

THE HISTORICAL WOUNDS. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ARMED STRUGGLE IN ITALY AND IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT (1968-1980)

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ABSTRACT

What does “armed struggle” refer to? Is it possible to borrow a non-philosophical perspective of history, not monistic, in order to bring women back to their historical, social and moral responsibilities? How has the concept of women changed in the public eye, and to what extent does gender bias persist? This work focuses on contrasting traditional historiography with new historiographic perspectives and emphasizes the importance of specific terminology for distinguishing key interpretative categories. Armed struggle, destabilization, terrorism, revolution and sedition are included in an international context, after comparing the peculiarities of the Italian revolutionary fringes to the multifaceted american, japanese, german and french experiences. Currently, we are experiencing an even more complex, stratified and liquid social and cultural context, which is struggling to overcome a political violence and its consequences. It seems therefore necessary to explain the actions of certain female representatives of the extra-parliamentary left, while destroying obsolete and anachronistic stereotypes. Thanks to the suggested rich bibliography, the most significant steps of this path will be reconstructed while bringing up new questions.

Keywords: *armed struggle; revolutionary left; destabilization; political violence; terrorism;*

INTRODUCTION

In nowadays’ increasingly dissolved and referenceless societies, where the concepts of armed struggle, terrorism and political violence are devoured to excess in conversations, interviews, television investigations (generalist and thematic), weeklies, reports and radio news, everything take on a meaning that is too vague, without being able to understand, select and reconstruct the backgrounds and characteristics of precise political strategies supported by an articulated and widespread social conflict.

At the basis of this work is the analysis of some issues relating to the conventional twelve-year period set between the end of the 1960s and the second half of the 1970s of the last century, which are experiencing a comeback, fueling debates and controversies. Without any claim to completeness, they are placed, through comparative lenses, in the Italian and

international panorama, paying due attention on the peculiarities of the new historiographical trends, leveraging the gender perspective. Why? It is necessary to clarify the historical, social and moral responsibilities of women, crucial actors in the destabilization implemented in Italy and in other national realities, sometimes strengthening gender disparities but also managing to break down those stereotyped, anachronistic and obsolete constructions present in the magmatic social fabric.

An extended time span, difficult to summarize in a few pages, from which food for thought will emerge, condensing various disciplines in a dialogic and yet complementary way: from historical research in the broad sense to general sociology, going through political philosophy, gender studies, social anthropology, reaching up to linguistics and sociolinguistics.

The interest in overturning themes dealt with by traditional historiography, which has made use of a predominantly male one-way perspective, was encouraged by touching experiences narrated by those who personally carried out voluntary activities in some prisons in northern Italy which inspired the authors to come into contact with varied realities.

In the total institutions of Goffman's memory, we have expanded in the field the theoretical knowledge acquired during the various academic courses, taking advantage of the studies carried out by world-famous historians, political scientists, sociologists and essayists, including Aldo Sabino Giannuli, Gabriele Ranzato, Isabelle Sommier, Jeremy Varon, pioneers of historical and social critical investigation. The goal is to undermine the conception according to which the militants were immune from errors and criminal atrocities, marginal, subordinate, mediocre figures or helpless victims of ideologies, pressures and feelings that were as distorted as they were encapsulating. Understanding, therefore, the prominent leadership role played by some female guerrillas, the training, support and recruitment implemented, placing them at the center of reconstruction and restoring their autonomy and authenticity.

In doing so, new flexible interpretations are proposed, essential for investigating the strategy of tension *tout court*, in that dramatic escalation of violence which involved, with no holds barred, activists, civilians, terrorists (red and black), law enforcement officers, politicians, professionals of various domains and many others.

The starting point cannot fail to be the *French May* with the virulent public demonstrations by students, workers, feminists and ethnic minority groups against a bourgeois, hyper-capitalist system, pervaded by exasperated consumerism, in that globalizing homologation that has spread like wildfire since overseas. A common thread that connects forms of counter-power based, primarily, on the needs of the school and the factory, heterogeneous organizations that implemented the armed struggle in different ways and at different times: a strategic tool for a gradual seizure of power vs. "immediate communism". An incurable fracture that has roots, at least in the *Bel Paese*, in the anti-fascism and in the Resistance, positions and currents characterized by ideological and value divergences, irreconcilable with the residual legacy of the fascist regime which have caused constitutional fragilities to re-emerge, putting national unity to the test. In that irreversible destruction of social relationships, we will try to understand what pushed young girls, but not only them, to join clandestine organizations, laying the foundations for a conscience far from the patriarchal concept that relegated them to mere *angels of the hearth*.

To eradicate the gender hierarchy with decision-making and operational tasks, actively participating, deciding, experimenting, sacrificing one's life. For many women, formal and

substantial emancipation required a decisive subversion of the authoritarian legacies spread across the board, denouncing oppression in the family, at work and in relationships, aiming for urgent equal opportunities as well as a definitive cultural transformation.

The following paragraphs wish to outline an ontological explosion, claiming specificity in a historical period that requires in-depth analysis from different perspectives. The methodological choice in the arrangement of the paragraphs, each of which is dedicated to nuances of the topic under consideration, cannot fail to favor the geographical criterion alongside the one of gender. By identifying the *public enemy* of the moment from time to time, the objectives and actions carried out for a more egalitarian society will emerge, without oppression or injustice, starting from a legitimate cause (or presumed such), openly challenging the atavistic, misogynistic and contradictory one branded label of subordination. Rather than re-telling the story, it becomes useful to re-structure a collective memory by taking advantage of the other half of the gaze, that of the permanent female political activism, putting aside distrust, disinterest or hasty catalogings like *mimeograph angels* which, once again, confined women to undue transgressions or accessory jobs such as printing protest or counter-information posters and leaflets.

1. TERMINOLOGICAL ISSUE*

A media imbalance is still tangible which immortalizes faces of only men in a commando, with a weapon in hand, perhaps with a Walther P38, a few minutes before carrying out the assault, diverting the attention of the general public from the protagonism of the *fair sex*. Whether it is guerrilla warfare or terrorism (Marxist-Leninist, neo-fascist, anarchist, religious) it is necessary to bring order to the maze of the terminological question which has seen, erroneously, mixing concepts that loudly call for caution and prudence. But let's take a step back.

Schmitt's *friend-enemy dichotomy* has undergone a significant revival in the period considered, since the enemy, including authority in its most disparate declinations, the state and its representatives, becomes absolute, public, total and no longer places itself on the same level of the opponent. It must be crushed and re-educated due to its lack of value and «annihilation [...] is now only at the service of a presumed objective affirmation of the highest values – for which, notoriously, no price is too high» (Schmitt, 2005, p. 131).

To understand this figure, the *enemy* one, let's pay attention to the risk of spectacularizing information or trivializing information violence, especially when we want to shed light on conflict dynamics or action repertoires, avoiding resorting to sterile communicative dichotomies that lead to propaganda loaded with both moralistic and subjective evaluations. It is also true that it was not easy to discuss it publicly and it is not still, and this is why appropriate terms must be carefully chosen in full respect of those who have lost their lives and the family members who remember them with pain: *on a scientific level, a new generation of historians is grappling with these themes, asking themselves the question of which words to use to define that season, the protagonists, the bitter conflict which was often characterized as a physical clash, the militarization of squares, armed struggle, the practice of massacres* (Francescangeli, 2013, p. 65).

One cannot fail to recognize the inadequacy of expressions such as “years of lead” or “years of blood”, “extra-parliamentary left”, “political violence”, “excellent murders” or

* The quotes from Italian and French to English are faithfully translated by Francesco Mastrocola.

