



Full Title of Thesis

'THE "DISINTEGRATION OF THE SYSTEM": THE NAZI-FASCIST TERRORISM OF FRANCO G. FREDA BETWEEN FASCIST MYSTICISM AND METAPOLITICS DURING THE STRATEGY OF TENSION (1969-1979).'

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THESIS ABSTRACT

The present thesis intends to focus on the controversial figure of the Italian far-right activist Franco G. Freda and neofascist terrorism in Italy between 1960s and 1980s. Franco G. Freda is known to the Italian general public as the alleged perpetrator of the neo-fascist terrorist attack on the *Banco Nazionale dell'Agricoltura* in Piazza Fontana in Milan on 12 December 1969. The attack represented the landmark of the *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension) in post-war Italy and saw the beginning of a period of political subversion and terrorism at the hands of both radical Marxists and neo-fascists groups in what was also dubbed by the Italian press as the *Anni di Piombo* (Years of Lead). Freda's relevance in post-war radical fascist ideology is of academic interest as he seems to combine the most sophisticated fascist philosophy with the praxis typical of a terrorist campaigner. His aristocratic view of fascism, a blend of Platonism and Evolian philosophy with a tendency toward nihilism suggests he sought a fascist ideology that turns to metapolitics in an attempt to shape a new not only political, but existentialist *Weltanschauung*. For instance, his combining Plato's idea of State and Justice with the detached and almost aristocratic and spiritual attitude embodied by Julius Evola. This makes Freda the main representative of the so-called 'fascist mysticism'. Freda is a typical neo-fascist intellectual who saw in the 'armed struggle' of the time the right response of a political and ideological minority that in Italy had felt marginalized and isolated after the war.

Freda's opposition and philosophical perspective of the world finds in fascist ideology pagan roots its ideal referent. This aspect is worth of being investigated for it casts a new interpretative light on fascism as ideology. It is Freda's mystical approach to the nature of fascism as an ideology defined by its anti-system, anti-state, anti-democratic, anti-modern qualities that makes him a figure of reference for generations of neofascists. The nature of his 'personal view' on fascist ideology so far tentatively described, opens the doors to further questions on the ideological mind-set of radical fascism and terrorism, the latter considered as the only political tool to affirm a certain set of ideas within the specific political climate in Italy and abroad in the historical period that the present research project aims to investigate. The present research will be conducted considering two perspectives: the ideological one will attempt to analyze and assess radical neofascism in the figure of Freda; and the historical perspective will attempt to examine and evaluate the role of Italy with her domestic ideological terrorism within the wider cold war context. Attention has also been paid to the impact that Freda has today to the younger generation of the 'fascists for the third millennium'.

INTRODUCTION

‘Some have preceded us. Others will forever follow us.’¹

The present research intends to analyse the controversial figure of the Italian radical fascist and intellectual and terrorist Franco Giorgio Freda. Freda began to be known during the *strategy of tension* period with a terrorist attack on a bank in Milan. Italy would then face the phenomenon of ideological terrorism that would last until the mid-1980s.² He was known to the Italian general public as one of the alleged perpetrators of the neo-fascist terrorist attack on the *Banco Nazionale dell’Agricoltura* [National Agricultural Bank] in piazza Fontana, Milan, which occurred on 12 December 1969.³ The attack represented the official beginning of a period of political subversion and terrorism on Italian soil, which characterised the 1970s and 1980s decades dubbed as *Anni di piombo* (years of lead).⁴

The relevance of Freda is of academic interest as he combines the most sophisticated political philosophy with the *praxis* typical of a terrorist campaigner, as will be better explained in chapter three. Freda shared a specific brand of fascism as the one sought by the radical right organisation *Ordine Nuovo*, which he became a member of in 1958.⁵ Freda’s fascism resulted from a radicalisation process that produced the following effects: ideological and political mysticism and a metapolitical message. As a political and ideological agent of this formula of radical fascism, Freda found his ideal space for action within the Italian socio-political climate of the period between the late 1960s and, again, in the 1990s until today, as better explained in the final chapters of the thesis. The first phase of Freda’s involvement in subversion and terrorism is the 1960s and 1980s. A historical period that saw Italy undergoing a series of social and political mutations within the socio-political, historical and cultural framework of the transnational wave of change

¹ Franco G. Freda, *Il Cattiverio e le Beatitudini* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1985), p. 52.

² For the history of the period known as *strategia della tensione* (strategy of tension), there is a vast literature, mainly in Italian. The expression was allegedly coined by a journalist of the British newspaper *The Observer*, which first referred to the specific Italian socio-political turmoil of those years by using the term to describe what was happening in the country. See Giuseppe De Lutiis (ed.), *Attacco allo Stato* (Rome: Napoleone Editore, 1982).

³ The terrorist attack on the *Banco Nazionale dell’Agricoltura* in piazza Fontana in Milan occurred on 12 December 1969, leaving seventeen dead and eighty-eight wounded on the ground. This event soon became the official starting date of the terrorist season in Italy.

⁴ *Anni di piombo* (years of lead) is taken from the homonymous movie ‘*Die Bleierne Zeit*’ (1981) by the German filmmaker Margarete von Trotta. The movie deals with terrorism in West Germany in the same years. On how this expression came of use, see Nicola Guerra, ‘Il Linguaggio degli Opposti Estremismi negli Anni di Piombo. Un’Analisi Comparativa del Lessico nelle Manifestazioni di Piazza’, *Italian Studies*, vol. 75, issue 4, 2020, pp. 470-486.

⁵ *Ordine Nuovo* [New Order] is possibly the most notorious far-right post-war organisation as the main protagonist of the strategy of tension period. It was born out of a desire of some members of the post-war neo-fascist party, MSI-DN, to establish a more ‘spiritual’, metaphysics and radical form of fascism, looking mainly at their master Julius Evola.

that the '1968 student movement' had brought with it.⁶

According to the Italian sociologist Sabino Acquaviva, as he observed in his relevant study on the phenomenon of Italian terrorism, the primary motive for the explosion of political violence in Italy was due to the religious crisis that the country was undergoing at the time. He considers this religious crisis critical in understanding the country's political violence and terrorism.⁷ Acquaviva also seems to agree with the other Italian sociologist, Franco Ferrarotti, that another additional factor to be considered to explain and understand the Italian terrorism phenomenon would be the country's tormented past.⁸

Undoubtedly, both Acquaviva and Ferrarotti have the merit of pointing out two relevant issues that may contribute to an understanding of Italy's cultural and socio-political complexity looking at that historical period. The heavy religious influence, with the physical presence on the Italian territory of the often repressive and suffocating moral authority of the Vatican on the Italian society as a whole, has often contributed to creating a strong anti-clerical reaction since the middle ages.⁹ Therefore, political violence as an answer to what was perceived as authoritarian repression has always characterised the Italian socio-political climate, as observed by the author Richard Drake.¹⁰ Acquaviva supports and strengthens Ferrarotti's position that sees the country's complicated past as the key to understanding the Italian phenomenon of terrorism and political violence. Indeed, Italy's history has always had dark sides and tormented times; however, both Acquaviva's and Ferrarotti's analyses are far too reductive in providing an exhaustive motivation for the insurgence of terrorism in the country even when they both rightly address two crucial factors in an attempt to explain and define the phenomenon of Italian terrorism. However, it is also necessary to include other elements to have a complete picture of the complexity of the historical period under examination.

⁶ On this point, see the essay of Nando Dalla Chiesa, 'Del Sessantotto e del Terrorismo', *Cultura Politica tra Continuità e Rottura* (Bologna: Il Mulino, Jan-Feb 1981).

⁷ Sabino Acquaviva, *Il Seme della Rivolta* (Milan: Rusconi Editore, 1976); Sabino Acquaviva, *Guerriglia e Guerra Rivoluzionaria in Italia* (Milan: Rizzoli, Editore, 1979).

⁸ Franco Ferrarotti, 'Editor's Introduction', *Social Research*, 48, 1 (special issue on violence: paradoxes and antinomies) in Mauro Galleni (ed.), *Rapporto sul Terrorismo* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1981).

⁹ In colloquial Italian even today, in order to indicate two different political and ideological factions, there is the common use of the terms *Guelfi* (Guelphs) and *Ghibellini* (Ghibellines). *Guelfi* and *Ghibellini* indicate two different political factions that, in medieval Italy, defined the supporters of the Papacy's spiritual and political power superiority (Guelphs) against the Emperor's temporal power superiority (Guelphs Ghibellines). The political contraposition between those two factions characterised Italian politics for the whole XIII and XIV centuries until the creation of the *Signorie* in the XV century (politically and autonomous city-states, especially in the north of the country). There has always been ever-present contraposition in the country's history of a robust clerical block supporting the Roman Catholic Church and an even stronger anti-clerical faction to oppose the Vatican.

¹⁰ Richard Drake, 'The Red and the Black. Terrorism in Contemporary Italy', *International Political Science Review*, July 1984, Vol.5, No.3, pp. 279-98.

This point is relevant, for instance, to Karl Mannheim's analysis. Mannheim maintains that an element to consider in explaining the insurgence of violence in a given society is to be found in its intellectual tradition. According to the scholar, to understand intellectual and political life in a specific historical period, it is necessary not only to examine the socio-economic factors as the Marxist narrative seems to indicate. It is, in fact, typical of the Marxist understanding of society to focus mainly on its economic progression, almost in a Hegelian fashion. In contrast, the progression is characterised by always a higher and higher stage (in this case, economic), as explained by Pachter.¹¹ Instead, Mannheim seems to concentrate on the ideological possibilities available to the intellectual and political class of a given society. He concludes his analysis by saying that to understand the power of an ideology as a political tool, it is necessary to look at the whole historical background of the country with great attention to the intellectual responsibility for such a phenomenon.¹²

Mannheim's analysis of political violence certainly contributes to the interpretative tools necessary to understand ideological terrorism. Indeed, intellectual influence is a factor to be considered when looking at Marxist and neo-fascist terrorism without mentioning anarchic terrorism. However, in the case of neo-fascist terrorism is first necessary to clarify what is meant by fascism. On this point, Freda seems to disprove the common cliché generally attributed to the fascist type, for he does not define himself as fascist but rather a 'free spirit'.¹³ However, by affirming this, Freda falls into the Evolian fascism cliché, where the spiritual and intellectual aspects are emphasised and shaped into a nihilist form of political existentialism.¹⁴ For the present analysis, it is relevant to assess first what is meant by the term 'fascism' and whether it is needed to establish the category of the *fascist minimum*, namely, the ultimate definition of the ideological tenets of fascism. This intellectual necessity has been felt among scholars since the first appearance of fascism, with the need to rationalise this new political expression to comprehend its central ideological core and several aspects.¹⁵

Roger Griffin's definition of the so-called 'fascist minimum' claims that the common denominator of all the different permutations of fascism is an 'ultra-nationalist palingenetic myth' and this revolutionary form of ultra-nationalism that attempts the myth of a regenerated nation.¹⁶ It should

¹¹ Henry M. Pachter, 'The Idea of Progress in Marxism', *Social Research*, Vol. 41, No.1, (Baltimore MA: John Hopkins University Press Spring 1974).

¹² Karl Mannheim and Paul Kegan, *Essays on the Sociology of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1956); CFR. Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1936)

¹³ Franco Giorgio Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p.25.

¹⁴ Julius Evola, *Rivolta Contro il Mondo Moderno* (1934) (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2010); cfr. Franco Giorgio Freda, *L'Albero e le Radici* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008). The Evolian blueprint can be detected throughout almost all of Freda's works.

¹⁵ For an exhaustive assessment and analysis of the scholarly debate on the nature of fascism, see chapter 1 of the present work.

¹⁶ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1996)

be stressed, however, that Griffin does not claim that his model of fascism is the 'true' one but that it could be 'heuristically useful' in the Weberian terms of an ideal type.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, the terms 'ultra-nationalism' and 'palingenesis' (rebirth) are two elements recurring in the fascist narrative amid others, which define this ideology and adapt and shape the specific physiognomy and ideological identity of each different form and permutation of fascism. The same fascism that Freda preaches is far different from, for instance, Mussolini's fascism. Although in Freda's vision of fascism can be detected both the revolutionary and the palingenetic element, the ultra-nationalist element is absent and is mentioned only in his last political endeavour of the *Lupi Azzurri*, as better explained in chapter five. According to Freda, revolution does not necessarily address Italy in specific but envisages a more universal, radical political and ideological shift that would primarily interest Europe and, by extension, the West.¹⁸ On the issue of transnational fascism, there has been an increasing interest by scholars in considering fascism as a global phenomenon, not just producing hyper-nationalism and, therefore, confined within the national borders, but as an ideological and metapolitical force expanding within and outside Europe, as stressed in their works by Martin Durham and Andrea Mammone.¹⁹ Indeed Freda, often referencing Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* (1918), seems to embody what Ernst Nolte described in his seminal work as the 'metapolitical' and 'transcendent' nature of fascism.²⁰ Freda holds a metapolitical and mystical view that is translated into his militancy, and this peculiarity has made him an appealing figure within the extreme right circles today as at the time of piazza Fontana events.²¹

In the present research work, it is, in fact, this theoretical approach that has been taken into consideration as it is the mystical and metapolitical aspects of the fascist ideological core that may explain fascism in its most violent forms like ideological extremism and the use of political violence. On this point is relevant to refer to the element of 'sacralisation' of politics that seems to fit better the peculiar permutation of fascism that Freda is embodying. Radical right organisations like *Ordine Nuovo*, *Anno Zero*, *Squadre di Azione Mussolini*, *Giustizieri d'Italia*, *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari*, *Avanguardia Nazionale*, to name but a few, and Freda's organisations *Gruppo di Ar* and *Fronte Nazionale* even with their diversity of intents and political

¹⁷ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1996); CFR. Roger Griffin, 'Studying Fascism in a Post-Fascist Age, From New Consensus to New Wave?', *Fascism*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, (2012), pp. 1-17.

¹⁸ See Andrea Mammone, 'Revitalizing and De-Territorializing Fascism in the 1950s: The Extreme Right in France and Italy and the Pan-National ('European') Imaginary', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 45, Issue 4, (2011), pp. 295-318.

¹⁹ Martin Durham and Margaret Power (eds.), *New Perspectives on Transnational Right* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan Transnational History Series, 2010); CFR. Andrea Mammone, *Transnational Neofascism in France and Italy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Ernst Nolte, *Der Faschismus in Seiner Epoche* (1963) translated into English with the title *The Three Faces of Fascism: Action Française, Italian Fascism, National Socialism* (New York: Reinhart and Winston, 1966), transl. Leila Vennewitz.

²¹ See chapter 6 of the present research work for a complete and detailed analysis of the 'Freda phenomenon' amid the worldwide neofascist circles.

action, have all in common the element of sacralisation of politics, and the mission of the individual political commitment. On this aspect, the Italian scholar Emilio Gentile maintains his theory that it is like fascism as a totalitarian regime and ideology to promote the sacralisation of politics, or better, to promote politics as religion.²² Emilio Gentile's theory reminds of the Austrian author Eric Voegelin who, in 1938, had first the intellectual intuition of the 'sacred' or 'religious' element of fascism, observing specifically Nazi Germany. Voegelin created the expression 'political religion' to indicate the degree of sacralisation and mysticism in politics. However, it should be stressed that Voegelin's later fusion between his political analysis and his political philosophy of Gnosticism does not help the academic enquiry, as better discussed in chapter one.²³

Within such an interpretative perspective, French Christian personalists like Jaques Maritain, Henri de Lubac and Joseph Vialatoux also viewed totalitarianism less within their social and historical context and more as a spiritual disorder.²⁴ Therefore, it could be concluded that the element of 'sacred' is a determining factor in defining the nature of fascist ideology and that this element can also be easily detected in the many expressions of the post-war radical right. Although Emilio Gentile's theory offers interesting interpretations for the understanding of the inner nature of post-war radical fascism, we are more interested in investigating further the spiritual dimension which characterises a specific form of radical neo-fascism as exemplified by Julius Evola's philosophy and that found in Freda one of its best representatives. We agree with Emilio Gentile that the elements of 'sacred' and 'politics' are strictly intertwined, and we add that in the case of neo-fascist terrorism, these two aspects are complementary to each other and cannot be separated. The element of mysticism is to be found in the sacralisation of political violence and personal martyrdom within the mystique of an idealised political theology that implies a delusional perception of reality's contingency. Undoubtedly, the aesthetic dimension in neo-fascist extremism is a characteristic that can easily be detected in Freda's self-defence when releasing declarations or statements of political nature and in the carefully studied narrative style with which he wrote his most known books and pamphlets. On many occasions, Freda seemed to almost praise the beauty of violence as the latter was perceived as vibrant energy that defined, in his view, the moral *auctoritas* of the true hero-warrior in the best Evolian tradition as we can find in his *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] (1969) and *In Alto le Forche!* [Up

²² Emilio Gentile and Robert Mallet, 'The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Questions of Similar Religions and Totalitarianism', in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, (2000), pp. 18-55; cf. Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on an Interpretation', in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 5, issue 3, (2004), pp. 326-375.

²³ Eric Voegelin, 'Autobiographical Reflections' in *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Ellis Sandoz (ed.) (Columbia MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

²⁴ On this topic, see the authoritative book by James Chappel, *Catholic Modern: The Challenge of Totalitarianism and the Remaking of the Church* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

with the Gallows!]) (1963).²⁵ Freda could be defined as a 'heretical' disciple and interpreter of Julius Evola's thoughts, even if the latter was one of the principals of Freda's intellectual and political reference figures. The reason for such remark could be found in Freda's perception of the Evolian theories and doctrines that were often re-interpreted according to Freda's interpretation as investigated in chapter three.²⁶

Therefore, the present research intends to investigate this metapolitical and mystical aspect of fascism that primarily characterised the extreme and subversive manifestations during the tension period. The investigation hypothesis demonstrates how this personal metapolitical and mystical perception of fascism generated a wave of political violence and terrorist militancy in the specific historical contingency of the period under examination.²⁷ For this purpose, an analysis of the Italian socio-political climate at the time of the Piazza Fontana events has been felt necessary to provide a solid historical framework for understanding this brand of fascist mysticism and its consequent metapolitical use of violence. After the end of the conflict, Italy found itself with a new liberal democratic regime and a territory often used as a stage for the new confrontation by proxy between the two superpowers: the USA and the USSR. Within the context of the cold war, Italy was governed by a large centre-right party, the *Democrazia Cristiana* [Christian Democracy], within a multi-party system that also saw the presence in the Italian parliament of the *Partito Comunista Italiano* [Italian Communist Party], one of the largest communist parties in western Europe at the time together with the *Partito Socialista Italiano* [Italian Socialist Party].²⁸ In the immediate post-war new democratic regime, we also find a party sporting a widespread nationalism with a residue of fascist populism as the short-lived (1945-1948) *Partito dell' Uomo Qualunque* [Common Man Party] and the MSI (Italian Social Movement), the latter formed by former fascists.²⁹ The presence on the territory of a reformed and 'democratised' neo-fascist party was perceived by many as an anomaly, considering the Fascist regime that the Italian nation had experienced just a few years before. However, the legitimisation of the former fascist militants and their being recycled in the newly democratic state institutions found a more prosaic explanation, as will be better explained in chapter two of the present research work.

The first twenty years after the war were years of reconstruction, establishing the values of liberalism and democracy in a country after a fascist dictatorship, and five years of war (1939-1945). The effects of the Fascist regime and the partisan resistance between 1943 and 1945 almost

²⁵ Franco G. Freda, *In Alto le Forche! Il 1968 e il Nichilismo* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008); cfr. Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010).

²⁶ Franco Ferraresi, 'Les Références Théorico-Doctrinales de la Droite Radicale en Italie', in *Mots*, No.12, 1986.

²⁷ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy. The Radical Right After the War* (Princeton NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1996).

²⁸ Piero Ignazi, *Il Polo Escluso. Profilo del Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Ignazi, (1989), pp. 15-52.

split the population into two halves after the end of the conflict: fascists and anti-fascists, with several episodes of violent confrontation between the two sides that were then ideologically and politically defined, characterised the difficult restarting of the country after the war.³⁰ The other element to consider is the incomplete process of de-fascination carried out by the post-war Italian authorities, often recycling old fascist officials into new institutional roles as pointed out by Ferraresi: '[...].In 1960, out of the 64 first-class prefects, 62 had served under Fascism. So, had all the 241 deputy prefects, the 135 *Questori* (provincial chiefs of the state police), and 139 deputy chiefs. Moreover, only five appeared to have contributed to the resistance [...]' . These are clear indicators of the failure of the attempt to purge the apparatuses, a matter deserving attention not only for its importance at the time but for its effects on the future of the radical right.³¹ Ferraresi rightly pointed out that such recycling of former fascist officials within the echelons of the new democratic institutions and the army, police forces, and the judiciary, was an element to be considered when analysing the extreme right terrorism between the 1960s and 1980s, and that would characterise the strategy of tension period as it will be better explained in chapter two and four of the present research work.

In post-war Italy, it should also be considered that other former fascists found new political virginity in politics as members of the Christian Democrats or the Italian Liberal Party (PLI), or even creating a legitimate neo-fascist party, the MSI. However, the latter professed to accept the country's new democratic values.³² The Italian scholar Piero Ignazi rightly observes regarding the constitution of the MSI that it allowed the former members of the RSI (The Social Republic of Salò) and previous fascist militants to found a party and thus legitimately participate in the political life of the country.³³ The reason for this may be in fear of the new Italian democratic authorities that a legal prosecution of former fascist militants would have generated, in turn, a national civil war, as pointed out by the analysis of this period of Italian history provided by Roger Eatwell.³⁴ He also notes that the democratisation process in post-war Italy assumed peculiar characteristics that contributed to slowing down the political maturity of the country as a whole.³⁵ This could be attributed to a chronic mistaken and misunderstood sense of political authority present in the population, to the pressure and political relevance of lobbies like the Vatican, for instance, which with its presence on national soil and as the religious authority of reference for a large part of the population, did not cease to attempt to influence and interfere with the social and

³⁰ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy. The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 16-17; cf. Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Post-War Italy* (New York: Praeger, 1981); Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Italy: The Post-War Years* (New York: Praeger, 1983).

³¹ Ibid., Ferraresi, 1996, p. 18.

³² Ibid., Ferraresi, 1996, pp.18-19.

³³ Ibid., Ignazi. 1989, see chapter 2.

³⁴ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism, A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), chapter 11.

³⁵ Ibid., Eatwell, chapter 11.

political life of the country as the city battles for the legalisation of the abortion (1978), or the legalisation of the divorce after an abrogative referendum (1974) demonstrate.³⁶ In addition, the backwardness of the southern part of the country, with an overwhelming presence of mafia organisations on the territory, contributed to widespread corruption of the political class and society in general. The collusion between the political class (at a local and national level) has been a constant trait of Italian politics for at least the first fifty years of its new life as a democratic state.³⁷ In mid - 1980s, such collusion started to be questioned by new lines of investigation and a different attitude by the authorities; this brought organised crime to respond to the Italian state with terrorist strategies, for instance, the case of the 1984 Naples-Milan train bombing case.³⁸ As well documented by Franco Ferraresi, the extreme politicisation of the Italian society had created extremisms and ideological polarisation leading to political violence with already some dramatic episodes in the aftermath of the war.³⁹ For instance, on 14 July 1948, a fascist militant attempted to assassinate Palmiro Togliatti, the leader of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and only fortuitous circumstances prevented a civil war from breaking out. This event in the newly democratic regime established in the aftermath of world war II is explicative of the volatile climate and the political tensions present in the so-called Italian 'First Republic' as highlighted by the academic literature on the subject.⁴⁰

³⁶ Lesley Coldwell, 'Abortion in Italy', *Sage Journal*, Vol. 7, issue 1, (March 1981); Erik Jones and Gianfranco Pasquino, *The Oxford Handbook of Italian Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). In Italy, divorce was introduced in 1970, but a legal and social battle undertaken by the MSI, the Christian Democrats, and the most traditional Catholic movements and organizations opposed the legalization of divorce. The civil battle for the legalization of divorce ended in 1974 with an abrogative referendum that confirmed the 1970 law on divorce, making it finally legal in the country. On this topic see: Giambattista Sciré, *Il Divorzio in Italia. Partiti, Chiesa e Società Civile dalla Legge al Referendum* (Milan: Bruno Mondadori Editore, 2007).

³⁷ The Italian literature on this topic is vast. Here is a selection of the most recent works on this subject: Piergiorgio Morosini, *Attentato Alla Giustizia* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubettino Editore 2011); Sebastiano Ardita, *Risotto allo Stato* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer 2011); Giovanni Fasanella, *Una Lunga Trattativa* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2013); Nicola Biondo and Sigfrido Ranucci, *Il Patto* (Milan: Chiarelettere, 2013).

³⁸ The bombing of the speed train 904 Naples-Milan occurred on 23 December 1984, when there was an explosion while the train was going through the *Gran Galleria dell'Appennino* (The Apennine Grand Gallery), just after the train station of Vernio, in Tuscany with 16 victims and 267 injured. The dynamics of the attack resembled a similar attack that occurred in 1974 on the train Italicus. However, the responsibilities for the 1984 attack were soon attributed to organized crime as a first response to the state that, in those years, was starting a counter-offensive against the mafia and other kindred organizations on the territory. After the 904 train attack, the mafia hit the Italian state with the 1992 attacks against the judges Giovanni Falcone and Paolo Borsellino, and the other attacks 'terrorist style' in 1993 in Milan, Rome and Florence. On this topic, see Alexander Höbel and Giampaolo Iannicelli *La Strage del Treno 904. Un Contributo delle Scienze Sociali* (Santa Maria Capua a Vetere: Impermedium Editore, 2006); Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi, *L'Italia degli Anni di Fango (1978-1993)* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1993); Sergio Zavoli, *La Notte della Repubblica* (Rome: NuovaEri Editore, 1992).

³⁹ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy. The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: University of Princeton Press, 1996), chapter 2.

⁴⁰ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism, A History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1997); Carlo Maria Lo Martire, *Insurrezione. 14 Luglio 1948, L'Attentato a Togliatti e la Tentazione Rivoluzionaria* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 2006); Massimo Caprara, *L'Attentato a Togliatti 14 Luglio 1948. Il PCI tra insurrezione e Programma Democratico* (Venice: Marsilio Editore, 1978); Giovanni Gozzini and Renzo Martinelli, *Storia del Partito Comunista Italiano: Dall'Attentato a Togliatti all'VIII Congresso* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1998).

The political climate embedded with radical ideological and political stances contributed to creating a society where the typical democratic values of the western liberal system struggled to be established. This fragility of the new Italian democracy also has to be considered an essential factor in determining the outbreak of political violence, as illustrated by Anna Cento Bull's volume on Italian terrorism in the 1970s.⁴¹ Finally, the cold war also had repercussions on Italian domestic politics with the government party, the DC (Christian Democrats), depending heavily on the USA's strategic decisions affecting the country overall. The central hypothesis and interpretative key in order to explain the outbreak of terrorism and political violence in Italy in the 1970s and 1980s decades for many scholars that a USA's intervention could be detected behind Italian terrorism and socio-political tension of those years as a response to the strong position of the Left on the territory which increasingly worried the American authorities, who feared an influence of the PCI on the social and economic politics of the country's government being the Communist Party rather present on the territory (especially in the northern part of the peninsula) and quite influential for specific social groups like students and factory workers with its trade unions and cultural and political associations and groups.⁴² Opposite to this political and ideological trend of the Left in the Italian post-war First Republic, it encouraged a secret and subversive activities network of several neo-fascist groups and organisations both on a national level and at a more international level, whose plan was to pave the way to authoritarian regimes as the ones of Greece, Portugal and Spain in the same years as the vast academic and journalistic literature on the subject show,⁴³ as discussed in chapter two.

