

# On the Principles of Political Violence and the Case of Anti-Fascist Action

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Fig. 1: two Anti-Fascist Action members fend off fascists at the “Battle of Waterloo”,  
12 September 1992.

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## Table of Contents

List of Diagrams and Pictures	II
List of Abbreviations	III
Thesis Introduction	1
Chapter One: What is violence, how can it be justified and what does it hope to achieve	6
What is violence?	7
How can political violence be justified?	13
What does political violence hope to achieve?	17
Conclusion	19
Chapter Two: The case of Anti-Fascist Action	21
The political violence of Anti-Fascist Action	24
Anti-Fascist Action's justification of violence	29
Anti-Fascist Action's Power	35
Conclusion	42
Thesis Conclusion	44
Bibliography	47

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1	Title Page
Figure 2	26
Figure 3	27
Figure 4	27
Figure 5	35

## Abbreviations

AFA Anti-Fascist Action

ANL Anti-Nazi League

B&H Blood and Honour

BNP British National Party

*BtF Beating the Fascists*

C18 Combat 18

CSB Cable Street Beat

DAM Direct Action Movement

ETA Euskadi Ta Askatasuna

INLA Irish National Liberation Army

IRG Instant Response Group

MUAF Manchester United Anti-Fascists

NF National Front

PIRA Provisional Irish Republican Army

RA Red Action

SWP Socialist Workers' Party

*TPV Terrorism and Political Violence*

WP Workers' Power

## Thesis Introduction

This thesis examines the principles of political violence in order to investigate the common assumption that violence used as a political tool is morally wrong and ineffective. Anti-Fascist Action (AFA) will be used as the empirical case study to interrogate the framework created in the theoretical discussion of political violence.<sup>1</sup> AFA was often on the receiving end of criticism regarding its use and promotion of political violence: a *World in Action* documentary labelled it as ‘paramilitary’, whilst *The Times* argued for ‘pre-emptive action ... even if this means restricting rights of free assembly’, against AFA.<sup>2</sup> The first objective of this thesis is to build a theoretical framework of leftist political violence, its justification and how it attains power, which in turn, challenges the state-based analysis commonly found in studies. By using AFA as a case study I will fulfil the second objective: filling the historiographical gap in research on AFA.

Despite a keen interest in anti-fascist history I was never aware of my grandfather’s participation in violent anti-fascist activities until I read *No Retreat*.<sup>3</sup> This exemplifies the hidden nature of the history of militant anti-fascism; moreover, it is a personal reason for tackling this thesis. In order for this thesis to have had real material benefit to those wanting to study, or who are interested in anti-fascism I have created the Anti-Fascist Archive.<sup>4</sup> This archive is the largest online archive of AFA material; it contains significantly more AFA

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<sup>1</sup> AFA is pronounced: æfə.

<sup>2</sup> *Violence with Violence*, *World in Action*, (ITV, 1993). Also, Sean Birchall, *Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-Fascist Action* (London: Freedom Press, 2010), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Dave Hann and Steve Tilzey, *No Retreat: The Secret War between Britain’s Anti-Fascists and the Far Right* (Lytham: Milo Books, 2003), p. 7 and 23.

<sup>4</sup> [www.antifascistarchive.com](http://www.antifascistarchive.com). All AFA sources used in this dissertation can be found on the archive, except interview transcripts and internal documents which have been withheld. The archive has collected a number of materials that have not been freely available before such as the first edition of *Fighting Talk* and *Violence with Violence* documentary which I found a VHS recording of the original airing in the cellar of an interviewee. The archive is already being used by Dr Evan Smith of Flinders University, Adelaide. The archive also helped establish trust to get interviews and material from ex-activists.

resources than the British Library. I hope my thesis makes headway in securing the history of AFA and understanding why violence is used as a political tool.

Political violence, its justification and how it helps achieve power is the subject of my first section. Although these topics have been studied since Machiavelli's *The Prince* and before, centuries later, Georges Sorel still found that the problem of violence is its obscurity; a point Hannah Arendt concurred with in 1970.<sup>5</sup> Violence has been the subject of research by Marxists who sought to explain how capitalism is inherently violent. This broad definition of violence has been contended by scholars such as C. A. J. Coady, who argues for a restricted definition which is in line with the *Oxford English Dictionary*.<sup>6</sup> Arendt's seminal work *On Violence* (1970) provided a unique perspective of violence which updated theories to the Cold War age. Thus, whilst violence has been greatly studied its principles remain contested.

AFA has received very little scholarly attention. Nigel Copsey's *Anti-Fascism in Britain* (2000) studies anti-fascism; militant and non-militant, from the 1920s until the late 1990s. However, Copsey's section on AFA contains no interviews with ex-activists. This is a problem Sean Birchall points out; although Copsey complains that his contact with AFA at the time was rebuffed.<sup>7</sup> A further problem is Copsey's failure to analyse AFA's changing political discourse following the election of Derek Beacon in 1993. Meanwhile, 'Anti-Fascist Action: Radical Resistance or Rent-a-mob?' by Mark Hayes and Paul Aylward provides an investigation solely into AFA, albeit brief. They also conducted research using interviews

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<sup>5</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (London: Allen Lane, 1970), p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> C. A. J. Coady, 'The Idea of Violence', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 244-65.

<sup>7</sup> Copsey states he was asked to pay for the privilege of an interview, Nigel Copsey, 'Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-Fascist Action - a Review', *e-Extreme*, 12.3 (2011), pp. 11-12. A leading activist denies this allegation stating they did not receive communication from Copsey. However he points out that communication to AFA was often intercepted by police, Interview with Joe Reilly, London, (20/02/2012).

with activists, although it was not published.<sup>8</sup> These two published works represent the only academic study on AFA's activities.

*No Retreat* and *Beating the Fascists* (hereafter *BtF*) both represent works by activists themselves at recording their own history; they are not without fault, however.<sup>9</sup> Whilst *No Retreat* records the recollections from just two people; *BtF* is a collection of memories from numerous individuals, all of which had to be backed up by newspaper articles and three different individuals to be put in the book.<sup>10</sup> However, the *BtF* recollections are mostly from individuals from one grouping in AFA: Red Action. Both, however, are useful first-hand accounts for historians despite problems associated with memory.<sup>11</sup>

Historiographical works have been completed by non-militant anti-fascists too, although, AFA has criticised it for ignoring their part. For example, AFA was highly critical of, Socialist Workers' Party (SWP) member, Dave Renton's *Fascism: Theory and Practice* for 'writing AFA out of history.'<sup>12</sup> AFA was similarly critical of Searchlight's November 1999 feature 'A century of British fascism' which, whilst noting AFA and its successes up until 1989, but AFA 'disappear[s] without explanation' in the section on the 1990s.<sup>13</sup> AFA was close to Searchlight up until the early 1990s but would split irrevocably by March 1993 when RA and AFA members Liam Heffernan and Patrick Hayes were arrested within two

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<sup>8</sup> R Aylward and M. Hayes, 'Anti-Fascist Action: An Ethnographic Investigation into an Organisation on the Periphery of Politics', paper presented to PSA (Politics of Law and Order Group) 14 November 1998. I contacted both Aylward and Hayes for a copy of the paper however neither had one.

<sup>9</sup> Sean Birchall, *Beating the Fascists: The Untold Story of Anti-Fascist Action* [Hereafter *BtF*](London: Freedom Press, 2010). Also, Hann and Tilzey, *No Retreat*.

<sup>10</sup> Interview with B, (29/01/2012).

<sup>11</sup> See: Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> AFA, 'Flabby Pacifism', *Fighting Talk* (22, October 1999), pp. 9-12.

<sup>13</sup> AFA, 'Missing in Action', *Fighting Talk* 23, (February 2000), p.20.

months of one another on charges relating to separate incidences of Irish republican terrorism, including the January 1993 bombing of Harrods.<sup>14</sup>

My first chapter will involve a theoretical investigation into political violence, how it can be justified and how it achieves power. This thesis will use several methodological devices to do so. The approach will be chronological thus enabling a view of the development of the philosophy of violence and to critique it. Using an approach Ted Honderich has taken to the justification of violence; I will deconstruct a theory and take what remains useful to my case study.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore this chapter uses the premise that under a normative view non-violent method of struggle is preferable to violence, as it is devoid of violence; therefore creating a normative adequacy which much be met when investigating violence.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, causing injury, harm or distress requires special justification.<sup>17</sup> A minor element of my methodology will be looking at violence from an economics vantage point; since the scholarly language of economics considered is striking. In sum, the essay will be chronological and deconstructive.

My second chapter considers the empirical case study of AFA in order to analyse the framework on the nature of violence, how it can be justified and how it achieves power created in the first chapter. This final chapter will use primarily primary resources gained from ex-activists' own collections however a small number has been obtained from the British Library. In order to gain wide insight from interviews I have conducted I have: interviewed those associated with *No Retreat* and *BtF*, from different sections of the hierarchy, from different geographical locations, both male and female members and activists

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<sup>14</sup> Stephen Ward, 'Proud' IRA Bombers Jailed for 30 Years: Police Remain Mystified Why Two Englishmen, Who Had No Apparent Connections with Ireland, Became Terrorists', *Independent* 14 May 1994. Also, Duncan Campbell, 'INLA's Would-Be Bombers Go to Prison', *Guardian*, 17 December 1993.

<sup>15</sup> Ted Honderich, *Violence for Equality: Inquiries in Political Philosophy: Incorporating 'Three Essays on Political Violence'*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1980), pp. 146-172.

<sup>16</sup> Note that I include psychological harm and distress as results of violence, not just physical injury.

<sup>17</sup> Pontara's uses this premise along with another two as his 'three premises of adequacy'. Giuliano Pontara, 'The Concept of Violence', *Journal of Peace Research* 1.15 (1978), pp. 20-21.



involved at different times.<sup>18</sup> However, this chapter does not consider the militant activities prior to the founding of AFA in 1985.

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<sup>18</sup> It was important to interview individuals from *No Retreat* and *BtF* because of personal and political differences which resulted in both authors of *No Retreat* being expelled from AFA. This has created a split which is evident in both of the books but also the Manchester United Football Club fanzine, *Red Attitude*. See: Manchester United Anti-Fascists [MUAF], *Red Attitude* 10, (1997). Also, AFA, 'When the Reds go Marching In...', *Fighting Talk* 16, (March 1997), p. 6-7.

## Chapter One: What is Violence, How Can it be Justified and What Does it Hope to Achieve?

This chapter will begin with a theoretical discussion on violence. Firstly, the broad ideas espoused by Friedrich Engels and Leon Trotsky are considered. This section will then move on to discuss the academics associated with the New Left; Jean-Paul Sartre and Frantz Fanon whose theories centred on national liberation struggles in colonial countries. Consequentialist arguments against deontological reasons for non-violence continue in studies by non-Marxists, for example: Hannah Arendt, Giuliano Pontara and Ted Honderich. However problems remain with their discourse on political violence.

The second section seeks to disprove the notion that violence by non-state groups is automatically unjust; as the 1997 United Nations International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings stated. It declared: 'No cause however good warrants a violent response if the actor is an individual or group, not a state.'<sup>19</sup> To do this I will firstly use Ted Honderich's analysis on moral necessity.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, Arendt's and Gert's work on reason will be examined to understand how with reason comes justification. Arendt's central idea of violence ends being justified by the means will be the third subject of study. To do this I will critique Leslie Macfarlane's work on the Provisional Irish Republican Army's (PIRA) and utilise the end state analysis developed by Virginia Held.<sup>21</sup> Finally, I will look at how organisations present their evidence to justify violence they have inflicted, to do this I will use the case studies presented in Garrett O'Boyle and Hanspeter van den Broek's works.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings, Dec. 15, 1997, U.N. Doc. A/RES/52/164; 37 I.L.M. 249 (1998)

<sup>20</sup> Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, pp. 146-210.

