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INSURGENT VIOLENCE AND DEFENSIVE VIOLENCE: UNDERSTANDING THE USE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE BY THE ITALIAN EXTREME LEFT IN THE 1960S AND 1980S.

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by Caroline Guibet Lafaye
CNRS

Abstract
Italy in the 1960s and 1980s experienced a remarkable wave of political violence involving the extreme right, the extreme left and the State. In order to highlight the mechanisms accompanying the emergence of this type of phenomenon and the way in which the violence actors relate to it, we conducted a qualitative sociological survey of 30 extra-parliamentary left-wing activists from this period. In opposition to the researches done so far on the topic (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012; Della Porta, 2013; Sommier, 1992), we will show the need to include the pragmatic interpretation of political violence in its politico-ideological paradigm and to propose a critical reading of the temporal evolution of these patterns according to the generations of activists encountered, in the sense, for example, that the paradigm of defensive violence does not intervene in the "escalation" phase of the conflict but from its origin. We will also highlight the role of the perception of a closure of political opportunities in the mechanisms of production of violence within the most militarized political groups rather than in the broader social movement.

Keywords: Terrorism, violence, utopia, Italy, Red Brigades.

"The perspective of a secular pacification of morals has been used in some works to affirm the thesis of the obsolescence of the revolutionary theme (Braud and Burdeau, 1992)."

Persichetti, 2002, p. 213

Introduction

The kidnapping and execution of Aldo Moro in the spring of 1978 marked the history of Italy. However, this event was part of a long period of conflictual social relations and – despite its repercussions – did not really constitute the peak of political violence in the peninsula. The demonstrations in Reggio Emilia, which brought together 20,000 people in response to the project of the Italian Social Movement (MSI) to organise its sixth congress in Genoa – important place of the Resistance –, were repressed in blood on July, 7th 1960. The bullets of the riot police killed five demonstrators and injured twenty others. In March 1977, on the occasion of a demonstration where tens of thousands of people converged, groups from the Autonomy cortege robbed two armouries along the Tiber in Rome. In this context, however, the actions of the BR have not followed a linear trajectory. The first peak was in 1974-75 and the second in 1979. Thus, among the actions carried out, attacks against individuals reached 20 and 25 per cent in 1977-1982 and 67 per cent in 1983 (Della Porta, 2013, p. 184).

In order to understand this socio-political violence and the illegal practices that accompanied it, it is necessary, in contrast to a trend characteristic of the "public" memory of these decades, to place it in the socio-historical context of its emergence. Indeed, historiography and public discourse tend to reduce the violence – possibly illegal – of those in power "to the actions of a *cabal*; symmetrically, the violence and illegalisms exercised by the dominated classes are stripped of all historical and social depth and are reduced to the fruits of a perverse will of subversion" (Cavazzini, 2014, p. 47). Generally speaking, the study of political violence in Italy in the 1960s to the 1980s makes it possible to highlight, in a paradigmatic way, the interactions between the dynamics of social conflict, the reaction of institutions and public authorities, on the one hand, and the ideological-organisational orientation of political actors, on the other.

The sociology of social movements has shown that processes and actions are built in a relational way and call for taking into account all the actors present in a given conflict space (Bennani-Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2012, p. 787). With regard to political violence, it tends to be seen as emerging at the crossroads of changes in the political environment, State repression, competition between social movements and the existence of counter-movements (see Bosi, 2012, p. 178). If we stick to the initial phase of its emergence, three mechanisms would intervene: the accentuation of repression against the protest movement, the intensification of organizational competition and the activation of militant networks (Della Porta, 2013).

Concerning Italy, the analysis of eight biographies and autobiographies of ex-Brigadists done by L. Bosi and D. Della Porta (2012), based on a comparative study with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), highlights three paradigms of the relationship to political violence of these activists. The first one considers revolutionary violence likely to change the socio-political situation (the so-called 'ideological' way). In the second, violence is used pragmatically (it is the so-called 'instrumental' way) and in the third it is used reactively in the face of a climate of radicalism (the so-called 'solidaristic' way). Is this triple paradigm relevant to address the relationship to political violence within the plurality of Italian armed organizations of the time? What role do secondary socialization and "martial role-taking" on the one hand, and "organizational competition", on the other, play in the implementation of this violence?

In order to re-evaluate the relationship to violence of clandestine activists of Italian extreme left-wing groups at the time and its role in what is commonly referred to as the "escalation" of violence, we conducted a qualitative sociological survey with 30 of these activists. The analysis of the semi-directive interviews makes it possible to nuance the thesis of a direct or immediate link between (revolutionary) ideology and action (for a radical transformation) from the consideration of the axiological and situational frameworks on which it depends. This framework involves in particular a representation of the structure of political opportunities. It therefore allows us to reconsider definitions of radicality in terms of a direct analytical implication between radical means of action and the so-called radical ideology (see Bronner, 2009). Criticism of this approach also leads, on the meso-sociological level, to a reevaluation of the place of organizations in these processes. We will rather highlight the competition in the positioning within the social space of contestation and for the monopoly of illegal violence. Finally, the analysis allows, at the micro-sociological level, a re-

examination of the three types of relationship to political violence drawn from Bosi and Della Porta's (2012) study of eight biographies and autobiographies of ex-Brigadists. We will address these points by considering, first, the evolution of the generational relationship to political violence and the sociological mechanisms underlying it. We will then consider the two main paradigms of this relationship: the ideological-strategic (or insurrectionist) paradigm involving an analytical relationship of the revolutionary project and action, and the defensive/reactive violence paradigm, from which we will critically question the readings in terms of the "escalation" of violence.

Presentation of the survey

The analysis we are developing is based on a survey conducted between February 2016 and February 2020. It allowed us to talk to 30 activists involved in extra-parliamentary organisations (BR, PL, LC, *Potere Operaio*, the Autonomy movement) active in Italy between the end of the 1960s and the 1980s. Individuals were contacted either directly or through the "snowball" method (Laperrière, 1997)[1]. They were born between 1933 and 1965. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. They lasted between 55 minutes and 3 hours, for an average of 78 minutes per interview. They were carried out face-to-face and, in two cases, by video-conference. Seven people preferred to respond in writing. Interviews were conducted in either Italian or French, in Italy and France. Annex 1 presents the list of respondents and their socio-demographic characteristics. The choice of the illegal organisations studied is based on their importance in Italy. Moreover, these collectives bear irreducible justifications for the use of political violence and used it in different ways. The BR and PL chose political execution in contrast to the Autonomy movement.

The primary data collection was complemented by a systematic study of the written documents published by the groups studied, such as the BR communiqués, the documents of the PL trial (1980), the statutes of the *Formazioni Comuniste Combattenti* (1970) but also the reviews *Quaderni Rossi* (1961-1966), *Classe Operaia* (1964-1967), *Quaderni Piacentini* (1962-1970). Several archive collections were consulted, including life histories and court documents relating to the period and collected at the Istituto Carlo Cattaneo (Bologna); the Historical Archives of the Senate of the

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[1] In this type of field, it is almost impossible to select respondents by age and sex, as contact opportunities are random (see Grojean, 2010).

Republic, from the computerized documentation of the *Commissioni stragi* (Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on Terrorism) and the documentation of the Commissione d'inchiesta per la strage di via Fani; the *Avanguardia operaia fund;* the *Lotta Continua* fund held at the Erri de Luca Foundation (Rome); the Vittorio Foa fund (ACS); the Pezzi Archive, Soccorso Rosso Militante at the Istituto storico Ferruccio Parri.

The collection of primary data and the exploitation of the archives were combined with a study of past and contemporary sources, the consultation of governmental and non-governmental documents and of any element relating to the subject in Italian, English, French and Spanish. The triangulation of documents from several sources helped to contextualize what respondents said about the role of networks, friends, ideology, violence, etc., as well as identifying the transformative events they experienced along the way. It also helps to put their discourse into perspective by taking into account their place and functions in the groups under consideration. Finally, by comparing biographical trajectories and autobiographies, it is possible to isolate dimensions of collective memory common to certain groups of respondents. However, each interview reflects how individuals want to be apprehended and present themselves after this stage of political violence has ended in their country. From each of the organizations mentioned, we interviewed several members who are numerically distributed as follows:

Tableau I. Distribution of respondents in political groups

Groups	**Numbers**
BR	7
PL	10
LC	3
Potere Operaio	5
Autonomy	5
Total	**30**

1. Political violence: contexts and generations

1.1 Mechanisms for the deployment of political violence

Far from being the product of a spontaneous explosion, political violence is the result of mechanisms that can be precisely explained. Causal mechanisms can be understood as “chains of interactions that filter structural conditions and produce effects” (Della Porta, 2013, p. 24). Thus defined, they find a *methodological function* in the analysis of the interactions between contextual, organizational and interpersonal factors. These mechanisms then coincide with “generative events linking macro causes (such as contextual transformation) to aggregated effects (e.g., cycles of protest) through individual and/or organizational agents” (Della Porta, 2013, p. 24).

In the early stages of the deployment of political violence, three mechanisms intervene: the accentuation of repression against the protest movement, the intensification of organizational competition and the activation of militant networks (see Della Porta, 2013). This introductory phase would result from increasingly violent interaction with the State (repression triggering the escalation mechanism according to Della Porta), while at the same time tactical innovation and competition between militant groups would encourage the adoption of increasingly brutal methods in certain branches of protest. If the Italian history of the 1960-80’s attests, as we shall see, to the mechanisms at work in this first phase, we may wonder whether those which could characterise the later phases of the development of political violence are actually at work. Bosi & Della Porta’s study establishes that during the phase of clandestine violence, four mechanisms would be operative: organizational compartmentalization, process of militarization, ideological “encapsulation” and militant enclosure. During this phase, the radicalization process, which has come to an end, transforms a fraction of a social movement into a “military sect” (Della Porta, 2013, p. 7), with clandestine armed action involving compartmentalization, withdrawal of the group from the social mobilisation and the ideological isolation of its members, according to the author. The organizational compartmentalization and militarization of actions would be linked to ideological encapsulation, associated with an evolution toward increasing elitism and Manicheism, as well as an essentialization of violence as valuable per se (Della Porta, 2013).

Even when it is not conceptualized in terms of causal “mechanisms”, political violence and its intensification is perceived as fostered by two closely related factors: competition between opposing

or like-minded groups; and the dynamics of secondary socialization and martial role-taking (Sommier, 2012, p. 22), i.e. by both meso- and micro-level factors. Thus, it has been considered that "physical confrontation with counter-movements, especially when they become auxiliaries or allies of repressive forces, and competition between organizations of the same obedience, measuring their fervour for the cause (and thus the capture of clienteles) by the audacity of their attacks, favours the formation of peer groups united by the same appreciation of physical capital, the same warrior *ethos* and a community of combat experience" (Sommier, 2012, p. 23). The survey we have conducted, based on the reconstruction of life trajectories, will therefore make it possible to consider, on the one hand, to what extent "the rise in levels of violence is […] fostered by the dynamics of secondary socialization and the assumption of a martial role" (Sommier, 2012, p. 22) and, on the other hand, whether the mechanisms described by Della Porta (2013) are actually at work in the initial and peak phases of political violence in Italy during the 1960-80s.

