

# Preface

This has been without doubt the most difficult book I have written to date. It is also a different book from the one I had planned to write.

I lived in Italy in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and again between 1978 and 1985, and was deeply affected by the events of those years, starting with the bombing attack of 12 December 1969, at Piazza Fontana, Milan. Since then, I have repeatedly tried to make sense of the many massacres of innocent civilians (*stragismo*) carried out in Italy during the period of the Cold War. Following the most recent investigations and trials, I believed that it was now possible to achieve a balanced, evidence-based reconstruction of *stragismo* and the Strategy of Tension. The latter used the massacres as means, aimed at creating an atmosphere of terror in the country, whereas the goal was some form of authoritarian or presidential political system.

To complement existing judicial material, I decided to interview some ex-protagonists of the radical neofascist movement, as well as representatives and intellectuals of the right, initially with a view to treating them as possible oral *sources*, particularly in view of the demise of the old neofascist party, the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), and its transformation into a democratic party, Alleanza Nazionale, which has distanced itself from both fascism and neofascism. However, it soon became clear that the stories they were prepared to tell did not constitute sources for reconstructing the past, but a plurality of *voices* through which a shared representation of a 'community of belonging' was being affirmed and deeply felt grievances were being expressed. While I found it very difficult to relate to the reconstructions put forward by the right, given that I come from the opposite side of the political spectrum and was unprepared to be faced with such uncompromising attitudes, I also wanted as much as possible to understand their positions.

The result has been this book, which is by necessity a book of two halves, rather than a comprehensive reconstruction of *stragismo*. In Part I, I have assembled the main evidence concerning the massacres as unearthed by successive judicial investigations and trials. I have also explored the reconstructions of *stragismo* and the Strategy of Tension put forward by a number of well-established and reputable, mainly left-of-centre, professional and scholarly people, as well as a leading witness for the prosecution, himself a neofascist. Despite significant differences of interpretation, the trial findings and these people's reconstructions have one thing in common: that the massacres were carried out by radical neofascist groups.

In Part II, I examine the reconstructions put forward by the neo- and post-fascist right, which reverse the previous interpretations. I consider their narratives primarily as 'narratives of victimhood', whereby the neofascists are constructed as victims, as opposed to perpetrators, of *stragismo* and the Strategy of Tension. To an extent they are also codified narratives which leave little room for a critical reappraisal of the past. One example is that of Stefano Delle Chiaie, who in 1997, during a hearing of a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, stated, with reference to his 'wronged' image, that 'Fantasy, plus more fantasy, plus archival news create the monster'. When I met him outside the block of flats where I would interview him, in October 2005, he greeted me with the same words, thereby clearly indicating that his story was not going to change in any significant way from his previous renditions.

Finally, I explore the reasons for this clear-cut division of opinions and narratives, and I consider its wider political significance.

In many ways, therefore, this is not the book I intended to write. It is, however, the only one that I could write given the current state of the judicial process and of political relations in Italy. I hope that one day it will become possible to write the original book I had in mind.