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Radicalization: A Relational Perspective

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Abstract

Radicalization is a process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time. Looking at radicalization mainly through the lenses of a relational approach, this article suggests that social movement studies allow us to bridge structural and agentic explanations in an analysis of the impact of political opportunities and organizational resources, as well as framing, in explaining forms of action and inaction. Available political opportunities influence the reactions of political actors in general to movement demands, thus affecting social movements' strategic choices. Moreover, the availability (or lack) of material and symbolic resources affects the choice of radical repertoire. Finally, organizational resources and contextual opportunities are framed differently by social movement actors, in some cases facilitating radicalization. At the individual level, different paths of radicalization are singled out.

RADICALIZATION: DEFINITIONAL ISSUES

Radicalization is a process of escalation from nonviolent to increasingly violent repertoires of action that develops through a complex set of interactions unfolding over time (Bosi & Malthaner 2015a,b). The term violence refers to "any observable interaction in the course of which persons or objects are seized or damaged in spite of resistance" (Tilly 1978, p. 176). Political violence occurs when physical force is used in order to produce or resist political change (della Porta 1995).

Attention to radicalization grew in the social sciences in the debate over so-called "homegrown" violent Islamists (Crone 2016). Embedded within antiterrorist policies, the concept of radicalization is often criticized as ill-defined as well as controversial (Coolsaet 2011); radicalization has become a master signifier for the "war on terror." In particular, counter-radicalization policies brought about "the emergence of a government-funded industry of advisers, analysts, scholars, entrepreneurs and self-appointed community representatives who claim that their knowledge of a theological or psychological radicalization process enables them to propose interventions in Muslim communities to prevent extremism" (Kundnani 2012, p. 3).

In the conceptual debate in the social sciences, scholars have pointed first at the changing meaning of "radical," which historically indicated movements and parties advocating democratic and republican institutions, mostly to be promoted through peaceful means. Recently, radicalization has acquired an ambivalent meaning, denoting in some cases the presence of "nonmoderate" ideologies, in others the use of violent means. In particular, radicalization has been related to the adoption of extremist beliefs or "mindsets," with the assumption, implicit or explicit, that radical beliefs tend to result in violent behavior (Malthaner 2016). By authors focusing on attitudes, radicalization has been defined as "the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology" (Horgan & Braddock 2010, p. 279; see also Sinai 2012). Other definitions, such as the one I suggest above, have instead pointed at behavioral changes, considering radicalism the "readiness to engage in illegal and violent political action" (McCauley & Moskalenko 2010, p. 240).

As tensions developed between attitudinal (or cognitive, ideological) and behavioral dimensions (Neumann 2013, p. 873), the very existence of a necessary link between the two aspects has been challenged, as "most people who hold radical ideas do not engage in terrorism, and many terrorists—even those who lay claim to a 'cause'—are not deeply ideological and may not 'radicalize' in any traditional sense" (Borum 2011, p. 8). In fact, the adoption of radical beliefs does not necessarily precede radical action, being rather linked to activism within radical environments (Bjørgo & Horgan 2009).

RADICALIZATION: A RELATIONAL APPROACH

Research on radicalization developed within two different fields of analysis that have only rarely interacted with each other: terrorism studies and social movement studies (della Porta 2013, Bosi & Malthaner 2015a). Looking at the macro level, research on terrorism has addressed contextual opportunities (preconditions or "root causes" such as modernization, cultural habits, and traditions that justify violence), as well as precipitating events (Crenshaw 1981, Bjørgo 2005). The reflection on how root causes are activated is, however, still open. Focusing on the micro level, social psychology has linked radicalization to individual vulnerability. While less and less present in the analyses of ethnonationalist and ideological forms of radicalization, psychopathological explanations have re-emerged in analyses of post-9/11 violence, which have singled out "radicalizable" people as endowed with personality traits such as hypersensitivity, depression, or anxiety. Nevertheless, much research has agreed that radicals tend to have normal personalities (Sageman 2004).

