Della Peruta in Bonanni, *Pensiero e azione*, 32.

[103] Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 164.

[104] As Faisal Devji puts it, "only by disdaining life could it be saved, while even politics in its most sacrificial forms, including the Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction, continued being devoted to life's preservation:" Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 187.

The analysis of Mazzini's and Gandhi's political strategies in a sacrificial perspective allows us to address the general issues regarding self-determination movements that were raised in the first section. Two issues are particularly salient.

The first concerns the relationship between the individual and the collective. In planning a broad-based political campaign, both Mazzini and Gandhi were obliged to appeal for large numbers of individual self-sacrifices; yet, in the space between the single act of devotion and the aggregate effect, mighty moral and political difficulties arise. Moshe Halbertal, the author of a very insightful treatment of the political dimension of sacrifice,[105] puts it best: when it becomes a question of violence, that is, "when [natural] morality is depicted as a temptation to be surmounted in the name of a higher goal, it is always someone else who pays the price."[106] This is all the more true since the extra-institutional nature of many self-determination struggles eschews the traditional division of labour, by which societies entrust the handling of violence to specific groups. Militants are combatants in the struggle only on the basis of a free choice of allegiance, hence their self-sacrifice is essentially free, un-coerced.

The teleological discourse of sacrifice has to bridge a gap that essentially transcends the political: only as theodicy can the individual moral gesture be re-inscribed in a meaningful narrative, can the individual self's demise be the salvation of the collective self.[107] However, this puts a peculiarly realist, results-based strain on the overall political movement, a requirement that it retroactively guarantee that all sacrifices in its name were not in vain. Only ultimately successful struggles can be seen to "redeem" the sacrifices offered to them. Yet, the destiny of self-determination movements, as any revolutionary 'appeal to Heaven,' cannot but remain open-ended, and it is on this ground that conviction politicians must stake their claims in terms of faith.

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[105] Moshe Halbertal, *On Sacrifice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[106] Ibid., 74.

[107] Hence, for instance, Gandhi "had turned the outcomes to which politics is dedicated into a set of expected yet unplanned demonstrations of divine grace, thus removing them from the realm of human instrumentality:" Devji, *The Impossible Indian*, 146.

The second issue highlighted by the sacrificial perspective concerns excess: even setting aside the issue of the political efficacy of the practice, and the aporias between individual commitment and collective achievement, for which goals is it permissible to enter into such a politics of the exception? The question is absolutely decisive (and all-too-pressing for our age of spectacular self-immolations).[108] The risk, to adopt Halbertal's terminology, is one of 'misguided self-transcendence,'[109] which –he argues– constitutes the ultimate sin of idolatry: the surrender to a cause unworthy of the corresponding sacrifice.[110] In a way, the topic is linked to the question of exemplarity: can the communicative action embodied in self-sacrifice bear any content, any meaning whatsoever, or are some goals fundamentally in contrast with the form itself, i.e. do they disqualify the purity of the action?

If we remain on the terrain of the analysis of conviction politicians (and thus bracket for the purpose of the argument any universalist moral evaluation of their cause), the question of the targeting of violence and the mechanisms for its limitation in a non-institutionalized context marks a key difference between our two cases: Mazzini's martyrdom is by any means necessary; Gandhi's satyagraha does not allow for freedom in the choice of means.[111] This may, indeed, be the pivotal moral distinction. However, what we have been at pains to show in the course of this analysis is how extra-institutional self-determination movements, even originating in different political cultures and ethical traditions, and holding opposite views on the moral permissibility of violence toward their enemies, could coalesce around the idea and practice of self-sacrifice as a way of waging their struggle.

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[108] Cf. Banu Bargu, "Unleashing the Acheron: Sacrificial Partisanship, Sovereignty, and History," *Theory and Event* 13, no. 1 (2010), and Achille Mbembe, *Politiques de l'inimitié* (Paris: La Découverte, 2016), 136.

[109] Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 4.

[110] Ibid., 78. Halbertal in turn sees this as a major challenge to the Kantian view of morality, understood as residing in the tension between self-interest and self-transcendence.

[111] De Donno, "The Gandhian Mazzini," 389.

Conclusion: is transformative politics unavoidably totalizing?

In January 1949 George Orwell penned a belated obituary of Gandhi, who had been assassinated twelve months previously, for the Partisan Review.[112] The article, entitled "Reflections on Gandhi," did not fail to recognize the Indian's accomplishments, or his exceptional character, albeit in a signally conflicted tone:

> "… I believe that even Gandhi's enemies would admit that he was an interesting and unusual man who enriched the world simply by being alive. Whether he was also a lovable man, and whether his teachings can have much value for those who do not accept the religious beliefs on which they are founded, I have never felt fully certain."[113]

A part of Orwell's misgivings about Gandhi were tied to a high-modernist sensibility that in political terms appears dated today: for instance, Gandhi's position is critiqued for preserving a place for religious faith in political commitment, or for opposing industrial development in the name of what we would now term environmental concerns.

