

Part II

Victims? The Truth According to the
Neo- and Postfascist Right

Introduction to Part II

As we saw in Part I, the judicial process has only been partially able to establish the truth concerning *stragismo* and to ensure that the culprits be prosecuted and punished. It appears that retributive justice has now run its course, given the time elapsed since the crimes and the difficulty of finding reliable witnesses who are still alive and capable of testifying. This leaves open the question of whether a parallel process of truth telling and reconciliation has taken place in the country, with a view to complementing retributive justice with a form of restorative justice, as promoted in various countries experiencing a transition to democracy after going through a bloody conflict and/or an authoritarian regime. Restorative justice, as we saw, refers to a process in which the emphasis is on uncovering the truth about past crimes, rather than on securing justice through the Courts. Indeed, at times the pursuit of criminal justice is consciously abandoned in favour of truth revealing. Truth, in turn, is seen as leading to reconciliation. Conversely, there can be no lasting reconciliation without truth: 'Until people know where responsibility lies for atrocities committed and are given information such as the location of missed loved ones, obstacles to reconciliation will remain' (Borris 2002: 168). This is a highly controversial and sensitive issue, yet many countries throughout the world which were experiencing a transition to democracy after the end of the Cold War had recourse to different combinations of retributive and restorative justice, often involving Truth Commissions. According to Wilson (2003: 369), 'roughly 20 such commissions ... were established between the 1970s and the present day, with the majority (15) established in the latter years of the Cold War (1974–1994).'

In Italy, since the end of the Cold War, there has not been a comparable process of truth telling and national reconciliation; only a few abortive steps were taken in that direction, for a number of reasons. To start with, the anomalous character of the political conflict during the period of the Cold War (in between a fully blown-out and a 'congealed' conflict), the similarly anomalous character of the fall of the First Republic and the transition to a Second Republic (in between an in-depth process of renewal of a static model of democracy and a simple institutional readjustment), and the unclear link between the two sets of events (the violent conflict had ended well before the end of the First Republic), contributed to relegating the question of national reconciliation well down the list of priorities of the new political parties that emerged out of the collapse of the old political system. Once the Communist Party had transformed itself into the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS), and the Movimento Sociale Italiano had

become Alleanza Nazionale, they acquired democratic credentials, even though doubts were expressed in relation to the latter (Ignazi 1994; Tarchi 1997; Chiarini and Maraffi 2001). Each of these two parties was able to take part in government, the PDS in 1996–2001, the Alleanza Nazionale in 1994 and again in 2001–2006. Thanks in no small part to their political ‘unfreezing’, Italy for the first time witnessed an alternation of parties in government, which seemed to indicate that the transition from a consensual to a competitive model of democracy had been fully completed.

Persisting divisions

Despite this achievement, according to many commentators, the country remained deeply divided socially, politically and ideologically. At first, however, it was the issue of persistent divisions of a territorial nature that rang alarm bells, due to the unexpected rise of the regionalist and secessionist Northern League Party (Biorcio 1997; Cartocci 1991, 1994; Cento Bull 1992, 1993; Curi 1997; Diamanti 1993, 1996; Mingione 1993; Moioli 1990; Rumiz 1997; Rusconi 1993; Trigilia 1994). Later, it was the figure of Berlusconi, with his shady past, his conflicts of interest, his suspected involvement in corrupt dealings and his aggressive personality, which was identified as undoubtedly contributing to the persistence and indeed revival of deep political fractures and ideological confrontations (Andrews 2005; Bocca 2005; Colombo and Padellaro 2002; Ginsborg 2003, 2005; Lane 2005; Salerno 2006; Travaglio 2004; Travaglio and Gomez 2003; Veltri and Travaglio 2001). Given that both the League and Berlusconi represented new phenomena, they did not seem to require the country to confront its past in order to achieve more stable and less conflictual political relations.

