

THE EMPIRE AND THE BARBARIANS

Cosmological Laceration and the Social
Establishment of Extremism



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‘Western superiority of force has reached its
limits and shows strong tendencies towards
implosion’.

—G. Arrighi, 2008:9

Prelude: Alibrandi’s Death

On 5 December 1981 the neo-fascist militant Alessandro Alibrandi (21) was hanging around in Rome’s Labaro neighbourhood with two of his comrades. He was—as usual—armed, and he was seeking revenge. He and his other two fellow travellers were among the last members of the so-called Spontaneismo Armato (Armed Spontaneity): a neo-fascist movement, or rather a galaxy of movements, that had quickly radicalized through the second half of the 1970s and left a trail of bloodshed behind. They had killed a number of adversaries with broadly left-wing political alignments, random police agents, lawyers and judges that had conducted inquiries against right-wing individuals and organizations, and

even—at times—political leaders of their own movement whom they felt had betrayed them. At this stage at the end of 1981, the majority of the Spontaneista had either gone abroad, were in jail, or been killed by the police or armed left-militants. Alessandro had just come back from a year in Lebanon, where he had fled to avoid prison, and to acquire military training with the Phalange. He had returned incognito, full of prestige and aura from the experience of war, and had led his comrades into a series of murders that he said were ‘to avenge wrongs’ (Rao 2006) that both he and the group had allegedly undergone. In this instance, his plan was to kill agent Angelino, the police officer that had arrested him years before. With his two armed companions, he made rounds of the officer’s house, waiting to ambush him. Yet, agent Angelino hadn’t shown up. They were now killing time—as teenagers normally would do—wandering about the neighbourhood. They stopped at a street-food seller and bought some tangerines. Alessandro was eating his alone on a little wall on the side of via Flaminia, while the other two remained chatting in the car. When a random police car passed by, Alessandro did something that all the witnesses would later describe as ‘mad’ (Anonymous: interview). He took a gun out of his belt and, without warning his accomplices, started shooting towards the police car, injuring one officer and killing another. Alessandro in return was shot in the back of the head, and died on his way to hospital.

I tell this story because it somehow situates Spontaneismo as an ‘extremist’ phenomenon, that is, one that is governed by a logic that is seemingly far removed from the normative predicaments of mainstream society, and thus released from its rules. While I do contend that extremist phenomena follow a functioning logic that is (at least partly) freed from the normative command of the

centre,¹ I will try in this chapter to demonstrate that this does not mean the two are unrelated. On the contrary, my goal is to illustrate how phenomena that we qualify as ‘extremist’ should not be regarded as an externality to the social-political systems they manifest themselves within, but are in fact a—historically situated—consequence of their earlier development. I will thus try to balance my analysis between phenomena of a thoroughly different scale: the general process of crisis and ensuing disintegration of the political system that was established in the West under American leadership after World War 2, and the particular explosion of Spontaneismo as ‘extremism’. As distant as these phenomena may seem, I intend to make the point that they are intimately related.

The Empire and the Barbarians

Like the barbarians of the Roman empire or—more recently—the mujahideen whom the CIA helped and supported during the Soviet-Afghan war (subsequently reorganized into Al-Qaeda), the Spontaneista people were the remainders of past structures of para-military control over an imperial periphery. Since the late 60s, the US imperial decline triggered a process of disintegration of those structures. Some of the fragments found themselves autonomous and isolated for the first time, armed and trained for war, and revolted against their former masters. From this perspective, several points need to be kept in mind:

1. The (relatively advantageous) position Italy held within the systems of politico-economic relations established under US hegemony after World War Two, was the result of a fundamental trade-off

between Italian, non-communist, socio-political elites, and the US ruling class. The Italian Communist Party (PCI) was considered a major threat to the US hegemony within the geopolitical relevance of Italy. The non-communist Italian elites were thus able to obtain further economic integration within the US-led market arena.