Recent developments in research on political violence have led to a challenge to the dominant perspectives of terrorism studies (Gunning 2007, Jackson et al. 2009), with increasing influence by theoretical approaches developed within the study of social movements (della Porta & Diani 2006). In this article, I focus on a relational perspective developed within the contentious politics paradigm (McAdam et al. 2001, della Porta 2003). Tilly (2003, p. 5) categorized scholars working on political violence as "idea people," who look at ideologies; "behavior people," who stress human genetic heritage; or "relational people," who "make transactions among persons and groups much more central than do idea or behavior people." Relational scholars focus "on interpersonal processes that promote, inhibit, or channel collective violence and connect it with nonviolent politics" (Tilly 2003, p. 20). Radicalization follows a gradual process, defined as "actions of some kind associated with other actions and reactions, often expressed in some sort of reciprocal relationship" (Taylor & Horgan 2012, p. 130).

In this perspective, radicalization stems from complex and contingent sets of interactions among individuals, groups, and institutional actors (della Porta 1995, 2013; Bosi & della Porta 2012; Alimi et al. 2015). It takes place during encounters between social movements and authorities, in a series of reciprocal adjustments. Repeated clashes with police and political adversaries gradually, and almost imperceptibly, heighten radicalism, leading to a justification for ever more violent forms of action. In parallel, radical groups interact with a supportive environment, in which they find logistical help as well as symbolic rewards (Malthaner 2011). Although radicalization is certainly influenced by the conditions of the political system from which it emerges, it involves fairly small organizations whose dynamics affect democratic practices.

Research on social movements has de-exceptionalized violent repertoires by locating them within broader contexts and complex processes. Violence develops relationally from interpersonal processes. Violent forms of contention usually belong to a wider repertoire, and social movements often shift between violent and nonviolent forms of action or use them simultaneously. The choice of a certain repertoire of action is emergent in processes shaped by the interactions among various actors. Militant groups act within a broad field, including police, counter-movements, and audiences, as well as allies or competitors within the same movement. Violence spreads within cycles of protest, during which the development of forms of protest follows processes of innovation and adaptation. Different actors respond to each other in spirals of action and reaction (della Porta 1995, Bosi & Malthaner 2015a).

A relational perspective seems particularly apt to address radicalization, which is in fact often an outcome of mainly nonviolent protest campaigns, with violence emerging during interactions between social movements and their opponents (della Porta 1995; see also White 1993, Wieviorka 1993, Zwerman et al. 2000, della Porta 2013, Alimi et al. 2015). Social movements are networks of individuals and organizations, with common identities and conflictual aims, that use unconventional means (della Porta & Diani 2006, ch. 1). Although they only very rarely advocate violence, they do use disruptive forms of protest that sometimes give way to escalation. Radicalization might therefore ensue from interactions on the streets with the police forces that are called upon to restore public order. Most radical organizations have their roots in splits within social movement organizations, and most of the militants of underground organizations have previous experiences with them (della Porta 1995). In fact, some social movement scholars have focused on the processes of radicalization in social movements, linking them to the interactions between these movements and the state (della Porta 1995), the "inversion" of collective actors (Wieviorka 1988), and the construction of exclusive identities (Goodwin 2004).

Social movement studies have bridged structural as well as agentic explanations, looking at the impact of political opportunities and organizational resources, as well as framing, in explaining forms of action and inaction (della Porta & Diani 2006). As we will see in what follows, available

political opportunities influence the reactions of political authorities and political actors in general to movement demands, thus affecting social movements' strategic choices. Moreover, the availability (or lack) of material and symbolic resources affects the choice of radical repertoire. Organizational resources and contextual opportunities are framed differently by social movement actors.

POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR RADICALIZATION

According to social movement studies, radicalism or moderation in the forms of action is influenced mainly by the available structure of political opportunities. These opportunities define the responses the movements meet in their environments, the reactions of authorities, and the strength and postures of their potential allies and opponents (Tilly 1978, McAdam 1982, Tarrow 1989). Violence tends to escalate especially in periods of social transformation, when new challengers fight their way into the polity and old polity members refuse to leave (Tilly 1978, pp. 52–55, 172–88). Radicalization is linked to stable institutional characteristics of a political system, such as the degree of functional or territorial centralization and the national political cultures in dealing with challengers (Kitschelt 1985, pp. 302–3), as well as to more contingent elements such as those provided by the strength and strategies of allies and opponents (Kitschelt 1986, pp. 61–64; Rucht 1994, pp. 303–12; Kriesi 1995). Countries with exclusive strategies are expected to experience conflict radicalization, whereas an inclusive strategy tends to produce a moderation of conflicts (della Porta 1995; Kriesi et al. 1995).

