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Italian Political Violence 1969–1988

The Making and Unmaking of Meanings

David Moss

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Preface

In liberal democratic societies, political violence - that is to say, violence which is organised clandestinely and intended to have political consequences - cannot accomplish its ends simply through utilising force to cause physical harm to opposing groups. To be effective, those who engage in political violence must also give broadly intelligible meaning to their actions, so that episodes of violence communicate a relatively coherent message within the society at large.

For this reason, our understanding of the dynamics of political violence can be greatly enhanced by focusing on the struggle waged between supporters and opponents of clandestine movements (as well as among groups within clandestine organisations) to control the interpretation of violence. This is the approach taken by David Moss in the following paper, as he provides a highly original and provocative explanation of the emergence, evolution and decline of political violence in Italy between 1969 and 1988.

The political identity of extremist groups within postwar Italian society was first established with relative ease, as an extension of the struggle between Fascist and Resistance forces during the Second World War. A boundary of hatred between clearly distinguishable camps provided the necessary definition of friends and enemies, as well as a plausible justification for violence as a tool of politics during the early period of political and economic reconstruction in Italy.

Over the years, however, the development of liberal democratic institutions, facilitating collaboration between parties of the left and right, posed a fundamental challenge to this early legitimation of political violence. It became increasingly difficult to justify violence as a means of action and to present a sufficiently convincing definition of what distinguished the goals of extralegal groups from others now drawn into the normal political process.

Moss stresses the extreme complexity of Italian political violence under these circumstances, and the need to move away from common misconceptions which bestow too great a degree of organizational strength and ideological coherence on groups engaged in terrorist activity in Italy. Through careful analysis of material culled from judicial and police proceedings, as well as other sources, he reconstructs a picture of disparate sets of actors, often sustained by conflicting interpretations of their roles and justification for their activities. The public discourse of violence, created by an intellectual elite, was only partially assimilated by the limited number of people who actually carried out terrorist attacks. And the latter, in turn, were sustained by wider networks of friends, neighbours and family members who acted primarily out of personal solidarity. For many of them, violence was only a peripheral feature of a broader political process.

Although the magnitude and frequency of terrorist activities increased during the latter 1970s, in a concerted attempt to retain a voice and a constituency for extremism, the groundwork of political violence in fact continued to weaken. By the mid-1980s, it had virtually collapsed. In Moss's opinion, the response of the Italian government to political violence reinforced the internal structural difficulties of extremist factions by systematically refusing to accord the latter any recognized status as interlocutor and by treating each terrorist incident as an isolated act -- thus denying any claim to broad national standing. The fragmented and localised nature of Italian politics further hindered efforts to associate violence with a clear political message.

The reader will find much in this paper to stimulate debate, both on the concrete characteristics of the Italian experience with political violence, and on the analytical insights to be gained from interpreting that experience in terms of the creation and destruction of "discourse communities". The study has been prepared within the framework of the UNRISD research programme on Political Violence and Social Movements, directed by David Apter.

Dharam Ghai, Director
February 1993

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My understanding of political violence has been very greatly deepened by the discussions at the UNRISD Workshops on Political Violence and Social Movements in November 1990 and May 1992 and by the extremely stimulating papers and comments of the participants: David Apter, Paul Arthur, Malcolm Deas, Carlos Iván Degregori, André du Toit, Bruce Kapferer, Elizabeth Picard, Jagath Senaratne and Michel Wieviorka. It is a great pleasure to acknowledge how much I owe to fellow-members of the Workshops, in particular the Convener, David Apter, and to express my gratitude to Dharam Ghai and UNRISD staff for the very efficient and hospitable organization of our meetings. The range and excitement of our discussions at the Workshops have provided me with a strikingly memorable example of intellectual collaboration and exploration.

Introduction: Failed Reconciliation

In August 1991 Italy's President Cossiga announced his intention to grant a Presidential pardon to Renato Curcio, one of the founders of the Red Brigades, who had served sixteen years of a cumulative forty-year sentence. Cossiga made explicit the practical and symbolic consequences that his initiative was designed to achieve. Pragmatically, he proposed to redress a perceived injustice whereby, thanks to the combined results of the introduction of harsh penalties for political violence and the so-called 'repentance' legislation of 1980, 1982 and 1987, several multiple killers from the former organizations of armed struggle were free citizens while Curcio and some other early participants, who had not themselves committed any woundings or murders but who had refused explicitly to abjure their past support for violence, remained in prison. Curcio's release would not only remedy the inequitable consequences of the so-called 'emergency legislation' - for which Cossiga himself, as Minister of the Interior (1976-1978) and Prime Minister (1979-1981) in the worst years of violence bore a major responsibility - but also prompt Parliament to repeal the measures which had increased the penalties for politically-motivated crimes. Symbolically, the pardoning of Curcio was designed as a public act of closure of the *anni di piombo*. Since the early 1980s, only a small number of tragic but isolated and politically wholly inconsequential murders (the last in 1988) had punctuated the return to peaceful politics in Italy; and the Presidential pardon was to be the formal sign of reconciliation and completed expiation. The darkest period of the Republic's history would be ceremonially brought to a close with a magnanimous concession by the representative of the victorious Italian state to the leading member of its best-known, unsuccessful, left-wing assailants.

Cossiga's initiative, however, aroused a storm of dissent and had quickly to be abandoned - temporarily, the President indicated. Some difficulties were technical: no pardon could be granted to anyone still awaiting a definitive judicial verdict, as was Curcio over his responsibilities for two Red Brigades murders in 1974. Constitutional problems were also raised by Cossiga's intention to give an explicitly political motivation to a Presidential pardon - traditionally an act of individual clemency for which the government takes no political responsibility, even though the Minister of Justice is required to countersign the Presidential act. A public dispute immediately broke out between President, (Christian Democrat) Prime Minister and (Socialist) Minister of Justice over the proper institutional paternity for any pardon, aggravated by different interpretations of the rules for its concession introduced by the new code of penal procedure in 1989. The difficulties raised by constitutional experts and politicians were accompanied by hostile declarations from the direct and indirect victims of violence. In protests issued individually and through the National Association for the Victims of Terrorism, they strongly condemned any further concessions to their aggressors, particularly to a leader who had given no public sign of contrition for either the political or personal damage he had helped to cause.

Some of the most passionate objections were, however, directed less to the content of Cossiga's proposal than to the accompanying reinterpretation of political violence by which he justified his initiative. In a publicly circulated letter to the Minister of Justice to argue the case for a pardon, Cossiga offered his own contribution to 'a more correct historical, political, ideological and social reading of this tragic phase of our national life' (**La Repubblica**, 17 August 1991). He made three major points. First, 'subversion' was a more appropriate term than 'terrorism' for the phenomenon, at least in its left-wing variant. Second, the origins of violence lay at least in part in the failure of the political parties and state institutions to ensure that the post-1968 social conflicts were articulated and addressed on the terrain of ordinary politics and political representation. Third, the principal responsibilities for violence must be at least equally attributed to the doctrinaire

ideologues (*cattivi maestri*) whose teachings had persuaded idealistic youths that violence was one of the appropriate methods for attaining political objectives.

All three points were forcefully contested. First, Cossiga's redefinition of 'terrorism' as 'subversion' reopened the long-standing disputes over the proper characterization of the phenomenon of political violence. His preference for the term 'subversion' - on the grounds that the terrorist components of the years of violence were less a consistently exclusive strategy than a tactical means of detonating a general insurrection - was resisted because, ironically, it selected the very description that many of those same culpable ideologues of violence had used to defend their activities morally, politically and judicially. Equally controversial was Cossiga's suggestion that, since similar socio-political factors underlay the emergence of the apparently contrasting phenomena of left-wing and right-wing violence, both kinds might be better analysed in symmetrical rather than separate terms. By exempting from his analysis the responsibilities for the bomb massacres (*stragismo*), which he held to be a 'qualitatively and quantitatively distinct' type of violence, Cossiga offered a further invitation to reopen the simple, and exhaustive, allocation of all violence to the extreme Left and extreme Right. And he provided reason to re-examine the very difficult question of deciding how the classificatory boundaries around and between the actions and agents of political violence should be drawn, as a necessary prelude to their satisfactory explanation.

On the second point, Cossiga's determination to link the origins of political violence closely to the social inequalities and injustices produced by Italy's tumultuous development in the 1960s seemed to credit the Red Brigades and others retrospectively with exactly the status of quasi-representatives of disadvantaged social groups that they had earlier been forcefully denied by all political parties. Indeed, the refusal of the government and the Christian Democrat party to negotiate with the kidnappers of Aldo Moro in 1978 had been explicitly justified by the dangers of conceding the kind of political recognition for the Red Brigades which would be symbolically entailed by any direct negotiations. Cossiga's reading thus rekindled a set of fundamental interpretive controversies. What connections could plausibly be drawn between the socio-political contexts in which political violence appeared and the content and evolution of the violence itself? Was subversion the (distorted) expression of genuine social conflict so that its protagonists could be seen, as Cossiga indicated, as the direct, even if self-appointed, 'representatives' of marginalized social groups which did not receive the attention that they should have received from the political parties? Or were its activists simply a conspiratorial élite, motivated exclusively by the strictly political ambition to damage Italy's two major parties, Christian Democrat and Communist, and perhaps clandestinely supported by other groups, national or international, with an interest in maintaining or altering the balance of Italian politics? Finally, was armed struggle most accurately characterized as the unintended product of Italy's cultural revolution of 1968-1969, or, in longer-term perspective, as the tragically anachronistic final attempt to take the possibility of Western communism seriously?

On the third point, Cossiga's attribution of direct responsibility to politically-fantasizing intellectuals, many of whom - so he alleged - had never been brought to book for their malign influence, seemed to reduce very considerably the responsibilities of the active militants who devised and carried out the actual numerous attacks on people and property. What, therefore, was the real nature of relations and responsibilities within the world of left-wing armed struggle? How were the organizations of political violence stratified in terms of activity and belief? And, what responsibilities - penal, political or moral - could indeed be attributed to the sections of Italy's intelligentsia contiguous to that world?

The responses to Cossiga's revisionist readings not only illustrate how the general interpretations of Italian political violence remain extraordinarily controversial, despite the ending of violence, the vastly increased knowledge of its details, and the freedom from the tyranny of considering the immediate political and judicial implications of any and every statement about the nature of violence. Notwithstanding the extraordinary accumulation of evidence bearing on all of the above issues, gathered over the past decade in judicial investigations, Parliamentary Commissions of Enquiry and academic analyses, little public agreement on what the substantive answers actually were had been achieved. The conflicts unleashed by the proposal to pardon Curcio illustrate some of the aspects of Italy's own recent past that remain unmasterable. Cossiga's procedure for national reconciliation failed as completely to relieve the tyranny of the past as other, incomparably more significant, rituals of reconciliation (Maier, 1988).

Mastering the Understanding of Violence

Issues of evidence

At first sight the feature which distinguishes recent Italian violence from many other cases of political insurgency makes it puzzling why the Italian case should continue to arouse so much interpretive controversy. For the very proposal to pardon Curcio is a reminder that we are dealing with a case of violent subversion that has been concluded, and concluded as a failure. Its characteristics and consequences are largely known: they are neither still obscure nor already buried beneath the mythmaking which political success would have ensured. With the serious exceptions of the five neo-Fascist bomb massacres between 1969 and 1984, and despite the persistent but ever less plausible insistence that the full range of responsibilities for the Moro kidnapping has still not been uncovered, the judicial and Parliamentary investigations into all episodes of political violence since 1969 are now all but complete, ensuring that what can be known on the details of events and the social attributes of the men and women responsible for them is now known.[1] Indeed, the factual basis for an understanding of Italian political violence consists of a probably historically unique mass of insider accounts, provided by former 'repentant' participants in armed struggle, whose reduced prison sentences were secured by full confessions of past involvements. Since the benefits from turning state's evidence were rescinded in the event of false or incomplete confessions, the analyst of Italian political violence is presented with a vast number of truthful insider accounts of the details of even the least significant brute acts of violence, embedded in the self-interpretations and (retrospectively recounted) perceptions and motivations of participants. Yet the large number of accounts nevertheless generates as many substantive and methodological problems as it might initially appear to resolve.

Substantively, the very volume and range of variation of accounts raise important questions of their own: why defections on such a large and rapid scale should have taken place at all; how far the rush to abandon armed struggle can be explained simply as a rational response to the incentives offered by the state; and what the process of exit can tell us retrospectively about the nature of individual affiliation, the social bonds between affiliates, and the ways in which they were sustained or undermined by the organizational dimensions of armed struggle. In those respects, the accumulation of defectors' versions

[1] The joint Parliamentary Commission into the most significant massacres of the period since 1969, set up in 1984 to examine some forty cases attributed to the extreme Right with suspected police, military or secret service involvement, has yet to deliver its findings: scheduled to complete its report by October 1992, the Commission has recently been granted a three-year extension to its work. As far as left-wing violence is concerned, the Moro kidnapping continues to generate confident affirmations that the key features of the event remain to be unearthed (see, most recently, Galli, 1991). For a recent controversial identification of responsibilities, see note 19.

forces analysts at least to reassess the received wisdom on the organizational and motivational nature of armed struggle. The relevant implications of the major types of account will be examined below.

Methodologically, however, the wealth of first-person materials is something of an embarrassment of riches. As their authors have successively reviewed their individual and collective pasts in front of different audiences (politicians, magistrates, academics, journalists, victims, former comrades) with various interests in soliciting the accounts, they have also shifted their explanatory emphases and revised their conceptions of what they did and why they did it. The vocabularies - political, judicial, personal - in which those accounts are formulated also change in response to the professional or private terminologies appropriate to the particular interpretive community whose members are soliciting the account and establishing the terms of relevance and plausibility for the replies to their questions. Likewise, the self-understandings of the actors themselves alter as a consequence of being prompted to elaborate successive accounts of their involvement in armed struggle by questioners with interests in different aspects of the past. Under those pressures, aggravating the effects of the lapse of time between acts and their recall, any particular pattern of remembered motivations, emotions and relationships threatens continually to dissolve and recombine in newly authoritative versions. When these retrospective, institutionally-elicited accounts are added to the huge volume of documents produced by participants during the period of violence itself, it is clear that some textual support is available somewhere in that vast corpus for utterly incompatible interpretations. Few hypotheses are likely to be ruled out for lack of any evidence at all - which ensures that few controversies can be definitively resolved. The search for a single consistent depiction of the nature and objectives of 'armed struggle', even limiting our sample to the productions of one reasonably articulate activist, is therefore a forlorn task: deciding which account of motivations or determining influence is 'really true' seems hopelessly arbitrary.

The substantive details of the conflicts which undermined Cossiga's attempt to establish a consensual reading of *gli anni di piombo* remain, of course, specifically Italian. They are also the problems of external interpreters confronted by the kinds of evidence which have become available. But the conflicts among the opponents of violence are matched, and aggravated, by the difficulties confronting the producers of clandestine violence in liberal-democratic societies. Problems arise in the management of three sets of relations in particular: the discursive and institutional relations between 'politics' and 'violence'; the relations between the groups or individuals who control the material, symbolic and logistic elements which have to be combined to make violence a recognized language of political communication and the basis of a livable political identity; and the developing pattern of relations between the producers of violence and external interpretive communities.

'Politics' and 'violence': Inversionary elements

The attempt to eliminate or entrench the distinction between 'politics' and 'violence' is a central aspect of interpretive conflict since, in the kind of liberal democratic societies that political violence is intended to transform, the two terms indicate sharp discursive and practical contrasts. 'Politics' marks the realm of rational persuasion through speech, representation by publicly visible and accountable figures, legitimate institutions organized according to written and public rules, and decisions - subject to bargaining and compromise - which can always be revised or reversed. 'Violence' is coercive, terminates the exchange of words, gains its effects through emotion, represents a zero-sum conflict between aggressors and victims, and has an irreversible outcome. Moreover, the kind of clandestine violence called 'terrorism' marks the furthest reach of the contrast. Where 'politics' is characterized by *presence*, symbolized by known representatives speaking directly to constituents at the hustings, to colleagues in Parliament or to the nation on

television, 'terrorism' is characterized by *absence*, the anonymity or pseudonymity of its authors, hidden behind stocking masks, bearing symbolic 'battle names' and protected by a clandestine existence.

