

Chapter 2

Competitive escalation during protest cycles

1. Violence in context: Competitive escalation during protest cycles

Militants who joined the underground were socialized to violence during harsh social conflict. Even while criticizing clandestine forms of violence, a large part of the left-libertarian social movements in Italy in the 1970s considered defensive violence as unavoidable, given violent opponents. Socialization to violence happened in action; and some radical forms of protest had particularly strong socializing effects.

Activists talked of burning cars. A former militant remembers that before entering an underground organization he had already burned the cars of some bosses of the big Pirelli factory – where he worked and was a delegate to the factory council – and had assaulted the headquarters of neofascist groups (Life History no. 3). Another also took part in picketing and sabotage, described as actions “linked to the working class knowledge of the production” (Life history no. 9: 260). In the factories, conflict escalated with “popular processes against the bosses, some of whom were acquitted, others expelled from the factory” (Life history no. 29: 24). Activists went to the headquarters of the Magneti Marelli and took files containing personal information on the workers (ibid.: 25).

Already in the first half of the 1970s, servizi d'ordine (marshals) specialized in these more violent actions. For instance Piero, with the Gruppo comunista Garbatella, participated in “a marshal body, a group of comrades that addresses the problem of the self defence of its part of

the march and of its presence on the street in an aggressive way, let's say in a way proportionate with the level of the fight" (Life history no. 9: 297).

In the mid-1970s, one form of action that contributed to socialization to violence was "proletarian expropriations," or "political" robberies in big stores. These actions, apparently spontaneous, were actually well planned in advance. As a militant recalls, "I thought that the military action had to be done by proletarians. We did proletarian expropriations, well organized: with the servizio d'ordine and the squads ... These actions were done by working class families, fifty of them, not a few" (Life history no. 16: 201). Those that, in the words of another militant, "we organized with military care, but appeared spontaneous had an easy success especially in the working class neighborhood ... 'today you do not pay' and you go out without paying" (Life history no. 12: 345).

Violence often develops in situations of contestation of specific spaces. Fights with the police often escalated around the "defense of a territory," such as squatted houses or sites for nuclear plants. An Italian activist explained, "I had my first really brutal experiences. For instance, when the police intervened to empty a squatted house, the type of violence was very different from what I had been accustomed to during our protest in the school or the police charges against student marches. For when the workers squatted the houses, there was a lot of blood, people were arrested and remained in jail for months. This gave me a very strong motivation to fight" (Life history no. 12: 17). There, battles became ritualized: "Every morning I left home, I went to fight the police in the street battles, I came back home for lunch, and went back to fight in the afternoon and until night. It was a Londonderry, I mean a series of battles carried out with

Molotov cocktails and stones to conquer five meters of land” (Life history no. 27: 26). Another recalled that, “The origins of this neighborhood group is linked to an insurrectional day ... an antimperialist demonstration that involves the whole neighborhood. For hours, there are clashes with the police, and this signals the possible use of violence as not just self-defence but also as an instrument of liberation” (Life history no. 9: 255). Another militant talked of the political isolation when they went to defend the squatted houses and had to fight with the marshal body of the PCI, on the side of the police (Life history no. 27: 433). In particular, after a young activist was killed during the clashes in the Roman neighbor of San Basilio, they started to talk about the need for an underground organization. Later, he remembers, “There is no complex political project, there is this need to re-unify the political and the military” (ibid., 439).

The use of guns often predated the entrance into an underground organization, contributing to socialization to violence. As an Italian militant remembered, “We started to study the way in which a gun works, to take a gun in our hands, to assemble and disassemble it. We practiced firing, and I enrolled at a rifle-range” (Life history no. 12: 19). In fact, “guns in the streets had become as common as the sticks of the flags some time before, and guerrilla attacks that started with marches and then reverted to marches were an everyday practice” (cited in Novelli and Tranfaglia 1988: 294). In fact, “guns were given to fifteen-year-old kids,” and shooting practices with guns were organized (Life history no. 9).

The project of many militant groups became linking armed struggle with mass violence: “We wanted to solder the armed struggle to the mass violence of the workers who fought against the police at Pirelli, who destroyed the sleepers at the Alfa Romeo factory, who occupied the

tollbooths of the highway and the railway stations; to solder the armed struggle and the violence of the squatters. For instance, in San Basilio ... the squatters fired their guns at the police. We wanted to be a link between the suggestive hypothesis of building the armed struggle and the mass movement” (Life history no. 12: 20).

These practices were followed by discourses that legitimated violence. In an activist’s recollections, “the discussion in the workers’ committees took for granted the use of violent means. The differences were between those who supported use of the armed struggle directly linked to some phases, moments and conditions, and those who began instead to conceive the armed struggle as a political fact per se, a process that becomes autonomous from the specific social conditions” (Life history no. 27.: 27). When he went underground, there was therefore no trauma, as he could still rely upon “a solid social environment” (ibid.: 32). He observed, in fact: “I know that the judges who interrogated the first repentants, they were shocked, because they did not expect at all that type of penetration in the social fabric” (ibid.: 34).

In all these cases, participation in violent action had relevant effects in terms of socialization. In the words of an Italian militant, “Every day you talked about the use of physical force and every day you practiced it” (Life history no. 8: 35).

What all these memories describe is the relevant impact that practices of violence within harsh political violence had in the political socialization of those who ended up in the underground. As we will see, Italian left-wingers were not unique: in right-wing, ethno-nationalist, and religious forms as well, involvement in violence during intense waves of protest

most often preceded recruitment to clandestine organizations. Explanations of political violence have often looked at environmental conditions, distinguishing (more structural) root causes, (more dynamic) facilitator causes, and (contingent) precipitating events. In this chapter, after reviewing some of these explanations, I will look at works on protest cycles and violence, focusing on competitive escalation as a causal mechanism in violent developments.

Looking at the macro, contextual level, research on extreme forms of violence has addressed *preconditions* (or root causes), which represent the contextual opportunities; *facilitator causes*, such as grievances, which make extreme forms of political violence possible or attractive; and *precipitating events*, which trigger violent reactions (Crenshaw 1981).

Preconditions include modernization, with related urbanization (which renders targets more accessible); cultural habits and traditions that justify violence; and government's weak repressive capacity. At the socioeconomic level, there has long been debate on the impact of poverty on political violence. While there is no proof of an effect of economic indicators (at either macro or micro levels), it has been suggested that rapid modernization and urbanization could lead to some types of violence. The idea is in fact that sudden social changes (for example in oil rich countries) challenge traditional social arrangements in the absence of an alternative social and political system. Violence, especially right-wing violence, is said to be the effect of the social disintegration induced by some specific paths of modernization (Heitmeyer 2005: 146). Islamist violence has often been discussed in the frame of failed, delayed, or incomplete modernization.

The link between poverty and violence is considered even more likely in cases of relatively unequally distributed income (Engel 2004; Weinberg 2005) and, especially, in ethnically or religiously divided societies in which some groups experience deep-rooted feelings of discrimination. Here, differential access to economic resources in specific groups of the

population is considered particularly conducive to violence. In parallel, political violence has been said to grow during economic crises when entire generations or specific class groups fear worsening conditions, and see no future for themselves. Research on civil wars has also pointed at some material – even geographic – conditions, such as the presence of mountainous terrains in which guerrillas can more easily hide (e.g. Fearon and Laitin 2003),¹ or of extractable resources that influence the structure of incentives for guerrilla recruits (Weinstein 2007).

Assumptions about social conditions are also related to those about cultural preconditions. The search for identity, unsettled by rapid processes of modernization, is expected to lead to identification with radical ideologies. Remaining at the cultural level, historical antecedents with political violence, perpetrated by the state (dictatorship or foreign occupation) or opponents, are seen as facilitating the acceptance of armed struggle. Socialization into a cultural narrative of revenge and martyrdom has been said to be conducive to new waves of terrorism. It has also been observed that civic types of nationalist ideologies tend towards moderation and accommodation; whereas ethnic, exclusive ones are more prone to radicalization, as they often incorporate traditions of violence (Reinares 2005). An historical presence of pan-Islamic nationalism has been seen as legitimizing participation in conflict abroad (Hegghammer 2010).

All of these explanations provide some leverage for the understanding of political violence. The search for common explanations at the contextual level has been criticized, however, under various perspectives. First of all, some have questioned the choice of variables

¹ For instance, Fearon and Laitin have considered rural-based insurgency as more likely when “the economy is poor, population is high, there is large mountainous terrain, there is non-contiguous territory and political life is fragile” (2003, 79-82).

and indicators in much of the large-N research. According to the task force of the American Political Science Association (APSA 2007),

there are two problems with existing literature which prompt us to be somewhat skeptical of the results and to look for insights elsewhere. First, the causal determinants within existing models don't change at all (e.g., the percent of the country that is mountainous), they change very slowly (e.g., per capita GDP) or they change rarely (e.g., the degree of political democracy). Second, the same variables are employed to operationalize diverse theoretical explanations and thus different arguments claim support from the same statistically significant variables.

Additionally, it seems problematic to link the behavior of very small groups to conditions that affect the population at large (Crenshaw 2011). And while long-lasting conditions limited explanatory power for sudden outbursts of violence, reference to precipitating events offers only a partial way out, as it often risks being too ad-hoc.

This might explain the inconsistency of research results on macro-dimensions. While some scholars have noted an association between economic difficulties and terrorism (Blomberg, Hess, and Weerapana 2004), others have reached contrasting results (for example on support on armed attacks on Israeli civilians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; Krueger and Malečková 2003). Even more relevant, the search for invariant causes risks hiding historical specific circumstances. Political violence can take different paths, developing under very different circumstances. In fact, conducive contextual characteristics vary in time and place. Historical antecedents for violence are present sometimes, but not always. Repression can produce

escalation or be effective in silencing dissent. Ethnic divisions or social inequalities may or may not precede violence.

Large-N causal analyses also risk missing the importance of processes over time, isolating violence from the complex evolution of political and social conflicts. It is usually during long-lasting protest waves that escalation occurs. Summarizing the debate on the “root conditions” for violence, Tore Bjørgo observed that terrorism is not caused by poverty, terrorists are not insane or irrational, suicide terrorism is not caused by religion, and state sponsorship is not a root cause. Rather, “terrorism tends to be the product of a *long process* of radicalization that prepares a group of people for such extreme action” (2005: 3, emphasis added). In a recent volume, Neil Smelser pointed at the existence of

long fuelling process, with the possibility that the accumulating sequence of conditions and causes will produce other kinds of outcomes all along the line ... first, a wide range of conditions that come to be regarded as dispossessing or depriving; next, a transition to how these conditions are regarded by affected groups; a focusing of these dissatisfactions into an ideology, which becomes the basis for channeling individual motivations by recruiting and mobilizing groups; next a series of structural conditions and short term situations that simultaneously constitute blockages to certain kinds of political expression and opportunity structures for the expression of others, including collective violence; next the availability of publicity, financial means, and weapons and technologies as resources; and finally the vulnerabilities of target societies, which constitute a final set of opportunities (2007: 52).

Various forms of extreme political violence often represent steps in long-lasting escalation processes, as noted in the escalation of lower-level conflict into civil war, in which the degree of violence prior to civil war is seen as one of its most important causes (Kalyvas 2004).

What is more, structural explanations do not take into account the role of agency. The passage from structural causes to effects is not automatic: “Even when violence is clearly rooted in preexisting conflicts, it should not be treated as a natural, self-explanatory outgrowth of such conflicts, something that occurs automatically when the conflict reaches certain intensity” (Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Seeing on the one hand the causes and on the other the effects, they do not recognize the relational and interactive nature of the phenomenon, with long causal chains in which the identification of dependent and independent variables is as misleading as it is fictitious.

One of the main analytical advantages in using social movement studies to understand political violence is in their capacity to locate it within broader conflicts, in which violence is only one form. Additionally, social movement studies allow us to locate radical organizations within the complex networks – or organizational fields – inside which they interact. As I will argue in what follows, a main observation coming from social movement studies is that causal mechanisms for radicalization are activated by interactions between movement activists and opponents, but also by competition inside social movement families during cycles of protest – that is, moments of intensified protest mobilized by many and different actors. Social movement studies have suggested the term of *movement families* to identify “a set of coexisting movements, which, regardless of their specific goals, have similar basic values and organizational overlaps, and sometimes may even join for common campaigns” (della Porta and Rucht 1995: 4). Movement families are located within a *social movement sector*, that is, “the

configuration of social movements, the structure of antagonistic, competing and/or cooperating movements which in turn is part of a larger structure of action (political action in a very broad sense)” (Garner and Zald 1985: 120; see also McCarthy and Zald 1977: 1220).

Competition increases during protest cycles. Looking at interactions in these intense moments helps in overcoming some of the limitations of a static analysis of causes and effects, by singling out some common contextual causal mechanisms in the various forms of clandestine political violence. I shall look in particular at the *competitive interactions* developing during cycles of protest. This will also help me to introduce references to the social movements in which violence developed.

