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A Nation's Demons:
The Legacy of the 70s in Contemporary Italy

by

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ABSTRACT

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This ethnography addresses how former Italian radical activists of the 70s negotiate their militant past with their present predicament. This is done by comparing and contrasting the public discourse (historical texts and legal proceedings) with the activists’ own interpretations of their past. Since most of the historians of these social movement are themselves former activists, their contrasting versions of the period contained in their texts are seen as expressions, at the level of intellectual discourse, of the inherently conflictive legacy of the 70s. It is widely acknowledged that the emergence of left wing armed struggle and the ensuing state repression prevents a balanced evaluation of this period. By examining the “Sofri case”, I argue that the emergency legislation adopted by the state to convict members of clandestine organizations, has determined what counts as a normative history of the period. I also argue that such normative implications re-actualize a conservative view of Italian national identity, which sees the state as pastoral authority. I thus suggest that “terrorism” is a symbolic marker consistent with this moralizing project, since, by essentializing the subjectivity of the “terrorists” it also prevents former activists who
did not engage in clandestine violence from publicly articulate a balanced version of their own past.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

That this dissertation has finally been written, I owe it to Petra Staberg.

Petra has not only endured my irritating silences and my recurrent doldrums during the writing process; she has also played the role of breadwinner in our household throughout my fieldwork and after. More important still, I doubt that without her I would have been able to experience some of the most “spicy” episodes that have made my fieldwork worthwhile. I am quite sure that at times she would have gladly done something else. Since time immemorial, it is customary that partners read the manuscript. Petra has not only read each and every chapter; she has also corrected my grammar and extensively criticized their content.

The Rice anthropology department has been my second partner in this quest. The affection with which I was honored as a graduate student in Houston and when I was struggling in the field and during my write-up has really been priceless. Jim Faubion’s friendship has been a gift both for Petra and me, his comments and suggestions first as a professor and later as an advisor, precious. Jim’s cuisine and W.R. Dull’s hospitality have made Houston our “home away from home”. George Marcus, has been my other mentor. He has never flinched at my most surreal and often obscure argument, and has managed to boldly engage with them with friendship and understanding, for this, for his supporting trust and for his friendship I am most grateful. Another friend has been July Taylor, to her I am indebted for arousing my interest in Argentina and political violence, something that allowed me to make some important and unexpected connections which would not have been possible otherwise.
Last but definitely not least, my gratitude goes to Carole Speranza, the department assistant. As everybody in the department knows, she is the real cornerstone of the whole establishment. Yet, there is something specific for which I am grateful to her. As an Italian-American, she has made me realize that there are more ways than one to interpret the meaning of “nation” namely that belonging to an “imagined community” may not necessarily imply the existence of borders. I nice thought in such dire times.

Finally, I like to thank my radical informants without whom I would not have been able to do fieldwork at all. Through them I have come to realize that what anthropologists ask of people is first and foremost their time, which is just another expression for life. This is what makes ethnography an ethical enterprise. I am sure some things I have written will not meet their approval. I hope that my rendering of their lives will be recognized for what it is, a token of my friendship.
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INTRODUCTION

- Listen, I forgot to ask you, what do you do for a living?
- Well, I’m involved in many things. Cinema, theater, photography, music, I read...
- I mean, for real.
- I don’t get it; how do you mean?
- What do you mean you don’t understand; what do you do for job?
- Nothing specific.
- ...How do you live?
- Well... I told you, I look around, I see people, I go places, I have acquaintances, I do stuff.
- How do you pay the rent?
- I don’t. I live with my brother.
- Your clothes?
- Like, this friend of mine, he goes to London and I ask him to bring me stuff, some clothes.
- What about food?
- I eat with people a lot.
- What about this cigarette?
- This morning I met a friend of mine and he gave me two packets.

I wish this were an excerpt from one of my interviews. Yet, surreal as often my interviews turned out, these lines are taken from Ecce Bombo, one of the early movies of Nanni Moretti. Long before he was awarded his first Palme d’or at Cannes in 1994, Moretti had become an icon for the disillusioned generation of Italians that had seen their 68 utopias shattered to pieces in the cross-fire between neofascist terrorism, state repression and left-wing armed struggle. Indeed, Ecce bombo was Moretti’s first, and to date foremost, Italian commercial success. Released in 1978, this movie stigmatized in pitiless dark humor the plight and self-indulgence widespread among the 1970s generation. Throughout the movie, the characters seem to move about restlessly yet aimlessly, unable to communicate with each other and with the outside world.

It is well known that the simultaneous emergence of left radical social movements worldwide in the late 60s has produced whole libraries of studies
interpreting such new forms of collective action as expressions of a new way of doing politics that heralded the emergence of new social needs and subjectivities. Yet, while stressing social movements’ positive role in the further expansion of democracy in the West, literature on social movements seem to rationalize their oppositional stance as some sort of post-industrial cunning of reason. Thus, the “new” social movements however radical in their expression were really reformist at their core. Though reasonable, this interpretation still does not account for the feeling of nostalgia and the difficulty in adjusting to the “real world” so common among that generation of Italian activists.

It was this feeling of loss, of having survived the “end of the master narratives” of liberation that that I have attempted to capture ethnographically. Whether I have succeeded in doing so, it is for others to decide. Yet, what I believe I have managed to do, is to describe some of the ways in which the social upheaval of the 70s still haunts Italy after all these years.

Doing good ethnography is hard enough, doing a decent ethnography of what for lack of a better term I would call a “structure of feeling” can really be quite messy. The more so if the ethnographer’s biography has been influenced by it. Be that as it may, once I arrived in Rome, my home town and the scene of my would be ethnography, the first difficulty I had to confront was how to transform it into “the field”. That is I had an intuition of what I wanted to do, I even had reasonable idea of what kind of people I wanted to talk to, but how could I combine these two things in something vaguely resembling the canonical site where anthropologists do their thing? I
was grappling with a problem very similar to the one Liisa Malkki faced when doing a research in a refugee camp in Tanzania.¹ The problem Malkki was struggling with was namely to what extent a refugee camp, or rather its displaced dwellers, could be the site of ethnographic fieldwork. That is, what kind of “field” was she dealing with? Obviously, whenever an anthropologist, even the most theoretically à la page, hears the word “field” he or she can only with extreme difficulty resist the Pavlovian reaction of looking for a “community” bearer of a specific “culture”. Malkki’s problem of course was that the refugee camp however materially self enclosed and institutionally localized, could with extreme difficulty resemble a community in the canonical ethnographic sense, i.e., a group of people who more or less self-consciously fashion their everyday engagement with each other as a the trace of common cultural meanings. Now, obviously, whatever meanings the Hutu refugees shared one was obviously paramount, namely their common traumatic experience of Tutsi violence. Malkki argument is of course that an excessive focus on the “durability” of culture with its not so implicitly communal and institutional connotations, does not do justice to role of contingency, of the event, in producing a shared yet inchoate structure of feeling among culturally diverse people. Thus elaborating on Barbara’s Meyerhoff’s “accidental community”, she suggests that such contingent groups could be viewed as “accidental

communities of memory". That is, people that have shared similar experiences but may not have shared them together.

Examples of such accidental communities of memory might be: people who have experienced war together, whether as civilians or combatants; people who have lived in a refugee or internment camp together for a certain period; people who were bombed in Hiroshima or Nagasaki [...]. People who have experienced such things together carry something in common – something that deposits in them traces that can have a peculiar resistance to appropriation by others who were not there.³

That the worldwide emergence social movements in the 60s and 70s has been recognized as an out-of-the-ordinary event is, I believe, beyond doubt. The more so since the vast majority of those involved, regardless of class, came from the same generation. The intimation not to trust anyone above 30 has probably been over-emphasized but it did reflect an “imaginary” shared identity based on age. This implied the shared belief that as young people were taking matters in their own hands, things were going to be different “from now on”. Thus, I would argue, the fact that such optimistic hopes were in the end defeated or at least heavily reduced, does account for the difficulty with which former radical negotiate their past. Indeed, the former-radical-

² Incidentally, one may note in passing that Barbara Meyerhoff referred to the famous Woodstock music festival, as an example of accidental community.
turned-moderate is a recurrent trope in post-Cold War political discussions. Yet, such difficulty of keeping together the past with the present among former social movement activists may shed some light on the equally unstable relationship between history and memory. Indeed, one may paradoxically argue that the literate character of the social movements of the 60’s and 70s makes the legitimacy of former radicals’ life course an issue of public heated debates. *Scripta manent* the good old Latins would maliciously remind us. Those who study the relationship and the political implication of the relation of memory with history are well aware that written documents tell only part of the story, they need a context of some sort. And indeed, this is what Pierre Nora’s description of archives, monuments, and other canonical mnemonic devices as *lieux de la mémoire*, alert us. That is, the “a-sincronicity” between “historicized” events, or rather of their material traces, being texts, monuments or memorabilia, and subjective memory in late modernity. But there is another more banal thus vital connotation to Nora’s suggestion - that such sites of memory that one “knows” to be relevant to one’s identity yet unsure how that may be – namely the crisis of the quite modern idea of history as national memory. This aspect, I would argue, is not completely irrelevant when confronting the worldwide 68, if one recognizes that the subjectization of politics was also a

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4 Joschka Fisher or Daniel Cohn-Bendit are two rather famous examples, especially when one considers their active support of recent military interventions in former Yugoslavia or Afghanistan.

5 In Italy at least, it is also an inexhaustible source of gossip among connoisseurs of the past and present radical scene.

6 Paul Veyne’s *Les Grecs ont-ils cru à leurs mythes?* Paris: Éditions du seuil. 1983, is another convincing intimation that the history’s truth is itself historic.
contestation and an effect of the nation's purported homogeneity. Thus, Marco Revelli has contrasted the 1848 “springtime of nations” with the a-national 68. If the 1848 revolutions where the explicit popular politicization of the nation and in turn problematized the political as coextensive with the nation-state, the worldwide 68 was a-national in character in as much as it addressed global issues (beyond the nation state) or local sites of struggle (beneath the nation state). Furthermore, as Revelli argues the anti-authoritarian attitude of the “68” also implied a sort of distrust for all things institutional. And indeed can one imagine anything more institutionalized than Nora’s lieux de la memoire intimating each and every pedestrian to remember their intimate connection with their nation state? Still, memory as anthropologists, among others, have realized is fundamental to the identity of social groups. Accordingly, they have looked at all different kind of social practices as mnemonic devices, from ritual to myths to lineages. Yet, if it is true that memory (and history) need some form of mnemonic support, maybe the relationship between the anti-istitutional mood of social movements, their a-nationalism and their contingent solidarity may contribute to explain why their

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former members have difficulty in accepting the (national) historical accounts of their heady days.\textsuperscript{10} Hence, to go back to more practical matters, once I was back in Rome I found myself in the weird predicament of talking to people who even though had participated to the same events, and sometime knew each other, had not met ever since. Indeed the only present connection I could find between them was my hunting them down to pry a conversation or an interview out of them. Quite a demanding task, I assure you. But again, my fieldwork was not as absurd as I like to describe it now. The other connection between them was the common concern with a public rendering of their past they did not agree with. After the fact I would argue that what they questioned was not so much the public rendering, that is, the historical textualization of their past, as much as the appropriation by others of a period of their lives they still viewed as seminal, yet eccentric, vis-à-vis their present. Thus, if I were to comment on my own work, I would say that one theme that is constantly evoked throughout the text is the symbolic evocation, indeed invocation, of historical reconstruction (or its impossibility).

Accordingly, in the first chapter I have attempted to trace some of the ways in which the history of the "contentious 70s" has been written, most of the authors I have looked at are sympathetic to the movement, what often transform their scholarly accounts in polemical and political interventions is most clearly seen by what they choose to include, an issue of no little relevance as it involves the thorny question of left wing armed struggle. The second chapter deals with the "Sofri case", the interesting and

\textsuperscript{10} This may also shed some light on the widespread obsession for collecting, or conserving personal archives of original documents, leaflets and newspapers dating back to their activist
disturbing aspect resides in its tragic (in the classical sense of the term) aspect; that is, how the past comes back to haunt the present. Here the difficulty, or rather the inherently selectivity of memory combined with the decontextualizing effect of a court proceeding results in the reappropriation on the part of the state of the eccentric past of former activists and the re-emergence of a canonical view of the “Italian national character.” The difficulty of appropriating an alternative idea of the nation is discussed in the third chapter. That the national framework cannot accommodate a version of 70s that the activists would accept is confirmed by their persistent reminder that their experiences were indeed exceptional, totally different from the topical view of Italy as a country at odds with modernity. The last chapter further addresses this idea of exceptionality of social movement participation in its most extreme form, namely left-wing “terrorism.” I dedicate a whole chapter on “terrorism” not because I view it as a deviation or separable from the social movement at large, as the discourse on terrorism often claims. I believe that by representing left wing armed struggle as “terrorist”, especially the Italian kind, is a terrible mistake not because political violence is acceptable but because, as I try to argue, it is a stigma that essentializes subjectivities.

As I see it, the problem with this particular mode of essentializing dissent is not so much that it paradoxically legitimizes the “terrorist” claim that the “democratic” state is indeed repressive, rather that it prevents other modes of critique to emerge.\footnote{Cf. Michel Foucault. \textit{Illuminismo e critica}. Roma: Donzelli. 1997.} That is
the possibility for the governed to affirm their right not to be governed "or, in any case, not to be governed here, in this way, by these people."\(^{12}\)

Yet, the choice to dedicate a whole chapter to the issue of "terrorism" is also an effect of the actual, unforeseen, conditions of possibility of fieldwork. Originally, I had no intention to address the issue at all. I believed that discussing left wing "terrorism" in connection with the social movements of the Italian 70s would constrain my problematizing intent into a potentially unending polemic. I was wrong. The more so since the only "site" were I was able to observe ongoing mnemonic practices, the traces of an accidental community of memory, were the moments when I "hung out" with former "terrorists."

*De te fabula narratur.*

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THE LONG 68

1. THE LONG GOODBYE: TEN YEARS OF ITALIAN RADICALISM AND ITS AFTERMATH

As in other parts of the world, the late 60s saw in Italy the emergence of new social movements. Just like what was happening around the world the Italian “68” social movements challenged the limits of post-W.W.II democracy. Contrary to what has happened in other countries though the Italian cycle of protest and social activism had a longer life span and only began to decline at the end of 70s.

This ethnography addresses the different and contrasting ways former social movement activists negotiate their militant past with their present predicament. This chapter will discuss the conflicts and paradoxes that writing a history of Italian social movements of 70s implies. Accordingly, I will discuss some historical texts. The contrasting versions of the same phenomenon contained in the texts will be seen as expressions, at the level of intellectual discourse, of the inherently conflictive legacy of the 70s within Italian society in general and particularly among former activists.

The mobilization of different constituencies was probably one major reason that prompted Italian governments of the early 70s to pass long-overdue reforms; unlike what happened in other parts of the world, this wave of social and political activism was further expanded by a radicalization of large sectors of the working class, in turn the

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consequence of a vast urbanization process generated by the economic expansion of the previous decade. Thus, the radical and the long-lasting character of Italian social movements can be understood as the combination of two elements.

On one side, the increased up-ward social mobility of the middle classes who, having gained access to higher education not only found these aged institutions unable to deliver high-quality education as they were supposed to, but also that once they graduated they could not be absorbed by the economy. On the other side, the changed composition of the working class in the country’s North, a relevant part of which was made up by immigrants from the countryside.

Unlike traditional workers, the new workers had few contacts with the left-wing parties and were unskilled. These two characteristics made them ideal for the fordist production process that required unskilled and non-politicized workers. The combination of failed social mobility (students) and harsh working conditions (immigrant labor) allowed the emergence of radical social movements and their persistent presence in Italian politics for over a decade.

Just as in other countries, it was a social upheaval that shook society to its foundations, or so it seemed at the time. Indeed, if one were to judge from the panoply of “life styles” which have appeared in its aftermath, the legacy of this long Italian 68 has an enduring influence in all spheres of cultural production, as well as the ways we

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think about ourselves and what we can do with our lives. Indeed the 60s and 70s are sometimes viewed as an icon of creativity and individual freedom.

Things may appear in a different light were we to focus on the more political aspects of the 60s and 70s. From this perspective, much like other overdeveloped Western democracies, the “68” seems to have left few visible traces in the Italian political landscape or, better still, what legacy social movement politics of the 60s and 70s may have left behind seems to go hand in hand with the notion of unresolvable conflict both between as well as within individuals. As Andrea Colombo a former activist struggling to describe his generation’s relationship with its past told me:

The best way to describe this generation’s relationship with this period is one of disavowal, not so much repression or working-through. It is truly one of disavowal because the reasons that lead to their revolt are still with us to this day, things have not changed, thus one cannot say that the experience was a negative one. Yet today the tension of these years is gone.\(^4\)

This feeling of being at odds with the world and with one’s own past is strengthened by the attitude of much mainstream opinion of these years. Thus at a conference on the on the social conflicts of the 70s, Pietro Scoppola a catholic historian who had been invited to open the proceedings began his speech by saying that he did not really understand why he had been invited to introduce the meeting. He did not agree with the overall approach to the issue. While the organizers had given a positive interpretation of the social conflict of the 70s, he stressed that he had a completely
different opinion; these social movements were inherently violent and were the breeding ground for left-wing terrorism. Indeed, shortly after his opening speech Pietro Scoppola left, leaving the somewhat embarrassed speakers to their papers.\(^4\)

The issue of the relationship between social movements and political violence looms large whenever the 70s are discussed, nor could it be otherwise, since the emergence of left radical social movements did prompt an ambiguous response on the part of the Italian State apparatuses at the time. The growth of social protest was accompanied by a series of bombings. Their perpetrators, commonly ascribed to the neofascist right, were never convicted, while inquiries persistently were sidetracked by Italian and NATO Intelligence networks.\(^5\) At the same time, the radicalization of social protest soon led to the formation of clandestine groups. As a consequence, most discussions of the 70s in Italy are haunted by the memory of violence, this in turn implies the question: who, being the State apparatuses, the neofascists or social movement organizations, are the primary culprits? Who, so to speak, fired the first shot? Hence, the 70s have become an icon for the conflictive features of Italian polity:

\(^4\) From my fieldnotes, 10/27/2000.

\(^5\) The conference held, in Rome on May, 14 1999, had the somewhat romantic title of “Gioventù, amore e rabbia. La storia dell’Italia repubblicana e la stagione dei movimenti” (Youth, Love and Anger: The History of the Italian Republic and the Era of Collective Action). It may be interesting to note that the expression “La stagione dei movimenti” (The Era of Collective Action) is the title of the chapter on social movements in Paul Ginsborg’s *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, Hammondsworth, Penguin, 1990, who gives a rather sympathetic account of their struggles. More important still, this book was the first attempt to explore the role social movements played in shaping Italian society politics. More below.

[The known liberal journalist] Enzo Forcella ascribes [the difficulty in coming to terms with the 70s] to the transformist syndrome of «Dr. Jekyll». «[In Italy] there is a little of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in everybody, yet contrary to what happens in Stevenson’s story, at the end of the day everybody end up wearing dr. Jekyll’s clothes»\(^7\)

Thus, when addressing the social upheaval of the 70s in Italy, one can hardly avoid to be confronted with a number of paradoxes. While most intellectuals would recognize, indeed remember either as bystanders or direct participants, the political and cultural relevance of collective action in shaping Italian society as a whole, few Italian scholars have actually studied the extent of that relevance in any detail.

While social and political scientists have studied the return of class conflict\(^8\), the innovative politics practiced by social movements\(^9\), the emergence of political violence and its relationship with left-wing social movements\(^10\), comprehensive histories of such movements are practically non-existent. Indeed, most recent general histories of post-war Italy, while acknowledging the relevance social movements had in the shaping the

\(^7\) Cited in “Anni settanta lo storico è in fuga”, la Repubblica, 3/3/1997. Throughout the text, all translations from Italian are obviously mine.


political and cultural make-up of the country, nevertheless fail to analyze their impact in any detail. Hence the first paradox: while the study of Italian social movements has lead social scientists to develop important theoretical contributions\textsuperscript{11}, their colleagues in the history departments seem not to have recognized them as legitimate field of study of their discipline. The first paradox is immediately followed by another one: the two most cited studies that address this topic in a historical perspective have been written by non-Italians and are also recognized as important theoretical contributions in the history of contemporary Italy\textsuperscript{12}.

At this point, one may believe that whatever happened in Italy in the 70s has left no meaningful trace in Italian national conscience. Indeed, one may end up believing that apart from some “antiquarian” baby-boomer, Italians today go about their business without ever reading or discussing it. Yet, this is hardly so, and this is yet another paradox, for the legacy of 70s periodically re-emerges out of collective oblivion in a number of ways: in courtrooms (as for the “Sofri case” )\textsuperscript{13}, whenever a new social movement emerges, or critiques of the neoliberal consensus are voiced. On such occasions a short-lived though heated, almost hysterical, polemic ensues. For a couple of days you may find yourself reading commentaries, usually written by former


\textsuperscript{12} Sidney Tarrow, \textit{Democracy and Disorder}, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989; Paul, Ginsborg, \textit{cit}.

\textsuperscript{13} Cf.chapter 2
activists, that either underscore how times have changed in terms of political participation, ideological allegiance and social conditions. Often, while looking back with nostalgia at the enthusiastic activism of their youth, many commentators hasten to condemn the “ideological” delusions, which informed so much of the social movement politics of the time.

2. **The Burden of History**

The 70s thus may seem to have become a post-modern icon marking the ambiguous relationship between past and present in a country where processes of modernization have been haunted by political conflicts. To be sure, the notion of a State out of sync with society is indeed a persistent trope Italians employ when commenting their political predicament.\(^{14}\) Hence, it sure seems odd that the longest period of social upheaval in post-war Italy is practically neglected by historians twenty years after its decline. Naive though they may sound, such questions are not mere rhetorical devices to bestow a sense of drama to the opening pages of an ethnography. Indeed, some “native” historians have recently begun to debate such issues. Two overarching themes seem to define the limits of what can be written about the social movements of the 70s.

First of all, the difficulty of writing a history of post war Italy that includes the role played by social movements is to be connected to the more general problem of how to write the history of the first fifty years of the Italian republic. This problem emerged in the aftermath of the big corruption trials (the so-called “clean hands” investigations).

As growing numbers of senior politicians and industrialists were indicted on charges of corruption, these investigations shook the Italian political establishment to its foundations. So far-reaching was the crisis, that between 1992 and 1994 most political parties that had emerged at the fall of Fascism and had drafted the postwar constitution had either disappeared, as the Christian Democrats and the Socialists, or had changed name, as did the Communists\textsuperscript{15} or the neofascists\textsuperscript{16}.

The combined effects of this crisis and the end of the "cold war", which is the second overarching theme defining much of recent historiographical debates, further delegitimized the postwar settlement that had defined Italian politics for fifty years\textsuperscript{17}.

The combination of these two crises, marked the beginning of the "Italian transition" which was to lead to what a growing number of commentators began to dub the "Second republic."\textsuperscript{18} Indeed, this expression soon became a buzzword for national civic renewal. Thanks to the provvidential indictment of the majority of the heretofore powerful political establishment and the "end of ideologies" resulting from the implosion of the Soviet bloc, commentators claimed that the long-awaited modernity


was finally within reach. Italy would finally be able to make a clean break with its conflictive past and become a full member of Western democracies.\(^{19}\) Hence, throughout the 90s there has been an ever-growing production of general histories of post-fascist Italy.\(^{20}\) Some critics have argued that many of such texts have too readily embraced the “Second republic” rhetoric. Indeed these accounts have focused predominately on aspects that have come to the fore as a result of the corruption scandals and the implosion of the Soviet bloc. Hence, they are excessively focused on party-politics, political institutions and the role of super-powers in shaping Italian politics. Accordingly, the long cycle of protest and its impact on the political and cultural make-up of the country has been on the whole neglected.\(^{21}\)

The institutional bias of such histories and the ironies such limited perspective generates, can also be perceived in Piero Craveri’s *La Repubblica dal 1958 al 1992*,\(^ {22}\) with no doubt one of the most detailed historical accounts of post-war Italy. Of the eight chapters that make up the book, only one is dedicated to the ’68. The seven chapters deal almost exclusively with institutional politics, government programs, and conflicts

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\(^{19}\) The image of a supposedly backward Italy, as a nation at the margins of Europe, is indeed a widespread trope Italians use when talking about their country; for a vivid description, Cf. John Agnew, *The Myth of Backward Italy in Modern Europe*. In Beverly Allen and Mary Russo (eds.). *Revisioning Italy: National Identity and Global Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.


within and between political parties and their leaders. Ironically though, out of 32 photographs placed in the middle of the book, 12, i.e., more than 1/3 represent protest events, the relevance of 9 of these can best be understood in connection with the Italian '68. Thus if you were to read the book starting from these pictures, you would imagine a country more that 37% of the population is protesting against an almost hypertrophic political establishment (a little more that 43% of the photos).\textsuperscript{23} And indeed, if you move on to read the 1,000 and odd pages that make up the book, you finally realize that what you got out of the pictures does match with what the author has written. Yet, it is an interesting sort of consistency. Just as the photographs of groups of protesters never show the movement’s leaders, those of the political establishment obviously do. Moreover, the text narrates the story of the movement, be that of the students, the workers - not to mention the women (which indeed make a rather fleeting appearance in the narration) – as a result of the shortcomings of the elite, namely its inability to modernize the country. Needless to say, such an elite has a name and a biographical trajectory. The movement on the other hand is just that: something that moves here and there waging its naïve and rather utopian critiques onto a system far more complex than it could ever fathom. Thus, the story goes, the Italian 68 exploded, all of a sudden. Its radicalism would then appear to be more a symptom of the failings of the elites than a reasonable revolt against the limits of cold-war democracy at the margins of the “free

\textsuperscript{23} The other photographs show: government politicians and presidents of the republic (7); party politics, congresses and rallies (7), everyday life (3); popes (2); anti-mafia justices (1).
world." Furthermore, if one were to look at the bibliographical section dedicated to left-wing social movements, out of 18 references, only four have been written after 1980, of these the most recent one was published in 1990. It is the Italian translation of Democracy and Disorder.

Obviously, the question in not that Craveri should have written a different book, the history of the Italian political establishment is definitely worth reading. At least you manage to get an idea why Italian politics is often so confusing for Italians and foreigners alike. The question is that the Italian '68, which lasted for at least a decade, did condition the choices of the political establishment as a whole. It had an impact on the economy (deficit spending escalated mainly because it became a means to keep social conflict under control),\textsuperscript{25} on parliamentary reform (the increasing prerogatives of the parliament that heavily conditioned government' action, date back to the mid-70s).\textsuperscript{26} The whole "Historical compromise" project, that lead to the establishment of "national solidarity" governments, supported by the Communists, can only be explained by the existence of radical social movements to the left of the Italian Communist party (PCI) itself.\textsuperscript{27} Moreover, there is little doubt that social movement activism, which peaked in

\textsuperscript{24} Incidentally, the triumphalism ensuing the relatively unexpected implosion of the Soviet bloc seems to have prevented most intellectuals to ponder the question whether the cold war was resulted from the existence of a "free world" or the other way around...


\textsuperscript{26} Cf., Piero Craveri, cit., ch. 6; see also Michele Salvati, Muddling Through: Economics and Politics in Italy 1969-1979. Western European Politics, 2 (3), 1979.

the mid-70s but lasted till the early 80s, had a relevant role beyond the confines of politics proper. As a result of grass-roots activism a wide, though at times contradictory, range of reforms, such as universal healthcare, the “worker’s charter”, the new family law, abortion and divorce, were implemented either by the government or through referenda. Hence, social movements had a more general modernizing impact on Italian society.

3. TRANSNATIONAL PROJECTIONS

Indeed, the fact that those who have drawn attention to the positive effects of social movement in democratizing Italian society are foreign scholars might be a cue to better grasp the extent of the impact (or dare we say trauma?) the long 68 had on Italian national conscience.

The Italian translation of Sidney Tarrow’s *Democracy and Disorder* was published in 1990. Maybe because he had already published in Italian, or maybe because *Democracy and Disorder* and Paul Ginsborg’s *A History of Contemporary Italy* were both published at the same time, or probably because it was the first time the long...

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29 Sidney Tarrow, The Crisis of the Late 1960’s in Italy and France: The Transition to Mature Capitalism. In Giovanni Arrighi (ed.), *Semiperipheral Development: The Politics of Southern Europe in the Twentieth Century*. Beverly Hills: Sage. 1985. Craveri, who has recently argued that he never was a “sixtyeigther”, cf. Gli storici e il ’69, in *Parolechiave*, 18, 1998, has a negative opinion of such impact, especially in relation to the egalitarian principle that characterized workers’ demands throughout the 70s. Such excessive demands, he argues contributed to the crisis of the whole system. One may argue that the defence of such system was not seen as a priority by the workers themselves.

Italian 68 was the topic of a scholarly study; be that as it may, Tarrow’s book was extensively reviewed.\textsuperscript{31}

Two issues that all reviews addressed had political implications. First of all, Tarrow argued that the long cycle of protest that shook the country for almost a decade, rather than being detrimental to Italian democracy, had actually a positive effect expanding political participation. Then, when addressing the emergence of left-wing armed groups, Tarrow argued that it was the combined result of the repressive reaction of sectors of the conservative elites and of the competition among social movement organizations trying to recruit followers once mobilization began to decline. When reading the reviews, one can hardly escape the impression that the author’s nationality allows native commentators to address the social conflicts of 70s with a more relaxed attitude, indeed many begin their article by praising Tarrow’s non-ideological approach.

Should we ask today’s most fashionable (and authoritative) political commentators and journalists what is the legacy of the struggles of the sixties and seventies, we would probably obtain more negative than positive judgments. Of the whole period would first of all be remembered as years of terrorism and destructive utopias [...]. One could wonder how come a liberal American scholar may reach conclusions many reformists and liberal democrats

in Italy would find difficult to articulate. The answer is quite simple; Tarrow has approached the facts without prejudice.\textsuperscript{32}

Thus, the meaningful attitude that best ensures a correct evaluation of the 60s and 70s would be one that chooses the facts bared of their prejudicial shrouds. According to Tarrow, the degree of success of the cycle of protest is measured by the extent to which its demands and grievances are recognized as legitimate by the political system and the whether emergent social groups gain access to the polity. The paradox is that in the end the same reviewers who hail Tarrow’s study for its fundamentally sympathetic, yet empiricist, attitude towards social conflict, concede that the expanded democracy it engendered was rather short-lived. By the end of the 70s political participation in general and especially the PCI electorate began to decline, and what the workers had gained (both in terms of rights and income) during the heyday of mass mobilization came increasingly under attack.\textsuperscript{33} Furthermore, as these same reviewers have pointed out, the protesters were not exactly seeking to reform the Italian capitalist democracy.\textsuperscript{34} Thus, two contrasting interpretations emerge. According to those who take a critical stance towards social movements, or at least enhance their limits, the cycle of protest did contribute to the country’s modernization only in so far as it gave the opportunity for a whole generation to choose different life-styles breaking the

\textsuperscript{32} Luigi Bobbio, \textit{art. Cit.}; see also Marco Revelli, \textit{art. Cit.}, and Salvatore Lupo in Franco Andreucci, \textit{op. Cit.}

\textsuperscript{33} Cf. Marco Revelli, \textit{Lavorare in FIAT}, Milano, Garzanti, 1989, for a description of this parable from the vantage point of the factory floor at Fiat.

traditional familiaristic and class constraints. Hence, results fell short of the more radical change the movement claimed to desire, i.e., the overthrowing of capitalism.\textsuperscript{35} Those who most explicitly read Tarrow’s book as a vindication of the positive impact of the political radicalism of social movements for Italian democracy, once they recognize that their political victories were indeed ephemeral and short-lived,\textsuperscript{36} are left with the problem of making sense of an experience which, while a constitutive part of their biography, is nevertheless practically meaningless in the present world.

It is probably this tension that can explain part of the difficulty of writing about the 70s, and which in turn makes the question of choosing the time frame that best can describe the true features of the “movement” a theoretical issue fraught with political implications. When did it start? When did it end? Answering these questions not only implies choosing who was part of the movement and who was not, it also defines its political relevance. Thus Tarrow’s choice of a ten-years cycle for his study (1965-1975) is crucial to substantiate his overall argument. For if it is true that by 1975 piecemeal reforms had been passed, the left-wing parties had increased both in membership (especially the PCI) and in electoral support, not to speak of the trade unions that had increased both their bargaining power and membership, it is also true that the combined effects of the economic downturn and the growing moderation of the trade unions and

\textsuperscript{35} Cf. Aurelio Lepre, \textit{art. Cit.}

\textsuperscript{36} Luigi Bobbio, \textit{art. cit.}, Marco Revelli, Violenza senza conflitto, \textit{cit.}

The emergence of grass-root activism had resulted into an increased support for the PCI thus allowing a heretofore marginalized party to break out of its political isolation. Yet, Italy’s international position was such that what was by now the largest opposition party in parliament was condemned to a role of permanent opposition. Yet, however substantial, such an increase in the polls was never enough to gain an electoral majority. Starting from the early 70s the problem of finding some sort of compromise which would allow the PCI to have a more active role in governing the country, began to be debated, both within the Christian Democracy (DC) and within the PCI itself. One effect of this was the emergence of a system of power sharing whereby political parties were increasingly institutionalized into the State apparatus. By the mid-70s, the institutionalization of the PCI was in full swing. It was within this context that the political formula of “Historical compromise” (\textit{Compromesso storico}) between the DC and PCI emerged.\footnote{Cf. Craveri, \textit{cit.}} To justify this policy shift to its constituency the Communist party leadership claimed that if not resolved the economic crisis would undermine Italian democracy. Furthermore, by showing restrain the working classes would prove to have the required moral and political fiber to lead country’s modernization.\footnote{Cf. Paul Ginsborg, \textit{op. cit.}}
Compromesso storico led in the second half of the 70s to the formation of ‘national solidarity governments’ led by the Christian Democrats with the external support of the Communists. The result of this new political scenario affected a radical change in the attitude towards social movements of both the PCI the communist-dominated CGIL trade union. Their often ambiguous sympathy towards them gradually into explicit condemnation. While throughout the 60s the PCI had been the privileged referent of social protest and its parliamentary mediator, now its newly acquired institutional relevance transformed it into the staunch defender of political and social stability. Consequently, national solidarity coalitions began to view post-68 grassroots politics as detrimental to the imperative of national reconstruction and as inherently antidemocratic.40

When a new cycle of protest erupted all of a sudden, at the beginning of 1977, the changed political landscape was such that the whole political system, apart from the shrinking New Left organizations, called for its immediate repression. This unexpected new upsurge of protest quickly spread throughout Italy. Right from its emergence the “77 movement” was something of a riddle. For one, its slogans referred to the revolutionary traditions the NewLeft had revived, yet these activists were also extremely critical of them. While defining themselves as communists these activists refused some crucial aspects of that tradition: the professional revolutionary, the vanguard party, the seizure of the state apparatus as the first step towards the establishment of communism. Furthermore, they claimed that the immediate fulfillment

of their everyday needs was a fundamental part of revolutionary politics. Hence, their demands did not resemble those that normally characterized leftist agendas. Instead of more jobs, better working conditions or better social services the 77 movement demanded a reduction of working hours -- thus a redistribution of work throughout society --, and the right of everyone to higher education as a means to individual self-improvement. More puzzling for progressives and conservatives alike was the ironic attitude this new movement had towards politics itself. By combining radical oppositional attitudes with aesthetic provocation this “strange movement of strange students” could hardly fit traditional political categories. Since many of its members were young students, observers viewed the new movement as a second ‘68. Yet their social origins as well as their experiences were radically different from their predecessors’. Unlike the 68 students, the 77 generation of protesters had grown up in the midst of widespread social conflict. Moreover, their socioeconomic background was more diverse. These students were not predominately of middle-class origins, many of them were from the working class. Few were full-time students and a growing number


43 Such was the title of a collection of essays, written by new left activists, which described the emergence of the new movement in Rome; cf. Gad Lerner, Luigi Manconi, Marino Sinibaldi, *Uno strano movimento di strani studenti. Composizione, politica e cultural dei non garantiti*. Milano: Feltrinelli. 1978
of them had either full-time jobs or worked part-time in the emergent service sector.\textsuperscript{44} Many had been active in New Left politics of the early 70s, but few had participated in the 68 movement. They had been socialized into radical politics but had also witnessed the New Left political crisis of the mid 70s. Though they had welcomed the Communist success in the 1976 elections they criticized the PCI's choice not to press for more radical reforms. Furthermore national solidarity politics appeared to be yet another example of the persistent tendency of Italian governments to enroll the support of the opposition to remain in office. Thus the radicalism of the 77 movement, unlike what had happened in 68 was characterized by a negative view of the state, parliamentary democracy and political representation. The movement was immediately labeled reckless, irrational and senselessly disruptive. Such features were taken as evidence of its utter irrationality that could potentially jeopardize democracy itself. Indeed, the PCI's leadership immediately accused the new protesters of being a bunch of irresponsible provocateurs whose actions were threatening the progressive cause of the proletariat, spoilt children of a bourgeois society whose moral bankruptcy the new movement mindlessly revealed.\textsuperscript{45}

The movement's failure to disengage itself from a purely confrontational attitude with the state and the repressive stance of the latter, lead to its decline and to a further


\textsuperscript{45} Cf. Marco Grispigni, \textit{op.cit.} Communist intellectuals were quick to accuse the new social movement of being irrational and expression of the anomic tendencies of bourgeois society, cf. Alberto Asor Rosa, \textit{Le due società. Ipotesi sulla crisi italiana}. Torino: Einaudi, 1977. Thus
increase of armed groups, the Red Brigades (BR) being the largest and the most renown.