The Italian context of exacerbated tension seems to confirm the relevance of distinct heuristic mechanisms that are placed, on the one hand, not so much on the side of a "competition for power" (Alimi, 2011), as on the side of the search for a positioning in the space of contestation. From a mesosociological point of view, the use of political violence can be explained more finely, not on the basis of an organizational "competition" for the recruitment and appropriation of activists, than on the basis of a position taken in this symbolic and political field. A second mechanism concerns, on the other hand, the favourable or unfavourable relationship between "opportunity and threat" between the social movement and the political system, the elucidation of this mechanism orienting, at the macro-sociological level, towards the theme of the closing of political opportunities (COP). Finally, a last mechanism suggests considering with more attention "action-reaction escalation" between social movement actors and opposing forces, both clandestine and legal (State repression).

1.2 Generations of Activists: Three paradigms of Political Violence?

Beyond the mechanisms at the macro and meso-social levels, the secondary literature has offered several analyses of the reasons that lead individuals to engage in armed struggle or propaganda at the micro-social level. This work is either situated at a very high level of generality, embracing in the same comparison the Italian extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing of the years we are studying, ETA and politico-religious networks such as Al-Qaeda (Della Porta, 2013), or is based on a

comparative perspective between the BR and the PIRA but with a very small sample of actors for the first group (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012). The first study argues for an evolution in the relationship to violence of the two generations of distinguished activists, in this case the founders and later activists. It suggests that for the former, family networks are more important, where the influence of an extended community is more obvious for the latter (see Della Porta, 2013, p. 131). Similarly, the emphasis on the three "paths" of armed activism (ideological, instrumental, solidaristic) suggests a differentiated approach and use of political violence (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012).

Activists who perceive themselves as belonging to a long history of struggle nourished by narratives of resistance, i.e. activists of the "ideological" type, would have a critical relationship to political violence. They grasp, in their socio-historical context, signals of a potentially revolutionary situation and seem to have understood more quickly than others, without any specific individual break with their previous political opinions, that the situation had changed and that the armed struggle now seemed relevant (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 372). State repression *consolidated* their earlier convictions and legitimized the final mobilization for armed activism, rather than functioning as a revelation or loss of innocence, a phenomenon found more among activists of instrumental and solidaristic paths.

The militant careers of the second group ("instrumental path") converge precisely around their relationship to political violence, understood in a pragmatic way. Believing that the legalistic path, in the context of Italy at that time, was an aporia, these individuals turned to armed organizations to continue their political struggle. The search for efficient strategies as well as the closing of political opportunities, at the macro-social level, led them down the path of illegalism and even political violence (see Balzerani, Fiore, Peci, Ronconi; interviewed 26 and 27 *in* Bosi and Della Porta, 2012). This relationship to political violence would also correspond to a later period in the evolution of clandestine groups. This profile of actors is said to be more individualistic, in that these activists see themselves less as taking up the continuity of a tradition they have inherited than as the result of a personal choice, motivated by an essentially strategic reasoning (see Balzerani, 1998) in view of the ineffectiveness of other means of action[2]. Rather, micro-mobilization here is based on the belief that non-violent forms of protest were no longer useful in the face of COP.

[2] See Box 2; Interviewee No. 20 *in* Bosi and Della Porta, 2012; Susanna Ronconi, cited *in* Novelli and Tranfaglia, 2007,

According to Bosi and Della Porta, who are jointly studying the PIRA and the BR, the relationship to political violence of the last group of "solidaristic" activists is orchestrated around a defensive will consisting, according to Bosi and Della Porta, of a concern to defend one's own community, particularly against State repression and violent attacks by the adversary (extreme right-wing groups). In the case of Italy, the community to be defended would not be the ethno-nationalist group of reference but rather a radical subculture where political and friendly ties overlap[3]. Commitment is nourished by solidarity with a community struggling in an environment characterized by intense emotions (among which anger and revenge would often be mentioned).

The use of force here would be part of a conflict marked by escalating violence[4]. The issue is not a matter of ideological or strategic choice. For these activists, at least in the beginning, violence would not be legitimised with reference to ideology or political strategies, but rather as a daily element in conflict management. It would be the result of a search for meaning and loyalty to the peer group (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 381). Individuals would become actors of a violence that they would first suffer in a context of street battles with the extreme right wing and in a radicalized environment. If the main motivation *given* for the engagement was that of a necessary response to State violence, there was also a strong emotional need among these activists to take revenge on the enemy (extreme right wing or the Italian police).

2. Political violence, an ideological or strategic issue?

"Politics is made with violence."
Paolino

2.1. The need for armed action

In order to test the validity of this typology, established on the basis of the autobiography of eight Brigadists, for other Italian illegal actors convicted for acts of terrorism, we have carried out a

p. 173.

[3] *A contrario*, we have highlighted, the role of friendly ties from the beginning of the formation of clandestine groups (cf. xxx, 2020a).

[4] Although it aims to establish ideal-types, Bosi and Della Porta's typology covers generational distinctions that make each "path" correspond to a stage of the Italian social conflict.

systematic analysis of their arguments and representations in the field of political violence. It is common to consider that the use of violence is based on normative or instrumental justifications (see Gurr, 1970), which "vary according to the countries and the singularity of their historical path" (Sommier, 2008, p. 95). These two categories, both general and abstract, can be clarified in the light of the speeches collected from those who convened it during the 1960-80s in Italy. From this perspective, two dimensions need to be elucidated: on the one hand, the reasons for resorting to this type of means; on the other hand, the definition of violence and the meaning given to it by those who have used it. Table II shows the distribution of reasons that may justify this *medium*.

Tableau II. : Activists' justifications for the need to use political violence[5]

Patterns	*Occurrences*	*Categories*	*Total*
Justified by State violence	5	Reactive violence	5
Response to other violence	8	Defensive violence	11
Invasion of the territory	3		
Offences against human dig-nity	1		
To assert a political project	**16**	Instrumental violence	**32**
To assert one's rights	**11**		

[5] Table II brings together the occurrences of responses to the question "Was it possible, from your perspective, to achieve the goals of your organization without resorting to armed struggle/violence? Why?" as well as references during the interview to the "inevitability" or even the necessity of the use of violence and military action. This double collection explains that the number of occurrences is higher than the number of individuals interviewed.

Response to the COP	5		
Encouraging collective action	1		
NSP	1		1

The subject of violence, because of the specificity of our sample, must be approached with caution insofar as it is taken *a posteriori* and considered by individuals who have often, officially or even publicly, distanced themselves from it. However, the actors manage to dissociate their past posture from the one they assume today, thus allowing a return to their previous motives and to the arguments that led them to resort to this repertoire. For them, it is always a question of contextualizing the choices they made, both in the international context (cf. national liberation movements) and in the national context (State repression, conflicts with the extreme right wing).
The motives invoked, while referring to normative and instrumental justifications, are however specified in terms of means at the service of a political project (ideological motive, instrumental violence) or reactive violence nourished by a posture of self-defence, whether against the State, the political enemy (the extreme right) or when other fictitious situations of self-endangerment are envisaged (invasion, expansion of the fascism of the Second World War, etc.). The occurrences in Tableau II highlight, against all expectations and against the backdrop of a discourse frequently brought to the fore, the prevalence of the ideological motive over the defensive motive. Table III illustrates its distribution and permanency across the political groups studied.

Table III: Justifications within the groups for the need to use political violence

Patterns	BR	PL	LC	PO	Autonomy
Justified by State violence	3	3			

Response to other violence	2	2	2		1
Invasion of the territory	1		1		
Offences against human dignity		1			
To assert a political project	**5**	**4**	1	**3**	**3**
To assert one's rights	3	3		3	2
Response to the COP	1	**4**			
NSP	1				

The "ideological" motive, however, needs to be appreciated in its complexity and multiplicity of facets. It determines, first of all, a strategic and instrumental relationship to violence based on the identification and framing of the socio-political situation in terms of the balance of power. The speech of M. F. (born in 1955 but belonging to 1γ[6], PL) highlights this:

> "I was absolutely convinced that we were doing the right thing. That we were the ones who realized what others were just talking about, the main slogan of 68-69: revolution, the fact that the bourgeois State must be brought down and cannot be changed. That's the crux of the matter. That by reformism, by voting, we could not go anywhere, which the secretary of the Communist Party had admitted, and that therefore the only thing to do was to build a revolutionary paramilitary organization. And from then, there was an internal debate: like this or like that."

[6] Generation that engaged between 15-17 years old.

Contexts change as does "tolerance" to violence. It is very weak nowadays, whereas in the 1960s and the 1970s it was more a part of the political game. At that time it did not have the exceptional status that it currently has and could therefore, in a reasoned way, be considered as a political instrument7. It is precisely because it is part of a political strategy and not exercised for its own sake that it proves, in the eyes of the actors, to be able to find legitimacy8. As a result, there is an irreducible continuity between the representations of the political tools of activists of the time and those of contemporary analysts. For the former, there is a continuity of means of action, whereas the latter introduce and project the "rupture" and discontinuity between "violent" and "non-violent", "legal" and "illegal" means of action, whereas, on the one hand, the continuity between these two dimensions is a central principle of revolutionary, anti-State or anti-system ideology. On the other hand, legal, illegal and violent actions must be understood as a homogeneous set of social practices. Quantitative work carried out on the German Federal Republic by M. Kaase and F. Neidhardt highlighted the link between the dimensions of legal and violent action, through the items of illegal action (Kaase and Neidhardt, 1990, pp. 11-14). They underline the existence of a continuum between the three dimensions (legal, illegal, violent)9. This continuity is illustrated by Melchior (PL, G 1[10]):

[7] This is what Paolino (PL), born in 1956, suggests when we asked about the possibility of achieving PL's goals without violence: "It's a difficult question. I do not think so, because at that time, *we were doing politics like that, there was no alternative solution*. We saw it in the 1975 elections, with *Democrazia Proletaria*, the clashes that took place inside to try to exclude LC, for example. It was not possible to disguise oneself as a reformer." (emphasis added)

[8] This strategy consists, as we shall see, in particular in articulating it with social struggles, as S. Segio said: "De Luca, finally, expresses a truth that is generally silenced: 'The armed struggle, compared to what we did, was different only because they [LC?] made the armed struggle *their only form of political expression*. For us, it was only the cursed corollary of a great political struggle that had to be played out in the light of day' ("Perché non dico chi ha ucciso Calabresi", interview with Claudio Sabelli Fioretti, *Corriere della Sera* Magazine, September 9th 2004)."

[9] An analysis of the correlations between ten participation items in the FRG shows that among the three sub-dimensions (legal, illegal, violent), there is a strong average correlation of .55 between each of their items; that there are intermediate correlations between the illegal-legal (40) and illegal-violent (28) items; and that finally there is practically no relationship between the legal and violent dimensions (r-09), which are therefore linked to each other via the illegal dimension.

[10] See the legend in Annex 1.