In the meantime, however, the old divisions along the lines of fascism/anti-fascism and communism/anti-communism also resurfaced and the question of the need for national reconciliation and of how best to promote it started to be addressed. Nevertheless, this debate took place primarily in relation to the 1943–45 civil war, which, given the time scale involved, did not appear to warrant a protracted process of national reconciliation or indeed the establishment of a Commission for Truth and Reconciliation along the lines of the South African one. The process of historical revisionism with regards to anti-fascism and the 1943–45 Resistance movement goes back to the late 1980s, frequently involving non- and anti-fascist authors. In 1986, anti-fascist historian Nicola Gallerano published an essay in which he critically reconsidered the ‘hegemonic anti-fascist narrative’, focusing upon its growing crisis of legitimation. In 1988, right-leaning but non fascist historian Renzo De Felice (who in the 1970s had caused a full-scale controversy for emphasising, in one of his volumes on the history of fascism, the popular nature of the regime and the weakness of all opposition movements and parties), publicly proclaimed that anti-fascism should no longer be considered the founding myth of the Italian Republic, as it was both divisive and played

into the hands of the communists. In 1991, anti-fascist historian Claudio Pavone published a widely praised scholarly history of the 1943–45 conflict, to which he applied the concept of a civil war, thereby opening space for consideration of the role and motivations of the losers, that is to say, those who had fought on the side of the Republic of Salò, while by no means establishing an equivalence between the two sides, least of all in moral terms.

After the crisis of the First Republic in the early 1990s, a flood of new studies and publications reopened the issue, this time deliberately blurring the difference between the participants in the 1943–45 civil war. In 1995, De Felice published a new book, again putting forward an uncompromising critique of the Resistance and anti-fascism, as well as identifying a fatal date for Italy in 8 September 1943, the day when the Italian government's armistice with the Allies was made public and national unity and identity were dealt an irrevocable blow (De Felice 1995; Bosworth 1998: 17–20). The same theme was re-presented and re-elaborated by the historian Galli della Loggia the following year (1996). Personal memoirs by neofascist protagonists of the 1943–45 civil war were also widely read, especially Mazzantini's second autobiographical account of his role in the Italian Social Republic (RSI), dedicated to both the partisans who died for 'freedom' and the combatants for the RSI, who died for 'honour' (1995). Various atrocities committed by the partisans, but withheld from public debate, were reconstructed and discussed. Particular attention, often in a deliberately polemical manner, was paid to the so-called *foibe*, with reference to the massacre of Italians in the north eastern regions occupied by Yugoslav partisans (Spazzali 1990; Cernigoi 1997; Valdevit 1997; Salimbeni 1998; Papo De Montona 1999). By contrast, important studies on the Italian Social Republic and German occupation seemed to attract less public attention (Klinkhammer 1993; Battini and Pezzino 1997; Gagliani 1999; Ganapini 1999; Pezzino 2001).

This type of historical revisionism tended to be explicitly political, the more so when Berlusconi formed Forza Italia and set himself the task of building an effective coalition of the right with the inclusion of the neo- and postfascists. At one level, given that both the ex-fascists and the ex-communists were eager to establish their democratic credentials, historical revisionism appeared to be linked to a perceived need for reconciliation, through acknowledging one's own past responsibilities. Thus a few positive gestures were made from each side, officially to mark a rapprochement between former enemies. Among these gestures was the unreserved condemnation of fascism on the part of Alleanza Nazionale's leader and Deputy Prime Minister Gianfranco Fini in November 2003, during a trip to Israel, and the approval of a parliamentary law in March 2004, with the votes of the postcommunist PDS, which established a Day of Memory (*Giorno del Ricordo in Memoria degli Esuli e Vittime delle Foibe*) for the Italian civilian victims of Yugoslav partisans in 1943–45. The latter event, to which various ex-Communist Party leaders had paved the way with official declarations of acknowledgement of wrongdoing by their own side during the war, was hailed as 'the historical moment of reconciliation, of national pacification', by Alleanza Nazionale deputy

Mirko Tremaglia (INFORM, 31, 12 February 2004). The following year, on the day of remembrance itself, Gianfranco Fini made a speech in Trieste and declared that: 'We have started the road towards reconciliation and truth. We must not oppose truth to truth. There is only one truth which, once established, will allow us rapidly to move on'. (*Corriere della Sera*, 11 February 2005)

Despite these gestures, 'reconciliation' soon turned sour, as it appeared to many to have taken on the meaning of attributing equal moral standing to both sides of the 1943–45 civil war and/or promoting a general collective 'amnesia' as regards the past. An attempt on the part of the Berlusconi government to approve a bill granting recognition as legitimate combatants to those who fought for the Republic of Salò, confirmed many people's worst fears. Claudio Pavone spoke for many when he stated that the political right 'say they want pacification whereas the sentiment that inspires them is revenge.' He added that 'the signatories to the bill seem to subscribe to the thesis put forward by the extremists of the MSI. By their reasoning, the real Resistance in Italy in those years was carried out by the Republic of Salò, born out of a healthy rebellion against the traitors of 8 September' (*La Repubblica*, 18 February 2005). The bill was withdrawn in January 2006 in the face of widespread opposition and condemnation.