“state massacres”, since they put in the background various achievements (e.g., workers’ statute, divorce, voluntary termination of pregnancy, etc.). A semantic *mare magnum* that struggles to distinguish nationalist terrorism from subversive terrorism, guerrilla warfare from partisan or liberation war. As can be seen from the critique¹ of Francescangeli and Schettini (2004), the use of the macro-term “political terrorism” - as a by-product of institutional violence - takes the form of a stretch, incorporating events attributable to other cases, producing historiographical misunderstandings with the Spanish Civil War, the Italian Second *Risorgimento* or with ethno-religious conflicts typical of the Irish Troubles and Basque independence.

A first definition of terrorism addresses the discordance between pure aggression and limited self-defense, useful not only for identify national actors and containment measures, but also to delimit those individual processes that have changed its physiognomy into an international problem. A debate that initially took place within the borders of individual states and soon even in the remote and peripheral corners, with actions of media impact. So, how should we consider it? Low intensity conflict - to paraphrase General Sir Frank Kitson - or aberrant acts to be addressed with shared interventions? The definitional discrepancy matters a bit, what is really relevant is the intimidating/demonstrative act as such, which instills terror, since an ambush on a Carabinieri van or a bomb attack may indeed be based on a supposed theoretical consciousness but they fall within a chronometric «premeditated and criminal form of violence for political purposes which is exercised through clandestine structures and actions» (Vignali, 2005, p. 11).

One cannot enrich oneself academically if one does not put aside popular antinomies that use graduated lenses depending on the event or ideological proximity, considering the terrorist now as a deviant and now as a political prisoner or fighter, assimilating common crime to terrorist activity. They differ, among others, in their political purpose, logistics, cells, propaganda and proselytism, training, coverage, direct or indirect training, claims, without neglecting the communications channel. Even if self-financing is used in both (e.g., kidnapping, hostage-taking, robberies, extortion, etc.), the objective for terrorists is not limited to personal enrichment, rather it becomes a tool to exert pressure and increase their own influence in the institutional fabric, aspiring to more decisive goals:

Terrorism refers to unexpected, sudden destructive violence against innocent victims with the aim of causing a state of panic, which goes beyond the specific crime scene, shocking the community and attempting to influence the political status quo. Dramatization of violence in which the victim is dehumanized, made an object and a means to achieve another goal (Fotia, 2012, p. 28).

«There were in excess of 110 different definitions of terrorism» (Bloom, 2011, p. 16) but the definition just reported appears too generalist. It can be integrated with greater rigorism, relating Italian strategic terrorism to a planetary and chronological dimension that takes into account the concurrence of multiple practical-doctrinal factors, often overlapping, both for fascist-inspired terrorism and for left-wing revolutionary terrorism.

A work also made possible by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, a polarizing figure subject to speculation, that can be recovered through his writings, as «he is the first in Italy to advocate

¹ Moral judgment and political judgment have become intertwined over the years, making the process of historical reconstruction of events cumbersome, since extensive use has been made, not only journalistically, of negatively qualified analytical and emotional categories.

the immediate passage to the «criticism of weapons», but he conceives the struggle armed in the perspective of a global communist and anti-imperialist strategy» (Ventura, 1984, p. 86).

Armed struggle is not synonymous with terrorism, they are not interchangeable even if the boundaries are not always so clear, just as the objectives and approach to violence may differ. Indeed, the armed struggle, not only in Italy, was characterized by the use of guerrilla warfare and terrorism as support practices, since the adversary was far equipped with greater resources capable of instantly repressing an attack in an open field. It was necessary to become invisible, maintaining a persistent state of alert, forcing the state-system to deploy a large number of men to protect sensitive objectives, without any possibility of prediction. In this way, small groups spread across the territory, if carefully organized, were able to attack the heart of the centers of power and guerrilla warfare became «the new form of war» (Giannuli, 2018, p. 41), especially the urban one, with a mix of local population and extra-parliamentary groups

[...] the armed party needs the vast background of variously extended and expressed solidarities, and that essential link in every war plan which is the connection with a real mass movement. Solidarity is necessary to paralyze the will of the State, in order to Argentinianize the country without running the risk of a Videla arriving in plain clothes. The connection is necessary to give the armed party both the propellant of a mass movement and the refuge in which to retreat as if within the city walls, when needed. Thus, more than clandestine groups, [...] it can count on large masses of young people to be involved in the violence-repression-violence spiral. [...] A third condition is needed, which is the connection with the oldest experiences of guerrilla warfare, namely the clandestine ones (Orlando, 1978, pp. 105-106).

The nihilism of the armed party is corroborated by an ideological-inspirational blunder that reflects the intolerance of the *Student Movement* and the workers, in that intransigent and decisive violence that found free rein in the squares, factories, schools and universities, supported by a long line of bourgeois intellectuals (also of Catholic origin) who rejected traditional political mediation. From battles over wages and greater social protection we moved on to purely political ones, resorting to armed insurrection and guerrilla warfare as field choices capable of overthrowing a state fused with the excesses of capital, paralyzed by the inertia of the large parties, incapable of gathering and follow up on social demands. Not a new way of understanding governmental dialectics nor a new refractoriness to decision-making decentralization, but a long-lasting transgenerational process that organized extremist consciences, seeking the consensus of the masses for class autonomy.

Yet, among all the clarifications produced so far, those of political violence and revolutionary violence are still missing, despite the attempts to bring together a literature detached from the de-naturalization of social facts. In both, the gaps between direct and indirect violence, authorized and unauthorized use of force, the threat of violence-violent act continuum are taken into account but the political violence includes

acts of disruption, destruction and offense such that their purpose, their choice of targets or victims, their execution and/or their effects have political relevance, i.e., they tend to modify the behavior of third parties in a bargaining situation that has consequences for the social system (Nieburg, 1974, p. 19).

It becomes more immediate to reconnect with the revolutionary violence which aims to «attack the power of the state starting from an ideology of radical social change» (Sommer, 2009, p. 20), preparing the community for a general clash evoked as inevitable. It is the

beating heart of the armed struggle, for many extremists the only path concretely practicable, without alternatives, by the popular avant-garde:

The situation of violence that reigns in the world due to the domination and exploitation of the capitalist system in all its forms; the impossibility of resolving the internal contradictions of this system through its own laws of evolution or through gradual reforms constitute the necessary objective conditions of the revolution. But the subjective conditions of the revolution depend on the will of the men collectively committed to promoting it. The revolution therefore appears to us as the only possible way and presupposes a radical change in economic and political structures. But there will not be a structural revolution without a cultural revolution (Tucci, 1968, p. 314).

2. HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT

In a climate of prevailing social conflict characterized by the low integration of the middle class and the working classes in the political-institutional, trade union and economic system, the latent antagonisms within Italian society took shape in the two-year period 1968-69. The cleavages between parties and classes became increasingly evident and were affected by the turbulent international situation, in particular the Cold War and bipolarism, the *rollback* strategy, the Vietnamese Resistance, Francoism in Spain, the military dictatorship in Greece, the Palestinian question, guerrilla warfare in South America and Maoism.

The slogan relaunched by the multifaceted artist Yanne, *Il est interdit d'interdire*, summarizes the *French May*, in that student demobilization first and then social-political, which found the approval of the workers. The *22 March Movement* (1968) led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, occupied the premises of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Nanterre following the six arrests carried out by the Parisian authorities against students who had participated in a solidarity demonstration for their American fellow students of Kent State University and the victims of the Vietnam War. A year earlier, on February 9th, 1967, Palazzo Campana in Turin was occupied, evicted in the evening by the police with a heavy bulletin with eighty-one reported among the ranks of the *Italian Goliardic Union* (UGI). In the following months the scenario repeated itself, until November 27th of the same year, when the session of the Academic Senate meeting, gathered to decide on the transfer of various study courses was interrupted. Valle Giulia, the beating and murder of nineteen-year-old Paolo Rossi, the attack on the German leader Rudi Dutschke of the *Socialist Student Movement*, via Solferino, the massacre in Avola and the clashes in Marina di Pietrasanta during the New Year's Eve party, are just some of the most sensational events that anticipated a tumultuous and eventful season.