No one could obviously accuse Tarrow for having finished his research before the new wave of protest erupted. Nor should one contest his more general argument that social movements are in general good for liberal democracy. The interesting thing that needs to be noted here is that due to the vagaries of book publishing and scholarly research, what was originally written as a book of political science, once translated became to closely resemble a book of history, or at least has been read that way. After all when the Italian translation of the book was published (1990) the question social conflict was not precicely on the agenda, far more important was the growing crisis within the country’s institutions which would explain the off-hand comment of one of the reviewers that the conflicts of the 70s were a sort of subspecies of the more general conflictive behaviour at the institutional level. Indeed, most of its reviewers mentioned are professional historians, and left-wing historians at that. Furthermore, quite a few of

Asor Rosa described the movement as a “second society”, social outcasts, whose critique of PCI’s political choices prevented a progressive solution to the Italian crisis.


47 Donatella della Porta has identified a total of 23 armed groups active in Italy between 1970 and 1983, with period of activity ranging from 14 years (BR) to a few months Revolutionary Action (AR); Cf. Donatella della Porta, Il terrorismo di sinistra, Milano: il Mulino, 1990.


49 C. Aurelio Lepre, art. cit.
them have been social movement activists in the 60s and 70s thus they read Tarrow’s text as part of their biographies. This tension between autobiography and history is further complicated by the issue of the political violence which came to characterize social movement politics at the time which lead to the emergence of left radical armed groups.

Hence, here is “the rub” as Shakespeare would say: the long wave of social conflicts that began in the 60s ended in an escalation of political violence in the mid-80s. Writing about the 70s and about the social movements of the time immediately begs the question of the rise and long duration of armed groups. Thus, while it is understandable that the issue of left-wing political violence of the 70s has attracted wide attention (and research grants) -- by Italian and foreign scholars alike -- for those concerned with the social movements of the 70s, the issue of the relationship between left radical grass-roots politics and political violence is indeed a thorny one. Then, it might not be too far-fetched to argue that one of the reasons why *Democracy and Disorder* is such a good read for Italian left-wing students of social movement is because, by giving an anticipated closure to the Italian protest cycle, it manages to transform a tragedy into and happy-ending drama.

That the feeling of failure is not simply the delusion of some hardcore veterans in furthermore confirmed by the Paul Ginsborg’s choice to conclude his book on the history of the Italian republic by citing the last public speech of Giovanni Falcone, a radical worker’s leader, who had been politically active throughout the 70s at the Fiat Mirafiori plant in Turin, made in 1980 during the last occupation of the plant in in
solidarity for the management’s decision to sack 80 activists, which ended up in a
defeat and in the laying off of 4000 workers:

A comrade said to me a few evenings ago: ‘It’s a fact of history: another
comrade like us spoke up in 1969, today it’s your turn, and in this way an epoch
is coming to a close.’ Back in 1969 it was the beginning, now it’s the end…
I’ve got to admit that it leaves me a pretty bitter taste in my mouth. Because for
me twelve years of struggle have not only been any old twelve years, but a long
political experience, and it’s been like that for all of us.\(^{50}\)

Ginsborg’s closure effectively renders the activists’ bitterness for the definitive
closure of a protest cycle they so have intensly experienced. We could say that one of
the nice things about history, or rather historical writing, is that no matter how well
grounded in the careful examination of documents and testimonies its interpretation, its
sense, both as meaning and trajectory, is really up for grabs. Far from advocating an
anything-goes approach to history, comparing these two different (and contrasting)
views of recent Italian history, can be seen as a cue to the unresolvable core at the heart
of the “era of collective action”.\(^{51}\) Again, the issue here is not to critique these texts,
highlighting their blind spots or deconstructing their rhetorical twists, it is rather a
question of readerships. Both authors, their contrasting interpretations notwithstanding,
are read simultaneously by the same people who in turn salute them for their balanced

\(^{50}\) *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics 1943-1988*, Hammondsworth, Penguin,
1990, p. 404.

and accurate account of the impact of social movements in post-war Italy; it is precisely this juxtaposition that reveals the conflicutive legacy of the 70s.

Maybe the difficulty of writing about, thus of coming to terms with, social movements is not something inherently Italian.

What if there were something specific to these movements that makes the Italian way of (not) reckoning with them not as exceedingly exotic (and troubled) as it would seem at first sight?

4. **BE REASONABLE, DEMAND THE IMPOSSIBLE.**

One among the famously creative graffitis which made their appearance on the walls of Paris during the May uprising, the one urging the immediate realization of utopia may well taken as exemplary the unheard of mixture aesthetics and politics so typical of the social upheaval of 60s and 70s. A momentous as unexpected event the 68 was a worldwide movement which brought to the forefront new political issues and new social actors. Perhaps one of the most striking ironies of the this movement that urged to immediate suppression of the social conditions whereby the life of the mind and everyday life entertained alienated relationship with each other, is the long-lasting effect it had on social theory. That new social movements were a radically different from previous forms of social conflict, was apparent apparent enough. Yet, to outside observers in particular, its rationality was less clear. To this day, theories and debates notwithstanding, the momentous appearance throughout the globe of a radical left-wing movement still constitutes something of a riddle. Students in Prague, Paris, Mexico City and Rome, had more in common with each other than with their fathers or mothers.
Indeed, the intertwining of generational and political aspects with social conditions, constitutes the original characteristics of the 68 movements. From the political point of view, the combination of left-wing radicalism with the status of university student was indeed an utter novelty. At least in the West, university students, had previously taken to the streets in support of right-wing causes. Yet, and this became an important cue to the new type of conflicts which were to become typical of the soon-to-be defined as new social movements, the relationship with the traditional left was at best difficult, often conflictive, always characterized by mutual suspicion. This alone may have been a decisive factor (though not the only one) explaining why the revolutionary dream never really materialized. There are obviously reasonable structural explanations as to why the traditional revolutionary subject of industrial capitalism and the new radicals never really joined forces against their common enemy. Yet in countries where such an alliance did occur, like in Italy in 1969, the image of an imminent revolution appeared less delusionary than elsewhere. Be that as it may, the issue of the novelty represented by the new social movements still remains. Many social scientists have attempted to answer the riddle, with more or less interesting results. Since a critical review of the literature on social movements is well beyond the scope of this ethnography, indeed of my present interests, we might as well let this one pass.

The interesting aspect which really motivates the whole topic of my research is something slightly different, namely the contrast between the high (utopian?)

expectations that drove people to protest in the streets, and the limited results of their protest. To paraphrase -- with a vengeance you may add -- a well known British stateman, never so many protested so much with so little success. Which does in no way imply a disparaging view of the impact these movements on the cultural, social or political make-up of their societies. What it does imply is the existence of the radical disproportion between the subjective intensity of the utopian drive that characterized these movements and the tangible results their protest accomplished. To approach it from a different angle, the new social movements constituted an embarrassing and unsettling disturbance, which urged students of society and culture to rethink the question of agency, of identity formation, of the subject as an agent of conflict, and society as the force-field resulting from such endless battle. Thus the problem they posed to the students of advanced industrialized society was the age-old issue of the relationship between structure and action.

Indeed, the basic issue the study of social movements of the late 60s and 70s sought to understand, has been their fundamental autonomy from the institutions that traditionally mediated social conflict within advanced Western democracies. Some, like Alain Touraine, argued that the new social movements of the 70s differed from preceding forms of social conflict in that they challenged the dominant cultural patterns of these societies. Affluent Western democracies had reached such a stage whereby social conflicts did not revolve so much around redistribution of material wealth, the “social question” had to a certain extent found a solution through the then dominant

53 Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, gives one of his typically commonsensical explanations, namely that the
Welfare state. Class struggle between labor and capital did not as a consequence constitute the dominant conflict within Western democracies anymore. The new social movements that had unexpectedly emerged at the end of the 60s expressed a different kind of conflict. No matter how diverse in terms of issues and constituencies, still these social movements expressed a conflict around dominant cultural norms.

Many observers are aware of the fact that central conflict deal less with labor and economic problems than with cultural and especially ethical problems, because the domination which is challenged controls not only “means” of production but the production of symbolic goods, that is of information and images, of culture itself.54

Thus, new social movements express a type of conflict which is grounded in contemporary society’s increased ability to modify the environment and the conditions of its production, hence the intervention in the private life of social actors becomes the dominant site of conflict. As a consequence, social movements increasingly address ethical and identity issues. At the same time, such movements are not classically political, that is their objective is not the state, political power, quite the contrary, they seek to free civil society from power, they do not so much seek to transform the state as to limit its intrusion in all domains of society. Furthermore, these conflicts over “the social control of the main cultural patterns”, which, according to Touraine, is the purest expression of social movements, are both endless and unresolvable. Endless, because

workers never had it so good for so many years; op. cit.
they are the expression of the increasing ability of advanced societies to manipulate the environment and are increasingly able to choose the orientation of their development.\footnote{55} Unresolvable, because new social movements can only emerge and operate within open-ended social systems\footnote{56}, i.e., societies where the parties to the conflict both operate within the same cultural pattern which in turn allows them negotiate their opposing claims. Indeed, new social movements are a form of collective action specific to advance liberal democracies.

In a similar vein, though from a different (and somewhat somber) approach, Claus Offe\footnote{57}, has also drawn attention to the same politically novel features characterising the new social movements that emerged from the end of the 60s. Political scientist that he is, he grounds the emergence of these new social movements in the expansion of the service sector typical of advanced capitalism. This implies an increasing number of people who produce goods whose exchange value can be quantified only to a limited extent (producing a car is not the same as caring for the elderly). This results in an increase of qualitative demands from sectors of society which while sharing common values, do not share the same class origins. The qualitative dimention specific to the new social movements contributes to the crisis of the welfare state whose bureaucratic structure was developed in order to mediate

\footnote{54} Alain Touraine, An Introduction to the Study of Social Movements. Social Research, 52 (4), 1985, p.774.


\footnote{56} Cf. Alain Tourain, art. cit., p. 755.
conflicting economic interests. Yet, as new social conflicts are increasingly over values, the welfare state can mediate them only to a limited extend. Thus, as new social movements express grievances which the state cannot negotiate there emerges a new field of non-institutional politics which challenges the classical state-civil society dichotomy.

The new paradigm forsakes the dichotomous concepts of social action that were central to the old paradigm. The opposition of the public-political to the private has been superseded by three spheres: the private, the non-institutional political, and the institutionalized political. So too the contrast of state and civil society is superseded as the new social movements claim the space of “political action within civil society” as the terrain from which to challenge both private and institutional political practices.\(^{58}\)

After a French and a German, it’s only fit to mention an Italian. Alberto Melucci, just like the other two stressed the symbolic and ethical features which characterize the new social movements, yet is more explicit in addressing the symbolic aspects of their actions and the relations between their conflictive behaviour and the construction of collective identities and shared meanings out of which a social movement emerges. Thus Melucci sees a social movement as a form of collective behaviour characterized by internal *solidarity*, whereby its members recognize their

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58 Claus Offe, *op. cit.*, p. 72.
actions as part of a common conflict, which seeks to break the limits of the social system.\textsuperscript{59} For Melucci the construction of collective identities is a fundamental feature in social movements since it is through an ongoing process of negotiation of meanings that social actors activate social networks which in turn allows such new forms of collective action to emerge. At the same time, it is through this same process of negotiation that social movements recognize the field of opportunities and constraints in which collective action can occur.\textsuperscript{60}

Just as one must explain how the minerals and strata of the rock have combined to create that particular geological formation, so we must consider collective action as a result and not as a point of departure.\textsuperscript{61}

To conceive social movements as social networks underscores the fact that social movements are not internally homogeneous, rather they are composite action systems characterized by internal tensions and by on-going processes of negotiation. Moreover, the sharing of a collective identity generating solidary networks implies that the participation to social movement activities cannot be understood on the basis of a disembodied rational action theory; social movement activists not necessarily behave according to their own “self interest”. As social movements are cultural producers, their


actions are also symbolic expressions of the need to maintain internal solidarity among their members. Thus social movements are action systems and emergent communities. This in turn implies that the reactions of the political system to social movement protest even when it leads to its institutionalization, is bound to create residues, i.e., expectations which are not, or cannot, be satisfied.

Social movements that have made this institutionalization possible also create residues. Expectations mobilized in the struggle are not satisfied by “realistic” conclusions within the institutional channels. It is inevitable that this produces fringes of disillusioned militants who claim the original purity of the movement and who struggle against what they call the “betrayal” of the initial objectives.

One may note, incidentally, that the refusal of “realistic” solutions on the part of disillusioned malitants, however “fundamentalist” they may be, is also as much an effect of the structural tension, typical of complex societies, between individual autonomy and social integration.

The paradox at the end of the previous paragraph -- that two contrasting accounts of the same phenomenon are praised as reliable representations of historical events -- implied the existence of a culturally specific tension in representing Italy’s

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recent past. The indeed brief overview of social movement theorists was really an attempt to underscore that its local (Italian) articulation notwithstanding, the contradiction represented by the social movements of the 60s and 70s has a specificity of its own. Indeed, seminally global phenomena that they were, reckoning with their legacy calls for strategies of containment, in texts and even more in subjective memory. Rhetorical strategies which allow to reconcile the activist exuberance of yesteryear with today’s predicament. Social movements, with their ethical and identity concerns, always exceed what results they may obtain. As Foucault would say, in as much as they express resistance to the modern state, social movements entertain an agonistic relation with power.

The crucial problem of power is not that of voluntary servitude [...]. At the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom.

Whatever institutional recognition they may acquire there is always something else, unspecified and maybe ineffable that no political reform may ever satisfy. Yet, however such an inherent excess is a specific feature of social movements in general,

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65 “I don’t think that we should consider the ‘modern state’ as an entity that was developed above individuals, ignoring what they are and even their very existence, but, on the contrary as every sophisticated structure in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.” Michel Foucault. “The Subject of Power.” In Michel Foucault 2002. Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. 3, edited by James D. Faubion. London: Penguin Books. 2002, p.334.

66 Art. cit., p. 342. “What was it that was everywhere being called into question? The way in which power was exercised – not just state power but the power exercised by other institutions
the “era of collective action” in Italy is inevitably intertwined with the emergence of left-wing armed groups. Thus the romantic nostalgia for the intense days of political activism and communal struggle, is burdened, stained if you prefer, by the memory of the victims of that violence. And the issue of terrorism, or as I would prefer, urban guerrilla, is the not-so implicit problematic which shapes most written accounts of the period. Indeed, as terrorism was the most spectacular and painfully tangible outcome of the long 68, any new historical account which does not outright condemn the social movements as the breeding ground of terrorism, is forced to adopt a counter-hegemonic rhetoric. Thus the constraints facing similar evedavours render such narrative inherently unstable forced as they are to negotiate between a vindication of positive features of radical social movements, and the rejection of the violent outcome which to that same radicalism is historically connected.

Perhaps then the Italian way of reckoning with its 68 is specific precisely because the theoretical problem posed by “structurally” excessive agency of social movements, is intertwined with the historical tragedy of left-wing terrorism.

5. The Return of the Repressed

The persistent presence of the social conflicts 70s in everyday Italian political discourse lends a spectral character to their legacy. One does not need to be a fan of horror stories à la Žižek to know that whenever the smooth flow of your daily life is broken by the reappearance of the deceased, something in your relationship with reality

and forms of constraint, a sort of abiding oppression in everyday life.” Michel Foucault. “Interview with Michel Foucault.” In op. cit., p. 283.
might just be a little awry. I am not familiar with other societies’ rapport with anniversaries, what I can say is that in Italy every decade since 1968 has been marked by a sudden increase in books, debates, commemorations, polemic, indictments and campaigns revolving around its legacy. Thus, one classic book on the 68 movement, Ortoleva’s *I movimenti del ‘68 in Europa e in America*, was first published in 1988 and reissued in 1998, the Italian edition of Luisa Passerini’s *Autobiography of a Generation: Italy, 1968*, also came out in 1988; the only “official” history of an Italian New Left organization, Luigi Bobbio’s *Storia di Lotta continua*, first published in 1979, was republished in 1998. Moreover, since the long Italian 68 was somehow prolonged by the 77 movement, the commemorations of these two “fatal” years often intertwine. Hence, the only comprehensive account of the decade-long trajectory of social movement politics, *L’orda d’oro 1968-1977. La grande ondata rivoluzionaria e creativa, politica ed esistenziale* by Primo Moroni and Nanni Balestrini, was originally published in 1988 and reissued in an updated edition in 1997. If such recurrent interest in the topic could be ascribed to the commercial interests of publishers, the coincidence whereby a former leader of the movement (Adriano Sofri) was formally indicted on murder charges in 1988, or the decision of Toni Negri, another charismatic figure of the 70s, to return from his exile in Paris in 1997, might lead one to wonder that a spectre is indeed haunting Italy.

As already noted, the specificity of the long Italian 68 was that the revolt which began in the universities soon spread throughout society leading to the radicalization of large sectors of the working class in the so-called “hot autumn” of 1969. The
mobilization of the rank and file workers, largely autonomous from the trade unions, in turn contributed to the extension of left-radical social movements and to the emergence of revolutionary organizations at the national level. Left-wing radicalism and the ambiguous reaction of the political system which combined piecemeal reform with the "strategy of tension"\textsuperscript{67}, were conducive to the emergence of armed organizations. In contrast to other European countries such armed organizations (especially the BR) did enjoy a certain amount of concensus among the radicalised working class at least till the late 70s. The 1977 movement, though less widespread nationally (its major centers were Rome and Bologna) was just as radical though did not last as long, indeed its decline lead to an increase of armed groups.

Thus historically one can subdivide the whole period into three phases. The late 60s, characterised by the emergence of youth activism (most notably the students). Working class activism which began in the "hot autumn" of 1968-69 and lasted till the mid-70s and was characterised by the strategy of tension and the emergence of New left organizations at the national level. Finally the 1977 movement, which emerged with the decline of the New Left but only lasted till the end of that year its fragments surviving the end of the decade. Considering the violent outcome of this wave of protest, the problem of writing a historical account of it implies struggling to explain the emergence

\textsuperscript{67} The strategy of tension (strategia della tensione), commonly defines a long series of bombings, plots and attemped coups, which began in the late 60s and lasted till the end of the 70s. The Piazza Fontana massacre, 12 december 1969, when the explosion of bomb in a bank left 16 dead and 88 wounded, is the seminal event. First ascribed to the anarchists investigations soon revealed neofascist involvement and the existance of a conspiratorial network which connected the neofascist groups to sectors of the Italian intelligence, the military, as well as to Nato and CIA. Its political objective was, or at least so is commonly believed, was to provoke a polarization in Italian politics in order to curb grass-root mobilization. Cf. ch. 2
of left wing terrorism. Was it inevitable? Was there something specifically Italian in culture of social movements that lead to its emergence? These are tough questions to answer especially for authors sympathetic to social movements. One way of dealing with them is to the limit the specificity of the Italian experience (students + workers + political violence). Thus Peppino Ortoleva\textsuperscript{68} writes a history of the Italian 68 circumscribing it to the student movement, comparing it to its foreign counterparts, stressing its features of generational revolt on a global scale. In the introduction to the second edition, the author asks himself somewhat rhetorically who may interest such a book, a history book devoid of nostalgic undertones,\textsuperscript{69} indeed the problem of writing a history of the “68” is related to its having been a formative experience of a whole generation. Thus, right from the start there is a clear break between the intensity of the 68 experience and the passing on of that same experience to the younger generations. The 68 inevitably becomes an event as exceptional as self-sufficient. Indeed Ortoleva does not attempt to explain its origins at all.\textsuperscript{70} It just happened. We close the book


\textsuperscript{69} Cf., p. 14.

\textsuperscript{70} The emergence of a radically politicized youth at the beginning of the 60s, thus long before the appearance of the student movement, has recently become a topic of some original research into the origins of the 68 movement in Italy, Cf. Marco Grispigni, Combattenti di strada. La nascita delle culture giovanili in Italia, in Massimo, Canevacci and others. \textit{Ragazzi senza tempo. Immagini, musica, conflitti delle culture giovanili}. Genova: Costa & Nolan. 1993; Paola Ghione and Marco Grispigni. \textit{Giovani prima della rivolta}. Roma: Manifestolibri. 1998; Diego Giachetti. Di nuovo a Reggio Emilia/ di nuovo là in Sicilia. In \textit{Collegamenti Wobby}, 10-11, n.s. 2001. Nor is it some hidden phenomenon, whose impact has only been recently discovered. The event most commonly associated with the emergence of youth political radicalism, are the riots that took place in Genoa between June 30 and July 2, 1960, when young workers and students clashed with the police protesting the decision of the neofascist party MSI, to hold its national congress in Genoa, cf. Renzo del Carria, \textit{Proletari senza rivoluzione}. Roma: Savelli. 1977, vol. V; Cesare Bermani, L’antifascismo del luglio 1960. In id., \textit{Il nemico interno. Guerra civile e lotte di classe in Italia (1943-1976)}. Roma: Odradek.
without knowing who the rebel student really were, where did they come from and, indeed, where did they go after the heady days of protest and crowded meetings. According to the author the 68 lasted a little less than a year, an academic year actually -- fittingly one may add, since we are talking about students. It ended once the students left their campuses to pursue radical political activities. It is well known that these students activists became revolutionaries. In the early 70s they made up the bulk of the leadership of the Italian New left, some ended up in jail as members of armed groups. Yet, according to Ortoleva these trajectories are not part of the 68 movement, indeed organized revolutionary activity is something completely different, it represented a refusal of the real cultural novelty expressed by the 68. There is something ironic in the author’s resolute characterization of “68”, since he was one of such new revolutionaries and was actively engaged as a local leader of Lotta Continua, the biggest New left organization in Italy, with some 20,000 members.

The decoupling of social movements and radical, indeed revolutionary, politics is one narrative strategy informing much of what one could call the “salvage” historiography of the 68, which attempts to isolate the 68 as a specific event, with no relation with what happened afterwards, thus implicitly separating the “utopian” and “generous” students from the “cold-blooded terrorists”. In accounts that focus on the “68” this opposition between culture (innovation) and politics (revolution) is connoted by the opposition between movement and new left organizations. Thus, to go back to Ortoleva, the rationale for such a dicotomy is that the novelty which best characterised the student movement, namely its global character, which crossed national borders as
well as geopolitical blocs, was undermined by the emergence of political organizations which restricted their activities within national borders.⁷¹ One would have the impression then that New left organizations appeared all of a sudden. Indeed, as Ortoleva argues, these organizations were a way for university students to recover a sense of communal identification they were on the verge of loosing once they had left their campuses. Radical fraternities some sarcastic could add. That collective identities and fusional relationships are important features of social movements, is obviously true.⁷² That the 68 movement should best be defined according to a quasi-Derridean *différance*, is hardly the whole story. Thus Diego Giachetti, is quite correct in stressing that left radical organizations and groups were quite influential among university students both *before* as well as *during* the student movement.⁷³ Indeed, Giachetti’s work exemplifies a diametrically opposite view to that of Ortoleva. Just as the latter considered the 68 movement strictily from the point of view of the university students, thus strictly limiting his life-span, Giachetti extends it to include the whole decade, thus stressing its peculiar Italian trajectory.

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⁷¹ Theoretically resonable yet historically inaccurate, for Lotta Continua, of which Ortoleva was a member, in the early 70s had activists carrying out political initiatives among Italian immigrants living in Germany, cf. Luigi Bobbio. *Lotta continua. Storia di una organizzazione rivoluzionaria*. 1979. Roma: Savelli.


When I talk of the ’68 in Italy I explicitly refer to a very specific period, that which includes the whole of the 60s and the whole of the 70s.74

By so doing he explicitly contrasts the view of the 68 as an exeptional event where its international character and the limited duration overshadow the national context in which it emerged. Indeed, the “national” focus is, according to the author, the best way to contrast an interpretation of this period which seeks to obliterate the politically radical feature of protest. According to Giachetti viewing the 68 as an event, as the confused yet generous eruption of a culturally creative youth, is consistent with today’s privileged social status of many former activists. Many leaders of the movement, he argues, owe their success in the media and cultural institutions either to the social networks they developed in the past or thanks to the communicative and organizing skills they acquired as through their political activities. Thus, interpreting the 68 as a purely cultural phenomenon is really a rationalization aimed at covering up the revolutionary “original sin”.75

Hence, once more the trope of recovering the historical truth is intertwined with the selectivity (way too selective, one may add) of personal recollections. Indeed, of betrayal. Nevertheless, the issue of violence remains in the background, just the same.

Ortoleva traces a downwards rationalizing spiral leading social movement activists from the undifferentiated community of student revolt, to revolutionary organizations till the “blind alley” of terrorism. Giachetti traces a parable, whereby

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74 Diego Giachetti, op. cit., p. 17.
75 Cf. Indeed, the much of the Sofri case can be understood under this light; cf. ch. 2.
social movements interacting with revolutionary groups gradually expand the scope of their protest into full-fledged political radicalism, which once defeated produces terrorism. Thus, when comparing the 68 movement and the 77 movement would be one crucial difference between the two would be that while the former was not explicitly violent from the outset, but was gradually forced by the increasingly violent reaction of the ruling class. The 77 movement on the other hand was violent from the beginning or better still; its radicalism was so extreme and its refusal of traditional revolutionary politics so uncompromising that to its activists, the recourse to armed struggle could be viewed as a reasonable option once the movement declined. Thus both authors place the origins of left-wing political violence *outside* of the social movement, or at least in a marginal position vis-à-vis its true features.

6. **HEGEMONIC NARRATIONS**

The question of violence, of it origins and seduction, still remains a hominous presence. Yet, could it be otherwise? It should be clear by now that the question of violence implies something else than the “physical force exerted so as to cause damage, abuse, or injury”.* From the point of view of the texts we are looking at violence is the point of origin of their narrative, better still it is what motivates their emplotment.

To be bold and daring one could even refer to Lacan via Žižek (of course) and say that violence in these texts, indeed in all texts on the social movement of the 70s, functions as a sort of *object a*, the object-cause of desire that grants them their moral

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coherence.\textsuperscript{77} Let's try to be a little bit more clear. To compare the issue of violence to the object $a$, does not mean that violence per se was the "object-cause" of desire of social movement activists; "revolution" or "communism" probably best evoked the horizons of their actions. The function of violence in these narratives betrays, to further pursue this psychoanalytical mood, a sort of displacement; the entry point which legitimizes at the level of historical narration hegemonic discourse whereby liberal democracy represents the ultimate expression of social justice. Such connection is clearly spelt out by Luisa Passerini in an essay on female identity and political violence based on a research she conducted among female political prisoners in Turin.\textsuperscript{78} She argues that the origins of left-wing terrorism are to be found in the New Left's legitimation of the recourse to violence in the struggle against oppression. This view, dominant within Italian social movements of the 70s, lead many of its activists struggling against social injustice to adopt the very same violent logic by which such injustices were reproduced. This in turn undermined the truly innovative a creative political traits these new forms of collective action had developed. On the part of the left the solution would then be to abandon its typical attitude of relentless opposition and to substitute its conflictive ideal with such potentially universal values as "reconciliation" and "repentance" which would allow a new pognessive politics consistent with Western liberal democracies. Thus the new left attitude of relenteless opposition to the existing social order is an illusion.


As the illusion Fortini still shares according to which the refusal of the violence of the system (as well responding to it through violence) is possible ‘before and beyond the choice to be in favour or against intitutions’, while in post-ww2 Europe this can only be possible within the institutions of parliamentary democracy.  

As can be guessed by the citation, the position of Franco Fortini, an intellectual, poet and literary critic of rather radical leftist persuasion, was quite the opposite. In an open letter to former terrorists detained in the San Vittore jail in Milan he argued against the dominant attitude to focus exclusively on the issue of violence when discussing left wing terrorism. By legitimizing the view that left-wing terrorism was a direct consequence of radical of social movements inasmuch as they opposed parliamentary democracy, the whole political establishment (left-wing parties included) and mainstream intellectuals refused to seriously discuss what had been going on in the 70s. Thus the exclusive focus on violence as a moral issue allowed the question of the emergence of radical social conflict, indeed as a political issue, to be utterly ignored.

Once the causal relationship between that form of opposition and the practice of armed violence was established, repressing the latter and showing its erroneous character meant undermining the former and obliterating its truth […]. One refused to acknowledge that such practice of violence (clearly a crime in the eyes of the law and a wrong for a moral code that recognizes it as such), before and regardless the sociological and psychological expressions of each single

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79 Art. cit., p. 76.
episode and experience, has been an error in analyzing and evaluating political factors. An error that strongly contributed to the defeat of the opposition of which such practices were integral part and not a mere consequence (nor was it written in the stars that it had to be so).\textsuperscript{80}

One may suspect Fortini of having been a little too sympathetic towards left-wing terrorist, surely his political radicalism was not an asset during the 80s in Italy. Still, the political ambiguities implied in defining certain actions as violent, cannot be easily dismissed, were it only for the fact the all hegemonic power tend to define oppositional practices as violent. A point very clearly made by Raymond Williams in his discussion of violence in \textit{Keywords}.\textsuperscript{81} Right from the outset he stresses the polysemy of the term, whereby political hegemony at the level of public discourse, is overshadowed by its emotional power. The meaning of violence as physical assault, which is the common definition of violence, is only one among a number of others. Thus another meaning of the word immediately implies an interpretation regarding the \textit{legitimacy} of the action, thus violence is also the illegitimate physical assault while the legitimate version of such action is defined as “force” (which is obviouslso the basic prerogative of states). Yet, the real problem, at least for the topic at hand, arises when the term is used to define behaviours considered menacing or unruly or even the uncontrolled expression of emotions. In this case it is not too far-fetched to say that


\textsuperscript{81} Raymond Williams. \textit{Keywords}. London: Fontana. 1988
there are a number of occasions in which violence “lies in the eyes of the beholder” or to be more specific in the eyes of legitimate authority.

It is within the assumption of ‘unruly’ and not, despite the transfer in the word, of physical force, that loud or vehement (or even very stong and persistent) verbal criticism has been commonly described as violent, and the two steps beyond – threat to some existing arrangement, threat of actual force – sometimes become a moving staircase to the strong meanings of violence [as physical assault] and [as dramatc portrayal of events].

Which is basically the point Fortini was making in his letter. It was not (and still is not) an attempt to side-step the question of violence nor to theorize its inevitability rather to acknowledge the existence of revolutionary ideas and practices within the social movements of the 70s and that the violent overthrow of the political system was one of the options, among others, contemplated by many activists. Thus writing about them, and to claim their legitimacy as part of the nation’s past, runs against the hegemonic process which Williams has compared to a moving staircase. The violence of left-wing terrorism has come to dominate the entire problematic of the social movements of the 70s resulting in the effacement of their complex political radicalism.

In Italy the persistance of a spectre (an almost derridean mixture of nostalgia and anticipation) of revolt might both be the real legacy of the 70s and the obsession

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82 Raymond Williams, cit. p. 330.

of legitimate discourses on the country’s recent past. Indeed, writing their history is inevitably selective and unstable.

It is at the vital points of connection, where a version of the past is used to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future, that a selective tradition is at once powerful and vulnerable. Powerful because it is so skilled in making active selective connections, dismissing those it cannot incorporate as ‘unprecedented’ or ‘alien.’ Vulnerable because the real record is effectively recoverable, and many of the alternative or opposing practical continuities are still available. Vulnerable also because the selective version of a ‘living tradition’ is always tied, though often in complex and hidden ways, to explicit contemporary pressures and limits.\(^{84}\)

In our case the selected past is even more unstable because the memory of these events embodied in living individuals are by definition memories of social conflicts. Collective acts of defiance, which as even the most traditional Kabyle knows, are bound to end in disaster.\(^{85}\) To one of such disasters, the “Sofri” case we will now turn.

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THE BIG CHILL, ITALIAN STYLE

1. BOULEVARD OF BROKEN DREAMS

That period is unrecognizable; it’s devoid of meaning. I too got a lot out of my political experience, but not much of it is usable. The changes one goes through in that type of experience are almost completely useless. According to me, there is still a void, an absence that is difficult to fill, because, even if that presence was dark, it leaves an absence that is more dramatic. There are roads to individual happiness, everybody has one or another, even I probably have one, but I don’t find them all that convincing, when it comes right down to it. It seems to me there is a hidden bitterness that actually has a hard time coming out, because there’s also a defensiveness about these things. You don’t talk about them or you talk about them on an anecdotal level. Like saying, “I don’t recognize my self anymore.”

[A]cts of cunning, not so much of the greater reason that works even in its sleep and gives meaning to the insignificant, as of the attentive 'malevolence' that turns every thing to account. Discipline is a political anatomy of detail.²

Absence and total accountability could well define the conflicting poles around which the reconstruction of the emergence and the trajectory of Italian social

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movements of the 1960s and 1970s revolve. Regardless of who does the reconstruction one cannot avoid the issue of armed struggle and political violence that accompanied (and often defined) the development of Italian social movements of the period. And yet that cycle of protest also marked a legitimization crisis of the post-W.W.II settlement and the political hegemony of the Christian Democrats. Of course the emergence of political violence is one extreme expression of a crisis of legitimacy. Brutal repression aside, two paths exist for political elites to reestablish their legitimacy, either by internalizing political violence or by externalizing it outside a polity, or both. From the end of the 60s till the mid 80s, Italy witnessed such a twofold process: first the “Strategy of tension” (1969-1976) then the “Lead years” of left-wing armed struggle (1977-early 80s). There is no need to foreground a unifying and monolithic arcana imperti³ lurking in the back-rooms of the “Palace” to conceive a common denominator between two opposing extremes.⁴ One common denominator is the continuity of State apparatuses, of laws and, especially up to the late 70s, of personnel that survived the end of the Fascist regime.⁵ In turn, the continuity of State produced a contradiction

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³ Cf. Norberto Bobbio, “Democracy and Invisible Power.” In The Future of Democracy. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987. At the same time, one needs to acknowledge the international constraints Italy was subjected to as a result of its being part of the Western bloc that limited its sovereignty.