> "In 1975, we began to carry out what we called 'combat' actions. They were actions characterized by the use of violence, not necessarily with firearms. With lighter weaponry, edged weapons, Molotov cocktails…
>
> *There was never in my head, or in my friends' heads, the idea of a breakup*. It was a progression in the use of violence, violence was internalized as just, from the time I was part of the Italian Communist Party." (emphasis added)[11]

However we will not interpret this continuity of engagement in terms of the "*natural* consequence of environmental conditions" (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 381), as the naturalist interpretation is so inadequate to account for social and political processes. Rather than a naturalization of commitment, it is cognitive processes and a framing of effective political action that is implemented by its actors. Thus the armed struggle appears, in the eyes of the actors, as the most effective and the only appropriate instrument for a political project of radical questioning of the *status quo* and the Italian socio-political situation of the time. This reasoning leading to the conclusion that

> "The only way to change the situation of a country, the situation of Italy, of Europe, of NATO at the time, was to move to armed struggle. For the struggle, let us say so, political, trade union and social struggle, had come up against a wall, a wall not simply of denying certain reforms – for yet the reforms had been made: the status of workers, divorce, etc. – but of changing the country's frameworks, not. It is so true that this wall has solidified, it presented itself in a solid way on December 12th, 1969 with the massacre in Piazza Fontana" (F. P., BR).

[11] M. F., charged with murder, echoed him: "I used to fight in high school, in the neighbourhood, I think the same way as anyone else. I was collecting signatures for the referendum, I did that too. We were no different from any "normal" left-wing activist, if that concept makes any sense." M. F.'s words attest to a normalization and trivialization of illegal engagement at that time, which can be explained by the numerical importance of individuals joining extra-parliamentary groups. Between 1970 and 1990, 4,087 people were prosecuted for belonging to an armed organisation, including 911 for the BR (Moretti, 2010, p. 272), to which must be added those working in the BR's subsidiary formations, totalling 426. Between 6,000 and 7,000 people from the extreme left served prison sentences of varying lengths (S. Segio). One of its founders estimates that there were 5,000 activists around PO.

The "revolutionary break" (M. F., PL) presupposes and depends on the implementation of political violence. However, as M. F. points out, "a large number of movements [such as PO, LC] had already integrated the fundamental idea of the revolutionary rupture, and even the necessity of political violence, which was considered inevitable from this point of view". A phenomenon of "belief amplification" then occurs (Snow *et al.,* 1986). On the one hand, beliefs constitute ideal elements that cognitively support or hinder action in the pursuit of desired values and, on the other hand, support for and participation in a social movement depend on the revitalization of an interpretative framework that calls for either an amplification of values or for an amplification of beliefs (Snow *et al.,* 1986, p. 469). Thus, the activists of these groups consider both that violence is inevitable in a project of radical social transformation and that it also has an instrumental dimension, in a class struggle mechanism where rights are to be won, in accordance with a Marxist logic inspired by the history of social struggles throughout the world. These include beliefs, on the one hand, about the likelihood of change or the effectiveness of collective action (see Klandermans, 1983, 1984; Oberschall, 1980; Olson, 1965; and Piven and Cloward, 1977) and beliefs, on the other hand, about the need and opportunity to "stand up", to cope (Fireman and Gamson, 1979; Oliver, 1984; Piven and Cloward, 1977). For this reason, it cannot be said that "instrumental" and "solidaristic" recruitment was virtually absent at the origin of the formation of armed groups (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 371), since revolutionary action is intrinsically contained, framed and integrated into a political project of radical social transformation.

Our analysis thus suggests another reading of the context and interpretation of the use of political violence by the "ideological" activists who, in the study mentioned, constitute the early activists. Bosi and Della Porta believe that they picked up signals in the socio-political context that the situation had changed and that the armed struggle now seemed relevant (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 372). In the discourse of the actors, the evocation of a "change in the situation" is rather linked to a change in the social climate in terms of tension with the State, violence from the extreme right wing, and repression. This representation is more present among the generation after the founders.

Beyond this assessment and the representations of the macro-sociological context, certain groups such as PL or the BR have formed around the option of implementing military action to support on-going social struggles. The intrinsic relationship between the political objective and military action

then comes into play as a principle of armed organisation and constitutes precisely what defines it, as S. Segio (PL) explains:

> "The use of weapons was then [in the PCI] rigidly subordinate to political leadership. This model, on the other hand, we contested it, both because of the "double game" that it implied and that we rejected (*we do so, but we don't say it*), and because of our analysis of the political moment of the time, according to which it was necessary to try to generalize the militarization of the workers' struggle, and according to which the armed struggle was an adapted and necessary form of opposition. So much that *PL* theorised and applied a "bipolar" agenda, and for our activists *the political and military aspects were inseparable*. This is a theoretical difference, but it also has practical consequences, on the structuring of the organization" (emphasis added).

This conviction was also already expressed in LC (see Box 1, E. B. and B. L.)[12].

Box 1: On the strategic use of political violence at the origin of the clandestine group formation.
B. L. (PL) explains the reasons that led him to take up arms: "Our project was, on the one hand, to encourage the combativeness of proletarians, and thus to *add armed practice to the demands of collective movements*; on the other hand, through the practice of these fire groups, to be an element of organization, and thus to have an autonomous practice as well. *The armed struggle was considered as transitory, reversible, a necessary 'coup de force' at certain moments in history to induce the masses to go on the offensive* against the different facets of capitalist power. The relationship between the masses and the organizations was considered fundamental, so that the debate on the proletarian fighting organization and the party could develop within the working class at the same time. We believed that: 'the process of building the proletarian army in a country with advanced capitalism passes at the same time through the fighting organizations and the appropriation of power by the working class'.
In addition to this public component, a smaller, more 'secret' component was created, equipped with

[12] LC "was founded precisely to have all the necessary tools to help and defend the working class and the social classes, which did not have the means to defend their interests. Our organization was really well structured. Either you make this choice for these reasons, or you do something else. At that time this choice seemed inevitable to me." (E. B.)

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firearms, which carried out acts of sabotage and tried to disarm security guards, police officers and carabinieri.
We set ourselves the goal of accomplishing an ambitious, but illusory project: the construction of a 'workers and proletarian militia', that is to say, to achieve a level of reticular armament, with a capillary presence in every neighborhood, in every local situation, in every factory. It is to this that I dedicated all my energy, with a group of very efficient comrades, in Turin, from the spring of 1977 until a tragic March 9th, 1979 when I was injured during an action." (emphasis added)

While it is analytically possible to distinguish ideological and defensive motives, on the other hand, the context of that time and its institutional violence feed confirmatory biases for extreme left-wing political activists, such as Margareth (BR) referring to "the 'massacre' in Piazza Fontana, which is a turning point, especially with regard to the subject of violence, i.e. the *quasi necessity of using* violence to *assert one's rights and a political project*. Yes, that's right, a kind of obligation, without which nothing is possible." This bias of confirmation and the violent tensions between politically opposed groups are therefore pushing some extreme left-wing actors to "get organised"[13]. The entry into political violence is therefore influenced by a dual mechanism based, on the one hand, on the perception of the relationship between "opportunity and threat" between the social movement and the political system, and, on the other hand, on the logic of "action-reaction" between the actors of the social movement and legal repression.

2.2 Pragmatic approach to political violence and COP

2.2.1. Evolution of the COP perception

"Social conflict has already passed the

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[13] This is indeed the conclusion to which Paolino's speech, recalling the attitude of the PCI in 1977 and the COP, leads: "*At a certain point, the only way to make your voice heard is to use political violence*. It was only then that someone started saying, 'Politics is made with violence'. It's true, if you wanted to be listened to, you had to use violence. But the State used it too. When they closed a social centre, they used violence. And so you had to respond to this violence because there were no channels for mediation, there was nothing in my opinion. And so the only way to make yourself heard was to respond to violence with violence. And from this comes the need to organize in a structured way, and so on."

> threshold beyond which peaceful means are no longer possible. Civil war is the narrow path through which all those who want to unblock this situation will have to go."
>
> Senza Tregua

The study of clandestine "pathways to activism" by Bosi and Della Porta (2012) also suggests that in each of the three groups (ideological, instrumental, solidaristic) there is a differentiated relationship to political violence. The former would have considered that armed struggle appeared as a relevant option in view of the "change" in the socio-political situation. The second group is mainly constituted around its interpretation of violence as the only efficient political tool, particularly in view of the closing of political opportunities (COP). The last group, known as the "solidaristic path", deals with a defensive violence, which is convened to defend "its community", which, in the case of Italy, refers to a "radical counter-culture", i.e. the extreme left-wing protest groups. The militant careers of the "instrumental path" are distinguished by pragmatic considerations: these individuals, believing that, in the context of Italy at the time, the legalistic path was an impasse, turned to armed organizations in order to continue their political struggle (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 372). While the actors of the "ideological path" would have an interpretation of political violence intrinsically linked to a revolutionary utopia, in a logic of exaltation and aspiration for social change, those of the "instrumental path" would have been led there due to the impasse caused in particular by the choice of the "historical compromise", the multiplication of extreme right-wing attacks (tolerated or even supported by the government) and the State "massacres". The former would act in the name of a utopia, the latter would seek efficient strategies to deal with the COP[14]. The speech of Aloys (BR, born in 1956) confirms the reality of this second reading:

> "Everything that happened, in my opinion, was mainly a response to the great immaturity of the unions and parties that started to co-manage the factories, on the whole, especially on the side of the trade unionists linked to the FIOM [*Federazione*

[14] See Box 2; Balzerani, Fiore, Peci, Ronconi; interviewed 26 and 27 *in* Bosi and Della Porta, 2012.

> *Impiegati Operai Metallurgici*], who completely sold out all the struggles and all the workers' demands. As a result, there was no way *out, including a democratic* way *out*, to be able to act in this context, there was no way to say, 'Now I'm going to make you pay for it', that sort of thing. Wrestling paid off. At least *one had the impression that there was nothing more to be done*, if not through a form of marginality which then led to these kinds of [violent] actions, which gradually developed during these years." (emphasis added)

Quite logically this representation comes after activists have experienced the limitations of other forms of political action. Our investigation allows us to qualify the constitution of a *specific* group of activists (those of the "instrumental route") whose micro-mobilization would have rather gone through the belief that non-violent forms of political protest were no longer useful in the face of the COP. Indeed, this inference is central to the engagement in illegal and violent action. It is inherent in *any* form of commitment to armed struggle and is transversal to all groups that have taken the option. Table IV allows us to appreciate the place of the representation of the COP among underground activists. A total of 16 out of 30 activists considered that the Italian situation at the time presented impassable obstacles that could not be overcome by legal and democratic means (see Box 2).

