Transnational Relationships between the Italian Revolutionary Left and Palestinian Militants during the Cold War

Luca Falciola

Journal of Cold War Studies, Volume 22, Number 4, Fall 2020, pp. 31-70 (Article)

Published by The MIT Press

Transnational Relationships between the Italian Revolutionary Left and Palestinian Militants during the Cold War

✣ Luca Falciola

Introduction

When one of the founders of Italy's Red Brigades (*Brigate Rosse*, or BR), Prospero Gallinari, died in January 2013, scenes of his funeral circulated widely on national and international news. His coffin was covered not only with the typical red flag bearing a hammer and sickle and five-pointed star but also with a banner of Palestine and a black-and-white kaffiyeh. Why did this image, epitomizing Gallinari's lifetime activities, associate far-left armed struggle in Italy with the Palestinian fight against Israel and with Third World national liberation?

The relationship between Palestinian and Italian revolutionary fighters during the latter part of the Cold War remains a puzzle in both public memory and historical analysis. The dearth of empirical research and the fragmentation of knowledge have meant that the terrorist dimension of the link has overshadowed all other aspects. Scholars generally have not specified which components, among the many different factions of both the Italian far left and the Palestinian movement, weaved transnational ties. Moreover, the places and the channels of such encounters are largely unmapped. Furthermore, the strength, the evolution over time, and the resiliency of the bonds have never been systematically scrutinized. Finally, the implications and outcomes of the relationship are commonly disregarded or deduced by analogy with other countries.

The present research aims to clarify all these issues through a fine-grained historical analysis based on primary sources. For this purpose, after a literature review and a methodological note, the article addresses four main questions. First, it briefly reconstructs the genesis of the Palestinian resistance and focuses on the political reception of the Palestinian cause within the Italian revolutionary left. Second, the article examines how Palestinian militancy established roots in Italy and how the national and international contexts

Journal of Cold War Studies
Vol. 22, No. 4, Fall 2020, pp. 31–70, https://doi.org/10.1162/jcws_a_00966

facilitated it. Third, the article traces the interaction between Italian revolutionary leftists and Palestinian militants both in Italy and in the Middle East. Fourth, the article scrutinizes the factors that strengthened the transnational relationship between Italians and Palestinians and how that relationship might have contributed to the radicalization of the revolutionary leftists; it also surveys the factors that inhibited even closer ties by preventing the establishment of structured coalitions and a broad transfer of repertoires of action.

The scope of this research extends beyond simple description of relationships and draws attention to the powerful fascination the Palestinian cause exerted abroad on politically engaged youth, provides a window into the life of the Palestinian diaspora, and offers a glimpse into the global ambitions of the revolutionary left. In addition, the article deepens our understanding of Italian counterterrorism strategies by exposing the effects of a policy of complaisance that allowed Palestinian militants a privileged sanctuary in Italy.

Literature Review

Despite the breadth of scholarly work on both the Palestinian resistance and the Italian revolutionary left, the transnational relationship between the two remains largely uncharted.[1] Four streams in the existing literature deal with aspects of the topic, often providing useful insights. First, a growing body of journalistic work on the international terrorism of the 1970s has pointed to the Palestinian connection, described as the epicenter of a single network masterminded by the Soviet Union. Although contributors to this literature correctly emphasize the global reach of the offensives against democratic institutions during this period, they tend to overstate the density of international linkages, with much speculation on the "mysterious network" behind Italian terrorism.[2]

Second, a few rigorous and well-researched studies of the BR have considered its cooperation with the Palestinian resistance. However, this research

1. For example, the literature on the international relations of the Palestinian resistance makes almost no mention of the Italian connection. See, among others, Augustus R. Norton and Martin H. Greenberg, eds., *The International Relations of the Palestine Liberation Organization* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989).

2. Andrea Jarach, *Terrorismo internazionale: Gruppi, collegamenti, lotta antiterroristica* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1979); Claire Sterling, *The Terror Network: The Secret War of International Terrorism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1981); Giovanni Fasanella and Alberto Franceschini, *Che cosa sono le Br* (Milan: BUR, 2004); Giovanni Fasanella and Rosario Priore, *Intrigo internazionale* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2010); and Silvano De Prospo and Rosario Priore, *Chi manovrava le Brigate rosse?* (Milan: Ponte alle Grazie, 2011).

focuses on material exchanges and operational coordination, leaving unexplored the circulation of symbolic resources, the individual trajectories of militants, and the influence of the political environment. Moreover, such literature generally overlooks the numerous nonviolent or merely violence-prone militant organizations that operated in the Italian and Palestinian contexts.[3]

Third, journalistic works on the Bologna attack of 2 August 1980—the most murderous terrorist action in Italy's history, which killed 85 people at the city's rail station—offer a close-up view of the Italian political authorities' stance toward Palestinian terrorism. However, this literature is oriented toward validating the hypothesis that the bombing, officially attributed to extreme-right terrorists, was actually a retaliation by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) against the Italian government after the latter's violation of a non-belligerence agreement.[4] Although this hypothesis is worthy of further exploration, the history of Palestinian resistance in Italy deserves a broader analytical perspective and a more neutral approach.

Fourth, a few recent historical studies of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict describe its repercussions in Italy from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. In doing so, they also offer valuable details about the reception of the Palestinian cause within the Italian revolutionary left. However, these studies are mostly limited to considering the ideological dimensions of this relationship and therein focus mainly on the issue of anti-Semitism.[5]

Sources and Definitions

The analysis here draws on a variety of primary sources, including recently declassified intelligence reports, judicial materials, militant publications, and

3. See, in particular, Ely Karmon, *The Red Brigades: Cooperation with the Palestinian Terrorist Organizations (1970–1990)* (Herzliya, Israel: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2001); and Ely Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations: Revolutionaries, Nationalists and Islamists* (Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 2005). See also the recent and very detailed Marco Clementi, Paolo Persichetti, and Elisa Santelena, *Brigate rosse: Dalle fabbriche alla "campagna di primavera,"* Vol. 1 (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2017).

4. In 1995 the neofascist militants Valerio Fioravanti and Francesca Mambro were found guilty of the attack. See Valerio Cutonilli and Rosario Priore, *I segreti di Bologna: La verità sull'atto terroristico più grave della storia italiana* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2016); and Gabriele Paradisi, Gian Paolo Pelizzaro, and Francois de Quengo de Tonquedec, *Dossier strage di Bologna: La pista segreta* (Bologna: Giraldi, 2010).

5. Arturo Marzano, "Il 'mito' della Palestina nell'immaginario della sinistra extraparlamentare italiana degli anni settanta," *Italia contemporanea*, Vol. 7, No. 280 (April 2016), pp. 15–39; and Arturo Marzano and Guri Schwarz, *Attentato alla sinagoga: Roma, 9 ottobre 1982: Il conflitto israelo-palestinese in Italia* (Rome: Viella, 2013).

other first-hand documents culled from Italian state and private archives. Ten original semi-structured interviews, personally conducted with militants belonging either to the Italian revolutionary left or to Palestinian groups, complement the set of sources.[6] The sample of interviewees is not representative of the two sides. However, I concur with Alessandro Portelli that even biased self-narratives and selective memories—if critically evaluated—can provide unique insights about the meaning of historical experiences and are valuable for cross-checking other sources.[7]

The article uses the expression "revolutionary left" to denote the whole political spectrum that placed itself to the left of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) by refusing parliamentary and democratic means while seeking revolutionary solutions. This front included aboveground groups that rejected clandestine armed struggle and only rarely employed violence, as well as underground groups, such as the BR, that made systematic use of violence.[8] From 1969—the year of the first violent episodes—to 1982, revolutionary leftist organizations claimed responsibility for an estimated 2,188 attacks against property and people on Italian soil. These attacks resulted in 321 victims—134 of whom were killed and 178 of whom were injured.[9]

The expression "Palestinian resistance" stands for the multifaceted and shifting cluster of political groups that engaged in radical struggle on behalf of Palestinians against alleged Israeli "colonization." The Palestinian resistance was all but unanimous in seeing violence as both legitimate and desirable. Some branches of the movement backed guerrilla warfare and terrorism in the Israeli-occupied territories while cultivating diplomatic ties abroad, whereas others refused any compromise and planned armed actions in the rest of the world. Such attitudes tended to fluctuate over time.

6. Giorgio Baumgartner, interview, Rome, 12 August 2014; Sami Hallac, interview, Turin, 23 July 2014; Vincenzo Miliucci, interview, Rome, 31 July 2014; Vera Pegna, phone interview, 15 August 2014; Daniele Pifano, phone interview, 8 May 2014; Bassam Saleh, interview, Rome, 29 July 2016; Anna Scarpone, phone interview, 12 July 2016; Oreste Strano, interview, Novara, 6 June 2014; Khader Tamimi, interview, Milan, 2 August 2016; and Kutaiba Younis, interview, Turin, 4 August 2016.

7. Alessandro Portelli, *The Death of Luigi Trastulli, and Other Stories: Form and Meaning in Oral History* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1991), pp. 1–26.

8. On the revolutionary ethos and its terrorist outcomes in Italy, see Richard Drake, *The Revolutionary Mystique and Terrorism in Contemporary Italy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989). On the distinction between radical groups and clandestine militant organizations, see Donatella della Porta, *Clandestine Political Violence* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

9. The number of victims does not include the combatants who were killed or injured in action. The number of attacks does not include a large share (1,792) whose responsibility is still unattributed. See Donatella della Porta and Maurizio Rossi, *Cifre crudeli: Bilancio dei terrorismi italiani* (Bologna: Istituto Carlo Cattaneo, 1984), pp. 18–19, 63–65.

The article covers the period from 1967 to 1982, approximately from the Six-Day War until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the ensuing expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the country. During the same years, the Italian revolutionary left completed its life cycle. By 1982, the broad leftist movement that had emerged since 1967 had nearly faded away.

The Rise of the Palestinian Resistance and International Terrorism

The Arab defeat in the Six-Day War in June 1967 and the subsequent Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai, and the Golan Heights brought despair and paralysis to Palestinians. By 1972, 1.5 million people had taken refuge in camps in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. As a consequence, the Palestinian resistance—the PLO in general and Fatah in particular—grew stronger and gained a reputation as the only political actor able to redeem the Arabs' military failure.[10] The PLO relocated its activities within refugee camps and tried to act as a legitimate authority, asserting its sole right to protect the people. The quest for "liberation" through armed struggle against "Zionist colonization" increasingly became "the source of political legitimacy and national identity, the new substance of the 'imagined community' of the Palestinians."[11]

In the face of Israeli military superiority, the PLO opted for the Vietnamese and Cuban models of guerrilla warfare and terrorism, thus turning the Middle East into a "second Vietnam." The PLO set up its headquarters in Jordan, whereas Beirut was imagined as an "Arab Hanoi," a "red base" for launching guerrilla attacks. "By casting themselves as liberation fighters," the historian Paul Chamberlin writes, "the guerrillas were able to access networks of international support emanating from revolutionary centers like Beijing, Algiers, Hanoi, and Havana and become a focus of international press." Therefore, Palestinians received not only solidarity but also financial aid, arms, training, and diplomatic backing from revolutionary movements and Communist countries across the world.[12]

10. Al-Fatah, reverse acronym of Palestinian National Liberation Movement, was founded by Yasser Arafat in 1959. In 1965, it began launching guerrilla attacks against Israel; in 1967, it joined the PLO.

11. Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement, 1949–1993* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 196.

12. Paul T. Chamberlin, "The Struggle against Oppression Everywhere: The Global Politics of Palestinian Liberation," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (January 2011), pp. 25–41.

