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Abstract

This thesis analyses the Italian far-right in the broad post-war period, 1945-2023. It employs the disciplines of history and political science to demonstrate the protean nature of this area in Italian politics. To do so, the thesis examines the intellectual foundations of fascism, contending that it lacked a coherent and consistent ideology from the get-go, drawing on diverse and at times even contradictory ideas. Nonetheless it allows the conclusion that this very vagueness acted as one of the greatest assets of the Italian far-right, making it more adaptable to changing circumstances in comparison to other political players. Secondly, the focus lies on the history of the Italian far-right, precisely the period from 1945 to 1995, examining the rise and evolution of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), a neo-fascist party in postwar Italy. Further, light is shed on the extra-parliamentary far-right pendant during the post-war period, with *Ordine Nuovo* (ON) as the most significant group in this regard. Finally, the analysis leads to the resurgence of the far-right in Italy from 1995 to 2023, tracing its continuity with historical fascism while acknowledging ideological and tactical evolution. The analysis conducted unveils an ambivalent relationship of Italy's far-right with fascism, with differences outweighing congruencies, although fascist ideology has never truly disappeared from the political discourse. Especially after the demise of the First Republic trough the so-called "*mani pulite*" scandal, influential figures like Silvio Berlusconi entered the political arena, immediately legitimizing the far-right in consecutive governments. Therefore, the thesis additionally emphasizes the rise of novel parties such as *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), whose progression reached its pinnacle in the establishment of Italy's first far-right administration since Mussolini in 2022, thereby accentuating the sustained existence of the Italian far-right from the MSI in 1945 to FdI in 2023. This observation asserts that FdI distinguishes itself from the remainder of Italy's political panorama through its indeterminate ideological stance, which is emblematic for the far-right area.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die italienische extreme Rechte im Zeitraum der Nachkriegszeit von 1945 bis 2023. Dabei werden die Fachbereiche Geschichte und Politikwissenschaft genutzt, um die Wandlungsfähigkeit dieses Sektors in der italienischen Politik zu demonstrieren. Zu diesem Zweck wird in dieser Arbeit die intellektuelle Grundlage des Faschismus untersucht. Dementsprechend wird argumentiert, dass es dem Faschismus von Anfang an an einer kohärenten Ideologie mangelte; stattdessen wurde auf vielfältige und manchmal widersprüchliche Ideen zurückgegriffen. Dennoch wird daraus geschlossen, dass gerade diese Unbestimmtheit eine der größten Stärken der italienischen extremen Rechten darstellte, da sie im Vergleich zu anderen politischen Akteuren besser auf sich ändernde Umstände reagieren konnte. Ein weiterer Schwerpunkt dieser Arbeit liegt auf der Geschichte der italienischen extremen Rechten, insbesondere im Zeitraum von 1945 bis 1995. Hierbei wird der Aufstieg und die Entwicklung des *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), einer neo-faschistischen Partei im Nachkriegsitalien, untersucht. Zudem wird die außerparlamentarische extreme Rechte in der Nachkriegszeit beleuchtet, wobei besonderes Augenmerk auf die Gruppierung *Ordine Nuovo* (ON) gelegt wird. Abschließend wird die Wiederbelebung der extremen Rechten in Italien von 1995 bis 2023 untersucht, wobei etwaige Kontinuitäten mit dem historischen Faschismus verfolgt werden, wenngleich auch ideologische und taktische Veränderungen anerkannt werden. Die durchgeführte Analyse zeigt eine ambivalente Beziehung zwischen der italienischen extremen Rechten und dem Faschismus auf, wobei die Unterschiede die Gemeinsamkeiten überwiegen. Besonders nach dem Zusammenbruch der Ersten Republik durch den sogenannten "*mani pulite*" Skandal traten einflussreiche Personen wie Silvio Berlusconi auf die politische Bühne und legitimisierte sofort die extreme Rechte in aufeinanderfolgenden Regierungen. Daher betont diese Masterarbeit auch den Aufstieg vorsätzlich neuartiger Parteien wie *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), deren Fortschritt im Jahr 2022 mit der Bildung der ersten extremen Rechtsregierung Italiens seit Mussolini seinen Höhepunkt erreichte. Dies unterstreicht die anhaltende Existenz der italienischen extremen Rechten vom MSI im Jahr 1945 bis zu FdI im Jahr 2023; FdI unterscheidet sich dabei von anderen politischen Gruppierungen durch unbestimmte ideologische Positionierungen, die für den Bereich der extremen Rechten als charakteristisch angesehen werden können.

To my mother Heidi for her unconditional love,
to my brother Florian for being a source of inspiration and guidance,
to my grandmother Marianna for teaching me the most valuable life lessons.

To my girlfriend Benedetta. When work consumed our precious time, you never held me back and always pushed me up when I was feeling down. A sacrifice I hope to reciprocate in the future.

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Introduction

As Italian voters made their way to the polling stations on September 25th, 2022, a palpable sense of awareness permeated the air. Close observers of Italian politics had seen the writing on the wall for a long time coming. In fact, since the "*mani pulite*" scandal in the 1990s, Italy has grappled with a deep-seated discontent towards its political establishment, leading to the rise of populist and anti-establishment parties – which continuously used to leave nothing but unfulfilled promises in their wake. Accordingly, months prior to the elections, polls clearly indicated who the winner was going to be.

One month later, on October 22nd, Italy finally witnessed the formation of its first far-right government since the demise of Mussolini's 21-year-long fascist regime in 1943, which left an indelible mark on the country, shaping the political discourse for decades to come. Until the formation of the Meloni government, almost 80 years passed in which the far-right was shunned and excluded from Italy's political life. As of today, this pivotal moment in Italian politics warrants a deeper examination of its historical importance, as it signals a reemergence of seemingly forgotten political beliefs and ideas.

Hence, through a scholarly lens, this thesis aims to analyse, first, the roots of the far-right. Since its inception, fascism has been an anti-intellectual movement, never advocating a clearly defined ideology. Its meaning, in fact, cannot even be understood in terms of the original theses that it periodically adopted: after making an effort to define a target, a notion, or a course of action, it frequently did not hesitate, after considerable trial and error, to entirely change course and reject particular goals or concepts as being insufficient or in conflict with its own values. What might appear to be sheer charlatanry developed into a powerful, unstoppable political idea. The far-right, much like the elusive Greek god Proteus, exhibits a shapelessness that defies easy categorization. Just like the Greek god – who would transform into various shapes, such as animals or objects, to avoid capture or to deceive those who sought his knowledge or power – the far-right encompasses a diverse range of ideologies, adapting and morphing into unlikely circumstances to suit the political climate.

This protean nature of the far-right poses a challenge in understanding and addressing its multifaceted manifestations, requiring a nuanced approach to navigate its ever-changing contours. Correspondingly, the far-right also represented nearly

every political subject, as will be shown in Chapter II, when a thorough analysis of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) – the predecessor movement of Meloni's 2022 victorious *Fratelli d'Italia* party – will be undertaken.

From 1945 to 1995 the MSI hegemonized the parliamentary far-right in Italian politics; rooted in the legacy of fascism and founded by former adherents of Benito Mussolini, the MSI sought to provide a platform for those dissatisfied with Italy's post-war political landscape. In its early years, the MSI faced marginalization due to its association with the fascist regime, which was clearly detrimental to its ambitions in a country whose constitution was founded on anti-fascist values. However, under different leaderships, the party underwent different, and one might also say, contradictory transformations. On an organisational level, the immediate post-fascist Italian far-right saw itself confronted with three possibilities: that of setting up clandestine groups in an anti-democratic function, that of constituting parties to disguise clandestine activities, or that of inserting fascist nuclei into the main existing parties. Under Almirante, its first secretary, the MSI opted for the third choice – to disguise itself as a Trojan horse within the Italian parliamentary system. The initial phase of the MSI was very much characterized by the antinomy of being "fascists in a democracy". Later on, Almirante aimed to redefine the party's image, presenting it as a conservative and nationalist force rather than a revival of fascism. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the MSI gained electoral support and parliamentary representation, especially in the regions of Southern Italy. It capitalized on nationalist sentiments, anti-communist rhetoric, and social conservatism, appealing to a segment of the population dissatisfied with mainstream political parties – but ultimately, it always fell short when it mattered.

Despite its efforts to distance itself from its extremist past, the MSI faced continuous criticism and controversy due to the lingering perception of fascist connections – while being kept at bay from any institutional role in a political landscape divided between the omnipotent *Democrazia Cristiana* (DC) and the ever-solid *Partito Comunista Italiano* (PCI) in the post-war era.

In between 1945 and 1995, when the party decided to completely rebrand itself to *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), it had already morphed into every possible political representation – in unmistakable protean fashion – from the middle-classes to the

upper-classes, big industries, small enterprises, the rich, the poor, the young and the old, the educated and uneducated as well as Northerners and Southerners alike.

Simultaneously to the parliamentary far-right in these years, Italy also disposed of an extra-parliamentary pendant, namely *Ordine Nuovo* (ON). The group emerged in 1956 when a faction led by Pino Rauti left the mainstream far-right party, the MSI. Considering themselves the guardians of a long-forgotten tradition and a superior elite, ON created an abstract, mythological community condemning modern civilization, capitalism and democracy. At the same time, ON served as a hub for all kind of subversive tendencies, culminating most notably in a failed *coup d'état*, or the "*Golpe Borghese"*, exposing connections between far-right groups, state institutions, as well as foreign influences.

Chapter III will shed light on the resurgence of the far-right in Italy from 1995 to 2023, highlighting its continuity with historical fascism while also acknowledging the evolution of its ideology and tactics. Moving forward, the chapter will explore the shift from the First Republic to the Second Republic in the 1990s, marked by the collapse of traditional political parties due to corruption scandals, allowing the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) to gain prominence and adapt quicker than others to the newly created circumstances. Eventually, its transformation into a mainstream political force was influenced by the cultural shift brought about on the one hand by the demise of the old parties, and the other by the emergence of influential figures like Silvio Berlusconi – who legitimised the parliamentary far-right – in three different governments as junior partners.

In an effort to conclusively legitimize the far-right, Gianfranco Fini (the former leader of the MSI) pursued an even more centrist and inclusive political transformation which significantly diverged from the traditionalist and conservative factions within the party, thus leading to internal divisions. His controversial statements expressing regret for fascism further alienated the party's far-right base, which eventually led to a considerable loss of support from the population and further internal political fragmentation.

Eventually, the phoenix that made the far-right rise from the ashes, which had been stale for many decades, presented itself in the form of *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdL). As the latest transformation of the far-right, after the Fini-Berlusconi era in 2012, FdI slowly took the stage of Italian politics. Led by Giorgia Meloni, the party quickly

established itself as a prominent force on the far-right of the political spectrum, advocating for national sovereignty, conservative values and a tougher stance on immigration. FdI has arguably been, ever since its creation, a modern continuation of what the MSI started in 1945. Yet just as a leopard cannot change it spots, FdI never got alienated from its true far-right descendance, allowing it to adapt to the evermore changing environment of the 21st century, and eventually garnering support from all sides especially in moments of national crises. Since October 22nd of 2022, the party that considers itself the heir of fascism has been in power in Italy. As the stage is set and the country embarks on a path which has been uncharted since the Mussolini era, the nation stands at a crossroad, facing both challenges and opportunities as it confronts the complexities of a far-right government in the 21st century. As Fdl continues adapting to the changing circumstances of the country, the world watches, curious to witness the unfolding of this pivotal chapter in Italian history.

Chapter I: The Fascist Past

I. Roots of the Right: A Political Chameleon

Fascism has been an anti-intellectual movement from the very beginning; as a matter of fact, it had little to do with any intellectual theories at all. Fascist doctrine was neither philosophy in the traditional sense nor a religion, as often claimed by Mussolini. It was not even a precise political theory that could be encapsulated in a set of terms, as there was never a specific, well-defined theory advanced by fascism. Instead, the reality is that its meaning cannot even be understood in terms of the unique theses that it occasionally embraced.[1] After attempting to define a goal, a concept, or a route that it meant to take, it frequently would not hesitate, after much trial and error, to completely reverse its direction and reject specific objectives or ideas as being insufficient or contrary to its own beliefs.[2] It is viable to argue that the absence of a cohesive and essentially consistent ideology was both one of the shortcomings and strengths of fascism. Nonetheless, ideas developed in an age of anti-democratic thought helped in preparing, interpreting, and constructing fascism as an idea. Noticeably, many of these thoughts were not compatible, as their impact was sporadic and they came from persons with diverse intellectual backgrounds. However, successive periods of fascism required adapted and refurbished *raisons d'être*.

Gentile, the designated philosopher of the dictatorship, only embraced fascism in 1923 following the March on Rome. His political philosophy was elaborated once the Blackshirts had gained power – hence, it was nothing else than an a-posteriori philosophical legitimization of the fascist regime.[3] Nonetheless, like many other critical observers of his time, Gentile sensed the deep moral crisis Italy and the Italians were suffering from – a crisis that could only be overcome by the imposition of something unheard of. In hindsight, Gentile – who disapproved of much of what Mussolini was putting forward (especially the 1938 racial laws) – was nothing more than a disappointed conservative, that happened to become the mouthpiece of the fascists whenever they deemed it opportune.[4]

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[1] Adrian Lyttelton, *Italian Fascism from Vilfredo Pareto to Giovanni Gentile*, (Oxford: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1973), 11.
[2] Ibid., 302.
[3] Ibid., 14.
[4] Unknown Author, *Gentile: come e perché uno strano tipo di liberale diventò fascista*, 10. January 2005, (accessed on March 31, 2023), https://digilander.libero.it/moses/gentile01.html.

Pareto – often labelled as a "precursor of fascism", due to some seeing in his sociological work the foundation of fascism (mainly through his elitist theory) – in reality was a radical libertarian. Regardless of that, fascists used him shamelessly for their own purposes – just like Mussolini, who, lacking a "*Mein Kampf*" or a "*Das Kapital*", desperately required the legitimacy of someone with Pareto's intellectual calibre.[5] Before the March on Rome in 1922, Pareto was completely unknown to most fascist authors and intellectuals, and it was not until much later that they realized that *some* of his sociology complemented their ideology. Pareto, on his part, looked through the real fascist nature rather quickly – on October 31st, 1922, he wrote that "the program of fascism is one thing; the goal which it will attain may be completely different." In fact, the only thing Mussolini and Pareto had in common, is that both were children of their times; the same social, economic, and political conditions that gave rise to ideas like fascism produced Pareto's theories.[6] Nevertheless, thanks to the correspondence with his close friends, we know that he never stopped expressing strong reservations about fascism and "Mussolino's" basic policies, as he called him in most of his letters.[7]

The same applies to *Sorel*, whose support for Bolshevism is a matter of abundant public record. In his renowned "*Reflections on Violence*" he fuelled the fascist credo of the use of brute force and direct action to overthrow decadent liberal democracy. The juxtaposed physical images of the New Man – young, vigorous, and agile – and of the old representation of the liberal order – obese, short-sighted, and sluggish – were very powerful in Sorel's myth, which served as a "body of images" for fascism.[8] Even though Mussolini, in an interview with a Spanish newspaper, claimed that "[it] is to Georges Sorel that [he] owe[s] the most"[9] – the sympathy was never reciprocated. It is true that much was made about Sorel's proximity to fascism, even though in reality, he was at odds with it from the very beginning; in 1921 he wrote to

[5] Renato Cirillo, "Was Vilfredo Pareto Really a 'Precursor' of Fascism," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 1983, 242.
[6] Ibid., 243.
[7] Ibid., 235.
[8] Adrian Lyttelton, *Italian Fascism from Vilfredo Pareto to Giovanni Gentile*, 23.
[9] Jack Roth, "The Roots of Italian Fascism: Sorel and Sorelismo," *The Journal of Modern History*, 1967, 42.

an Italian friend that “things in Italy seem to me to be going very badly [...]. The disorder [...], could well bring Italy back to the times of the Middle Ages”.[10]

Likewise, the glorification of the aphorism by *Nietzsche* contributed to the disdain of a cohesive, systematic, and formal metaphysics of fascism. To many he "unmasked" moral and political philosophy as little more than a rationalization of interest or feeling. Vitality is the absolute good, and life has its highest expression in the active, decisive individual. The effect of Nietzsche is clear in this instance since his ideas were extremely popular in Italy between 1900 and 1915, despite the fact that they were sometimes only known through rumours or in popularly distorted forms.[11]

In fact – as demonstrated above – most of the writers fascism drew on were not even fascists. Even in its developed form, the fascist doctrine was never coherent. In spite of that, in the case of all these authors, it is clear how some of their concepts spread across fascism, frequently through Mussolini’s interpretations. The “*Duce*” popularized many of the ideas mentioned here, since he was a keen, but shallow reader.[12] Despite the fact that philistinism was a hallmark fascist characteristic, there was more to the fascist antipathy to philosophy than just that. The fascist intellectuals displayed an anti-intellectualism with obvious cultural origins.

Ever since, fascism was characterized by an emphasis on the person rather than what the person had to say. Lemmonio Boreo, the protagonist of one of Soffici’s novels, does not find a reason to favour anarchism over socialism, but rather, "what intrigued him were the guys preaching these doctrines" – indicating the perennial far-right credo, that the words of a speech are considerably less important than the man who utters them.[13]

To conclude, fascism was more of a “way of life” than a political doctrine or a philosophy at any point. The 1914-15 catastrophe turned an intellectual heresy into a political schism. The idea of spontaneity and bravery helped early fascism flourish. The ethos that its founders liked to think they had is best exemplified by a statement of one of the characters in one of Marinetti's experimental novels: “Anything may be improvised, even God! I am the leader of that crowd!” However, paradoxically, the

[10] James Meisel, „A Premature Fascist? Sorel and Mussolini,“ *The Western Political Quarterly*, 1950, 21.
[11] Adrian Lyttelton, *Italian Fascism from Vilfredo Pareto to Giovanni Gentile*, 14.
[12] Ibid., 12.
[13] Ibid., 23.

shapelessness of fascist, far-right thought later on proved to be one of its greatest assets. What started out as an ideological blasphemy, as mere opportunism, turned out to be a triumphant, non-eradicable, political idea. Within the last century the far-right, in Italy and elsewhere, distinguished itself for its anti-ideology and for its sensibility of what matters most, at that specific moment. Whereas the left seems to be restricted, today, just as much as 100 years ago, by its political subject (the proletariat) and by its ideological framework (the class-struggle), the post-fascist far-right flows seemingly effortlessly through time and space, adapting to apparently contradicting political subjects, as it represented almost every political subject, from the lowest strata of society, to the middle-class, to the elite – over the course of its history. By the same token, today, just as a century ago, writers like J.R.R. Tolkien (although not exactly a fascist) are on the bookshelves of the new far-right. Meloni herself, Italy's first far-right PM since Mussolini, is a renown aficionado of the fantasy genre, just like many other *Fratelli d'Italia* cadres, who started adopting fantasy-mythologies to substitute the censored symbolism of the fascist past. Indeed, especially the Italian far-right, holding on to perennial ideas without names and to seemingly contradicting writers, lives up to its history as a political chameleon, which can nestle into the unlikeliest circumstance.

II. Coming to Terms with the Fascist Past

Mussolini was toppled in July 1943 by a group of disgruntled fascist leaders and a palace plot that was approved, if not actively directed, by the King. Italy was split into two parts between 1943 and 1945: the North was ruled by Mussolini (*Repubblica Sociale Italiana*), which was under the control of the German occupiers, and the South was ruled by the royal government, which eventually fought alongside the Allies. The "Kingdom of the South" and its jurisdiction gradually expanded as the Allied troops advanced northward, while they saw the northern Resistance's calls for dramatic social change as deeply alarming. The Allies, who dreaded the rise of communist and socialist rule, shared this worry. As Allied forces conquered Rome in 1944, the royal government restored its formal seat there, inheriting the "continuity of the state".[14]

[14] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 15.

The Roman government and the Allied Military Administration immediately got to work stopping the "wind of the North" after the Germans and fascists unconditionally surrendered in April 1945.[15] Due to a breakdown in unity of the Resistance parties brought on by the *Cold War* in 1947, socialists and communists were expelled from power. The DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*), which achieved a large and unmatched victory in the 1948 elections (50% of the turnout), became henceforth the center of the conservative alliance. In fact, the social groupings that had backed the fascist government had succeeded in returning to their original positions of power, immediately after the war. These remarks, however, should not be interpreted as indicating that fascism was still in power; quite on the contrary, both the military loss and the reality that fascist ideas and beliefs were universally rejected and characterized by failure could not be disregarded. The secular and liberal middle and upper classes, which had previously accepted fascism out of fear of revolution after WWI, now saw the Church and the party associated with it, the DC, as their greatest line of defense. Hence, neo-fascism was unable to take up its predecessor's position as the principal advocate for conservative values. Yet, given the two-decades-long commitment to fascism by the Italian people and the Church, and the resurgence of their old enemy communism, they were hesitant to turn against it.[16]

One immediate result was the nearly complete failure to expel fascists from the military and civil structures. The fascist regime in its 20 years in power was extremely cautious about alienating the bureaucracy and considered it as a crucial conduit for middle-class agreement despite its much-boasted desire for efficiency and severe discipline. Bureaucracy responded in kind: 95% of the personnel had enlisted before 1943, as data from 1973 shows. Several divisions of the state institutions had similar characteristics. 62 out of 64 first-class prefects had already served under fascism. The same was true for all 241 deputy prefects, 135 provincial heads of the state police, and 139 deputy chiefs. What is more, just five of these top-bureaucrats seemed to have made any kind of contribution to the Resistance; on top of that, the rank-and-file's ideological stance matched those of their superiors almost all across the entire administration. As Ferraresi writes, these are unmistakable signs that the attempt to

[15] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 16.
[16] Ibid., 17.

purify the apparatuses failed miserably and this issue merits examination both for its historical significance and its implications for the far-right's future.[17]

On the post-war anti-fascist agenda, the purges were given primary attention. The initial goal had been to "*colpire in alto, indulgere in basso*", or in other words, to target higher positions of authority while showing mercy to the vast majority of government servants and other low-level employees who frequently joined the fascist Party just to support themselves. Legally, purges violate the nonretroactivity principle, a cornerstone of any state that upholds the rule of law ("*nullum crimen sine lege*"). In reality, because purges are essentially political actions, their likelihood of success depends on the strength and will of those in authority. The new Italian administration, which was headed by many people who had long aided fascism, was in fact not very encouraging: the individuals in control refused to face justice for their prior dealings with the dictatorship and made every effort to obstruct the success of the "*defascistizzazione*".[18]

For instance, sanctions were placed on people "who had participated with pertinent deeds to hold the fascist dictatorship in power", according to one penal article. Nonetheless, when applying this article, the courts distinguished between the state and the fascist regime, along with the "causal link" rule.[19] Hence, they were able to free people like Guido Leto, the former head of the notorious OVRA secret police ("*Opera Vigilanza Repressione Antifascismo"*) and later deputy commander of the RSI's police, on the premises that he had worked for the state as opposed to the regime. The implementation was then abruptly ended in February 1948 by a decree that readmitted all bureaucrats to their positions, including at the highest levels, with full pay. This may be simply because the DC needed their votes for the vital elections of April 1948, which were just two months away at that point.[20]

Another, and perhaps most contentious, occurrence of this time was the 1946 declaration of an amnesty for offenses related to the *Civil War*. The wording of the amnesty excluded individuals who had committed "especially heinous tortures" on their victims and was intended as a symbol of national rehabilitation, especially for

[17] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 18.
[18] Ibid., 19.
[19] Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica: Scritti su fascism, antifascismo e continuità dello Stato*, (Rome: Bollati Boringhieri, 1995), 242.
[20] Ibid.

lower-rank fascists who were only guilty of minor infractions. The way the sentence was phrased was not exactly appropriate, though, as it is difficult to comprehend how individuals not plagued by sadism could conceive that conducting not only “simple tortures” is unsufficient, but also “heinous torture” is, thereby demanding that they be “extremely heinous" – as Pavone contends.[21] Yet, the judicial system, and especially the Supreme Court, went well beyond this text, freeing fascist torturers who had committed the most horrifying crimes.[22]

To give yet another example, to get rid of the High Commissar on Sanctions, after his demands rankled certain powerful individuals, they even went so far as to bring down and reassemble Bonomi's first administration. Senior bureaucrats and, in particular, a judiciary that had not been initially cleansed progressively took control of the purging system. The primary law governing the situation demanded that those "members of the fascist government and fascist officials who had been guilty of destroying constitutional guarantees, abolishing popular freedom, creating the fascist regime, and [who] thus compromised and betrayed the future of the country, leading to the present tragedy" be subjected to harsh punishment. The courts demanded proof of a direct causal relationship between the defendants' actions and each of the accusations mentioned in the act. Naturally, no single fascist leader could be held accountable for directly producing *all* of these catastrophes. Therefore, the whole fascist higher classes escaped punishment. The main fascist war criminals also received light treatment. First-degree courts frequently handed down severe sentences as soon as the war ended; however, later, higher tribunals and special courts drastically reduced the terms or even freed the offenders, including those who had held the highest positions, such as Marshal Rodolfo Graziani, the supreme commander of the RSI army. As early as the mid-1940s, many fascist leaders and militants who had thereby evaded republican justice returned to the political scene and began to reconstitute the far-right sector.[23]

[21] Claudio Pavone, *Alle origini della Repubblica: Scritti su fascism, antifascismo e continuità dello Stato*, 252.
[22] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 20.
[23] Ibid.