Encounters between movements and the state, in particular through the policing of protest, are especially influential in radicalization processes (della Porta & Reiter 1998, 2004). Protests, as a challenge to public order, normally bring about interactions between protestors and the police who must defend that order. Strategies of protest policing, however, vary broadly. Police can privilege the right to demonstrate over the disturbances to public order, choosing to tolerate minor violations, or they can strictly enforce law and order. They can rely on softer or harder tactics when they intervene, using persuasion or force. Their intervention can be not only more or less brutal, but also more or less focused on "troublemakers." It is especially escalating policing, with broad and indiscriminate repression, that triggers radicalization (della Porta 2013). In a process of double diffusion (della Porta & Tarrow 2012), the radicalization of the forms of protest often interacts with repressive styles that are not only brutal but also diffuse, hitting not only violent militants but also nonviolent ones. Tactical interactions develop through reciprocal adaptation with innovative turns, so that each party's choices are influenced by those of the adversary. Radicalization spreads especially when the state is perceived as overreacting to the challengers—as in Italy, when the student movement and then the labor movement protest of the late 1960s and early 1970s signaled a growing hostility. This was even more the case in Franco's Spain, when labor protest met ethnic revival, and in the authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, which reacted strongly to the so-called religious awakening (della Porta 2013).

In many historical cases, everyday experiences of physical confrontation with police brought about an image of an unfair state, ready to use brutal force against its citizens. The more the repression was perceived as indiscriminate, the more the solidarity with—or at least the tolerance of—the militant groups increased. This was particularly notable in Franco's Spain, under the authoritarian regime of Mubarak in Egypt, or under the Israeli occupation in Palestine as brutal police actions delegitimized not only the police but also the state, which the police claimed to serve. Perceptions of injustice grew when the state was perceived as taking sides, repressing some groups' violent behaviors but tolerating the violence of others. Not only indiscriminate repression but also inconsistent repression facilitated escalation. Both Italian right-wingers and Islamists in Saudi Arabia felt betrayed by a state they had formerly seen as somewhat supportive. In all cases,

repression was perceived as unjust (della Porta 2013). Repression produced transformative events (Sewell 1996, Beissinger 2002, della Porta 2016). In particular, the killing of activists by police was recalled as fueling intense emotions of identification with a community of fighters and the designation of the state as an enemy (della Porta 2013). Repression, then, created subcultures sympathetic to violence, often resuscitating old myths. Read within a broader narrative of oppression and resistance, brutal repression was framed as an indicator that there was no other way out but violence (Goodwin 2004).

As McCauley & Moskalenko (2008) note, competition with state power triggers a mechanism of condensation. When a group is hit by police repression that is considered indiscriminate and brutal, solidarity with the victims ensues. In particular, "Radicalization by condensation depends upon the strength of the affective ties between individuals, in particular ties to individuals who suffer from the state reaction to radical challenge. Comrades imprisoned cannot be abandoned; comrades killed in police shootouts or in prison are martyrs whose deaths demand a response. The reaction in many cases is increased commitment to violence to pay back state violence" (McCauley & Moskalenko 2008, p. 425). Then, "In small face-to-face groups, outgroup threat leads reliably to increased group cohesion, increased respect for ingroup leaders, increased sanctions for ingroup deviates, and idealization of ingroup norms" (p. 426).

Radicalization processes have different timings, twists, and turns, differences that are influenced by the characteristics of the political regimes they address. Violence escalation has gone much farther in nondemocratic countries. In authoritarian Franco's Spain and in the Middle East, hard repression was often unable to demobilize protests, contributing instead to increasing support for violence. However, as the Spanish case indicates, violence can develop as opportunities are opening, within a process of liberalization and transition, both as a means of negotiation and as a reaction to the perceived frustration of hopes for a quicker and deeper democratization process. The long-lasting legacy of direct experiences of police repression can indeed fuel radicalization of groups of activists, for left-wing and right-wing activists as well as for ethnonationalist groups. Research on home-grown radicals has also pointed at the importance of identifying with the victims of repression in distant conflicts, which Khosrokhavar (2004) defined as a process of humiliation by proxy.