Research on protest cycles indicates that violence is driven less by strategic concerns than by relational dynamics developing during moments of intense mobilization. The concepts of cycles, waves, or campaigns all attempt to describe and explain periods of intensified protest. The analysis of protest cycles is particularly useful for an understanding of the development of political violence, frequently one (though neither the only nor the most important) of the protest’s outcomes. Tarrow has defined cycles of protest as “a phase of heightened conflict across the social system, with rapid diffusion of collective action from more mobilized to less mobilized sectors, a rapid pace of innovation in the forms of contention employed, the creation of new or transformed collective action frames, a combination of organized and unorganized participation, and sequences of intensified information flow and interaction between challengers and authorities” (2011: 199). As in culture and the economy, he has in fact identified a recurrent dynamic of ebb and flow in collective mobilization which proceeds “from institutional conflict to enthusiastic peak to ultimate collapse” (1994: 168).

Cycles have their own dynamics. The cycle evolves through different stages: expansion

through diffusion, radicalization/institutionalization, exhaustion, and restabilization (Tarrow 2011). Diffusion happens at the beginning of a cycle, as the first movements to emerge lower the cost of collective action for other actors, by demonstrating the vulnerability of the authorities. In addition, the victories of the early risers undermine the previous order of things, provoking counter-mobilization. Civil rights coalitions emerge to push for increasing recognition of the right to demonstrate. Repeatedly, spin-off movements contribute to the mobilization of other groups, inventing new forms of action, enlarging the protest claims and winning some concessions, but also pushing elites and countermovements to form law-and-order coalitions (della Porta 1998). When elites reorganize, often adopting a mix of repression and concessions, mass protest tends to decline in intensity: radicalization, but also institutionalization might ensue.

During cycles, in fact, the repertoires of collective action tend to change. In the initial stages of protest the most disruptive forms often come to the fore (della Porta and Tarrow 1986). New actors invent new tactics as emerging collective identities require radical action (Pizzorno 1978). As the cycle of protest extends, the reaction of the authorities produces a proportional increase in radical forms of action, but also a simultaneous moderation of protest forms, with a reduction of disruptive action. Both processes, for different reasons, bring about the demise of the cycle.

Radicalization is in fact activated by *competition* between movement activists and opponents, especially in the form of escalating policing (see next chapter), but also of competitive escalation within the social movement sector, as well as within social movement families. Competitive dynamics tend to intensify during cycles of protest, as social movement organizations split over the best strategies to adopt, some of them choosing more radical ones. Looking at violence as an escalation of protest repertoire during cycles of protest points at the

fluid borders between different strategies, as well as the reciprocal adaptation and learning processes between social movements and external actors, mainly police and other adversaries. However, social movements are also often divided on which tactics to pursue. In this sense, different groups not only adapt to environmental conditions, but also exercise agency: they discuss strategies, experiment with them, divide over them. As Alimi recently observed (2011: 99),

One of the most basic features of opposition movements is that they consist of various actors and groups who, based on common interest and beliefs, interact informally with one another and mutually affect each other's strategy. These actors do not necessarily hold the same ideology, strategy, or preferable modes of action and goals. The mechanism "competition for power" between movement actors is about how challengers sometimes complement and sometimes undercut each other's strategies. This occurs as they struggle over whose strategy and tactics will dominate the goals, resource flow, translation of the struggle to specific gains, and the support of yet uncommitted adherents and allies.

In these various steps, in fact, various organizations, movements, and countermovements interact, gaining and losing weight and power in intense relations of cooperation and competition. Protest tends to develop from splinter groups coming from within traditional actors. The peak of contention sees the mobilization of social movement organizations that actively sponsor the diffusion of protest. When the momentum is over, political parties and other more traditional actors regain control, taking advantage of the disruption of previous assets and

negotiating new agreements. Radicalization is also produced by the *different pace of demobilization*. While those at the periphery, who are also more moderate, tend to drop out earlier, the more core activists, who are also more radical, tend to remain mobilized. So, “Unequal rates of defection between the center and the periphery shift the balance from moderate to radical claims and from peaceful to violent protest” (Tarrow 2011: 206).

In what follows, I shall look at competitive escalation in left-wing, right-wing, ethnic, and religious types of clandestine political violence.

2. *Competitive escalation and left-wing violence*

In the Italian cycle of protest, violence developed from the intensity of the conflict: the forms of action were initially disruptive but peaceful, and the aims were moderate, mainly claims for the reform of existing institutions. Although remaining mainly non-violent, protest repertoires radicalized at the margins, especially during street battles with adversaries and the police. In particular, escalating police strategies contributed to radicalization. In a very long process, students and workers paved the way for the mobilization of other actors. New collective identities were formed on issues of gender equality or urban structures, while groupings of different sizes, forms, and ideas enriched the left-libertarian social movement family, combining Old Left social rights concerns with emerging visions of liberty.

In his analysis of the Italian case, Tarrow (1989) observed that the forms of political violence used tend to vary according to the stages of the cycle. At the outset of protest, violent action was usually limited in its presence, small in scope and unplanned. Typically, it was in this phase an unforeseen result of direct action such as sit-ins or occupations. As protest developed, violent forms of action initially spread more slowly than non-violent forms, frequently taking the

shape of clashes between demonstrators and police or counter-demonstrators. Starting out as occasional and unplanned outbursts, such episodes nonetheless tended to be repeated and to take on a ritual quality. During this evolution small groups began to specialize in increasingly extreme tactics, built up an armory for such action, and occasionally went underground. Their very presence accelerated the moderate exodus from the movement, contributing to demobilization. This author and Sidney Tarrow summarized the results of a large-N study on repertoires in the Italian cycle of protest:

Violence tends to appear from the very beginning of a protest cycle. In this phase, it is usually represented by less purposive forms of action and it is used by large groups of protesters. Clashes with adversaries or police during mass actions are the more widely diffused types of political violence during the height of the cycle and decline at its end. In the last phase, aggression carried out by small groups of militants and direct attacks on persons become more frequent. The more dramatic form of violence rise when the mass phase of the protest cycle declines. To put it differently, as mass mobilization winds down, political violence rises in magnitude and intensity (della Porta and Tarrow 1986: 620).

Generalizing from the Italian case, Tarrow suggested that the final stages of a cycle of protest tend to see both a process of institutionalization and a growing number of violent actions:

When disruptive forms are first employed, they frighten antagonists with their potential cost, shock onlookers and worry elites concerned with public order. But newspapers

gradually begin to give less and less space to protests that would have merited banner headlines when they first appeared on the streets. Repeating the same form of collective action over and over reduces uncertainty and is greeted with a smile or a yawn.

Participants, at first enthused and invigorated by their solidarity and ability to challenge authorities, become jaded or disillusioned. Authorities, instead of calling out the troops or allowing the police to wade into a crowd, infiltrate dissenting groups and separate leaders from followers. Routinisation follows hard upon disruption (1994: 112).

The analysis of the evolution of violent forms of action during that cycle has in fact shown the specific relations between cycles of protest and violence. In a joint article, this author and Sidney Tarrow concluded:

The incidence of political violence is strictly connected with collective action in at least two ways. First, it grew in total numbers during the whole cycle. Second, its percentage weight was average in the beginning, low during the upswing, and high in the declining period of the protest wave. Violent forms were, therefore, part of the protest repertoire from the very beginning and their presence tended to grow in total numbers during the whole cycle. But it was when the wave of collective action declined that their percentage distribution increased (della Porta and Tarrow 1986: 616).

Figure ## here

In his analysis of the Italian cycle of protest, Tarrow pointed at the role of internal competition in its evolution:

During the upward curve of the cycle, as mass participation increases, there is creative experimentation and a testing of the limits of mass participation. As established groups, such as trade unions, parties and interest associations, enter the movement sectors, they monopolize conventional mass forms of action, producing incentives for others to use more disruptive forms of mass action to outflank them. But as participation declines later in the cycle, the mass base for both moderate and confrontational mass actions begins to shrink. New groups who try to enter the movement sector can only gain space there by adopting more radical forms of action that do not depend on a mass base. Through this essentially political process, the social movements sector evolves, divides internally, incites repression and eventually declines. This differentiation, competition and radicalization of the social movement sector is the central process that give the cycle a dynamic character (1989: 19).

The spread of protest was triggered by a demonstration effect: early risers showed the possibility and potential success of contention. There was, however, also competition: within a social movement sector, victories by those mobilizing challenged existing rights and interests, and within a social movement family, organizations competed on the best strategies to adopt. As Tarrow observed, “competition may arise from ideological conflict, from competition for space in a static organizational sphere, or from personal conflicts for power between leaders. Whatever its source, a common outcome of competition is radicalization: a shift of ideological

commitments toward the extremes and/or the adoption of more disruptive and violent forms of contention” (2011: 207).

Competition increased with the very pace of mobilization as large number of social movement organizations were created during the protest – in fact, “the growth in popular participation in the upward phase of the cycle invites organizational proliferation, and these new organizations compete for space with each other and with earlier risers” (ibid.: 208). Competition interacted with repression as “when elites sense that the mass base for the collective action is in decline, they can re-knit the fabric of hegemony by repression, by press campaigns against violence, as well as by selective reform” (Tarrow 1989: 343). In this way, state responses contributed – often consciously, sometimes not – to divide the movement into good and bad activists, trying to co-opt the former and repress the latter.

In fact, radicalization in Italy in the 1970s developed in dense organizational fields, from intense interactions between social movement organizations that cooperated and conflicted with each other (among other issues) on the use of violence. My own research has shown that underground organizations have evolved within and then broken away from larger, non-violent social movement organizations. In the late 1960s, the decline of the student mobilization, and the consequent reduction in available resources, increased competition among the several (formal and informal) networks that constituted the left-libertarian families. After having created semi-clandestine marshal bodies, the organizations then tended to split on the issue of violence (della Porta 1995: ch. 4). Exploiting environmental conditions conducive to militancy, these splinter groups underwent further radicalization and eventually created new resources and opportunities for violence.

During the cycle of protest of the late 1960s–early 1970s, a myriad of new groups

emerged at the school, university, or factory level. Most developed from, but also challenged, previously existing social movement organizations such as main trade unions, student unions, catholic organizations, and left-wing political parties. With the evolution of protest, various sites of coordination developed, at first often territorial and issue based, but also some with a strong political and ideological basis. Competition and cooperation gave rise to the foundation, in 1968 and 1969, of the main organizations of the Italian New Left: the Union of the Italian Communists (Marxist-Leninist) (Unione dei Comunisti Italiani-ml); Workers' Vanguard (Avanguardia Operaia, AO); Worker's Power (Potere Operaio, PO); Il Manifesto; the Student Movement (Movimento Studentesco, MS); Continuous Struggle (the aforementioned Lotta Continua, LC). The coordination of local protests, often with weekly meetings of representatives of different organizations, was, for instance, the basis of LC, at first just a group of comrades that mobilized around the strikes in the large factories in Northern Italy, often through *Assemblee operai studenti* (workers' and students' assemblies). In this dense environment, various groups, including LC, formed, with internal ideological differences that reflected past organizational and strategic debates on the Left. For instance, in the beginning, LC was not much more than an "umbrella term for a loose coalition of extreme left groups and radical workers who met everyday in the bar" (Tarrow 1989: 268).

In time, the groups that emerged for the coordination of the thousands of small collectives that operated at the local level not only became more centralized at the national level, but also acquired a more exclusive structure, moving from a movement identity to a strong organizational identity. In 1972, with about 150 chapters all around the country, LC discussed overcoming the limits of spontaneity and "return to the patrimony of militancy, discipline, and seriousness typical of the working class" (Bobbio 1988: 129). From this, the assumption

developed that “There are not only many groups, ... there are many political lines. Among them, *only one is correct*, because it contributes to unifying and strengthening the working class; the others are wrong because they weaken the working class” (quoted in Bobbio 1988: 97).

Typical of most of the mentioned groups of the New Left was the creation of specialized semi-military units to provide “self-defense” for movement activities and militant actions, sometimes even in physical fights with each other.

Experiences of daily fights developed into the creation of marshal bodies. A member of a left-wing underground group recalls that: “Thanks to the activities in the marshal, I had no trouble in adapting myself to the more dramatic techniques of the armed struggle. ... It was all familiar to me. One could say that I had substituted the gun for the monkey-wrench [a widespread ‘arm’ in the marshal bodies]” (in Tranfaglia and Novelli 1988: 247). Another activist remembers, “Our milieu is the one of the marshal body of Lotta Continua, the youth circles” (Life history no. 29: 39); “we lived in a very fluid relations, the most continuous, with our network of militants or legal sympathizers” (ibid.: 40); “I remember some of them, they drove us crazy, because they run away to see their mom, their girlfriend” (ibid.: 46).

The so-called 1977 movement was “a very violent movement that sedimented through the bad network of the previous stories and political class” (ibid.: 41). It then produced a disaggregation in their milieu, with the development of some activists into robbers and drug dealers.