III. The Ideological Universe of the Italian Far-right

A) Metamorphosis in-between Demise and Resurrection

The well-known reference to the term of the "return of fascism" holds no sensible ground, for a number of reasons. Firstly, a historical phenomenon never repeats itself in the same way as it happened once. Secondly, one cannot speak of the return of something that never completely ceased to exist, not even after the epochal loss of 1945. In fact, in Italy, more than anywhere else in Europe, what never disappeared does not return: rather, it regenerates, manifesting itself in new disguises, in accordance with the day's pressing issues.[24]

Throughout the postwar era the far-right in Italy was a small, active minority, one whose relentless, uncompromising rejection of the system severely restricted its grasp on material resources. Recent sociological and political research has paid very little attention to the far-right's ideological landscape. This overlooking should be understood in the context of the postwar anti-fascist intelligentsia's overall approach, which has tended to despise all fascist ideologies and reject the possibility of a "fascist culture" at all. Even more blatant was the intelligentsia's denial of neo-fascist ideology, which was either completely disregarded or merely dismissed as nostalgic rhetoric intermingled with a variety of odd, esoteric lucubrations created by "crazy" cliques. Because of this mindset, it was impossible to delve into the far-right's symbolic world. Yet, their symbolism must have been very potent since it was able to sustain a small, profoundly oppositional milieu in the difficult struggle it waged against the system for over 50 years, from the conclusion of the war until the mid 90s, when it made its way back to *Palazzo Chigi*. In reality, there was always a robust ideological discussion inside this movement, for the whole time; the far-right had a number of strong intellectuals on its side, and it had access to an excellent network of publishing and editing enterprises. The upcoming sub-chapters will therefore focus on some theoretical key-concepts that welded the far-right together.[25]

[24] Claudio Vercelli, *Neofascismo in Grigio: La Destra Radicale tra l'Italia e l'Europa*, (Torino: Enaudi, 2021), 23.
[25] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 31.

B) Theoretical Points of Reference of the Far-right

a) Oxymorons

Throughout the post-war era until its resurgence in 1995, the Italian far-right continued with its obsession with *oxymorons*, which dates back to the coinage of concepts like the "*Conservative Revolution*" or "national bolshevism" in the inter-war periods.[26] In the post-war era it was all about avoiding to fall into ideological traps. Ideologies were seen as little more than "*doxa*", false narratives of the past and a deadly deception for understanding the present. To the far-right, ideologies reflected reason at work, claiming to subject the rawness of reality to the pretentious abstractions of rationality. The far-right in the 20th century had a general belief that ideology by nature was inherently leftist because it relied on arbitrary labels like "right" or "left", which could only offer a partial understanding of the world. In order to demonstrate that both the right and the left had epistemic gaps, oxymorons were used; on the other hand, transcending these categories would enable the application of a wider perspective in light of the complexity of the world, even if it looked like a contradiction at first sight.[27]

In other words, it involved putting forth the novel idea of an amalgamation between the inventive and avant-garde aspects of the left and the original facets of the right, while simultaneously disengaging from a counter-revolutionary tradition that had grown to be a heavy burden because it was unable to recognize the novelties that had emerged in the historical landscape of the second half of the 20th century.[28]

As in the case of the "national socialism" of a Maurice Barrès or a Georges Valois, this political culture had the trait of reconstructing certain concepts from the left. The "revolutionary right" had emerged on the political and intellectual scene behind the "revolutionary left", using the latter, if not as an interlocutor, then frequently as a resource to draw categories and attitudes to be reworked from a different perspective. Hitler himself had acknowledged in "*Mein Kampf*" – in reference to the Austrian socialists' efforts to uphold the use of the German language in the

[26] Marco Revelli, *La cultura della destra radicale*, (Roma: Franco Angeli, 1984), 14.
[27] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, (Rome: Carocci, 2014), 24.
[28] Ibid.

Habsburg empire – that he was sympathetic towards the activities of the socialists in many ways, as astonishing as it might sound to many.[29]

A similar behaviour could be detected especially in the Italian parliamentary far-right throughout all those years. It thus does not come as a surprise that Gianfranco Fini, the leader of the MSI/AN (*Movimento Socialo Italiano/ Allenaza Nazionale*, the parliamentary far-right), regretted in the 90s to not have sided with the protesters of the year '68 – "missing out on a great opportunity" – as a "protest party and a party of government".[30] In fact, the usage of oxymorons equipped the far-right with a much deeper toolset in order to manoeuvre through the political landscape of the second half of the 20th century, serving as a catalysator for consent from its humble beginnings as "men amongst ruins" to the mid-90s, when the far-right eventually reappeared on the big political stages.

b) The Attitude before History & Problem of Tradition

"Revolutionaries" on the far-right were always framed for viewing history as not much more than simply an unnecessary burden placed on the shoulders of the people. The far-right was perfectly aware that the defeat in 1945 had been of an epochal magnitude, and it was precisely this epochality that had decreed a revision of its attitude before History[31] – with a capital "H". One was to presume that History itself did not view favorably one's political side if the rubble of Berlin symbolized that a period had ended with a crushing defeat; as a result, one was to distrust History. Or, to put it in another way, History abandoned Tradition (the sphere of primordial and perennial truths), submitting hopelessly to mere Becoming and progress. The primary driving force behind the conflict between Tradition and History was obviously the debacle suffered in WWII: on that occasion, History had exposed itself as the enemy, acknowledging victory to the forces that shielded themselves with the claim of precisely representing the reasons for a History reduced to progress. Henceforth, Tradition became the meta-historical retreat of the perseverance of values in the face

[29] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 25.

[30] Andrea Riscassi, *Andrea Riscassi*, 2023, (accessed on April 25, 2023), https://www.andreariscassi.com/2011/06/06/il-fascista-libertario-gli-ossimori-di-luciano-lanna/.

[31] History with a capital "H" is the study of the past as "thing in itself" (especially Hegel's account of History as an entity might be very useful in understanding this concept); history with a minuscule "h" is simply the mere succession of things, anything and everything, everywhere that has ever happened.

of History's ongoing changeability, and as a result, it came to play a crucial part in the intellectual milieu of the far-right. For as long as History was an expression of ideals of Tradition, the connection with it had been beneficial. The bourgeois era, though, had unfortunately caused a profound crack in the course of History by directing society towards materialism and individualism over heroism and a sense of community. From that point on, History morphed into an inexhaustible Becoming that had obscured the world of Tradition. The death trap created by the blunders of History has now been exposed through the bourgeois age.[32]

The constant appeal to Tradition consolidated the far-right, giving it a strong feeling of identity and self-sufficiency, shielding it from any other theoretical influence that could not be traced back to the concept of Tradition. Julius Evola, the undeniable pioneer of this political culture, would have been a noteworthy illustration of this mindset, but he was only the most prominent and evident embodiment of a more ubiquitous attitude that the far-right had come to identify with. From the end of WWII to this day, traditionalism constituted essentially the only position and political proposal developed by this area, that is, the vague idea that all moral and religious truth derives from divine revelation and is transmitted through tradition since human reason is unable to fully grasp it. Simultaneously, to this day, the attitude of the far-right towards History did not change either – as can be deduced from FdI's (*Fratelli d'Italia*) continuous regress to fantasy mythologies, from the *Lord of the Rings* to the *Hobbit*, in an effort to substitute the censored symbolism of the fascist past, or to put it differently, its self-perceived fall from grace with History.[33]

c) Shortcomings in Committing to a Revolutionary Subject

Most importantly, its incapacity, if not open rejection, of identifying a historical subject that could be utilized and exploited in a political battle was the main flaw of the post-WWII far-right and the one that doomed it to play an overall minority role. It was this constraint that set it apart from historical right-wing movements that had littered Europe's political landscape between the two world wars. The parallel to

[32] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici,* 27.

[33] Marco Bruna, "Tolkien, così l'universo fantasy del Signore degli Anelli influenza i discorsi di Giorgia Meloni," *Il Corriere,* 26. October 2022.

those movements is important to highlight: all in all, historical fascism was effective in intercepting the middle-class malaise, coupling it with the segment of Italian society that had identified with the war effort prior to the interventionism of 1914-15. Nazism – as Germinario writes – on the orders of Hitler and Goebbels, had privileged the sections of German society overwhelmed by the 1929 crisis, while also being mindful to the demands of the middle classes drastically affected by the economic crisis of the Weimar Republic.[34]

The Italian far-right after 1945, on the other hand, was never able to pinpoint its own revolutionary subject of reference, resigning itself to a probably marginal and testimonial role throughout a full period of history. In that respect, locating a revolutionary subject meant adapting to the vulgar game of History, accepting its progressive logic whereby one social order was succeeded by another, with men determined to fight each other over ideological issues. This was the inevitable result of a judgment on the world of Tradition that had essentially shifted outside of History. The far-right was fully aware that a revolutionary subject might change over time, depending on the specific historical circumstances: failing to see this would have meant accepting the absurd logic of History's mutability.[35]

Throughout the post-war period until 1995, the extra-parliamentary far-right in particular dissociated itself completely from the logic of representing a specific strata of society, whereas the parliamentary far-right changed its subject of reference continuously, as they saw fit. From the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI) to the *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) and now *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI), everyone has been represented, from the rich to the poor – until current PM Giorgia Meloni seemingly found a winning formula in 2022 becoming the first far-right PM since Benito Mussolini.[36]

[34] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 30.
[35] Ibid., 34.
[36] Luisa Perri, "L'identikit degli elettori di Fratelli d'Italia: un partito sempre più radicato sul territorio," *Secolo d'Italia*, 29, April 2022.

IV. The Philosopher of the Far-Right: Julius Evola

A) Biography

By far the most important intellectual figure of the Italian far-right and of the far-right in general, a figure mostly unknown outside of its narrowest circles, is Julius Evola (1898-1974). Born in Rome and arguably a descendant of Sicilian nobility, Evola started off as an artist and painter during his time at university, where he met Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and briefly joined the pre-fascist, futurist movement. Due to Evola's disapproval of Marinetti's excessive nationalism and his support for the industry, the two parted ways early in 1916. Thereupon, Evola fought as an artillery officer during WWI, despite thinking that Italy was fighting on the wrong side, against Germany. After the war, Evola returned to society and was said to have had a "spiritual crisis" caused by the "intolerance of civil life" and his urge to "transcend the emptiness" of everyday human activity. In a time where he wrote that his experimentation with psychedelics nearly drove him insane, he started reading a variety of esoteric books and slowly got more into the occult. Similarly to other intellectuals from the "Lost Generation" who came of age during WWI, Evola's estrangement from modern values acquired an uncompromising, eccentric, and reactionary expression, triggering a prolific writing-career that lasted for almost six decades.[37]

In many of his early books Evola put esoteric perspectives on traditionalism, orientalism, occultism, alchemy, and mysticism forward. It has to be noted that his works, opposing christianity and supporting imperial Roman and mystical, pagan ideas, were of little interest to the general public. Likewise, his perception of buddhism was equally distinguished, praising its "anti-democratic" notion and its firm belief in traditions that had been lost and distorted in the West.[38] In fact, Evola was always on the periphery of society; by the same token, he never bothered to become a member the fascist party, something much advertised by his followers bent on demonstrating his distance from fascism. Simultaneously, his towering nonconformism, his interest in esoteric wisdom, and his imperial paganism were not well received by the state

[37] Paul Furlong, "Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola," *Routledge Studies in Extremism and Democracy*, 2011, 9.
[38] Unknown Author, *The Famous People*, no date, (accessed on April 29, 2023), https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/julius-evola-9797.php.

bureaucracy at a time when Mussolini and the Pope were ratifying an agreement that made the Catholic Church a cornerstone of the dictatorship. Nevertheless, Evola managed to supervise the cultural page of "*Il Regime Fascista*", a significant newspaper, for about ten years.[39]

Certainly, Mussolini and Evola had a multifaceted relationship that evolved over time, reflecting the changing dynamics of Italian fascism itself during the interwar period. At first, Evola supported Mussolini's rise to power and his fascist government, seeing it as a possible means to implement his own ideas about a traditionalist, spiritual society. However, as time went on, Evola became increasingly critical of Mussolini's government, believing that it had become too influenced by modernism and liberalism. He argued instead that true fascism should prioritize the creation of a society based on a "spiritual aristocracy" rather than a political or economic elite.

That being said, despite their differences, Mussolini kept Evola in high regards for his intellectual rigor and esoteric knowledge throughout the whole "*ventennio fascista*". Towards the end of Mussolini's dictatorship, Evola was even granted direct access to the *Duce*, supervising him on the implementation of the racial laws, even though his advice is said to have been of "little impact". In fact, Evola was surely kept close to the fascist regime, but never left the sidelines of officiality, as "some sort of eccentric" – much alike the nazis saw him.[40] The "*Ahnenerbe*", the official think-tank of the SS, dismissed many of Evola's ideas as "supranational" and "aristocratic", labelling his work as "fantasy" that disregarded historical facts.[41] Even though Heinrich Himmler, the leader of the SS, knew him personally, this did not prevent the SS to keep a dossier on Evola (document AR-126) describing his aspirations for a "Roman-Germanic Imperium" after all as "utopian" and him as a "reactionary Roman", whose objective was an "insurrection of the old aristocracy against the modern world". The document concluded that the SS should "stop his effectiveness in Germany" and offer him no assistance.[42]

After Mussolini's fall from power in 1943 Evola managed to flee first to Berlin and then to Vienna with the assistance of the SD ("*Sicherheitsdienst*"), the intelligence

[39] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 44.
[40] Franco Ferraresi, "*Julius Evola: Tradition, Reaction and the Radical Right*," *European Journal of Sociology*, 1987, 84.
[41] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 44.
[42] Hans Thomas Hakl, *A Short Introduction to Julius Evola,* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2019), 18.

agency of the SS, despite their disagreements. It was also in Vienna in 1945, during a Soviet bombing raid, where a shell fragment hit him, paralysing him from the waist down for the rest of his life, before he made his return to Italy once again.

As of that time Evola started, through his writings, to become "the guru" for generations of far-right militants to come, not just in Italy but certainly worldwide, considering that the translations and editions of his most important volumes have embraced almost all continents by now.[43]

In 1951, further cementing Evola's legacy, he was charged on suspicion that he was an ideologist of the "*Fasci di Azione Rivoluzionaria*" (FAR), a militant neo-fascist movement linked to several attempted bombings in the immediate post-war era. Defending himself on trial, Evola stated that while his writings may be related to fascism – at least fascism according to his criteria – they could not be associated with the fascist dictatorship under Mussolini, denying being a fascist and referring to himself instead as a "*superfascista*", leaving space for interpretation as to whether he was "above" or already "beyond" fascism. The judges, all of whom had served during the fascist regime, determined that Evola could not be held accountable for the crimes and thus dismissed all of the accusations.

Henceforth, in a "last attempt to promote the formation of a true right", Evola became the mouthpiece of the neo-fascist Italian far-right, contributing to publications of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI), which claimed him as their undisputed "philosopher king" – even though "he barely tolerated their attention" – and of extra-parliamentary far-right organizations like *Ordine Nuovo* (ON) and *Avanguardia Nazionale* (AN).[44] In hindsight one might argue that one of the most extreme and constant antiegalitarian, antiliberal, antidemocratic, and antipopular doctrines of the 20th century may be found precisely in Evola's ideas, whose thought is indeed casting a long shadow over the ideological universe of the far-right until this day, as proven by the continuous reference of current far-right figures like Steve Bannon, Alain de Benoist or Alexander Dugin.

[43] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 55.
[44] Stephen Atkins, *Encyclopaedia of Modern Worldwide Extremists and Extremist Groups*, (Iowa: Greenwood, 2004), 89.

B) Opus

The most significant points of Evola's productivity are two: the first consists of the period between the mid-30s, in the aftermath of the publication of "*Revolt against the Modern World*", and the early years of the war, when his writings are numerous and almost all focused on the theme of anti-Semitism. The second period is spanned in little more than a decade, between 1950, when "*Orientamenti*" was published, and 1961, the year of "*Riding the Tiger*". Within that decade between 1950 and 1961, Evola charted the course for the resurgence of a far-right in Italy and elsewhere. This being the case, the following chapters will pick up on central concepts mainly from Evola's second period, precisely from "*Orientamenti*" (1950), "*Men Among Ruins*" (1953) and "*Riding the Tiger*" (1961), in an effort to shed light on Evola's centrality for far-right thought.

a) A Crusade against Modernity

However one wishes to judge Evola's thought, one finds oneself unquestionably in the presence of an author to be displayed in the gallery of the critics of modernity, alongside the likes of René Guénon and Nicolás Gómez Dávila, with the sole difference that Evola's work comes along with an unmistakable political mood.[45]

For Evola, there was nothing to be saved of the modern world, especially after 1945, when the decisive victory of the forces of modernity had eradicated those political attitudes that harked back to the world of Tradition. Italian fascism, German nazism and Japanese imperialism gave form to a coalition of forces representing an open challenge to modern civilization, "both that of the liberal democracies and the other, representing the extreme limit of the Western man's degradation – the collectivist civilization of the Fourth Estate, the communist society of the faceless mass".[46]

Today, the heirs of those defeated forces should not be set aside, but it should be acknowledged that "we find ourselves in the midst of a world of ruins"; the question

[45] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici,* 55.
[46] Julius Evola, *A Traditionalist confronts Fascism,* (London: Arktos, 2015), 10.

therefore had to be: "Are there still men standing in the midst of these ruins? And what must they, what can they still do?"[47]

Evola's fascination with right-wing radicalism found precisely in the eulogy of defeat one of its fundamental motives: it was a defeat that Evola celebrated as a gigantic and meta-historical act of sacrifice against the tumultuous advance of liberal-communist modernity. Hence, according to Evola's reading, history placed a very heavy responsibility on the shoulders of the veterans of Mussolini's Social Republic: their choice to fight for the honour of the nation, against the cowardly betrayal of the partisans, were all aspects to be understood as an articulation of a much broader choice, even of metahistorical nature: that of sacrificing oneself to halt the advance of the destructive forces of modernity. Those political themes, from respecting the word given to the ally to sacrificing oneself for the honour of the nation – all themes on which neo-fascist propaganda and political imagery were built upon – were abruptly emancipated from their historical contingency and enrolled in the world of Values and Tradition; by fighting for a hopeless Mussolini after 1943, the veterans of the "*Repubblica di Salò*" had fought, unconsciously, for a battle of metaphysical proportions.[48] Now, in the immediate post-war, it was all about consolidating those groups "that had refused to be dragged down by the general ruin".[49]

b) Individuality over Politics

Acknowledging that opposition to modernity would be long-term in all likeliness, perhaps of an entire historical phase, as was theorized in "*Orientamenti*", it would be conducive to maintain an attitude of indifference and isolation in front of modern politics before the time was ripe to come out yet again. Instead, given the prospect of any immediate political participation being off the table, Evola directed all the focus on the "detoxification of the individual".[50]

In this sense, much of the centrality Evola occupied in the post-WWII far-right can also be traced back to his accentuation on the individual, rather than on the masses. In fact, Evola's contempt for the people and the masses had existed even before, but

[47] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 63.
[48] Ibid., 65.
[49] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 48.
[50] Julius Evola, *Messaggio alla gioventù*, (Roma: I Nostalgici, 1950), 40.

now, more than ever, the formula of politicising the masses had to be rejected. Those who call themselves "people" and instead are merely masses – grey, inert, mediocre – have always been and should always remain outside the enclosure of history. After all, the same masses that applauded Mussolini for 20 years turned out to be communists in the immediate post-war era really quickly. [51]

To Evola, politics and thus the masses, were a weak and insufficient instrument to halt the tumultuous progress of modernity. At best, politics could function as an accessory instrument, but it needed much more. Indicative in this sense was Evola's rejection of both the party form as well as the concept of movement: the former was relegated to "a contingent instrument in view of given political struggles"; as for the latter, it was nothing more than "a phenomenon of masses and aggregation, a quantitative rather than qualitative phenomenon".[52]

At this point, having discarded the prospect of a political commitment – or rather: of a immediate political commitment that was based on the split between politics and the individual, moreover resorting to exquisitely modern forms of aggregation such as the party form, the only possible solution remained the anthropological one, that is, the cultivation of individual qualities of those "men standing among ruins".[53]

Radicalism, to Evola, had to be first and foremost anthropological; political formulas were deleterious – what mattered instead was the presence of "men who are here not to preach formulas, but to be examples". Thus, it was a matter of "slowly reconstructing a new man to be animated by means of a spirit and an adequate vision of life, to be strengthened by an iron adherence to given principles".[54] It was not the political choice that defined and projected one's value, but the conduct of life, an internal coherence, a style made up of uprightness and intellectual courage"; the goal was to give life to an "inner character: to rise up, to rise again inwardly, to give oneself a form, to create in oneself an order".[55]

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[51] Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale*, (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984), 23.
[52] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 81.
[53] Ibid., 83.
[54] Julius Evola, *Messaggio alla gioventù*, 37.
[55] Ibid., 19.

In "*Riding the Tiger*" of 1961, the need to privilege the existential and anthropological dimension over the purely political dimension is reaffirmed as a decisive strategic choice. The question of paying attention to the individual dimension was undoubtedly driven by a mistrust for the tool of politics. To this point was added yet another aspect, an equally decisive one, that is the disastrous condition in which contemporary men found themselves: the Herculean task of being truly oneself in a faceless, ever more decadent, materialistic mass-society. At this point, having resigned to the fact that the "political" could no longer be influenced and having ascertained that the overall sphere of politics constituted an articulation of modernity in itself, Evola's radicalism could only invest the possibilities of resistance in a purely anthropological dimension – as if to derive that, having understood that bringing down modernity was impossible in the short-term, one restricted oneself to conserving and refurbishing one's anthropological differences.[56]

Evola's "*uomo differenziato*" (differentiated man) renounced taking part in this world, in contrast to the fascist "*uomo nuovo*" (new man), because Evola believed that contributing to this world – or being part of it – would be a betrayal to Tradition as well as a detachment from it. If anything, the differentiated man had to create a world for oneself, within oneself, and not for anyone else. Fascism used politics to carry out its plan for an anthropological revolution; in contrast, in Evola's view for the post-war far-right, the emphasis on the anthropological dimension came about as a result of refusing politics in the first place. Hence, Evola's "*uomo differenziato*" was the "priest who is sufficient for himself", celebrating a cult destined for him alone, a cult he is the only follower of.[57]

c) The Dead End in Evola's Philosophy

Evola's radicalism presented a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it declared its own unwillingness to confront and compromise with modernity; hence it was a matter of organizing resistance "to modernity, its foundations and its significant effect". On the other hand, he proclaimed hostility towards everything "political", reinterpreted as a dimension deputed to absorb antagonistic positions and to blunt

[56] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 86.
[57] Ibid., 94

them. The extreme essence of Evolian radicalism is essentially this: it makes the "political" flow back into the sea of modernity, excluding any possibility of reconsidering the "political" itself.[58]

fascism made it very evident that politics and anthropological revolution were intertwined: the former was in charge of putting the social processes that would give rise to the "*uomo nuovo*" into motion. In Evola, the relationship between the two dimensions was interrupted, leaving unanswered at least two problems that closely implicated the political strategy of the far-right: how could Evola's "*uomo differenziato*" influence the "political", should the historical conditions for action ever arise? What function might the "differentiated man" have played, even if one were to assume that one was at the end of a decadent period? These were issues for which Evola's theoretical-political framework could not provide appropriate answers.[59]

Evola has already urged the rejection of any illusion regarding the immediacy of a revolutionary split in "*Orientamenti*" (1950). In "*Men Among Ruins*" (1953), a hesitant openness in favor of political commitment was again discernible. In republishing this work in 1972, Evola noted that it had come out in its first edition in 1953, when "it seemed that in Italy the conditions were present to begin the formation of an alignment of the right: of the right not in the political sense, but also and above all in the ideal and spiritual sense".[60] Any remaining illusions were now categorically cast aside in "*Riding the Tiger*" (1961) in favour of a disastrous view of the present but most importantly of future hopes: "The transformations that have already taken place are too profound to be reversible. The forces that have passed into the free state, are not such that they can be brought back within the structures of yesterday's world"[61]; above all, should the redemption of Tradition have taken place, "it is extremely improbable that any significant change in the general present state of things can be brought about by effective actions or reactions of a certain magnitude". A disenchanted analysis of the historical situation could only recognise that there was no longer any

[58] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 97.
[59] Ibid., 98.
[60] Julius Evola, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine*, (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1953), 7.
[61] Julius Evola, *Cavalcare la Tigre*, (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1961), 22.

possibility of nourishing easy illusions in the “irreversibility of dissolving processes”, recognising that “there is no way back”.[62]

Therefore, from an Evolian perspective, the "differentiated man's" only choice at this point was to use self-defense if there was no longer any possibility of a historical uprising against the bourgeois world. In “*Orientamenti*” it had been a matter of holding firmly to a position of “loyalty to oneself and to an idea, [...] in a repulsion of compromise”; in “*Riding the Tiger*” – only ten years later – Evola openly theorised a mysticism of defeat, given that one of the concepts of Tradition consisted in “action without desire”, i.e. in the need to “act without looking to the fruits, without the prospect of success or failure, victory or defeat, gain or loss, [...]”.[63]

[62] Julius Evola, *Cavalcare la Tigre*, 22.
[63] Ibid., 68.