Moreover, while politics gains its attraction through an ideal *speech* situation, clandestine violence provides meaning for its acts through *writing* - the range of texts which offer reasons for every level of action: the choice of a particular target, the kind of violence used, the overall meaning of violence as a political technique. In politics the significance of acts is directly communicated (as when the casting of a vote in Parliament is publicly motivated by declaration of reasons). By contrast, most (but not all) acts of clandestinely-authored violence depend for their meaning on written communications which necessarily *follow*, rather than *precede* the action. In a limiting case, the authors can proclaim the intended meaning for an action after the responses to the act itself have appeared. The consequent *deferral* of meaning, therefore, allows for all the ambiguity of the act to be appreciated and exploited. Indeed, left-wing groups in Italy explicitly rejected the use of types of violence with minimal deferral of meaning, whether bomb massacres (whose meaning is displayed in their taking place at all and thus providing a self-exemplifying instance of the need for strong government to eliminate social insecurity) or *violenza giustizialista* (which assumes that the reasons for punishing the victim are notorious and require no elaborate textual explanation). Reliance on deferred meaning opens up the possibility that false claims of responsibility will appear and contrasting versions of the meaning of a violent act will circulate. It also ensures that the relation between acts and intentions becomes more complicated for the users of violence, since each intention is retrospectively established and permanently subject to later modification. Interpretive conflicts necessarily ensue, exacerbating the hermeneutic controversies to which all written texts are liable and requiring continuing attention to the management of meaning.

Those who intend their violence to have political outcomes therefore have to bind together the two deeply incompatible types of communication through 'politics' and 'violence' to produce comprehensible meanings for their actions. In particular they have to deal with the practical and discursive issues raised by what Derrida (1976) has called the logic of supplementarity. To what extent is violence to be seen as a *supplement* of ordinary political activity and to what extent a *surrogate* for it? Is violence to be seen simply as the necessary concluding, or perhaps just history-accelerating, step in a process which is essentially political - just one component of a class struggle routinely waged pacifically? Or is it the step that has to be taken when the ordinary methods of political conflict are no longer possible - the detonator required to awake activism and ideas which are merely potential and which could not have been elicited without recourse to violence? Substantial disagreements are likely to emerge here even among those who share the general conviction that violence is a necessary element in social transformation. The ways in which the issues are resolved have substantial consequences not only for the organization of violence but also for the identities that its activists try to construct.

The management of such issues has to take account of their historical and substantive context. Societies vary in the availability of persisting historical memories, and still powerful myths, of ways in which 'politics' and 'violence' have been or might be bound together. That symbolic capital, which can of course be exploited by both supporters and opponents of violence, is likely to provide the elements for making any new sequences of violence initially intelligible. In post-war Italy, for example, violence has never been very clearly demarcated from politics. The 1948 Constitution was linked directly to the violence of the Resistance; the Italian Communist party (PCI) and neo-Fascist Italian Social Movement (MSI), accused openly by their opponents of support for violence, could boast substantial membership in Parliament; separatist violence in the South Tirol had given Italy some of the highest levels of terrorist violence in Europe in the 1960s; and social protests had often been met by violent repression, provoking 243 victims from

clashes between demonstrators and police between 1946 and 1977 (Viola, 1977). The boundaries between 'politics' and 'violence' can hardly be described as very firm even if they are somewhat stronger than in the preceding period of Italy's existence (Davis, 1988). Both the supporters and opponents of violence were therefore seeking to establish the possibility or impossibility of exchanges between the two poorly-distinguished realms; at the same time, they were aware that the meanings generated by the outcomes of the attempted exchanges would also determine the fate of the framework within which the exchanges took place. The emergence of political violence in the 1970s thus added a further level of interaction to Italy's 'bargained democracy' (Rusconi and Scamuzzi, 1981).

Identities and difference

Attempts to promote clandestine social-revolutionary violence in advanced industrial societies have to contend with a difficulty not encountered in cases of ethnic-nationalist violence. The activists of ethno-nationalist violence at least share a clear set of religious or ethnic characteristics with the populations on whose behalf they are fighting, as well as some straightforward political goals, even if the identification of exactly which hostile group stands between the population and its goals may be a matter of controversy. But the social-revolutionary use of violence in liberal-democratic societies such as Italy has to confront the much more demanding task of attempting to use violence not only as an instrumental technique to damage opponents but also as the symbolic basis of the community of activists. Solidaristic relations have to be built around availability for violence alone rather than around enduring social and territorial cleavages (most commonly grounded in ethnicity or religion) in order to attract sympathizers, encourage affiliates and identify enemies. Whatever support for social-revolutionary violence may be claimed from class identification, the dispersed social classes of present-day capitalist societies can only on very rare occasions provide the kind of direct explicit solidarity that ethnicity or religion confers.

Users of violence must therefore base their claims to a political identity on difference: their distinction from the world of ordinary non-violent politics. In establishing that difference, they must be sensitive to the tensions provoked by the double necessity to address internal and external audiences in each single action and to transmit messages which simultaneously affirm a symbolic identity and show that violence is an effective - the only effective - method for reaching shared political goals. But the dynamics of difference are also likely to be at work in the world of the politically violent themselves: to distinguish group from group, to distinguish different elements within single groups, and to distinguish the user of violence from his former non-violent self. In the case of group distinction, where strategic or tactical disagreements arise among those who share the conviction that violence is acceptable, violence itself can be used as the medium in which specific identities are displayed. Difference may be manufactured out of the choice of targets for violence (individuals or institutions; industrial, commercial or political sectors) and the levels of violence used against those targets (destruction of property, 'kneecapping' or murder of individuals).

Within any armed group the unequal distribution of attention given to the syntax and semantics of violence can easily solidify into an organizational division of labour, separating the producers of violence from the producers of meanings and thus reproducing in the world of armed struggle itself the cleavage between armed struggle and its opponents. The clear distinction between 'military' and 'political' wings of any armed organization is merely the extreme resolution of a general problem: how the powers to establish the identity of groups, by violence or by texts, are actually distributed in any group claiming distinctiveness. Patterns of control over the material resources required to sustain a campaign of semi-clandestine political violence have rarely been examined in any detail, perhaps on the erroneous assumption that the manufacturers of

public meaning for violence are necessarily the practitioners of the violence itself. But a moment's reflection will suggest the need to examine the (changing) distribution of command, first, over the intellectual resources necessary to give an act of violence a clear, and at least potentially plausible, public meaning; second, over the weaponry necessary to carry out a publicly visible and significant range of violent actions; and, third, over access to lodgings and contacts to allow activists of violence to survive the inevitable police attention, live in the interstices of ordinary society and recruit new affiliates. In cases of ethnic-nationalist violence each participant may command a share of all three sets of resources and the resulting organization of armed struggle may be built around a stable pattern of widely-shared interests, particularly in long-enduring cases. But in the Italian case, control over the distinctive but equally essential resources may well be vested in different groups, opening up the possibility that one of the central dynamics of violence may be a developing discontinuity between those who control the delivery of violence and those who provide the public meanings for it.

A further arena where the logic of difference is at work is within the self which every participant in political violence must manufacture to justify and sustain the delivery of damage to other people. One dimension concerns the continuity of the self. Often a stereotypical pattern of complete rupture with a former non-violent self is credited to the violent, but the radical self-differentiation implied by such conversion is likely to be only one, probably rare, route into the use of violence. Indeed, different organizations of violence may promote contrasting images of the extent of rupture with their pasts which may be required of members. A second dimension concerns the self-estrangement which many participants have claimed to be essential to any continuing direct involvement in wounding or murder. The creation of any kind of stable self from the tension between altruistic political motivations and readiness to inflict deliberate damage on individuals is always likely to be problematic. So identifying the stratification of armed struggle by organization and by control over resources must be a necessary accompaniment to a more realistic appreciation of how the different types of involvement in violence may be connected not only to different ambitions for a self which incorporates the acceptance of violence but also to the kind of self that is actually achieved.

Problems of response

Adherents of violence as a political technique need to show that violent acts can have political consequences. They must demonstrate that some kind of exchange relation holds - or can be created - between the worlds of violence and politics. The aim of the opponents of violence is exactly the reverse: to prevent any suggestion that a single political market exists in which some kind of calculable equivalence can be reached between violent and non-violent actions. In maintaining the boundary between the two domains, governments need to tread a delicate line between showing that violence is powerless to acquire any kind of political exchange value and enacting the necessarily political responses which demonstrate their commitment to its repression. Those responses have to be given publicly and simultaneously to a wide range of audiences. The public needs to be reassured that the government is treating the threat to public order sufficiently seriously, yet preserving basic democratic rights; the police and judiciary are likely to insist on extra powers to ensure more successful repression; particular categories of target will want to see their own protection given a high priority; and the protagonists of violence have to be convinced that their actions are indeed powerless to influence the frameworks and content of ordinary political relations and can earn them no place or influence, open or surreptitious, in the democratic political community.

Co-ordinating political parties and public authorities to disseminate a consistent set of messages on violence is unlikely ever to be easy; and in the kind of fragmented political system that characterizes Italy it is extremely difficult. Regular changes of government, switching between smaller and larger combinations of more or less distant parties, work

against policy consistency: Italy saw 19 governments, made up of nine different kinds of coalitions, between 1970 and 1984. Because the component parties are ideologically distinct, they are also likely to have different interpretations of the origins of violence and thus different recipes for its elimination. The impression of divisions in the resistance to violence is further accentuated when violence is directed against non-political targets (industrial managers, judges, police) whose representatives are forced to make particularistic responses and to demand specific kinds of protection from government. Conflicts among those demands are hard to avoid, so that governments have the further task of preventing damaging internal wrangles that convey at least the negative power of violence to divide and weaken its opponents.

The difficulties of establishing long-term co-ordinated responses ensure, first, that the dissemination of clear and consistent messages about violence is frustrated and, secondly, that governments are permanently open to the accusation of failing to be sufficiently active. The visible gap between ambitious plans for response and their incomplete realization inevitably contributes to a persistent impression of uncertainty about the actual power of violence. Failure to stabilize the limits of meaning for violence broadcasts the message that its actual political potential has not yet been fully explored and that the claims made by its supporters might indeed turn out not to be simple fantasies after all. But, contrarily, the fragmentation of reactions also demonstrably undermines any claim that the targets of violence are merely components of a simple monolith whose power might be destroyed by a 'Winter Palace' attack on an arbitrarily selected key institution or individual. In liberal democracies where debates over how to react to violence enter the rhetoric of wider party competition, therefore, the responses themselves contribute to the formation and plausibility of the meanings promoted by the users of violence.

Discourse communities and the politics of interpretation

One way of grasping the extreme complexity of the interactions among users of violence and their opponents is to see how efforts to give political significance to clandestine violence are trapped inside the play of *différance*, Derrida's term to convey the processes of differentiation and deferral (Derrida, 1972). The attempt to give violence a political meaning leads its users into manufacturing identities based on differentiating themselves from those favouring non-violence and from other groups favouring violence, as well as on accentuating the difference between the violent and non-violent dimensions of their own 'selves'. In doing so, they have to make use of communicative systems - writing and violence - which are themselves irreconcilably divided: writing presupposes the practicability of rational persuasion; violence, its impossibility. Furthermore, dependence on the responses provoked by violence as a means of determining its meaning entrenches the logic of deferral; but since the fragmentation of responses prevents any clear meanings being plausibly established, deferral is effectively endless. Derrida's terminology of 'dissemination' to characterize the entire process, and his preference for describing the techniques of meaning-making as 'grafts' and 'splices', seems especially appropriate for the kinds of exercise to which the users of violence are necessarily committed (Derrida, 1981). 'Dissemination' indicates a perpetual but unsuccessful attempt to stabilize the meanings of violence by establishing clear, consensual criteria to generate a fixed order of representation and resemblance linking features of Italian society, acts of violence, and textual accounts of them.

The processes of differentiation and deferral suggest how difficult it is, *both for the users and the opponents of violence*, to construct a stable discourse community, united around agreement on key meanings, maintained by an authoritative centre. Appreciation of the difficulty is an invitation to caution in making too literal use of Bourdieu's terminology of 'markets' and 'capital' to describe the structure of exchanges involving violence, since the economic metaphor implies the prior establishment of a framework of conventions and rules within which exchanges gain value (Bourdieu, 1977). Indeed, Bourdieu's

analysis of violence rests largely on ethnographic materials from societies which display highly detailed and fully acknowledged conventions on its place in social interaction. But, in the Italian case, the existence of any such conventions cannot be taken for granted. To the contrary, it was precisely the task of the users of violence to try to establish them, exploiting or steering their way around the existing understandings of the relations between politics and violence in the attempt to turn individuals and events into vehicles of explicit and shared meaning and to divest existing symbols of their current meanings.

In this perspective, the analysis of political violence is necessarily dominated by the politics of interpretation. Since acts of violence, intended politically and carried out clandestinely, rarely carry intrinsic meanings or establish clear identities for their authors, engaging in the politics of public interpretation is unavoidable for affiliates of armed struggle. It is equally ineluctable for their opponents, for whom resisting the interpretations of violence by its supporters is as vital a task as preventing the acts of violence themselves. Tracing the complicated skein of exchanges within the armed community, and between its several components and the equally differentiated array of opponents of violence directs analytical attention, therefore, to the key issues of production, reception and destruction of the meanings of violence. First, what symbolic resources did the users of violence draw on to make their actions as widely intelligible as possible? What conventional delineations of friends and enemies were they able to exploit to legitimate the use of violence? Secondly, what constraints determined the appearance and circulation of their versions of violence in the public domain? Several practical, and usually controversial, issues are immediately raised over the extent of contact that can be tolerated between acknowledged users of violence and their opponents: the acceptability of journalists interviewing terrorists and printing the transcripts; the publication of communiqués by the authors of violence; and direct negotiations over, say, the fate of kidnap victims. Third, how are the limits of interpretive communities set and shifted? Such boundaries, which determine the extent of recognition granted to speakers, can be regarded as fixed interactionally by the willingness or refusal of potential audiences to acknowledge and respond to the communications which justify violence. Fourth, what factors influence the interpretations of violence produced by its opponents? That question entails consideration both of the kind of evidence that is treated as reliable and the particular vocabulary in which interpretations are framed. Fifth, what specific groups, among the communities of supporters and opponents of violence, dominate the production of versions at any one time? How far, that is, do the opposed interpretive communities develop centres with the power to determine the range of meanings associated with violence? And, finally, what consequences in either interpretive community follow from the dominance of a particular group among its opponents? The separate milieux within the armed community, for example, may be able to sustain exchanges with different external groups and draw distinctive kinds of recognition from them. Answers to such questions reveal the (changing) internal structures and external relations of the interpretive communities through which brute acts of violence are made intelligible and ultimately become available for sociological and cultural analysis.

Before charting some of the interactive patterns of violence, however, I want to summarize current knowledge of the most significant elements of Italian violence, covering the period between 1969 and 1982, and derived from the accumulation of judicial and sociological evidence. At each point I shall also indicate some of the persistent biases and lacunae which reinforce some widely-held misunderstandings and obstruct a grasp of the aspects of violence which most stand in need of explanation.

Italian Political Violence: Characteristics and Some Outstanding Questions

Probably the commonest depiction of Italian political violence after 1969 sees it as a protracted national phenomenon, dominated on the Left by the clandestine militants of the Red Brigades and on the Right by the authors of bomb massacres, and leading to serious restrictions on civil liberties as a consequence of the government's responses. To take a single recent example of this view: Lumley discusses violence only with reference to the Red Brigades and claims that its principal outcome was the 'adoption of draconian legislation and repression' (Lumley, 1990). To a considerable extent, such descriptions are the product of the selectivity of both academic and judicial treatments. Political scientists and sociologists have overwhelmingly concerned themselves with the violence of the Left and, within the Left, of the Red Brigades alone. Similarly, the judiciary has been far more successful in prosecuting left-wing violence: all of the major, and many minor, instances of right-wing violence remain unpunished and the real pattern of responsibilities among the suspects is still obscure. The resulting, deformed, picture of violence contributes to the misrepresentation of the actual distribution of responsibilities for violence, the nature of the activists' participation, the evolution of the principal armed groups, and the complexity of political and judicial responses to violence.