Justification for violence developed in action, especially during conflicts with political opponents. It also came from the experience of physical fights with opponents, in a sort of community polarization (for a review, see Zald and Useem 1987). On the Left, daily experiences of defense and offense with radical right activists are recalled to justify violence. An Italian left-

wing militant recalls, for instance, that “at school, there was a very small group of fascists, a daily source of fights. They were few, but evil. Moreover, they had the external support of a military group, the Alpha Group, based in a residence hall ten meters away from my school. They were fanatics, really threatening; many of them ended by bombing trains. They came to the entrance of the school and made revenge attacks, they even knifed people” (Life history no. 12: 9). In 1970, as a defense against the neo-Fascists, his collective organized a marshal body, which he “joined with excitement, very glad to have been chosen” (Life history no. 12: 9); its activities “consisted of the fact that we met at six o’clock, or at very dreadful hours, and we patrolled all around the school with iron bars, to check if any fascist was there. Then, we garrisoned at the entrance, to be sure that all the students could enter the school quietly. After that, we went to class – at the second hour, of course, because we were members of the marshal, and this was appreciated even by our professors” (Life history no. 12: 10).

In these struggles, violence became more and more brutal, with a reciprocal adaptation to increasingly dangerous weapons, from stones and sticks to “monkey-wrenches,” heavy chains, and guns. In the Italian radical Left, “[since] the physical struggle with the political counterpart, I mean with the fascists, was a matter of almost every single day ... it was therefore inevitable that we would start to equip ourselves in a military way” (Life history no. 13: 29). These continuous battles justified violence as a needed defense – as an Italian militant recalled, as “the problem of the fascist in Rome was big and then, there was little to ethically reflect upon: you needed to defend yourself” (Life history no. 16: 197).

In the second half of the 1970s, recruitment to the underground developed inside the “autonomous” collectives: “squads of the underground organizations were built inside a legal collective. A militant of the organization got involved in the collective and convinced those who

he thought were more conscious to start an intermediary structure” (Life history no. 12: 31). Marco’s life history testifies of this escalation in the experiences with and justification of violence. He remembers the splits in the organization called Movimento studentesco in 1973-74 as starting “this thing that I always hated, of the internal divisions on streams of different degrees of radicalism” (ibid.: 334). With the so-called Autonomous groups (which advocated for an autonomous organization of workers), in 1974, he participated in burning the car of a school director and in a hold-up in the house of an arms trader, where – he recalled – a sick girl was sleeping.

In the second half of the 1970s, experiences with violent forms of protest spread, up to their peak in the so-called “77 movement.” According to a left-wing militant, “In these years, between 1974 and 1977, the radical autonomous collectives grew enormously; month after month, they multiplied their presence in the city, their bases, their guns” (Life history no. 12: 25). In the second half of the seventies, “From a ‘trot’ phase, in Milan the armed struggle started to ride at full gallop. There were armed actions every day, at every march, at every deadline, at every strike” (Life history no. 12: 23). In the mid 1970s, a militant remembers the debate on violence, and the “splitting in the group, and the spreading of the thousands of forms, also spontaneous, also not organized. You started to see what was going to take a definite form in 1976” (ibid.: 264). This is seen as a testimony to “the possibility of a mass practice of violence, subversive and antagonist, that was going to be the 1977” (ibid.: 264). The acceptance of illegal forms of action was so widespread that “there were periods in which we intervened in a general meeting of the movement and, in front of 200, 300 or 500 people, we almost openly supported the strategy of the armed struggle” (Life history no. 12: 33). As a future Italian left-wing militant recalled, when he became responsible for the marshal body of Potere Operaio (PO, Workers’

Power) in Rome: “I started to study the problems, how to say?, political-military, that is, I started to read all what was available. I think I have read everything: Lussu, Marx himself, that Polish there, von Clausewitz: I have read all was available” (Life history no. 16: 192). In fact, he spoke of “two levels. One was the marshal body: there they taught us little: Molotov cocktails, the use of explosives ... And then there was the school of Valerio ... I was his pupil for those two or three years. And I have learned everything he knew” (ibid.: 196).

Spirals of revenge developed in the fights between movements and countermovements. On the left-wing side, there was “an atmosphere [that encouraged the] lynching of fascists. ‘If you see black, shoot at once,’ this was the slogan, ... there was a man-hunt, without any pity, it was a hunt against the fascists that then had repercussions for us, because there was a spiral of revenge” (Life history no. 6: 29). As many left-wingers remembered, “Milan had a large bunch of funerals that were a continuous plea, over the deaths, those killed by the fascist, an continuous plea to revenge, and then when you take revenge, well it is not traumatic” (Life history no. 3: 65).

Although extremely violent, the '77 movement was very critical of the Red Brigades. While the BR were considered as “compagni che sbagliano [comrades who make mistakes], with their concept of a strategic use of the armed struggle,” the new radicals aimed at “Linking the use of force, forms of struggle, mass practice and realization of the objectives” (Piero: 263). The BR are instead considered to be “hostile to the movement. In '77 the BR did not exist, the '77 movement outlawed them. They were put at the margins by a armed and illegal practice that has a mass dimension and therefore exclude the formations such as the BR” (Life history no. 9: 265). The same activist remembers that “most of the Autonomia was against the kidnapping of Aldo Moro” (the president of the Christian democratic party, kidnapped and killed by the RB). In this

moment, “the project was to revitalize the elements of the movement that were dispersed” (ibid.: 269). Similarly, Marco remembered that at an assembly after the kidnapping of Aldo Moro, 90 percent were against it: “For us, the Moro kidnapping, as it was developed and ended, is a clamorous failure from the political point of view. There is a restriction of the spaces we had opened in society and, at the human level, it was an imagine of violence, cold, that creates many problems” (Life history no. 12: 355).

It was in this radicalized environment, however, that other clandestine organizations were founded. The second largest and longer-lasting clandestine organization in Italy, Prima Linea (PL–Front Line) emerged, at the end of 1976, via a split within the Comitati Comunisti per il Potere Operaio (CCPO), when some members of the group faced legal prosecution after carrying out their first assassination. While one wing condemned illegal actions, the “military structure” (which included a former member of BR) opted for organizational “compartmentalization” and the use of increasingly violent forms of action.

Similarly, in 1977, a third, relatively large clandestine organization, the Fighting Communist Formation (Formazioni Comuniste Combattenti, FCC), emerged from a split in the collective that published the magazine *Rosso*. The FCC was founded by militants of the Communist Brigades, a kind of marshal body formed from the various groups close to *Rosso*. After a gradual increase in the use of violent forms of action, the May 1977 assassination of a policeman during a public march organized by the more radical groups in Milan produced a split, with the majority in favor of pursuing mass actions and retaining legal structures and the Communist Brigades instead choosing to go underground.

In the FCC, as in PL, military skills increased when a former member of the BR joined the group – as a militant recalled, “this guy arrived and, for contingent and personal reasons,

because he was a clandestine, he was much more anxious to stress the logistical aspect. ... He had a surprising, scientific ability for robbing banks” (Life history no. 12: 24, 25). Similarly, previously existing groupings with developed military skills were also at the origins of other underground groups. As a militant observed, “The real legacy of the armed struggle was ... the [large] number of cadres [that were] able to build up an armed structure from nothing” (ibid.: 24-5).

Research on various cases has observed that the repertoire of action has radicalized in much the same forms and according to much the same timing during cycles of protest involving different political and social actors. Ruud Koopman (1995) looked at similar developments in two German waves of protest, at the end of the 1960s and at the beginning of the 1980s; in both cases “the action repertoire was relatively radical in the initial periods of rapid expansions, around 1968 and 1981. Subsequently, these radical forms declined, while the number of demonstrative actions continued to increase, reaching their peak in, respectively, 1972 and 1983. After this period of moderation, the number of demonstrative actions decreased, and simultaneously radical actions made a come-back, although in both waves they did not reach the level of the first peak of disruption” (Koopman 1995: 141). Protest cycles started with symbolically innovative tactics and then shifted to mass action, which sometimes escalated into violence. When mass mobilization declined, many movement activists returned to more institutional forms, while small groups resorted to more radical action.

As is always the case, however, comparative analyses contributed not only to confirm, but also to challenge and specify the various components of this picture. For instance, my comparison of the Italian and the German cases showed similar dynamics, but also relevant differences (della Porta 1995). In both countries, there was some radicalization of the student

protest, with a shift from defensive to organized violence. This radicalization involved only small groups within much broader non-violent movement milieus, and was fuelled by conflicts with the police and political opponents. In both countries, while the protest spread to various social groups, semi-military violence was criticized within the movement but contributed to the spread of some radical symbolic violence in small and loosely coordinated autonomous groups. The presence of clandestine organizations contributed to radicalize protest forms. Later on, in the 1980s, in both countries, the mobilization of the peace movement against the deployment of NATO missiles helped to spread non-violent repertoires.

A main difference emerged, however, in the spread of violence. While in Germany a consensual culture and neo-corporatist agreements, together with the Left in government, tended to facilitate moderation, in Italy violence escalated during longer lasting and more intense protests (see also next chapter). In particular, developing from the crisis of the New Left organizations, the Italian radical “autonomous” groups had a much broader base and were more highly structured than their German counterparts. The more exclusive attitudes of the Italian state towards challengers and the presence of a violent, neo-fascist countermovement, interacting with a larger acceptance for radical frames and forms of action in the social movement sector, contribute to explain the higher degree of escalation in the Italian cycle.

3. Competitive escalation and right-wing violence

Italian right-wing organizations also developed during harsh conflicts, in direct opposition to left-wing groups, but also with a strong criticism of the neo-fascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). This is true for both periods that have been singled out in the history of radical right clandestine organizations in post-World War II Italy.

The presence of a strong neo-fascist movement has been considered a peculiarity of the Italian case. Looking for explanations for the high degree of clandestine political violence found in Italy in the 1960s and the 1970s, it has been observed that “one of the most distinctive features of the Italian experience was the strength and intensity of the neo-fascist terrorism” (Weinberg and Eubank 1987: 3). The radicalizing effect of the presence of such a movement “was played in two ways, one passive and the other active.” On the one hand, “the very presence of a large neo-fascist movement in Italian politics served as a provocation to leftist groups whose adherents’ view of the world was shaped in no small measure by stories of the heroic struggle waged by the resistance against Fascist rule during World War II.”² On the other hand, “mass protest produced a revitalization of neo-fascism ... If leftists saw the neo-fascist presence as a provocation, the neo-fascists themselves saw an opportunity. The opportunity was based on the exploitation of the popular fears of the mass protests going on in schools, university and industrial plants all over Northern Italy” (Weinberg and Eubank 1987: 17-18).

The 1960s and 1970s were also decades of radicalization for the radical right, which felt excluded by the other political parties. In the 1960s, right-wing radical groups split from the neofascist party Movimento Sociale Italiano, the most important being Ordine Nuovo (ON), already founded in 1956, and Avanguardia Nazionale (AN), which was a further split from ON in 1960. Since their origins in contact with other neofascist groups in Europe, ON and AN organized in the 1960s a long series of physical attacks against their left-wing adversaries. While the European fascist regimes in Italy and Germany provided the ideological frames, the

² This would contribute to explaining another peculiarity – the fact that “Italy’s left-wing revolutionary terrorists also differed from their peers. Most obviously, there were more of them” (ibid.).

contemporary authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe (in Greece, Portugal, and Spain) offered some logistical protection, as did some Italian secret services.

Clandestine violence in the late 1960s spread within existing institutions, with complex relations in particular with the MSI. The first, so-called “golpist” period lasted from 1969 to 1975. The radical right generation active in this period had already been involved in the various attempts to fund a fascist party, often splitting from and reconverging in the MSI. In 1951, among the thirty-six people tried for founding the *Fasci d’Azione Rivoluzionaria* were the future leaders of this generation, such as Julius Evola, Clemente Graziani, and Pino Rauti. *Avanguardia Nazionale* (AN) was founded in 1959 by Stefano Delle Chiaia, a former MSI leader who planned a revolution stimulated by small basis groups. One of the main radical right organizations, *Ordine Nuovo*, also emerged from the neo-fascist MSI, living a theoretically public but practically clandestine life until 1973, when it was sentenced for “reconstitution of the fascist party” and banned, becoming totally clandestine.

Quantitative research based on newspaper and police data indicated that 96.5 percent of the right-wing militants arrested for terrorism had previous membership in radical right groups (Weinberg and Eubank 1987: 86), most of them somehow affiliated to the MSI. In fact, “many neo-Fascists ... had been drawn from the ranks of the MSI. There were only a handful of individuals who made the long voyage from one side of the political spectrum to the other, and fewer still who drifted to the extremes from the political centre. In thinking about how these people became involved in violent groups, it is worth noting that a little over 12 percent (305 of the 2,490 persons about whom information was obtained) were related by family to other members of the group” (Weinberg and Eubank 1988: 544).

The roots inside the MSI are confirmed by the individual histories: “almost all of the

young people – barely over 20 – tried in 1973 and 1976 as members of ON and AN, had started their political path inside the youth movements of the MSI” (Minna 1984: 39). In 1968, Valerio Borghese, a fighter of the Republic of Salò (formed by fascists who refused to comply with the armistice to end World War II) and former honorary president of the MSI, funded the Fronte Nazionale Rivoluzionario, which involves several former Salò fighters as well as militants of AN and ON and members of the military hierarchies (ibid.: 47).