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[112] George Orwell, *Essays*, ed. John Carey, Everyman's Library (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2002), 1349–57.
[113] Ibid., 1352.

However, it is unmistakable that something deeper was at stake in Orwell's reservations about Gandhianism, which in a way turned his article into a counterpoint to the entire worldview of self-determination through self-sacrifice we have explored so far. Orwell perceived the moral strength of non-violence, as well as its capacity to bring about social change even under the most unpromising conditions; however, he also perceived that such a form of engagement could only be pursued if politics became the all-encompassing sphere of life. The true force of satyagraha appeared only when its practitioners had achieved a disdain for worldly possessions and endeavours that allowed them to sacrifice all to the struggle. In Halbertal's terms, this was a politics of sacrifice as "unconditional love."[114]

For Orwell, this omnipresence of the political, this devaluation of other spheres of life presented too many similarities with the totalitarian worldview he execrated (it is no coincidence that at much the same time he launched a scathing attack on 'nationalism,'[115] a notion he expanded to include any stance we might characterize today as 'identity politics'). Rather than pushing anti-institutional politics to such extremes, he had come to believe in the virtues of a limited State as the most appropriate political division of labour. Ultimately, I would claim, such a belief was grounded in historical experience: for the Englishmen of his generation, it was possible to assert that their State had been capable, in the words of A.J.P. Taylor, of "that rarest of things, a just war".[116]

Such confidence rings increasingly foreign to contemporary sensibilities. The crisis of the State, both in terms of its capacity to guarantee the safety and wellbeing of its citizens and with regards to its normative justification, is a signal feature of early twenty-first century politics.[117] The present analysis of the worldview entailed by the sacrificial dimension of Mazzini's and Gandhi's doctrines is not intended as conclusive. It has aimed to demonstrate the possibility, not the unavoidability, of the linkage between a politics of self-determination and a strategy of self-sacrifice, with its attendant dilemmas concerning the relation with violence. However, I believe that the historical reconstruction leaves us with the following issue of contemporary relevance: if the crisis of the State forces politics, or at least transformative politics, into an extra-institutional dimension, are we obliged to experience it as an omnipresence, as in Gandhi's famous quote "if I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircles us today like the coil of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries"?[118]

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[114] Halbertal, *On Sacrifice*, 57.

[115] Orwell, "Notes on Nationalism," *Essays*, 865-84.

[116] These are the closing words of Alan John Percivale Taylor, *The Second World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Penguin books, 1976).

In conclusion, this article has endeavoured to explore what follows, morally and politically, from the adoption of certain tactics in self-determination struggles. The quest for self-determination unavoidably implies the radical political demand of the expulsion of the old sovereign from the polity; in most cases, though, the indipendentist forces lack the means to challenge government institutions through direct military confrontation. Therefore, they are impelled to delegitimate them. This can be done by concerted direct action, but how is mass mobilization to be achieved? Two different paths have been discussed: Mazzini's, through conspiracy, guerrilla warfare, and exemplary action (with its attendant memorialization); Gandhi's, through principled anti-institutionalism, ascetic discipline, and a distrust of humanitarianism. While these paths are in many ways opposed, the main claim of this article is that they converge in providing a moral justification of violence when it is directed towards the militants themselves, in the form of self-sacrifice. The religious foundation of such a justification is discussed, as well as its risks: its reliance on a successful outcome of the struggle to validate the meaningfulness of sacrifices made on its behalf, and the difficulty of restricting the ambit of ideal goals to attain which such violence is permissible. Sensing the problematic nature of these tactics, critics of self-sacrifice, such as Orwell, had by contrast extolled the virtues of institutional politics in righting wrongs without the risk of an escalation of violence. The contemporary deepening of the crisis of the State, however, calls into question the continuing feasibility of such a politics of gradualism in the face of extreme societal ills and entrenched injustice, thus renewing the relevance of the dilemmas illustrated by Mazzini's and Gandhi's politics.

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[117] On the relation between sacrificial politics and the contemporary crisis of the State, see Paul Dumouchel, *Le sacrifice inutile* (Paris: Flammarion, 2011), esp. chaps. 5–6.
[118] "Neither a Saint nor a Politician," Young India, 12 May 1920, reprinted in Gandhi, *Non-Violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, 109.