The terrorist period in Italy has a precise starting date: 12 December 1969. This was the day two bombs were placed inside the *Banco Nazionale dell'Agricoltura* [National Agricultural Bank] in Piazza Fontana in Milan, killing seventeen people and injuring eighty-eight. This was not the first bombing of civil and state locations by terrorist organisations, for there had been several bombing attacks since the previous April-May. Nevertheless, this was the first time a bomb attack had made victims among civilians. The very same afternoon of the Piazza Fontana bombing, three other

⁴¹ Anna Cento Bull and Giorgio Adalgisa, *Speaking Out and Silencing: Culture, Society and Politics in Italy in the 1970s* (eds.) (Oxford: Legenda, 2006).

⁴² Alexander Höbel, 'Il PCI di Longo e il '68 Studentesco', *Studi Storici*, Year 45, No.2, (Apr-June 2004), pp. 419-439; Gregorio Paolini and Walter Vitoli (eds.), *PCI, Classe Operaia e Movimento Studentesco* (Bologna: Guaraldi Editore, 1977); Cyrille Guiat, *The French and Italian Communist Parties. Comrades and Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002).

⁴³ The academic and journalistic literature on this point is quite vast. Here are some selected academic works on the topic: Emanuele Bettini, *Gladio. La Repubblica Parallela* (Rome: Ediesse Edizioni, 1996); Paolo Inzerilli, *Gladio-La Verità Negata* (Bologna: Edizioni Analisi, 1995); Daniel Gasner, *NATO's Secret Armies Operation. Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe* (London/New York: Cass Publisher, 2005); Aldo Bertucci, *Guerra Segreta Dietro le Linee* (Turin: Mursia, 1995); Giovanni Tamburino, *La Rosa dei Venti nel Quadro dell'Eversione Stabilizzante*, paper delivered at the International conference *La Rete Eversiva di Estrema Destra in Italia e in Europa (1964-1980)*, Padua: 11-12 November 2016; Claudio Nunziata, 'La Democrazia Violentata' in A. Beccaria, G. Marcucci, C. Nunziata, R. Scardon (eds.), *La Guerra Segreta degli Italiani: Da Piazza Fontana alla Strage della Stazione di Bologna* (Bologna: Castelvechchi Editore, 2016); Jeffrey M. Bale, *The Darkest Sides of Politics. I- Post War Fascism, Covert Operations, and Terrorism* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

bombs exploded in the same Milan and Rome, with a fourth one found unexploded just outside the *Banca Commerciale* [Commercial Bank] also in Rome.⁴⁴ The attack worsened the already fragile country's social and political climate and served as a trigger for what would later become known as the *strategia della tensione* [strategy of tension]. The present research work has dedicated two chapters to the topic: chapter two and chapter four, which will discuss and analyse respectively, the general socio-political climate and historical background which saw the explosion of terrorism and political violence in the country between the 1960s and mid-1980s (chapter two), and the events and leading actors of the Piazza Fontana events (chapter four).

The volatile political climate thus generated saw radical Marxist groups, anarchist organisations, and neo-fascist movements acting contemporarily on the ground of the subversion and opposition to the established authorities, often targeting symbols of the state and politicians (as in the 'Moro' case in 1978)⁴⁵ With the political and social stability of the country heavily compromised.⁴⁶ The social unrest and political confusion also served to several coup d'etat attempts, of which the most known ones are the 1964 *Piano Solo* ('Solo Plan') organised by the Carabinieri general De Lorenzo with the complicity of the CIA and the Italian intelligence SIFAR, and the 1970 'Borghese coup' where the neo-fascist prince Junio Valerio Borghese organised a failed coup attempt with the complicity of the neo-fascist group *Avanguardia Nazionale*'s leader Stefano Delle Chiaie.⁴⁷ The two attempted plots need to be understood within the socio-political framework of the time and as a product of the cold war climate in the background. The claim that in Italy, terrorism in all its forms and ideological inspirations was triggered and or even encouraged by third parties will also be further investigated and assessed in the present work in chapters two and in chapter four, which discuss and analyse the specific events and historical background of Freda's fascist mysticism.

In all this political and social chaos and confusion also generated by the 1969 'hot autumn', the terrorist attack on piazza Fontana drew attention to Franco Giorgio Freda and his comrades, soon to be indicated by the press and the investigative bodies as one of the material perpetrators of what

⁴⁴ See chapter 4 of the present thesis for a more detailed analysis of the Piazza Fontana events.

⁴⁵ For a better understanding of the 'Moro affair', see: Gianni Oliva, *Il Caso Moro. La Battaglia Persa di una Guerra Vinta* (Turin: Edizioni del Capricorno, 2018); Gennaro Acquaviva and Luigi Covatta, *Moro-Craxi. Fermezza e Trattativa Trent'Anni Dopo* (Venice: Marsilio Editore, 2009); Gianni Baget Bozzo and Giovanni Tassoni, *Aldo Moro. Il Politico nella Crisi (1962-1973)* (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1983); Giorgio Galli, *Piombo Rosso. La Storia Completa della Lotta Armata in Italia dal 1970 and oggi* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi Dalai Editori, 2004); Agostino Giovagnoli, *Il Caso Moro. Una Tragedia Repubblicana* (Bologna: Il Mulino Edizioni, 2005).

⁴⁶ Giuseppe De Lutiis (ed.), *Attacco allo Stato* (Rome: Napoleone Editore, 1982).

⁴⁷ Anna Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of No Reconciliation* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007) with specific attention to chapter 4.

will be then defined as the ‘mother of all massacres.’⁴⁸ Freda gained notoriety not only for the Piazza Fontana attack but also because of his radical ideological motivations that shaped his political militancy and gave a new meaning to the more common and traditional expression of 'being fascist'. Freda became a mesmerising dark character for always appearing cold, detached and under control. His ideological framework was intellectually sophisticated: a mixture of Evola, Plato, the oriental and classical myths, and the principal anti-Enlightenment philosophers as his intellectual reference.⁴⁹ The records of his trials for the piazza Fontana attack reveal an individual entirely in control and that did not show to the outside any form of remorse for his subversive activities and militancy, nor did he shows remorse for his radical Nazi-fascist views. He will become an authoritative reference for the myriad of far-right groups and movements in Italy and abroad, who look today at him as an inspirational ideological leader and model.⁵⁰ His publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar* [Ar Publishing], published 2016 his fictional biography in the format of a novel where it is described Freda’s involvement in the strategy of tension period.⁵¹ The novel intends to be an alternative account of neo-fascist political violence and militancy in the 1960s-1970s and proposes a romanticised and glossed-over image of Freda and his political endeavours. However, the novel is also addressing all those young Italian far-right militants searching for a political and ideological figure of reference. The book can then be considered an interesting primary source regarding Freda's revived figure amid the Italian new far-right generations, as it will better be discussed in chapter six of the present research work.

It could be assumed that Freda’s success amid neo-fascist extremists was due to his charisma and the strong determination and coherence of his ideas. In 1990, once released from prison after spending fifteen years in detention for his subversive activities and after being acquitted with his associate Giovanni Ventura for his involvement in the piazza Fontana terrorist attack,⁵² Freda

⁴⁸ This well-known expression indicates that the bombing of Piazza Fontana (12 December 1969) does not seem to have clear paternity, although it has been used extensively by the Italian journalist Indro Montanelli in his book *Storia d'Italia* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978).

⁴⁹ Chiara Stellati, *Una Ideologia dell'Origine. Franco Freda e la Controtendenza* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2002).

⁵⁰ See on this point an article published in the Italian daily *Libero* by the spokesman of the Italian far-right organization *CasaPound Italia* that discusses the figure of Freda and his contribution to neo-fascism in post-war Italy: Adriano Science, 'Gli Anni Formidabili Visit dall'Uomo Nero', *Libero*, 18 April 2016.

⁵¹ Anna K. Valerio and Silvia Valerio, *Non-Ci Sono Innocenti* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2016).

⁵² Franco Giorgio Freda and his associate Giovanni Ventura were arrested in 1971 for their alleged involvement in the piazza Fontana terrorist attack. The several trials Freda and his associate were standing can be summarized as follows: 1971-1974 Milan; 1974-1977 Catanzaro (where the trial had been moved from Milan for security reasons) and where Freda and Ventura were found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment. In 1982, the *Corte di Cassazione* (Italian correspondent of the High Court) condemned Freda to fifteen years in prison for his subversive activities, but in 1987, the same court acquitted both Freda and Ventura for insufficient evidence for the events of Piazza Fontana. In the 1990s, some new evidence indicated some responsibility of Freda and Ventura in the piazza Fontana attack, but little could be done because it was difficult to reverse the 1987 sentence that had acquitted both Freda and Ventura. See on this topic: Fabrizio Calvi and Frédéric Laurent, *Piazza Fontana, La Verità su Una Strage* (Milan: Mondadori, 1984); Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984), chapter 4 of the present research thesis with a more updated bibliography and new data on this topic.

became again active by founding an organisation called *Lupi Azzurri* (Azure Wolves) with the primary purpose of stopping the migration process in Italy and integrating the migrants and other ethnic minorities into Italian society.⁵³ The organisation was structured according to strictly hierarchical bases. It was considered illegal by the Italian judicial authorities, for it seemed to re-propose and held a racist and Nazi agenda both in its ideological and paramilitary style.⁵⁴ After the trial concluded in 1995, Freda was detained for another five years. In 2000, he established a publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar*. He retired to a small town in the south of the peninsula, where he continues his political and ideological engagement as publisher and public speaker for the underground archipelago of the many far-right labels active in Italy and abroad.⁵⁵

His personality's peculiarity determines Freda's figure's academic interest and his ideological profile. He does not seem to have any nostalgia for Mussolini's regime, he rejects the traditional values of the fascist middle classes, he is anti-capitalist, and his fascism is rather metaphysical and metapolitical even when manifesting in concrete militancy and subversive actions, and holds a contingent socio-political agenda. Man of many contradictions, he has, in time, become a transnational reference for European and oversea far-right groups and movements.⁵⁶ He enjoys fame and acknowledgement by the intellectuals on the right and academic interest on the Left of the political spectrum. As already said, Freda's primary ideological references are, among other authors, Plato and Evola, the latter fine and sophisticated interpreter and disciple of the French traditionalist philosopher René Guénon. Evola has a significant influence on Freda as on many young militants of his generation, to the point that most of his *Weltanschauung*, as illustrated in Freda's works, especially in his *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969), is primarily a reflection of Evola's thought with some Platonic and Nietzschean themes added to the overall perspective as will be better explained and discussed in chapter three of the present research work. Within such a research perspective, the approach taken in the present thesis will aim to combine an intellectual history of Freda informed by theories of fascism with, wherever possible, an archival study of his main political activities. The reason why Franco Giorgio Freda has been chosen is, therefore, because he can be considered as the leading representative of a specific strand of radical fascism on which the present research work focuses (the one that saw in the political activism the accomplishment of a particular political philosophy and metaphysical state of mind), whose radical and totalitarian existentialist. To a certain extent, his nihilist nature can easily explain the

⁵³ See the book Franco Giorgio Freda, *L'Albero e Le Radici* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008). This publication reports the court case for the constitution of the *Lupi Azzurri* organization and provides a good insight into Freda's new political projects. Chapter five of the present research thesis will analyze and discuss this new phase in Freda's political engagement in depth.

⁵⁴ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000).

⁵⁵ See the *Edizioni di Ar*'s website: www.edizionidiar.it and chapters 5 and 6 of the present research thesis.

⁵⁶ Freda's iconic text *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) has been translated into French, Portuguese, Czech, and English.

extreme political he and his alike violence.

In order to provide a straightforward reading of the present research, it has been thought to structure it as follows: chapter one assesses the nature of fascism as an ideology by taking into consideration the main theories, approaches, models, and aspects of fascism flourished since its first appearance on the political scene. It is interesting to assess the scholarly debate on fascism as the many interpretative approaches have generated endless discussions among academics on what can be defined ultimately and, without any doubt, its nature. Scholars have leaned toward different research hypotheses, whereas the sociological, philosophical, and historical instances have all played an essential role in the game of assessing and defining. The chapter intends to offer an overview of the various and more relevant interpretative models and theories on the nature of fascism. Starting with a chapter on assessing the diverse and different theories on fascism is to be considered the correct starting of the present research work and also will provide a general introduction to the further analysis and discussion of the core of the present research work, namely, fascist ideological mysticism and its political violence and urban terrorism.

Following this research line of investigation, chapter two will provide an analysis and historical account of the period under examination. It is determining for a complete understanding of the hypothesis of the present investigative work to provide an accurate explanation of the socio-political dynamics of the country between the 1960s and mid-1980s. Only an analysis of the historical coordinates can allow that comprehension of the ideological radicalisation and political polarisation process that can be detected in the period in question. The historical account has been made possible thanks to the incredible wealth of secondary and primary sources both available in Italian and English, for instance, the archives available online of newspapers like *Il Messaggero*, *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*, or *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Times*, *The New York Time* et al. but also, thanks to the declassification in 2015, of documents related to the period of the strategy of tension. More than 50,000 pages now, it is possible to consult both online and in loco by the general public and scholars in Milan and Rome.⁵⁷ The above historical investigation of the period under examination has been felt necessary to allocate Freda's ideological assets within a specific historical context. Chapter three is an exhaustive analysis of Freda's iconic text *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] (1969). The aims of this chapter are: to assess the reasons why this pamphlet has soon become a text of reference for the entire radical right militancy in Italy and abroad both at the time of his first publication and circulation (1969) and within today's far-right circles and movements in Italy and abroad. Nevertheless, it also investigates why the ideological and intellectual motivations influenced Freda into shaping his peculiar form of radical fascism inspired by the less conventional

⁵⁷ www.gov/archivi.it

intellectual and ideological references in matters of fascist ideology, like Plato, the Oriental religions and Mao's China. This chapter aims to finally show the influence of ideological mysticism on the use of political violence and terrorism, of which Freda is one of the most relevant instances in the Italian post-war 'black' terrorism.

The interest in Freda and not, for instance, in other equally relevant protagonists of the strategy of tension relies upon the fact that he is one of the few of the old guard to have retained a prominent role as a figure of reference for the new generations of neo-fascists. Freda's notoriety with the piazza Fontana attack on 12 December 1969 made him immediately a central character of the Italian neo-fascism of the time. Chapter four intends to carefully analyse the event that marked the beginning of the terrorism season in Italy. The historical sources used for such analysis will be both primary and secondary with extensive use of archive material, whereas it is possible, as in chapter two, and with the aid of the vast academic narrative and press archive material at disposal. The chapter will be analysed and discuss several aspects of the event and to what extent Piazza Fontana could be considered a case study to demonstrate the alleged interference of third parties and segments of the Italian state alike in contributing to creating a strategy of tension in the country. The chapter will also analyse the complex trial thread history and discuss the final acquittal of Freda and Ventura as responsible for the piazza Fontana attack amid many doubts and perplexities even today. The fortuitous timing of this research project has allowed access online to most of the documents now declassified and related to the Piazza Fontana bombing, and therefore, with this chapter, it has been possible to include new research material to be viewed in the present work.

The involvement in the piazza Fontana attack of Freda's associate Giovanni Ventura focuses the attention on another crucial chapter in the life of this enigmatic character. Freda had founded in 1963, after leaving the neo-fascist *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order) movement, a new radical fascist group: the *Gruppo di Ar* [Ar Group], to create an intellectual and ideological cénacle of kindred spirits to discuss and organise political activities on the territory and by adopting the same model of proselytism used by radical Marxist groups. The *Gruppo di Ar* also included a publishing house which printed specific literature close to the ideological and intellectual interests of the founder and its members. Chapter five intends to provide a complete historical account of Freda's *Gruppo di Ar's* activities at the time of the piazza Fontana bombing to give the reader a better understanding of the character Freda and of his social and intellectual milieu. However, the chapter also focuses on Freda's political and ideological creation: the *Fronte Nazionale* [The National Front], founded in 1990, a few months after Freda had been released from prison. The *Fronte Nazionale* is interesting because it appears to be a continuation of the *Gruppo di Ar* under specific organisational criteria. It also anticipated the agenda of the transnational white supremacists concerning the immigration issue as experimented today. The *Fronte Nazionale* was

characterised by a rigid paramilitary structure and a narrow agenda: to fight actively against the increasing immigration that the Italian minister of the interior of the time, Claudio Martelli, had favoured with a law that bared his name.⁵⁸ The intent of Freda's organisation was an active militancy on a specific racist agenda that, for many verses, recalls today's 'Eurabia' white supremacist conspiracy theory, which was, at the time, considered ideologically inspired by the Nazi ideology. For this reason, the Italian authorities eventually dismantled the organisation, according to Mancino Law (1985), which forbids any attempt to re-construct the fascist party. Also, on this occasion, Freda remained loyal to his public persona image, and in court, he did not show any emotion while defending himself and his organisation's activities and agenda. This last project cost Freda more years in detention on the charges of sedition and for apology of fascism. He was released from prison in 2000. The chapter, therefore, intends to be a historical and ideological analysis of those two organisations with attention to their fascist mysticism matrix. The final chapter focuses on Freda's increasing popularity amid radical fascist groups in Italy and abroad. The transnational character of his popularity was already detected in the 1970s when his book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* was translated into French and Portuguese. Not forgetting that Freda's debut as a political activist occurred at the European Front Conference held in Regensburg in 1969, a few months before the piazza Fontana terrorist attack. The aim of chapter six, the final chapter of this research project, is to assess the motives behind Freda's renewed popularity amid today's far-right groups. He has become an intellectual guide for the new generations of young neo-fascists in Italy and abroad. In the chapter, it has been analysed the reception of his persona and his ideas by different groups and movements, and it has been assessed to what extent his influence is today still relevant in the shaping of the ideological and political profile of these new realities in the contemporary far-right milieu of the 'fascists for the third millennium'. The conclusion will be an evaluative summary of what is discussed and analysed in the present research.

⁵⁸ Legge Martelli (Martelli Law) 28 February 1990 no. 39 (converted into law from the 30 December 1989 decree law no. 416).

CHAPTER ONE

‘AN “IDEOLOGY OF THE ORIGINS”’. ASSESSING THE NATURE OF FASCISM: DIFFERENT THEORIES, PERMUTATIONS, MODELS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Introduction

*‘Like all sound political conceptions, Fascism is action, and it is thought; action in which doctrine is immanent, and doctrine arising from a given system of historical forces in which it is inserted, and working on them from within’.*⁵⁹

The chapter’s opening is the incipit of the famous description of fascism given in the *Dottrina del Fascismo* [Doctrine of Fascism], a lengthy definition of the political ideology published in 1932 in the *Enciclopedia Italiana Treccani*, and by the authorship of Benito Mussolini and the Italian neo-idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile. Since its publication, fascism has fascinated, and puzzled generations of scholars engaged in finding its core nature and attempting to define and explain its main characteristics.

What exactly do we mean when we use the term 'fascism'? Do existing interpretative criteria fit enough to supply an ultimate definition of fascism? What does it take to solve what the British historian Roger Griffin defines as the ‘fascist conundrum’?⁶⁰ The present chapter aims to attempt an overview of the methodological approaches and interpretative models of fascist ideology through an analysis of some of its aspects since it is coming into the political scene. Fascism has always fascinated its observers since its beginnings, as pointed out by the American historian Stanley Payne who noticed how the debate around the nature of fascism started soon after the march on Rome in 1922 with the first attempts of the historiography of fascism made already in the 1920s and 1930s.⁶¹ In the 1920s, Antonio Gramsci’s several reflections on Italian fascism as a political novelty contributed to outlining some of the ideological coordinates of Mussolini’s movement.⁶² One other early analysis of fascism to be taken into account of fascism comes from the Austrian sociologist Eric Voegelin who, already in 1938, referred to fascism as a 'political

⁵⁹ Benito Mussolini, Giovanni Gentile, ‘La Dottrina del Fascismo’, *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti Treccani*, Vol. XIV (Firenze: Editrice Treccani, 1932), p. 847, (my translation).

⁶⁰ Roger Griffin, ‘Solving the Fascist Conundrum’, *European History Quarterly*, Vo.27, Issue 4, pp. 573-580.

⁶¹ Stanley Payne, 'The Concept of Fascism' in Stein U. Larsen et al. (eds.), *Who Were the Fascists?* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1980), pp. 14-25.

⁶² Antonio Gramsci, *Scritti Politici 1910-1926*, Paolo Spriano (ed.) (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1973); Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere* (1948-1951); Valentino Gerratana (ed.) (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1975); Luciano Canfora, *Gramsci in Carcere e il Fascismo* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2012); Benedetta Garzanelli, ‘Il Fascismo negli Scritti di Antonio Gramsci del 1924-1926’, *Studi Storici*, Year 48, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec.2007).

religion' highlighting the spiritual and mythical aura surrounding German National-Socialism.⁶³ The American political scientist Anthony J. Gregor concluded that, however, the interwar fascism studies were 'full of generalizations' and, therefore, not entirely reliable.⁶⁴ Gregor's position questions the validity of the several interpretations of fascism provided by those interwar scholars as possibly too emotionally and politically involved, hence not objective enough in their analysis of the phenomenon and not in possession of all the socio-political and ideological elements that would become instead available to the series of historians that had the opportunity to analyze fascism retrospectively after 1945.

When looking at the historiography of fascism, the decades 1950s and 1960s seem a breakthrough in the fascist studies academia. Hannah Arendt's work on totalitarianism opened the debate on fascism again.⁶⁵ As explained later in the chapter. Fascism became a historical topic by the end of the 1960s, when more studies, works and comparative analyses started to appear in the scholarly debate, also arising a series of questions addressing a new generation of historians. When the scholarly debate on fascism resumed after Arendt's work, were, for instance, whether scholars had to talk of one single type of fascism or if instead there were several types of fascism, where the emphasis of those studies had to lie upon? Furthermore, to what extent was Italian fascism kindred to German National Socialism? Could a Weberian 'ideal type' theory be suitable for studying fascism? Can the political scientist Michael Freeden's theory of ideological morphology apply to fascism?⁶⁶ Moreover, what is meant by the 'fascist minimum', which discusses extensively by the British historian Roger Griffin in his most famous book, *The Nature of Fascism*?⁶⁷

These are a few of the questions that the present chapter intends to address by exploring different models, aspects, and interpretations of fascism; not to eventually answer what fascism ultimately is, but to provide a theoretical and interpretative background to identify and define the category of 'fascist mysticism' as an intellectual category that can be determined in the comprehension of certain aspects of the ideology we are discussing. Specifically, we believe that the 'spiritual' or 'mystical' element is fundamental for a complete understanding of the fascist ideological core. An aspect that should be considered with more attention within the general debate on the nature of fascism is assessing whether fascism's religious and mystical aims can be considered the theoretical blueprints of such ideology, or, at least, to what extent the 'mystical' element can be considered determining for the fascist ideological morphology. It is our conviction that such a

⁶³ Eric Voegelin, 'Autobiographical Reflections', *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Ellis Sandoz (ed.) (Columba MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

⁶⁴ Anthony James Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism* (New Jersey: New Learning Press, 1974), p. 27.

⁶⁵ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) (La Vergne TN: Benediction Classics, 2009).

⁶⁶ Michael Freeden 'The Methodological Analysis of Ideology' in Michael Freeden, Lyman Sargent, and Marc Stears, *The Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 115-137.

⁶⁷ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991).

heuristic approach could aid in better comprehending its successive permutations taking as an example the development of some segments of post-war neo-fascism in Italy and abroad if compared to the interwar fascism instances. The present chapter aims to guide the reader through the general scholarly debate around the nature of fascism and analyze its central tenets and permutations that occurred in time. For this purpose, the chapter has been structured as follows: in the first subsection, the origins of Italian fascism will be explored, primarily referring to the solid Gentilean philosophical influences. In the second subsection, we will analyze fascism as a political religion, looking at its inner 'spirituality' or, at least, its claim of being a new religion, as stated in the *La Dottrina del Fascismo*. The second sub-section will critique the Marxist interpretation of fascism and will focus on discussing the materialistic and class-based analysis of fascism. The third sub-section will instead be an analysis of the post-war scholarly debate on the nature of fascism as happened in Italy, and, for this purpose, most of the sources selected are in Italian. In the fourth sub-section, it has been chosen to review and assess the Italian neo-fascist own interpretative approach to fascism as ideology and regime. This choice was considered helpful for a better understanding of the neo-fascist intellectual framework in which Freda's version of fascism could be inserted and possibly, better understood together with the adoption of a different interpretative approach to the study and analysis of the political climate during the strategy of tension period. Nevertheless, also to better comprehend the neo-fascist militancy of the so-called 'black terrorism' within the political context of the 1970s-1980s Italian politics and for an attempt to successfully frame today's far-right groups and movements in Italy and abroad. In conclusion, the reader will find an evaluative summary of the chapter's discussion.

1. Fascism and Neo-Idealism

Fascism has assumed different forms and contours since the official definition of the fascist doctrinal tenets was expressed in what can be considered its political manifesto in 1932. The document, *La Dottrina del Fascismo* [The Doctrine of Fascism], explains in detail the theoretical aspects of the ideology and its political vision, resenting Gentile's strong neo-Idealism influence, especially in the third part of the document, whereas the Gentile influence is more evident.⁶⁸ It is the Italian neo-Idealist philosopher Giovanni Gentile, a fervid supporter of Fascism and Mussolini, that gave direction to the theoretical coordinates of the ideology as we read in the *La Dottrina* in which the political theory and the political aims are illustrated and explained echoing a strong neo-

⁶⁸ Benito Mussolini, 'La Dottrina del Fascismo', vol. XIV, pp. 847-884, *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti Treccani* (Firenze: Editrice Treccani, 1932). Gioacchino Volpe edited the whole *Dottrina* for the historical aspect, Arturo Marpicati edited the aspect related to the social and political aspects of fascism, and the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile edited the theoretical part of the document. An English translation of the document appeared with the title: *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism* translated by Jeane Soames (London: Leonard and Virginia Wolf at the Hogarth Press, 1933).