Table IV.: Occurrences of the perception of a COP according to the collectives

Groups	*Occurrences*	*Number*
BR	**6**	7
PL	**8**	10
LC	0	3
PO	0	5

Autonomy	2	5
Total	16	30

Table V: Occurrences of the perception of a COP according to generations of activists

Groups	Occurrences	Number
G 1	4	11
G 2	**11**	18
G 3	1	1

Table IV and Table V therefore highlight two key points: on the one hand, it is among the groups that have taken the strongest military options that the perception of COP is most present, confirming the existence of a causal mechanism between this type of perception and the implementation of political violence. On the other hand, this representation, nourished by a well-documented contextual evolution, is more shared by actors born after 1950 and who are in their twenties during the 1970s. Faced with a blocked situation, some actors have chosen to leave the struggle. Nevertheless, it would be simplistic to consider that the others *only* joined clandestine organisations for pragmatic reasons[15]. Indeed, Tables VI, VII and X show that political motives *systematically* govern the engagement of the activists. This is also the logic and intentionality behind the creation of the clandestine structures, as S. Segio recalls:

[15] The individualistic bias proposed by the pragmatist interpretation should also be ruled out, since incorporation decisions are rarely individual (see xxx, 2020a). The commitment processes are often collective and carried out within peer groups. Moreover, an individualistic logic of incorporation, even in the name of pragmatic motives, seems rather contradictory with the search for efficiency.

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> "I, personally, like the majority of those who created PL, had been active for several years in *Lotta Continua*. I left in 1974, precisely to try to organize the armed struggle explicitly. However, both in the *Senza Tregua* movement and in previous extra-parliamentary organizations, in reality there had already been illegal, even armed, practices, but they were within a political conception and an organizational structure that was part of an 'armed arm', i.e. a use of weapons that was not claimed, which was considered a technical instrument, a mere complement, so to speak; This was, moreover, a very traditional logic in the communist movements and parties, which could rely on a tactical use of weapons and even include an underground military apparatus."[16]

These elements make it possible to question the individualism of militants of the "instrumental" path, who identify less with a tradition that they will inherit than they would have made "a personal choice, motivated by an essentially strategic reasoning" (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012)[17]. This thesis is, for example, very strongly challenged by the testimony of actors within the BR (see A. Franceschini, Federico), PL (such as B. L., P. M., Paolino, Sophie) or in the Autonomy (such as Guiseppe) who testify that decisions to join illegal groups are rarely individual and that the process is rather collective within peer groups (see also xxx, 2020a, Table V). Moreover, it would be inconsistent to search for efficiency while at the same time adopting an individualistic stance, since this search can only be successful within a collective approach. Mathias' testimony thus confirms the constitution of illegal and armed groups based on collective dynamics:

> "A part of us, some comrades, was linked to the Autonomy circles, which was becoming more and more powerful, because in 1976, all the extra-parliamentary organizations came into crisis, *Avanguardia operaia,* LC, the Fourth International… so this huge reservoir of comrades, this set of struggles, on different territories, is in

[16] See the rest of the quotation from S. Segio in 2.1.

[17] This interpretation is all the more problematic as many actors say they have taken the option of illegality or even the underground collectively (P. Margini, A. Soldati, M. F., F. P., Giuseppe; see xxx, 2020a).

large part… It's not that this whole milieu is going to end up doing armed struggle. Part of what is called Autonomy, in its various components, and particularly here in Turin, it was *Senza Tregua,* which was originally part of Autonomy, and later became PL. It was already sort of an armed formation. Another party seeks to pursue on the same way, and that's when *Collettivi del proletariato were* created… wait, what exactly was it called? Finally, this is what we call the *Centri sociali* today, which, in reality, were created by the LC elders. And then finally, there's all that was called the ebb, all those who at the time didn't take sides and stayed in the middle of the ford."[18]

While the choice of illegal engagement is not exclusively pragmatic, the option of armed struggle is indeed based on strategic reasoning[19]. Consequently, we cannot consider that there is a dichotomy between the utopian and revolutionary representation (of a continuation of the family resistance struggle leading to the "ideological" path of armed activism), on the one hand, and the perception of the COP, on the other hand, at the initial stage of strategic reasoning (*i.e.* the "instrumental" path). The perception of this closure has, for some of the activists, in this case those who will join or found the BR and PL, a confirming effect of a political situation that defeats the means of legal and non-violent action.

Box 2: Testimonies from the COP

Asked about the possibility of "resisting" without resorting to armed struggle, A. Soldati (PL) is categorical: "No. Let's say that for years there were people, young people who did this: who resisted, who did counter-information, information, who took cultural and ideological initiatives, but afterwards in 1977, there was a period of repression that was so difficult. Afterwards, I don't want to paint a picture that is too black from that time either; in any case, *our perception* of the time was that we had no choice (she underlines). We felt like we were at the foot of the wall in terms of other possibilities for activism. Besides… obviously a lot of people made that choice and a lot of people didn't. All the people who were in different political, legal and

[18] Mathias explains how he is drawn into Autonomy in these terms: "Here [in his geographical area], we have done everything together. Me, Stefano, Guido, everyone from the valley…"

[19] See Balzerani, 1998; interviewee No. 20 *in* Bosi and Della Porta, 2012; Susanna Ronconi, cited *in* Novelli and Tranfaglia, 2007, p. 173; and the excerpts mentioned above in the body of the text.

institutional paths were really… We were not allowed to speak, we were compartmentalized in something that had to work in line with the will of the power in place. So there you go, it was complicated but… I realize that we were still very, very fascinated by the experience of Latin America, of certain countries, notably Cuba, so we certainly lacked lucidity about certain things and possible means or tools to militate in a different way."

Alexandra (BR) explains why she agreed to use violence: "After the first cycles of struggle that were very harshly repressed, slowly – even if it was also a consequence of episodes like Piazza Fontana, and especially Brescia – the *democratic path seemed impracticable*. So violence, on the contrary, seemed an inevitable necessity at the time. It wasn't, but we thought it was."

Alexandra returns to the subject later in the interview: "When you quickly realize that demonstrations are useless, that they are only a way of exposing yourself to these extremely harsh forms of repression and that, consequently, you have to move on to other actions, to another level of confrontation. There was a direct link, precisely when the first deaths in armed organisations also occurred, as in the case of Annamaria Mantini, for example, or Mara Cagol, people who, in our view, were executed on the spot, without trial. *All of these events have contributed to the fact that we are not going backwards*." (emphasis added)

2.2.2. Revolutionary Utopia and the Strategic Use of Political Violence

Our analysis therefore leads to conclusions that help to challenge the dichotomy between an ideological relationship and an instrumental or strategic approach to political violence. It leads first of all to subsume the pragmatic or instrumental interpretation of political violence into the ideological approach. Revolutionary discourse and emancipatory utopia are *constitutively* articulated around a strategic relationship to political violence. For this reason, the analytical implication between so-called extreme ideologies and extreme means of action, in this case violent ones, has often been stressed[20]. Ideologies can be defined as "a set of beliefs about the social world and how it functions" (Wilson, 1973, p. 91-92) that serve as a basis for individuals to understand the world and as a guide

[20] In so far as extreme thinking "demonstrates the ability of some individuals to sacrifice what is most precious to them (their professional career, their freedom…) and in particular their lives, and in many cases those of others as well, in the name of an idea." (Bronner, 2009, p. 13)

for action. They constitute links between thoughts, beliefs and myths on the one hand, and actions on the other (see Moghadam, 2008, p. 1).

The role of ideologies, particularly revolutionary ideology in social mobilizations, allows for a definition of social movements as "ideologically structured actions" (Zald, 2000, p. 1). Radicalization would then reside in the articulation of an extremist ideology and a more or less organized violent action (Bronner, 2009). Radical ideologies have often been identified as the drivers of radicalization processes. The analysis we propose, however, aims to qualify the role of ideology as such, while specifying the role of the groups (meso-level) likely to handle these ideological elements as well as the situational frameworks in which they are embedded. We will thus underline the intermittent nature of the situations in which ideology operates, which is only *one* of the elements involved in social transformations, without necessarily being the driving force behind them. Indeed, it is all the more effective that it is part of a situational framework in which a perception of COP and the feeling of being the target of illegitimate violence leads to the adoption of a defensive posture. It illustrates the mechanism of unfavourable relationship between "opportunity and threat" between the social movement and the political system.

Ideology also provides a "cognitive map" that filters the way social realities are perceived, making that reality easier to grasp, more coherent, and therefore more meaningful. However, when it comes to collective mobilizations, ideology cannot be approached as such, as an independent variable. The relationship between ideologies and "interpretive frameworks" thus needs to be clarified (see Fillieule et *al.*, 2010, p. 71). These interpretative frameworks are built from the three operations of diagnosis, prognosis and motivation (Snow, 2004)[21]. With regard to the time studied – which is not always the case – ideological discourses and strategic frameworks seem to merge. In some configurations, the strategic framework goes beyond the initial ideological boundaries to adapt to particular political circumstances. In others cases, protesters develop a framework that strategically appropriates a hegemonic ideology and turns it against power (see Westby, 2002).

Thus within the extra-parliamentary groups of the Italian left wing, the ideology confers an identification with a particular cause and thus outlines a common goal. The feeling of sharing a

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[21] The construction of meaning is based at the meso-organisational level on "diagnostic framing" (identifying and attributing problems), "prognostic framing" – which proposes a way to remedy or address them – and "motivational framing" based on the need and possibility of action, as we will analyse in the present paper.

common goal nurtures a collective identity within the group, while reinforcing opposition and a sense of separation from individuals who do not share these beliefs (see Moghadam, 2008, p. 1). Thus, when the actors mention revolutionary ideology, they do not fail to raise the question which, at the time, was central to radical transformation (see F. P. infra) and, consequently, to confrontation with the authorities (see Demis infra 3.2[22]) in a logic in which the latter is identified and framed as the obstacle to any possibility of radical transformation, whatever it is by a desire to maintain the *status quo*, by economic or political interest (then interpreted as a class interest), or as a result of strategic alliances in a geopolitical context that does not only involve national actors. F. P.'s testimony allows us to grasp the complexity of the context of that time:

> "Some decisions, of course, cannot be taken alone, they need a context, they need a common elaboration, common practices, discussions, a maturing of decisions and perspectives, for which *the only way to change the situation* of a country, the situation of Italy, of Europe, of NATO *at the time, was to move to an armed struggle*."[23]

However, this logic is not only based on a theorization of radical transformation but also, and above all, on an interpretation of effective political action and a strategic approach to the use of armed struggle, which has nothing in common with any taste for violence. What B. L. said sums it up synthetically: "The armed struggle was considered to be transitory, reversible, a coup de force necessary at certain moments in history to induce the masses to go on the offensive against the different facets of capitalist power. "The effectiveness of this repertoire of action is conceived with a propagandist aim in accordance with the anarchist tradition (see xxx, 2019). It is a question of drawing attention to, highlighting a problem, a conflict, a situation of injustice[24].

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[22] "There was a conviction that in order to achieve change in society, it was necessary to come to a concrete conflict against power, against those who hold the levers of power, against those who control society." (Demis)

[23] See the continuation in 2.1, p. 10.

[24] As Guillermo points out: "If we didn't try to invade the Greek embassy, if we didn't try to invade the American embassy, nobody would talk about it. We had in the papers… there was no Internet, there was nothing. The next day there was a paper in the *New York Times* that said the American embassy in Rome had been surrounded by 3,000 people, by 4,000 people. And that had a *political meaning*, and even the PC liked it, eh! Even if they, perhaps, didn't. The Greek colonels, they could feel in trouble if in Rome, Paris, London, etc., there were demonstrations against them. It was a way to isolate them."