Rather than moving towards reconciliation, many acts of the Berlusconi government were judged to constitute a deliberate strategy to delegitimize and devalue anti-fascism (Focardi 2005a, 2005b; Giustolisi 2004; Luzzatto 2004; Mammone 2006; Santomassimo 2004). In the words of Focardi (2005b), 'in place of the memory of the Resistance there was an attempt to promote a "reconciled" national memory based on the presumed equal historical and moral dignity of fascists and antifascists. It is a matter of a hard struggle for cultural hegemony, which is fought on the contested terrain of historical memory.' In this context, the books by journalist Giampaolo Pansa (2003, 2005), on the killings of fascists by communist partisans after the war were heavily criticised by many left commentators for their a-critical stance in relation to the 1943–45 civil war. A book by anti-fascist historian Roberto Vivarelli (2000) on his personal experience as a combatant for the Italian Social Republic also proved controversial and was seen as another attempt to provide justifications for those who fought 'on the wrong side'. By contrast, journalist Paolo Mieli openly defended the right to historical revisionism in a volume published in 2001, which itself caused a lively debate. The 'war of memory', appeared to have taken central stage in political and scholarly debates (Ventrone 2006).

Not surprisingly, given the prevailing climate and the controversies raging over the 1943–45 civil war, the few voices raised by those who hoped for the creation of a 'Commission for Truth and Reconciliation' in Italy, along the lines of the one in South Africa, in order to achieve reconciliation for the post-1969 conflict, did not go very far. The proposal was initially put forward by Alleanza Nazionale Senator Alfredo Mantica (2001) in the *Commissione stragi* ('Commission on the Massacres') and was supported by Giovanni Pellegrino, Chair of the Commission between 1994 and 2001. Given his interpretation of the period of the Cold War

in terms of a 'creeping civil war' whose legacy is still visible today, Pellegrino was one of the main proponents of the need for a process of 'Truth and Reconciliation', to be achieved through a 'shared memory' of the past, including the frank acknowledgement, on the part of the different political forces, of their own roles and mistakes during the period of the Cold War. 'Reconciliation', in his view, would also necessitate an end to any attempts to achieve justice through judicial trials, since justice presupposes getting to know the truth, and the judiciary does not represent the best way to arrive at the truth. In any case, 'judicial truth and historical truth often do not coincide' (Fasanella and Pellegrino, 2005: 155).

It is in this context that Pellegrino's role as President of the *Commissione stragi* can be properly understood, as, in the absence of a process comparable to the one carried out in South Africa and in other countries torn by fratricidal conflicts, he used his chairmanship to steer the Commission towards acting almost as surrogate for a 'Truth and Reconciliation' Commission. Originally set up by Law No. 172, on 17 May 1988, the Commission was chaired first by Senator Libero Gualtieri, of the Republican Party, and later, from 1994, by Senator Giovanni Pellegrino, of the Left Democrats. The Commission was given three main tasks: to assess the results achieved by the fight against terrorism in Italy; to investigate the reasons which had prevented the identification of those responsible for massacres and other acts of subversion since 1969; to assess new evidence in order to supplement the knowledge reached by the Commission of Inquiry into the massacre of Via Fani and the murder of Aldo Moro, which had been set up with Law No. 597 on 23 November 1979. According to D'Agnelli (2003), the two Chairmen marked two different phases in the work of the Commission. During Gualtieri's chairmanship, the main aim was to gather new information in relation to specific events with the help of technical experts, primarily magistrates, judges and police officers. By contrast, during Pellegrino's chairmanship, the aim was 'the construction of a comprehensive historical-political judgement' (ibid.: 3), and this was reflected in the choice of the collaborators, primarily historians and journalists, often chosen 'more for political reasons than for real research needs' (2003: 4). D'Agnelli remarked that parliamentary commissions of inquiry tend to aim at reaching a shared political and cultural judgement on recent historical events, and that this aim did appear achievable in the early years of Pellegrino's chairmanship, in a climate strongly conditioned by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the ideological divide. The personality of the Chair also seemed to match the new goals of the Commission, since Pellegrino's political career was relatively recent and he had a reputation for speaking his own mind rather than adhering to the party line (ibid.: 3).