Idealism influence, especially in the third part of the document.⁶⁹ Giovanni Gentile saw in Mussolini's movement the incarnation of his theory of *il Pensiero come azione* [thought as action] that he developed and wrote about extensively during his academic life.⁷⁰ Gentile's influence contributed heavily to defining the official theoretical tenets of the nascent fascist movement. His influence was, to a certain extent, determinant to providing a solid philosophical framework, although applicable solely to Italian fascism as sustained by scholars like Stanley Payne. He tends to clarify and distinguish Italian Fascism from German National Socialism. We agree with the American scholar who tends to clarify and distinguish Italian fascism from German National-Socialism. In Payne's view, Italian fascism was never a coherent and organic ideology, although the efforts of Giovanni Gentile and Mussolini provided a well-defined ideology and a well-structured political programme.⁷¹ The introduction of the binomial 'thought-action' as absolute value underlining Italian fascism was the perfect transposition, in Gentilean terms, of the neo-Hegelian *theoresis* actualized into the *praxis* as Anthony J. Gregor has extensively argued in his analysis of fascism.⁷² When looking at the fascist experience in Italy during the Fascist *Ventennio* (1922-1943), Mussolini attempted, with the aid of intellectuals and philosophers, to shape this new ideology and movement according to some theoretical coordinates. The ideological framework provided at the time contained traces of Mussolini's interest in the French philosopher George Sorel and his 'vitalism theory',⁷³ However, the old fashion values of Giuseppe Mazzini's liberalism and the idea of nationalism also recall the Italian nationalists Enrico Corradini and Giovanni Papini's idea of a nation that Mussolini endorsed when leading the war intervention movement (*interventismo*) in 1914.⁷⁴

To consider fascism, at least considering its Italian version, as a mere translation of neo-Idealist and neo-Hegelian philosophical precepts does not provide a conclusive understanding of it as a

⁶⁹ Benito Mussolini, 'La Dottrina del Fascismo', vol. XIV, pp. 847-884, *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti Treccani* (Firenze: Editrice Treccani, 1932). Gioacchino Volpe edited the whole Dottrina for the historical aspect, Arturo Marpicati edited the aspect related to the social and political aspects of fascism, and the Italian philosopher Giovanni Gentile edited the theoretical part of the document. An English translation of the document appeared with the title: *The Political and Social Doctrine of Fascism* translated by Jeane Soames (London: Leonard and Virginia Wolf at the Hogarth Press, 1933).

⁷⁰ Giovanni Gentile, *Teoria Generale dello Spirito come Atto Puro* (Bari: Laterza, 1920); Cinzia Cassani and Cecilia Castellani (eds), *Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile: Carteggio Vol. I (1896-1900)* (Turin: Argano Editore, 2014); Piero di Giovanni, *Giovanni Gentile e la Filosofia Italiana tra Idealismo e Anti-Idealismo* (Milan: Franco Angeli Editore, 2003); Marco Berlanda, *Gentile e l'Ipoteca Kantiana. Linee di Formazione del Primo Attualismo (1893-1912)* (Milan: Università Cattolica Editore, 2007); Bruce Haddock and James Wakefield, *Thought Thinking. The Philosophy of Giovanni Gentile* (La Vergne TN: Ingram Book Company, 2015); Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism. The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

⁷¹ Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914-1945* (London: UCL Press, 1995).

⁷² Anthony J. Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism* (Morstintown NJ: General Learning Press, 1974).

⁷³ On George Sorel's influence on the young Mussolini, see James A. Gregor, *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1979).

⁷⁴ Anthony J. Gregor, *Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2012).

political phenomenon and ideological challenge. Other elements cannot be easily dismissed when attempting a comprehensive understanding of fascism. Fascism is a more complex phenomenon to be understood as the scholarly debate has extensively demonstrated since its first appearance in the 1920s. Multiple aspects contribute to rendering fascism enigmatic and, to an extent, impenetrable to rational comprehension. The nature of fascism appears contradictory and multifaceted, which has originated several schools of thought and academic disputes on assessing its ideological core and characteristics. There is, for instance, the necessity to discuss whether it is necessary to distinguish between fascist ideology and Fascist regime and, to what extent these two aspects are intertwined alternatively, whether it is appropriate to agree with Walter Benjamin's theory of the 'aestheticization' of politics concerning fascism, as the German philosopher discussed in his most famous book, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935). In contrast, the author describes politics as a form of art that reciprocates the idea of life as considered, in turn, as a form of art.⁷⁵ Alternatively, whether to consider fascism in so far as a form of politics, as a 'secular religion' as Emilio Gentile has often sustained in most of his publications.⁷⁶

Contradictions, believing in what is perceived as political and ideological heresies to the point of becoming a proper 'political religion' with its creed, rituals, and precepts. Whether all those characteristics make fascism more like a religious doctrine rather than a political ideology constitutes an interesting argument to discuss to define its political claims and ideological core better. According to this interpretative key, fascism, therefore, cannot simply be explained through the reductive lens of the class-based ideology or as the result of the failures of the capitalist society as viewed by Marxist historicism. The New Consensus approach has been considered the most interesting for the present research work, for it provides the heuristic tools for an original and new interpretation of the 'fascist mysticism' embodied by Freda's works and political militancy.

2. Fascism as Political Religion

Eric Voegelin was one of the first to indicate the metaphysical aspect of fascism while observing

⁷⁵ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) (London: Penguin, 2008), trans. by J.A. Underwood.

⁷⁶ Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism: Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism and Interpretation' in Roger Griffin (ed.) *Fascism: Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 33-72, transl. by Natalia Belozeuskeva; Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism as Political Religion', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, No.2/3, (May-June), 1990, pp. 229-251; Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), translated by George Stanton; CFR. Walter L. Adamson, 'Fascism and Political Religion in Italy: A Reassessment', *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, (February) 2014, pp. 43-73; Luca della Rovere, 'Interpretations of Fascism as a Political Religion in Post-Fascist Italy (1943-1948)', *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, Vol. 15, Issue 1, 2014.

the rise and consolidation of National- Socialism in Germany and Austria.⁷⁷ The Austrian sociologist's analysis based on Max Weber's 'ideal type' model made it possible to detect how Nazism was retaining the cultic physiology by borrowing all the elements common to a religious organization and creating a political party with a spiritualistic sub-layer. It is to scholars like the Austrian sociologist Eric Voegelin that we owe the concept (and the term) of *political religion* when looking at totalitarian ideologies.⁷⁸ The Austrian sociologist stated, ' When I spoke of the *politischen religionen*, I conformed to the usage of literature that interpreted ideological movements as various religions.⁷⁹ In the same historical period in which Voegelin was reflecting on the 'religious' nature of totalitarian ideologies like fascism, National-Socialism and communism, also Catholic personalist philosophers like Jacques Maritain looked at the emerging of totalitarian ideologies and regimes more in terms of a profound spiritual disorder of the western society and less in terms of social and political phenomena.⁸⁰ Without mentioning the analysis of the Frankfurt School's fascism in general and on National-Socialism specifically, testify the early interest in the fascist phenomenon within interwar intellectuals.⁸¹ However, the American scholar Anthony J. Gregor considers the studies on fascism before 1945 'full of generalizations' and therefore not entirely reliable.⁸² Gregor's position questions the validity of the several interpretations of fascism provided by those interwar scholars as possibly too emotionally and politically close and, therefore, directly involved in several cases; hence, they were not objective enough in their analysis of the phenomenon and did not have all the socio-political and ideological elements that would become instead available to scholars that have had the opportunity to analyze fascism retrospectively after 1945.

The 'religious' aspect of fascism is relevant to Emilio Gentile's studies of fascism as a political religion.⁸³ According to the Italian scholar, both leftist intellectuals, as well as the official authorities of the Catholic Church, detected from the very beginning a 'religious' element in both Mussolini's regime and other kindred movements like Nazism in Germany.⁸⁴ Other authors of the ideology repeatedly stressed this religious and spiritual aspect of fascism; the same Franco

⁷⁷ Lee Trepanier and Steven F. McGuire, *Eric Voegelin and the Continental Tradition: Exploration in Modern Political Thought* (Columbia Mo: University of Missouri Press, 2011).

⁷⁸ Emilio Gentile, *Politics As Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), trans. G. Staunton.

⁷⁹ Eric Voegelin, 'Autobiographical Reflections', *The Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, Ellis Sandoz (ed.) (Columba MI: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

⁸⁰ Dries Deweer, 'The Political Theory of Personalism: Maritain and Mounier on Personhood and Citizenship', *Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (Leuven: Routledge, 2013), issue 2, pp. 108-126.

⁸¹ George Friedman, *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981); Martin Jay, *The Dialectic Imagination: A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute for Social Research 1923-1950* (Berkley CA: University of California Press, 1996); Rolf Wiggershaus, *The Frankfurt School: Its History, Theories and Political Significance* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995).

⁸² Anthony James Gregor, *Interpretations of Fascism* (New Jersey: New Learning Press, 1974), p. 27.

⁸³ Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁸⁴ Emilio Gentile, 'The Conquest of Modernity: From Modernist Nationalism to Fascism', in *Modernism/Modernity* 1/3, 1994, pp.235-7.

Giorgio Freda constantly repeated that he considered his theoretical references rather theological than ideological and considered himself more on a spiritual journey rather than a political or ideological one.⁸⁵

The academic attention to the religious nature of fascism has been found in authors like Emilio Gentile and George Mosse, the strongest supporters of the sacralization of the ideology, not without criticism by other scholars who, for different reasons, admitted the spiritual character of fascism reluctantly. Particularly hostile to Emilio Gentile's theory of fascism as political religion is Roger Eatwell, who, although he recognizes some heuristic merits to Gentile's approach, maintains that fascism must be considered as a political ideology rather than political religion'.⁸⁶ Eatwell's position of dismissing fascism as possible political theology echoes Hannah Arendt's similar position in the related debate refusing the idea of political religion for fascism.⁸⁷ Eatwell criticizes specific academia as overstating the 'religious' character of fascism as compared to its rationality. Eatwell observes how fascism had serious ideological claims in creating a 'Third Way' between capitalism and socialism State and contemplated scientific views on matters of geopolitical settings and race.⁸⁸ However, it could be objected to Eatwell regarding the rationality of fascism that, alongside its more political and rational aspects undoubtedly, the ideology had a metaphysical and esoteric core as investigated by scholars like Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. In several of his books, he has looked at the occult side of the Nazi ideology.⁸⁹ The British scholar documented in his work the cultic and esoteric elements, especially Nazism, and by finding its roots in the Theosophical and Ariosophists movements popular in Europe during the period known as *Positivism*.⁹⁰ Goodrick-Clarke's contribution to the academic debate on the nature of fascism casts a new light on certain aspects of the ideology often neglected by the mainstream academia of fascist studies. His analysis of this aspect of fascism in his work is fundamental because it provides a different and maybe less conventional interpretative key to comprehending the complexity of fascism and its character of universality. Indeed, from this interpretative angle, fascism acquires a different eschatological significance that can easily explain all its features and aspects, even the more rational ones.

Although more evident in National-Socialism, the relevance of the supernatural and mystical elements is also a defining feature of interwar Italian fascism in the development of the central ideological tenets of fascism, as it has been extensively discussed in Emilio Gentile's work. An

⁸⁵ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padova: Editioni di Ar, 2010), p. 20.

⁸⁶ Roger Eatwell, 'Reflections on Fascism and Religion' in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, 4/3, 2003, p. 163.

⁸⁷ Hannah Arendt, 'Religion and Politics, in *Confluence: An International Forum*, 2/3, 1953.

⁸⁸ Roger Eatwell, "Reflections on Fascism and Religion" Special Issue of *Totalitarian Movements and Politics Religions*, 2003.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (London and New York: Tauris Parke Paperbacks, 2004).

⁹⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

example of how mysticism was a fundamental element of fascist ideology from the beginning is the *Scuola di Mistica Fascista* (School of Fascist Mysticism), founded in 1930 by the *camicia nera* (black shirt) Niccoló Giani under the patronage of Mussolini's brother Arnaldo Mussolini. Giani and Arnaldo Mussolini created and ran the 1930s and 1940s *Scuola di Mistica Fascista*. This academy was the *locus* to forge the so-called 'fascist spirituality' for the future generations of Italian black shirts.⁹¹ In the *Scuola*, the fascist creed was preached in a typical religious, cultic fashion.⁹² The Messianic role of Mussolini, at the time already commonly defined as the 'Providence man', was dominant in the writings of Giani e Arnaldo Mussolini as well as being a repeated concept in the fascist propaganda of the time. It is, in fact, the latter who shares with Giani the primary intellectual responsibility for the *Scuola* and the mystical approach to the political and ideological changes happening in the country during the *Ventennio*.

The aim of building a solid ideology found its deep roots in this new vision preached by fascism, of politics as a totalizing experience for the individual. Therefore, politics should be conceived as a life mission and an existential and spiritual response to the pitfalls of modernity.⁹³ On this point, fascism seems to entertain an ambiguous relationship with modernism. If, on one side, the artistic and intellectual circles of T.F. Marinetti's futurists and the avant-garde welcomed the advent of a new era characterized by technology, speed, and innovation. On the other side, there is also the element of being anchored to a tradition of choice, for instance, the interwar Italian Fascism obsession with the Roman Empire legacy, or German National-Socialism choosing as historical and traditional reference pre-Christian and medieval Germany.⁹⁴ In both cases, we should notice how the 'spiritual' plays an essential role in shaping this ideology. In reality, we are convinced that the 'religious' or 'spiritual' side is not marginal but a fundamental feature of fascism. Therefore, those mystical and religious elements should not be dismissed in the scholarly debate but instead considered a critical interpretative key. Interestingly enough, from the reading of the relevant sources, we can affirm that Freda's organizations like *Gruppo di Ar* [Ar Group] (1963) and especially the organization *Fronte Nazionale* [National Front] (1990), resemble in their structure, aims and principles the *Scuola di Mistica Fascista*, but also are infused with the esoteric spirit that can be found in Himmler's S.S., as will be better analyzed in chapter five of the present thesis.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Niccoló Giani, *Mistica della Rivoluzione Fascista. Antologia di Scritti 1932-1941* (Catania: Il Cinabro Editore, 2015); Arnaldo Mussolini, *Coscienza e Dovero* (1933) (Rome: Raio Editore, 2007).

⁹² On the *Scuola di Mistica Fascista* see: Michael A. Leeden, *Universal Fascism* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1972); Luca Fantini, *Essenza Mistica del Fascismo. Dalla Scuola di Mistica Fascista alle Brigate Nere* (Perugia: Associazione Culturale 1 Dicembre 1943, 2004); Tomas Carini, *Niccoló Giani e la Scuola di Mistica Fascista* (Milan: Mursia Editore, 2009); Aldo Grandi, *Gli Eroi di Mussolini. Niccoló Giani e La Scuola di Mistica Fascista* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 2004); Daniele Marchesini, *La Scuola dei Gerarchi: Mistica Fascista: Storia, Problemi, Istituzioni* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1976).

⁹³ Roger Griffin, *Modernism and Fascism, The Sense of a Beginning Under Mussolini and Hitler* (New York- London, Palgrave MacMillan, 2007).

⁹⁴ Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship. Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015); Hannah Johnson and Nina Caputo, 'The Middle Ages and the Holocaust. Medieval anti-Semitism in the Crucible of Modern Thought', *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5, Issue 3, (September 2014), pp. 270-277.

⁹⁵ See chapters 4 and 5 of the present work.

Therefore, fascism's theoretical principles also reflect a mythical perception of history and a mystical approach to politics. In both Fascism and Nazism's ideological narrative, we find the religious and cultic elements, where central is the messianic figure of the movement's leader is considered in all his supernatural dimensions. The cultic element of the ideology is explained by the studies published by Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw on the character of sectarian groups or movements.⁹⁶ The abovementioned study points to the attention to the element of exclusiveness and elitism in the message of the given group, and how this factor makes militants feel the privilege of belonging to a cadre group, and in the case of far-right organizations, to belong in the specific to a warrior caste. This notion of 'fighting the good fight'⁹⁷ It is overexposed in most fascist literature generated in time or the German Conservative Revolution visionaries like Ernst Jünger or Moeller van den Bruck with their celebration of the 'political soldier type. The sacrality of the struggle and a 'metaphysical engagement' was made famous in the Italian post-war radical fascism by Julius Evola's starting with his publication *Orientamenti*.⁹⁸ And then, followed by the rapid spreading of his works amongst the Italian radical right in post-war Italy also thanks to the creation of the *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* [Centre for Studies New Order] (1956-1969) that was longing for a more 'spiritual' dimension of the fascist ideology as we will explain better in the present research work. Evola, by many considered the 'Hidden Master' of the Italian far-right extremism, has the responsibility of having influenced, indoctrinated, and fascinated generations of post-war neofascists, as his trial of 1951 demonstrated. What we find as a recurrent theme in post-war 'Evolian' Italian neo-fascism is the constant element of the spiritual and esoteric threads of what Evola et al. call 'Tradition', a spiritual dimension of an ideal world which refers to versus the world of modernity and capitalism. The same Freda acknowledges on several occasions to be in debt to Evola and kindred authors by affirming that his full ideological and political awareness of the world is due to the spiritual teachings of the 'Hidden Master'.⁹⁹ However, we must clarify a few points in this regard. First, one must pay attention here to the use of the term 'spiritual' rather than 'political' or 'ideological'. In the entire narrative endorsed and preached by both Freda and his author of reference, Evola often indulges in key terms like 'metapolitical', 'metahistorical', 'spiritual', and 'metaphysical'. What is the meaning of all this? How could this tendency toward 'metaphysical' fascism explain the cult of violence that characterized Freda's Nazi fascism and the Italian far-right terrorism? The present thesis addresses these questions in chapters two and three to contribute to the current scholarly debate on the nature of Italian neo-fascist terrorism. Hence, the 'religious' element should be considered alongside this complex ideology's more rational and prosaic aspects. Moreover, when looking at Italian fascism, it is in the post-war neo-fascist

⁹⁶ Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw (eds.), *The Cultic Milieu: Oppositional Subcultures in An Age of Globalization* (Lanham MD: Altamira Press, 2002).

⁹⁷ This quote is from St Paul's second letter to Timothy (4:7).

⁹⁸ Julius Evola, *Orientamenti* (1950), (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2002).

⁹⁹ Franco G. Freda, 'Professione di Identità', *Risguardo IV* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1985), pp. 11-12.

movements that the cultic and mystical element became more evident and specific in the morphology of these movements' aims and structures.¹⁰⁰

3. Fascism and Society

About the Italian post-war fascist extremism, Freda's *Gruppo di Ar* (Ar Group), founded by the Italian neo-fascist militant in Padua in 1963, aimed at being a 'selected group of souls' that had been called by their inner nature to be refined and been indoctrinated to the truth of the Tradition as in the best Evolian terms: 'we are for an 'aristocracy of values' which is a total refusal of the egalitarian principle of levelling. They continued, 'We assume an organic and hierarchical perspective'.¹⁰¹ This quotation shows the 'aristocratic' imprinting in Evolian terms that Freda's first group retained. The 'aristocratic' character of a society dominated and shaped by Tradition clashes with the notion of society that emerged in the nineteenth century, characterized by liberalism and capitalism. How can we explain the social model according to the fascist coordinates? Moreover, which social group fascism attracted more? Before answering these questions, we must clarify between interwar fascism and post-war neofascism, specifically looking at the Italian situation. We need to establish the type of society these two different stages of fascism were envisaging, what were the ideological coordinates, and how the scholarship has discussed this aspect of fascism.

The debate on the nature of fascism has been dominated for decades by the materialistic approach. Marxist scholarship tends to consider fascism a reaction of the middle classes to the menace of the rise of bolshevism. Starting with the Marxist interpretation, fascism appeared from the beginning as a fierce opponent to communism. The 'orthodox Marxist approach' saw the binomial fascism-capitalism implying that fascism was a product of the dissatisfaction of the middle classes in the aftermath of the disastrous consequences of the First World War together alongside elements of nationalism and a strong sense of social class determinism. In other words, fascism was perceived as 'the product of class struggle'. A 'middle-class offensive against the working class'.¹⁰² Antonio Gramsci's analysis of Italian fascism as a new political reality contributed to outlining some of the ideological criticism of Mussolini's new political movement. The father of Italian communism did not consider the nature of Mussolini's fascism as revolutionary but

¹⁰⁰ Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization', Jeffrey Kaplan and H elene L o ov (eds.), *The Cultic Milieu. Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (New York-Oxford: Almira Press, 2002).

¹⁰¹ see 'Manifesto del Gruppo di Ar' (1963) in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p.70. The 'Manifesto del Gruppo di Ar' appeared for the first time in *Tradizione*, Year 1, No.1, (Jul-Aug.), 1963.

¹⁰² Peter Davies and Derek Lynch, *The Routledge Companion to Fascism and the Far Right* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp.11-12.

somewhat reactionary, and he continued to underestimate its success until 1926. Subsequently, Gramsci began to devise interpretative categories to better understand the *fascist phenomenon* by envisaging it as a form of Caesarism without acknowledging the peculiarity of the fascist ideology.¹⁰³ It is undoubtedly true that fascism and National-Socialism addressed specific contingent political and social questions and had the consensus of the elite and the middle classes in Germany and Italy. However, the nature of fascism is more complex, and elements of several European intellectual trends and philosophical schools constituted its ideological framework survive in the European contemporary extreme right, as shown by the Italian scholar Andrea Mammone et al. in a relevant study on this theme.¹⁰⁴

The core idea of fascism was to create a perfect governing system that would include a society traditionally anchored to the country's national values, restoring the cult of the country's history and past, ethnonationalism, and consolidated culture and traditions. The creation of a 'new man' for a 'fascist society' is a founding myth of fascism where the dystopia that accompanied the *delirium visionis* of interwar regimes like Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany has found correspondence in the Italian post-war radical right narrative. The notion of 'fascist society' differs on a few points when referring to interwar fascist movements and post-war Nazi-fascist organizations. If both fascist experiences share the same dystopic narrative of an ideal society organized according to specific economic, political, and social coordinates, the post-war far right tends to be heavily influenced by intellectuals and authors of reference. One above all is the over-quoted Julius Evola and his theory of 'cycles' borrowed from Hindu mythology. Freda often refers in his writings to the Evolian concept of 'Kali Yuga', the age of iron that humankind was currently experiencing and that in Hinduism represents the lowest level of development reached by a given society.¹⁰⁵ In the interwar fascist regimes, the model of the ideal society is ambivalent. On one side, the construction of the 'society of the future looks at the past with critical historical references for Nazi Germany with his glorification of the medieval period or pre-Christian Europe.¹⁰⁶ Italian fascism built a whole propaganda machine on the legacy of the Roman empire and Latin culture, as the Italian territory's architecture and urbanization showed. On the other side, however, both regimes endorsed a strong modernization campaign. In Italy, the two schools of thought, *strapless* (dedicated to the glorification of rural Italy with its small countryside villages and lifestyle), and *stracittà* (the glorification of the dynamism, technology, modernity and lifestyle

¹⁰³ Antonio Gramsci, *Scritti Politici 1910-1926*, Paolo Spriano (ed.) (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1973); Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere* (1948-1951); Valentino Gerratana (ed.) (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 1975); Luciano Canfora, *Gramsci in Carcere e il Fascismo* (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2012); Benedetta Garzanelli, 'Il Fascismo negli Scritti di Antonio Gramsci del 1924-1926', *Studi Storici*, Year 48, No. 4 (Oct.-Dec. 2007).

¹⁰⁴ Andrea Mammone, Emmanuel Godin and Brian Jenkins *Mapping the Extreme Right in Contemporary Europe* (London: Routledge, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 40-49.

¹⁰⁶ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930) (Wiltshire: Black Kite Publishing, 2020).

of the 'fascist' city), symbolically represented the tendency.

The fascist creed, therefore, clearly implies a type of society monocratic, where democracy, with its values of egalitarianism and pluralism of ideas and costumes, and with the overwhelming presence of capitalism as a socio-economic feature, was to be considered the enemy to fight. A society where neither the values of liberal democracy nor bolshevism would prevail. This myth of a 'perfect fascist society can be seen in the attempts made by the interwar fascist regime's social structure with the Italian Fascist 'corporatism' and the biological racist agenda of Nazi Germany. Post-war fascism, on the other hand, seems more oriented toward a metapolitical interpretation of society with a constant reference to the world of Tradition. This vision of a 'society of the Tradition' versus the effects of the modern liberal-capitalist society is a constant in Evola's post-war production.

The same nationalist aspect, which is maybe the most recognizable one, can be easily understood within this conceptual framework where, especially with Oswald Spengler's famous *The Decline of the West* (1918), whose call was to safeguard and preserve the Western civilization from what the German thinker perceived as an inevitable decline due to the advent of modernity. Call that we find in Freda's writings where he often refers to Spengler's work. Here again, it is necessary to analyze the differences between the interwar fascist movements and the post-war neo-fascist groups and organizations created after 1945 to better comprehend fascism in all its many permutations. Regarding nationalism, for instance, this seems to be a central feature of fascism, at least the most usable to attract the interest of the masses. Concepts like 'homeland' or the Nazi motto 'blood and soil' are elements that constitute the hallmarks of fascist doctrine, as we can detect in Mussolini's work *Dottrina del Fascismo* or Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. Nationalism, therefore, seems to be the distinctive feature of fascism; the zest for the nation seems central to fascism to the point of becoming a mythical element as, for instance, the myth of the nation's rebirth (palingenesis) from corruption and decadence like the phoenix rising from its ashes, as pointed out by Griffin in his work.¹⁰⁷ The objection that can be moved here to the Marxist interpretation of fascism as mainly class-based comes from the work of George L. Mosse, who first noticed the mass mobilization of fascism and its nationalization across social classes.¹⁰⁸ Mosse started a new historiographical approach to the study of fascism, followed by the study of Juan Linz and Stanley Payne, to cite a few.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, on this wave of alternatives to the Marxist interpretation, Roger Griffin has based his popular interpretative theory of fascism within the

¹⁰⁷ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 1991); Roger Griffin, *An Introduction to Comparative Fascist Studies* (Oxford- New York: Polity, 2018).

¹⁰⁸ George L. Mosse, 'The Genesis of Fascism', in *Journal of Contemporary History* 1/1, 1966, pp. 14-26.

¹⁰⁹ J.J. Linz, 'Some Notes Toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historiographical Perspective' in Walter Laqueur (ed.) *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 24-6; Stanley G. Payne, *A History of Fascism 1914-1945* (Madison WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

school of the New Consensus. Griffin's theory of the *ultra-national palingenetic myth* tends to supply a conclusive explanation of the nature of fascism, aimed at finally drawing the line on *fascism minimum*.¹¹⁰ The theory of generic fascism is undoubtedly a fascinating interpretation. It provides an interpretative model based on an original theoretical approach to understanding fascism rather than relying mainly on its historical or socio-economic aspects, as the Marxist approach has always indicated. Griffin has the merit of a brilliant intellectual intuition that contributes further to addressing the studies on fascism toward the new path already already undertaken by Mosse and a fascinating and not sterile approach to the understanding of the nature of fascism rather than simply considering fascism as a 'historical negativity' as the Marxist approach seems to see it.

Marco Tarchi, in his book *Fascismo*, attempts an analysis of the several theories of fascism, concluding that there is no conclusive and exhaustive explanation for it and that the quest for the 'fascist holy Graal' is still open.¹¹¹ The same collocation of fascism on the right of the political and ideological spectrum finds its critics. It was already Mussolini who, in the *Dottrina*, referred to fascism as a *Terza via* (third way) between liberal democracy and Marxism by defining fascism as a worthy alternative to these two ideologies.¹¹² The attempt to define fascism as an entirely different set of ideas, as a new way of perceiving not only politics but the whole life and reality, is therefore set from its very beginning in its metapolitical character and does not seem to address one specific social class as argued by Marxist interpretation.¹¹³ The academic discussion on whether to allocate fascism on the right or on the left results as well as an almost impossible task, which becomes even more impossible to achieve when analyzing some post-war neo-fascist realities, whereas the anti-capitalist element is central to the core doctrine¹¹⁴ as it will be explained in the following chapters of the thesis.

Freda has often been associated with the odd fascist permutation of the Nazi-Maoism

¹¹⁰ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

¹¹¹ Marco Tarchi, *Fascismo: Teorie, Interpretazioni e Modelli* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2003), p. 153.

¹¹² Benito Mussolini, 'La Dottrina del Fascismo' in *Enciclopedia Italiana di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti Treccani*, vol. XIV (Florence: Editrice Treccani), p. 849.