<sup>21</sup> Leslie Macfarlane, 'The Right to Self-Determination in Ireland and the Justification of IRA Violence', *TPV*, 2.1 (1990), pp. 35-53.

<sup>22</sup> G. O'Boyle, 'Theories of Justification and Political Violence: Examples from Four', *TPV*, 14.2 (2002), pp. 23-46. Also, Hanspeter van den Broek, 'The Legitimation of Street Violence in the Political Discourse of Radical Basque Nationalists', *TPV*, 16.4 (2004), pp. 714-36.

The final section of Chapter One will deal with the fundamental objective of political violence: power. Such an investigation already contradicts a fundamental notion of Arendt's treatise: power can never be derived from violence.<sup>23</sup> However, her argument stems from a state-based thought process; this is evident in her examples of national revolutions and state terrors. After a discussion on Arendt's writings on power, this section will move onto a comparative investigation of Steven Lukes' and Keith Dowding's theses on the nature of power. Thus, the section will conclude with more general principles of power which stand up to empirical testing.

What is Violence?

Violence in Marxist thought has a broad definition. Engels writes in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England* (1844), 'murder has also been committed if society places hundreds of workers in such a position that they inevitably come to premature and unnatural ends.'<sup>24</sup> This system is of course capitalism. The idea continues in Trotsky's *Terror and Communism* (1920) to refute Karl Kautsky's writings against the "Red Terror" in Revolutionary Russia. He writes: 'As long as human labour-power, and, consequently, life itself, remain articles of sale and purchase, of exploitation and robbery the principle of the "sacredness of human life" remains a shameful lie.'<sup>25</sup> In sum, capitalist society is violent thus violence is simply part of life; therefore taking a life with the sword cannot be morally different to that of the mill owner's employee being killed by machinery.

More recently John Harris, best known for his literature on bioethics, expands on this Marxist definition. 'Negative Actions', defined as an actor not taking an action to prevent a consequence despite knowing, or reasonably presumed to know the outcome, from a moral

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<sup>23</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted in: John Harris, *The Value of Life* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

<sup>25</sup> Leon Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism: A Reply to Karl Kautsky* (London: Verso, 2007), p. 62.

point of view are no different to positive actions causing harm, injury or distress.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, Harris' definition of violence is devoid of intentionality. Pontara gives further weight to the idea that violence does not require intentionality. He argues that although committing an act which results in unintentional suffering, distress or injury is a reason in favour of doing the act, it still does not negate the fact that, under the normative premise, justification is still required for the action.<sup>27</sup> Thus from this first section on Marxian thought I can take the following elements of the nature of violence. Firstly, that a deontological argument against violence on the principle of "Thou shalt not kill" is not infallible to criticism. Secondly, violence does not have to be intentional to require justification.

Post-war, the New Left gave a more colonial-centric Marxist perspective of violence. New Left philosophers utilised the Hegelian Master-Slave concept to understand Third World liberation movements. Ronald E. Santoni maps out what he calls Sartre's 'curiously ambivalent' stance towards violence.<sup>28</sup> In Sartre's early work *Notebooks for an Ethics*,<sup>29</sup> Santoni notes his use of Kantian autonomy as an argument against violence: violence negates others' freedom.<sup>30</sup> On the other hand Sartre does give some qualification to achieving an end "by any means necessary".<sup>31</sup> Although Santoni argues that this must be seen in relation to Sartre's phenomenological account of violence and thus ought not to be seen as an endorsement of violence.<sup>32</sup> In keeping with Marxist thought, *Notebooks* does maintain that oppression is violence. On this point Sartre's later writing develops to accommodate violence to overturn an injustice.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> John Harris, 'The Marxist Conception of Violence', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 185-207.

<sup>27</sup> Pontara, 'The Concept of Violence', p. 26.

<sup>28</sup> Ronald E. Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), p. XV.

<sup>29</sup> *Notebooks for an Ethics* was written in 1947-1948 but published posthumously in 1983.

<sup>30</sup> Santoni, *Sartre on Violence*, pp. 23-25.

<sup>31</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Notebooks for an Ethics* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 264-65.

<sup>32</sup> Santoni, *Sartre on Violence*, p. 29.

<sup>33</sup> Santoni, *Sartre on Violence*, pp. 29-31.

In *Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960), Sartre develops ontological thoughts on violence, one area expanded being violence and its relation to “the group”. Matthew Mackenzie examines *Critique*; particularly the idea of violence as the origin of humanity. Sartre argues that everything can be explained by need and that human praxis, the freedom to move, think and create, tries to solve need. Using the example of the Storming of the Bastille (1789), Sartre shows how group praxis is superior to individual praxis in fulfilling an objective.<sup>34</sup> A result of the outward and inward violence of the group is the creation of solidarity, a point which Arendt gives credence to quoting Fanon: ‘the practice of violence binds men together as a whole.’<sup>35</sup> In sum, if praxis is equal to freedom and group praxis, as shown, is superior to individual praxis; then violence maintains the highest expression of freedom which, Sartre contends, is synonymous with the origin of humanity.<sup>36</sup>

Mackenzie has a number of criticisms however. He argues people perceive others as opportunities rather than as threats; more importantly he argues that Sartre is taking freedom as a concept to its absolute limits.<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, although Sartre’s philosophy is abstract there is evidence that it did have material consequence as Alison Jamieson’s interviews of Red Brigade members attests.<sup>38</sup> Despite the problems with the theory, Sartre does provide two ideas we can utilise: the superiority of group praxis and the creation of solidarity.

Continuing with the New Left discourse, Fanon in his early work, *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), details the difference between his and Hegel’s Master-Slave relationship. In Fanonian Master-Slave dialectic, Slave is not content with being the object, or “thing”, of the

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<sup>34</sup> Matthew Mackenzie, 'Jean-Paul Sartre on Violence and Terror', *Terrorism and Political Violence* [here after TPV], 6.4 (1994), p. 482.

<sup>35</sup> Mackenzie, 'Jean-Paul Sartre on Violence and Terror', p. 495. Also, Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 67.

<sup>36</sup> This is an extremely light description of Sartre’s ideas and does not discuss praxis-inertia a key element however it is not relevant enough, taking into account the constraints of this essay. This description has been taken from: Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason; Vol.1, Theory of Practical Ensembles*. trans. by Jonathan Rée (London: Verso, 1991), and Mackenzie’s article, which excels at making a very complicated philosophy understandable.

<sup>37</sup> Mackenzie, 'Jean-Paul Sartre on Violence and Terror', p. 492 and p. 501.

<sup>38</sup> Alison Jamieson, 'Identity and Morality in the Italian Red Brigades', *TPV*, 2.4 (1990), pp. 518-519.

Master and desires to be the subject, like the Master, which contrasts with the Hegelian Slave who turns to the object; his labour, for self-consciousness.<sup>39</sup> The difference continues in the Master element too. Hegelian Master needs Slave to ‘achieve his recognition through another consciousness’ thus becoming ‘dependent on the thing for his own self-consciousness.’<sup>40</sup> On the other hand there is no reciprocity in Fanonian Master as he requires Slave merely for his labour and laughs at Slave’s consciousness.<sup>41</sup> Fanon’s development of the Master-Slave dialectic is used in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961) to explain national liberation movements in colonies.

Fanonian Slave desires subjectivity, despite being against the odds, and drives Slave into conflict with Master.<sup>42</sup> Sartre’s poetic preface to *Wretched* describes how the violence inflicted upon Slave will be reciprocated and through this Slave will gain consciousness.<sup>43</sup> Consciousness is an upshot of violence at the macro level; with regards to the individual Fanon writes: ‘violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect.’<sup>44</sup> In sum, Slave achieves self-respect through conflict with Master.

To analyse this concept consider Polemarchus telling Socrates on the road from Pireaus: You cannot persuade those who will not listen.<sup>45</sup> This thought leads Held and Arendt to conclude that violence may be necessary if the avenue for persuasion and argument is not open.<sup>46</sup> Violence to end injustice has common ground with Walter Benjamin’s ‘divine

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<sup>39</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), pp. 210-212.

<sup>40</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*. trans. by Arnold Vincent. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), pp. 116-117.

<sup>41</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Villet, 'Hegel and Fanon on the Question of Mutual Recognition: A Comparative Analysis', *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, 4.7 (2011), pp. 44-48.

<sup>43</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*. trans. by Constance Farrington (London: MacGibbon and Kee, 1963), pp. 7-27.

<sup>44</sup> Quoted from *Wretched of the Earth* in Nigel C. Gibson, *Fanon: The Postcolonial Imagination* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), p. 118.

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Gorgias*. trans. by James H. Nichols Jr. (New York: Cornell University, 1998), p. 23.

<sup>46</sup> Held, *How Terrorism Is Wrong: Morality and Political Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 138-139. Also, Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 79.

violence' which Slavoj Žižek defines as a 'brutal intrusion of justice beyond law.'<sup>47</sup> Fanon and Sartre's writings on counter violence to end an injustice illustrates that a deontological argument against violence on the basis that it infringes Kantian autonomy is found wanting. Paradoxically, infringing the oppressor's autonomy can enable the oppressed to have their autonomy. This further provides evidence against "Thou shalt not kill" as an absolute rule against violence. Thus I have two more elements of violence from Fanon's work: the element of self-esteem and the element of violence to end injustice.

Written at a time of social protest, *On Violence* is Arendt's examination of the causes, nature and definition of violence. *Violence* is also a critique of Fanon's 'glorification of violence' in his work which was popular with protesting students at that time.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, she attempts to update Engels' and Clausewitz's nineteenth century theories on violence to the age of the Mutually Assured Destruction. A change to nineteenth century conditions Arendt notes: post-Second World War, peace was the continuation of war by other means, the contrary of Clausewitz's maxim.<sup>49</sup> Arendt also rejects zoological investigations into violence as too simple and not comparative.<sup>50</sup> In sum, Arendt analysed violence in a cold war context and to move away from scientific and New Left explanations of violence.

One of the most important aspects of Arendt's essay is her definitions of power, force, and violence.<sup>51</sup> In their absolute manifestations, argues Arendt, violence is One against All and power: All against One. Power is defined as the ability of a group to act together and requires legitimacy when challenged; legitimacy is in turn defined as an appeal to the past.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, according to Arendt, force is wrongly used as a synonym for violence and should be reserved for use in terms of physics. Thus it is defined as the energy released by

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<sup>47</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Violence* (London: Profile, 2008), p. 151.

<sup>48</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 12.

<sup>49</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, pp. 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, pp. 59-60.

<sup>51</sup> It should be noted that Arendt also defines strength and authority. These terms however are not central to this thesis. She also defines them in largely normative terms.

<sup>52</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, pp. 44 and 52.

physical or social movements.<sup>53</sup> Finally, violence is distinguished by its instrumental character and, like a tool, multiplies the individuals' natural strength.<sup>54</sup> If power needs legitimacy then violence, like all actions, particularly extreme actions; requires justification. Justification, she argues, relates to the end state.<sup>55</sup> These definitions will remain important throughout this thesis.

