

Conclusion to Part II

As the previous chapters have shown, the dominant narratives and self-narratives of the neo- and postfascist right in relation to *stragismo* and the Strategy of Tension are in total contrast to the judicial findings and mainstream interpretations. The main differences concern the targets and goals of this Strategy, the role played in it by neofascism on the one hand, and communism on the other, and, lastly, the nature of the judiciary and of the ‘repented witnesses’ for the prosecution.

With regard to the aims and targets of the Strategy of Tension, all neo- and postfascist narratives examined in these chapters argue that the Communist Party was never the intended victim, since *stragismo* aimed at promoting an overarching anti-fascist alliance which included the Communist Party and excluded the extreme right, through its criminalisation and persecution. In this sense it is true that *stragismo* aimed at stabilising, rather than destabilising, ‘the system’, but the system itself included the communist left. Alternatively, a subordinate interpretation claims that it was the extreme left, led by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, which masterminded the Strategy of Tension, as a means of accelerating the revolutionary process by galvanising a guerrilla-based resistance movement against what would be perceived as an attempted coup by the right. In either case the neofascists were the designated scapegoats for massacres which had been conceived and carried out by other forces; indeed they were the only pure and uncontaminated political group.

As to the roles played by the extreme right and the extreme left, they are fairly clear cut, since, in the reconstructions of the right, the latter were the villains, and the former were the victims. However, this simple truth about *stragismo* was deliberately obfuscated by the enemies of the neofascists, who for a long time succeeded in driving a wedge between different generations of activists, purposely disseminating fabricated information, generating suspicions among members of the community, and falsely blaming many of them for infamous acts. It is only nowadays, in retrospect, that both neo- and postfascists are able to see through this conspiracy and to acknowledge their common status of victims. Virtually all the narratives analysed in Part II contribute to this positive reassessment of Italian neofascism throughout the First Republic, beyond the political, ideological and strategic divisions and bitter fighting which characterised the various groups and their leaders in the 1960s and 1970s, and to a large extent continue to characterise them in the present.

Lastly, the judicial investigations and trials are dismissed as irrelevant, since the Italian judiciary, in the eyes of the right, have long been infiltrated by the communists. Indeed, both Accame and Adinolfi, as we saw, argued that this was a deliberate, Gramsci-inspired strategy on the part of the communists after the Second World War, aimed at achieving hegemony. According to Adinolfi, it was a much more genial (and cunning) strategy than the rather crude and generally naïve putchist attempts of the extreme right. As for the ‘repented witnesses’ for the prosecution, they are simply not credible, because their collaboration was actively solicited by partisan judges and because they consist of sick, deviant, and/or criminal subjects, possibly even of infiltrators and spies, whose ‘confessions’ should be considered an integral part of the wider conspiracy against neofascism.

These reconstructions have effectively turned charges of *stragismo* on their head, reversing the roles of villains and victims, and constructing neofascism as a virtuous, persecuted, battered community, whose members have been heroes and martyrs, surrounded by corrupt and evil enemies. In this way a ‘common history’ of the ingroup is forcefully reasserted, perpetuating its distinctiveness, collective identity and continuity over time. This is perhaps what is most puzzling about the current reconstructions of *stragismo* by both the neo- and the postfascist right, that is to say, the fact that they paint a picture of sameness and continuity for an ingroup which has politically separated into two, with Alleanza Nazionale now claiming discontinuity in respect to fascist ideals and a fascist past, and the smaller groups to its right reasserting their faith in fascism.

It is easier to understand the positioning of individual protagonists of Italian neofascism, such as Delle Chiaie and Adinolfi, who are obviously eager to paint themselves in the light of persecuted and misunderstood heroes, particularly since they both continue to subscribe to fascist ideas and to be engaged in political activism, albeit at a cultural rather than party political level. It is just as easy to understand the wish of current neofascist groups to preserve the legacy of the fascist tradition, including the ideology and political activities of Italian neofascism during the period of the First Republic. The only exception are those groups which, while still subscribing to fascist ideals, see neofascism as responsible for betraying those ideals and allying with the former enemies of the fascist regime, the Anglo-Americans, as well as for conniving with the armed forces and intelligence services of the much-hated Italian Republic. These groups, which include the Italian Association of the ex-Combatants for the Social Republic, are inspired primarily by the figure of Vincenzo Vinciguerra and by his reconstructions of the Strategy of Tension and *stragismo*, which were analysed in Part I. It is for these reasons that, in a recent work (Cento Bull 2005), I painted a fragmented picture of the Italian extreme right, one in which the legacy of the past plays a crucial divisive role, preventing the reconstruction of a community of belonging. However, at the time I had (wrongly) assumed that Alleanza Nazionale would stand apart from the reconstructions put forward by the neofascist right, both as regards the Delle Chiaie variety (neofascism as victim and scapegoat of the

Strategy of Tension) and the Vinciguerra variety (neofascism as complicit in this Strategy and as traitor of the true fascist creed).