Chapter II: 1945-1995

I. The "Movimento Sociale Italiano" (MSI)

A) The Foundation of MSI: "Nulla Osta" from the Vatican

The so-called "*Polo della Libertà*" won the Italian elections on March 27th, 1994, culminating in the first democratic rule by a neo-fascist party in postwar Europe. The Italian Social Movement (MSI), which nominated candidates under the name of "*Alleanza Nazionale*", received 14% of the votes, appointing five ministers. Nobody had anticipated the Pole to have such a huge impact. The lack of consideration often given to this aspect of the Italian political system contributed significantly to the upset. In fact, it is often forgotten that the MSI was Italy's fourth-largest party during most of the postwar years.[64] From the first postwar years through the turn of the 1980s, an extraparliamentary far-right coexisted with the parliamentary far-right. Its members have participated in "*squadrista*" activities, acts of street violence, insurgencies, and ultimately a wide range of blatant terrorist activities.[65] Indeed, Italy is the only advanced nation with a lengthy history of fascist or far-right terrorism; while Italian society has undergone a lot of significant changes, the far-right has always persisted and has done so on a far larger scale than in any other Western nation.[66]

As early as the mid-1940s, many fascist leaders and activists who had evaded republican justice returned to the political scene and began to reconstitute the far-right sector.[67] The MSI took over and turned this heated environment into a party. One of the phenomena that most strikes anyone observing the Italian far-right after WWII is the great heterogeneity of lines and orientations that characterises it. The groups and formations that can be located in this political space have already recorded positions regarding topics like institutional issues, foreign policy, religion, and others that differ not in gradations or nuances but in even contradictory terms – truly living up to the far-right's reputation of being a political chameleon. Thus, we have monarchists and republicans, "socialisers" and defenders of private property, pro-bourgeois and anti-bourgeois, but also neutralists, pro-NATO, anti-NATO, Catholics, a-Catholic traditionalists; among them, those hostile to the Church for political reasons (the

[64] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 3.
[65] Ibid., 3.
[66] Ibid., 14.
[67] Ibid., 21.

'betrayal' of fascism), neo-pagans, mystics, sympathisers for Islam, and the list goes on. On an organisational level – as Ferraresi recounts – the immediate post-fascist Italian far-right saw itself confronted with three possibilities: that of setting up real clandestine groups in an anti-democratic function, that of constituting parties of convenience to disguise clandestine activities, that of inserting fascist nuclei into the main existing parties.[68] These diversifications and contradictions are then reproduced within the Italian Social Movement (MSI), and to these are added the specific contrasts and dilemmas of a party: for example, whether it should be squadrista-revolutionary-anti-system, or legalitarian-parliamentary, or the two together; whether it should take up the inheritance, ideologically very ambiguous, of the dying "*Uomo Qualunque*" (a right-wing conservative party from 1944-49), or whether it should keep itself "pure"; later, whether it should ally itself with monarchist formations, or refuse all contact with the followers of the dynasty that had overthrown fascism in the first place. Contradictions, these, which are cut across by the geographical-regional factor: the party was born with a predominantly northern leadership, i.e. composed of the veterans of the *Italian Social Republic* (RSI), Mussolini's puppet state from 1943-45, but its electoral base was mainly in the South, which ignored the Salò experience completely.[69]

Officially, the MSI was established in December 1946 as a result of the union of many smaller groups and formations: it was the party of those who had been fascist and wanted to remain fascist.[70] The first political act of the MSI was the "*appello agli italiani*" in which workers and anyone who wished to serve the fatherland were summoned. The MSI was essentially founded to guarantee a line of continuity with the RSI and to protect the veterans of fascism. Thus, many forces, energies, groups and magazines converged into the party, contributing to its heterogenity from the get-go. The symbol of the new political grouping, the tricolour flame, and its name were borrowed essentially from the *French Social Movement* (MSF), a reactionary party, that existed in France between 1940-45.

It can be stated that the MSI was born indeed with the blessing of the Vatican and the "*nulla osta*" of the Ministry of the Interior, both intent on creating an anti-

[68] Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale*, 13.
[69] Ibid., 14.
[70] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, (Rome: Quadrante Laterza, 2013), 3.

communist deterrent and preventing much of the fascist base that believed in socialism from going to swell the communist ranks. Interestingly, the negotiations between the Ministry of the Interior and the fascists were conducted through the special office of the anti-fascist centre directed by the former Carabinieri General Pièche, once in charge of the RSI espionage services, to be later appointed by the DC government.[71] Shortly after, Romualdi and Michelini, to founding figures of the MSI, were introduced by their DC-contacts to leading religious figures. Thus, from the very beginning deals were made with the Vatican. The Jesuits, who became their intermediaries within the Vatican City, managed to obtain a substantial financial contribution from the Holy See for the neo-fascist party's campaign. A push to the negotiations between fascists and clerics resulted from the exceptional results of the "*Uomo Qualunque*" (UQ) at the 1946 elections. By then, both the DC and the Vatican decided to go after the UQ that threatened to monopolise even the masses that the Catholics wanted to manage at all costs: they therefore organised and encouraged dissidence and rebellion, and one of the most important stages in the manoeuvres to break up the UQ passed through their approval of the creation of the MSI. By favouring it, the Church and the DC were aiming at two objectives: to divert the currents sliding to the left and, at the same time, to divide the forces of the right, also tying a part of them to themselves in tight obligations and conditionings. First defeated by history, fascism was eventually reawakened, in Italy, under the auspices of the Catholic Church.[72]

B) Return to Politics - The Almirante Era (1945-1950)

Beginning with Giorgio Almirante, the "left-wing" controlled the party secretariat and set the MSI's position.[73] As anticipated above, on an organisational level, the immediate post-fascist Italian far-right saw itself confronted with three possibilities: that of setting up clandestine groups in an anti-democratic function, that of constituting parties to disguise clandestine activities, or that of inserting fascist

[71] Unknown Author. *Senti le rane che cantano*, no date, (accessed on April 2, 2023). https://sites.google.com/site/sentileranechecantano/schede/destra-politica-e-sindacale/la-nascita-del-movimento-sociale-italiano.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 6.

nuclei into the main existing parties.[74] Under Almirante, the MSI opted for the third choice – to disguise itself as a Trojan horse within the Italian parliamentary system. Simultaneously, the residual RSI nature of the MSI created the conditions for a community aggregation which, on the one hand, ended up configurating itself as a strong ideological factor of group identification, but which, on the other hand, also determined an insuperable contradiction on the level of legitimacy. The deepest expression of this conflictual dimension was undoubtedly Almirante himself, the historical leader who better than anyone else knew how to combine the aspirations of enlargement and legitimisation with the most profoundly anti-systemic impulses. The initial phase of the MSI was very much characterized by the antinomy of being "fascists in a democracy".

Radicalizing the idea of *Realpolitik*, Almirante attempted to modify the political framework by replacing the historical denominator, anti-fascism, with the political denominator, anti-communism. With this strategic outlook, in Almirante's mind, the party would have managed to escape the logic of a zero-sum game, maintaining a recognisable profile while politically legitimising itself. According to this logic, evidently more realistic than a possible authoritarian involution, the MSI would have represented itself as yet another alternative.[75] With the "return to politics" in 1946, many within the party saw an immediate opening for neo-fascism: all that had to be done was to occupy the very space that democracy left open to the heirs of the RSI, in an international context characterised by the bipolar division of the *Cold War* that would then inevitably split the same anti-fascist constitutional front.[76] The intense, long-lasting conflict that arose subsequently was about the question between a pro-NATO stance – whose advocates were Michelini, De Marsanich and Romualdi – and an identity-driven, *Third-Way* stance (opposed to both liberal and communist worldviews), composed almost exclusively of "exiles in the homeland", around Secretary Almirante.[77]

Hence, with Almirante as secretary, a line of rejection of NATO was maintained, which led to the marginalisation of the MSI into a niche-position between

[74] Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale*, 13.
[75] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, VI (Preface).
[76] Ibid., 4.
[77] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 5.

the two blocs, which did not represent the strategic horizon to which the party's leaders had looked at initially.[78]

Meanwhile, the 1947 local elections in Rome and the subsequent elections of 1948 marked for the MSI a first form of legitimisation in the system, allowing the party to exist in an apparently democratic and anti-fascist republic. In Rome, the election and the decisive support of three MSI municipal councillors allowed the Christian Democrat Salvatore Rebecchini to be appointed mayor, while in the first general election of 1948 the MSI obtained a significant 2% considering the difficulties of a party that declared itself to be heir to the RSI only three years after the end of the war.

The petty-bourgeois voters, especially in Rome, the bureaucratic capital of the "*ventennio fascista*", found neo-fascist rhetoric to be quite appealing; this is especially true given that the share of blue-collar workers there was small and Mussolini had cleverly pampered public servants for 20 years there.[79]

The so-called "clemency laws," which were approved on February 7th, 1948, at the suggestion of the undersecretary to the Presidency of the Council, Giulio Andreotti, preceded the decisive elections of 1948 by reinstating in their positions all the administrative personnel of the fascist regime that had been purge and even those involved in acts like executions.[80]

The victory of the Christian Democrats, which alone obtained an absolute majority in combination with a clear defeat of the left-wing parties defined a national political framework in which the MSI was able to find its place. Furthermore, thanks also to the standstill on the implementation of the Constitution, which lasted until 1956, the MSI was not compelled to measure itself against an institutional system that was profoundly renewed in terms of personnel and structures; if anything, the substantial maintenance of the fascist regime's measures in terms of public order and repressive state action was a natural habitat for the party. In fact, between 1948-50 clashes between police and workers resulted in 62 deaths and 3.123 injuries among demonstrators and 91.433 arrests with 19.313 convictions.[81] The secretariat of

[78] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 6.
[79] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 23.
[80] Rosario Mangiameli, "Gli anni del centrismo," *Lezioni sull'Italia Repubblicana*, 37.
[81] Ibid.

Augusto De Marsanich, who took over from Almirante in January 1950, was characterised by the aim of stabilising the MSI within that very framework.[82]

C) The De Marsanich Era (1950-54)

The secretariat of Augusto De Marsanich, who took over from Almirante in January 1950 was characterised by an aim of stabilising the MSI despite the arrests in May 1951 against far-right exponents like Pino Rauti and Julius Evola (they were accused of being part of several bombings).[83] Regardless, at the end of 1950, the MSI had 800.000 members, with the largest number of adherents in Rome, Naples, the province of Bologna and Sicily. In terms of identity, in addition to its fascist heritage, the MSI retained positions that were strongly refractory to both democracy and adherence to NATO, which was only officially accepted as an anti-communist military system in the press conference of November 28th of 1951. The establishment of an initial split in the representation of the centrist camp in southern Italy following the implementation of the agrarian and tax reforms, which pushed the most conservative sectors towards the right in the 1951 local elections, also contributed to the consolidation of the MSI in Italian society.[84]

In fact, right-wing ideology did actually have a great attraction during those years for the middle-class and upper-class Italian youth, who were still nostalgic of Mussolini and fascist slogans, and repulsed by the reality of republican politics, which were focused on economic rebuilding only. Nationalism was a powerful tool for ideological identification, especially because the *Cold War* climate had all but eradicated it from the left-wing opposition, as well as from the cultures of the ruling parties, due to their polarized international allegiances.[85]

The expansion and relative progress of student organizations affiliated with the MSI at universities substantiated this view. Students from the working class at the time had *de facto* no access to higher education (only at the end of the 60s would there be a generalized opening). On top of that, only a small percentage of the professors that oversaw the institutions had an anti-fascist history (only 13 out of 1200 professors refused to take an oath to fascism when it was requested in 1931). Thus, it is hardly

[82] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 6.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 7.
[85] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 26.

surprising that these academic institutions supported an atmosphere that was tolerant if not sympathetic to the right, which made it possible for neo-fascist student organizations to emerge and grow. The FUAN (*fronte universitario d'azione nazionale*) received around 15 to 20% of the student vote during the 1950s, which is at least three times more than MSI received as a percentage of the overall vote.[86]

With regards to the ruling parties – a first fault line of the centrist bloc aroused particular apprehension especially in PM Alcide De Gasperi who was worried by the possible expansion of the MSI and the National Monarchist Party (PNM), and at the same time was aware of the possibility of local agreements with the far-right, even though he was convinced of the impracticability of an alliance on a national level. From this point of view the local elections of 1952 became a central test for the stability of the centrist structure. The Vatican promoted the DC-MSI alliance in Rome; De Gasperi, though, with the support of the US administration chose to oppose the opening to the neo-fascists since it could have pushed the opposition towards the recomposition of an anti-fascist front hegemonised by the communists (PCI). In the elections of May 25th of 1952, the MSI – allied with the PNM – obtained significant successes in Naples, Bari, Salerno, Avellino, Foggia and Benevento, bringing the total number of votes obtained in the administrative elections of 1951-52 to almost 1.5 million.[87]

De Gasperi's agenda, which was focused on the State and an anti-communism that the head of the Christian Democrats did not wish to hand over to the MSI, was undermined by the social conflict within the political culture of "centrismo" and the ensuing electoral defections on the right.[88] All this was developing against the backdrop of an international framework focused on the *Korean War* which, having broken out in 1950, cast the shadow of a new military conflict over Europe (through the parallel with Germany divided into two areas of influence, the Atlantic and the Soviet ones). This context altered the government's view of the MSI and PCI for a while, since De Gasperi acknowledged that in the event of an armed conflict between

[86] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 26.
[87] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 6.
[88] Ibid., 8.

the East and the West, the MSI would certainly side with Italy and NATO, as opposed to the communists.[89]

On July 26th, 1952, the MSI had its third national congress, which was held at L'Aquila and witnessed a resurgence of the conflict between factions. Almirante reopened the identity conflict by claiming that "ideology was the palladium of a party" and that without it, the MSI would eventually be swallowed by the conservative, liberal and Christian Democrat sector. The atypical profile of Italian democracy, centred on the "*conventio ad excludendum*" of the PCI, could instead have allowed the far-right to aim not at influencing centrist coalitions, but the very form of the republican state, transforming parliamentary democracy into a presidential republic.[90] However, the MSI continued to remain divided into three main currents, the pragmatic De Marsanich-Michelini centre, the ideological current led by Almirante and the revolutionary wing around Romualdi and Evola.[91]

When operating within the framework of a parliamentary system, extremist movements frequently encounter what has been dubbed as the paradox of an illegitimate identity: if they maintain their identity, they will be unable to establish a legitimate foothold within the system. Instead, if they want to be legitimated, they must weaken or completely give up their identity.[92] Within all those years the MSI found itself in such a dilemma.

The political elections of June 7th of 1953, characterised by the so-called "*fraudulent law*" that provided for a new push towards polarisation of the vote and a majority prize to the coalition that obtained 50,01% of the votes, could have weakened or wiped out the far-right, but instead marked a sharp loss for the DC: -8,4%, and a notable affirmation of the PNM and MSI, which obtained 6,9% and 5,8% of the votes.[93]

Indeed, the entire system of state leadership set up in the De Gasperi era showed signs of a structural crisis. The failure of the plans for economic growth aimed at the weaker social classes, the disorganisation of the governing secular parties, the increase in criticism and discontent of large sectors of society with the development

[89] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 10.
[90] Ibid., 6.
[91] Ibid., 11.
[92] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 22.
[93] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 10.

model and the failure to define the Trieste question and the détente line approached by the USSR, are just some of the events that led to the failure of De Gasperi's line.[94]

The pending Trieste issue in particular, that was left unresolved in the peace treaty, gave the MSI some leeway. Marshal Tito claimed the whole former Italian Istrian Peninsula, including the city of Trieste, for Yugoslavia (with the help of the Soviets). In reality, Trieste and the surrounding area were promised to Italy by the Allies in March 1948. The promise, however, was rendered meaningless when Tito broke with Stalin, strengthening his negotiating position. The city did not return to Italy until 1954, and the majority of the Istrian Peninsula and the surrounding area – both of which had Italian residents – were lost. The topic served as one of the main subjects for right-wing propaganda in general throughout that time period.[95]

The MSI took advantage of this and almost tripled its consensus: through it, the MSI was able to sidestep the fascism/anti-fascism distinction and position itself with "legitimate" parties by using Trieste as a national problem. The fact that the communists faced significant challenges as a result of their pro-Soviet devotion to the same subject only served to strengthen the MSI's victory.[96]

In this context, the formation of the new Pella government – in succession to De Gasperi –could have foreshadowed a first opening for the inclusion of the far-right in the government area. At the same time, the excellent result obtained in the 1953 general election marked the climax and conclusion of the De Marsanich secretariat.[97] Circumstances appeared to be favorable for the MSI for a time during De Marsanich's reign. Faced with shifting social and economic realities, "*centrismo*", or the coalitions of the center parties that had previously been in power, started to fall apart in the early 1950s. The dominant party, the Christian Democrats, were unsure for a while whether to open to the right or to the left, that is, to form new coalitions with organizations from both wings.[98] The possibilities for the MSI to realise the tactical prospect of insertion and the strategic one of the composition of a broad anti-communist front – a "*great right*", fell short following the results of the PLI and DC congresses. The PLI congress in Florence in January 1953 rejected the hypothesis of convergence with the

[94] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 10.
[95] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 25.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 12.
[98] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 27.

MSI and the PNM. The DC congress in Naples in June 1954, which sanctioned the rise of Amintore Fanfani, and the difficulties of the Catholic right marked the exhaustion of the hypothesis of a shift towards the far-right of the political axis of government – for now.[99]

In the summer of 1954, despite the fact that secretary De Marsanich had provided positive data on the provincial federations and sections in his report to the Viareggio congress, the conditions for a change in the party leadership matured. De Marsanich was supported by influential names within the party like Junio Valerio Borghese to name one, but the need for a change at the top seemed inevitable even to his own allies. One of the most vocal critics of the secretariat's work was Filippo Anfuso, who was a representative of the pro-Atlantic area of the party that was inclined towards a more sustained evolution of the MSI as a political subject functional to the composition of a national front, i.e. an anti-communist alliance extended to the conservative right and the traditionalist Catholic wing of the DC. Many moderate members of the party questioned De Marsanich's conduct throughout his dealings with the PNM, particularly following the departure of Achille Lauro, who formed the PNM and with whom De Marsanich had turned down local political deals for economic reasons.[100] The internal crisis within the MSI had its clarification in the central committee of October 11th of 1954, when De Marsanich's was outvoted, leading to his replacement by Arturo Michelini.[101]

The IV Congress in Viareggio on January 9th, 1954, was a turning point in Almirante's strategy for approaching the secretariat – at a time, when the internal dynamics and the new balances that evolved within the central committee had already become apparent. Almirante had aligned his wing with the moderate centre which presented itself as the pro-Atlantic component of the party within the framework of a relocation of the MSI on positions of strong support for NATO. This contributed not only to reintegrating Almirante into the majority area, but above all to overcoming the knot of NATO acceptance that had affected the end of his first secretaryship.[102]

[99] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 14.
[100] Ibid., 15.
[101] Ibid., 16.
[102] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 16.

The MSI, after gradually taking control of the parliamentary far-right during the 1950s, guided it more and more into a moderate, pro-Atlantic, parliamentary direction. Due to this, the more extreme factions withdrew from the party at the conclusion of the 1945–55 era and founded their own extraparliamentary organizations, which later came to dominate the non-parliamentary far-right movement (*Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanguardia Nazionale*).[103]

D) The Michelini Era (1954-1969)

If the idea of the "great right" failed – it was mostly due to the refusal of Giovanni Malagodi's PLI, who did not intend to pursue a strategy that would have placed the liberals in a non-democratically legitimized line-up, weakening Michelini's strategy and at the same time strengthening Almirante's opposition.[104] Instead, Malagodi not only rejected the proposal of the "great right", but aspiring to make the votes of the MSI usable for the centrist camp, he launched an attempt to break up the neo-fascist area. Taking advantage of the internal divisions, the liberal leadership prepared the co-optation of political personnel from the MSI with the prospect of enlarging the PLI's hegemony in the conservative political space and constituting itself as an irreplaceable pivot not only of the centrist camp but of the national political system itself.[105]

The operation of re-dimensioning the MSI through the disarticulation of its organizational structures turned out to be complex for the PLI, especially because of the diffidence of the provincial organs of Malagodi's party to absorb elements, and even entire grassroots organizations, from the neo-fascist area. Malagodi's concerns stemmed from internal reports that reported very negatively on the political conduct, individual behavior and criminal records of some of the MSI exponents.

Michelini, for his part, found himself at the head of a party that was, on the one hand, torn apart by the clash between currents and the loss of hegemony over the neo-fascist area and, on the other, held back in its strategic project by the PLI, which was

[103] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 21.
[104] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 22.
[105] Ibid.

supposed to represent the decisive component of the “great right” in terms of political legitimization.[106]

Even in the years of the high phase of the policy of inclusion – which ended with the downfall of the Tambroni government in 1960 – the MSI, despite some important achievements such as the leading initiative in the events regarding Trieste and the support of the Pella government in 1953 and Zoli in 1957, was not able to free itself from the role of "mute guest" of the anti-communist coalition, clashing with a process of a progressive loss of hegemony in the far-right sector. The ratification of the liberal unwillingness to the formation of a "great right" determined the strategic crisis of the party line and, again, confirmed its substantial political marginality.[107]

With 2 million lire each month in addition to money for the rent of the MSI's offices in Rome, Nicolò Pignatelli, general director of *Gulf Oil*, informed Michelini of the halt of donations. Likewise, the MSI secretary was also refused additional assistance by Marcello Casanova, managing director of *Shell Italy*, "pending the outcome of the internal struggles within the party" and a clear explanation of his policies.[108]

The party's political and financial crises was made worse by the party's electoral setback in the 1958 general election, which saw the MSI's vote share drop from 5.8% to 4.8% and the monarchical right generally retreat. Michelini tried to repair his relationship with possible lenders in an effort to buck the trend. This also helped change the political line of the directorate, and in this context – faced with a progressive reduction of subsidies from the *Esso-Shell* and *Montecatini* groups, which in the past had economically supported the MSI (as well as the Agnelli family, the owners of *Fiat*) in order to count on its parliamentary support for anti-*ENI* energy policy – Michelini activated “understandings” with *ENI* president Enrico Mattei “concerning a conspicuous financial contribution in favor of his party”.[109]

[106] Davide Conti, *L’anima nera della Repubblica*, 23.
[107] Piero Ignazi, *Il polo escluso: profilo storico del Movimento Sociale Italiano*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989), 88.
[108] Davide Conti, *L’anima nera della Repubblica*, 24.
[109] Ibid.

On the international front, however, the MSI continued to count on the support of Spain and some American circles in contact with Filippo Anfuso and Tullio Abelli.[110]

The events of July 1960 (the fall of Tambroni and a new centre-left government), therefore, not only determined on a national political level the irreversible crisis of the Michelinian strategy of insertion, but also, in regard to the neo-fascist milieu, the re-proposition of the more complex question of the identity of those who defined themselves as "fascists in democracy".[111]

The new centre-left government was part of an overall framework that consisted of strategic reasons for both the centre parties and structural sectors of the Italian economic-industrial sector (such as *Fiat*). The objectives of the economic unification of the country through the overcoming of the imbalances found a direct correspondence on an international level, in the framework of the policy of détente, with the affirmation of the English *Labour Party* in 1964 and the entrance of the *SPD* into the government area in Germany in 1966.[112]

Meanwhile, the MSI sought, through some of its Atlantic exponents, a resumption of links with international organizations hostile to the détente-policy in order to revive forms of contrast to the new political direction imparted by the Kennedy administration and the repercussions that this could have on individual national contexts. On February 23rd of 1962, high-ranking MSI members met in Rome with Oswald Mosley, founder of the *British Union of Fascist* (BUF), who was interested in gathering information on behalf of London on the developments of the left-wing opening in Italy, and on the weight that the right-wing opposition could have had in preventing the constitution of a government, including the PSI. A new trip by Mosley to Italy the following March laid the foundations for the establishment of a far-right international liaison structure with headquarters in London and an Italian office in Venice. The meeting was attended by Belgian and German exponents; financing for the organization was to be guaranteed by the German industrialist Krupp, whom Mosley himself had helped during the period of de-Nazification in Germany.[113]

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[110] Saverio Ferrari, "Un movimento con doppietto e manganello," *Il Manifesto*, 20. November 2013.
[111] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 27.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Veronica Bortolussi, *I rapporti tra l'estrema destra italiana e l'Organisation de l'Armée Secrète francese*, (Master Thesis, University Ca' Foscari Venice, 2016), 32.