Violence: Right and Left

Not only has the overwhelming volume of analysis of violence concentrated on left-wing violence, but the right-wing contribution to political violence is for the most part seriously under-acknowledged. The distribution of responsibilities, claimed or attributed, for the total of 10,815 attacks on people and property between 1969 and 1980 shows that right-wing violence (55 per cent of attacks) clearly outweighed left-wing violence (45 per cent) overall.[2] Charting the annual incidence of violence reveals a more complex pattern of alternation in the relative significance of left-wing and right-wing violence over the complete period. In the years 1969 to 1974, right-wing violence of all kinds (3375 attacks) was ten times as frequent as left-wing violence (336 attacks). Yet in the second half of the 1970s, the responsibilities were reversed: the extreme Left (4568 attacks) accounted for nearly double the contribution by the extreme Right (2536 attacks), before the rapid decline of all violence after 1980. Notwithstanding the statistical evidence, it would be hard to guess either the overall importance of right-wing violence or its clearly-patterned distribution over time from most accounts of Italian political violence.

Giving proper weight to right-wing violence has certainly been obstructed by the lack of reliable evidence available to magistrates and sociologists. Details of the attributes, beliefs and ambitions of right-wing activists have therefore been far slighter than for their left-wing counterparts; and only recently have sociologists begun to pay attention to those that are available (Weinberg and Eubank, 1988; Ferraresi, 1988). Moreover, the forms of right-wing violence that have attracted most attention - the seven bomb massacres between 1969 and 1984 - have been widely held to have had little to do with any grassroots activity of the extreme Right, so that the activities and organizational relations of the local-level militants of the extreme Right have been virtually ignored. Apart from endorsing a truncated account of violence, the lack of attention given to the extreme Right has had a further especially damaging consequence. No analysis of left-wing violence has been able to make a serious attempt to examine its relation to the violence of the Right, as a route to an improved understanding of its origins or evolution. Yet the rise and decline of considerable reciprocal violence between Left and Right in the early 1970s, coupled

[2] To avoid cluttering the text with repetitive references in support of the following profile of political violence, I shall list here the sources on which I have drawn and which provide many further details of acts and activists: della Porta, 1990; della Porta and Rossi, 1983; Ferraresi, 1988; Galleni, 1981; Moss, 1989; PCI, 1983, Weinberg and Eubank, 1988.

with the evident alternation in their incidence over the decade, raise the question whether in fact the two kinds of violence can indeed be explained separately - and, if they cannot, what kinds of connection might be traced between them. The only suggestion so far made - that the neat alternating importance of two apparently opposed kinds of violence actually conceals the presence of a single directing intelligence - has had considerable popular support, but no serious evidence supports it (Moss, 1989). The question and significance of the relations between left-wing and right-wing violence remain to be resolved.

Left-wing violence: The place of the Red Brigades

A parallel selectivity has often characterized accounts of left-wing violence. The attention of commentators has overwhelmingly been drawn to the Red Brigades because of the group's longevity (the only signature to appear every year between 1970 and 1985), size (attracting more affiliates than other, shorter-lived groups), extension (appearance of the group's signature in most of the cities of Central and North Italy), and levels of violence (responsible for more than half of all left-wing murders (58 per cent) and woundings (51 per cent) and for all political kidnappings). The analytical fascination exerted by the Red Brigades has been reinforced by its responsibility for the single most dramatic terrorist attack - the kidnapping of Aldo Moro in 1978 - and by the authorship by former group affiliates of the only three published autobiographies by former protagonists of violence (Peci, 1983; Fenzi, 1987; Franceschini, 1988).

Notwithstanding the evidently central role taken by the group, however, the overall Red Brigades' contribution to violence amounted to only one-quarter of the actions explicitly claimed by left-wing groups. A total of 526 left-wing signatures, rising very rapidly from a mere 8 in 1975 to 217 in 1979, was recorded over the complete period, involving between 2700 and 3000 participants. The judicially-estimated 426 members of the Red Brigades, therefore, amount to no more than 16 per cent of the participants in clandestinely-organized attacks, and to a much smaller proportion of those involved in all kinds of left-wing attacks. The political ambitions and imaginations of the activists who did not belong to the Red Brigades have been much less fully described; and few attempts to relate their support for violence to their social circumstances, in the ways in which the ideas of Red Brigades' affiliates have sometimes been tied to the alleged nature of the group's clandestine existence, have been made.

Apart from simply ignoring the overwhelming majority of left-wing violence, exclusive attention to the Red Brigades generates several kinds of misunderstanding. First, the largely distinctive emphasis by the Red Brigades on organization encourages a quite inaccurate view of left-wing political violence as the work of rigidly-structured groups with a clear hierarchy of tasks and responsibilities. Such a view is in fact doubly misleading since it is derived less from the organizational reality of the Red Brigades than from the group's documents and declarations - which are more accurately treated as ambitions to be realized rather than as reliable guides to relations among affiliates. Secondly, a quite misplaced, but analytically convenient, homogeneity is credited to group signatures, which are assumed to be self-evident indices of unity among their users. Scepticism here can and ought to be turned back against the Red Brigades themselves by asking what kinds of beliefs, ambitions and involvements were indeed shared by the group's affiliates - questions which rightly imply that the kind of reasoning from the use of a single signature which gives the Red Brigades statistical primacy in the first place may prove incapable of tracking the causes of shifts in the group's ideology and tactics. Third, the failure to deal seriously with other left-wing signatures prevents the identification of the 'market' in left-wing violence and therefore of explaining developments in the use of violence by reference to changes in features of that market.

The evolution of types of violence

Prefaced by a note of caution - that displaying any precise and differentiated evolutionary trends in political violence depends on an inevitably controversial definition of the term and the accurate and consistent categorization of single cases of violence - a broad distinction between three phases of violence, 1969-1974, 1975-1979, and 1980-1984, can be made. This periodization corresponds to shifts in the major responsibilities for, and levels and nature of, violence.

As far as the overall distribution of types of violence is concerned, the repertoire of violent acts in use over the period 1969-1982 was very broad, including attacks on private property and vehicles, industrial and commercial sabotage, wounding, kidnapping and murder. A sense of proportion needs to be established in regard to the relative incidence of the various kinds of acts, in order to avoid the risk of focusing solely on the most dramatic incidents and thus misrepresenting what commitment to violence in fact meant to most activists. Distinguishing between attacks on property and attacks on persons shows that in the overall total of all violence between 1969 and 1982 the attacks on property (12,568) overwhelmingly outnumbered those on persons (609). An identical picture can be found in the total of left-wing violence alone (4855 against 286), and even in the kinds of left-wing violence carried out clandestinely (914 against 277). Since attacks on property consisted mainly of the destruction of private cars and minor damage to offices and buildings, then, roughly 95 per cent of all violent attacks are most accurately described as small-scale instances of vandalism.

Nonetheless, the impression created by emphasizing the very small statistical incidence of the most serious forms of violence needs to be redressed by looking at their concentration in a particular period. Here the years 1975-1979 stand out on three grounds. First, four-fifths of all left-wing violence took place in that phase. Second, the levels of violence sharply increased. The mass illegalities and infrequent, unpremeditated killings of the years 1969-1974 gave way to systematic attacks on individuals and the generalized use of lethal weapons by both Left and Right. In 1979, for example, murders and deliberate woundings accounted for one in seven of all left-wing clandestine attacks; and all of the Right's 37 clandestine attacks on specific individuals took place after 1975. Third, the years after 1975 saw a greatly increased role for signed clandestine actions. Until 1974, clandestine actions accounted for only 10 per cent of all attacks attributed to the Left: between 1975 and 1979 they amounted to 40 per cent. Similarly, two-thirds of all clandestine right-wing attacks took place over the same period.

In late 1979 an almost equally sudden reversal of the upward trend took place, cutting the volume of attacks from 2139 in that year to 174 in 1982. The political impact of the most serious acts was quite dramatically reduced: even the four concurrent kidnappings by the Red Brigades in 1981 were treated as a sign of weakness rather than strength. The subsequent right-wing massacres and left-wing murders, which continued sporadically until 1988, were made to appear all the more tragically futile by the disappearance of any wider context of violence. The strikingly rapid disappearance of a violence which had very recently been producing some seven attacks daily deserves the same analytical attention as its equally abrupt appearance only a few years earlier.

Fully satisfying explanations of the apparently drastic discontinuities between the three phases of violence have not really been provided - partly because the demand to look for explanations at all has been muffled by the characterization of the evolution of violence as a 'trajectory' or 'parabola' (eg, Moss, 1989), thus misleadingly implying that what analysis is dealing with is the motion of a single clearly-defined object. The currently most illuminating approach attributes the emergence and escalation of violence to the impact of organizational competition in the 'market' of political protest at both national (della Porta and Tarrow, 1986; della Porta, 1990; Tarrow, 1990) and single city (Moss,

1989) levels. As the appearance of new groups and signatures made the search for recruits and resources more competitive, so each group sought to identify itself more visibly and distinctively, expanding its repertoire of violence to steadily more extreme levels. The exclusively internal focus of this market-competition approach needs, however, to be supplemented in two ways. First, it requires an account, not only of the rise and decline of mass protest actions between 1968 and 1974, but also of the evolution of the extraparliamentary community of political actors, created in the course of mass protest and supplying the majority of recruits to violence. Second, the dynamics of the relations *within* left-wing groups - and not simply the relations *between* groups - demand explanation, so that the macro-social narrative of competition can be linked more closely to changes in the direct pressures experienced by individuals to live with the use of violence as an expression of political commitment.

Two approaches which tacitly depend on the assumption of some underlying continuities, and which model armed organizations as allegedly typical individuals writ large, can, however, be ruled out. One treats the escalation of violence in terms of a simple frustration-aggression analogue: the failure of 'soft' violence to achieve the desired impact leads inevitably to recourse to increasingly dramatic acts. The second suggests that levels of violence are driven upward by an ineluctable 'logic of clandestinity' - that is, the practice of violence necessarily pushes its users into clandestinity, severing them more completely from contact with civil society, removing their inhibitions against serious violence and encouraging a wholly unrealistic impression of the popular support that serious violence actually received. The principal reasons for rejecting those explanations will become clear once the heterogeneity in social attributes, routes of affiliation, and actual participation of participants in violence over the course of the 1970s are appreciated.

Social attributes: Violence and marginality

Examining the social attributes of participants raises the much-debated question whether the evidence from the Italian case supports a direct connection between economic marginality and political violence. In any straightforward way it does not. At the individual level, very few leaders or followers among the approximately 3500 participants in violence were marginal to the productive process in any obvious sense. All surveys of left-wing and right-wing militants show that they were drawn from a wide range of blue-collar and white-collar occupations and that the numbers of activists from the Left or Right who were unemployed or subproletarians were insignificant. Only 2 per cent of a sample of 237 neo-Fascists were petty criminals or sub-proletarians, and Weinberg and Eubank note that in fact the social distribution of their sample is actually skewed towards the upper end of the occupational spectrum (Weinberg and Eubank, 1988). Likewise, the proportion of the unemployed or subproletariat in different samples of left-wing militants ranges from no more than 2 per cent to 6 per cent (Moss, 1989; della Porta, 1990). Nor can the distribution of participants between left-wing and right-wing violence, or to particular groups within the Left or Right, be linked to distinctive social or economic attributes. The only exception appears to be that women played a much larger role in the violence of the Left (approximately one-quarter of participants) than they did in the violence of the extreme Right (approximately 7 per cent), although that contrast does not seem to be linked to any broader set of distinctive ideological or organizational features (Moss, 1989; della Porta, 1990; Weinberg and Eubank, 1988).

The hypothesis of any direct connection between marginality and violence receives no better support at macro-social level. The geographical incidence of political violence does not correspond to the distribution of relative backwardness in Italy. Although it is true that by 1980 every province had seen some kind of violent political episode, and some provincial centres like Padua had experienced prolonged sequences, the overwhelming majority of attacks - and especially the more serious episodes of murder and wounding -

were concentrated in North and Central Italy - more precisely, in the five cities of Rome, Milan, Turin, Bologna and Genoa. North and Central Italy account for 82 per cent of all violence between 1969 and 1980, including 91 per cent of murders and 94 per cent of woundings (Galleni, 1981). Left-wing violence was still more narrowly concentrated: three-quarters of Red Brigades' affiliates, and four-fifths of the group's actions, for example, were located in the four cities of Rome, Milan, Turin and Genoa (Moss, 1989). A parallel concentration is also visible in right-wing violence: 52 per cent of the neo-Fascist activists charged or arrested between 1970 and 1984 came from Rome, 35 per cent from the North and a mere 4 per cent from the South. The concentration of both kinds of violence in North and Central Italy therefore makes it impossible to argue for any clear macro-social connection between economic marginality and violence, since Italy's most notoriously long-standing regions of economic deprivation - the South - saw little of any political violence and almost no clandestine 'terrorism'.

Even if the hypothesis of a significant impact for economic marginality in determining the occurrence of violence among particular social groups in specific places has to be ruled out, we may nevertheless still ask whether any more subtle dimensions of estrangement, voluntary or involuntary, from dominant social or political institutions can be traced. Given that participants in armed struggle are mainly inserted in, rather than excluded from, educational and occupational contexts, we are likely to learn more about the propensity for violence from considering the actual nature of their involvements rather than insisting on a generalized lack of involvement. I shall suggest that the passage towards the symbolic simplification of the social and economic world and the extent of self-estrangement that the users of violence saw as demanded of them can be tied to their progressive marginalization - a process which becomes clearer once the political context of armed struggle is considered.

Routes into violence

The heterogeneity of participants is also reflected in the different routes into violence that they followed. Two sorts of overall difference stand out. First, the political careers of left-wing and right-wing activists diverge in terms of their origins in, and continuing attention to, the legal political parties of the Left (in particular, the PCI) and Right (notably, the MSI). Second, the left-wing activists belong to quite distinct political generations, with corresponding variations in political experiences and ambitions. Grasping those two sets of differences is essential to an understanding of the distinctive dynamics which govern the changing patterns of commitments to violence.

The somewhat sketchy evidence on the routes into extreme right-wing violence suggests a formative involvement with the internal politics of the party of the institutionalized Right, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI). The life-histories of older and younger activists show at least an initial phase in the factions or youth organizations of the MSI; and even when they are no longer members, the nature of their relations to the MSI, and the role of the organized Right in the Italian political system, remain continuing themes for discussion. In the case of the extreme Right, therefore, explaining the evolution of the political imagination and affiliation of activists requires attention to the changing state of relations between Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary organizations on the Right.

For the overwhelming majority of left-wing militants, however, the point of entry to armed struggle was through the organizations and political activity of the extraparliamentary Left. Only in rare cases were activists from the institutional Left (Communist and Socialist parties, trade unions) recruited directly into violence: 3 per cent had been activists in the PCI and 6 per cent in trade-unions prior to their involvement in armed struggle (della Porta, 1990). Such limited numbers imply that ideological traditions, policy shifts and organizational experience in the institutional Left have a very limited explanatory role in accounting for the emergence of violence. Militancy in the

PCI, for example, was not a direct launching-pad for a violent career; nor can dissatisfaction with the Party's retreat from revolution or with its adoption of the 'Historic Compromise' policy be adduced as important motivations propelling people into violence, since almost all participants in violence had cut their political teeth in an environment which took the reformism of the PCI for granted. It is therefore in the dynamics of the extraparliamentary Left that the development of political violence must be sought.

Probably the most persistent and refractory issue in the controversies over Italy's political violence has been the precise nature of the relations between the protest movements of 1968-1969 and the appearance of clandestine violence (Tranfaglia, 1988; Tarrow, 1989; Lumley, 1990). But although many answers from the perspective of political responsibility - both of the protesters and of the responses that their protests drew from Italy's political élite - have been offered, few sociological accounts assessing the strengths and relative importance of the personal, organizational, and ideological links between the two phenomena have been attempted. Any adequate description needs to accommodate the fact that the overwhelming majority of participants in the events of 1968-1969 and in the groups of the extraparliamentary Left to which those events gave birth did *not* choose the path of armed struggle: in Milan, to take a single example, the proportion was at very most some 5 per cent and it is unlikely to have been greater elsewhere (Moss, 1989). A similarly small proportion of the neo-Fascist *squadristi* involved in mobilizing openly against the Left in 1968-1969 went on to the practice of right-wing clandestine violence. In any direct sense, therefore, rhetorical inculpations of 1968-1969 or of the failure of governments to respond adequately to the demands embodied in mass protests are sociologically uninformative. More discriminating pathways towards violence need to be identified.