2. Within this frame, the formation of a neo-fascist sector in Italy was instrumental to the containment of local communist expansion.

The action of a local elite is always the result of a precarious balance between two forces, pushing in opposite directions: a) the drive by elites for further integration within the epicentre of the hegemonic system, by which they can access goods and resources necessary to local development;² and, b) the need to preserve the internal cohesion and social integration of their local society by which they can claim the right to leading/ruling role (Tainter 1988: 37).

3. The loss of such equilibrium can lead to major processes of social laceration and fragmentation, fostering social disorder and the subsequent increase of cultural, or even cult reactions to the former.

It is only by bringing together the various scales of this diverse and historically deep evidence, that we can make sense of Alibrandi's death.

To understand the historical constitution of Spontaneismo, we need to look at the *longue durée* of the Italian neo-fascist sphere, of which the Spontaneista teenagers were both a continuation and a negation. One can see how the early vitality of Italian neo-fascism was a result of the hegemonic competition between the US and the Soviet Union. Italy, right in the middle of the Mediterranean, was

geographically a fundamental launchpad for both naval and air power, towards Eastern Europe and North Africa. Even more importantly it was a border zone to communist Eastern Europe, while the Italian Communist Party—the biggest in the West—constituted an enormous internal threat to US hegemonic interests. Within this frame, the full integration of Italy into the US world order, as well as the constitution of a neo-fascist sphere, were part of the US's hegemonic strategy. Since the late 1940s neofascist militants were used as a proxy to counter the territorial spread of the PCI, via physical intimidation (Cento Bull 2007; Ferraresi 1995, 1996; Rao 2006).

An explicitly neo-fascist party, Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) was founded in 1946, some three decades before any other fascist organization in Western Europe. By the end of the 1960s two more radical, extra parliamentary groups, Avanguardia Nazionale (AN) and Ordine Nuovo (ON), emerged. These were later found to be heavily involved into what has become known as 'the strategy of tension': a political and para military strategy to organize terrorist bomb attacks for which progressives were blamed in order to spread fear through the peninsula, and favour electoral success for conservative forces. The operational network animating this strategy, between the latest part of the 60s and the early 70s, involved the neo-fascist radical sphere, Italian secret services, the CIA and the NATO secret services. The attacks were materially perpetrated by members of the two groups ON and AN, with the logistical support and political covering of Italian intelligence, as well as some 'sympathetic' politicians, often from the MSI and the Christian Democratic Party (DC).³

After a few years, it was clear that there was massive public disbelief in this theory of left-wing responsibilities. At the same time, allegations about involvement of

segments of the state and US secret services in these attacks were becoming established in the public sphere. As the ‘strategy of tension’ was proving inefficient, it was abandoned and—to reassert the credibility of the Italian state—both the neofascist groups were labelled as ‘extremist’ and disbanded by law: ON in 1971, AN in 1976.⁴ It was a heavy blow for the neo-fascist scenes, especially the extra-parliamentary movements, which all of a sudden became labelled as ‘extremists’. They lost political support, found themselves leaderless, and were exposed publicly as being solely responsible for the horrible slaughters of the early 1970s.

Spontaneismo came into being at this time.

Inversion of the Cultural Frame: from Orientalism to Occidentalism . . . and the Nihilist Cult

The first Spontaneista group, *Costruiamo l’Azione* (CLA), was constituted in 1977, initially as an attempt to restructure the neo-fascist arena as it was before the banishment of the existing groups. Some veterans thought that they could use neo-fascist youth to pursue their old authoritarian project. Philo-American neo-fascism had been imperialist and orientalist, its ideological structure grounded in the strenuous defence of the Italian state, from ‘the leftist threat’.

With this in mind, Paolo Signorelli and Fabio De Felice, two older militants who had survived the state repression of the mid-70s,⁵ set to enlist younger activists and give new life to the deserted movement.