The interpretation offered by Pier Paolo Pasolini (1968) is fitting, an unpopular provocation following the violent scuffles in Valle Giulia, in the same Faculty of Architecture which saw scions of wealthy families depicted as dross of the bourgeoisie, and policemen (often peers) who were the ones, with the only fault to be on the opposite side of the barricade². Clashes that continued unabated, riots full of hatred, of resentment catalyzed by the *Student Movement* led by Mario Capanna and Salvatore Toscano who blocked the cities invaded by tear gas, stone throwers and set fires to vehicles. The soldiers found

² An emblematic judgment that created bitter tensions, taking the defense of the boys in uniform, mostly of peasant and working-class extraction, in opposition to the affluent offspring, armored in the so-called *bourgeois entropy*.

themselves between two fires, as happened on November 19th, 1969 when more than five hundred demonstrators, gathered in Piazza Duomo, marched towards Via Larga, not far from the University of Milan. The most extremists closed the protest rally, attempting to block the officers who were escorting the participants, but at that moment the revolt broke out and tension became very high. Every material useful to intensify the riot was raided and a man with his face covered, never identified, took a tubular from a scaffolding and threw it against the windows of a van driven by twenty-two-year-old Antonio Annarumma, fatally wounding him. A few weeks later, on the afternoon of Friday December 12th, 1969, the Piazza Fontana massacre, whose explosion of seven kilos of TNT caused the loss of seventeen people and the wounding of eighty-eight, marking the beginning of the *strategy of tension*. Not even time to commemorate the victims who fell, the anarchist and partisan Giuseppe Pinelli fell out from the offices on the fourth floor of the Milan police headquarters on the night between December 15th to 16th, held for investigations following the carnage at the National Bank of Agriculture.

We are not here to promote a chronology of events which, however useful it may be, differs from the initial considerations, but makes clearer the overall picture in which some phenomena have found strength, exploiting the inconsistency of a sick governance that retreats, abandoning its law enforcement and defenseless citizens to their fate, unprepared for an affront as such. An inaction that did not give sufficient weight to the evictions of universities and production plants, in that rampant political violence, maneuvered by the most intransigent fringes and «from the street fight we moved on to the organized armed one. [...] the killings, from accidental, became targeted, transformed into real political murders» (Serra, 2006, p. 76).

Symbolically, «the first episode of armed struggle on the left took place on October 5th, 1970» (Galli, 2013, p. 7), when Sergio Gadolla was kidnapped by the Genoese gang *XXII October* to ask for his ransom. Kidnapping was less risky and more profitable, and targeting a family of entrepreneurs and supporters of the *Italian Social Movement* (MSI), it became the optimal objective to self-finance the group and create enthusiasm. That was possible thanks to reconnaissance attempts in the area, promoted by Mario Rossi, which allowed the members of the *Tupamaros of Val Bisagno* to delve into the meanders of the Ligurian chief town. From the Radio GAP interference to the sabotage of industrial plants, from the explosive attacks to the attempted robbery of the valuables transporter of the *Autonomous Institute for Social Housing* (IACP) which ended with the death of the delivery boy Alessandro Floris, multiple analogies can be identified with other subversive cliques that radicalized the clash awaiting that palingenetic event which was slow in arriving.

Here, a passage of primary importance that will allow future analysis to be linked to the hot topic of this discussion. The passing of the baton from black to red violence occurred when the neo-fascist destabilization, which mostly affected innocent people, gave way to that of the far left, at that tipping point constituted by the first political murders³. Sectarian targets, carefully chosen. From material violence we moved on to physical violence, as happened with the kidnapping of the Sit-Siemens manager, Idalgo Macchiarini on March 3rd, 1972:

³ June 17th, 1974, terrorist assault in via Zabarella n. 24 in Padua, local headquarters of the MSI. Graziano Giralucci and Giuseppe Mazzola were killed following a brawl by a BR commando, composed of Roberto Ognibene, Fabrizio Pelli (material executors), Susanna Ronconi (rear guard), Martino Serafini (lookout) and Giorgio Semeria (driver).

The goal is no longer just the car or a theater, but man, the “enemy” to be captured and tried [...] On the late afternoon of March 3rd, Dr. Idalgo Macchiarini, manager of Sit-Siemens, was assaulted. For about half an hour he will remain a prisoner of the BR, subjected to a “proletarian trial”, photographed and released. Thus, a technique was inaugurated that would be scrupulously followed in the future. The action, studied in detail for a long time, became operational on the night of February 25th (Tessandori, 2004, p. 75).

Until December 10th, 1973, the date of the kidnapping of Ettore Amerio, head of FIAT personnel, by the *Red Brigades* (BR), there has been a stasis in an embryonic phase where a lot of energy had been spent on exhausting sieges. After Amerio’s imprisonment, a new cycle began, with the support of the proletariat and respectable groups of intellectuals. The hypothesis of armed struggle outside of union representation, as well as the related collective bargaining, became increasingly plausible.

There was a period up until 1972, which we then defined as a period of implantation, in which our project was unable to spread... above all, we consumed the energies of the comrades who came from the movement of 1968-69. After 1972, in particular after the Amerio kidnapping, a new phase began in which many people, especially factory workers and neighborhood proletarians, tried to get in touch with us and began to consider, even in a concrete way, the possibility of a development of the armed struggle (Franceschini, 1994, p. 105).

A “necessity” against the risk of a new fascist coup, the electoral expansion of the center-left in a country with the most solid and structured Western Communist Party banned by too many opposing forces, considered excessively reformist, lax, assimilated to the financial doctrine and open to the solicitations of center, losing its maximalist connotation. The incompatible coexistence with an opposing extremism that aimed to neutralize the revolutionary vanguard through indiscriminate massacres, was necessary to reawaken that dormant class consciousness clouded by the slimy imperialistic lackeys. Leaving aside the proclamation-filled declarations of intent and the catastrophic death toll:

[...] the most profound difference consists in the fact that, while fascist-inspired terrorism does not raise doubts about its aversion to socialism as such, the “red brigadier” instead wants to demonstrate the impossibility of a democratic path to socialism to the advantage of a claimed armed path, thus reviving the pre-Marxist myth of a revolution as destructive violence and as palingenesis (Minucci, 1978, p. 17).

The majority of movements and groups of the revolutionary left adopted *modus operandi* similar to each other, with actions considered euphemistically “legitimate” in response to a system anchored to the two cornerstones of the twentieth century: factory and statism. An offensive declared by incandescent armed propaganda, aimed at discrediting the sustainability of capitalism, with a bottom-up political rise characterized by protests, public disorder and widespread dissent, fueling drastic skepticism about representative democracy in its markedly liberal sense. An ideological absolutization that put entire nations in check, victims of blind and deaf governments in the face of strikes and demands directly proportional to rapid economic development, with civil and political rights savagely dissolved in anarchic liberalism.

3. THE ARMED STRUGGLE AS A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEM: THE CASES OF BARBARA BALZERANI AND SUSANNA RONCONI

The scenario behind the long and intense Seventies does not only present socio-political events that have reshuffled the international structure, but «a privileged place for exercising the historiographical canon of the crisis» (Baldissarra, 2013, p. 30). Post-war industrialization and the continuous intervention of the state have allowed sudden economic growth, thanks also to the notable welfare policies. There has been a redistribution of wealth which has seen the birth of a middle class eager to improve its status. However, with the end of the convertibility of the dollar into gold (1971), the eclipse of mass production based on the Fordist-Taylorism organization of work, the opening of markets and increasingly looming indebtedness, financial capital found the way leveled by taking over on doing and praxis. If the exaggerated accumulation of the capital also caused positive effects in the social consortium and a fair amount of widespread well-being, it soon transformed itself into a parasitic process with dangerous and difficult to predict effects.