By 1968, rifts between PLO factions had deepened. The PFLP gradually emerged as the main Marxist-Leninist group, assuming the status of most important force after Fatah. The organization grew out of the Arab Nationalist Movement, which was established by leftist refugees in 1949 at the American University in Beirut and was led by George Habash. Initially, the movement supported tactical cooperation with Gamal Abdel Nasser and the Arab countries, but it rapidly embraced a truly revolutionary agenda. If Fatah's ideological identity and political project were fluid and ecumenical, the PFLP's struggle became theoretically clearer. Liberation and revolution had to combine. The aim was twofold: building a free Marxist Palestinian state and transforming reactionary Arab regimes. The struggle for Palestine was only the first stage in the pan-Arab social revolution and, ultimately, was part of a global insurgency that started in the 1960s in the Third World and in the West. Contrary to the conventional nationalist view, a new understanding of a colonized society divided into classes prevailed. Moreover, the PFLP converted into a proletarian party that emulated a Communist party structure, with a Politburo and a Central Committee. Habash was named General Secretary, and Wadi Haddad was appointed head of the Special Apparatus.[13]

Even as the Palestinian resistance at large gained international sympathy, the PFLP decided to start operating abroad by attacking the large web of alliances that economically, politically, and militarily supported Israel. This plan led to the indiscriminate use of terror, with no distinction between military and civilian targets.[14] According to the PFLP, such a strategy was the only one available to call world attention to the Palestinian problem and was the only substitute for direct warfare against Israel—an effort that proved to be debilitating. In doing so, the PFLP inaugurated modern international terrorism. On 22 July 1968, a commando hijacked an Israeli El Al flight in Rome and forced it to land in Algiers. The passengers were held hostage for three weeks, until Israel agreed to release a dozen Palestinian terrorists from prison. This was, as Bruce Hoffman points out, the first time that terrorists deliberately targeted the nationality of the flight, succeeded in forcing their enemy to communicate directly with them, and had the power to create a major media event. Moreover, terrorists began to travel from one country

13. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, p. 234. In 1972, Wadi Haddad's branch, named PFLP-External Operation, started conducting attacks outside the territories without the official approval of the PFLP.

14. Ariel Merari and Shlomi Elad, eds., *The International Dimension of Palestinian Terrorism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), pp. 20–21.

to another to carry out attacks in which they hit innocent civilians of any nationality.[15]

Other highly publicized actions followed, such as the simultaneous hijacking and destruction of five aircraft in September 1970. This episode led King Hussein to crack down on the PLO and expel it from Jordan. During two weeks of fighting, several thousand Palestinians were killed, and the PLO was forced to relocate to Lebanon. In May 1972, Israeli commandos stormed a plane hijacked by the PFLP in Tel Aviv and rescued the passengers. The PFLP responded a few weeks later by organizing an attack conducted by three members of the Japanese Red Army Faction. The terrorists boarded at Fiumicino Airport in Rome, hiding their assault rifles in violin cases, and landed at Tel Aviv's Lod airport, where they killed 26 people and injured 80 others.[16] A few months later, the Black September organization kidnapped and murdered eleven Israeli athletes and officials and fatally shot a West German policeman during the 1972 Summer Olympic Games in Munich.[17] From 1968 to 1984, according to Ariel Merari and Shlomi Elad, Palestinians committed some 435 terrorist attacks outside Israel. The United States was the leading target, and Western Europe was the principal venue of activity. Only in Arab and Communist countries did the Palestinians avoid attacks.[18]

The decision to extend the struggle to the international arena favored cooperation with global revolutionary forces. The fedayeen "found themselves in good company at the crest of a rising wave of transnational radicalism."[19] The Palestinian problem gradually assumed a central place in radical left-wing rhetoric and was heatedly debated. The PFLP gained international renown, and some of its operatives became international celebrities. Airline hijacker Leila Khaled, for example, achieved fame as the female terrorist par excellence.[20]

Although international opinion was essentially unanimous in its condemnation of the Munich attack, the exposure accorded to the Palestinian cause meant the operation was "a spectacular publicity coup." As Habash noted, the

15. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), pp. 63–64.

16. Aaron Mannes, *Profiles in Terror: The Guide to Middle East Terrorist Organizations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), p. 311.

17. After the expulsion from Lebanon in 1970, members of Fatah decided to establish the Black September Organization, which adopted a strategy of total terror. Its main goal was not only to regain the "lost honor" of Palestinians but to prevent the more radical militants of Fatah from joining splinter groups. Until 1973, the leadership of Fatah at least tolerated Black September's operations.

18. Merari and Elad, eds., *The International Dimension of Palestinian Terrorism*, pp. 4–5, 52–55.

19. Chamberlin, "The Struggle against Oppression Everywhere," p. 27.

20. Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations*, pp. 250–253.

world at least was talking about Palestinians.[21] By 1974, however, Fatah and the majority of the PLO came to the conclusion that relying just on international terrorist activity did not serve the cause. The growing diplomatic support for the PLO, Yasser Arafat's address to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly, and the special observer status accorded by the UN helped to move the PLO in this direction.[22] In 1974, all the factions within the PLO umbrella agreed that terrorist activities outside Israel had become counterproductive. The PFLP continued to perpetrate international terrorism but also began giving chief priority to attacks within Israel. A few months later, following the adoption of the Ten Point Program, the PFLP announced its resignation from the PLO executive.[23] Habash's organization, together with the most militant factions of the resistance, joined the so-called Rejectionist Front. Such splinter groups, backed by Libya and Iraq, disagreed with the PLO on at least three points: the recognition of Israel, the acceptance of a Palestinian state only on the West Bank and Gaza, and the ensuing pacific path toward coexistence without a socialist transformation.[24]

The Italian Left and the Palestinian Cause

In Italy, awareness of a Palestinian problem gradually surfaced in 1968. Both the parliamentary and the extra-parliamentary left began expressing their solidarity with the Palestinians, protested against the occupation of the territories, and organized the first demonstrations supporting the cause. Meanwhile, the traditional, diffused empathy for the sufferings of the Jewish people gradually receded.

In March 1969, a joint action between the PCI and the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) founded the Committee for Solidarity with Palestinian People (CSPP) in Rome with the aim of advocating Palestinian resistance by means of public debates, conferences, movie screenings, healthcare material collection, and exhibitions.[25] A magazine, *Rivoluzione Palestinese* (later renamed *Palestina*) was also published with the goal of increasing public awareness of the Palestinian tragedy. The committee was soon

21. Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism*, pp. 64–69.

22. Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations*, p. 257.

23. Merari and Elad, eds., *The International Dimension of Palestinian Terrorism*, pp. 31–33.

24. After 1978, the PFLP again approached the PLO.

25. The PSIUP was created in January 1964 by a leftist section of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) seeking closer cooperation with the PCI.

recognized by Palestinian organizations, and a CSPP delegation was invited to the Second World Congress of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) in Amman.[26] In the meantime, political personalities belonging to both the Marxist and the Catholic left, including Socialist senator and human rights activist Lelio Basso, Socialist deputy Riccardo Lombardi, and Communist deputy Giancarlo Pajetta, took a public stance in favor of the Palestinian cause. Basso—already known as a member of the so-called Russell Tribunal that accused the United States of war crimes in Vietnam—urged the Italian public to draw a line between "the terrorism of the oppressors," always iniquitous and harmful, and "the terrorism of the oppressed," deserving attention and comprehension. Palestinian terrorists were the "oppressed" who acted out of "desperation," claiming the right to inhabit their own land.[27]

The PCI made its first contacts with the PLO in 1969 and 1970, establishing official relations with Arafat's organization. In the early 1970s, this liaison appeared politically dangerous. In the PCI newspaper *l'Unità*, Arafat partly disavowed the PFLP's violent tactics while admitting that Habash's group could not leave the PLO without damaging its unity.[28] The PCI declared its solidarity with the Palestinian people but simultaneously supported Israel's right to exist, assuaged the concerns of the pro-Israel component of the party, and put diplomatic pressure on the PLO to renounce armed struggle.[29] When the PLO rejected terrorist strategies and changed its status, its ties with the PCI grew stronger and evolved into a diplomatic relationship.

Although the parliamentary left had to cope with several contradictions, the revolutionary left was much freer to embrace the Palestinian cause without making many distinctions. Palestinian guerrillas achieved their first resounding success among the Italian leftists after the battle of al-Karamah, on 21 March 1968, when Israeli forces were first defeated by Fatah in a sort of Palestinian Tet Offensive.[30] Anti-Zionism and solidarity with the Palestinian liberation struggle soon became revolutionary duties. Leftist publications maintained that Zionism was "covering in mud the Jewish people," and they

26. Raccomandata della Questura di Roma, "Organizzazioni di solidarietà con i movimenti di liberazione della Palestina," 24 November 1970, in Archivio Centrale dello Stato (ACS), Ministero dell'Interno (MI), Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza (DGPS), Divisione Affari Generali, 1944–1986, Folder 312.

27. See, for instance, L. Basso, "La morte ha tante radici," *L'Espresso* (Rome), 17 September 1972, p. 5.

28. Romano Ledda, "Un'intervista ad Arafat all'Unità mentre ad Amman si combatte," *l'Unità* (Rome), 13 September 1970, p. 3.

29. Antonio Rubbi, *Con Arafat in Palestina: La sinistra italiana e la questione mediorientale* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1996), pp. 15–44.

30. See Marzano, "Il 'mito' della Palestina nell'immaginario," p. 15.

called for the destruction of Israel, denouncing it as an "authoritarian, racist, and imperialist state."[31] Leftists of various lineages organized solidarity committees and embarked on missions to Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, ostensibly to help refugees. For example, the anti-imperialist militant Oreste Strano—later accused of being a supporter of the Palestinian armed fringes who trained with the Fedayeen—in 1967 had already started organizing art exhibitions and fundraising on behalf of the Palestinians.[32] In Novara, Piedmont, he established a Committee to Help Palestinian Refugees.

In this period, Movimento Studentesco (MS)—the Milanese student movement, a leftist organization born in 1968 and led by the charismatic Mario Capanna—became the staunchest ally of the young Palestinians belonging to the GUPS. The MS championed their cause, signed their leaflets, and even wrote many communiqués on behalf of them.[33] Capanna himself, after traveling in the Middle East, even imported to Italy a few kaffiyeh for his comrades. During the assemblies then promoted by the MS, the kaffiyeh gained tremendous popularity, becoming one of the leftists' favorite garments.[34]

Fatah's gradual de-escalation and the ensuing diplomatic recognition of the PLO, combined with the radicalization of the extra-parliamentary left and its growing anti-PCI sentiment, contributed to the shift of the Italian revolutionary left's perception of the Palestinian resistance.[35] Leftist groups started criticizing both Arafat's "appeasement" and his reactionary Arab allies. Arafat was mocked as "the enfant terrible of Arab moderation," and the leftist militants were increasingly skeptical about the politics of conciliation.[36] While the MS was fading, the GUPS—supporting the PLO's line—grew progressively isolated among the young leftists and reached consensus with more moderate parliamentary forces, notably the PSIUP, the PCI and, later, Democrazia

31. *La questione palestinese* (Verona: Centro antimperialista, 1970), pp. 13–14, in Istituto romano per la storia d'Italia dal fascismo alla Resistenza, Archivio Memorie di carta, Fondo Grispigni, Folder 60.

32. Alfredo Mantica and Vincenzo Fragalà, *La dimensione sovranazionale del fenomeno eversivo in Italia: Studio sui collegamenti tecnico-operativi fra le organizzazioni terroristiche internazionali* (Rome: Senato della Repubblica—Camera dei Deputati, 2000), pp. 133–138.

33. Tamimi, interview.

34. Mario Capanna, *Arafat: Intervista al presidente dello Stato palestinese* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1989), p. 20.

35. In 1977, after a meeting in Cairo between Italian Foreign Minister Emilio Colombo and his Palestinian counterpart, Farouk al-Kaddoumi, the Italian government finally recognized the PLO. As a consequence, the PLO was allowed to establish a liaison and information office in Rome.

36. "Non devono perdere!," *Potere operaio*, No. 38–39 (17 April–1 May 1971), p. 18; and Baumgartner, interview.