ORGANIZATIONAL DYNAMICS AND RADICALIZATION

Social movements are networks of individuals and organizations that share certain goals and collaborate in collective protest but also compete with each other for power and resources (Diani 1992). While converging on some aims, groups within the same movement often diverge in their ideologies and forms of action. Within a relational field, the interactions between different groups and organizations can trigger processes of escalation, as groups attempt to outbid each other by the adoption of more radical positions or the use of more militant forms of action (Bosi & Davis 2017). While protest cycles bring about the emergence of large numbers of social movement organizations that tend to cooperate during the peak of protest, the decline of mobilization is especially likely to produce conflicts about the best strategies and tactics to be used in order to overcome the perceived crises. As groups and organizations struggle for scarce resources, including recruits and support from constituencies and bystanders, competition ensues (della Porta 1995, Zwerman & Steinhoff 2005).

The resources available to particular groups influence their repertoires of action. As organizations must mobilize material and symbolic resources in their environment and allocate them to various tasks, the availability of certain kinds of resources and the lack of others might push collective actors to use political violence. Rooted in the shared subculture of the activists, repertoires contain the options considered practicable, while excluding others (Tilly 1986, p. 390). Forms of

action are culturally constrained in both time and space. Not only are they limited by the traditions handed down from one generation of activists to the next, and crystallized in institutions (Tilly 1986), but they are also normatively constrained by what is considered to be right. Moreover, different collective actors give different meanings to the same conditions. Organizational resources and contextual opportunities exert their effects especially according to how they are framed by social movement actors. Frames are schemata of interpretation that enable individuals "to locate, perceive, identify and label" what happens within their life space and in the world at large (Snow et al. 1986, p. 464; Snow & Byrd 2007). Radicalization can then be triggered by mechanisms of competitive escalation and violent outbidding.

Competitive escalation is an important mechanism of radicalization (della Porta 2013). Social movement studies have linked radicalization to the development of protest cycles. While waves of protest often bring about a normalization of once unconventional forms of protest, they could also lead to the development of some violent forms of action, which might change along the cycle: more occasional and defensive in the beginning, then increasingly organized and ritualized. Toward the end of the cycle, while the number and size of protest events decline, clandestine forms of violence develop (della Porta & Tarrow 1986, della Porta 1995). One of the reasons for this radicalization is the organizational competition within dense milieus of social movements, social movement families (made up of social movements that share some general orientations and are often allied), and broader social movement sectors involving a plurality of social movement families. Violent outbidding then develops among different groups that compete for recruits and support from radicalized constituencies (della Porta 1995, 2013; Crenshaw 1995, 2001; Bloom 2005; Alimi et al. 2015). By escalating their use of violence, some groups aim to acquire a reputation for effectiveness, attract new recruits, and reinforce group cohesion (Crenshaw 1985). This was the case for social-revolutionary armed groups in the Italian and German contexts during the 1970s (della Porta 1995).

In general, competition is strongest between organizations that pursue similar goals and target the same constituent groups, inducing differentiation in goals and tactics by which groups seek to distinguish themselves from their competitors. The choice of radical forms of action proceeds through slight differentiations of goals and tactics (McCarthy & Zald 1973). The use of more intense and brutal forms of violence might increase sympathies and recruits in radical milieus, but at the same time it risks repelling broader audiences and provoking counterattacks against their potential constituencies. Whether competition results in radicalization depends on the extent of social acceptability of certain forms of violence, which is often connected to government policies targeting broader communities and escalating the overall level of violence (Bloom 2005). When the adoption of certain violent tactics is rewarded due to widespread support for militant action within a certain constituency, this outcome will push radical groups to violently outbid each other in competing for support. In addition to social acceptance among an organization's constituencies, attitudes among leaders and rank-and-file members can be a factor in escalation but also in moderation, facilitating or impeding dynamics of outbidding or de-escalation.