¹¹³ On this point, see Douglas Kellner, 'Critical Theory and the Critique of Fascism', in Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1984).

¹¹⁴ Maddalena Greta Cammelli, *Fascisti del Terzo Millennio. Per un'Antropologia di Casa Pound* (Verona: Ombre Corte Edizioni, 2015).

movement.¹¹⁵ Moreover, on several occasions, he liked to define himself as a Nazi-Maoist.¹¹⁶ This peculiar neo-fascist movement active in Italy at the beginning of the 1970s claimed, in fact, its admiration for Mao's China and Chinese communism with its strong anti-capitalism policies and the cult of the leader in the figure of Mao Zedong. The movement ceased to exist in 1973, with the arrest of the members and the dissolution of the radical right university movement *Lotta di Popolo* (People's struggle).¹¹⁷ The apparent ideological contradiction of the Nazi-Maoists can somehow illustrate the confusing times that Italy was living in that specific historical period of the *Anni di piombo* (years of lead), as Freda himself affirmed in an interview in 1977: 'the paradox of the Nazimaoism- not wholly false, but also not completely justified- is that allows [us] to split its fundamental elements, for the communists tend to stress the "Nazi" element in order to scare their comrades. The MSI neo-fascists tend to highlight the 'Maoist' aspects to intimidate the *camerati*'.¹¹⁸ In some far-right fringe groups, the anti-capitalist aspect resulted from a strongly perceived anti-Semitism and thus a product of an ideological short-circuit where capitalism was considered a product of modernity and where the latter was the result of Jewish culture.¹¹⁹ Linking modernity to capitalism and anti-Semitism generated in the Italian neo-fascism of the 1970s, an ideological hybrid like Nazi-Maoism. The Nazi-Maoists and the other neo-fascist movement called *Terza Posizione* (Third Position) of the same period, the 1970s, clearly illustrate the complexity of post-war fascism and its meta-political dimension that Freda incarnated so well with his 'aristocratic communitarism', which he borrowed not so much from the Marxist idea of common property, but rather from the German Conservative Revolution.¹²⁰

In addition, the 'communist' connotation of those radical fascist groups contradicts the Marxist view of fascism as the expression of the capitalist elites and the bourgeoisie. It is, then, the meta-political aspect of fascism that should be analyzed more attentively as it is this aspect to be linked once more to its religious and mystical dimension. The French historian, Zeev Sternhell, seems to consider fascism more a complex cultural phenomenon than a mere episode in the history of countries like Italy or Germany, as Marxist historiography indicates.¹²¹ Sternhell's analysis of

¹¹⁵ The movement's name came from the right-wing press close to the MSI. It is, in fact, dailies like *Il Secolo d'Italia*, *Il Tempo* and *Il Borghese* that dubbed this mixed student movement made of neo-fascists students members of *La Caravella* and *Lotta di Popolo* organizations, and some extra-parliamentary Marxist students disappointed by the 'bourgeois' political line adopted by the PCI, and active at the university of Rome. This unusual bonding of Marxist students with some neo-fascist students' university movements generated perplexities from both sides of the political and ideological spectrum. On this specific topic, see Giuseppe Bessarione, *Lambro/Hobbit. La Cultura Giovanile di Destra in Italia e in Europa* (Rome: Arcana Editrice, 1979).

¹¹⁶ Edoardo M. di Giovanni e Marco Ligini, *La Strage di Stato* (Rome: Salmonà and Savelli, 1970); Nicola Rao, *La Fiamma e la Celtica* (Milan: Sperling & Kaupfner Editori, 2006);

¹¹⁷ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy* (1997) (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁸ Franco G. Freda in Bessarione (cit. 1979), pp. 99-100.

¹¹⁹ Julius Evola

¹²⁰ Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (London-New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1996).

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fascism as a cultural phenomenon rather than a merely political one perfectly supports the meta-political dimension of its nature and accommodates the theoretical approach to its understanding. However, Sternehell's interpretation of fascism as a cultural phenomenon found many objectors when his theory first appeared.¹²² The interpretative hypothesis that fascism could result from a European cultural shift was questioning the consolidated Marxist approach, which tended to see fascism as the populist reaction of the low-middle classes and as the protective shield of the industrialist elites and religious authorities against the menace of bolshevism. Undoubtedly, the petite bourgeoisie and the former war veterans constituted the bulk of the original grass-roots of the fascist movement. However, to support Sternehell's argument, there was already an intellectually lively European cultural movement with the anti-Enlightenment Tradition as a reference.¹²³

Fascism, therefore, can also be seen as a reaction to the crisis of the nineteenth-century political and cultural Tradition that culminated in the decadence represented by the events of World War I. Within this perspective, fascism presented itself as a reaction to the 'old' world decadent and corrupted, paving the way for a new world, a new society, and a new man projecting into a future with its roots in the past as for Italian fascism, the constant reference to the Roman Empire, and leading thus, to political militancy as a spiritual and religious experience as fascist militants have more than in one occasion stressed rather than the expression of the middle classes in defence of capitalism.

4. Italian Fascism: Authoritarian or Totalitarian?

When analyzing Italian neo-fascism in the aftermath of World War II, it is possible to detect an opposition in the political organizations present on the territory at the war's end. Although the 1946 general amnesty for the former combatants and supporters of the Salò Republic was done in order to avoid a possible civil war, in the north of the country, the purges and the blind justice on Nazi-fascist collaborators continued locally at the hand of groups of partisans until well into 1948, which made the former fascist militants feeling 'exiled in their own homeland' as Tarchi defines the marginalized conditions of post-war fascists in one of the books.¹²⁴ If, on one side, the Italian historiography available of the fascist period has been instead a lucid and punctual analysis of

¹²² Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, Maia Ashèri, David Maisel, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Revolution to Political Rebellion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹²³ Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (New Haven CT-London: Yale University Press, 2010), (transl. David Maisel).

¹²⁴ Marco Tarchi, *Esuli in Patria: I Fascisti nell'Età Repubblicana* (Parma: Ugo Guanda Editore, 1995).

fascism and Mussolini's regime,¹²⁵ on the other, we also have historiography that is nostalgic of the fascist period with hints of revisionism, often glossing over its totalitarian nature, its ultra-nationalist populism and its anti-Semitism, or simply attempting to defend or a revival of the fascist authoritarianism, or a different and more indulgent view of fascism.¹²⁶ The increasing presence within the Italian academia, of historians or political scientists who have in the 1980s and 1990s been freer to provide a different reading of Mussolini's regime, has today generated the common imaginary that Mussolini's Fascism was not as harsh and repressive and totalitarian as instead Nazism in Germany, claiming the authoritarian nature of fascism rather than its totalitarian inclinations, and one its main ideological traits.¹²⁷

This was also the official party line of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement). This post-war neo-fascist party never admitted in public, and its official publications and documents the dictatorial nature of fascism, as we can read in an article published in the party newspaper *Il Secolo d'Italia*: '[fascism] became a dictatorship by force of circumstances, rather than through inclination'.¹²⁸ This conviction of the authoritarian character of fascist ideology rather than its totalitarian tendency reveals an ideological confusion among the neo-fascists of the MSI as they do not seem to acknowledge the inner totalitarian nature of their ideology of reference with its centrality of the State, the cult of the leader, and the rigid hierarchical structure of the society. Neither seems to consider the annihilation of any form of pluralism or individualism, which were all characteristics of Mussolini's regime. Domenico Fisichella, a prominent member of the post-fascist party *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance Party and ex MSI) and a well-established political scientist, supports the definition of fascism as an 'authoritarian regime of mobilization, but not totalitarian'.¹²⁹ This conviction of the authoritarian nature of fascism rather than its totalitarian character can be found in some historiography as illustrated, for instance, by Marco Tarchi, a well-known intellectual and academic leaning on the right, who in his book *Fascismo: Teorie, Interpretazioni e Modelli* [Fascism, Interpretations, Theories and Models] (2003) where states that 'The conviction that was developed during those twenty years was an authoritarian regime of classical type, and that although there were some elements of totalitarianism, those never fully developed during the Fascist *Ventennio*'.¹³⁰ The insisting by right-wing leaning intellectuals and by the Italian official neo/post-fascist party on the authoritarian nature of fascism rather than acknowledge its totalitarian traits must be read as an attempt of wishing to outdistance Fascism from National Socialism and also as an attempt to

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¹²⁶ Renzo De Felice, *Intervista sul Fascismo*

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¹²⁸ *Il Secolo d'Italia*, 14 December 1986 in Emilio Gentile, 'Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation', pp. 33-72, p.76 (note 39), Roger Griffin (ed.) *Fascism: Totalitarianism and Political Religion* (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), p.10.

¹²⁹ Domenico Fisichella, *Totalitarismo: Un Regime del Nostro Tempo* (Rome: Pagine, 2002).

¹³⁰ Marco Tarchi, *Fascismo: Teorie, Interpretazioni e Modelli* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2003), p. 130.

rationalize fascism's ideological core. Moreover, the Italian post-war historiography had seen the definitive sanctioning of the Fascism regime and fascist ideology with Renzo De Felice's extensive study of fascism, who re-stated its non-totalitarian nature.¹³¹ On this point, it is necessary to take into consideration the following conclusion that De Felice writes regarding the nature of fascism as reported by Marco Tarchi: 'The conviction that was developed during the *Ventennio* was a classic authoritarian regime, although in black shirt, strongly conditioned by its supporters, built on the compromise with the traditional social actors and institutions, whose most modern demagogic innovations are not sufficient to make it, although its aspirations, a proper totalitarian regime'.¹³²

The insisting on the authoritarian nature of fascism as distinctive from the totalitarian nature of Nazism has the double purpose of on one side to minimize the moral and historical responsibilities of the Fascist regime and ideology, especially regarding its racial policies and anti-Semitism. Moreover, to minimize the harsh repression of the masses proper of totalitarian regimes, this type of historiography did not recognize as a characteristic trait of fascism. However, more specifically, to safeguard the myth of *Italiani brava gente* (Italians good people), meaning that Italians by culture and traditions would never be able to deliver such evil and repressive ideology because of their inner 'good' nature. On the other hand, to overstress the authoritarian nature of fascism also meant to dismiss any interpretative analysis of the fascist phenomenon as a political religion and thus dismissed, as a consequence, its potential irrationality with all its cultic aspects and rituals as already discussed in the previous sub-section of this chapter.

On the right of the political spectrum, the perception and myth of fascism have resisted to time often proposed in its mythical light, saving it from the ugly expressions of Nazism. The perceived difference like Italian fascism as authoritarian rather than totalitarian is therefore maintained also to provide legitimacy to post-war neo and post-fascist parties as opposed to the emergence of the extreme right in the post-war period that instead claims a different and more radical nature of fascism often creating ideological hybrids or, overall novel and original interpretation of the ideology as we will explain better in the following sub-section.

5. The Quest for a New Ideological and Political Identity

In Italy, the perception of fascism has therefore assumed ambivalence in neo-fascist circles: on one side, we find legitimate political parties like the neo-fascist forerunner *Movimento Sociale*

¹³¹ Renzo De Felice, *Intervista sul Fascismo* (Bari-Rome: Laterza Editore, 1975).

¹³² Renzo De Felice, *Fascismo* (Milan: Luni, 1998), p.60 op.cit. in Marco Tarchi, *Fascismo: Teorie, Interpretazioni e Modelli* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 2003), p. 133.

Italiano-Destra Nazionale [Italian Social Movement-National Right] (1946-1995) MSI, the post-fascist and now defunct *Alleanza Nazionale* [National Alliance] (1995-2009) and the current *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy) (2012-), and on the other, the increasing popularity of extreme forms of fascism that found in Julius Evola et al. one of its best representative and reference points.¹³³ In 1946, the creation of an official and legitimate political party like the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Italian Social Movement) was intended so to include the neo-fascist party within a freely elected parliament and to be considered a good help against the several political and social battles that the centre-right party *Democrazia Cristiana-DC* (Christian Democracy) would then be engaged with the Italian Left in the following decades.

In the 1950s, fascism as a political faith was relegated to the nostalgic fringes of those Italians who had fought in Salò and were now tolerated but marginalized within the political framework of the young Italian democracy. Within this fringed milieu, we find the creation of 'cultural' organizations with a clear far-right and radical ideological agenda. For instance, groups like *Ordine Nuovo* [New Order], created by Pino Rauti, were meant to give the pulse of this new reality in post-fascist Italy, as the Italian scholars Roberto Chiarini and Ernesto Galli della Loggia have pointed out.¹³⁴ In Italy, the process of definition of the post-war new radical right derived on one side, from the weakness of the newly found democratic identity of the country, as Chiara Stellati seems to indicate;¹³⁵ Moreover, on the other, the ex-*salotini*, who were increasingly pushed to the margins of the society and of the political debate to the point of defining themselves, *resulted in Patria* (exiled in their homeland) as most efficiently Marco Tarchi's book title exemplifies.¹³⁶

Are the factors of marginalization, of feeling 'exiled at home, together with a 'blocked' party system typical of Italian politics since its unification, that Tarchi considers the main responsible for the further ideological extremism of the Italian neo-fascism, as well as for the uprising Marxist militancy active in the country. According to Tarchi, Italy has always had a static party system which alternated marginalization and cooperation with radical and extreme political realities.¹³⁷ Furthermore, Chiarini adds that the socio-political ground thus produced would always see an alternate between legitimacy and illegitimacy of the political parties according to their grade of radicalism and moderation.¹³⁸ The consequence of this marginalization will thus pave the way to a re-organization of the neo-fascist area with the creation of radical and clandestine movements with a revolutionary soul, the infiltration of other parties thus to influence their political orientation

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¹³⁴ Roberto Chiarini, *Destra Italiana* (Venice: Marsilio Editori, 1995), p.82; Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *La Morte della Patria* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1996), p. 28.

¹³⁵ Chiara Stellati, *Un'Ideologia dell'Origine: Franco Freda e la Controtendenza* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2002).

¹³⁶ Marco Tarchi, *Esuli in Patria: I Fascisti nell'Età Repubblicana* (Parma: Guanda Editore, 1995).

¹³⁷ Marco Tarchi (1995), p.28.

¹³⁸ Roberto Chiarini (1996), p. 78.

and the creation of a legitimate political party that would proudly vindicate the fascist legacy within the legitimacy of a democratic system.¹³⁹ Ferraresi also stresses how in the immediate aftermath of the war in Italy, there was a flourishing of clandestine extremist fascist groups covering a broad political and ideological spectrum: from those with clear, pragmatic political agenda to those with a mere demonstrative character, which revealed the complex heterogeneity of the post-war neo-fascist milieu as it will be better explained in chapter two.¹⁴⁰

However, one particular radical organization is worth mentioning among the few because it showed a clear political and ideological agenda, and that is the *Fasci Azione Rivoluzionaria* [Revolutionary Action Cells] FAR founded by Adriano Romualdi, but that did not survive the creation of the MSI for its radical visionary and utopian ideological message.¹⁴¹ The FAR seemed openly inspired and influenced by Julius Evola's teachings, who ended up in court to respond to some bomb attacks organized by the FAR between 1950 and 1951.¹⁴² Interesting to notice the coming back after the war of figures like Julius Evola as he would then become the 'Hidden Master' and thus would dominate the radical right circles ideological and political debate in the years of the strategy of tension with his spiritual approach to life and politics, and with his creating and preaching the illusion of belonging to an elite of superior hero-warriors.

Is this then the Italian post-war fascism? On one side, an official, domesticated version of post-war fascism with the creation of legitimate political parties; and on the other, the different interpretations of an idea of fascism that became increasingly less influenced by the Fascist regime and more inclined to undergo an extremization process that would include specific themes like identity, nation, race, honour, brotherhood often viewed through the lens of a theoretical approach and by adopting metapolitical and mystical categories for a mission or duty to accomplish. Looking at the development of fascism from this perspective, one cannot avoid considering also those aspects that have undoubtedly contributed to the transformation of the ideology in time with all its permutations and also consider the mysticism that thus derives in order to offer a complete heuristic analysis of the fascist phenomenon.

6. Neo-fascism in Italy Between Mussolini Nostalgia and Subversion

¹³⁹ Franco Ferraresi *Minacce alla Democrazia. La Destra Radicale e La Strategia della Tensione in Italia nel Dopoguerra* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1995).

¹⁴⁰ Ferraresi (1995), p.31.

¹⁴¹ Alessandro Streccioni, *A Destra della Destra. Dentro e Fuori il MSI, dal FAR a Terza Posizione* (Rome: Edizioni Settimo Sigillo, 2000), pp. 13-14; cf. Ferraresi, *Minacce alla Democrazia* (1995).

¹⁴² The FAR will be the first group to go on trial and then be dissolved by the Italian authorities as a consequence of the Legge Scelba (1952) on the illegitimacy and unconstitutional character of fascist ideology and fascist movements. See chapter 2 of the present work.

By the second half of the 1950s, in Italian neo-fascism, we see the progressive change in scenarios and actors. The previous decade had seen a re-settlement of the fascist survivors of the Italian authorities' purges, and those who decided to continue on the path of the fascist political Tradition were domesticated in a legitimate authoritarian political party, the MSI. However, from the second half of the 1950s onward, we see a new type of neo-fascism that claimed to revive the true revolutionary spirit of fascism and that dissociated itself from the domesticated version of fascism represented by the official party's lines: the initial *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* [New Order Studies Centre] (1956-1969, and the splinter group, the *Movimento Politico Ordine Nuovo* [New Order], 1969-1973), or *Avanguardia Nazionale* [National Avant-garde] (1960-1976) groups, to cite the historical and more known ones, were thus born. The birth of such radical fascist realities in post-fascist Italy might be explained from a socio-political point of view but also considering the evolution of the Italian fascism (interwar and post-war), always trapped between the compromise with the traditional and conservative forces of the territory and the most idealistic and spiritual aspects of fascism whose core concepts can be identified in the myths of the 'new man, the nation, the sacralization of politics through active militancy that does not exclude the use of violence.¹⁴³

It is interesting to notice how the most distinctive ideological traits of fascism can be seen re-proposed radicalized and in their meta-political version of those Italian neo-fascist organizations. The traditional political disengagement of those neo-fascist groups marked their further ideological extremism. In contrast, the ideological commitment resembled more the joining of a cult or religious sect rather than a political organization with a new myth, the myth of Europe. In neo-fascism, Europe became the core myth of an ultra-national palingenesis. To quote once more Griffin,¹⁴⁴ with a new sacralization of politics with its gurus in Julius Evola et al., its heroes in Drieu de La Rochelle, or some representatives of the German Conservative Revolution like Ernst Jünger or Arthur Moeller van den Bruck to cite the most popular ones.¹⁴⁵ An interesting data is that the grass-roots post-war neo-fascist groups in Italy as well as in France belonged at the time more than 74% to the middle classes, the military, the police forces and the aristocracy with little presence of manual workers, thus supporting the Marxist interpretation of fascism as a middle-class phenomenon.¹⁴⁶ In particular, the class element in supporting this type of neo-fascism seems to be determined for the Italian far-right milieu where the recruitment of members was done within the same social class group with attention to the recruitment of students in order to reach thus a high level of intellectual sophistication were the doctrines and teaching of Julius Evola played a significant role as one of the members of this associations once affirmed: 'Our work since 1953,

¹⁴³ Emilio Gentile, *Le Origini dell'Ideologia Fascista* (Rome and Bari: Laterza, 1975).

¹⁴⁴ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London-New York: Routledge, 1991).

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¹⁴⁶ Dogan Mattei, 'Political Cleavage and Social Stratification in France and Italy' in *Party System and Voter Alignments*, Seymour Lipset and Stein Rokkan (eds.) (New York: Free Press, 1967), 159.

has been to transpose Evola's teachings into direct political action.¹⁴⁷ Quoting again, although indirectly, the Gentilean motto '*Pensiero come azione*' [thought as action] was adopted by Mussolini's regime.

In the analysis of the Italian extreme right provided by the Italian scholar Franco Ferraresi also looking at Evola's influence during the fascism, emerges a description of a regime more authoritarian than totalitarian and more attentive to creating a solid and fruitful relationship with the conservative and clerical forces of the country rather than unleashing the full totalitarian potential of the fascist doctrine. In this case, Ferraresi seems to support the interpretations of fascism as those given by De Felice, Fisichella or Tarchi, that did not see the 'political, religious aspect of fascism unlike instead, unlike Emilio Gentile and the others. Ferraresi observes how the totalitarian nature of fascist ideology became more manifest only after the formal fall of the Fascist regime in 1943. The Republic of Salò (1943-1945) was revealed to be much more repressive and totalitarian than the Fascist regime of the *Ventennio*. Furthermore, the far right that emerged after the war also manifested the totalitarian character of the fascist ideology fully. The urban legend reported by Ferraresi of Julius Evola was tolerated as an eccentric character. However, it is marginalized within the Fascist circles, contributing indirectly to dismissing further the totalitarian character of fascism and its sacralization as ideology, thus affecting its real ideological potential.¹⁴⁸

Instead, academics like Piero di Vona considered the relevance of characters like Evola for a re-definition of the inner metaphysical meaning of fascism. Di Vona is one of the most popular and accredited scholars of Julius Evola's thought and has often attempted to clarify the importance of the philosopher for the intellectual development of fascist ideology, especially concerning neo-fascism.¹⁴⁹ Evola's thought can be considered the most anti-egalitarian, anti-democratic and anti-liberal. His doctrine is a blend of German Idealism, Oriental doctrines, Traditionalism and racism within the view of the German *Konservative Revolution*. Evola's view of history is regressive rather than progressive, his refusal of modernity considered an element of corruption of the human being and finally, his urge for a renewed sacralization of politics can be well fitted in the view of fascism as a sacred doctrine as was perceived, preached and actively proposed by the Italian far-right groups from the 1950s onward.¹⁵⁰ Within this new *Weltanschauung*, fascism acquires its sacrality that possibly had to be compromised during the *Ventennio*. In post-war neo-fascism, what comes to life is the true essence of fascism, its sacred nature, its metaphysical character, and

¹⁴⁷ Clemente Graziani, *Processo a Ordine Nuovo, Processo alle Idee* (Rome: Edizioni di ON, 1973), p. 27-30.

¹⁴⁸ Franco Ferraresi, 'The Radical Right in Post-War Italy' in Stein U. Larson and Bernt Hagtvet (eds.), *Modern Europe After Fascism 1943-the the 1980s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), vol 1. p. 598

¹⁴⁹ Piero di Vona, *Evola e Guénon: Tradizione e Civiltà* (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985).

¹⁵⁰ Julius Evola, *Il Cammino del Cinabro* (Milan: Scheiwiller, 1961).

therefore, its metapolitical and mystical essence as already preached by Arnaldo Mussolini e Niccoló Giani as previously mentioned in this chapter.

The Evolian emphasis on the sacrality of the State, represented by an elite intellectually aristocratic and spiritual elite, is another element that tends to point to the direction of fascism as political religion and its utopian and metapolitical dimension of it. The refusal of modernity and the longing for a 'futuristic past' of an idealized Europe and an idealized notion of the State were all elements that contributed to shaping the fascist ideology in the post-war period. Therefore, the contemporary radical right's ideological core is mythical and metapolitical, as in the search for an idealized 'homeland' that is increasingly losing the contours of the national borders and is becoming more of the sacred, mythical land of a non-better specified mythical populace. The Italian far-right of post-war Italy, therefore, became grounded based on Evolian thought and interpreted his works as well as the works of other intellectual and political figures of reference into a novel 'ideology of the origins' that ended in a political militancy characterized by the use of violence and terrorism as it will be discussed in the following chapter where the historical background of the 'strategy of tension' Italy is being illustrated and explained.

Conclusion

The present chapter has attempted an overview of the main interpretations, models and approaches to studying fascism and its different aspects. What has emerged is that fascism as an ideology is somewhat complex and multi-faced. Since its first appearance, it has interested scholars, intellectuals and academics who have attempted to penetrate its inner core to understand better its political manifestations and actions in real life. The debate around the nature of fascism is not concluded yet, and the question of what fascism ultimately is still open. This chapter did not mean to provide an ultimate answer but attempted an overview of the different and several heuristic and interpretative approaches undertaken by academia to assess the nature of fascism in order to introduce the reader to the core hypothesis of this research work, namely, the mystical and meta-political nature of a specific interpretation of fascist core concepts that found its expression in the use of terrorism and political violence in the Italian strategy of tension period. Understanding fascism from this angle would help enormously in the analysis of neo-fascist terrorism and in understanding one of the most relevant Italian neo-fascist intellectuals and a terrorist like Franco Giorgio Freda allegedly responsible with his associate Giovanni Ventura, of one of the most dramatic episodes in the post-war Italian history as it will better be discussed in the following chapters.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Franco G. Freda and Giovanni Ventura were part of the plotting of the Piazza Fontana bombing on 12 December 1969.

To acknowledge fascism as a theoretical or even a philosophical backbone as Giovanni Gentile attempted to do in the 1930s, might help in avoiding some fallacies committed by the Marxist interpretation of fascism, which considered fascism as merely the product of the petite bourgeoisie to protect its interests and social status from a possible Bolshevik menace. The Marxist approach to the interpretation of fascism as an irrational product of specific social classes' interests and an enormous mistake in humankind's history risks minimizing the impact and ideological relevance that fascism has proven to have. However, also the risk of overlooking the dangers that, in its many permutations, this ideology could still bring with it. To acknowledge fascism in its cultural aspects, and see it as a revolutionary mass movement, could be a fruitful approach to better understanding the fascist phenomenon and its impact on our modern democracies. The consideration of fascism as political religion can help to understand better its inner core and dangerous appeal to the people. It can help to better comprehend its most radical and lethal expressions, for instance, far-right terrorism and its most virulent forms of ultra-nationalism and racism. The spiritual dimension often dismissed by scholars should instead be considered when analysing fascism, especially in its radical permutations. The present work aims to continue in the path of this interpretative approach as it fits better the task of explaining, analysing and illustrating how fascist mysticism can provide a helpful intellectual and theoretical framework for political violence and terrorism as the case study of Franco G. Freda demonstrates.

CHAPTER TWO

The Role of Neo-Fascist Terrorism in Post-War Italy between Metapolitics and Metaphysics of War (1960s-1980s)

*Pulvis et umbra Sumus*¹⁵²

Introduction

The quotation of the verse of the Latin poet Horace chosen as incipit of the chapter intends to denounce the obscurity of this period of post-war Italian history with its evanescent and elusive glares of an out of reach political truth, and shady characters as its main protagonists. The present chapter will attempt to explain and analyse the social and political factors within a historical perspective when looking at the explosion of neo-fascist terrorism and political violence in Italy in a period that historians usually collocate between the end of the 1960s and the mid of the 1980s dubbed as 'years of lead' with its 'strategy of tension' tactics.¹⁵³ Fourfold factors we need to take into consideration for a better understanding of the rise of radical right terrorism in post 1945 Italy. Those aspects contributed to the socio-political meltdown that the country experienced at the time,

¹⁵² Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, Michele Lowrie (ed.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), V, p.7.