However, the developments of the early 1960s put the MSI on an unstoppable path towards political irrelevance and, as a result, to the dissolution of the far-right area. The splits of the *Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanguardia Nazionale* groups, first, and then the traumatic failure in forming a "great right", had created a state of deep frustration in the youth base towards Michelini's political line, which was seen as a betrayal to the original soul of fascism.[114]

The new centre-left government confirmed the exhaustion of the "insertion strategy", leading the MSI to its VIII national congress, in Pescara in June 1965, with the permanent Michelini-Almirante clash. Until 1960, the MSI, with its policy of insertion, had aimed at the achievement of a concrete and essential objective: the rupture of the anti-fascist ranks, but the failure of this prospect had ended up preventing the opening of a fruitful dialogue between national and Catholic forces as well as the possibility of increasingly conditioning the DC. In essence, the radicalization of the political struggle with the left in the streets, of which the MSI would certainly have been the backbone and spearhead had not taken place. The experience of the 1920s was not repeatable, *Ordine Nuovo* observed, because the tactics with which the forces of the left advanced towards power were completely different, no longer through the revolutionary route but through systems and techniques of "subversive war".[115]

The repositioning of the political system along a line of democratic anti-communism, reproduced on the right by the PLI, on the left by the PRI-PSDI-PSI and in the centre by the DC, reaffirmed the impossibility for the MSI to be included in the government area, confirming its identity crisis. The MSI seemed to be a party in slow but continuing crisis of disintegration by the end of 1967; on top of that it was unable to provide even the starting point for a political resurgence of the far-right, having lost about a fourth of the activists it had counted on in 1960. The party's lowest-ever performance was 4.5%, which also happened in the election of 1968. All in all, it was the first time since its foundation that the MSI's hegemony in the neo-fascist political scene was being threatened by competing organised groups. This framework

[114] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 31.
[115] Ibid. 38.

sanctioned the exhaustion of the Michelini line, designating, ipso facto, the political end of its secretariat, despite the protraction of time until June 1969.[116]

E) Almirante and the New Strategy of Tension

The MSI in early 1969 was a severely weakened party whose political crisis was represented by the image of the vacant secretariat. Almirante's numerical and political preponderance, Michelini's indications and the need for a unitary choice that would avoid further dangerous splits, never seriously called into question the choice of the MSI leadership, which was unanimously ratified by the central committee on 29 June 1969. With Michelini's passing and Almirante's return to the party's leading position (after 20 years), a new era of strategic change and personnel rotations, alongside a refurbished strategy to accomplish Michelini's old goals of leaving the underground and building credibility as a possible government partner with the DC, began. These changes included more specific strategies and an ideological refacing. The MSI made an effort to assume the role of a modern right on an intellectual and strategic level by portraying itself as less sentimental of the past and opening themselves up to voters who did not adhere to the fascist milieu.[117]

With the new leadership, also the big industry seemed interested in further exploring the space to the right of the DC and to use it in the framework of an overall redefinition of the political landscape, paving the way to the MSI for a place among "ordinary parties". A meeting between Almirante and Giovanni Agnelli, head of Fiat, in Turin in September 1969 during which a potential "new policy of the MSI" was discussed, was significant in this regard. In comparison to Michelini's circumstances, the new secretariat inherited a far more favorable scenario on an international level. Almirante, while not producing any rifts with the conservative wing of the party, significantly rectified the two basic concepts that had characterised the MSI from its foundation to Michelini's death; the "great right" and the politics of inclusion. Almirante re-proposed the prospect of a great right, but radically renewed its political

[116] Ferran Gallego, „The Extreme Right in Italy from the Italian Socialist Movement to Post-Fascism," in *Working Papers*, 1999, 7.
[117] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 53.

terms and strategic objectives. The new secretary aimed also at exacerbating the crisis of the political framework through "anti-systemic" activities.[118]

The MSI specified its programme, starting with the renewed denunciation of the inability of the reigning parties to resolve the political crisis. Secondly, the militant mobilisation in the "piazze", schools and factories in an anti-communist function was emphasized. Last but not least, the re-aggregation of all the dissident far-right components within this renewed movement, in the prospect of the constitution of a parliamentary bloc of right-wing deputies numerically and politically hegemonised by the MSI, had to be reached. In particular, most of Almirante's efforts were concentrated on this last aspect. In fact, little more than one hundred MPs would have been sufficient to confront the centre with the choice between opening up directly to the PCI, which was impracticable given the international constraints, or compulsory collaboration with the right. In practice, the institutional structure would have been radically transformed had the anti-communism divide taken the place of the anti-fascist divide.[119]

In hindsight, the strategy of insertion was at best motivated by political opportunism and founded on the simple idea that a fervent anti-communism, regardless of its content, would legitimize the MSI to the point of reaching national government.[120]

It was within this perspective that, after the resignation of the Rumor government on July 7th of 1970, the MSI's first request for the early dissolution of the Chamber of Deputies was placed – an event that had never before occurred in the history of the Republic.[121] The crisis was the fruit of the very irreversibility of the centre-left formula, given the *conventio ad excludendum* with regard to the MSI and PCI and therefore, for Almirante, the country would come out "either with a political alternative within the system or with a system alternative", with the latter that should by now "not frighten anyone anymore". Faced with the weakness of the government and institutions, the MSI proposed itself as an anti-subversive force ready to flank the

[118] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 60.
[119] Ibid., 62.
[120] Gregorio Sorgonà, *Jacobin*, 29. July 2022, (accessed on February 12, 2023). https://jacobin.com/2022/07/italy-far-right-united-states-movimento-sociale-italiano-msi-post-fascism-anti-communism.
[121] Fausto De Luca, "Il governo Rumor si è dimesso: Incomincia una crisi difficile," *La Stampa*, 6. July 1969.

police and carabinieri, but at the same time able to give life to forms of counter-mobilisation whose squadrist character, which in the militant organisations took on paramilitary-type traits, was combined with the constant reactionary tendencies of the Italian petty-bourgeoise, middle classes, metropolitan proletariat and the depressed areas of southern Italy.[122]

The very presence of the MSI in the majority space would have represented not a different government formula "in the system" but "a system alternative", i.e. the overcoming of the anti-fascist divide and the maintenance of the only anti-communist discriminant. The events of July 1960 had put an end to Michelini's claim that the politics of insertion would gradually legitimize the party within the democratic and anti-fascist system. Contrarily, Almirante's strategy involved inserting oneself into the system with the goal of reformulating it internally in presidential terms so that it could provide political citizenship to the MSI in a democratic institutional framework that was no longer based on anti-fascism. The goal of the secretary's line was to alter one's political standing within the context of the republican balance, transforming the tactical function carried out until then by the MSI, understood as support for the centrist parties in an anti-communist key, into a strategic function, that is, as a factor in the development of the process of simplifying the system into two opposing fronts.[123]

Regarding the international context, from the mid-1960s, some far-right organizations looked more extensively to forms of radical Atlanticism as a hypothesis of ideological updating. The election of Kennedy to the US presidency, international détente and the policy of reforms – which produced the hypothesis of an opening to the left in Germany and Italy, theorized by the new administration in Washington – defined a general framework in which the conservative forces, both American and international, saw a dangerous yielding in the fight against communism. It was in this context that theories of counterinsurgency and revolutionary war were elaborated first by senior military leaders of the Atlantic alliance, to be then further elaborated by the far-right – as the MSI did through its research center, the Pollio Institute.[124]

[122] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 62.
[123] Ibid., 65.
[124] Ibid., 51.

Counterinsurgency was mainly characterized as a military doctrine, used mainly in third-world countries where the guerrilla phenomenon tended to assume no longer a tactical role in support of the action of regular armies, like the *Résistance* in Nazi-occupied France, but a strategic function capable of subverting the initial power relations and able, therefore, to represent a viable option for the peoples of developing countries in their struggle for emancipation.[125] The Italian far-right took notice of the decolonization processes, Castro's *revolución cubana* and the Vietnam conflict as evidence that guerrilla warfare represented an inversion of the conventional relations between politics and war. Concerning this matter, Carl Schmitt developed the notion of counterinsurgency in the early 1960s, suggesting that the only effective solution to guerrilla warfare was the creation of structured organizations, such as the OAS ("*Organisation de l'armée secrete*").[126]

With the National Security Action Memorandum 124-182 and General Westmoreland's Field Manual 30-31, which openly theorized the American right to interfere in foreign countries, if necessary also altering the structure of foreign governments as part of the anti-communist struggle – counterinsurgency directly entered into US military manuals.

In response to the new revolutionary strategy of the communist parties, the elaboration of a "fourth dimension of war" took shape, based on the strategic collaboration of military and civilian structures within the framework of the Italian far-right. In fact, in 1969, the MSI developed an intense internal and foreign activity aimed at linking the party's national policy and line with the international dimension of the conflict between the West and the Soviet bloc, according to a logic of extreme tendencies. In this regard, a "refresher course for MSI youth leaders" took place in Rieti from September 4th to September 15th and involved 127 militants who were trained in the "revolutionary alternative", the relationship between "hierarchy, élite, and State" and the "genesis of the coup d'état".[127]

In this bigger picture, the MSI re-proposed itself as a shock force against the "syndicalism" and the disorder of the strikes and workers' struggles – pushed by the far-left – offering a political representation to the middle and industrial classes. With

[125] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 51.
[126] Carl Schmitt, *La teoria del partigiano: integrazione del concetto politico*. (Milan: Adelphi, 2005).
[127] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 79.

the intention of bringing the whole party and the entire far-right with him, Almirante represented his political line with the formula of the "*nostalgia per il futuro*".

In Rome on November 7th, an international meeting of far-right organisations from across the continent was organised by the RGSL ("*raggruppamento giovanile studenti e lavoratori*", the youth organization of MSI), including the Greek 4th August Movement, Jeune Europe from France, New European Order from Switzerland, NPD from West Germany and several other organisations from Sweden, Romania and Czechoslovakia. The MSI propaganda adopted the condemnation of "red violence" as its defining feature, along with its view that counterinsurgency would be necessary in the event of a communist revolt. In Parliament, MSI representatives made clear connections between the issues of public order and political unrest and those of system compatibility, underlining the particularity of the Italian case in relation to the international military alliance arrangement that the DC, by opening up to the PCI, would no longer have had the capacity to guarantee. Meanwhile, the MSI simultaneously increased the squadrist activity of its organisations.[128] Almirante attempted to represent those segments of Italian society that, shaken by the years of 1968 and 1969, no longer looked to the MSI as a nostalgic party but as an activist structure capable of polarising the clash in the "piazze", schools, universities and workplaces, where the left was finding consolidation and hegemonic expansion – inciting tension, but at the same time portraying itself as a force of order, ready to capitalize on it in case of an insurgency.[129]

F) The Beginning of the Years of Lead – "Gli Anni di Piombo"

Around 4.30 p.m. on Friday December 12th of 1969, a high-powered bomb exploded in the central hall of the Banca Nazionale dell'Agricoltura, in Milan. The effects were devastating: the floor of the hall was ripped open and seventeen people were killed. About 90 others were injured. A few minutes before the explosion, another bomb was found in the headquarters of the Banca Commerciale in Piazza della Scala, also in Milan. Between 4.55 p.m. and 5.30 p.m., three other explosions occurred in Rome: one, inside the Banca Nazionale del Lavoro in Via San Basilio and two others, on the Altare della Patria in Piazza Venezia. The five attacks on the afternoon of

[128] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 83.
[129] Ibid., 84.

December 12th, 1969, marked the beginning of a period that goes by the name of "*strategia della tensione*" in Italian history, which, until this day is among the most radical acts of subversion by the far-right in any Western country.[130]

a) The Massacre of Piazza Fontana

The Piazza Fontana Massacre killed seventeen people and injured 88; nevertheless, from the get-go the investigation unraveled into an odyssey that lasted almost 40 years and ended in 2005 without any final convictions. Initially, the investigation did not suspect the far-right and converged on the so-called anarchist track, leading to a series of arrests in two circles: the "*Circolo Anarchico Ponte della Ghisolfa*" in Milan and the "*Circolo 22 Marzo*" in Rome. To the first belonged to Giuseppe Pinelli, a Milanese railway man and former partisan during the Resistance; three days after his detention, during a break in the interrogations conducted by Commissioner Luigi Calabresi, he died falling from the fourth floor of the police headquarters. The authorities registered his death as a "suicide". Shortly afterwards, the commissioner himself was assassinated with two shots in the back. Amid various interruptions, the trial went on, but the focus finally shifted to a new area of investigation: neo-fascist subversion. The investigators discovered the existence of a far-right cell in Veneto orbiting around *Ordine Nuovo*. Among the key figures are Franco Freda, a publisher and prosecutor, who left the MSI to set up a ultra-right group, the "*Gruppo di AR*", and Giovanni Ventura, also a former MSI member. It was only in the 1990s, that a new investigative phase opened, led by Judge Guido Salvini and based on the testimony of figures linked to the far-right, starting with former *Ordine Nuovo* member Carlo Digilio. In the end, after 36 years, no party was be declared guilty be the Court of Cassation. [131]

Nonetheless, through Digilio, links between the terrorists and the US-led NATO bases in Verona and Vicenza were exposed. Carlo Digilio, who was linked to the captain of the NATO command in Verona David Carret, played the role of technical adviser for the composition of explosive devices used by the cell of *Ordine*

[130] Unknown Author, *Vittime Terrorismo*, 13. December 1969, (accessed on April 16, 2023), https://www.vittimeterrorismo.it/vittime/la-strage-di-piazza-fontana/.
[131] Alberto Magnani, „Strage Piazza Fontana, cosa è successo a Milano il 12 dicembre 1969," *Il Sole 24 Ore*, 11. December 2019.

Nuovo (ON), the group behind the attacks. According to the testimony given to the judges, his task was to contain and limit the explosive power of the devices planted by ON – "Carret congratulated me in the sense that I had avoided a very serious thing" – because the attacks were conceived and tolerated by the same American circles as "demonstrative actions in an anti-communist sense, not indiscriminate massacres". Against this background, according to Digilio's testimony, it were elements of the Italian secret services that forced their hand by irritating the US structure itself, which was "fed up with tolerating or supporting actions by Italian secret services that had gone beyond the limits".[132]

US officials were informed in advance about the attacks of December 12th by Digilio himself, who told his American superiors that he had heard "that there were going to be big attacks", supporting the information held by Carret, who confirmed that he "knew very well that the far-right was plotting something big at that time, […] a seizure of power by the military forces". Regarding the Piazza Fontana massacre, Carret assured Digilio that the attack's political motives are shared by the US and that the investigation would not focus on the perpetrators. Therefore, ON would have served as the catalyst for a process that, starting from the periphery of the political structure, would have been able to set off a progression of destabilizing events aimed at reshaping the social power relations as well as the constitutional architecture. Such instances were to be carried out along the lines of the abovementioned National Security Action Memorandum 124-182 and General Westmoreland's Field Manual 30-31, which openly theorized the American right to interfere in foreign countries and the possible "modification of the structure" of their governments as part of the anti-communist struggle.[133]

The political and propaganda action carried out in the 48 hours following the massacre by the forces of the extra-parliamentary far-right, by the MSI, by certain institutional sectors and by Italian and foreign military circles laid the foundations for an authoritarian-style operation that finally failed to take off. Captain Carret himself confirmed to Digilio "that that had been the project that the Americans had also liked and that it had failed because of the hesitations of some Christian Democrats". The political perspective of those engaged became strategically fractured as a result of the

[132] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 87.
[133] Ibid., 51.

inability to initiate the process of an authoritarian revolt. The unfolding of the bombing events would have not only increased military control over civilian life without a real coup d'état, but would have also allowed the "*Nuclei di Difesa dello Stato*" to openly perform their support and pro-military propaganda functions. In fact, parts of the military and the far-right, represented in the parliament by the MSI and outside of the parliament by groups like *Ordine Nuovo* and *Avanguardia Nazionale,* just waited for their call. The failure of the highest offices of the Republic to proclaim a state of emergency was therefore interpreted by ON as a retreat by Rumor, who had imposed an immediate stance on the military and had ultimately nipped in the bud any political hypothesis of an authoritarian turnaround.[134]

The bloodshed of December 12th of 1969 could have produced an unmediated rift in Italian society, but the substantial tightness of the country's democratic fabric ended up thwarting any reactionary subversion. Instead, the MSI, aware of the impracticability of a forceful solution to the crisis, sought to lay the foundations for a *de facto* overcoming of its marginalisation by attempting to combine a policy centred on the call to order with a militant activism capable of keeping the party structure in a state of permanent mobilisation, fuelling its anti-systemic charge.[135]

Accordingly, in an effort to disrupt the system by escalating tension in the nation, the Almirante secretariat marked a significant departure from what the party used to do under Michelini. The latter had initiated a process of inclusion of the MSI by eluding to a re-examination of its party identity. This strategy had brought the MSI to the threshold of the government area in 1960 but had failed ultimately. Almirante put forth a new insertional policy with the aim of eliminating the MSI's systemic incompatibility, seemingly serving the state but in reality being subversive.[136]

For instance, on the 18th of April 1970, during a rally of Almirante in Genoa, the head of the National Volunteers of the city, Ugo Venturini, was hit on the head by a blunt object thrown by militants of extra-parliamentary left groups and died a few days later in hospital. The unfortunate incident was presented to the public as a

[134] Giovanni Maria Bellu, "Strage di Piazza Fontana spunta un agente Usa," *La Repubblica*, 11. February 1998.
[135] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 98.
[136] Ibid., 99.

demonstration of the need for militant activism capable to counter subversive violence – with the far-right being depicted as the only force in the country capable of standing up. “We don't have action squads”, declared the leader of the MSI, “but we do have a large, very large influx of young people who are fed up and are coming with us. These young people are determined to defend, not to oppose”. The representation of a weak state in the face of subversion legitimised a principle of the autonomous exercise of force, “if the state does not do its duty, we defend ourselves, when the state is not there, the citizen becomes the state”. This, Almirante maintained, was not “a subversive conception”, but on the contrary the only conception of order.[137]

The youth groups, for their part, increased their squadristic activities so much so that in the two-year period 1970-71, 53 people belonging to far-right movements were denounced for terrorist acts, while the number of complaints for subversive activities and street violence rose from 15 in 1968 to 360 in 1970.

Between 1969 and 1972, the MSI slowly started pushing various sectors of the Italian society towards a more conservative direction. A fact that confirms this orientation is the substantial increase in funding received by the MSI from 1970 onwards for electoral campaigns. This trend attracted the attention of some DC personalities who were alerted by the considerable amount of resources that the MSI lavished on the electoral campaign coming not only from Greece and from certain West German and American circles, but above all (and this was the element that had aroused a sensation in DC circles) from some large state bodies, including IRI and Montedison thanks to which "the MSI rolled in money". In fact, the '68-'69 cycle of struggles had ended up eroding the weight of the conservative middle class and the MSI attempted to represent, through a new and visible militant activism, those sectors of Italian society that saw their social relevance called into question. Relying on the malaise of the small and medium bourgeoisie, Almirante aimed at calling early elections that would have determined a decisive shift to the right of the political axis of the nation.[138]

In fact, Almirante adopted a fundamentally contradictory stance that allowed him to serve both as the far-right's dominant force and as an interlocutor of moderate public opinion. The secretary, marking a substantial discontinuity with the Michelini

[137] Davide Conti, *L’anima nera della Repubblica*, 103.
[138] Ibid.

line, aimed to sharpen the political confrontation to give the party the role of vanguard of the anti-communist line-up. For many within the party, in fact, the MSI had to intercept the widespread delusion of the middle class and the petty bourgeoisie in order to fit fully into the new Italian dynamic and bring about a systemic change, bearing in mind that the power vacuum that had emerged in the face of the radicalisation of the conflict would be filled either by the MSI or the PCI given that other alternatives were completely unthinkable.[139]

The general strike on May 19th, 1970, served as a vehicle to revive the order campaign and mobilize activist organizations for anti-union activities. In Rome, Almirante ordered groups with the task of "organising demonstrations against the strike, while at the same time making propaganda for the MSI"; helping citizens in difficulty due to the public transport strike, offering them to travel on the cars provided by the MSI activists; inducing and encouraging shopkeepers and other public businesses not to close for fear of reprisals from the strikers. In short, Almirante, for his part, emphasised, on the one hand, the fact that the MSI had finally appeared to moderate public opinion as a political party that says "no more to nostalgia" and, on the other, there was the presence in the piazza, the ability to hold it and also to repel opponents since "the use of force [did] not displease the party".[140]

b) The Reggio Calabria Riots

In the summer of 1970, a revolt broke loose in in the South of Italy: clashes, assaults, barricades, general strikes, schools closed for months and turned into barracks, 43 bomb attacks, eleven dead and thousands injured resulted from it. A civil war in which for eight months an armed mob occupied a city, took the place of the authorities and fought against carabinieri, police as well as the army. Officially, the Reggio Calabria riots were an incomprehensible revolt of the people over a matter of mere "parochialism": to claim for Reggio the role of capital of the Calabrian region, against the designated Catanzaro.[141]

[139] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 106.
[140] Ibid., 110.
[141] Gianni Barbacetto, "I moti di Reggio, 50 anni fa la rivolta nera dei "boia chi molla" che creò un nuovo blocco di affari e potere. All'ombra di 'ndrangheta e massoneria," *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 23. July 2020.

Almirante opened his front in the southern province of Calabria in this environment of political unrest, just months after the bombing massacre of Piazza Fontana, with the intention of capitalizing on the rebellious and anti-systemic instances of southern Italy; at that point, Almirante did not hesitate to define the MSI as "a proletarian party with a southern base."[142]

From mid-August, however, due to the increasing presence of MSI cadres among protesters, the uprising became the symbol of the popular mobilisation of the far-right also because it highlighted the crisis of hegemony of the centre-left.[143]

Due to the absence of economic unification of the nation to the detriment of the South, the reform project's failure ultimately exacerbated the conflicting peculiarities of the Italian economy throughout the boom years. A further element that pushed the MSI to support the Reggio uprisings was, then, the obvious difference between the social movements of '68-'69 and the anti-progressive and traditionalist nature of the Reggio uprising. The *Fronte Nazionale*, with *Avanguardia Nazionale* and MPON (*Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo*), carried out a particularly relevant activity, and Junio Valerio Borghese (the leader of *Fronte Nazionale* and an ex-MSI member) declared his intention to take "the responsibility in Reggio to evolve the revolt from the simple demand of the capital to the rejection of the party regime" by fuelling the protest to "make public opinion understand that the democratic-parliamentary system does not work and create a suitable climate to overthrow it ".[144]

The tendentially populist charge and the progressive spread of violence as a praxis for breaking institutional efficiency allowed the far-right to pursue an anti-systemic line capable of combining the true nature of neo-fascism with its tendency to subversive-rebellionist charge.[145]

The MSI's policies had widened the area of agreement in the South of Italy, resulting in a convergence of the upper and lower classes. If these potentialities of the MSI had remained unexpressed during the 1960s, at the beginning of the 1970s, the lack of economic unification of the country, the crisis of the mediating function of the DC, the programatic failure of the centre-left and the institutional crisis of the central

[142] Piero Ignazi, *Il polo escluso: profilo storico del Movimento Sociale Italiano*, 146.
[143] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 120.
[144] Gianni Rossi, *Alternativa e doppiopetto*, (Rome: ISC, 1992), 158.
[145] Ibid., 141.

and peripheral powers of the state, contributed to the re-emergence of neo-fascist phenomena.[146]

The economic crisis in Italy in the 1970s and the ensuing effect of the far-right on the process of ideological composition of the Italian middle class made it possible for a totalitarian movement of a "fasci-type" nature to evolve over time.[147] That of Reggio Calabria, in fact, represented more than a strategic choice of the Almirante secretariat, which was able to transform the failures of the centre-left in the local area into electoral consensus by riding the revolt.[148]

At the same time, also in northern Italy, despite the renewed mobilisation of cadres and militants and a progressive expansion at a territorial level, the MSI clashed with the intrinsic contradictions of a political line, which, if on the one hand had relaunched it electorally, on the other hand proved insufficient with respect to the strategic perspective of the reformulation of the identity of the far-right. Almirante had declared that relying exclusively on the consensus of the electorate would not be sufficient as "it is necessary to move on to direct action" in order to bring about "similar results as in Greece, Spain and Portugal".[149]

Neo-fascist activism spread to all areas of the country and in late 1970, law enforcement throughout Italy registered dozens of arrest orders against militants of the MSI, denunciations, seizures of blunt material and improper weapons, raids in high schools, assaults on the offices of left-wing parties, clashes and incidents with the police. Within the framework of a general national extension of the organised "*squadrismo*", the big cities of Milan and Rome were largely affected, where the party tried to accredit itself as a direct interlocutor of the industrial masses through "demonstrating to certain economic forces in the North that the MSI is ready to fight in the streets". The scheme to reunify and relaunch the far-right through the upheavals in Reggio Calabria ultimately failed, opening yet a new phase of conflict within the neo-fascist area that culminated with the events of the so-called Borghese coup.[150]

[146] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 122.
[147] Ibid., 123.
[148] Gianni Rossi, *Alternativa e doppiopetto*, 167.
[149] Ibid., 125.
[150] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 127.

c) The Golpe Borghese

Junio Valerio Borghese, a fascist nobleman who remained loyal to Mussolini's RSI until the very end as well as a former MSI member, had already started planning the coup in 1969, looking for partners and followers among the military forces as well as requesting financial backing from noteworthy entrepreneurs and industrialists. In exchange for their backing, Borghese even made a deal with the *'Ndrangheta* and *Cosa Nostra* at the end of 1969, promising to scale back the war against the mafia in exchange for their support; likewise, also Licio Gelli's *Loggia P2* pledged its assistance to Borghese's coup.[151]

In January 1970, Borghese was even welcomed at the American embassy in Rome, trying to find out how well-received his proposals were by the American side. In fact, the US would not have opposed Borghese's coup if certain requirements were met, as a number of official documents declassified following the passage of the "Freedom of Information Act" revealed: no American civilian or military personnel were to be involved; members of all Italian armed forces (army, navy, police and Carabinieri) had to take part. After the coup, an interim administration must have been established and should have been headed by a Christian Democrat, ideally Giulio Andreotti, and a fresh general election that excluded left-wing parties ought to have been held within a year after the coup.[152]

Rogers, the then US Secretary of State, had his doubts about the likelihood of the coup succeeding, but he nonetheless summoned the ambassador to Rome to manage the situation and alert the leaders of Italy – President Saragat, PM Colombo, and Defense Minister Tanassi. The Defence and Interior Ministries, the headquarters of the Italian state broadcaster RAI, as well as the phone networks, were among the targets of the coup organizers' complex plot to attack and seize control of key locations around the nation. Giuseppe Saragat, the president, was to be abducted by the *Loggia P2*, and Angelo Vicari, the director of the police, was to be murdered by the mafia. The overthrow of democratic institutions would have been proclaimed on TV and radio the next morning. A temporary military junta would have been put in place, and the parties would have been disbanded.[153]

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[151] Ippoliti, Riziero. "The Story of Golpe Borghese," *Oltremanica*, 2020.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid.