Pellegrino himself was convinced that within the Commission, which was not a judicial body and did not carry out the role of public prosecutor, the different political representatives could and should have worked together to overcome past divisions and promote a process of national reconciliation, through mutual recognition and a shared memory. His declared intention was to convince all members of the Commission to produce a final unitary report which would help the coun-

try come to terms with its past and heal still-open wounds. To this end, Pellegrino prepared a text as a basis for a unitary report (Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, *Proposta di Relazione Pellegrino*: 1996). However, by the year 2000 it had become clear that the divisions within the Commission would not allow such an outcome (Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, *Settima relazione semestrale sullo stato dei lavori*: 2000). Pellegrino himself had to acknowledge the complete failure of his aims; the Commission terminated its work in 2001, producing eighteen separate reports. In his own summing up of the situation, Pellegrino stated that the lack of consensus within the Commission reflected both the deep divisions between the political elites, as witnessed in the Italian Parliament, and the continuing fractures within the country at large. A further exacerbating factor was the imminence of the general elections (due the same year), which led the political parties to emphasise their distinctive identities and their differences. In this context, it had been illusory to assume that there could have been mutual reconciliation and an overcoming of bitter divisions (Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, 78th session, 22 March 2001). D'Agnelli (2003) also argued that the primacy of politics within the Commission, which in the early 1990s had appeared conducive to a shared judgement of the past, later determined the impossibility of an internal agreement, especially in the context of pressing electoral deadlines and a general failure by the political parties to reach an overarching consensus over institutional reforms.

While for Pellegrino the main obstacle to reconciliation was represented by party political interests and partisanship, his emphasis on a 'shared memory' of the past in turn turned out to be very controversial and was rejected by many historians, for whom the concept itself was highly problematic. Luzzatto (2004) interpreted their disquiet when he proudly reaffirmed the merits of a 'divided memory', which a common history cannot and should not suppress. Many also reacted negatively to the suggestion that 'justice' could be traded in exchange for 'truth', which appeared as both cynical and immoral, particularly from the point of view of the victims of the massacres.

Matters worsened considerably after the *Commissione stragi* was replaced, in 2002, by the Mitrokhin Commission, which examined the files concerning Italy brought to the UK by former KGB archivist Vasilif Mitrokhin, and subsequently made available to the Italian government. The new Commission, chaired by Forza Italia Senator Paolo Guzzanti, was set up by Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to investigate the links between the KGB and representatives of the left parties during the period of the Cold War. The new Commission soon became extremely controversial, under accusations that it was being used as a political instrument in order to discredit the leaders of the left, as opposed to ascertaining historical facts. At any rate, the Commission failed to produce any real evidence incriminating prominent leaders of the centre-left coalition. However, there are some

who believe that the most compromising material may have been the object of political negotiations between left and right, which might explain the fact that the files examined by the Commission were never made public. In April 2006, thirty-four established Italian historians reacted to this situation by publicly asking for the files to be made accessible, in the name of 'ascertaining the truth concerning the past of the nation'. One of these, Salvatore Sechi, even expressed the opinion that the left parties were more interested in keeping alive the idea of 'political mysteries' than in providing the necessary evidence to solve them (Sechi 2006).

The polemics around shared memory, (instrumental) historical revisionism, and (lack of) justice, aggravated by the mutual distrust between the parties in government and those in opposition, and in particular the strong suspicion, on the part of the latter, that Berlusconi and his allies were intent on erasing anti-fascism as the founding value of the Italian Republic, all contributed to a negative evaluation of the concept and process of 'reconciliation', and the notion of a specific Commission to this end quickly became a nonstarter. In short, as O'Leary (2003) put it, 'the political mood has never existed to deal with the legacies of the *anni di piombo* [years of lead]; there have only been partial or juridical attempts to clarify the history of those years.'