¹⁵³ The period of time that covers the 'years of lead' and the 'strategy of tension' is not perfectly defined. Usually, it is dated between the end of the 1960s and the middle of the 1980s. Although the years of beginning and ending may vary according to the political orientations of the historians. On this point see: Indro Montanelli, 'Avvertenza', *L'Italia degli Anni di Piombo* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1991).

and that brought social and political unrest in a nation that had just managed to rebuild its foundations from the debris of the previous Fascist regime and from the disastrous effects of the war. The first factor to consider is the fascist legacy and the resistance lore that derived from the Nazi occupation during the war period, especially in the north of the country with the presence on the territory of the *Repubblica Sociale di Saló* (Social Republic of Saló), a Nazi-fascist regime created after the 8th September 1943. A question that we should ask is to what extent we should consider relevant the heavy legacy of the fascist regime and the resistance in the newly democratic-built 'First Republic' established in 1946? Undoubtedly, the legacy of the *Ventennio* was still quite strong in the first two decades of post-war Italy. In our view, this was due to several elements like the lack of a consistent and serious process of 'de-fascistation' of the national territory. The second factor to consider is the social and political tension crucial in explaining the explosion of violence that lasted almost three decades (late 1960s- mid 1980s). The Italian society of the 'strategy of tension' was politically dominated by a centre-right government party, the DC: *Democrazia Cristiana* [Christian Democracy] but with the presence on the political scene of a large communist party like the PCI: *Partito Comunista Italiano* [Italian Communist Party], and the PSI: *Partito Socialista Italiano* [Italian Socialist Party], and with the neo-fascists represented by the MSI-DN: *Movimento Sociale Italiano Destra Nazionale* [Italian Social Movement National Right]¹⁵⁴ which was kept at the margins of the political debate but still quite strong in the capital city of Rome and in the south of the country.¹⁵⁵ In matter of extra-parliamentary movements and groups, we see in the same years, an increasing radicalization of ideologically oriented militants among the younger generation of Italians.¹⁵⁶ The third factor to consider is strictly speaking geopolitical and within the historical framework of the cold war. The fear shared both by the Italian centre-right government party, the DC, and the powerful American ally, of a possible coalition government with the PCI, or worse, a PCI's electoral victory, was what worried the American ally most.¹⁵⁷ Finally, the ideological factor needs also to be taken into consideration. The 1960s cultural and political turmoil in Italy and abroad, created numerous groups, logos and organisations which claimed each to act in the interest of the national community, the proletariat, or the social group of reference according to their ideological creed and mission.¹⁵⁸ They were often the result of a radicalization process¹⁵⁹ that was happening in the universities halls as well as in the factories social clubs, or private hubs and associations. When looking at the involvement of the Italian far right into the social and political unrest that characterised the almost twenty years

¹⁵⁴ The party added 'Destra Nazionale' (National Right) in 1972.

¹⁵⁵ Piero Ignazi, *Postfascisti? Dal Movimento Sociale Italiano and Alleanza Nazionale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994).

¹⁵⁶ Piero Ignazi, *Il Polo Escluso: Profilo del Movimento Sociale Italiano* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989).

¹⁵⁷ Christopher Duggan and Christopher Wagstaff, *Politics, Culture and Society: 1948-1958* (Oxford: Berg, 1995).

¹⁵⁸ Giorgio Galli, *Storia del Partito Armato 1968-1986* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1989).

¹⁵⁹ On the process of radicalization see: Donatella Della Porta, 'Radicalization: A Relational Perspective', *Annual Review of Political Science*, Vol. 21, pp. 461-474 (May 2018).

of terrorist activities in Italy, what gains the attention of the observer is the complicity and even the collusion between those extreme right groups and some segments of the Italian army, the judiciary, and the political class of the time.¹⁶⁰ The theories and explanations given for such collusions have been multiple through time and often fed the collective imagination with appealing and yet dangerously misleading versions of the truth. Nowadays access to the archives and to the declassified documents related to events that characterized the years of lead and the strategy of tension can shed the light on a historical period protected for many years by the official ‘secret of state’.¹⁶¹ In this chapter, most of the primary sources analysed and used to support the chapter’s narrative and arguments are taken directly from the declassified archives material available and from the literature of the time on those events, looking at news reels, newspapers articles, interviews, books and testimonies of the period under examination.

The element of secrecy indeed characterised the period drama in which the Italian neo-fascist terrorism was shrouded in with its secrets, shady and yet charismatic characters, secret societies and protections from a non-better identified ‘above’. Half-truths, unsolved assassinations and the involvement of powerful and influential external agents seem to have defined the contours of the Italian terrorism of those years.¹⁶² All those mysteries contributed to give to the topic a conspiratorial aura that is difficult to dismiss when attempting to discuss the argument within the parameters of a rigorous historical investigation and in a rational manner. Central to an historical investigation of the period seems to be the geopolitical framework of post 1945 world. The mostly accepted *vulgata* even today is that the Italian far-right underworld was manipulated and acted often with the tacit assent and logistic support of some of the high ranks of the Italian authorities and with the complicity of segments of the Italian intelligence and the American CIA likewise so to facilitate a possible coup d’etat at the hands of the neo-fascists and thus secure the country to an authoritarian but allied government within the framework of the Cold War strategy against the Soviet Union.¹⁶³

The idea was to re-establish an authoritarian regime in the country on the example of other

¹⁶⁰ Luciano Lanza, *Bombe e Segreti. Piazza Fontana: Una Strage Senza Colpevoli* (Milan: Elèuthera Editrice, 2005); Adalberto Baldoni and Sandro Provvionato, *Anni di Piombo. Sinistra, Destra: Estremismi, Lotta Armata e Menzogne di Stato dal 1968 and oggi* (Milan: Sperling Kupfer 2009); Fulvio Bellini and Gianfranco Bellini, *Il Segreto della Repubblica. La Verità Politica sulla Strage di Piazza Fontana* (Rimini: Selene Editore, 2005); Giorgio Bocca, *Il Filo Nero* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 1995); Giorgio Bocca, *Gli Anni del Terrorismo* (Rome: Armando Curcio Editore, 1988); Marco Dondi, *L’Eco del Boato: Storia della Strategia della Tensione 1965-1974* (Bari-Rome: Laterza Editore, 2015); Giovanni Fasanella, Claudio Sestieri, Giovanni Pellegrino, *Il Segreto di Stato* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2000).

¹⁶¹ Giovanni Fasanella, Giovanni Pellegrino, Claudio Sestieri, *Segreto di Stato. Verità e Conciliazione* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer, 2008).

¹⁶² Commissione Parlamentare-Senato della Repubblica, *Commissione Parlamentare d’Inchiesta sul Terrorismo e sulla Mancata Individuazione delle Stragi*, X Legislatura, Vol. 1, 1990-1991 (Archivi di Stato, Rome).

¹⁶³ Corte Suprema di Cassazione Sezione Penale I, *Processo Catanzaro, Sentenza No. 1209*, 1982 (Archivi di Stato, Rome).

European right-wing autocracies of the time like Franco's Spain (1939-1975), Salazar's Portugal (1932-1968) or the Colonels' military junta in Greece (1967-1974), which would have secured a strong control of the territory and protected western Europe against the menace of communism. Whether this constitutes a credible geopolitical and ideological framework to explain Italian neo-fascist terrorism, this is an aspect of the question that will be assessed in a subsection of the chapter dedicated to this specific aspect. However, to limit the discourse to solely the cold war to explain the reasons of the neo-fascist terrorism for fear of an upcoming Italian communist government, is not sufficient for its full understanding. Another aspect that we need to explain and clarify is the ideological morphology¹⁶⁴ of the Italian far right of this period. Its meta-political aspect and its new view of fascism as an ideology did not seem to retain any longer the characteristics of the interwar 'classical fascism', but had instead assumed other intellectual and theoretical tenets, and saw in authors like Evola, van den Moheler, Drieu de la Rochelle and others, its new ideological fathers. The 'call to the arms' to which the Italian far-right galaxy felt ready to respond to was in fact based on a different and novel understanding of the term 'fascism' which after the war, acquired new ideological meanings and political identities.

In this new type of fascism is evident how the mythical core of the original ideology had assumed a different political physiognomics with a renewed ideological mysticism that found in organizations like Pino Rauti's *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* [Centre of Studies New Order] (1956-1968), or Stefano delle Chiaie's *Avanguardia Nazionale* [National Avantguard] (1960-1976), a fertile ground for the breeding of a new 'ideal type' of fascist activist like Franco Giorgio Freda, one of the alleged authors of the Piazza Fontana attack that seems to embody the perfect representative of 'universal Nazism'¹⁶⁵ with his conviction of being a 'political soldier' and with the intellectual strive for authors like Julius Evola, or fascination for the German Conservative Revolution, and its ideology'.¹⁶⁶ The underground of the far-right was therefore, a ready-to act movement of new 'political soldiers' like Freda, Stefano Delle Chiaie, Franco Moggi, Claudio Mutti and others alongside the 'old guard' like Pino Rauti and Adriano Romualdi, and all those former *salotini* (comrades of the Salò Republic) disappointed by the domesticated version of fascism that they envisaged in the official neo-fascist party, the MSI-DN.¹⁶⁷ All seemed to be searching for a new ideological identity of fascism, where the metaphysics of violence taught by Evola,¹⁶⁸ their meta-political commitment and a perception of the ideology as their prime religious

¹⁶⁴ Michael Freeden, 'The Morphological Analysis of Ideology' in Michael Freeden and Marc Stears, *Oxford Handbook of Political Ideologies* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

¹⁶⁵ Roger Griffin, 'Interregnum or Endgame? Radical Right Thought in "Post Fascist" Era', *The Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 5., no.2, July 2000, pp.163-78, (p. 8).

¹⁶⁶ Francesco Ingravalle, 'La Controtendenza: Teologia Politica', Renato Del Ponte (ed.), *Julius Evola, I Testi di Ordine Nuovo* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001), pp.1-12, (p.1).

¹⁶⁷ Julius Evola, 'Lettera ad Almirante', Renato Del Ponte (ed.), *Julius Evola, I Testi di Ordine Nuovo* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001), XII, pp. 127-131.

¹⁶⁸ Julius Evola, *Metafisica della Guerra*, Renato Melchionda (ed.) (1935-1950) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

faith converged into their apoliteic mission.

The present chapter on Italian far-right terrorism of the decades 1960s-1980s therefore, has the aim to unfold and explore all the different layers of an indeed very complex period in the post-war Italian history that still shows aspects not yet fully clarified and that is prone to different interpretative keys. The chapter has been structured as follows: in the first subsection, we will discuss the socio-political tensions of the decades 1960s -1980s and assess the notion of ‘un-orthodox war’, an expression often used by segments of the political class and army alike within the context of the cold war period, and referred to alternative ways of fighting including terrorism.¹⁶⁹ The second sub-section will focus on the role of Italian neo-fascism between stragism and failed *coup d’etat* with an analysis of their actual relevance in the volatile and complex political climate of the time. In the third sub-section, we will explain the far- right’s zest for a metaphysics of violence and their metapolitical *Weltanschauung* within the context of the strategy of tension. The fourth sub-section will analyse the role of the Italian secret services in the strategy of tension and its collusion and meddling into the underground world of subversion. Finally, the conclusion will provide an evaluative summary of the chapter’s analysed.

1. The ‘Un-Orthodox war’ in Italy Within the Context of the Cold War

The socio-political climate of the late 1960s Italy is often considered by historians and political scientists as the breeding ground of the following decades of political violence. The country was experiencing a social and economic boost due to the centre-right social and economic reforms with the support of foreign investors into the nascent phase that the Italian trade and industry were experiencing.¹⁷⁰ The consequent social changes with an internal mass migration from the under-developed south to the industrialised and dynamic north, had altered the otherwise rather stagnant social infrastructure with an overwhelming influence of the authority of the Church, which had in the centre-right government party, the DC, its political correspondent responsible for maintaining the solid principles of Catholicism within the frame of bourgeois secularism.¹⁷¹ In this sense, the Italian society that emerged after the war and in the immediate decades afterwards, while

¹⁶⁹ Processo Catanzaro, pp. 60-65.

¹⁷⁰ Camilla Cederna, *Nostra Italia del Miracolo* (Milan: Longanesi Editore, 1980); Andrea Leonardi and Alberto Cova, *Il Novecento Economico Italiano dalla Grande Guerra al Miracolo Economico* (Milan: Monduzzi Editore, 1997); Valerio Castronovo, *1960: Il Miracolo Economico* (Bari-Rome: Laterza Editrice, 2012); Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy: Society and Politics: 1943-1980* (London: Penguins Paperbacks, 1990).

¹⁷¹ Pietro Ignazi, ‘Territory, Religion, and Vote: Nationalization of Politics and the Catholic Party in Italy’, *Italian Political Science Review* (Rivista Italiana di Scienza Politica), No. 15, (March 2017), pp. 99-141; Luca Diotallevi, ‘The Territorial Articulation of Secularization in Italy: Social Modernization, Religious Modernization’, *Archives de Sciences Sociales des Religions*, No.107, (1999), pp. 72-108; Franco Garelli, *Religione all’Italiana* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011).

witnessing the country's reconstruction, seemed also to be crossed by social contradictions and changes that would eventually cause a volatile climate with the precipitation of politics into the polarization of the political discourse and with forms of extremism and violence as a consequence.¹⁷²

After 8 September 1943, there was the constitution of the RSI or the *Repubblica Sociale di Saló* [Social Republic of Saló], a territory between the Alps and the Lazio region under the Nazi-fascist jurisdiction. The creation of the RSI was a response to the general Pietro Badoglio at the head of the internal coup that saw Mussolini officially deposed as the *Duce* by the 'Grand Council of Fascism' (*Gran Consiglio Fascista*).¹⁷³ The RSI intended to be a truly fascist regime where the original fascist values and principles could be finally established without the mediation of the Italian monarchy and the Church, the latter institutions responsible in the eyes of the die-hard fascists for soothing the true character of fascist ideology during the dictatorship of the *Ventennio*.¹⁷⁴ The creation of the RSI brought to a heavy persecution and deportation of the Jewish minority and a harsh repression of the local population at the hands of the notorious para-military squad XMAS aiding the Nazi troops also present on the territory. The XMAS division was led by the prince Junio Valerio Borghese, later involved in the 1970 coup d'état attempt as we will see later in the chapter. The RSI's repressive occupation of the territory generated a counter-reaction with the creation of several groups of partisans belonging to different parochial stands. Within this resistance network, the 'white partisans' (resistance organizations of Christian denomination) were the ones more actively involved on the oriental front at the border with Yugoslavia against a possible communist invasion of the Tito's troops which was feared by the Allies, especially in regard to the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia border region.¹⁷⁵ But can the cold war context be enough to explain the strategy of tension, the years of lead, and neo-fascist, anarchist and Marxist terrorism? The main line of academic inquiry on this topic seems to agree on the cold war as the main thruster of the Italian ideological terrorism, ideologically right or left.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Richard Drake, 'Italy in the 1960s: A Legacy of Terrorism and Liberation', *South Central Review*, Vol. 16/17, Vol.16, No. 4 (Winter 1999-Spring 2000), pp. 62-75; Ignacio Sánchez-Cuenca, *The Historical Roots of Political Violence. Revolutionary Terrorism in Affluent Countries* (Cambridge-New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁷³ Marco Liberati, *La Repubblica di Saló* (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Roma, 1952); Ricciotti G. Lazzero, *Il Sacco d'Italia: Razzie e Stragi nella Repubblica di Saló* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 1989).

¹⁷⁴ Renzo De Felice, *Breve Storia del Fascismo* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 2002).

¹⁷⁵ Roberto Fornasier, 'The DC and the PCI in the Seventies: A Complex Relationship Supervised by the United States', *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, Vol. 4, No.2, (2012), pp. 209-229; Rosario Forlenza, 'The Enemy Within: Catholic Anti-Communism in Cold War Italy', *Past and Present*, Vol. 235, Issue 1 (May 2017), pp. 207-242.

¹⁷⁶ Kaeten Mistry, *The United States, Italy and the Origins of the Cold War, Waging Political Warfare 1945-1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Aldo Giannuli, *La Strategia della Tensione. Servizi Segreti, Partiti, Golpe Falliti, Terrore Fascista, Politica Internazionale: Un Bilancio* (Florence: Ponte delle Grazie Editore, 2018); Richard N. Gardener, *Mission Italy: On the Front Lines of the Cold War* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Valentino Lomellini (ed.), *Il Mondo della Guerra Fredda e l'Italia degli Anni di Piombo. Una Regia Internazionale per il Terrorismo?* (Milan: Mondadori Editore, 2017);

In the present chapter, we will analyse the social and political coordinates of neo-fascist terrorism and its breeding grounds in an attempt to demonstrate to what extent fascist mysticism and its metapolitical approach to the historical contingency of the time could be considered major aspects of far-right political violence and militancy as the works and the deeds of Franco Freda testify. The cold war context then, becomes an interesting element to consider when looking at the position of Italy within the geopolitical asset of post 1945 world politics. The country had at the time, the largest communist party in western Europe, the PCI, with a secretary, Palmiro Togliatti, already victim of an assassination attempt on the eve of the general election of 1948, and who had signed in 1946 the amnesty for the former *salotini* (ex members of the Republic of Salò) who had thus been able in the same year to found their own party, the MSI.¹⁷⁷ The presence of a large and quite popular Communist Party in a western liberal democracy holding an important strategic geographical position within Europe was a disturbing factor for the American ally. There was therefore the need to contain the ‘red menace’ of communism both inside and outside the Italian borders.¹⁷⁸ The American ally had already started during the last phase of the war (1943-1945) to support some ‘white partisans’ groups. This strategy continued to be implemented by the US in Italy even after the end of the war initially with the specific intent of monitoring and protecting the oriental border of the Friuli Venezia-Giulia region from a possible communist invasion from Yugoslavia through the border city of Trieste. In 1945, US military officials had in fact contacted some non-communist resistance groups in order to organise a common military strategy in this sense. Such partisan organizations were made of mainly monarchists, liberals and Catholics.¹⁷⁹ The most relevant of all was the *Brigata Osoppo-Friuli* [Osoppo-Friuli Brigade] that was then soon dissolved for their refusal to incorporate other communist or pro-Tito partisan groups. The ‘Osoppo Brigade’, as was then better known, lost many of its members as a consequence of such refusal, and renamed itself simply ‘O’, incorporating some members from the *Brigata Venezia-Giulia* (Venetia-Julia Brigade). The ‘O’ group remained active at the border with Yugoslavia between 1946 and 1950.¹⁸⁰

Paramilitary organisations were present on the territory (mainly monarchists and Catholics) in the transitional period between the official end of Fascism and the two first years between 1946 and 1948 of the First Republic (1946-1994). In this regard, it is worth to mention a Catholic paramilitary organisation aligned with such political strategy. The organization’s acronym is MACI: *Movimento Avanguardia Cattolica Italiana* [Italia Catholic Avantguard Movement] ready

Tobias Hof, ‘From Extremism to Terrorism: The Radicalization of the Far-Right in Italy and West Germany’, *Contemporary European History*, Vol. 27, Issue 3 (Aug.2018), pp. 412-431.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., Piero Ignazi, (1996).

¹⁷⁸ Emanuele Bettini, *Gladia-La Repubblica Parallela* (Rome: Ediesse Edizioni, 1996).

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), p. 30.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), p. 32.

to pick up the arms against a possible victory of the communist party, the PCI, in the volatile climate that surrounded the general election of 1948.¹⁸¹ This group received also the blessing of the cardinal of Milan, Carlo Maria Montini (later Pope Paul VI) for such readiness to take the arms.¹⁸² In those years the activities of former partisan organizations were intertwined with the activities of anti-communist groups like MACI. The general outlook seems to tell us of the presence of a network made of monarchists, Catholics, all of them 'white partisans' to which soon were joining former *salotini* often with the blessing of the American and Italian intelligence in an attempt to prevent the country to fall in communists' hands.¹⁸³ At this stage, it is important to mention that in the 1950s, the US considered Italy an important pawn on the geopolitical chess board and a crucial ally in their efforts to reinforce the anti-Soviet bloc in Europe.¹⁸⁴ The war on communism became therefore the principal objective of the American Department of State's foreign politics in Italy.¹⁸⁵ The preoccupation that in Italy the PCI could eventually take over winning a general election, led the American ally to create an 'Office of Policy Coordination' with the purpose of undertaking political operations, propaganda and paramilitary cover operations.¹⁸⁶

The creation of the secret paramilitary organisation *Gladio* can thus be better understood within this new geopolitical asset that the cold war had generated. This organisation, has been officially active until 1990, when a large-scale investigation on the strategy of tension and terrorism eventually took place.¹⁸⁷ In the period between 1994 and 1995, many state archives became accessible to the public and many of the documents were de-classified. This is when the existence of *Gladio* became known to the general public. *Gladio*, like many other similar underground organisations of the same period, was part of the American strategy named 'stay-behind'. This strategy consisted of creating secret paramilitary organizations in allied countries made by civilians volunteering and ready to take action in case of Soviet invasion.¹⁸⁸ In Italy *Gladio* intertwined with elements of the subversive extreme right and with segments of the Italian intelligence, the latter protected by the 'secret of the state' and thus, virtually acting and moving independently from any state institution. The whole operation 'stay-behind' with its organisations like *Gladio*, progressively started to change objective from invigilating on a possible invasion of the territory by an external enemy, to observe and report on the 'internal' enemy, i.e., all those Italian citizens who had expressed or showed some communist ideas and/or had been openly

¹⁸¹ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), pp, 33.

¹⁸² Ibid. Bettini, (1996), pp. 33-34.

¹⁸³ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), p. 35.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), p. 33.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), p. 33.

¹⁸⁶ Bettini, (1996), p.38; cfr. Paolo Inzerilli, *Gladio-La Verità Negata* (Bologna: Edizioni Analisi,1995); cfr. Daniel Gasner, *NATO's Secret Armies-Operation Gladio and Terrorism in Western Europe* (London-New York: Cass Publishers, 2005).

¹⁸⁷ Commissione Parlamentare (1990-1991).

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. Commissione Parlamentare (1990-1991).

critical of the Italian authorities and of the NATO's and of the US' foreign politics of the time.¹⁸⁹ This 'un-orthodox war' fought behind the lines and secretly involving all those agents that would share the same intents brought also on the scene some representatives of the Italian neo-fascist underworld.¹⁹⁰

In 1994-1995, folders found in the Italian state archives revealed the existence of documents that testify the links between the neo-fascist paramilitary organisation XMAS of the prince Junio Valerio Borghese and *Gladio*.¹⁹¹ The documents also hinted to another aspect of the organization, for *Gladio* showed also to hold an anti-Atlantism position, which appeared in contradiction with its 'stay-behind' purpose and support of the US's anti-communist strategy. This was the same type of anti-Atlantism that was shared by many extreme right organisations at the time.¹⁹² 'Atlantism' was a term coined at the time to indicate the often openly supportive politics undertaken by countries like Italy toward the United States' foreign politics within the cold war contest.¹⁹³ The anti-Atlantism strategy used often underground groups to monitor the political and social climate of the country. Within this context, the main purpose of *Gladio* in the decades 1960s and 1970s, was that of infiltrating the civil society with agents carefully chosen who would camouflage and meddle themselves having an everyday activity or job to pass thus un-observed and carry out the tasks of reporting on any suspicious and anti-State activity in a perfect espionage style.¹⁹⁴ At this stage, the objective therefore was not so much to reject the external threat of invasive communist forces from outside, but rather, to defeat the internal enemy identified with specific ideological and political claims and within the parameters of an underground parallel war fought with all means available. This type of 'un-orthodox' war meant also what the colonel Renzo Rocca defined as 'extra-institutional war',¹⁹⁵ a claim made also by many several right-wing terrorist organisations present on the territory.¹⁹⁶

One of the guerrilla warfare technique often used in this un-conventional war was that of the so

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. Commissione Parlamentare (1990-1991).

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. Commissione Parlamentare (1990-1991).

¹⁹¹ AttiParlamentoItaliano<https://www.leg13.camera.it/_dati/leg13/lavori/doc/xxiii/064v01t04_RS/0000014.pdf

¹⁹² By 'Anti-Atlantism is intended a specific political and ideological position common in the Italy of the 1950s-1970s whereas it was objected the political and economic hegemony of the United States in world politics. On this point see: VitoFranco Pisano, *Italia e Stati Uniti. Terrorismo e Disinformazione* (Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2016).

¹⁹³ Matilde Ateneo, *Neo-Atlantismo e 'Apertura a Sinistra' nei Reports del Foreign Office 1953-1962* (Reggio Calabria: Città Del Sol Edizioni, 2015).

¹⁹⁴ Aldo Bertucci, *Guerra Segreta Dietro le Linee* (Turin: Mursia Editore, 1995).

¹⁹⁵ Giovanni Tamburino, 'La "Rosa dei Venti" nel Quadro dell' "Eversione Stabilizzante" ', *International Conference 'La Rete Eversiva di Estrema Destra in Italia e Europa (1964-1980)*, Padua, 11-12 Nov.2016, <https://www.memoria.san.beniculturali.it/c/documenti_library/get_file?uuid=bb9b106d-cla6-4831-b727-c9ac422505d0&group11601, p.5, (last accessed: 20/10/2018). Tamburino's paper is also cited in Carlo Fumian and Angelo Ventrone (eds.), *Terrorismo di Destra e Sinistra in Italia e in Europa* (Padua: Padua University Press, 2018), p.194.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. Tamburino, (2016), p.6.

called ‘false flag’, meaning the strategy of blaming the adversary by attributing them the authorship of any criminal or subversive act by spreading false clues and by building fake lines of enquiry.¹⁹⁷ On this aspect, we can mention as an example the failed attempt of a train bombing made by the neo-fascist extreme group *La Fenice* (The Phoenix) on 7th April 1973. On this occasion, one of the group members, Nico Azzi, was posing as a Marxist activist by being seen on the train carriage by having in his coat pocket a copy of the popular communist daily *Il Manifesto* [The Manifesto] while travelling on the high-speed train Turin-Milan so that eventual witnesses could testify that they saw some communists on the train before the bomb deflagration.¹⁹⁸ The other episode worth mentioning in regard of the ‘false flag’ strategy is the Piazza Fontana attack that initially saw the anarchists at the centre of the police investigation with the arrest of Giuseppe Pinelli and Pietro Valpreda.¹⁹⁹ Possibly, the initial mistake made by the investigators on the identity of the material perpetrators of the attack in the first phase of the enquiry, could be attributed to such strategy as will be better explained in the chapter four of the present thesis dedicated specifically to the Piazza Fontana case. The other tactic that was often used within the parameters of the un-orthodox war fought by the radical right was to infiltrate the police forces and the army with their own elements or agents and thus spreading paranoia, anti-communist propaganda on the obsessive theme of an imminent communist invasion alongside another popular theme like the progressive Marxist ‘infiltration’ into the major Italian society institutions as the political pamphlet written by Guido Giannettini and Pino Rauti and commissioned by the Carabinieri general D’Aloja.²⁰⁰

The adoption of the *stragismo* tactic (the targeting of civilians in mass bombing attacks) became soon a characteristic of the black terrorism’s unconventional warfare, which tended to identify its ‘soft targets’ in civilians by often choosing crowded places like trains, banks, rallies or train stations. This type of terrorism did not refuse but instead willingly practiced the indiscriminate attacks on the local populations so that the *stragismo* became the trademark of their *modus operandi* and helped the police distinguishing neo-fascist terrorist attacks from those perpetrated for instance, by Marxist or anarchist groups, which instead tended to target representatives of the established authority, and of the political and economic institutions.²⁰¹

Within this political framework, the strategy of tension became a valid instrument to destabilize and disintegrate the Italian liberal democratic state as Freda’s iconic text pledged.²⁰² The plan was to establish an autocratic regime with the intervention and logistic support of the NATO. For this purpose, the NATO military base in Verona became the training base for the implementation of

¹⁹⁷ Atti Processo Catanzaro su Piazza Fontana, (1982).