In hindsight, the development and conclusion of the subversive action known as the "*Golpe Borghese*" represented the end of the first phase of the strategy of tension and marked a first inversion of the authoritarian metamorphosis of the Italian political system. Operation "Tora-Tora", as it was called, was activated throughout Italy, and then blocked by a counterorder on the night of December 7th of 1970, involving civilian structures of the *Fronte Nazionale* and the *Avanguardia Nazionale*, top members of the State's military circles as well as various criminal organisations. Who was behind the counterorder has not been revealed to this day.[154]

Over the years, the gradual emergence of relevant documents has succeeded in shedding light on various aspects of the coup, such as the role of Licio Gelli and the *Loggia P2*, the support of US circles represented by Hugh Fendwich, and the documents not handed over to the judiciary by Defence Minister Giulio Andreotti in 1974.[155]

The search for interlocutors in American circles did not assume a unidirectional character, in fact, Borghese – when planning his coup – used his old relations to activate channels of communication also with the State Department. It was precisely the various contacts activated by the organisers of the coup with US circles, often in rivalry with each other, that could have been an incidental element in the development of Borghese's project and the counter-order given when the operation was already underway. The reasons for the halting of the Tora-Tora operation were clearly stated by Ernesto De Marzio, a participant in the activity, in differences between the CIA and the State Department. After the coup in Greece, the Americans "had decided not to do any more coups. But the CIA had continued on its own by getting in touch with far-right groups in Italy, now I don't know whether by getting in touch with them or them with the CIA. And the State Department, informed, at the last moment blocked it".[156]

The subversive effort was not only known to the US, but it was also being watched through the activities of General Vito Miceli, who had received significant financing from the US ambassador to Italy, as was only discovered years later. According to Adriano Monti, one of the conspirators, at least since May 1970 the President of the Republic Saragat, Defense Minister Mario Tanassi and SID (*Servizio*

[154] Adriano Monti, *Il golpe Borghese: Un Golpe Virtuale all'Italiana*, (Milan: Lo Scarabeo, 2006), 16.
[155] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 133.
[156] Adriano Monti, *Il golpe Borghese: Un Golpe Virtuale all'Italiana*, 22.

Informazioni Difesa) chief Eugenio Henke had been made aware of the facts by the Americans.[157]

The organization of the subversive scheme was even partially handled by Italian secret services, who closely monitored the activity. In the following years, the role of Licio Gelli and of Carabinieri captain Antonio Labruna emerged, but it was above all the shady handling of information concerning the coup by the then Defence Minister Giulio Andreotti, to take on a particularly controversial character both in relation to the participation in the subversive plan of the *Nuclei di Difesa dello Stato* (State Defence Nuclei) and for the management of the judicial enquiries into the far-right scene which, brought together in a single proceeding in 1974 in Rome, led to the acquittal of all the defendants.[158]

After the strategic divergence with the MSI and given the continuation of the *Fronte Nazionale* coup d'état strategy, the distance between the party and Borghese widened to such an extent that, close to the events of December 8th, MSI leaders, fearing a state indictment and a request for dissolution, informed the security organs of his subversive plans to the extent that "an MSI leader went to the prefecture on the evening of December 7th and asked for an audience with the prefect. He confided to him that he had learned that a group of young people were organizing to take part in a subversive action. The prefect disregarded this confidence and did not send any phonogram to the Ministry of the Interior".[159] Even Berlinguer (the leader of the PCI), in turn, had received from the leaders of the MSI, evidently uninvolved and worried by these maneuvers, the news of a gathering of several thousand fascists in Rome for a possible coup d'état. Because they considered "the episode could have had serious consequences for the parliamentary part of the far-right, if it had come to attempt any action that was doomed to fail", the leadership of the MSI was particularly concerned about the possibility of its exponents becoming involved in the Borghese coup. In addition, the occurrence of such a hypothesis would have led to the justification of a repressive action against the whole sector and would have been a success for the most

[157] Adriano Monti, *Il golpe Borghese: Un Golpe Virtuale all'Italiana*, 22.
[158] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 139.
[159] Adriano Monti, *Il golpe Borghese: Un Golpe Virtuale all'Italiana*, 81.

left-wing part of the governmental majority, who were supporting the thesis of the reactionary conspiracy.[160]

Anyways, the nexus between national and international political factors allowed the MSI – after the failure of the coup – to reassert itself as the predominant force in the neo-fascist area and to emerge before the US administration as the only real aggregation of the far-right that could be used in the project to stabilise a new centrist balance based on the exclusion of the PSI from the majority, on the reduction of the influence of the Christian Democrat left within the Catholic party and on the DC as the pivot of a conservative government. The US line in the Mediterranean and the consequent need to stabilise the Italian political framework led the Nixon administration to consider the entry of neo-fascists into the area of government as "the lesser of two evils", considering it necessary to intervene directly in Italy to "arrest the drift to the left" with the supply of "clandestine assistance to organisations and individuals working for political stability". From this perspective, the end of the Borgheses's *Fronte Nazionale* marked the end of the first phase of the far-rights "*strategia della tensione*", allowing the MSI to remain the only force capable of representing the composite area of neo-fascism.[161]

G) The Years of Illusion

After the Borghese coup, Almirante's action was centred entirely on strengthening the control of the party structures and on the recovery of the extremist sectors through practices and propaganda with markedly radical tones. "Soon, comrades," he proclaimed in a rally in Rome, "you will receive orders and you will have to obey: this is an order of historic importance; our path is long, it will be a path of tears, blood and sweat; one thing is certain, from today, it will no longer be only our blood that will flow". The Borghese coup, the uprising in Reggio Calabria, as well as the massacre at Piazza Fontana created serious difficulties for the leadership on a legal level, giving the most extremist sectors the conditions to develop their own projects within the far-right scene in the event of a party dissolution. In this critical framework, the MSI leadership increased the control measures on the base and tried to stop the

[160] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 143.
[161] Ibid., 145.

most radical impulses; it went so far that Almirante intervened personally to ease tensions in the political clash with the PCI and the trade unions.[162]

Precisely in this time, in between 1970-72, the MSI also succeeded in endowing itself with a mass base, especially through the events of Reggio, redefining the perimeter of the representation of the middle classes. The constant growth of the MSI electoral consensus in the 1970-71 local elections and in the 1972 parliamentary elections was the confirmation of this temporary relocation of the moderate social body outside the usual subjects of representation of the DC or the PLI.[163]

Meanwhile, Andreotti's recomposition of the centre on the basis of an inflationary economic orientation, high public spending and wage increases represented more than just a strategic shift of the political axis, but the start of a process of re-absorption of the DC on its right. Two years later, by the years '73-'74, the MSI was pushed back into a marginal position yet again, leaving the question of the party's transformation unanswered. The failure to elaborate on their structural deficiencies represented the most serious and insuperable inadequacy of the MSI. Despite being able to leverage the international constraint that penalised the entrance of the PCI into the government area, Almirante's party, in fact, was not able to become a factor of economic and social necessity in the country, acting at the best as a "thermometer" of the DC's policy towards the moderate sectors. The unresolved knots of the MSI's political-identity line were resolved by the electoral successes of 1971-72, but emerged in all their centrality from 1973 onwards when the party progressively lost all the electoral and representative weight it had acquired throughout the centre-left crisis. Although it reached its historical peak, the MSI failed to initiate that process of political legitimisation in the system that should have been affirmed by the broadening of the base of its representation. The 38.8% obtained by the DC and the 27.2% of the PCI indicated the tendency to the progressive polarisation of the system around the two large mass parties. Furthermore, the slight recovery of the PSI, with 9.6%, made the centre-left formula reproposable as a government proposal, leading to a second

[162] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 147.

[163] Ferran Gallego, „The Extreme Right in Italy from the Italian Socialist Movement to Post-Fascism," in *Working Papers*, 1999, 10.

Andreotti government (DC-PSDI-PLI, with PRI external support) without the MSI. By now, the parliamentary path to the right seemed barricaded once and for all.[164]

H) The Final Act of Condemnation for the MSI

The two-year period 1973-74 represented for the MSI the point of definitive failure of the national right-wing political perspective. The changed international conditions with the fall of the authoritarian regimes in Greece, Portugal and Spain as well as the resignation of the Nixon administration after the Watergate scandal; the need for strategic re-structuring of the Italian industrial sector hit by the economic crisis; the progressive modification of the PCI's policies on the economy, the armed forces and public order, as well as the proposal of the "*compromesso storico*" (an agreement between the DC and the PCI to form a government); all determined a condition of irresolvable marginalisation of the far-right.[165]

The international turning point of 1974, with the final crisis of the fascist regimes in Greece, Portugal and Spain, closed a political phase and redefined a continental context where the economic, social and political space occupied by the most reactionary instances was significantly reduced and where the far-right, and in Italy the MSI, once again became a marginalised part of the system. In retrospect, the attempt to use the wave of unrest to quell the demands that had developed with the year 1968, however, failed. At a time when Italian society was moving in the opposite direction, the MSI proposed an evermore patriarchal, hierarchical culture. The progressive tendency of Italian society in the 1970s, in addition to the national and international political situation, rendered the antidemocratic objectives of the far-right unrealistic.[166]

So, finally, the terrible defeat in the referendum against divorce in 1974 in combination with the clear defeat in the local elections in 1975, set the MSI on the irreversible decline of its legitimacy projects once and for all, which was only completed with the end of the Cold War, the First Republic and the Fiuggi congress in 1995. In particular, the victory of the divorce coalition gave the political system an

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[164] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 173.
[165] Ibid., 201.
[166] Gregorio Sorgonà, *Jacobin*, 29. July 2022, (accessed on February 12, 2023). https://jacobin.com/2022/07/italy-far-right-united-states-movimento-sociale-italiano-msi-post-fascism-anti-communism.

acceleration in a progressive and secularising direction that a formation like the MSI could not but suffer as a push towards new marginalisation.[167]

The "historic compromise" between DC and PCI symbolized the complete dissolution of the idea that DC and the right would form a government coalition. First the parable of rapprochement of the PCI to the government area, culminating with the governments of "national solidarity" until 1979, then the return, in the 80s, to the organic centre-left characterised by the leadership of the socialist secretary Bettino Craxi and the birth of the alliance with the two Christian Democrat leaders Andreotti and Forlani, relegated the MSI to the role of "mute guest" in the national political system. The 1976 political elections, in the midst of a deep economic and systemic crisis, gave the DC 38.7% and the PCI 34.4%, which was the start of a convergence between the two major parties that led to the definite marginalisation of all the minor forces, with the MSI, which, with 6.1%, saw a sharp drop in. The formula of "national solidarity", which progressively associated the PCI with the majority area and culminated with the formation of the Andreotti IV government voted in Parliament on the day of Aldo Moro's kidnapping by the Red Brigades, could have represented a growth factor for the far-right, which remained the only opposition party, with the PDUP and DP. However, the complexity of the political crisis and the delicate balance of compatibility between internal needs, the economic crisis and public order, as well as international constraints, the *conventio ad excludendum* against the PCI, represented openings largely beyond the reach of a party like the MSI at this point, which had no chance either to influence the ongoing political processes, nor to stand as an alternative to the DC.[168]

The 1979 elections confirmed the crisis of the MSI, bringing the party down to 5.3% just when a general shift to the right of the international political axis was beginning, favoured by the global economic recession, which in 1979-82 saw the election of Margaret Thatcher in England, Ronald Reagan in the USA and Helmut Kohl in Germany. In the context of the substantial changes taking place in the international context, with the return of a new phase of bipolar tension between the US and the USSR, the Italian political framework changed profoundly in 1979-1980, when first the exit of the PCI from the majority area closed the historical-political-social

[167] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 205.
[168] Ibid., 206.

cycle that had begun at the end of the 1960s and initiated a new phase characterised by the return to the "*pentapartite*" centre-left, which associated the government with the DC-PSI-PRI-PSDI-PLI and brought the PCI and, of course, the MSI back into the extremely isolated positions.[169]

Almirante outlined the MSI strategy during the 1980s along the lines of undermining democracy, taking advantage of economic and financial scandals, systematizing public corruption, and the pervasiveness of the party system in all aspects of the state and public administration. In response to these phenomena, which characterised the 1980s and marked the definitive decline of all the founding parties of the Democratic Republic, the MSI set up a legitimacy challenge against the entire political system, claiming its extraneousness "to the regime", presenting itself in a new guise and trying to take advantage of the slow electoral decline of the DC and the general ideological-political reflux of the country. However, despite some good electoral results, such as that of 1983 which brought the party back to 6.8%, the MSI maintained a marginal role in the system, exacerbated also, in its public representation, by the gradual decline of the Almirante secretariat, which was coming to an end with the retirement of the leader of the MSI and the necessary indication of a successor able to ensure internal unity and relaunch the party's image.[170]

An old Almirante who stepped down meant that the segments of the population around through the "*ventennio fascista*" was now also on the decline, if not entirely gone, and it became harder and harder to describe the far-right project in terms of a now bygone era – and the electoral results showed it. The path was set for a new generation of the far-right. [171]

I) The End of the First Republic & Abandonment of the Fascist Past

The withdrawal of Almirante in 1987 and his replacement with the designated successor Gianfranco Fini, interspersed in 1990 by a brief and incisive leadership of Pino Rauti, did not change the substance of the MSI nor its ability to influence the complex of political, social and institutional intricacies of the country, highlighted by

[169] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 206.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ferran Gallego, „The Extreme Right in Italy from the Italian Socialist Movement to Post-Fascism," in *Working Papers*, 1999, 10.

its immobility in the presence of a general shift to the right as well as the collapse of the Berlin Wall. In fact, the MSI was never able to change the outsider character it had and initiate a process of true political legitimisation.[172]

The turning point came, as had always been indicated by the leadership itself, with the end of the party-system of the "First Republic", and the removal of the historical discriminator against the far-right, due to the progress of the judiciary's investigations into political corruption through the "*mani pulite*" scandal.[173] Once that happened, the "fascists in democracy" would no longer represent the system's alternative, taking on a new and participatory role in the reformulation of the perimeter of political legitimacy and institutional balances – and that is exactly what happened.[174]

The collapse of the parties of the First Republic, the German unification and the Maastricht process of European construction, altogether created the ideal conditions for the MSI to present itself to the moderate public as the only right-wing party able to represent an alternative to the variegated cartel of the left after the end of the old centre parties. The new leadership steered the MSI in the 1990s towards a transformation that made it the reference point for the conservative electorate after the crisis of DC and PCI, taking advantage primarily of the corruption scandals, which shook up Italy and laid bare what 50 years of demo-socialist power really had meant.[175]

The political elections of March 1994 confirmed this projection, allowing the far-right to reach an all-time high of 13.5%, almost trebling the votes it had received just two years earlier, and to become, in the conservative camp with *Forza Italia* and *Lega Nord*, a ruling party and a decisive force in the formation of the national executive. In this way, the Fiuggi congress in January 1995 and the birth of *Alleanza Nazionale* closed the history of the MSI by sanctioning "the abandonment of the father's house" to which "there would never be a return".[176]

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[172] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 207.

[173] "*Mani pulite*" (also known as "*Tangentopoli*") is the journalistic name given to a series of judicial investigations conducted in Italy in the first half of the 1990s, in particular that of Milan, which revealed a corrupt system involving Italian politics and business in collusion.

[174] Marco Revelli. *La destra nazionale*. (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 1996), 87.

[175]Unknown Author. *Wayback Machine*, 1 January 1995, (accessed April 21, 2023), https://web.archive.org/web/20170209050232/http:/www.archivionline.senato.it/scripts/GeaCGI.exe?REQSRV=REQPROFILE&ID=628185.

[176] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 209.

Throughout the congress in Fiuggi, the Italian parliamentary far-right finally realized that the time was ripe to "officially" abandon ideological references to fascism in order to qualify as a political force legitimised to govern – now that the old party system was gone. This transformation, operated by party secretary Gianfranco Fini, led to the disintegration of the old party, the MSI, and the birth of *Alleanza Nazionale* in early 1995.[177] The "historicization" of fascism made it possible to give up defending hopeless ideas publicly; by transforming the fascist past into a straightforward historical incident that did not in any way prejudge political possibilities for the future. It provided, in its place, a respectable path ahead that would make it easier for the Italian far-right to reunite the country behind it again.[178] In order to understand that a new leader like Fini, who represented a new generation untouched by the "*ventennio fascista*", was needed. In 1994, the parliamentary far-right, the *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN), received 14% of the votes and appointed five ministers in the first Berlusconi cabinet. For 15 years, the AN would then be the cornerstone of the center-right coalitions that ruled Italy. [179]

II. The "Ordine Nuovo" (ON)

A) The Extra-Parliamentary Far-right

The universe of the far-right, aside from the MSI, also included a galaxy of extra-parliamentary small groups, organisations and circles. Within this agglomeration of forces, however, the experiences and actions of one group, which goes by the name of *Ordine Nuovo* (ON), has a particular significance. In fact, ON played an unquestionably hegemonic role for the entire duration of the post-war period until the far-right eventually returned to government – linking the veterans of the 1940s with the terrorists of the 1970s and 1980s – disposing of a personal continuity that extends even to the 1990s. [180]

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[177] Piero Ignazi, *Il polo escluso: profilo storico del Movimento Sociale Italiano*, 412.

[178] Ferran Gallego, „The Extreme Right in Italy from the Italian Socialist Movement to Post-Fascism," in *Working Papers*, 1999, 7.

[179] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 3.

[180] Marzia Minnucci, *A Destra del MSI: Evoluzione Armata della Destra Radicale*. (Master Thesis. LUISS Guido Carli Rome. 2015). 22.

The other noteworthy group was *Avanguardia Nazionale* (AN), which formed within *Ordine Nuovo* and assisted it in many of its undertakings, mostly working closely together. Its orientation was basically that of an action squad – and to it corresponded its level of ideological soundness, putting together only the most basic clichés and conspiracy theories from the far-right's arsenal without ever adding any originality to it, which conceptually connects it to the poorest of right-wing groups, such as today's American right. Against this background, the primary focus with regards to the extra-parliamentary far-right will be put on *Ordine Nuovo*.[181]

That being said, the history of *Ordine Nuovo* as an autonomous political group began in 1956, when, at the Milan congress of the MSI, a group led by Pino Rauti started threatening the party to leave. The beginning of the "economic miracle", the resolution of the Trieste question, and land reform initiatives in the South had temporarily reduced social unrest in the latter part of the 1950s. These developments led the MSI – as we know by now – to move towards a moderate, pro-DC strategy, which the radicals around Rauti saw as a dead end. Furthermore, the DC congress chose Fanfani as its new secretary in 1954, and it was well known that Fanfani, if he had to choose, would favour the left. Simultaneously, for the MSI, partial elections in 1955 and 1956 had produced disappointing results; hence, the 1956 party congress in Milan was marked by clashes and confrontation. However, Michelini, the then leader of the MSI and a great moderate himself, was able to keep the majority once more. As a result, the most ardent radical members left the MSI and founded the extraparliamentary group of *Ordine Nuovo* – which would then be the cornerstone of the considerably more radical, extra-parliamentary far-right in the second half of the 20th century.[182]

The motivations with which Rauti's group explains its exit from the MSI are the classic ones of this type of diaspora, applied to the particular situation of neo-fascism: loss of tension, purity, and momentum of a party now involved in the anti-fascist parliamentary system – a system it was actually supposed to fight. Furthermore, to the hardliners around Rauti the new evolution of the MSI resembled a betrayal of the idea, the cause and the fascist past; pettiness, intrigues, "shallow ambitions of

[181] Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale*, 71.
[182] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 52.

careerists and cunning businessmen, lacking the qualities of coherence and style peculiar to the fascist man".[183]

Accordingly, during its legal existence the activity of the ON was focused mainly in two directions: (a) ideological education of the members in accordance with the principles of Tradition, in Evolian fashion; the proclaimed goal was to create a compact élite, an order made up of diehards "standing amid the ruins", for the preservation of "the traditional remains that survived after the blast of the 1789 bubo spread plebeian pus all over the world"; and (b) carrying out militant street-fighting activity and implementing close connections, in Italy and elsewhere, with other conspiratorial groups and with the "separate corps" of the state, thereby becoming involved in a number of coup d'état attempts.[184]

That being said, the history of the ON that followed is legally split into two periods: the first, from 1956 to 1969, when the Center rejoined the MSI and was succeeded by the *Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo* (MPON, Political Movement ON), and the second, from 1969 to 1973, until its official dissolution by the Ministry of the Interior. In actuality, both phases exhibit a strong ideological and personal continuity that allows for discussion of the ON as a single phenomena.[185]

B) The Ideological Universe of Ordine Nuovo

"From this author [Evola] we have borrowed our entire doctrinal and existential approach; [...] the work of *Ordine Nuovo* from 1953 to the present has been to transfer the teachings of Evola onto a political level [...] "Men Among Ruins" [...] can be considered the political gospel of the national-revolutionary youth".[186]

These words haven been spoken by Pino Rauti in 1956; hence, it is safe to say that the whole ideological universe of *Ordine Nuovo* circled around the very doctrines of Julius Evola and, in fact, the appreciation was reciprocated – "the only group that has stood firm doctrinally without stooping to compromise is the one that has taken the name of *Ordine Nuovo*" – as Evola made known in his autobiography.[187]

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[183] Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale*, 62.
[184] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 54.
[185] Marzia Minnucci, *A Destra del MSI: Evoluzione Armata della Destra Radicale*. 22.
[186] Piero Ignazi, *Il polo escluso: profilo storico del Movimento Sociale Italiano*, 77.
[187] Julius Evola, *Il Cammino del Cinabro*, (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1963), 208.

That being the case, it is commonly accepted that ideologies often include a variety of symbolic codes that reflect important aspects of the world. These codes specify the community or group that the actors positively identify with, as well as their opponents and the countervalues they represent. The lack of tangible social referents and the abstract, disembodied quality of ON's symbolic codes, both in terms of in-group representations and political propositions, are two of their most notable characteristics – in true Evolian fashion. This is especially clear when compared to other far-right organizations like the French *Front National*, whose enemies include non-white immigration, the establishment and other groups that have clear social connotations while also having positive referents like the nation and the "common people".[188]

In contrast, the ON disregarded all tangible social and political variables, starting with the state and its citizens, as potential sources of group identity. The order, the elite group of superior creatures, and the band of heroes preserving the principles of Tradition served as their sources of reference. Through "exemplary portraits", the idea of heroism in particular, was frequently promoted as the ideal that militants should strive for as well as an unabashed account of the ON's own struggle against its numerous enemies. Regardless of the portrayal, they were fictitious, abstract communities or collectives that had little to do with the social groupings or institutions that the ON purported to uphold or represent.[189]

It was the Aryan race, represented by the warrior classes and the heroes of a familiar list: the Samurai, the Ksatryia, and the medieval knightly orders.[190] By way of mythical transformation, even the most concrete referents were deprived of any social coherence – from the German SS to the Japanese Kamikaze pilots, the French Foreign Legion, the paras of Indochina, the OAS (*organisation de l'armée secrete*) in Algeria, the Vietnam "Centurions", colonial armies like the ones in South Africa and Rhodesia, and other desperate fighters in the “last battle of the West” were all represented in the gallery of *Ordine Nuovo*.[191]

[188] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 55.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Giuseppe Parlato, *Neofascismo italiano e questione razziale*, (Roma: Resta, 2015), 162.
[191] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 55.