To varying degrees and duration, those same demands for renewal from the middle class arose during the *Second Red Biennium*, when social tensions worsened and the assault on the heart of the state became reality. These frictions exacerbated the rejection of democratic institutions and norms, giving rise to a multitude of extra-parliamentary groups that implemented strategies intended to subvert the established order:

[...] hundreds and hundreds of small organizations were trying to give themselves an operational structure (the general figure relating to terrorist acronyms alone is impressive: 221 will be counted, as far as the left is concerned; in the neo-fascist nebula, the count will give singularly similar results: 223 acronyms) (Bonante, 2001, p. 144).

To break this deadlock, as if it were not already sufficiently undermined by social insubordination, the use of violence and the consequent political-military demobilization appeared to be the most representative responses for extremist fighters, not to be confused with a questionable and reductive ideological consequence.

In this paragraph, will be made a further crossing, leaving room for the stranded historiographical debate on the armed struggle, favoring a fearless and atypical point of view, debunking a taboo topic, going against all political interests.

Actually, this female perspective has sporadically been at the center of historiographical reflection in the strict sense, that is, since it has focused on the fictionalized reconstructions of the various mass media, on the autobiographical testimonies, interviews and reflections of former militants, or because it has always been linked to broader themes (socio-cultural struggles, strategy of tension, terrorism, etc.). In this regard, Bini (2017) has carried out compensatory work, particularly advanced regarding the correlation that insists between the female figure and the armed struggle, recognizing the negligible number of publications, with partial data to be compared with more structured international works. The scholar essentially distinguished two types of contributions from which modest data can be obtained: on one hand the essays, which deal with generalist discourses that have little or nothing to do with traditional manuals, addressing the general public, victim of a ruthless *media voyeurism*; on the other, the newspapers and periodicals of the time, where is possible to find interviews, biographies and experiential stories of those who argue introspectively and *a posteriori* for a certain type of choices. Life stories, autobiographies, long dialogues, poems with pictorial representations, memoirs and *Bildungsroman* are the main sources from which

to draw information, going beyond the soporific procedural folders but recognizing the impracticability of reaching a universally accepted historical truth.

A reiterated psychoanalytic perspective is found in that personal reconstruction which considers joining the non-PCI ranks as a priority, an essential condition for drastically changing the course of events and securing a front row seat in the regenerated society. If the decoding codes are eminently self-representative, one cannot fail to pay attention to hyper-subjectivity mixed with self-censorship, and a generational responsibility to be safeguarded. Unconsciously one justifies one's behavior by placing it in that intricate framework of politically motivated violence, redefining an identity torn apart by the consequences of decision-making. Those are small parts of a larger narrative where the current positions are exposed, bringing the reader closer to the writer in a sort of proximity, almost as if wanting to publicly rehabilitate the individual combatants. A different - and more subtle - discussion for oral testimonies (direct and indirect), and for award-winning television/cinematic films in which one or more privileged witnesses are interviewed, focusing on non-verbal communication, pauses, silences and omissions. These caesuras, however, usually concern the bloodiest episodes but are not made to deceive the audience, rather as a form of "respect" for the victims, making it difficult to "objectively" evaluate the violence by those who perpetrated it.

The gender lens is the main tool deployed by the Italian media to explain and justify the involvement of women in the armed struggle. However, this tool seems to be flawed and most often used improperly. [...] more useful seems to be a biographical approach that pays attention to the complexity of the subjects investigated and highlights the awareness of the decisions made by women in the armed struggle. The priority is therefore to listen to their voices and make use of oral sources, in order to consider them subjects of study and not media objects locked up in schematisms and categorisations, proceeding to contextualize their choices and recognizing them as having a political value like those made by their fellow militants (Stagno, 2018, pp. 129-130).

Noteworthy, is the documentary *Do you remember revolution* (1997), directed by Loredana Bianconi, since room is left to four great protagonists of red terrorism, who retraced the stimulating factors and salient moments that led them to make the revolution essence of their existence⁴. A look back, choices that saw ideological rigidity put before family, determination and isolation over well-paid stability, in a mature reconstruction of the climate of the time. An eternal optimistic present in which it has been referred to a private justicialism rather to a perspective of hope against the economic conditions denounced in the streets. Dissimilar stories with equally different pasts and, in addition to dealing with the removals of the official version:

those accused of terrorism are generally described and represented by the media, in particular by television, in accordance with the most common stereotypes, taking it for granted that a natural incompatibility exists between women and armed violence, for which female participation in radical and extremes of political initiative, as well as being somewhat anomalous, depends above all on the sentimental bond with a man (Di Cori, 1994, p. 326).

⁴ The autobiographical stories of Barbara Balzerani, Adriana Faranda, Nadia Mantovani, and Susanna Ronconi alternate, in a bitter tone that must deal with pasts that weigh like boulders. It is also relevant to remember *Die bleierne Zeit* (1981) directed by Margarethe von Trotta, which retraces the vicissitudes of the Ensslin sisters (Gudrun, Andreas Baader's girlfriend, founders of the Red Army Fraktion). The movie follows the lives of two sisters, Marianne and Juliane, that mirror the real-life figures of Gudrun and Christiane Ensslin.

Unfortunately, in previous works, women have often been reduced to petrifying typifications, chained in the man-woman polarity or secluded in the dungeons of the weak subject. They have never been debated as autonomous interpreters or in continuous metamorphosis but as “outsiders”, related to terrorist organizations only to passively follow boyfriends or friends, experimenting with the coercive use of force in a defined strategic project, capturing contradictory and apparently inexplicable aspects, thus reducing their actions to isolated events of an exhibitionist and/or emancipatory nature. Consequently, emerged the need to «introduce into historical discourse the idea that «women» are not a natural object of study, equal to each other, always similar in space and time and whose identity is established once for all» (Ivi, p. 307). A resonance reinvigorated by insights that document a detailed historical category that takes back a gender identity, reclassifying the false myths of masculinity and vile coercion:

[...] il importe de souligner que le recrutement actif des femmes dans la lutte armée requiert de surmonter tant au niveau idéologique que pragmatique, les réticences individuelles et collectives que suscite la participation des femmes aux tâches et aux secteurs de tradition exclusivement masculins (la politique et le militaire). Autrement dit, il est nécessaire d'influencer les points de vue des hommes pour qu'ils ne voient pas les femmes en tant que déviantes mais en tant que camarades (Felices-Luna, 2007, p. 9).

A constantly reshaped boundary, moral prohibitions that leave room for pretentious battle names, for a continuous change of self with courageous camouflage, and for the element that more than any other signifies the split (and the necessary comparison) with the female universe, that is daily familiarity with weapons. Even if there are varied basic motivations, all the militants converge in the desire to profoundly change a society in which one felt like a stranger, where capital despised the weaker classes, caught on the hook of wage labor. The simplest alternative was to return home, give up, abandon the revolutionary illusion and the seasons of protest into oblivion and conform to that coercive and authoritarian system. An unthinkable hypothesis, bordering on the absurd for those who, unreservedly, truly believed in the most radical change. This is what emerges from the chosen case studies, two protagonists in the Italian terrorist scene: Barbara Balzerani and Susanna Ronconi.

The first one, nom de guerre *Sara*, is an example of how a provincial girl, thanks to her personality shaped by economic difficulties (the last of five children of a working-class family) and her organizational skills, managed to establish herself as a leader in the Roman column of the BR, founded in 1976 by his boyfriend Mario Moretti. Numerous crimes have been contested her: from the planning of illustrious murders, such as that of the magistrate Girolamo Minervini (1980) to the kidnapping of General Dozier (1981), through the claiming of the ambush on the Florentine mayor Lando Conti (1986), up to a prominent role in the events that led to the Via Fani massacre and the death of the Hon. Aldo Moro.