Proletaria.[37] At the same time, Marxist-Leninist organizations such as Lotta Continua and Avanguardia Operaia oriented their support mainly toward the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP), whereas Potere Operaio, a radical aboveground group with an underground armed branch—which later morphed into Autonomia Operaia—explicitly endorsed the PFLP.[38]

In the second half of the 1970s, Autonomia Operaia (henceforth referred to as Autonomy) represented the main revolutionary leftist faction operating in Italy. More than a group, Autonomy was a constellation of collectives and committees that housed militants from various leftist organizations. From its inception in 1972–1973, it stressed its independence vis-à-vis the old left and the "opportunist" left, the importance of proletarian mass violence to bring about socialist revolution, and its linkage with the international class struggle.[39] In particular, anti-imperialism and solidarity with North Vietnam motivated Autonomy's first demonstrations and attacks against U.S. targets, coinciding with the visits to Rome of high governmental representatives from Washington, such as Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger. Later, Autonomy's "internationalist debate" broadened by virtue of its encounter with Greek, Portuguese, and Palestinian students who settled in Italy.[40] Political discussions and friendships flourished. As the organization's leader Daniele Pifano later recalled:

> We were persuaded that we could absolutely not change the power relationships without strong international support and a large international perspective. Although the concept of globalization was not yet in circulation, we would often say that it was impossible for us, alone, to change the local situation because the power relationships were already globalized.[41]

37. Democrazia Proletaria was a leftist electoral cartel born in 1975. For an example of the leftist criticism toward the GUPS and the PLO, see "Sul GUPS," *Al-Sharara: Bollettino della resistenza palestinese a cura dei compagni sostenitori del F.P.D.L.P*, 1972, p. 13, in Archivi Fondazione Basso (AFB), Collection "Diritti dei popoli," Section 446 "Questione palestinese," pt. 1, Ser. 2 "Organizzazioni, 1965–1991," Folder 1.

38. In 1969, a faction of the PFLP broke away from the main organization to form the PDFLP. The new group was headed by Nayef Hawatmeh, who believed that the PFLP, under the guidance of Habash, had become too focused on military matters. Hawatmeh wanted to make the PDFLP a more grassroots and ideologically rigorous organization. From the mid-1970s, the group occupied a political stance midway between Arafat and the hardliners. In 1974, the PDFLP changed its name to Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP).

39. See Lucio Castellano, ed., *Aut. Op.: La storia e i documenti: Da Potere operaio all'Autonomia organizzata* (Milan: Savelli, 1980).

40. Comitati Autonomi Operai di Roma, ed., *Autonomia Operaia* (Rome: Savelli, 1976), pp. 315–318.

41. Pifano, phone interview.

The PFLP emerged as the natural reference for Autonomy because it was perceived as the most Marxist and the least nationalist among the Palestinian resistance groups.[42] As Vincenzo Miliucci, a Roman leader of Autonomy, explains, "they represented the most advanced revolutionary segment of the Arab world. They were born from nationalism, but they became internationalist."[43] Some Italian militants were also fascinated by the romantic personality of the PFLP's leader, Habash, who was regarded as the Che Guevara of the Middle East. Like Guevara, Habash was a medical doctor who left everything to devote himself to Marxist revolution. He abandoned his family and everyday comforts to live in poverty, concealed in his hideouts, and constantly protected by bodyguards.[44] The PFLP's "internationalism" was intrinsic; the group operated abroad with terrorist attacks and worked to build an active following around the world by "selecting the most extremist groups abroad, [and] looking for support for its upcoming actions."[45] Moreover, its willingness to break with the patronage of Arab monarchical regimes was always emphasized in declarations.[46] Although Autonomy was also in contact with other Palestinian factions, such as the PDFLP and Fatah, it established a "stable and enduring relationship" with the PFLP that was unmatched within the Italian revolutionary left.[47]

The Palestinian Militants in Italy

The widespread sympathy for the Palestinian cause, the relative openness of universities, and the low cost of living made Italy a perfect country for Palestinian youth seeking refuge and a better future.[48] As Kutaiba Younis, militant of a Marxist-Leninist faction close to the PFLP, remembers, "it was enough to say the magic word 'I am Palestinian' to get assistance or simply

42. See, for instance, "I Palestinesi, che per i padroni del mondo sono solo dei profughi, hanno conquistato con la lotta armata il diritto di essere un popolo," *Rivolta di classe*, 28 June 1974, p. 4.

43. Miliucci, interview.

44. Oriana Fallaci, *Intervista con la storia* (Milan: BUR, 2011), pp. 204–224.

45. Baumgartner, interview.

46. "Usare la pace per annientare il popolo palestinese . . . e risolvere il problema," *I volsci: Mensile dell'autonomia operaia romana*, No. 3 (April 1978), p. 6.

47. Vincenzo Miliucci, Sirio Paccino, and Daniele Pifano, "Comitati autonomi operai di via dei Volsci," in Sergio Bianchi and Lanfranco Caminiti, eds., *Gli autonomi: Le storie, le lotte, le teorie*, Vol. 1 (Rome: DeriveApprodi, 2007), pp. 343–374. See also Hallac, interview; and Miliucci, interview.

48. Saleh, interview.

a ride by car."[49] Rome, Pisa, Florence, Perugia, Bologna, and Modena were favorite destinations and hosted hundreds of Palestinians, and the University for Foreigners in Perugia became the principal hotbed for radical youth coming not only from Palestine but also from the entire Middle East and other European countries.[50]

At the beginning of the 1970s, 300–400 Palestinians were living in Perugia, and the majority of them gravitated toward the GUPS network. Predictably, the GUPS Italian chapter was established in the same city in 1970–1971 with the help of the PCI, which provided material support and a location. Two main factors explain the GUPS's initial hegemony among the Palestinian students in Italy. On the one hand, the organization was adaptable and politically heterogeneous, embracing all ideological currents from the Baath to the PFLP (at least until the split of 1974). Approximately 80 percent of the militants identified with Fatah, 15 percent with the PFLP, and 5 percent with the PDFLP or other movements. On the other hand, the GUPS was well organized and ubiquitous. For example, GUPS activists welcomed the new arrivals directly at the train station and offered them orientation tips and language classes. Enrolling the young Palestinians into its political activities was thus an easy next step. GUPS established relationships not only with the MS but with the parliamentary left, which proved crucial in implementing the Palestinian diplomatic agenda.[51]

Relationships between individual Italian leftists and Palestinians were pleasant. Both groups later recalled the interactions as idyllic. Leftist militants accommodated Palestinian students in their homes, not just for a few months but for as long as several years. Strano remembers bringing Palestinians with war injuries to Switzerland, where the autonomous network had branches, so they could receive medical care.[52] According to police reports, in May 1969 a Fatah delegation came to Italy and met with representatives of the PSIUP as well as other "important extreme left leaders."[53] Official representatives of the PFLP traveled many times from Beirut to Italy, at least until 1982, when the guerrillas were forced to evacuate from Lebanon. In Italy, the PFLP's militants were hosted by members of the Autonomy network, which organized

49. Younis, interview.

50. See Telegramma della Prefettura di Perugia al Gabinetto Min. Interno, 28 September 1979, in ACS, MI, Gabinetto 1976–1980, Folder 310.

51. Saleh, interview; and Tamimi, interview.

52. Strano, interview.

53. Appunto, 15 November 1969, in ACS, MI, DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali, 1944–1986, Folder 312.

several propaganda meetings in the major cities. To amplify the voice of the Palestinian resistance, the Roman Autonomy Committee, which launched its first private radio station, Radio Onda Rossa, in May 1977, started to broadcast a program (*Speciale Palestina*) dedicated to promoting the violent struggle against Israel and its allies. The show often featured the voices of Palestinian students living in Italy. In October 1982, the Autonomy movement paid the price for this initiative. A bomb planted by the Jewish Defense League destroyed the entrance and much of the premises of the station's broadcast facility in Rome.[54]

Palestinian militants were also invited to student assemblies and local gatherings organized by leftist groups to help sustain the position of the fedayeen. For instance, Autonomy promoted a counterinformation campaign to explain and justify the massacre perpetrated by the PFLP at Tel Aviv's Lod airport in May 1972. Such murderous action had brought sharp criticism from moderate currents of the leftist movement, and Autonomy therefore felt the need to emphasize the rationale provided by the Popular Front.[55] The translated text of Ghassan Kanafani's press conference defending the carnage was printed in a pamphlet released by Autonomy.[56] Similarly, in June 1974, the Autonomy magazine *Rivolta di classe* reproduced Red Army Faction (RAF) founder Horst Mahler's laudatory views of the Palestinian armed struggle. Mahler's text glorified the "Black September" attack in Munich as "the perfect expression of the right strategic line." "The responsibility for the death of the Israeli athletes," Mahler specified, "was entirely [that] of Israeli and German authorities," and Israeli athletes themselves were not truly extraneous from the crimes perpetrated by their country.[57]

Italy: A Safe Haven and a Silent Ally

The Italian-Palestinian network of exchange and solidarity was contingent on a crucial factor, namely, Italian political authorities' benevolent attitude toward Palestinian militancy and terrorism on Italian soil. At least two key

54. Miliucci, interview.

55. Strano confirms that Autonomy always justified Palestinian attacks "because the situation was a blind-alley." Strano, interview.

56. The writer and journalist Ghassan Kanafani was the editor of the PFLP newspaper *al-Hadaf*. On 8 July 1972, he was killed by a bomb planted in his car in Beirut. The assassination was reportedly conducted by the Mossad in revenge for the Lod Airport attack. See Comitati Autonomi Operai di Roma, *Autonomia operaia*, pp. 325–326.

57. "Monaco 72: Horst Mahler sulla lotta armata della Palestina," *Rivolta di classe*, 28 June 1974, p. 4.

circumstances worked to orient Italian institutions toward appeasement of the Palestinians.

First, Italy had important economic interests in the Middle East, including heavy reliance on Arab countries for supplies of oil and natural gas. After the 1973 Arab oil embargo, this dependence became acute. Moreover, Italian companies were interested in Arab natural resources as well as in potential new markets.[58] Sustaining the Palestinian cause was an invaluable diplomatic passepartout, especially with regard to Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Libya, and Kuwait. Judicial documents reveal that the director of Italian intelligence services warned the Italian Foreign Ministry that Italy was running economic and political risks by failing to side decisively with the Palestinians. Other West European countries such as France were offering immediate cooperation, enabling them to acquire positions of advantage and conclude far-reaching deals.[59]

Second, in the aftermath of the Munich attack, almost all Western security agencies were on high alert. Palestinian terrorism appeared indiscriminately murderous and uncontrollable. Moreover, Israeli revenge was abrupt, and European cities were expected to be the stage for a long bloody battle. Italy owed loyalty to the North Atlantic alliance but had to grapple with Palestinian terrorism and the Mossad's retaliatory strikes on Italian soil.[60]

The following major episodes occurred: On 16 October 1972, the Mossad killed Palestinian poet and translator Abdel Zwaiter in Rome after determining that he was one of the main coordinators of Palestinian terrorism in Europe. The perpetrators of the attack were identified but never apprehended. On 25 November, four Arabs were arrested at Rome's Fiumicino airport while transporting a load of weapons. A few hours later, they were released without explanation and sent to Cairo. On 30 January 1973, a group of Fedayeen, supposedly ready to perpetrate an attack, were halted at the Austrian border and expelled from Italy. Fifteen days later, police seized two Arabs who in August 1972 had delivered a record player full of explosives to two English girls who were about to board an El Al flight from Rome to Tel Aviv. Inexplicably, the judge put the two terrorists on probation in a small village where they could easily run away. On 27 April 1973, in Rome, a Black September

58. Miriam Rossi, "Aldo Moro, l'Italia e la questione palestinese," in Italo Garzia, Luciano Monzali, and Federico Imperato, eds., *Aldo Moro, l'Italia repubblicana e i popoli del Mediterraneo* (Nardò: Besa, 2013), pp. 233–274.

59. Tribunale di Venezia, Ufficio del Giudice Istruttore, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, Procedimento penale No. 204/83, 28 June 1989, pp. 307–309.

