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Several revolutionary left groups in Europe and Japan had contacts with Palestinian militants during the 1970s and 1980s, but there has been very little research in English about those transnational relationships. Luca Falciola's article sheds considerable new light on the Italian case and provides intriguing comparison with some of the others. He places the study within the existing literature on the Palestinian resistance during the fifteen-year period from the Arab defeat in the Six-Day War in June 1967 until the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in June 1982, which led to the expulsion of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) from the country. This roughly coincides with the life cycle of the Italian revolutionary left, which by definition covers groups to the left of the Italian Communist Party, including both aboveground and underground groups.

As summarized by Falciola, after the 1967 Arab defeat, Israel occupied the West Bank (Jordan), the Gaza Strip and the Sinai (Egypt), and the Golan Heights (Syria). By the early 1970s, 1.5 million Palestinians who had been pushed out of the newly-occupied territories were housed in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. With strong financial and diplomatic support from Communist countries and revolutionary movements around the world, the PLO and its various factions provided services in the refugee camps while simultaneously leading a Vietnamese-style campaign of armed struggle against Israel. The dominant Fatah faction maintained military units that engaged in skirmishes along the Israeli border, but also sought international legitimacy through diplomacy. Meanwhile, the leading Marxist-Leninist faction in the PLO, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), saw itself as "part of a global insurgency that started in the 1960s in the Third World and in the West (36)." Without PLO approval, it carried out a campaign of dramatic international terrorist acts in order to call attention to the web of international ties that supported Israel. These activities destabilized Jordan and led to the PLO's expulsion from Jordan in 1970 and its relocation to Lebanon, where PFLP also cultivated ties with domestic New Left or revolutionary left organizations in other developed countries. By late 1974 the PLO sought to abandon terrorism and focus on diplomatic recognition. PFLP and other militant factions rejected several tenets of the PLO's new policy, to become a Rejectionist Front backed by Libya and Iraq.

Against the complicated and shifting background of Middle East politics, this study examines four key questions about the relationships between Palestinian militant groups and their counterparts in the Italian revolutionary left. While acknowledging the existing journalistic and academic work that touches on this issue, including studies specifically on the *Brigada Rosse* (BR), Falciola delves deeper into the transnational relationship using newly available primary textual sources plus personal interviews with participants.

How was the Palestinian issue received within Italy's revolutionary left? Falciola traces the genesis of Italian interest in the Palestinian situation among both the parliamentary and extra-parliamentary Left to 1968, soon after the mass movement of exiled Palestinians into refugee camps. The following year a Committee for Solidarity with Palestinian People, formed jointly by the Communist Party of Italy (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party of Proletarian Unity (PSIUP) in Rome, advocated Palestinian resistance through public forums and publications, and sent a delegation to the second World

Congress of the General Union of Palestinian Students (GUPS) in Amman, Jordan. This led to official relations between the PLO and the PCI, which also had a strong pro-Israel wing and pressured the PLO to renounce armed struggle.

The extra-parliamentary revolutionary Italian left was not so constrained. “Anti-zionism and solidarity with the Palestinian struggle soon became revolutionary duties (39)” and various leftist groups sent missions to aid refugees in the Palestinian camps. The Marxist-Leninist groups of the Italian revolutionary left also fluctuated over time. In the early 1970s *Lotta Continua* and *Avanguardia Operaia* mainly supported the middle of the road Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP). The loose network *Potere Operaio* gravitated naturally toward PFLP, which had a similar ideology and international perspective. Morphing into *Autonomia Operaia* (called Autonomy by Falcicola), by the mid-1970s it became the dominant revolutionary left presence in Italy with Palestinian ties.

What facilitated Palestinian militancy in Italy? There were hundreds of Palestinian university students in Italy during this period, who enjoyed both the low cost of living and the general sympathy of local students. GUPS established an Italian chapter early on, and established relationships with both Italian student organizations and the parliamentary left. Official representatives of PFLP traveled to Italy frequently and were hosted by the Autonomy network, which also organized public meetings for them. In 1977 Autonomy launched a private radio station in Rome that broadcast a regular program promoting PFLP’s struggle against Israel. Autonomy also promoted a counterinformation campaign to present PFLP’s rationale for major international terrorist incidents that were criticized by more moderate elements of the left, such as the May 1972 Lod Airport massacre in Tel Aviv (carried out by three young Japanese men on behalf of PFLP), and the June 1974 attack at the Munich Olympics (carried out by Black September, a radical Palestinian group formed after the PLO’s expulsion from Jordan).