Tracing such routes is made more complicated by the second characteristic of both left-wing and right-wing violence militants: the heterogeneity of their political socialization. As might be expected from the longevity of the violence itself, participants came from generations with quite different political experiences. Three age-groups can be distinguished: those who had been politically active before 1968-1969; those who were initiated into politics in that period; and those who were too young to have participated in the protests and counter-protests of the student revolt and Hot Autumn (Moss, 1989; della Porta, 1990). Both Left and Right share the trend towards steadily younger affiliates, who came to be increasingly distant from the political ambitions and experiences of older militants. Half (46 per cent) of the early generation of right-wing militants, but three-quarters (76 per cent) of post-1977 participants, were aged less than 25 (Ferraresi, 1988), for example: a similar picture holds for the Left, where the period of greatest violence corresponds to the recruitment of the most youthful militants. Within Right and Left, however, age differences do not translate neatly into organizational distinctions. Although the four most violent cities (Rome, Milan, Turin and Genoa) show somewhat different age profiles for affiliates of different armed groups, the variations depend principally on the relative timing of the establishment of each group's first local base rather than on any affinity between a particular phase of political socialization and the ideology of a specific armed group.

Since every significant armed organization contained affiliates who not only showed great variation in their social origins but were also drawn from different political generations, the world of armed struggle was deeply divided by contrasts in political experience and imagination. Notwithstanding the common origins of left-wing users of violence in the evolving extraparliamentary community of the Left and of right-wing militants in the organizations flanking the MSI, therefore, the heterogeneous political experiences on each wing of violence presented an intractable problem to be overcome rather than an unproblematic basis for a shared identity. In consequence, no hypothesis

which points to a *single* set of political experiences can be adequate to explain how men and women of very different ages, formed in correspondingly distinct local and historical milieux, came to accept participation in violence.

The nature of participation in violence

Just what participation in violence actually consisted in requires a more nuanced description than it is usually given. Since the overwhelming majority of participants were able to combine their involvement in violence with ordinary employment and often with family life, the stereotypical image of terrorists as fanatical full-time clandestine combatants obviously needs revision. Analyses of participation have naturally been drawn to extreme cases: by what social and psychological mechanisms could anyone choose and sustain cold-blooded, not directly self-interested, murder as a livable profession? The distortions entailed by an exclusive focus on that line of enquiry can be suggested by three general dimensions of participation. First, the numbers of cases of clandestinity, overall or at any one time, were very small: della Porta's sample of left-wing participants showed that only one in ten had to go underground, many only in the very last years of violence (della Porta, 1990); and examples of voluntary clandestinity were a tiny minority of that minority. Most found themselves driven into it against their will, usually after learning of the arrest of a comrade and fearing that a warrant had been issued for their own arrest. Participation was thus clandestine only in the sense that participants concealed their involvement in violence, not in the sense that they had chosen to live an outlaw life under a false identity. Second, the overwhelming majority of participants had no direct role in acts of violence. Two-thirds of left-wing affiliates took no part in any attack on individuals, and two-fifths had no part in any kind of violent action (della Porta, 1990). In Rome, for example, the 32 murders and woundings by the Red Brigades over virtually the entire life of the local group between 1976 and 1982 were the responsibility of no more than 20 members (Moss, 1989). Very many of those convicted of involvement were in fact accused of helping, directly or indirectly, a small circle of much more centrally-involved friends or acquaintances in various minor ways (storing or distributing documents, providing information or accommodation). That type of participation corresponds closely to the nature of recruitment: three-quarters of participants were drawn into armed struggle by their kin, spouse or friends (della Porta, 1990), and the bonds of personal solidarity remain a vital element of cohesion for both left-wing and right-wing groups (Novaro 1990; Pisetta 1990). Third, participation in violence was actually combined with a visible role in ordinary legal politics. The police later noted that many individuals who turned out to be involved in clandestine violence were well-known as political activists and had been classified in police records simply as 'extremists', with a small number also continuing to play minor roles in trade-unions (Moss, 1989). Police investigations were indeed hampered by the assumption that the early Red Brigades provided the model for the organization of all political violence, treated as the product of underground militancy in a highly structured group.

The real dimensions of majority participation in violence prompt a redirection of enquiry. Rather than trying to explain how people could enter a closed mental and social universe of political fanaticism and self-evidently implausible convictions, we need to examine the more banal, intricate and variegated routes by which the combination of support for both legal and illegal, political and violent, activities emerged as a widely available option. Most participants indeed declared that involvement in violence was felt to represent no drastic break with their existing political commitments, any more than it did with work or family ties. So, how was that perceived linear development of commitment constructed and eventually disrupted?

Shared ideologies

The social and generational heterogeneity of participants, the discontinuities in violence between 1969 and 1980, and the variations in kinds of participation - all make for evident

difficulties in trying to identify beliefs both clearly shared by participants and directly related to the actions they were prepared to perform. Assertion of the powers of 'Marxism' and 'Leninism' on the Left, or the mandarin philosophizing of Julius Evola on the Right, to motivate individuals to violence, whatever its value in party-political rhetoric, runs up against three obvious problems. First, it is by no means easy to say exactly what beliefs did in fact accompany the invocation of broad ideological labels by participants in violence. Second, after dissecting some of the writings circulating in the especially obscure imaginative world of the extreme Right, Ferraresi has observed that it is nevertheless extremely hard to show a connection between their content and almost any aspect of the violence practised by those who acknowledged their authors as guides (1988: 102). The link between alleged belief and specific action is equally fragile on the Left. Third, the difficulty of identifying which beliefs were shared by all participants in violence is matched by the awkward fact that many of the beliefs which they do appear to share are shared by considerable numbers of people who were not attracted by violence or explicitly refused to become involved. For example, although most members of the extraparliamentary Left in Milan proclaimed Marxism as their guiding set of ideas and declared their (perhaps qualified) assent to the need for revolutionary violence, it remains the case that only a tiny minority pursued their widely-shared beliefs as far as armed struggle.

In sum, although many former participants have subsequently declared that left-wing violence was entirely created and nurtured in the realm of ideology, the contours and distinctive features of that ideology are very hard to draw. As a result current analyses seem to have become trapped between former participants' insistence on the power of ideas (in retraction of their earlier assertions of the economic basis for violence) and the sociologists' inability to show what those practically motivating and sufficiently exclusive ideas were. Two ways out of this impasse can be suggested, which acknowledge that participants in violence were neither cultural dopes nor *maîtres-à-penser* and which tie the most resonant themes in their political ideology to the particular circumstances of their political activity. First, the content of the texts authored by particular sections of armed organizations must be distinguished from the beliefs that most affiliates held. Documents about armed struggle should be treated not as a transparent guide to the convictions of participants but as a strategic means to secure convergence around hypothetical meanings for violence. In that respect they have a fundamental role to play in the politics of interpretation, both among the different milieux in armed struggle and among their antagonists.

Second, too little attention has been paid to a key term which, while hardly part of the master ideological systems to which political violence is usually referred, nonetheless appeared in very many left-wing documents associated with political violence and authored by participants who otherwise had little in common. Indeed, for a period in the late 1970s, it appeared among the vocabulary of right-wing activists. The term in question is *autonomia* ('autonomy') which has recently been described as 'a touchstone of revolutionary politics' after 1968 (Lumley, 1990). The principal point of excavating this term lies less in explicating a component of ideology hitherto ignored but in recovering a central topic of discussion which can be fitted to the particular circumstances of those among whom it was so popular. By comparison with the many abstract themes circulating in the milieux of political violence, the concern with *autonomia* resonates much more closely with the life circumstances of many participants in armed struggle. 'Autonomy' has an elective affinity with the social contexts in which commitment to politics came to express itself through the use of violence. In its basic form, therefore, the term encodes a kind of symbolic misrecognition whereby the negative consequence of increasing political estrangement is exchanged for one of the positive objectives of violence itself. In this respect, the type and representation of marginality in Italy can be compared with the

products of very different forms of marginalization in other societies which have generated political violence.

An overview of violence 1969-1982: Patterns of schismogenesis

The evidence on the profiles of violence and participants between 1969 and 1982 clearly raises more issues for detailed discussion than can be addressed in this paper. I shall therefore confine myself to describing the evolution of the attempts by supporters of violence to establish - and by their opponents to resist - a clear set of plausible correspondences between acts of violence, political meanings and revolutionary identities. The principal features of the evolving pattern provide an example of the processes in group conflicts which Bateson has named 'schismogenesis' and 'symmetrical differentiation' (Bateson, 1973). The initial stability provided by a clear boundary between direct antagonists is likely always to be undone by the ways in which any escalation of hostile exchanges provokes differentiation within each party to the conflict, leading in turn to a loss of focus on the original boundary and thus to the collapse of the order and restraint which it provided.

Described in Bateson's terms, a direct and entrenched opposition between extreme Left and extreme Right, extended and radicalized by the formation of extraparliamentary communities on both wings of politics, characterized the early years of violence between 1969 and 1974. However, from 1975 onwards, the upsetting of the stable 'segmentary' pattern of that opposition was accompanied, as Bateson's analysis leads us to predict, by the disappearance of a number of restraining factors, provoking a further escalation of increasingly damaging and widely-directed violent exchanges and culminating in generalized incoherence by 1979. Widespread recognition of this incoherence prompted a rapid sequence of highly public defections from left-wing violence, followed by a rather slower withdrawal on the part of right-wing activists, and accentuated on both sides by the introduction of state incentives to render defection irreversible.

The symbolic and pragmatic responses to violence by the opponents of armed struggle - in particular by the major political parties and the judiciary - played an important role in both phases of that process. Until the mid-1970s, the government's analysis of the conflict as the product of 'opposed extremisms' reinforced the central focus on the direct antagonism of extreme Left and extreme Right. After 1975, by inhibiting any concentration of the symbolic capital necessary to legitimate armed struggle in the hands of a single group of protagonists, the institutional opponents of violence were also able to forestall the reconstruction of a single unambiguous boundary which could offer the possibility of direct confrontation between themselves and the users of violence. I shall therefore deal, first, with the two phases of violence itself, and, second, with the two phases of its interpretation.

Political Violence 1969-1974

Retrieving the Resistance

Accounts of the Red Brigades, both by former members (eg, Franceschini, 1988) and analysts (eg, Manconi, 1990), emphasize the importance of the Resistance (1943-1945) as a source of ideas, terminology, support, and even weapons themselves in the early years of armed struggle. Exploitation of such resources places the first phase of clandestine violence firmly within the dominant conceptual and symbolic tradition of post-war Italian politics. Enshrined at a formal level in the constitutional and legal prohibitions on reorganization of the Fascist party and routinely underlined in the rhetoric of political conflict, the boundary between the anti-Fascist victors and Fascist vanquished of the years 1943-1945 guided political imagination. The evocative centrality of that division

lived on, fuelled by the sense among many anti-Fascists that it was poorly secured and required perpetual political vigilance. Indeed, no clear rupture with the former regime had taken place in the domain of class power, to the disappointment of the partisans who had hoped to transform civil war into social revolution; nor had an adequate purge of the Fascist regime's personnel been carried out.[3] Moreover, the Cold War pressures on the Christian Democrat (DC) governments to tolerate any strongly anti-Communist forces led some DC leaders into occasional explicit acceptance of political support from the MSI, which led inevitably to doubts about the strength of anti-Fascist commitment among the political ruling class. The Resistance tradition was, however, given a powerful new lease on life by two developments in the period 1968-1974: the formation of an extraparliamentary community on the extreme Left, and the increasing identification between the state and neo-Fascist organizations on the extreme Right.

Out of the student and worker conflicts of 1968-1969, and in dissent from the pragmatic reformism of the parties and trade unions of the institutional Left, were created a set of extreme Left groups, principally *Lotta Continua*, *Potere Operaio*, *Movimento Studentesco* and *Avanguardia Operaia*, flanked by an array of smaller and more fragile coagulations which drew, often haphazardly, on the full range of Leninist, Maoist and "workerist" inspirations for the Left (Vettori, 1973). Each major group was closely identified with a particular city, even - as in the case of *Lotta Continua* at Fiat Mirafiori - with a particular factory, and maintained its primary centres of recruitment and intervention in schools, universities and factories. These groups, later joined by the myriad 'autonomous collectives' under the generic label of *Autonomia Operaia*, were the bearers of the left-wing 'cultures of revolt' between 1969 and 1977 (Lumley, 1990), drawing on the continuing high levels of social and industrial conflict and providing an introduction to politics for a progressively younger age-group, particularly in Central and North Italy.[4]

Divided internally by each group's sensitivity to the particular state of conflict in its city of primary support, the extraparliamentary Left achieved its solidarity in two ways, both recalling the experiences of its predecessors in the Resistance. First, the shared insistence on the necessary role of violence served to mark out the extraparliamentary from the parliamentary Left and to define a 'revolutionary' political identity. Second, the extreme Left was unified by the temporary convergence of otherwise discrete oppositions between friends and enemies. For, as Pavone (1991) has emphasized, the 'Resistance' constituted a condensed symbol for three quite distinct antagonisms: a patriotic war against foreign occupation; a civil war against Fascists; and a class war against the bourgeois supporters of Fascism, to achieve a social revolution. Updated in its referents (the substitution of the imperialist United States for the occupying German forces of 1943-1945), the same mix of international, national and class oppositions identified their allies and their enemies for extraparliamentary Left activists after 1968. Although each group might give a (temporarily) different priority to one or another of the antagonisms, the plausibility of pursuing them all as essentially aspects of a single struggle was a key element in binding the otherwise very diversified community together. The parallel success of armed resistance to the United States in Viet Nam and in allegedly client Latin American states and the evident gains made by the class mobilization of the 'Hot Autumn' held the

[3] For a discussion of the half-hearted purge of Fascist officials and the rebirth of right-wing organizations after 1945, see Ferraresi (1988).

[4] Aware that too high a proportion of secondary school students among militants reflected poorly on their own political seriousness, the leaders of *Il Manifesto* deliberately inflated the average age of its activists for public consumption (Castellina, 1985). Since the groups had no overall system of formal membership, the evidence on their social and demographic composition is very sketchy. A rare snapshot of the largest group in 1975: one-third of *Lotta Continua*'s 8000 militants were concentrated in four cities (Milan, Turin, Rome and Naples); some 20 per cent of its congress delegates were aged less than 20; and membership in its provincial branches saw secondary school students (31 per cent) outnumber workers (27 per cent) (Bobbio, 1979).

international and class dimensions of struggle together clearly, if rather remotely, for many militants. But it was the new role of the extreme Right in Italian politics that offered, at the most experientially direct level, verification of the accuracy of their composite world-view for most militants.

In terms of its relations with dominant institutions, the extreme Right actually followed an exactly opposite track to the extreme Left after 1968. The extreme Left groups became increasingly sharply distinct from the parliamentary Left: the extraparliamentary activists of the Right were brought more closely into institutional politics in the first half of the 1970s. In the first place, the return of Almirante as leader of the MSI in 1969 heralded explicit party encouragement for the activities of their militant groups (*Avanguardia Nazionale*, *Ordine Nuovo*) after a long period of official indifference, even opposition. Secondly, the MSI itself drew greater political legitimacy, not only from its substantial electoral gains in 1972 but also from closer relations with the Christian Democrat party, which found itself aligned with the MSI in the election of its own candidate (Leone) as President of Italy in 1972, in its support for the replacement of a Centre-Left by a Centre-Right coalition government in 1973, and in the referendum on divorce in 1974. In the eyes of the extreme Left (and many on the institutional Left), the increasing identity of government, state and extreme Right was demonstrated most dramatically by the Piazza Fontana bomb of 1969 and the revelations of active and passive complicity between right-wing activists, security services and senior politicians which followed and which appeared fully to justify the left-wing claims of a 'state massacre' (*strage di stato*). Further massacres of a similar kind followed between 1970 and 1974. For many left-wing militants, however, these massacres represented only the most damaging elements of a strategy based on violence which they increasingly encountered at local level in new and direct forms.

The emergence of clandestine political violence

Whatever declarations on the (ultimately) revolutionary necessity of violence resounded in the extraparliamentary Left, its practice was largely confined to the civil war, rather than class war, dimension of activism. Mass illegalities were of course a common feature of the mobilizations of 1968-1973, but analysis of the occasions on which they included violence shows three interesting features (della Porta and Tarrow, 1986). First, although most protests in schools and factories did not involve violence, a substantial minority (respectively 26 per cent and 21 per cent of all confrontations) did, providing direct experience of violent conflict for many members of the extraparliamentary groups. Second, violence in the course of mass demonstrations was gradually replaced by violence involving small groups. Third, the majority of violent episodes occurred in direct clashes between extreme Left and extreme Right, mostly of an expressive, non-instrumental, kind. Recalling that the extreme Right was responsible for the overwhelming majority of attacks, we can produce a clear picture of the ideological and experiential origins of clandestine political violence.