Returning to the debate surrounding the synonymy of force and violence, another clause for my definition of violence will be provided. Contrary to Arendt, Gibson notes Fanon uses force and violence interchangeably in *Concerning Violence*.<sup>56</sup> Raphael Cohen-Almagor does the same in her article on violence.<sup>57</sup> However, the distinction has been made in some scholarly writing such as Robert F. Litke and Newton Garver who both regard violence not in relation to physical force, but violation of autonomy.<sup>58</sup> Gert distinguishes force as an act which inhibits autonomy without causing injury,<sup>59</sup> whereas Allan Bäck defines force as the changes within a time period to an object or person by either an inanimate thing, such as wind, or a person.<sup>60</sup> To return to Sartre, he outlines force as an action within the 'laws of nature' giving the example of opening a wine bottle: force pops the cork; violence breaks the neck.<sup>61</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* too includes force as a requirement for violence.<sup>62</sup> What these different definitions all have in common is that they regard force as energy being released.

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<sup>53</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 45.

<sup>54</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*. p. 46.

<sup>55</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, pp. 51-52.

<sup>56</sup> Gibson, *Fanon*, p. 106.

<sup>57</sup> Raphael Cohen-Almagor, 'Foundations of Violence, Terror and War in the Writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin', *TPV*, 3.2 (1991).

<sup>58</sup> Robert F. Litke, 'Violence and Power', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 296-310. Also, Newton Garver, 'What Violence Is', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 170-84.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard Gert, 'Justifying Violence', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 66.

<sup>60</sup> Allan Bäck, 'Thinking Clearly About Violence', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 365-366.

<sup>61</sup> Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent*, p. 22.

<sup>62</sup> Oxford English Dictionary [online], (<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/223638?rskey=nGN7zW&result=1&is>)



Pontara provides a clear empirical argument as to why force and violence are not synonyms and, furthermore, why force is not a requirement for violence. It follows: Group A provides food aid to Group B, however conflict breaks out between the two and Group A ends the food aid, with the intention of making Group B surrender owing to starvation. Although Group A has not used physical force it has infringed Group B's autonomy. Moreover it contradicts a normative view that violence requires justification, as one would find it difficult to demand justification for the killing of a person with a rifle whilst not demanding justification for starving her to death.<sup>63</sup>

Efficiency is an important idea in Arendt's philosophy. Violence, she argues, is created by rage; which is described as the want to alter a changeable social condition which is not being changed by those in the position to do so. In response to rage, violence becomes an attractive option because it is swift and more efficient in changing social conditions.<sup>64</sup> Arendt uses the civil rights movement in the southern states of the United States to show how non-violence is described as being totally useless and counterproductive in attempting to change social conditions.<sup>65</sup> In contrast black students using violence tend to have their demands met even when they are 'silly and outrageous.'<sup>66</sup> The economic definition of efficiency can be summed up as gaining the maximum output for a given input. This gives an interesting conclusion: it is possible by directing your input (human resources) from non-violence to violence to achieve a greater output (demands being met or national liberation). Another upshot of violence in relation to efficiency is intimidation. Killing, writes Trotsky, eliminates individuals but intimidates thousands, therefore, magnifying the impact of violence.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Sartre's superiority of group praxis, using all inputs together, could be

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<sup>63</sup> Pontara, 'The Concept of Violence', p. 23.

<sup>64</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 63.

<sup>65</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 76.

<sup>66</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 19.

<sup>67</sup> Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, p. 58.

described as an economy of scale.<sup>68</sup> The element of efficiency is one which we will use in the case study and the economics of violence will also be developed later.

Politics has been entirely absent from this investigation so far, thus my attention will now turn to understand what political violence is. Cohen-Almagor uses Ted Gurr and Ted Honderich's analyses which defines political violence as revolutions, warfare and rioting against the legal norms to influence and change the regime, its actors or its policies. Cohen-Almagor adds political violence is a method of coercing peoples, and also government's attitudes and decisions, therefore, granting the violent actors greater influence than non-violent actors.<sup>69</sup> Held's assessment of political violence investigates, Charles Tilly's, Lewis Coser's, and Arendt's thought. However in each case, just as with Cohen-Almagor's discussion, her chosen scholars look at political violence in terms of the state. Tilly argues, political violence seeks to influence the levers of power; Coser discusses political violence in relation to progressive changes in politics such as the Chartist movement and Arendt, as we have seen, has investigated violence in terms of protesting students and the black community to influence the state or an institution, a school for example. In sum, the discourse on political violence has been only in reference to the state.<sup>70</sup>

However, the above explanation of political violence does not stand up to a normative analysis. For example: the Communist Party of Germany's violence against the Nazis, prior to their victory, is not considered political, whilst the violent Spartacist Uprising in 1919 is considered political. Furthermore, is the feud between the Official Irish Republican Army and the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) in the mid-1970s non-political but the PIRA's campaign against the Union is? Here I contend that the following should be added to the definition of political violence: non-state individuals or groups use violence against other

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<sup>68</sup> Economies of Scale are defined as an upshot of large production, such as being able to produce more outputs per unit of input owing to the large scale of production. In our case because of the grouping of inputs we are able to produce an output which would not have been possible otherwise.

<sup>69</sup> Cohen-Almagor, 'Foundations of Violence', p. 3.

<sup>70</sup> Held, *How Terrorism Is Wrong*, pp. 129-132.

non-state individuals or groups for the purposes of influencing or coercing their will, decisions and praxis.

To conclude and provide my framework on the nature of violence:

A state or non-state actor uses the tool of political violence in order to coerce or influence another state or non-state actor's will, decisions or praxis whether intentional or not, with or without force; resulting in the inhibition of autonomy for the receiving actor. Autonomy being infringed does not mean, automatically, political violence is morally wrong as actors using political violence to end an injustice can gain autonomy and recover self-esteem. Political violence is utilised because of its efficient properties; a further upshot is the creation of solidarity. Although political violence can be used by individuals, it is more efficient in the hands of a group, as groups have a superior praxis. Finally, violence always requires justification.

How can Political Violence be Justified?

Gert gives five moral rules which under normal circumstances should not be broken. The five rules are: do not kill, do not cause pain, do not disable, do not deprive of freedom or opportunity and do not deprive of pleasure.<sup>71</sup> These rules provide a foundation to analyse Honderich's argument against moral necessities. Honderich's argument against deontological rules, which are deemed by some as necessary for humanity's moral wellbeing, echoes that of Trotsky and the New Left against the 'thou shalt not kill' doctrine. He argues that moral necessities, rather than being clear cut, can often conflict; such as in self-defence, judicial killings or to fight against injustice.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, one can have a greater moral obligation than not committing violence thus disproving the UN's statement that non-state actors cannot justify their violence. However, where Honderich improves on their argument is his provision of a framework on how one chooses a violent strategy over a non-violent strategy.

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<sup>71</sup> Gert, 'Justifying Violence', p. 66.

<sup>72</sup> Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, pp. 182-183.

How one chooses a course of action, Honderich argues, is probability. One must weigh up which course of action best serves the needs and wants of the actor. Consider an example using Honderich's thoughts and two of Gert's five rules. Actor A is confronted with deprived freedom and injury in a given environment; she must use probability to decide whether a non-violent or violent strategy best suits her needs and wants of freedom of autonomy and health. Honderich contends that the judgement must be made composing the following given elements for both violence and non-violence: distress, misery and time.<sup>73</sup> Given the value of these elements it may be taken that if the probability of violence being successful may be above a certain critical level where non-violence is below; the choice of violence can be made with confidence.

The situation described where an actor decides to use violence to end certain conditions could be between a non-state actor and a state or non-state actor, however, in both circumstances the "contract argument" can be used to that argue violence is not justifiable. Honderich describes the contract argument as the views put forward by Hobbes and Locke that the people have entered a social contract with the state thus they must obey its laws.<sup>74</sup> This utilitarian idea dictates that with obedience to the law come the benefits of protection by the state and an environment free from lawlessness. Hobbes contends that the people must submit to the state's monopoly of force, an argument also put forward by Max Weber in *The Politics of Vocation*.<sup>75</sup> Honderich fails to note this similarity but does note the resemblance to Rousseau's *Social Contract*.<sup>76</sup>

Honderich disagrees with the contract argument. He argues that no contract has been entered on behalf of the people thus it is a general expectation to obey laws, nothing more.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, p. 202.

<sup>74</sup> Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, pp. 173-179.

<sup>75</sup> Weber, Max, *The Vocation Lectures*. trans. by Rodney Livingstone (IN, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2004) pp. 35-91.

<sup>76</sup> Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, p. 174.

<sup>77</sup> Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, p. 176.

To use our Master-Slave analogy: Master expects Slave not to rise up but this does not prevent Slave from engaging in an uprising because there are greater obligations to him than obeying the law such as freedom and equality. However, Honderich's argument and the Master-Slave analogy are state-based. Nevertheless the contract argument does not simply apply to non-state actors *versus* state actors but also, for example, to inter-tribal conflict in a given region because it hampers stability.

Robert P. Wolff's 1969 thesis extends Honderich's argument by using philosophical anarchism to contend that no legitimate political authority exists thus people have no requirement to obey. In regards to violence, Wolff's thought always allows for a resort to violence in politics.<sup>78</sup> However, it is not necessary to investigate the validity of Wolff's argument because when the state does have legitimacy, the idea of the people signing a social contract can be countered using Honderich's analysis. Violence to overturn injustice has been discussed in the previous section, however, Honderich's arguments gives a consequentialist framework firstly, on how to decide a course of action; lastly, on how to justify violent action when it is *prima facie* wrong.

Using Honderich's writings, the moral justification of a violent strategy can be put forward; however, there is another, more important justification which must be made: utilitarian justification. Held, like Honderich, lists rules to which violence must not break in order for it to be justifiable practically: political violence does not lead to more violence, political violence directly and promptly produces results which are more acceptable to society than what may have resulted without violence, and that there was no other way to achieve these results other than by violence.<sup>79</sup> Held's and Honderich's arguments relate to the end state and find common ground with Arendt's and Bäck's views that violence is justified by

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<sup>78</sup> Robert P. Wolff, 'On Violence', in *Violence: A Philosophical Anthology*, ed. by Vittorio Bufacchi (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 51-65.

<sup>79</sup> Held, *How Terrorism Is Wrong*, pp. 134-135. Also, Honderich's rules similarly regard the end state of violence and as to whether violence was the only method of achieving the end. See: Honderich, *Violence for Equality*, pp. 200-201.

the ends.<sup>80</sup> Similarly to Held, Arendt argues that time is an important element in the ends justifying the means; the farther away the ends, the less justifiable the violence.<sup>81</sup> Therefore personal self-defence is one of purest forms of justifiable violence as the end results are immediate. However this time element is problematic.

Macfarlane argues that the PIRA's violent campaign is not justifiable because the end results they desire would be worse than the present environment.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, they would break all of Held's rules. He does, however, state that the original Irish Republican Army's campaign to free Ireland was justified because it brought the British state to the negotiation table.<sup>83</sup> However, in 1998 the PIRA would negotiate the Good Friday Agreement and the ends Macfarlane anticipated, such as pogroms, do not come into fruition. Therefore, an argument based on Held's rules can be made to justify the PIRA's violence, however what concerns this section is whether the twenty-nine year conflict can be considered prompt, thus justifiable, under Arendt's and Held's arguments. What is, and what is not short term is difficult to answer.

In keeping with the PIRA case study: consider the hypothetical shooting of the Shankill Butchers. The act would be prompt and its results would mean innocent people would not be murdered; therefore it can be justified under the end-state analysis. However, this ten minute individual action is part of a campaign of decades; does this mean the hypothetical killing of the Shankill Butchers is not justified? I believe what can reasonably be concluded is that individual actions must be justified on a standalone basis and the longer term campaign must too be justified in relevance to the time it has taken to achieve the end state.