They soon discovered that the neo-fascist youth had significantly different ideas. They had not seen the war, and had been socialized, instead, after the reform of

mandatory education. They had watched closely the excitement of the revolutionary breeze their classmates from the left were experiencing during the 70s. The anti-authoritarian revolt, sexual liberation, access to light drugs, cultural emancipation, involvement in political violence, all looked appealing to neo-fascists, who had culturally much more in common with their peer group political opponents than with the veterans of their own movement. The youngsters of CLA were not to be controlled by their elders. Instead of backing the state's authoritarian power, admiring the imperial grandeur of their American allies, and laying their orientalist gaze over the imperial peripheries, they turned towards another direction. Still loyal to the fascist liberating narratives of violence, nihilism, and war, they now discovered that the Italian state and the US empire had betrayed them, and started moulding a new critical idiom, generally orientated against Western values and social institutions.

These changes were not specific to the neo-fascist sphere, but part of a larger transformation, or even inversion, within what might be called the 'Western identity space' (Friedman 1994; Jacoby 1999). Emerging signs of the USA's imperial decline were also transforming the way people identified within it. This has been described as 'Occidentalism': the reversal of a previous 'Orientalist' relation in representations between the 'West and the Rest', whereby a dominant Western rationality essentialized its (colonized) Others (Said 1978). In the Occidentalist frame, a declining Western civilisation had lost the power to hegemonize the representation of its Others, and it was the West to be now stereotyped by the gaze of its (internal and external) critics (Buruma and Margalit 2004; Friedman 2009; Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, this volume).

The ideological repositioning of neo-fascist youngsters generalized the conflict expressed by cultural minorities

all over the world. If the left was supporting liberation struggles within and without the Western world (from black power movements to anti-colonial revolts in Africa or South America), Spontaneista supported the mujahideen against the Shah, Muḥmar Gaddafi's revolt against the West's ally, King Idris, and even looked towards Che Guevara as a hero of the struggle against American imperialism. Invariably, both left and right perceived Western political orders as the living matrix of oppression against free peoples and cultures in the world.

Younger Spontaneista started loudly proclaiming anti-authoritarian messages in their supporters' magazine (a fanzine of sorts) and organized 'counter-cultural activities'. They had an 'armed wing' of the movement, which they called—somewhat awkwardly for neo-fascists—*Movimento Rivoluzionario Popolare* (People's Revolutionary Movement, MRP). They targeted the symbols of the state's authority, like prisons and courts, while publicly claiming responsibility for the attacks.⁶

When—from the pages of the fanzine—they offered an alliance to the extreme left,⁷ it became too much for the neo-fascist veterans to take. A conflict exploded in which the youth emerged victorious, expelling older militants and setting the frame for further transformations in the extreme right. Soon enough two new groups were founded, both following CLA's ideological path: *Terza Posizione* (Third Position, TP) and *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (Armed Revolutionary Squads, NAR). All three displayed ideological features almost diametrically opposed to what neo-fascism had shown in the period immediately after the war. They were anti imperial, anti-authoritarian, and against the state. TP claimed to hold a 'third position' between communism and liberalism, based on local communitarianism, local sovereignty and local solidarity;⁸ while NAR reiterated CLA's offers

of alliance to the extreme left. They asserted a post-ideological stance claiming that their goal was to expose the general decline of society, and their project was not grounded in the interests of a given social part. Rather, they maintained they were interested in ‘the whole’, and claimed that they were acting in *everybody’s* behalf. They would induce a thorough regeneration of the social world, an upside down reversal of reality which would give birth to ‘a new man’. Within this discourse, death and birth were intimately connected projects, as the death of the old order also meant the birth of a new, desired one.⁹

Despite these efforts, the project of political regeneration that the young Spontaneista were attempting to put into operation, by transforming enemies into friends and old friends into enemies, didn’t succeed.. The hard realization of this failure came about on 7 January 1978, with the unfolding of what is known as ‘the Acca Larentia event’. Two young neo-fascists were shot dead by a left-wing commando while they were leaving the MSI party branch of Acca Larentia in the Tuscolano neighbourhood of Rome. Shocked by the killing, Roman neo-fascists gathered at the spot, to mourn their deaths and to demand justice. The police force were also present in large numbers, and the tension was palpable. Rioting broke out, and in the commotion that followed, a police officer killed a third neo-fascist militant.