As we saw in Chapter 5, the dominant narrative adopted by the middle ranks (and even some leaders) of Alleanza Nazionale, as well as by right-leaning intellectuals close to the party, is extremely close to the reconstructions put forward by those neofascist groups which subscribe to a victimhood scenario. Indeed, in terms of conceptual frames, images and narratives in relation to the role of neofascism in the political violence of the 1960s and 1970s, there seems to be a seamless continuity between the bulk of the radical right and Alleanza Nazionale, especially some of its factions, such as *Destra Sociale* and the youth organisation, *Azione Giovani*. The importance of these factions in transmitting a specific collective identity should not be underestimated. As revealed in a survey of Alleanza Nazionale activists conducted in the second half of the 1990s (Catellani et al. 2005: 213–14), most tended to stress ‘their belonging not so much to the AN party itself, but to a subgroup inside the party ... The consequent development of a strong subparty identity, was the only way for them to overcome the heterogeneity of the new party and not lose their roots.’ This may explain why, in the context of my own study, it has been possible to detect almost a greater propensity to acknowledge past (mis)deeds on the part of those, like Pino Rauti, who still consider themselves fascist, than those who have publicly renounced fascist ideas and ideology.

The picture that emerged in Chapter 5 was one in which the moderate leaders of the party have only partially been able to reframe the traditional narrative about the ingroup and the enemy, despite the often instrumental role political leaders play in this respect (Rouhana and Bar-Tal 1998). According to Bargal and Sivan (2004: 133–35), who base their analysis on Lewin’s work (1947), the process towards reconciliation between former enemies requires various steps, starting with the ‘unfreezing’ of the status quo, which in turn generates opportunities for, and driving forces towards, change. At every step, however, opposition groups put up both ‘passive’ and ‘active’ resistance to change. As Bargal and Sivan (2004: 137) explain, ‘active opposition is often adopted by groups that have opposed any dialogue with the former enemy at the outset’. By contrast, ‘passive opposition involves denial of the new reality created by the reconciliation, and may be manifested by neglecting to reframe one’s views and test old stereotypes in light of the changing relations with the former enemy’ (ibid.: 137).

On the basis of the findings discussed in Chapter 5, one can talk of the existence of substantial ‘passive opposition’ within Alleanza Nazionale to any reframing of traditional views or overcoming of old stereotypes. This widespread attitude of passive resistance greatly strengthens the ‘active opposition’ expressed by those who left the party to form alternative organisations, such as Pino Rauti, who opted to break away from the MSI after the 1995 Fiuggi Congress and formed the *Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore* (MS-FT). Such findings confirm the recent reassessment of the nature of Alleanza Nazionale by Piero Ignazi (2003: 7), according to whom ‘a cleavage between leadership and party

cadres cuts across the party', even though the resistance put up by part of the middle ranks 'remains underground, underrepresented'. According to Ignazi, the mainly passive resistance to change demonstrated by the cadres does not affect the behaviour and strategy of the leaders; nevertheless, 'it still weighs on the wing of the leadership, somewhat restraining its freedom of manoeuvre' (ibid.: 7). The already mentioned study by Catellani et al. (2005) strikes a somewhat more positive note. While acknowledging that activists of both the neo- and postfascist right shared similar values and ideologies, as well as strong narratives of victimhood, and that 'a difficulty in dealing with the party's "black history" existed' (2005: 219), they also found that within Alleanza Nazionale, as opposed to the groups to its right, frequent reference was made to the issue of reconciliation, represented as 'the healing of an open wound in the political life of the country' (ibid.: 219).