Barbara Balzerani declared several times that she had never regretted the actions taken, nor did she ever dissociate herself from the armed struggle in court, rather she criticized how this was carried out by force of inertia both before and after the internal splits. Despite the life sentences, she finished serving her sentence in 2011, gaining parole in 2006 after twenty-one years of imprisonment. A political story that took shape in the year of the student revolts, when she moved from her hometown to Rome, a metropolis that could offer her those opportunities that seemed unattainable in Colleferro. A key transfer in her growth path, not only from an educational point of view. She conceived the Capital as a world in turmoil, just

a handful of kilometers away but enough to leave behind that stringent context in which she lived for nineteen years. To pay for her studies, she carried out occasional jobs, which allowed her not to burden her family, obtaining a degree in philosophy in 1974 in a *pan-politicism* where the revolutionary possibility was on everybody's lips. Hard-nosed against the politics of the left which too often lowered its head in front of the choices made by Christian Democratic governments, minimizing the black subversion which for years had thrown the country into a climate of chaos and oppression through attacks, political shenanigans and warnings of coups of state:

How come it is not said that the bombs and violence of the employers' reaction and of politics reduced to an instrument of power prevented us from believing in the effectiveness, reliability and even innocence of the worn-out mediations of the parties? How come those who conceived that social conflict as irreconcilable with the tactics and alliances of the leaders are not called to their responsibility? And to that of whoever fired the first shot, mortgaging the years to come? (Balzerani, 1998, p. 37)

The official entry into the BR in 1975 was marked by anxiety and worry, gripped by doubts, perplexities and uncertainties about a clandestine lifestyle which would have meant the interruption of all previous ties, to embrace ideals with rigid behavioral patterns.

The comparison with the Nazi-Fascist Resistance during the Second World War is not useful, if not downright misleading, because women did not replace men at the front with work in the factories and did not limit themselves to carrying messages from one cell to another. They were required to respect the same internal rules, subjected to the same sanctions without substantial differences with men and one did not enter these organizations as lovers, wives, sisters or mothers, but as militants co-opted by familiarity, always and consciously driven by their own strength of will. Self-discipline, skills, action and management of responsibilities were fused since each one was the bearer of ideas, energy and resourcefulness, regardless of class or origin. Membership did not equate to a sudden elimination of differences, millenary patriarchal legacies were not magically dissolved, but it allowed the opening of new spaces to address stereotyped prejudices, in view of a (more) important objective that would absorb them.

Decision-making sexism or the accommodating attitude, although present in other collectives, did not find realization in the BR and even less in the strategic direction because men and women were united by a common destiny. Accused of having embraced the armed struggle out of fanaticism or sick love, Balzerani has always sent such nonsense back to the sender because it was a thoughtful, difficult choice, without receiving any type of pressure. Her accusations also came from traditional feminist movements, which pointed the finger at the assimilation of a part of women to violent male chauvinist politics, forgetting the priority gender battle. To the fervent emancipationists anointed by interclassism, she reminded the pressing class struggle with the *theory of two times*: by transforming political relations (superstructure) it would be possible to modify capitalist economic relations (structure) and, with them, the gender issue.

The second one, nom de guerre *Laura*, was born in San Barnaba in the Dorsoduro neighborhood of Venice, from a middle-class family (the mother was a teacher and the father was first a cadet in the Navy, then a civilian, manager of multinationals in the oil sector). Raised and educated in Padua, there were frequent clashes with the authoritarian father, who had never accepted the rebellious nature of his daughter, who wanted to assert and dedicate herself in different fields, historically reserved for men. After graduating from high school, in

1969 Susanna Ronconi was forced to enroll in Political Science despite having expressed the desire to move to Trento in the new faculty of Sociology. During the last year of high school, she was overwhelmed by the hot autumn and the student collective that organized group reflections, discussions, and occupations with external associations that fought for the Palestinian people. A political conscience that was born with *Potere operaio* and with the seminars held by Gambino, Negri, Dalla Costa, strengthened by dinners at the homes of out-of-town students, by meetings with occupational physicians and with the workers of the Marghera Petrochemical Plant:

Potere operaio was an organization with a strong male leadership where the dynamics were identical to those of traditional parties and other parliamentary groups, that is, machismo galore, where I also acted as the “mimeograph angel”, but when I wanted to do something else I did it (Ronconi, 2017, p. 66).

Crucial were the anti-fascist counter-information and feminism that led her to abandon *Potere operaio* for following the feminist group, which came out a year before the *Rosolina Conference* (1973). The counter-information revolved around the Milanese newspaper *Nuova Resistenza* was organized in the *Brigata Proletaria* “Erminio Ferretto”, merging with the Venetian column of the BR under construction. The armed initiation of the «Amazon of Terror» (Cecinini, 2018, p. 74) occurred with some robberies without casualties at credit institutions but, as anticipated, the first episode was the assault on Via Zabarella that caused the death of the MSI members Giralucci and Mazzola. In those months, Ronconi fell madly in love with Fabrizio Pelli, extremely different but enough to ignite passion and, at the same time, internal tensions within the BR, where some leaders did not approve of those risky elopements that could blow up the hideouts and covers of the entire group. Thus, in 1976, after having engaged in a fruitful correspondence with the Turin comrades of *Senza Tregua*, the birth of a new formation was made official, with goals still too distant from those of the BR but united by territorial rooting. *Prima Linea* (PL) gathered the orphaned souls of *Lotta Continua* (LC), *Potere operaio* and the BR themselves who wanted to raise the level of the conflict, acting on two levels:

- ⇒ *National Command* with organizational and vanguard functions;
- ⇒ *Squads and Patrols* with support functions during kidnappings, expropriations, sabotage of industrial plants and dedicated to self-financing activities.

Whether it is a centralized and pyramidal structure (BR) or a vertical and horizontal structure (PL), the clear common denominator is given by the «great attention to the denunciation of the alleged personal «guilt» of the target hit» (Caselli, Della Porta, 1984, p. 165). This can be deduced from the shootings and murders in which Ronconi was the material executor, targeting judges, company executives, “repentants” and managers within the penitentiaries such as Alfredo Paoletta, professor of criminal anthropology, member of the *National Commission for Penitentiary Reform* and director of the *Criminological Observation Center for the Campania, Puglia and Basilicata regions* based in the Poggioreale prison. A recipient chosen not by chance, in line with the protests that arose within the prisons due to the precarious hygienic-sanitary and overcrowding conditions in which the inmates found themselves, especially in the south of Italy. Arrested in 1980 in Florence, Ronconi was captured again following the escape from the prison in Rovigo. On the afternoon of Sunday January 3rd, 1982, Ronconi with the inmates Loredana Biancamano, Federica Meroni and Marina Premoli went down to the courtyard during the yard time carrying a small radio. The commando led by Sergio Segio (Ronconi’s boyfriend) positioned

on the other side of the perimeter wall with 20kg of TNT, detonated the device as soon as California by Gianna Nannini started:

January 3rd: a “mixed” commando formed by members from the Communist Nuclei and the Committees for the Organization of the Proletarian Liberation, led by Sergio Segio and composed of Pasquale Avilio, Giulia Borelli, Gianluca Frassinelli, Lucio Di Giacomo, Massimo Carfora, Diego Forastieri and Rosario Schettini, blows up an external wall of the Rovigo prison, allowing Susanna Ronconi, Loredana Biancamano, Marina Premoli and Federica Meroni to escape after a shootout. A passer-by, Angelo Furlan, dies of a heart attack (Steccanella, 2018, p. 325).

After ten months on the run, Ronconi was stopped by the Carabinieri in Milan, sentenced to 22 years of detention, while was on the verge of surrender and definitive dissociation. Through the *homogeneous areas* in the Turin prison, she had the opportunity to maintain relationships with cultural associations, universities, and local production centers, starting to weave links that were essential for a reintegration into civil society. In 1998, she returned to being a free citizen, immersed in social work alongside the marginalized, working in a cooperative for the prevention and recovery of youths afflicted by the scourge of drug addiction, in the non-profit organization *Abele* founded by Don Luigi Ciotti.