This event, remembered to this day by a highly ritualized march to the site of the killings (Loperfido 2013), was deeply shocking to the Spontaneista, who saw their failure acquire an apocalyptic dimension, as old enemies and old friends seemed to be coalescing in a common project to annihilate them. It brought about a wave of deep nihilism among the young neo-fascists, who became convinced that they needed to take action and take steps to realize the apocalypse they themselves had been announcing.

It was the beginning of a half a decade long wave of violence from the Spontaneista, one that, as we have seen, targeted nearly everyone: leftists, state representatives, random people, and even the Spontaneista themselves. As Alibrandi's death shows, there was neither a project nor a strategy, be it in favour or against the state. Only death and violence were left. In the leaflet in which they took responsibility for the killing of yet another police officer, Alibrandi and some of his associates wrote:

We're not going after power, nor after educating the masses: what matters to us is to respect our ethical predicament, by which enemies are killed and traitors annihilated. . . . We're not afraid to die, neither are we to end our days in jail: the only fear we have is not to be able to clear the world from everything and everyone, but be assured: we won't stop until our last breath. (NAR's leaflet claiming responsibility for the Straullu murder, 1981)

This sort of chilling nihilism is not a unique to the Spontaneismo, and can be found in what Vittorio Lanternari has called 'evasion religions' (2003), as well as—more generally—in revolutionary messianic movements of colonial times. His and others' studies (Adas 1979; Pereira de Queiroz 1964, 1968) show how the cultural disintegration triggered by the transformations in the structures and dynamics of social control, appears to have given way to cultic tendencies and apocalyptic beliefs. These revolved around an obsession with death, and a profound desire for it, as death was seen as the fundamental principle of cosmic regeneration (Lanternari 2003: 245). Alienation plays obviously an important role here as it seems to push subjects to sever their identity from their own life experience, and to produce projective identifications with a future of destruction and renewal (see also Bastin's, and

Wilson's contributions to this volume). This is—it shall be noted—the kind of situation where death becomes ubiquitous, first in representations, then in reality.

Social Fragmentation, and the Violent Attempts to Restore Cosmological Unity

Throughout the late 1970s, with the escalation of left-wing violence, on the one hand, and the Spontaneista attacks against the men of the state, on the other, a new expression became common currency in the narratives of institutional power. The struggle against 'opposed extremisms' of left and right, became a rhetorical device to sustain the claim that respectable citizens, regardless of their political persuasion, should unite against the threat of extremists. This is a common pattern during periods of acute social turmoil, which we have also seen more recently, for instance, in the #jesuisCharlie campaign (Zagato 2015). Here 'the people', re-emerge as an undifferentiated category, as vastly differing social and political constituencies are asked to unite with institutional power in national solidarity, regardless of their views, to face 'the invasions of the barbarians': the physical threat represented by 'uncivilized others'.

Curiously, Spontaneista people held a similar stance, asking both left and right to forget their differences, for the 'people' to unite, to defeat their rulers and punish them for their greed, and their subservience to American interests.

There seemed to be a symmetry within the spatial logic of this opposition. The critique of Spontaneista was enacted on the basis of rulers' allegiance to foreign potencies while the categorisation of Spontaneismo as extremism, located them out of the social body, and represented them as allied to foreign, threatening and destructive forces.

These reciprocal oppositions appear to represent the inescapable cosmological remoteness of the Other, itself an expression of the inability of the two poles to exert any sort of control over one another.