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<sup>80</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 52. Also, Bäck, 'Thinking Clearly About Violence', p. 370.

<sup>81</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 54.

<sup>82</sup> Macfarlane, 'The Right to Self-Determination', pp. 35-40.

<sup>83</sup> Macfarlane, 'The Right to Self-Determination', p. 40.

Moving on to how political groups present their justification requires a look into reason. Reason is an important factor in Arendt's discussion on violence. She states when a violent response is necessary to overturn a present set of conditions, it is also a rational response; it is only irrational when the violence is directed at a substitute.<sup>84</sup> When one demands justification for another's actions, one seeks to find the reason for why an action has taken place. When an actor suffers from a given ill treatment and uses violence on an actor who plays no part in the ill treatment, the violence appears without logic or reason. This forms the core of Gert's argument. He writes, 'with reason comes justification.'<sup>85</sup> Reason must be given when breaking his five moral rules but, most importantly, violation of the rules can only be justifiably committed by one publically advocating it.<sup>86</sup> Reason, it has been deduced, is vital to justification and now this thesis must investigate how political groups publically present their reason.

Justification can be presented in a number of ways: deontological, consequentialist, *ex-ante*, *ex-post*, internally and externally. Scholars also attempt to justify the violence of the past. For example, Stephen Cullen attempts to give an *ex-post* consequentialist justification of the British Union of Fascists by arguing that their violence was defensive.<sup>87</sup> Returning to how political groups justify their violence, O'Boyle uses four case studies: Red Army Faction, PIRA, American anti-abortion activists and Al Qaeda. He argues that these groups use consequentialist and/or deontological justifications. The PIRA, for example, point to 800 years of struggle and to using arms as a last resort for a united socialist Ireland: the latter being deontological; the former consequentialist.<sup>88</sup> A deontological explanation of violence is much more difficult to present owing to its more abstract nature. The two leftist groups of

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<sup>84</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, pp. 63-64.

<sup>85</sup> Gert, 'Justifying Violence', p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> Gert, 'Justifying Violence', p. 71.

<sup>87</sup> Stephen M. Cullen, 'Political Violence: The Case of the British Union of Fascists', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 28.2 (1993), pp. 245-67.

<sup>88</sup> O'Boyle, 'Theories of Justification and Political Violence', pp. 29-32.

O'Boyle's study chose a mostly consequentialist argument contrasting with the religious deontological justification of the anti-abortionists and Al Qaeda. However, a political group's justification of violence is more complex than O'Boyle's comparative investigation reveals.

Broek's analysis of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) points out that justification is an important strategy of terrorist activity. By exploring ETA's political discourse he argues that there are two time periods of justification, *ex-ante* and *ex-post*, and two directions justification is aimed at: internally and externally. He calls this the 'four faces of legitimacy.'<sup>89</sup> The following examples exhibit this theory: *ex-ante* internal justification, removing doubts in ETA volunteers; *ex-post* external justification, reiterating correctness of their actions; *ex-ante* external justification, warning the government of future attacks; and *ex-post* external justification, the reiteration of the victim being the aggressor.<sup>90</sup> Using defence as a justification is a common theme, seen here in ETA and in Cullen's article. In sum; there are six spheres of discourse; therefore, my justification methods of my case study will be investigated along this line.

To conclude and provide my framework on how political group's discourse is used to justify their violence:

Non-state actor violence can be justified in the face of deontological moral and legal arguments because violence can be used to fulfil a greater moral obligation than the obligation opposed to violence. The more prompt the ends are the more justification the act of violence has. Thus, violence is *prima facie* wrong. A non-state actor must, therefore, provide reason for their violence in order gain justification. This may be done consequentially and/or deontologically, although consequentialist justification is preferable as one can use an end-state and moral probability analysis. Moreover this discourse takes place in four spheres: internally, externally, *ex-ante* and *ex-post*.

What does Political Violence Hope to Achieve?

In the discourse of power, violence is widely seen as intrinsic to gaining, retaining or usurping power. Power is often defined as the ability to make others do as one wishes harking

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<sup>89</sup> Broek, 'Legitimation of Street Violence', p. 716.

<sup>90</sup> Broek, 'Legitimation of Street Violence', p. 732.



back to the idea of Kantian autonomy investigated in the first section. This definition is evident from Voltaire, ‘power consists of making others act as I choose;’ to Clausewitz’s definition of war, ‘an act of violence to compel the opponent to do as we wish.’ Also, Mao’s revolutionary maxim, ‘power grows out of the barrel of a gun;’ to Trotsky on revolutions, ‘the problem of revolution, as of war, consists in breaking the will of the foe;’ and finally C. Wright Mills, ‘all politics is a struggle for power; the ultimate kind of power is violence.’<sup>91</sup> This evidence suggests that the instrumental nature of violence can help gain, retain and usurp power.

Arendt takes issue with this discourse; instead she seeks to isolate violence to study it independently from power. As discussed in the first section, her study leads her to understand violence as an instrument thus not necessitating numbers, therefore, opposite to power, as James Madison states, ‘all government rests on opinion.’<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, this leads Arendt to her definition of power to be devoid of any notion of the bending will or praxis, contrary to those quoted above. Instead compromising will is relegated to the simple idea of command. ‘Violence can always destroy power,’ she writes, but ‘out of a barrel of a gun grows the most efficient command. What never can grow out of it is power.’<sup>93</sup> Violence cannot create power, Arendt argues, because it is opposite to power in absolute terms: violence requires one against all; power requires all against one. However, Arendt’s analysis is in regards to the state and discounts, for example, two opposing non-state actors warring for power on the streets. Using the previously stated definition of war by Clausewitz, consider his writings on how the extent of political ambition guides the extent of war.<sup>94</sup> To sum up, what if an actor wants power over a sphere of society, such as the streets, football terraces or music clubs, as

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<sup>91</sup> Quoted in: Arendt, *On Violence*, pp. 35-37. Except Trotsky, see: Trotsky, *Terrorism and Communism*, p. 54.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in: Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 43.

<sup>93</sup> Arendt, *On Violence*, p. 53.

<sup>94</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*. trans. by J. J. Graham (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997). pp. 66-69.

opposed to taking over the state? Laconically, can street power grow from the edge of the knuckleduster?

This thesis contends that in a limited conflict limited political violence can create limited power. In order to substantiate this claim an investigation into the nature of power as described by Lukes and Dowding can be made. In Lukes' 1974 treatise *Power: A Radical View* he describes three faces of power. Firstly, the public face whereby actor A makes actor B do something he would not otherwise do. The second face describes actor A's ability to prevent actor B setting items on the political agenda. Finally, actor A's power to determine actor B's very wishes and desires; this is the most all-encompassing power.<sup>95</sup> These three faces all relate to actor A's ability to bend or break the will of actor B. However, Lukes fails to provide methods of how these faces of power can be actualised, and furthermore one face is often reliant on the other two faces.

Dowding's theory is more conclusive. In *Power* he divides power into two facets: 'outcome power' and 'social power'. Outcome power's definition is straight forward: it brings about outcomes. On the other hand social power is more complex. Social power helps create outcomes via the incentive structure; for example, an actor may change her mind about selling propaganda on a street corner if there was a threat of violence.<sup>96</sup> Economic language again comes to the fore; violent or economic instruments can change the incentive structures of an actor. Moreover Dowding's thesis has the advantage over Lukes as outcome power encompasses the first face of power whilst the second and third faces are represented by social power. However, social power has the benefit of being able to include more strategies to change the incentive structure, such as violence. Thus Dowding's theory is superior to Lukes'.

To conclude:

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<sup>95</sup> S. Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Macmillan, 1974), pp. 13-26.

<sup>96</sup> Keith M. Dowding, *Power* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 4-8.

In a limited conflict between non-state or state actors, violence can change the incentive structures of an opposing actor thereby influencing her will, decisions or praxis. This creates power in a limited sense. Power must be always be legitimised by looking to the past.

## Conclusion

Chapter one has provided a three-part framework in which Anti-Fascist Action will be compared to. The first section concluded with an amalgamation of theoretical elements including the idea that political violence can be conducted between non-state actors, a factor missing in the considered scholars' writings. The second part of this chapter concluded that, whilst political violence is *prima facie* wrong it can be justified owing to a greater moral obligation via the display of reason. Furthermore, Arendt's and Gert's thoughts on time were proved to be problematic. The final chapter critiqued Arendt's definition of power finding that Dowding's theory was superior to hers and Lukes. It has been deduced that the strategy of violence can achieve power, if only in a limited context.

## Chapter Two: The Case of Anti-Fascist Action

### Introduction

In this final chapter this thesis examines the framework of political violence, justification and power by using AFA as an empirical case study. To conduct this interrogation of my theoretical framework; firstly, this thesis will enquire whether AFA meets the elements of violence deduced in the previous chapter. In order to do this I will use evidence collected from my interviews, from original literature of AFA and RA and secondary literature written by ex-activists, such as *Beating the Fascists (BtF)*, and historians, such as Nigel Copsey's *Anti-Fascism in Britain*.

The second section will deal with how AFA justified its political violence. Again the structure has already been provided in section two of chapter one. To investigate how AFA justified their violence *ex-ante* and *ex-post* externally, this thesis will primarily use AFA's theoretical journal, *Fighting Talk*, and RA's newspaper, *Red Action*, thus, fulfilling two of Broek's 'four faces of legitimacy'. The final two 'internal faces' will be examined using AFA internal documents and interview testimony. The editions of *Newsletter*, the internal RA bulletin I have sourced, are devoid of any justification of their political violence; this is the reasoning behind using the testimony. This examination will enable the thesis to conclude if AFA's justification bares similarity with the concluded framework.

The third section of the prior chapter asked: can street power flow from the edge of the knuckleduster? The far-right and AFA contested three working class constituencies: the streets, football terraces and music scene. This final section will attempt to answer this question with relation to these battlegrounds by using testimony collected from interviews,

details from newspapers and primary literature. Thus, I will be equipped to provide a conclusion as to what extent AFA's political violence gave them power over the far-right in these working class constituencies.

This chapter relies heavily on interview testimony. As previously explained the interviewees are diverse in order to give a wide perspective of AFA, as a result it is important to give an insight into the interviewees so that the reader can place them chronologically and geographically. Jeremy Corbyn MP became the national secretary for AFA at its founding in 1985 and was involved until 1989, when RA sought to move AFA back towards its founding principles of physical confrontation and political emphasis on the working class. D, from Manchester, joined AFA in 1986 but moved to London in January 1987 'because that's where the fight was.' He moved to Belfast in 1989 but still travelled to London for 'big ones.' He was jailed for 23 years for conspiracy to cause explosions for an INLA campaign in 1993. E, from Coventry, joined RA in 1981, he spent the next ten years 'enjoying getting [his] revenge' in London.

Some remained within AFA from beginning until the end. For example, Interviewees B and Joe Reilly were "generals" who too originated in the ANL Squads until expulsion in 1981.<sup>97</sup> Reilly remained based in London, however, B moved from Manchester to London in the early 1990s but returned in the mid-1990s. C, the only female interviewee, remained in Hertfordshire and London AFA throughout AFA's existence. A was part of a wave of new recruits in the early-1990s. He helped found Kent Anti-Fascist Action Committee in 1991 but moved to Manchester in 1992, becoming leading RA and AFA in Manchester.