Research has indicated, in fact, that on both the left and the right, in ethnonationalism and in Islamist fundamentalism, internal strategic struggles have ended with the intense radicalization of one faction and the moderation of another. Additionally, cycles of protest stimulated the emergence of counter-movements, often with physical conflicts between militants of different fronts (della Porta 2013). Several clandestine organizations originated from within organizations active in protest cycles, through internal contestation. Italian left-wing groups split off from the Partito Comunista Italiano, their right-wing counterparts from the Movimento Sociale Italiano, the Basque Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA; Basque Land and Freedom) from the Partido Nacionalista Vasco, and Islamist groups from the Muslim Brothers, when the emergent social movements contested the original actors as too tame, if not traitorous (della Porta 2013). Experimentation

with violent tactics emerged from attempts to outbid the other groups—attracting the residual militants—and through small everyday adaptations to the tactics of the adversaries. Organizational competition influenced the radicalization processes. Addressing different constituencies, movement organizations targeted their strategic choices to make themselves more attractive to them. Especially during the declining phases of mobilization, violence became a trademark, designed to attract attention in the radicalized movement groups.

In this process, some organizations adapted their structures for more and more militarized forms of action—in particular, through the creation of martial bodies, devoted first to defense but then to attack. In several cases, structures specializing in violent repertoires developed slowly during fights with political adversaries and the police, until particular occasions of violence or repression pushed their members underground. While in the Italian case street fights involved left-against right-wingers, in the Basque Country ethnonationalists competed (even if not physically) with a class definition of the conflicts. In the case of the Islamists, harsh, sometimes physical struggles pitted left-wing social movement organizations against nationalist and religious ones.

The presence of a diverse repertoire of action can affect social movements' chances for success either positively or negatively. Research on social movements has singled out a radical flank mechanism, referring to the impact of groups that adopt more radical positions or forms of action on largely nonviolent movements. While under some conditions radical actions can contribute to repression and stigmatization, in other cases they can increase attention and support, pushing the elites to collaborate with moderate groups (see, e.g., Haines 1984, Chenoweth & Schock 2015, McCammon et al. 2015).

RADICAL MILIEUS: MICRODYNAMICS OF RADICALIZATION

Research on political violence has focused on various characteristics to explain why individuals resort to radical action. The first studies in the field, which pointed to psychopathologies such as dependency, circular reaction, or identity-seeking personalities, have never stood up to empirical examination, partly because the armed groups tend to select out undisciplined or unreliable individuals (Crenshaw 1995, Horgan 2008). Other theories stressed grievances: "terrorists" were said to come from the most deprived (frustrated and therefore aggressive) groups within a given population. Here, as well, empirical evidence was at best inconsistent. Moving from grievances to greed, recent approaches in terrorism studies stress instrumentality, defined as a rational means of redressing poverty, inequalities, social exclusion, or disenfranchisement. Profiling groups of the population that possess one or more of these characteristics as "at risk of radicalization" has become a widespread "counter-terrorist" tactic (Goodwin 2004). These debates can be found in different areas of research on political violence. For instance, in recent debates on suicide bombers, once clinical disorders are excluded, opinions tend to diverge about these individuals' main motivations. Some scholars have stressed how the careful choreography of suicide missions aims at strengthening solidarity (Moghaddam 2005); others stress a moral logic (Atran 2006); still others posit a strategic point of view, given the success of past suicide missions (Pape 2005).

A widespread observation is that individual motivations vary (Horgan 2008). For instance, Bjørgo (2005) distinguishes between ideological activists, motivated by ideas; drifters and fellow travelers, seeking friendship; and frustrated youth with criminal records. In addition, activists' trajectories might involve continuity in political interest and involvement but also conversion (a sudden break with their past) or compliance with requests of friends or relatives (Linden & Klandermans 2007; see also Kimhi & Even 2004).