Especially for those who joined the radical neo-fascists in the 1960s, there is “a pattern of youthful participation in the MSI followed by disenchantment, withdrawal and affiliation with one of the more militant neo-fascist organizations, a form of youth rebellion well before the explosion of 1968” (Weinberg and Eubank 1987: 37). At the individual level, in fact, “constant to many of the analysed cases is the beginning of political activity in the legal right-wing party, the MSI, and the youth organizations linked to it (Giovane Italia, Fronte della Gioventù, Fuan)” (Pisetta 1990: 192). Some of the activists even came from families which had been involved in the Repubblica Sociale Italiana, the aforementioned Salò Republic, which after the armistice continued to fight the Allies in loyalty to the regime (ibid.: 199; see also ch. 7). As mentioned, the extreme right organizations of the first generation had international links with fascist regimes in Spain and Greece (where, for example, a military camp took place in 1968), as well as contacts with the Italian secret services, Sifar (ibid.; see ch. 3).

Links of the radical right groups with the MSI still existed in the second half of the 1970s. In this period, *Costruiamo l'azione* emerged from the so-called Tivoli group (the *Circolo Europeo Drieu La Rochelle*), linked to *Ordine Nuovo*. Its leader, Paolo Signorelli, came from the MSI. In 1977, a group of young activists from the MSI section Monteverde in Rome founded the *Nuclei armati rivoluzionari (NAR)*, which would be responsible for eight assassinations and

over 100 attacks before dissolving in 1980.

However, relations with the MSI grew more and more tense. Especially in the second half of the 1970s, criticism of the old generation took dramatic tunes. In the radical right journal “Quex,” the MSI was defined as “the party of betrayal and mediocrity”: “deprived of a true strategy, deprived of political flexibility, sectarian, immovable, the organizations that vegetated for twenty years are now death” (1979: no. 2). Even more explicitly, the MSI leaders were defined as “political frauds,” “paid mercenaries,” “*ducetti* of the lowest category,” “deprived of ideas and principles,” “part and parcel, support of this putrefied system, and therefore to be fought against and destroyed, as all regime supporters” (“Quex” 1980: no. 3, 3, cit. in Guerrieri 2010). For another new radical right group, *Costruiamo l’Azione*, as well, the MSI had a reactionary face, having sold out for the paltry public party financing. According to a former militant, “The MSI is sclerotic, it has a leadership which is incredible, a true gerontocracy. ... There is a base that does not reason as the top, and the top does anything it can to constrain ... this juvenile exuberance” (interview with M.B.: 93-5, in Pisetta 1990: 195). As NAR activist Valerio Fioravanti declared regarding the street fight with police that followed the deaths of militants during the fight in front of the Roman MSI section of Acca Larenzia: “In reality, our target were not the Carabinieri, our aim was to kill our treacherous father, in a mythological sense, to kill the MSI which had sold us out” (Cento Bull 2007: 148). Young people of the radical groups also felt instrumentalized by the MSI. A militant lamented that, “It happened that when you glued the [MSI] posters during the electoral campaigns you thought you did something right, to defend an idea, but often those who asked you to do it only had an interest in occupying a chair” (interview with A.I.: 56, in Pisetta 1990: 196). A right-wing militant talked of a “very dramatic game played above our heads” (interview with M.M.: 120, in Pisetta 1990: 198). The

MSI was accused of instrumentally using the young activists to promote disorder: “I cannot forgive them for sending kinds of the Fronte della Gioventù in front of the schools where they knew they would be wounded with iron bars ... for us it was clear that the party needed deaths ... they hoped there were victims in front of the schools, to be able to show that violence was communist” (interview with A.d’I.: 57, in Pisetta 1990: 201). Another militant stressed that “the MSI had a responsibility because it got us involved, it pushed us into a logic that was a logic of hater, a logic of death. It ideologized people that were prone to be ideologized, that were 17 years old, like me” (interview Roberto: 47, in Pisetta 1990: 196).³

The MSI was not the only traitor; the same was said of “the leaders of those extraparlimentary organizations that in Italy had a relevant importance in a recent past, but whose revolutionary charge was invested in regime complots, in pseudo attempted coup d’état, letting themselves (voluntarily, we have to believe) be instrumentalized from the most reactionary and conservative forces of the system” (“Quex” 1980: no. 3, 3, in Guerrieri 2010).

Here as well, throughout the 1970s, as protest became increasingly violent, radical right activists started to kill and be killed, during both street fights with and individual aggression by radical left activists. The killing of the two young sons of an MSI activist in Primavalle in 1973,

³ Later on, research on the radical right noted the difficult interaction between the two extreme right areas: one “macho and chauvinist, with hooligan attitudes and consumptions linked especially to the characteristics of youth subcultures, and the politicized one, fascinated by the nazi- and Evola stereotype, linked to the tradition of the radical right, with militant attitudes. The Saturday night attacks, the rock concert, the passion for alcohol and soccer are expressions of the first soul; the political initiative, from marches to leaf-letting, from the meetings on negationism to workshops on anti mondialism, are expressions of the second” (Marchi 1994: 174).

of Mikis Mantakas, a militant of the FUAN (the MSI university students' association) in 1975, and of three other activists during an assault to the MSI section in via Acca Larentia in Rome in 1978 were very intense memories for the young activists in the second half of the 1970s. One NAR militant, Franco Anselmi, was said to bring with him during terrorist actions a balaclava hat, dirty with the blood of his comrade Mikis Mantakas.⁴ In September 1977, future NAR activists were involved in the assassination of Lotta Continua activist Walter Rossi, shot dead while running away during street fights, as well as in the February 1978 assassination of left-wing activist Roberto Scialabba and the injuring of his brother. In June 1979, Francesco Cecchin, a young militant of the Fronte della Gioventù, died while escaping from political adversaries. As an act of revenge, radical right-wingers broke into a PCI section, wounding thirty-five people. In 1980, Valerio Verbanio, member of a left-wing collective, was killed in his apartment, in front of his mother; and Angelo Mancina, MSI, was killed by a Volante Rossa.

The context of continuous battles is also often mentioned as justifying the choice for violence on the Right. One activist thus recalled fights at his high school: “[the leftist students] threw down desks and we tried to assault them” (right-wing radical, in Pisetta 1990: 200).

Another mentioned, “We had to enter the school in a group. ... if there were troubles, if there was tension in the air, we met before school in order to arrive at school together, because, you know, it is difficult to attack a group of ten people” (right-wing radical, in Pisetta 1990: 200).

Still another recalled the 1970s as the years when “there were fights almost every day and I can assure you that we never shirked away from fighting” (ibid.: 134).

⁴ A Greek student who died in 1975 during the fights between radical right and left-wing activists in front of the justice palace, where the trial on the fire that had killed the two young sons of an MSI activist in Primavalle in 1973 was held (Guerrieri 2010).

Here as well, violence started to be justified as defensive. A militant of Terza Posizione, Adinolfi stated that “The first person to be beaten with a bar in Italy, Spanò, was beaten by the [left] student movement, the first person to be killed by a bottle full of sand was Ermanno Venturini, in Genoa, and the first person to be shot dead was Mikis Mantakas in Rome. I believe that even the first person to be knifed was Falvella in Salerno. In other words, the escalation was always taking place from the left to the right ... the taste for civil war was developed by the extreme left ... the left developed a strategy of hatred” (in Cento Bull 2007: 141). He also remembered, however, that “The physical struggle for us was a test of strength” (ibid.), and “we went to conquer the streets” (ibid.: 142). And another explained, “Eventually the fascists were forced to go around carrying guns, and they had to use pistols, because they were attacked and *sprangati* [hit with bars]” (right-wing radical, in Pisetta 1990: 201).

A sort of battle spirit towards politics is particularly stressed by the militants of the second generation. A militant of Terza Posizione talked of “years of lead, of civil war, of daily clashes, years in which what mattered was to survive or to eliminate the enemy” (ibid.: 141). The need to defend their right to mobilize is also cited: “we deliberately decided to carry out military actions that would allow us to be politically active ... we carried out various successful military actions which wounded a great number of our enemies but lastly allowed us to engage in politics” (Cento Bull 2007: 122). One of them, talking about the mid-1970s, recalled: “At that point, in those years, political struggle became a territorial problem ... it was a climate of continuous violence” (Ferraresi 1995: 342). Similarly, another reminded, “outside school, there were the externals, the external and the internals together, do you understand? So I had to go to school at 7:30, so they did not get me in the morning and leave at 2:30pm. It was like going to a battlefield” (Ferraresi 1995: 342).

Even if in a much smaller milieu than at the Left, also right-wing violence developed in Italy within a broader movement, made of several and various organizations in cooperation, but also competition with each other. Notwithstanding formal and informal alliances with the neo-Fascist party, the MSI, the radical groups emerged also from widespread critics of the party moderation, and tensions developed also between the organizations that had been founded in the 1960s and those which grew in the 1970s, from a contestation of the former.

4. *Competitive escalation and ethnic violence*

In the Basque Country, radical nationalism developed during a very long conflict that saw waves of particularly intense protest. The emergence of Basque nationalism in the latter part of the century (the National Basque Party, PNV, was founded in 1895) has been seen as a reaction of the urban middle class to migration and first industrialization in a context characterized by a fragmented social structure. Not by chance, ETA is particularly present in areas with a particular type of industrialization such as Guipuzkoa, and especially in the Goierri region, which is a mountainous area with a late but very fast growth of the manufacturing industry and high persistence of Basque language use (Clark 1984).⁵

Competitive escalation also happened in ethno-nationalist types of violence. In an explanation of why violence had emerged in the Basque Country but not in Catalonia, Juan Medrano noted different degrees of organizational competition, which he assessed as higher in the Catalonia case. However, this interpretation has been challenged. Luis de la Calle Robles

⁵ In fact, 85 percent of victims are in the Basque region, especially in the provinces of Guipuzkoa and Biscay; the same path can be seen in ETA activists, about half of whom come from Guipuzkoa (0.25 on 1,000 inhabitants) and 40 percent (0.12) from Biscay.

(2009) has noted that, since at least the civil war, Basque ethno-nationalist organizations have been embedded in a very competitive environment.

Even before the civil war, the PNV was in strong competition with the Carlistas, which also referred to a traditionalist base but bridged traditionalism with “*espanolistas*” positions. In addition, the first wave of industrialization had brought about the spread of a class discourse and of related left-wing organizations, which competed with the nationalist narrative. During the Republic, the Basque electorate was in fact equally divided into three groups: Carlistas, Nationalists, and Republicans (especially PSOE, whose electoral strongholds remained stable after Francoism).

The ethnic conflict radicalized in this environment. ETA was born inside the PNV, contesting the PNV’s position of alignment with the nonviolent opposition of the all-party government in exile and its confidence in a negotiated concession of autonomous status after the return of democracy. The strong reliance of the PNV on the support of Western democracies was bound to produce internal criticism after those countries recognized the Francoist regime, abandoning the Spanish democratic opposition. In the early 1950s disillusionment with the allegedly passive collaborationism of the traditional Basque nationalism, in particular of the PNV, pushed a small handful of students from the University of Deusto – all belonging to the urban middle class – to create a discussion group called the Society of the Basque student (EIA) and to produce a newsletter, *Ekin*. Not by chance, most of ETA’s founders came from a nationalist family background (Unzueta 1988).

In this period, the conception of ethnicity shifted from a racial to a linguistic definition. The Basque language, which had remained a marginal concern in the previous wave of ethno-nationalist mobilization, now became central, as ETA advocated the *euskera* as a unique official

language. In 1953, the group developed contacts and ultimately merged in 1956 with the PNV's youth organization, EGI – although keeping a critical stance towards the PNV, which was accused, among other things, of being too authoritarian in its internal life as well as promoting an exclusive conception of the Basque identity. In 1959, when the party expelled a member of the group, hundreds of others quit to follow him. On 31 July 1959 (the 64th anniversary of the foundation of the PNV), they founded ETA, Euskadi ta askatasuna, Basque homeland and freedom (Muro 2008).

Later, ETA would also contribute to an ethno-national revival. Although less than 20 percent of those living in the region spoke *euskera*, in the early 1970s, the self-identification as Basque was quite high (34 percent were those who felt Basque-only, plus 10 percent who felt more Basque than Spanish; only 24 percent felt only Spanish, and 3 percent more Spanish than Basque). Furthermore, the percentage of those favoring independence doubled from 6 to 12 percent following Franco's death, then tripled to 36 percent in 1979 (Clark 1984: 171).

During its founding years, ETA cooperated and competed with a fast developing labor movement. Franco's dictatorship strongly repressed both the anarcho syndicalist Confederacion Nacional del Trabajo (CNT, General Confederation of Labour) and the socialist Union General de Trabajadores (UGT, the General Workers' Union), which had played an important role in the defense of the Republic. Thousands of unionists were killed, and many had to flee the country, while all unions were banned and strikes became illegal.