⁴ The “Theory of opposed Extremisms” (Teoria degli opposti estremismi) became increasingly popular in Italy in the mid-70s, it was first enunciated by Christian democrats. Such a theory claimed that Italian democracy was under attack both from the extreme right and the extreme left and that its survival could only be guaranteed by the Center, i.e., themselves. The “Theory of opposing Extremisms” marked the transition from the “Strategy of Tension” period to the “Lead Years.”

between the legal system and society. The legitimating qualifier of Italian democracy, namely anti-Fascism, carried within itself the possibility of conflicting interpretations of the meaning of democracy: a moderate version, as political representation and a more progressive one, as political participation. This second view considered the playing out of social conflicts as one major driving force toward a more advanced form of democracy. One consequence of this was the emergence of at least two contradictory versions of the country’s recent past. One interpreted the Anti-fascist resistance as national liberation while the other viewed it as a social revolution. Such conflictive visions of the past also implied equally opposing views of the present. The "national" view maintained that with the fall of Fascism, democracy in Italy was a mere question of modernizing the country. The other that the true spirit of the Resistance had been betrayed and that a radical social and political change was needed. The emergence of social movements in the 60s was, at least in part, the expression of this second interpretation of national history: society reclaiming political agency outside and against institutions and traditional parties. It was also, much as the antifascist resistance had been, a conflict that combined the political with the personal. Individual choices were experienced as having far-reaching consequences both for one’s identity and his or her becoming part of a new community. Political militancy immediately involved, for the

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6 Indeed much of the anthropological literature on systems of patronage in Italy can be read as an ethography of such a split and their hegemony on the part of the Christian Democrats.

7 Claudio Pavone has argued that the complexity of Resistance should be best described as three-way war: a war of liberation against the Germans, a civil war against the Fascists and as revolutionary class war. Drawing from diaries, memoires and literature, Pavone shows how choosing one’s enemy implied, for the people involved, the moral choice of an identity. Cf.
‘68 generation, a break with their past identities. An individual rupture whereby the individual perceived him/herself as the creator of his or her present identity through the reconstruction of an alternative past.

It is this identity that tries to create for itself a memory and that must reinterpret the past. All those who contributed to the formation of the new culture may not have suffered the social inequalities and the individual traumas of the preceding years in the same way. On the other hand, many experienced the contradictions and their aftermath -- the economic boom, the new youth market, the accentuation and shifting of the man/woman difference -- without being recognized full citizens of the new society.8

The judiciary odyssey of Adriano Sofri, can be seen as the expression of the conflictive legacy of the Italian social movements of the 60s and 70s at a political level as well as at a personal level. All its main actors: Sofri (the accused), Leonardo Marino (the accuser), the public, and the State, are -- albeit in different ways and for different purposes -- struggling to legitimize their version of the past. Such a conflict of interpretations is so explicit that some commentators have defined the Sofri trial as an experiment in historiography.9 Adriano Sofri is accused, together with two of his former comrades, of the killing of police Commissioner Luigi Calabresi in 1972. The incident is commonly viewed as the first political murder to have occurred in Italy since the fall


of Fascism. Hence the trial entertains a multiple and complex relation with recent Italian history. Indeed, such a complexity can best be grasped if one realizes the oddity that the first political murder to have occurred in post-WW2 Italy not only has been the last to have come to trial, but that the defendants never defined themselves as political prisoners and indeed were tried and sentenced as common criminals.

On one level, the suspects have been indicted (and today convicted) for a crime that occurred eighteen years before. Moreover, the various stages of the trial, from the initial indictment in the Summer of 1988 till the final sentence in September 2000 confirming Sofri's conviction, have accompanied relevant changes that have occurred in Italy within the justice system. The Sofri trial has been the last major political case to be tried according to the old Code of Criminal Procedure. This Code dated back to the Fascist period and though it had been modified after the fall of the regime, it still maintained authoritarian features, the pivotal role played by career judges being one of them. They carried out the preliminary investigations, wrote the formal brief of indictment and presided in courtroom proceedings. Although different justices were involved in the different phases, they had the same career path.\(^9\) Hence, the inquiring judge at a later stage of his or her career would be a presiding judge in court. In turn, the presiding judge had a pivotal role during the hearings. Neither the prosecution nor the defense could question the witnesses directly; they had to formulate their questions to the judge who would then directly address the witness.


\(^{10}\) This single-carreer path has been maintained in the new Code of Criminal Precedure.
At another level, the public's attitude toward the judges has also changed. The years going from the end of the 80s through the 90s have also seen the progressive indictment on charges of corruption of the vast majority of senior politicians who have ruled the country for over forty years. The judiciary has succeeded where elections, demonstrations and protests have failed: to dismiss the whole political elite that had monopolized the Italian political system for forty years. Except for the Communist Party all parties have collapsed as a result. The Communists themselves have changed their name and their political program. Moreover, for the first time former Communists have been elected into power, something that the "Strategy of Tension" had sought to avoid.

One third element that needs to be mentioned, is the effect the collapse of the Eastern bloc had in Italy. Since the end of 1980s common assumptions regarding Fascism and Antifascism have been object of a heated debate. The issue at stake is the role of Antifascism as one basic requirement everybody must fulfill to be recognized as a true democrat. Considering that Antifascism the cornerstone of the post-war Constitution, such a debate goes beyond mere issues of historical interpretation. It questions the basic assumptions regarding the meaning of Italian democracy and role of the status of the Communist-led Resistance as its foundational event.\textsuperscript{11} With the "end of Communism," revisionists claim, the Fascism-Antifascism dualism loses all meaning.

with the end of ideological politics these two poles of the opposition become ideological remnants and as such mutually equivalent.\(^\text{12}\)

Hence, the "Sofri affair" and the ensuing debates are intertwined with a crisis of legitimization of the political system and with a conflictive revision of Italy's recent history. Indeed, that Sofri and his codefendants have been convicted with no proof other than the testimony of a former member of their organization, Lotta Continua, underscores the persistence of historic tensions both between and within the state and civil society in Italy. These tensions emerge transfigured through the tragic representation both of Sofri and his accuser.

2. THE DEAD HAUNTING THE LIVING

On January 24, 2000, Adriano Sofri, Ovidio Bompessi and Giorgio Pietrostefani were found guilty in the murder of Luigi Calabresi, the police officer who headed the investigations into the Piazza Fontana Massacre. Luigi Calabresi was murdered in 1972 in Milan and for over 20 years police failed to bring his killers to justice. In 1988, Leonardo Marino, a street vendor living in Tuscany, confessed his accessory role in the murder. He also accused Sofri and Pietrostefani of having organized the killing and Bompessi as the actual killer. Yet the "Sofri affair" is not as straight forward as it may appear. Not only did Marino’s testimony contradict all eyewitnesses' accounts of the killing (from the color of the killers’ car to their sex); it was

itself contradictory (Marino periodically changed his version of what had happened). Moreover, since most of the original exhibits (the killers’ car, the bullets, the victim’s clothes, etc.) had been destroyed, there was no way to verify Marino’s testimony. These procedural flaws aside, the “Sofri affair” acquired further complexity because of the years that elapsed from the incident to the final conviction. In the early ‘70s Italy was witnessing a period widespread social activism; political tensions ran high throughout society and the extraparliamentary left was challenging the country’s political framework. Twenty years later, all of this has vanished. Both the New Left and all major political parties have either changed, broken up or disappeared. On its part, the public is at best indifferent to politics let alone militancy. The country’s political institutions are indeed struggling to regain their legitimacy among citizens but their crisis, rather than having a political origin, is the result of the uncovering of pervasive political corruption at all levels. And yet, the “Sofri affair” has revived past demons and old political (and emotional) allegiances long thought to be forgotten. The conviction of Sofri and his former comrades, though apparently a result of the inquisitorial tendencies of the Italian justice system, also represents an unexpected twist in the country’s persistent denial of its recent past. First, a brief historical contextualization is in order.

In contrast to other countries in Western Europe, the Italian “68” lasted for over a decade. It saw the converging mobilizations of wide sectors of Italian society: students (within universities and high-schools), blue-collar workers (the traditional skilled workers as well as those recently emigrated from the countryside), State and private employees (the new professional middle classes) and Catholics.
The killing of Luigi Calabresi is thought to be connected to one of the major terrorist incidents in recent Italian history: the bombing of the *Banca dell'Agricoltura*'s Milanese branch on December 12, 1969. This bombing is commonly understood as the opening act of the "strategy of tension" period. From 1969 to 1976, Italy witnessed a sequence of bombings aimed at "containing" or curb the rising tide of social movements. Though most of such incidents have been left unpunished, all investigations have persistently uncovered underground networks linking right-wing terrorists to sectors of the state apparatus (mainly the intelligence service and the police), to moderate sectors of the Christian Democrats, and to international counterinsurgency structures sponsored by NATO.

The Piazza Fontana bombing marked a turning point in Italian politics for various reasons. Apart from being the first major (and seminal) terrorist act, the massacre affected social activists in two contradictory ways. On the one side it confirmed their suspicions of an imminent military *coup*, and hence facilitated the legitimization of violence as self-defense. On the other, it allowed a partial reconciliation with the traditional parties of the left (communists and socialists). Indeed, the timing of the bombing and the dynamics of the ensuing investigations had long-range repercussions. It contributed to the radicalizing of internal tensions that were emerging within the student movement and favored an alliance between sectors of the student movement and an increasingly militant working class. The "hot autumn" of 1969 had tipped the balance of power in the industry in favor of the workers opening the way to a wave of contract renewals largely to their favor. Hence, the Piazza Fontana
bombing was immediately interpreted as a warning directed against the increased militancy of the workers. Moreover, the overwhelming conservative and moderate media interpreted the incident as a further example on imminent chaos accusing the extreme left of being responsible for the massacre. Police immediately claimed that the culprits were members of the extraparliamentary left. Police commissioner Luigi Calabresi was appointed to head the investigations. On the evening of December 12, Giuseppe Pinelli, an anarchist, was arrested. On December 15 Pinelli fell out of the window of the interrogation room on the fourth floor of the Milan police headquarters and died. According to the first official version he committed suicide because the police had cracked his alibi. Yet, this version was far from being convincing. It soon turned out that Pinelli had not been formally charged and as a consequence, since the police had a 48-hours limit from the arrest to press charges, Pinelli had been illegally held into custody. Finally, the police claim that his alibi had been cracked was not true. On that day, another anarchist, Pietro Valpreda, was arrested in connection to the bombing. He was freed in 1972 and cleared of all charges only in 1979.

With the death of Pinelli and the arrest of Valpreda a pattern began to emerge pointing to the political bias that had characterized the official investigations right from the start. Such a bias was especially evident in Luigi Calabresi who was well known within the extraparliamentary left for his hostility and for his persistence in targeting the anarchists and other left-wing activists. As the official version began to crumble, activists began a campaign denouncing Calabresi’s role in framing the anarchist, accusing him of being responsible for Pinelli’s “suicide”.
At the forefront of this campaign was the newspaper *Lotta Continua*. Founded in November 1969, first as weekly magazine, later as a daily newspaper, *Lotta Continua* was the organ of a political organization bearing the same name. Lotta Continua was to become the major and the most original political group of the Italian New Left with Adriano Sofri as its charismatic leader. By the end of 1968, protest had expanded outside the universities into high schools and factories. Yet, the mobilization among students was beginning to decline; out of this crisis the first organized groups of the New Left emerged. Lotta Continua differed from other organizations in that it tried to combine the advantages of organized politics with that of grass-roots spontaneity. Moreover, while upholding a Marxist perspective, it refused the Leninist orthodoxy upheld by most of the organizations of the New Left. Its main objective, rather than constituting itself as the revolutionary vanguard, was to bring together different experiences of social conflicts without constraining them into the straight-jacket of Leninist orthodoxy. In short, Lotta Continua refused to see in the industrial proletariat the sole revolutionary subject, and focused on *all* areas social conflict where such a subject could possibly emerge. Thus, from time to time, the organization’s focus shifted from the industrial workers of the North to the unemployed in the South. It began to address issues as diverse as those concerning draftees in the army, housing struggles, the living conditions of southern emigrants or prison inmates. The underlying rationale of this perspective was the belief that marginality as such was potentially revolutionary. Social transformation had less to do with the application of some revolutionary strategy

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13 Since both the organization and the newspaper bore the same name, I use italics when
developed and led by professional cadres, than with the continuous development and unification of social conflict throughout society. Hence the newspaper acquired a major role; both as the forum where the diversity of social struggles found their unitary (and unifying) identity as expressions of an emerging revolutionary class and because of its role in focusing on issues in need of political intervention.

Once it became apparent that the authorities had framed the anarchists as a way to criminalize the whole left (both traditional and extraparliamentary), *Lotta Continua* launched a campaign. The paper though did not limit itself to mere denunciation, it soon became the major outlet allowing a new brand of investigative journalism written by its activists. While lawyers and activists began to investigate the bombing, *Lotta Continua* launched a relentless campaign against Luigi Calabresi, considered to be the primary suspect in Pinelli’s “suicide.” The movement’s investigations resulted in the publication of a book wherein the responsibility of the bombing was traced to a secret network connecting neo-fascist terrorist to State apparatuses. The paper’s campaign against Calabresi prompted the latter to file a libel suit against its editors. This was precisely what the journalists were hoping for. The trial appeared to them an opportunity to publicly confront the authorities for their responsibility in the cover-up, and to turn the libel suit into an indictment of State apparatuses.\(^\text{14}\) Yet, this never happened. Right after the first hearing, Calabresi’s lawyer demanded the presiding judge be substituted. He claimed that he had overheard him voicing his belief that Calabresi was indeed referring to the newspaper.

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responsible for Pinelli's death. The lawyer's request was granted and the trial rescheduled. This second trial never took place; on May 17, 1972, Calabresi was shot dead. *Lotta Continua's* commentary claimed that his killers had performed an act of proletarian justice and that Calabresi had finally gotten what he deserved.

Over the following years, the police persistently investigated the murder with no results. Then, on July 19, 1988, Leonardo Marino entered a police station and confessed his involvement in the murder.

I have already mentioned the flaws of his confession and the dubious decision of the inquiring judge to use Marino's testimony as the cornerstone to the whole case. But this is nothing new in Italy. The central role played by Marino in Sofri's indictment and conviction perfectly fits into a category officially recognized by the judicial system and disciplined by law. Marino is a *pentito*; one who has repented of his crimes, gives a full confession, and collaborates with the authorities to bring his accomplices to justice. The first *pentiti* emerged in the early 80s in connection with the fight against left-wing armed struggle. They were former members of armed organizations who, once arrested, decided for various reasons to give a full confession of their crimes and to reveal the identities and the whereabouts of their former comrades. One needs to stress the crucial difference between someone who repents and confesses and a *pentito*, for the latter not only confesses his or her role in the crimes he/she has committed but also implicates others. A *pentito* only makes sense as a former member of a conspiratorial network held together by strong emotional ties and sharing a common goal. Hence a *pentito* has an ambiguous moral status, especially if he has been a member of a terrorist organization.
The *pentiti’s* active role in breaking the bonds of secrecy and complicity that have governed their previous lives is tainted by the suspicion that their repentance is not as sincere as they claim. Moreover, the benefits *pentiti* can obtain are directly proportional to the number of accomplices they implicate. Hence, they are forced into a never-ending sequence of revelations both to maintain their credibility and to convince the authorities and the public of his sincerity, and to increase their benefits. Thus their confessions can never be complete. The limit of their revelations is set both by how far the investigators are willing to pursue their inquiries and the strength of their beliefs in the actual existence of a conspiracy. During the years of the fight against left-wing armed struggle (late 70s-early 80s) investigators did indeed go very far. They reached a point where they theorized the existence of a hidden directorate responsible of *all* incidents of left-wing political violence that had occurred in the 1970s. Such a theory was called the “Calogero theorem.” It had been developed by Pietro Calogero, the Padua State Attorney whose brief led to the indictment of numerous prominent militants of a left-wing political movement called *Autonomia Operaia* (Worker’s Autonomy). *Autonomia Operaia* was a loose network of local collectives that emerged in the mid 70s out the ashes of various New Left organizations. Calogero claimed that the suspects -- most of whom were academics -- were actually the hidden directorate unifying both different terrorist groups and other extraparliamentary groups into one common subversive design.\(^\text{15}\) That most of the defendants (who were later cleared of all charges)

were intellectuals and outspoken radicals led to the creation of a specific category, that of the “evil professors.” In a country where professors are also commonly defined as "barons" because of their power over students, their monopoly over access to positions and for their intense (by US standards) involvement in national politics, the hypothesis that a few professors could actually mastermind insurrection did not seem so far-fetched. This label also allowed granting a surplus of innocence to the pentiti. After all, their repentance had the moral virtue of highlighting how in their youth they had been led astray by machiavellian individuals who from their protected chairs were preaching the revolution. The pentiti, young and inexperienced, seduced by their inflammatory texts, had rushed to arms; thier mind clouded by ideology. Such was the story then, so is the story now. But differently from the “April 7 Case,” as the trial against the Autonomia was called, the “Sofri affair” has acquired a further moral twist that had been previously absent (or at least less explicit). In the “April 7 Case” the innocence of the defendants was not an issue (especially for mainstream public opinion, who believed they were indeed guilty), and debates revolved around procedural issues. In Sofri’s case the procedural flaws only add to the moral outrage resulting from the widespread belief in the defendant’s innocence.

3. L’ENFANT PRODIGE

From journalists to historians, from writers to politicians, all those who have argued his innocence have also premised their arguments by praising his rectitude, his sincerity, his honesty, indeed his outstanding moral fiber. Consequently, Sofri and his former comrades from being just victims of a judiciary system still haunted by demons
that it has conjured have become the heroes of a generation. Such a tragic (in the classical sense of the term) depiction of the defendants has prompted hard-line critics to denounce the existence of a “Lotta Continua lobby” relentlessly engaged in manipulating public opinion in their defense. Themes of conspiracy and hidden puppet masters that have persistently characterized Italian politics, thus reemerged. I will try to elaborate on this later. For now, let us take a closer look at Sofri.

Who is Adriano Sofri? Politically, he has long rejected the radicalism of his youth. Had it not been for his indictment and conviction, he probably would never have become the public intellectual he is today. His political past, though, has some of the heroic features of the rebellious youth. His first public appearance dates back to 1964. At the time he was a student at Pisa’s Scuola Normale, an elite public university founded by Napoleon on the model of the École Normale in Paris. In those years Sofri was a member of the Communist-dominated UGI national student association. One day Palmiro Togliatti, secretary of the Italian Communist Party, gave a lecture at the Scuola Normale. The rebellious Sofri publicly accused him of having abandoned his revolutionary ideals. In anger Togliatti retorted: “You go and make the revolution.” “I will,” answered Sofri. Thus his charisma was established. Years later, in recalling the incident, Sofri maintained that, though at the time he had given little thought to revolution, he had been rather proud of his exploit.16 In the following years he became one of the most prominent leaders of the emerging “Movement,” first as a member of a

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small operaista (workerist)\textsuperscript{17} collective, then as the influential leader of the student movement in Pisa.

By the end of 1968 the student movement had reached its peak. It was increasingly apparent that, to develop their radical political agenda, student activists had to extend their involvement beyond their institutional base and address issues of national and international politics. It was also commonly held that spontaneity had reached its limits, hence both organizational issues as well as which revolutionary subjects such an organization was to bring together, came to the fore. Out of this debate the first organizational nuclei of the New Left emerged, Lotta Continua being one of them.\textsuperscript{18}

As already mentioned, one distinctive feature of this organization was its attempt to combine spontaneity with a non-bureaucratic organizational framework. Such a perspective forced Lotta Continua to be constantly on the “move,” seeking to promote and enhance the “revolutionary subject” wherever a site of conflict emerged within society. One implication of this was that the issue of identity (political and otherwise) was continuously in flux and open to innovation. The continuous refashioning of a communitarian and affective identity still remains the most important (and, as we will later see, ambiguous) legacy framing the memories of most former Lotta Continua members. This is what distinguishes Sofri’s supporters both from his

\textsuperscript{17} First developed in the early ‘60s by Raniero Panzieri. Operaimo stressed the political autonomy of the working class thus implicitly criticizing the Leninist model of external avant-garde. Because of its stress on class struggle, and autonomy, Operaismo became one major theoretical referent for the student movement in the 60s and ‘70s.
detractors and from the judiciary perspective that produced the sentence. Where the former see expressions of communitarian identity, the opponents see strategic scheming. What former militants see as an experience where politics was also intertwined with emotional commitment and the intimacy of friendship, the accusers see the working of hidden directorates and cynical manipulation.

That existential dimension was not a "normal" political choice; the youth of its protagonists, combined with the radicalism of passions and the rigor of militancy, resulted in a mix that has sedimented rock-hard identities and allegiances. After the end of the organization those identity mechanisms have continued to inform feelings, have nourished friendships and emotional relationships.\textsuperscript{19}

It was not a friendship founded on secrecy [\textit{omertà}]\textsuperscript{20}, as the judges claim today and as did till yesterday the envious theoreticians of the so-called Lotta Continua lobby […]. It is, rather, a friendship and a feeling of trust formed and confirmed through the shared experience of something rare and extraordinary; the experience of conquering autonomy, at the individual level as well as collectively. I was the experience of the construction of one’s own human dignity through the action and the direct assumption of one’s personal


responsibilities. It was the discovery of a free sociality, external to the official
frameworks, such as the government or the opposition.\textsuperscript{21}

This also meant that the "party line" was ever-changing to include the emergent
issues of the moment. As a consequence, "charismatic" leadership acquired a
fundamental role for the survival of Lotta Continua. Sofri fulfilled such a role. Indeed,
his abilities to continuously mediate conflicting views, and his rhetorical abilities, are
features that persistently emerge in the memories of activists:

I was first struck by him in 1969 while attending a workers' assembly in Milan.
With his peaked cap on his sweet, thin face, he was a reckless boy very sure of
himself. With his articulate language, harsh and witty at the same time, he was
leading the discussion, clarifying doubts, confused and foolish ideas,
responding to the deceptive arguments of his opponents. Years later, he was at
a meeting in Naples and, because of his charisma, I was very proud to be able
to respond to some of his arguments.\textsuperscript{22}

Youth, recklessness, creativity, all permeate, in the recollections of former
activist, both the general climate of the "68" and the figure of Sofri:

It is without doubt, even for its detractors, that '68 has marked the changing of
an epoch. Customs, for one, were irreversibly transformed (just think of the

\textsuperscript{20} Omertà has slightly different implications than mere secrecy, it refer to the mutual support
between accomplices, a bond based on the sharing of an unavowable secret; it commonly used
to refer to the Mafia.


revolution that has occurred among women). Lotta Continua (of which the author was never a member) was the group that best represented the ‘68. It was colorful, insubordinate, libertarian, messy and romantic, as were its two leaders: Guido Viale [...] and Adriano Sofri.  

Were it not too barren, the category of political entrepreneur would appear aptly to describe Sofri, ever on the move and always up to something:

Adriano, was part neither of Pisa’s official political scene nor of the academy. He was a high-school teacher in Massa [a small coastal town to the north of Pisa] where -- according to rumors -- he had organized, all by himself, a strike in the Olivetti plant against work rhythms. [...] He was a young and extremely bright intellectual, who was able to arouse his audience with words and proposals yet unheard of, in short revolutionary. Such was the impression of those who would meet him for the first time [...]. He was always very sure of himself, to the point of being arrogant. He would utter his provocations with harsh voice, irony, in a desecrating spirit -- he could not but become a leader, and this he rapidly became.  

In the early ‘70s, as the charismatic leader he had now become, Sofri claims of having contributed in preventing Lotta Continua from pursuing armed insurrection. In

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1976, after the party’s unexpected electoral defeat, he resigned from his leadership role. He claims that his decision, which eventually lead to the dissolution of the organization, had the merit to prevent it from becoming yet another sect as most of other New Left organizations had become. The newspaper survived till the early ‘80s. With the disappearance of Lotta Continua, Sofri soon abandoned active politics and his public appearances were reduced to editorials on political and cultural issues. By the time of his indictment, in 1988, Sofri had abandoned the radical politics of his youth. Like many ‘68 activists, his change of heart occurred individually and was in part determined by his revulsion towards the increasing violence perpetrated by left-wing armed groups. Yet, the private character of Sofri’s rejection of political radicalism and activism while confirming his ethical persona (of being sincere and disinterested) has also indirectly confirmed the inquisitorial narrative of the “evil professors”. The ambiguity of his position can best be grasped through his accuser, Leonardo Marino.

4. The Marginal Who Came In from the Cold

If Sofri is a tragic hero whose present plight is the result of past crimes, Leonardo Marino can be seen as the nemesis both of Sofri’s and of the whole ‘68 experience. Much like his former leader, with the end of Lotta Continua, Marino drifted away from social movement politics. Unlike Sofri, though, Marino was a rank and file militant, as a worker at FIAT in Turin he joined Lotta Continua from the very beginnings. Today he is struggling to make ends meet. Before going any further one has to keep in mind a crucial difference between Marino and Sofri. While the latter has been
an active participant in his defense, producing memoirs, analyses and books, the former has been silent all along. Only in 1992 did he publish a book on the affair in the form of an autobiography. One striking difference emerges between this book and Sofri’s *Memoria*, the book that more specifically addresses Marino’s accusations. Sofri’s takes issue with Marino’s allegations both by highlighting their internal contradictions and through historical reconstruction by drawing from original documents (newspaper articles, police reports, etc.), while Marino takes the version of the past emerging from the trial for granted and concentrates solely on his internal turmoil that led to his repentance. The story of his life as he narrates it is unwittingly consistent with the religious (catholic) discourse that characterizes most *pentiti’s* self-portraits. Born in the South in a working class family the father was a railroad worker, the mother a housewife. When he was 6 his family moved to Turin:

I have unpleasant memories of those years [in Turin]. At school you were the Southerner, the one to pick on because you did not speak Italian and you did not understand things [...]. There was little one could do about it. I could only endure it.

Poverty and humiliation come to define his childhood and the feeling of being a powerless victim who can only endure and suffer in silence is a recurrent motive in Marino’s narrative. One happy period of his childhood is when he manages to enroll in

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a boarding school run by priests; there he finds a warm and friendly environment. His grades improve and he is not subject to any discrimination, moreover the religious education he receives strengthens his self-respect and has a long-lasting effect on his moral fiber:

The education I received from the priests, stressed the sense of justice: everybody has the right to a life, to work, to have a house, to dignity and to be respected as a human being.\(^{30}\)

This positive period comes to an abrupt end in 1959 with the death of his father. Marino at 14 is forced to quit school and to find a job to support his family. In 1966 he starts working at FIAT as an unskilled worker. He will be fired in 1970 as a result of his political activities. The harshness of his working conditions clash with his sense of justice:

And so it happens that your sense of justice, this rebellious instinct, is channeled in a direction you are not aware of. It is exploited by a power antagonist to the industrial power, against the capitalists. It is someone who thinks about you, about your conditions as a worker but who also has other plans.\(^{31}\)

And so Marino gets involved into politics. In 1969 he meets Sofri who is giving a speech in front of the gates of the plant. Marino’s joins his group and begins to learn

\(^{30}\) Cit., p. 17.

\(^{31}\) Cit., p. 28.
about politics and Marxism. At the time most of the members of Sofri’s group were university students, from them Marino learns about the Antifascist resistance, the Black Panthers, “Che” Guevara, and so forth.

[Many members of the group] came from wealthy families, their fathers were industrialists and successful professionals [...] In those days we all viewed Sofri as a revolutionary leader -- later, during the trial, he said that those revolutionary projects were only words. Then, we believed in him just like the Bolsheviks had believed in Lenin. We knew, we believed, that he meant what he said. For this reason I worshipped him, for this reason I named my son after him.32

But just like the true revolutionary project of the Bolsheviks had been betrayed by the successive leaders of the USSR, also the revolutionary potentials of the Italian Antifascist resistance had been betrayed by the leaders of the Communist party. Lotta Continua thus embodied the authentic spirit of the Communist revolution that was to renew Italy. Such a belief was not completely unrealistic either. Many sectors of society believed that the young generation of revolutionaries would play a positive role in changing Italian society. So, just as the Resistance had resorted to armed struggle against Fascism, the new revolutionaries had to prepare themselves for the confrontation.

The state was weak and we knew it. We understood that it would have never declared the state of emergency. Moreover, there were friendly forces --
particularly certain sectors of the Socialist party, who were inside the
government itself. We used to talk about it all the time. A large sector of the
public opinion, intellectuals, writers, famous journalists, looked upon us with a
sympathetic eye, and envisioned that we could positively change society.\textsuperscript{33}

According to Marino the bomb in Piazza Fontana and the death of Pinelli
convinced the leadership of Lotta Continua of the need of a clandestine military
apparatus similar to the clandestine groups active during the Resistance. Something they
had been thinking about for some time. Moreover, the dubious role played by Calabresi
during the investigations provided the ideal target.

You may say they had the opportunity and the motive.

Apparently, Marino maintains that they were not alone in this.

The attitude of the major intellectuals of the time played an important and
decisive role in confirming our conviction, our hatred [...] Then the \textit{Espresso}, a
weekly we all read, published [the document requesting Calabresi’s resignation
from the Police]. It was signed by great thinkers as professor [Norberto]
Bobbio, great directors as Federico Fellini, writers and poets like Pier Paolo
Pasolini [...]. It pointed to Calabresi as “Pinelli’s murderer”. This initiative was
very important for us [...]. If names of such caliber were against Calabresi, this
meant that he was the main target.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{32} Cit., pp. 35-45.
\textsuperscript{33} Cit., p. 44.
\textsuperscript{34} Cit., p. 50.
Still, according to Marino progressive intellectuals and renown journalists were not the only ones to condition the choice to kill Calabresi, his indictment for the death of Pinelli, reinforced Lotta Continua’s decision:

Those were also the days when newspapers were reporting the magistrates in Milan had officially indicted Calabresi for Pinelli’s murder, this reinforced our conviction that he was guilty.\[^{35}\]

It seems as if everybody, either by omission, by tacit consent, or through explicit decisions manipulated Marino into participating in the murder. More a victim of the circumstances than active participant in this murderous design, Marino is surrounded by mighty power structures. They may be represented as the obscure workings of bureaucratic bodies (the justice system) or scheming government politicians, but they are also powerful discourses (Marxism) or national myths (the Italian Resistance). Such manipulations by reckless intellectuals whose inflammatory harangues will later result in the killing of innocent people, unknowing and humble victims of the powerful. Thus Marino is lured into participating in the action as the driver that will take the killer (Bompressi) to his victim. Marino will begin to feel the first tinge of remorse the day after:

One photograph stands out in my memory: Calabresi on the marble table of the morgue, he was covered with a white sheet, with a crucifix on his chest. Most of all I was struck by the impressive funeral attended by two hundred thousand

\[^{35}\] Cit., p. 51.
people [...]. They could not all be Fascists! They were ordinary people, Milanese from all walks of life [...]. When a villain dies, I thought, people stay at home they do not go crying in the streets.36

And so Marino begins to be troubled by remorse, the pity for Calabresi will instill doubts in his political convictions leading him to gradually abandon active politics:

Regardless of you efforts to believe, to continuously tell yourself, that “Priests always lie,” the notion of remorse and sin is always there [...]. I began to question who I was, who we were, where we were going. If all this, the struggle, the armed avant-garde, had any sense. After the first euphoric years, the belief the we were right, the hope we would win Calabresi’s shadow, the dead, that lifeless corpse at the morgue began to haunt me.37

The break up of Lotta Continua in 1976 dealt a final blow to his revolutionary beliefs. It was the end of an epoch everybody was going their own separate ways. No more revolution; vanished were the revolutionaries.

When Lotta Continua broke up, some joined the Socialist Party while others joined the Communist Party [...]. For many leaders the choice was elitist one: they joined the Socialist Party, the workers on the other hand chose the PCI.38

36 Cit., p. 65-66.
37 Cit., p. 68.
38 Cit., p. 71.
And yet, though the organization has been dissolved, some of its former militants stubbornly entertain proclivities for criminal activities. Thus throughout the '70s and '80s Marino is almost persecuted by former Lotta Continua militants or other left-wing extremists who, aware of his clandestine past, lure him into robbing banks. Marino, however remorseful and repentant, accepts:

[They were individuals] whose violent past had left a trace [...] though they did not know everything about me, they knew that I used to rob banks for the organization [...]. This time the bank robberies were not intended to finance the movement, but for ourselves. The effect such a proposal had upon me can only be described as the 'call of the wild' [...]. It was as if I had a split personality as if I were Dr. Jekyll.\(^{39}\)

Again, throughout his book Marino never goes into any detailed description of events every time he wants to refute the Sofri’s version, he urges the reader to read the trial proceedings. His main concern is to give the psychological and emotional context of the events. What he had to say, he said it already in the courtroom and during the inquiries. Those were the bare facts. And yet, those bare facts that resulted in Sofri’s conviction are recognized as true precisely because they are narrated in the context of his remorse and repentance. As one judge has explicitly recognized, they are the cornerstone of the whole trial.\(^{40}\)

\(^{39}\) Cit., p.74.

One has to keep in mind not only that Marino’s testimony contradicts all of those who have witnessed the murder in 1972, but that he has changed it over the years. It may be worthwhile to take a closer look at the various versions of the story of his first confession. The first version claims that Marino after years of internal moral struggle, spontaneously decided to confess his role in Calabresi’s murder, the date is July 19, 1988. He goes to the local Carabinieri and renders his confession thus reported by the inquiring judge:

For some years now I had developed the conviction, engendered by moral and religious sentiments, that I had to confess to the competent\(^{41}\) authorities facts and circumstances in which I was involved between the end of the ‘60s and the beginning of the ‘70s. At the time, I was a militant of the extraparliamentary movement “Lotta Continua”. Though certain that I had never been a suspect, also because I have never had anything to do with the law, since 3-4 years an imperative has emerged in my conscience. I feel the need to account for what I have done in a political context from which I have separated myself for more than 15 years [...]. Though I may conceive that many people will not believe

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\(^{41}\) The Italian word is competenti; again one has to keep in mind that this is not the verbatim rendering of Marino’s confession, but how his oral confession has been first rephrased and then dictated by the judge. No one in Italy would normally qualify authorities as competenti; used in this context the adjective refers to bureaucratic bodies specialized agencies entitled to address specific issues (you go the police to report a crime, you go to the local ufficio edilizio to apply for a building permit, etc.). In short, competenti as it is used in this context could normally be uttered by members of a specific sector of bureaucracy to qualify and legitimize their own actions.
me, I have decided to confess all that I have done or that I know, especially out of respect for my children.\textsuperscript{42}

So far, so good. Bureaucratic jargon aside one could imagine that Marino is truly struggling with his conscience. Yet during the first trial another version of his conversion emerged. In a catholic country such as Italy conversion and confession go well together and in this combination, the role of the priest looms large. And indeed a priest did play a role in Marino’s interior struggle. During the preliminary inquiries, Marino has maintained that he had approached the local priest and had confessed to his involvement in terrorist activities. He had hitherto repented, but one of such acts he specifically regretted. Yet he apparently did not elaborate farther, what he did say was that he feared for his life and he was tailed. During the hearings of the first trial, in 1990, the priest was questioned on whether he had noticed unknown individuals tailing Marino. He confirmed but he also added that he had learned that these people were Carabinieri in civilian clothes. The local Commander was thus summoned and during his testimony he unexpectedly declares that Marino had first contacted him on July 2, 1988, and not on the 19th as it was previously claimed. As with the priest, Marino mentioned his participation in an awful crime without actually saying what sort of crime he had committed. Yet, the local commander had perceived clear signs of an embattled conscience.