Social movement studies have stressed the roles of political opportunities and organizational resources utilized by networks of activists. Research has considered social ties or relational

mechanisms to explain how and why ordinary young people end up participating in acts of extreme violence (see, among others, della Porta 1995, 2013; Sageman 2004, 2008; Wiktorowicz 2004; McCauley & Moskalenko 2008; Hegghammer 2010). Some researchers have pointed at typical steps in radicalization processes: the recognition of some conditions as wrong, the framing of those conditions as unjust and of violence as just, the singling out of specific responsibilities, and the demonization of the other (Borum 2003, Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010) As Malthaner & Lindekilde (2017) summarize, trajectories of radicalization often start with chance encounters within a specific milieu, pre-existing personal ties, or interactions within small groups or larger movements in which perceptions, beliefs, and values are formed and strengthened.

The activation of militant networks is a main mechanism in the microdynamics of radicalization. According to McAdam's (1986) work on recruitment to high-risk activism, families or friends socialize individuals to certain political ideas, and encounters with political activists then motivate them to engage in an initial low-cost/low-risk activism. Under conditions of "biographical availability"—that is, for instance, for young people—"these 'safe' forays into activism may have longer-range consequences . . . for they place the new recruit 'at risk' of being drawn into more costly forms of participation through the cyclical process of integration and resocialization" (McAdam 1986, p. 69).

In Italy in the 1970s, networks of friends and comrades proved relevant not only in the radicalization processes for ideological groups but also in the escalation of ethnonationalist organizations, from demands for civil rights to armed struggle for independence (della Porta 1995, Alimi et al. 2015). Similar developments have been identified for religious fundamentalist groups. Wiktorowicz (2005), in his research on al Muhajiroun in the United Kingdom, singles out a process of individual radicalization that tends to follow some specific steps. A phase of cognitive opening, sometimes initiated by a personal crisis, is followed by a religious conversion. Pre-existing personal ties with relatives or friends might then facilitate the connections with a radical organization (Wiktorowicz 2005, p. 15). Recruitment could, however, also be top-down, driven by outreach activities at the organizational level. "Exposure to teachings in the form of lectures and participation in movement activities is followed by more intense socialization within closed study groups, where ideological commitment is reinforced by personal and emotional ties that render an individual ready to engage in militant action" (Wiktorowicz 2005, p. 20).

Looking at jihadist micromobilization in Western societies, Sageman (2004) identifies bottom-up processes of radicalization involving pre-existing personal ties. Radical beliefs shape individual radicalization paths when they not only resonate with personal experiences but also combine with friendship or kinship networks. Cliques of like-minded friends emerge in particular around mosques or other spaces in which strong bonds promote loyalty to the group. Small and tightly knit, these groups provide for intensive interactions (echo chambers), forming and reinforcing radical beliefs, in increasing isolation (Sageman 2004, pp. 110, 120–21; 2008, pp. 86–87). The group becomes then more and more important to the individual, while family and the wider community are less and less able to influence him. Withdrawal, enclosure, and isolation ensue as group loyalty increases (Sageman 2004, 2008). Mentors and peers can work as "radicalization magnets" increasing group loyalty (Wiktorowicz 2004; Bakker 2006; Bokhari et al. 2006; Hegghammer 2006, 2010; Precht 2007; Neumann & Rogers 2008; Dalgaard-Nielsen 2010).

As McCauley & Moskalenko (2008, p. 419) note, "it is rare that an individual moves from sympathizer to activist by suddenly undertaking some major risk or sacrifice. Typically an individual's progress into a terrorist group is slow and gradual, with many smaller tests before being trusted in more important missions, and with many nonviolent tasks before being asked to use gun or bomb." This tends to be the case even for so-called lone-actor terrorists, who have more complex

Table 1 Paths of radicalization (Bosi & della Porta 2012)

Path	Dominant motivations (micro level)	Recruitment-relevant networks (meso level)	Perception of context (macro level)
Ideological	Ideological, identity	Family and territorial traditions	Potential revolutionary situation
Instrumental	Aspiration to change	Political groups	Closed opportunities
Solidaristic	Experiential cognition	Peer group	Escalation of political conflict

and discontinuous trajectories. "While to some extent socially embedded in radical movements or groups at some point in time, the pathways which lead them to eventually commit a terrorist act on their own are also shaped by *patterns of failed joining, marginal drifting, rejection, or impatiently pressing ahead and breaking away* from a reluctant group or milieu" (Malthaner & Lindekilde 2017, p. 170; emphasis in original).