60. The first Palestinian attack on Italian soil occurred on 4 August 1972, when a Black September commando blew up four oil tanks, linked to the German pipeline, near Trieste.

commando killed an El Al employee who was mistaken for a Mossad agent. The murderer, arrested and confined in Sardinia, rapidly disappeared. On 17 June 1973, two Arabs were apprehended in the center of Rome after their vehicle was destroyed by the unwanted detonation of the explosive they were carrying on board. The two suspected terrorists were quickly released, and a Mossad agent later claimed responsibility for the alleged diversion. Finally, on 5 September 1973, after Mossad's tip-off, five Fedayeen belonging to the PLO were arrested in Ostia (Rome). Inside their apartment, police found two SAM-7 Strela missile launchers. Investigators also discovered a plan to shoot down he plane of Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, who was expected to visit Italy during that period. The PLO reacted with anger, and those arrested were soon released and escorted to Libya, where they found asylum.[61]

Italian counterterrorism agencies were both unprepared and unwilling to counter the Palestinian threat, fearing a spiral of escalation. A policy of agreement and leniency thus emerged as the most pragmatic solution. Extensive judicial and historical evidence proves that the Italian government, by means of its intelligence apparatus, reached a secret agreement with high representatives of the PLO in 1972 and 1973. The settlement allowed Palestinian militants free circulation in Italy of people and weapons, along with impunity. Moreover, the Italian government pledged to chamption the Palestinian cause at the international level. In exchange, Palestinians promised to exclude Italian targets and citizens from their terrorist attacks.[62] The first documented meeting between Italian diplomats and PLO delegates was held in Cairo in October 1973. Then a summit at the Foreign Ministry in Rome gave the green light. The informal agreement is today recalled as "*lodo Moro*" because Aldo Moro, minister of foreign affairs at the time, was the one who endorsed this policy of accommodation.[63] Colonel Stefano Giovannone—Moro's trusted aide and station chief of Italian intelligence in Beirut from 1972 to 1981—acted

61. Cutonilli and Priore, *I segreti di Bologna*, pp. 50–52. See also George Jonas, *Vendetta: La storia vera di una missione dell'antiterrorismo israeliano* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1984), p. 243; and Vittorio Lojacono, *I dossier di Settembre nero* (Milan: Bietti, 1974), pp. 148–153.

62. See, among others, Salvatore Sechi, "Su Moro, Arafat, Gheddafi e la strage di Bologna," *Nuova storia contemporanea*, Vol. 17, No. 6 (November–December 2013), pp. 129–144; Alberto La Volpe, *Diario segreto di Nemer Hammad ambasciatore di Arafat in Italia* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 2002), p. 45; and Lorenzo Matassa and Gian Paolo Pelizzaro, *Relazione sul gruppo Separat e il contesto dell'attentato del 2 agosto 1980* (Rome: Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta concernente il "dossier Mitrokhin" e l'attività d'intelligence italiana, 2006). See also the references to the agreement in six letters written by Aldo Moro while imprisoned (to Pennacchini, Piccoli, Cottafavi, Dell'Andro, Misasi, and to the Christian Democratic Party). Aldo Moro, *Lettere dalla prigionia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008).

63. A deposition by Luigi Cottafavi (1985), head of Moro's cabinet, is illuminating and confirms that minister Moro was personally involved in the agreement. Cottafavi nevertheless scales down Moro's alleged philo-Arabism and remembers Moro's "doctrine of fairness," aimed at showing sympathy to

as a guarantor and became the guardian of the agreement after gaining the confidence of leaders of the Palestinian resistance.[64]

The agreement, however, was at times on a precarious footing. On 17 December 1973, Palestinian terrorists assaulted a Pan Am airplane at Fiumicino airport. Initially, they threw two phosphorus bombs inside the aircraft, killing 30 passengers. They then hijacked a Lufthansa plane with fourteen hostages. During the operation, they also executed two people. The mayhem ended a day later in Kuwait City. Italian tribunals never brought the perpetrators to justice, but the evidence indicates that the attack was masterminded by Ahmed Abdel-Ghaffar, who was fighting against the PLO's moderation strategy and was backed by Libya. It is unclear whether the attack represented a warning to Italy not to bargain with Palestinian guerrillas outside the PLO or was merely an intra-factional maneuver to tarnish the PLO's image. However, various testimonies confirm that, after the Fiumicino attack, Italian authorities tried to extend the agreement with the PLO to its dissenting and more radical factions, notably the PFLP.

Former PFLP spokesman Bassam Abu Sharif claims to have personally negotiated the agreement in Rome and Beirut with two Italian intelligence officials. Terms and conditions of the agreement are not documented, but they probably replicated the earlier agreement with the PLO. Abu Sharif explained that the PFLP had been asked to notify Italian intelligence services before deploying weapons on Italian soil. He also recalled that Italian authorities often escorted and protected him, but he admitted that Giovannone sometimes complained to him about the small services the PFLP provided to Italian far-left terrorists, such as passports and shelter.[65] Similar arrangements were reached in other Western countries. For example, the United Kingdom and Switzerland sometimes released Palestinian inmates or paid ransom in exchange for hostages.[66] However, the Italian scenario seems unique.

both the Palestinian and the Israeli cause. See Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, pp. 322–323.

64. Officially, Giovannone was the military attaché at the Italian embassy in Beirut. However, his real task was protecting all Italian diplomatic missions in the Middle East. In doing so, he weaved a network of contacts across the Arab countries, becoming a master of parallel diplomacy. In that period, he gained easy access to people such as Arafat, Habash, and the PLO chief of security, Hassan Salameh. See Fulvio Martini, *Nome in codice: Ulisse: Trent'anni di storia italiana nelle memorie di un protagonista dei Servizi segreti* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1999), pp. 80–81; and Francesco Grignetti, *La spia di Moro: Il colonnello Stefano Giovannone, dieci anni di servizi segreti tra petrolio e terrorismo* (n.p.: e-letta, 2012), pp. 6–9.

65. See Davide Frattini, "Trattai io il lodo Moro: Mani libere a noi palestinesi," *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), 14 August 2008, p. 19; and Matassa and Pelizzaro, *Relazione sul gruppo Separat*.

66. See Merari and Elad, *The International Dimension of Palestinian Terrorism*, p. 53. See also *The Treatment of Arab Terrorists* (Jerusalem: Israel Information Center, 1975).

Against this backdrop it is not surprising to learn that Abu Anzeh Saleh, a Jordanian citizen who represented the PFLP in Italy, became an occasional informant for Italian intelligence and enjoyed the favor of Giovannone. Arriving in Italy in 1970, Saleh was a student in Perugia and Bologna, but most of the time he was busy organizing shipments of weapons, fabrics, and many other items to the harbors of the Middle East. His hospitality was prodigious, and his Bolognese apartment, located a few hundred meters from the local prefecture, was always crowded with Italian militants and foreign refugees.[67] (Saleh was also reportedly in contact with international terrorists, including the notorious fugitive Ilich Ramírez Sánchez, alias Carlos, who had masterminded some of the most grisly attacks.)[68] Yet, not only did Saleh receive preferential treatment for his visa and have a direct line with Giovannone, but he also obtained money from Italian intelligence on at least one occasion.[69]

The case of Italian leftist militant and journalist Rita Porena is also emblematic of the secretive relationship between Palestinians and Italian authorities. Recently declassified intelligence memoranda reveal that she visited training camps in Lebanon, married a PFLP representative in Beirut, and was involved in illegal activities to the benefit of Palestinian militants (e.g., delivery of passports and cover-ups of arms trafficking). Yet, Giovannone employed Porena to infiltrate and inform on the Palestinian organizations for many years.[70]

Declassified documents also confirm that at least one representative of the PFLP—known as "source 2000"—leaked a good deal of information regarding international terrorism to the Italian secret services in Beirut in the 1970s. The presence of a steady connection between Italian intelligence and Palestinians (essentially PLO and PFLP) came into play during the kidnapping of Moro, when Palestinian channels were activated, albeit unsuccessfully, in an effort to reach out to the BR and open secret negotiations.[71]

67. Miliucci, interview.

68. Paradisi, Pelizzaro, and de Quengo de Tonquedec, *Dossier strage di Bologna*, pp. 152–154.

69. For Abu Saleh's version, see *Intervista alla storia: Abu Saleh e i lanciamissili di Ortona*, copy in author's possession. See also Grignetti, *La spia di Moro*, p. 66.

70. Mantica and Fragalà, *La dimensione sovranazionale del fenomeno eversivo in Italia*, pp. 234–246.

71. See Secret message No. 1626, from Ufficio R, Reparto D, 18 February 1978, in Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul rapimento e sulla morte di Aldo Moro, *Relazione sull'attività della commissione* (Rome, 2015), p. 153. The document was found by historian Marco Clementi. For additional details on the intelligence provided by the Palestinians, see Commissione Parlamentare di inchiesta sul rapimento e sulla morte di Aldo Moro, *Relazione sull'attività della commissione* (Rome, 2016), pp. 82–100.

The Italian-Palestinian agreement was publicly disclosed in November 1979, when three Autonomy militants—Daniele Pifano, Giorgio Baumgartner, and Luciano Nieri—driving a Peugeot van were arrested in Ortona. A search of the van disclosed a box containing two sophisticated Soviet-made SAM-7 Strela surface-to-air missile launchers with infrared viewfinders. According to the defendants, the weapons came from Palestinian hands and were simply in transit, headed for a Lebanese ship going to Beirut from the local harbor. Inquiries revealed that Saleh had organized the smuggling, and he was later arrested. For the first time, a Palestinian terrorist lost immunity. The four men were sentenced to seven years in prison (later reduced) for illegal transport and possession of high-grade military weapons. Scholars and journalists have speculated about the origin of the missile launchers and their possible intended use—for example, a joint action between Autonomy and the PFLP or a terrorist attack originating from Italy—but no conclusive evidence has emerged to support any of these hypotheses.[72]

The episode did, however, confirm that the PFLP and Autonomy were cooperating; it also revealed the existence of an agreement between Italian authorities and the PFLP. In January 1980, as Saleh and the three Autonomy militants were being tried, the PFLP Central Committee wrote a letter to the head of the tribunal asking that the four indicted men be released from prison and that the PFLP's weapons be returned. The PFLP letter reminded the Italian authorities to respect the bilateral agreement. The PFLP also demanded that the judges hear from several witnesses who could certify the validity of the pact, including Italian Prime Minister Francesco Cossiga, Director of Military Intelligence Giuseppe Santovito, Colonel Giovannone, and the ambassador to Lebanon, Stefano D'Andrea.[73] The Italian government replied by denying the existence of any agreement, and the court refused the direct examination of the people named in the PFLP letter. According to several sources, the August 1980 Bologna attack was then staged as retaliation by the PFLP, which denounced the violation of the pact and urged the liberation of Saleh. Documentary and judicial evidence is suggestive but not yet conclusive. Further research is needed to establish the real motive of the attack beyond any reasonable doubt. In any event, Saleh was released from detention in August

72. Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta concernente il "dossier Mitrokhin" e l'attività d'intelligence italiana, *Documento conclusivo sull'attività svolta e sui risultati dell'inchiesta* (Rome, 2006), p. 291.

73. Raccomandata della Prefettura di Chieti al Ministero dell'Interno, object: "Sentenza emessa dal Tribunale di Chieti nel procedimento penale a carico di Pifano Daniele ed altri," 8 March 1980, in ACS, MI, Gabinetto 1980–1985, Folder 4. See also "La lettera del FPLP: Vi abbiamo chiarito tutto e subito," *I volsci: Mensile dell'autonomia operaia romana*, No. 10 (March 1980), p. 7.

1981, and in 1983 he returned to the Middle East. Italian authorities forever turned a blind eye to him.[74]

The *lodo Moro* also operated abroad, covering Palestinian actions. The unsolved Toni–De Palo affair might be a case in point. Italian freelance journalists Italo Toni and Graziella De Palo traveled to Lebanon in September 1980 to investigate international arms deals in the Middle East and never returned. They were seemingly kidnapped and killed by PFLP militants, who suspected that the two were spies. Judicial evidence demonstrates that security and government officials—Colonel Giovannone among them—systematically tainted any proofs of Palestinian involvement and diverted the inquiry so that the perpetrators were never found.[75]

Based on the preliminary investigation conducted by Italian public prosecutor Carlo Mastelloni, who inquired into the alleged weapons deals between the PLO and the BR, the PLO might also have received supplies of weapons from Italian companies. According to multiple sources, such deliveries bypassed the embargo on the PLO by virtue of "triangulations" approved by the Italian Foreign Office. Specifically, when the PLO requested Beretta firearms, Augusta helicopters, or military electronic devices produced in Italy, the Italian export committee authorized the illicit trade by stipulating Middle Eastern countries such as Lebanon and Jordan as cover. Eventually, the weapons ended up in the hands of the PLO.[76]

To be sure, Palestinian organizations and their Italian counterparts were under constant police surveillance.[77] National authorities were mindful of the radicalization of "Arab activism."[78] In the second half of the 1970s, the Italian government repeatedly tried to limit the influx of foreigners asking for student visas, fearing additional political disturbances.[79] However, as oral testimonies confirm, both Palestinians and Italians were well aware of the special treatment Palestinian militants were likely to receive in the 1970s and early

74. See *Intervista alla storia*.

75. The best summary of the case is Nicola De Palo, *Omicidio di stato: Storia dei giornalisti Graziella De Palo e Italo Toni* (Rome: Armando Curcio, 2012).