Political violence was predominantly found in the context of mass demonstrations which brought protesters into direct confrontation with the police. The rise of small-group violence between 1969 and 1973 was primarily attributable to a desire for defence or revenge by the Left against right-wing assaults, which were much more likely to be committed by small groups and showed a much greater fondness than the Left for direct attacks on individuals (della Porta and Tarrow, 1986). Most of the Left's premeditated violence was the responsibility of the 'defence squads' (*servizi d'ordine*) of the extraparliamentary Left, which had evolved from an ad hoc and informal means of self-protection into institutionalized components of every group, with exclusive membership, internal hierarchies and a distinctive camaraderie created by the shared risks of involvement in violence. The increasing frequency of right-wing assaults, tolerated - or at least suspiciously ineffectively repressed - by the police, reinforced the extreme Left's

conviction of an increasing identity of interest and activity between neo-Fascism and the state, reaching downwards to neighbourhood violence and upwards to active support from neighbouring right-wing regimes in Greece, Spain and Portugal. Whatever their proclamations about violence as a revolutionary necessity, therefore, the extraparliamentary Left was in practice occupied in defending its activists and sympathizers from neo-Fascist attacks or in displaying how violence might be used as a technique of 'counter-power' (*contropotere*) to evade the convergent levels of warfare they saw being waged against them.

Alongside the activities of the *servizi d'ordine* appeared the earliest forms of organized clandestine violence by left-wing groups, notably the Red Brigades (BR), whose signature first appeared in Milan in 1970. With the exception of five bloodless kidnappings, the 70 actions authored by the Red Brigades between 1970 and 1974 consisted mainly of small-scale attacks on industrial targets or personnel, proclaimed as the group's contribution to the defence of working-class interests in the key site of socio-political transformation, the factory. The mix of internationalist, class and Resistance rhetoric in the Red Brigades' texts mirrored the conflation of those conflicts in the extraparliamentary Left. The express refusal 'to engage in sterile ideological debate' indicated the BR members' determination to define the group's political identity by reference to the already widely circulating symbolic capital of the Resistance and to differentiate themselves only by their insistence on the need to take seriously the organization of armed defence. The rigid organizational structure copied from the Tupamaros was, however, never translated into reality, nor was anything more than a rudimentary division of tasks achieved. Furthermore, although the early activists had been forced into clandestinity by police investigations, contacts with members of the extraparliamentary Left, and even with sympathizers from the Communist Party, were never broken off, and the group's few texts and actions received attention, favourable and critical, in the extreme Left press.

However, in part precisely because of the lack of any distinctive Red Brigades ideology to attract members, in part because the overwhelming majority of left-wing activists did not favour the deliberate use of violence against individuals for any reason and the minority who did accept the risks of violence were committed to the work of neighbourhood confrontations with the extreme Right, the early efforts to extend the practice of clandestine violence were wholly unsuccessful. Feltrinelli's *Gruppi armati proletari* did not survive his death in a botched act of sabotage; the Red Brigades failed to recruit more than a handful of activists, even after the display of their ability to kidnap (and release unharmed) an unpopular magistrate (Sossi) in 1974; their founding members were arrested later in the same year as a result of police infiltration; and the group's attempts to establish new centres of support outside Milan had limited success in Turin but never got off the ground in Rome, Genoa and the Veneto. Early failure was not, however, accompanied by the deaths of the early leaders, save in the case of Margherita Cagol, so that, unlike many unsuccessful terrorists, they survived to continue their struggle. In jail, where they could legally be interviewed and visited, they came to serve as the sole publicly available interlocutors for clandestine violence. In the courtroom, on trial for their actions between 1970 and 1974, they played out, on a miniaturized, public and densely symbolic site, the direct confrontation with the state which clandestinity made impossible elsewhere. The role they came to occupy after 1975, however, was created by an almost wholly transformed symbolic and organizational context for violence.

Political Violence 1975-1979

The escalation in violence which marked the years 1975-1979 can best be explained by the erosion of the interpretive and organizational grids which held violence in check in the preceding period. In some respects, indeed, a better sense of perspective is gained by taking the *infrequency* of degeneration into violence in that early period as the primary issue for explanation - given the general entanglement of politics and the economy with violence in twentieth century Italy, the scale of the mass mobilization and widespread illegalities on the Left and the readiness of the extreme Right, encouraged by some employers and politicians, to make extensive use of intimidation. The relative absence of violence, rather than its limited appearance, might seem the more appropriate focus for analysis. From that point of view, the dramatic increase in clandestine violence after 1975 can be linked to four developments: the loss of centrality of the direct Left/Right antagonism; the maintenance of high levels of conflict in the institutions where the extraparliamentary groups were traditionally strong; shifts in the relation between 'politics' and 'violence' as the practical basis for a 'revolutionary' political identity; and the emergence of a language which simultaneously described the social and political position of the most committed militants and justified a characteristic, livable, combination of violent and non-violent activism.

Left/Right opposition: The loss of the 'Other'

The role of the Right in Italian politics was abruptly overturned after 1974. Its surrounding international platform of support disappeared with the changes of regime in Portugal, Greece and Spain; the collaboration between DC and MSI was abandoned after their joint defeat in the 1974 divorce referendum, the return to a Centre-Left government, and the increasing attention to the possibility of a 'Historic Compromise' between DC, Socialists and Communists, proposed by Berlinguer in 1973. The MSI itself sustained a clear electoral rebuff in 1976, followed by a significant scission leading to further electoral decline; and the relations between the MSI and the fringe organizations of the extreme Right were disrupted by the legal orders to dissolve *Ordine Nuovo* (1973) and *Avanguardia Nazionale* (1974) and by the deaths, arrests or self-exile of the groups' leaders. In consequence, the political protection that the violent Right had enjoyed was substantially reduced, and levels of local right-wing assaults fell accordingly. In the roughly stable incidence of political violence between 1973 and 1975, for example, the proportion of right-wing attacks was reduced from 88 per cent to 40 per cent: over the longer period between 1971 and 1976, they declined by two-thirds across Italy (Galleni, 1981).

Those changes signify broader shifts on both wings of politics. On the extreme Right, the disruption provoked by the shift in the position of the legal Right and by police investigations of violence marked a major rupture. Since the early extreme Right groups had enjoyed an ambiguous but continuing relation with the MSI and its leaders, the loosening of their ties in the wake of the inability of the party either to exploit its parliamentary advantages of the years 1969-1974 or to guarantee continuing impunity for the use of violence led in turn to a reluctance merely to reproduce the simple anti-Communist line characteristic of MSI rhetoric. No doubt, too, the increasing policy conflicts between the original leadership of the MSI and the ex-Monarchists who had merged with the party in 1972 helped to throw into doubt the nature of party tactics and strategy (Caciagli, 1988). Moreover, the judicial enquiries into the bomb massacres of 1969-1974 furnished some details, and much broader suspicions, of the equivocal informal links between the MSI leadership and the political and state élites, thereby redoubling the growing sense among grassroots activists that their commitment had been exploited to pursue a strategy which had been kept hidden from them and which appeared to be producing no results, legally or illegally (Pisetta, 1990). The simple antagonism to

the Left which had provided a rationale for the right-wing violence of 1969-1974 no longer seemed to be plausible to many younger activists, who saw a clear need to redraw the map of their friends and enemies. The state itself, whose magistrates and police were now pursuing the perpetrators of right-wing violence with much greater zeal, represented an obvious immediate opponent.

For the extreme Left, the declining significance of right-wing assaults weakened the urgency of practical 'militant anti-Fascism' (*antifascismo militante*). Simultaneously, the symbolic source of legitimation for its distinctive identity and for violence, defensive or aggressive, was displaced after 1973 by the Communist Party's extensive historiographic and ritual reappropriations of the years 1943-1945 to legitimate its 'Historic Compromise' strategy. Party celebrations of the thirtieth anniversaries of the major events of the Resistance were designed less to emphasize a continuing Fascist threat or the uncompleted social revolution than to remind Italians of the historically demonstrated value of an earlier collaboration between Catholics, Socialists and Communists.[5] Moreover, PCI reassertion of control over the 'true' meaning of the Resistance and its symbolic and mythological capital was accompanied by vastly increased levels of mobilization against the extreme Left and the practice of violence. The PCI and trade unions came to conceptualize left-wing violence as a distinctive threat, reversing their earlier analyses that its actions were simply Fascist provocations, and redoubled their commitment to organizing mass demonstrations as a vehicle for displaying their rejection of 'armed struggle'. Since the mobilizations, in the shape of marches, strikes and funeral attendance, were often motivated by reference to the continuing actuality of Resistance values, the opportunity for its much smaller political competitors on the extreme Left to make use of the Resistance as the diacritic of their own political identity or to legitimate violence was much reduced. In the same way, the protection which the Resistance symbolism offered to both violent and non-violent components of the extreme Left - and, which indeed obscured any clear differentiation between them - was removed, releasing the dynamic of their progressive divergence.

On both extreme Left and extreme Right, therefore, the mid-1970s saw the collapse of the segmentary model of Left/Right violence and its symbolic carapace. While most of the political violence of the early 1970s cannot be explained without reference to the hostility between Right and Left, in particular the violence of the Right as a counter-mobilization force (Clark, 1988) and the response by the Left to that attack, the political violence of the late 1970s needs to be accounted for by other factors. The collapse of the self-definitions of Left and Right activists as each other's primary enemies was accompanied by the erosion of some of the limitations on the use and range of violence itself. The fading of the anti-Fascist theme in Resistance symbolism helped to dissolve the unity of the three-tiered conceptual universe which had linked international, national and local dimensions in a single set of targets. That (temporary) convergence had helped to restrict the possible range of targets for violence by allowing limited violence against low-level objectives to carry highly condensed, wide-ranging political meanings. But the pressure to describe violence in terms of the remaining internationalist and class themes encouraged its linkage to more remote and abstract meanings. Once the primary vehicle of symbolic condensation disintegrated, so the classificatory mechanisms which served to guide and restrict violence weakened. Actualization of the potential for a dramatic spread of violence, however, required the set of 'carriers' whom the Red Brigades had been unable to find in the early 1970s. The mid-1970s supplied them.

[5] See Pridham (1981) for the revival of historical interest and local celebration of the Resistance by the PCI in Tuscany in the mid-1970s.

Changing conflicts in school, factory and neighbourhood

In contrast to the decline in direct confrontations between Left and Right, conflicts in the institutions where the extraparliamentary Left was especially strong - schools and universities, factories, and neighbourhood politics - persisted at high levels. Industrial conflict in 1975, for example, showed more workers involved and more working days lost than at any time since the cycle of mass mobilization had begun (Rusconi and Scamuzzi, 1981): a clear decline in disputes is only visible after 1978. Schools and universities, too, were coping with the overcrowding and under-resourcing consequences of the reforms of 1962 and 1969 which, by liberalizing access, had ensured rapid and substantial growth in the numbers of students. The secondary school population grew by 72 per cent between 1959 and 1969; and in Milan, for example, the upper secondary school population grew by 33 per cent between 1969 and 1976 (Lumley, 1990; Pasini, 1984). University enrolments grew by a comparable two-thirds in the decade after 1968, which, in tandem with the weak sense of any academic community, generated a 'part-time' institution for many students (de Francesco, 1984). Moreover, the educational reforms drew in students from social strata previously under-represented in post-compulsory schooling, with few family traditions of prolonged educational participation, thus compounding the difficulty of relegitimating the formal curricula contested by the student movements of the late 1960s. Alternative knowledges, and criteria for marking progress, were supplied by the extraparliamentary Left groups which became increasingly active in secondary schools. Re-establishing work and study as central components of individual identity for the generation immediately following the events of 1968 was therefore particularly difficult.

Although the level of conflict remained high, its concerns and objectives changed. Efforts to alter entire institutional frameworks were replaced by the problems of institutionalizing and implementing the reforms which the mobilizations of 1968-1969 had achieved: the Workers Statute (1970) on the shop-floor and the *decreti delegati* (1974) in the classroom. Conflicts became increasingly local and particularistic, managed by trade-union and political professionals who controlled access to the new systems of interest mediation. The new actors, new systems of representation, and new dimensions of conflict all served to marginalize the activities of the extraparliamentary groups, accentuating the sense of estrangement of both leaders and followers and weakening further the nexus between institutional and individual identity. A parallel process of marginalization was also taking place in the remaining principal area of extraparliamentary Left activity: neighbourhood politics.

Conflicts over housing, transport and local services, which were the consequences, particularly in Milan, Turin and Rome, of the unregulated urban development and massive population movements of the preceding two decades, had been a major terrain for extraparliamentary activism of the years 1968-1973 (Lumley, 1990; Laganà et al., 1982; Corvisieri, 1979). Here too, however, the scope of extraparliamentary activity was progressively diminished and redirected. For the decentralization of administrative authority in the mid-1970s saw the creation of neighbourhood councils, filled by representatives of the major political parties, which took over responsibility - not always successfully or consistently - for grassroots issues. The incorporation of those issues into the logic of political party activity and negotiation was powerfully assisted by the election of left-wing parties to municipal power in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome and Naples in 1975, since the PCI, PSI and PdUP had much better links with neighbourhood activism than the outgoing centre parties. More or less simultaneously, two issues which routine party and union politics were much less well-equipped to deal with - the black market economy and drug use - came to constitute visible problems for neighbourhood life, following the growing decentralization of economic activity into local sweatshops (Brusco, 1982) and the new forms taken by the drug trade (Moss, 1991). Regulation in both spheres was of course often extra-legal or illegal, involving intimidation and violence. For the activists of the extraparliamentary Left who, in their shrinking political

'space', wished to remain active by incorporating such issues into their neighbourhood politics, the readiness to respond to coercion with coercion and to add violence to their tactical repertoire were almost necessary conditions for displaying their political identity and significance.

The divorce between extraparliamentary 'politics' and 'violence'

The use of violence as a means of expressing political commitment was accentuated on the extreme Left and extreme Right by the increasing distance between the practices of 'politics' and 'violence'. On the Right, the activists of violence lost the leaders of their fringe organizations, so that they forfeited both the direction and the protection which those leaders' direct links with the MSI politicians afforded. The practitioners of politics and of violence drifted further apart, leading the MSI leaders into progressively more explicit condemnations of the use of violence in the name of the Right - which further fuelled the sense among grassroots activists that their own political leaders had abandoned them. A parallel, but more complex, separation can be traced on the extreme Left.

The restriction of the scope of extraparliamentary activity in workplace, school and neighbourhood politics entailed the progressive estrangement of its activists from life outside the extreme Left community, even - in the case of the more committed members - from life outside their particular organization. One of the leaders of *Avanguardia Operaia* noted that in Milan by 1975 self-sufficient 'ghettos' of the group's militants had emerged in which members could earn a living by selling secondhand clothes for the organization's benefit, get their news from the organization's newspaper and radio station, find their partners among fellow-members, live and relax in the organization's squats, enjoy themselves at Dario Fo's plays and at concerts of left-wing bands, and so on, leading gradually to 'the all-but-complete ending of any contact with the rest of the world' (Corvisieri, 1979). Likewise, the participants in violence have frequently underlined the frenetic pace at which their political lives were lived, based on increasingly intensive and narrow relations with other members of their organization, mostly numbering no more than a few dozen (della Porta, 1990). The breakdown of solidary relations within this narrow world was largely the consequence of the following two processes.

First, in all groups, the members of the 'defence squads' had developed an exclusive identity built around violence. As long as their primary role lay in protecting the organization's political initiatives against neo-Fascist assault, use of the resource in which they specialized was held in check. But once the significance of the right-wing threat had diminished, they were released from simply protecting political initiatives and were freed to seek to use their expertise in violence actively as a political instrument in its own right. The convergence with the kind of restricted activities permitted in the new neighbourhood politics for the extreme Left is clear. Second, the political élite of the extraparliamentary Left devoted increasing attention to participation in parliamentary politics in the mid-1970s. Such a shift drew the professionals of politics away from the 'vertical' connections with the local professionals of violence in their own group and towards full-time 'horizontal' bargaining with the leaders of other groups. But, as a result of the disastrously worse-than-anticipated showing by the extraparliamentary cartels in the elections of 1975-1976, it also caused many skilled and experienced activists to abandon politics altogether and provoked the virtual collapse of the organizational structure of the extraparliamentary Left community. As on the Right, therefore, the linkages between the domains of 'politics' and 'violence' slackened or snapped.