[While he was relating his story] I became aware, I don’t know, how he would move and look around as if there were someone looking. In short, he wasn’t at

\textsuperscript{42} Quoted in Carlo Ginzburg, Il giudice e lo storico, cit., p. 16.
ease, that is, he was nervous, he was sweating and smoking [...] I clearly perceived that he was troubled, I mean somebody who sweats while he is talking and looks around.\footnote{In Carlo Ginzburg, cit., p. 53.}

Marino is troubled but does not say anything and yet the local commander contacts his superior officer, Captain Meo, who arrives from a neighboring town to question him. Again Marino does not give any specifics of the event he most regrets, but also Meo clearly perceives his remorse:

He would say: “You are surprised, because here I am telling you about events have occurred twenty years ago. Someone like me, who now leads a normal and quiet life, who has wife and children, that has a job [...]. Yet you know I want to have a clean conscience. I want to be able to look in my children’s eyes, and though they may suffer from this I must talk, I must be able to look in their eyes” this was a recurrent theme. Moreover, he was extremely troubled, because he was very nervous, he would move his hand a lot and he would chain-smoke.\footnote{In Carlo Ginzburg, cit., p. 53.}

Even in the presence of an officer who has come explicitly to hear what he has to say Marino does not explain what he is talking about. And yet another superior officer in Milan is contacted and he too makes the trip all the way to Tuscany (roughly 400 Km) to talk to an unknown individual with a troubled conscience. This time the officer in question has a specific \textit{competence}. Colonel Bonaventura is an expert on
terrorism and has repeatedly investigated Calabresi’s murder. The Colonel arrives and still Marino does not give a confession but as other colleagues before him he does perceive Marino’s remorse:

At the end [of their first conversation] I wasn’t really satisfied, because I hadn’t accomplished much. He said that, yes, the event, I deeply regret ... Is it this [event], is it this other? and so on and so forth. [and Marino] No, absolutely not. "But, you know, I think one has to be patient with me, if..." When I arrived the second time [...] he greeted me with a smile and so I said to him: “Well, I guess you are more relaxed now, you trust me. We can talk, we can move forward...” And he said: “Yes, because you know...” He began to talk about his children, that for him the issue of his children was extremely important [...] he then became a little more specific and told about Lotta Continua [...]. That when he worked at Fiat he was a point of reference for his coworkers.45

Still Marino does not talk, so a couple of days later the Colonel returns. For the third time Marino talks about his family and children. This time though the Colonel being the (competent) authority that he is urges Marino to come clean and tells him he should come to Milan. According to Captain Meo this is what Bonaventura said:

Come, Marino, you have to make up your mind; we cannot go on talking with you about your personal problems and your family. Surely you have come to us in order to tell us something, something you don’t want to tell us. Come to Milan, we write something down and maybe you finally decide to tell us

45 In Carlo Ginzburg, cit., p. 54.
something more, so that we can understand what you want speak with us about. There is no point for you to talk about this awful event [...] without explaining what it is.\textsuperscript{46}

And so Marino goes to Milan, notice that he never mentioned Milan in his statements. The presiding judge of the first trial does wonder why Marino agreed to make the trip. Again Meo:

Well, we had try to make him talk, and possibly to write or otherwise force him to tell us what he wanted to say. He was resistant to dialogue. We thought and understood [...] “It may be better in Milan [...], since he has committed this awful crime there [...]. Maybe being in Milan could have a positive influence on him.”\textsuperscript{47}

Such kafkaian examples could go on forever so maybe I can stop here. The question is not whether Marino tells the truth (he obviously is not) nor whether Sofri and the others have been convicted on the basis of an unreliable testimony. Of interest here are the tropes and discourses that have allowed the transformation of an individual’s unresolved past into criminal charges against others leading to their conviction. A ruling that amounts to the revision of almost thirty years of Italian history.

5. ON THE VIRTUES OF JUDICIARY HISTORY

The ”Sofri affair” has been described as an experiment in historiography where the past (in this case the events as narrated by each witness) has been performed rather

\textsuperscript{46} In Carlo Ginzburg, cit., p. 35.
than *reconstructed*. Witnesses were urged to relate those events without acknowledging that twenty-odd years had elapsed since their occurrence. Individuals were treated as original documents, and no recognition was given to the fact that the process of remembering is immediately an act of interpretation, as any oral historian well knows.\(^{48}\) For example during the first trial, (January 1990) Marino while relating Sofri’s instructions for the killing, confuses the present with the past:

Marino: Adriano [Sofri] told me not to worry; he and the others trusted both Ovidio [Bompressi, the alleged killer] and me.

Judge: You are sure it was Ovidio.

Marino: Yes.

Judge: But this totally contradicts what you have been saying so far, that you knew him as Enrico!

Marino: Obviously he said Enrico

Judge: But you have just called him Ovidio! Just say what you remember...you are not here to argue a theory, you are because you are indicted of first degree murder!\(^{49}\)

The judge here views Marino as if he were an original document, or a recording, and as such Marino must behave. Individual memory is here reified as if it were a written document. To be sure, such an attitude toward the past and memory is not new.

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\(^{47}\) In Carlo Ginzburg, cit., p. 35.


In his article on the “April 7 Case,” Alessandro Portelli has noted how the oral depositions of the *pentiti* during the courtroom proceedings were considered subordinate to the written documents gathered during the inquiries. What the witnesses for the prosecution had to do was to rehearse what had been written down during the pre-trial inquiries. Thus the complexity of experience, was reduced into an univocal narrative.\(^50\) One may recall the *Lotta Continua* editorial that greeted the murder of Calabresi as an act of proletarian justice, had prompted the authorities to direct their investigations toward members of the organization. At the time the inquiries led to nothing but today thanks to the “confession” of Marino they become another piece of evidence. The same thing happened during the “April 7 Case.” Then, as today, written documents were reified and placed out of context. As a critic of the Calogero Theorem remarked:

> Negri complained in court of the “damning pretense, which runs through all our writings, “ and added that theirs was “the language of the Marxist tradition, but it carries a residue of simulation that creates a distorted redundancy.” Much New Left literature, especially propaganda, is filled with exaggeration and wishful thinking. Reading it literally, Palombarini [the critic] concludes, one is apt to take “purely ideological expression” for “factual truth.”\(^51\)

\(^50\) “In the April 7 Case, the prosecution followed the course of assimilating ‘oral sources’ by turning them into written documents: the records of pretrial testimony and interrogations, once committed to the transcripts became ‘documents’ which were consigned to the courtroom judges and adopted wholesale -- to the point that the oral testimony of courtroom witnesses was never allowed to contradict the now-written pre-trial testimony.” Alessandro Portelli, “the Oral Shape of the Law..., cit., p. 250.

\(^51\) Cf. Alessandro Portelli, “the Oral Shape of the Law..., cit., p. 249.
We all understand that to err is human, but when the tendency is to persevere in committing the same error, we may be led to suspect the presence of an underlying pattern. Indeed a plot! Since what we are dealing with is the reconstruction of past events and the "truth-effects" produced by their narration, looking at what historians have to say on the writing of historical texts may be useful. It would seem that the judges involved in the "Sofri affair" (as well as those of the "April 7 Case") had all but forgotten Giambattista Vico's warnings on the problem of taking figures of speech literally.\textsuperscript{52} They seem, though, to have read Hayden White, albeit backwards. He does draw attention to the narrative dimension inherent to the writing of history. He suggests that the crucial difference between a chronicle and a historical inquiry resides in the rhetorical aspects of the latter. The difference between a historian and a compiler of chronicles is that the former makes stories out of them. The historian performs an operation of emplotment.

[H]istorical narratives are not only models of past events and processes, but also metaphorical statements which suggest a relation of similitude between

\textsuperscript{52} "The development of consciousness [...] is for Vico a process of abstraction in which the distance between topics (places) and tropes (images) widens until the metaphorical origins of a topic are forgotten in the ironical imagery of modern discourse. The process of abstraction that inheres in the development of consciousness, therefore, is one of forgetting the connection between our present vocabularies and the poetic process through which they were originally formed." Patrick Hutton, "The Art of Memory Reconceived: From Rhetoric to Psychoanalysis." In Journal of the History of Ideas, 48(3), 1987; p. 378. The judges may not have read it, but Colonel Bonaventura apparently did, otherwise why did he ask Marino to come to Milan so that they could "write" what he could not say? Maybe Bonaventura is just a good reader of detective novels, i.e., the criminal alway returns to the scene of the crime!
such events and processes and the story types that we conventionally use to endow the events of our lives with culturally sanctioned meanings.\textsuperscript{53}

So, what is the story that the judges, against all odds, are so eager to tell? It definitely looks like that of a conspiracy. And in this respect the “Calogero Theorem” assumes the role of a master-narrative. Remember that Calogero claimed that behind all acts of left-wing armed groups and behind all armed organization there was a secret directorate coordinating all forms of political violence according to the strategic intent of overturning the Italian State. Connected with this conspiratorial view of social conflict, there was the trope of the “evil professors” whose writings having survived the political context in which they had emerged were considered evidence that their authors’ mischievous intentions were indeed to plague an otherwise peaceful nation with bloodthirsty terrorism. It would appear the \textit{arcana seditionis}\textsuperscript{54} that haunted political imagination of absolute monarchs and enticed the theoretical musings of many \textit{raison d’\text Superscript{e}}\textit{tat} theorists of the seventeenth century was for the judges not only a reality but also a satisfactory paradigm allowing their understanding of the country’s past. Some (all too cynical?) critics may suggest that positing the existence of an invisible menace both legitimizes state secrecy\textsuperscript{55} while reducing citizens to passive subjects. In


\textsuperscript{55} “Among the reasons which can be invoked in favour of secrecy [...] the necessity for all decisions concerning the supreme interests of the state to be expedited as quickly as possible,
turn, the recourse to secrecy “secretes” (an all too tempting pun!) a surplus of state power by means of a spectacular re-legitimization:

The brilliant almost blinding visibility of the actor, necessary to instill a sense of respect and reverential awe towards someone with the power of life and death over its own subjects, must be matched by the opaqueness of action necessary to guarantee that it will defy control or interference from outside.\(^{56}\)

Hence, one way to frame the “Sofri affair” would be to ascribe the all story to the long series of plots resulted from the double allegiances\(^{57}\) held my all major Italian political actors after WW2. Of course one feature of conspiratorial reasoning is that once it has gained currency it tends to proliferate.\(^{58}\) Indeed Sofri himself and at least one other critic (Carlo Ginzburg) have entertained the idea that the whole affair is the result of a conspiracy against Sofri orchestrated by a series of individuals (policemen, magistrates, politicians) who either had previously investigated the murder of Calabresi unable to find the culprits or had otherwise concerned themselves with left-wing armed grup. Marino, on the other hand, points to another conspiracy orchestrated by former Lotta Continua members (now journalists and politicians) aimed at discrediting his testimony. And yet, however seducing plots may be for the alleged victims it does seem

\(^{56}\) Cit, p. 88.


that such an explanation would grant too much importance to their actions. Coincidences do occur and there is no need to posit an overall scheme to explain them.

It may turn out more rewarding and interesting to try pursuing how Marino’s delayed repentance has come to be regarded as true. That is to say, we could look at the conditions that allowed his internal struggle to take the shape that it did, legally sanctioned repentance, resulting into the conviction of a quite harmless individual, Sofri. To do this we have to take into consideration the coming together of three discourses: the self-fashioning of Marino’s subjectivity as innocent victim via repentance, the law’s acknowledgment of that repentance as sufficient ground for Sofri’s conviction, and the historical reconstruction produced by the combination of these two discourses (repentance and conviction).

Much like the conspiratorial reasoning, the emergency legislation that was passed by Italian governments in the mid ‘70s, has developed into a paradigm enabling the political system and its institutions to deal with potentially disrupting social tensions. Never an organic piece of legislation, what is defined as Emergency legislation is series of decrees and piecemeal administrative measures that have survived the issues that prompted their inception. With the decline of radical leftist movements and the defeat of armed organizations, other long-standing Italian problems were defined as emergencies: unemployment, drug addiction, various forms of organized crime, the social and economic crisis of the South, etc. Just as the fight against terrorism had been interpreted as a mortal menace to the survival of the Italian
democratic state, also these issues became national priorities requiring immediate action rather than long-range structural reforms. Hence, while the term emergency (*emergenza*) came to define a wide range of issues, the antiterrorist laws and practices came to inform both the definition of the crimes connected to these issues (organized crime and political corruption) and the attitudes of those involved in their repression (the magistrates, the police, prison administration, etc.)\(^{59}\) In short, norms and practices that were originally thought of as exceptional and temporary, became the rule. In his critique of the emergency legislation, Mauro Palma\(^{60}\) draws attention to the alterations in the trial procedures produced by these “exceptional” measures.

First of all the prosecution is focused on the defendant instead of being focused on the crime committed. Thus the motives become more important than the crimes they allegedly produced. Consequently, the defendant's identity (political allegiances, relationships, opinions, attitudes, etc.) becomes a decisive factor in the trial. The trial itself acquires the symbolic valence of a struggle between the state and the defendant. Prosecutors come to embody the state and their defeat immediately implies the defeat of the state itself, at issue is not the prosecution of a crime but the defense of institutions. Thus the conviction of the defendant symbolically represents the victory of the state over mortal danger. Of course, it goes without saying that the defendant must prove his or her innocence. Being on trial is in itself evidence of one's guilt. After all, people have been convicted on grounds of their favorable opinion of the crime, i.e., they shared a

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\(^{60}\) Cf. “Una mutata questione penale.” In Germano Monti, cit.
moral responsibility with the criminal (*concorso morale*). Finally, the standard legal criterion whereby people who have committed the same crime should be subject to equal punishment, is totally disrupted by the preferential treatment granted to those who agree to collaborate with the prosecution (*pentiti*). This has produced paradoxical results whereby *pentiti* though guilty of murder have been released while others equally guilty of murder may be sentenced to life because they have refused to repent or to implicate others. 61 Thus crimes and punishments, under the regime of the emergency legislation, acquire a political relevance that overshadows the rule of right; reason of state takes precedence over the rights of the individual.

Regardless of their plausibility, conspiracy theories have the undeniable virtue of producing strong collective solidarities and constructing constituencies, which relegitimate established power structures. Conspiracies share with the reason of state the tendency to interpret social conflicts or tensions as irreconcilable conflicts between good (social and political harmony) and evil. 62 That an obscure state prosecutor of Padua, Calogero, constructed his whole case against a group of intellectuals and activists on a conspiracy theory (Calogero Theorem) goes to testify that emergency

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61 The “April 7 Case” is a paradigmatic example.

62 In his reconstruction of the persistence of a paranoid style in American politics, Richard Hofstadter noted that those who theorize conspiracies believe them to be directed “against a nation, a culture, a way of life whose fate affects not only himself alone but millions of others.” Richard Hofstadter, cit., p. 4. Moreover, one may argue that the proclivity of the reason of state to view resistances to the exercise of sovereignty as the result of conspiracies is connected to its inability to conceive the existence of all collectivity external to it. As a rationality well aware of unsatable legitimacy while convinced that the state is the sole totalizing agent, reason of state, sees mortal dangers instead of social problems and conspirators instead of social movements. Cf. Colin Gordon, “Governmental Rationality: An Introduction.” In Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), The Foucault Effect. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
legislation, reason of state and conspiracy theory are intrinsically connected. Moreover, the tendency of Italian magistrates to persistently apply procedures, norms, theories, derived from emergency legislation can best be appreciated if we keep in mind that by doing so they are also able to acquire power and prestige within society and vis-à-vis the political system. Conceiving themselves as front-line soldiers in the battle for the survival of the democratic state, the magistrates have increasingly transformed trials and preliminary investigations in inquisitions where confessions, repentance and cooperation become major instruments for seeking convictions. On the other hand, defendants increasingly view repentance and confession as their best bet to milder punishment.

6. MEMORY AND THE RULE OF LAW

In "Body Memories" Julie Taylor tries to understand the Argentine paradox whereby a high-ranking officer well known for his ruthless and indiscriminate repression of dissidents during the dictatorship, may run for Governor and be defeated only by a narrow margin. The riddle is more puzzling considering that the detailed reconstruction of the proceso has been the specific task of the Argentine National Commission on Disappeared People established soon after the country’s return to democracy. How can the detailed and public recording of terror go hand in hand with such a striking collective amnesia? She argues that this paradox is to be connected with the way the memories of these not so remote events have been recorded by the

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Commission. One basic assumption of the commission was that the years of state terrorism had to be understood as a suspension of the rule of law. Thus the gathering of detailed testimonies of state-sponsored violence aimed not only to reconstruct a true version of the past whose violence was thus never to be forgotten, but also to relegitimize the state itself as the impartial guarantor of the rights of the individual. The return to democracy was thus intimately connected with setting the record of past events straight. Yet, the major concern of the commission was to record specific cases that would later allow to bring the perpetrators to justice. The issue was to establish facts not intentions or motivations. Thus when information thus gathered led to the indictment of the members of the junta,

All who passed through this process [...] accused and accusers -- actors in highly political dramas where they represented clashing worldviews and collective strategies for implementing them -- were refigured as innocent or transgressing individuals with individual rights and obligations [...]. Collective political motivations were not recognized [...]. Political history became juridical history, recreating a new memory. Collective facts and sociopolitical identities underwent a profound transformation as they were denuded of the political language that had made them accessible to social actors in Argentina.  

Just as the Argentine terror had resulted in the crumbling of political and social ties through fear, the return of democracy understood as a return to the rule of law

64 Cit, p. 197.
echoed terrorism because it only recognized individual victims of specific crimes committed by individual perpetrators:

As evinced in the trials of the Argentine junta, in the course of legalistic rendering through recording, official memory is cast into forms that are integral to the judicial process. Such forms [...] suppress the remembering and the recording of any motivation that is not individual.\textsuperscript{55}

Moreover, by positing a distinct opposition between the rule of law and violence as public order versus chaos prevented all recognition of the political rationalities that informed Argentine terror.\textsuperscript{66} By recording and acknowledging only individual memories, first the commission then the trials constructed a national narrative that effaced both political conflict and collective identities while establishing the law as the sole repository of collective bonds. Collective memories were thus reduced to files gathered in archives.

Italian political violence in the 70s was of course far less indiscriminate that it was in Argentina but similarly to Argentine terror its perpetrators did not indulge in thorough record-keeping. Apart from actions claimed by left-wing armed groups, bombings, shootings and killings could only be ascribed to a particular political design by the reactions of different collective actors. Thus, as the Argentine case exemplifies, since legal reason can only evaluate actions as relationships directly connecting

\textsuperscript{55} Cit., p. 198.

\textsuperscript{66} "The opposition of the order of and the chaos of violence further led to the omission of collective motivation not only of victimizers (national security doctrine as political program)
individuals (victims of perpetrators), crimes that cannot be traced back to a specific perpetrator can only be explained either as the effect of chaos or of conspiracy. Much like the approach of the Argentine Commission and the ensuing trials, Italian emergency legislation cannot acknowledge that specific events are to be connected to a wider political conflict. It refuses to acknowledge that collective behaviors are not necessarily the product of conspiracy. It thus tends to conceive political and social tensions as part of an invisible design. The Argentine and the Italian cases could be then seen to complement each other. In the former, the relegitimation process is accomplished by eliding the political context to individual actions; in the latter the historical and political context of actions is reconfigured as the product of far-reaching conspiracies. In both cases, chaos is the backdrop motivating the evaluation of events. For both, the solution resides in finding out who did what when and to whom. In both instances the triumph of justice is mediated by harnessing social and political conflicts along the divide of crime and punishment. In both instances, actors and actions, words and deeds can only be connected by positing a direct causal link. Most important still, in both instances the individual testimony can only be admitted if it can connect specific individuals to specific actions. In the Argentine case, individualized testimonies were the precondition for reconstructing the past. Conceived as a facts-gathering endeavor, this judiciary form of historical reconstruction imposed its own rationality on individual memories.

but of victims as well, who were defended as individuals whose human rights had been violated rather than as political activists.” Cit., p. 198.
In this role as testimony, evidence, and document, memory does not only salvage, construct, and invent. Memory as constituted is exclusionary: it omits what hierarchy does not recognize. Thus authority admits some narratives and omits others in a process of articulating memory and power. Remembering, then is also a process of forgetting. It is a process of simultaneously constructing subjectivities and doing violence to others [...] More than content, memory is an arena.\textsuperscript{67}

The Argentine example can help us to understand how the state can re legitimize itself though the judiciary. The Commission’s and the trials’ urge to record and to prosecute specific incidents resulted in the reconstruction of a national historical narrative that excluded the collective and political context of these same events. As a consequence, the whole process re configured collective identities and political allegiances into a web of individual obligations and responsibilities. So, if in Argentina individuals were either victims or perpetrators, in the Italian case they were either peniti or terrorists; in both instances the process of collecting and evaluating narratives of individualized agencies and atomized identities, results in a “true” and (sanitized) rendering of the past.

If we now return to the Sofri trial we may be able to better appreciate the different attitudes towards the past of Sofri and Marino. Indeed the problem of historical reconstruction through individuals’ recollections comes to the fore. When Sofri says that his revolutionary rhetoric was just words motivated by passionate and naive

\textsuperscript{67} Cit., p. 200.
enthusiasm of youth he may not be completely honest. On the other hand, when he insists that in those years people did and said things that today may seem inconceivable he makes an all-too sensible statement. Actions and words of the past can only be understood if placed in their historical context: attitudes that today may indicate criminal intentions, yesterday were popular political expressions. Yet, to contextualize his articles would mean, on the part of the judges, to acknowledge the political and socially motivated conflict that raged in Italy in the 70s. This in turn would undermine the historiographic assumptions underlying emergency legislation. At the same time, though, Sofri appears to have difficulties in acknowledging the force of past collective identities. When he refers to Marino he views his allegations as the expression of a pathological obsession with the past, as if Marino was traumatized by the intensity of his experiences. Probably Marino has been traumatized and maybe his frustrations are the product of the breaking up of those brotherly communal ties that Sofri and other former Lotta Continua members all remember being an important feature of common militancy. Considering their class background and their subsequent trajectories, maybe Marino’s suspicion that his middle-class comrades did not really mean what they said, is not so pathological after all. To be first glorified as a member of the revolutionary working class that was to lead the revolution, then ending up as a street vendor may well result in frustration and resentment. From this, to suspect that other and unavowable interests may have conditioned one’s choices, does not necessarily require a pathological imagination.
Yet after all this psychologizing we may have only managed to instill some reasonable doubts onto Marino’s accusations while the spontaneous character of his confession is still not problematized. Worse, we may fall into the trap of conspiratorial reasoning. Could Marino and the magistrates be unwittingly telling a story and not be aware that is completely false? Could it be that they both somehow confuse truth with plausibility? Could the story they narrate be plausible because it echoes Italian national narratives? If so, how can Marino’s recollections be so heavily conditioned by such narratives?

Yet, before moving on, a further “cannibalization” of the Argentine case can help us to suggest a specular relationship between this mode of collective memory construction and terrorism. Taylor remarks that the legalistic language with which military terrorist practices were recorded by the Commission as well as the victims’ role during the trials had exclusionary features. Individuals were called upon to refer on specific incidents they had witnessed involving identifiable perpetrators. By ignoring the collective dimension of repression, the law reproduced the terrorist project, namely the breaking up of collective identities.\footnote{“Terror can be defined as absolute lack of recourse to the law, lending credibility to the intuitively held view that terror and the law are opposites. Terror may also be seen, in the same vein, as absolute excision. Yet the legalistic language used to protest terror in these volumes/documents is itself exclusionary. Attempting to remember, diagnose, and cure an era of spectacular political violence, Never Again resorts to forms […] that impede dealing with the exclusionary political nature of the violence and even participates in it.” Cit., p. 196.} Taylor’s argument traces a commonality of effects between the rule of law and terrorism from the point of view of the victims who as witnesses were victimized (disciplined) a second time. If we look at the Italian situation I would argue for a commonality of effects from the point of view of the
perpetrators (emergency law and left-wing armed groups). By this I do not mean that (Italian government and terrorists) both consciously shared a common project, though commentators from different political viewpoints do make that claim. 69 It seems to me that emergency legislation and clandestine violence (left-wing or otherwise) conceive politics the same way. Both view the state as the fulcrum of society, both see military rationality as the best way to pursue their goals. This also means that if terrorists view their opponents as unitary agency so does emergential legislation. In turn since the latter seeks to repress terrorism, every defendant is a potential terrorist and what he or she is called to report is, regardless of its content, terrorism. His or her recollections are thus recombined by the fragmenting rationality of the law into memories of a “terrorist as a young man.” Of course all collective behavior that challenges or otherwise criticizes the law is immediately seen as the misleading tip of the conspiratorial iceberg. In short emergency legislation, like terrorism, not only terrorizes but excludes all alternative discourses that are not informed by its reason of state rationality.

7. THE NATION

I began this chapter citing Luigi Bobbio, former Lotta Continua member and author of its “official history.” 70 Bobbio remarks that he is not able to make any sense out of his past and that he is not able to connect his experiences as member of a social movement with the present: “That period is unrecognizable; it's devoid of meaning.” 71


70 See note 18, above.

Of course the void in his memory does not refer to individual amnesia but to the collective memory of a generation of activists. He argues that there is a break between the historic past and its recollection. For him the past is indeed a foreign country. We may also recall that both Marino and Sofri make references to the trauma of the breaking up of collective solidarities and the ensuing emotional tensions. Thus we are confronted with individual memories devoid of sense due to the effacement of their collective origins and a historical narrative that interprets past collective identities as the product of willful manipulation.

Could the selective retrieval of individualized memories operated by the law -- or rather the tendency of the former to reduce the recollection of collective dramas into anomic webs binding instigators, perpetrators and victims in a senseless theater of cruelty -- condition the reconstruction of past events?

The law is seen in this context as violent itself: constraining, fragmenting, hierarchical, and power-fraught, in contrast with Foucault’s distinction between law as universal and discipline as hierarchical, asymmetrical.²²

Taylor’s remarks on the violent and fragmenting effects of the application of the rule of law to legitimize Argentina’s transition to democracy can help us to see the emergential workings of Italian law as a technology of subjection whereby the individual is constructed as an ethical and self-reflexive being. A subject with responsibilities towards others but mostly accountable for the upholding of his or her
own morality. An individual who must always be able to account for his or her actions both publicly and privately in the intimacy of his or her conscience.

We may then argue that the emergency legislation is a discourse that opens up the possibility for individuals that find themselves entangled in it, to articulate their experiences on the basis of a specific narrative (a tale of conspiracy and manipulation) leading to the construction of a specific type of persona (the repentant).

What we need to note is that Foucault argues that the subject is an effect of power, that subjects come into existence in relation to each other and that those relations are power relations. Disseminated throughout society (indeed constituting it as such), power constructs the subject as a moral being, at the same time the object and the locus of ethics. Knowledge, or rather its Enlightenment’s version, as a way to pursue its goal to uncover the hidden and systematic relations between things, words and bodies by assigning to them specific attributes. Knowledge about society and about human beings as social beings, can only be pursued by objectifying discourses, behaviors, types of subjectivities into systematic relationships that constitute “society.” A more mundane version of the argument is articulated by Ian Hacking. He is interested, as he often is, in the emergence of “multiple personality” as a clinical phenomenon. He argues that such a phenomenon first emerged around 1875 in France in the context of the then raging debate on the existence of a transcendent subject prior to all


knowledge. The “discovery” of cases of multiple personality by Pierre Janet was considered to prove that the idealist conception of a unitary self was flawed. Hacking argues that once positivist psychology developed a diagnostic label that granted coherence to a series of unusual behaviors a number of mental patients began to spontaneously reproduce the symptoms. At the same time such a theoretical construction allowed individuals to articulate subjectivities that made sense to them, but most important were recognized by those who listened to them.

Hence, in the “Sofri affair” we have Sofri, constructing himself as a stoic victim of mean-spirited lies (those of Marino) that can only be explained by jealousy and moral misery:

Why did Marino come to hate me? For various reasons […]. First of all because he worshipped me in the past [in those days] our relationship was that of a quotidian and brotherly communitarian life […]. My complete and sudden resignation from the role “charismatic” political leader in 1976 produced briefly resulted in intense yet perfectly understandable hostility among my former comrades and followers; as time went by such feelings subsided. In Marino’s case the passage of time has made them meaner. In his eyes my life arbitrarily mystified and reconstructed through rumors and fictions […], has become an example of betrayal, egoism, success, power and prestige.75

74 Cf. Ian Hacking, cit., pp.223-224.
Marino, on the other hand, also constructs himself as a victim. Yet, unlike Sofri, he sees himself as a victim both of the circumstances and of manipulating individuals, false preachers who after having taken advantage of the naive ignorance of common people will readily abandon them to their destiny and return to the warm embrace of their class of origin. In his book, Marino not only stresses that Sofri is the son of an admiral but also mentions the middle-class background of a number of prominent members of Lotta Continua. Moreover we have seen that in his book he connects the emergence of remorse to what he perceives as his class origins. That so many common people attended Calabresi funeral is for Marino an indication that the policeman was an honest and peaceful individual who was just doing his job. He was also a victim just like himself. Moreover, just like Marino had once been, Calabresi was a fervent catholic, as the photographs of his corpse in the morgue clearly indicated. If Calabresi was slurred by mainstream intellectuals and even indicted, Marino too had been a victim of reckless manipulation of self-serving radical intellectuals and ambiguous politicians. Hence his repentance is only in part motivated by his urge to become a law-abiding citizen, for his main concern is recovering his self-respect as a father and a devoted catholic. Indeed, both he and the magistrates view his decision to confess as the result of an internal moral battle totally unrelated to any material interest. Thus his testimony is viewed as reliable and true precisely because he was never indicted nor suspected of the crime. Why then should he implicate himself otherwise? Lack of self-interest and spontaneity have indeed led some commentators to argue that Marino is the first (and so far the only) true repentant terrorist. A judgment that strengthens the
perception that emergency legislation rather than aiming at punishing the crime, is keen on morally reforming individuals.

So far we have a set of legal norms and practices that target the identity of the defendant, and that have the tendency to place the crime as part of a conspiracy. We have a technique of gathering information about the past that does not acknowledge that individual recollection is always interpretation and that excludes the possibility that these events are the result of collective behavior. We further have a group of experts (the judiciary) entrusted with the prestige (and power) to articulate a coherent and true version of national history that places all conflict outside the social and political covenant. Finally we have two individuals at odds with their past; one (Sofri) who only looks at it as the naive passions of youth; the other (Marino) who only sees deception.

Emergency legislation would then appear as form of constituting a political community by a simultaneous process of individualization and totalization. On one side it only grants recognition to those who can give detailed accounts of themselves, a technique whereby self-portrayal is always self-justification. On the other, it constitutes its subjects by placing them against the backdrop of a specific interpretation national history.

It is as if the constitution of subjectivities through such a legislation and the reconstruction of an Italian national identity, implicate each other. Nation-making and people-making go hand in hand. In this respect, the “collective amnesia” of a generation of Italian activists is at the same time the precondition and result of the workings of the law. At the level of the individual being part of a social movement that questioned
traditional allegiances and identities while radically challenging dominant power structures had implied the fashioning of an identity which was antagonist to the dominant social order and integrated into collective political projects. The decline of social movement politics and the break of collective ties produced atomization and frustration. Assumptions and behaviors that were normal in the heat of revolutionary activity were now deviant and marginalized and collective memories of struggle gradually lost their clarity for people who were now at best defeated veterans.

The social movements of the ‘60s and ‘70s combined a generational aspect and social crisis with radical politics. Being part of a social movement implied for the individual the shedding off and the radical critique of his or her previous identity. Insofar as social movement expressed an oppositional political project the identity construction of its members implied also an alternative interpretation of Italian history. The failure or defeat that political project and the decline of the collectivity that expressed it resulted in an identity crisis of individual activists. Political defeat

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66 That individual identity is an effect of social and national framework is, by now, a truism as well as the complementary observation that the way a collective past is (re)constructed condition the identity of the individual; Cf. Nathan Wachtel, “Memory and History: An Introduction,” History and Anthropology, 2, 1986; Pierre Nora, “Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de la Mémoire.” Representations, 26 (Spring), 1989; James Fentress and Chris Whickham, Social Memory. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; Patrick H. Hutton, History and Memory. Hanover: University of Vermont, 1993.

77 “Self-definition does not occur in a vacuum, but in a world already defined. As such, it invariably fragments the larger identity space of which its subjects were previously a part [...]. The construction of a past in such terms is a project that selectively organizes events in a relation of continuity with a contemporary subject, thereby creating an appropriated representation of a life leading to the present, that is, a life history fashioned in the act of self-definition. Identity, here, is decisively a question of empowerment.” Jonathan Friedman, “The Past in the Future: History and the Politics of Identity.” American Anthropologist, 94(4), 1992; p. 837.
deprived them of the historical narrative that gave meaning to their lives. They truly became individuals without history.\textsuperscript{78}

The armed groups-emergency dualism at the same time reinforced and exploited this fragmentation of identities and memories. Armed struggle increased with the crisis of the New Left organizations (mid-1970s). The emergency legislation in its fight against armed organizations destroyed the last remnants of left-radical movements (1977-early 1980s). The kidnapping of Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978 can be taken as the point of juncture between left-wing armed struggle and emergency legislation. Indeed one could argue that Moro’s death made this collective amnesia available to the political restoration of the succeeding years. What I mean is that political crisis allowed certain narratives of national identities to articulate the subjective crisis of a generation of militants and the accounts of the past on their opponents.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{78} “The people without history in this view are the people who have been prevented from identifying themselves for others.” Jonathan Friedman, cit., p.837.

\textsuperscript{79} The connection between Moro and Sofri is more than legitimate. To begin with, during that 55 days-long crisis (which ended in Moro’s death) Sofri and Lotta Continua were at the forefront of what at the time was called the “Party of negotiation”. Indeed, radical as Sofri and his comrades were, they went as far to publish an appeal, signed by high-ranking members of the Church, urging the authorities and all major political parties to negotiate with the Red Brigades. Then, there is Ferdinando Pomarici, the inquiring judge whose “investigations” led to Sofri’s indictment. In 1978 (after Moro’s death), the police discovered an apartment in Milan which had been a Red Brigades hiding-place, in charge of the investigation was Pomarici, the apartment was “thoroughly” searched and nothing notable was found (usual terrorist paraphernalia aside). In 1990, while renovating that apartment a carpenter tears apart an evidently make-shift wall and finds: the photocopies of letters Moro had written while prisoner of the Red Brigades, a hand-gun, a sub-machine gun and a bag containing 60 Million Lire. Of course, to err is human, why should Pomarici be deprived of his humanity? I can imagine his embarrassment in learning that his search had not been as thorough as he had claimed in front of a parliamentary commission (he had “stripped the apartment clean”). I can also suspect a the irony that accompanied Sofri when he prefaced his book on Moro’s kidnapping by citing the
Robin Wagner-Pacifici has analyzed Moro's kidnapping as a social drama.\textsuperscript{80} The issue she intended to address was to understand how a society constructs (emplots?) a social and political crisis and the roles played by individuals and institutions. Unlike Victor Turner's formulation of social drama (a ritual that seeks to reconcile at the symbolic level contradictions at the level of society), she points out that, though in the case of Moro's kidnapping social and political tensions were symbolically played out, the result was both a reconciliation and schism. When he was kidnapped Moro was the president of the Christian Democracy; at one time of other he had held all major positions both in the government and in the party. Since the early '60 he had been the principal supporter first the center-left coalition governments between the Christian Democrats and the Socialists. Then in the early '70 he had actively tried to enroll the support of the Communists. The morning he was kidnapped he was on his way to the parliament were the first Christian Democracy-led government explicitly supported by the Communists was to be voted into office. Apparently by kidnapping Moro the Red Brigades thought they could trigger fatal contradictions within the emerging coalition. The opposite happened. Both the Christian Democrats and the Communists chose to reject any form of negotiation. The Communists especially were adamant in their refusal fearing that otherwise their long-awaited political legitimization would have been lost forever. On their part the Christian Democrats, their credibility

increasingly undermined by a series of scandals, viewed the hard-line attitude as functional to their re legitimation. In between was Moro.