TRAJECTORIES OF RADICALIZATION

If networks are important for most types of activities, the challenge is to specify which networks are conducive to radicalization. In all cases, networks are not only exploited but also produced by the radical groups in action (Wood 2003, della Porta 2013). In a relational perspective, scholars have studied trajectories of radicalization at three interrelated levels: individual motivations, to understand different personal choices (micro level); the network that facilitates recruitment, to grasp the socialization process and how this depends on the armed groups' recruitment processes at certain moments in time (meso level); and the individuals' perceived external opportunities, to study the social valuation of the context in relation to their engagement (macro level) (White 1992, della Porta 1995, Zwerman et al. 2000, Steinhoff & Zwerman 2008).

Bosi & della Porta (2012) singled out three paths of radicalization (see **Table 1**) that were common to the Red Brigades and Irish Republican Army. In the ideological path, they single out the relevance of deeply rooted family and local traditions, which allowed participants to frame the choice of joining the armed struggle within a narrative of continuity. The family and the immediate environment provided political socialization into an ideological background in which rebellion could be framed as an obligation, in a context perceived as ripe for the successful continuation of the old struggle. Within the instrumental path, recruitment instead passed through the belief that nonviolent forms of political protest were no longer helpful in the face of closing political opportunities. A third path developed out of solidarity with a community in struggle, in an environment characterized by intense emotions (among which anger and revenge were often cited). Recruitment processes tended to be quicker here than in the previous paths and, especially, tended to involve a new generation of very young militants directly socialized into politics during street battles with security forces and counter-movements' violence.

Defined at the micro level, these paths interacted with some conditions at the meso and macro levels (Bosi & della Porta 2012, p. 372):

> At the macro level, the first path developed predominantly at the beginning of a cycle of radicalization, when protest was still at its peak and produced optimistic beliefs in an approaching revolution. The very actions of these tradition-driven militants then contributed to increasing tensions at the macro level. The perceived closing of political opportunities pushed some of the activists involved in the nonviolent social movements towards an instrumental choice for violent means, perceived

as the only option for continuing the struggle in an effective way. The perceived transformations in the socio-political system required, according to these militants, a change in their predisposition for political violence. Finally, the harsh dynamics of clashes with the state and counter-movements produced a radicalized environment in which young individuals became very quickly involved in armed action out of solidarity with a community perceived as unjustly repressed.

These differences also interacted with organizational dynamics at the meso level, which had an effect on the recruitment process. The armed groups studied by Bosi & della Porta (2012), founded by tradition-driven militants, tended to maintain much continuity with the past, following the model of an army in Northern Ireland and of a Leninist vanguard in Italy. When, however, violence spread to less organized forms, the involvement of a second generation introduced changes in the organizational strategies and forms, challenging the hierarchical structure implemented by the previous generation and centrifugal evolutions.

This also explains why we often find two (or even more) generations of recruits following different motivations. In many cases, a first generation grew inside longstanding social movement traditions, whether "red" subculture for the Left, nostalgic fascist milieus for the right, nationalist communities for radical nationalists, and specific religious enclaves for Islamic fundamentalists. The presence of different generations of militants in armed organizations has been noted in other cases as well. In ETA, Reinares (2001) has observed many differences between the generation recruited in the first half of the 1970s and the one recruited in the 1980s–1990s. In the beginning, ETA members tended to be recruited in their twenties and to come from autochthonous families, living in small and medium-sized localities, in which the use of Euskera as a language was widespread. Over time, activists in ETA have tended to be younger, to be less integrated in Basque traditions (coming from urban areas with fewer Basque-speakers) and often a high presence of migrants, and to have direct experience of armed action (Reinares 2001, p. 19).

Similar micro mobilization paths can be found in other armed groups. So, for instance, Viterna (2006) has singled out three different paths for women's participation in the guerrilla army in El Salvador: the politicized guerrillas, the reluctant guerrillas, and the recruited guerrillas. The politicized guerrillas, most of whom joined early on in the war, were moved by strongly held political beliefs and ideological convictions, often strengthened by involvement in political organizations and family networks that supported guerrilla activism. Reluctant guerrillas joined as the development of the civil war, with government repression and economic disruption, gave them the impression that they had no other option. The recruited guerrillas stressed personal reasons over more generalized political beliefs, often mentioning motivations such as the search for adventure or revenge.