One has the impression that the paradox of a more intractable, nonnegotiable defence of Italian neofascism on the part of the postfascist Alleanza Nazionale, compared to the radical groups to its right, represents almost a quid pro quo in exchange for the acquiescence of many cadres to the transformation of the MSI and the official renunciation of fascist ideals and goals. As was discussed in Chapter 5, another important reason was that Alleanza Nazionale's need to consolidate its newly acquired democratic legitimacy among the wider public and the electorate was not conducive to acknowledging the judicial truth about *stragismo*, especially since becoming a partner in government. This is not to say that the transformation of the MSI into Alleanza Nazionale was only cosmetic; rather, that it applies mainly to the present and the future, but only on condition that the past remains 'frozen' in a mythical and ahistorical dominant narrative, which the party continues to share with its previous comrades. This is a highly risky strategy, since the construction of a 'common past' always works towards the creation of a community of belonging in the present. As Wagner remarked,

The conjuration of 'common history' ... is an operation that is always performed in the respective present – as a specific representation of the past with a view to the creation of commonalities. Such an operation may well 'work' in the sense that an idea of proximity and belonging is created between people in the present. Yet it is not the past in the form of 'common history' that produces this effect, but the present interaction between those who propose to see the past as something shared, and those who let themselves be convinced to accept such representations for their own orientation in the social world. (Wagner 2002: 51)

With specific reference to the French extreme right, Flood (2005: 222) also argued that 'the transmission of collective memory structures the identity of the group by reiterating shared interpretations of the group's own past in relation to that of the nation as a whole.' He concluded that the extreme right's constant reaffirmation of their heroic past behaviour and values constituted an important practice for the preservation of the ingroup: 'The practice of counter-memory is thus essential to the maintenance of the subculture' (ibid.: 235).

Seen in this light, Alleanza Nazionale's current position is clearly untenable, as well as extremely precarious, since it is constantly at risk of becoming reversible. It was not surprising that one of the people I spoke to, who on this occasion shall remain anonymous, candidly stated that, 'Today I support a different political project which pursues a democratic path. While then [in the 1970s] I could not envisage a political project which relied on popular consensus in order to gain office, in order to change things, today by contrast I understand that this is the only foreseeable formula in the current historical phase. I am not saying this applies universally, but it does apply to this historical phase.'

The party needs to complete its transformation by constructing a different narrative for Italian neofascism, one which takes into account the outcomes of judicial investigations and trials and includes the reconstructions put forward by those ex-neofascists who have become witnesses for the prosecution. In this respect, the self-narrative of Fioravanti, examined in Chapter 6, can provide a valuable blueprint for a critical revisitation of longstanding myths and a reconstruction of Italy's violent past which, at the very least, sees the role played by the neofascists as a dual role of villains and victims, and acknowledges the legitimacy of the judicial process. This does not exclude questioning the outcome of individual trials in the light of new evidence, as in the case of the Bologna massacre. It does, however, include accepting the outcome of other, less welcome, retrials, such as the one on the Piazza Fontana massacre which ended in 2005 with substantial new evidence against neofascist groups, primarily Ordine Nuovo and Avanguardia Nazionale. New evidence can work both ways. It cannot be heralded as vindication of the truth in one case but dismissed as fabricated falsehood in another. Indeed this kind of reasoning is typical of 'fundamentalist' groups, which convince themselves of being the only repository of 'the truth' and view other versions of events as conspiracies.

A reframing of the narrative constructed and popularised by Alleanza Nazionale would make it possible for (some of) the culprits to admit to their own misdeeds and to agree to be part of a process of truth telling. This reframing may actually require the party to rethink the systematic attribution of the label of satanic monsters to the authors of the massacres, which is currently the one theme all political actors, as well as the victims, appear to share. The perpetrators are seen as constituting a particular species of monster, since they are unspeakable, unlike the 'monsters' the repented left terrorists have been able to recognise in their past selves and to leave behind with their acts of 'conversion'. While it is morally fully understandable that for the culprits of the bombing massacres special opprobrium is reserved, it is also the case that the truth can only emerge if what is currently unspeakable is at last revealed. This can only happen as part of a wider narrative which, while condemning past deeds, is also able to account for the historical and political context within which certain acts became possible even to contemplate. Such a narrative can only originate from a source able to empathise with the mindset and goals of the old ingroup, yet also ready to look critically at its past actions. As Fioravanti suggested, truth telling may even require that the identity

of the perpetrators – those responsible for depositing the bombs in public places – is protected in exchange for an explanation of the context, strategy and connivances behind *stragismo*. Whichever form it may ultimately take, a new narrative conducive to truth telling can only emerge if the postfascist right detaches itself from the radical groups and ceases to construct all neofascists as blameless victims.

Whether the party can perform this operation of its own accord or indeed unilaterally is a moot point. It is for this reason, as well as for others which will be discussed in the final chapter, that a process of national reconciliation, in which different political actors are made to revisit the past and to face up to each other's reconstructions, for the sake of the relatives of the victims of the massacres and all the citizens, should be seen as desirable and ought to be attempted.