Marshal Sahlins (2008) has shown how ‘taming the barbarians’ is a foundational archetype of the very symbolic structures of political (and perhaps more specifically imperial) power. In an essay about the countless variations of popular legends about ‘The Stranger King’, he explains how the symbolic constitution of political power heavily relies on metaphors of the violent encounter (and final conciliation) between forces that are claimed to be ‘external to society’, and the indigenous, autochthonous ‘owners of the land’. While I concur in the recognition of a recurrent symbolic structure, I would argue for a more historicised understanding of it. There is more in the ambivalent representation of the civilized and the uncivilized, the central and the marginal, those identifying outside and above and those identifying inside and below, than a simple symbolic affair between cosmic forces of opposed nature. These recurrent oppositions are produced throughout, and embedded within, the historical pulsations of civilization cycles of expansion and contraction, and underpinned by material historical processes of rearrangement and reconfiguration of translocal power structures and alliances, that find in these metaphors and narratives their own legitimization.

In fact, the archetype around ‘taming the barbarians’ (extremists, pirates, etc.), seems to gain strength and social recognition when imperial hegemony starts to decline, and society finds itself ridden by centrifugal tendencies and intra social conflicts of various sorts.

The constitution of hegemonic orders depends on local elites’ capacity to integrate larger commercial-political systems through alliances with foreign elites, which are

situated outside the identity field of their local communities (Van Der Pijl 1998: 117). This is how a given community can get 'access to external resources and to other people's labor and skills', thus becoming able to 'transcend the limits of what is culturally/materially possible in a closed and socially undifferentiated local society'. (Ekholm Friedman 2005: 55). But the equilibrium between extra-local expansion and intra-local cohesion is delicate, and can only be maintained for a limited period of time, after which we see tendencies towards hegemonic contraction, fragmentation, and internal disintegration of the previously constituted orders (Ekholm Friedman 2005; Tainter 1988).

These logics apply to post-war development strategies of Italian elites. We have seen how both the political (for having been part of the fascist axis in the war) and economic peripherality of the country were overcome through commercial and political post-war alliances with the US establishment. This allowed Italy to integrate the then expanding commercial and political arena of the US hegemony. American help had of course a very strong geo-strategic purpose, since it served the formation of both political and paramilitary structures of defence of hegemonic interests in a country considered as an imperial frontier (Smith 1991).

The alliance between Italian and US elites worked well initially. It was sustained locally by the very economic expansion it was itself making possible. Italy was inundated with American investments and its productive economy grew immensely through the 50s and 60s, favouring economic redistribution, social peace and a strong solidarity between DC, the party that had dominated the after-war, and its constituencies. But the balance between identification of elites with foreign allies and their communities identification with them, is always precarious,

given the natural tendency of the political establishment to transform ‘into a bourgeoisie increasingly active in the global political economy on its own account, as part of an immanent world capital facing the working classes’ (Van Der Pijl:1998, 117). In this frame, the elite’s involvement in long distance political economic relations tends to realise ‘the primordial alienation from the community that is the precondition for market relations, exploitation for wage labor’ and—for that matter—surplus extraction *tout court* (ibid.: 99).

From the mid-60s on, various processes of social and economic change started to undermine DC’s relative political and cultural hegemony. The progressive unfolding of a systemic economic crisis (which acquired structural proportions in the mid-70s, which—perhaps not coincidentally—was also the time of Spontaneismo’s first manifestation) heavily hit the market relations that underpinned US expansion. This implied the progressive decay of economic growth, the shrinking of available resources, and the weakening of the US’s hegemonic position. In this conjuncture, the USA’s mode of control over peripheral regions of the empire switched from ‘trade’ to ‘warfare’, often using paramilitary ‘proxies’, formerly put in place and financed, as in the cases of the Chilean (1973) and the Greek (1975) putsches (Arrighi, 2009). These developments were more nuanced in Italy, where the ‘strategy of tension’ threatened rather than carried out a putsch. Yet, local political elites appeared less secure, and if the politically established parties like the DC became even more subservient to the American will, outsider parties like the Communists looked to appear more moderate by allying with their historical adversaries, the pro-American DC, in what became known as ‘the historical compromise’. Moreover, the crisis had opened the door to the greed of the political class altogether, progressively abandoning

distributive policies, voting for the public funding of parliamentary parties (against the advice of a the popular majority), and exposing themselves to a long series of bribery and corruption scandals. Last but not least, the ‘opposed extremisms’ rhetoric, justified repression via a negative moral essentialization of political opponents from both left and right as being part of a lower order.