76. See, in particular, the hearing of Mario Pedini, Italian undersecretary for foreign affairs from 1968 to 1974: Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, pp. 324–356.

77. Appunto della DGPS, Divisione AA. GG. Servizio stranieri, 11 November 1969, in ACS, MI, DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali, 1944–1986, Folder 312.

78. Appunto del SID al Servizio informazioni generali e sicurezza interna, object: "Associazioni arabe in Italia—Attività," 7 June 1973, in ACS, MI, DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali, 1944–1986, Folder 381.

79. Teleradio del ministro Cossiga ai Questori e ai Prefetti, 20 April 1977, in ACS, MI, Gabinetto 1976–1980, Folder 310. See also Enzo Marzo, "Le università italiane rifiutano iscrizioni di studenti stranieri," *Corriere della Sera* (Milan), 29 June 1977.

1980s. Some protagonists remember the existence of agreements that implied the normalization of illegal behaviors.[80] Others recall that Italian authorities simply exhibited tolerance and benevolence; for example, granting student visas or ignoring expulsion orders, even if Palestinians did not comply with the rules.[81]

The Italian Militants in the Middle East

Italian revolutionary leftists frequently traveled to Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan (until 1970). Usually, the official purpose of the trips was cultural or humanitarian (e.g., to deliver medicines, transfer money collected in Italy, or provide medical assistance). The philanthropic aspect was not phony. Archival documents show that, when police checked some missions going to those countries, the loads were effectively related to medicine.[82] Yet, the motivation behind these trips was first and foremost political; militants wanted to discover Palestinian resistance, witness an authentic movement of liberation, and personally interact with the Fedayeen.[83]

Young leftists who journeyed to Palestinian camps were so numerous that the PCI grew concerned about the potential negative consequences of the encounters.[84] For example, in the late 1960s and 1970s, Strano traveled to the Middle East at least ten times, including twice to Palestine. He traveled with friends to Amman to deliver medicine to the Red Crescent and then visited camps on the Jordan River, in Irbid, where he met with representatives of the Palestinian resistance.[85] Baumgartner from Autonomy went to Lebanon and

80. See Strano, interview; Miliucci, interview; and Pifano, interview. Baumgartner insists that the agreement between Italy and the PFLP was unclear, and Younis claims that, as far as he was aware, the agreement concerned only the PLO. Baumgartner, interview; and Younis, interview.

81. See Saleh, interview; and Tamimi, interview.

82. See Raccomandata della DGPS alle Prefetture di Novara e Firenze, object: "Comitato Aiuti Profughi Palestinesi di Novara," 12 September 1970, in ACS, MI, DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali, 1944–1986, Folder 312; and Comunicazione della Prefettura di Novara, object: "Comitato Aiuti Profughi Palestinesi di Novara," 29 September 1970, in ACS, MI, DGPS, Divisione Affari Generali, 1944–1986, Folder 312.

83. For a typical account by an Italian militant who spent a summer in the Palestinian camps, see Giuseppe Morosini, "Rapporto dalla Palestina," *Rivoluzione palestinese*, No. 6–7 (September–October 1969), pp. 63–68.

84. Gian Carlo Pajetta, *Socialismo e mondo arabo: Rapporto presentato alla 1° commissione del Comitato centrale del PCI, febbraio 1970* (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1970), p. 23.

85. Strano, interview; and Scarpone, phone interview. See also "Solidarietà internazionale," *Rivoluzione palestinese*, No. 6–7 (September–October 1969), pp. 81–85.

Syria three times from 1972 to 1979. Typically, a Renault 4 or a similar economy car was the preferred means of transport, and journeys through Communist countries were as lengthy as they were fascinating. However, flights were also common. Until the civil war, Lebanon was the leading destination and the safest refuge, being a sort of Switzerland "full of fugitives" and revolutionaries from all over the world.[86] During and after the prolonged civil war, Lebanon was still attractive for many; "it was a jungle" where people could establish training camps without oversight.[87]

When Italians went to refugee camps, they met with representatives of militant groups (usually Fatah, the PFLP, and the PDFLP) and visited their schools, political bureaus, and military training camps.[88] Sometimes the travelers remained there for a month or two.[89] Autonomy delegations, for instance, attended almost all PFLP congresses after 1972 and, after the Palestinian group's defeat in Lebanon, also went to meet the exiled PFLP leaders in Tunis.[90]

Testimonies conflict regarding military training *in loco*. Some concede that Palestinians were eager to offer instruction and preparation but that the Italians generally refused, replying that they "already knew very well the use of guns and other weapons." "We said we could auto-train," Miliucci clarifies. "The field of armed struggle was not open yet in Italy and, like the partisans that were not partisans before the resistance, we could have rapidly learned. We thanked them, and we never sent anyone to training."[91] Others frankly admit that "training was the primary scope of the trips."[92]

The training camps, Baumgartner remembers, were often located in hidden places such as forests or highlands in the south of Lebanon, close to the border with Israel, and were full of young European revolutionaries, especially from West Germany, Spain, and Ireland.[93] "The international crew,"

86. Strano, interview; and Baumgartner, interview.

87. Saleh, interview.

88. The three military structures operated separately, but they preserved for most of the time a common coordination. See Miliucci, interview.

89. Younis, interview.

90. Miliucci, interview; and Younis, interview.

91. Miliucci, interview.

92. Baumgartner, interview. Tamimi confirms the attractiveness of Fatah's training camps in Jordan as well as the huge number of foreign visitors. Tamimi, interview.

93. Baumgartner, interview. At the end of the 1970s, the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen also became a hotbed of Palestinian resistance. Journalistic sources contend that a few Italian militants joined a PFLP-EO training camp near Aden. See Pino Buongiorno, "Perché lo Yemen?," *Panorama* (Milan), 16 June 1980, pp. 52–53.

Younis confirms, "was particularly cosmopolitan," and Italians were also present.[94] Abu Sharif recalls the power of attraction the training camps exerted over European radicals:

> They were looking for guidance and a scope; they often wanted an opportunity to vent their dissent, which was frustrated in the action. We provided it. . . . We offered these people practical training and a valid cause. Disappointed as they were, they welcomed our revolution, the Palestinian one, as a providential gift.[95]

Training experiences were usually well organized but sometimes appeared "touristic." Palestinians—who had themselves received guidance and arms from the Soviet Union, China, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), Czechoslovakia, and Libya—brought trainees to wide-open spaces, then exhibited various weapons and explained how they functioned and how to assemble them.[96] Baumgartner recalls: "I had the impression that they let us play . . . it was like: we show you something, but we are the ones doing serious things."[97] As a consequence, the impact of Palestinian militarization on Italian leftists was not univocal. One participant vividly remembers:

> When we went there the first time, we saw them defending their camps with bags of sand and with armed groups that were on guard all day. They had bazookas, anti-aircraft guns, and machine guns. For us, it was appalling. In Rome we didn't guard our territory in that way! It was an absolutely novel experience and somehow exciting.[98]

Others were not particularly impressed by the training camps. The militarization of Palestinian society was more shocking for them; even ordinary people driving their cars carried arms and usually embraced Kalashnikovs.[99] In September 1970, student leader Mario Capanna and his Italian comrades took part in the GUPS congress in Amman. Over a few days, they witnessed the PFLP supporters' enthusiasm after the multiple hijackings, Arafat's incendiary speech at the conference (his Kalashnikov resting on the desk, "at his fingertips"), and the combat in the streets of Amman, where buildings burned

94. Younis, interview.

95. Bassam Abu-Sharif and Uzi Mahnaimi, *Il mio miglior nemico: Israele-Palestina dal terrore alla pace* (Palermo: Sellerio, 1996), p. 96.

96. Tamimi, interview; and Younis, interview.

97. Baumgartner, interview. Saleh confirms the large number of "tourist" trips to terrorist training camps. Saleh, interview.

98. Pifano, phone interview.

99. Baumgartner, interview.

down and the roar of firearms woke people in the middle of the night. The predominant reaction, Capanna wrote, was "a growing sadness."[100]

Journalistic sources maintain that the millionaire publisher and revolutionary combatant Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, who was among the first leftist leaders to open a channel with the Palestinian resistance, received military coaching in Jordan in December 1969, just before going underground. However, by that time, Feltrinelli's radicalization was largely complete as a result of his enduring relationship with Latin American guerrillas.[101] Documentary evidence also shows that Potere Operaio, in contact with the PFLP since the early 1970s, arranged both the participation of Italian militants in summer military training courses in Lebanon and the assistance of Palestinian military "instructors" in Italy. However, the documents also suggest that the project achieved meager results.[102]

According to protagonists, Palestinian guerrilla groups never proposed the creation of "an international brigade," never asked Italians for recruits ("they did not need additional people because they already had plenty of volunteers"), and did not suggest conducting joint armed actions.[103] For instance, a 1969 report from the training camps of Al-Assifah—Al Fatah's armed wing—corroborates this conclusion. The camps were allegedly "flooded" with Palestinian and European volunteers, but foreigners were usually rejected. The Palestinian recruiters did not seek "mercenaries" because they considered them potential turncoats.[104] Younis remembers the words Habash pronounced at the beginning of the "foreign comrades' pilgrimage": "be wary of Western comrades. Most of them are agents of imperialism." Given this basic distrust, Italians, including the BR, were not recruited. In the rest of the non-Arab world, the only visible exception to this rule was the case of some Japanese revolutionary leftists who volunteered (as individuals) with the PFLP, trained in Lebanon, and conducted a few attacks under the external operations section of the front. They soon opted to leave the PFLP and formed an independent

100. Capanna, *Arafat*, pp. 17–19.

101. Chiara Sottocorona and Chiara Valentini, "Il testamento," *Panorama* (Milan), 25 July 1978, pp. 34–37.

102. See Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di via Fani, sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia, *Atti giudiziari della Procura della Repubblica di Padova, Requisitoria del pubblico ministero Pietro Calogero nel procedimento penale contro Alisa del Re ed altri del 18 maggio 1981*, Vol. 81 (Rome: Senato della Repubblica—Camera dei Deputati, 1993), pp. 52–62.

103. Miliucci, interview; and Baumgartner, interview. There were perhaps a few exceptions, such as leftist militant Francesco Ravizza Garibaldi, who reportedly joined the Palestinians. See Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, pp. 29.

104. "Rivoluzione palestinese," *Testimonianze*, No. 2–3 (1 May 1969), pp. 26–33.

organization: the Japanese Red Army.[105] Ultimately, the Palestinian attitude toward foreign militants was consistent with their global conception of the struggle against imperialism; that is, as Younis notes, "everyone has to fight in his own country against the common enemy."[106]

With few exceptions, Palestinian guerrillas were not accustomed to supplying Italian leftists with firearms.[107] Palestinian armed groups were always looking for weapons for themselves. A regular supplier of the most radical factions of the international guerrilla movements was instead the Libyan regime.[108] Autonomy, an aboveground organization in which firearms widely circulated, obtained weapons without any problem from Libyan channels, the local black market, and, alternatively, robberies.[109]

Italian Armed Groups and the Palestinians

The BR and other clandestine armed organizations also established relationships with some factions of the Palestinian resistance. Though contradictory on a few details, testimonies and documents consistently report several coordination meetings and two significant arms deals.

According to an informant of the Italian and U.S. secret services, on the night of 15–16 February 1975, in an elegant Beirut apartment, four "alleged members of the Red Brigades" met with Habash, Abu Iyad (the PLO head of intelligence), and other Arab militants. The meeting agenda included possible avenues for cooperation between the two fronts. The Italians reportedly discussed their plans for multiple hijackings of Alitalia planes and other attacks against Israeli objectives, but they did not ask Palestinians for specific support. Instead they requested assurances that asylum or protection would be given in case of stopovers during the hijackings. A follow-up meeting was probably held on 20 March, again in Beirut.[110] Other encounters were apparently

105. Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Transnational Ties of the Japanese Armed Left: Shared Revolutionary Ideas and Direct Personal Contacts," in Alberto Martín Álvarez and Eduardo Rey Tristán, eds., *Revolutionary Violence and the New Left: Transnational Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 163–181.