Research on Islamic militants has also noted generational differences. In al Qaeda, for example, at least two generations have been singled out. In the first generation, "all came from a Muslim country and had a previous record of political activism; almost all went directly from the Middle East to Afghanistan. They had little experience of the West, and had a traditional way of life (traditional marriage and their women kept at home" (Roy 2004, p. 301). Since the early 1990s, the new group of militants "was above all largely more uprooted than its predecessors, had few links (if any) to any particular Muslim country, and moved around the world, traveling from jihad to jihad" (p. 302). Among the cases Roy analyzed, most left their country of origin to fight or study and were Westernized; none had attended a madrasa; they were trained in technical or scientific disciplines; all spoke Western languages, drank alcohol, had girlfriends, smoked (Roy 2004, p. 311), and had no traditional Muslim marriage within the kinship group. The re-Islamization was mainly pushed by an individual search for roots in the face of discriminatory experiences in the host country.

Recruitment often happened through meeting Afghan veterans in a mosque, and many cut their family ties when they joined al Qaeda. According to Roy (2017), the new recruit

> is a young, second-generation immigrant or convert, very often involved in episodes of petty crime, with practically no religious education, but having a rapid and recent trajectory of conversion/reconversion, more often in the framework of a group of friends or over the internet than in the context of a mosque. The embrace of religion is rarely kept secret, but rather is exhibited, but it does not necessarily correspond to immersion in religious practice. The rhetoric of rupture is violent—the enemy is *kafir*, one with whom no compromise is possible—but also includes their own family, the members of which are accused of observing Islam improperly or refusing to convert.

External events and conditions therefore have a bearing on radicalization through individuals' perception of these events and how they interpret and process them.

CONCLUSIONS

When we look at radicalization processes, our attention goes to the evolution of protest cycles (della Porta 2013). Radicalization is a composite process, made of cognitive radicalization, changes in activist practices, and relational mechanisms that interact in complex ways (Malthaner 2016, 2017). Protest tactics often bring about frictions between protestors and police forces, so the police present as the most visible face of the state. In the mechanism of escalating policing, violence develops as a reaction to hard and indiscriminate repression, which radicalizing agents consider brutal and deeply unjust. Within interactive processes, violence and so-called counter-violence pair together. Transformative events of increased violence not only create martyrs and myths but also push forward the development of structures and norms that reproduce violence, paving the way to radical political violence. These events, from protests to civil wars, can impact not only those who directly participate in them but also those who (at a distance) affectively identify with the participants. During intense political and social conflicts, forms of action escalate following internal competition, confrontation with opponents, or encounters with the state. Competitive escalation links radicalization to the interactions within and between social movement organizations, families, and sectors. In these interactions, violence is partly a means to outbid the competitor and partly an unintended consequence of experimenting with new tactics of physical confrontation. Activists thus slowly socialize through the use of radical means of action. In the activation of militant networks, cognitive and affective dynamics also support the maintenance of commitments within underground settings and organizations, at the domestic as well as the transnational level.

In sum, radicalization has an emergent character. Choices of violence develop in action. Beyond the original cleavages, identities, and interests, new ones are created, weakened, or strengthened during radicalization processes. Radicalization therefore acquires a logic of its own, producing the very same polarization that fuels it (Wood 2003, p. 19; Kalyvas 2006, p. 389; della Porta 2013). As McCauley & Moskalenko (2011, p. 223) have pointed out, "radicalisation happens to Them and Us . . . . Political radicalisation of individuals, groups and mass publics occurs in a trajectory of action and reaction, and the end of the trajectory can seldom be controlled by either side alone. Radicalisation emerges in a relationship, in the friction of intergroup competition and conflict that heats both sides. It is this relationship that must be understood if radicalisation is to be kept short of terrorism. Focusing on them is not enough. Focusing on us is not enough. Focusing on the dynamic of conflict over time is essential." Transformative events, such as confrontations between opponent groups, are indeed extremely important turning points in radicalization processes, as they are intensely felt (della Porta 1995).

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