On the other hand, virtually everything else in modern civilization fell under the negative referents. For the ON, as Evola taught, the contemporary world was one single vast historical distortion, where old values are abandoned, matter rules over soul, and businessmen are regarded as superior to heroes. Obviously, the economic institutions were the first to be rejected, followed by capitalism, marxism, and the countries that embodied them. The onslaught extended into politics, affecting socialism, democracy, the parliamentary party system, unions, and other institutions. The ON grouped all of their adversaries into a single, scathing condemnation without trying to scrutinize in detail either the system's internal workings or any person inside it.[192]

A broad overview of the symbolic world of the ON is indeed very insightful. It indicates a lack of interest in addressing recognizable social groups and, eventually, in casting a wide net for recruitment when the positive reference society is constructed in abstract, mythological terms without any obvious social links. The ON pretended that the sort of elitism they were proposing had to do with a spiritual, not a social kind of superiority, even though the majority of the members were from the medium to upper socioeconomic strata (it was taken for granted that the environment naturally implied contempt for the lower classes). As a result, mass promoting was avoided because the group was tiny and planned to stay that way. To the militants of ON locating a revolutionary subject meant adapting to the vulgar game of History, accepting its progressive logic whereby one social order was succeeded by another, with men determined to fight each other over ideological issues, or worse, over merely economic matters.[193]

Given this, the ON ideologues had little regard for issues like internal coherence or the need for an ideology to match real practice. In fact, there were a lot of contradictions in this symbolic realm – but contradictions never hampered the far-right, especially its most radical elements. The ON, to mention a few, declared itself a national revolutionary movement while rejecting the country as a nonvalue. The ON teamed up with some of the Italian Armed Forces' most pro-American elements but at the same time they saw the US as the embodiment of all that is bad within the

[192] I Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 55.
[193] Francesco Germinario, *Tradizione, Mito, Storia: La Politica della Destra Radicale e i suoi Teoretici*, 34.

contemporary world. They were elitist, knightly, aristocratic - yet they hurried to group together and lead the populist, plebeian, mass insurrection of Reggio Calabria. All of this lends the ON's entire ideological cosmos a curiously murky shadow, giving the leadership plenty of room to manoeuvre. This even included the potential to form coalitions and alliances with elements of the exact state machinery that the revolutionaries in principle wished to overthrow.[194]

C) To the Right of the MSI: Counterinsurgency and the Years of Lead

Regardless of their ideological inconsistencies – which ontologically very much defines what the far-right actually is – ON was quickly met with acceptance within the European nazi-fascist milieu.

Thanks to relations with "*Jeune Europe*" and with the French *OAS – Ordine Nuovo* was immediately accredited towards the high spheres of international anti-communism. At the same time, these international relations opened important doors also at home. In fact, it was thanks to Rauti's OAS connections that he came into contact with the Chief of Staff, General Aloja, who introduced him, between 1961 and 1964, into the *Sifar*, the secret service of the Italian military.[195]

But besides ON's solid network in France, it was especially its good relationship with Franco's Spain that strengthened its ideological and logistical apparatus from the get-go. A brief historical reminder of what was going on in the 60s might be useful: António de Oliveira Salazar rules over Portugal, Franco has a solid grip over Spain and the "regime of the Colonels" is about to take over in Greece – constituting a fascist belt that clutched the Mediterranean at its heart. In essence, Italy was surrounded by a network of right-wing regimes that also represented the ideological spearhead in the war against the socialist bloc – at least in South/Western Europe. Conveniently, the Italian far-right only needed to cross a couple of borders or a stretch of sea to find protection, shelter, weapons and all the resources they needed.

In this framework it was the secret services – especially the Spanish ones – that connected like-minded forces on the far-right and got them on board in an effort to contain communist influence in the Mediterranean; hence, the relationship between ON and the Spanish secret services was not a coincidence, but the logical consequence

[194] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 57.
[195] Aldo Giannuli, Elia Rosati, *Storia di Ordine Nuovo*, (Milan/Udine: Mimesis Edizioni, 2017), 12.

of the Spaniards' attention to everything that moved in the field of counterinsurgency and of their acknowledged competence in this regard.[196]

In fact, since the 1930s Spain was the laboratory for counterinsurgency across Europe, offering valuable intelligence to like-minded partners. The lessons from the Spanish Civil War in particular anticipated several solutions that were to be repeated in the counterinsurgency plans of the 1960s, at a time when the Spaniards were the benchmark in the field of psychological and unorthodox warfare.[197]

As has been pointed out, particularly Italy disposed of a tense framework of political confrontation in those years, with industrial development strengthening the workers' movement, giving the PCI a political weight in Italian society that was even greater than its actual electoral weight. It was in this framework of murky relations that the plans for a counterrevolutionary war were elaborated – in which the junction between institutions and civil militias were far-right extra-parliamentary movements such as ON. For these diehards on the far-right the idea was that the fight against communism and the workers' movement was to be conducted not only through the official state and military apparatus, but also on the basis of an armed initiative from below, outside of the government monopoly. It is precisely against this background that the mysterious "*Nuclei per la Difesa dello Stato*" were born.[198]

Carlo Digilio, a former ON member and a witness in law-suits against the Italian far-right shed light on the workings of the so-called State Nuclei: "Basically, they were made up of people who had always kept in touch with the army, such as former officers, former Carabinieri, former combatants that formed small platoons that also trained with serving soldiers. They were small units that were also capable of being independent of each other, according to the techniques of a certain type of defense. Among them, only the group leaders knew each other. The existence of this essentially semi-official structure was fully known to the military authorities... Its purpose was the defense of the territory in the event of invasion and, if necessary, it also had anti-insurrectional tasks if there was ever a communist uprising. In essence, these structures followed the orthodox NATO line. It was certainly present in the

[196] Aldo Giannuli, Elia Rosati, *Storia di Ordine Nuovo*, (Milan/Udine: Mimesis Edizioni, 2017), 12.
[197] Giovanni Iozzoli, *Carmilla*, 16. December 2017, (accessed on May 3, 2023), https://www.carmillaonline.com/2017/12/16/storia-di-ordine-nuovo/.
[198] Ibid.

Veneto, in Alto Adige and in Valtellina. The purpose of the structure was certainly to carry out a coup d'état within a situation that provided for demonstrative attacks, preferably without victims, in order to push the population to demand or accept a strong government. Obviously, there could be casualties in an assassination attempt, but this, according to those who ran the structure, was a price that could be paid in such a big clash for our country."[199]

Ordine Nuovo was to be the clearing house in which these subversive tendencies often converged. In an endeavour to strengthen and extend this intricate network that held together political militancy, military garrisons and security services, the activities of Pino Rauti and other ON members were untiring: at the public debates at the Pollio Institute's, the "talent foundry" of the Italian far-right, top-tier officials of the Italian Army, the heads of the Italian secret services, MSI politicians, newspaper editors, financiers of Confindustria and so on would participate, sitting side by side.[200]

It was also precisely at this time, at the beginning of the 70s, when the far-left, with their terrorist guerrilla-groups such as the "*brigate rosse*" (Red Brigades) and "*lotta continua*" (Continuous Struggle) initiated their season of terror, that far-right groups like ON were dragged into the spotlight. Needless to say, in the face of a communist uprising in Italy American military and security structures went into turmoil, supporting in return the far-right in their counterinsurgency efforts, as pointed out in the previous chapters. The Piazza Fontana bombing of 1969 – for which *Ordine Nuovo* was responsible (and never got convicted for) – conceived by the same American circles as "demonstrative actions in an anti-communist sense", was only the tip of the iceberg.[201]

Beginning with 1969, *Ordine Nuovo* formally dissolved, but absolutely operative in the dirty war launched against the left, started distinguishing itself for its unwillingness to compromise. On July 12th of 1970 ON was suspected of being involved in a bombing on a train traveling from Rome to Messina that killed 6 people and injured dozens. On December 15th of 1970, ON members assassinated Leonardo Carbone, a lawyer and member of the Italian communist Party. On February 17th of

[199] Giovanni Iozzoli, *Carmilla*, 16. December 2017, (accessed on May 3, 2023), https://www.carmillaonline.com/2017/12/16/storia-di-ordine-nuovo/.
[200] Aldo Giannuli, Elia Rosati, *Storia di Ordine Nuovo*, 143
[201] Davide Conti, *L'anima nera della Repubblica*, 51.

1971, Giuseppe Impastato was murdered, a political activist and journalist who opposed the group. On April 28th of 1974, militants of *Ordine Nuovo* were suspected of being involved in a bombing at an anti-fascist demonstration in Brescia that killed 8 people and injured over 100. Finally, on August 2nd of 1980, although no members of the ON were convicted, the group was suspected of being involved in a bombing at the Bologna railway station that killed 85 people and injured over 200.

By the beginning of the 80s most of the ON high-echelon was either convicted or had fled into foreign countries, when the "years of lead" were finally about to end. Now, all the more, the blurry lines between parliamentary far-right and extra-parliamentary far-right came to light: personnel, newspapers, headquarters, sources of financing, all transitioned effortlessly from one organisation to another, continuing, more or less with the same policies. The events following the confluence of the ON within the MSI, the creation of the MPON (*Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo*) – recount the usual plot of acronyms, disbandments and restyling – for which the Italian far-right is notoriously known. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the official defeat of the working-class movement which, between the 1980s and 1990s drew new balances in Italy and Europe, saw the far-right rather successfully adjust and adapt to an ever more changing environment. In the midst of these earthquakes, Pino Rauti – the former leader of ON – survived like a chameleon, collecting indictments and dodging sentences. As a moral beacon of the far-right, he would also become secretary of the MSI in 1990, trying to promote an unlikely political turn. Indeed, the time of the MSI, at the beginning of the 90s, finally seemed to be ripe: all the Italian far-right had to do was to wait for the passage of the corpse of the First Republic, a couple of years later – notably through the so-called "*mani pulite*" corruption scandal, which brought the old party system to demise and half of the members of the Italian Parliament under indictment. With the far-right largely being untouched by the corruption scandals, 50 years later their dream of returning into governmental positions would finally come into fruition. Needless to say, much of the political personnel who had passed through the ranks of *Ordine Nuovo* would then find themselves suddenly sitting in parliament.

Chapter III: 1995-2023

I. New Environment – Same Old Chameleon

As already mentioned, there is no such thing as the "return of fascism". First of all, historical events at no time repeated themselves exactly as they did the first time; secondly, it is impossible to speak of the return of something that never truly vanished, not even after the catastrophic defeat of 1945. In point of fact, Italy – Europe's far-right stronghold – is the place where what was never gone regenerated and took on new forms in response to what seems to matter today.[202]

That being said, it is true though that Mussolini and his men left a long-lasting mark on the Italian society, a fissure that has never properly healed. Today, apologists of the "*ventennio fascista*", sympathizers, people who are made out of the same cloth, intellectually speaking, – in one word, the far-right – seek to regain strength in the very same space that Mussolini and the early fascist left vacant. Even if the guises and forms of appearance differ very much from those of yesterday, one needs to understand that they are less committed to the continuity of an idea, than to the mere struggle of building hegemony once again. The far-right adapts like chameleons to changing conditions, while somewhat defending a deep core, an ideological stance experienced and presented as a "Tradition", as a set of unquestionable values.

Moreover, the social conflicts of the present have a very different nature and dynamics from those of a hundred years ago, when the "*camicie nere*" took power. Today, the great divide that runs through our societies is between that part of the population that enjoys the advantages and guarantees offered by a system of collective protection sanctioned through liberal institutions, and those who, on the other hand, feel excluded from it and do not chime with the values and worldviews of that very same liberal system. It is probably not the only dividing line, but it is certainly the most insidious one. Hence, the action of the far-right is aimed at trying to gather the adhesion of those who feel excluded from the circuit of rights – as had already happened to some extent after the end of the WWI – taking on the guise of representing their unease. In this sense, sovereigntism, populism, identity politics and other political phenomena – which may be very different from each other and not always traceable to a single root – nevertheless share a common subversive matrix, which seeks to take advantage of

[202] Claudio Vercelli, *Neofascismo in Grigio: La Destra Radicale tra l'Italia e l'Europa*, 23.

the current situation.[203] Once again, the root of the far-right does not lie in something they generate on their own, but in their ability to soothe generalized bewilderment.

The relationship between historical fascism and the far-right nowadays is indeed ambivalent. One could almost say that there are as many differences as congruencies. The ideology of historical fascism was a combination of several ideas from various philosophical schools, such as socialism, anarcho-syndicalism, activism, conservative traditionalism, law-and-order bourgeois authoritarianism, and revolutionary anti-Capitalism, among others. It has been asserted that Mussolini was able to fuse these components into a unified intellectual work, in an unseen fashion. Among the features adopted, probably the most complete and comprehensive one was a drastic and steadfast rejection of democracy and the "false egalitarian utopia", which was substituted by a *Weltanschauung* anchored in the ideas of élitism, natural hierarchies, and forcefully enforced authoritarian rule.[204] Democracy was not just rejected because of its shortcomings or the discrepancies between its declarations and actions. Instead, it expanded to the fundamental principles and laws that underpin a democratic and free society, starting with the peaceful resolution of disputes. Instead, violence was continually praised as the key for bringing about social change. The minimum program proposed by the pre-fascist Futurists was "the love of danger, the rehabilitation of violence as the decisive argument".[205]

While today's far-right still shares many of those tenets – from the rejection of egalitarianism to the right of the stronger – it softened up, at least seemingly, on democracy. It needs to be said, though, that in-between 1945 and 2023 the far-right appeared in many different and at times contradicting disguises – from an early, revolutionary, elitist, anti-parliamentary notion in the first post-war years to the most recent, populistic, conservative appearances. Hence, many of the old fascist convictions can still be found in the current far-right's pantheon of ideas, even if those very same ideas are not always publicly addressed.

One the one hand, historic fascism also praised a group of "deeper", "more authentic" values in opposition to the "shallow" ones of positivistic logic, those "ideas without words" adored by Oswald Spengler. These values included vital forces,

[203] Claudio Vercelli, *Neofascismo in Grigio: La Destra Radicale tra l'Italia e l'Europa*, 28.
[204] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 32.
[205] Adrian Lyttelton, *Italian Fascism from Vilfredo Pareto to Giovanni Gentile*, 368.

enormous creative impulses, and primordial instincts. They fostered a view of vitalistic activism, the pinnacle of immediate action and encouraged creativity – "ideas without words" over reason and "dead" systems of thought, all of which were essential to the fascist worldview. In other words, "fascism favoured action, not thought".[206]

The paradoxical pursuit of popular support of fascism – which resulted exactly from the mobilization of petty-bourgeois strata – was accompanied, contradictorily as some may say, by élitism, hero worship and an actual distaste for the majority of the population.

On the other hand, the postwar far-right had no illusions about their capacity to rally the people who, after supporting fascism for two decades in Italy, had dissipated like vapor when the dictatorship faced its first challenges. Immediately after the war they were all captivated by communism. In that sense, the post-war far-right, in their unrelenting disdain for the public, targeted only specific audiences or, more specifically, sought to build small elites of men "standing among the ruins", stubbornly defying the surrounding society.[207]

It has been pointed out that 21st Century right-wing radicalism, compared to the residual neo-fascism of the second half of the 20th Century, undoubtedly gathers aspects of classical fascism, but has also emancipated itself from it; in fact, many of these movements no longer claim this provenance. And in any case, they no longer present a visible continuity, on an ideological level, with classic fascism. Yet, some affinities are still given, ranging from a spiritual elitism, fervent anti-egalitarianism, to a conviction of the existence of "natural hierarchies". Nevertheless, the environment has changed, and so has the far-right. The chameleon might be the same, but the enemy of today goes by the name of globalization, multi-culturalism, Americanism and much more.

Therefore, when attempting to identify the far-right nowadays, we must not only consider the fascist origin, without which they would not exist, but also the fact that they have changed and are currently evolving in an uncharted route. Today, what characterizes post-fascism is a particular regime of historicity – the beginning of the

[206] Adrian Lyttelton, *Italian Fascism from Vilfredo Pareto to Giovanni Gentile*, 365.
[207] Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy*, 33.

21st Century – which explains its fluctuating, unstable, often contradictory ideological content, in which antinomian political philosophies are mixed.[208]

Traditional fascism presented itself as the synthesis of a series of elements that pre-existed it: Nationalism with an imperialist slant; the widespread forms of anti-modernist Catholicism; the vocation of religions in presenting themselves as an exclusive social doctrine; the most uninhibited and unrestrained colonialism; the racist vision of social relations (which was already present in the liberal field anyway); the ethnicization of power relations; the transformation of social conflicts into identity conflicts. Precisely because of such a conglomeration of elements, historical fascism had decreed the end of the "system of bourgeois democracy", declaring it fallen once and for all. However, today's new far-right proposes itself, if anything, as a political subject that will reform society from within, not necessarily by resorting to force, but certainly by gathering the consensus of a community that is as disappointed and defrauded as it is definitively disillusioned. The environment might be different, the objectives might be contradicting to what fascism once stood for, but the chameleon is the same.[209]

II. The Berlusconi-Fini Era

A) The Shift from the First Republic to the Second Republic

Indeed, the environment in the 1990s changed drastically, but a leopard cannot change its spots, and so the far-right remained what it always was, with the sole difference that now the time seemed to be ripe. In fact, the regeneration of the parliamentary far-right in the mid-90s in Italy can be seen as a result of a broader cultural shift. For the whole area of the right, finally, the spirit seemed conducive to revision.[210] A cultural shift was necessary in light of the abrupt transformation of the Italian political system at the beginning of the 1990s, as anticipated in the previous chapters: the old parties that had governed Italy after the post-war period collapsed

[208] Claudio Vercelli, *Neofascismo in Grigio: La Destra Radicale tra l'Italia e l'Europa*, 103.
[209] Ibid., 104.
[210] Ibid., 140.

between 1992 and 1994 due to scandals in the so-called "*mani pulite*" (clean hands) investigation.[211]

The majority of the sitting Italian politicians were involved in those corruption scandals, and even though only a small percentage of the accused politicians were ever found guilty, the socialist and Christian Democratic parties' reputations were irreparably damaged, and by the end of 1994, both had completely vanished from the political stage. By the same token, the fall of these old parties of the postwar era was a moment of emancipation for their eldest foe, the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*. In this era of waning support for the established parties, the MSI took pride in its identity as an outsider; its membership cards proclaimed it to be the "party of the honest", as opposed to the "partyocracy" at the epicenter of unscrupulous networks.[212]

The tide started to turn in 1993 with the demise of the old parties, and even more so when the Second Republic had its first-ever direct mayoral elections. In this occasion, the MSI won a number of smaller cities, but also finished second in Rome and Naples in the first-round voting. In the capital city, Fini ran against Rutelli from the Green Party. Berlusconi, a Milanese business-tycoon who was yet to enter politics, gave the MSI-leader a surprise endorsement just before the second round on December 5th, saying that if given the choice, he would support the MSI. In fact, the *Cavaliere*[213] was convinced that around Fini a moderate-right area may be constructed which could "guarantee a future for the country".[214] Although Fini finally came up short, he received almost 47% of the vote. In the Naples runoff, Alessandra Mussolini – Benito Mussolini's niece and current member of the European parliament – received 44% in turn. Despite losing, the MSI had demonstrated its capacity to win over voters from outside its core for the first time in its history.[215]

Whereas Almirante and the old MSI-leadership made countless attempts to unite the right with a good portion of the mainstream DC base in an anti-communist

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[211] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022. 2.

[212] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, (London: Pluto Press, 2023), 214.

[213] A nickname given to Berlusconi after having been appointed in 1977 for the Order of Merit of Labour for his economic success in Italy; he relinquished the title in 2014 after being convicted for tax fraud.

[214] Mario Portanova, "18 anni di Silvio Berlusconi, il racconto di una storia italiana," *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 12. November 2021.

[215] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 218.

effort, Fini, who took over at the age of 35, pledged to reconcile “modernization with continuity”, while also declaring himself and his party the “heirs of fascism”. That being said, his initial stint as *segretario* was brief, and when the 1989 European elections produced disappointing results, Pino Rauti, the creator of *Ordine Nuovo*, was chosen to lead the MSI. By recreating the "revolutionary" and "anti-bourgeois" spirit of the fascist past, Rauti claimed to appeal to the left-wing electorate. However, disappointing results in the 1991 Sicilian regional elections triggered a new leadership election, which returned Fini to the secretary position. According to political scientist Piero Ignazi, this brief time under Rauti paradoxically aided Fini's own project to modernize the MSI because, despite the “fascist-left’s” unsuccessful attempt for 40 years to distance itself from the moderate right, its belated and unsuccessful moment of control served to immunize the party against this very stance.[216] Fini's MSI instead repositioned itself as a force of the "European right" for the remainder of the decade, being tailor-made for a right-wing coalition within a possible Berlusconi government.[217]

Clearly, the demise of the old party-system not only made room for the entry of seemingly shunned parties outside the power bases of the political system, like the MSI, but also to influential individuals such as aforementioned Milanese businessman Silvio Berlusconi, who established his own power base through private TV stations. This was undoubtedly a paradoxical by-product of the demise of the old order: Berlusconi had been a close ally of the now-discredited Bettino Craxi, whose deregulation of the broadcast industry in the 1980s had allowed for the expansion of Berlusconi’s TV empire, *Mediaset*, in the first place. On the other hand, Umberto Bossi's northern-regionalist Lega also capitalized on the anti-political mood to criticize an overbearing central state, which Bossi's party crudely referred to as "*Roma ladrona*" (thieving Rome). Other small parties that had never held office before were also all of a sudden well-positioned to seize the opportunity in this political Wild West, which Italy in the mid 90s found itself in. Therefore, as the old ruling parties' moral standing

[216] Piero Ignazi, *Postfascisti Dal Movimento Sociale Italiano ad Alleanza Nazionale*, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), 89.
[217] David Broder, *Mussolini’s Grandchildren*, 220.

was finally in tatters, a new age set in in Italy, where parties like the MSI were no longer relegated to the periphery but set to rule.[218]

B) Fiuggi: The "Bad Godesberg" of the Right?

In a 2019 discourse at the Manzoni theatre in Milan, in front of *Forza Italia* members, Berlusconi boasted that "in '94, we decided to run with the right, that is, with the *Lega Nord* and the fascists, whom the other parties – the ones that had governed Italy since the beginning of the First Republic – had kept out of what was called the constitutional arc: they had never allowed the League and fascism to enter the government. We let them in in '94, we legitimised them, we constitutionalised them!"[219]

While Berlusconi still claims to this day to be the one who opened the door to the government to the far-right, the MSI rather saw history itself as the main driver for their sudden political success. In hindsight, it might have a been a bit of both; on the one hand Berlusconi's opportunism, on the other hand the fall of the Berlin Wall, the demise of communism and the breakdown of the old party-system. While it is true that the MSI had been fighting for a legitimate position within the Italian political arena alongside a broader right, it also benefited from the willingness of other forces inside this very camp, and Berlusconi in particular, to finally bring in the edges of the right-wing spectrum. Thus, the mainstreaming of the MSI was not a unilateral process in which it decided to give up its identity or adopt new principles; rather, it was able to find a new home for itself in a framework defined by the dissolution of the old party structure.[220]

Anyways, the polarization of the 1994 election around the historical political identities in the main coalitions, with the right-wing parties organized still as an anti-communist front against the Democratic left, was what was so surprising about the MSI's breakthrough. The *Cold War* had come to an end, the continent was moving towards a monetary union, but nevertheless Berlusconi's election campaign was more fervently anti-communist than ever before. Paradoxically, especially in the 1990s-

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[218] Ibid., 222.

[219] Author Unknown, "Berlusconi dice che fu lui a portare i fascisti al governo," Il Post, 29. September 2019, (accessed on May 29th, 2023), https://www.ilpost.it/2019/09/29/silvio-berlusconi-fascisti-governo/.

[220] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 223.

2000s, anti-communism was still a characteristic element of the Italian political discourse – in a time when the PCI was actually already dissolved. Similar to how the MSI presented anti-communism as the guiding principle for a new Republic between the end of the *Cold War* and the early 1990s, Berlusconi used it as a political polemic against his opponents well into the Second Republic (regardless the demise of international communism), and it seemingly still worked.[221]

The MSI's entry into a larger right-wing camp comprised of "totally new men" – or at least those who had not previously led Italy – was therefore crowned by the 1994 election campaign, which was waged in conjunction with Berlusconi. In order to do this, Berlusconi formed his own political party, *Forza Italia*, before the election. Forza Italia then also formed partnerships with the northern-regionalist *Lega Nord* and Fini's *Movimento Sociale Italiano*. The Lega was both envious of its strongholds and hesitant to directly ally with "former fascists", and so the relationships suffered from their own limitations. Forza Italia and the MSI ran together as "*Polo del Buon Governo*" (Pole of Good Governance) in the southern and central regions, whereas in the North a different "*Polo delle Libertà*" (Pole of Freedoms) united the *Lega* and *Forza Italia* without the MSI.[222]

What followed was an MSI which took 5 million votes, and together with Umberto Bossi's *Lega Nord* and Berlusconi's *Forza Italia,* headed a national government for the first time.

From the get-go Fini worked to establish the MSI as a trustworthy government partner, while emphasizing that this did not imply rejecting the MSI's historical foundations. Just four days after the election triumph, on April 1st, he was questioned by *La Stampa* journalist Alberto Statera about how his party had managed to gain power without gaining distance from its past. Fini replied that his party could now "look forward without being trapped in the contradictions of the past", because the dichotomy of fascism and anti-fascism now finally "belonged to history". He did, however, make a statement that was likely to satisfy party extremists, saying that

[221] Gregorio Sorgonà, *Jacobin*, 29. July 2022, (accessed on February 12, 2023). https://jacobin.com/2022/07/italy-far-right-united-states-movimento-sociale-italiano-msi-post-fascism-anti-communism.
[222] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 226.