106. Younis, interview.

107. Among various testimonies, see Ahmad Rafat, "Ridateci il nostro missile," *Panorama* (Milan), 16 June 1980, pp. 52–53.

108. Younis, interview.

109. Baumgartner, interview.

110. The meeting is described in the decree of indictment for the 1980 crash of the Itavia DC9, see Tribunale di Roma, Ufficio Istruzione, *Ordinanza-sentenza contro ignoti*, Procedimento Penale No. 527/84, 31 August 1999, pp. 4,784–4,785.

organized in Paris. For example, the BR's first repentant, Patrizio Peci, disclosed details about meetings organized in the French capital between BR representatives and low-ranking Palestinian militants belonging to the PLO, contacted through the RAF. During the talks, the BR stressed its focus on class struggle in Italy, thus refusing to become "the PLO's armed wing in Italy" while still accepting supplies of armaments.[111] Finally, representatives of the BR and unspecified Palestinian armed organizations took part in coordination meetings with other revolutionary armed groups from various countries. For example, in October 1978 nine of them convened in Yugoslavia. Meeting participants criticized the unreachable "unity of revolutionary forces" they had projected a few years before, laying out instead a strategy based on the "revolutionary simultaneity" that implied greater organizational autonomy.[112]

The first weapons deal dates to the summer of 1978 and involved Maurizio Folini, who belonged to the armed group Comitati Comunisti Rivoluzionari (COCORI) but apparently transformed himself into a mere trafficker of weapons thanks to his father's contacts in the Middle East. Folini, who traveled by his boat and with a promise of safe conduct from the Soviet State Security Committee (KGB), carried a stock of Soviet-made weapons he traded in Lebanon that were sold "at political prices" to various leftist armed organizations, such as Prima Linea, Proletari Armati per il Comunismo, and COCORI. According to testimonies, the PFLP or another PLO dissident group acted as intermediary with the Lebanese arms merchants.[113]

A second, more substantial arms deal was conducted in the spring of 1979, when four BR members, including their leader, Mario Moretti, set out to sea on a 39-foot sailboat named *Papago* and navigated from Numana, Ancona, to Lebanon. Approximately four miles from the coast, they stowed a huge load of weapons and explosives—150 Sterling rifles, two machine guns, grenades of various types, and six tons of plastic explosives—in the yacht.[114] The deal was consummated without any money changing hands. Italian and

111. See Peci's testimony (1–2 April 1980) in Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di via Fani, sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia, *Allegato alla relazione: Documenti: Atti giudiziari* (Rome: Senato della Repubblica—Camera dei Deputati, 1991), pp. 272–273, 335.

112. See the reportage by Pino Buongiorno, "Non dovevamo uccidere Moro," *Panorama* (Milan), 21 November 1978, pp. 44–47.

113. *Relazione della commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di via Fani, sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia* (Rome: Senato della Repubblica—Camera dei Deputati, 1983), pp. 131–132. See also Stelio Marchese, *I collegamenti internazionali del terrorismo italiano* (L'Aquila: Japadre, 1989), p. 163.

114. *Relazione della commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di via Fani*, pp. 133–134.

Palestinian militants said goodbye and raised their fists in solidarity. Eighteen days later, the boat safely reached a small harbor near Venice, and the arsenal was stocked in two storage facilities, one close to Treviso and the other in Sardinia, with the help of the armed leftist-separatist group Barbagia Rossa.[115] In accordance with the agreement, the BR could keep part of the stock but had to allocate a share to the PLO and deliver the rest to other armed organizations, notably the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA), and the RAF. The deal required the Red Brigades to devise counterfeit documents and to begin attacking Israeli and NATO targets in Italy. The BR reportedly "extorted" the promise of training in Palestinian camps and the protection of fugitives abroad.[116]

Judicial hearings and firsthand testimonies also revealed that Moretti negotiated the deal in Paris with an unspecified Marxist-Leninist faction of the PLO after the BR gained some credibility by virtue of Moro's abduction and murder. According to Judge Mastelloni, Moretti interacted with Abu Iyad, who was one of the leading figures in Fatah's far-left camp and maintained close ties with the PFLP and the DFLP. As a founder and Central Committee member of Fatah, Abu Iyad was also considered one of the masterminds of Black September.[117] Moreover, the agreement was supposedly approved by Arafat in person. Judicial evidence is not conclusive, and both the PLO and Arafat publicly denied the operation, disowned the BR, and condemned them as agents of imperialism.[118] Yet, Moretti himself claimed they "were interested in Palestinian comrades because they were talking about similar things," and so the BR contacted a PLO faction "of Communist tendency, which watched Europe attentively."[119] Hence, it is plausible that the BR interacted and negotiated directly with Abu Iyad. Finally, there is abundant evidence that a

115. Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, pp. 10–11. For additional details on the trip, see Giorgio Guidelli, *Porto d'armi: Indagine sui rapporti BR-Palestinesi* (Urbino: QuattroVenti, 2012).

116. See Marchese, *I collegamenti internazionali del terrorismo italiano*, p. 169; "La rete internazionale del terrorismo italiano," *Gnosis: Rivista italiana di intelligence*, No. 3 (July–September 2005), http://gnosis.aisi.gov.it/Gnosis/Rivista4.nsf/ServNavig/7; and Fasanella and Franceschini, *Che cosa sono le Br*, pp. 166–182.

117. Abu Iyad was Salah Khalaf's nom de guerre, usually transliterated "Abu Ayad" in Italian sources. See As'ad Abu Khalil, "Khalaf, Salah," in Philip Mattar, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, Rev. Ed. (New York: Facts on File, 2005), pp. 276–278.

118. Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, pp. 87, 107, 144–145. Despite the evidence, Nemer Hammad, the PLO representative in Italy, denies any involvement on Arafat's part and claims that Abu Iyad is unlikely to have met the "unknown" Moretti. See La Volpe, *Diario segreto di Nemer Hammad*, pp. 104–105.

119. Mario Moretti, *Brigate rosse: Una storia italiana: Intervista di Carla Mosca e Rossana Rossanda* (Milan: Anabasi, 1994), pp. 188–190.

"network of comrades" was active in France and favored international cooperation with leftist armed militants—including the Palestinians—and provided them with support and protection under the auspices of organizations such as the language school Hyperion and the International Center for Popular Culture, both based in Paris.[120]

After the BR turned down the Palestinian request to attack Israeli personalities in Italy, on the grounds that doing so would not affect the balance of power in Italy, the relationship cooled and the arms deal remained the sole macroscopic episode of cooperation. Even so, a few years later, the leader of the BR splinter group Partito Guerriglia (BR-PG), Giovanni Senzani, tried to get back in touch with the Marxist factions of the Palestinian resistance. At least one meeting was reportedly held in Paris with high representatives of the IRA, the ETA, the RAF, and Action Directe. However, the outcome of the meeting is unclear.[121] Furthermore, the other BR splinter group, Partito Comunista Combattente (BR-PCC), seemed to have partly reconnected with Palestinian armed groups. The 1984 document claiming responsibility for the murder of U.S. diplomat Leamon Ray Hunt, the director general of the multinational force in the Sinai, was signed by the BR-PCC and the Lebanese Armed Revolutionary Faction, linked to the PFLP. However, the perpetrator was never found. In 1989, when police dismantled the last BR-PCC cell and arrested ten of its alleged members, one of them was a Jordanian citizen, Khalid Hassan Thamer Birawi, a militant of the Revolutionary Council of Fatah, led by Abu Nidal.[122] Finally, anecdotal evidence indicates contacts and exchanges of help at the individual or local level in the early 1980s between Palestinian militants affiliated with the PFLP (or similar groups) and Italian militants belonging to the BR or Prima Linea.[123]

Ultimately, all the information currently available leads to the conclusion that the relationship between Italian clandestine organizations and the most

120. See Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, p. 34. See also, for a recent update on the available knowledge about the French connection, Marco Benadusi, *Terrorismo rosso: La sinistra eversiva nell'Italia repubblicana* (Lucca, Italy: Tra le righe libri, 2016), pp. 102–119.

121. In 1982, when Senzani was arrested, a handwritten paper summarizing the discussion of the Parisian meeting was found in his wallet. The conversation apparently focused on geopolitics and grand strategies. See Tribunale di Venezia, *Sentenza ordinanza contro Abu Ayad ed altri*, pp. 74–76.

122. Sabri al-Banna, under the nom de guerre Abu Nidal, was a Fatah representative who in 1974 established a new organization—the Fatah-Revolutionary Council—whose principal enemy was Arafat's strategy of moderation. Iraq, Syria, and Libya protected Nidal, whereas the PLO finally condemned him to death. See Patrick Seale, *Abu Nidal: A Gun for Hire* (London: Hutchinson, 1992). On the relationships with the BR-PCC, see Ambra Somaschini, "Era la scuola quadri delle nuove Br," *La Repubblica* (Rome), 7 September 1989, p. 20; and Daniele Mastrogiacomo, "È il killer del jumbo: Gli inglesi vogliono l'arabo preso a Roma," *La Repubblica* (Rome), 19 September 1989, p. 20.

123. Younis, interview.

radical elements of the Palestinian resistance consisted of political dialogue, several attempts at coordination, covert political solidarity, and a few concrete episodes of mutual aid planned at the highest level. The relationship did not evolve into structured coalitions with deeper implications. Italian revolutionaries did not translate into practice any specific Palestinian repertoires of action. Typically, they did not replicate hijackings or engage in transnational terrorism.[124] Indiscriminate attacks were also avoided in Italy. Only a few targets chosen by Italians had international significance. For instance, the BR never carried out attacks against Israeli targets on behalf of Palestinian organizations, even though they probably explored such possibilities.[125] So far, nothing suggests that the BR was operationally involved in Palestinian armed activities in Italy or abroad or that BR militants were systematically trained in Palestinian camps. Moreover, documented arms deals all happened after Moro's kidnapping, when the BR's violent escalation was already largely completed. The BR did not have to rely on Palestinian arms dealers. Intead, they stole weapons from munitions stores and armories, bought them in Italy with counterfeited documents, and purchased them abroad, mainly in Switzerland and Lichtenstein.[126] There is also little evidence of ideological contamination. The topic of Palestinian resistance was glossed over in almost all of the BR's publications—including the semi-official periodical *Controinformazione*—and appeared in only one line of the BR's strategic resolution of 1978. Not until the early 1980s did some interest in the Middle Eastern situation surface. By that time, however, Italian armed organizations were already fading.[127]

The Unifying Factors

Italian leftist militants drew at least four lessons from their encounter with the Palestinian resistance that strengthened the transnational relationship and enhanced their cognitive radicalization.[128]

124. There might have been an exception. In 1976, in Amsterdam, police arrested three Italian leftist revolutionaries who allegedly planned—but never carried out—the hijacking of an Alitalia aircraft with Palestinian support. However conclusive evidence has not yet emerged. See Romano Cantore, "Operazione Amsterdam," *Panorama* (Milan), 7 December 1976, p. 76.

125. *Relazione della commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di via Fani*, p. 132.

126. See, for example, Clementi, Persichetti, and Santelena, *Brigate rosse*, pp. 52, 72.

127. Karmon reaches similar conclusions. Karmon, *The Red Brigades*; and Karmon, *Coalitions between Terrorist Organizations*, p. 277.