Nevertheless, the relationship between (revolutionary) ideology and action (for radical transformation) is far from being direct or immediate. There is no immediate analytical implication between radical means of action and the so-called radical ideology. In order to move from adherence to an ideology to action, a combination of factors is required: a narrative, even if ideologically inspired, must be grafted to on both a blockage in the political structure (COP) and to a favourable global political context, in this case one that carries revolutionary hopes (see F. P. and S. Segio, infra). The effectiveness of the mechanism, involving a certain relationship between "opportunity and threat" in the interaction between social movements and the political system as a factor in the production of political violence, is then sketched out.

The term "ideological" must, however, be understood as the permanence and quasi-omnipresence of the political motive across the generations, which still justifies the identification, *i.e.* the convergence of the "ideological" and "instrumental" approaches to political violence. The influence of political motives is all the more noticeable if the actors belong to organizations characterized by violent political action (see Table VI). This observation imposes a re-reading of the representations commonly associated with the use of violence within social movements.

Table VI.: Political motivations for activist engagement in the organizations studied

Reasons for commitment	*Political*	*Support for the working class*	*Number*
BR	**6**	2	7
PL	**9**	7	10
LC	**3**	2	3
PO	3	**5**	5
Autonomy	3	2	5

Total	24	19	

The convergence of instrumental interpretation and ideologico-political motives for engagement is generationally explained by macro-social factors. For the oldest generation whose militancy emerges in an international and national context of emergent guerrillas, armed struggle is the inescapable instrument of revolution. Its implementation is justified historically, ideologically and socially. S. Segio who, while belonging to the G 2 (born in 1955), is a founding member of PL, which was founded in 1976-1977. He underlines this motive when asked why he chose to take up arms:

> "I was convinced, and we were convinced, that *there could be no radical transformation without going down the path of civil war*, a confrontation that would also be an armed confrontation between social classes. Violence was thought to be the birthplace of history, and we didn't invent it. This was also the lesson that could be drawn from the October Revolution, that of resistance against Nazifascism and against anti-colonial struggles. This was for us the lesson of the 20th century, a short but terribly bloody century." (emphasis added)

Yet the ideological rationale for the use of weapons remains strong over generations, as Table VII shows.

Table VII: Justifications for the need for political violence in civilian generations of activists[25]

Patterns	G 1	G 2	G 3
To assert a political project	**6**	**10**	

[25] On the constitution of the table, see supra note to Table II, "Justifications for the need to resort to political violence".

To assert one's rights	**4**	**7**	
Justified by State violence	1	5	
Response to other violence		6	
Response to the COP	1	3	1
Invasion of the territory		3	
Offences against human dignity		1	
NSP	1		
Total	11	19	1

This relationship to political violence is ideologico-pragmatic in nature. Violence is then invested with a political and instrumental role. This interpretation is still prevalent among activists born in the 1950s (G 2), although, due to the evolution of the repressive context, an interpretation of violence as defensive, absent from the discourse of actors born before 1950 (G 1), has been added. Even among the reasons given for engaging in clandestine struggle are references to self-defence and the evocation of a reaction to the violence of the adversary (State or political enemy, *i.e.* the extreme right wing) among 11 of the 19 G 2 activists met[26].

It can be considered that the defensive motive is weakly mobilized by the first actors of the struggle at least for two reasons: 1. while the repression of social movements exists in Italy and concerns (indirectly) the first generation of militants, it does not yet affect the clandestine groups, which began to organize themselves in the last years of the 1960s and early 1970s; 2. violence has not reached the

[26] On the other hand, this motive for engagement – which is distinct from the interpretation of the necessity of resorting to violence – is absent from the discourse of the youngest PL activists (N = 1).

degree it had with the strategy of tension after 1969 and especially from the mid-1970s[27]. To this extent, the thesis that violence develops through repression and competition between clandestine groups rather than from pre-existing ideologies (Della Porta, 2013, p. 289) needs to be qualified. Ideology is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. Similarly, the context as such is not enough, nor is the proliferation of extra-parliamentary groups. On the other hand, the *development* of political violence is subject to a configuration that it would be inaccurate to restrict to the national level alone. The international ferment of national liberation struggles intervened, in the case of Italy, as a "facilitating factor" for insurrectionary social mobilizations (see xxx, 2020b; A. Soldati supra, Alexandra). Nevertheless, this context is only efficient if it is mediated by representations, in this case interpretations, projections and framing that allow a projection of this context on the national reality.

3. Defensive violence or solidarity illegality?

> "In those years we changed, not because the individuals or our line changed, but because the situation changed. It is first of all the state of the movement and the intensity of the repression that led us to become the BR as they were afterwards". (Moretti, 2010, p. 147)

A study of the context of that time and of the trajectories of the activists allows us to distinguish two – rather than three – major conceptualizations of the need to resort to political violence. They consist, on the one hand of an ideological paradigm (see supra) and, on the other hand, of a defensive conception. The first one is more specifically political or ideological. It consists of an insurgent approach to political violence. The other is defensive and is grounded on the immanence of participation in social struggles, on the one hand, and confrontation with the extreme right wing, on the other. Nevertheless it must be understood as a form of "occupation" of the street, *i.e.* of self-affirmation in the social space, in the symbolic and political field. The highlighting of the first paradigm challenges the thesis that, in Italy, "the 'cause of violence' is not constructed" (Sommier, 1992, p. 86). The interpretation that we propose thus differs from the analysis proposed so far on Italy (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012; Della Porta, 2013; Sommier, 1992), not only in the elucidation of this

[27] However, this statement should be qualified, since AO (Avanguardia Operaia) was formed in 1968 and PO in 1969. Furthermore the explosion in Piazza Fontana took place in 1969. PO, however, dissolved in 1973. All the other groups are emerging when the strategy of tension has already emerged.

double paradigm, but also in the identification of their temporal emergence during this particular period in the peninsula. Indeed, these interpretations of political violence coexist from the very beginning. We have previously shown the relevance of subsuming the pragmatic interpretation of political violence into its ideological reading. We would now like to stress that the defensive relationship to violence does not take place in the "escalation" phase of the conflict and clashes, but from the outset, as shown in particular by A. Stella. There is an overlap of conceptualizations of violence, associated with a shift that occurs around 1976-1977. This superimposition or concomitance can be explained by the ideological orientation and the proximity of the armed groups to the social movement, as well as by the perception that the former have of themselves as political groups (some would say avant-garde) or, conversely, as emanating from the social movement. The distinction is between groups that have a revolutionary aim of overthrowing power (BR, PL) on the one hand, and those who think themselves as supporting social struggles (PO, Autonomy)[28] on the other.

The dichotomy between these two approaches (insurrectionist and defensive) is confirmed in testimonies of the time such as that of P. Virno, editor of the review *Metropoli* and indicted on April 7th 1979: "In short, an offensive theory, of rupture due to the fusion of a new political actor, that of 1968, with the communist culture, and minimal practical achievements." (Virno, 1983)[29] Similarly, the precocity of the emergence of the defensive paradigm is attested to both by P. Virno and in our survey[30]. A. Stella (PO, Autonomy) recalls the context in which this issue arises:

> "From… 70-71, the whole extra-parliamentary movement was permeated by the question of… defending oneself first, and then: is it… legitimate to use force, violence

[28] As the actors repeatedly testify: "There is no fetishism of violence as a means in this, but on the contrary its very close subordination to the progress of mass confrontation." (Virno, 1983) Our divergence with Bosi and Della Porta can be explained by the fact that their study only deals with the trajectories of Brigadists.

[29] This conclusion is preceded by the observation that: "In the political programme, therefore, a violent break with legality was conceived as the manifestation of a different power: slogans such as 'let's take over the city' or 'insurrection' sum up this perspective, which was considered inevitable even if it was not immediate. In terms of its practical application, however, the organisation of an illegal point of view is rather modest in scale, limited to a piecemeal defence: defence of picket lines, occupied houses, demonstrations, and preventive security measures in the face of possible right-wing reprisals, which could no longer be ruled out after the attack in Piazza Fontana in Milan." (Virno, 1983)

[30] "After the 'two red years' of 1968 and 1969, it had become a common place for tens of thousands of activists, including trade union leaders, to organize on the terrain of 'illegality' as well as to publicly debate when and how to confront repressive State structures." (Virno, 1983)

> against the enemy, the State, the class enemy, the bosses, etc.? And it's a debate that took place throughout the first half of the 1970s. Because after the second half of the 1970s, it was the leaden years. But it took years and finally… *The fact that armed groups are formed comes first of all from a feeling of defence* because the armed groups come from the law enforcement agencies. The security services had been created to defend themselves during the demonstrations, against possible attacks by the fascists, the police, etc. The police had been created to defend themselves during the demonstrations. And for many years, violence was conceived only as self-defence. Self-defence against fascists who attacked us, and self-defence against *carabinieri*, repressive forces, etc. And from there, little by little, the groups began to arm themselves… for real. And so from defensive actions, we have moved on to offensive actions… But everyone has conceived of defensive action as an accompaniment to mass social struggles. The Red Brigades in the first half of the 1970s did what I would call [armed] propaganda… The Red Brigades from 76 and *Prima Linea* in the same year started killing."

This testimony, as well as the length of time during which these debates were extended (1970-1975), highlights a relationship to violence that is not only military or utilitarian. Even between 1969 and 1971 and among the so-called "most extremist organizations (*Potere Operaio*, *Lotta Continua*, among others)" (Sommier, 1992, p. 86), the question of the use of violence is posed in moral terms. If this question had no normative or even moral substance, it would certainly have been answered more quickly than if it had been posed exclusively in organizational and strategic terms. We shall see that these terms (clandestinity or semi-clandestinity, techniques of action, priority adversaries, etc.) only enter the debate at a later stage of the balance of power with the political enemies that extra-parliamentary groups choose to confront.

3.1. A context of intense tension

Bosi and Della Porta identify, among the eight Brigadists whose trajectories they have studied, a group of actors whose recourse to political violence is neither an ideological nor a strategic choice. Their choice is rather justified in a defensive logic or by a search for meaning and loyalty to the peer

group (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 381). This group coalesces around a "will to defend its own community" which, in the case of Italy, would be a radical subculture with overlapping political and friendly ties (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 375)[31]. With these activists, the "solidaristic path" to the illegal struggle is taking shape. The commitment would be nourished by solidarity with a community in struggle. Their recourse to violent action is part of a conflict marked by an escalation of violence, rather than an ideological or strategic (in terms of effectiveness) choice. However, the division between "strategic" and "solidaristic" or "defensive" seems again irrelevant, as the actors are convinced that in the face of the violence of the "fascists", *i.e.* the extreme right wing, the only answer is violence. The latter is not assumed here in an insurrectionist logic, but rather in a device both of resistance (against the historical enemy) and of occupation of the symbolic-political space as well as the social space of protest.