Before moving on I think it is important to provide a short narrative, owing to its relative obscurity, on the process of events leading to AFA's founding. The seeds of its

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<sup>97</sup> Joe Reilly is a *nom de guerre*

founding were in the 1975 informal fighting groups in the SWP which built up a ‘culture of attack’ to combat the National Front (NF) who were physically attacking left-wing events. Structures were formalised in 1977 with the creation of the Squad in Manchester.<sup>98</sup> Expulsions of “squadists” began at the 1981 SWP Easter summer camp and continued after the last ANL carnival in Leeds before it was wound down. The Leeds SWP district committee wrote:

A small minority of SWP members feel that the use of violence and individual terrorism is a preferable method to taking on the Nazis ... the carnival seems merely to offer an outlet for drunken and violent behaviour, which differs little in style from the macho loutish behaviour of the Nazis. We therefore call upon the central committee to firmly state against the concept of squads as a means of opposing the Nazis.<sup>99</sup>

This criticism of violence and drunkenness would sow the seeds for the contempt RA would have towards what they termed “trendy lefties”.

RA was formed in January 1982 out of those expelled from the SWP. Initially RA maintained a semi-clandestine nature and continued in physical confrontation with fascists.<sup>100</sup>

The RA pamphlet *Making of Red Action* writes:

We sought neither recognition nor recruits. To describe the structure of Red Action at this time as “Terrorist” is not intended as a smear or an accolade but as an *accurate* political definition of how we operated (original emphasis).<sup>101</sup>

In order to prevent ‘degeneration into individual terrorism ... incarceration or annihilation’ RA needed to move out of its closed circle.<sup>102</sup> This thought process as well as subsequent events led to AFA which was founded at Conway Hall, London, July 1985.

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<sup>98</sup> John Penney, 'Anti-Fascist Recollections, 1971-1977', 2012). These recollections are to feature in the upcoming book *Militant Anti-Fascism: 100 Years of Resistance* to be published AK Press.

<sup>99</sup> RA, *We are Red Action: A short history of Red Action, where we came from, and why*. (Published between 1982 and 1985), p. 26.

<sup>100</sup> Letter to *The Guardian* from Martin Webster, NF Croydon organiser, Eye for an Eye on Sundays, 17 May 1983

<sup>101</sup> RA, *Making of Red Action* (1989), p. 2.

<sup>102</sup> RA, *Making of Red Action* (1989), p. 2.

## The Political Violence of Anti-Fascist Action

It has been deduced that violence is used to overthrow injustice. Was there an injustice being inflicted upon the left? Tautology would suggest fascist violence was being inflicted against the left, proof being that if there was not, AFA would not have existed. The tipping point for the creation of AFA is an example of this oppression. The Greater London Council's 'Jobs for a Change' festival, in London, June 1984, was attacked by just 70 members of the NF's Instant Response Group (IRG), disrupting an event attended by thousands. *BtF* notes that the IRG had been consistently attacking left-wing paper sales and meetings; and attacking ethnic minorities thus building up enough moral to launch a brazen attack on a national event.<sup>103</sup> This violent strategy was part of a wider strategy to 'control the streets.'<sup>104</sup> Fascists sought to dictate political activity on the street, thus, oppression was a feature in AFA's discourse.

Gaining self-esteem and respect from violence against one's oppressor is a theme in the Master-Slave dialectic discussed in chapter one. Both D and E have exemplar stories of gaining self-esteem when first meeting RA and AFA. E:

The first time I saw Red Action was at a Troops Out Movement meeting and outside my friend was selling issue one of *Red Action*. I saw a large group of fascists and thought "this is going to go off." Just then I saw the Red Action lads all go streaming into the "fash". It was a beautiful, beautiful sight. From going on these things [left-wing meetings] and being scared; I now saw a group of people who was willing to react.<sup>105</sup>

Similarly, D explains when he first witnessed AFA:

I was stewarding a republican meeting in Strangeways and across the way was a group of around 200 loyalists and fascists. I saw a group of them, about 40, marching towards us. The other stewards started to back off but then I saw they were wearing Celtic scarves.<sup>106</sup> 40 AFA had walked right through the middle of them; they didn't give a fuck.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, p. 160.

<sup>104</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 98.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with E.

<sup>106</sup> Celtic FC is associated with Irish republicanism and Rangers FC is associated with loyalism.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with D.

C too stated 'to be able to go up to one of them [a fascist] and hit them over the head with something felt good actually.'<sup>108</sup> C, D and E had been inspired by RA and AFA; from being scared of attack, they now felt empowered.

The political violence not only served to inspire AFA activists but also members of the public. *BtF* notes an occasion when a British National Party (BNP) election rally in Weavers Field, in 1990, was violently disrupted. A local teacher remarked how his pupils were 'electric' and they spoke of nothing else. The supposed 'hard men' of the BNP had been found wanting.<sup>109</sup> The results were similar with besieged Asian youth in Rochdale when AFA attacked the BNP at Rochdale town hall in 1994.<sup>110</sup> Kaliphz's, a local hip-hop act, in an interview with *NME Magazine* waxed lyrical about AFA, 'you have to do what you AFA [sic] do: find the Nazis and sort them out ... AFA are the only ones out there doing it.'<sup>111</sup> In conclusion, gaining self-esteem through using violence against the oppressor is evident in AFA's history.

AFA created broad, single issue organisation which united smaller groups such as RA, Direct Action Movement (DAM) and unaligned anti-fascists which enabled violence to be used more efficiently via group praxis. To refer back to the 'Jobs for a Change' attack, this event displayed how thousands of individuals can be defeated by a small organised group. Reilly states: You've seen relatively big crowds scattered by a relatively small group if the small group is ready to use violence. It is effortless.<sup>112</sup> In 1986 the AFA "stewards group", the organisation responsible for security, presented itself as strong enough body to make the NF unwilling to attack the 2000 strong Remembrance Sunday march.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with C.

<sup>109</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 188.

<sup>110</sup> AFA, 'Out for the Count', (*Fighting Talk* 8), June 1994, p. 4.

<sup>111</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 358.

<sup>112</sup> Interview with Reilly.

<sup>113</sup> 'Re-Launch in London', *Anti-Fascist Action: An Introduction to London AFA* (1991), p. 3.



Remembrance Sunday, 1989, provided a clear example of AFA's group praxis. Following London AFA's militant re-launch, activity on Remembrance Sunday 1989 now concentrated on the defence of the anti-apartheid picket which was annually attacked after the NF march. On the day 500 anti-fascists commandeered pubs in the vicinity of the NF rally point and fought with fascists thereby delaying their march by several hours. This tactic Copsey writes, 'so clearly rattled the fascist contingent that there was no subsequent attack' on the anti-apartheid picket for the first time.<sup>114</sup> By uniting smaller groups and individuals AFA was able to prevent an annual attack for the first time, something which Red Action remaining as clandestine 'terrorist' organisation would have been unable to do.

A further upshot of violence noted in Sartre's work is the creation of solidarity. Solidarity appeared, in AFA, in two forms: firstly, money raising for legal costs or to support a prisoner, exemplified material solidarity.<sup>115</sup> More importantly violence also created an intangible fraternity. Ex-DAM member K. Bullstreet recalls 'a plus side is that strong friendships develop among comrades who have shared dangerous moments together.'<sup>116</sup> Equally, D, when questioned as to whether violence created a bond he replied, 'without a doubt, without a doubt. Without a doubt it created a bond.'<sup>117</sup> 'What was important', E explained, 'was to find a group of people who shared your political and cultural values.' The working class fraternity in RA and AFA meant, no longer, did E have to maintain a separate political and public life. He explained with gusto after the interview what the solidarity was like, 'I'd go back now if I could' he explained.<sup>118</sup> Interestingly B and Reilly, the two

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<sup>114</sup> Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, p. 161.

<sup>115</sup> Money was raised for Patrick Hayes whilst in prison, see: RA, Newsletter, December 1994 to April 1997. Also, CSB, D.C. (Manchester) Letter, Cable Street Beat, (1989), p. 23.

<sup>116</sup> K. Bullstreet, 'Bash the Fash: Anti-Fascist Recollections, 1984-1993', (London: Kate Sharpley Library, 2001), p. 2.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with D.

<sup>118</sup> Interview with E. **EDIT:** E, would like to clarify: "What I was saying (I think) was that nothing in my life since then has matched the intensity of that particular feeling... of really knowing... solidarity. And thankfully it never will need to."

“generals”, although in agreement that solidarity was created, were less enthusiastic. Reilly stated ‘it was one piece in the relationship.’<sup>119</sup> To summarise, solidarity created by violence has been proved thereby confirming the theoretical notion.

There is no doubt that intimidation and terror was created by AFA. This was created by AFA’s violence and calibre of recruits, such as well-known Manchester “faces” Desmond “Dessie” Noonan and Patrick Logan.<sup>120</sup> D states he only discovered after being released from jail ‘the extent people were scared of us.’<sup>121</sup> The extent of the fear created was so great that *Spearhead*, a BNP magazine, reported that Special Branch had used AFA’s reputation as a threat against joining Birmingham BNP.<sup>122</sup> C noted she would over hear fascists at clubs and football matches worrying about “reds” preparing to attack them; ‘they were constantly seeing ghosts’, she concludes.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, the intimidation went from the rank and file to the leadership, the former were not exempt from attack and the founding of Combat 18 (C18) to contest AFA’s violence recognises this fact.<sup>124</sup> AFA recognised their intimidation and used it to their advantage. For example, posters were distributed with the picture and address of NF organiser, John Hamilton, with the headline ‘wanted dead’ and Noonan had a regular column in *Red Attitude*, an AFA affiliated Manchester United FC fanzine.<sup>125</sup> RA even made light of their intimidation producing t-shirts seen in figure 3.

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<sup>119</sup> Interview with B. Also, Interview with Reilly.

<sup>120</sup> Dessie Noonan boasted of murdering 27 people in the documentary *A Very British Gangster*, dir. by Donal MacIntyre, (Strategy Films, 2008); he was murdered in Chorlton on 20 March 2005. Patrick Logan was executed in Withington on 28 July 1999. Also, I have mentioned the jailing’s of E and Hayes. The third, Kevin Patton, was jailed for activities in the Scottish National Liberation Army. See: RA, *Newsletter*, (January/February 1996).

<sup>121</sup> Interview with D.

<sup>122</sup> RA, ‘Something We Said !?!’, *Red Action*, 3.2 (August/September 1998), p. 12.

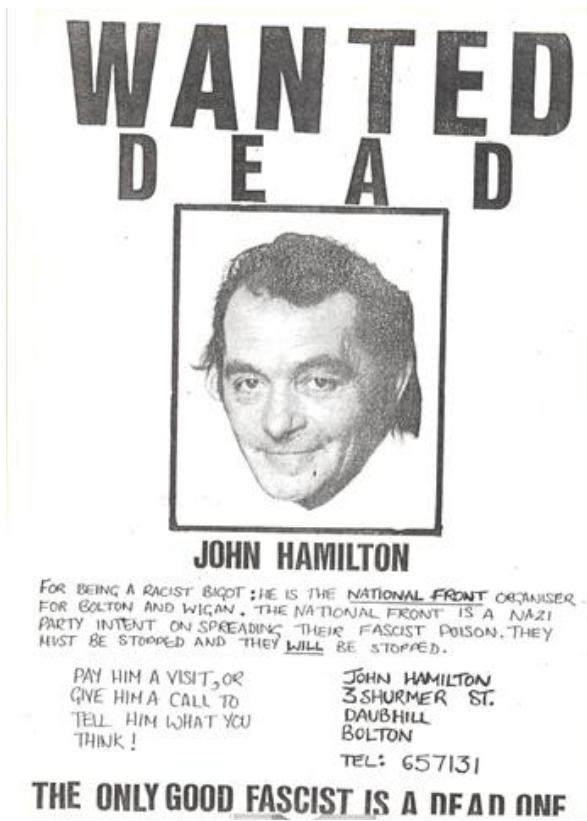
<sup>123</sup> Interview with C.