Trying to sum up, for Ronconi, the armed struggle was a lack of concreteness, a revolutionary blunder behind many lost their lives or their loved ones, shattering fraternal bonds. Even today, despite the distancing from extremist dynamics and the assumption of responsibility, there is a sense of widespread confusion mixed with regret for the stinging generational defeat. They are terrorists who have committed crimes but, even before that, they were women who have pursued ideals, overturned gender differences, taking on burdens, leaving the younger ones a message to rediscover. Compared to Balzerani, there is an intimate transformation in Ronconi, passing through the dissociation from the armed struggle as a political instrument, with diametrically opposed backgrounds, attitudes, stories and dissonant paths but both

They had taken death into account, as anyone who makes a radical choice takes it into account. An eventuality that must be constantly confronted. Giving and receiving suffering. It is not easy for anyone, whether woman or man. You do it since you are convinced it is a historical necessity. You do it for love, even if it may seem strange. Love for justice, for freedom. Love for the revolution (Staccioli, 2015, p. 12).

4. PREJUDICES AND STEREOTYPES: HISTORICAL, SOCIAL AND MORAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF WOMEN

In every form of conflict, sexual identity with its clichés and preconceptions represents relevant dimensions for an appreciable analysis of the underestimated relationship between female protagonism and political violence. An almost cumbersome historiographical presence, a sacrificial victim of heavy stereotypes that have forcefully reduced its importance.

Stereotypes and prejudices are not at all superimposable, they do not represent the same concept even if they are connected to each other: «the stereotype is in fact the cognitive core of prejudice» (Villano, 2003, p. 7). If the first ones can be defined as small immutable and tendentious representations, emotionally charged mental shortcuts, the latter, on the other hand, are mostly negative attitudes based on rigid preconceived beliefs.

In Italy, the old historiography has flattened the discourse on the 70s by resorting to such simplifications, attributing an exceptionality of the Italian case to the constant of politically motivated violence, forgetting all the subjects involved. Why is the obsessive defensive tendency of armed struggle seen as the obvious and only response to indiscriminate massacres? If it is true that violence «[...] calls into question cultures, social contexts, norms and rights, political strategies and military practices of a vast circle of actors» (Neri Seneri, 2012, p. 26), it is necessary to suspend the elusive category of cause-effect, avoiding gratuitously condemning those who have not been able to choose instruments of protest worthy of a state of law. Among these, armed women, who have escaped from misunderstandings and anachronistic cultural constructions, based on shared expectations that repudiate that predetermined deviant attitude, especially if committed by those who are habitually placed at the antipodes of violence.

Using gender as an interpretative key to female political violence means being able to bring out the complexity of the protagonists' lives and it also means keeping in mind that women's involvement in political violence is placed outside the stereotypes and expectations regarding the "ideal-typical" behavior of women, but also outside the stereotypes and expectations of what we generically conceive as "terrorist behavior" (Musolino, 2017, p. 38).

In the collective perception, women's participation in the armed struggle has caused a stir, because it condenses the gap between certainties and illusions, reality and the cancellation of expectations about traditionally understood life. Curiosity has often prevailed over sociological analysis, with a magnifying glass placed more on private life, physical appearance, clothing, psychological characteristics (expressive aspects), diminishing political commitment, and with it, the revolutionary drift. Above all, media narratives resort to personality disorders, sexual problems or an unhappy adolescence before feeling part of a more inclusive project. Not only that, efforts are made to retrace the encounters that shaped the personality of disoriented university students, both with professors (e.g., Susanna Ronconi, a student of Toni Negri) and with fellow students who later became leaders and partners. The choice of weapons is considered an unseemly consequence of a lack of rationality, decreeing *ipso facto* the exit from the private-identification-aesthetic dimension to land in the public one, interfering with ancestral models that relegate them to an imaginary soaked in maternity and home care. Not being recognized, their crimes are spectacularized, exorcised, in line with archetypes that carry androcratic values, referring to a cogent imitative action: *Models still largely sedimented in the individual and social imagination return [...] to underline the fundamental inconsistency of women in the face of managerial tasks, their total psychological dependence, their priority being, even physically, in traditionally feminine attitudes and ways of relating, therefore linked to expressive rather than productive purposes even in this extreme case of belonging to terrorist groups. [...] we are faced with the reconstruction (or construction) of criminality starting from the traditional stereotype of female deviance (linked to madness, love, etc.) and of the role of women themselves (Iaccheo, 1994, p. 107).*

In this sense, the hypothetical emulation with the male universe, despite being completely devoid of any argument or empirical evidence, launches a compelling challenge: the recovery of subjectivity. The rational elaboration of one's own experience allows one to insert these within power relations that today appear outdated, making intelligible a memory that is neither preserved nor extinct. It is no coincidence that the assumption of responsibility

passes through the sense of justice in response to a repressive state apparatus, but also through the discrepancy between favorable premises for protest and the speed of socio-cultural upheavals.

Women like Balzerani and Ronconi were not forced to join their respective subversive groups but deliberately chose their own destiny, moving from violence against goods and structures to violence against other human beings, jeopardizing ideals that were in some ways respectable. The desire for redemption loses all value when the point of no return of political murder is passed, and it is limiting to respond that they were pressured by the circumstances or events that imposed it. They had their relevance but were not the exclusive factors since each action has a history, a price to pay in terms of mourning, defeats, mistakes, understandable only if we put ourselves on the other side of the blame, in the shoes of the protagonists.

In doing so, we touch with our hands burning biographical material that must be recognized not in the sense of ideological legitimation but as overcoming a dramatic silence «because a country that has no memory is forced to continually relive its past» (Limiti, 2013, p. 28). If we condemn them to oblivion, too many mysteries will remain such and just as many doubts will not find an answer, leaving gaps that the mass media touch up with care by leveraging collective emotions, riding fragmentary and accommodating reconstructions.

5. EXPERIENCES AND PATHS OF ARMED STRUGGLE IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, JAPAN, WEST GERMANY AND FRANCE: A BRIEF REVIEW

Introducing the category of gender as a keystone for the analysis of women's participation in left-wing terrorism has proven providential for understanding the relationship between the sexes, by renouncing a merely factual historical chronology. Depriving oneself of it means cultural impoverishment, symbolic misery based on distinctions of nature and not on socially defined constructs, galvanizing masculine self-representation. Only by restoring meaning to differences is it possible to draw the coordinates of a psychological and symbolic revolution, which restores dignity to those women who have become unconsciously interpreters and spokespeople of popular ferments and instances of renewal.

In this last section, intercultural and geopolitical research will dominate, a passage that moves parallel to the gender issue by offering, in a comparative perspective, a brief overview of the experiences of armed struggle outside national borders and, in particular, in the United States of America, Japan, West Germany and France. It is undeniable that the international context, the wave of protests in the main urban centers and the galloping anti-authoritarianism have been conducive to degenerative thrusts both in academic spaces and in industrial plants

Daily news reports tell of murders, shootings, and woundings perpetrated with unstoppable frequency, and perceived with ever greater and resigned impotence. People died "since" they were enemies. And they were enemies because they died. [...] they died because they held a public or private position of responsibility or for a thousand other "whys". Because there was always a why to die for in a time of delirium. A delirium that was first timid, then collective, that overwhelmed everyday life [...] (Casamassima, 2011, p. 6).

5.1 U.S.A.

Towards the end of the 1950s, protests against military involvement in Vietnam spread like wildfire across all the federal states, starting from demonstrations for the protection of civil rights but, above all, from dissent towards compulsory military service, racial

segregation and the Cuban crisis, themes extensively addressed in *Tom Hayden's Port Huron Manifesto* (1962).