Similarly, it cannot be considered that "for these activists, violence would not be legitimized with reference to ideology or political strategies, but rather as a daily element in conflict management" (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012: 380). Indeed, militant antifascism is nourished by strong ideological convictions and has also constituted, through its role in the space of protest as well as through its actions, a remarkable pole of attraction on certain militant trajectories, as Paolino attests:

> "We chose violence also because there was an extremely strong antifascism.
> - Did that count towards the choice of violence?
> Yes, in my personal choice, but also in the choice of many, in my opinion, because in those years anti-fascism was extremely strong, I would say. It was the movement of 1977, which was a break with militant antifascism, if I remember well. But when I

[31] Paola (BR) rejects this reading: "One clarification: the State massacres (attributed solely to fascists) from 1969 onwards did not determine the birth of armed struggle, nor their defensive vision, as if a new form of Resistance against fascism were to be repeated. These massacres did not even accelerate the process of creating revolutionary organizations; they simply highlighted the nature of the class conflict: this conflict was centered on power, far beyond any economic and social demands, far beyond the individual anger of the people."

> started to militate, we were still rooted in this culture, with the old resistance fighters giving up their weapons, as Franceschini says"[32].

Nevertheless, even before 1977, the practical reality of violence was already evident in the daily lives of activists through the "illegality and violence of the often savage social struggles during the "hot autumn" of 1969, the regular clashes with the forces of law and order and extreme right-wing activists" (Sommier, 1992, p. 86). In 1972, the first political assassinations began with the execution of Commissioner Calabresi on May, 17th. The attacks redoubled in 1974 (with the bombing of Piazza Della Loggia in Brescia during an antifascist demonstration on May, 28th and the bombing that derailed the Italicus train on August, 4th). From 1974-1975, street clashes became very violent. In 1976, extra-parliamentary organisations entered into crisis, which had the effect, in particular, of provoking, from 1977 onwards, both a phenomenon of decline but also an increase in armed confrontation. From the same year on, people in arms no longer hide during demonstrations. We remember in particular those of Milan and Rome on March 12th, 1977. 1978 was of course marked by the kidnapping and execution of Aldo Moro, but there were precedents for this, with that of the President of the Turin Bar Council, Fulvio Croce, on April, 28th 1977 by the BR and that of the magistrate of the Court of Cassation, in charge of the funds for the construction of the prisons, Riccardo Palma, in Rome by the BR on February, 14th 1978. In addition, there was the execution of Rosario Berardi, police marshal of the anti-terrorist section on March, 10th 1978 in Turin (action by the BR), the assassinationby the BR of Antonio Esposito, police commissioner and head of the anti-terrorist services in Genoa on June, 21st 1978 and, finally, the murder of Judge Girolamo Tartaglione in Rome on October, 10th 1978 by the BR[33]. These operations continued in 1979, which allows us to say that the years 1978-1979 – until the emergence of the first repentant – are the years when the armed struggle was at its height[34].

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[32] Paolino was born in 1956. He became politically involved at the age of 14 and began the armed struggle at 22 after passing through the FGCI, *Il Manifesto* and the Autonomy.

[33] Girolamo Tartaglione was involved in strengthening the prison policy and its security standards. In addition, there was the attack, sponsored by the BR, on the deputy director of *La Stampa*, Carlo Cassalegno, in Turin on November, 16th 1977. He died of his injuries on November 29th.

[34] Among the outstanding executions of the years 1978-1980 was that of Guido Rossa, a militant of the PCI and the CGIL, on January 24th, 1979 in Genoa, killed by the BR for having denounced Francesco Berardi (BR); that of Judge Emilio

While the use of *illegality* is motivated by loyalty to the peer group[35], this does not motivate, strictly speaking, the use of political *violence*[36]. Extra-parliamentary groups and their members take a defensive stance with regard to what is framed as an attack by the political rival (the extreme right wing) and then by the enemy (the State). Political violence participates in the positioning in the space of contestation whose axiological justification is explicit in terms of self-defence.

Support for and participation in the activities of social movements is often conditional on the clarification and renewal of an interpretative framework. There are at least two sets of factors that explain why some framing processes find a scope lacking in others situations. The first concerns the content or substance of the proposed frameworks and their degree of resonance with the current life situation and experience of potential participants in social mobilization (Snow *et al*., 1986, p. 476). The framing suggests answers and solutions to problematic situations and dilemmas that resonate with the way they are experienced. It builds on existing dilemmas and grievances, and develops them in a credible and convincing manner. In this case, he proposes a "frame resonance". Thus, one of the main determinants of the differential success of framing efforts can be considered to be the variation in the degree of frame resonance, such that the higher the degree of frame resonance, the greater the likelihood that the framing effort will be relatively successful, other things being equal (see Snow *et al*., 1986, p. 476).

Among the activists, 12 (*i.e.* a third of the sample) consider violence as a "response" to previous violence or as a "defensive tool"[37]. The speech by M. F. (PL, dissociated) re-establishes a linearity in the use of violence: "The reason you agree to enter into violence, at least as far as I am concerned, is that someone started against you before. It's a choice in reaction, not a choice in the first place." M. F.

Alessandrini, on January 29th 1979 in Milan, by a commando of PL; that of the jeweller Luigi Torreggiani in Milan on February 16th 1979 by the Proletarians Armed for Communism (PAC); that of the Vice-President of the Judicial Council Bachelet on February 12th 1980 in Rome by the BR; that of the magistrate and criminologist Guido Galli on 19th March 1980 in Milan by PL; that of the journalist Walter Tobagi in Milan on May 28th 1980 by the "March 28th Brigade"; that of Prosecutor Mario Amato in Rome on June 23rd 1980 by the *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR), close to the Italian Social Movement (MSI); that of General Enrico Galvaligi, Carabinieri General of the Coordinating Office of the Prison Security Services, in Rome on December 31st 1980 by the BR. Added to this is the attack at Bologna station on August 2nd 1980 which killed 85 people and injured more than 150.

[35] See the trajectory of A. Soldati.

[36] Contrary to what has been established (see Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 381).

[37] Federico, Margareth, Alexandra, Paola for BR; M.F., S. Segio, Bertrand, Mathias for PL; Guillermo and Marco Boato (LC), A. Stella (PO), Mateus (Autonomy).

says that what was "decisive" in his trajectory "was realizing that you are the target of a physical elimination plan. And that you have to defend yourself against it, that's what I think is decisive. Because otherwise, I wouldn't have done what I did." (see also Mathias, Box 3)

The 12 activists who recognize the defensive role of political violence were all born between 1944 and 1959. Rather, they belong to generations that began their political socialization at a very young age (γ 1 = 6, γ 2 = 3 and γ 3 = 3[38]). All of them institute a political motivation at the origin of their commitment, which for 9 of them is to "make the revolution". Similarly, half of them (N = 5) mention values to justify their commitment. Only 2 refer to indignation or anger[39]. Thus, as far as Italian militants are concerned[40], the defence of community does not constitute a moral justification for the use of political violence.

While one cannot deny the role of street battles with the extreme right wing and of socialisation within a radicalised environment, in the commitment of "solidaristic" militants to political violence, it should nevertheless be recalled that these confrontations have marked the Italian history from the beginning of "Long 68". In this respect, several dates linked to the repression of social movements have been emblematic. On April 9th, 1969, in Battipaglia, province of Salerno, police fired on a procession of demonstrators protesting against the closure of the Tobacco Factory, which stormed the town hall. Two demonstrators are killed and 200 injured. On Corso Traiano, near the Fiat Mirafiori, a trade union demonstration for the right to housing on July 3rd of the same year degenerated: groups of workers linked to LC attacked the police. The clashes lasted all night and left 70 people injured. The year 1969 saw the repression of a peasant demonstration in Avola (Sicily) in December, where police bullets killed two farm workers. These examples of repression contributed to a framing of the social context in which "the State monopoly of force appeared to be an inescapable obstacle with which confrontation was inevitable" (Virno, 1983).

Box 3: An excerpt from the interview with Mathias that captures the cognitive dispositions in which activists

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[38] Age of entry into militancy: γ1: 15-17 years; γ2: 18-20 years.

[39] Bosi and Della Porta's thesis is that activists within the solidaristic path are less politicized and more driven by emotional or sentimental motives, caught in a climate of radicality and political violence prevalent in the country and in the groups they join. This thesis is taken up in Della Porta (2013).

[40] Rather than those of PIRA studied in comparison with the Brigadists by Bosi and Della Porta (2012).

found themselves regarding the framing of violence as a 'response' to previous violence. Mathias disagrees that it should be possible to achieve the objectives of PL without resorting to violence:
"No. For one simple reason: because the violence that was being expressed at that time was *the violence of the State*. At that point, there is an everyday confrontation in the street. If you wanted to go and demonstrate, you had to go a certain way, otherwise you couldn't go. And so *it's a bit like a one-way street, you couldn't help it*. When in 1975, we find ourselves with four comrades who died in four days during demonstrations, you understand that if you go down to demonstrate, that's what you risk. And so you must also be able to defend yourself, but also defend the procession. At the time, the security services had the duty to defend the procession… and then, of course, there was also the objective of arriving at a specific location, and the security services made sure that they got there. But at the time of the confrontation, the order services had to defend, so to speak, the procession. And so to defend the procession, at a certain point, it also meant to oppose it in a certain way. In Rome, to oppose the fascists, when the fascists were all armed to the teeth, it was better to be armed too, or else go somewhere else, or you'd get massacred. So there are levels at which we're forced to accommodate you."

3.2. Reactive violence and affirmation of the revolutionary subject

These elements further confirm the inadequacy of a dichotomy between defensive use and strategic recourse to political violence, insofar as defence is part of a political and operational strategy whose antonymous position would be to exit from conflict and the balance of power. Moreover, the defensive logic is driven less by the "search for meaning and loyalty to the peer group" (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012, p. 381) than by a positioning framed as defensive, in a vital logic (see M. F. supra 3.1) with regard to what is framed as an attack by the political enemy and then by the State, which enjoys a monopoly of legitimate violence. For these activists and clandestine groups, it is a question of both taking a position in the space of protest and asserting themselves as revolutionary subject(s)[41].

[41] Alexandra stresses the gradual shift from defensive to offensive violence: "We always assume that violence can be legitimised only as self-defence. To a certain extent, it seemed to me that violence, even when carried out, for example, by our law enforcement agencies during demonstrations, was a form of self-defence. In reality, this quickly went beyond the limits of self-defence and became a preventive attack – I do not know how to explain it – a preventive war, there too. And so the line was very thin, very thin indeed. So I don't know… at that time I saw our choice of violence, and armed struggle, as an extreme form of self-defence, in some ways. That's how I saw it in the beginning. But in reality, for me, it was a form of attack… from the moment you are inside a revolutionary ideology, violence appears as the form most likely to contribute to the birth of a new society."