Falcicola argues that a crucial factor was the Italian political authorities’ benevolent attitude toward domestic Palestinian militant activities, which prevailed for two reasons. First, Italy had strong economic interests in the Middle East. Particularly after the Arab Oil embargo in 1973, support for the Palestinian cause was essential to maintain the Italian supply of oil and natural gas from Arab countries. Second, although Italy was part of the North Atlantic alliance, it was not equipped to control Palestinian terrorism domestically and chose appeasement as a pragmatic solution. Using declassified diplomatic and judicial documents plus personal interviews, Falcicola documents secret agreements with the PLO and later PFLP, through which Italy permitted Palestinian activity on Italian soil and supported their cause internationally in exchange for protecting Italy’s territory and citizens from terrorist attacks. He traces the subsequent activities: international weapons shipments, along with a complex web of personal interactions and information exchanges among Italian government officials, PFLP representatives, and Italian militants and journalists. There were also unsuccessful efforts to activate these channels after the BR kidnapped former Prime Minister Aldo Moro in March 1978.

How did the militants interact in Italy and the Middle East? Italian revolutionary leftists traveled regularly to visit Palestinian camps in Lebanon and Syria by car or plane, and spent time in PLO training camps, but do not seem to have been interested in military training or being recruited to participate in joint operations. They also resisted opportunities to carry out operations in Italy for the Palestinian cause. Falcicola points out that the Italians had their own domestic sources for obtaining weapons and military training, and planned their own domestic operations, but sometimes participated in meetings at which participants from other countries discussed their common interests. This corresponded with the Palestinian vision of relations between militant groups that were fighting parallel battles against imperialism in their own countries. He also documents at least two international arms deals at sea in which Italian militants participated. The first involved facilitating the sale of Soviet-made weapons to other Italian groups through Lebanese arms dealers; the second involved BR members receiving an arms shipment offshore of the Lebanese coast. The BR was to keep some of the stock, but share the rest with the PLO, as well as the Irish Republican Army, the Basque separatist organization ETA [*Euskadi Ta Askatasuna*], and the German Red Army Faction. Falcicola contends that these relationships did not develop into “structured coalitions with deeper implications” (59). Moreover, the Italians did not adopt Palestinian practices of hijacking or transnational terrorism.

What strengthened or inhibited the transnational relationship? Falcicola believes the Italian militants learned several lessons from their encounters with the Palestinians. “First was an increased belief that the whole world was in turmoil under the same banner and against the same enemy” (60). They recognized that the Palestinians were secular freedom fighters rather than Islamic jihadists; they saw the Palestinian struggle as following a David versus Goliath myth; and viewed the Palestinians as the contemporary equivalent of partisans in other times and places.

Although there were a variety of interactions between Palestinian and Italian militants, Falcicola argues that the relationship did not grow deeper for several reasons. The territorial problem the Palestinians faced was fundamentally different from the Italian situation, and the groups had different conceptions of how to deploy political violence in their respective circumstances. The Italians were sensitive about the potential dangers of political patronage from other countries, while the Palestinian resistance was fundamentally dependent on Soviet support. The relationship was also unbalanced in that the Palestinians expected the Italians to promote their cause and provide various forms of support to them but did not offer public support for Italian armed groups. Moreover, the Italians viewed the Palestinians as ideological opportunists, who used Marxism primarily as cover for their nationalist aims. Falcicola argues that unlike the Italians, “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” (66). A related bone of contention was the Palestinian willingness to accept solidarity with neo-Fascist and anti-Semitic groups on the Italian far right that were anathema to the Italian revolutionary left. Finally, the Italians had less incentive to become transnational; until the late 1970s subversive activities were relatively safe in Italy and the milieu supporting the revolutionary left encompassed radicalized factory workers and students, whereas German and Japanese radicals sought refuge in the Middle East from harsh repression at home.

This is a well-researched study of the transnational ties between the Italian revolutionary left and Palestinian militants that should quickly become the standard English reference on the topic. It is most helpful in documenting why the Italian case was so different. Although revolutionary left groups in Italy, Germany, Japan, and the United States arose in similar ways out of the New Left protest cycle of the late 1960s and early 1970s, their subsequent trajectories diverged. In contrast to the extensive open interaction between Palestinians and Italian activists both in Italy and relatively nearby Lebanon, comparable left revolutionary groups in Japan and Germany were subject to very harsh repression.¹ A small number of individuals from these countries who were under heavy police pressure at home sought refuge with PFLP, which shared their ideological vision and offered them military training and safety in the Middle East. They repaid their Palestinian benefactors by participating with PFLP in joint international attacks and supporting the Palestinian cause in other ways, and they seem to have been treated as revolutionary comrades by PFLP.