After World War II, however, the labor movement remobilized. The Manresa strike in 1946 ended with a compromise; in 1951 a streetcar strike in Barcelona spread to other sectors and was accompanied by public demonstrations. With the economic development of the 1950s, strikes multiplied. In the late 1950s, in an attempt to legitimize itself internally and abroad, the

regime began allowing collective bargaining as well as the election of delegates (*jurados*) at the factory level, changing labor relations. Workers on strike started to elect Comisiones Obreras (CCOOs), workers' committees that formed in relation to specific conflicts and were discontinued afterwards. Largely communist-led, the CCOOs were declared illegal in 1967 (despite some opposition inside the official, vertical union, voiced by its leader José Solís). However, already a strong organizational presence in the factories, they continued to be active, mixing an occasional visible presence with a clandestine, more stable one. With their movement-like character and hidden organized nuclei, the CCOOs were extremely successful in the mobilization into strikes, notwithstanding hard repression, imprisonments, and dismissals. The labor movement thus recovered its capacity to act collectively. As Fishman (1990: 16) summarized, "this politically divided labour movement would form one of the principal forces pushing to end authoritarian rule and return to democracy."

The labor protest that challenged the authoritarian regime found in the Basque country a particularly fertile soil. The second wave of industrialization in the 1950s and especially the economic crisis that hit the region with particular intensity in the 1970s and well into the 1980s brought about a radicalization of the Basque workers. Already in May 1947, a first general strike organized by the resistance committee involved 75 percent of the workers. Despite ending with 15,000 dismissals, it was considered a positive sign of resistance and repeated in Bilbao in 1951. In April 1967, violent repression followed demonstrations during another strike in the Basque capital that coincided with the celebration of *aberi eguna*, the day of the Basque fatherland. In February and March 1969, strikes took place in Vizcaya. As it was summarized:

Partly because of the blue-collar workers' dissatisfaction with living and working

conditions, wildcat, sympathy and general strikes constantly broke out during the late 1960s and early 1970s. More than 37 percent of all recorded strikes in Spain between 1967 and 1974 took place in the Basque region, even though it was home to only 11 percent of Spain's urban workers. Labor activists, belonging to more than a dozen underground Marxist, Christian and anarchist labor parties, established vast networks of militant shop-floor organizations. Hundreds of urban neighbors' associations also blossomed and, despite police surveillance, organized boycotts, marches, building occupations and petition drives to compel the government authorities to provide poorer residents with affordable housing, medical care, garbage collection and educational services for children (Zirakzadeh 2002: 69).

ETA's adoption of a Marxist discourse (see Chapter 6) was linked to its intervention in the industrial disputes, and orientation to recruit there; it also increased competition within the Left. Soon after its emergence, ETA combined the traditional nationalist discourse with a class one, enjoying alliances with both traditional nationalisms as well as with the left-wing opposition and the labor movement. As Luis de la Calle Robles (2009: 66) observed, "far from being empty, the boom of ETA in the early 1970s took place in a quite flourishing oppositional environment."

In fact, workers continued to play a most important role in the transition phases and afterwards. Industrial conflicts were quite widespread. The number of workers on strike went from about 500,000 in 1975 (with ten million hours of strikes) to more than three and a half million (with 110 million hours) in 1976. Similar rates were measured in 1977 and 1978, increasing to 5.8 million (and 170 million hours) in 1979 but then declining to below the 1976 level in 1980. Notwithstanding the myth of the *transition pactada*, after the mid-1970s: "there

was an entire, very politicized country” (Reinares 2001: 69). As an *etarra* remembers, “everyday life was, in practice, demonstrations, barricades ... they went on the street, for a demonstration. To ask for a salary increase ... and the police arrived ... a real fights, with guns and deaths ... that, everyday. Constantly ..., they made road controls ... they fired at you, killed you. And this after the death of Franco” (ibid.: 69). In the words of another militant, “It was a period with many strikes. We lost many days of classes. There was a lot of political mobilization ... many days with police occupations of the Institute as well. It was the period of the transition ... we were young and we started to do many things” (ibid.).

The pacted transition developed under Suarez and his Union del Centro Democrático, culminating in the Moncloa Pact in October 1977. Signed by the major parties, it divided the leadership of both CCOOs and UGT, as well as disappointing many workers. The fear of weakening democracy as well as economic depression contributed to the demobilization of the workers, in part proactively pushed for from above. At the end of the 1970s, feelings of *desencanto* (disenchantment) followed the peak of participation in the mid-1970s. The attempted coup on 23 February 1981 scared activists and the Left, producing a decline in labor mobilization. Although organizationally very weak, however, the Spanish unions did show an astonishing capacity to mobilize workers in the late 1980s.

If the very emergence of ETA reflected tensions in the Basque movement about the correct strategy to adopt, it also fuelled those divisions. The great repression of 1969 favored ETA as it was, above all, perceived as indiscriminate, addressing (in contrast to Catalonia) the Basque speaking population (see also Chapter 3). Additionally, local elites adopted a competitive (and exclusionary) stance (de la Calle Robles 2009). Especially after 1970, with the Burgos trials against ETA militants and ETA’s assassination of Franco’s designated successor Carrero Blanco,

ETA became a symbolic point of reference for the Spanish anti-Franco opposition.

During and after the transition, ETA developed through competition within the ethno-nationalist front, but also with the Left and the organization itself. During the transition, Basque nationalist forces tried to build a common front, with a view to the first general elections. While the PNV favored participation, the two components into which ETA had split in the mid-1970s took different positions. ETA military (ETA-M) asked for an amnesty and the legalization of all political parties as a necessary precondition, and ETA politico-militar (ETA-PM) agreed on a compromise: participation, supporting the left-wing party Euskadito Eskierra (EE), in exchange for the release of some prisoners (Sanchez-Cuenca 2009: 18). The division inside the nationalist front escalated on 8 September 1977, when the activists participating in two different marches in San Sebastian – one organized by the moderate ethno-nationalists, the other by the radical ones – clashed with each other, with verbal insults as well as some physical violence (ibid.: 19). In the fall of 1977, ETA-M intensified its terrorist attacks as an alternative strategy to the perceived failure of peaceful protest. As it explained in the 69th edition of its internal publication *Zutik*: “After the Freedom March and the latest demonstrations for amnesty, popular mobilizations plummeted and the masses shifted from actors to spectators in the parliamentary game” (cit. in ibid.: 20). The ETA-M attacks in fact increased with the decline of the huge mobilizations for amnesty, after the Summer Freedom March that, composed by various columns coming from different directions, converged in Pamplona following over three weeks of demonstrations throughout the Basque Country. Other massive protests had also denounced heavy repression, including the killing of demonstrators (ibid.).

A study on the evolution of violence within the cycle of protest that accompanied the transition confirms that political killings increased as participation in demonstrations declined.

Focusing on the 982 demonstrations that took place between May 1976 and December 1978, and on 718 killings (214 of them from state violence), Sanchez-Cuenca and Aguillar observed that “mass mobilization reaches its peak in the last quarter of 1977, after which there is a significant drop in the number of demonstrators. This drop is followed immediately by a rapid increase in the number of mortal victims. It would seem, therefore, that one cycle is replaced by the other” (s.d.: 15). In fact, intense protest accompanied the democratization period, between Franco’s death in November 1975 and the victory of the the Partido Socialista Obrero Espanol (PSOE, the Spanish Socialist Workers’ Party) in the 1982 elections. Heavy protests were organized in particular on regional autonomy (38 percent of participants), economic issues (23 percent of demonstrators took to the streets on labor related issues) and amnesty (8 percent). The protest declined however after 1977, in particular after the Moncloa Pacts were signed by the government, the opposition, trade unions, and employers’ association with the aim of addressing the economic crisis.

FIGURE 3 and 4

The Basque Country remained, however, a very contentious region. According to Casquete (2003: 17-19), data provided by the Basque police on the number of demonstrations for the late 1990s and the beginning of the years 2000 “unequivocally back the hypothesis of over-contention,” with respectively, 4,000 demonstrations and public gatherings in the last ten months of 1998, 5,608 in 1999, 12,465 in 2000, and 8,730 in 2001 – as compared to an average of 9,515 demonstrations a year for all the rest of Spain. In the same period, the number of demonstrations per thousand inhabitants was eighteen times higher in the Basque Country than in Spain. He concludes, “No question, then, that in social protest, at least, Bilbao occupies the world’s leading

position” (Casquete 2003: 19). Data at the individual level confirms that opinion: according to a survey, in the Basque Country 54 percent of the population has attended lawful demonstrations, as compared to 27 percent in Spain.

ETA did play a role in this contentious evolution. First of all, the union LAB (Langile Abertzale Batzordeak, Patriotic Workers’ Committee) and other organizations close to ETA are quite strong in some localities, often in small or medium sized but not rural or isolated municipalities, and often, but not only, where there is a high presence of Basque-speaking persons (Beck 1999). Additionally, the ETA discourse conditioned new social movement activities, whether on women’s or on environmental issues (Tejerina 2001: 51). In the 1990s, street violence was organized by organizations close to ETA: about 300 incidents of street violence were counted in 1990 and in 1991, with an increase to about 500 in each of the following two years, and peaks of about 1,000 in 1995, 1996 and 1997, returning to about 500 in the following three years (de La Calle n.d.). These events aimed first at the moderate nationalists and Basque police, then broadening their target to include national actors (de La Calle nd; see also van der Broek 2004).

In addition, non-violent marches frequently organized by the Movimiento de Liberacion Nationale Vasco (MLV; Basque Movement of National Liberation) – a platform of various radical Basque nationalist organizations – had a highly ritualistic character that contributed to identification with the movement, as well as providing occasions for the strengthening of radical identity. The typical nationalist demonstration of the 1990s and 2000s has been described by Casquete:

The Basque flag, the *ikurriña*, was the most widely represented symbol at every

demonstration covered in this study. Apart from the countless *ikurriñak* evenly scattered throughout the demonstration, invariably a huge one held by Basque dancers (*dantzariak*), by relatives of ETA prisoners, or simply by anonymous militants opens the march. Singing is another symbolic element with plenty of significance: It is not hard to hear a classic Basque song that goes “Come, come home boy” (“Hator, hator mutil etxera”), in open reference to prisoners. Occasionally, the “Basque Soldier’s Hymn” (*Eusko gudariak*) concludes the demonstration. Apart from the flag and songs, a third kind of symbolic element present at every demonstration is the portraits of ETA prisoners, around 400–500 in the years covered here. These portraits are carried by relatives, who always occupy a preferential place. Banners demanding either prisoners’ amnesty or that they fulfill their sentences in prisons located in the Basque Country are also present. “Long life to the ETA” (*Gora ETA*), “Independence” (*Independentzia*), and cries in support of ETA prisoners can also be heard. Songs, cries, and placards are exclusively in the Basque language, in spite of the fact that many demonstrators have no good command of it, or no command at all (according to the last sociolinguistic survey conducted in 1996, only 25.2% of the population was fluent in the Basque language, though language proficiency no doubt is more likely among nationalists in general, and even more so among radical nationalists) (Casquete 2003: 27-8).

In recent years as well, marches in Bilbao are designed to perform a highly integrative function in the movement, through the development of intense emotions. This is evident in the very route, which is different from those of marches organized by other types of actors:

(a) It is somewhat longer, approximately 3 km, so that demonstrators enjoy more time to stick together and thus lengthen their liturgical performance, and (b) whereas the main route is completely flat, the two main streets along which the alternative route goes have a sloping topography, so that either from the front or from the back of the demonstration it is possible to enjoy an overall view of the marching crowd. In this way, those sympathizers unable to attend the demonstration have a chance to see the crowd the next day on the cover page of the *Gara* newspaper. The lengthy coverage of the event on the inside pages provides a detailed description of the event and is accompanied by a photographic report, as well as by interviews with anonymous, rank-and-file participants at the demonstration expressing their opinions and, more important, their feelings (ibid.: 30).

However, the intense protest culture in the Basque Country also testifies to some increasing tensions among different generations of Basque nationalism. An example is, in the early 1980s, the debate about the *radikal rok basko* (radical Basque rock), which developed in the radical bar culture, shaping youth identity. A combination of British punk with ska and reggae, played by dozens of Basque punk bands, *radikal rok basko* was, in effect, the “theme music” of the radical youth (Kasmir 2002: 54). Notwithstanding the final endorsement by Herry Batasuna, it also divided the Basque scene. In fact:

The relationship between *radikal rok* and the radical nationalist newspaper enacted HB’s “sanctioning” of Basque punk as nationalist music. An Hertzainak band member said of the radical-nationalist decision to associate itself with punk: “It made a bet, I think in

essence political, and that it still maintains. Today, 70% of the concerts that are organized in Euskadi, are organized in the orbit of HB. That is to say that there is a relationship between rock and roll, the milieu of HB, and a form of political thought, if you like.” However, radical nationalists were not uniform in their acceptance of punk. Many saw it as a “foreign” expression that contaminated “authentic” Basque culture. Indeed, one HB supporter told me as we were having a drink in Bar Jai that punk “is not Basque; it’s mass culture.” He meant to devalue punk by suggesting that it was a foreign or international style that diluted regional culture and “real” Basqueness. He preferred to hear Basque folk in radical bars. Other older or more culturally staid radical nationalists referred to Txema, Marieli, Monica, Maite, and their friends as “*los modernos*” (“the modern ones”) conveying their disapproval of the aesthetic and mores of punk youths: if punks are “modern” they can’t be “traditional,” and hence (in this formulation) they are not truly Basque. For their part, punk youths characterized these HB militants as “*cerrados*” (“closed minded”). Interestingly, there was particular tension between *modernos* and *cerrados* over the use of hashish (Kasmir 2002: 56).