<sup>124</sup> Nick Ryan, ‘Memoirs of a Street-Fighting Man’, *Independent*, 1 February 1998. Also, See figure 2.

<sup>125</sup> See figure 3.



Fig.2, centre: A bloodied John Tydnall, leader of the BNP.  
Left: David Copeland, future Soho nail bomber.



The collapse of the south Manchester BNP branch provides a concrete example of AFA's ability to intimidate. In 1993 a new BNP branch in south Manchester was advertised, south Manchester was considered AFA territory.<sup>126</sup> A sustained campaign of terror included damage to the organiser, Mike Nolan's, property and having a fellow taxi driver inform Nolan that Noonan was looking for him. The pressure brought Nolan to the negotiation table where he underwent a three hour interrogation in which Noonan made an appearance.<sup>127</sup> The south Manchester branch lasted a mere two months before collapsing. Actual bodily violence could be forgone because of the level of intimidation AFA possessed. B recalled an example where a Hemel Hempstead pub refused access to the BNP because of a threat by AFA turning up despite no group being present. 'One person could do the job of a gang because of the fear we had created,' B summarised.<sup>128</sup>

B's tale can be reduced to violence creating efficiency; a theme discussed in the prior chapter. Intimidation is an example of efficiency but AFA's tactics made use of violence's efficient characteristics. Reilly comments that 'it always surprised me how easy it was to get our people to stop fighting, all I had to say was "stop".'<sup>129</sup> This he remarks was the difference between the anti-fascists and the fascists. The fascists: 'were undisciplined. They would do it [violence] drunk or "coked" up. They would not stop if someone was down ... who was more efficient? Us.'<sup>130</sup> For example, on 5 October 1989, 50 AFA members successfully attacked the fascist paper sales on Brick Lane. The next week this resulted in the BNP and NF requiring 80 defenders, four times the previous week; thus draining resources from other activities. Meanwhile, AFA would not show up; the reduction in fascist

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<sup>126</sup> Hann and Tilzey, *No Retreat*, pp. 244-248.

<sup>127</sup> Birchall, BtF, p. 269.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with B.

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Reilly.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Reilly.

capabilities being done without needing a presence.<sup>131</sup> In sum, AFA took advantage of violence's efficient properties.

To conclude, this section has uncovered evidence supporting my theoretical framework of political violence. Oppression was felt by leftists under a strategy of sustained attack from fascists aimed at preventing left-wing organisation. Reactive violence against this injustice resulted in the gain of self-esteem and solidarity. Moreover, AFA created group praxis allowing it to operate with more efficiency. Efficiency manifested in discipline and intimidation too. These results give empirical evidence to the framework of political violence concluded in section one of the previous chapter.

#### Anti-Fascist Action's Justification of Violence

Owing to AFA's composition of members one could argue that it was simply a network of violent people committing violence purely for its own sake. This deprives AFA of any end-state or moral reasoning. The argument is not difficult to piece together and *BtF* contains concerns that a documentary on RA, along this line, was being prepared.<sup>132</sup> Firstly, consider the organised crime element which has already been discussed. Irish republicanism is another element which can be used against AFA. Furthermore, Noonan has been recently implicated as a PIRA "sleeper" by his brother, however, this is a charge strenuously denied by every RA interviewee.<sup>133</sup> Furthermore, Hayes, the Harrods bomber, was not simply a lay member; he is described by A as being in the 'inner circle of six', he was also AFA's liaison to Searchlight, the Anti-Nazi League and on occasion the police.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 207-209.

<sup>132</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>133</sup> *Sins of the Father: A Very British Gangster 2*, dir. by Donal MacIntyre, (Eyeline Entertainment, 2012).

<sup>134</sup> Interview with A, Manchester, 15/01/2012. Also, Interview with Reilly.

This section will disprove the circumstantial evidence which points to AFA being a ‘rent-a-mob’ and, thus, supports Hayes and Aylward’s thesis. To discover the two internal faces of justification I asked the interviewees what their personal justification of violence was; this questions relates to Kantian autonomy discussed in chapter one. An answer given by A, B, C, D and E to the question noted that, as working class persons, violence was not shocking to them. Interviewee A explained ‘working class people have a different attitude towards violence because they experience it in the communities.’<sup>135</sup> Violence was part of life for those interviewed; indeed B’s brother, a British Movement Leeds organiser, was jailed for murdering a white man who had black company 1981.<sup>136</sup>

A further internal *ex-ante* and *ex-post* justification given by interviewees bore similarity to the Socratean maxim discussed in section one of the first chapter. D stated:

... violence is justified because you know arguments won’t work with the opponent ... fascists are using violence because it’s a violent ideology pursuing a violent strategy [controlling the streets].<sup>137</sup>

E makes the same case, ‘I had spent my whole life on construction sites talking to casual racists. But in the political arena the “fash” didn’t want to debate.’<sup>138</sup> Militant anti-fascists reasoned that violence had to be met with violence and this is summed up succinctly by *Fighting Talk*: ‘he who lives by the balaclava may also die by it.’<sup>139</sup>

An argument used by B can be described as a moral necessities argument. ‘Violence is justified,’ argues B, ‘on the understanding that it’s a necessary evil; it has to be done. If you don’t, you pay a bigger price.’<sup>140</sup> B agreed that violence was an evil however he had a greater moral obligation to prevent a future evil. Similarly, Reilly argued that not using

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<sup>135</sup> Interview with A.

<sup>136</sup> Leeds Trade Union Council and Leeds Anti-Fascist Action, ‘Racism and Fascism in Leeds and West Yorkshire: Twenty Years of Violence and Intimidation’, (1987), p. 6.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with D.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with E.

<sup>139</sup> AFA, ‘Fascism and the Media’, *Fighting Talk* 5, (April 1993).

<sup>140</sup> Interview with B.

violence would be ‘a sin of omission; because of your cowardice, you let something bad happen.’<sup>141</sup> Preventing the future evil of fascism was a greater moral obligation than to not commit violence; this empirical evidence concurs with Honderich’s theory of moral necessity.

Interviewee’s reasoned that their violence was self-defence. As discussed before attacks on left-wing activity was a cause for the foundation of AFA. Fascism, they argued, is a violent ideology pursuing a violent strategy therefore pre-emptive attacks were justified. D candidly admits: ‘if a fascist is walking down the street minding his own business I have no problem kicking the shit out of him.’<sup>142</sup> Internal AFA documents show that in 1992 the overall strategy was to ‘blunt the specific threat that fascism carries for working class and progressive organisations.’<sup>143</sup> Once the BNP began to move away from trying to control the streets, however, and towards Tony Lecomber’s strategy of ‘no more meetings, marches, punch-ups’ in 1994, A and Reilly state that AFA would lose justification for attacks which would become more offensive in nature.<sup>144</sup> Lecomber, quoting AFA’s ‘Filling the Vacuum’ document, recognised that the BNP’s move from street confrontation delegitimised AFA’s.<sup>145</sup> Therefore, reactive violence is another element behind the internal reasoning of a violent strategy.

With regards to problematic theory that, the more prompt the results of violence, the more justification it has. The interviewees all spoke of violence enabling swift results in an operation; such as preventing a BNP paper sale and case studies already listed such as intimidation show that fascists could have their will bent without even the use of a physical

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<sup>141</sup> Interview with Reilly.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with D.

<sup>143</sup> *Strategy of Containment*, Internal AFA document (1992).

<sup>144</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 335. Also, Interview with A and Interview with Reilly.

<sup>145</sup> RA, ‘Know your Enemy’, *Red Action*, 3.3, (October/November, 1998), p. 13.

presence. In sum, violence created swift results from operations which by using non-violence may not have occurred; such as, the effect the Brick Lane attack had.

This section now moves on to AFA's *ex-ante* external justification of acts of political violence. A primary *ex-ante* justification of self-defensive violence used by AFA would prevent race attacks; indeed this was one of the public reasons for its founding.<sup>146</sup> Whilst the ANL had dissolved due to the electoral failure of the NF; AFA argued fascism continued in working class communities and manifested itself in race attacks and attacks on progressive movements. AFA went to great lengths to report racist and sectarian attacks through local bulletins such as *Attitude* and nationally in *Fighting Talk*.<sup>147</sup> AFA's 1989 campaign linked two Blood and Honour (B&H) shops on Carnaby Street, London to the 43 racist murders since 1980, reasoning they should be closed down.<sup>148</sup> In May 1989, two men in balaclavas destroyed one shop and its contents with sledge hammers and acid contributing directly in their permanent closure.<sup>149</sup>

The second method of *ex-ante* external justification relates to Arendt's requirement of legitimising power by looking to the past. This took two forms: theoretical and historical. Prior to London AFA's declaration 'socialism is dead', RA used Marx's and Engel's thoughts on violence to justify their own.<sup>150</sup> The most important legitimatisation was historical. Hayes and Aylward, and Copsey agree AFA was in the tradition of the Battle of Cable Street and the Spanish Civil War.<sup>151</sup> AFA went to great lengths to present themselves as the continuation of the militant anti-fascist tradition, from: Cable Street to the Spanish Civil War, to the 43

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<sup>146</sup> David Rose, 'Anti-Fascists Regroup to Signal Direct Action', *Guardian*, 2 September 1985. Also, Shyam Bhatia and Arlen Harris, 'New Group to Combat Race Attacks', *Guardian*, 8 September 1985.

<sup>147</sup> 'Nazi Terror Exposed', *Attitude: Voice of Leeds Anti-Fascist Action*, Spring 1994. Racist and sectarian attacks are recorded in: AFA, *Fighting Talks* 2, 6, 14, 16 and 20.

<sup>148</sup> 'Stop the Sale of Nazi Propaganda', AFA leaflet, (January, 1989).

<sup>149</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>150</sup> *Cutting Edge*, (1998). Although this leaflet is not explicitly RA or AFA it uses London AFA's BM Box in its contact information. Also, RA, 'Marx and Engels: Street Fighting Men', *Red Action*, (Summer 1995). pp. 6-7.

<sup>151</sup> Hayes and Aylward, 'Anti-Fascist Action', p. 56. Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, p. 164.



Group and 62 Group and, later, to the ANL squads.<sup>152</sup> Following their major victory in London, September 1992, dubbed the “Battle of Waterloo”, it was seen to be the third great militant anti-fascist victory; *Fighting Talk* 8’s front cover read ‘Cable Street 1936; Lewisham 1977; Waterloo, 1992.’<sup>153</sup> Copsey agrees writing that the ‘major victory’ of Waterloo gave credence to their heritage claims.

Other methods of legitimacy were Cable Street Beat’s (CSB) annual benefit gig on the anniversary of the battle, holding historical exhibitions, events to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Cable Street and the Spanish Civil War.<sup>154</sup> Further reinforcement to this claim are letters sent to *Fighting Talk* from veterans and their participation in AFA activities.<sup>155</sup> This evidence demonstrates using the past to legitimise AFA’s means to limited power, thus, providing empirical evidence to Arendt’s theory.