In many ways the Christian Democrat *par excellence*, Aldo Moro had been defined by Pasolini as "the least implicated of them all," in contrast to Andreotti who definitely represented the opposite. Being a Christian Democrat, Moro viewed politics as the art of mediation, the pursuit of reconciliation with political opponents. Mediation and reconciliation for him meant the inclusion of the political opposition into a power structure hegemonized by the Christian Democrats. Moreover, he did not consider the party and the nation (least of all the state) as separate entities, quite the contrary.  

Moro believed the fate of Italy as inevitably intertwined with that of his party, and vice-versa. He thus came to symbolize the Italian nation state attacked at its heart by the revolution (or rather its spectacularization). Among the most cruel aspects of Moro's kidnapping, apart from his death at the hands of the Red Brigades, are the reactions of his "friends." From his prison, Moro began to write letters to friends, fellow politicians, to his family. In his letters Moro tried to persuade the hard-liners to pursue a negotiated outcome. Not only his requests were rejected, but the authenticity of the letters was questioned. Moro, the refined politician, "the least implicated of them all," would have never written such letters, he could try to manipulate his captors, but he

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81 This would seem an example of how the discontinuities in the art of government suggested by Foucault could be productively conceived as articulable in a combinatory scheme as well as genealogical one. Thus in Moro's view of government pastoral power played a central role. Cf. Michel Foucault, "Governmentality." In Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991.
would never indirectly support their demands.\textsuperscript{82} Thus Moro was symbolically split in two. One was the statesman who would never concede to terrorist demands, especially if the survival of the State was at stake, the other was the human being, and as such his survival had a secondary importance. The more Moro wrote the less he was recognized. He was twice a victim. As the cool politician he was thought to be the letters he was writing proved that he was the victim of torture and thus he was not himself. Since the “best” victim is a dead one, Moro became the sacrificial offering to a system of power he had helped to create and that was in dire need of legitimation. What about the “party of negotiation”, those revolutionary theorists who favored a different outcome? They ended up in prison. For to favor negotiation was immediately interpreted as a critique to the state and evidence that they were siding with the Red Brigades.

During the first trial on the kidnapping of Aldo Moro (1982) the vice-secretary of the Socialist Party was questioned on the reasons why during the kidnapping his party was in favor of negotiations:

We wanted [...] an open door and a possibility that I would not call trattativa (negotiation) -- I want to be very clear on this -- a possibility to create conditions of fact that would leave, I repeat, at least a road open to the possibility of releasing the Honorable Moro.\textsuperscript{83}


\textsuperscript{83} In Richard Drake, \textit{The Aldo Moro Murder Case}. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995; p. 67.
If a high-ranking politician of a party member of the ruling coalition, needs to specify that his party’s pro-negotiation stance was not really pro-negotiation but an attempt to keep a door open, which borders on the tautology, what about those who did not enjoy the protection of the government? They were thus charged of being members of a terrorist organization. This is what happened to Lanfranco Pace and Franco Piperno, two leaders of Autonomia Operaia who were asked by the Socialists to help them in their efforts to negotiate Moro’s release. Pace and Piperno ended up as defendants in the “April 7 Case.”

Thus the narratives of terrorism became the only stories one could tell about the immediate past. Regardless of their truth they were plausible and officially recognized. The fragmented identities of frustrated militants whose defeat was both subjective and political were increasingly articulated according to the “emergential canon”.

The pedagogical concern driving the Argentine commission in collecting stories of army terrorism was aimed at the construction of a nightmarish archive that would prevent the repetition similar events in the future. That of the emergency legislation, was the constitution of a polity by emplotting the lives of defendants into a narrative of the Italian national character as where revolution or radical politics perforce led to terrorism and conspiracy.

Massimo D’Azeglio, a major historical figure of the Risorgimento, once the unification was accomplished observed: “Now that we have made Italy, we still have to make Italians.” He thus unwittingly, and with totally different intentions, anticipated
Gramsci's description of the Italian Risorgimento as a passive revolution accomplished without the active participation of the lower classes. One should note that the main architect of Italian unification was Count Cavour who shrewdly played the European powers against each other to the advantage of the Piedmontese monarchy. Those who without doubt considered themselves full-fledged Italians were of course the upper-classes (mainly landowners), the rest of the population (popolino, literally “little folk”) could only aspire to such an honor in times of war, as cannon-fodder. In return for their sacrifice they could aspire to share some of the cultural aura emanating from Roman antiquity, through Catholicism and the Renaissance. Lower classes could be acknowledged spectators of what was conceived as the cradle of Western civilization.

The problem of who to include within the nation was not only a matter of distinction. It was also a political concern: how to combine capitalist modernity with traditional power-structures? How to exorcise the specter of revolution? By educating the commoners, of course. But the education was not conceived as empowerment but as a means to prevent revolution, by constituting the ideal Italian as faithful subject. And on

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84 Risorgimento (national rebirth) is the name given to the process that lead to Italy's unification (1848-1870).

85 The tendency of the Italian ruling class to play conflicting interests of international powers of each other is apparently a feature of their habitus (in Bourdieu's sense of the term) that surfaces during national crises. Such was their tactic during the Risorgimento; they resorted to it to raise the cost (in terms of political recognition and territorial gains) of Italy's siding with the Allies in WWI; it was also their tactics after WW2 when the Christian Democrats played the communist menace to secure US support and relief funds thus rallying moderate and conservative forces behind them. Today, the Mastricht treaty and the European Union are used in a much similar way.

this path we run into Alessandro Manzoni, another national icon.\textsuperscript{87} What is interesting is that in his meditations addressing the specificity of "Italians' character" as the product of a common history and culture, we find not only the construction of the true Italian as the generalized victim, of politics, of intrigue and power games of the powerful. Victim of politics, the dreams of which all too often are accomplished through violence, the true Italian can regain his or her dignity by abiding to the moral teachings of Roman Catholicism. Politics, like all human endeavor is bound to have unintended and unwelcomed results this also amounts to a harsh indictment of revolutionary theories. Their quest for earthly justice can only result in further violence. The only justice Italians can aspire to is that which emanates from God.

Italy's national unification came long after that of other European countries just as the industrial revolution had yet to take off. Aware of the country's backwardness, Italian intellectuals were haunted by the specter of revolution.

It was also what worried Manzoni.\textsuperscript{88} The puzzle that needed a viable solution was how to bring about a radical political change such as the country's unification

\textsuperscript{87} Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) is a major literary figure of the Risorgimento. Indeed if the origins of Italian literature in the late middle ages are canonically identified with Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio, the birth of a national Italian litterature is identified with another tryad: Foscolo, Leopardi and Manzoni. Manzoni both a romantic and a catholic has strongly contributed in his time to reinterpret the middle-ages and the role of catholicism as two major symbolic aspects of Italian national character. This in turn implied a devaluation of Roman antiquity and humanism.

\textsuperscript{88} "[...] Manzoni most dramatically the fundamental contradiction of the Risorgimento, the juncture of two vectors heading in opposing directions. One is the objective need to steer all of the country's energies towards the construction of an indipendent and unified state [...] the other is the tendency of the European bourgeoisie of the Restoration to harness, control and constrain within tolerable limits the revolutionary movement unleashed by the French revolution." Giulio Bollati, "L'Italiano." In L'Italiano. Il carattere nazionale come storia e come invenzione. Torino: Einaudi, 1993; p.81.
without unsettling social consequences; it is in this context that the middle ages and Catholicism became for him the symbolic cornerstones that could synthesize a viable Italian national character. The dark ages of barbaric invasions that destroyed the last remnants of Roman antiquity were viewed as the historic moment that best combined both the true human features and moral dignity of the Italian people. The underlying concern of Manzoni’s broodings is to avoid the destabilizing effects of a too sudden modernization that would undermine Christian civilization. In his *Osservazioni sulla morale cattolica* (1819) he thus waged an harsh critique of Enlightenment philosophy for having supported the revolution. Its ambitions of earthly justice have ignored the fallibility that inheres all human endeavors. Man must renounce to such presuming ambitions and abide to the only reliable and eternal law, that of God. Instead of the pursuit justice in this world, a quest that invariably results in violence and wars, men should live according to Christianity’s moral teachings that only can guarantee social harmony. Against the liberals’ admiration for the Italian middle ages of the Communes where free citizens where masters of their destiny as the ideal political referent, Manzoni praises the humble commoners innocent victims of the powerful.

I see the faculty to address men independently from political relations as one of the most wise and eternal feature of religion. All political systems are complicated, to support or to attack them is an endeavor where honest means to

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89 Manzoni’s argument was directed against the interpretation of Italian history that informed *Storia delle repubbliche italiane nel Medioevo* (1809-1818) written by the Swiss economist and historian Jean-Charles-Léonard Sismondi de Sismoni (1773-1842). In his 20 volumes history of the Italian communes in the Middle Ages, Sismondi stressed how the free institutions of the
often are combined with vicious means. Their effects are too often a combination of good and evil. For the most part they are unforeseen even by their producers.\textsuperscript{50}

By way of a combination of the paradigmatic humanity of God with its specific Italian historical expression, the humble come to embody the true Italian national character. The benevolent society envisioned by Manzoni is one where the disrupting effects of modernity are kept at bay thanks to the universal faith in divine justice. A society where the humble recognize that their daily toils are part of God’s plan. If they will be able to enjoy the protection of the powerful, so much the better, for them as well as for their masters. Regardless of man’s worldly conditions godly justice will in the end prevail.

Does it not sound a bit familiar? Is it too far-fetched to imagine the persistence of a national trope that posits a thread connecting the victims of foreign invasions and of Machiavellian politics with the \textit{pentiti}? One cannot help (at least I cannot) to perceive in this exaltation of the victim and in the related condemnation of revolutionary theories, the figures of Leonardo Marino and Adriano Sofri. And indeed the one \textit{is} humble and the other \textit{is} arrogant. For Marino confession is not a matter of being recognized as a citizen by the Italian authorities, but to be recognized in what is the essentially human feature of Christianity, namely sin and misjudgment. If the meek will inherit the earth, it is with the meek and the humble that Marino sides; with the

\textsuperscript{50} Alessandro Manzoni, “Sulla Morale cattolica”, cited in Bollati, cit.; p.92.
victims of events they cannot control and yet endure their everyday toils without envying the rich and the powerful. The countless victims of pride and prejudice whose hardships never prevent them to pay one last sign of affection to an innocent policeman slain by the senseless ambitions of some “evil professor.”

Once the verdict is pronounced Italian law requires judges to give a written explanation on the reasons such a verdict has been reached, here is the explanation of the 1997 ruling:

As to the rejection of all extenuating circumstances, the present verdict has correctly drawn attention to the lack of any sign of atonement, of remorse, or confession on the part of the defendants. It further stressed the absence of any word of rejection of the crime, of compassion for the victim and his surviving children, and of specific incidents worthy of recognition aside from their hitherto clean record, or of any particular merit on their part.⁹¹

“Making up” Italians is indeed a messy and lengthy business.

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OUR MEMORIES, OURSELVES

1. NATIONAL FRACTURES

One truly red thread running though the Sofri case is the uneasy and conflictive tensions that characterize the relationship between the state (or the political system) and society in Italy. Indeed, Italians’ alienation from their national institutions, either expressed by the lack of trust in their elected representatives or by their supposed indifference towards matters of collective interest, has been one major, if not “the”, defining trope of Italian national Identity.

Recently, the Italian sociologist Loredana Sciolla, irritated by the persistent and expanding popularity among Italian and foreign commentators alike to identify the cause of the Italian flawed national identity in the persistence a widespread familist ethos, has convincingly demostrated its stereotypical character.¹ According to the familistic paradigm, first developed by Edward Banfield² out of his fieldwork in a southern Italian town in the 50s, social and economical underdevelopment was an effect of the locals’ amoral familism which priviledged domestic (private) immediate interests above and against those of the community. Over the years the familistic paradigm has grown to be an enduring trope used by Italian and foreign commentators to define the

Italian specificity. One implication of the extended use of familism to define a national ethos is that the more people value their local identities over their national allegiance, the less will they engage in social and political participation. Thus affective ties at the local level inhibit the fullfledged development of modern democracy. One further implication of this thesis is that the lack of trust towards national institutions is the symptom of the lack of civic culture among Italian citizens. Drawing from a statistical data, Sciorilla argues that the familist paradigm does not correspond to the Italian social reality in any way. Thus in the south, lack of trust in the family is lower than in the centre-north, while trust in national institutions (being the state apparatuses, the political system or the Catholic church) is higher and political participation is lower. In the center-north on the other hand, a higher trust in the family corresponds to higher participation in local politics and citizens’ groups, while at the same time a higher politicization is matched by a critical stance towards national institutions. Hence, Sciorilla argues that what is specific in the Italian case is the widespread alienation of the citizens from their political system and national institutions and that activism within civil society does not necessarily imply identification with the Italian nation. Yet, statistical realities notwithstanding, there remains the Italian enigma whereby Italians themselves quite explicitly employ the familistic trope to define their national predicament. According to Sciorilla, this “lack of national pride” is an effect of the

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conflictive character of Italian history, or rather, the multiplicity of histories which coexist side by side but are not woven together into a common national narrative. More specifically, she argues that there is an opposition, or lack of dialogue, between the national history told by intellectuals (the scholarly tradition of Dante, of the great Italian artists, etc.) and the histories experienced by common citizens.

Internal conflict as a trait of Italian national identity is also the theme of a recent essay written by the historian Mario Isnenghi. He argues that one solution to the identitarian problems haunting contemporary Italians lies in the recognition that modern Italian history has the features of a "necessary tragedy", thus instead of seeking a national reconciliation which would put past opponents on an equal footing (as for example fascists and antifascists) Italians should attempt to acknowledge that since its unification, Italy has witnessed a series of internal struggles, based on class and conflicting ideologies. A result of this has been a perduring alienation between the Italian state and its citizens. Rather than eliding such ideological and political differences Italians should finally recognize that the only national history available is a fractured one. Thus defining Italian history as a necessary tragedy implies first of all recognizing that differences exist and they are necessarily part of a common heritage. Easier said than done, I might add, especially when, as in the case of the social movements of 70s, a proteous political radicalism grows out of the same emergent community.

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2. **NEGATIVE NATIONALISM**

Obviously, when the nation is at stake, one is usually prone to reach for his or hers personal copy of *Imagined Communities*. According to Anderson, nations emerged as the combined result of European colonialism, print capitalism and the expansion of bureaucratic administration. Nationalism first emerged in the American colonies at the end of the 18th century and later spread to Europe in the 19th century. Here the combined effects of the French revolution and the further expansion of a bourgeois civil society based on vernacular print-languages lead absolute monarchies to legitimize their rule as national sovereignties. Indeed, one of the perduring contradictions inherent to the unification of Italy (1870) is that the majority of the population was not really involved, indeed one of the preoccupation of the national elites was to limit popular participation.

In sketching the genealogy of nationalism, Anderson argues that the characteristic of European nationalism is that the “official nationalism” of the European monarchies with the ensuing expansion of bureaucratic apparatuses contributed to the emergence of popular nationalism through the development of state languages, which in turn legitimized the nation state while undermining the dynastic prerogatives that official nationalism sought to preserve.

What is interesting in the Italian case is that the spread of an Italian national language acquired mass (truly national) proportion only after WW2, with the establishment of mass compulsory education. Thus as Sciolli notes it was only in the

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late 50s-early 60s that the linguistic unification of the country came into being. Another phenomenon that contributed to the cultural unification was the momentous spread of mass-media. Clearly, such a momentous transformation had a deep impact at the level of inter-generational relationships. Such tension were not specific to Italy, of course, what might be peculiar though is that the same generation which gave birth to social movements, was at the same time the first truly Italian generation. Which is another way to understand the peculiar combination of generational solidarity and (national) political activism of the Italian 70s. In the historigraphical sketch of the first chapter one of the issues which defined different approaches to the Italian “68” revolved around its similarities and differences vis-à-vis the experiences of other countries. Thus Ortoleva stressed the similarities by focusing on student activism in universities, a phenomenon he sees as representing the true meaning of the 68, the subsequent politization of the students is then interpreted as a completely different phenomenon indeed a residual (thus regressive) attempt to maintain doomed communal identities. Giachetti, on the other hand, stressed the positive specificity of the “era of collective action” because it activated democratic direct participation which undermined established identities of class and gender. Furthermore, in direct polemic with Ortoleva he stressed the specific influence played by Italian radical intellectuals and marginal political groups in shaping the politics of the movement. Such influences were not limited to the dissemination of radical political theories but included also new artistic expressions. In short the

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7 While in 1959 32.2% of the 14 years-old had received compulsary education, in 1966 it had risen to 56.2% and in 1972 reached 72.7%. At the university level, enrollment in 1959 was 7% of the age corresponding group, in 1975 was 30% and in 1992 had reached 41.3%. In the mid-
emergence of social movements went hand in hand with the emergence an alternative civil society where cultural and political influences from abroad were grafted, reinterpreted and adapted to become part of a new national culture.

One could even be tempted to compare this generation of Italian radicals with Anderson’s “last wave” of nationalist intelligentsias which acquired a leading role in the national liberation struggles after WW2. Anderson notes that one peculiarity of this younger generation of nationalists was its being predominately made up of young people who were the first of their families to have acquired a European education.

Youth meant, above all, the first generation in any significant numbers to have acquired a European education, marking them off linguistically and culturally from their parents’ generation, as well as from the vast bulk of their colonized agemates.⁸

The parallelism between Anderson’s “last wave” of nationalism and the Italian social movements is useful inasmuch as the accounts of former activists as well as their sympathetic historians describe them as collectivities separate from and opposed to the political system and the state. Similarly to the post-WW2 anti colonial struggles the strength of Italian radical movements was their ability to combine (generational) counter-culture with (national) radical politics. In other words antifascism went hand in hand with rock-n-roll.

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I am not arguing that the Italian social movements of the 70s were national liberation movements, rather that the problem of recognizing their trajectories as a legitimate moment of national history has much to do with the peculiar antisystemic character of social movements in general\(^9\), as with the ambiguities of Italian national consciousness. As one aspect of such ambiguities seems to be the lack of a shared historical narrative, the attempt of weaving the social conflicts of the 70s into a legitimate Italian history ends up in re-enacting the conflictive, indeed mutually exclusive, features at the heart of the Italy’s national discourses.

Indeed, conflicting interpretations seem to share the same crucial problematization of Italian national identity, namely its exceptionality vis-à-vis the rest of the (Western) industrialized world. Thus Ortoleva’s focus on the Italian student movement is motivated by its sincronicity with the emergence of student movements in other countries. Once the Italian experience diverts from the global course, it looses its innovative features and falls back into tradition, namely leninism and radical politics. Moreover, Ortoleva’s claim that such trajectory was an attempt on the part of activists to prolong their fusional experiences into the surrounding society seem to evoke the familist specter that supposedly haunts Italians. Accordingly, Italian left radicalism of the 70s would end up as yet another expression of Italy’s perduring flaws.

Giachetti, on the other hand, by focusing on the 68 as a long cycle of protest spawning for almost two decades, argues that the Italian peculiarity is characterized by the emergence of widespread demand of democratic participation which was contrasted

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and eventually repressed by a political system unable and unwilling to fulfill its specific democratic role. In this interpretation the PCI is at the top of the list of the culprits, precisely because it claimed to embody the promise of national democratic renewal yet was the most adamant opponent of the movement. So much for Italian trope of a nation without a state and a state without a nation.

There is yet another trope which seems to emerge out of these to (topical) accounts of social movements in Italy, namely the contested and ever unsettling question of modernity. Tim Mason and John Agnew\textsuperscript{10} were both baffled by the peculiar relevance of modernity and modernization in Italian public discourse. Being both historians their focus was on historical writing. Mason, for example, remarked how all reference to the modern in Italy implies a value judgement whereby any process or event that is defined as modern immediately is hailed as positive innovation against the traditional stagnation that supposedly characterises Italian culture.

The first striking fact about the Italian discussion is that all the different words which have \textit{modern} as their root form seem to have a much less problematic status in Italian culture than in British, German or American culture. In Italy ‘modernity’, ‘modernization are words which are used freely, easily and positively, as though everyone knows what their import is.\textsuperscript{11}


\textsuperscript{11} Tim Mason, \textit{art. cit.}, p. 128.
Indeed, Mason argues, regardless of their theoretical background, Italian historians and intellectuals seem to share the conviction that crucial in the history of the country is its problematic relation with the modern. Debates thus revolve whether a specific event or epoch, or cultural experience can be considered modern or not.

On his part Agnew remarks how modernity in Italy has a spatial implication, that is modernity is always external to the country. Modernity appears to be situated in northern Europe. Thus, for example recent discussions on European unification depict the country as “entering in Europe”. Again, modernity, its meaning left unexamined, is both positive and non-Italian.

For some years I have been fascinated, if somewhat perplexed, by the ease with which Italians and others account for some particular feature of “Italian life” in terms of Italy’s “backwardness” or “immaturity” in comparison to other European countries. More often than not, invoking backwardness appears to involve situating the phenomenon in question (Mafia, government deficit, economic disparities between north and south) in a simple backward-modern couplet that all who read or hear intuitively understand as meaningful.\footnote{John Agnew, \textit{art. cit.}, p. 23.}

It may then not come as a surprise if activists when narrating their past and commenting on the difference between then and now, seem to organize their narratives through the tropes of a flawed nation.
I learned about the Associazione Compagni di Walter Rossi a couple of years ago, (1997) from an ad in the radical daily Il Manifesto. I missed their previous initiatives, but this time I was able to go. The ad published in the newspaper had a telephone number, but I did not trust myself to contact them out of the blue. So, having learned about the press conference, I decided to go to check these people out. As a precaution I called around asking who they were. I learned that the press conference was going to take place at a law firm whose solicitors had assisted M. and A. two former BR members. I got there a little before noon, when the press conference was supposed to start. To my surprise, the person who answered the door was the same lawyer I met with A. when we were looking for his wedding suit. At first he did not recognize me, indeed he did not know anything about a press conference, but again, as he was not working on the case, he wouldn’t know either. He let me in and showed me to the waiting room, and went to inquire about the initiative to the other lawyer, Sodani, whose name was cited in the communiqué. After a few minutes, Sodani came to greet me, inquiringly suspicious, he asked who I was, and learning that I was not a journalist, he asked how I learned about the press conference, adding that it was not intended to be open to the public. Needless to say, I was a little surprised. Anyway, as he did not mean to be rude, and since he was not a member of the group (I subsequently learned that he was among it founders); I should better wait for the organizers and left. I sat back and waited, somewhat flustered by the reception. A few minutes went by and in came a man who I guessed to be one of the Walter Rossi people; he grabbed the dossiers on the
Walter Rossi affair that had been sitting on the sofa and went back out. He soon came back and asked me pretty much the same questions as the lawyer's. This time adopted a different strategy: I explained that I was an anthropologist, doing a research on the 70s generation for an American university (a qualifier which usually implies that you mean business, and you are not monkeying around). Like the lawyer before him, Renato Rizzo, that was his name, did not know that the press conference had been announced by the Manifesto. Once I explained my work, he immediately asked me where I was in the 70s (the implication is that he wants to know were I stand politically, if I am of the Movement or not). I told him that I was in Germany at the time, and to respond to his implied inquiry on my political credentials, I immediately informed him that I was from the anarchist book shop at via dei Campani. Just like the lawyer he too told me that the press conference was really not open to the public and maybe we should talk another time? He then asked me what kind of things I was doing and who I had talked to. Trying to keep my frustration under control, I mentioned the cooperative where A. and M. work. He lit up, he knew them very well, as a matter of fact the previous week he had taken a group of schoolchildren or something at their farm (I did not know they had one, but I keep my mouth shut too happy of the break-through) we talked a little more. By now he was more relaxed, and began to tell me more about the association. It was founded a couple of years ago in the anniversary of the killing of Walter Rossi, a 20-years old Lotta Continua activist killed by neofascists in 1977 in Rome. While we were talking the first journalist finally arrived, followed by another one. He looked familiar though I really could not place him, to my embarassment he greeted me warmly... later I remebered we been introduced to
each other by a common friend, though I had seen him often in rallies etc., Checchino worked for a left-wing radio in Rome, but also wrote for the daily of the communist party. I obviously was glad that there was someone who knew me from elsewhere...an implicit confirmation from a third party of my credentials. In the meantime, other members of the association arrived while no other journalist showed up. Thus the press conference began. Rizzo, who was the president of the association, began by summing up the its history. Its members were friends of Walter and was founded on the twentieth anniversary of his death, in 1997, they organized a rally, and in that occasion they were attacked by a group of neofascists, this incident, in which two young activists were injured, confirmed their conviction that Walter’s assassination had further implications, if the fascist were still keen on attacking his friends, it was not a issue long forgotten.. Indeed, as they began to piece together their investigation, they discovered that Walter’s assassination was not a random incident but was part of a political strategy to provoke violent response from the radical left movement in Rome. At one point, Checchino felt the need to say that even though he was a small kid at the time he nevertheless rembered the incident. At the end of the press conference, Sodani, the inquiring lawier came up to me and asked whether I was not a friend of A. asking me to send him his greetings. Compared to when I first got there he was a lot more friendly and relaxed, I realized that the other lawyer, the one who had answered the door, must have explained to him who I was, i.e., a friend of Alessandro indeed, it came back to me that he has said something about “explaining my presence”... being an
anthropologist did not qualify my being there, being a friend of a former
member of the Red Brigades, did.\textsuperscript{13}

Needless to say I was rather irritated and taken aback by the cold reception I
received. Yet, irrational as they seemed at first, these attitudes of distrust towards
myself struck me to be different from the canonical reluctance of "natives" to talk to
their curious ethnographer. To be sure, each new rapport I established implied careful
manoeuvring on my part to justify my interest in the topic. As the lawyer's and
Renato's reactions exemplify, being an anthropologist did not in itself justify my
presence, indeed why would an anthropologist be interested in the 70s, in the first
place? Not that the cross-examination I was subjected to was completely unjustified, as
the neofascist wounding of a left-wing activist during the first public rally
commemorating Walter Rossi's killing in 1997 testifies. Granted that the whole thing
was a little paranoid, the oddity of a press conference behind "closed doors" is an apt
metaphor of the tensions involved in the activists’ attempts to recover or otherwise
vindicate their version of the 70s.

Walter Rossi was a young activist in Rome. He was shot on September 30 1977
by a group of neofascists literally under the eyes of the police. Some 10 police officers
were present when the shots were fired. Though they were sent there in order to prevent
clashes, they did not intervene, either before or after the incident. Indeed, only an hour
after the incident did the police began to round-up local neofascists. Investigations were
far from accurate thus the suspected killer Alessandro Alibrandi was able to flee to
Lebanon in 1981. In December 1981 Alibrandi, who had returned to Italy, was killed by

\textsuperscript{13} From my fieldnotes, 9/29/1999.
the police. The case was obviously closed. In 1997 the Walter Rossi Association, founded by the friends of the dead activist, having gathered new evidence leading to a different suspect, Cristiano Fioravanti a former neofascist activist, filed a writ to reopen the case. The new investigations led to a new trial in June 2001. Yet, despite all the evidence (three eyewitnesses and the testimony of his brother Valerio, another former right-wing terrorist, who identified Cristiano as Walter Rossi’s killer) Cristiano Fioraventi was acquitted in the first hearing. Much like the Sofri case, though with far less publicity, issues of historical reconstruction were intertwined with legal issues. Unlike what happened in the Sofri case, though, the appeal to the law, had an explicit instrumental trait. Bringing the Walter Rossi’s killer to court had as much to do with affirming the rule of right as with affirming an alternative version of national history. Thus in the paid ad published by the radical newspaper _il Manifesto:_

The possibility that an individual may cease to exists because of his attempt to affirm his own personality in a positive and collective form, cannot be left without explanation and without a persistent endeavour to understand his motives as well as personal and political responsibilities.\(^{14}\)

This connection of personal and political responsibility is indeed a rather explicit cue that the stakes involved in reopening the investigations into Walter’s murder go well beyond the solution of an unsolved murder, for the intention is no less an indictment of the institutional repression suffered by Italian radicals in the 70s. Nor is such a strategic use of official discourse to further radical political objectives

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\(^{14}\) Cf. 30 settembre 1977 – 30 settembre 1997 20 anni dalla morte di Walter Rossi. _Il Manifesto, 09/07/1997_
historically unfounded. All neofascists involved in the case had been active participants in the "strategy of tension".\footnote{cf. ch. 1 and ch. 2.} The appeal to the official liberal democratic discourse of the rule of right is intertwined with a historical critique of the power relationships which shaped Italian democracy.

In Italy, what has occurred in the [recent] past can be interpreted from a political and historical point of view as well as from a and from a juridical point of view. Seldom are these different interpretations consistent with one another. The reason for this is not to be ascribed to the "bias" of political interpretations [...] ; this has not been possible due to pressures originating also at the institutional level -- a unique phenomenon among industrialized countries -- that have prevented investigators to identify the culprits.\footnote{Cf. 30 settembre 1977 – 30 settembre 1997 20 anni dalla morte di Walter Rossi. \textit{Il Manifesto}, 09/07/1997}

Michael Herzfeld has recently\footnote{Herzfeld, Michael. \textit{Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State}. London: Routledge. 1997.} warned that by taking the official rhetoric of the nation-state at face value students of nationalism in general and anthropologists in particular risk to not fully appreciate the extent to which the appeal to national essences can be used as a cover for social action aimed at redefining or subverting existing hegemonic discourses. Herzfeld argues that the hold that national rhetoric exerts upon common citizens can hardly be explained by the force of its ideological institutions; nationalism works because it allows a variety of conflictive interests to be articulated within a common frame of reference. To the extent that national identity is based on
mythical transhistorical essences which confer a character of immortality to the historical existence of the individual, the appeal to such national “truths” can be used to lend a legitimate form to alternative social practices or discourses.

The state is caught on the horns of its own reification. To achieve at least an illusion of stability it must command the active involvement of ordinary people; and ordinary people reify, all the time, everywhere. They, too, invoke solidified histories, rediscovering in the official mythology some aspects that will serve their own cause […] the play of power, while often oppositional, draws on shared symbols that are then differently used and interpreted according to the interests, resources, and desires of the actors. 18

In a typical anthropological move, Herzfeld draws attention to the performative aspects of national ideologies, whereby essentializations and stereotypes are resources for a cultural engagement whereby official national discourse becomes the cover for strategic social action on the part of elites and “common” citizens alike. Thus reference to national character, national history or national institutions allows individuals and groups to think and challenge relations of power.

In the case of Walter Rossi, the dead activist becomes the methonymic figure of the original character of Italian post-war democracy. He was killed by neofascists who were part of a conspiratorial network which aimed at undermining Italy’s democratic self-determination.

Moreover, the reluctance on the part of the system to bring the culprits to justice, allows the “friends of Walter Rossi” to accuse the historical, i.e., contingent functioning
of the system without contesting its official ideology of impartiality. Inasmuch as the struggle against fascism has been the founding myth of contemporary Italy, the appeal to rule of law seeks to legitimize the paradox that the most authentic expression of Italian democracy is its inherent conflictive dimension.

In Italy, the Constitution had been drafted with the contribution of all political parties and social organizations that defeated nazi-fascism. The elections that took place on April 18 1948 split the majority of the population in two opposing camps. Christian Democracy, led by De Gasperi, won these elections mainly with the help of a vast anticommunist front supported by the USA and the hierarchy of the Catholic Church that sought to prevent that an electoral victory of the left could bring Italy under the influence of the USSR.  

Thus Walter Rossi’s death is recontextualized within a national narrative whereby native democracy, born out of a popular struggle against an authoritarian regime, is encroached by overwhelming transnational forces whose native representatives are the prime culprits for the terrorist violence that plagued the country in the 70s.

[The strategy of tension was] not only a violent and anti-democratic reaction against the attempt of left-wing reformism to win the leadership of the country. It also rendered the politicization and radicalization of large sectors of youth and workers inevitable.

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20 Cit.
Thus combined, antifascism conceived as national liberation and cold-war politics generate the image of left-wing radical social movements as the true expression of Italian democracy. At the same time, antifascism as national liberation is further contextualized as the native expression of the wider category of national liberation struggles against foreign oppression and authoritarian regimes.

Once upon a time there was "another" society, made up of workers who sabotaged industrial plants, long-haired youths who threw eggs at fur-clad "ladies" at the Scala premiere, women who struggled for their rights, little vietnamese with sandals at their feet and a gun on their shoulders fighting monstrous machine that poured napalm on their houses, young and old Africans who chased century long centuries-old colonial powers from their lands, central and south Americans who torture and mass disappearences notwithstanding opposed blood-thirsty dictatorships. They were the same people who just a few years before had spilled their blood on the mountains of Italy fighting against Fascists and Nazis, the Russian peasants who planted the red flag in center of nazi Berlin, the students, workers and intellectuals from all over the world who fought Fascism in Spain with the international brigades, they were all who have always, everywhere and with all means, rebelled against oppression, injustice, war, exploitation, racism, poverty. Walter Rossi was one of them, a twenty-years old who fought the arrogance and injustice of power. He was someone who wanted to be master of its own live and thoughts. Walter has been killed in an ambush jointly organized by fascists and police because in this society taking the sides of the weak, the exploited and to think with your own head, to
be coherent with your own values different from those of the class in power, is a considered a crime.\textsuperscript{21}

Thus vindicating the murder of Walter Rossi implies that national history needs to be rewritten as a continuous struggle between common people (the true agents of the Italian nation) and a system of power which persistently undermines the democratic principles it was supposed to uphold. The paradox of course is that the “imagined community” of which the state should the institutional representative, is in itself an effect of such continuous struggle.

One way to understand the inherent tension haunting the nation state whereby political institutions are able to command an allegiance on the part of citizens inasmuch as they give a “universal” expression to the particularity of social interaction, is Herzfeld’s concept of \textit{structural nostalgia}.\textsuperscript{22} Herzfeld argues that the conflictive relationship between the state and its citizens is shaped by an implicit reference to an imaginary past of communal harmony subsequently disrupted by social conflict or moral decay. Such nostalgic rhetorical reference both legitimizes state intervention and citizens’ reactions to it and constitutes the common ground for their mutual engagement. In our case the persistent call for the recovery of the historical truth about the 70s, on the part of its former participants is shaped by a continuous evocation of the communal solidarity whereby social class, cultural background and political action were reconciled and fulfilled on a daily basis the promise of Italian democracy. Thus Renato,


began his narrative of his involvement in the movement back in the early 70s by stressing his discovery of another way of life, another sociality, on his first days of classes in his first year of vocational school.