On the other hand, there are also protests against ETA and political violence. A main umbrella social movement organization against violence is Gesto por la Paz, made up of 160 groups and about 1,500 activists in the late 1990s, with up to 40,000 supporters. It has a pluralistic membership in terms of political positions, with young activists more present in the cities. When someone is kidnapped, members meet once a week, and stand in silence holding a banner requesting the hostage be freed. Another organization, Elkarri (“among all of us”), is composed of 107 local chapters for a total of about 1,200 members, mainly intellectuals, oriented

to develop conflict resolution solutions. It recruits mainly members from the nationalist Left, and even former ETA supporters (Funes 1998).

Concluding, also ETA grew and radicalized during waves of protest, in cooperation and competition with other social movement organizations, both within the nationalist social movement family and the workers' movement, as well as, later on, within the left-libertarian movement. ETA's presence conditioned indeed the development of protest and the social movement sector in the Basque countries for at least half a century.

5. Competitive escalation and religious violence

Religious networks are often safe spaces for activism against dictators, given institutional legitimacy, or at least tolerance (Aminzade and Perry 2001: 159ss.). Religious spaces work as (relatively) free spaces, and this is one of the reasons that "religious groups have a unique institutional legitimacy that gives them distinctive advantages; it is harder to repress them; and they feel 'safer' to confront and discuss issues that no one else can" (Aminzade and Perry 2001: 159).

In the repressive Arabic countries, social movements developed within mosques as well as Islamic NGOs, including hospitals, schools, and cultural centers. Professional organizations or student associations represented important networks for both reformist and radical Islamist groups. In general, the importance of religious places in facilitating mobilization in repressive regimes is related with their capacity to provide mobilized networks. As the authoritarian nature of several regimes jeopardized political mobilization, "the Mosque was the one institution the state had the most difficulty dominating or controlling. Religion, mosques and mullahs became a rallying point when there was no space allowed for any other" (Esposito 2006: 147).

Moreover, far from using only terror, several Islamist organizations in the Middle East have developed charity activities. In his economic approach to violence, Berman suggests that religious prohibitions are productive for the community because they “increase the availability of members for collective activities such as mutual aid, an essential part of what makes radical religious communities cohesive” (2009: 81). In this sense, “Radical religious groups, or sects, operate as economic clubs. They collectively provide both spiritual services and an entire array of concrete social services through mutual aid systems” (ibid.: 118). He recalls, in fact, that “charity is a pillar of mainstream Islam and that radical Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood are famous for running religious schools, orphanages, soup kitchens, clinics, hospitals, and even youth centers and soccer clubs, all operated as charities” (Berman 2009: 77).⁶ The importance of these social services increased with the declining capacity of Arabic states in the provision of welfare (Ahmed 2005). In a similar way, Islamic student associations are said to have provided the space for the formation of informal nets.

These informal networks facilitated the spread of Islamic organizations. Recruitment in Islamic groups occurred through activities such as “attending religious lessons at a nearby

⁶ Hamas and Hezbollah developed social institutions and helped the local population with day-to-day survival: “In this sense, Hamas is not a terrorist organization using social service provision as a front to disguise its other activities ... The social services come first” (2009: 132). In fact, among the social services for the community are 130,000 scholarships and 135,000 microcredit loans to needy families managed by Hezbollah and the forty Hamas social welfare organizations. These groups provide food, clothing, and shelter but also education, training, libraries, sport clubs and medical relief amounting to 40 percent of social welfare institutions in the West Bank and Gaza (Pape 2005: 188, 191-2).

mosque, joining an informal study groups, or accompanying a friend of neighbor to special prayer services in observance of an Islamic holy day” (Rosefsky Wickham 2004: 232). The legitimacy of those institutions reduced the perception of risks as “Islamic lessons, seminars, and prayer meetings offered some of the few socially sanctioned venues for graduates of both sexes to congregate outside the home” (ibid.: 233). Socially embedded Islamic groups also allowed for different degrees and forms of involvement, and therefore for a gradual integration into the organization. Additionally, “most residents had a brother, cousin, friend or neighbor involved in Islamic prayer circles or study groups, and Islamist participants frequently maintain close relations with non-activist peers” (ibid.).

Often considered a product of fanaticism or frustration, Islamic fundamentalism is also located within broader cycles of protest in which religious claims are intertwined with socioeconomic and nationalist ones. The nationalist dimension of religious clandestine violence has been indeed stressed. According to Esposito (2006: 146), “Political Islam is in many ways the successor of failed nationalist ideologies and projects in the 1950s and 1960s, from Arab nationalism and socialism of North Africa and the Middle East to the Muslim nationalism of post-independence Pakistan.” Bin Laden’s message has been defined as primarily political (Esposito 2006). Suicide terrorism itself has been presented as a strategy of nationalists fighting against occupation by democratic regimes, motivated by expectations of success, when other means are lacking.⁷ Additionally, research has pointed at the role of social, especially class conflicts in the development of Islamism (for example, Gunning 2007; Ritter 2010). This means

⁷ As Pape observed, “Perhaps the most striking aspect of recent suicide terrorist campaigns is that they are associated with gains for the terrorists’ political cause about half the time” (2005: 66).

that the evolution of radical Islamist organizations has to be located not only within the dynamics of competition within Islamic movements, which always involved nonviolent components as well, but also in waves of protest in which different types of organizations – religious, but also nationalist and class-oriented – interacted.

That religious, nationalist, and class motivations tend to interact is no new discovery. Under some conditions, the search for national independence takes a religious tone. As Pape observed, “under the circumstances of a foreign occupation, the relative importance of religious and linguistic differences normally reverses and religious difference can influence nationalist sentiments in ways that encourage mass support for martyrdom and suicide terrorism” (2005: 88). From this perspective, political violence is more likely when “the presence of a religious difference reduces room for compromise between the occupying power and the occupied community, because the conflict is seen as a zero sum game” (ibid.: 89).⁸ In order to understand the development of radical Islamism as well, it is therefore important to look at forms of internal competition. As Sadowski correctly reminded us, Muslims have internally diverse values, and this is also true of the so-called political Islam: “studies of political Islam commonly begin from two faulty assumptions, guaranteeing that whatever questions are asked will generate misleading answers. The first assumption is that Muslims around the world share a common, relatively homogenous body of doctrine on a wide array of religious, social, and political matters. The second is that this doctrine is actually the primary determinant of Muslim behavior” (2006: 216). Not only are there doctrinary differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims, but rural-urban cleavages as well as cleavages related with specific national declination of Islam (ibid.: 218). In

⁸ The presence of American military forces for combat operations on homeland territory has a stronger explanatory capacity than does (Salafi) Islamic fundamentalism (ibid.: 103).

addition, Islamic movements are divided over strategies, with pietistic movements aiming at personal transformation and political ones sharing a belief in the importance of political power.

Even political Islam is internally split: traditionalist groups tend to focus on local tradition and privilege informal networks; while fundamentalist groups aim to purify Islam from local practices, often coalescing around clerics. Islamist groups, in turn, emerged from a critique of fundamentalism. As Sadowski (2006: 221-2) summarized:

The Islamists, with their cosmopolitan backgrounds, introduced various tools they had borrowed from the West into their organizational arsenal. Ideologically, they drew on anti-modernist philosophies that embodied Western dissatisfaction with the consequences of industrialization and positivism: Spengler, Althusser, and Feyerabend supplied some of their favorite texts. They rearticulated Islam as a modern ideology in which control of a totalistic Islamic state would permit the transformation of society in a manner that promoted not only piety but progress. Recruiting from the same intellectual groups through which Marxism penetrated the Muslim world – and often doing jail time in the same prisons as persecuted communists – they quickly learned the advantages of organizing into parties of disciplined cadres, organized into discrete cells, that could work to lay the foundations for revolution among wider groups.

Conflicts between, but also within these different versions of Islamism heavily influenced the evolution of Islamist clandestine organizations. Again according to Sadowski (2006: 228), “relations between Muslim communities have grown dramatically worse since the 1990s. Neo-fundamentalist groups such as the Salafis [Wahhabis who reject the authority of the traditional

Saudi clerics] in Algeria and Syria, the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Jama`at-i Ulema-i Islam in Pakistan, and the Jaysh-i Muhammad in Kashmir are strikingly less tolerant than older Islamic movements.” In part a reaction to the increasing relevance of Shia in Iran and in Lebanon (through the Hezbollah), some Sunni Salafi groups have even denied that Shia belong to Islam, attacking Shia minority groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as the Iraqi security forces, which are dominated by Shia Muslims. In 2005, for instance, in the document “Why do we Fight and Whom do we Fight,” the Islamic legal committee of AQ in Iraq stated that they wanted to “restore their rightly guided caliphate” and “reject rule by the Shia ... who have betrayed Muslims” (in Hafez 2007: 73).

In fact, contextualized analyses of specific cases of radicalization during cycles of protest in the Middle East point at the importance, during cycles of protest, of internal competition between social movements and social movement organizations, often with interactions of, and competition between, class, nationalist, and religiously oriented narratives. In what follows, I will reconstruct the role of competitive escalation during cycles of protest in this type of political violence, referring especially to the work of Stefan Malthaner (2011) on Islamic groups in Egypt, Jeroen Gunning (2007) and Eitan Alimi (2011) on Palestine, and Thomas Hegghammer (2010) on the Jihad in Saudi Arabia.

5.1. Competitive escalation in Egypt

Founded at the end of the 1970s, the Egyptian radical groups al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Group) and Tanzim al-Jihad (“Jihad Organization”) have grown inside a broader Islamist movement which – as Malthaner wrote (2011: 25) – “had radicalized in political confrontation with the government of Anwar al-Sadat.” After the food riots in 1977, repression became

particularly intense, hitting all the opposition, and culminating in 1981 (Esposito 2002: 88-89). Although both belonged to the radical Islamist wing, these two organizations differed from and competed with each other, investing much energy in internal fights. Al-Jihad developed as a small and secret group, al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya instead as a large organization with a double organizational structure, including a grassroots level. Allied in the assassination of President Sadat in 1981, both groups suffered the heavy repression that followed, but then reemerged during a wave of (also violent) protests in 1988 and 1989. While violence initially took the form of clashes with the police, it radicalized in 1991, “including attacks against police officers, politicians, intellectuals, Coptic Christians, and the tourist industry in Upper Egypt and Cairo.” While al-Jamaa participated in the protests, eventually being defeated by the Egyptian security forces, until its unilateral disbanding in 1998 al-Jihad was responsible for a few attacks between 1992 and 1993, renouncing action in Egypt, and instead joining the al-Qaeda network (ibid.).

The history of both groups can only be understood if we take into account their development within, and later competition with, the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) during broader waves of protest. Founded in 1928, MB initially focused on educational and charitable activities at the local level as a way to form pious Muslims who could then create a new Islamic nation (ibid.: 62). Politicization evolved during confrontations with the Egyptian authorities, but initially addressed especially opposition to the influence of foreign powers, in particular of Great Britain (which, even after Egypt became an independent state in 1936, still had troops on the Suez Canal) – as well as against the Israeli state.

In addition, the later evolution of the MB was determined by competition with non-religious nationalists. After some cooperation with Nasser’s government, which came to power after a coup d’état in 1952, strong tensions emerged, leading to repression and ensuing

radicalization two years later. Islamist reorganized in the beginning of the 1970s, especially within the university system, which had been expanded by Nasser. While left-wing and national groups had been dominant in the late 1960s, addressing especially social and economic policy issues, Islamic student groups had initially focused on religious activities, slowly extending their concerns to address political questions. Thus a student activist described this process, in an interview with Stefan Malthaner:

I think, first, the activity was mainly religious activity and did not focus on some political demand or quest. But through the activity increased the interest in political issues. [...] And the political issues then increased over time and it is also a symbol for the whole group, it is the disaster of 1967, this big defeat in the history of Egypt, that made up our minds that we are going in the wrong direction and we must have a new start and bring back the Islamic traditions [...]. But as students we were part of a big movement. [...] There was a big return at that time to Islamic prayers, Islamic regulations (ibid.: 57).

The Islamist students thus came to perceive themselves as the vanguard of a broader movement, or a broad Islamic Awakening: “They identified with the Muslim population and emphasized their strong bonds with their families, who approved of Islamic traditions and supported their struggle, rejecting notions of self-separation or challenging their parents’ values ‘because our religion makes this harmony in our life between what is right for a family and what is right for a person’” (ibid.: 61).