¹⁹⁸ Massimiliano Griner, *Anime Nere* (Milan: Sperling& Kupfer, 2014).

¹⁹⁹ See chapter 4 of the present thesis.

²⁰⁰ Guido Giannettini and Pino Rauti, *Le Mani Rosse sulle Forze Armate* (Milan: Savelli Editore, 1966).

²⁰¹ Tamburino, *La Rosa dei Venti* (2016), p. 5, footnote 21; cfr. Jeffrey M. Bale, *The Darkest Sides of Politics I. Postwar Fascism, Covert Operations, and Terrorism* London-New York: Routledge, 2018).

²⁰² Franco Giorgio Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969), (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010).

the guerrilla warfare, and for the explosive supplies used for possible terrorist attacks as the presence of the Army colonel Amos Piazzini shows.²⁰³ Another interesting element to consider is the continuity between those ‘stay-behind’ organizations engaged in this ‘un-orthodox’ war, and the consolidation of the far -right network with the same intents. The two sides often seemed to overlap on each other making at some point difficult for the investigative forces and judicial authorities to distinguish between the two realities also because both often used the less respectable and ideological questionable and radical anti-communist fringes present on the territory. The communist threat was often emphasized for political reasons and sustained by ideological motives to receive better support by the American ally. In conclusion, we could describe the relationship Italy-US during the period of the strategy of tension in terms of mutual conditioning and double exploiting as based for both on the fear –founded or not- of a possible and up-coming ‘communist Italy’ due to the popularity of the Italian Communist Party amid the working classes and the country’s intellectual milieu.

Within such climate of cold war espionage, the Italian historian Emanuele Bettini concludes in his book that *Gladio*’s move of approaching the prince Borghese should be interpreted more as an attempt to convince the Roman aristocrat and his paramilitary group to be part of this ‘stay-behind’ structure rather than *Gladio* becoming part of the radical right underworld network of terrorist organisations and subversive groups.²⁰⁴ In Bettini’s view, there is evidence of some cooperation between neo-fascist groups, intelligence elements and ‘stay-behind’ organizations, which, if we take *Gladio* as an example, revealed to have a firm control of the territory with cells of the organisation in several regions and cities of the country (especially in the northern part). For instance, *Gladio*’s cells were present in the Liguria region (in Genoa and Riviera), in the Piedmont region (Turin), in the Emilia region (Modena and Bologna), and in the Veneto region (Treviso and Padua).²⁰⁵ The reason why *Gladio* had its unities in those cities and regions could be explained with the fact that in those areas the PCI and left-leaning trade unions like the CGIL: *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* [Italian General Confederation of Labour] were rather popular and influential with a large membership and supporters amid factory workers and intellectuals being the north the more industrialised and developed part of the country.²⁰⁶ The other reason could be the legacy of the Social Republic of Saló’s Nazi-fascist regime that the local population of those northern regions had to endure during the last years of the war and which had in return, consolidated a strong anti-fascist feeling as the 1960 Genoa events demonstrated when there was a huge uproar of the local population against hosting a MSI’s rally, and that ended with

²⁰³ Stefania Limiti, *Doppio Livello. Come Si Organizza la Destabilizzazione in Italia* (Milan: Chiarelettere Editore, 2013).

²⁰⁴ Ibid. Bettini, (1996), p. 32.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. Bettini, 1996, p. 31.

²⁰⁶ Sidney Tarrow, ‘The Italian Party System Between Crisis and Tradition’, *American Journal of Political Science* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1977), Vol. 21, No.2 (May), pp. 193-224.

street riots and the resignation of the prime minister Fernando Tambroni that had authorised the neo-fascist party's demonstration.²⁰⁷

The *Gladio*' official creation goes back to 1956, although other sources indicate 1951-1952 as in those years the Italian Military Service bureau, the *Servizi Informazioni Forze Armate* or, better known as SIFAR, and the CIA had already established some contacts in order to create 'stay-behind' paramilitary organisations.²⁰⁸ From first-hand documents on *Gladio* analysed by Bettini in his book, we know that the members of the organisation must have been of 'clear anti-communist faith' as stated in the note of the 'section D' of a document of the other branch of the Italian intelligence, the *Servizio Informazioni Difesa* (SID) regarding the recruitment in the organisation of the lieutenant Mattia Pussudetti and dated 8 December 1958. In this document, it was stressed as note of merit on how the lieutenant Pussudetti had been a member of the PNF, *Partito Nazionale Fascista* (National Fascist Party) during the Mussolini's regime.²⁰⁹ This document supports the hypothesis according to which, between these 'stay-behind' organisations and the underworld of post-war fascist diaspora there was a contact and that often these two worlds were in matter of fact overlapping because of the common enemy and cause of intents.²¹⁰ Indeed, the insistence of being of 'clear anti-communist faith' attracted many former *salotini* and neo-fascists opening thus a communication channel. The inevitable collusion and overlapping between neo-fascist activists and the 'stay-behind' groups stresses the unclear role of these paramilitary organisations creating confusion and generating lack of clarity between the role of subversive neo-fascist groups and the 'stay-behind' organizations in matter of aims and authorship of operations. *Gladio* ceased officially its activities in 1990, when the end of the cold war left behind several unanswered questions and untold truths feeding thus the Italians' collective imagination with conspiracy theories and secrets yet to be revealed.²¹¹ The other organisation that was born as a 'stay-behind' and instead soon adopted an ambivalent role between subversion and its 'stay-behind' aims was the *Rosa dei Venti* ('Wind Rose') group. The organisation had as members RSI's former hierarchs, young and petty criminals, and neo-fascists. The subsequent investigation of the Italian judiciary also revealed the membership of high profile representatives of the Italian masonic lodges, army generals, important industrialists and aristocrats with Evolian inclinations like the prince Giovanni Alliata di Montereale.²¹²

²⁰⁷ In 1960, Genoa was chosen as venue to hold the annual party conference of the MSI. This was perceived as a provocation by the local population being the city of Genoa a symbol of the resistance during the Nazi-fascist Salò Republic (1943-1945). The popular city's uprising and consequent unrest and riots led to the resignation of the DC prime minister Giovanni Tambroni who at the time, was opening to the right with a possible coalition government with the MSI.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Bettini, (1996), p. 37.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., Bettini, (1996), p. 37.

²¹⁰ Ibid., Bettini, (1996), pp.36-37.

²¹¹ Ibid., Processo Catanzaro (1982).

²¹² Ibid., Processo Catanzaro (1982).

What emerged from the investigation was also a widespread network on the territory that gathered together different expressions of the post-1945 neo-fascism and that included a vast variety of fascisms: the Nazi-fascists like Franco G. Freda or Stefano Delle Chiaie, fascists nostalgic of Mussolini's interwar regime ready for an authoritarian coup d'état, the theoreticians of a psychological war against communists, and many other individuals diverse for census, age and education as the already mentioned aristocrats Junio Valerio Borghese and Giovanni Alliaia di Montereale who belonged in the so called *aristocrazia nera* [black aristocracy].²¹³ Or, for instance, members of the army like the colonel Angelo Dominioni of the NATO Verona command base and the general Francesco Nardella linked to Alliaia di Montereale alongside another character, Adamo degli Occhi, leader of the neo-fascist association *Maggioranza Silenziosa* (Silent Majority), the latter involved in subversive strategies and linked to neo-fascist organisations.²¹⁴ This composite universe of the most diverse ideological and political denominations, contributed to the un-orthodox war silently conducted within the wider context of the cold war climate. The 'Wind Rose' organisation for instance, held an ambivalent position between a 'stay-behind' group and an underground and subversive neo-fascist organization, for its membership indicates clearly links with the neo-fascist underworld as for example, the case of Eugenio Rizzato shows. He was a former *salotino* that during the RSI had the task of torturing anti-fascists and partisans and that was enrolled in the 'Wind Rose' group with the task of providing proscription lists of citizens who were critical of the US and its foreign politics.²¹⁵

The picture that emerges is radical right groups members working as secret agents for those semi-legal entities with the tacit blessing of segments of the Italian authorities of the time.²¹⁶ It has also provided neo-fascist groups with a certain degree of self-legitimization of their subversive activities all leaning toward the defence of the nation-state, and by fulfilling their purposes of being 'political soldiers'. The same link between *Gladio* and the prince Junio Valerio Borghese, already mentioned above, constituted a dangerous liaison between state-agents and neo-fascists active on the territory with their subversive agenda and radical ideological beliefs. Most probably, those links could be interpreted within a general political and social instability accompanied by a confused understanding of the new democratic system, and the role of Italy within the new post-war geopolitical asset. Therefore, we could conclude that although the aims and purposes of organisations like the 'Wind Rose' or *Gladio* were to defend the Italian liberal democracy from both the internal and external menace of communism, their collaboration, in many cases to the point of overlapping, with self-declared neo-fascist extremist organisations constituted dangerous

²¹³ By 'Black Aristocracy' is intended Roman and Southern aristocratic families that sided with the Papacy during the unification process under the king of Savoy in 1870. On this topic see: David Alvarez, *The Popes Soldiers: A Military History of the Modern Vatican* (Lawrence KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011).

²¹⁴ Insert reference

²¹⁵ Ibid., Tamburino, 2016, p. 11, footnote 32.

²¹⁶ Commissione Parlamentare, (1990-1991).

grounds for the democracy itself that they proclaimed to defend. The willingness of contrasting Marxism, which in the 1960s, had spread and become dominant amid factory workers, students and intellectuals, saw those organisations ready to ally themselves with subversive neo-fascist groups, for the latter felt the impellent necessity to fight the weaknesses of the liberal democracy and the dangers of communism, both considered in their eyes responsible for the decline of the society as a whole. This call to the arms was also transnational and the Italian far right participated into the dystopian view of the future world that authors like Julius Evola or activists like Jean Thiriart were promoting in those years at an international level.²¹⁷ The radical right was breeding a new generation of fascists intellectually ready to take the arms to fight for what they considered a better world. The metaphysics of violence and the metapolitical discourse became in this way the ideological engine that put into motion the use terrorism within the political and strategic context of an un-orthodox war from a neo-fascist perspective.

2. Italian Post-war Neo-Fascism

The Italian socio-political climate of the 1960s and 1970s, is representative of a period in the Italian history where the neo-fascism and extreme right was overly present with its coup d'état attempts, terrorist actions, and proclaims in the streets and in the court rooms in order to affirm their project of a total political shift that would safeguard the nation against the decline and corruption of a democratic regime, or from the menace of the communist creed widespread among the population. The intent of creating a new generation of fascist intellectuals already started in the 1950s when neo-fascist organisations like Pino Rauti's *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* [New Order Studies Centre], began to produce its fruits. In 1963, Franco Giorgio Freda founded in Padua, the neo-fascist organisation *Gruppo di Ar* [Ar Group]. Freda was at the time a former member of the New Order organization and fine intellectual and profound connoisseur of Nietzsche, Mohler van den Bruck, Julius Evola, René Guénon, and of the whole anti-Enlightenment pantheon. The perception of being on a mission to save not only the homeland but the entire western culture and civilization, to be then the 'chosen ones', the awareness of going back to an 'ideology of the origins',²¹⁸ some degree of nihilism, and a clear anti-Semitism camouflaged in the pro-Arab resistance and anti-capitalism were all elements that contributed to form the intellectual framework of a new generation of neo-fascists of which Freda could be considered one of the best example as we will see in the following chapters of the present thesis when we will provide an assessment of the theoretical framework of the Italian black terrorism of the 1970s.

²¹⁷ Yannick Sauveur, *Jean Thiriart and the European Communitarism* (Charleroi: Machiavel Publishing 1978).

²¹⁸ Chiara Stellati, *Un'Ideologia dell'Origine* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000).

The Italian instable and critical social and political conditions facilitated the indoctrination and radicalization of the younger generations on both sides of the political spectrum thus perpetuating that ideological division already present within the Italian politics as explained by Franco Ferraresi in his work.²¹⁹ The mapping of the black terrorism suggests that it was present over the whole national territory although it appeared to be more active in the north of the country and in the capital city of Rome.²²⁰ Alongside bomb attacks and street riots, the other constant element of the neo-fascist subversion was the recurrent use of staged coups d'état attempts. The two coup attempts mostly known are the 1964 '*Piano Solo*' ('Solo Plan') masterminded by the Carabinieri General Giovanni De Lorenzo, and the 1970 '*Golpe Borghese*' ('Borghese Coup') masterminded by the prince Junio Valerio Borghese. In both cases, the plan was to involve the army and thus, stage a military coup that would facilitate in turn, an authoritarian regime governed by a military junta following the example of Spain, Greece or Portugal making *de facto* the southern Europe a strong anti-communist barrier. However, in both cases, the strategy of overturning the democratic system failed spectacularly due to lack of organisation as especially the Borghese coup demonstrated.²²¹ In this case, the coup was organised with the complicity of the neo-fascist organization *Avanguardia Nazionale* (National Avantguard) and its leader Stefano Delle Chiaie, directly involved into action. The whole action was set in the night between the 7 and 8 of December with some divisions of the *Guardie Forestali* (Forest Rangers), a military division of the Italian army gathered in Rome and, alongside some groups of neo-fascists, in charge of taking the weapons hidden in the dungeons of the *Viminale* palace (The Ministry of Interior headquarters) and thus, occupying the vital centres of power, The plan included also the kidnapping the Italian republic president, the socialist Giuseppe Saragat.²²²

The magistrate Giovanni Tamburino in charge of the inquiry on the 'Wind Rose' case mentioned in the previous subsection, affirms that: 'A coup in Italy risks to fail, especially the after-coup as this would create further problems than those that pre-coup militants wish to resolve [...]. In Italy, the loyalty to the armed forces does not allow episodes of coup d'état. A coup without traditions is dangerous [...] it is necessary experience to master a coup d'état'.²²³ What Tamburino intends here is that a strategy of a military coup d'état in Italy would never be successful considering the historical and social premises of the Italian political tradition, which shows that Italians in general

²¹⁹ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy. The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²²⁰ Claudio Nunziata, 'La Democrazia Violentata' in A. Beccaria, G. Gazzotti, G. Marcucci, C. Nunziata, R. Scardona (eds.), *Alto Tradimento. La Guerra Segreta agli Italiani: Da Piazza Fontana alla Strage della Stazione di Bologna* (Bologna: Castelvechi Editore, 2016).

²²¹ Aldo Giannuli, *La Strategia della Tensione: Servizi Segreti, Partiti, Golpe Falliti, Terrore Fascista, Politica Internazionale: Un Bilancio* (Florence: Ponte delle Grazie Editore, 2018).

²²² Fulvio Mazza, *Il Golpe Borghese: Quarto Grado di Giudizio: La Leadership di Gelli, Il 'Golpista Andreotti', I Depistaggi della 'Dottrina Maletti'* (Cosenza: Luigi Pellegrini Editore, 2020).

²²³ Ibid. Tamburino, (2016), p. 5.

are not so supportive of the armed forces. He advances an audacious theory instead that it is interesting to mention, for it could help to better comprehend the type of historical cultural and political background we are attempting here to define. Tamburino, in his quoted paper, define these coup attempts more as ‘stabilizing strategy’ rather than a ‘de-stabilizing strategy’ as the traditional aim of any coup d’etat attempt would be. The theory of ‘stabilizing strategy’ becomes then an interesting interpretative key to better understand the neo-fascist subversive agenda of those years, and questions at the same time, the stability of the Italian democracy of that period. In 1962, the ‘Fanfani government’ was timidly opening to the communists of the PCI, and in 1963, the prime minister Aldo Moro, was opening to the socialists of the PSI: *Partito Socialista Italiano* [Italian Socialist Party]. This openness to the left by the centre-right and traditionally oriented Catholic party DC, became known as the *compromesso storico* (historical compromise) as this new collaboration between the DC and the Left meant also more attention to the workers’ rights, emancipation of certain social categories like women, but most importantly, a programme of nationalization of the electric energy suppliers with the suppression of many private companies with links to international companies.²²⁴ Considering the financial interests of international powers in Italy’s economy, the theory here is that this programme needed to be stopped even with the aid of neo-fascists organisations and radical right sectarian groups adopting un-orthodox means as already discussed in the previous subsection. Furthermore, the possible collaboration with the Left and the economic programmes that would have derived from it in a NATO country was also worrying the American ally, who in those years intensified the funding of the Italian intelligence in order to better invigilate, monitor and control the many different political movements and groups politically active on the territory.

Pier Paolo Pasolini, a fine Italian intellectual of the time, published in 1974, an article on the Italian daily *Corriere della Sera* entitled ‘*Cos’è Questo Golpe? Io So*’ (What Is This Golpe? I know’) in which he describes the landscape of the Italian politics and hinted to a no better specified ‘dark forces’ that were manipulating and controlling the country’s politics and the economy at the time: ‘I know. I know the names of those responsible of what is called “golpe” (and that is in truth a sequence of “golpes” institutionalized to protect the country)’.²²⁵ By the end of the same year, police investigations on the ‘Wind Rose’ organisation revealed a worrying high level of subversion activities and a well-structured and widespread neo-fascist network on the territory with links to the transnational far-right. This was also the year in which Vito Miceli, a shady character and head of the military branch of the Italian intelligence, the SID, *Servizio Informazioni Difesa* [Defence Information Agency], was arrested and found guilty of conspiracy, subversion

²²⁴ Roberto Fornasier, ‘The DC and the PCI in the Seventies: A Complex Relationship Supervised by the United States’, *Bulletin of Italian Politics*, (Milton Park: Taylor and Francis, 2012), Vol. 4, No.2, pp. 209-229.

²²⁵ Pier Paolo Pasolini, ‘*Cos’è Un Golpe? Io So*, *Corriere della Sera*, 14 November 1974.

and collusion with radical right terrorist organisations.²²⁶ The arrest of Miceli on 30 October 1974, attempted to provide answers to the many questions on the events that until then had characterised the volatile political climate of the country.²²⁷ The explanations and conclusions of the judges that in those years were called to conduct investigations on terrorism and subversion were all converging toward a specific strategy of action in relation to a series of operations of political conditioning within a network that supported a complex structure and of which groups like the ‘Wind Rose’ were part of.²²⁸ The picture that emerged from the judiciary investigative work showed that the Italian intelligence not only was aware of such neo-fascist subversive network, but that also knew in advance the movements of those groups and was able to exploit and manipulate the radical right fringes for its own ends.²²⁹ Within such political context, the possibility of a coup was real and was often used as a threat whenever necessary. The ‘stabilizing strategy’ was supposedly a strategy designed to stabilize the country according to specific political and ideological coordinates that tended to a right wing authoritarian system.²³⁰ This strategy would have had the purpose of further consolidate a centre-right government of the pro-Atlantist DC party, and avoid a possible openness of the latter to left-wing parties like the PSI or the PCI. The fact that none of the several coup d’etat attempts succeeded should indicate, according to Tamburino’s explanation, such theory. In other words, none of the coup attempts was meant to succeed. In support of such hypothesis, it is interesting to refer to the testimony of one of the defendants in the court case against the ‘Wind Rose’ organization. Roberto Cavallaro declared in court that there was the need to make a distinction between ‘coup d’etat’ (litt. trans. ‘coup to the state’) and ‘coup by the state.’²³¹ Such declaration seems to reinforce the conviction that the strategy of tension was in reality staged by segments of the Italian political class and the military intelligence with the supervision and control of an external agent like the US, apt to ‘stabilize’ the subversive activities of the radical fascist groups for their own ends of the control of the territory through an authoritarian regime in an anti-communist strategy as Pasolini had denounced in his article mentioned above. The reason for adopting such strategy lied upon the fact that with a controlled coup operation, or by staging a terrorist attack attributed and actually carried out by political adversaries of a given regime, it was possible to achieve at once goals of political relevance that would otherwise be very difficult to achieve through the more conventional dynamics of a democratic discourse. Within such perspective, the targeting of civilian victims should be considered more of a tool rather than a political and ideological end so to emotionally affect the general public and thus seek for a more authoritarian and therefore safer regime.

²²⁶ Stefania Limiti, *L’Anello della Repubblica* (Chiarelettere Edizioni, 2009).

²²⁷ Atti Processo Piazza Fontana, 1977 (Archivi di Stato di Roma).

²²⁸ Tamburino, *La Rosa dei Venti*, (2016), p.3; cf. Stefania Limiti, *Doppio Livello: Come Si Organizza la Destabilizzazione in Italia* (Milan: Chiarelettere Edizioni, 2013), p.27.

²²⁹ Ibid., Limiti, 2013, pp.27-29.

²³⁰ Ibid., Tamburino, (2016).

²³¹ In the original Italian quote: ‘colpo di stato e colpo dello stato’, in Tamburino, (2016), p.5, my translation.

The many actors interested in staging a subversive ‘stabilizing’ strategy for the fear of a looming communist regime were at the time gravitating around non-better specified ‘cultural centres’ as for instance Freda’s *Il Gruppo di Ar* [Ar Group] at the back of his bookstore in Padua or, the *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* [New Order Studies Centre]. At the beginning of May 1965, all those cultural centres came together in a conference named *Convegno sulla Guerra Rivoluzionaria* [Conference on the Revolutionary Warfare] organised by the *Istituto per gli Studi Militari Alberto Pollio* [Institute for Military Studies Alberto Pollio] held in Rome at the *Parco dei Principi* hotel.²³² Here we find the Gotha of the Italian neo-fascism of the time represented by characters like Pino Rauti, Eggardo Beltrametti, Adriano Romualdi, and the journalist Guido Giannettini, the latter a key figure in the Piazza Fontana events.²³³ The theme of this conference was which one could be adopted as the best military strategy for the safeguard of the country from a communist invasion. The peculiarity of this conference was that none of the participants and speakers had a military role, nor was a professional military although the conference was mainly focused on military topics, themes and strategies

The confusion, or better, the fusion between the categories of military and civilian ‘experts’ discussing on war strategies and alliances, as the *Pollio* conference shows, should not surprise the reader as it was perfectly in line with the necessity in those circles to overcome the distinction between such categories as already demonstrated by the akin French group OAS with the adoption of the political and ideological label of the ‘political soldier’ as conceived by Evola and adopted by the radical right intellectuals, philosophers and militants like Franco Freda.²³⁴ The ‘political soldier’ became in fact a mythical figure in the metapolitical discourse within the neo-fascist milieu of those years. The insisting on the ‘political soldier’ was the legitimization of that metaphysics of violence that Evola had been preaching in several of his books and that had in characters like Drieu La Rochelle or Ernst Jünger the perfect embodiment and example to follow for the young generations of far-right activists called to a new type of warfare as we will better discuss in the third sub-section of the present chapter. Another mythical reference for the young Italian neo-fascist militants was that of the RSI and its combatant model. The consequence of this level of indoctrination was the romanticising of the fascist *salotino* figure and of the XMAS combatant viewed as engaged in a historical and epical struggle against the evil forces of communism and against those forces of the decadent liberalism generated by the capitalist-Judaic democracy that the Allies wanted to impose also on Italy.

²³² The *Convegno sulla Guerra Rivoluzionaria* was held at the Hotel Parco dei Principi between 3rd and 5th May 1965 and organized by the *Istituto Studi Militari ‘Alberto Pollio’* under the initiative of three neo-fascist journalists: Enrico de Boccard, Gianfranco Finaldi and Eggardo Beltrametti. See: *La Guerra Rivoluzionaria. Atti del Primo Convegno Organizzato dall’Istituto ‘Pollio’* (Rome: Giovanni Volpe Editore, 1965).

²³³ See chapter 4 of the present thesis on the events related to Piazza Fontana.

²³⁴ Julius Evola, *Metafisica della Guerra* (1935-1950) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

The political and ideological mission of the Italian radical right of that period was then to provoke social and political tension with the subsequent weakening of the country's democratic institutions. The use of the *stragismo* technique resulted in the 83 percent of the 4.384 acts of terrorism to be responsibility of the far-right terrorist groups as reported by the American historian Jeffrey Bale,²³⁵ although the prosecution of the neo-fascist terrorists responsible for such acts did not succeed in securing all those responsible to justice as noted by the Italian historian Anna Cento Bull.²³⁶ Bruce Hoffman affirms that '[...] only two out of the 150 indictments of right-wing extremists in Milan have resulted in conviction and imprisonment [...]. In 1976, and again in 1978, judges in Rome, Turin and Milan fell over each other in their haste to absolve 196 neo-fascists'.²³⁷ What we can infer here is that besides a handful of journalists, judges and policemen that were willing to investigate into the neo-fascist underworld, the official political and judicial apparatuses were initially dismissive of the presence on the territory of a neo-fascist terrorist threat. Another element to be considered is that the Italian judicial authorities seemed to have applied different evaluative norms in handling left-wing terrorism and its right-wing counterpart. The ostensibly blindness of the high state officials of the time is rather indicative of this difference in attitude. In an interview given in 1980, the interior minister Virginio Rognoni denied firmly the allegations of collusion between the neo-fascist terrorist groups and members of the police forces by denying in addition of applying different lines of investigation and judicial standards when dealing with right-wing terrorism compared to its left-wing counterpart: 'the ministry and the police do not apply different standards of scrutiny to different types of terrorism'.²³⁸ Rognoni's strong reassurance to the journalist that was interviewing him is indicative of the Italian authorities' ambiguity regarding the presence on the territory of neo-fascist organisations and neo-fascist subversive groups, and it could maybe be explained taking into account four possible factors for such reaction by the official Italian authorities. First, by the 1960s, many former *salotini* and ex-fascists members of the *Partito Nazionale Fascista* [Fascist National Party] recycled themselves into the Italian first republic's military, judicial and administrative sectors finding thus a new social and political virginity in the newly Italian democracy. Second, that a strong neo-fascist presence in the country although controlled, was welcomed by the mainstream centre-right party, the DC, in order to contain the popularity of the communist party among students and factory workers and thus preventing the PCI to become even more popular and politically and socially influential. Third, that the neo-fascist milieu was in matter of fact strictly under surveillance by the intelligence and the police as in the Italy of those years for extra-parliamentary

²³⁵ Jeffrey Bale, *The Darkest Side of Politics I. Postwar Fascism, Covert Operations, and Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 1-46.

²³⁶ Anna Cento Bull, *Italian Neofascism. The Strategy of Tension and the Politics on Non-Reconciliation* (New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), pp. 96-127.

²³⁷ Bruce Hoffman, 'Right Wing Terrorism in Europe', The United States Government, (March 1982), pp.5-6.

²³⁸ George Armstrong, 'Timetable of Terror', *The Guardian*, August 10, 1980.

and political groups was virtually impossible to avoid being infiltrated by undercover agents: ‘In conclusion, the hypothesis that in those years an organised group could be structured, live and operate without being infiltrated by the secret services is quite unbelievable.’²³⁹ Fourth, the strategy of tension cannot be understood without taking into consideration the historical framework of the cold war that seems instead to have played a crucial role in the social and political dynamics in the country of those years. In the almost twenty years that define the ‘years of lead’ period, the increase use of street violence and the targeting of civilians determined a large adoption of the *stragismo* as privileged tool of mass destruction for the far-right terrorism attacks like Piazza Fontana (1969) or the Bologna bombing (1980), considered the two most deadly attacks with the highest number of victims since the war, demonstrates.