'Autonomy' as ideology and practice

It is hard not to see the extraordinary popularity of the term *autonomia* ('autonomy') among extreme Left militants in the second half of the 1970s as a reflection of the effects

of the trends described above. The term itself had already been given wide currency in the texts and talk of all the most significant extraparliamentary groups after 1969 (Vettori, 1973; Bobbio, 1979; Castellano, 1979), including the early productions of the Red Brigades (Martignoni and Morandini, 1977). However, only after 1973 did 'autonomy', somewhat self-contradictorily, become a widely used label for a loosely-structured political organization and identity. *Circoli autonomi* were founded by former affiliates of extraparliamentary Left groups, renting or squatting in empty buildings, acknowledging *Autonomia Operaia* as the reference point for their radical conflicts and protest, and providing a focus for the political activities of the members of the generation which had been too young to participate in the events of 1968-1969 but had been initiated into politics at school. Journals, broadsheets and radio stations were founded; collections of key texts appeared; and an intelligentsia was formed from the theoretical and practical exegetes of the new vocabulary, tracing its genealogy through 1968-1969 down to the university-based protests of 1977 which supplied the movement with its last set of recruits.[6] The culture developed by these 'superfluous men' embodied an attempt to represent in positive terms the increasing political marginality of the extreme Left.

The dominant theme uniting the many different formulations of the meaning of 'autonomy' emphasized the deliberate negation of, and estrangement from, the political and economic institutions of Italian democracy. The most important negation was the 'refusal of work', accompanied by rejection of the political parties and trade unions of the Left. Especial importance was given to fomenting and prolonging local conflicts in order to demonstrate antagonism and to reveal the continuing potential for 'counter-power' within the institutions of the existing social order. Detachment from all external identity-creating social institutions was urged, frequently accompanied by the call to display disaffection by violence. Similarly, a clear organizational structure for the *circoli autonomi* themselves was rejected, leaving militants bereft of any positive collective support for their political identity. As an ideology and practice, 'autonomy' in effect sought to reunite, exclusively at the level of single individuals, the practices of politics and violence which had combined to furnish a livable revolutionary identity in the early 1970s but had since slipped apart.

The organizational connections between the intelligentsia of *Autonomia* and the actual practice of clandestine violence have been widely debated, inside and outside the courtroom.[7] The principal importance of 'autonomy' in the growth of violence lay, however, in the dissemination of a culture which, by insisting on the rejection of all institutional participation, effectively promoted action as the key site for the realization of self. However, the disconnection of action from any direct relationship with institutions inevitably encouraged an exclusive attention to the components of action itself as a major source of identity and distinctiveness. Detailed absorption in the nature and types of violence as sources of identity in themselves thus came first to supplement, then to supplant, any concern with the relation between action and outcome. Its consequences can readily be seen in the changing nature of violence itself after 1975, the scale of mass exit from armed struggle after 1979, and the strategies for social reintegration followed by the militants who have repudiated their former, violent, selves.

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6 The most influential publications included *Rosso*, *Metropoli* and *Senza Tregua*; the most significant radio stations, Radio Onda Rossa in Rome and Radio Sherwood in Padua. The major documents have been collected by Martignoni and Morandini (1977) and Castellano (1979).

7 The arrest of Toni Negri and his colleagues from the Political Science faculty at the University of Padua in April 1979, followed by prolonged preventive detention and the varying judicial outcomes of their trials, provided many opportunities to debate the involvement of *Autonomia*'s leaders.

The milieux of left-wing armed struggle: Intelligentsia, apparatchiks, locals

As the organizational and ideological developments of the years 1969-1974 worked themselves out, the three distinctive milieux of left-wing armed struggle that I have described in detail elsewhere - the intelligentsia, the apparatchiks, and the locals (Moss, 1989) - were formed. Each controlled a key resource to carry out and confer meaning on violence, so that the creation of a stable set of internal and external exchanges between the armed community and its opponents required their collaboration. The 'intelligentsia' designates the authors of the texts which supply broad meanings for the strategy of violence; the category of 'apparatchiks' names the full-time activists of violence who controlled the weaponry and the group signatures; and the term 'locals' indicates the overwhelming majority of participants who combine the use of violence with open political activity in their factories, offices or neighbourhoods and who provide essential logistic support to the apparatchiks. In the early years of clandestine political violence, such distinctions are not appropriate since the small set of Red Brigades members had planned, executed and publicly defended their own acts of violence. After 1975, however, those functions came to be split up among the members of the three milieux so that much of the violence of the later 1970s can be described in terms of the dynamics of conflicts within each milieu and their inevitably destructive impact on the relations between milieux.

The formation of an intelligentsia

The rise of *Autonomia* as a political force, accompanied by extensive theorizations from its university-based supporters, provided the first elaborate cultural resources to justify the deliberate use of violence. Hitherto, the Red Brigades leaders had explicitly eschewed extensive formulations of their ideology and strategy, since they had relied on Resistance symbolism and terminology for their legitimation. The brevity of the few BR texts which went beyond the claim of responsibility for a single action reflected their reliance on the condensed symbol of the Resistance: indeed, their impact depended very largely on *not* publicly elaborating - and thereby underlining - the multiple and discrepant meanings which the Resistance embodied. However, the theorizing of violence by *Autonomia*'s intelligentsia, and the opportunities provided by their own collective incarceration in one of the maximum security prisons created in 1977, prompted the early Red Brigades members to author increasingly prolix justifications of their approach to violence, which ultimately reached treatise length of more than 300 pages. Definition and coverage were, however, achieved at the expense of intelligibility. In competition with the increasingly widely disseminated formulations of *autonomia*, the Red Brigades texts became more arcane, the affirmations more apodictic and grandiose, and the range of targets indicated for attack steadily more diffuse. The significance of any particular action, and the texts' potential to provide meanings which the actual authors of violence could plausibly make use of, was progressively diminished.

In deciding deliberately to take on the role of 'historic leaders' of the group and serve as its intelligentsia (Franceschini, 1988), the Red Brigades members in jail introduced a further dynamic of differentiation into left-wing armed struggle. Conflict with *Autonomia*'s leaders over the general sense to be given to political violence made all meanings seem arbitrary; and the establishment of clear functional divisions between the producers of 'politics' and 'violence' within the Red Brigades themselves ran contrary to the post-1975 activists' search to combine 'politics' and 'violence' as the basis of their individual political identity. Thus, the accumulation of any enduring symbolic capital, derived from even so dramatic an event as the Moro kidnapping, was inhibited both by the continuing disagreements among Red Brigades members themselves and by the refusal of the *autonomi* to endorse what they saw as a Red Brigades' attempt to secure a hegemonic role in the direction of armed struggle by forcing the state to concede political recognition to the group through negotiations for Moro's release. Moreover, since the effort to determine and control the range of acceptable meanings for violence led the BR

intelligentsia to insist on their own hierarchical authority in a formally clearly structured and distinctive group, they were necessarily forced to take an interpretive direction in striking contrast to the value attributed precisely to the lack of organizational attachments among the extraparliamentary militants available for violence. No doubt influenced by their own position in jail, the members of the intelligentsia were encouraged to see violence as a *surrogate* for politics: in contrast, the locals built their identity around the view that it was a *supplement*. That divergence in meanings was accentuated by developments in the milieu of the apparatchiks, who occupied the mediating role between intelligentsia and locals.

Apparatchiks and the escalation of violence

On the Left, the apparatchik milieu - comprising the full-time militants of armed struggle who filled the organizational roles envisaged for each group and were responsible for planning and executing the murders, woundings and kidnappings - was formed very largely out of the defence squads of the defunct extraparliamentary Left groups. As noted above, their numbers were small, especially those who were genuinely clandestine, and probably amounted to no more than one hundred activists for the entire 1970s. Only six of the 526 left-wing signatures for acts of violence made any pretensions to constructing an enduring group identity, but those six (principally the Red Brigades and *Prima Linea*) were responsible for the most dramatic features of the escalation in violence between 1975 and 1979: the increase in the volume of all violence and in attacks on individuals, the diversification of targets, and the particular growth in assaults on state property and personnel.

The position of the apparatchiks in armed struggle rested, first, on control over lethal weaponry, which provided the only means of carrying out more than locally significant violence. Their (limited) supply of weapons came mainly from robberies of armouries; and success in obtaining modern guns automatically devalued the practical and symbolic importance of the Resistance arms which had provided the most tangible claim to historical legitimacy for the earliest users of violence (Franceschini, 1988). The second source of apparatchik power lay in their control over the use of group signatures, which could - in an increasingly competitive and confusing field - ensure the association between a particular type of violence and a distinctive kind of 'revolutionary identity'. The apparatchiks' main tasks were therefore to splice together elements of political meaning for violence from the intelligentsia's texts, select an appropriate target, and secure the logistical support necessary to carry out the action successfully. In effect the full-time activists functioned as translators between the national-level aspirations of the intelligentsia and the neighbourhood-level motivations of the locals.

Their ability to perform this 'vertical' integrating role was in part undermined by 'horizontal' developments in the milieu itself. As more nuclei of support were created in different cities after 1976, the apparatchiks with allegiance to the same signature were divided by the different local patterns of confrontation with the extreme Right and competition within the Left that they faced. In cities where the extreme Right remained active, clandestine left-wing groups found it difficult to make recruits and therefore had recourse to more serious violence to attract attention and members. Similarly, in cities where several left-wing groups competed for recruits, levels of violence rose sharply: where the competition between left-wing groups was lowest, left-wing groups had least recourse to murders and woundings (Moss, 1989). Some of the most dramatic instances of violence, notably the Moro kidnapping in 1978, thus embody attempts less to achieve a clear objective at their enemies' expense than to display an audacity and impunity which could lead to the authors not only establishing hegemony over their competitors in the world of armed struggle but also forcing a convergence of the very disparate ambitions for violence held in their own groups. However, the different local pressures on apparatchiks from a single group to exploit the full scale of violent acts also led to evident

discrepancies in the forging of an identity between their particular signature and a given scale and direction of violence. The ensuing conflicts among each group's affiliates provoked the sequence of regular fission and fusion which characterized all groups.

Not only did the apparatchik milieu itself lose all stability, but its members found themselves equally unable to bind together the intelligentsia's abstract justifications for violence and the locals' micro-level concern to make violence significant in the diminishing space of factory and neighbourhood politics. The search for appropriate targets that might successfully splice together both levels of meaning became increasingly wide-ranging and random, thus ensuring more intensive police investigations with resulting arrests. As the activists came into direct confrontation with the police, magistrature and prison authorities, so the 'state' featured ever more clearly as their primary antagonist and furnished a growing proportion of victims (della Porta, 1990). Although the common emphasis on 'state' targets aligned the apparatchiks more closely with the intelligentsia, it simultaneously drove them further away from the locals and from any residual grassroots support.

Locals: The decline of grassroots support

The overwhelming majority of acts of left-wing violence were carried out by temporary action-sets, whose members displayed their political identity by coining a suitably 'revolutionary' signature to claim responsibility for their (usually minor) damage to property. Some of the 'locals' served in the grassroots organizations of the major groups, but any such specific identification rarely prevented them from operating independently, helping affiliates of other groups, or changing their own group allegiances at short notice. Participation in local-level violence was reached as much by friendship, previous militancy in an extraparliamentary group, or generic solidarity with other members of the extreme Left as by any particular conviction of its revolutionary value (Novaro, 1990). Stress on the obligations of friendship as a reason for involvement in violence, and in prompting acts of violent revenge, brought a largely non-political, and certainly non-ideological, dynamic into the practice of violence.

The tasks which locals actually performed were frequently only indirectly related to specific acts of violence: providing information on factory conflicts and likely targets, sheltering apparatchiks, and offering logistical help of all kinds. Most convicted members of armed groups made only non-violent contributions to armed struggle; and the role of the contributions they did make was - for 'security' reasons or to ensure continuing support - often concealed from them by the apparatchiks. No doubt the willed estrangement cultivated by the *autonomi* also served to diminish interest in the link between acts and consequences and to blunt a concern to analyse their own participation in any detail. But the determination of many locals to preserve an identity attached to membership of a generically 'antagonistic community' rather than to a specific armed organization, paralleling their distance from organizationally-conferred identity in general, ensured that armed struggle as perceived by the locals differed sharply from armed struggle as envisaged by the intelligentsia and apparatchiks. In consequence, systematic political violence was very insecurely linked to local conflicts and support, even when it appeared to be enjoying its greatest diffusion.

The supply of locals, and the availability of a contiguous audience prepared to reason with the users of violence, began to contract from the mid-1970s. Electoral success by the Communist Party in the municipal elections of 1975 in Milan, Turin, Genoa, Rome and Naples had turned the party into the immediate local guarantor of public order. Party militants could therefore no longer offer the benign indifference that, in some neighbourhoods, they had displayed in earlier years: indeed, PCI members found themselves under increasing pressure actively to inform on fellow-workers suspected of involvement in violence. Further contraction in the numbers of locals available for

violence was ensured by the decline of the extraparliamentary Left and the steadily more explicit rejection of violence by its surviving groups. The dissolution of *Lotta Continua* in 1976, in particular, ushered a substantial number of militants out of all political activity - or (back) into the parties of the organized Left - at the same time as it released others into the area of *autonomia*. The residual extraparliamentary Left, and extreme parliamentary Left, responded to the contemporaneous increase in violence by clarifying the ambiguities in their earlier public pronouncements. Whereas violence had once been the distinctive rhetorical feature of their political identity as revolutionaries, the groups began, unevenly but audibly, to refuse the term 'comrade' to armed militants and to insist on the radical incompatibility of violence and politics. Those who expressed a continuing belief in the efficacy of their combination became progressively isolated as extreme Left activists sought to re-establish their own political identities by severing their personal and communicative links with members of the 'antagonistic community'. Supporters of violence were thus excluded from the discourse community of the extreme Left: no longer accepted as interlocutors, they found their claims on behalf of violence, and efforts to explain their politics, ignored. The communicative exchanges central to their self-understandings as political activists were gradually, but irrevocably, reduced - as indeed they had been, at a greater political distance and with more dramatic public effect, by the mass mobilizations against violence, sponsored by the Communist Party and trade unions.

The steadily more public hostility to violence by both extraparliamentary and parliamentary Left, coupled with the arrest of *Autonomia*'s intelligentsia in 1979, made it clear how narrow the scope for continuing to conjugate politics and violence had become. The locals were thus forced either to renounce violence altogether or devote themselves to it full-time. In both cases the network of contacts linking apparatchiks to their local sources of practical and symbolic support dissolved. Moreover, for those locals who were drawn into full-time clandestine activity, their self-discipline in the practices of estrangement ensured that they would be very poorly integrated in the organizations they had joined to protect their identities: the organizations themselves would therefore progressively lose any residual power to confer either a single identity on affiliates or agreed meanings for the violence they committed. By the end of 1979 these failures were evident to affiliates, provoking not only a sharp decline in the number of attacks but also the first public repudiations of violence by former activists.

Right-wing violence 1975-1979

The dynamics of violence on the extreme Right after 1974 can be summarized more rapidly, since they share a number of formal similarities with the Left. Most activists had served their violent apprenticeships in the now-dissolved groups of the early 1970s, *Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanguardia Nazionale*. Freed from the double limitations exercised by the Left/Right opposition and by links to the MSI, right-wing violence displayed the same schismogenetic pattern as the Left. Some 105 group signatures were recorded between 1975 and 1980, the overwhelming majority representing transient action-sets which drew on increasingly young militants and made no claim to establishing a political identity. Only three groups (*Nuclei armati rivoluzionari*, *Terza Posizione*, and *Costruiamo l'Azione*) claimed responsibility for more than ten acts of violence; all operated around Rome and were the only right-wing groups to engage in systematic murder campaigns, in particular against police and magistrates.

Only embryonic distinctions can be made between separate milieux in the world of right-wing armed struggle, since its full-time apparatchiks were surrounded neither by a genuine intelligentsia nor grassroots supporters. Relations between the very few ideologues of violence and the activists appear to have been conflictual from the beginning (Fiasco, 1990); and the total number of identified activists after 1977 amounted to only 266, 87 per cent of whom came from Rome (Ferraresi, 1988). However, two

aspects of left-wing violence find direct parallels on the Right. First, the traditional right-wing concern with action rather than ideology led to an interest in violence as the means of displaying 'autonomy' and thence to (unsuccessful) attempts to organize joint campaigns with the extreme Left (Fiasco, 1990; Ferraresi, 1988). A second similarity is also evident: the convergent attacks by left-wing apparatchiks and right-wing activists on the police and magistrature who represented their common direct antagonists, the state. For those right-wing activists who had acquired an expertise in violence in the early 1970s, the state replaced the extreme Left as their symbolic enemy, just as it had come to do for their left-wing counterparts. But the Right was no more successful than the Left in convincing even its own activists of the plausibility of its revamped justification for violence.