The Islamic student groups expanded rapidly: by the mid 1970s they covered all main universities with their several thousand members (Kepel 1985: 144, cit. in ibid.). Initially

concerned mainly with providing services (such as lectures and teaching materials, or even clothes), they then started to put pressure on the administration to prohibit what they considered as anti-Islamic activities (such as concerts) (ibid.: 66-7). On these issues they even engaged in physical fights with other students and the university administration, as well as Sadat's government.

By the late 1970s the conflict had quickly escalated, involving different organizations and factions which then split over their reactions to repression. In fact, "the Islamists rejected Sadat's policy of economic openness towards the West, and when the president began direct negotiations with Israel in 1979 and offered refuge to Shah Pahlavi after the Islamic revolution in Iran, campuses were blocked in protest and students clashed with the police. In reaction, police arrested numerous Islamic activists, the national student union was dissolved, and student activity was severely restricted" (ibid.: 62). While in Cairo and Northern Egypt some groups chose more moderate forms and claims, in Upper Egypt others – which later formed al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya – thought that an Islamist society had to be reached through a violent jihad that included attacks on property.

Radicalization in Egypt spiraled in 1981, after violence erupted in Cairo in June, with ensuing repression (including 1,500 arrests and the dissolution of thirteen organizations) and the assassination of President Sadat in October by a member of al-Jihad, the brother of an arrested al-Jamaa activist. In the following wave of repression under the presidency of Hosni Mubarak, most radical Islamist leaders were arrested and four of them executed, while the moderate Muslim Brothers wing grew under the unfavorable economic conditions determined by the declining oil price, which increased unemployment also among university graduates and brought many migrants back from the Gulf states (ibid.: 73). While the moderate Islamist movement

expanded,

the Muslim Brotherhood, reinvigorated by the influx of former student activists, became the most important oppositional political force, took over the leadership of most professional associations, and began to forge a coalition with other oppositional parties, such as the Labor Party. On the local level, a broad spectrum of religious associations spread 'the call' and provided social services. Large Islamic charitable organizations operated hospitals and schools and, together with Islamic economic enterprises, formed a "parallel Islamic sector" rivaling or replacing the state as a provider of public services (ibid.: 105).

In the competition with nationalist and Communist organizations, the Islamists could exploit the increasing religiosity that was noted in the broader public, providing a basis of support for the activists. As Malthaner noted, "The militant Islamist groups emerged as the violent offspring, or the radical fringe, of a broader, oppositional but nonviolent, Islamist movement, and the Muslim Brotherhood and other (non-violent) Islamist groups remained al-Jamaa's main competitors. The conflict between the broader Islamist movement and the Egyptian state not only formed the origin of the militant groups, but also part of the environment within which they operated ... Protests, demonstrations, mass arrests, and police crackdowns were a regular occurrence in the late 1970s as well as during the 1980s" (ibid.: 115). In the words of one of his interviewees, "there was already a change on the religious level of the people here, as many women wore the scarf, and many frequented the mosque to do their prayers. And also because of the harsh atmosphere of living, because of the rise of prices, the people found no

shelter to protect them from the hard life but to get closer to God. [...] And they admired their bravery to voice something that the government doesn't want" (ibid.: 132).

In radical Islam, internal competition favored fractionalism. In fact, "The alliance between al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad, forged to kill Sadat, collapsed after the arrests of 1981. The two groups split over an argument about leadership as well as over strategic issues and re-organized separately. Al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya re-emerged in the mid-1980s as an open movement on the local level, but confrontations escalated into a nation-wide conflict in the 1990s. Al-Jihad, on the other hand, after re-organizing abroad, planned to attack targets in Egypt. After their failure, they gradually joined the global terrorist project of al-Qaeda" (ibid.: 74-5).

In the mid-1980s, al-Jamaa networked small groups active in universities and neighborhoods, becoming gradually more centralized and with a functional differentiation with separate branches, for example, for open political work and proselytism, for logistics and media, and for military operations. Leadership was in the hands of al-Jamaa's "governing council" (*maglis alshura*), comprising about 8-10 people, which was until 1993 allegedly headed by Omar Adel Rahman, a blind al-Azhar sheikh who was also the group's "spiritual guide" (Malthaner 2011: 70). Gradually, however, decision making moved towards the military command, while the political leader was in exile. In the mid-1990s, a new wave of repression brought about a new decentralization.

As for al-Jihad, it went more and more underground. In 1987 in particular, after the failed attempt of an imprisoned leader to re-launch the group,

Ayman al-Zawahiri, arrested and then released, "established an organization based partly in Egypt and partly abroad, which took the name and the remaining members of al-Jihad.

.... He recruited from among the Egyptian Islamists in Peshawar and in Afghan training camps and together with Sayyed Imam founded a new organization called “al-Jihad organization” (*tanzim al-jihad*). Around 1986, Zawahiri came into contact with Usama bin Laden, and it was from their base in Afghanistan that al-Jihad began to establish a branch in Cairo” (Malthaner 2011, 74).

The two organizations cooperated but, especially, competed with each other:

Initially, the relationship between al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya and al-Jihad in Afghanistan was friendly, but became strained, not only due to personal animosities but also because of political and strategic differences, particularly in regard to their approach to the Muslim population. According to a former al-Jamaa leader who spent several years in Pakistan and Afghanistan in the early 1990s, his group regarded al-Jihad as isolated from the people and as “cowards,” because they were reluctant to engage in a confrontation with the Egyptian government. At the same time, Zawahiri’s group regarded al-Jamaa as “naive students” and accused them of rushing into confrontations with the Egyptian government without proper planning and thus “wasting” many of their young members in a hopeless war against a superior enemy. Al-Jihad, in contrast, favored an approach concentrating on carefully educating and training their members and forming a base of committed cadres. Al-Jihad’s strategy of secretly preparing a coup d’etat – while refraining from direct involvement with the “masses” – certainly indicated a certain detachment from their constituencies and mistrust in popular support (“realism,” in their words). In spite of that, it seems improbable that they considered the Muslim population

unbelievers (ibid.: 75).

The conflicts escalated again in the second half of the 1980s, after members of al-Jamaa al-Islamiyya were released from prison and mobilized again for the implementation of the *sharia* in an Islamic state, violently clashing with police (ibid.). In 1988, police interventions against mosques and Islamists produced a wave of riots in Ayn Shams, with five people killed and hundreds wounded in August, the assassination of a policeman in December, and further rioting, deaths of activists, arrests, alleged torture of prisoners and a curfew, which further polarized and radicalized the residents. These developments increased support to the organized Islamists, in what started to be perceived as an attack against the community.

In 1990, the assassination of the speaker of parliament followed the death of an al-Jamaa leader, triggering a wave of massive violence that lasted for eight years, along with attacks against policemen, government officials, and intellectuals. At the same time, sectarian tensions between Christian and Muslim communities increased, with spirals of reciprocal (physical and symbolic) attacks (ibid.: 113-14). Also in the 1990s, repression interacted with competitive escalation, as it increased support for (even violent) resistance to what was perceived as unjust behavior by the authorities.

5.2. Competitive escalation in Palestine

Competitive escalation within and without the Islamist movement family can also be seen in the radicalization process in the Palestinian case, especially in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Here as well, competitive escalation developed within broader waves of protest, which in their expansive moments gave birth to new groups but also gave way to increasing competition in the

low ebb of mobilization. Here as well, groups were created and split over the best strategy to use in order to resist repression.

In Palestine as well, the life of MBs has been rich in internal splits on strategic issues. Created in 1987-88, Hamas has its roots in the long history of the Muslim Brothers, particularly their cooperation and, especially, competition with other social movement families (class based and nationalist), but also in the internal competition within the Islamist movement. Hamas was created as the paramilitary wing of the Palestinian MBs, which in turn developed as a branch of the Egyptian MBs. Involved in military actions against Israel, which provided the training ground for some future Fatah leaders, the Palestinian Brothers were hit heavily by Nasser's repression in the 1950s and decided to renounce armed resistance. Although they were revitalized after the Israeli victory in the Six-Day War in 1967 and the ensuing discrediting of traditional Pan-Arabic nationalism, the MB had to compete with the nationalist Fatah and its capacity to mobilize the Palestinian Diaspora and other Arabic countries' support, as well as with a nationalist- and Marxist nationalist-dominated Palestine Liberation Organization after 1969 (Gunning 2007: 29). In the 1980s, "the [right-wing party] Likud's decapitation policy ... had resulted in the removal of the older PLO [the Palestinian Liberation Organization] cadres, enabling a younger, more militant leadership to emerge, many of whom had been radicalised by the clashes between the nationalists and the Israeli army in the late 1970s and 1980s, and by their time spent in Israeli" (ibid.: 35-6). Nationalists and Islamists also competed with the revival of the Communist Party, favored by changing social conditions.

In this competitive environment, in the early 1970s the MBs in Palestine found their niche in charity activities: "That the Brotherhood re-emerged as a modest charitable network, rather than a political faction, was a function of its relative weakness vis-à-vis the nationalists.

Islamism was only just beginning to regain ground regionally” (ibid.: 30). As in Egypt, however, the massive enrollment of Palestinian students in Egyptian universities represented a turning point that overlapped with the oil price increase and related support for Islamist groups. Here as well, in a climate of broader revival of religiosity, the MBs successfully competed with nationalists and Communists for the control of professional, labor, and student unions, exploiting their higher appeals for the large percent of student population coming from lower class origins, small villages and refugee camps, as well as discontent with Fatah’s acceptance of a two-state option (ibid.: 33). In Gunning’s (2007) account, “The Brotherhood, with its insistence on a one-state solution, a return to Islam and on meeting people’s local social and communal needs, could capitalise on this discontent” (ibid.: 33). The repression of nationalist activists and the conflicts between PLO and Jordan also gave a competitive advantage to the MBs, which had chosen a low profile in terms of repertoire of contention.

Internal competition in a very dense social movement sector also contributes to explaining the radicalization of the MBs, with the creation of Hamas as a semi-military branch in 1987. Hamas emerged, in fact, from splits within the Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (Gunning 2007), with long-lasting debates and fights among the various factions.

The economic recession of the early 1980s and the related frustration of the hopes of an increasingly educated population combined with the escalation of violent fights between PLO factions and the MBs activists in the universities to increase internal demands for more radical actions within the Brotherhood. New generations of activists, radicalized by the Israeli “Iron Fist” repression in particular in 1982 and 1985, replaced the old leadership in both the PLO and the MB and led the Intifada after 1987 (ibid.: 36). The MBs had already been challenged by the splitting of the group Islamic Jihad in the early 1980s, by a broader process of politicization and

increasing support for armed struggle after the PLO's defeat in Lebanon, and by the development of an Islamist nationalism that had involved parts of the MBs' membership as well (ibid.: 36-7).

By the mid-1980s, this had brought about the construction of military cells inside the MBs.

After its creation, Hamas participated in the internal struggles in the MBs between the moderate leadership and the more radical younger component, pushing not only for more radical means but also for a greater focus on Palestinian nationalism. As Gunning observed, "The establishment of Hamas had a profound impact on the evolution of the Islamic movement as a whole. Within years, Hamas had eclipsed the Muslim Brotherhood as the central Islamist political actor" (ibid.: 39), recruiting among those who were disappointed by Fatah's support for the peace process. The increasing and increasingly heterogeneous membership, as well as growing repression, brought about an organizational re-structuration. With the formation of the military Qassam Brigades, legal (social and political) activities were separated from the focus on resistance, controlled by the (more radical) external leadership.

Competition within the religious groups also interacted with the struggles within other components of the Palestinian social movement sector. In particular, Fatah and the PLO were often divided on the relations towards peace and the recognition of Israel. The Rejectionist Front led by George Habash was a mid-1970s reaction to Fatah's moderation. In the 1980s, grassroots groupings spread in the occupied territories, resisting (externally based) Fatah's attempts at control. Later on, "the Israeli authorities played a role in heightening the violent potential among the organizations, a potential that was inherent within the ideologies contending for influence among the Palestinians of the occupied territories. The framework of constraints and restrictions imposed by the military authorities was, to a large extent, designed as a strategy of divide and conquer" (ibid.: 63). Attempts at coordination within the social movement sector – such as the

National Guidance Committee, founded in 1983 as an alliance between nationalists and communists – were hit particularly hard by Israeli repression (ibid.). Competition between communists and nationalists strengthened in the 1980s, with PLO penetration among the workers. In the declining phase of the first Intifada, divisions took most dramatic forms inside the Unified/Coordinated Command of the Uprising (UNCU), particularly with regard to the units specializing in the military defense against attacks by settlers. Competition between the MB and the PLO increased in the late 1980s, as the MBs increasingly profiled themselves as a political actor by attacking Arafat for his UN declaration renouncing terrorism.