On the third day, I go to the first meeting of the school collective and there for the first time I hear another language being spoken, different things being said, it is a collective way of talking .... It was something completely different from the kind of activism I had been used to till then... I had been an altar boy, a boy scout, I had been active in the local parish, all the friends I hung out with were from *Balduina*23, who were all from good families, the high bourgeoisie, ... then suddenly I hear all this talk about political engagement, the need to change society ... I thus decided to be active in the *Genovesi*24 political collective, which was close to Lotta Continua, I began to do things seriously.25

“Doing things seriously” did not only imply political initiatives in the strict sense of the term, it also implied to become an active member of an emergent community.

If I look back at it now, [our activity at school] was something which sought to put into question the traditional idea of school in itself, the class discrimination in school, the political character of knowledge, we set up beautiful exhibitions, on the Portuguese revolution, for example,26 we organized concerts by De

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23 Middle class neighbourhood in the north part of Rome.
24 The name of the vocational highschool for accountants (*Istituto tecnico per ragionieri*).
25 Renato, interview, 10/12/1999.
26 The May 1974 uprising led by left-wing military officers which toppled the right-wing dictatorship.
Gregori and Venditti, we organized meetings with Argentinian groups on the
question of desaparecidos, Dario Fo came to perform his plays.

Renato, the inquiring president of the association, is to this day still relentlessly active. A social worker, he is also an activist of the Reformed Communist Party (Rifondazione Comunista), indeed he sits in the Rome committee of the party and, on top of that, he is also a leading member of the Tenants Union (Unione Inquilini). Needless to say I had a hard time getting hold of him. Most interesting, he was reluctant to speak of his past, or rather to speak of his political activity in the past tense. Better still, he was reluctant to speak of its past from his subjective point of view. Almost as if the only real history worth telling could not but be collective, accordingly his self-presentation was that of a speaker for, or a representative of, a larger experience. Yet at the same time what made that experience unique, what made it important, i.e., being part of a larger whole, was so intensely felt that could not be verbalized.

It is something so particular, indeed too intimate to express into words. A way of being which he could share only with its former comrades. A way of being and a way of doing which set them apart from the others, younger activists included, thus when preparing the first public initiative of the association, a public rally on the twentieth anniversary of Walter Rossi death, the difference between him and his re-united collective and the younger activists was clear

Thus this small association, this group of comrades was back... we became the center of attention for a whole range of other comrades from Ya Basta, from

27 Francesco De Gregori and Roberto Venditti were two famous Italian musicians.
Cortocircuito, who came to see these zombies that had returned, who were politically capable, because they knew how to do things, to talk without using any political jargon [...] I remember that we printed three different posters on our own, which is something completely extraordinary ... and we posted 5000 of them throughout Rome, something that not even the most structured political organization can do, but we did it in our own way, we were 40, we sang, we pasting the posters in downtown, the police would stop us we would joke with them...that is it was a different way of doing things.

Now, most external observers would probably recognize that such a specific way of doing things is not so specific after all. On the contrary, it is rather an ordinary result of a closely-knit group of friends doing things together. Yet, here it evokes the recovering of a collectivity whose members had drifted apart over the years.

In his swift discussion of the concept of community, Anthony Cohen, argues that community is a symbolic construct allowing its members to articulate their identities and their worldview as particular instances of a collective essence. What defines a community is not as much some structural feature (the face-to-face interactions, for example) which would set it apart from society, as its allowing a field of intimacy among its members to emerge, thus communities are always community of meaning, themselves symbols of belonging.

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28 Renato, interview, 10/12/1999.

29 Ya Basta is an organization inspired by the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico; Cortocircuito, is a self managed social center in Rome.

30 Renato, interview, 10/12/1999.
The quintessential referent of community is that its members make, or believe they make a similar sense of things either generally or with respect to specific and significant interests, and, further, that they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere.\textsuperscript{31}

Marco Revelli has argued that one specific (paradoxical one would be tempted to say) legacy of the 68 is constituted by a huge quantity of dispersed documents whose individual authors are effaced in favour of the wider context of collective agency. In the past, such prominence of the collective over the individual rendered the relationship between the traditional left and the movement problematic, today it makes historical reconstruction difficult.\textsuperscript{32}

From this perspective the call to recover the true history of the movement on the part of the friend of Walter Rossi, reveals a symbolic and performative aspect. In as much as what is to be recovered is a collective experience what has to be first of all reconstituted is the collective bond out of which rendered that experience meaningful. Thus, in Renato’s own words, not only must that historical experience be recovered collectively, also the recovery of its essential \textit{collective} intimacy is crucial.

Twenty years after [Walter Rossi’s murder] because whatever our limits at that time, the crucial aspect is that any other of his fellow comrades could have ended up in his place, he was a friend, his story was our story, hence the issue is that twenty years afterwards this story as the stories of others like him – it’s the


issue of historical revisionism\textsuperscript{33} -- was misrepresented, or worse there was the risk that it was never to be written. Twenty years ago there was a strategy of repression both decentralized as well as centralized, its decentralized aspect were the hundreds of political murders, while its centralized aspect was the strategy of tension. Today it has changed, it is a political and cultural strategy of denial, of revisionism, an attempt to efface events. At this point, twenty years afterwards, we have grown up and looking backwards we have reclaimed our ...history, with all its flaws, and since Walter was one of us, we want this to be part of history, we want the historical truth to be recognized, that those who killed Walter were fascists, we want the name of his killer, this also implies going against the police and the intelligence services that have covered up the murder, that wanted Walter to be killed. We want his true killer to come out, we do not care so much for the judicial aspect of the case, we are more concerned that the truth goes down in history. We hope that all the truths connected to that experience will not be written by others, they need to be written not by others but by us, this the issue at the core of our association. Then each one of us may have different political opinions. That is, the issue of Walter aside, once we start discussing terrorism, how it should be judged, or our views of the present political situation, the \textit{Ulivo} coalition,\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Rifondazione}, radical politics and so forth we are forty people who have forty different opinions, this is ... we have a lot in common at the personal level, we enjoy being together, and...yet I think

\textsuperscript{33} For Italian left-wing radicals, but also many many of the moderate, liberal, left, historical revisionism (\textit{revisionismo storico}) has a negative meaning. Thus authors as Furet, Nolte, or the Italian Renzo De Felice, fall into this category to the extent that they place marxist-inspired popular movements and Fascism as different instances of totalitarian politics.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ulivo} (Olive Tree) is the name of the center-left coalition which was governing the country at the time of the interview (November, 1999).
this is part of it ...I believe that being politically active, to be together again
doing very intimate things is part of what it means to be comrades, communists.
For those who are politically active, to be a comrade implies something...
more, it also implies being ... close to each other, a brotherhood, a form of
solidarity, a humane experience which is not written, but it has been practiced
in the movements, people have theorized it from the point of view of
psychology, yet what being politically active also implies, namely that one
developes stable realtionships... when one looks back, one can say “I had some
nice experiences...” this is it, whatever the political implications of these
experiences, they were beautiful at the personal level.35

Then, recovering the historical truth is relevant not so much because there are
specific events which have been censored by dominant discourse, rather because allows
the long lost community to be re-constituted. The symbolic implications at the core of
the association can be further appreciated when we listen to Renato’s narration of the
devastating impact of Walter’s assasination on the collective.

I remember clearly that after the death of Walter Rossi, [our group] stopped all
political activity, it exploded, as so did all activism in the north area36 [of
Rome], the whole area, because it was a very large area, this resulted,
unfortunately I think, in the emergence of small vanguards which where the
first embryos of the Red Brigades Primavalle37 column38 , from this point

35 Renato, interview, 10/12/1999.
36 Area, in this context refers both to a urban region, the northern part of Rome, as well as a
network of political groups active in a specific part of the city
37 A working class neighbourhood in the northern part of Rome, where large sectors of the local
population had been extremely involved in struggles for housing and social sevices.
onwards ... there emerged this all new phase from 1977 though the darkness of the 80s... to now... in the twentieth anniversary. Anyway, its been a tremendous vacuum, definitely ... if on the one hand what has happened in the northern part of Rome, has also happened throughout the city, throughout Italy, [if before] you had thousands of activists, communists or other extraparlamentarians, new left militants, alternative activists who were ready in the streets... [afterwards] just like it happened in our neighborhood, only a few remained.\footnote{39}

It would then seem that the one crucial concern is indeed that of redressing, reconstitute and maintain a fragmented community by evoking a past yet to be “remembered.”

Discussions of nationalism have stressed the role played by metaphors of intimacy in shoring up national identification. Thus Herzfeld argues that the rhetorical evocation of symbols of intimacy delimits the discursive space whereby social conflicts can be recognized as a nationally, and thus politically, relevant problematic engaging both the state and its citizens. Cohen on his part stresses how communitarian symbolism functions as boundary-setting mechanism which simultaneously generates internal solidarity and external difference.

The Walter Rossi example seems to be a case in point. The commemoration of a dead comrade not only allows a community to re-emerge but it also allows the reactuarization of past conflicts as historically and politically relevant in the present.

\footnote{38} Columns (colonne) were the territorial units if the Red Brigades.

\footnote{39} Renato, interview, 10/12/1999.
This is accomplished by articulating an intimate and exceptional experience to the broader context of Italian national discourse which sees society as an inchoate polity set against a repressive and overbearing state. One might recall Sciolla’s discussion of the familistic ethos. She argues that rather than representing the cypher of what is wrong with Italian identity, it is the precondition for the existence a vibrant civil society, one might say that relations of intimacy allow Italians to be citizens albeit with conflictive relationships with the state and its institutions. Furthermore, the relative lack of legitimacy of the Italian national institutions is very much of their own making, inasmuch as they are unable to articulate their universalizing mission to a protean civil society.

One may argue at this point that the conflicting use of the familist trope is one constitutive feature of Italians’ open-ended cultural engagement with the nation. Accordingly to engage, or rather, to be recognized as a interlocutor of this “other” society implies one the denounce one’s own position vis-à-vis the two conflicting sides and to express the intimate foreknowledge of their opposing worldviews. Thus the unease generated by my unexpected presence at the press conference was not so much due to my being an anthropologist, as much as my being Italian. My age and nationality where the two defining criteria according to which I had to motivate by being there. Hence Renato’s question as to where I was in the 70s and what social networks I was part of (when I mentioned the cooperative I was recognized as someone who was already part of this “other” society).

The implicit obligation to share some intimate, always already existent, foreknowledge of what it means to be part of this “other” society was further expressed
by Checchino’s comment on his personal recollections of the impact Walter Rossi’s
death at the time. What needs to me stressed is that Checchino, the journalist who I did
not recognize at first, has roughly my age, thus slightly younger than Renato and his
cohort, though his presence there was far more legitimate than mine, as an activist and a
journalist, he still felt the need to claim a direct, intimate if you will, connection with
the incident. Thus, he said, though he was small at the time Walter’s death, he
nevertheless clearly remembered the trauma it represented for the movement as a
whole. By remembering the emotions he thus declared his allegiances.

4. THE WAY WE WERE: KEEPING MEMORIES AT BAY.

So far I have suggested that activists’ reference to an effaced history of the 70s
implies both an attempt to reclaim their role in shaping Italian democracy and an effort
to piece back together a fragmented collectivity.

On the one hand, the attempt at reclaiming a legitimate position in Italy’s history
seems to involve more that just recovering forgotten events (though historical research
on Italian social movements has only recently began), it also implies the need to frame
such the social movement trajectory within the tropes of Italian national discourse. On
the other hand, evoking the past as a collective and intimately shared experience has the
performative effect of reconstitutiong a long-lost community, the enduring trace of
social movement militancy. Accordingly the past as affectively-charged experiece
functions as a boundary-producing mechanism separating those who own that past, have
an intimate knowledge of its seminal relevance, and those who know it intellecually, as
received historical narrative.
The tension of such a multifaceted appeal to the past implies a radical conflict between memory and history. While such conflictive relationship is one which has acutely defined modern European sensibilities for over two centuries whereby the the idea of an open-ended (and never-ending) progress cohabited with the nostalgic perception of waning of “customary” lifeworlds, in this case it represents a potentially self-defeating mechanism. Indeed, activists’ relation with their own past seems to be caught in a paradox which both construes that past as mythical and historical. Mythical because it defines their subjectivity as absolutely idiosyncratic at its origin, yet historical because social movements are rooted into a notion of subjecivity as absolute agency. As Marco Revelli argues, one constitutive feature of social movements of the 70s, was the anti-bureaucratical character of their (left)libertarian politics which valued concrete and non-institutionalized collective action over long-term political strategies. In other words politics as a radically open ended-endeavor which sought to revolutionize society in its entirety. Thus Marco Grispigni, an historian fo Italian social movement himself formely a social activist:

Well … yes [in the case of social movement activists] one may talk of repression … the other night Andrea Colombo used a a stronger term, he mentioned disavowal\(^4\), which surely involves the myths which so many people intensely shared. They expressed a political drive which was also an extistential moment, so to speak. It involved everything, it implied the questioning the

whole social realm, individual autonomy, the couple and so on. It implied a whole series of dramatic questioning at the individual level. It was thus a profoundly radical moment, extremely so. From this point of view, for example, I am totally convinced that to view of the nonsense the years of the contestazione\footnote{Cf. Ch. 1, p.3} as just a fad, characterized by superficial attitudes is truly nonsense … of course there was an egemonic role of certain behaviours, thus people were swayed by such hegemonic features, yet for most people who participated to the these movements, it was something so absorbing … it was like … I believe -- the more so if one interprets it from a generational perspective – the phases of adolescence, of youth; when it is extremly difficult to make analyse different aspects thus you get into it completely, don’t you think so? Then such an absorbing experience as has it been for so many people the outcome… the end of that experience, regardless of how one may evaluate its negative or positive outcomes, for most who have lived that experience has been negative, because the more explicitly political aspects have been surely defeated. It is difficult to accept, to harbour it, to directly put it use, explicitly, an experience so absorbing yet many aspects of it have been denied and defeated by history, you know what I mean? Thus it is for this reason I believe there is this mechanism … of repression, in some cases or, even worse, true disavowal, in others.\footnote{The term \textit{contestazione}, which can be translated as with the English “protest”, is often used as short hand for the Italian 68, yet it specifically refers to its generational aspects, thus one usually refers to the student’s protest as \textit{contestazione}.} \footnote{Marco Grispigni, interview, 10/15/2000.}
Such seminal experience, which though effaced from the official political scene, has nevertheless survived at the individual level, is in itself inherently conflictive as it represents both the original quid of a generation as well as its curse. Hence according to Renato former activists have positively translated their radical politics of yesteryear in a modernizing quest.

You find [these] stong individuals today actively engaged in the thousands facets of culture and social activism, doing volunteer work, in ngos, mass media, in computer programming, that’s it if we were generalize, thousands of these comrades are involved in all cutting-edge sectors of society, also at the economic level. I think that the majority of them, at least the ones I know, still retains something of that innovative drive, this is not all of them have sold put to consumerism, to capitalism ... most of them are still there, maybe silently, with no precise common political allegiances, but they are still there... and they also are critical, they are the core, the true hard core of what is left of a critical stance towards the existing society... stronger that any organized group.\(^4^4\)

Renato’s narrative implicitly connects the idiosyncratic structure of feeling of his generation with the tropical character of the question of modernity in Italian national discourse as the positive horizon which permanently seem to elude the country’s grasp; Grisgipnigi, this time writing as an historian, vividly stigmatises the reluctance of many former activists to accept that such an important moment of their youth could become matter of historical investigation.

\(^4^4\) Renato, interview, 10/12/1999.
Try to talk about historical sources with someone who played an active role in those events. They will reply that it is impossible to write the history of such recent events, and that they cannot possibly already be "historical witnesses" [...]. I can perfectly understand that becoming an adult, to be long past one's twenties, may be hard to accept. The more so if one feels so much younger than the "absurd" youth of today who seem to have exchanged their youth for myths of normality and virginity and so forth. Yet, things are indeed so banal. Years do go by.45

The frustration of the historian thus touches the fateful aspect of memory critically described by activists such as Graziella, today a head-nurse in the child neuropsychiatric ward at Rome university hospital, who, just like Renato is still very much politically active as representative of an independent trade union. In her view the inability of many among her cohort to objectify the past prevents them from engaging with the present.

If you want to talk about the past, to look at the way former activists talk about may not be worth it, because I think in any case such situations are a way of living and re-enacting things. These situations are maybe a way re-tell things wishing to be able to resuscitate them without really questioning their limits [...]. These comrades that [...] hold meeting also at the national level, are beutiful people, extremely sensitive, valuable individuals, yet I think that their self-presentation and politics are a little bit rigid, today we cannot think ... also because our own experience has lead us to realize that some of our assumptions

45 Marco Grispigni, "Se Peter Pan affronta i movimenti." Il manifesto, 06/08/96, my translation.
were wrong, that the way you approached people, was wrong [...] you cannot ask them to ... live certain things as intensely as we do, it’s unbelievable, really unbelievable to me. Unless you also share a ... and this is probably the best part of our experience, the sociality, having fun together, of sharing things which fill you day, on top of all the other things you may do all day. Otherwise you really ask people to sacrifice themselves when for better or worse a society like ours always leads you to draw back into yourself, to concentrate on your own business [To go back to what we said last time], whether there has been some continuity between then and the present, the feeling I have is that such continuity is first and foremost a result of the person’s actions rather than the effect of the realization of ideals. Yet this is a big limit that we have, because as long as a person embodies such ideals, he or she acquires a persona, become something of a myth [...] had we left something behind... and this is in part my... anxiety sometimes not only in relation to politics, but also towards your children, towards the pedagogical role you have as parent and so forth... to say: when it’s alla said and done it is not the person that has to ... draw you in... but a certain continuity, you know what I mean? Certain things certain opportunities that though may have been created by adults, each child must address and develop on her own. Maybe this is ... if I have a criticism to make vis-à-vis our past, I still feel that ... that is: the fact that we have failed to transmit that intensity [...]. Because the nice thing of our experience was the belief that the individual cannot change society on his own, because it is not your individuality as such that can solve the problem. You can change society if a large part of it gets actively involved in world of solidarity, full of drive, seeking change, full of anger and aggressiveness yet able go beyond the moment
of conflict and generate something real. [Today] there is a difficulty in understanding our past and to discuss it. [Because it is true, to certain extent we were childish] ... I think it is ok to be it when you are an adolescent, in late adolescence one can act so, is also ok, I even accept when an adult is immature every once in a while, for brief moments. I cannot accept if such immaturity becomes his or her way of being [...] it is true that among the comrades left, in centri sociali,\textsuperscript{46} ... it is customary to discuss in a very boorishly and politically superficial way and often in doings so they behave as coatti,\textsuperscript{47} you see people adopting conflictive roles against each other, thinking only they know the truth. On the contrary I believe that what I learnt from my past experience is the realization that all those certainties we once had, was very much confusions which we viewed as certainties. Today I doubt that anybody can be bold enough to claim he or she has certainties. What we need is to work on our confusion, and admit that we are indeed confused.\textsuperscript{48}

The ambiguous status of the past, caught as it is between the opposing horns of memory and history thus becomes both a haven the more cherished by the individual to he extent that it blocks off the passage while allowing him or her to map the world in clearly demarcated boundaries and identities, and the prison-house of subjectivity

\textsuperscript{46} Centri sociali (social centers) are maybe the most successful social movement instutions in Italy. They are usually illegally occupied buildings abandoned by their owners (often the state) which are then renovated and used for concerts, arts exhibits, political initiatives etc.

\textsuperscript{47} Coatti (plural; coatto/a singular), is roman slang. It describes someone who is coarse, rough, straight forward and aggressive, yet not necessarily phisically violent. It is usually associated with people coming poor working class neighborhoods. It seems to be derived from the term “coatto” as an individual serving a prison sentence used to be defined.

\textsuperscript{48} Graziella, interview, 9/12/1999.
whereby cognitive grids turn into iron bars that place all engagement with the present out of reach.

Yet, the disempowering effect of past empowerment, may not necessarily produce monstrous delusions, it offers vivid rationalizations. Thus, the trope of intensity becomes a way of reading present human conditions whereby today unlike before, people have lost the ability to fully experience their own predicament.

I have known Luigi for over `fifteen year now, to a certain extent I could be tempted to define him as some sort of political mentor for me. He is 50 and is one of the holders of the movement in Rome, as an architect he runs an anarchist bookshop. This means that both his profession and the bookshop suffer. He comes from a working class family and was the first of his siblings (and the only one, I believe) to earn a university degree. Like many of his generation he got into politics as a university student. Unlike most of his fellow architects he never stopped, choosing politics over the profession. The bookshop may indeed be considered as Luigi’s personal lieu de la mémoire. In the heady days it was the seat of the anarchist collective, then as the movement declined and, as Hobsbawm would say, activists went back to “civilian life”, Luigi, together with what was left of the collective transformed it into a bookshop. It was not to be a purely commercial endeavour, rather an attempt to concretely experiment anarchist self-management, alas with little success.

I must confess that one of the reasons why I got into this messy and weird project was that I wanted to make some sense of my years of past activism (militancy would me more accurate, at least from the native point of view). It was also an opportunity to bring the three years I spent in Houston back home.
One attempt to gain an entry point in the field was thus to recover my activist/anarchist persona, believing that by declaring my political allegiances to my would-be informants I would be granted an easier access to their narratives, it was also an identity-trip for me. Thus the anarchist bookshop was my cover. The point of entry to the field.

For the best part of 1998 I tried, with little overall success, to organize initiatives at the bookshop. Thus, when activities resumed in the fall I suggested to the others to form some sort of reading/study group instead. It was soon apparent that my idea of a group of people reading and discussing was a little too academic. The main problem was the age difference among us and the lack of “discipline”. Yet, what struck me was that though we were getting nowhere – as new topics of discussion kept coming up with no apparent order – people still came to the meetings. I realized that discussing of everything and nothing at the same time (something like Monty Python’s *Meaning of Life* in the anarchist mode) was for all of us a way to get together, to connect. Thus neither a collective nor a business the bookshop with Luigi at the counter, is the true metaphor of the longing for a long-lost community as the ever-receding promise of liberation.

The tragedy is that nobody really experiences anything anymore. It seems as if everybody is absent. I mean, if you ...here’s an example, today came a comrade, she is studying to get a driving licence, so she takes driving lessons. You know that when you ride in a driving school car, you have a big “driving school” sign on the back, right? So, here she is in the middle of traffic and she obviously has difficulties, and people driving behind her honk their horns, you
see what I mean? I mean, it’s absurd, people don’t understand that in front of them there is somebody who is learning to drive, I mean people are totally alienated from any form of communication, because they have been subject to such an oppressive mode of communication that they don’t feel anything anymore. They sit in front of the TV, they sit in front of the computer, and they lose touch with their own brain, if you know what I mean. They sit there, eyes wide open and let themselves be further victimized. I mean, there is no more everyday drama in today’s live [...] It’s the message that has to go. It’s a message, similar to the one Rutelli⁴⁹ broadcasts day in and day out. What I mean is that Rutelli seeks to make Rome big, big not for the everyday life of citizens, but big as in the Jubilee, big as in the olimpic games, beause this world of today lives though satellite antennas, and so Rome must have a huge communication center nobody really knows for what purpose, because there is only so much you can do with optical fibers, I mean my mother could not care less. So we are in a society where there is this complexity of communication.

Enter Versace⁵⁰, done; enter the pederast, done. Yet, your own everyday drama, that you don’t have a house nor a job, is lived by nobody. It is the people who live such predicament the first not to perceive it as such. I mean society’s primary objective in informatization should be to allow people to use their own brain, still...now there’s this absurd project: the local administration has spent billions – AMA⁵¹ that is – to publish a book which nobody will ever read: The

⁴⁹ At the time of the interview, Francesco Rutelli was the mayor of Rome, head of a center-left administration.

⁵⁰ The reference is to the murder of Gianni Versace in Florida, which obviously created a media hype in Italy.

⁵¹ AMA, is the city agency responsible for garbage disposal.
history of trash in Rome. Screw them, it costs 45,000\textsuperscript{52} lire. Who the hell gives a damn of the history of trash in Rome! Can you believe it? 45,000. This is the message they send, they give you a fancy trash container and things like this! But there are totally different problems and people don’t get it, you see – and it’s not the history of trash, it’s not it. Because when you go out on the street it’s littered with dog shit, why don’t people say it? Why don’t you start to live your everyday life and stop have others make art pieces for the eck of it… now there’s this other big context -- and one doesn’t know who are the winners and how they managed to win -- you know what for? To make a new type of cast iron garbage can shaped as a street fountain, fuck you! Why don’t you come here and clean the street everyday, what the fuck do I care of cast iron containers when in this street, or in this whole neighborhood for that matter, there is no garbage can in the first place! It’s pure spectacle. I mean, the point is something else, it’s the quotidian and people still don’t understand that it does not exist anymore. Before, there was the drama of class struggle, people had nothing to eat and so forth, yet they lived that condition... In the 50s there was the drama of urbanization, and people lived it, they came to the city with cardboard suitcases, today there is nothing.\textsuperscript{53}

Luigi’s vivid narrative is in itself quite spectacular, and in a very personal way he manages to conveys the burden of having been one among many who have acted and failed. And indeed the memory of action and the consciousness of its failure contributed

\textsuperscript{52} Roughly 20 USD.

\textsuperscript{53} Luigi, interview, 7/10/1997.
to the paradoxical result of a past too intense to shed and too internally conflictive to fully commemorate.

5. MEMORIES' BURDEN.

Repression was the basic element, this was the scenery, but then again mine is a very personal perspective, because I am a subject that has not fregotten, yet this does not mean that the vast majority of those who have made that experience have not repressed it. In the introduction to the chapter on the 77 movement in L'orda d'oro, 54 I write that such a repression has been characterized by two aspects: the repression, censorship and effacement of memory by those who were interested in preventing this memory from being reproduced, yet there is also another repression which those who had that experience have wrought on themselves. Because anybody who loses a war has the tendency to not talk about their defeat. Thus repression as defensive mechanism, then many of may generation then tend to not talk about these events, as these events had a negative outcome. The disaster has not only been the blood and state repression, the main ingredient of such a disaster is not to be seen in the fact that people have been killed or have been the victims of state repression, nor that they have killed, this is not the problem. The real problem has been infamy. The main contributing factor of repression, the true failure one has experienced, is in the realization that within your own ranks, those aspects of solidarity and community that had emerged, that is those aspects which determine collective

identification have been shattered once brothers have sold out and have let
other brothers be killed. It is this element that led to an identity crisis.55

I met Stefano in July 1997. Petra, my wife, had met him in 1989 through a
friend of hers when she was working as a production assistant. They went together to
Berlin to shoot a documentary on the fall of the Wall. The documentary was never
released. They had lost contact afterwards. So it was only by chance that we met. I was
at the very first stage of my project so I was even more confused (than I am now) as to
what I was after. I told him that I was interested in the 70s movements and that I
thought people knew little about it. Stefano, reacted saying that a few books had indeed
been published recently and that there was little more to know about the period. A little
intimidated by his reaction, I answered that to me the issue was not to discover more
unknown aspects about the movement, rather than to understand how the younger
generation, my generation, felt about it. I thought that the fatal trajectory that movement
experienced, terrorism, state repression, exclusion from politics, in short something very
similar to defeat, had something to do with my generation’s structure of feeling. Of
course I did not say it in so many words, but that was the sense of my reply. Little did I
know, and he did not tell me, that he had just edited a book on the 77 movement, nor
did I know that his experiences as activist of that movement had been the topic of a
novel by Nanni Balestrini, Gli invisibili.56 I knew that he edited a review on radical
politics. Anyway, he agreed to meet me for an interview. Sometime later I called him at
work and we fixed an appointment, since he could see me only in the evenings we

55 Stefano, interview, 7/20/1997.
decided I would go over to his apartment. I expected to meet him alone, but when I got there there was a woman friend with him. This was going to be a standard feature with him; whenever we would meet there would always be somebody with him. He was friendly and very interested in my perspective though confused as it was. Anyway the interview was long, relaxed and stimulating. As the evening wore on into the night Stefano became more excited (this too, was something that I would become accustomed to). We drank a lot more than we talked (which was a lot nevertheless). He had been an activist in northern Italy and had been jailed at the beginning of the 80s in connection with the “7 April” case. He was in jail with Toni Negri, one of maître-à-penser of the movement in the 70s. He had known him beforehand but I believe the period they spent in prison together has been extremely important for Stefano, as he became closely associated with the intellectual elite of the movement.

Right from the start, probably also due to my initial focus on generational discourses, my conversations with Stefano focused largely on generational differences. Indeed in our first interview, Stefano told me of his difficulties in understanding my generation, the one immediately after the 77. A non-generation if you will, part of it sharing the views and attitudes of their older brothers and sisters while the other totally ignoring them, living the 80s to their fullest. He felt that he had nothing to say to both of them. The overwhelming “structure of feeling” of that generation was characterized by a disillusioned attitude towards collective endeavors. Yet they were disillusioned about something they had not experienced (disillusionment by proxy if you will). In our interview Stefano claimed that since his political generation had been crushed both politically and emotionally by the political violence of the 70s, he felt that they had not
the energy or the confidence to share their experiences with us. Their lack of success meant that the best they could do was to keep to themselves and try to understand what had gone wrong. After his release from prison Stefano spent a couple of years in Paris and eventually moved to Rome in the mid-eighties. There he started working in an independent film company, he now runs a small publishing house. From the way he tells his story it seems that he went to Paris more as sort of moral exile than for anything else; to get away from a situation too painful to bear. Apparently once he was released from prison, he had been indicted for illegal possession of weapons, his old comrades did not believe he was innocent and accused him of having used the collective as a cover-up for his clandestine activities. It was this lack of trust that led Stefano to leave Italy and go to Paris first and then to Rome. Thus when Stefano claims that his generation had nothing to say to us it seems to refer to this experience, the failure of his generation to stick together in the midst of repression.

From behind the bookshop counter Luigi, seems to echo Stefano’s rueful view of his generation

The fact is that the 70s have left no trace neither in history book nor in today’s everyday life. The 77 movement has been something that has belonged to a generation that has intensely lived those months of political antagonism, yet without being really aware of its broader implications. This antagonism has been the target of different forms of repression, especially on the part of those who were part of the movement. Something very similar is exemplary of the Red Brigades’ phenomenon; these people had chosen to pursue a radical form of antagonism through armed struggle. Yet as soon as they get to know our
nation's jails they sold out, in one way or another they prostituted themselves because though they might have lived their militancy intensely their also made their choice without really thinking it though. If you compare the antifascist partisan of the 40s and the terrorist of the 70s there's this enormous difference.  

I began this chapter noting how the Sofri case pointed one major stereotype of Italian national Identity. The image of state without a nation and a nation without a state would then appear to be an extremely powerful rhetorical figure capable as it is to combine the continous struggle for empowerment and its recurrent failure, whereby agency and disempowerment rather than being opposites are inextricably intertwined. Thus the haunting character of the memories of the 70s is not simply the effect of the workings of hegemonic discourses on the Italian nation, it also expresses the subjective struggles a whole generation with the unintended consequences of its own actions. One could argue that precisely because of this familiarity with the failings of social action the 70s generation could represent the cohort best placed to heed Mario Isnenghi's call to recognize Italian history as "necessary tragedy". Yet, to pursue this option would first require the coming to terms with left-wing "terrorism".

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57 Luigi, interview, 7/10/1997.
LIFE AFTER THE REVOLUTION

1. THE WEDDING

With hindsight, the wedding proved to be my topic moment in the field. Indeed, it came close to those precious and unexpected instances, when paradoxes heretofore implicit, become suddenly manifest thus allowing the ethnographer to finally see things in a completely different light.

The wedding in question was that of an old friend of mine, Silvio. Now in his late thirties, he had been in his youth an activist in the Italian section of the Fourth International, he had turned to anarchism for a brief period of time, then gave up active politics and finally graduated in history of medieval art at the university of Rome. Like many of his generation, he has had a hard time in finding a steady job, in the end he gave up and decided to invent an occupation for himself. Together with two fellow students from the university Silvio formed a cooperative that offered guided tours to museums and exhibitions and organized small art history seminars for elementary school pupils. In a few years the cooperative has diversified its activities and formed a consortium with other cooperatives. One these cooperatives had a number of former Red Brigades activists among its members. Hence, when he announced his wedding two of them, Alberto and Maurizio, were among the few of his friends he decided to invite to the dinner following the ceremony. At this point, things became complicated. Alberto argued that if you are invited to a formal wedding such as Silvio’s was likely to be, not only you have to wear a suitable attire, you have to bring a proper gift too. Needless to
say, not only did Alberto lack a proper suit but neither had he any idea as to what type of gift was suitable for such an occasion. We all\(^1\) decided we would pool our meager financial resources and buy a collective gift. And so the search began. We ruled out any kind of appliance, cutlery or similar kitchen apparel. We finally concluded that the best possible gift was a totally useless one, a vintage radio or a fancy telephone. We kept each other informed of how the gift-search was progressing by phone.\(^2\) It was during these conversations that a whole new realm of ritual practices was revealed to me concerning wedding presents (when and where to give them), suits (color) and wedding-etiquette in general. Amused though I was, I did not give his unexpected concern much thought. I rather enjoyed the opportunity granted by our common quest to bolster my rapport with them thus crafting that long-sought intimacy with my informants, which is the dream of any ethnographer-in-the-field. What more could one ask than to befriend former terrorists? Indeed, up to that point I had made only a limited progress in this direction.

To be sure, Alberto, to whom I had been introduced by the would be groom, had been extremely friendly and amusing right from the start, yet it seemed that I could not go beyond him to his comrades. Indeed, his friendliness made the difficulty in furthering my contacts more frustrating.

In short, it seemed as if I had finally struck a little vein of gold. Reveling in anticipation of the ethnographic gold I was soon to unearth, I barely noticed Alberto’s

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\(^1\) That is, Alberto, Maurizio, my wife and I.

\(^2\) You might be interested to know that we finally settled for a fancy-looking glass vase.
enhanced sensitivity for bourgeois ritual practices. I dismissed his preoccupation to do the right thing, wear the right suit and buy the right gift as yet another example of his somewhat surreal sense of humor. Yet, confident though I was that the glitter I was gleaning was gold, I had a hunch that there was something missing. It sure took me sometime to figure it out.

Let's start from the beginning. The underlying assumption of my research was that there was something about the social and political upheaval of the 70s in Italy that had not been told; something authentic about that political generation which could not be reduced to the "irrational" political violence of left-wing terrorism. Moreover, I believed that traces of the structure of feeling of these past radical social movements could still be perceived in the present behavior of former activists as well as in Italian civil society of today. Indeed, when I began talking to former activists I discovered that my assumptions matched their anxieties perfectly. There was something that needed be said. The historical record had to be set straight. There was some truth to be vindicated about the 70s and their fate as a generation. Such were my initial gratifications of fieldwork. Yet, my euphoria was short-lived and what appeared a promising overture to my ethnography soon began to look like a false-start. I soon began to realize that the people I talked to while pointing to the need for a historical and political reassessment of the 70s they also situated their own experience as the authentic exemplification of what still needed vindication.