Gert states that public advocacy of violence is required for justification. AFA’s representative filmed for *Violence with Violence* made clear his advocacy of violence. When asked if AFA condones violence, the representative replied: ‘we actually promote it.’<sup>156</sup> The *Fighting Talk* documentary is equally as open, even filming scuffles.<sup>157</sup> Both documentaries presented candour as to why violence was chosen as a strategy.<sup>158</sup> *Fighting Talk* quoted Hitler on how to prevent his rise which would have required ‘brutality of the utmost kind’ whilst a second AFA representative on *Violence with Violence* stated: ‘the BNP are seriously violent people, ... so you have to be prepared to inflict violence on them.’<sup>159</sup> From its foundation

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<sup>152</sup> *Heroes or Villians?*, (1992). Also, the 43 Group and 62 Groups were militant Jewish anti-fascists active post war. See: Morris Beckman, *The 43 Group* (London: Centerprise Trust Ltd, 1992).

<sup>153</sup> AFA, *Fighting Talk* 8. The Battle of Lewisham refers to a 5000 strong counter demonstration against the NF in 1977. Violence resulted and the police used riot shields for the first time outside of the Six Counties. See: Tilzey and Hann, *No Retreat*, pp. 3-15.

<sup>154</sup> AFA, *Fighting Talk Special: Spanish Civil War and Battle of Cable Street Commemoration*, (October 1996).

<sup>155</sup> AFA, ‘Letters’ *Fighting Talk* 5, (April 1993), p. 16. Also, *Fighting Talk*, (BBC, 1992).

<sup>156</sup> *Violence with Violence*, (ITV, 1993).

<sup>157</sup> *Fighting Talk*, *Open Spaces*, (BBC 2, 1992).

<sup>158</sup> *Fighting Talk*, (BBC, 1992).

<sup>159</sup> *Violence with Violence*, (ITV, 1993).

AFA was open about its twin track strategy of physical and ideological confrontation. Furthermore, AFA was public *ex-post*. Post Battle of Waterloo, an AFA press release stated: ‘Anti-Fascist Action claims responsibility for the emphatic anti-fascist victory at Waterloo.’<sup>160</sup> Thus, Gert’s requirement of public advocacy was fulfilled by AFA.

*Beating the Fascists* and *No Retreat* must both be viewed as *ex-post* justification too. Significantly both books mention very little on race attacks and the tradition, the Battle of Cable Street and the Spanish Civil War do not feature in *BtF*’s index for example. In contrast, Bullstreet does mention that AFA was in the tradition of past militant anti-fascism and so does Corbyn.<sup>161</sup> An explanation for this change is revealed by interviewees: that the tradition was merely used for propaganda purposes.

To conclude, it is clear that AFA’s justification of violence is much more complex than simply committing violence for its own sake. Internal justification argued that violence was necessary because discussion with fascists was not possible, also, because results from violence were prompt. They also introduced a sociological reason which was not covered in the theoretical texts studied: that for working class people, violence as a political tool, does not require the crossing of an unimaginable barrier because of their predisposition to it. Internal *ex-ante* and *ex-post* justification revealed empirical evidence supporting the theoretical conclusion in the previous chapter.

Whilst the above arguments did not feature largely in external justification there was some cross over. The moral necessities argument of fascism being a greater evil than violence committed, for example. Thus, the ends would be justified by the means. Race attacks and tradition featured heavily in the external justification however in *ex-post* literature they were given less importance. Furthermore, AFA was openly violent. Overall this justification was

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<sup>160</sup> AFA, ‘The Battle of Waterloo’, *Fighting Talk Special Bulletin*, (September 1992).

<sup>161</sup> Bullstreet, *Bash the Fasc*, p. 4. Also, Interview with Corbyn.

consequentialist although the tradition element could be seen as deontological. This section has provided empirical evidence for each factor of justification given in section two of the previous chapter.

### Did AFA Achieve Power?

Conflict, it was concluded using Clausewitz, is limited by the political ambition of the actor. AFA's limited conflict did not see fatal shootings like that between paramilitaries in the Six Counties or between communists and Nazis in 1930s Germany.<sup>162</sup> Instead, AFA's violence was clinically primitive; D recounts tales where he has stabbed men in the face with knives and 'L' shaped building joints and smashed hammers into faces in broad daylight. 'I have left a scene thinking we have left dead, it has made me feel sick inside,' D tells me; Bullstreet writes a similar tale.<sup>163</sup> The victory conditions set, in April 1998, by the newly created International Militant Anti-Fascist Network stated it had to:

destroy the fascists' influence in all areas of working class life ... For militant anti-fascism to take root in working class communities it must retain the ability to out-violence the fascist, but ... it must also out radicalise them.<sup>164</sup>

By 1995, AFA's claimed it had broken the back of the NF, B&H, C18 and had driven the BNP off the streets.<sup>165</sup>

AFA was in competition with fascism for the working class constituencies of music, football and the estates. On the music front, Desmond Decker, the Pogues and the Angelic Upstarts, amongst others, had their gigs attacked for being black, Irish and left-wing,

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<sup>162</sup> See: Eve. Rosenhaft, *Beating the Fascists?: The German Communists and Political Violence, 1929-1933* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>163</sup> Interview with D. Also, Bullstreet, *Bash the Fascists*, p. 6-7.

<sup>164</sup> AFA, 'International', *Fighting Talk* 19, (April 1998), p. 11.

<sup>165</sup> *Beating the Fascists*, 2012.

respectively, prior to 1989.<sup>166</sup> In 1996 Nick Griffin argued that it was more important to control a town's streets than its council chamber.<sup>167</sup> An example of racist at football is Elland Road, which was described as a 'whites only affair' prior to 1988.<sup>168</sup> To contest these constituencies AFA used a uncompromising 'No Platform' strategy. This strategy would spit AFA in 1989, Jeremy Corbyn whilst stating he believed there was no 'absolute right to free speech' believed that only purely defensive physical confrontation should take place, thus, no pre-emptive violence.<sup>169</sup> More liberal elements within AFA would be replaced with DAM and Workers' Power (WP) in the 1989 militant turn and AFA greatly increased in numbers.<sup>170</sup>

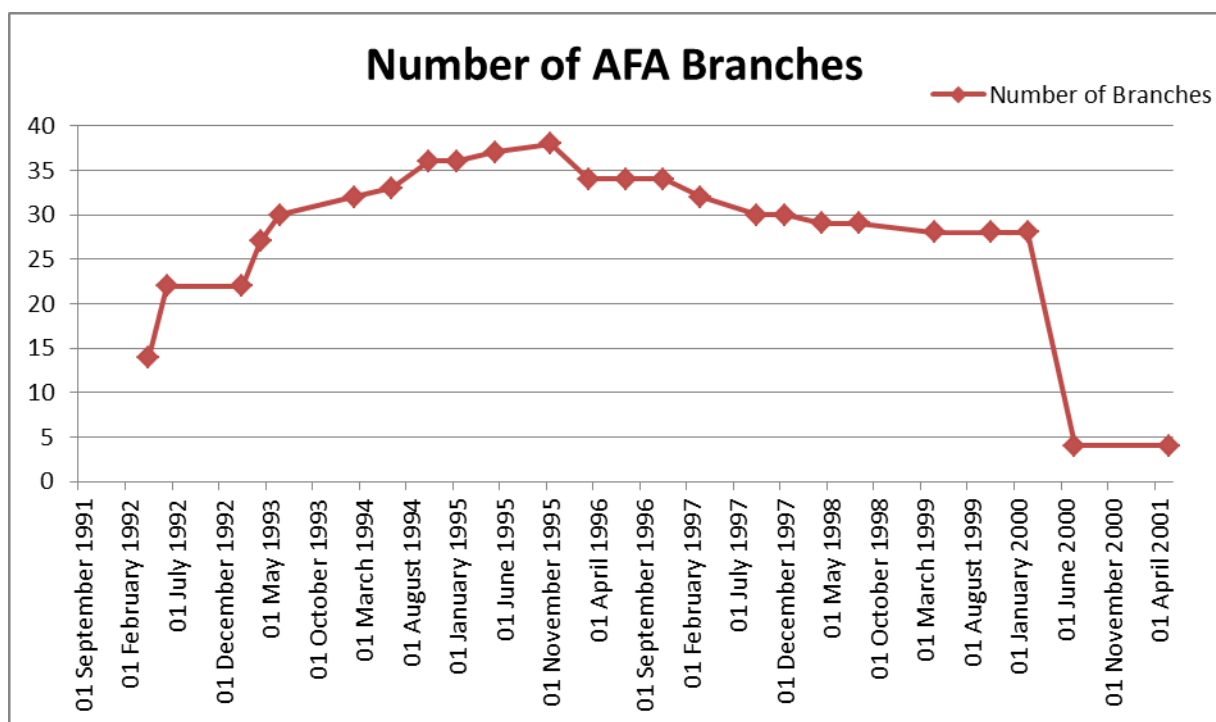


Fig. 5

<sup>166</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 40-41.

<sup>167</sup> Tony Lecomber 'Success and Failure: The New Politics and the Old', *Spearhead*, (March, 1996), in RA, *Newsletter*, (April 1996).

<sup>168</sup> Paul Thomas, 'Marching Altogether? Football Fans Taking a Stand against Racism', in *Sport and Challenges to Racism. Global Culture and Sport Series*, ed. by Jonathon Long (London: Palgrave Macmillian, 2010), pp. 185-98.

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Jeremy Corbyn, London, (20/01/2012).

<sup>170</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 170. Also, see figure 5. Statistics for the number of AFA branches is taken from AFA, *Fighting Talk* 1-25.

The constituency this section will examine is music. B&H, a collection of neo-Nazi bands with links to the NF, dominated the far-right music scene.<sup>171</sup> AFA claimed B&H followers and band members themselves were responsible for race attacks and attacks on leftists in the Kings Cross area of London.<sup>172</sup> Merchandise was being sold through their aforementioned two shops on Carnaby Street and their newspaper, *Blood and Honour*, reached an estimated circulation of 5,000.<sup>173</sup> The Board of Deputies of British Jews worried that B&H was turning London into a 'Mecca for European neo-Nazis.'<sup>174</sup> To contest the music societal sphere AFA launched CSB in October 1988 and later Freedom of Music, which was based in the club scene.<sup>175</sup>

In 27 May 1989 B&H planned a concert in Camden; thousands were expected to attend with tickets and being sold throughout Europe. The concert would have proved financially lucrative at £10 per ticket plus merchandise sales; however, Camden Town Hall cancelled the event when AFA revealed who it was being organised by, losing B&H their £800 deposit. The B&H redirection point at Speakers Corner in Hyde Park was occupied and *BtF*, *No Retreat* and *Bash the Fash* tell similar stories of brutal clashes with B&H supporters.<sup>176</sup> AFA claimed the result exposed the weakness of B&H and caused considerable financial problems as the tickets had to be refunded. Whilst Copsey does not contend this issue, he points out it came at the cost of unity between militant and non-militant wings.<sup>177</sup> Later Ian Stuart Donaldson, the key B&H organiser, was forced to move to Derbyshire under

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<sup>171</sup> David Brownie, 'Racists Rock to a Beat of Hate', *The Observer*, 4 September 1988.

<sup>172</sup> *Anti-Fascist Action*, (1991), pp. 6-7.

<sup>173</sup> Martin Turner, 'Evil Face of Youth', *People*, 17 July 1988.

<sup>174</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 156.

<sup>175</sup> CSB, *Cable Street Beat* 1, (1988). Also, MUA, *Red Attitude* 11, (1997).

<sup>176</sup> See Fig. 4.