The reconstructions of the Italian right

For the purposes of this book, however, the growing literature on conflict resolution and national reconciliation provides a useful lens through which it becomes possible to analyse the reconstructions of stragismo and the Strategy of Tension put forward by Alleanza Nazionale and the groups and representatives of the radical right. It is also possible through its lens to reassess the nature and depth of the transformation of the Movimento Sociale Italiano into the postfascist Alleanza Nazionale. It is not only the legacy of the fascist regime and the Italian Social Republic, in fact, that this party (as well as the radical right) has problems in coming to terms with, as has been shown in the excellent work by Francesco Germinario (1999, 2001, 2005). Just as importantly, the positioning of representatives and intellectuals linked to this party vis-à-vis the much more recent history of the Italian First Republic, specifically concerning the role played by neofascism in its murkiest deeds, can help to throw light upon the alleged distancing between Alleanza Nazionale and the groups to its right, its renouncing of fascist ideals, and its full acceptance of the democratic rules of the game. The literature on national reconciliation, in fact, emphasises many important aspects which go well beyond the highly controversial concept of a 'shared memory' of the past or the simplistic assumption that justice should be sacrificed for the sake of truth. National reconciliation implies above all that each party to the conflict has to change itself, its assumptions about the other(s) and its deep-seated prejudices. Second, each party must acknowledge its past deeds and adopt a critical stance towards its past actions and beliefs. In short, if we adopt a 'creeping

civil war' perspective, and we also accept that one of the poles of the conflict was represented by the neofascist right, then we must also accept that this is one of the groups that should be involved in this difficult process of self-transformation.

Chapter 5 will consider the reconstructions of the Strategy of Tension put forward by representatives and sympathisers of Alleanza Nazionale and will assess the reasons why the party failed to take the opportunity of its participation in the Parliamentary Commission headed by Senator Pellegrino in order to distance itself from neofascist organisations and protagonists. Far from acknowledging that some at least of these organisations played a role in *stragismo*, Alleanza Nazionale representatives on the Commission seemed intent on turning the table on the traditional political enemies of Italian neofascism (above all the Italian Communist Party), placing the blame in turn upon the KGB, anarchist groups, left-wing editor Giangiacomo Feltrinelli and his paramilitary group GAP, the group MAR headed by partisan Carlo Fumagalli, and, last but not least, Palestinian terrorists.

Why is a party which has seemingly abandoned its fascist ideology and is keen to achieve internal and external recognition as a legitimate and fully democratic party of the right, so preoccupied with shifting the blame away from extreme-right 'fringe' organisations and with safeguarding the reputation of notorious neofascists? The interesting aspect is precisely the fact that what is under discussion is not the involvement of the old Movimento Sociale Italiano (the precursor of Alleanza Nazionale) in the Strategy of Tension, as this would obviously have provided a strong motive for the party's attitude of total denial. The possibility that the MSI was implicated has indeed been raised on various occasions (though not in the main trials examined in Part I), but there are as many who believe that the party played an important role in curtailing the subversive activities of the radical groups operating to its right. One of these is Paolo Emilio Taviani, Christian Democratic Minister in successive governments, responsible for outlawing Ordine Nuovo in 1973. According to Taviani, some protagonists of the massacres came originally from the MSI but 'they had moved away from it, and had been expelled since the early 1970s' (Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, *Elenco Audizioni, Aggiornamento al 17 gennaio 2001*, 24th Session, 1 July 1997). Yet the heir to the MSI, Alleanza Nazionale, today appears concerned with shielding neofascist paramilitary organisations from any responsibility in the various acts of *stragismo*, even in the face of copious evidence produced by judiciary investigations and trials. The implications of the party's attitude for a policy of long-lasting national reconciliation, beyond the phase of conflict resolution, are also addressed in this chapter.

Chapter 6 will consider the self-narratives of prominent leaders of extreme-right paramilitary groups, who, either directly or indirectly, in many cases were charged and/or convicted for acts of violence, including acts of *stragismo*. The chapter will analyse not only their attitudes when confronted with charges of *stragismo*, and their own reconstructions of the Strategy of Tension, but also their reassessment of their past political militancy from the perspective of the present.

These personal testimonies are often used by the protagonists as an opportunity to reconstruct their lives as exemplary ideal-types, while, conversely, they can

also represent a sincere attempt to revisit their past actions in a self-critical manner, thereby opening up space for other voices, including those of their victims. Given the complex and often contradictory psychological context within which these memoirs originate, the chapter makes use of narrative psychology and narrative analysis theory in order to investigate the motivations of the narrators, the 'truth' of their narratives, and the contrastive role these can play, either supplying ideological 'ammunition' for current and future generations to continue the struggle or promoting 'closure' through greater mutual understanding and a critical reassessment of their past actions and beliefs.