Defection and repentance

Since, for reasons given below, the extent of conflict within armed groups during the 1970s had remained even more inaudible to outsiders than clandestinity alone would have ensured, the rapidity and scale of defection after 1979 seemed hard to comprehend. The apparent conversion experience away from violence seemed as inexplicable as the conversion experience (wrongly) believed to have taken political militants into violence had been. Moreover, since recourse to political violence in democratic Italy had been widely portrayed as evidence of deep irrationality, to characterize defection from armed struggle as the rational response to the obvious failure of the project of violence begged the question of how the capacity for rational calculation had suddenly been restored. The suggestion that the relevant mechanism was the 1979 decree-law providing substantially reduced sentences in return for turning state's evidence cannot easily accommodate the fact that some of the most significant defections preceded the law or were later made by people whose confessions were too limited to allow them to benefit from it. Nonetheless, between 1979 and 1984, the overwhelming majority of left-wing practitioners of violence had come to abandon armed struggle as a practice or article of faith: by 1991 only 127 of the 297 participants still in jail had refused to abjure their commitment to armed struggle (**La Repubblica**, 10 August 1991).

Not surprisingly, given their generational heterogeneity and different levels of involvement, the participants in political violence proceeded at various speeds through the distinctive stages of the exit process: renunciation of violence, dissociation from their armed group, admission of their own responsibilities, and full descriptions of everything and everyone connected with armed struggle. The broad pattern of defection does, however, shed further valuable light on the different types of affiliation and on the sources of identity. The earliest left-wing defectors (*pentiti*) were all from the apparatchik milieux, indicating the pressures on its members - and especially on those who occupied marginal positions in their group organizations (Peci, Sandalo, Viscardi) or found themselves virtually without an organization at all (Barbone) - which the increasing distance from both the intelligentsia and the locals had created. These participants made the fullest confessions; their careers in armed struggle had gradually deprived them of the local social relations to inhibit them from providing details of their contacts, without permitting any compensatory solidarity in their own milieu. The second category of defectors, largely locals, adopted the strategy of 'dissociation' (*dissociazione*), by which they repudiated violence but limited their confessions strictly to their own direct responsibilities. The rapidity with which the attachment to violence was jettisoned confirms how few locals had been convinced that violence was the *only* possible political strategy, rather than simply a technique of political intervention which might be combined with others; neither the symbols nor the practice of violence had become the unambiguous core of their political or personal identities. But the difficulties they encountered in declaring a clear break with their pasts and with their former comrades-in-arms can be appreciated as a consequence of the strength of the personal ties which had caused them to become entangled in the world of armed struggle at all.

Significantly, the participants who found it hardest to dissociate themselves from violence were the intelligentsia. Although the Red Brigades leaders, Curcio and Franceschini, had declared in 1984 that armed struggle was finished, Franceschini only formally affirmed his dissociation in 1987 (Franceschini, 1988), and Curcio has not yet done so, restricting himself to proposing a general amnesty in which no explicit repudiation of the past would be demanded. Likewise, the intelligentsia of *Autonomia*, who denied any direct organizational or executive role in violence itself, maintained that they therefore had no violent pasts from which to dissociate themselves. No doubt, the persistent refusal to recant has been reinforced by the solidarity - and coerced by the mutual surveillance - of a shared and long-term prison life.[8] But the contrast between the stances of the apparatchiks and the intelligentsia suggests the effects of different connections between writing and violence. Until the confessions began to appear, the meanings which the apparatchiks and locals gave to violence had been very largely obscured by the attention paid to the meanings supplied by, and solicited from, the intelligentsia. What defection therefore meant was seizure of an opportunity to recount the details, motivations and meanings of acts of violence as they were understood by the actual participants, not as they had been interpreted for wider publics by the intelligentsia.

The consequences of the gap between the meanings for violence which circulated in different left-wing milieux can be underlined by examining the contrasting case of exit from right-wing violence. Here, since the rupture of the mid-1970s had effectively destroyed the links between the (MSI or extreme Right) intelligentsia and the activists, no obscuring of the meanings that the activists gave to violence occurred. Pressures towards providing alternative accounts, recovering the local meanings and rationales for what they were doing, were correspondingly far less intense. Repentance and dissociation among right-wing activists have therefore been less common than on the Left: only 28 per cent of right-wing, as against 41 per cent of left-wing, prisoners were either *pentiti* or *dissociati* in 1991 (**La Repubblica**,10 August 1991). Right-wing accounts also show that in most cases the principal spur to collaboration was the need to emphasize distance from the strategy of particular kinds of violence (the bomb massacres) and rarely to repudiate either violence itself or an activist past (de Lutiis, 1990).

The evidence concerning the Right, and the sequencing of withdrawals on the Left, suggest that the recovery of an externally acknowledged 'voice' was a significant element in the dramatically rapid ending of widespread violence. No causal claim that a sudden mass interior conversion to non-violence took place has therefore to be made. 'Repentance', I shall suggest, was concerned with recovery of 'voice' by the apparatchiks against the intelligentsia: 'dissociation', by the locals against the apparatchiks. Grasping why repentance and dissociation should have seemed such compelling tasks directs us to the politics of interpretation and response among the institutional opponents of violence.

Political Responses to Violence

No less essential than the interactions within and between armed groups, and between all armed groups and the non-violent extraparliamentary Left, to the outcome of the attempt to establish an identity between politics and violence were the interactions, achieved and attempted, between the armed community and its institutional opponents. A full account of these interactions, covering every major site in which violence appeared between 1970

[8] The earliest repentant apparatchiks, whose exhaustive descriptions often made the denials of many others redundant, had not yet been transferred to prison, and its system of appalling mutual surveillance, at the time of their confessions. Several participants who reached prison under suspicion of having collaborated were murdered or wounded.

and 1985, is too ambitious for the scope of this paper. I shall therefore restrict myself to examining the nature and contrasts between the two phases of interpretation, political and judicial, by the opponents of violence.[9] I shall deal first with the period 1969-1979 in which the public interpretations of violence offered by the political élite profoundly influenced the development of the armed community and the ultimately unavailing search by its members for clear, univocal meanings for their violence. I shall then consider the subsequent interpretations by the judiciary, dominating the years 1980-1987, which re-read *gli anni di piombo* from a different standpoint and made their own contribution to the definitive elimination of violence.

Sources for the understanding of political violence

Responding to violence requires some understanding, tacit or explicit, of its agents and their goals. Co-ordinated responses require a basic level of shared understandings. In the early years of violence, however, the interpretations of political violence by Italy's major parties, the Christian Democratic and Communist parties, were far apart.[10] The DC treated the declarations accompanying the clandestine violence of the extreme Left and extreme Right at face value: the problem of violence was a problem of equally threatening 'opposed extremisms', each inevitably generated by the radical ideologies of Communism and Fascism, which emphasized the importance of the DC's own 'central' role in defending Italian democracy. The DC-led government's public stress on those 'opposed extremisms' thus contributed to restricting the imaginative possibilities for violence within the straightjacket of direct confrontation between Left and Right.

The PCI naturally took a different stance, arguing that 'left-wing' violence did not exist: the texts which appeared to indicate left-wing authorship were therefore forgeries, and the selection of right-wing targets a mere 'provocation' - a flimsy camouflage for the necessarily reactionary inspiration, and probably direct organization, of all such forms of violence. The PCI's politically convenient, perhaps unavoidable, interpretation did not, however, long survive the escalation of violence after 1975: its flagrant indifference to the origins and political biographies of the second generation of activists was matched by failure to unearth any evidence of neo-Fascist collusion with left-wing groups. The PCI and other associations of the Left therefore came to join the DC in deriving their understanding of the projects and world-views of the politically violent from the growing number of texts authored by the intelligentsia of the Red Brigades and *Autonomia*.

The interpretive privilege granted to the intelligentsia as the mediators of the meanings of violence stemmed from several convergent processes. First, only after 1975 did the first extended texts appear, reflecting the emergence of the distinctive milieu of the intelligentsia determined to act as 'political interlocutors' with the opponents of violence (Franceschini, 1988). Second, the elaboration of meanings for violence was facilitated by the government's decision to incarcerate the Red Brigades intelligentsia and militants in a small set of maximum security prisons, created in 1977, in order to prevent them from fomenting disturbances in the ordinary prison system. The consequent opportunity for a single prison to become the Red Brigades 'university for violence' was willingly accepted.[11] The members of *Autonomia*'s intelligentsia, who were not arrested until 1979, were of course able freely to compose and disseminate their texts. Third, the imprisoned intelligentsia became physically and visibly available to external audiences, since the prison reform of 1975 permitted legal visits by politicians or their emissaries. More

[9] Elsewhere (Moss, 1989), I have described the responses to violence in factories and the judicial management of the principal Italian trials.

[10] I shall consider only the DC and PCI here. With some, usually temporary, deviations, the smaller parties followed the interpretive line of one or other major party.

[11] The description belongs to General Dalla Chiesa, who was the principal architect of the government's prison policy and the successful anti-terrorist investigations of 1977-1980.

importantly, the virtually continuous public appearance of the Red Brigades intelligentsia as collective defendants in major trials, notably in Turin between 1976 and 1978, offered many opportunities to display their interpretive dominance. Neither apparatchiks nor locals could of course have access to so public a platform, nor did they enjoy the personal, sometimes long-standing, links to journalists that the intelligentsia possessed by virtue of their shared social and educational backgrounds. Fourth, since the apparatchiks tended simply to copy extracts from the intelligentsia's documents into their own brief texts which claimed responsibility for specific acts of violence, the intelligentsia's writings took on a particular plausibility as a guide to the beliefs and ambitions of all participants in violence. Indeed, they provided a seemingly transparent essential guide to the mentality and meanings of an increasingly complex world of violence. Only later, once the first apparatchiks had been arrested and interrogated, were senior police in a position to acknowledge how inaccurate their deductions of the cultural capital of the apparatchiks from the intelligentsia's texts had been revealed to be. Fifth, the intelligentsia enjoyed a special privilege insofar as they were partially exempt from the normal strictures against journalistic use of direct contact with apparatchiks as a source of information. Although no laws, or even self-regulatory codes for the mass-media, restricting the reporting of violence were introduced, every case in which a journalist used interview or documentary materials from a clandestine meeting with a self-confessed participant in violence generated fierce controversy and often led to criminal charges. Use of texts and interviews authored by the imprisoned intelligentsia - who could not be the direct executors of the worst crimes - attracted far less opprobrium. Indeed, soliciting such exchanges could simply be represented as a valuable contribution to an improved understanding of violence - a defence which entailed the further claim that the intelligentsia's texts were indeed a transparent guide to the truth about violence, not simply one among several competing versions.[12]

Finally, police investigations provided little hard evidence about either apparatchik or local milieux throughout the 1970s. Enquiries had to surmount both organizational and cultural difficulties. The entrenched conflicts between police forces, the territorial limits to investigators' powers, and the regular dismantling and reorganization of national-level police and security service units - all served to hamper the police understanding of violence.[13] Furthermore, many local police, recruited from Southern Italy, were unfamiliar with the symbols and languages of the extreme Left in use in the North, so that the problems of tracking the evolution of the armed community through its public signals matched the difficulties of using routine techniques of infiltration in the unstable, friendship-based action-sets of violence. Suspicions of individual involvement could therefore rarely be turned into arrests, or arrests into convictions. The evolution of the actual organization of violence thus remained a mystery, ensuring that the intelligentsia's descriptions and claims gained particular authority by default.

The interpretive outcome of treating the intelligentsia's texts as the primary source of the meanings of violence was to read left-wing violence as radically divided between the two ideologies of the Red Brigades and *Autonomia*, each of whose memberships was credited with great internal homogeneity. That reading in turn encouraged a strongly organization-centred portrayal of armed struggle, misleadingly characterized as ruled by formal hierarchies, exclusive allegiances, and clear boundaries between members and non-members. Correspondingly, participants were imagined as full-time clandestine militants who had at some mysterious moment converted to the use of violence. This interpretation had its own consequences for political and police responses to violence.

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[12] Significantly, the very few apparatchiks who managed to secure publication for their views justified their contact with the press in terms of the need to correct the misleading impressions being given by the intelligentsia.

[13] For a detailed account of the vicissitudes of police investigations, see Moss (1989).

Constraints and strategies

Contrary to recent claims about the introduction of 'draconian legislation and repression' (Lumley, 1990), Italian responses to violence were remarkably low-key and did very little to modify wider political or legal processes. Although many elements of the so-called 'emergency legislation' between 1974 and 1982 aroused some controversy at the time of their introduction, the public support enjoyed by the major anti-terrorist measures was shown by the substantial majorities in favour of their retention when they were submitted to referenda in 1981. Only a small minority of Italians (one in six) claimed that state responses to violence had actually curtailed democracy and individual freedoms (Moss, 1989). Indeed, by comparison with initiatives taken in other European states - the introduction of the *berufsverbot* and legal restrictions in Germany or the recently-revealed nature of police enquiries and judicial direction in cases involving the IRA in Britain, not to mention the drastic innovations in Northern Ireland itself - the Italian state's responses seem a model of restraint.

Some of the restraint was simply the by-product of Italy's fragmented political system which makes rapid, wide-ranging and consensual changes hard to achieve in almost any field of public intervention. The succession of 18 governments, made up of nine different political party combinations, hardly offered the most promising instrument for any consistently interventionist, let alone draconian, policy to combat violence between 1970 and 1984. Indeed, in the early 1970s, progressive reforms dealing with citizens' rights, police powers and the prison system were achieved: the countervailing imposition of harsher penalties for violent offences and possession of weapons was in fact provoked by the rapid increase in ordinary crime which characterized the 1970s and was of far more concern to Italians than political violence.

The difficulties of securing sufficiently wide agreement on any drastic restrictions to social and political rights produced an outcome which was perfectly consistent with the deliberate intentions of policy-makers. Two general objectives stood out: first, to prevent any unification, tactical or organizational, between the two primary agents of violence, the Red Brigades and *Autonomia*; and, second, to exclude any perception of a common identity on specific issues between the armed groups and non-violent segments of society.[14] The first objective was reflected in the refusal to provide a single definitive identity in which the competing armed groups might recognize themselves or find common cause in resisting. Although the term 'terrorism' was formally introduced into the penal code in 1978, it was deliberately given no explicit definition.[15] Moreover, every law which increased the penalties for involvement in political violence simultaneously offered incentives and procedures for abandoning armed struggle. Likewise, by resisting the pressures to declare *Autonomia Operaia* an illegal organization (in contrast with the decrees dissolving two right-wing groups), the political élite prevented the *autonomi* from occupying the outlaw status already assumed by the Red Brigades.

As far as the content of anti-terrorist legislation was concerned, the armed groups were not given any general opportunity to justify their claims about the state's innate repressiveness nor to pose as the defenders of wider interests. No new national rules were introduced to restrict freedoms of speech and public protest; no delegation of authority to defend public order was made to the army, whose eventual involvement could only have provided evidence to support the insurgent claim of a generalized civil war in the making

[14] See Cossiga's testimony to the Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry into the Moro kidnapping for a statement of the government's strategy.

[15] By the terms of the laws of 1978 and 1980, suspicion or proof of 'terrorist' motivations for criminal activities entailed longer periods of pretrial detention and increased sentences, by comparison with non-politically motivated crimes.

or in progress. Decisions on what to publish were left to individual editors and media staff; local police chiefs were empowered to determine what demonstrations to permit or ban; and the definition and application of 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' were delegated to local magistrates and courts. Most of the harsh penalties to which the politically violent were subject derived from the application of measures introduced earlier to combat ordinary serious crime, so that no clear political status could be extracted from the measures to repress violence. The difficulty of deriving any general conclusions about the impact of violence from the myriad local, conflicting, and rarely publicized responses certainly helped to prevent its supporters from compensating for their failure to find common meanings for their attacks by extracting a common identity from those responses to their challenges. Moreover, in the single case (the Moro kidnapping) in which the political élite was invited to concede a political identity to the Red Brigades by negotiating Moro's release directly with his kidnappers, the government and opposition parties refused to break ranks and deviate from the strategy of refusing recognition.