In these extreme left-wing groups, defensive violence is referred back to vital necessity, as *praxis* of resistance (see Dorlin, 2017) in a dynamic of individual and political *self-affirmation*. Defending oneself by attacking is part of the self-affirmation of a subject who thus tends to "declare a war that does not say its name, that is to say, to re-establish the modalities of a battle on *equal terms*" (Dorlin, 2017, p. 130), as reflected in the declarations on "the need to arm oneself" that cross the minds of extra-parliamentary groups in the face of the violence of the extreme right wing and of the State. Mathias, retracing the history of PL, identifies with precision the stages in the evolution of social violence in Italy at the time:

> "From 1974-1975, there began to be battles in the streets that were very violent. Little by little, going down to protest meant accepting high levels of confrontation. Just walking down the street. At that time, going to demonstrate became… I remember perfectly well in 1975, there were comrades who died in demonstrations, I wouldn't say every day, but during that year, it seems to me that there were almost ten comrades who died in demonstrations. So *that provokes a reaction on our part*, clearly, not so much to raise the level of confrontation, but simply to keep going down the street, to hold the street. And that, of course, meant accepting a level of confrontation, I would say of a military nature, and accepting the type of response we were giving."

The desire to "take a stand" in the space of contestation and to take a strategic position in the political space also emerges in the narrative of a low intensity war, whose role in the processes of militant engagement is well known (see B. R., xxx, 2021). This strategic option contributes to questioning social positions and relations of domination, to restoring dignity to the combatants, to restoring the pride of the repressed minorities who then become "belligerent" or "resistant", as seen for example in the offensive posture of Fiat workers in Corso Traiano following the armed repression of April 9th 1969 in Battipaglia. This is also obvious in the justifications proposed by Pietro, a former Brigadist, when asked about his motivations in the fight and the struggle. He considers that it was

> "first and foremost a fight for my dignity as a human being. When there are revolutionary omens, in many countries, as was the case at the end of the 1960s and

> the beginning of the following decade, those who are on the side of the oppressed, those who criticize oppression defend their human dignity, they refuse to end up in the trap of charlatanism, of hypocrisy, insofar as they participate in one way or another in the revolutionary struggle, even in the least violent way, through simple civil disobedience. As Che Guevara says, 'Man must walk with his face turned towards the sun, so that it burns him and marks him with its dignity. The man who lowers his head loses that dignity'."

In the context of the Italy of the time, "self-defence must be understood as the condition by which a revolutionary political subject is made possible" (Dorlin, 2017, p. 131). Self-defence and resistance nourish the founding myth of the revolutionary subject and provide the material for a narrative (Dorlin, 2017, p. 133) that Pietro's words illustrate in an emblematic way. International symbols and myths such as that of Che Guevara or the Viet Cong, along with State repression, fuel the discourse and justifications for the necessary use of violence. In this logic, highlighting the violence of the system, that of the enemy, or the violence inherent in historical circumstances becomes an issue in the description – and interpretation – of the situations with which the actors are confronted. The conviction is that force and violence can only be responded to with violence. The framing of the situation then plays a central role and contributes to a redefinition of the notion of violence and its content. This framing can consist in particular in presenting oneself as actors of a violence that Paolino has first undergone, when he retraces his first "violent" action:

> "I was part of a collective in Milan and someone came from the magazine *Rosso* and told us… Well, there had been some arrests in the *Soccorso Rosso* area, in the Bologna region. So it was necessary to provide an immediate response. The Autonomy organized the demonstration. The day before, it is decided, in the most involved social centres, to prepare Molotov cocktails, with paraffin, because paraffin has a high calorific value. And here come some *Rosso* executives. Yes, they were the leaders, the first nuclei of *Prima Linea*, which was still in formation, or at least of the collective

> that was going to form *Prima Linea*. It was the demonstration during which poor Custra died[42]. My first action was to throw Molotov cocktails against the police."

This "reactive" framing of the use of political violence does not allow us to conclude that, among the actors who convene the defensive paradigm, politics constitutes a form of violence[43]. Conversely, the actors who assume and justify the use of political violence are driven by the conviction that it is a way of "doing politics differently", as Demis reminds us:

> "Concerning the clandestine military actions carried out by the armed organizations at that time. At the beginning, it was not much, but we were already talking about kidnappings, and there have been kidnappings. Then there were assassinations. For us, the fact that you could not claim authorship of these actions without damage meant that there was no social mobilization to prevent repression, and therefore the possibility of using these methods was not guaranteed and did not lead to political change."

This is expressed less in terms of "taking on a martial role" (Sommier, 2012, p. 23) than in terms of asserting oneself as a political subject, in this case as a revolutionary subject for whom the use of illegality, force and violence are political tools that are certainly on the fringes of legality but are considered legitimate by those who use them. If the strategic use of violence as a "daily element in conflict management" is rather a characteristic of *certain* groups at the time of their emergence and positioning on the scene of contestation[44], on the other hand, when the BR – and to a lesser extent PL – opt for the strategy of "attacking the heart of the State", indeed we faced the political use of coercion and political homicide[45].

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[42] Police officer killed in Milan on May 14th 1977 during a demonstration.

[43] Which Bosi and Della Porta (2012, p. 376 and p. 381) attribute to the militants of the solidaristic path.

[44] See how LC and PL emerge from SO of high school movements in particular.

[45] See BR, "Contro il neogaullismo, che attacca il cuore dello Stato", April 1974; "Risoluzione di Direzione strategica", April 1975.

3.3. An "escalation" of violence?

The analysis of the perception of the COP makes possible to clarify the contours of the mechanism concerning the play – favourable or unfavourable – between "opportunity and threat" between the social movement and the political system, at the outset of the recourse to political violence. We will now discuss a second mechanism suggesting to consider this phenomenon from the point of view of "action-reaction escalation" between the actors of the social movement and the opposing forces, both clandestine and legal. The above-mentioned interview excerpts and primary data collection allow us to capture the effects of this mechanism, where the secondary literature, in both French and English, has tended to focus primarily on the effects of organizational rivalries[46]. It has been suggested, for example, that "rising levels of violence are […] always promoted by two other closely related factors: competition between opposing or like-minded groups; and the dynamics of secondary socialization and martial role-taking." (Sommier, 2012, p. 22) Microsociological analysis allows us to qualify the function conferred on organizational competition. Moreover, it seems that the importance attributed to "martial role-taking" reflects both a gendered reading and an underestimation of the political motivations underlying the military actions we have previously highlighted.

Moreover, interpretation by organizational competition is quite resistant to the chronology and ephemeral nature of extra-parliamentary organizations. PO dissolved in the spring of 1973. LC only existed between 1974 and 1976. In 1975, *Avanguardia Operaia* entered into an electoral coalition with the *Democrazia Proletaria*, LC and the Party of Proletarian Unity for Communism. PL was mainly active between 1976 and 1981-1983. The BR are active over the entire period. These organizations develop in a context where workers' autonomy is strong from 1975-1976. After 1977, some activists of the Autonomy joined PL and BR. This list does not include those formations that have had less impact on the Italian history due to their more limited operational potential. They were then unable to set themselves up as "competitors" of more organised structures throughout the peninsula. While one must acknowledge the efforts made by some groups such as the BR, particularly in the later stages of the conflict, to attract Social Movement activists to them, it seems more

[46] The emergence of illegal violence has thus been explained by "organizational competition within dense milieus of social movements, social movement families (made up of social movements that share some general orientations and are often allied), and also broader social movement sectors involving a plurality of social movement families" (Della Porta, 2013, p. 285).

appropriate to speak of positioning within the social space of contestation rather than of a strictly speaking organizational "competition", since the option of political assassination in the mid-1970s was a major cleavage within extra-parliamentary groups. Far from instituting rivalry, this orientation has contributed to a division between PL and BR, on the one hand, and the rest of the formations or the Social Movement, on the other. Saro's testimony to this in a concise manner:

> "The two most important positions were the ones I gave you. On the one hand, those who proposed the formation of an armed party aimed at conquering the Winter Palace, on the other, those who, through the use of force, but not violence, continued to claim, to claim more rights, in different registers and in different situations. […] Those were the two political positions."

Finally, having reached an advanced stage of social conflict, Italy has instead experienced the dissolution of extra-parliamentary organisations, which has had the effect of leaving the only field of protest free, on the left wing, for the BR.

On the micro-sociological and temporal side, the defensive paradigm does not strictly coincide with the ultimate phase of the political conflict or with the so-called "escalation" of violence. The chronology of the 1970s shows that this paradigm is not involved in the "escalation" phase of conflict and confrontation, but from the outset, as shown by A. Stella (see supra 3.). This model of the use of political violence, like the ideological (or politico-pragmatic) paradigm, calls for cognitive mediation and a specific framing, mobilizing in particular the memory of war, in this case resistance against fascism (xxx, 2020a), and the fear of an authoritarian *coup d'état*, since context is not the only vector for the use of violence, just as ideology alone is not a sufficient condition for the development of violence.

The superimposition between normative representations and temporal periods[47] is particularly problematic in the case of Italy because of the acceleration of time and event intensity over less than

[47] The "ideological" path coincides with that of the first militant generation and the "solidaristic" path with the last ones engaged in the main study cited (see Bosi and Della Porta, 2012; Della Porta, 2013). One of the reasons why the proposed distinctions are difficult to operate (notably the three paths of armed activism extended to trajectories other than that of the Brigadists) is that over the period studied, time is accelerating.

two decades. On the whole, it was barely 15 years between 1968 and the early 1980s (PL was dissolved in 1983, for example). Between 1975 and 1980, a form of acceleration of both repression and spectacular actions by armed groups took place. In such an intense context, it is perilous to distinguish specific forms of engagement, especially for activists with political trajectories often dating back to their adolescence – a trait that characterizes almost all of the people met in the survey. It is all the less relevant to consider that the defensive paradigm intervenes in the ultimate phase of the political conflict since the historical period opens with the founding event of Piazza Fontana in December 1969, which was quickly seen to be the work of the extreme right wingh, backed by the State's secret services. However, this attack places the idea of the need for self-defence in the minds of far-left activists.

Since political violence develops in the course of long-term processes, it would be simplistic to confine the analysis to the identification of pre-existing conditions, since these also form in the course of action. Violence is an emerging phenomenon, which reproduces the conditions for its development within the action itself. Thus, transformative events, whether repressive or referring to illegal State violence, feed the escalation [of violence] by creating radical identities, as well as by forcing actors to take a position (Sewell, 1996). Causal mechanisms, in the sense of "chains of interaction that filter structural conditions and produce effects" (Della Porta, 2013, p. 283).

These causal mechanisms give rise, for the period we are dealing with, to several forms of "contextual violence". Bosi and Della Porta highlight the role of street battles between extreme left and right-wing groups as well as a radicalized environment. Yet these clashes have marked Italian history from the beginning of the Long 68. The founders of clandestine groups face institutional violence that represses social movements. For the following generations, violence is that of the ideological enemy (extreme right wing) and that of the illegal political violence of the State (illegal attacks, police and judicial repression, torture). The notion of the "escalation" of violence, commonly referred to in the secondary literature, also calls for critical reflection, particularly in a context where repression against social movements was very strong from the 1950s to the 1960s. Is it "escalation" when the Social Movement "responds" to State violence rather than abandoning its claims, and when there is violence on both sides? Is there an "escalation" of violence when there is a numerical increase in military and paramilitary actions, or in the number of victims, bearing in mind that the share of those due to actions

supported by the State is far from negligible[48]? Indeed, account should be taken not only of the actions of illegal groups but also of State violence, which in the case of Italy is spectacular. Because of the strategy of tension that began in 1969, it is difficult, in this context, to speak strictly and chronologically of an "escalation of violence", as it was so dense between 1969 and 1980, unless clandestine groups are considered as the sole vectors of this violence.