Mussolini remained Italy's "greatest statesman of the century" and that Italian minorities in Dalmatia had to be protected.[223]

Quite interestingly, in 1992, Fini was still undertaking excursions into the Adriatic to stand up for Italian territorial claims vis-à-vis Yugoslavia. By 1994, he was all of a sudden well aware of the international press regarding the new Italian right-wing government and did not tolerate comments from high-ranking MSI members that, for instance, publicly claimed that the 1975 border treaty with Yugoslavia "belongs to the bin".

In conjuncture with Berlusconi, Fini stopped his followers from launching a "parallel foreign policy". In fact, Berlusconi's party itself intervened to calm tensions with his foreign minister, insisting that socialists in Europe were stirring up controversy because "they are having difficulty to find their own identity now, and it seems they can only do so in terms of reviving the old struggle against fascism". However, it was still unclear what Fini's party actually stood for and whether it had the potential to develop into a "mainstream conservative movement".[224]

At that time several commentators and analysts discussed the possibility of an "ideological Bad Godesberg", now that the MSI was a party in power. The name was inspired by a spa resort close to Bonn, where the German Social Democrats (SPD) had a convention in 1959. Since Hitler's takeover in 1933, the SPD had been excluded from all government positions, including those following 1945. However, in 1959, at Bad Godesberg, it laid forth a vision that provided a more accurate summary of its current objectives. In the convention at the spa resort, the SPD publicly abandoned its Marxist history in favour of a "liberal socialism".

Those who urged the MSI to cut its links to historical fascism brought up the concept of a "Bad Godesberg of the right", and the metaphor gained particular momentum when the party's convention was held in the spa resort of Fiuggi, in the south of Rome, in January 1995. Since the fall of the First Republic and Fini's return to leadership, many inside and outside of the MSI have advocated for a new definition of the party.[225]

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[223] Alberto Statera, "Il migliore resta Mussolini," *La Stampa,* 1. April 1994.

[224] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 230.

[225] Ibid., 232.

In an article that appeared in *La Repubblica*, Francesco Storace, the MSI's spokesman, urged taking a "step forward in accordance with our tradition" in order to create a "new right". Storace cautioned against just "gripping to the party banner" through "another 40 years of opposition"; what the MSI needed to do now was to take advantage of the situation. Needless to say, many within the MSI saw it as a betrayal of the very ideals which kept the party alive for half a decade. Nonetheless, the breakup of the traditional parties forced the MSI to seize the historical opportunity, since it continuously attempted to lead a larger right-wing alliance without much success. The MSI was not being dissolved, claimed Fini, but rather continuing under more favourable circumstances: *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) was "not a party, but a strategy".[226]

Fini utilized an old phrase at the 1995 Fiuggi Congress to emphasize the continuation of the postwar heritage: "No one can ask us to renege on fascism, when we clearly declare that we do not want to restore it." However, he emphasized the necessity for a "clear and irreversible shift": the right should take the chance to play a role in forming the Second Republic rather than continuing to be defined by the anti-fascist and fascist dichotomy. This did not imply disintegration but rather development. Through this approach even critical members could accept the transformation, since it was more of a marketing move rather than a genuine shift in political identity.[227]

What followed was the official transformation into *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN) during the congress held in Fiuggi in January 1995, reaffirming its commitment to liberal-democratic principles – which happened countless times before, but never as a ruling party. Yet, the political organization that came out of the Fiuggi Congress was unusual, retaining aspects of an ultra-nationalist, fascist mindset together with what seemed to be a sincere embrace of liberal constitutionalism. In hindsight it might be concluded that the Fiuggi Congress was fundamentally different from the SPD's Bad Godesberg in that it produced a real democratic socialist party in Germany, while in Italy the *Alleanza Nazionale* was a rather contradictory fusion of fascism and liberalism. The formal collapse, however, was not welcomed by all. Pino Rauti's wing broke out to form the *MSI-Fiamma Tricolore*. Ironically, the resignation of this long-

[226] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 235.
[227] Ibid., 237.

time Julius Evola supporter, who was also highly involved in the legal proceedings surrounding far-right terrorism in the 1970s, served also as a sort of affirmation of the MSI's "*svolta di Fiuggi*" (Fiuggi turn).[228]

Ultimately, Fiuggi paved the way to some form of political pluralism, promoting at the same time recuring fascist themes; but above all it claimed that the "political right is not the daughter of fascism" and that the overall national culture served as the foundation for the Italian right.

To that end, as per usual, the Italian far-right – now under the banner of *Alleanza Nazionale* – rhetorically alluded to a jumble of philosophical references, including Carl Schmitt, Giovanni Gentile, Julius Evola, Gabriele d'Annunzio, as well as Catholic social teaching, alongside Italian national heritage, like Dante, Machiavelli, and even, as contradictory as it may seem, Antonio Gramsci, the founder of the PCI.[229]

C) The Second Right-Wing Coalition (2001-2005)

The first right-wing coalition did not last for very long due to internal tensions, especially over *Lega Nord's* separatist pretensions. Hence, after barely 8 months, Berlusconi was forced to step down given the pull-out of Bossi's League from the government. From 1995 until 2001 four different centre-left governments followed, yet the right-wing alliance returned to power in the May 2001 general election, with *Forza Italia* as by far the strongest force in a coalition that also included *Alleanza Nazionale* and *Lega Nord*.[230]

By then, Bossi's party had abandoned its separatist intentions, but it once more faced significant defeats and dropped to the third place in the right-wing coalition. AN once more took over subordinate ministries at the beginning of Berlusconi's second government, but this time there was a difference from 1994: Fini was already the deputy PM and later in this term he also became foreign minister.

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[228] Nigel Copsey, "Fascism… but with an open mind: Reflections on the Contemporary Far Right in (Western) Europe," *Journal of Comparative Fascist Studies*, 2023, 14.

[229] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 241.

[230] Gianni, Lucini, "La caduta del primo governo Berlusconi," *Daily Green*, 22. December, 2021.

The founding of *Alleanza Nazionale* during Berlusconi's first brief term as PM in 1994–1995 had already been crucial in recasting the previous neo-fascist MSI as a "post-fascist" force, and Fini would further move away from the fascist past during the Berlusconi II government. As deputy PM following the right-wing coalition's victory in May 2001, Fini paid a widely publicized visit to Israel in November 2003. While visiting the Holocaust museum with the traditional kippah on his head, he delivered a historic speech claiming that "the racial laws promoted by the fascist regime were part of the absolute evil" and that "Salò was a shameful page" in Italian history. Later Fini vindicated that his words there would "finally take fascism off the Italian political horizon and consign it to the judgement of history". The rift with Salò, in particular, was difficult to accept for the heirs of a party that had its roots in the tragic experience of Mussolini's desperate Salò Republic.[231]

Even though Fini had been the party's head for almost 10 years, several of its senior figures protested vehemently in response to his remarks, also because news agencies such as *La Repubblica* reported inaccurately that Fini said that "fascism was the absolute evil". Still, Fini's declaration of loyalty to freedom and democracy did not make AN's fascist affiliation fade away overnight; instead, the years after the "*svolta di Fiuggi*" revealed the limits of the parliamentary far-right's cultural reform and the various trends at play inside the party.

In fact, almost all of AN's top officials – with a few notable exceptions – were former MSI cadres. However, they frequently reorganized themselves into a number of internal factions, three of which in particular controlled party affairs around the turn of the millennium. The elements that held together the comparatively liberal currents were those closest to Fini, which also represented the centre of the party. Then, there was the "*destra protagonista*", the right-wing led by Ignazio La Russa and Maurizio Gasparri, which traditionally had the best relationships with Berlusconi. The third current was the left-wing of the party, the so-called "*destra sociale*", which supported a "communitarian" economic model and was most overtly opposed to neoliberal economics. It was led by Rauti's son-in-law and future mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, as well as by Francesco Storace. As a matter of fact, the second Berlusconi administration served only to intensify the internal disputes within AN, which were

[231] Author Unknown, "Da Salò alle stragi naziste, così Fini ruppe col passato," *Il Giornale*, 11. April 2007.

already evident in the late 1990s. The Jerusalem speech in November 2003 was a turning point in this regard, since Mussolini's granddaughter Alessandra had already declared her intention to leave the party before Fini even touched down in Rome again – like many other party members.[232]

As Fini increasingly embraced more liberal positions without the support of most of his activists, his position became shakier. The leader of AN's youth organization, Giorgia Meloni, an up-and-coming figure within the party, was among the many voices opposed to Fini's position – claiming that after all "there were no politicians like Mussolini in the last 50 years".

D) The People of Freedom – Popolo della Libertà

The Berlusconi II government, lasting from June 11th of 2001, until April 23rd of 2005, will go down as the longest in Italian Republican history.[233] New elections in 2006 relegated the right-wing coalition once again to opposition by a narrow margin: the centre-left *Unione* won the race for the lower house by less than 25.000 votes and assumed a one-seat majority in the Senate. Berlusconi unsuccessfully appealed the decision in court, but Romano Prodi's new government, relying on groups such as Rif*ondazione Comunista*, was very unstable anyways.

Finally, after the Prodi administration lost its majority in the Senate in January 2008, immediate elections were scheduled for April. In light of this, Berlusconi resurrected the idea of creating a unified centre-right party to bring together his followers and *Alleanza Nazionale*. While initially expressing reservations, Fini in late March of 2009 accepted the merger – seeing it as the final step in legitimizing the political culture associated with the MSI-AN legacy as well as a personal launchpad to lead the centre-right after Berlusconi.[234] From an ideological point of view the liberal current of AN saw the transition into "*Popolo della Libertà*" (PdL) as the conclusion of what has been kicked off in Fiuggi. Thus, since the snap-elections in 2008 the centre-right around Berlusconi was in power again, with La Russa as defense

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[232] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 260.

[233] Francesco Cortese, *Your Trend*, 26. November 2020, (accessed on May 29, 2023), https://www.youtrend.it/2020/11/26/governi-italiani-piu-lunghi/.

[234] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 3.

minister and Meloni as youth minister; hence the PdL was immediately the leading force of the country. The serenity did not last for long though: on September 8th of 2008, La Russa accompanied President Napolitano at a celebration honouring the 65th anniversary of the German invasion. On that occasion former PCI member Giorgio Napolitano honoured the troops who refused to enlist in the Salò army, but La Russa emphasized that they were not the only patriots who died. If he would not acknowledge that troops who fought for the Salò Republic "subjectively, from their point of view, fought believing in the defence of the homeland, opposing the Anglo-American landings," he said, "he would be betraying his conscience".

At this point, Fini had to weigh in on the debate, being scheduled to speak at *Atreju* – an Azione Giovani event named after the protagonist of "The Neverending Story", a fantasy novel by German writer Michael Ende – the very same weekend. Fini argued to AN's youth organization that it was incorrect to equate the two sides since "the men of the Resistance were on the right side, while those of Salò were on the wrong one", even if some people had undoubtedly joined Salò "in good faith". The Italian right, especially the young, "must unambiguously say loud and clear that they identify with the values of our Constitution", in fact, "fully identify with anti-fascist values". This time, Fini went even further than before, arguing that his party had not only surpassed fascism in the sense of confining it to the past, but was anti-fascist by now. The speech, unsurprisingly, reanimated disbelief and anger among the youth base, which was still led by Meloni.[235]

With Almirante's personal approval, Fini rose from leading the MSI youth organization to leading the party itself. However, Fini's growing image as a liberal "modernizer" put him at odds with his followers. As the *Cold War* ended and the Italian political system fell into pieces, he guided the MSI veterans over a number of obstacles in an effort to create a larger party that might shape the Second Republic. By doing so, he went even so far that some Christian Democrats praised him for attempting to establish a "normal" right. This needed a number of steps, starting with the transition to *Alleanza Nazionale* and continuing through the formal collapse of the MSI, the denunciation of the "absolute evil", the merger to the centre-right PdL, culminating in Fini's own "identification with anti-fascist values." Obviously, each such remark

[235] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 274.

included several contradictions; frequently, the tone of the intervention and the pushback against it, as in the instance of the 2003 visit to Israel, had a greater impact on public perception than the exact content of what was stated. As a result of all of this, we can see that the legitimization of a post-fascist party such as the former MSI was rather the product of its engagement in government than merely an artifact of its adherence to anti-fascist speech standards or the likes. In contrast, unlike Fini, Berlusconi frequently lacked the same commitment to anti-fascism, making several remarks that romanticized the "*ventennio fascista*" and the "holidays" Mussolini sent opponents on.[236]

Meanwhile, as Fini's influence over the party faded away he still tried to challenge Berlusconi's leadership, supporting voting rights for immigrants for the sake of integration, contrary to the views of Berlusconi and the rest of the party.

After all, on April 22nd of 2010, at a PdL convent, it came to a showdown between the two-party heavyweights, where Berlusconi sternly criticized Fini from the speaker's desk, accusing him of purposefully undermining the party, while challenging him to resign. This came after a heated exchange in which Fini had already threatened to form a separate parliamentary group. In an iconic moment of recent Italian history, Fini sprang up and yelled out – "*che fai, mi cacci*?" – "what are you doing, throwing me out?".[237] And in fact, Berlusconi quickly took such action. Fini and a few friends created a new coalition named "*Futuro e Libertà*", asserting that his new party would not be a "small *Alleanza Nazionale* but a bigger *Popolo della Libertà*"; yet his endeavor was doomed from the get-go due to a lack of funding and supporters. Later, Fini would insist that the reason for his expulsion from PdL was not due to his support for integration policies, but rather because he turned down Berlusconi's request to pressure the parliamentary Justice Commission to shorten the period of time that convicts are prohibited from holding public office.[238]

The power-base MSI-AN frequently accused Fini of being was the "kind of right that wants to please its opponents", and in December 2010 he finally showed his true colors when together with the centre-left parties, he introduced a resolution of no

[236] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 277.
[237] Claudio Bozza, Claudio, "Dieci anni fa il 'Che fai, mi cacci?' di Fini a Berlusconi. La Russa: Avrei seguito Gianfranco, ma era diventato di centro," *Corriere della Sera*, 22. April 2020.
[238] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 281.

confidence against Berlusconi. Even though this fell short of just three votes, the foundations of the Berlusconi IV administration were already severely undermined by the deepening financial crisis, looming over southern Europe. Mario Draghi, the head of the European Central Bank (ECB), issued an ultimatum shortly after that: the ECB vowed to no longer guarantee its credit supply to the administration unless it carried out extensive privatizations and labor reforms. A hunch was verified when President Napolitano ordered former European Commissioner Mario Monti to the Senate, since the open letter by the ECB appeared to be a complete government program. On top of that, many EU leaders declared no willingness to bail out Berlusconi's government. Hence, Monti was propelled into the position of PM in the face of political isolation and escalating market pressure. This was considered unacceptable meddling from outside by some in the PdL, such as Guido Crosetto – now defense minister, and before a longtime Berlusconi supporter – who condemned the party for failing to defend Italian sovereignty. In early November 2011, Berlusconi instructed his followers to back Monti's technocrat-heavy cabinet, which was also pushed, not without irony, by a certain Gianfranco Fini.[239]

Berlusconi's demise continued in the light of the 2013 general elections, where further secessions from the PdL happened – due to Berlusconi's unwillingness to hold primary elections for the leader of the coalition, which was also contested by newcomers such as Gianni Alemanno and Giorgia Meloni. Berlusconi just cancelled the contest, and a couple of weeks later, Meloni, Crosetto and La Russa announced that they were creating a new party: *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI). [240]

[239] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 282.

[240] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 3.

III. *The Accession of Fratelli d'Italia (FDI)*

A) The Rise of the Seagulls: Foundation of Fratelli d'Italia

Towards 2010 the life of the right-wing coalition led by Berlusconi was becoming increasingly troublesome. Even though PdL ruled Italy in coalition with the *Lega Nord* between 2008 and 2011, Berlusconi's leadership was seriously harmed by a number of scandals – ranging from abuse of office, bribery, extortion, money laundering and tax fraud, to underage prostitution influence and witness tampering, among others.[241]

The second chink in Berlusconi's armour was the looming eurozone crisis, which unfolded between 2010 and 2012. Especially the southern countries of the EU were vulnerable to punitive debt levels and swiftly rising interest rates in the aftermath of the financial crisis that shook global markets beginning in 2007. Within the EU, Greece became the epicenter of the unrest after 2010, but Italy was not far behind.[242]

Italy's massive public debt rounded about €1.9 trillion, and fast increasing interest rates compelled both Italian big business and foreign elites to seek a government capable of stemming the magnitude of austerity politics required by the so-called Troika (European Commission, ECB and IMF). It was believed that Berlusconi, who had once again led his right-wing coalition to victory in 2008, was unable to do this.

Meanwhile, internal tensions in the PdL started to rise. The first breakup occurred in 2010, when Fini and his closest allies left and created an ill-fated party, as anticipated in the previous chapter. Eventually, in November 2011, Berlusconi announced his resignation due to his government's failure to address the worsening eurozone crisis and surmounting international pressure. A technocrat, Mario Monti, took his place charged with enacting radical economic reforms – while being supported by Fini's FLI (*Futuro e Libertà per l'Italia*), the PD (*Partito Democratico*) – and ironically, Berlusconi's PdL. [243]

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[241] Francesca Brunati, Igor Greganti, *Ansa*, 15. February 2023, (accessed on May 31, 2023), https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2023/02/15/la-lunga-storia-giudiziaria-di-berlusconi_d149104d-a283-4bf0-aeb2-e8d2c9dcaf7a.html.

[242] Mark Thomas, "Fascism's return to Italy? The meaning of the Fratelli d'Italia," *International Socialism*, 2023.

[243] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022, 6.

In this absurd context, a number of ex-AN parliamentarians in the PdL expressed increasing disapproval of Berlusconi's leadership. The straw that broke the camel's back was a Berlusconi statement in late 2012 stating that he would head the PdL again without holding the competitive primaries to choose the PM candidate as he had promised months earlier. Thereupon the opposition split away in the run-up to the February 2013 elections – creating *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI) on December 21st, 2012 – led by a certain Giorgia Meloni, alongside Guido Crosetto and Ignazio La Russa.

FdI, however, was not a hardline split when it first emerged. The major FdI supporters could not be regarded as hardcore AN members by any means, and no far-right organisation, such as "*La Destra*" (The right) – an AN offshoot party that had broken out a few years prior – joined FdI. Instead, the so-called "*gabbiani*" (the seagulls), a group that joined the new party as a whole and to which Meloni belonged, played a crucial role in the establishment of the young movement. The "*gabbiani*", which was effectively a faction of AN, based mostly in Rome, achieved some notoriety inside the party and in particular within its youth wing while maintaining close ties to the most significant faction of AN – the so-called "*destra protagonista*" – the right-wing of *Alleanza Nazionale*.[244]

By then, Meloni, the leader of the newly founded party, had already made herself a name as a youth minster in Berlusconi's last coalition. Coming from Rome, she had joined the MSI youth wing ("*Fronte della Gioventù*") already in 1992. In 1998, she was chosen as a councillor in the provincial administration of Rome, and in 2006 she made it into the parliament, while still serving as the president of "*Giovane Italia*", AN's youth wing, before finally being appointed as minister in the Berlusconi IV cabinet.[245]

FdI first presented itself as an insurgent anti-establishment movement, in contrast to AN's self-presentation as "a new moderate, and pacifying, political force". It expressed this in nationalist terms, asserting that the whole political establishment, and particularly the Monti administration, had usurped the sovereignty of the people

[244] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 4.
[245] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022, 7.

at the behest of the EU and financial markets, while holding grudges especially against Fini, because they believed that he had destroyed and sold out the Italian far-right. According to Broder, Meloni dismissed Fini as "a lucky charm for the high finance and freemasons". Instead, what she had in mind for her party was a rampant back-to-the-roots movement towards the true nature of the far-right – immediately letting the party undergo its baptism of fire in the 2013 general election .[246]

B) 2013 – FdI's First Election

Especially over the last decade, since FdI was founded, Italy experienced a period of severe political turmoil. In the 2013 general election, the mainstream left- and right-wing parties, above all the PD (*Partito Democratico*) and Berlusconi's PdL/FI (*Forza Italia*, after the PdL broke up) had significant electoral declines, while anti-system parties as the M5S (*Movimento Cinque Stelle*) accumulated consent. Hence, in order to understand the rise of FdI in a time of extreme "political volatility", its existence needs to be put into a bigger perspective; for this reason yet another detour through recent Italian political history is unavoidable.[247]

Deeper truths are frequently hidden by clichés about Italy's "political volatility", as the country had almost 70 different governments since WWII. One might say that this portrays a vivid image of Italians uniting behind the most recent demagogue which then vanishes, leaving only unfulfilled promises in his wake – but the truth lies even deeper. From 1947 through 1992, the DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*), a party with a sizable electorate that served as the foundation of all administrations, dominated the Italian political life. Its dominant position was a result of the structural rivalry with the communists, the second-largest party in the country. A majority was often achieved by the large-tent Catholic party through minor coalitions, ranging from centre-left deals with socialists to centre-right agreements with liberals. Although the PC (*Partito Comunista*) did not participate in any national governments during this time, it did contribute to the Republic's structure by acting as a link between its own constituency

[246] Mark Thomas, "Fascism's return to Italy? The meaning of the Fratelli d'Italia," *International Socialism*, 2023.
[247] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022. 1.

and the national institutions. It had up to two million members, strong links to the working class, cooperatives and trade unions, as well as up to 1/3 of the voters. These parties were ideologically diverse, but they also represented diverse segments of society.[248]

The 1992 "*mani pulite*" scandal was then the watershed-moment in Italian political life, causing a wave of public outrage, which led to a major political shakeup in Italy. The corruption exposed in the scandal contributed to the downfall of the traditional political establishment – the DC and the PCI – that had dominated Italian politics for decades. In the aftermath of the scandals, the political landscape of Italy laid in ruins: newcomers on the left studied international models such as Germany's SPD and Tony Blair's New Labour, while right-wingers like Berlusconi defined their political orientation to be "European, Christian and liberal" – or in Fini's case even turned to examples like the US Republicans. These parties joined periodically together to form the wide coalitions known as the centre-left and centre-right – but this did not imply a restoration of the postwar political culture, but rather a steady loss of democratic choice.[249]

The collapse in general adherence to political parties by Italians has not resulted in a resurgence of the social turmoil that had subsided in the 1980s – instead, the outcome has been a more volatile political life due to the emergence of outsiders, who not only indicate diminished expectations for future change but also served as a vehicle for rage. In addition to a string of technocratic administrations, beginning with Mario Monti, the 2013 election was a reflection of the political bankruptcy that reigned supremely since the demise of the First Republic.

In light of this, the newly formed *Fratelli d'Italia* received barely 2% of the vote, which was less than the neofascist coalition *La Destra – Fiamma Tricolore* (The Right – Tricolour Flame) received in the previous election. In contrast to the M5S, that gained almost 26% as the winning party of the 2013 election, FdI gave off the impression of being a stolid residue of the previous MSI.

Even though the M5S had the biggest electoral outcome, it did not commit to any coalition. As a result, a period of political deadlock followed, and it took several

[248] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 351.
[249] Ibid., 352.

months to form a government. Eventually, the "Letta Cabinet" was formed, with members from the centre-left PD, the centre-right PdL (which later transformed into *Forza Italia* again), and the centrist *Scelta Civica* party.

Together with the *Lega Nord* and the M5S, FdI agreed to remain in opposition throughout the grand-coalition governments. During this time, FdI started an internal process to become a more organized and structured party. For instance, the "*Officina per l'Italia*" (Laboratory for Italy), a think tank aimed at uniting the scattered and divided right in a unified cultural and political platform, was established. On top of that, Meloni started delineating the new party to the public – criticizing Fini's choice to merge AN with PdL not only as a grave political error, but also as a betrayal of the right's principles and past in pursuit of personal gains. She denounced the failure of Fini's goal to create a mainstream, right-wing conservative party and said that in order to provide FdI with a clear political platform, it was necessary to go back to the origins of nationalist philosophy.[250]

With Meloni firmly in charge of the party in the years that followed, FdI systematically strengthened its platform by gradually incorporating many of the views of the European far-right. The reasons for the shift are numerous: the unstoppable decline of Berlusconi's influence and the concurrent emergence of Salvini's Lega forced FdI to use more extreme positions on immigration and Europe. This was also made feasible by Italy's rising euroscepticism – a country which had previously been one of the most europhile member states – which was due to both austerity measures and the handling of the refugee crisis. Despite the fact that the party did not actively reverse the process of detaching from the fascist past, compared to AN, there was generally less pressure on it to establish itself as a national conservative party as a result of the normalization of nationalist and eurosceptic views in a nation riddled by political bankruptcy and economic decline.[251]

[250] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022, 7.

[251] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 4.

C) From another Fiuggi to Palazzo Chigi?

The first ever congress of FdI was held in Fiuggi on March 8th and 9th of 2014 – not surprisingly, the city that also hosted the inaugural AN congress in 1996, where the Italian far-right morphed from MSI into AN, declaring the historicization of fascism. In this occasion Meloni was officially elected as leader of the party, whose new logo resembled elements of both predecessor parties.[252]

There again Meloni spoke harshly about Fini's leadership over the far-right, whereas Fini in response mocked the "spoiled children" and their "farce of aping history" by attempting to recreate the *Alleanza Nazionale* in completely changed circumstances. At the same time, *Fratelli d'Italia* had made its political debut, with rather modest results, electing only 9 MPs – what was a significant decrease from the 71 MPs that AN got elected on its final ballot in 2006. Likewise in the 2014 EU elections the party fell short of the required 4% hurdle, receiving only 3.7% of the turnout.