They argued that what was needed was a public debate that would recognize the social conflicts of the 70s as part of Italian political history and that their radical and
violent features were not results of conspiracies or irrational mass behavior, but responses to repressive policies waged against them by the state and the whole political system. They were tired of being publicly stigmatized as bloodthirsty conspirators or demented idealists and wanted to be allowed to get on with their lives without having to answer of their past actions day in and day out. The issue moreover was not that the events they had been involved in were not known or that there was a lack of historical knowledge of the social conflicts of the period. It was a question of recovering the meaning of these events as a constitutive element of the country’s recent history. It was their point of view that was ignored. It seemed that I was the right ethnographer at the right time; their desire to tell their story perfectly matched my eagerness to record them. Alas, I had rejoiced too soon! Never were interviews so boring and predictable, filled as they were with political rhetoric that reduced their subjectivity to their ideological allegiances of the time. Each of these stories appeared to be structured along the friend-enemy dichotomy. This in turn implied that either the vindication of their point of view meant the total rejection of that of their past opponents, or that the whole issue was reduced to a question of relation of force whereby the weakest looses. Alberto was a case in point. Or rather, he was a partial exception to the rule.

At first, when I told Alberto about my research, he was a little uncertain, he immediately told me that if I wanted to interview him I was not to cite his name. I tried to reassure him that I was not interested in specific events nor in reconstructing the historical details of the 70s; I just wanted to know his thoughts about the end of the Movement and its defeat. I also made clear that I was not interested in discussing
political violence. As an example of what kind of things I was interested in I mentioned the Sofri-Marino relationship. I argued that Sofri was innocent and that Marino had not participated in the killing of Calabresi but he was nevertheless convinced that what he was saying was true because his past life was a puzzle deprived of any meaning. Alberto replied that the realization of the defeat varied depending on whether one was in prison or not. Being a political prisoner implied a strengthening of solidarity bonds among fellow inmates of the same organization. This in turn strengthened their political convictions and consequently hindered. As for Marino and Sofri, he did not say anything. Anyway, he agreed to meet me, yet I felt he still had his doubts. Thus I was a little uncomfortable when early one December morning he rang the bell to my apartment for our first scheduled interview. Anticipating a reluctant interviewee, I was pleasantly surprised by Alberto’s friendliness and jocularity. We had coffee, cookies and ended up having lunch. In short, what I feared would be a somewhat formal interview turned into a pleasant and rather amusing conversation. It seemed as if Alberto’s diffidence had completely disappeared. Here we were, sitting at the table sipping coffee, munching the cookies away while Alberto would vividly narrate amusing anecdotes of his detention in a maximum security prison. The way he talked, the language he used, the incidents he described, were more consistent with a Saturday Night Live show than with the experiences of a political prisoner. Indeed, the prison would at times appear as a rather amusing and fascinating establishment where you would have the opportunity to meet all kinds of weird people whose piquesque lives could very well inspire more than one novel. To further contribute such surreal
depiction of his prison experience, Alberto referred to it as “Oxford” to ironically evoke the long days he and his comrades spent in prison reading and studying the classics of Marxism. Yet, by comparing a maximum security prison, whose inmates included also included ordinary criminals, to a renowned university, Alberto also would implicitly make fun of his and his comrades’ demanding study of rather complex Marxian texts.

To be sure, our first interview as well as the succeeding ones where not mere jocular juxtaposition of amusing anecdotes. Such vignettes did not even make up most our conversations. More form than content, it was his style of narrating, his choice of words, the figures of speech he used that lend to his story the odd flavor of a comedian act. Neither was this pure spontaneity; at least in part this was his way of keeping an extremely demanding past at harm’s length. This, of course should not come as a surprise, considering his strong experiences which has inevitably defined Alberto’s whole biography.

An: What about your younger co-workers, how do they relate to your past?

Al: Well, as a rule ... I always try to establish an open relationship with a person also because someone like me ... a little bit weird ... in the sense that I don’t embody ... the [terrorist] stereotype...

An.: You don’t have a mustache, for once...

Al.: ... I don’t have a mustache, I’m absent-minded, I’m easy-going, clumsy, and so I’m the total opposite [of the stereotype] ... moreover I’ve ... let’s say

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3 Cf. David Moss. The Politics of Left-Wing Violence in Italy, 1969-85. Houndsmills: MacMillan. 1989. The author discusses how members of clandestine groups once arrested assumed the role of intellectuals whose task was to develop and publicize a coherent political theorization of their organization’s political objectives.
a survival technique of my own.... so that, if I can I don’t say right away who I am, so people get to know me first as I am then later...this might at time disorient people, but after all I’ve noticed that... this is something that younger people tend to miss; and that is that regardless of [one’s clandestine activity] those who were then politically active believed ... I mean that what most miss out of the period is that these people took themselves extremely seriously, that is, we took ourselves seriously, we saw ourselves as true revolutionaries who are doing a revolution, and they do it because they believe they can win.4

There is the widespread folk knowledge, derived from crime novels, that the best way to hide things, most notably the fateful scrap of paper or the murder weapon, should be to place it in full view of the gaze of the detective. Not that Alberto was hiding something, all things considered he was rather forthcoming in his narration. The thing is that I did not realize what I had to pay attention to, namely that the aesthetics of the delivery was as relevant for the politics of memory of the Italian 70s as the content of the narration. There is no doubt about it, I was seduced, and enjoyed every minute of it.

During his fieldwork in Argentina, Antonious Robben5 fell prey to a similar spell from his informants. He wanted to understand how Argentine society was trying to

4 Interview with Alberto, 12/02/99.
come to terms with the legacy of the violent repression waged against the left by the military dictatorship. Yet, Robben found to his dismay that perpetrators and victims alike were, albeit for opposing motives, employing similar manipulative strategies in their relationship with the ethnographer. At first, Robben did not realize that what he believed to be a good rapport was really a successful strategy of seduction on the part of his informants. What first made him realize this was the eerie (for him) behavior of his military interlocutors. Polite, polished, educated and pleasant as they were when conversing with him, Robben could hardly imagine them capable of the ruthlessness they had shown in repressing their opponents.

The affability and chivalry of the officers clashed with the trial records I had read, affected my critical sensibility and in the beginning led me astray from my research focus. I was only later that I realized that I had been engrossed in ethnographic seduction. This process of seduction and subsequent awareness repeated itself in my meetings with bishops, human rights activists, and former guerrilla leaders. Each group was seductive in its own way, and it was only after months of interviewing that I succeeded in recognizing the prevalent defenses and strategies and learned to distinguish seduction from good rapport.⁶

And thus Robben realized that he had become a pawn in the conflict over the legitimate representation of the country’s past. All parties to this conflict sought to lure him into seeing things from their point of view, indeed took advantage of different

⁶ Art. cit., p. 83.
facets of his persona in order legitimize their conflicting agendas. Thus the officers would appeal to his intellect placing their actions within the historical context of cold-war geopolitics while their victims would go into detailed narration of their victimization thus establishing a deeply emotional empathy. Much like our proverbial detective, Robben found that what he had come to look for, his cultural object of study, was as much inside him (the seductive spell cast by his informants) as “out there”. What he then realized was that what he had experienced was at the heart of his ethnography, indeed the manipulation of appearances was the defining feature of the conflict he had come to study.

    Neither brute force nor coercion but the molding of appearances became the weapon of influential players in the Argentine polity. Ethnographic seduction was my personal experience with a national debate in Argentina among adversarial protagonists of the decades of political violence.\textsuperscript{7}

While Robben’s conclusions may apply to Argentina, they have little relevance to Italy. Yet, the bewitching spell of seduction his informants casted upon him, does have some resemblance to the ironic complicity that characterized my relationship with former “terrorists” right from the start. Though the differences are more illuminating that the similarities.

One difference between Rosen’s position and mine, is most notably to be seen in how he chose to situate himself in the “field”. What alerted him to the not so naive nature of his informants was their all too apparent open-heartedness, or to put it the
other way around, the paradoxical realization that he was a little too conformable with them. This led him to wonder where exactly could he draw the line between who he was and what they were saying. Hence looking for distance, he found seduction.

Yet, the question left unanswered is: why was he seduced in the first place? The paradoxical answer might be that he was a too good ethnographer; and indeed he was, since all his informants recognized in him an interlocutor. For the generals he was the educated European; with the former guerrillas he shared the progressive structure of feeling derived from belonging to the same generation; for the parents of the disappeared and for the human rights activists, he was the foreigner, the European academic who had access to transnational liberal public sphere. Thus, one is lead to wonder whether what Robben felt as manipulative on the part of his informants was not really their reasonable realization that the Argentine tragedy albeit its gruesome specificity was not so Argentine after all, as it was clearly intertwined with cold-war

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7 Art. cit. p. 97.

8 “The discursive strategy of the military consisted of appealing both to my common sense and to the dispassionate logic that is supposed to be the hallmark of any scientist. This discursive technique consisted of an outright dismissal of any major human rights violation without denying that they could have occurred. If this technique failed to have the intended effect on me, then they began to relativize the Argentine abuses by making a comparison with atrocities committed by the so-called civilized Western world.” Art. cit., p.90.

9 “Well versed in the jargon of sociology [the guerrilleros'] historical interpretations had a truthful ring. It was difficult to distinguish their vocabulary and semantic constructions from my own. It was tempting to become absorbed in this discourse. It had an emotional pull. It seduced me by an indescribable familiarity, by its allure of going to the heart of historical events with their architects; all this set in the special atmosphere of the grand cafés of Buenos Aires with their dense cigarette smoke, the buzzing of voices, and the waiters swiftly maneuvering through the maze of wooden tables while carrying trays of small coffee cups. I felt that I could take my guard down in this environment and become absorbed in a close discussion in which I could share intellectual doubts and queries with people of my own generation.” Art. cit. 90; note the Sartrean citation which gives a rather Parisian flavor to this description.
geopolitics. One may further pursue this line of reasoning and wonder whether the "manipulation" enacted by these informants did not in fact imply the recognition that the Argentine transition was as much dependent on local power relationships as on the legitimizing role of the "international community", i.e., Western democracies.

The point of this digression is obviously not to accuse Robben of being insensitive to the role global processes play in even the most "remote" locale, nor do I wish to moralistically accuse him of not taking in due account the authoritative role any ethnographer plays vis-à-vis his or hers informants. The point is that if even a Dutch ethnographer living in the US is liable to become (despite his best intentions) a full-fledged participant in the contested field he has come to study, the native ethnographer may not only be unable to avoid to participate in his "participant observation" but may even conceive this as a constitutive part of what he is out to observe. He thus may find some encouragement in this quest by reading an article entitled "The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-scene of Anthropological Fieldwork". In it, George Marcus discusses how the meaning of ethnographic rapport has changed in connection with the changing conditions of fieldwork. Thus in parallel to the ever increasing relevance of the influence global actors and processes have on local social

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10 "Another discursive tactic [of the military interlocutors] was to sketch ominous scenarios of what would have happened if the Argentine military had not destroyed the insurgents root and branch. The grave situation in Peru during the late 1980s, when the Shining Path revolutionaries controlled large areas of the highlands, and had even succeeded in reaching the gates of Lima at the time of my fieldwork, was mentioned as a nightmare that had been prevented in Argentina through the resolute action of the armed forces." Art. cit., p.92.

11 "The human rights activists and former guerrilleros could have equally made appeals to common sense, but many preferred to make an emotional plea to a moral sense of humanity and justice." Art. cit. p.92.
formations, the traditional relationship of ethnographers with their informants have changed accordingly. Obviously, the first challenge that prompted a critical revision of the mode in which anthropology produces its knowledge were national liberation struggles, which rendered the image of self-enclosed locales as sites of autonomous cultural production utterly unrealistic. This also forced anthropology to acknowledge and criticize its role towards the people it studied and the political and economic conditions upon which its status as a discipline was premised. One effect of this has been the undermining of the topos that defined the ethnographer’s quest as the crossing of self-enclosed cultural boundaries to see things “from the native’s point of view”.\(^\text{12}\)

The recognition that anthropology, like any other field science,\(^\text{13}\) had been implicitly complicit with Western colonialism and that ethnographic subjects were historical agents embedded in global power struggles has further lead ethnographers to acknowledge the situatedness of their knowledge.\(^\text{14}\) Namely, that the locales they study and their position in the field are not only politically partial but also influenced by processes originating “somewhere else”. Marcus argues that while such increased discontinuity of cultural formations – that cultural production is increasingly dispersed through a multiplicity of locales – has forced anthropologists to realize that their object


of study is not fully accessible within a particular site. Hence, he argues, the relation between ethnographer and informant can be fruitfully reconceived as a rapport of complicity premised on a mutual recognition of displacement.

The basic condition that defines the altered mise-en-scène for which complicity rather than rapport is a more appropriate figure is the awareness of existential doubleness on the part of both anthropologist and subject; this derives from having a sense of being here where major transformations are under way that are tied to things happening simultaneously elsewhere.\(^{15}\)

2. **The Orphan Ethnographer**

Since its inception my ethnographic enterprise has sought to negotiate passion and interest, nostalgia and anticipation seeking thereby to bridge the gap between the past and the present that haunts a whole generation of Italians who participated in the social upheaval of the late 70s. In other words, the issue of complicity, or rather my political allegiances, shaped the way in which I defined the “field”, indeed it was one major problematic\(^{16}\) that sought to endow some sort of consistency to my ethnography. If you will, unlike Rosen in Argentina, my concern was not how they negotiated their conflictive past with the present, but how could we as natives bridge that divide. That the divide existed and that bridging it was an important issue could only be developed

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ethnographically if you shared at least in part their left radical politics (better still their "structure of feeling"). To put it bluntly, the political and cultural defeat stings only if one takes up the position of the defeated. Once you take this step, everything somewhat fatally follows. Or does it? Obviously not. I too was taken by surprise. I too was seduced, but unlike the Argentine informants, seduction in my case did not imply "being lead" into a "misleading" empathy with the informant's predicament, I was rather "lead astray" from what I believed had to be the issues I thought were the focus of my research. All of my informant who had been engaged in clandestine organization politics had been convicted and had either served their sentences or were still in jail and had been granted the permit to work outside the jail during the day. During my conversations with them their choice to join the Red Brigades was never particularly elaborated, never detailed. In their narratives it was a quite rational outcome of their previous activism. They described it with no particular emphasis, nor did they qualify it as a subjective break with their former lives. This was by no means the effect of the complicity I tried to establish with them during or encounters, quite the contrary. The reasonable, indeed, rational consistency of their choice was even more explicit in public.

One of the of my ethnographic sites was a book shop owned in part by the cooperative where Alberto and Maurizio worked. Periodically, books about the 70s were presented. On such occasions the question of political violence would obviously come up. In one of such instances for example, the speaker who was to introduce a book on the addressing the role of armed struggle in the social upheaval of the 70s, was
Federico a former leader of the Red Brigades who had been convicted in connection with the kidnapping of Aldo Moro.¹⁷

[Federico], begins by commenting the contemporary Italian government, as an example of the authoritarian tendencies of the center-left government, he cites the new law regulating the strikes in public transport, according to this law a strike is legitimate only if the regulatory commission approves it. Yet, if the commission does not approve the strike, the workers cannot file an appeal. Policies such as these subject us to a full and unrestrained power, this last phrase resembles a famous expression contained in one of the first letters Aldo Moro wrote from the Red Brigades’ “People’s prison” to describe the conditions of his captivity. Federico the introduces the book and approvingly mentions one of its authors, once a social movement leader now living in exile in France, who contrary to other former activists, his reference to Adriano Sofri is quite explicit, does not claim his innocence.

Other speakers commented on different aspects of the book, arguing that the social conflicts of the 70s and the widespread political radicalism they embodied was still something of a taboo in contemporary Italy, both at the intellectual level as well as among the wider public, etc. Then the debate began with comments and questions from the audience.

A woman intervenes arguing that the Red Brigades’ predilection for a direct confrontation with the state as its specular enemy has inevitably

¹⁷ Cf. ch. 2.
reproduced the logic of the adversary. One needs instead to develop an alternative mode of radical political action. Furthermore, one should also begin to address the question of armed struggle from the subjective level, one should begin to talk about the everyday life of underground activists, the impact their choice had on their affects, etc. Then she suggests that one reason why public discussions about the Red Brigades persistently make reference to conspiracies and hidden puppet-masters is perhaps also a consequence of the fact that the Red Brigades conceived revolutionary action in purely political-military terms.

Her remarks receive a rather cold reception; Federico replies that there nothing mysterious in the history of the Red Brigades, one knows all there is to know: "Everything there was to know about all 6000 thousand of us\(^{18}\), who have been indicted of being members of an armed organization, is well known today, there is no mystery whatsoever", on the contrary, it is precisely this persistent claim

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\(^{18}\) The extent of the membership of left-wing clandestine groups is not known, the only relatively reliable figures refer to the people who stood trial. Thus David Moss cites the number of Red Brigades to 426 for the period of 1972 to 1982, in *The Politics of Left-Wing Violence in Italy, 1969-83*. Houndmills: MacMillan.1989, p.66; Franco Ferracuti places the total of terrorists in jail in 1990 at 2000, in "Ideology and Repentance: Terrorism in Italy." In Walter Reich, editor. Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind. Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press. 1990, p. 62; Mauro Palma places the total of defendants at 5000, of those 200 were still in jail as of 12/31/1995, of which 184 were from the left, in addition he also cites 150 people who have been convicted but are in exile, in Mauro Palma. “Eccezionalmente.” In Germano Monti, Mauro Palma, Giovanni Russo Spena. *La metafora dell’emergenza*. Roma: Strategia della lumaca, 1996, p.124, n.8. Again, to these figures do not reflect the actual consensus clandestine organizations enjoyed in the 70s and early 80, as these groups did not obviously keep a record of their members, nor of their supporters. Some authors estimate extremely high figures. Thus Vittorfranco Pisano cites that according to a PCI study in 1978 there were 700 to 800 clandestine terrorists, 10,000 were the people “often armed and given to arson, pillage and other violent actions”, in the same period an anonymous report published by the weekly *Panorama*, placed the total amount of active “combatants” at 3000, while the figures published by the press ranged from 150-180 to 100,000, in Vittorfranco Pisano. “The Red Brigades: A Challenge to Italian Democracy.” In William Gutteridge, editor. *The New Terrorism*. London: Mansell Publishing. 1986, p.169.
that there something yet to be revealed -- conspiracies and plots of various kind
- the means by which a misleading representation of 70s is accomplished, one
that effaces the widespread political radicalism and the fact that armed struggle
was not something coming from outside the movement.\textsuperscript{19}

Fair enough. Yet, clear-cut and unambiguous as this position is, it falls pray to
the paradox of extreme rationalization. For effective as it is as a means of self-defense
that grants at least a limited control over one's own biography, it also reifies it as the
inverted image of the state's master narrative it seeks to criticize.

One might recall the conspiracy trope whereby the Italian state posited at the
origins of the movement the existence of an all-encompassing conspiracy.\textsuperscript{20} In contrast,
many former Red Brigades members by placing their extreme choice on yesteryear in
direct and seamless continuity with the social movements of 70s, claim to embody the
essence of the 70s radicalism. A case in point is Federico, whose narrative of his
transition from social movement politics to armed struggle is self-consciously factual:

A: Let's start with a bit of archeology, how did you come to armed struggle?
F: It's a choice that needs to be contextualized within the political situation of
the times. At the end of 60s students and workers the world over revolt. In
Italy, the reaction of the state ... is not just repression, or rather its only
marginally so, it's also of a political kind [...]. Through the strategy of
tension it seeks to accuse the movement -- this is what happens with Piazza

\textsuperscript{19} From my fieldnotes, 4/7/2000

\textsuperscript{20} The Sofri case, its peculiarities notwithstanding, is a case in point.
Fontana and the framing of the anarchists – of being prone to senseless violence, to bomb a bank has no sense as it kills whomever happens to be there, its terrorism pure and simple ... its pure and simple terrorism since it seeks to take a whole population hostage: “Whoever you are, whatever you may be doing at the moment, you run the risk of getting killed”[...]. This had a paradoxical effect, which isn’t really a paradox but a rather predictable political effect, to radicalize the movement. The more so when one learns that the anarchists have been framed [...]. This lead many activists to realize that radical political change will inevitably imply the resort to violence, and truth be told everybody [in the radical left was] was aware of this [...]. Because over the years one has forgotten that there were scores of people who were involved in armed struggle, they might have been explicit about it [...] yet, there were many people who had weapons, who were involved in semi-clandestine activities [...] Marino\textsuperscript{21} was one of the official robbers of Lotta Continua ... his story is does have a certain... relevance... this things were true [...].

A: To what extent your experiences have played a part in your decision to join the Red Brigades?

F: But these are social, not individual phenomena. Of course you make your own decisions, but the repertoire, the available options you have are determined by ... I mean ... your own experiences ... well, maybe had I not met certain people, had I not discussed with certain people, had I not lived with certain people, had I not reasoned with certain people, my thoughts

\textsuperscript{21} Leonardo Marino, was Sofri’s accuser.
would have been different and would have been a different person altogether
... I don’t get your question ... I mean, when you are 17, and you begin to
do stuff, with people of your age at school, that is you begin to think by
yourself, and you get together with people on the basis of what they think
and what you decide to do, and these things change you... because to a
decide things ... like, coin 1968, when I was in school I decide to change
classes, because I could not stand my classmates, it is true that they were all
males, and things were beginning to change in 1968... and so I made that
decision for a whole set of reasons...yes, it’s true that I went in a class were
there was a girl I liked, but I think that’s normal [...] I mean, personal
choices are always very weird, they occur in a certain context...sure had I
not met a certain set o people that challenged me in a certain way ... I would
have been a different person ... but this doesn’t make much sense.22

Why should it not make sense to reflect upon the subjective dimension of an all
too subjective decision? Clearly choosing to join an armed organization with rules and
conventions of its own does change something in one’s everyday life? Red Brigade
members had to observe minimal security measures for example such as dressing
inconspicuously as to blend in the crowd carry the gun with them at all times. Nor could
they continue to be active in social movement politics as intensely as before. Thus, for
example Flavio, who had been leading figure of a youth center in a working-class
neighborhood, had to leave this activity altogether.

R: Then [Red Brigades activists] began to be more ... specific about things, the
in [the late 70s] ... I began to find their leaflets at the center and I would get
pissed: "Who is it?", what I was really afraid of was that if the police came,
all my activities [at the center] would have been put in jeopardy.
A: Because in the meantime you were still actively involve in them?
R: Sure... during the discussions [with Red Brigades activists] I didn’t agree
with them in the need to go completely underground. It is also true that if
want to do these kind of things, you cannot be conspicuous for you would
end up being arrested. Yet, I’ve never really got it though I abided to their
rules, yet I’ve never really understood it nor was I ever convinced.
A: Did they participated to the activities at the center.
R: No, till 1978 we kept discussing thing in general terms. They had told me
that they were members of the organization, but we did not do things
together, at the time I was a member of the PSI,\textsuperscript{23} and they didn’t trust me
that much .... Our discussions lasted for a couple of years, they wanted to
know me better, my take on things, what were my intentions. [When I made
my choice to join] I gradually started to be less active at the center
A: In a discreet manner...
R: Sure, slowly... then since whether I liked it or not I was a leading figure of
the center, once I left the whole thing collapsed ...
A: Did the others at the center realized what you were doing?
R: Those who paid most attention did, they understood ... from the topics we
began to address about what was happening at the international level, how

\textsuperscript{23} Italian Socialist Party.
you approached certain topics. Those who were most attentive, they realized
the direction I was taking.24

Flavio, who is now in his late 50s, is the oldest of the former Red Brigade
activists I talked to, right from the start he was quite forthcoming in discussing his
experiences in a self-reflexive mode. Indeed in contrast to the others he did not adopt
the “factual” narrative of the seamless trajectory form left radical activism to armed
struggle.

Could it be that I simply did not “probe” the other enough? Though that may me
the clearly possible, the case of Geraldina seems to discount this.

I met Geraldina during a meeting against the war in Kosovo, she was one of the
speakers. In that occasion when discussing the possibility of a radical oppositional
politics in contemporary Italy, she argued that radicals needed to come to terms with the
armed struggle of the 70s, had to acknowledge that things had changed and that while
she had not repented from her violent activism of the past, she also recognized the limits
of that experience and that an open-hearted discussion was needed that would allow the
radical left to “work though” that traumatic experience. I obviously jumped at such
unexpected opportunity. To be sure, our first interview was to a certain extent
rewarding. We did manage to blend the issue of political violence in the 70s with the
difficulty of dealing with the consequences of one’s action. The interview was relatively
short and a bit confused as we were sitting in a crowded bar next to the offices of il
manifesto. Geraldina though still in prison worked during the day as one of the editors

24 Interviews with Flavio 02/01/2000 and 02/08/2000
of the weekly cultural segment of the newspaper. Though short the interview seemed a
good starting point. As I was walking back home I made mental note that on the next
occasion I had to get more “facts” out of her. Alas, that occasion never materialized, for
the best part of the next year I tried in vain to fix an appointment, Geraldina was always
busy. I did gave her the transcribed interview hoping that would stimulate her to have
another interview, but it did not work. We kept on meeting in various occasions, we had
extremely affectionate conversation over the phone, yet we never met for an interview.
Perhaps realizing the awkwardness of the situation, Geraldina announced she would
look over the interview and write some comments. After month of phone calls I readily
accepted, of course. Surely something interesting would have come of her contribution.
I waited. Finally, as I was struggling to write the first sentences of the dissertation, out
of the blue, Geraldina called announcing she was sending the “revised” interview by e-
mail. In eagerness I logged on, anticipating my close reading of the “native” text.
Again, I was totally surprised, indeed, amused. Geraldina had subjected the interview to
a rather radical “revision”. She had edited out all the self-reflexive parts of her narrative
leaving only the most barren political biography standing. More than one half of the
interview was gone, nor had she added any further detail to the already scanty account
of her Red Brigades career.
**ORIGINAL INTERVIEW**

A: How did you deal with [being in the underground]?

Gr: How do you mean?

A: Did things change for you?

Gr: No, because long before I joined the Red Brigades, I had decided that I would lead an underground life. You can understand this only if you place it in that historical context; if you wanted to get involved in not-so-legal activities, then you couldn’t [...] use your true identity. Only those who were wanted by the police kept their own identity. Not me... and it’s difficult indeed, at the psychological level. Though it has its advantages, since you know that if you want you can always retrace your steps. Hence your choice is renewed everyday. As for me, I stuck to it. Even when I was in Paris...

**GERALDINA’S VERSION**

A: How did you deal with [being in the underground]?

Gr: I had no problem whatsoever. I had already decided the life I would have lead, long before that. It was common in the 70s, that if you were an activist known by the police, and you wanted to do “the real thing”, you would try to be inconspicuous.. If I wanted to, I could have stopped, I could have retracted my steps. Yet, I never was tempted to do so.
and I had regular jobs. I quit very interesting jobs because I had my revolutionary activity to attend to [...] it’s something I’ve always been very self-conscious about and this has been an advantage, even when I was arrested [...]. Today there is a process, there is a defense mechanism that involves a whole generation. It’s a sort of protective screen, misleading and ambivalent I believe, against the pain derived from the fact that you have tried [to do a revolution], a dream that more or less all of us shared, which was tragic and joyous at the same time and yet... you know it’s very hard to live with the consequences of your actions, one would rather push everything back into oblivion. Yet, one has to insist [...] we try to do everything possible to make others
understand that to work through you
repressions however difficult it may
be is always productive. Because
you sit around the table, and one
tries to understand, one starts to talk
again and maybe something new
may come out, something different
from the stale politics we have
today. Otherwise the burden of your
memories that everybody seeks to
discard to no avail, will get back at
you with a vengeance.

Never had the contrast between orality of the testimony and the response of the
interviewee once confronted with its transcribed rendering so stark.

Whenever possible, I always gave my informants the transcripts on their
interviews both for ethical reasons (as an attempt to counter the inevitable hierarchical
relationship implied in the textualization of someone else’s life) and as attempt to gain
further insight from their response. To be sure often the reactions revolved around
questions of style and syntax. Thus the usual comment was: “Yes, it’s interesting,
clearly you’ll have to do some editing before you publish it...” I always dismissed such
comments are irrelevant to my research. Thus I would explain that I was not going to
include the whole interview in the dissertation, but just some excerpts that I believed relevant to my argument.

Sure there had been that “weird” behavior of Renato. On our second interview before I had time to ask my first question, Renato with the transcript of the first one under his eyes, started by rereading his answers out loud in formal Italian. With some internal turmoil, I managed to distract him from what I believed was a useless task. Sure, I was aware that it was an expression of the low esteem orality is held by literate individuals, but I had no interest in pursuing that line of investigation. I was just a little frustrated by the feeling that Renato’s behavior somehow betrayed a formality I thought I had managed to pierce over the course of our numerous encounters and informal conversations. In short, I saw this as yet another instance of my perduring difficulty in establishing intimate relationships with my informants. It was something I was ready to dismiss as my personal “Malinowski-syndrome” whose effects had to be strictly left out of my work. Until Geraldina sent the edited version of her interview I was satisfied with keeping this specific brand of ethnographic malaise at bay. I thus rationalized the endless sequence of failed encounters as the effect of her busy schedule. Yet, upon reading her edited transcript I realized that her choices pointed to a dichotomy different and more relevant to my topic than the one opposing the spoken word to the written text. Namely the opposition between public discourse and private narrative. And indeed, it was precisely this opposition that not only framed the narratives of my informants but

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25 Cf. ch. 3.
also defined the conditions of possibility of my project. The existence of an authentic experience about the 70s, which the radicals viewed effaced by the official record.

3. **Did You Say "TERRORISM"?**

The persistent feature of my difficult rapport with my "terrorist" informants was the gap that often developed between their concern for objective (in the dual sense of rationality and distance) character of their stories when they were speaking in front of my tape recorder and their informal and outspoken attitude not only when the interview was finished but also whenever we met on social occasions, such as parties, dinners, etc. In such instances, the 70s were talked about in completely different terms, or rather in ways which allowed their internal conflicts to be quite openly discussed.

The role of the tape recorder in discipling the ethnographic rapport during interviews certainly was not a peculiar feature of my fieldwork experience and has been acknowledged before. Sherry Ortner, while doing her fieldwork among "the Newark", realized that in some instances the presence of the tape recorder defined the limit of what the informant felt suitable to say. One topic of her interviews revolved around question of class, trying to understand how the issue of class played into her informant's lives. The ethnographic twist is of course the difficulty of talking about class in a cultural context, such as the US, where issues of class are perceived as irrelevant (un-American?) by public discourse.

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In my case the relevance of the tape recorder as a framing device defining what the informant deemed legitimate to say is that it mediated a public audience. One could say that my attempts to establish a relation of complicity with my informants were hampered by the presence of the tape recorder. In the “professional” context of the interview that little black machine alerted them that, though Italian and fellow radical, I still was an anthropologist, which meant that whatever they would say to me was bound to be read and pondered upon by others. However a marginal role their testimony were going to have in the historical reconstruction of the 70s, still they had to take into account the hegemonic discourses which had delegitimized their side of the story. Thus, recording a testimony implied that the encounter was immediately party to a conflict of representation. Accordingly, the interview came to resemble a re-enactment, at the level of discourse in the present, of the rather concrete conflicts of the past. This circumspection was common to all the radicals I interviewed. Yet, for those who had joined the Red Brigades discretion was also motivated by the not so remote possibility that the publication of their narratives could constitute material for the ongoing polemic against communism and left radical politics that has shaped the Italian transition to the so-called “second republic”. Moreover, there was also the not so remote possibility that, if excessively detailed, their accounts could prompt new investigations by the judiciary. As I was perfectly aware of the sensitive implications of these interviews I

27 Cf. ch. 1

28 This is what happened in the early 90s to Carla Mosca and Rossana Rossanda, who published in 1994 a long interview with Mario Moretti on the history of the Red Brigades, cf. Mario Moretti. *Brigate Rosse. Una storia italiana*. Milano: Anabasi. 1994. On that occasion the Roman judiciary ordered the two journalists to surrender all the tapes of the interviews on the
always avoided to ask any historical detail, and always tried to be clear that what I was interested in was their way of negotiating their past in their everyday life today. What I had not anticipated was that the possible publication of a recorded interview strengthened their reluctance to talk about more “intimate” matters. In short what I did not realize was the extent to which the hegemonic discourse on terrorism in general and on the Italian one in particular problematized their narratives. Thus, in Alberto’s words:

There is always the usual problem [posed by mainstream public opinion]: why do you talk? What right do you have to talk? And it is clear that this constitutes a problem. Besides, there is also this paradox that when the brigatists did not talk then [people] would ask: “Why don’t they talk?” Today, when the brigatists after twenty years have began to talk, “Why are they talking?” Why are they talking and most of all why do they say certain things and not others? That is, why don’t they say something that matches what today we, as establishment and public opinion, want them to say? It’s OK that they’ve started to talk now, yet they should be saying certain things, like: “We were wrong, we are very sorry for all the wrong things we have done to society, and so let’s be friends and I’ll go and paint landscapes....” [...] there is actually...a judgmental attitude towards what you say, which is never made explicit yet questions your right to speak. So if you say: “I’ll cover my head with ashes and disappear from the civilized world, I’ll do like Cincinnatus and take the plow, I’ll go and assist people with AIDS, but only the terminal cases to atone for my
sins against society”, then they would say: “This is a good thing...” But, if you say: “I was a political phenomenon, and so I don’t feel sorry form an ethical point of view, I don’t consider myself a common criminal, but I am a political militant that has waged a war and has lost...” [...] This is not acceptable, then whether you sing it, say it in rhyme, in prose, on television or write it in a book, it makes no difference. Consider also the fact that the two big Italian churches; the Catholic one and the former Communist one, would both have liked, especially in 1990-1991, to use historical reconstruction against the opponent. So the Communist party would have liked that the Red Brigades were in fact a product of the CIA, the P2 etc. in order to attack the Communist party. While the other would [have liked] former members to say: “We are the progeny of the PCI, we come from that culture, ... actually, we had close ties at least at the beginning with them, and Marx-leninism leads directly to the guerrilla, and Berlinguer was responsible for everything that has happened, etc.” But the brigatists have never said these things – apart from Franceschini, but he is a terminal case ...then again one may say that there is some truth in the second narrative, at least in the context factories of the early 70s, when there were contact with the workers... and so there is the paradox that what the right claims is, in a very limited sense, truer than what the left claims... yet both [churches] are nevertheless annoyed that their respective versions haven’t been confirmed.29

One does not need to be a “fellow traveler” of sorts to realize that much of the scholarly literature that discusses terrorism is heavily conditioned, in some cases

29 Interview with Alberto, 12/02/1998.
hopelessly flawed, by the negative values the term “terrorist” imply. Even if one were to leave aside the political effects that labeling a form of radical dissent as “terrorist” entail (in terms of legitimating state repression), using the term in a scholarly context is liable to misrepresent the phenomena one seeks to understand. Obviously most conceptual tools students of society and culture adopt carry political implications and value judgments. Yet in the case of terrorism one may wonder whether a term that stigmatizes behaviors and individuals from the beginning is liable to produce a critical understanding of the phenomenon. Thus, for example William Douglass and Joseba Zulaika suggest one should drop the category altogether.

Given the emotional and practical consequences of terrorism in the modern world, it is scarcely surprising that much research on it is commissioned by existing states or is otherwise advocacy by its nature. In the study of political violence we are particularly tempted to disregard the epistemological gulf between factual and normative propositions, as if there should be no question as to what “ought to be” the case regarding such heinous phenomenon. This tendency – to define terrorism as more of a “problem” to be dealt with rather than a “phenomenon” to be studied in its own terms – thereby Weber’s dictum that social sciences “are the least fitted to presume to save the individual the difficulty of making a choice” [...] and consequently also
disregards the methodological imperative that science cannot determine the
validity or falsity of ultimate ideals.\textsuperscript{30}

In the case of Italian terrorism the normative (some would say manipulative)
implications are even more relevant since its practitioners never willingly engaged in
violent actions which involved the risk of harming bystanders.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, for example the
Red Brigades from the beginning never used bombs against their victims, they only
used rudimentary devices to destroy cars.\textsuperscript{32}

On her part Donatella della Porta is well aware of the need to develop a
definition that can accommodate Italian left wing terrorism. The interesting aspect is
that she adopts two different definitions depending on the scope of her research. Thus
when she focuses on Italian left-wing armed struggle exclusively she talks about
“terrorism”.