In the light of the chronological elements mentioned, it appears that the "escalation of violence" in Italy has not culminated in street battles or confrontation between groups of political opponents, but in an intensification of repression with a systematisation of arrests, the practice of torture and a strategy of tension in which, on the one hand, the State becomes a central actor in the violence and, on the other hand, the clandestine organisations move on to attacking directly people. It is more relevant, from an heuristic point of view, to conceive the so-called escalation of political violence at the macro rather than at the micro-sociological level. Indeed, looking at this phenomenon from the strategy of tension rather than from the street confrontation alone allows for a more appropriate framing of the means of political action, especially when it comes to studying the effects of the context on armed organizations rather than on the Social Movement. An influence of the macro level on the meso and micro levels is then emerging, as shown by the interviews conducted (see also xxx, 2020b, Annex 4).

Conclusion

Our study of the framing of political violence, nourished by a survey of empirical sociology, contributes to reject the dichotomy between an ideological relationship and an instrumental or strategic approach to political violence, for the Italian revolutionary groups of the 1960-80s. It suggests to replace it with the partition between an insurrectionary and a defensive approach. First of all, it calls for the pragmatic or instrumental interpretation of political violence to be subsumed under

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[48] During the 1960s and 1970s, extreme left-wing groups killed 60 people in 71 attacks. Those of the extreme right claimed 120 fatal victims in 27 actions (Engene, 2004, p. 136). Between 1969 and 1982, the extreme right perpetrated 2,925 violent actions in Italy against 1,173 by the extreme left wing (Della Porta, 2013, p. 185). There were 148 in 1969, 286 in 1970 and an average of 400 in the following years. They dropped to 154 in 1975 and 110 in 1976, then rose to 279 in 1978. The far right has ordered more bloody actions in Italy than the far left. It is responsible for the attack of 51 people against 272 for the extreme left, but its actions resulted in 758 victims, including 186 deaths, the figures being 360 and 164 respectively for the extreme left wing (Della Porta, 2013, p. 186).

the politico-ideological approach, the revolutionary discourse and the emancipatory utopia that is constitutively articulated around a strategic relationship to political violence. Moreover, it imposes the dissociation of a chronological and an axiological reading to consider that the defensive relationship to violence does not involve a phase of "escalation" of the conflict that would correspond to later stages of its development, but that this paradigm emerges from the very beginning of the confrontation, due to the spectacular implementation of State violence.

If we consider the adherence, within the groups studied, to the insurrectionist (or ideological-political) and defensive paradigms, we can observe, on the one hand, that the more actors belong to organizations characterized by violent political action, the stronger the influence of political motives (see Table VI). On the other hand, the prevalence of the ideological motive over the defensive motive appears to be recurrent, even over generations (see Table II). The long-term persistence of these motivations tends finally to call into question the incidence of "martial role-taking" in the use of political violence.

For each of the two paradigms, a distinct axiological framework is mobilized whose "resonance varies. In the first case, and when legal politics is perceived and framed as systemic social violence, defended by law enforcement agencies whose monopoly on violence has lost its legitimacy in the eyes of protesters, it becomes legitimate to consider political violence as a means of "doing politics differently". This violence then participates in the positioning in the space of contestation. Its axiological justification can be explained either in terms of a logic of inescapable confrontation either in terms of self-defence. In the second case, defensive violence is framed as *praxis* of resistance and referred to vital necessity in a dynamic of political, collective and individual self-affirmation. From then on, the conviction emerges that force and violence can only be responded to with violence. The defensive paradigm consists in assuming violence, not in an insurrectionist logic, but rather in a logic of both resistance (against the historical enemy) and occupation of the symbolic-political space as well as of the social space of contestation. In both cases, situation framing plays a central role in redefining the notion of violence and its meaning.

Beyond the reinterpretation of the phenomenon of violence, the situational framework proposes a specific framing of the macro-social context. Within the groups studied, the perception of a COP is the most present in the groups who have taken the strongest military options, confirming the existence of a causal mechanism between this perception and the implementation of political violence.

Moreover this representation, nourished by a well-documented contextual evolution, is more shared by actors born after 1950 and who are in their twenties during the 1970s.

The analysis of the positions of the Italian extreme left in the 1960-80s differs from the work carried out until then on Italy (Bosi and Della Porta, 2012; Della Porta, 2013; Sommier, 1992), not only in the highlighting of the interpretative paradigms of political violence, but also in the identification of their temporal emergence. We have emphasized their coexistence from the very beginning of social mobilizations, associated with a shift around 1976-1977. This overlap of violence conceptualizations due to the diversity of the groups' ideological orientation but also to their proximity to this or that fringe of the social Movement (working class, marginalized urban groups, feminists, etc.). The insurrectionist and defensive approaches reflect the positioning of collectives with a revolutionary aim of overthrowing power (BR, PL), on the one hand, and of those who see themselves as supporting social struggles (PO, Autonomy), on the other hand.

Finally, microsociological analysis, based on the collection of primary data, makes it possible to nuance the function attributed to organizational competition in the mechanism of the "escalation" of violence. An interpretation based on the positioning within the field of contestation, on the one hand, and within the social space, on the other, seems more heuristic than that of organisational "competition", insofar as, on the one hand, the collectives took divergent strategic options as early as the mid-1970s and then, on the other hand, due to the dissolution of extra-parliamentary groups in the second half of that decade.

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Annexes

ANNEX 1

Table X.: List of respondents with their socio-demographic characteristics

Pseudonym	*Sex*	*Year of birth*	*Civil generations*	*Political Groups*	*Generations of commitment*	*Years in jail*	*Father job*
Alberto Franceschini	M	1947	G 1	Brigades Rouges	γ 1	18 years	Worker
Paola	F	1947	G 1	BR	γ 3	17 years	Shopkeeper
Alexandra	F	1950	G 2	BR	γ 2	15 years	Lawyer
Margareth	F	1950	G 2	BR	γ 2	3 years and half	Merchant
F. P.	M	1951	G 2	BR	γ 3	23 years and half	Mason
Aloys	M	1956	G 2	BR	γ 3	1 years and half	Worker
Pietro	M	1957	G 2	BR	γ 2	18 years	Civil servant
Melchior	M	1948	G 1	Prima Linea	γ 1	17 years	Worker

S. R.	F	1950	G 2	PL	γ 1	7 years and half and 20 years of substitution measures	Artisan
Paolo Margini	M	1950	G 2	PL	γ 2	5 years	Small businessman
B. L.	M	1953	G 2	PL	γ 2	11 years	Worker
Sergio Segio	M	1955	G 2	PL	γ 2	24 years	Worker
M. F.	M	1955	G 2	PL	γ 1	7 years and half	Bank Employee
Paolino	M	1956	G 2	PL	γ 1	14 years	Worker
Massimo Battisaldo	M	1956	G 2	PL	γ 1	11 years	Merchant
Mathias	M	1959	G 2	PL	γ 1	10 years	Shopkeeper
Anna Soldati	F	1962	G 3	PL	γ 1	2 month and half	Entrepreneur
Marco	M	1944	G 1	Lotta	γ 3	6 days	Artisan

Boato				Continua			
Guillermo	M	1953	G 2	LC	γ 1	-	Scriptwriter
E. B.	M	1954	G 2	LC	γ 1	5 years	Worker
Théodore	M	1933	G 1	Potere Operaio, Autonomia operaia	γ 3	11 years	Employee
Guillem	M	1947	G 1	PO	γ 2	4 years et 9 months	Worker
Saro	M	1948	G 1	PO, Autonomia operaia	γ 2	3 months	Lawyer
Emilia	F	1951	G 2	PO	γ 2	1 an	Civil Engineering
Alessandro Stella	M	1956	G 2	PO, Autonomia operaia	γ 1	Exile	Teacher
Demis	M	1946	G 1	Autonomy	γ 3	10 years	Doctor
Guiseppe	M	1947	G 1	Autonomy	γ 2	1 year and half	Woodworker

Paloma	F	1947	G 1	Autonomy	γ 3	1 an	Hairdresser
Gihen	M	1948	G 1	Autonomy	γ 3	-	Forman
Mateus	M	1954	G 2	Autonomy	γ 1	-	Civil Engineering

Five of the respondents refused anonymity, namely Marco Boato, Paolo Margini, Sergio Segio, Alessandro Stella and Anna Soldati. Two people agreed to have their identities revealed (Massimo Battisaldo and Alberto Franceschini). The seven are therefore shown in the table under their true identities.

Legend: G 1: generation born before 1950; G 2: generation born before 1960 (1950s decade); G 3: generation born after 1960 (1960s decade).

γ 1: commitment between 15 and 17 years; γ 2: 18-20 years; γ 3: after 20 years.

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ANNEX 2

Table IX: Reasons for activist engagement

Reasons for commitment	*Poli-cies*	*Support for the working class*	*Feelings of injustice*	*Emotion, reaction*	*Repression*	*Number*
BR	6	2	2	0	5	7
PL	9	4	3	2	3[49]	10
LC	3	2	0	0	0	2
PO	3	5	1	0	0	5
Autonomy	3	2	1	0	0	4
Total	24	19	7	2	8	-

Table IX brings together all of the occurrences mentioned, which explains why they are greater than the number of activists interviewed. The heading "Feeling of unfairness" forms a separate category insofar as it associates an emotion or feeling with a normative appreciation referring to a conception of what is just. Only those instances are counted in this category that refer to a normative judgment involving an axiological dimension. The column "Affective, reactive" includes occurrences of a reaction to a situation deemed unbearable, whether or not it is repressive. Reactions expressing feelings of intolerable, unacceptable, unbearable, etc. in an emotional modality rather than within an

[49] For PL, it is a repression that has affected the surrounding environment.

argument have been placed in the "Affective, Reactive" category. This category, although close to that of "Repression", is therefore more encompassing.

Table X: Political motives justifying the illegal engagement

Mobiles	*Occurrences*
Revolution project	**13**
Utopia[50] (anticapitalism: N = 2)	5
Fighting against the political *statu quo*	5
Fighting against the State	2
Changing the society[51]	**13**
Fighting against injustice	2
Fighting for rights	1
Resistance	1

[50] We counted in the category "utopia": "defending a political hypothesis, the battle of ideas, fighting for a different and more just world, the reference to liberation struggles and Latin American guerrillas, anti-capitalism".

[51] In the category "transforming society" there are occurrences such as: "radical transformation of society, changing the world, changing the present state of things and the world, changing things, changing society in a rapid and violent way, improving the quality of our lives, changing reality from the factory, changing personal relationships".

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