Meloni, despite the party's subpar early performances, insisted on its far-right descendance, hinting at its ability of continuously morphing into unlike circumstances. Historically, the MSI covered a wide spectrum of positions, from support for the "socialization" of the Salò period to the "anti-bourgeois" undertones of the Rautian left and the influences of the Reaganite new right. In its formative years, FdI included elements of each tradition, promoting for instance in its 2014 European election campaign tax cuts as well as anti-austerity measures. Along with a new national investment plan, it advocated for the "controlled dismantling of the Eurozone" as the "first condition to bring Europe out of recession and Italy out of crisis". As ever, these ideas had important contradictions because they rather appeared as political explorations than clear commitments. Of little surprise was therefore also the quick withdrawal from this idea as Brexit happened in 2016. Instead, FdI started adopting the guise of a "European conservative party" that blended tax reduction and free market economics with an emphasis on cultural wars and national identity, capitalizing on the changed political circumstances, with fascism as a distant memory in the collective political consciousness (on the contrary, MSI and AN had to fight for decades for their standing in the political arena, in spite of their fascist pedigree). [253]

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[252] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022, 7.

[253] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 371.

Hence, FdI, after some trial and error, started finding its place while taking advantage of the situation, especially on the centre-right of the political spectrum. The second FdI convention, which took place in Trieste in 2017 – which is likewise a city of great symbolism for Italian irridentism – gave the nativist approach even further support. Intriguingly, the document that came out of the convention made reference to the "Great Replacement" conspiracy theory, which contends that the EU is trying to bridge the demographic gap in Europe with non-Christian immigrants and therefore erasing the religious heritage of the continent. The suggestion to choose immigrant arrivals based on their cultural background reflects this culturalist approach towards migration.[254]

The Trieste platform focused on what Puleo and Piccolino refer to as a "nativist construction of the pure Italian people oppressed by the EU institutions and threatened by immigrant inflows" while targeting "the traditional parties that are stuck in the Europeanist and globalist political view". To many, this was a return to the terminology already used by the previous MSI, which also highlights the level of continuity among the MSI, AN and FdI cadres.[255]

It is safe to say that the direction pursued by Meloni slowly but steadily started to pay off in electoral terms. The party increased its vote continuously, year by year, going from 1.96% in 2013, to 3.67% in 2014, to finally 4.35% at the general elections in 2018. Along with a more constrained intake of minor leaders from other political cultures, this growth also saw the admittance into the party of numerous AN members who had previously stayed loyal to Berlusconi.[256]

The 2018 elections brought an unlikely government between the two main winning parties to fruition, M5S and *Lega* (formerly *Lega Nord*). In hindsight, it was hardly surprising that a coalition between such opposing populist parties was not of a lasting nature, and by 2019 the PD (*Partito Democratico*) substituted Salvini's *Lega* as the governing party.[257]

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[254] Mark Thomas, "Fascism's return to Italy? The meaning of the Fratelli d'Italia," *International Socialism*, 2023.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 5.

[257] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022, 8.

In the meantime, FdI never bothered joining any of those governments, obtaining constant approval through its role as opposition party, which turned out to be a winning formula. With 6.4% of the vote and the election of its first MEPs in the second-order European election in 2019, the party scored its highest electoral performance at the time. The main winner of the 2019 election was also to be found on the right, with *Lega* scoring a ground-breaking 34% of the turnout. In succession to the historic entry of FdI into the European Parliament (EP), the party joined the European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) in the EP – which can be interpreted as the last departure from the old-established AN standpoint. Although Fini made explicit in the years to come that *Alleanza Nazionale's* aspired to join the mainstream centre-right European People's Party (EPP), Meloni and her supporters never shared this ambition.[258]

2020 was then the year marked by the pandemic. Needless to say, its management had an impact on the policy agenda for the entire year and beyond, and the opposition centre-right parties had varying reactions to it. While *Lega* and FdI condemned the Conte II administration for the strict lockdowns and the "economic suicide", Berlusconi's FI maintained a balanced stance. It has been claimed in this thesis that the right, much more skillfully than the left, capitalizes on new environments and crisis circumstances, dramatizing and exaggerating them for political purposes – accordingly, by the end of 2020, FdI's popular ratings had risen beyond 10% while the Lega had rapidly fallen below 30%. It was evident at the time that a future centre-right alliance would have been a contest between the populist-right Lega and the far-right FdI, or in other words a Salvini versus Meloni situation.

On January 17th of 2021, Sergio Mattarella, the President of the Republic, was obliged by the instability of the majority around the Conte II government to call Mario Draghi, the former head of the ECB, to create a new government. The Draghi-led government of national unity was formed with the support of all political parties, with the exception of one: FdI.[259]

In fact, the Draghi government marked a significant turning point for Meloni's party. As the only parliamentary group that opposed the new government, FdI was also the

[258] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 5.

[259] Alessia Donà, "The Rise of the Radical Right in Italy: The Case of Fratelli d'Italia," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, 2022, 2.

only significant Italian party that has never thus far backed a government. This decision was successful in terms of support as shown by surveys, which in December 2021 revealed that FdI accounted for about 20% of vote intentions. On the eve of the 2022 general election, Meloni appeared fully prepared to challenge Salvini for the leadership of the centre-right alliance, given FI's precipitous drop under Berlusconi (below 10%) and the numerous challenges Salvini faced inside his own party.[260] By now, *Palazzo Chigi*, the seat of the Italian government, seemed closer than ever for what would be Italy's first far-right PM since Benito Mussolini.

[260] Leonardo Puleo, Gianluca Piccolino, "Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change," *South European Society and Politics*, 2022, 5.

Conclusion

In hindsight, the 2013 election earthquake provided fresh openings for an ideological makeover. *Fratelli d'Italia* took advantage of the rising euroskepticism and anti-establishment attitude among Italian voters, but the party also developed a distinctive strategic stance that set it apart from the rest of its rivals, who had all sporadically held political office.[261]

Not even 10 years later, on October 22nd, 2022 – the first ever far-right government since Benito Mussolini was officially sworn in, with Italy's first ever female PM to be at the helm of the country, Giorgia Meloni.

From a statistical standpoint, the emergence of FdI is no different to that of the other anti-system parties in Italy starting in the 1990s, following the demise of the so-called First Republic. The current changes – from the outside – seem to be an updated version of the same old pattern, with isolated parties emerging and riding successive waves of protest. Since the rise of anti-political sentiment in the early 1990s, those waves have not died down.[262]

But this time around, to keen observers, things seem to be different. Unlike the countless protest parties that occasionally performed well over the last 30 years – not a single one disposed of such a clear lineage. Nonetheless, newspapers and TV shows alike continue to underscore the supposed novelty of Meloni's *Fratelli d'Italia* – while, in fact, as unveiled in this thesis, the party has been an unweary work in progress since fascism's historic defeat in WWII. What Almirante and the heirs of Mussolini's desperate Republic put together in 1945, after much trial and error, crowned its completion 77 years later, with Giorgia Meloni as Italy's first far-right leader since "*Il Duce*" himself. Not without reason, the same tricolor flame adorns the logo of FdI as it did in that of the MSI.

By the same token – in true protean fashion – FdI exhibits a chameleonic shapelessness that defies easy categorization, as has been claimed to be typical for the area of the far-right. What might appear to many as sheer charlatanry in fact is a powerful, inerasable political idea.

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[261] Mark Thomas, "Fascism's return to Italy? The meaning of the Fratelli d'Italia," *International Socialism*, 2023.

[262] Tom Kington, Tracy Wilkinson, *Los Angeles Times*, 22. September 2022, (accessed on June 1. 2023), https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2022-09-22/far-right-giorgia-meloni-could-become-italy-prime-minister.

Back in the day, the far-right had to fight for its legitimate standing in Italy's political agora. Nowadays – once the burden of legitimacy has been lifted upon them – FdI militants have no need to seek their place in the political arena anymore; any formal cordon sanitaire which kept the MSI and then the AN out of the "constitutional arc", belongs to the past.[263]

As a result, before its election victory in 2022, FdI still disposed of a much more overt "anti-systemic" face, while finally being a legitimate part of the political landscape. For instance, in fall 2021 – a year ahead of the elections – Meloni outlined much of her political views at a Vox-rally in Spain for the local far-right: to her, in the 21st century, it is the nation against the forces of globalism. Globalism is portrayed as an existential danger to every country; in the same vein, financial speculators, Silicon Valley billionaires and multinational lobbyists are examples of globalist forces who collaborate to undermine states and strengthen their own power. In the fall of 2021 Meloni still admonished of the dangers of globalism, which "standardizes" populations across borders in an effort to deprive them of their national identity, leaving them rootless and exploitable.[264]

What echoes through this major speech is the constant appeal to Tradition, which continues to act as a cornerstone of the far-right since the days of Julius Evola, the undeniable pioneer of this political culture.

It is true, from the end of WWII to this day, traditionalism constituted essentially the only position and political proposal developed by this area. Simultaneously, to this day, the attitude of the far-right towards History[265] did not change either – as can be deduced from FdI's continuous regress to writers like J.R.R. Tolkien (not exactly a fascist) and to fantasy mythologies on principle, from the *Lord of the Rings* to the *Hobbit*, in an effort to substitute the censored symbolism of the fascist past, or to put it differently, its self-perceived fall from grace with History.[266]

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[263] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 375.
[264] Mark Thomas, "Fascism's return to Italy? The meaning of the Fratelli d'Italia," *International Socialism*, 2023.
[265] History with a capital "H" is the study of the past as "thing in itself" (especially Hegel's account of History as an entity might be very useful in understanding this concept); history with a minuscule "h" is simply the mere succession of things, anything and everything, everywhere that has ever happened.
[266] Marco Bruna, "Tolkien, così l'universo fantasy del Signore degli Anelli influenza i discorsi di Giorgia Meloni," *Il Corriere*, 26. October 2022.

Now, as of 2023, Meloni still holds on to many of those beliefs, but in a much for moderated fashion – seemingly aware of the historical weight which lies upon the shoulders of the far-right. In the light of almost 70 different governments since 1945 FdI policy-makers are especially aware of the importance of domestic stability and international relations.

The 2017 Trieste Theses shed light on how the Italian far-right assessed global politics – Italy's crisis began in 1943, with the military defeat in WWII, ever since "no political subject could afford to pursue the national interest and that alone". From there on every government had to select from a variety of foreign designs in order for it to be integrated into the international scene. Along the way – according to the Trieste Theses – Italy's ruling class lost its "sense of the Fatherland", lagging behind the international agendas of others rather than asserting its own national interest.[267] Nonetheless, since taking office, Meloni was clever enough to accept the main Euro-Atlantic institutions, especially its place within NATO – accommodating to Italy's junior role within the Western camp.[268]

Despite having frequently used vehement language, Meloni has opted for prudence over confrontation both domestically and internationally, supporting the status quo rather than taking a chance on radical transformation that would exacerbate tensions or financial problems.[269]

FdI policymakers are well aware that Italy is still too unstable on a domestic level to project its influence elsewhere. Accordingly, the Italian far-right has always enviously glanced at France's presidential-system, with dreams of turning the country's weak PM into a French-style decision-maker. While all the other parties were opposed to French semi-presidentialism, the MSI has viewed it favorably since 1958. Before undergoing international rebranding, Italy has to stabilize domestic politics – if Meloni and FdI can do it is still to be seen.[270]

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[267] Stefano Rolando, *Percorsi*, 16. January 2023, (accessed on June 4, 2023), https://stefanorolando.it/?p=7202.
[268] David Broder, *Mussolini's Grandchildren*, 382.
[269] Crispan Balmers, *Reuters*, 26. January 2023, (accessed on June 4, 2023), https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/italys-meloni-belies-radical-image-cautious-first-100-days-2023-01-26/.
[270] Elena Giordano, *Politico*, 11. May 2023, (accessed on June 2, 2023), https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-giorgia-meloni-francy-idea-presidency/.

A century after assuming power, Mussolini is still an almost ever-present image in Italian public life. Fascism is still discussed in everyday politics, but rather as a thing of the past than as living history. As a matter of fact, the barriers between centre-right and far-right movements are dissolving throughout Europe. Italy's story might be original, but in reality it is only part of a bigger phenomenon which is spreading over the Western world: FdI's coming into power – rather than a return to the past – seems to be the future. It depicts a political landscape in which both the world of 1945 and the anti-fascist parties rooted in it are on the verge of extinction. Italy's most right-wing government since 1945 is therefore not the recreation of Mussolini's regime, or the dawn of a new one, but the image of the modern far-right in new times.

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Appendices

a) CHRONOLOGIES

1943-1945: RSI *Repubblica di Salò*

First right-wing party after fascism: *L'Uomo Qualunque* (1946-1949)

1946: Foundation of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI)

MSI: 1946-1950 Almirante
1950-1954 De Marsanich
1954-1969 Michelini
1969-1987 Almirante
1987-1995 Fini (1990/91 Rauti)

"*Anni di piombo*" between 1969-1982

Ordine Nuovo (1956-1969)

Avanguardia Nazionale (1960-1976)

1995 → "*Svolta di Fiuggi*": MSI becomes *Alleanza Nazionale* (AN)

Movimento Sociale Fiamma Tricolore (MS-FT) (1995)

Forza Nuova (FI) (1997) [out of *Fiamma Tricolore*]

CasaPound Italia (CPI) (2003) [joins *Fiamma Tricolore* in 2006]

Alleanza Nazionale [AN] (1995-2009)

Popolo della Libertà [PDL] (2009-2013)

Lega di Salvini [LN] (2013)

Fratelli d'Italia [FDI] (2012)

Berlusconi I (1994-1995) [FI, AN-MSI, LN]

Berlusconi II (2001-2005) [FI, AN, LN]

Berlusconi III (2005-2006) [FI, AN, LN]

Berlusconi IV (2008-2011) [PDL, LN]

FdI: 1,96% (2013); 3,67% (2014); 4,35% (2018); 6,46% (2019); 26% (2022)

2022 → Meloni becomes PM and FdI is the strongest party in Italy

b) MAPS

Map VI: "Vittoria Mutilata" – Italy after WWI with the gained territories according to the Treaty of Saint Germain (1919): Trentino, Gorizia, Trieste, South Tirol, and Istria[271]



[271] *Kingdom of Italy (1919)*, 2. March 2007, (accessed on January 10, 2023), https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Kingdom_of_Italy_1919_map.svg.

Map VII: Italy's Colonial Empire - every territory ever controlled by the Italian Empire at some point in time during WWII[272]



[272] *Italian Colonial Empire*, 1. August 2011, (accessed on January 10, 2023), https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Italian_Colonial_Empire_%28orthographic_projection%29.svg.

Map VIII: Italy after the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947 – it lost substantial territories: Libya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somaliland, Albania, its concessions in China, the Dodecanese Islands, as well as Fiume, Zara, Gorizia, and Pula.[273]



[273] *Italy after the Paris Peace Treaty in 1947*, no date, (accessed on January 10, 2023), http://italianmonarchist.blogspot.com/p/maps.html.

Map IX: Europe on the eve of WWI[274]



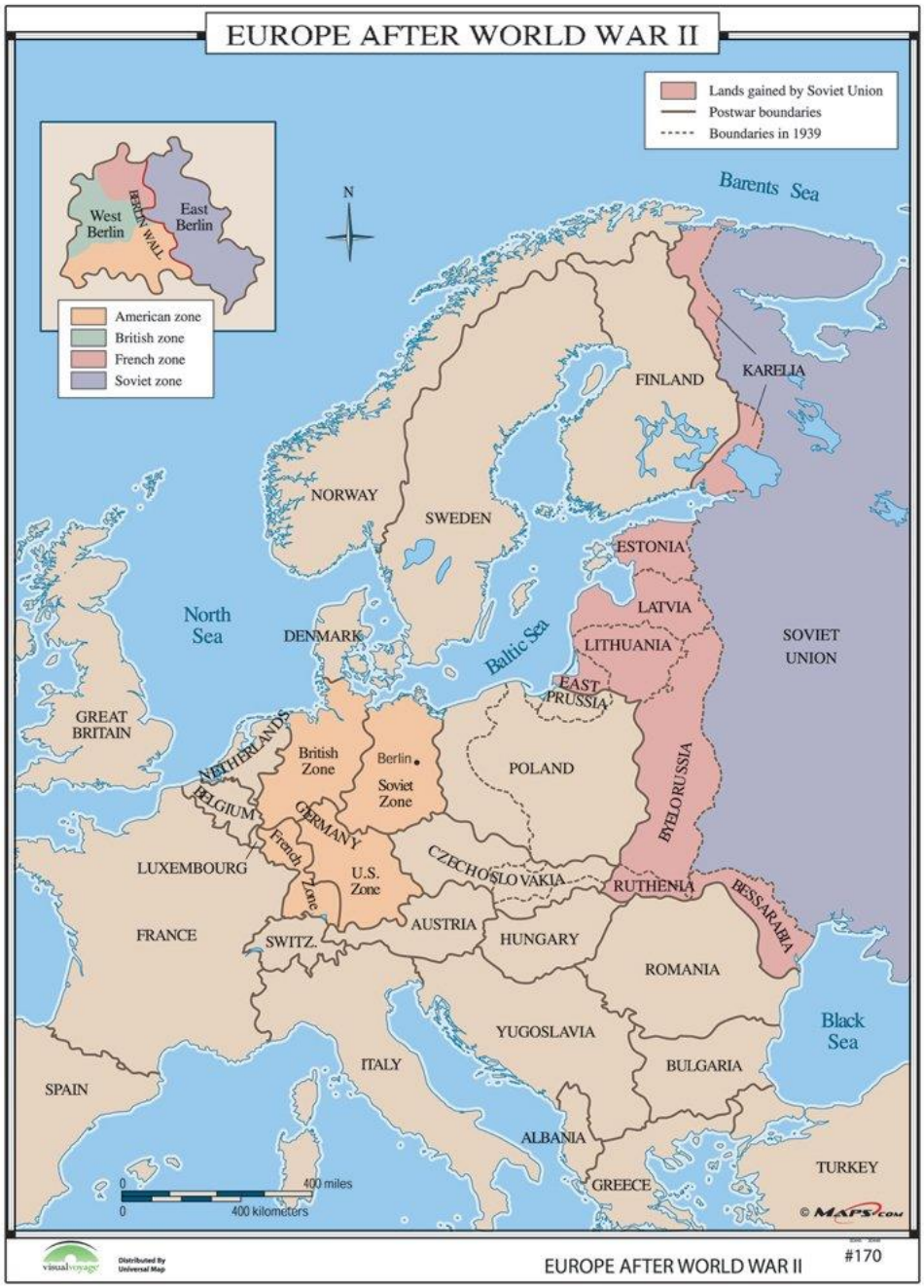
[274] *Europe 1914*, no date, (accessed on January 11, 2023), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Europe_1914_%28preWW1%29,_coloured_and_labelled.svg.

Map X: Map of Europe after the Treaty of Versailles in 1919[275]



[275] *Map of Europe after The Treaty of Versailles*, no date, (accessed on January 11, 2023), https://www.pinterest.at/pin/366480488398812235/.

Map XI: Europe after WWII[276]



[276] *Europe after WWII*, no date, (accessed on January 11, 2023), https://www.amazon.in/Europe-After-WWII-World-History/dp/0762550686.

c) **DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

- Benito Mussolini (1882-1943)
    - Italian dictator from 1922-1943
- Giovanni Gentile (1875-1944)
    - Main philosopher during the "*ventennio fascista*"
- Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)
    - Polymath, inventor of "elitism"
- Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900)
    - German philosopher and philologist
- George Sorel (1847-1922)
    - French political thinker
- Rodolfo Graziani (1882-1955)
    - Italian Marshall, active in the colonies and the RSI
- Victor Emmanuel III (1869-1947)
    - King of Italy from 1900-1946
- Ivanoe Bonomi (1873-1951)
    - MP of Italy after WWII
- Corneliu Zelea Codreanu (1899-1938)
    - Romanian far-right politician and founder of the Iron Guard
- Giuseppe Pella (1902-1983)
    - Italian politician, PM of Italy
- Josè Antonio Primo de Rivera (1903-1936)
    - Founder of the Falange Española and son of dictator Miguel Primo de Rivera, Spain's dictator from 1923-1930
- Julius Evola (1898-1974)
    - Italian philosopher and father of the far-right
- Enrico Mattei (1906-1962)
    - Italian public administrator and businessman
- Augusto De Marsanich (1883-1973)
    - Second leader of the MSI
- Giorgio Almirante (1914-1988)
    - Founding figure of the MSI, Italian politician

- Arturo Michelini (1909-1969)
    - Italian right-wing politician, third leader of the MSI
- Achille Lauro (1887-1982)
    - Italian shipowner and politician
- Giuseppe Pella (1902-1983)
    - Italian politician, PM of Italy
- Junio Valerio Borghese (1906-1974)
    - Italian naval officer and far-right political figure
- Giovanni Agnelli (1866-1945)
    - Italian industrialist, founder of Fiat
- Carl Schmitt (1888-1985)
    - German jurist, philosopher, and political theorist
- Marshal Tito (1892-1980)
    - Yugoslav statesman and revolutionary, leader of Yugoslavia
- Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984)
    - Italian politician, leader
- Clemente Graziani (1925-1996)
    - Leader of Ordine Nuovo (ON)
- Giulio Andreotti (1919-2013)
    - Italian politician, seven-time PM of Italy
- Pino Romualdi (1913-1988)
    - Italian right-wing politician
- Augusto De Marsanich (1893-1973)
    - Italian fascist politician and the second leader of MSI
- Pino Rauti (1926-2012)
    - Italian far-right political activist and journalist
- Filippo Anfuso (1921-1994)
    - Italian politician, member of the MSI and AN
- Giovanni Malagodi (1904-1991)
    - Italian politician, leader of the Italian Liberal Party
- John F. Kennedy (1917-1963)
    - 35th President of the United States

- Oswald Mosley (1896-1980)
    - British politician and founder of the British Union of Fascists
- Amintore Fanfani (1908-1999)
    - Italian politician, six-time PM of Italy
- Enrico Letta (1966)
    - Politician, served as PM and leader of the Democratic Party
- Pier Luigi Bersani (1951)
    - Former leader of the Democratic Party
- Walter Veltroni (1955)
    - Former leader of the Democratic Party
- Angelino Alfano (1970)
    - Politician and lawyer, served as Minister of the Interior
- Dario Franceschini (1958)
    - Politician, served as Minister of Cultural Heritage and Activities.
- Gianfranco Fini (1952)
    - Former leader of the AN, played a significant role in right-wing politics
- Pier Ferdinando Casini (1955)
    - Politician and leader of the Union of Christian and Centre Democrats
- Giorgio Napolitano (1925)
    - Former President of Italy
- Emma Bonino (1948)
    - Politician, served as Minister of Foreign Affairs
- Silvio Berlusconi (1936)
    - Entrepreneur and media tycoon, served as PM multiple times
- Romano Prodi (1939)
    - Economist and politician, served as PM and President of the European Commission
- Matteo Renzi (1975)
    - Former PM and leader of the Democratic Party
- Sergio Mattarella (1941)
    - Current President of Italy

- Mario Monti (1943)
    - Economist and academic, served as PM during a crucial period of economic crisis
- Matteo Salvini (1973)
    - Leader of the League party, prominent figure in right-wing politics, served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior
- Antonio Tajani (1953)
    - Politician, former President of the European Parliament
- Giorgia Meloni (1977)
    - Italian PM since 2022 and leader of FdI
- Luigi Di Maio (1986)
    - Leader of the Five Star Movement, served as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Economic Development
- Ignazio La Russa (1947)
    - FdI politician and former Minister of Defence

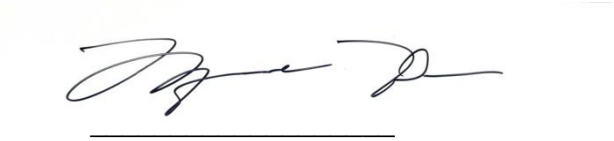
Vita

Michael Steger was born in 1997 in Brunico, Italy. Prior to studying at the *Diplomatic Academy of Vienna*, he concluded an undergraduate degree in Business and Japanese Studies in between the *Vienna University of Economics and Business* and the *Hitotsubashi University* in Tokyo. Furthermore, he also obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy at *University of Vienna*, while completing parts of his studies at the *Sapienza University of Rome*. Throughout his academic career Michael managed to collect experiences in a vast array of fields, spanning from the private sector in Japan (*GKN Automotive*) to the political sector in Italy (*Senate of the Republic*) – besides his most recent work-experience in Austria's financial sector (*Austrian National Bank*). Along with the aforementioned experiences Michael published various articles for Italian and German language newspaper, while also composing twice the editorial article for the largest newspaper of his region (*Dolomiten*, South Tyrol).

This thesis is meant to serve as a nexus and combine all of these personal interests, which include a genuine passion for history and philosophy, a fascination for politics, as well as the desire to understand decision-making – in a country as complex and multifaceted as Italy.

Pledge of Honesty

On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.



Michael Steger