128. Assessing whether and how the acquisition of such frames also fostered militants' behavioral radicalization is problematic. For a theoretical discussion, see Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins,

The first was an increased belief that the whole world was in turmoil under the same banner and against the same enemy. That is, the Italian revolutionaries were reinforced in their conviction that they were fighting—shoulder to shoulder with the Palestinian comrades—a global struggle against imperialism and capitalism. As one protagonist remembers, "We were encouraged by the fact that we were part of a worldwide battle. If you were not an internationalist and if you did not have a general vision of the others' suffering, your battle was meaningless."[129] The most widely circulating anthology of Palestinian revolutionary texts echoes this reasoning, claiming that "ultimately there is only one party to blame: the aggressive and violent spirit of the West, which speaks about civilization but means imperialism."[130] Similarly, Baumgartner, who was particularly angered by the tragic situation in the Palestinian refugee camps, remembers stressing the direct culpability of Western capitalism and imperialism. He perceived a common system of exploitation and hence the urgency of a unique revolution against it. Baumgartner recalls having thought that "everything will change, once we are able to disrupt this single mechanism." By the same token, he and his comrades endorsed Ghassan Kanafani's political theory that portrayed Israel as an octopus backed by U.S. interests, with an extended web of supporters and allies around the world. According to Kanafani, opposing this system of powers meant starting a global struggle against Israel and its accomplices, without distinction between civilians and militaries.[131]

Second, the Italian leftists recognized that the Palestinians were, like themselves, secular freedom fighters.[132] For example, some Autonomy militants observed that most PFLP members did not pray and that the few who sometimes did were just barely tolerated by their comrades.[133] Others

"The Radicalization Puzzle: A Theoretical Synthesis of Empirical Approaches to Homegrown Extremism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, Vol. 38, No. 11 (June–July 2015), pp. 958–975.

129. Miliucci, interview.

130. "Dopo Tal El-Zaatar," in Bichara Khader and Naïm Khader, eds., *Testi della rivoluzione palestinese 1968–1969* (Verona, Italy: Bertani, 1976), pp. 11–20.

131. Baumgartner, interview.

132. The idea of liberating Palestine by means of jihad in the name of Islam—first popularized in the 1930s by Sheikh al-Qassam—gave way, in the course of the 1950s and 1960s, to the secular nationalism typical of the PLO. Starting in the late 1970s, marginalized Palestinian religious-driven organizations (e.g., the Muslim Brotherhood) made a successful comeback by criticizing the PLO. The Palestinian cause then became a symbol of the supposed injustices suffered by Muslims and was at the core of Osama bin Laden's agenda. See Shaul Bartal, *Jihad in Palestine: Political Islam and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pp. 625–631; and Bruce Lawrence, ed., *Messages to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden* (New York: Verso, 2005), esp. pp. 3–14.

133. Baumgartner, interview.

were impressed by the militants' equal treatment of and lack of bias toward women.[134] A celebratory photo-book about Al-Assifah, published by two Italian leftist militants who toured the camps, is all about the importance of combining physical and military training with education, mutual aid, and ideological awareness.[135] The book was conceived as a document to counter the widespread perception among the Western left that the Fedayeen were backward, religiously fanatical, uneducated, self-serving terrorists.[136]

Miliucci notes:

> We verified that they did not distribute Kalashnikovs and handguns to everybody indiscriminately, but they first delivered elementary training on why and how it was necessary to take up arms. There were schools where it was taught not only how to read and write, but also the structure of Arab society, its stratifications, and the rationale for armed struggle within the political battle.[137]

Third, Italian leftists acknowledged the extraordinary power of the David versus Goliath myth. Although the Palestinian resistance did not succeed against Israel as the Vietnamese guerrillas did against the United States, the Fedayeen were seen as victorious. Despite the convergent assault of Israel, the United States, and numerous Arab governments, armed groups were still resisting and counterattacking. The leader of Autonomy, Pifano, remembers: "Going there, we could see with our own eyes that, also before structured national armies and lethal forces, it was possible to express and develop a more than efficient self-defense."[138] The concept was widely echoed. As the Autonomy magazine *Rivolta di classe* noted, Palestinians finally "developed the consciousness that the armed struggle is the only winning card, and that the Zionist enemy is not as invincible as it was presented."[139] If such "heroic people" did not succeed immediately, the reason was not incapacity but the lack of unconditional support from the USSR, which, for instance, had not provided the Palestinian guerrillas with high-grade weapons.[140]

The fourth lesson consisted in the idea that the Palestinian guerrillas were "partisans taking up arms in present times."[141] The Fedayeen were

134. Miliucci, interview.

135. Vera Pegna and Carlo Vogel, *Al Fatah* (Milan: Vangelista, 1969).

136. Pegna, phone interview.

137. Miliucci, interview.

138. Pifano, phone interview.

139. "I Palestinesi, che per i padroni del mondo sono solo dei profughi, hanno conquistato con la lotta armata il diritto di essere un popolo," *Rivolta di classe* (28 June 1974), p. 4.

140. Baumgartner, interview.

141. *La questione palestinese*, p. 13.

increasingly depicted as "the new partisans that operated around Europe and the entire world."[142] "The Palestinian partisans (the Fedayeen)," a collection of militant writings explains, "equal the European partisans who fought against the Nazi occupiers, the Algerian and Vietnamese insurgents, and everybody who fights with arms to defend his usurped rights."[143] The same concept resonated in a play written by future Nobel laureate Dario Fo that achieved great success within the leftist milieu. The play associated the Italian leftists' yearning for revolution with the Palestinian struggle. Despite the different historical contexts, common features were multiple: guerrilla warfare, the refusal of the conventional "schemes of the Bourgeois War," the political and social ends of the conflict, and a willingness to fight until the very end.[144] Many Italian leftist revolutionaries made another, controversial historical claim, asserting that "Palestinians are the Jews of our time." Using the word "Jew" as a synonym for "persecuted," proponents of this notion depicted the Palestinians as the "new Jews" and Zionists as the "new Nazis." Thus, the process of the "Nazification" of Israel was frequently discussed in radical literature, and far-left documents regarding the Middle East often presented a perfect equivalence between Zionism and Nazism.[145]

What Prevented Closer Connections and Wider Exchanges?

According to documents and testimonies, six main factors may have hampered the construction of tighter coalitions and a wider transfer of ideas and repertoires of action.

The first of these factors is the uniqueness of the territorial problem. The main Palestinian issue could not be mirrored in the Italian context. The Palestinian revolutionary spirit, no matter how appreciated by the Italian leftists, was only one part of a political program whose gist was the "liberation" of

142. Miliucci, interview.

143. *Dossier Palestina: Testimonianze sulla repressione israeliana nei territori occupati* (Verona: Bertani, 1974), 17. See also "Editoriale," *Rivoluzione palestinese*, No. 1 (1 April 1969), pp. 2–3.

144. See Dario Fo, *Vorrei morire anche stasera se dovessi pensare che non è servito a niente: Resistenza: parla il popolo italiano e palestinese* (Verona, Italy: EDB, 1970), p. 7. Two years later, Fo also presented *Fedayn*, a sequel that put real Palestinian terrorists (members of the FDPLP) on stage. See Dario Fo and Franca Rame, *Fedayn* (Milan: Sapere, 1972).

145. On the Nazification of Israel, see "Dopo Tal El-Zaatar," p. 19; and Felicia Langer and Massimo Massara, eds., *La repressione di Israele contro i Palestinesi* (Milan: Teti editore, 1976). For an example of the equation of Zionism and Nazism, see the leaflet produced by Collettivo Policlinico, *Sionismo = Nazismo, 9 June 1982*, in Vincenzo Miliucci's private archive.

territory. Italian militants still recall both their astonishment and their feeling of estrangement when they saw Palestinians hanging the keys of their "stolen homes" around their necks.[146] As one Autonomy militant recalls, the Palestinians' peculiar situation of being out of their fatherland—implying "bombs, refugee camps, and the daily struggle for existence"—made a constructive and durable relationship ultimately impossible.[147] Conversely, the Palestinian guerrillas were much better attuned to other Third World liberation movements.

Second, Italian and Palestinian armed groups had different conceptions of political violence. Although fascinated by Palestinian armed intransigence, Italian leftists were still convinced that indiscriminate violence against civilians was a futile strategy—certainly so in the Italian context but also with regard to Palestine. Autonomy militants, who publicly refrained from criticizing international terrorism or other attacks endangering innocent people, privately tried to dissuade the PFLP from carrying out such attacks. Such methods, the Italians claimed, were ineffective in winning hearts and minds and would merely alienate Western public opinion and leave the Palestinians even further isolated. Miliucci remembers having repeatedly said to the PFLP's militants: "We recognize your tragedies and the fact that you may well respond with the logic of an eye for an eye, but a party like yours suits a superior intelligence." Thus, he advised them to go back to the first symbolic actions, such as the hijackings with the liberation of hostages.[148]

"It is true," Baumgartner admits,

> that we approved Kanafani's logic of indiscriminate culpability, and it is also true that we thought every single attack abroad against Israel represented a serious blow. However, the PFLP applied this logic in too extreme a way. They would have also killed a baby in the cradle, if a Jew.[149]

Third, Italian militants were traditionally sensitive to questions of freedom from international patronage. Autonomy was uncomfortable with dependence on the USSR and, to a lesser extent, on China and the Arab regimes. The coincidence between Moscow's interests and the other countries' revolutionary cause was clearly interrupted. "The red square," Italian leftists claimed

146. Baumgartner, interview.

147. Pifano, phone interview.

148. Miliucci, interview.

149. Baumgartner, interview.

at the beginning of the 1970s, "is a turned off beacon."[150] The same held true for the Red Brigades, who were always worried about the risk of being manipulated by international sponsors and thus kept their focus on the Italian sociopolitical context. However, Soviet support, including funding, training, and military aid, reached all branches of the Palestinian resistance, including Fatah, and was thus crucial.[151] Hence, the Palestinians dismissed the Italians' objections. "When we discussed with them their relationship with Russia," one Italian militant recalls, "they showed us a typical anti-aircraft missile and asked, 'Do you know how much is this? Ten dollars.' They were skeptical, too, but they considered this relationship inevitable and useful in a situation of war."[152]

The fourth factor preventing closer ties between the two groups was the differing degree of instrumentality in their international relationships. The Palestinian resistance expected its foreign allies to publicize Palestinian suffering and provide external support. As testimonies insist, Palestinians pushed the Italians to promote the Palestinian cause and to provide logistics, shelter, and information.[153] The relationship was not envisioned as a mutual alliance or coalition, and it was always unbalanced. Hence, debate on equal terms was difficult. For instance, differing views about the suitable level of violence were discussed, but the PFLP was reluctant to accept any recommendation. As a Palestinian militant emphasizes: "It would have been unrealistic that a personality such as Habash would give credit to Toni Negri's advice."[154] In any event, the strategic reorientation of the Palestinian resistance materialized regardless of these discussions. Far more significant were episodes such as the debacle at Uganda's Entebbe airport in July 1976, when Israeli commandos were able to overwhelm the Palestinian terrorists and rescue all the hostages.

150. "Rivoluzione comunista e sistema mondiale," *Potere operaio*, No. 43 (25 September–25 October 1971), pp. 9–12.

151. Younis, interview. The Soviet stance toward Palestinian terrorists fluctuated over time as Soviet political and diplomatic interests changed. However, from 1968, under Yuri Andropov's chairmanship, the KGB maintained clandestine contacts with both the PFLP and the PLO, using them as intermediaries for expanding its control over foreign armed groups, while avoiding direct ties to them. Soviet security personnel increasingly pursued close collaboration with the PFLP and other PLO breakaway groups, which the KGB considered more promising than Arafat and Fatah. Later, worried about the possibility that Soviet sponsorship of terrorism would come to light, the USSR renounced such cooperation, urging the Palestinians to concentrate instead on the struggle for national liberation. See Rami Ginat and Uri Bar-Noi, "Tacit Support for Terrorism: The Rapprochement between the USSR and Palestinian Guerrilla Organizations Following the 1967 War," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2007), pp. 255–284.

152. Baumgartner, interview.

153. Ibid.

154. Younis, interview. See also Baumgartner, interview.

Another facet of this asymmetric relationship was the absence of public Palestinian support for Italian armed groups. Unlike relationships with other partners—such as the German Revolutionary Cells, the Sandinistas, or the Vietnamese guerrillas, who were always presented as parts of "a unified global network of revolutionary fighters"—Palestinian representatives were quick to deny any link with Italian armed organizations.[155] This attitude can be explained by both the perceived unreliability of the Italians, long considered to be left-wing adventurers, and the Palestinians' reluctance to open an Italian front against a complaisant government only relatively close to Israel and the United States. Conversely, the Palestinians recognized the "West German front" as "the most important" in the battle against Israel in Western Europe. The PFLP, for example, labeled the Federal Republic of Germany and Israel as similar "imperialist subcenters," sharing not only a "close and special cooperation in military and economic matters" but also a neo-Nazi identity.[156]

As a result, the PFLP, the PLO, and Arafat himself always rebuffed any link with the BR, at least publicly and especially after the kidnap and murder of Moro, when the PLO sought to strengthen its good relationship with Italian authorities.[157] Likewise, the GUPS emphasized the absolute legality of its militancy and branded the news, spread in the early 1980s, about connections between the Palestinian resistance and "Italian terrorists" as "fake scoops" and "lies."[158] Similarly, the PFLP international bulletin never referred to the support of Italian groups.[159] Even the PFLP letter to the tribunal of Chieti (seeking to exculpate the three Autonomy militants who had been arrested while carrying Palestinian weapons) was "extorted" by Autonomy itself, which sent two representatives to Beirut for that purpose.[160] The relationship between

155. On the Palestinian's continual efforts to publicize their struggle as a worldwide offensive, see Paul T. Chamberlin, *The Global Offensive: The United States, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and the Making of the Post–Cold War Order* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), esp. pp. 24–27, 156.