The *Free Speech Movement* (FSM) born on the Californian campus of Berkeley in October 1964 not only claimed freedom of expression and student participation in the various decision-making processes, but was inspired by a boiling ferment about the new guise of the university as a mass institution crushed by the financial market. The radicalization of student protests was followed by worker protests, destabilizing the institutional left considered too close to the establishment, responding with a deafening silence to the requests for change coming from the heterogeneous currents present in the *Students for a Democratic Society* (SDS). The movement *par excellence* of the *New Left* that counted hundreds of thousands of supporters, which, at first, managed to synthesize the demands of even the most marginalized souls such as feminists, homosexuals, African Americans and Hispanics, reached its apogee during the spring of 1968, between April 23rd and 30th: *The Columbia protests, as they escalated into the takeover of the university, also became one the primal scenes of New Left radicalism, from which the idea and then the reality of "armed struggle" emerged. [...] Columbia had a strong SDS chapter, which in 1966-67 protested the presence of CIA and military recruiters on campus. The SDSers initially pursued institutional channels for changing university policies but soon came under the leadership of an "action faction" that favored polarizing confrontations* (Varon, 2004, p. 25).

A symbolic date for the largest mobilization of the student with more than a million participants, it saw the occupation of five buildings at Columbia University, accused of real estate speculation to the detriment of Harlem residents, of military recruitment and of having had less than clear relations with the *Institute for Defense Analysis*.

The seven hundred and twenty arrests in a single night and the eviction by the New York police further distanced those marginalized currents that decided to organize themselves autonomously, leaving the SDS at the mercy of anarchists, Maoists, Trotskyists and Third Worldists. During the ninth convention held in Chicago in June 1969, the *Manifesto* entitled *You don't need a Weatherman to know which way the wind blows* was circulated, signed by the *Revolutionary Youth Movement* (RYM), the intransigent faction of the SDS that would transform itself into the *Weather Underground Organization* (WUO) or commonly *Weathermen*. Their first public demonstration, also held in Chicago, was called the *Four Days of Rage* (October 8th-11th, 1969), in which participants were incited to direct action, positioning themselves as a vanguard together with the *Black Panthers Party* (BPP) to overthrow American imperialism and racial discrimination. A project debated during the *Flint War Council* (December 26th-31st, 1969) in which it was decided *to bring the War Home*, moving on to armed insurrection and proclaiming a hostile declaration against the government. The main catalyst was the double murder of Fred Hampton and Mark Clark, theorists and leaders of the BPP, killed by a commando of fourteen men from the Chicago police, which was followed by the first WUO statement recorded on a tape and sent to a Californian radio station by Bernardine Dohrn⁵: *Hello. This is Bernardine Dohrn. What I am going to read is a declaration of war. This is the first statement from the Weatherman Underground. All over the world people are fighting imperialism and are looking to the*

⁵ She also founded the *Women's Brigade of the Weather Underground*, initially called *The Proud Eagle Tribe* and numbering around seventy members, remembered for its bombings of *Harvard University's Center for International Affairs* on October 14th, 1970 and the *Department of Health, Education, and Welfare* in San Francisco on March 6th, 1974.

youth of America to use their strategic position behind enemy lines to join forces and destroy the empire. (.) If you want to find us, we are here. In every tribe, commune, dormitory, farm, shack and suburb where the kids make love, smoke, anyone who is running away from American justice is free to come. In the next 14 days we will attack a symbol or institution of American injustice (Ricciardi, 2012).

Nineteen demonstration bombings to strategic buildings were claimed before the dissolution in 1977, with announcements made thirty minutes in advance to allow the evacuation of civilians. The only casualties were three WUO members (Terry Robbins, Diana Oughton, and Ted Gold) at 18 West 11th Street, Greenwich Village, New York on March 6th, 1970, during the preparation of a IED containing dynamite, glass, and ferrous material that exploded prematurely, destroying the entire building and significantly damaging surrounding properties.

5.2 JAPAN

The causes of the Japanese student protests must be sought in anti-Americanism, in US interference within the archipelago and in Japanese political history following the surrender of August 15th, 1945. On January 19th, 1960 the *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (Ampo-Toso)* was signed, which committed the US to build a more balanced and collaborative relationship with Japan, both by intervening in the event of external attacks and by informing the Kishi government about the number and different locations of foreign military bases. In other words, a revised and expanded version of the first *Security Treaty* signed on September 8th, 1951 which provided for the massive presence of American military and nuclear bases also in strategic Okinawa.

During the demonstrations against the extension of the agreement, a young girl was victim of repression by the police, exacerbating the dissent of the *Ampo generation* that would have to deal with the corruption scandals at Nichidai and the violent eviction of the Yasuda amphitheater in Todai, academic excellences of the *Land of the Rising Sun*. Following, all the other universities, protagonists of an exasperated increase in enrollment fees that facilitated the mass mobilization of student organizations, already taken to the streets in 1958 to support the *teachers' union (Nikkyoso)*, forgotten by the Communist Party. An irreparable rift that saw the simultaneous removal of the most important student union, the *Zengakuren*, which represented about a million and a half, divided into extremist groups of various kinds, totally detached from institutional party logic: [...] *Zengakuren came into the hands of an anti-JCP group in June 1958. The new Mainstream, [...] took a radical Marxist position, denouncing all Communist states for their excessively statist, bureaucratic character, and reflecting in some measure the earlier currents of anarcho-syndicalism so prevalent in Japanese radical circles before the Bolshevik Revolution. At this point, Zengakuren became deeply factionalized* (Scalapino, 1967, p. 133).

The transition to armed struggle occurred with the fragmentation of the *Trotskyist League of Communists* into other subgroups where the *Nihon Sekigun (Japanese Red Army)*, with a transnational vocation, would emerge, aligned alongside left-wing extremist organizations to promote a large-scale revolution. This was the intent of Fusako Shigenobu, who exploited the synergy with European and Lebanese movements, resulting in her being the first leader to promote suicide attacks for the armed cause, following the kamikazes of the Imperial Japanese Navy.

Under Shigenobu's leadership, the JRA was one of the first terrorist groups [...] to practice suicide attacks. Global ambitions brought Shigenobu to the Middle East, where she could evade the Japanese intelligence service and get her recruits military and terrorist training. With the help of the North Koreans, Soviets, and Syrians, Shigenobu established an international alliance with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP was headquartered in Lebanon, and the JRA sent its most capable operatives there for training. They learned how to build bombs, stage aircraft hijackings, and carry out assassinations (Katz, 2004, p. 43).

Of all the crimes committed, the hijacking of Japan Airlines flight 351 (March 31th, 1970) to Fukuoka, with one hundred and twenty-nine people on board by a commando of nine men, and the attack at Calata San Marco in Naples (April 14th, 1988) had a greater media impact. In the first one, the aim was to reach Havana but, due to lack of fuel, the commando decided to change course towards North Korea, where it was taken into custody by the Korean authorities and then used by them for secret operations and propaganda activities in support of the regime. In the second one, the purpose was to kill a great number of US soldiers, gathered in the United Service Organizations club, in the San Ferdinando neighborhood of Naples.

After the split in 1971, only the *Yodo Group* remained in Pyongyang while the *Japanese Red Army* decided to continue the revolutionary project also outside the national borders. The *Rengo Sekigun (Unified Red Army)* settled permanently in Japan, forming organized armed gangs that were economically sound, thanks to self-financing, before dissolving due to the purge that took place on Mount Asama, fueling public outrage.