3. The Italian Radical Right of the Strategy of Tension

‘The condition -not sufficient but nevertheless necessary-for the foundations of the true State is the SUBVERSION of everything that today exists as political system’.²⁴⁰ The quote is from Freda’s iconic text *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] written in 1969, and that concisely summarises the feelings of many radical fascists gathered in borderline groups and associations in post 1945 Italy. In the present sub-section, we will analyse the ideological creed that constituted the intellectual and political framework of all those neo-fascist extra-parliamentary organisations present on the territory; and assess their relevance in building the regime of terror that the country experienced during the ‘strategy of tension’ and the ‘years of lead’.

In the 1960s, Italy seemed to have recovered from the war and the economy of the country was increasingly growing. The idea of ‘modern Italy’ expressed by Richard Drake in his book implies the progressive conforming to the western model of a consumeristic society that by the end of the decade would become the norm. Drake continues his analysis stressing how in his view, the consumerism that had characterized the social and economic progress in Italy in the 1960s, was also the cause of social tensions that started to appear by the end of the same decade: ‘the explosion of consumerism resulted in a revolution of rising expectations.’²⁴¹ In other words, the fast improvement of the economic conditions and the adoption of an American-style consumerist model could have contributed to the acceleration of political and sectarian violence which would characterise the successive decades starting with the 1969 *Autunno Caldo* (Hot Autumn) characterized by strikes, rallies, and general social and political disorder. However, another

²³⁹ Ibid., Tamburino, (2016), p. 11.

²⁴⁰ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p.35.

²⁴¹ Ibid., Drake (2019).

scholar, Arthur Marwick, argues that is the Catholic Church the main responsible for the explosion of violence in Italy in that period. His explanation considers the repressive influence of the Church in matter of gender roles, sex, marriage in a decade of women's emancipation and generally speaking, a social and political climate characterized by the attention to civil and human rights as never before. Within such a climate, the Catholicism could have been the trigger that generated the profound sense of rebellion against the bourgeois and religious foundations of the Italian democracy paving the way to social unrest and political extremism.²⁴² Both Drake and Marwick undoubtedly point out factors that may help in providing a credible reading of the socio-economic framework in which to insert the experience of terrorism, social unrest, and urban guerrilla that the whole country experienced between the 1960s and 1980s. But their analyses fail to provide an exhaustive explanation of the phenomenon of the Italian terrorism of those years, for it is not sufficient to take into consideration social and economic factors for the explosion of violence and unrest experienced in the country. The questions we are attempting to address in the present subsection are: how the neo-fascist metaphysics of violence can find justification and a place in such social, cultural, and political climate? Was the neo-fascist subversion part of the more general 'anti-system' ideological and political tendency we witness at the end of the 1960s worldwide? In other words, was the Italian neo-fascist extremism of those years part of a wider intellectual and political shift affecting the mainstream ideologies? Looking at the works of Freda and other neo-fascist intellectuals, it seems so as it will be better discussed and analysed in the following chapters of the present thesis.

The creation as early as 1950s, of radical and 'spiritual' neo-fascist organizations like *Ordine Nuovo* ['New Order'] was symptomatic of an idealization of the fascist creed and its metapolitical and apoliteic mission that consolidated after the war and that was coming directly from a 'pure', radical version of the fascist doctrine of the RSI, but that also dipped into the fascist mysticism of the fascist regime authors like Niccolò Giani and Arnaldo Mussolini²⁴³ as already explained in chapter one. Julius Evola and René Guénon were also taken into account as well as the fathers of the German Conservative Revolution.²⁴⁴ The process of radicalization of young neo-fascists in that period was due to a combination of several factors. Among those, the perceived marginalization suffered at the hands of the established political class, which alongside the Marxist dominant intellectual milieu, had contributed to the dismissal of the intellectual legacy and cultural/political contribution of right wing authors.²⁴⁵ The terrorist attack on the Piazza Fontana's *Banco Nazionale dell'Agricoltura* [National Agricultural Bank] on 12 December 1969, whilst leaving seventeen dead and eighty-eight injured, opened also officially the strategy of

²⁴² Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Social and Cultural Transformation in Britain, France, Italy and the United States, 1958-1974* (London, Oxford: Bloomsbury Reader, 1998).

²⁴³ Tomas Carini, *Niccolò Giani e la Scuola di Mistica Fascista, 1930-1943* (Turin: Mursia, 2009).

²⁴⁴ Insert reference

²⁴⁵ Anna K. Valerio and Silvia Valerio, *Non-Ci Sono Innocenti* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2016).

tension, by intensifying on the national territory the forming of extra-parliamentary groups and attacks ‘on the State’ that had innocent civilians as target. The following terrorist bombings like the ‘Peteano massacre’ in 1972, where seven Carabinieri military died, or the 1974 Piazza della Loggia bombing in the city of Brescia (Lombardy region), with seven killed and one hundred two wounded, and in the same year, the train express ‘Italicus’ bombing with twelve dead and forty-eight wounded, or the Bologna train station bombing on 2 August 1980 with eighty-five dead and more than two hundred wounded are only few of the episodes related to the neo-fascist terrorism of the time. The documentation available on 1970s and 1980s neofascist terrorism indicate consistency of the modalities used as for instance the indiscriminate targeting of civilians as well as the declarations, plans and statements of the main representatives of this brand of radical right that show a clear presence of ideological mysticism focused on the ‘metaphysics of war’ of which Evola discusses in his homonymous book²⁴⁶ focussing on what he calls ‘ethics of the warrior’ within the context of a metapolitical discourse directed to disintegrate a system representative of the *Kali Yuga* (borrowed from the Hindu theology), and often recurrent in Evola’s personal cosmology.²⁴⁷ The Italian far-right underworld of those years grew within such intellectual and ideological coordinates thus manifesting a metapolitical and nihilist approach to politics as the same Franco Freda and his associates demonstrate as it will better be discussed in the following chapters.

The neo-fascist subversion was heavily influenced by Evola’s thought, who undoubtedly was the central intellectual reference for the Italian black terrorism of those years.²⁴⁸ Evola declared that: ‘Today as ever is necessary to [...] create an insurmountable wall between different sets of values. Only in this way, we can be “guardians” of the “Tradition”’.²⁴⁹ Evola was inciting his adepts to become the ‘guardians’ of the ‘Tradition’ in a sort of mystical call to a holy war that would finally liberate the western civilization from the decadence and corruption of the ‘merchants’ as he defines capitalists. This is a recurrent *topos* in the mind-set of the typical neo-fascist combatant of the strategy of tension period that looks at Evola as his privileged teacher. The notion of the ‘differentiated man’ of which talks Freda²⁵⁰ was characteristic of the thought of the Italian far-right milieu of the time. It indicates the far-right militants’ awareness of being different, of belonging to a selected group of human beings determined and defined by their mission within the political scenario. The same attitude of not recognising themselves in the neo-fascist party of reference, the MSI, considered by this type of hard core neo-fascist militants too bourgeois and

²⁴⁶ Julius Evola, *Metafisica della Guerra* (1950), (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001). The text is a collection of articles written by Evola and published on his journal *Diorama Filosofico* and on the publication *Quaderni di Ordine Nuovo-La Difesa della Razza* (1942).

²⁴⁷ The theme of the *Kali Yuga* is developed and discussed in Julius Evola in his *Cavalcare la Tigre* (1961), Stefano Zecchi (ed.), (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2009).

²⁴⁸ Julius Evola, *Rivolta Contro il Mondo Moderno* (1932) (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998).

²⁴⁹ Julius Evola, *I Testi di Ordine Nuovo* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

²⁵⁰ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 30-35.

well-inserted in the Italian democratic system, is also indicative of the perceived significance of their elitism and sense of ‘mission’ that the militants were called to accomplish.²⁵¹ The creation of the *Centro Studi Ordine Nuovo* [New Order Study Centre] by Pino Rauti and Adriano Romualdi in the 1950s indicates the willingness to differentiate ‘spiritual’ fascism considered the purest form of such ideology from what was considered a tamed version of fascism compromised by accepting democratic values in order to exist in the Italian political panorama.²⁵² In 1967, Evola wrote in an open letter to Giorgio Almirante, MSI party secretary at the time in which he said that ‘given the current situation, it should be a most holy thing, whereas possible, the onset of healthy elements of the nation in order to form action squads so to fight the subversion and those socio-political blackmail represented by the working class’ continuous strikes’.²⁵³ Here Evola voiced the common feeling shared within the files and ranks of the Italian far right of the 1960s: the necessity to create an un-orthodox army of volunteers able to fight against the threatening menace of Marxism through the manipulation of the working classes. The relevance of characters like Evola in the shaping of the post-war generation of Italian neo-fascists lies in what we can define ‘political theology’, for the ‘spiritual’ element of metapolitical mysticism was always present in the theoretical approach to political violence as the chapter three of the present thesis analyses taking Franco Freda’s iconic book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) and others of his texts as case study.

Characters like Freda or Delle Chiaie for instance, were clearly influenced by the Evolian doctrine sharing his interpretation of the western history as decadence as discussed in Evola’s book *Rivolta Contro il Mondo Moderno* (1932), whereas the differentiation made by Evola in two different types of civilization, created the intellectual reference for the plan of action of organizations like Pino Rauti’s *Ordine Nuovo* [New Order] or Stefano Delle Chiaie’s *Avanguardia Nazionale* [National Avantgarde], and inspired characters like Franco Freda or Piergiorgio Concutelli. The intention was to oppose the modern civilization, whose main characteristic was considered to be the social contract based upon utilitarian and individualist values with the Evolian idealized civilization based on the so-called ‘traditional values’ such as an internal hierarchy and its spiritual principles.²⁵⁴ These could be considered the grounds upon which the intellectual and ideological framework of the post-war Italian extra-parliamentary neo-fascism was built. The above quoted passage is from an open letter that Evola addressed to Giorgio Almirante, secretary of the neo-fascist party, and contains many reprimands for the MSI Party’s secretary accused of becoming too ‘soft’ on themes like anti-Semitism and accused of ‘betraying’ the core values of fascism in order to be accepted by the democratic political system. After all, the neo-fascist group *Ordine*

²⁵¹ Franco Giorgio Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, (2010), pp. 33.

²⁵² Ibid., Evola, (2001), p. 130.

²⁵³ Ibid., Evola, (2001), p.128.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., Freda (2010), pp. 48-54.

Nuovo was created in 1956 with the intent to provide a more ‘fascistic’ organization to those Italians disappointed by the domestication of the MSI.²⁵⁵ Pino Rauti, one of the founder, intended in this way, to keep alive his idea of ‘pure fascism’ as in opposition to the softer approach adopted by the MSI political strategy based on ideological compromise.²⁵⁶ The type of fascism that those far-right organizations professed was not the type of fascism that looked at the *Ventennio* with nostalgia for a past forever lost. The fascism professed here sounds more as an existential *Weltanschauung* that found its profound significance in spiritual and intellectual coordinates leading to a profound comprehension of the true nature of the individual and the society thus built.

According to this new interpretation of the fascist creed, we detect social elitism for the society structure is centred on the principle of hierarchy according to which in certain superior beings was alive a ‘Rule’ that in the rest of the other ordinary individuals was instead experienced only in the form of an embryo. The foundations of such metaphysical *ethos* were developed around the concept of the so called ‘race of the spirit’ as found in Julius Evola’s *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* written in 1941,²⁵⁷ one of the many books written by Evola that soon became a text of reference for the young generation of Italian neo-fascists in the post-war period. The idea of ‘spiritual racism’ constituted one of the doctrinal points central to the ideological *corpus* of the neo-fascist extremists, who then considered the external reality by intellectual standards which provided a dystopic view of the society and its politics as a whole. The aim of such metapolitical discourse was therefore, to contrast and combat the category of modernity that characterised their contemporary model of society in order to return to the ‘spirit of the origins’ with its respect for the Tradition and its attention to the ‘metaphysics’ of the Spirit.²⁵⁸ The current society was thus viewed as decadent and corrupted and the need for a militia that could be capable to engage in an outside struggle against such corruption and decadence, and above all, to be capable to guard from within those values and virtues that would define its militants as the chosen soldiers of what was considered a ‘holy war’ with the purpose to rebuild a ‘new order’ was highly felt.

An ideological peculiarity of the Italian far right underworld of those years was the so called ‘Nazi-Maoism’. This is a term that indicates a certain experience of the radical right which had embraced an ideological creed whereas elements of Nazism as for instance, the centrality of the doctrine of the race and the anti-modernity were combined with the Maoist concept of the state and its attention to the traditions. Freda is often defined as a Nazi-Maoist for in many of his books he often praises the Maoist China in terms of Traditional Society and anti-capitalist regime, and in fact, the description of the ideal state in his view, recalls the Maoist regime as it will be better

²⁵⁵ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

²⁵⁶ Aldo Giannuli and Elia Rosati, *Storia di Ordine Nuovo* (Milan: Mimesis Edizioni, 2018).

²⁵⁷ Julius Evola, *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* (1941) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1994).

²⁵⁸ Julius Evola, *Rivolta Contro Il Mondo Moderno* (1934) (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998).

explained in chapter three of the present thesis.²⁵⁹ But the major group to whom we can refer the label of Nazi-Maoism was the extra-parliamentary radical right group *Lotta di Popolo* [People's Struggle] active between the 1968 and 1969 at the university of Rome *La Sapienza* with the other Italian neo-fascist group *Terza Posizione* [Third Position].²⁶⁰ Evola criticised the infatuation that young neo-fascist militants showed toward the Nazi-Maoism as the articles published on 27 June 1968 on the official neo-fascist magazines *Il Borghese* and *Il Conciliatore* show.²⁶¹ The same 'Third Position' constitutes an interesting example of the variety and different ideological interpretations of fascist ideology during the strategy of tension period. Alongside the better known and active groups like *Ordine Nuovo*, *Avanguardia Nazionale*, *Ordine Nero* [Black Order], et alia, *Terza Posizione* proposed a bizarre mixing of elements of social realism (with the attention to the Chinese Maoism) with the better understood principles of Nazi-fascism like nationalism, cult of the leader, and anti-Semitism instances. However, it must be said that the label 'Nazi-Maoism' was given by the press to those youth organizations that although gravitating within the radical right galaxy, were rejecting some of their political decisions and reshaping some of their ideological principles. Within such a context, interesting are Gabriele Adinolfi's 'Third Position' movement, and the group that embodied the Nazi-Maoist principles, the *Organizzazione per la Lotta del Popolo* ['Organization for the People's Struggle] or OLP. Initially, the ideological innovation proposed by the OLP resents of the influence of the MSI's initiative of controlling the movements and the most radical fringes (also after the experience of the creation of the ON).²⁶² The OLP was officially created on 1 May 1969, but its baptism of fire goes back to 16 March 1968, when the group was involved in a fratricide clash with the MSI members who organised a punitive rally on the Law faculty of the University of Rome for the 'rebels' of the 'Avanguardie Movimento of the Worker Students' (*Movimento Studentesco Operaio d'Avanguardia*), a movement on the model of the German national-socialist left.²⁶³ The language adopted by the OLP was the language typical of the left but with anti-Zionist and racist tones when criticising the Israeli politics in the Middle-East.²⁶⁴ Interestingly enough, the OLP gave life to kindred organizations abroad in countries like Spain, France and Germany similar to the NRAO-National Revolutionnaire in France, and the Aufban Organisation in Germany for instance.²⁶⁵ In France, the group was joined by the dissident members of the *Ordre Nouveau* and by the 'European socialists' of the *Jeune Europe*. Its leader was Yves Bataille who then coordinated a committee of

²⁵⁹ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 42-44.

²⁶⁰ See: Gabriele Adinolfi and Roberto Fiore, *Noi Terza Posizione* (Rome: Settimo Sigillo, 2000).

²⁶¹ Julius Evola, 'L'Infatuazione Maoista', *Il Borghese*, 27 Giugno 1968; Evola, 'Un Mito e una Forza per la Destra', February 1971.

²⁶² Ibid., Ferraresi, (1996).

²⁶³ Ibid., Ferraresi, (1996).

²⁶⁴ Nicola Rao, *Il Piombo e La Celtica* (Milan: Sperling & Kupfer Editore, 2009).

²⁶⁵ Matteo Albanese and Pablo del Hierro, *Transnational Fascism in the Twentieth Century. Spain, Italy and the Global Neofascist Network* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

‘International solidarity’ with Freda.²⁶⁶ The far right intellectual Francesco Ingravalle in an article published in 1979 on the French journal *Totalité* affirmed that ‘the OLP represents the necessity to graft the revolution of the tradition on those movements that emerge from the fracture between the real Nation and the legal Nation’.²⁶⁷ The OLP then, represented the first innovative experience of a ‘third position’ with strong anti-Zionist and anti-Imperialist characteristics that earned the group the epitome of ‘Nazi-Maoist’. Here, the people were seen as a reality in movement that was seeking unity and destiny through the political and ideological *Avangarde* born out of the struggle and against the democracy myths of representation and parliamentarism.²⁶⁸ The universal dispute against what was considered the bourgeois contraposition between fascism/anti-fascism was thus developed on an intellectual and ideological level. In this way, the OLP represented the attempt to translate into practice a political line of action similar to that of Freda’s *Gruppo di Ar*: their refusal to participate in confronting opposed extremisms, and this attitude would eventually determine the group’s end.²⁶⁹ In 1973, within the movement occurred a fracture between the ‘black line’ and the ‘red line’. The ‘black line’ would then constitute the ‘Committee Pro-Freda’ and opened a bookstore in Rome, the *Libreria Romana*. [The Roman bookstore] The group ‘Third Position’ attempted to always maintain a balance between national socialism and revolutionary fascism, however, the organization went through a radical change in 1979, with several of its members embracing subversion and political violence, with some of them joining the other far right terrorist organization, the *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* [Armed Revolutionary Nuclei] NAR later involved in the Bologna train station bombing on 2 August 1980.²⁷⁰

From what discussed above is then clear that the Italian radical right of that period developed various and multi-faced political projects and ideological responses, even by going openly against the official line of the politically legitimate neo-fascist party, the MSI, by many considered far too domesticated for championing the ‘true’ fascist ideals. In addition, the protest movement on the right that was born on the trail of the global student movement of the 1968, claimed equally the intellectual and political sophistication of its Marxist counterpart. The birth of currents like the ‘Nazi-Maoism’ and ‘Third Position’ reveals therefore a profound crisis within the files and ranks of the Italian neo-fascist young generations. The adoption of intellectual masters like Evola, Guénon, Thiriart, Degrelle, and others rather than Mussolini or Giovanni Gentile for instance, shows a new and different understanding of the political activism, which transcended the objective and prosaic reality with the proposal of a metapolitical approach whereas the use of violence is

²⁶⁶ Jean Yves Camus and Nicolas Leburg, *Far-Right Politics in Europe* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).

²⁶⁷ Francesco Ingravalle, ‘Pour une Analyse du Mouvement Révolutionnaire en Italie’, *Totalité*, No.10 (Nov-Dec.), 1979, p. 3357.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, Albanese, (2016).

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, Albanese, (2016).

²⁷⁰ Guido Caldiron, *Estrema Destra* (Rome: Newton & Compton, 2013), p. 124.

then viewed as legitimate within its metaphysical dimension.²⁷¹ The apparent contradiction of the Nazi-Maoism in reality, lied upon a different understanding of the fascist creed conceived in its outmost spiritual and universal dimension and therefore, impermeable to the dichotomy fascist/anti-fascist or right/left created by a bourgeois understanding of ideology and political reality.

4. The Role of the Secret Services

In Rome on 6 April 1995, the MP Massimo Brutti, chairman of the parliamentary commission for the *Servizi di Informazione e Sicurezza per il Segreto di Stato* [Services of Information and Security for the State Secret] presented to the speaker of the House (chamber of Deputies) Irene Pivetti, and to the president of the Senate, Carlo Scognamiglio-Pasini, the report named *Primo Rapporto sul Sistema d'Informazione e Sicurezza* (First Report on the System of Information and Security).²⁷² Brutti's report stressed the necessity of a proper reform of the Italian intelligence services and highlighted at least twenty points to be addressed for such reform. The senator Brutti, coordinator of the parliamentary commission, seemed particularly concerned with the right to information (control of) that the intelligence agencies held until then and to what extent the state could and should prevent it. Furthermore, Brutti noted how the military's action should have been limited to the defence of the country from external enemies only as from the report emerged instead the heavy interference and presence of the military in controlling the citizens and their political activities and ideological preferences.²⁷³ In the report, such collection of personal data of Italian citizens was considered to be illegal, although it was recognised the specific peculiarity of the historical period that allowed international agreements between the Italian authorities on this matter even if this was openly against the principles established in the Italian constitution.

Brutti's reports with its remarks, observations and suggestions, highlighted a common practice that had existed in Italy as early as the end of the war in 1945, when the presence of the US in the country started to become a constant feature of the Italian domestic politics within the context of the cold war as already explained in a previous subsection of the present chapter. On this point, Brutti affirmed that: 'Numerous deviations and frequent illegalities have affected the information

²⁷¹ Giovanni Biancon, *A Mano Armata. Vita Violenta di Giusva Fioravanti* (Milan: Baldini & Castoldi Dalai, 2007); Mario Caprara and Gianluca Semprini, *Neri!* (Rome: Newton & Compton, 2011).

²⁷² Massimo Brutti, 'Relazione del Comitato Parlamentare per i Servizi di Informazione e Sicurezza per il Segreto di Stato', Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Allegato B, DOC XXXIV, No.1, XII Legislature, 6th April 1995. The report is of 96 pages and deals with the main problems of internal security, decoys, relationship between the Italian intelligence and the *Corte dei Conti* (The Italian judicial branch that oversees and regulate the public spending).

²⁷³ 'Basic Principles and Minimum Standards of Security Protection of Classified Information, DOC. CM55 15 final, NATO Council 2nd May 1955 (*Legge 3 Agosto 2007, No. 124*) in Carlo Mosca et al., *I Servizi di Informazione e il Segreto di Stato* (Milan: Giuffrè Editore, 2008).

and security services in the history of Italy of the last thirty years. In many situations, it has been detected a bad use of the discretionary. The participation in subversive plans, the decoy of sensitive judicial investigations in order to cover those plans, the relationship with those centres of dark powers [...]. The end of the cold war [...] represents a historical occasion, it is now possible to cast a light on the abuses of the past [...] regarding some horrendous terrorist crimes. It is possible now to renovate from the foundations the organizational structures of those agencies'.²⁷⁴ The quote above reveals a *modus operandi* made of illegalities that the Italian intelligence had committed during the period of the strategy of tension against Italian citizens and on Italian soil. The necessity of a profound reform of the secret services' structure, role and functions came in a period that saw the first Berlusconi's government (1994-1997) in a coalition with the post-fascist party *Alleanza Nazionale* [National Alliance] and few years into the post-cold war period.²⁷⁵ It is also relevant notice that in 1990, was launched an inquiry on the so called *stragismo* with the constitution of the *Comitato Stragi* (a parliamentary commission devoted to investigate and clarify the still many obscure and unclear situations related to the strategy of tension events. In truth, in 1977, with the *legge 801* [law 801] there had already been some reforms of the Italian intelligence with the creation of the branches of the SISMI and SISDE which had distinctive functions: the former dealing mainly with the military aspect of the intelligence and handling any external threat and the latter, dealing mainly with internal and domestic security on national soil.²⁷⁶

The interference of the Italian intelligence is evident in cases like the 'Piazza Fontana' events (see chapter four of the present thesis), but also it seems to be allegedly behind unresolved assassinations still considered today as 'cold cases' like the murder of the journalist Mino Pecorelli on 20 October 1979. The 'Pecorelli affair', like many other similar cases of that period, remains unsolved until today and implies an alleged interference of the Italian intelligence of the time in the political and private life of the citizens. And while we can dismiss the innuendos of a possible interference of the Italian intelligence in the killing of Pecorelli as a rather imaginative journalistic reconstruction, the same Brutti parliamentary report insisted on the issue of the ill-behaviour of the Italian intelligence during that period by affirming that: '[...]. Regarding the many decoys, emerges the dramatic element of how oftentimes the military intelligence has intervened with the declared purpose of interfering and misleading investigations on terrorist attacks and that the same secret services have entertained rapports with subversive groups (between 1970s and 1980s). At the top of all the structures and departments of the Italian intelligence agencies were found members of the super-secretive masonic lodge "Propaganda 2" (P2), and the creation in the SISMI

²⁷⁴ Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Allegato B, 6 April 1995, Senator Massimo Brutti, DOC XXXIV, No.1, XII Leg., p. 11.

²⁷⁵ Ibid. Ignazi, (1994).

²⁷⁶ Ibid. Mosca, (2008).

of a parallel group completely independent from the high command of the intelligence agency and absolutely out of control'.²⁷⁷ The report refers also to the fact that the investigations and probes on alleged collusion between subversive terrorist organizations, illegitimate groups of power, segments of the military/political class, and intelligence services have been quite difficult to prove due to the absence or lack of consistency in the material and data collected in the archives. These difficulties testify a certain degree of disorganization in classifying and storing the material held in an accurate collection of primary sources.²⁷⁸ On this point, it should be interesting to note that large part of the material related to the strategy of tension emerged only in 1996-1997.²⁷⁹ An example of such negligence in preserving sensitive material, is supported by the declarations of the judge Guido Salvini, involved in the 'Piazza Fontana' inquiry, who testified how the material had been abandoned in a depot archive in Rome with evident signs of negligence by the Italian authorities, who instead of preserving and guarding such sensitive material, had abandoned it in a forgotten location on the via Appia in Rome.²⁸⁰

The episode of the forgotten material can be read in the proceedings of the parliamentary committee on the interrogation of the judge Guido Salvini, involved in the inquiry of the 'Piazza Fontana' events: 'Some documents were referring to other documents that could not be traced back. The research made led to an unknown archive-depot on the via Appia. Inside this depot was found an enormous quantity of documents, most of which had not been made available online or otherwise'.²⁸¹ Such negligence of the Italian authorities seems odd considering the sensitivity of the investigative material held in forgotten and unknown archive depots, and it is only with the end of the cold war and with the changes in the Italian politics that relevant sources of the period of the strategy of tension started to re-emerge. Moreover, what also emerges from Brutti's report is the picture of a country whose citizens are spied upon and controlled by the intelligence often colluded with obscure organizations and shady characters within a clear strategy of control of the territory and focused mainly against an internal enemy rather than an external menace. There is also evidence that the intelligence agencies had infiltrated several subversive organizations, both on the left and the right of the political spectrum, in an attempt to control and manipulate them as in the case of Freda and Ventura: '[...] we can affirm that the intelligence was infiltrated in the Venetian cell of Freda and Ventura and also in the groups of *Ordine Nuovo* and *Rosa dei Venti*, and in the cultural centre of '*Carlo Magno*' in Verona, in the M.A.R. [Revolution Action Movement], of Carlo Fumagalli, in the 'Silent Majority' of the lawyer Adamo degli Occhi, in

²⁷⁷ Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, Allegato B,6 Aprile 1995, Senator Massimo Brutti, DOC XXXIV, n.1, XII Leg., p. 15.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., Atti Parlamentari, (1995), pp, 17-21.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., Atti Parlamentari, (1995), p.20

²⁸⁰ Ibid., Atti Parlamentari, (1995), p. 25.

²⁸¹ Proceedings of the interrogation of the judge Guido Salvini, Senato della Repubblica, Camera dei Deputati, XIII Leg., Disegni di Legge e Relazioni, Documenti, p. 287.