The Japanese case illustrates this difference. Its Red Army Faction, which had been pushed underground by harsh repression in Japan,² quietly sent a tiny delegation half-way around the world to Lebanon in 1971, where they volunteered with PFLP as individuals. The men joined PFLP’s external operations section where Wadi Haddad was orchestrating dramatic international terrorist attacks, and they carried out the 1972 Lod Airport attack.³ Fusako Shigenobu, the one woman in the

¹ See Donatella della Porta, *Social Movements, Political Violence, and The State: A Comparative Analysis of Italy and Germany* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Gilda Zverman, Patricia G. Steinhoff, and della Porta, “Disappearing Social Movements: Clandestinity in the Cycle of New Left Protest in the United States, Japan, Germany, and Italy,” *Mobilization* 5:1 (Spring): 91-111.

² Steinhoff, *Nihon Sekigunha: Sono Shakaigakuteki Monogatari (Japan Red Army Faction: A Sociological Tale)* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobo Shinsha, 1991); Steinhoff, *Shi eno Ideology: Nihon Sekigunha*, Iwanami Bunko Modern Classics Series (Tokyo: Iwanami Publishing Company, 2003).

³ Steinhoff, “Portrait of a Terrorist: An Interview with Kozo Okamoto,” *Asian Survey* 16 (September 1976): 830-845; Steinhoff, “Transnational Ties of the Japanese Armed Left: Shared Revolutionary Ideas and Direct Personal Contacts” in Alberto Martín Alvarez and Eduardo Rey Tristán, eds., *Revolutionary Violence and the New Left: Transnational Perspectives* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016), 163-181. The surviving Japanese participant of the Lod Airport attack, Kōzō Okamoto, became a national hero in the Middle East and was given a life sentence in Israel, but experienced mental problems during his incarceration in Israel. After his release in a

group, volunteered with PFLP's newspaper *Al Hadaf*, where she wrote articles about the Palestinian cause for publication in Japan and organized production of a propaganda film, *Sekigun-PFLP Sekai Sensō Sengen* [Red Army-PFLP Declaration of World War]. The film toured Japanese universities, where it excited young Japanese radicals with its portrayal of Palestinians casually handling firearms that are extremely rare in Japan and brought a trickle of new recruits to Lebanon.⁴ The Japanese group participated in several more international attacks orchestrated by Haddad in 1973 and 1974 and developed ties with other Japanese living in Europe. Police investigations of Japanese in Europe brought threats of deportation, leading still other Japanese to seek refuge with PFLP in Lebanon.

As circumstances within the PLO changed, they formed their own independent Japanese Red Army in the Middle East in late 1974 but continued to have good relations with PFLP. Subsequently they carried out two 'free-the-guerrilla' international attacks in Kuala Lumpur and Bangladesh that released associates from prison in Japan to join them in the Middle East and also netted them a large ransom payment from the Japanese government. From the time of the Lod Airport attack, the Japanese government has placed all known associates of the Japanese group in the Middle East on the Interpol wanted list as soon as they were identified.⁵ It has actively hunted them down all over the world in order to have them deported to Japan for trial and prosecution.⁶

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Palestinian prisoner exchange in 1985, Okamoto was brought back to Lebanon, where he has been cared for by his Japanese associates and Palestinians and later was awarded political asylum. He is still wanted by the Japanese government.

⁴ Patricia G. Steinhoff, "Three Women Who Loved the Left: Radical Woman Leaders in the Japanese Red Army Movement," in Anne E. Imamura, *Re-Imaging Japanese Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 301-323; Steinhoff, "Shifting Boundaries in Japan's Criminal Justice System in G. D. Hook and H. Takeda, eds., *Decoding Boundaries in Postwar Japan: The Koizumi Administration and Beyond* (London: Routledge Press, Taylor and Francis Group, 2010), 206-233.

⁵ Steinhoff and Zwerman, "Passer puis renoncer à l'action violente : les mouvements de la Nouvelle gauche aux États-Unis et au Japon face à la répression," *Cultures et Conflits* 88 (Spring 2013):1-22; Zwerman and Steinhoff, "The Remains of the Movement: The Role of Legal Support Networks in Leaving Violence while Sustaining Movement Identity," *Mobilization: An International Journal* 17:1 (2012) :67-84; Zwerman and Steinhoff, "When Activists Ask for Trouble: State-Dissident Interactions and the New Left Cycle of Resistance in the United States and Japan," in Christian Davenport, Hank Johnston, and Carol Mueller, eds., *Repression and Mobilization, Social Movements, Protest, and Contention* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 85-107.

⁶ On 14 February 2022, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Department issued an update of its longstanding international search warrant for the arrest of seven members of the Japanese Red Army who remain at large. It contains gray sketches of the six men and one woman, including Okamoto Kōzō, as they are thought to look today in their seventies https://www.keishicho.metro.tokyo.lg.jp/jiken_jiko/ichiran/ichiran_10/tehai_nihonsekigun.html.