It was the final collapse of the relative social harmony and homogeneity that had been the basis for post-war development. The alliance between representatives and represented, which had sustained the social peace in Italy, started to break apart, while the more extreme fragments of previously more homogeneous constituencies (like the Spontaneista and the extreme left) became increasingly violent.

One of the main contentions of this chapter is that, in face of the shrinking of the conditions of possibility for mutual identifications between the elites and their constituencies, often violent processes of social and spatial fragmentation are likely to attain the social field.

We can find testimonies of such evidence not only throughout the long decline of American hegemony, but as a general feature of imperial decline, from the Mesopotamian, to the Roman and British empires. Much like contemporary ‘preppers’ (Ekholm Friedman and Friedman, this volume), what we see is uprooted groups deciding to live outside society, forming their own communities, refusing to recognize any value in the state or centralized authority. Of such kind are the interesting connections between different ‘localisms’ revealed by Dahl in the US (1998), but also—in more distant historical eras—the revolutionary-messianic groups who retreat to isolated areas (sometimes as residents and at others as nomads) in times of decolonization (Adas 1979; Lanternari 2003; Pereira de Queiroz 1968), or even the Abiru self-isolating

communities that emerged during the collapse of the Late Bronze Age (Ekholm Friedman 2005: 83; Heltzer 1988). Spontaneista also planned their own cultural enclaves, where they would live autonomously under their own rule (Rao 2006: 263–264).

In this scenario, the increasing inability of different segments of society to identify with one another seems to inspire cosmological lacerations of the kinds described above, where the potencies of alterity are felt to penetrate the social field and bestow the power to destroy it.

This is also the context in which antinomic categories become established in the institutional discourse (i.e. the extremists, the barbarians, etc.), which are often defined as ‘foreign’, as a threat coming from the margins. Attributes of this threat vary between the irrational/anti-rational, pre- or anti-social, impulsive, natural and uncivilized, as opposed to the cultured and civilized nature of the centre. It is to be noted that these dichotomies are mutually reinforced within the oppositional relation between the centre and the margins, where each defines itself as the opposite of the other. The attributes remain the same, here (both the centre and the extremes see the centre as ‘civilized’ and the margins as ‘irrational’), but what changes is the moral value ascribed to those (each side ascribing totally positive value to its own features and a totally negative one to the other’s).

A general disordering of the social field is the more likely outcome, where socially shared feelings of anxiety and fear, which have variously been termed ‘cultural anxiety’ (Grillo 2003), ‘cultural despair’ (Stern 1974), or ‘depressive overload’ (Alberoni 1984), are likely to sublimate into apocalyptic imageries, and ‘end of the world’ kind of predictions.

This is the context in which the model of extreme alterity exemplified by the rulers/extremists oppositional

dichotomy tends to emerge. Cosmological laceration opens the way to very violent attempts to restore cosmogonic unity via a project of ‘destruction and regeneration’. This is because, to the extremist aggressor, the power to create a new order solely depends on this ability to violate the old. One of the Spontaneista leaders explained to the judges his impressive record of murders in the following way: ‘In order to create a “new man” you’ll have to destroy the “old one”, as there is no point in seeking to change his mentality and morality’ (Valerio Fioravanti, cit. in Bianconi, 2003: 47).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to illuminate the transformative trajectory of the Italian neo-fascist sphere, from a para-military formation integral to the imperial structures of social control, to a formation of ‘extremism’. I have argued that the understanding of such transformation is only possible via historically informed approaches aimed at overcoming othering narratives implicit in the label of extremism. More specifically, I suggested one should look at the neo-fascist milieu in its constitutional relation with larger processes of reproduction of statehood within complexes that are produced as civilizational.