Later, repression had the perverse effect of favoring, in the early 1990s, a rapprochement between Hamas and the left wing of the PLO, in part originating in the Israeli prisons. The creation of a Palestinian Authority, with its strong control over previously more autonomous civil society organizations, made Hamas' affiliated charities more attractive, as they appeared more independent (also from western support). Since 1993, the resort to terrorism by the Qassam Brigades (including suicide bombings, later to be imitated by Fatah's Martyrs' Brigades) as a way to jeopardize the peace process is to be seen in the context of competition with the moderate nationalists – as is the second Intifada, which contributed to decreasing support for Fatah and a new growth of Hamas. Israeli repression, with the assassinations of Hamas' leaders and the mass funerals that followed, furthered popular support for the organization, as did the internal conflicts, corruption, and authoritarian leadership in Fatah (ibid.: 50).

Fatah's Tanzim paramilitary force also emerged from the competition inside a dense movement network. As Alimi (2011: 97-8) noted, “despite profound deprivation, ample incentives for violent outbursts, and preexisting violent-prone ideology, Fatah-Tanzim members' adoption of terrorist tactics was not a mere expression of the armed-struggle approach inspired

by Hezbollah's mode of struggle, but rather a gradual development that took place in the context of an escalating action-counteraction dynamic with Israeli security forces and fierce competition for power among groups within the Palestinian movement." In fact, Tanzim's development in 1995 followed the creation of a Fatah-led Palestinian Authority and the increasing dissatisfaction of local activists with the takeover of power by Tunisian PLO leaders. The tense and ambivalent relations with Arafat are explained by the attempts by the PLO leader to counterbalance the growing influence of religious Hamas with a radical, but secular organization. A few years later, however, the Tanzim cooperated with Hamas on the riots on 15 May 2000 and then in the second Intifada, among other actions (ibid.: 103).

Later, Hamas would also enter in competition with AQ. In January 2006, al-Zawahiri criticized Hamas' participation in the Palestinian Legislative Council elections: "The leadership of the Hamas movement has trampled on the rights of the Muslim *ummah* [community] by accepting what it calls – in a mockery of the intelligence and feelings of the Muslims – respect for international accords. It is with regret that I confront the Muslim *ummah* with the truth, and tell it: my condolences to you over the loss of the leadership of Hamas, for it has sunk in the swamp of surrender" (cit. in Cragin 2007: 5). Hamas responded by accusing al-Qaeda of indiscriminate attacks against innocent Muslims, stating, "The [Muslim] people loved al-Qaida because it declared war on the American enemy who supports the occupation of Palestine and is the occupier of Iraq and Afghanistan; however this love was taken out of people's chest when they hit the innocent. The victims of the Amman wedding and their families, of who we see and console them even today, are proof of the blind use of weapons which tainted al-Zawahiri and his group" (ibid.).

5.3. Competitive escalation in Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia played a most important role in the development of the recent wave of Islamist political violence: not only for the terrorist attacks performed in the country, but also because of the large number of Saudis who went to fight in Afghanistan and then joined al-Qaeda. Violent pan-Islamism has motivated many of the terrorist attacks in the country (in contrast to Egypt, where violence developed within a state oriented socio-revolutionary Islam). In Hegghammer's careful reconstruction, however (2010: 6), this is only one type of Islamic activism, which in Saudi Arabia took mainly non-violent forms, including the state oriented reformism of Sahwa, the Ummah-oriented soft-Islamism of the World Muslim League, and the morality-oriented pietism of JSM. Locating AQ in a broader social movement family, in his periodization, he singles out in the development of Islamism a first phase, in the 1980s and first half of the 1990s, characterized by a classical Jihadist movement involved in national liberation struggles in Afghanistan, Bosnia, and Chechnya; a second phase, from the mid 1990s to 2001, which saw the emergence of a more radical global Jihad, with strong anti-Americanism and use of terrorism at international level; and a third phase (2001-2006) during which AQAP (al-Qaeda in the Arabic Peninsula) targeted the American presence in the country.

In the first phase, pan-Islamism was encouraged by the state in terms of both economic support and direct participation in distant conflicts. Thousands of Saudis “put their life at risk for people they had never met and for territories they could barely put on a map,” in order to express pan-Islamic solidarity with Muslims in need (ibid.: 16). The same Saudi King Faisal had revived the pan-Islamic call, in part as a way to distract public opinion from domestic claims, promoting the emergence of the Mecca-based Muslim World League (MWL) in 1962 and the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) some ten years later. The MWL, with heavy support by the state

and a strong presence of Egyptian and Syrian MB members who had fled their countries to avoid repression, was involved in cultural and charity activities, nurturing in the 1980s a populist pan-Islamist movement, for rank-and-file support to suffering Muslims all around the world.

Politicization followed, however, especially on the Palestinian cause, as “apolitical issues gave way to politically grounded suffering such as war, oppression and discrimination” (ibid.: 19). Security issues became central. In the 1980s, with the American blessing, state support for pan-Islamism (particularly in Afghanistan) multiplied, while the oil crisis hit Saudi Arabia, jeopardizing the King’s promises to grant employment to the growing student population. Internal opposition increased nevertheless, especially on the side of the moderate Islamist movement, when King Fahd allowed US intervention in the “holy land” after Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait. As in Afghanistan, the conflict in Bosnia, where Islamists were no longer welcome, further contributed to radicalize the internal opposition, affecting especially the Saudis who went to fight those distant wars, but also many of those who remained.

The radical global Jihad developed in this climate, fuelled by governmental repression of the moderate Islamist opposition and returning Saudi fighters in the mid-1990s. As Hegghammer recalls, “While it never turned violent, the Sahwa articulates a more explicit and biting critique of the Saudi system than the regime was willing to tolerate” (ibid.: 70). The repression that followed contributed to convince the activists of the need for violence as well as pushing remaining opponents into clandestinity. Not by chance, a first terrorist attack in 1994 targeted a police interrogator and alleged torturer. The perpetrator, a former Afghan fighter, was criticized by other violent groups, but his death in prison produced a wave of outrage in the Islamist community and was avenged, in 1995, by a car bomb in Riyadh killing seven people (among them five Americans) and a year later by a bombing at a US Air Force barracks (19 people died,

about 400 wounded) (ibid.: 72). Different groups were responsible for the two attacks. Arrests (about 2,000) and torture followed between 1996 and 1998, with a further radicalization.

After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, the al-Qaeda branch in Saudi Arabia could grow on the revived pan-Islamism that followed the US-led wars on Afghanistan, in the same year, and on Iraq later on, as well as what was perceived as Muslim suffering in the Guantanamo prison, or in the Jenin's massacre in Palestine. Mass demonstrations testified of these sentiments.

Linked to these waves of protest in Arabic nations, the evolution of al-Qaeda was also torn by internal conflicts. At its foundation, al-Qaeda was ideologically divided, with the Egyptians proposing a social-revolutionary discourse and others pursuing a classical Jihad strategy against the infidel invaders. As we will see in Chapter 4, al-Qaeda developed in fact from the Service Offices (Maktab al-Khidamat) that organized the fundraising, recruitment, and training of Arab support to the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation. Toward the end of the occupation, division emerged within the Maktab on the future activities of the Islamist volunteer network as, closed to the Jordan MBs, "Azzam wanted the network activists – Mujahedeen – to operate as an Islamic 'rapid reaction force,' available to intervene wherever Muslims were perceived to be threatened," while for bin Laden, influenced by the Egyptian Islamic Jihad, the al-Qaeda activists should "dispatch to their home countries to try to topple secular, pro-Western Arab leaders, such as President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and Saudi Arabia's royal family" (Katzman 2005: 2). The internal struggle led to the exclusion of Azzam from al-Qaeda in 1988 and, later on, to his assassination in November 1989 (Alimi 2011: 104). While Azzam was focused on constructing an Islamist state in Afghanistan and keeping AQ as an organized force for quick intervention, bin Laden aimed at the creation of centralized and secret organizations for the global Jihad. Even though AQ's declaration of war on the far enemy

temporarily placated the internal conflicts, the tensions between those who wanted to target the “far enemy” through the global Jihad and those who, instead, targeted especially the “near enemy” with local aims, remained a central topic for tension.

Within the broader Salafi community, which advocated return to the purity of original religious practices, al-Qaeda had to fight with those who opposed waging war against Muslim rulers and attacking Muslim people. Quintan Wiktorowicz (2004) has described the intra-movement framing struggle between AQ over the permissibility of certain forms of violence. While there was little criticism about the need to support Muslims who suffered in Afghanistan, Bosnia, or Palestine,

This consensus, however, began to erode as “Arab Afghans” returned from the front and organized violence in their home states. Salafi Jihadis continued to support the use of violence while “reformists” emphasized the necessity of individual spiritual transformation, propagation, and advice to the rulers and umma (Muslim community). During the 1980s and 1990s as al-Qaeda developed, the initial debate between violent and non-violent salafis was over *takfir* – declaring a Muslim an apostate (ibid.: 160).

While the non-violent groups stated that it was not possible to declare a ruler apostata without knowing his beliefs, AQ preachers stated one could declare a ruler an apostate based on his actions. Later, a discursive struggle developed on the means to use in the global jihad, with some Salafis supporting a violent solution, others focusing instead on reform. In fact, in order to persuade the Muslim population, AQ invested resources and energies in framing its message, vilifying the popular intellectuals, especially religious scholars, that supported the moderate

position: they challenged their credibility, accusing them of being emotional, ill-informed, but also of being “the scholars of power,” “palace lackeys,” and “corrupt *ulamas*” (ibid.: 171).

6. Competitive escalation: some conclusions

Explanations of political violence have often looked at structural causes, considering the economic, social, political, and cultural conditions that are more conducive to radicalization and addressing both deeply rooted causes and more contingent precipitating events. Attempts to formulate a general explanation for political violence have been frustrated, however, due to the challenges created by the differences among phenomena considered as forms of political violence – and, therefore, conceptual stretching. At the same time, evidence of multiple paths of causation, with clandestine political violence developing under very different social and political conditions, pushes towards more attention to processes rather than (only) causes, and agency rather than (just) structures.

I have considered the embedding of political violence within broader social and political conflicts as a most important contribution from social movement studies to the understanding of the causes of violence. In particular, I have referred to the concept of protest cycle as a main analytical contribution for the understanding of political violence. I have suggested that political violence has to be understood as one of the outcomes of intense interactions developing during moments of heightened conflict. The concept of cycle of protest also allows us to see the multiplicity of actors and forms of action at work in these moments.

In Tarrow’s theorization, which built upon the analysis of the Italian case, different forms of violence were linked to different stages in the cycle. Further research in part confirmed the general value of those observations, but also pointed at cases in which cycles of protest had not

produced violence. While more systematic research is necessary in order to identify under which conditions protest cycles end in radicalization and in which cases they do not, my aim in this chapter has been to contribute to answering the question from the point of view of the operation of a specific mechanism or radicalization: competitive escalation. Even though I do not mean to suggest that competitive escalation operated as the unique trigger of clandestine political violence, I would nevertheless stress that, in all four, most different cases, competition between and within social movement families contributed to escalation of the repertoires of contention.

In the Italian case, competition between social movement families had mainly involved right-wing countermovements, which revived long-lasting hostilities and built upon a tradition of harsh conflicts. Within both social movement families, on the Left as well as on the Right, radical movements grew in competition with the existing Old Left and neo-Fascist traditions. Multiple conflicts – and readings thereof – were present in the Basque countries as well. Here, nationalist and class narratives grew in reciprocal tensions, with cooperation but also competition. The brutal repression of Franco's dictatorship and the slow and uncertain pace of the democratization process also contributed to debates and divisions over the best action strategies. Cleavages existed, within both the left-libertarian and nationalist social movement families. In the Middle East, nationalist, class- and religious-oriented movements competed within a broader opposition, with some general trends and events favoring the religious groups. The religious awakening, together with some moment of regime liberalization contributed to the strengthening of the traditional MBs, but also to more radical groups, which often emerged from criticism of the MB's moderation. In Egypt and Saudi Arabia, authoritarian regimes contributed to the escalation, as it did in Palestine the Israel occupation.

While the protest cycles intensified the production of social movement organizations, the

radicalization of repertoires of action was, in some moments, a competitive asset in this inter-movement relation. Even within the same social movement family, however, different organizations competed for followers, adopting different frames and repertoires of action. In organizationally dense environments, different groups specialized in different tactics, but they also influenced each other, with processes of imitation and “outbidding.”

During protest cycles, as moments of intense relations, practices of violence develop, and activists are socialized to them. Proletarian expropriation, armed marches, burning cars, and break-ins belonged to the experiences of many social movement activists even before they entered clandestine organizations. In fact, in emergent processes, violence emerges from violence, in periods of “thickened history” (Beissinger 2002).

Especially when repression hit hard, and the community solidarized, the most radical tactics spread from one organization to the next. Escalation is helped, as Tarrow (1989) has observed, by the contemporary institutionalization of large part of the movements that gave momentum to the ascending phase of the cycle. Disillusioned by insufficient results, or co-opted in institutional politics, many activists leave the protest scene, where the radical fringes acquire in fact more and more visibility and prominence.