<sup>177</sup> Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, p. 163.

constant vicious attacks.<sup>178</sup> Thus, violence had forced B&H against their will to have their shops closed down, be prevented from holding concerts and their main organiser was forced to leave London. AFA had prevented London from becoming a cultural Mecca to neo-Nazis.

In 1992 B&H had begun to resurface, now with close links to the BNP. Their return was heralded by announcing a concert for 12 September 1992 and it was advertised European wide. Prior to the concert AFA announced that it would 'take any steps necessary to prevent the concert.'<sup>179</sup> The scene was set when Neil Parish, a B&H organiser, announced that he would be able to take questions from the press at Waterloo station from 4:30pm; AFA announced it would assemble at the same place, at the same time. Similar ruthlessness was exacted upon travelling fascists at the Battle of Waterloo as at Hyde Park three years earlier.<sup>180</sup> The events saw four tube stations including Charing Cross closed 'due to rioting' and a police constable described it as 'Cluster's last stand.'<sup>181</sup>

The final result was a greatly reduced attendance of 500 but furthermore it resulted in demoralisation and recriminations when the B&H organisers failed to assist stricken fascists.<sup>182</sup> *BtF* describes it as a 'crushing victory', a declaration supported by Hayes and Aylward who wrote the 'set piece' triumph became a 'cultural icon' to AFA.<sup>183</sup> Copsey too stated that B&H was 'smashed' but, more importantly, the BNP was not thus allowing their first electoral victory in Tower Hamlets a year later. *BtF* retorted that Copsey did not understand the synonymous relationship between B&H and the BNP or, moreover, that organising for the Battle of Waterloo was a mere two weeks.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 158.

<sup>179</sup> 'Anti-Fascists Plan to Halt Neo-Nazis' Concert', *Guardian*, 4 September 1992.

<sup>180</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 291-303.

<sup>181</sup> John Chapman and Mark Christie, 'Battle of the Nazis', *News of the World*, 13 September 1992.

<sup>182</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 298-301.

<sup>183</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 299. Also, Hayes and Aylward, 'Anti-Fascist Action', p. 58.

<sup>184</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 301.

The final major clash with B&H came in 1994, by which time their political allies took the form of C18. C18 had taken charge of B&H on the back of their fearsome reputation.<sup>185</sup> The Little Driver pub in Bow had been chosen for the venue of an Ian Stuart Donaldson memorial concert, however, AFA was able to engage physically and later the police brutally broke the event up.<sup>186</sup> *Searchlight*, by this point estranged from AFA, admitted it was 'a major defeat for C18 and B&H.'<sup>187</sup> Hyde Park 1989, Battle of Waterloo 1992 and The Little Driver represent three case studies in the music sphere where the will of B&H, NF, BNP and C18 was bent to the will of AFA.

This section has investigated music; however, a similar scene of using violence to change the incentive structures of fascist organisation was taking place in football and on the estates. AFA was particularly active at Celtic FC and Manchester United FC, although, these clubs were largely devoid of fascist activity but by organising at Celtic Park and Old Trafford they prevented fascist groups gaining a foothold. However, AFA was also active at clubs with a notorious racist reputation like Leeds FC and Chelsea FC. In the case of Leeds a joint report with Leeds Trade Union Council saw racists banned from the ground.<sup>188</sup> Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn concluded, partly using AFA affiliated MUAF as an example, that direct physical action was the most successful strategy at preventing fascists organising at football clubs.<sup>189</sup>

On the estates conflict often focused around the BNP's election mobilisations and by 1993 AFA had begun to defeat them on the streets. For example, in Rochdale the BNP came

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<sup>185</sup> The numbers 1 and 8 represent A and H (Adolf Hitler). They were initially created as a 'Pro-Fascist Action' to defend the far right against AFA attacks. See: C18's magazine: *Target* and Ryan, 'Memoirs of a Street-Fighting Man'.

<sup>186</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, p. 334.

<sup>187</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 331-335.

<sup>188</sup> Leeds TUC and Leeds AFA, 'Terror on the Terraces', (1989).

<sup>189</sup> Steve Greenfield and Guy Osborn, 'When the Whites Go Marching In? Racism and Resistance in English Football', *Marquette Sports Law Journal*, 6.2 (1996), pp. 315 - 35.

under sustained attack until their organiser Ken Henderson resigned.<sup>190</sup> In Burnley, the BNP candidate, David McNee, withdrew following running battles at a BNP march.<sup>191</sup> On the other hand, in September 1993, Derek Beackon would become the first BNP councillor in an Isle of Dogs by-election. *Fighting Talk* 5 argued whilst AFA lost its grip in East London it was down to WP abandoning AFA in favour of the ANL and the latter's failures. 'Let's be right about this,' the article complained about the ANL, 'while they play around getting bashed and making idiots of themselves, all of the anti-fascist movement gets tarred with the same brush.'

Despite London AFA's explanation *No Retreat* complains their failure over shadowed the Northern Network's aforementioned achievements.<sup>192</sup> Copsey, whilst accepting these reasons, argues it was AFA's militant tactics were rendered useless by the non-confrontational BNP election strategy.<sup>193</sup> *BtF* contradicts AFA's earlier explanation involving WP, stating it was not a major issue. Moreover, it expands on the reasoning involving the ANL; *BtF* argues it could not operate physically in such a close-knit community, or ideologically without being perceived as outsiders.<sup>194</sup>

However, Copsey does not consider is AFA's changing political discourse following Beackon's election. The BNP had moved largely towards a 'Euro-nationalist' strategy which hoped to emulate successes nationalist movements had had in Austria and France. The strategy until then can be summarised as 'holding the line' to allow a left-wing movement to become a radical alternative to the fascism and the main parties. The realisation that a leftist group was not going to fill the vacuum combined with the turn away from confrontational

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<sup>190</sup> AFA, 'In the Area', *Fighting Talk* 10, (January 1995).

<sup>191</sup> Stuart Draper, 'Terror in the Town Centre', *Lancashire Evening Telegraph*, 30 August 1993, pp. 2-3.

<sup>192</sup> The Northern Network was the grouping of local northern AFA.

<sup>193</sup> Copsey, *Anti-Fascism in Britain*, pp. 172-4.

<sup>194</sup> Birchall, *BtF*, pp. 315-320.



politics resulted in London AFA's proposal that AFA had to 'fill the vacuum.'<sup>195</sup> AFA began to wind down physical confrontation and the Independent Working Class Association was launched in 1995 to challenge the far-right and the three main parties in the political arena.

To conclude, AFA was able to bend the will, decisions and praxis of the far-right in music, football and on the estates. Using Dowding's theoretical terms, AFA's outcome power was to prevent the fascists from organising in the music scene, at football ground and on the estates, thus, allowing the left space to organise political. Violence was a social power strategy. Violence changed the incentive structures by not allowing fascists freedom from attack when organising, evidence of this is in recruitment. Lecomber used the rationale that the attrition from street combat was resulting in a high turnover of members, thus, a move from street strategy was necessary.<sup>196</sup> Other leading BNP members, such as Nick Griffin and Eddy Butler, would eventually recognise this too.<sup>197</sup> Filling the Vacuum regarded this change as tribute to AFA's strategy.<sup>198</sup> Ultimately, violence enabled AFA to exert power over the fascists on the streets, on the terraces and in the clubs creating demoralisation, recrimination and forcing the only surviving far-right grouping to change tact completely.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the political discourse of AFA has displayed the elements deduced in the theoretical chapter and added factors not considered. AFA was formed out of oppression conducted by fascist groups in the working class constituencies of the streets, football grounds and clubs. AFA's reactive violence to defend leftist public organisation created self-esteem and solidarity for activists. Political violence was used more efficiently via AFA's

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<sup>195</sup> London AFA, 'Filling the Vacuum', (1995).

<sup>196</sup> Lecomber 'Success and Failure', (March, 1996).

<sup>197</sup> RA, 'Editorial', *Red Action*, 3.3, (October/November 1998).

<sup>198</sup> London AFA, 'Filling the Vacuum', (1995).

group praxis of which the most important component was discipline. Efficiency also manifested via intimidation and was used to their advantage.

Internal *ex-ante* and *ex-post* justification of political violence used the reasoning of their social background, being unable to debate with fascists, a moral necessities argument and deciding that violence yielded the best probability to gain their wants and needs. Differently, *Ex-ante* external justification centred on race attacks and the militant anti-fascist tradition, furthermore, AFA publically advocated political violence. However, *ex-post* external justification was largely devoid of race attack and heritage claims and concentrated on AFA's violence as reactive, an argument presented *ex-ante* too. Finally, AFA's use of political violence has been shown to change the incentive structures of the fascist organisations and individual fascists thereby changing their will, decisions and praxis.

## Thesis Conclusion

This thesis began with a theoretical investigation and moved onto an empirical interrogation of the framework of what violence is, how it can be justified and how it can achieve limited power. Chapter one began with the first section questioning what violence is, by using Honderich's deduction method. The theories of Engels, Trotsky, Sartre, Fanon, Arendt and Pontara were examined, however, they were all criticised for not considering non-state on non-state violence. Justification was the subject of the second section. The second summarised that public advocacy and reason are requirements for justification and can be presented via Broek's four faces of legitimisation. Lastly, by defining power as bending an actors will, decisions and praxis and using Dowding's theory.

The second chapter used the case study of Anti-Fascist Action to provide empirical evidence for the formulated theoretical framework. The first section provided evidence of oppression against the left by fascists, furthermore, in the fight to overturn this oppression self-esteem was increased and solidarity created. Evidence was also found for using violence for its efficient properties. AFA's conflict with the various fascist and loyalist groups for a purely political objective proved that political violence does take place between two non-state actors. The second section presented evidence of AFA's justification which bore similarity to the theoretical conclusion: AFA's justification differed between the four faces of justification, moreover, AFA was public in its advocacy of violence. The third section also proved that the strategy of violence did enable AFA to achieve power over fascist organisations in the streets, on the terraces and in the clubs.

Limitations exist in the first chapter. The theoretical discussion focused primarily on political violence of the left and did not consider criticisms of political violence from the right, such as Hobbes' and Locke's 'contract arguments'. A wider investigation could have

been taken on the idea of power too. Despite this thesis using resources which have yet to have been used in academic research of AFA, such as some of those interviewed, most limitations exist in the second chapter. RA's relationship to Irish republicanism and other political organisations within AFA such as Searchlight and DAM have not been investigated, these made an important impact on AFA's discourse. Furthermore, the internal working class culture of AFA is an important aspect which has not received attention. This working class culture caused members to have friction with other left-wing groups.

Limitations exist in the interviews too. For example, apart from Corbyn all interviewees were former Red Action members. Furthermore, I was unable to gain interviews with the other main group in AFA, DAM. However, Red Action was the driving force behind AFA, thus my reasoning for using my limited resources and time interviewing ex-RA members. The interviews could also be criticised for only interviewing one female and no ethnic minorities. I believe this only further confirms the need to conduct wider interviewing to record the oral testimony of the small piece of radical history before it becomes impossible.

Despite these limitations I believe this thesis has been successful in its objectives. Firstly, a theoretical framework of political violence, which considered a number of scholars, was devised and presented evidence that violence can be used as a political tool with positive outcomes. This framework was tested with the AFA case study which found supporting evidence for the elements deduced. This interrogation has revealed that non-state actors can justify the pursuit of their aims via violent means. Moreover, a small section of AFA's history has been captured and recorded. This thesis has filled a historiographical gap and the Anti-Fascist Archive will ease the study of anti-fascism, which I hope will mean further academic works on AFA will be conducted.

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