The pattern of state responses amounts, directly and indirectly, to the rejection of an inversionary logic in combating violence. Thanks in part to the nature of the political system and in part to its rulers' deliberate strategies, the politico-legal responses to armed attack provided little opportunity for the very heterogeneous armed community to unify itself around a clear identity as 'Other'. Indeed, throughout the entire period, successive governments showed an extreme reluctance to make any general pronouncements about the nature of the threat from which they intended to defend Italian democracy or to offer any precise public assessments of the motivations and causes of violence (Pasquino, 1990). The obstacles placed deliberately or inadvertently in the way of the creation of an agreed national-level interpretation of violence, which would translate local meanings into evidence for a single assault on the Italian state, prevented the dissemination of a unified set of meanings which the users of violence could then have converted into their own understandings of what they were doing and might achieve. The limitations on the formation of public knowledge of armed struggle show up particularly clearly in the vicissitudes of the political élite's explicit attempts to provide a single consensual interpretation of violence.

Although their readings of violence all granted evidential privilege to the intelligentsia's texts, the political parties differed sharply on the substantive interpretations which those texts licensed. The DC, PCI and PSI continued to disagree on the immediate and long-term objectives of violence and on the nature of relations both among the main armed groups and between those groups and the surrounding society. However, in the wake of the Moro kidnapping, a Parliamentary Commission of Enquiry was established in 1979 to assess the state's performance during that episode and to provide a general account of 'terrorism'. After four years' work and persistent controversy, the Commission had finally to be content with producing six contrasting reports on the Moro kidnapping: its attempt to write an overall account of violence was abandoned almost from the outset. A further Parliamentary Commission, dealing only with the most serious episodes of violence after 1968, was established in 1984 but has so far fared no better in its efforts to reach an agreed interpretation of the meanings and responsibilities of those acts.[16] These failures rest in part on long-standing ideological differences in understanding political violence, in part on each party's determination to retain the maximum freedom to emphasize different aspects of violence according to the changing state of overall relations with other parties.[17] But they also reflect the general reluctance to try to impose

[16] As indicated in note 1, the conclusion of the Commission's work is still distant. Although it has been dealing principally with right-wing violence, reports of its deliberations suggest just as great a set of divergences between the parties as characterized their interpretations of left-wing violence.

[17] Thus the Socialist Party came, in retrospect, to distinguish its line on the Moro kidnapping ever more clearly from the DC's position as the PSI accentuated its competition with the DC in the 1980s. Similarly, the Communist Party interpretations converged with the DC's understandings during the years of

a single authoritative narrative of political violence which might serve to provoke interpretive divisions among the opponents of violence and unifying contestations among its supporters. An exactly parallel pattern of interpretation can be seen in the judicial responses to violence and the public meanings they disseminate.

Judicial Responses

From 1980 onwards, judicial readings of violence held centre stage in public debate. Political analyses had retreated behind the closed Parliamentary doors of the Moro enquiry and the commission into the right-wing massacres, so that the investigating magistrates and trial judges became the principal public interpreters of the *anni di piombo*. Their leading role rested on their initially exclusive access to the confessions made by increasing numbers of former armed militants - in particular the apparatchiks - under the provisions of the repentance legislation of 1980 and 1982.[18] The resulting judicial reconstructions necessarily went far beyond the routine institutional tasks of compiling a list of individual criminal responsibilities. Indeed, they offered, for the first time, a detailed account of the evolution of armed struggle, the histories of its various organizations, and a portrayal of the relationships among participants. In doing so, they provided the evidence necessary to achieve their authors' primary institutional objective: to repress and punish violence. But, equally importantly, by endorsing accounts which favoured the perspective on armed struggle from a particular milieu, the judiciary also contributed to the definitive undermining of any residual unity in the armed community. For the desire to revise the magistrates' versions led initially unrepentant or reticent participants to elaborate publicly their own reconstructions of past involvements and thus construe the highly individualized motivations and interests which had drawn them into violence in the first place. Connecting the formation of participants' post-arrest identities to their highly variegated pre-terrorist origins therefore helped to accelerate the collapse of the collective dimensions of organized violence and to prevent any chance of their reproduction or resuscitation.

In writing their histories of political violence, judicial authors were composing under three sets of constraints: the organization of judicial enquiries, the categories of the penal code, and the single-milieu perspective of the 'repentant' activists who provided the fullest early accounts. For the most part, the magistrates created, and then worked within, an informal interpretive community whose discussions and resolutions guided them through the enormously complicated task of processing an entire decade of political violence. The only two significantly deviant interpretations of left-wing violence were in fact produced by magistrates in Padua and Rome who had not been central members of that community and who rejected its informally agreed interpretive procedures.

The organization of the judicial discourse community

The limits to the content of judicial interpretations must reflect the constraints on the extent of investigative powers. Unifying 'national' interpretations will be encouraged in enquiries directed from a single investigative centre; local meanings will be favoured by decentralized, city-based enquiries. In the Italian case, although support was occasionally voiced for the judicial handling of all political violence by one set of magistrates attached to a single court, no such formal proposal was ever seriously considered. A court of that kind was held to resemble too closely the special tribunals of the Fascist period and therefore convey exactly the wrong message about the effects of violence on the

'National Solidarity' governments between 1977 and 1979 but diverged increasingly rapidly once the PCI had abandoned the 'Historic Compromise' strategy in 1980.

[18] Details of the laws 1980 and 1982 and 1987 are provided elsewhere (Moss, 1989).

democratic state. All judicial work was therefore carried out locally, according to the existing code of ordinary penal procedure.

After 1978, however, steps were taken to overcome the highly individualistic organization of Italian justice. First, teams of magistrates were created in every major city to deal with all episodes of political violence. Second, informal meetings between the most knowledgeable magistrates from the different cities were arranged to deal with urgent practical issues: to disseminate rapidly the information gained in particular inquiries; to reach agreement on the uniform application of the often unwieldy categories of a penal code whose relevant provisions had been devised for the quite differently organized anti-Fascist subversion half a century earlier; and to determine where the crimes authored by a group which had been active in several different parts of Italy should be brought to court. Collaboration among magistrates was also made easier from 1978 onwards by the relaxation of the rules of secrecy governing the materials of all criminal investigations; and the extensions of the limited terms of preventive custody for political crimes enabled magistrates to prolong the availability of suspects for interrogation. The deliberate construction of a judicial interpretive community, whose members could co-ordinate the content and justification of their decisions on awkward terminological and procedural issues, provided the essential organizational basis to establish a particular reading of armed struggle.

Interpretations and evidence

The favoured reading, composed out of the mosaic of information collected in separate enquiries, sealed the meanings of violence at city level. The magistrates' decision to deal with all episodes of violence authored by a particular signature through a single trial in the city where the acts occurred ensured that the local meanings would constitute the focus of attention; any accompanying supra-local meanings or aspirations were relegated to the background. Eventual similarities between the ideas and organization of distinct groups, or between the use of a single signature in different cities, were scarcely addressed, so that few opportunities arose to develop an inclusive interpretation of political violence as an overall co-ordinated attack on Italian democracy. Each episode of violence was accounted for in terms of its immediate local origins and intended meanings; and no obligation to examine the nature of relations between the affiliates of a single group in different cities was imposed.

Such a single-city, signature-focused interpretation of the organization and meanings of violence fitted neatly with the existential biographies of the primary sources of the magistrates' versions, the repentant apparatchiks. For most apparatchiks had operated in a single city and had based their participation in violence around affiliation to a single organization and control over use of its signature. Moreover, their strongly organization-bound commitment to armed struggle - which distinguished them from the abstract internationalism of the intelligentsia and the unstructured community solidarities of the locals - provided the structuring theme in their accounts of armed struggle. Not only was organizational allegiance the best guide to their experiences and to an explanation of the involvements of the affiliates with whom they had contact, but the terms of the repentance legislation required explicit dissociation from the practice and organizations of armed struggle, encouraging them to (re)describe the loose network of past relationships in strongly structural terms as a means of displaying their rupture with those relations more sharply. Casual encounters were subtly transformed into purposive meetings among fellow militants; gestures of friendly support became commitments to a specific group's project; and consensus on a particular act of violence mutated into consent to a decision made by the organizational hierarchy represented by the apparatchik. The emphasis common to those interpretations was also closely matched to the rigid formal criteria of membership that the penal code obliged magistrates to use for assessing individual responsibilities in collective violence. The dynamics of *différance*

which marked the processes of involvement in armed struggle are equally evident in the patterns of withdrawal.

Just as the apparatchiks had been spurred to offer their own versions of violence as a way of dissociating themselves from the publicly dominant accounts by the intelligentsia, so the locals became concerned to escape the interpretive hegemony of the apparatchiks. The judicial and media endorsement given to courtroom accounts describing participation in terms of organizational roles not only threatened to saddle locals with criminal responsibilities far superior to their actual involvement but it also obscured the importance of their engagement in open political activity. In locals' own understandings and practice, violence represented a convenient additional tactic in their political repertoire: it did not constitute the central source of their identity in the way that the apparatchiks' versions suggested. Locals thus found it necessary to offer progressively more complete versions of their own participation, as the judicial processing of their responsibilities moved from initial interrogations up to the final court of appeal. Naturally, shifts in self-understanding marked many of the successive accounts. The locals, and the apparatchiks too, frequently reworked the insights provided by collective discussions in prison and took advantage of appearances in open court to convey the transformation of their identities and their deepening appreciation of the nature and consequences of violence.

Deviant accounts

The fate of the only two instances of deviation from the city limits of interpretation shows clearly how accounts reliant on the intelligentsia's texts had been superseded as acceptable descriptions of armed struggle by versions based on the oral testimony of the apparatchiks. In both cases left-wing violence was credited with an organizational and strategic unity far transcending single cities, and evidence derived exclusively from the textual production of the 1970s was treated as conclusive. Both cases were based on the rare charge of 'armed insurrection against the state' and were tried in Rome, remote from the actual site of much of the violence under consideration but a convenient symbolic representation of the alleged aspirations of the armed groups to destroy Italian democracy. The magistrates' interpretations represented the final attempt to find a single overall pattern to armed struggle and to attribute at least a basic set of shared meanings to all participants.

The first case involved the judicial evaluation of 'Calogero's theorem', named for a Padua magistrate who claimed that left-wing violence was the product of a single co-ordinated attack by the Red Brigades and *Autonomia*. Relying entirely on the alleged identity of the lexicon used in the intelligentsia's texts, and treating their declamations as descriptions rather than aspirations, Calogero argued for the existence of a single 'armed party'. Apparent divergences or conflicts between its members were, he maintained, merely cunning attempts to mask an organizational and strategic identity and throw investigators off the track. The failure of the repentant apparatchiks to provide the slightest confirmatory evidence was attributed to culpable reticence. An oddly, apparently symbolically, selected group of defendants was arrested in 1979, finally brought to trial in 1983, but acquitted on the armed insurrection charge. The second case concerned the Red Brigades alone. In 1982 the group's total membership, consisting of all 426 affiliates identified since 1970, was charged by the Rome judiciary with armed insurrection against the state and civil war. However, by the conclusion of the trials in late 1989, the public prosecutor himself acknowledged that, whatever their ambitions, the Red Brigades had never constituted the kind of serious danger for the state that would justify conviction.

The defendants were acquitted, and the judicial processing of left-wing violence came to an end.[19]

Some of the deconstructive potential of any broader denial that the Red Brigades violence expressed common objectives were drawn by Cossiga himself, commenting on the refusal of an appeal court in Cagliari to recognize any direct connection between the array of crimes attributed to Curcio as leader of the Red Brigades and therefore to grant the appropriate reduction in his overall prison sentence. Without a clear link between crimes - Cossiga was reported to have mused - no single criminal design could be said to exist; without a shared criminal intent, the unity of the group labelled 'Red Brigades' dissolved; Curcio therefore could not properly be designated the leader of what had turned out to be a non-existent 'organization' (**L'Espresso**, 1 September 1991). Probably Cossiga did not intend his meditations to display any such generally subversive analytical implications. But the far-reaching implications of questioning the routine conferral of an organizational label reveal how unstable and essentially contested the procedures for fixing and subverting meanings of political violence have been in Italy.

Victims' Versions: The Final Stage of Individuation

Conclusion of the major trials ended the productivity of judicial meanings for violence. The public interpretive space has subsequently been occupied by a new vocabulary associated with a new set of protagonists, the surviving victims of the armed groups. Although their voices had been heard individually since the early 1980s, usually to condemn the generous application of the repentance legislation, the victims had not acquired an effective public identity. Two factors made their collective recognition possible. First, news of the meeting in prison between one of Moro's daughters and some of her father's kidnappers in 1984 prompted the arrangement of a very large number of similar encounters between the violent and their victims (Lenci, 1988; Bussu, 1988). The content of such meetings frequently became public knowledge, creating a wide and often-resented audience to assess each victim's readiness to offer, and each assailant's capacity to earn, forgiveness for the irreversible damage of the past. Second, the resulting publicity encouraged the victims to form a national association in 1985, which could intervene to promote their common interests and to convey their views most effectively in just such cases as Cossiga's proposal to pardon Curcio in 1991.[20] In that particular instance, the victims challenged the politicians' right to determine the symbolic meaning of granting freedom to the intelligentsia. Having themselves served as symbols of the national community throughout the 1970s, their own hospital beds and the funerals of their kin attended by official representatives of state and party, the victims sought to broaden consideration of the responses to violence by insisting on the importance to be given in public policy to their own previously ignored experiences.

The shared understandings of the past negotiated in the exchanges between assailants and victims constitute the final stage in the destruction of the collective meanings for political violence. By concentrating on direct consequences and individual responsibilities, former participants in violence were driven to confront explicitly the relations between a past self that they had often constructed in courtroom testimony and a present, not yet externally validated, self. The dominant focus of interest was narrowed to the details of individual

[19] Some single episodes remained under investigation, the most controversial leading to the conviction of *Lotta Continua* leaders in 1990 for the murder of a police officer in 1972 (see Ginzburg, 1991). None of the major right-wing massacres had been resolved: the forthcoming report of the Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry is expected to provide the evidence to lay charges.

[20] In 1990 the Association for the Victims of Terrorism achieved the formal recognition and financial compensation which the political élite had refused to concede for many years.

psychological careers in which neither the personal networks nor the organizational dimensions of armed struggle played much of a part. Encounters with their victims in fact provided former 'terrorists' with an opportunity to reconstruct social identities whose forms had been rendered progressively unstable, not only by the use of violence but also by estrangement from the ordinary institutional supports for the self during the 1970s. The type of marginality affirmed in the desire for 'autonomy' might have helped to make violence, even against individuals, livable; but it also proved corrosive, at both private and public levels, of the certainty required to define and bind together plausible meanings for violent and non-violent political activity.

Conclusion

This analysis has made the creation and management of meaning the key to the understanding of the emergence, evolution and decline of recent Italian political violence. At macro level, the entire sequence can be described as schismogenetic. The order in violence, initially produced by hostility across a common boundary, is dissolved as the antagonists lose the identity provided by direct confrontation, revise their hierarchies of friends and enemies and become internally more differentiated. The dominant armed organizations of both Left and Right attempt to redraw the boundary across which violent exchanges are acceptable, replacing their reciprocal antagonism by common hostility to the state. Neither succeeds. By refusing any general identity to its assailants, and by rejecting negotiations with the Red Brigades to exchange 'political prisoners', the state ensures that the division between supporters and opponents of violence remains a frontier, not a boundary. Delegation of responses to routine local police and judicial activity preserves this frontier.

As the initial order of Left/Right confrontation fragments, so the emphasis of the armed groups on internal boundaries increases. Violence is used to point up the vertical distinctions between organizations and the horizontal divisions of their milieux. The stability of such divisions is undermined by the failure to create an interpretive centre which possesses the authority to determine how the meanings conveyed by violence and by accompanying texts should be spliced together. The languages remain stubbornly distinct. The consequent failure to create symbolic capital either from acts of violence or textual exegesis ensures that the dynamics of *différance* cannot be halted. The manufacture of a clear political identity which incorporates violence is thereby frustrated; and the attempt to sustain the inversionary reversal of marginality into the positive goal of 'autonomy' is blocked. Appreciation of failure leads most activists to search, in the accounts they offer to magistrates and their victims, for a reconstructed self. Recognition of the actual boundary between violators and victims is the first stage in its eventual dissolution and to the violators' reincorporation into civil society. Whether a ritual consecration of that reincorporation can yet take place, presided over by the President of a state which refused to accept a political status for its assailants and by the leading assailant who has declined to revalue *gli anni di piombo* publicly, seems at present unlikely.

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