My main argument was that contraction of hegemonic orders tends to trigger—locally—processes of intra-social disintegration. I have argued that in Italy (like elsewhere), the cultural terrain for this processes was the shrinking conditions for mutual identifications between political representatives and their constituencies. Crisis, and the decline of mutual trust between ‘the people’ and the ‘elite’ paved the way for contestation and at times violent social conflict (both against the political class and

between social/political groups themselves), political stigmatization of marginal groups, and, more generally, the relentless decline of the relative social cohesion that was achieved in the period after World War Two.

The general disintegration processes referred to above, also implied a crisis of the homogeneity of social forms and the way they were represented culturally. The 1970s saw the resurfacing of ethnic and linguistic diversity, the resurgence of localism and emergence of autonomist and independence movements in Italy and more generally in the West. More specifically this general process of heterogenization also was at the core of transformation of the neo-fascist sphere. As we have seen, neo-fascism had become established early on after the war as a 'legitimate' formation, integral to the structures of the USA's hegemonic expansion in the Mediterranean area. This was in spite of many individuals and groups from that milieu practising political violence, murder and terrorist attacks against the national population, and at times even against the state's security forces, within a context of the so called 'strategy of tension'. But when that strategy was no longer functional to the purposes of hegemonic control, Italian neo-fascism was abandoned to itself and institutionally re-categorized as extremist: an ontological other that had penetrated the local cosmos, threatening its very substance.

In this scenario, the progressive decrease in social cohesion, the fragmentation and multiplication of social/political identities, and the increase in intra social conflict, led to a cosmological laceration in which different groups and subjects were becoming increasingly unable to recognize each other as parts of a shared social universe.

This is the context in which the neo-fascist milieu, dismissed and newly labelled as 'extremist' by the institutional sphere, formed an apocalyptic eschatology of its

own, finding new meanings and directions for its violent actions, and attempting—in their own words—to accelerate the dis-integration of a world that was too sick to be cured (Freda 2000), and expecting, at the end of that path, the millenarian resurgence of a new Golden Age of national resurgence. The heretical, nihilist violence, the ravaging, degrading, grotesque, and at times carnivalesque violence of what we call extremism, seems thus to be rooted in this paradoxical, profoundly ambivalent dimension of hegemonic decline, one that is suspended between catastrophe and regeneration, degradation and renovation, social death and revival.

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Notes

1. By ‘centre’ here I mean, very generally, the established social order and its institutions, as opposed to extremism (the latter including, also very generally, social phenomena that radically deviate from the norms and rules expressed by that order).
2. This is, Ekholm Friedman reminds us ‘ . . . a project run by elites and oriented towards elite consumption’ (2005: 81), more than anything else.
3. Cento Bull 2007; Ferraresi 1995, 1996; Salvini 1995.

4. On the inefficiency of this repressive strategy, see also Pasieka, this volume.
5. De Felice in particular was known to have had consistent relations with Italian secret services.
6. As we mentioned, previous generations were instead perpetrating terrorist attacks and deliberately blaming the leftists.
7. 'We recognise our former mistakes and we are saying to leftists: wake up boys! Don't let them fuck you again, haven't you been the trained monkeys of the state for long enough? ... Our enemies are the same and they all gang up against us, let's fight the filthy shit-hole together! (Anonymous, *Costruiamo l'Azione*, April 1978, n.I, p. 1).
8. On localism as a response to crisis situations, see Dahl, 1998. On localism as a critique to state power, see Diamanti, 1996.
9. This vision was heralded by the neo-fascist ideologue, Franco Freda, who professed the need to 'destroy the system' in order to give place to a new order (Freda 2000: 60; Stellati 2001: 69)

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