Terrorism […], the activity of those clandestine organizations limited
in size that, by means of a continuos and almost exclusive recourse to violent
forms of action, aim at attaining preeminently political goals.\textsuperscript{33}


\textsuperscript{31} Cf. Federico’s interview above.

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Curcio, Renato. A viso aperto. Vita e memorie del fondatore delle BR. Milano: Mondadori. 1993; Mario Moretti. Brigate Rosse. Una storia italiana. Milano: Anabasi. 1994. One other reason was that for not using explosives was that bombs were the preferred weapons used by right-wing terrorists.

Yet, when comparing political violence in Germany and Italy, the term terrorism disappears.

*Clandestine* violence – that is, the extreme violence of groups that organized underground for the explicit purpose of engaging in the more radical forms of collective action.\(^{34}\)

To be sure, both definitions reveal an effort to limit the normative implications of the word terrorism (or violence), moreover della Porta is careful to alert the reader that her definitions seek to operationalize specific aspects of the phenomenon she tries to address. The first definition seeks to understand the trajectory of Italian left-wing terrorism in detail, the recruitment of its members, the development and symbolic dimension of internal solidarity, the organizational structure and its political rationality. The second definition is tailored to her comparative focus, which, among other things addresses the different reactions of the two states towards the phenomenon. Accordingly, in this second text della Porta acknowledges that the “strategy of tension” was widely interpreted by the left as a “dirty” repressive tactic emanating from within sectors of the Italian state. Yet, the interesting thing is that she describes it as a “strategy to control protest”. This would seem imply that left-wing political violence, which obviously includes groups such as the Red Brigades, was *at least in part* an effect of state repression. Even more interesting is that the issue the of the “strategy of tension” is mentioned in the chapter where she compares the different modes of policing protest

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events in Germany and Italy. Her rationale for doing so is that how the police handles protest events is one very concrete way for protesters to understand how the state views them. Or to put it in more technical terms protest policing is the most intelligible cue social movements have to understand the range of political opportunities available to them. Now, the crucial difference between Italy and Germany from the 60s though the end of the 70s, is that Italian policing was far less selective and definitely more ambiguous than in Germany.

In the early seventies, the state responded to the radicalized left-wing movements with a use of police force, that, on several occasions, reverted to the most brutal traditions of the fifties. Protest policing continued to mix tolerant tactics – which in fact produced a well-developed system of bargaining between police leadership and movement leadership – with an increasingly hard handling of large protest groups. Although police forces used other means than firearms, their reactive tactics for the control of mass demonstrations encouraged escalation, especially when large police squads charged the demonstrators with jeeps and tear gas.\(^{35}\)

This police ambiguity, one should note occurred in period when right-wing terrorism was at its most lethal stage. At the same time, the first half of the 70s saw the emergence of left-wing armed groups (the Red Brigades were founded in 1970).

\(^{35}\text{Cit.}, \text{p.60.}\)
By the second half of the 70s while right-wing terrorism was in relative decline.
Thus, one might say that police tactics lost their ambiguity at a very “interesting”
junction.

As the information I collected from the press on some protest campaign
in the spring of 1977 indicates, in most of the demonstrations that flared up in
violence, the police tactics seemed inappropriate to control violence. The police
would charge an entire march, hitting the peaceful protesters as well as the
militant ones. Armed cover agents were often deployed during the policing of
public marches and, according to press reports, on a few occasions they faired
against the protesters. [...] Identified as “terrorists” or “sympathizers for
terrorism”, the movement activists became scapegoats. The government as well
as well as the parliamentarian opposition defined most protest as dangerous
“disorder.” Police practices were not the only factor contributing to the
“leaden” climate of these years: the laws changed and in an illiberal direction. 36

One may note at this point that the latter half of the 70s not only marked the
second and most lethal phase of left-wing clandestine violence, but also that the end of
70s these groups’ membership actually increased.37 The process was so fast and
unexpected that former Red Brigades members claim that it created some problems.

36 Cit., p. 61-62.
1993 (1986); David Moss. The Politics of Left-Wing Violence in Italy, 1969-85. Houndsmills:
1993. See also Ermanno Gallo. “Movimenti e gruppi armati in Italia negli anni settanta.
Propaganda e autopropaganda.” In Primo Moroni and IG Rote Fabrik, Konzeptbüro, editors. Le
In 1980 we experienced a political crisis due to the first pentiti [...], yet, people still wanted to join, it's hard to believe but it's true; we had a lot of kids that followed us, who were more angry than we were [...] of course we are always talking of limited numbers of people [...] still, many comrades were knocking at our door though we did not have the answers, well this has helped us not to understand soon enough to perceive the defeat.\textsuperscript{38} We kept on recruiting and people kept on joining saying that they wanted to fight [...] were talking of very young people...I remember – and this tells you a lot about what the period was like but also tells me a lot a bout myself – that when Morucci was arrested\textsuperscript{39} in 1979, he was born in 1949-50, and the newspaper said that the “young man” had been taken to the police barracks, I was astonished because to us he was an almost elderly man, an old leader of great political experience, he had been arrested way back in 1971! Which to us seemed way back then. And this thing, that I was 21 and he was described as “young”, surprised me, when we were all young at the time, the majority was 23-24-25, many leaders were 24-25, they were born in 1953-54, some were even born in 1956-57. I’m mentioning this generational aspect, not because of its peculiar relevance. Over the years people have tended to forget this aspect of our experience. Paradoxically Red Brigades activists then were younger than today’s social


\textsuperscript{38} Cf. ch. 2. and below.

\textsuperscript{39} Valerio Morucci was a leading figure of the Red Brigades in Rome.
center activists, if you go to their demonstrations most of them are over 20, and they are the really young ones.  

Now if we re-read the two different definitions used by della Porta, there is a phrase present in the first that disappears in the second: “limited in size”. So, if in the first definition terrorist organizations are \textit{limited in size}, in the second clandestine violence (which substitutes “terrorism”) is a form of \textit{collective action}. Now, social science operativism aside it seems to me quite clear that dropping all reference to size of “terrorist” organizations implies that size does not matter. Moreover, if one substitutes “terrorism” with “clandestine violence” and then still refers to the same phenomenon and describes it in much the same way as before, maybe something else is operating somewhere. This something seems to me to be the normative implications of the “t” word, which can be gleaned at through the juxtaposition of the limited size of the group with its \textit{clandestine} organizational structure and that not only implies the existence of well defined boundaries but also an image of isolation and marginality vis-à-vis the surrounding environment (the social movement). Thus terrorism is what a few isolated people do at the margins of a more complex and diversified form collective action. Yet the Italian problem is that clandestine organizations were not as isolated and marginalized as the above juxtaposition would seem to imply. Nor were the simply a extremization of social movement radicalism. As different Italian historians have shown clandestine groups and political violence have a long tradition in Italy. Thus for example the memory of the Resistance against Fascism did play a role both in the

\footnote{Interview with Alberto, 06/10/1999.}
imaginary of the social movement activists regardless whether they later joined clandestine organizations. Luisa Passerini, who was never a member of clandestine groups, in her memoir\textsuperscript{41} mentions how she eagerly listen to former resistance fighter narrating their stories. On his part Alberto Franceschini, one of the founders of the Red Brigades, recalls how a former resistance fighter had given him his old pistol as a token of the passing on of a revolutionary ideal.\textsuperscript{42} Other historians have noted how the concentration in certain regions of Italy of violent incidents perpetrated during and after the war by members of the Resistance are in fact a response to violence perpetrated by fascist militias \textit{twenty} years before\textsuperscript{43}, which in turn was a response to workers militancy. This persistence of violent antifascist militancy has obviously embarrassed the Communist party (when it still existed) in the 70s and was used by its opponents as evidence that the clandestine organizations were really its responsibility. On their part the Communist leadership claimed that these organizations were something completely different and defined them as the combined product US and right-wing conspiracies, aiming at undermining Italian democracy.\textsuperscript{44} The point to all this is not asses who was responsible for what, rather to highlight that the category of terrorism is indeed problematic. It is problematic precisely because, by defining both a crime that deserves


to be punished and a form of collective action to be studied analytically, risks to construe the subjectivities involved (especially those of the “terrorists”) as a-historical essences.\footnote{Cf. David Moss. \textit{The Politics of Left-Wing Violence in Italy, 1969-85}. Houndsmills: MacMillan. 1989. For a detailed description of this effort.}

One may then wonder whether the two different definitions adopted by della Porta not only respond to the changing perspectives of her two studies but also to their different readerships. In the Italian context, for example to describe left-wing armed groups as terrorist was a self-conscious political move aimed at rallying the Italian citizenry around the state. Thus David Moss describes that his claim that a general theory of terrorism could not be applied to the to the Italian context, was criticized because questioning the category implied a deligitimation of Italian institutions.

Many of the armed groups’ accusations against the State echoed views to be found among the political parties and complaints audible in any bar or marketplace. Even the extent of participation in left-wing violence to be easy to misrepresent. Its agents were neither a exactly a tiny sect wholly divorced from the surrounding society nor a fully fledged social movement nor, despite the inflated claims of its protagonists an entire political generation [...] When I suggested in a seminar in Turin that there could be no ‘general theory of

\footnote{For example, Michel Wierwiorka defines terrorism as anti-social movement, that is a form of collective action that is separate from the collectivity it seeks to empower, it is thus the opposite of a social movement. Since social movements have a positive connotation for Wierwiorka; indeed they represent the one positive aspects of (post-industrial) democracies terrorists represent the total negation of one of best social innovation that Western democracies have produced, thus he compares their subjectivities to totalitarianism since like any totalitarian terrorists ideologize reality; cf. \textit{Sociétés et terrorisme}. Paris: Fayard. 1988; p. 21. Would FMI structural adjustment programs count as terrorist?}
terrorism,' I was rebuked for discounting the importance of intellectual unity against violence and ignoring the need for citizens to have a general, even if admittedly not wholly plausible, explanation behind which to mobilize – points to which any social scientist opposed to political violence and with no sympathy for the translation of social critique into the deliberate damage of individuals must be sensitive.\textsuperscript{46}

4. A TERRORIST, IS A TERRORIST, IS A TERRORIST.

The rappel à l'ordre which Moss was subject to by his Italian audience clearly implies the fundamental question that informs all those who study terrorism in a Western European context: how can such an extreme form of political dissent erupt in an open and democratic society? To answer the question one has obviously to solve the thorny problem of what counts as legitimate dissent in a democratic context. The answer to this seems easy enough: illegitimate dissent is that which questions the state's monopoly in the exercise of violence. Indeed, and this may come as a surprise to the reader, this answer is probably one of the few things on which the terrorists and the

state have in common. At my wife’s birthday party some time ago, a friend of ours who likes to question what he considers our excessively idealistic left-wing beliefs, offered an anecdote he thought would challenge our soft-hearted attitude towards criminals. Quite unexpectedly Maurizio readily concurred.

It all starts when Rosario decides to launch one of his “challenges”. He begins by saying that he wants to tell us something that happened to him recently, and anticipates that people present will probably find his behavior on this occasion objectionable. The other night he was unable to sleep, finally at 4 in the morning, he decided to take a walk. Once he is on the street, he sees two people rummaging inside a car. He realizes that it is his car these people have broken into and they are trying to steal his radio. He rushes over and confronts them. The two run away on a moped. Yet, he so angry that he writes down the license plate number and goes to the police to file a complaint. Later on, he receive a phone call from the police saying the two have been arrested and that they will be promptly tried, he should go an testify against them. Which he does and the two robbers are sentenced to 4 months. This is the story, Rosario obviously is waiting for our unanimous criticisms. Yet, Maurizio unexpectedly asks him how he confronted them. Did he look them in the eyes? How was it? then he continues by saying that he considers Rosario’s reaction completely justifiable, that is, he agrees with the idea that people have a right to be punished. Everybody has such a right; the issue is not whether there is justice in punishment, nor whether the rules upheld by the sanction are reasonable or not. On hearing Maurizio’s word people are taken aback. Does he have any idea what being in prison is like? Others ask him whether his argument is based on
personal experiences. Petra, my wife, and I are embarrassed: Maurizio has placed himself in the position where I cannot avoid to say something about his past, nobody knows he was a member of the Red Brigades. Unflinchingly and very smoothly Maurizio answers that he was in prison for political reasons. Then he continues that every society has its own rules and that social innovation implies the breaking of those rules. This is what he has learned in prison. Before he used to think that society did not have to have any rules whatsoever yet, the time he has spent in prison has allowed him to understand their importance. The right to be punished, he further argues, does not only imply the right to be recognized, more important still punishment gives the individual the opportunity to acquire full awareness of the consequences of his actions, consequently punishment allows the individual to realize the strategic character of his agency. This does not imply necessarily the recognition that such limits are legitimate. On the contrary punishment reveals to the individual which rules needs to be broken, this in turn allows him to reject the status of victim […] thus prison functions as a sort of sentimental education, something like a university. Everybody should spend some time in prison, this would allow them recognize the costs and the serious character of innovation and transgression.47

Sure, we were well into the early hours of the morning, a lot of wine had been drunk and we were now switching to some more intoxicating beverages. Yet, Maurizio’s words, his very personal rhetoric notwithstanding, could hardly be discounted as “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.”

In the heyday of armed struggle, once arrested, members of the Red Brigades would declare themselves political prisoners, as such they would refuse to collaborate with the state, in any way. While refusing the state’s legitimacy, they also rejected the legitimacy of Italian courts to judge them, thus they also rejected their right to defend themselves from the charges brought against them. The oddity of such behavior obviously hindered the smooth functioning of the rules of due process. This in turn implied that the prosecutors often lacked the elements of evidence that would allow them to evaluate who was responsible for what. As self-declared members of the Red Brigades, suspects claimed responsibility for everything their organization had done, regardless of the seriousness of the crime. The consequence of this was that the judiciary ended up in convicting defendants on the basis of their declared political allegiances and not for their actions. One way to break up this collective resistance was to charge people in prison who had been already convicted or were awaiting trial of every action the Red Brigades committed even after their arrest. This obviously further undermined the credibility of the Italian judiciary’s allegiance to the rules of due process. Thus confirming the Red Brigades’ accusation that the Italian state was indeed a bourgeois dictatorship.48

Things began to change in 1980 when the so-called *Legge Cossiga* was passed by parliament. Among its provisions this law introduced the figure of “collaborator” better known as *pentito*. By repenting, rendering a full confession and actively collaborate with the police to identify other members of the armed organization the suspect could enjoy a substantial reduction of sentence. Yet, his or her testimony, in order to be valid, had to be rendered in public during the trial hearing, obviously the symbolic effects of a publicly sanctioned repentance where as valuable as the information provided. Indeed, one may argue that the symbolism of this new form of *autodafe* largely superseded the reliability of the information provided. Here was someone who had actively sought to undermine the Italian state and its democratic institutions. Someone who, by declaring that he or she had been wrong all along also accepted the legitimacy of the state to judge the morality of his or her action, to be the arbiter of his or her subjectivity. Yet, a troubling question still haunted the public. As the only evidence of the sincerity of the conversion could only be measured by the quantity of the information provided, who could discount the possibility that his or her testimony was motivated more by the prospect of a reduced sentence than actually the effect of a sincere repentance? Indeed, who can trust a traitor? The political relevance of the terrorist as moral subject ushered in by the emergence of the *pentiti* thus came to be a decisive issue not only in the legitimization of the state’s struggle against left-wing armed groups but it also affected judicial proceedings themselves. Justices and left-wing armed groups but it also affected judicial proceedings themselves. Justices and left-wing

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(05/12/1977) that those citizens that refused to serve as jurors in the trial, were completely justified since the state they where called to defend was too corrupt in the first place.

49 Law no. 15, 02/06/1980.
intellectuals realized that if the role of the *pentiti* effective in dismantling armed organizations still presented the stain of questionable motifs. It is in this context that another figure emerged that of the *dissociato*.\(^{50}\) Contrary to the *pentiti*, the *dissociati*, while claiming that they acknowledged their defeat and rejected armed struggle, argued that as the emergence of left-wing armed organization had been a political phenomenon, itself the expression of the social movement radicalization, also the solution was to be political. Yet, while agreeing to confess to all crimes they had been personally involved in, they nevertheless refused to identify people who had not been already indicted. Contrary to the *pentito*, the figure of the *dissociato* was not sanctioned by a law. It was only in 1987 (*legge Gozzini*) that after much controversy a law defining the *dissociato* and the benefits he or she was entitled to came into effect. That the *dissociati* connected their armed militancy to a political context of collective action allowed them to retain at least some control over the definition of their identity, yet to be recognized as a *dissociato* one still had to justify one’s own identity in front of the state.

Recognition as a *dissociato* required the unequivocal abandonment of all former links to an armed group, admission of all personal responsibilities, behavior clearly incompatible with any continuing association with armed struggle, and explicit repudiation of violence as a method of political struggle.\(^{51}\)

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\(^{50}\) This option was first theorized in 1982 by a group of political prisoners members of different left-wing political groups, the document, came to known “document of the 51”.

More that the *pentiti* the *dissociati* responded to another concern that informs much of the literature on terrorism: what are the political solution to terrorism, how can society re-integrate former terrorists? Regardless of political discourse, the question still seem to entail the problematic subjectivity of the terrorist. Will she or he do it again? How can we be sure? The problem is rather explicitly addressed by Franco Ferracuti. Indeed his words are *revealing* in this respect. He recognizes that since it is impossible to *eliminate* terrorists, one solution is to provide a place within the country’s political system where radical dissent can find a legitimate expression. One should note in passing that Ferracuti, in line with the basic problematic that informs the literature on terrorism, sees the terrorist as the ultimate enemy of society.⁵² Yet, clandestine left-wing organizations, at least of the Italian sort, and especially the Red Brigades during their most lethal phase, claimed they were waging an attack at the heart of the Italian state. Indeed, the whole point to clandestine politics responds to an attempt to avoid state repression. Here we have a clear example of the Foucaultian notion of knowledge-power, that is a discursive practice that produces its own object of knowledge and endows it with a subjectivity that can in turn be targeted as the site of moral and

⁵² "In general, belonging to a group and remaining isolated from society at large reinforces the terrorists’ ideology and strengthens their motivations. Deviants tend to group together and cut ties with society – which is seen as the alien and hostile enemy – and to engage in a ‘fantasy war’ with it – a war whose reality seems enhanced when that society engages in repressive actions. Such actions reinforce the terrorists’ deviance and make it difficult for such people to make an exit from the life of terrorism.” Franco Ferracuti. “Ideology and Repentance: Terrorism in Italy.” In Walter Reich, editor. *Origins of Terrorism: Psychologies, ideologies, theologies, states of mind*. Cambridge: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and Cambridge University Press. 1990; p.61.
political intervention. Indeed, an intervention that produces both a collectivity and its enemies. Thus, it seems quite reasonable that what is at stake in the reintegration of the “person-formerly-known-as-terrorist” within the bosom of society is a certain type of subjectivity. Yet the type of subjectivity that need to be reintegrated will never be fully reliable. Indeed the more one repents the less he or she can be trusted.

What happens in the minds of terrorists who decide to abandon terrorism is not known. The material available consists of a few interviews and autobiographies in which real motives lie hidden beneath rationalizations and self-serving reinterpretations of reality. Preliminary data from my research suggest that repentant terrorists are less stable and less well-adjusted than unrepentant ones.

Thus we come to the baffling situation whereby the terrorist whether he or she repents or not is still a dangerous and not fully reliable member of society. Indeed, we may even come to the paradoxical conclusion that the unrepented terrorist is more well-adjusted than the unrepented one. But then again, is not this paradox that informs the discourse on terrorism very similar to the one, which according to Foucault has characterized the emergence of panopticism that shaped Western modernity? Foucault argues that a process peculiar to the industrializing societies in Europe in the between

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the 18\textsuperscript{th} and the 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries was the widespread practice of confinement as a mode both of punishing criminals, as well as taking care of the sick. This practice, a response to momentous demographic changes triggered by the industrial revolution, not only came to be applied in factories and schools and hostels, it also produced a certain knowledge, indeed it gave birth to the "human sciences". The problem these knowledges sought to respond to was a fundamentally pedagogical one: how could a population (being them the poor, the criminal etc.) be transformed into productive citizens? The paradox of this process that subjected individuals to constant and detailed supervision was the practice of punishing individuals through confinement was legitimated by a theory of punishment that was antithetical to this same practice.

That theory of punishment subordinated the punishment, the possibility of punishing, to the existence of an explicit law, to the explicit establishment that a breach of this law had taken place, and finally to a punishment that would compensate for or, to the extent possible, prevent the injury done to society by the offense. That legalistic theory, a truly social, almost collectivist, theory, is completely antithetical to panopticism. In panopticism, the supervision of individuals is carried out not at the level of what one does but of what one is, not at the level of what one does but of what one might do.\textsuperscript{56}

And in order to learn one might do one has to find a way to uncover his or her most intimate being. One has to transform the object of knowledge into a subject

endowed with agency, someone who bears responsibility for his or her action. One may say that in the case of the terrorist, we are confronted with a subject with an excess of agency, someone overburdened by responsibility. Something no punishment will ever be able compensate.

I have difficulties in talking [about armed struggle] with people of my own age, who did not share my same experience, because I’m afraid that they’d see me too self-critical. Let’s say that I often notice in them a sort of ... a feeling... as if they wanted me to retain more of my truths than I really care ... sometime I feel they would like me to confirm those truths are still mine while even though they don’t share them. Yet, I have I have worked them through in a different way though I am not, how should I put it? A *pentito* or *dissociato mentale*\(^{57}\), nor someone who must carry out a self-critique to the extreme. Yet, it is clear that I am someone who’s quite at peace with how the whole story has lead, I am perfectly conscious of the extent of the defeat. ... that is, I am aware o the defeat. ...on the other had they: “Yes but...” but what? My arse! [...]I am really annoyed by being put in a situation in which I cannot contrast their point of view, a situation where I always have to be very careful not to be too critical, where I feel I have choose the right words ...I don’t want to behave as a moderate when I am not. I know I’m not. Yet sometimes I’m

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\(^{57}\) A pun that plays of the two different meanings of the same word, that refers both to the legal category and mental disorder.
surprised by the feeling, I get when talking to these people [...] that they give
me more credit that I would give to myself.\textsuperscript{58}

Maurizio is an odd character, someone who likes to play with words chooses
them carefully yet likes the roundabout turn of phrase. Yet his difficulty in piecing back
together his past, the almost mythical image his friends have of it (he was very young
when he joined the Red Brigades at the end of the 70s, and contrary to many brigatists
did nor repent nor dissociated from armed struggle), does seem to tell a different story
than the one told by the discourse on terrorism. Caught in the web of its own
disciplinarian discourse terrorist studies seem still to be fighting an enemy who has long
left the battlefield not knowing where to go.

\textsuperscript{58} Interview with Maurizio, 9/30/1999.
PLAYBACK

On May, 20 1999 quite unexpectedly the Red Brigades made a lethal comeback in Rome. Early in the morning Massimo D’Antona, an advisor to the Ministry of labor was shot dead as he was walking to work. The public was shocked, the enemy all believed had been defeated long ago, had re-emerged. Indeed, that something thought to belong to a past as “remote” as the 70s had come back alive, was a haunting theme that many commentators struggled with in their op-eds. Who where the killers? Where they really members of the Red Brigades? Maybe they were using the name as a cover? Moreover, the Red Brigades had made their come-back at a critical moment. The Kosovo crisis had lead to a full-fledged war between NATO and Yugoslavia. Not only Italy was for the first time in his post-war history was directly involved in a war, but was also playing a major logistical role. The Aviano air base in the north-eastern part of the country was where planes took off for their daily air strikes. The fact that the Italian government was involved in a war (however “humanitarian”) without having officially declared it, as the constitution explicitly prescribed, had lend a juridical argument to the anti-war camp. Moreover, bearing in mind that the prime minister, Massimo D’Alema, was a member of the same former communist party (DS) that had heretofore claimed to embody pacifist ideals, one can easily understand the difficulty of the situation. Thus, commentators argued, if the Red Brigades had re-emerged at this particular moment, it meant not only that they had not been militarily defeated, but that they had a political strategy. Yet who where they? Where were they hiding? Were they the survivors of the
old organization or had they recruited younger militants? Puzzlement was further increased by the fact the police investigations were leading nowhere.\(^1\) With so many questions and not enough answers to go about, conspiracy theories and hysterical accusations increasingly filled newspaper reports. Experts claimed that investigators should carefully re-read their files on the Moro affair for leads that had not been pursued at the time.\(^2\) Some argued that the re-emergence of the Red Brigades pointed to the existence of a clandestine network. Hence newspapers began to focus their attention on a Russian musician, Igor Markevitch, who had died in 1983, wondering whether the rumors that he had hosted clandestine meetings of the Red Brigade leadership in his villa in Tuscany were indeed true. Maybe there was some new leads to uncover?\(^3\) The fact that he had been an eccentric who, though gay, had been married to an Italian duchess and, finally, that he had been involved with the Communists during the Resistance, were obviously precious ingredients lending an aura of exotic and kinky mystery to the Red Brigades' come-back. Yet, these rumors soon proved to be utterly unfounded. Alarm further increased when a progressive cardinal and political leaders received envelopes containing a bullet and a letter of threats with the Red Brigades logo. A week later paranoia turned to embarrassment when it the authors of such letters revealed with an anonymous letter to the ANSA press agency, that it had all been a

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\(^1\) To this day (May, 2002) the police have made very little progress. In the meantime another advisor to the Ministry of Labor, Marco Biagi, has been killed by the (new?) Red Brigades.


\(^3\) Cf. Cristina Mariotti “Mistero Markevitch” *L’Espresso* 06/10/1999.
joke. They had wanted to make fun of the media-hype the reappearance of the Red Brigades had created.

Unable and in part unwilling to address the soundness of the black and white interpretation of the 70s that “terrorism” legitimated, politicians began to throw the “t” word at each other, thus the center-right opposition began to accuse the former-communists in government that they still had not fully eliminated their communist genes. Soon after the murder, the Red Brigades had sent a long document to newspapers explaining the rationale of their action. Fausto Bertinotti the general secretary of Rifondazione Comunista, argued that though political violence could never be justified, somewhat unwittingly remarked that this document, its abstruse rhetoric notwithstanding, carried some well-founded political critiques. His remarks obviously generated a barrage of accusations that the radical left, the same that opposed the war with Yugoslavia, was complicit with terrorism. Rifondazione Comunista had recently taken back its support to the center-left. This decision had lead to a cabinet crisis and had weakened the coalition. Thus the remarks of its leader further contributed to the heated polemic between the moderate and the radical left. D’Alema admonished that such “extremist” rhetoric was dangerous in itself as it came close to legitimize political violence, others claim that having been a socialist, Bertinotti did not have the anti-terrorist culture of the old PCI. This obsession of the bewitching danger of “extremist” words moreover lead some commentators to accuse the active anti-war movement of

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4 Cf. see Sergio Romano, “Non potete far convivere Lenin con Bernstein.” Liberal, 06/03/1999.
5 The Refunded Communist Party.
abetting would be or even active terrorists. In the midst of this commentators and the occasional Red Brigade interviewees repeated in a mantra-like fashion that these new terrorists were going to be defeated as their predecessors; the more so since times had changed and the present political context was completely different from that which had generated the BR. Now, precisely what kind of context that was, was not so clear. Did they mean that past terrorism had been a political, though aberrant, expression of the social upheaval of the 70s? This was the position of most former “terrorists”, who in turn urged parliament to finally approve a law granting pardon to political prisoners who had not been directly involved in violent crimes. A measure that, the argued, would have given the opportunity for a public discussion of the political aspects of the 70s. Yet politicians readily dismissed this suggestion claiming that such a measure would implicitly legitimize the new terrorists.7

In short, what was clear to everybody was that the resuscitated Red Brigades were out of context.

Mary Douglas has written a modern classic on symbolic pollution.8 She connects concepts of pollution and taboo with the imperative need societies have to maintain some form of coherent moral order. Thus pollution is the symbolic stigma attached to events or behaviors that undermine social order. As I have tried to argue in these pages terrorism in Western democracies and in Italy has analogous implications. Indeed it may be one of the many instances in which cow-obsessed Nuers and, say, car-obsessed

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Italians (or otherwise obsessed moderns) seem to be rather similar, after all. That terrorism is conceived as the deranged effect of words is a universally acknowledged truism. That talking to "terrorists", if you are not a member of the police or of the judiciary, may be a "pollutant" experience for ethnographers, has also been acknowledged.

Any ethnographer of subjects labeled "terrorists" may ipso facto become liable to charges of contamination by merely having transgressed the taboo of never talking to them, even if they are neighbors with whom one has to deal on a daily basis.\(^9\)

Douglas is keen to point out that pollution beliefs kick in when a morally ill-defined situation emerges. Indeed, terrorism seem evoke this kind of predicament all-too common in "open societies." Namely that it is some excessively violent reaction to social and political contradictions that need to be addressed anyway (questions of ethnicity, political disempowerment, what have you). One should not forget that what sparked the wave of modern terrorist studies was the massacre of the Israeli Olympic team by PLO militants, a failed national liberation struggle if there ever was one.

Accordingly, a not so implicit concern of terrorist discourse is to clearly demarcate legitimate, even radical, dissent represented by social movement from illegitimate forms.

Yet, as the Italian case amply demonstrates, that symbolic boundary that the “t” word should help to maintain is far from stable. Depending on the political context it may be extended to encompass expressions of dissent heretofore considered legitimate.\textsuperscript{10}

Hence, here we are back with the issues I have struggled with throughout my fieldwork. The problem I have addressed, yet I have not been able to resolve, has been precisely the difficulty of developing a collective narrative of the 70s not only in the public sphere at large but also among the more restricted circle of former social movement activists. Such was the difficulty of my mission that may be better described as mission impossible.

Rather than looking for the condition of possibility of such public narrative, it may be more reasonable to look at what makes such narrative impossible to emerge. At the level of discourse the damning effects of the emergency legislation-terrorism discourse couple sure seems to have a negative impact. The negative connotation that such a discursive couple plays, is most clearly seen in the way it reifies the past. It places each individual involved in a position which requires on his or her part a detailed account of his or her deeds. And here is one of the many paradoxes I have encountered. Regardless of their relationship with violence, former radicals as Sofri and Marino, active “veterans” or former “terrorists, all share the same political point of origin in a movement which valued subjective choice, Giddens would say, that these activists were

\textsuperscript{10} In rare cases the boundary may also be redrawn more selectively, the KLA is a case in point, with the Kosovo crisis its original terrorist features were soon forgotten.
the first post-traditional individuals. Yet, Whenever their past is discussed it is a *collectivity* they evoke which embraces and overshadows their individual biography. As if the only testimony they recognize as legitimate is one that can account for everything. Yet, this inevitably implies division, indeed separation from an "accursed" past.

You may recall Renato the rather circumspect activist of the Walter Rossi association. On our first interview he was keen to point out that he had a personal style as an activist, for one he shrugged away from violent behavior. The real movement, he argued was a mass movement, armed struggle marked a deviation from its true character. Yet, during a subsequent interview he had this to say:

I remember the slogan we used to shout:: “Ira, Fedayn, Tumamaros, Vietcong” we always shouted this, as for me the one of the group who had the role starting the slogans, I had my own megaphone [...] and we had this set of slogans and we always shouted this particular one three or four times [each demonstration] and so there was also this myth of national liberation struggles... it was something strong ... you know seeing these Vietnamese i defeating the Americans, it was something made us feel ... close to an international struggle.\(^{13}\)

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\(^{12}\) Cf. ch. 3.

\(^{13}\) Renato, interview, 07/05/2000.
Does this mean that Renato is a potential "terrorist"? Hardly. Does it mean that the "terrorists" were as consequential and coherent in their choices as they claim? I wonder. Maybe we should ask a different question.

What makes the "will to freedom"\textsuperscript{14} prone to "violence"?

It is commonly understood that the opposite of violence is non-violence. Good. But when one looks at that peculiarly modern realm of polemical practices that goes under the term of politics, one of the possible, indeed canonical, discourse that is associated with non-violent practices is that of the rule of right. Thus in Western liberal democracies, the recourse to violence to further political objectives, is not justifiable precisely because such regimes are founded on the rule of right, which recognizes the political freedom of each and every citizen. Who is entrusted to see that such rights are respected? The state of course. How does the state accomplish this? Through its legitimate use of force. Hence, if legitimate violence is defined as force, illegitimate force is defined as violence. This in turn implies that, at least in the political sphere, the opposite of violence is not non-violence but force.

Foucault has argued that what is specific to the modern (Western) state is that it is a form political rule which is not only concerned with maintaining its sovereignty over a territory but is quite keen to improve the welfare of the population under its jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{15} Foucault has described this process as the "governmentalization of the


state.” It is this process that renders the center of power in modern societies extremely difficult to locate.

I don’t think that we should consider the “modern state” as an entity that was developed above individuals, ignoring what they are and even their existence, but, on the contrary as a very sophisticated structure in which individuals can be integrated, under one condition: that this individuality would be shaped in a new form, and submitted to a set of very specific patterns.¹⁶

Precisely because the modern state is a form of power that both individualizes (objectifies individuals) and totalizes (attends to the well being of the population), the politicization of subjectivity of the social movement of the 70s by challenging the boundaries of the political, i.e. the governmentized state, was immediately lead to frame its practices as inherently “violent”. Thus their struggle against subjection, in as much as it was framed as political discourse, was locked into a deadly conflict against the state as the absolute sovereign that had to be defeated with its own weapons (both discursive and otherwise). In shot they challenged the political boundaries not politics as such. In the process the issue of government as the agonic engagement that structures the possible field of social practices remained unchallenged.

The govermentalization of the state is at the same time what has permitted the state to survive, and it is possible to suppose that if the state is what it is today, this is so precisely thanks to this governmentality, which is at once internal and
external to the state, since it is the tactics of government which make possible the continual definition and redefinition of what is within the competence of the state and what is not, the public versus the private, and so on; thus the state can only be understood in its survival and its limits on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality.\textsuperscript{17}

After all, what do Sofri, Marino, the active veterans and the “terrorists” have in common? They all, in different ways, struggle to with a subjectivity refracted by the state. Indeed they are all entangled in the governmental web, which, though rooted in the whole network of society ultimately falls under the jurisdiction of the state thanks to the mediation of the political.

Thus the dominant issue that informs the historical reconstruction of the Italian social movement of the 70s, is to what extent they can be part of Italian national history. In a very similar vein the accounts of active “veterans” and the “terrorists” by recognizing the meaningfulness of violent non-violent divide (who was really violent and who was not) subject the government of their subjectivity to the disciplining discourse of politics. Finally, both Sofri and Marino, frame their conflicting narratives within the same discursive field oriented by the governmentalized state. Thus Sofri’s defense adopts the ethical discourse of the rule of right and the miscarriage of justice,


\textsuperscript{17} Michel Foucault. “Governmentality”. In Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, editors. The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1991, p. 103.
while Marino’s accusations are motivated by the moral trope of wayward son seeking to return under the protective, indeed pastoral, care of the Italian state.

I rest my case.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