156. Jeffrey Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel: East Germany and the West German Far Left, 1967–1989* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 97, 338, 355.

157. See Pino Buongiorno, "Venivano qui a imparare," *Panorama* (Milan), 10 October 1978, pp. 61–63; and Ahmad Rafat, "Ridateci il nostro missile," *Panorama* (Milan), 16 June 1980, pp. 52–53.

158. See the leaflet *Sono i nemici della pace che vogliono destabilizzare l'Italia* (n.p.: n.pub., n.d. [1981]), in AFB, Collection "Diritti dei popoli," Section 446 "Questione palestinese," pt. 1, Ser. 2 "Organizzazioni, 1965–1991," Folder 1.

159. A few generic references to European solidarity appear only once during this period. See "European Solidarity Conference," *PFLP BULLETIN édité par le Front Populaire pour la Libération de la Palestine*, No. 16 (March–April 1975), pp. 10–13.

160. See Marchese, *I collegamenti internazionali del terrorismo italiano*, p. 199; and Baumgartner, interview.

Autonomy and the PFLP contributed little if anything to the Italian group's standing in the international arena.

This instrumental conception of international relationships is strictly correlated to the fifth factor; namely, Palestinian ideological opportunism. A case in point is the transformation of the PFLP into a Marxist-Leninist party lacking both a political constituency and concrete substance. As scholar Yezid Sayigh points out, "Marxism-Leninism was adopted as a 'pure' ideology, not practical ideology."[161] According to other sources, the leftist conversion of the PFLP was the result of a deliberate choice made by a few intellectuals and leaders who rejected Nasser's pseudo-socialism and tried to build a new revolutionary party sustained by workers and peasants. Moreover, Habash viewed Marxism instrumentally as a tool he could use to promote cultural revolution through the introduction of a laic, rational form of reasoning among Arab militants.[162] For this reason, PFLP's Marxism was frequently perceived as a façade to cover a pure nationalist agenda, an artifice to tap into the spirit of the time, or as a "coat of paint" useful in seeking from Communist countries the help that was essential for sustaining thousands of armed militants.[163] The GUPS's ideological ecumenism was even more blatant. Its members today recall that Palestinian students were mostly driven by "the idea of Return" and knew little about proletarian economic exploitation or class struggle. Instead, Palestinians asked, endlessly, "When can we go back?"[164] This lack of ideological depth and orthodoxy clearly differentiated the BR, Autonomy, and most other dogmatic leftist groups from their Palestinian counterparts. By contrast, the Palestinian resistance found greater common ground with West German and Japanese radical organizations because they always emphasized anti-imperialism and Third-Worldism over any other issue.

The instrumental use of ideological resources led to another point of friction; namely, the tacit Palestinian approval of the Italian extreme right's solidarity. Neofascist organizations such as Avanguardia Nazionale and Ordine Nuovo, together with Nazi-Maoist groups such as Organizzazione Lotta di Popolo, openly supported Palestinian militants because of their nationalist,

161. Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State*, pp. 233–234.

162. Valerio Evangelisti, "I primi anni del Fronte popolare della Palestina" (originally published in 1987), available online on Palestina Rossa, http://www.palestinarossa.it/?q=it/content/page/i-primi-anni-del-fronte-popolare-della-palestina.

163. Paul J. Smith, *The Terrorism Ahead: Confronting Transnational Violence in the Twenty-First Century* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2008), p. 34; Miliucci, interview; and Baumgartner, interview.

164. Tamimi, interview; and Saleh, interview. See also Samir Franjieh, "How Revolutionary Is the Palestinian Resistance? A Marxist Interpretation," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Winter 1972), pp. 52–60.

anti-imperialist, and anti-Semitic character. Indeed, these organizations opposed the parliamentary right that backed Israel in the name of anti-Communism and Americanism. For example, in May 1969, various neo-fascist associations from the region of Veneto organized a conference in Padua in defense of the Palestinian cause. Furthermore, extreme-right leader Franco Freda acted as a self-appointed representative of the Association for Italian and Palestinian Friendship, and Nazi-Maoist leader Claudio Mutti chaired the Association Italy-Libya.[165] Freda's bookstore in Padua sold various pro-Palestinian publications, and, after Freda himself was arrested, several Palestinians participated in the committees organized for his release.[166]

Palestinian militants declined the recurrent offers of cooperation and solidarity that came from extreme-right organizations.[167] Yet, Palestinians sometimes avoided explicitly rejecting such support, and this irritated the leftists. For instance, the potential relationship between the PFLP and Avanguardia Nazionale worried the Roman committee of Autonomy. Therefore, Autonomy militants not only attempted to dissuade the PFLP, by making clear the dangers inherent in a link with such a group, but also raided the Avanguardia Nazionale headquarters in Rome and took away—and sent to the PFLP—documents purporting to show the neofascists' bad faith in seeking to cultivate a relationship with the Palestinians.[168]

The sixth factor standing in the way of the development of tighter coalitions and a more widespread exchange of repertoires between the Italian and Palestinian groups relates to the Italian context. In comparison to the West German and Japanese revolutionary left, which were more internationalized and worked in closer cooperation with the Palestinian guerrillas, the Italian leftists enjoyed a domestic environment that reduced the incentives to go transnational. Two conditions were especially important.

First, Italian protest policing and counterterrorism efforts were, at least until the late 1970s, softer and less methodical than in the other countries, making subversive activities relatively safe on Italian soil. By contrast, Japanese

165. Massimo Pieri, ed., *Internazionalismo e rivoluzione palestinese: La causa dell'autodeterminazione nella lotta di classe* (Rome: GPR, 1976), pp. 99–100. On the neo-fascist viewpoint, see Maurice Bardeche, Francois Duprat, and Paul Rassinier, *L'aggressione sionista* (Padova, Italy: Edizioni di Ar, 1970).

166. Alfonso M. Di Nola, *Antisemitismo in Italia 1962/1972* (Firenze: Vallecchi, 1973), pp. 178–179. See also Lojacono, *I dossier di Settembre nero*, pp. 144–145. The collection of Palestinian resistance poems and songs, *Poesie e canti della Resistenza palestinese*, was first printed by neo-fascist publisher "Ar" in 1971 and then reissued, a year later, by the leftist Student Movement.

167. Tamimi, interview.

168. Miliucci, interview.

militants traveled to the Middle East explicitly seeking refuge from harsh policing. Similarly, the West German leftists, hit by severe repression, made extensive use of Arab countries as rear bases "when Europe got too 'hot.'"[169] The cooperation between the West German armed groups (essentially the Revolutionary Cells, the 2nd of June Movement, and the RAF) and their Palestinian counterparts (mostly the PFLP) was also facilitated by the use of East German territory as meeting point, logistics base, and sanctuary.[170]

Second, the radical milieu advocating, supporting, and breeding the revolutionary left in Italy was wider and more contentious than in Germany and Japan. Notably, it included large sections of radicalized factory workers, students, and youth. This circumstance made both transnational audiences and partnerships less crucial for the Italian far left. The leftists perceived their country to be a favorable environment for revolutionary struggle, thus reducing the appeal of foreign constituencies and cross-border engagements.[171]

Conclusion

Archival evidence and firsthand accounts highlight the enormous fascination the Palestinian resistance exerted on the Italian revolutionary left from 1968 onward. Given the large spectrum of political forces that sustained Palestinian grievances, the presence of numerous Palestinian activists on Italian soil, and Italy's geographic proximity to the Middle East, the Palestinian cause generated even more attention and militant fervor than the Vietnam War. In particular, the relationship between the GUPS and the MS, as well as the relationship between the PFLP and Potere Operaio (later Autonomia Operaia), were particularly robust and long-lasting. Both relationships demonstrate that the Palestinians exploited not only the Italians' genuine solidarity and extreme proclivity to connect with "the new partisans," but also the politics of leniency practiced by Italian authorities. The Palestinians thus had strong incentive to nurture ties with leftwing Italian organizations. Not least were the invaluable opportunities to operate securely on Italian territory. Both national and

169. See Steinhoff, "Transnational Ties of the Japanese Armed Left"; and André Moncourt and J. Smith, eds., *The Red Army Faction: A Documentary History*, Vol. 1 (Montreal: PM Press–Kersplebedeb, 2009), pp. 56–57.

170. Herf, *Undeclared Wars with Israel*, pp. 345–385.

171. On the Italian radical milieu, see Luca Falciola, "From Legitimation to Rejection of Violence: The Shifting Stance of the Radical Milieu in Italy during the 1970s," in Lorenzo Bosi, Niall Ó Dochartaigh, and Daniela Pisoiu, eds., *Political Violence in Context: Time, Space and Milieu* (Colchester, UK: ECPR Press, 2015), pp. 253–276.

international contexts confirm their crucial relevance. For a long time, Italy was a safe haven and a silent ally for Palestinian militants and terrorists because of the Italian government's political, geopolitical, and economic calculations. This climate explains why illegal behaviors and subversive activities could proliferate unchecked.

Transnational relationships entailed a large variety of interactions. Italian revolutionary leftists expressed human sympathy, conveyed political solidarity, and promoted propaganda initiatives. On trips to the Middle East, Italian militants were eager to learn about the reality of armed struggle and the use of weapons. However, the training that some of the Italians undertook was fairly superficial and never systematic. The documented weapons deals between the Palestinians and the Italian armed groups were sizable but sporadic. Political dialogue, attempts at coordination, micro-level solidarity, and a few concrete episodes of mutual aid planned at the leadership level substantiated such ties. Encounters with Palestinian armed fighters fostered Italian leftist militants' cognitive radicalization but did not necessarily translate into a wider adoption of violent repertories. The absence of mutual recruitment, a lack of joint action, the exclusive focus of the Palestinians on their national liberation, the Italian indifference to targets related to the Middle East, and the Italians' reluctance to condone indiscriminate terrorism, implicitly confirm this point.

The feeling of being part of a global offensive against a common enemy, together with the example of heroic guerrillas fighting against what they claimed was a new Nazi-like danger, galvanized the Italian revolutionary left. The force of numerically insignificant numbers of people supposedly struggling against the brutality of the imperialist front instilled courage among the revolutionary leftists and forged a common bond. Such David-and-Goliath framing strengthened the transnational relationship. However, a total identity of purpose was never quite feasible in light of the uniqueness of the Palestinian territorial problem, differing ideas about the legitimacy of political violence, dissimilar conceptions of foreign patronage, Palestinian ideological opportunism in the practice of transnational relationships, and, finally, a favorable domestic environment for Italian leftists. These factors ultimately prevented the establishment of structured coalitions and a broad transfer of repertoires of actions.

Finally, the Palestinian-Italian relationship was asymmetrical. The former benefited from solidarity and practical support, whereas the latter drew little more than inspiration and limited material resources. The Palestinians were also careful about their image and avoided potentially dangerous liaisons. The Italians, for their part, flaunted their bonds with an idealized anti-imperialist avant-garde—and the symbolism of Gallinari's coffin perpetuates this logic.

Ultimately, the Palestinian militants entered into a marriage of convenience, whereas the Italians had a sentimental crush.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to all those who agreed to be interviewed. I also want to thank Stefano Costalli, Nicola De Palo, Marco Demichelis, Francesco Grignetti, Ely Karmon, Francesco Moro, Gian Paolo Pelizzaro, Paolo Persichetti, and the Forum Palestina for their insightful comments and precious help.