5.3 FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

German students did not passively suffer the implosion of the imperialist order but started again from American antagonism, from the rejection of the Vietnam War and from the resentment held towards the former soldiers of the *National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP)*. Common causes in all the revolts of the *League of German Socialist Students (SDS)*, even if the murder of Benno Ohnesorg first, and that of Rudi Dutschke later, sharpened the frictions both with the armed forces and the *Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD)*. When other movements, including the *Extra-Parliamentary Opposition (APO)*, were dissolved, some activists went underground like Andreas Baader, Ulrike Meinhof, Gudrun Ensslin, influenced by the South American urban guerrilla warfare and the strategies of the *Nihon Sekigun*, founding the *Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF)* on May 14th, 1970. Before it was torn apart by the *Stammheim trial* (1975), there were frequent contacts with the Berlin anarchists of the *Kommune 1 (K1)* and the *June 2nd Movement (B2J)*, but also with the lesser known *Roter Morgen (RM)* and the *Revolutionäre Zellen (RZ)* who boasted a female armed wing called *Rote Zora (RZ)*. The first generation of the *Baader-Meinhof organization* included former members of the *anti-psychiatry movement*, united in the *Socialist Patients' Collective (SPK)*, outlined in a female terrorist's autobiography:

The SPK had been disbanded, people I liked had gone underground or been arrested. They could arrest me too, if it was discovered that I had rented a house for the RAF [...] I had put a full stop to my past, my parents, my friends, my previous life. Now, I only had RAF left (Schiller, 2011, p. 77).

The second generation, however, broke away from the student-worker background by signing the offensive of '77 with political murders, dynamite attacks and industrial sabotage, attacking the heart of the State. It was responsible for the prelude to the massacre of Via Fani, kidnapping the industrialist Hanns-Martin Schleyer⁶, killing the driver and 3 men of the security guards in the ambush of Vincenz-Statz-Strasse (September 5th, 1977). After forty-three days of captivity, the body was found in the trunk of a green Audi 100 in Mulhouse.

Before proceeding with the execution, from October 13th to October 18th of the same year, with the help of the *Martyr Halima* commando of the PFLP, the Landshut of Lufthansa (flight no. 181) was hijacked to request the release of the RAF leaders. The lifeless bodies found in their cells after a presumed suicide did not quell the mobilizations in defense of political prisoners in prohibitive conditions, favoring the continuation of the armed struggle of the third generation until 1998, the year of the dismantling of the terrorist network that had caused «67 deaths, 230 wounded, damages amounting to several billion marks, 517 convictions for participation in an armed gang and 914 for aiding and abetting» (Casamassima, 2017, p. 62).

5.4 FRANCE

The *French May* shook the national university system, highlighting the critical issues of the massification of education and the unsustainability of a hedonistic society in favor of a libertarian earthquake typical of anti-authoritarianism, fueled by critical theory and counter-culture. The student unrest and the *angry people of Nanterre* triggered an unstoppable cycle of protests in factories starting from Nantes with three thousand workers, occupying Sud-Aviation from the afternoon of May 14th, 1968. In a week, the revolts crossed all industrial sectors, with eight million demonstrators taking to the streets to block the national economic apparatus and send a signal to the Gaullist dome (May 22nd). From May 25th to May 26th, negotiations were started between representatives of the Prime Minister Pompidou, workers' unions and employers' associations to obtain a union section inside the company, an additional week of paid leave, a 35% increase in the guaranteed minimum interprofessional wage and a 10% increase in real wages. The *Grenelle Accords* were never approved and the crisis continued until the National Assembly was dissolved and the citizens called to the polls to confirm de Gaulle, temporarily slowing down the political crisis. The social and cultural crises did not subside at all, on the contrary, they found in the *May 1968* a paroxysmal intensity that favored the extra-parliamentary left also engaged on the front of neocolonialism and Third-Worldism.

The progress of the far left was aided by the process of politicization of youth in contact with anti-colonial struggles. The war in Algeria shaped the first generation of militants and ensured visibility for the Unified Socialist Party (PSU) created in 1960 by the unification of three left-wing groups. The Vietnam War was a precursor to a second generation emerging from the crisis of student organizations, the UNEF (National Union of Students of France) and in particular the UEC (Union of Communist Students), whose waves of exclusion gave rise to currents (the «Italians») and, at times, new parties: the Trotskyist Revolutionary Communist Youth (JCR) in April 1966 and, [...] the Maoist Communist Union of Young Marxists-Leninists (UJCml). The latter in turn experienced a crisis in the aftermath

⁶ The "perfect" victim was the Christian Democrat president of the *Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie* (BDI), who had a Nazi past, first in the ranks of the *Hitler Youth* and then in the *Schutzstaffel* with the rank of *Untersturmführer*, without ever regretting it or dissociating himself from it.

of May from which two organizations were born: the Proletarian Left (GP) and *Vive la Révolution!* (VLR) (Sommier, 2019, pp. 277-278).

Both the *Communist Revolutionary Youth* (JCR) and the *Gauche prolétarienne* (GP) - the latter with the clandestine armed wing of the *New Popular Resistance* (NRP) - alternated with demonstrations against far-right militants, the armed forces and police stations. Before dissolving independently in 1973, the GP claimed responsibility for sabotage, arson and kidnappings, including that of Renault-Billancourt manager Robert Nogrette (1972) in retaliation for the killing of worker Pierre Overney.

The armed struggle was also embraced by the female workers of the LIP watchmaking company in Burgundy and continued by revolutionary fringes that had emerged from the GP such as *Vaincre et Vivre* and the *International Brigades*, united in the *Noyaux armés pour l'autonomie populaire* (Napap). Thanks to the incessant mediation of Jean-Marc Rouillan, the Napap merged with the *Groupe d'Action Révolutionnaire Internationale* (GARI) to create *Action Directe* (AD). Although, the first murder (police infiltrator Gabriel Chanine) promoted by Régis Schleicher dates back to March 1982, the practice of political murder became a constant after the amnesty granted by François Mitterrand (1982). Among others, the fatal attack in La Celle-Saint-Cloud against the engineer of the Minister of Defense, René Audran (1985), and that against the CEO of the Renault group, Georges Besse (1986) were claimed.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Fifty-five years have passed since the Piazza Fontana massacre in the center of Milan, since that device placed inside the Agriculture National Bank, and despite the seven trials, we can no longer resort to the hasty rhetoric of Italian-style mysteries.

It was an atrocious asymmetric war with hundreds of casualties and thousands of wounded, mostly civilians, with the only fault of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. From strikes to union demands, from the *Observer's* definition of "strategy of tension" to the collusion of political forces with occult organizations, secret services, and paramilitary structures, the clear common denominator has been the progressive and systematic recourse to violence in all its declinations. It is impossible to accept the anachronistic construction according to which the armed struggle took place occasionally, with small episodes disconnected from each other, isolated, on a level outside of party fragmentation and polarization, as if it were something extraneous to the institutional structure.

This contribution has gone off the rails of classical historiography, adopting an unusual but contemporary bold perspective, taking inspiration from those who have experienced that antagonism to bourgeois-financial capitalism since its embryonic stages. Through the cases of Barbara Balzerani and Susanna Ronconi, images have emerged that are profoundly different from women immune to errors, barbarism and male oppression, who have gone underground, exploiting organizational and communication skills to plead the revolutionary cause. Destroying oppression, the subordination of the sexes, resorting to weapons to confront the monopoly of state power and all-male protagonism, a non-refundable, one-way ticket for change and to make a breakthrough, once and for all, in the collective conscience. By privileging this point of view, they are brought back to the center of the academic analysis, accepting a certain type of choices that make them responsible on a par with men, highlighting gender differences and returning the due historical, social and moral burdens. It becomes imperative to shed light on the reasons, roles, idealistic and personal components

underlying female participation in armed groups, using a critical eye, capable of delving into paths that must not be only limited to the Italian context.

Given the impossibility of creating a predominant ideal type of militant, a paradigm for all states, it is necessary to recognize the failure of the subversive experience, contextualizing the events in that pangean social fabric, and distancing any form of Simonian value judgment. Open research that does not cling to procedural truths and does not offer shreds of truth but sociological keys that place men and women behind the same dock, examining every hypothesis, misunderstanding, fear, and argument, selecting heterogeneous sources that can favor future debates that are as constructive, formative and multidisciplinary as possible.

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