Giancarlo Rognoni's group 'La Fenice', and so on'.²⁸² The interference of the Italian Intelligence emerges also from the documentation relative to the Piazza Fontana trials history, where members of the secret services were summoned to court not just as witnesses of the events but allegedly, as active participants in the subversive activities of Freda and his associates²⁸³ as will be better explained in chapter four. The presence and role of the Italian secret services in the underground world of subversion and political violence in the strategy of tension period is proven by evidence of investigative work and by the historical testimony of the characters actively involved in this volatile period of Italian history. The several dark sides of the strategy of tension lead to consider alternative readings of its historical truth heading to conspiratorial hypothesis that although fascinating, need to be supported by a rigorous historical research and objective data, as it will be better explained in the next and final subsection of the present chapter.

Conclusion

The present chapter has attempted an analysis of the strategy of tension period with its events, agents, and numerous mysteries and half-truths unveiled. The decades between the 1960s and 1980s undoubtedly saw a crescendo of violence that often implied the radicalization and polarization of the political discourse with a fast changing of the social structure and a shift in the scale of the population's values. The element that often is taken into consideration when discussing the strategy of tension period is the cold war within its framework the several obscure episodes of the time could not be otherwise explained. One of the factors that may contribute to such conspiracy theory climate is that for many decades there was the 'state secret' clause locking and guarding events and situations that left the public opinion with many un-answered questions. To such suspicious climate contributed the secret services' action and their almost being above conventional behavioural patterns with their task of manipulating and infiltrating subversive groups and the terrorist network present in the country in that period. The trail of unsolved murders that have constellated the strategy of tension, and the dynamics of the terrorist attacks goes from the number of terrorist groups used for the action, to the type of the explosive used, to the alleged interference of high rank politicians.²⁸⁴ All those elements have contributed to give a nebulous picture of the *stragismo* in Italy. The theory exposed by Giovanni Tamburino on the 'stabilizing' strategy rather than 'de-stabilizing' strategy as explained in this chapter, tends to also wed the conspiratorial character of the Italian terrorism. The involvement of semi-legal groups like *Gladio* or, the active involvement of army generals in a subversive strategy in collusion with the black

²⁸² Ibid., Tamburino, (2016), p.11.

²⁸³ For a more detailed analysis of the Italian Intelligence interference in the Piazza Fontana events please see chapter 4 of the present thesis.

²⁸⁴ Philip Willan, *Puppetmasters: The Political Use of Terrorism in Italy* (London: Constable & Company, 1991).

terrorism also give a confusing and blurry explanation of the dynamics and events analysed.

The writing of the present chapter has revealed to be particularly difficult for this reason: for the confusion and the many and unclear sources available, and for the several truths found while researching both on primary and secondary sources. The wealth of information and data is enormous but, at the same time, contradictory and providing different explanations to one single event as for instance, in the case of the 'Piazza Fontana' attack, where there are different versions of the episode with different actors and motives, and where even the type of explosive used still rises few doubts as the chapter four dedicated to this event will better illustrate. The overall impression that the researcher has when approaching the Italian years of lead period, is that the ultimate truth lies folded within many layers and that it has only be partially unfolded until now. It is not the ambition of the present work to provide the ultimate historical truth of this particular period in post war Italian history, and although most of the documents have been declassified, hard research work is needed in order to eventually shed a light on one of the most dark and mysterious chapters of the so-called Italian 'First Republic'.

CHAPTER THREE

‘THE “DISINTEGRATION OF THE SYSTEM”. FREDA'S RADICAL CRITIQUE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY BETWEEN METAPOLITICS AND FASCIST MYSTICISM

‘We have already stated the rule according to which our political endeavor must conform and express itself by seeking men whose tendencies, vocations and personalities are kindred to ours. People that would identify themselves with the very same idea we have of the State’²⁸⁵

Introduction

The present chapter intends to be an analysis of Freda’s ideological profile starting with his most popular and iconic publication, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] published in 1969, within the context of his works and publications which reflect the historical periods in which Freda was actively involved in political militancy. Freda’s iconic book represents fully his political manifesto which has accompanied him throughout the whole of his militancy, including as well his prison years and even after the conclusion of ‘his captivity’ as he likes to define it.²⁸⁶ The short book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* is an iconic text and a compendium of what we can define ‘fascist mysticism’ of which Freda can be considered one of the best representatives when looking at the Italian 1970s far right *ambiente*. The present chapter is central to our research hypothesis focusing on assessing to what extent a spiritual or mystical vision of fascism was able to forge and shape political violence and terrorism. Franco Giorgio Freda is a good case study to assess our hypothesis if we consider his works and militancy during the years of the strategy of tension, and even in more recent

²⁸⁵ Franco Giorgio Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1970) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 36, (my trans).

²⁸⁶ Chiara Stellati, *Un’Ideologia dell’Origine. Franco Freda e la Controdecadenza* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001), p. 10.

years as it will explained in the following chapters. The reason for such a choice is that Freda, compared to the other radical neo-fascists figures like Stefano Delle Chiaie, Adriano Romualdi or, Pino Rauti embodies fully the aristocratic apoliteia and mysticism of the Tradition as preached by Julius Evola, an intellectual and ideological important reference for the Italian post-war radical right which, combined with personal charisma and personal intellectual profundity and knowledge, has made him a figure of reference since his debut with the Piazza Fontana events. We reckon that it is important to understand Freda's ideological framework and intellectual references in order to fully comprehend the level of political radicalism and involvement in activities of sedition and terrorism of the Italian far-right during the historical period that saw Freda as one of its main actors.

For the present analysis, we have considered the most recent Italian editions of Freda's works to be used. The rationale for such a choice lays in the fact that it has been difficult to find the first edition of the text even after several attempts. The edition used was published in 2010 and consists of the original text, and a collection of several articles and brief essays published in the course of time by Freda through his publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar* (Ar Editions), and kindred publications and publishers. The text of the *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* consists of just forty-nine pages, and the text has not undergone any substantial revision or change since its first appearance in 1969.²⁸⁷ The structure of the text consists of five brief sections, and by the addition of two notes by the author. Particularly worth of interest are sections two, three, and four where Freda discusses the nature of the true state (section two), the necessity of an efficient methodology of the political action (section three), and his view on the structure and organization of what he calls 'people's state'. Those sections reveals the dystopic view of a renewed society in the best of Evolian terms, but also, the admiration for Mao's China, which earned Freda the label of 'Nazi-Maoist'. The section on the necessity of an operational methodology to achieve such social model was considered of particular interest for the argument held in the present thesis because it reveals the inclination to the use of violence as means of expression of a totalizing worldview as the one maintained and preached by Freda and his associates at the time. After an attentive analysis of the text, we have concluded that *La Disintegrazione* should not be considered as merely a political pamphlet but rather, as a revolutionary ideological manifesto that shows in full

²⁸⁷ Francesco Ingravalle, 'Introduzione' in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 9-14.

its mystical and metapolitical character. In *La Disintegrazione* there are several points worth of analysis that can be ascribed to ‘fascist mysticism’ or ‘spiritual fascism’. The idea of state, the ideal of the individual’s commitment and devotion to the political cause, and the sense of mission that the heroic comrade and his associates feel to being called to, and finally, the longing to a superior level of consciousness, and awareness that define the inner and outside reality necessary to the individual to achieve the heights of his/her personal understanding of the metapolitical message. All those elements are discussed and explained by Freda who oscillates between nihilism and a metapolitical discourse often using an initiatic and cryptic language to illustrate and communicate his viewpoint that may sound obscure to the non-initiated, revealing the ‘spiritual’ nature of his political message. In other passages, however, the language used is rather blunt and corrosive, inciting the reader to use violence in order to disintegrate the hated system in which the society seems condemned to live and operate. It is in fact, Freda’s alternance of open and frank rhetoric and obscure and cryptic language for adepts that constitutes the peculiar trait of his narrative and political message. Characteristics that we can detect not exclusively in his works but also in the interviews given that render him appealing and attractive to the neo-fascist cohort of the 1970s and beyond. Those traits of his personality have also allowed him to become a perennial mentor for the far-right youth circles of today as it will better analyzed and discussed in the chapter six of the present work.

The chapter has been structured as follows: the first sub-section explain the book and its author within the historical context of reference. It is intended as a historical account of the ideological and political climate in which Freda matured his ideological beliefs and political militancy, also referring to chapter two and chapter four of the present research. In addition, this sub-section aims to provide a critical analysis of the main concepts expressed in the text showing the strong influence on Freda’s views by authors for instance like the omnipresent Julius Evola.²⁸⁸ These intellectual and ideological influences will be further analyzed in the second subsection of this chapter where the idea of State as matured in Freda’s conceptual frame, shows a clear reference and personal interpretation of Plato’s idea of *Politeia*, and more in general, to Plato’s idea of State as

²⁸⁸ Julius Evola is undoubtedly an important theoretical reference for neo-fascism and scholarly articles and publications have been numerous during the years. Here we will refer mainly to Piero di Vona, *L’Alchimia della Razza. Julius Evola e la Razza dello Spirito* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010); *Metafisica e Politica in Julius Evola* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000); *Evola, Guénon e De Giorgio* (Reggio Emilia: Edizioni SEAR, 1993); Paul Furlong, *Social and Political Thought of Julius Evola* (London-New York: Routledge, 2011).

well as referring to Evola's idea of State, with also clear references to the equally utopian *City of the Sun* written by Tommaso Campanella²⁸⁹ or the Thomas Moore's *Utopia*.²⁹⁰ This sub-section is relevant because aims to demonstrate Freda's own perception of fascism by assessing his idea of state built on metaphysical and mythical grounds. It is in fact, this intellectual and ideological peculiarity that renders Freda an original interpreter of the fascist doctrine if compared to other fascist authors as it will be better explained in the chapter. In this sub-section the analysis will be conducted taking *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) with the support of Freda's other works like his doctoral thesis *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* [Plato, The State And Justice] (1964-1965) or *L'Albero e le Radici* [The Tree and Its Roots] (1996). In this sub-section it will be also assessed Freda's alleged militancy in the Nazi-Maoism ideological strand of Italian 1970s neo-fascism already mentioned in the previous chapters. By looking at the section that Freda dedicates in the text to Mao's China, he seems to overcome the ideological differences between communism and fascism. The third sub-section of the chapter will then analyze Freda's place in the wider intellectual tradition often developed by fascist ideologues steeped in themes like the opposition to modernity and to the values of liberal democracy to which Freda refers when developing his own political *Weltanschauung*. An assessment of the main ideas and principles of the anti-Enlightenment tradition²⁹¹ and of the German Conservative Revolution²⁹² is useful, especially for Freda himself claims in

²⁸⁹289 Campanella's book *The City of the Sun* (Italian: *La Città del Sole*; Latin: *Solis Civitas*) was written in 1602, soon after the author's imprisonment for heresy. The book consists of an imaginary dialogue between the Grandmaster of the Knights Hospitaller and a Genoese Sea-captain, inspired by Plato's *Republic* (*Politeia*) and the description of the mythical *Atlantis* in the Platonic *Timeus*. Here there is the description of a theocratic society that has property and women in common, and that is based on a rigid hierarchical society. See also: Regina Monteiro, 'The City of the Sun: A Machiavellian Utopia', *Moretana*, Vol. 49 (Dec.2012), pp. 41-54.

²⁹⁰ Thomas Moore's *Utopia* is a text written in 1516 and can be read as a socio-political satire of Moore's society. Again, here there is the description of a fictional island with the laws and customs of the population. Originally written in Latin is today available also in English. See also: Gerard Wegemer, 'The City of God in Thomas Moore's Utopia', *Renascence*, Vol.44, No.2 (Winter 1992), pp. 115-123.

²⁹¹ Isaiah Berlin, 'The Counter Enlightenment', Henry Hardy and Roger Hausher (eds.), *The Proper Study of Mankind: An Anthology of Essays* (London: Plimco, 19998); Isaiah Berlin and Henry Hardy (ed.) *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (London: Plimco, 2000); Bernard Yack, 'The Significance of Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment', *European Journal of Political Theory*, Vol. 12, No.1, (Jan.2013), pp. 49-60; Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler, *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia PA: American Philosophical Society, 2003).

²⁹² Martin Travers, *Critics of Modernity: The Literature of the Conservative Revolution in Germany 1890-1933* (Oxford: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001); Jeffrey Herf,

more than one occasion to refer to the authors of those philosophical traditions for the formation of his own ideological pattern.²⁹³ The forth sub-section is then dedicated to an analysis of René Guénon and Julius Evola's notion of the *religio perennis* as the mystical archetype that tends to shape the ideological core of the opposition to modernity. It will also explain the reasons that made it possible for Freda to see fascism as the appropriate response to fight modernity in all its declinations. Freda's own version of fascism has found strong ground in his personal theoretical approach to the so-called 'philosophers of the Tradition' like Evola and Guénon but also, as already mentioned above, to the thinkers of the German Conservative Revolution or to his other main philosophers of reference like Plato and Nietzsche for instance. Interesting is to notice how Freda's intellectual unrest and his innate sense of dissatisfaction with what he perceived to be the effects of liberalism and democracy, have contributed to shape his ultimate dystopic sense of historical reality and, as a consequence, his radical political response finding in ideological and political references a stimulating inspiration for his personal revolution appealing to all those who considered themselves against the bourgeois society of the time: 'We want however, address all those who reject radically the system, collocating themselves beyond the left, being confident enough that with them we could realize a true unity of action in the struggle against the burgeois society'.²⁹⁴ In the book *Un'ideologia dell'Origine*, the author Chiara Stellati,²⁹⁵ attempts an analysis of Freda's conceptual vision of politics and of the world affirming how he had always been seeking an 'ideology of the origins' by looking at the world of the Traditions and of the ancient world.²⁹⁶ By adopting such theoretical approach, Freda does not do anything original as he is repeating the intellectual pattern of authors like Evola for instance who is utterly fascinated by ancient and distant civilizations which became in his mystical conception of history firm points for the development of his doctrine. Another intellectual reference that often Freda

Reeactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study in the Rise of the German Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974); Roger Woods, *The Conservative Revolution in the Weimar Republic* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996).

²⁹³ Particularly relevant for the formation of Freda's own ideological profile are for instance authors of the German Conservative Revolution as Moeller van den Bruck or Oswald Spengler as himself declares in more than one occasion in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969).

²⁹⁴ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 48, my transl.

²⁹⁶ C. Stellati, *Una Ideologia dell'Origine*, Padova, Edizioni di Ar, 2002, Chap. 3

cites in his works and interviews is the medieval German mystic and heretic Meister Eckhart to whom he refers specifically when he attempts to justify his personal need for a model of perfect detachment from the material world²⁹⁷ as will better explained in the subsection. The fifth and conclusive subsection of the chapter will demonstrate how Freda's personal fascist mysticism justify his militancy and radical ideological beliefs. Finally, a conclusion will provide an evaluative summery of what analyzed and discussed in the chapter.

1. La Disintegrazione del Sistema and its Author

Franco Giorgio Freda's most famous and quoted text is undoubtedly the *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* written in 1969 just few months before the piazza Fontana bombing. Any attempts to analyze the Italian post-war neofascist radicalism needs to take into consideration this text and his author, and the reasons for the relevance of this book are multiple as set out in the introduction. Freda has become one of the most iconic figures of the Italian neo-fascist radicalism alongside others like Mario Tuti, Pierluigi Concutelli, Claudio Mutti or Stefano Delle Chiaie, and his involvement in the Piazza Fontana bombing is an inescapable reference when considering the strategy of tension period.²⁹⁸ The name of Freda became thus familiar to postwar Italian neo-fascism history, and the interest in his persona and in his works lays in being often considered quite enigmatic and charismatic figure compared to other well-known neo-fascist leaders of the strategy of tension period. Furthermore, what makes both his author and the above quoted text of lasting relevance for today's far-right cohort, is its philosophical and metaphysical approach, which claims to solve contingent socio-political problems allegedly generated by a corrupted western civilization as understood by Freda and his associates today as it

²⁹⁷ Meister Eckhart is a 14th century German mystic belonging to the Christian Neoplatonism school. Freda seems to be interested in all those religious and mystic figures that in his view, match his own idea of pure intellectual militant: a sort of pure, radical free spirit in direct contact with the Absolute and that conducts a pure, detached and monastic style of life. See: Bernard Mc Ginn, *The Mystical Thought of Meister Eckhart* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2001).

²⁹⁸ By the expression '*strategia della tensione*' ('strategy of tension') it is indicated a tactic used in the terrorist period named 'years of lead' that affected Italy between 1960s and 1980s.

was in the 1970s.²⁹⁹ Freda in this text broadens further his discourse and calls for action against capitalism.³⁰⁰ The real innovation of Freda within the context of the most inner circles of radical Italian neofascism of the time, is found in his renewed meaning of the political militancy within a spiritual and mystic dimension : ‘A culture of the ancestors’ soul, hence a culture of the evocation: religious, cultural, liturgical’³⁰¹ Freda offers thus an image of an ascetic and solitary hero facing adversities in typical Evolian style that fascinated several far-right militants of the time.

Alongside Freda we find other similar personalities gravitating in the neo-fascist circles of the period in question. Characters like Pino Ruti , Adriano Romualdi , Stefano delle Chiaie, Vincenzo Vinciguerra, Pierluigi Concutelli, Claudio Mutti, Mario Tuti or Delfo Zorzi need to be recognized as well established personalities and militants of the many far right groups and movements that, at the time, fully represented the further radicalization of the Evolian personal reading of fascism.³⁰² However, not many of these far-right activists and ideologues have managed to achieve the long-lasting popularity that Freda still enjoys within today’s militant far- right circles both in Italy and abroad as it will explained in chapter six. This may be due to Freda’s on-going activity as publisher with his publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar*, or his activism as theoretician of an ‘alternative thought’, and leader of an underground anti-immigrant organization active in the 1990s. His consistent activism and ideological engagement since the 1960s, could explain although partially, the success that *La Disintegrazione* has experienced in the past and that still enjoys today. Undoubtedly, the appeal of the book is due to an original and radical view that seems to transcend historical fascism by enhancing the metapolitical and philosophical aspects of the political and social analysis proposed in it. However, at the time of the first publication, its popularity was also due to the new ideological and socio-political climate determined by the arguably revolutionary conditions of 1968 in

²⁹⁹ *Manifesto del Gruppo Tradizionalista di Ar* in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p 70.

³⁰⁰ See Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp.48-49.

³⁰¹ Franco G. Freda, *Il Cattiverio e le Beatitudini-Risposta a Gianni Vattimo* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1981) republished by the *Gruppo di Ar: Totalità Sociale e Comunità Organica* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1982), p. 47 (pp. 45-48; cfr. Gianni Vattimo, ‘Da Quale Cultura Viene la Destra?’ in *Tuttolibri*, 13/09/1980; cfr. Chiara Stellati, *Un’Ideologia dell’Origine* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

³⁰² For a general reference see the book on the Italian Far-Right by Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War*, New York (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Italy and abroad. This is an historical period that witnessed a new understanding of ideological militancy which contemplated subverting established political systems by providing a stronger political response. The revolutionary approach was also felt in the radical right whereas modernity was perceived as the capitalist society's characteristic malaise as already explained in chapter two. Freda's ideas had their debut with his participation in the 'European Front Conference' held in Regensburg in the summer of 1969 as testified in preface to the text, which contains the following statement: 'The document that we are here presenting is the text of Franco G. Freda's contribution to the Regency Board of the Revolutionary European Front, held in Regensburg on 17 August 1969. We think that there is the need to publish it with the aim of proposing the terms of the discussion on the state and to offer the necessary indications to those that have shared with the author the same political experiences and that are now willing to overcome the uncertainty of the present moment to mobilize themselves in becoming subversive against the bourgeois society'.³⁰³

The above passage is indicative of how others within radical right circles perceived the relevance of Freda's ideas in that specific historical period of the late 1960s. As it stated, Freda's pamphlet soon acquired notoriety within the European far right circles. Whether considered as a political pamphlet or an ideological manifesto, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* represented in a concise and succinct document, the call to subversion and political activism against the bourgeois society and its decadent values. In this specific period, Freda was 28 years old and was openly endorsing a type of fascism whose main ideological trait was not at all nostalgic of the *Ventennio*³⁰⁴ but that reflected the spiritual neo-fascism engrossed by far-right movements like *Ordine Nuovo*. This new variant of fascist ideology welcomed by Freda and other young neo-fascist intellectuals of the period, was radical and absolute to the point of being perceived by its followers as that *religio perennis* popularized by the theosophists³⁰⁵. The idea of *religio perennis* will be later discussed in the chapter as we believe that this is one of the fundamental aspects of

³⁰³ This passage was the incipit and the introduction to the 1ST edition (1969) to the text in the 5TH edition of the text Franco Giorgio Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 17.

³⁰⁴ Italian nostalgic neo-fascism can be easily detected in the political party MSI (1946-1994). The party founded in 1946 and active in the Italian political arena, has always proposed a nostalgic mythology of the *Ventennio* and a cult of the figure of Mussolini, plus strong support to traditional values like family, religion and nation. On this point see: Piero Ignazi, *Il Polo Escluso* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1997); Marco Tarchi, *Esuli in Patria. I Fascisti nell'Età Repubblicana* (Modena: Ugo Guanda Editore, 2003).

³⁰⁵ William B. Parsons, *Teaching Mysticism*, (Oxford University Press, 2011).

Freda's personal interpretation of fascism. Piero di Vona, a well-established Italian scholar of Julius Evola and René Guénon, argues consistently in his comparative study on these two authors how their intellectual weight has made possible to produce a 'heretical' generation of postwar neofascist militants who were falling for a less traditional form of fascism and were instead embracing more consistently a specific fascist identity which included more mystical and meta-political tenets. Freda can be seen as exemplar of such a trend.³⁰⁶

The *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* therefore, as already mentioned, started as a pamphlet delivered at a meeting held by the European Revolutionary Front³⁰⁷ in which Freda participated with what appears to be a strong critique of the liberal democracy perceived as the ultimate political and intellectual fallacy produced by the bourgeois capitalistic society.³⁰⁸ Moreover, the text wished to be a critical proposal of the state and its nature and, at the same time, set out what were seen as the appropriate methods to radically change the *status quo* dictated by capitalism and liberal democracy while also giving an assessment of the main characteristics of what a perfect state would look like. In his intentions, Freda intended to provide a theoretical interpretation of the most inner aspects and dynamics of the society through his philosophical and metaphysical interpretation of mankind's history, discussing the different phases and stages of its alleged evolution as he understood it. The intention was to penetrate deeply the phenomenology of the state and thus, to comprehend its true and profound nature, functions and role. The intellectual approach to discussing the main themes of the book does not appear to be the original product of the author's theoretical reflection but rather, it is more to be intended as a proposed summary of already known theories and philosophical approaches to the nature of the state and on the nature of liberal democracy from an ultra-conservative and radical perspective. The same Freda in fact, states in the footnote to the second Italian edition of *La Disintegrazione*: 'I will therefore synthesize my opinion- opinion that has also to be considered as a warning to the reader- as it follows: in the *La Disintegrazione* there is

³⁰⁶ Piero Di Vona, *Evola e Guénon, Tradizione e Civiltà* (Napoli: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985).

³⁰⁷ The 'European Revolutionary Front' was a natural evolution of the movement *Jeune Europe* founded in the January of 1963 by the Belgian nationalist Jean Thiriart who envisaged a sort of 'communitarism European nationalism' very close to the position of other *mâitres a penser* of the radical right like Julius Evola and as well as Freda.

³⁰⁸ The common critique moved by neo-fascist movements of this period to the capitalist model was of racial nature as liberal democracy and capitalism were considered consequences of the influence of Judaism on what was defined as 'western civilization' along the line of Evola's or Spengler's critique of modernity.

nothing to be considered original; the only personal elements in it are the commas and the periods; while almost everything else is instead to be considered pristine'.³⁰⁹ It is interesting to notice in such statements how Freda stresses that the text should not be considered original. The reason for this clarification is to state his role as mere channel through which re-proposing what Freda believed to be the universal principles belonging to a superior form of eternal knowledge.³¹⁰ In *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, Freda structured his analysis around the following themes: the critique of the bourgeois society and its consequent capitalism, the divine and absolute nature of the state, the exaltation of the ascetic hero as ideal-type, the myth and the mystique of war; and finally, the structure of the ideal society. All themes that we find in Julius Evola et al.

The book is then essentially the evaluative summary of the several theories and interpretations of the nature of the state as given by the many authors of reference with particular attention to Julius Evola and Plato but also to German Conservatives like Moller van den Bruck, to name but few.³¹¹ Within this conceptual context, *La Disintegrazione* is an attempt to provide an analysis of the contemporary society's dynamics taking into account the interaction and rapport between the individual and the state, a theme dear to authors like the ones above mentioned. Here the proposal of a different *Weltanschauung* was not intended, strictly speaking, as the product of his own original line of thought. Rather, Freda offers his ideas in a new interpretative synthesis of a quite consolidated radical anti-modern tradition. This was a tradition that included personalities like Plato, Evola, Guénon, Thiriart, Spengler, Nietzsche, Leibniz, Vico, Fichte, Schelling, et al. as the major intellectual references that can be inscribed broadly within the anti-Enlightenment tradition, a theme that will be developed further in the chapter.³¹²

³⁰⁹The above quote appears in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1978), 2nd edition, and was quoting the above Freda's warning that we also find in the French edition of the book, (French transl. by E Houillefort), *Totalité*, (Paris: 1978), p.1, my transl.

³¹⁰ Freda states here his ideological influences that look back at the esoteric and philosophical approach of Evola and Guénon and that will have a determining effect on his overall approach to politics.

³¹¹ On Moeller van den Bruck see: Stan Laurysens, *The Man Who Invented the Third Reich: The Life and Times of Arthur Moeller Van Den Bruck* (New York: Sutton Publishing, 2003).

³¹² by 'Anti- Enlightenment' (original German term *Gegen Aufklärung* we broadly indicate a counter Enlightenment philosophical and literary movement born out of reaction to the French Enlightenment and found in philosophers like Fichte and Schelling some of the most determining personalities between the late 18th century and the early 19th as its main intellectual fathers. Interesting to note how the *Gegen Aufklärung* has provided

Freda also grounded his ideas in the philosophy of Plato, a major philosophical reference point for him as proven by the text of *La Disintegrazione* which was heavily inspired by his law degree thesis on Plato's idea of state.³¹³ Freda used such intellectual positions to add weight to his ideas, and his ascetical standpoint and meta-political, mystical worldview allowed him to profess a certain degree of mysticism within neofascist circles already familiar with Evola's theories. His radicalism reflected the ideological blueprint especially of intellectuals like Julius Evola, ideologue and author of reference for a specific type of neo-fascist militant as he is.³¹⁴ The circles of domesticated neofascism, usually still bound to a specific nostalgic lore of the Mussolini's *Ventennio*, found Freda rather eccentric and guilty of ideological heresy. Nevertheless, they seemed to tolerate him within their files and ranks alongside other similar radical personalities, such as Clemente Graziani and Pierluigi Concutelli.³¹⁵

Freda refers to the Nietzschean rule of the 'military academy of the soul' against the decadence and through the decadence that would then create a different type of society being inspired by the Spartan society's coordinates.³¹⁶ Therefore, it is not to be considered out of place the consideration that Freda had for Mao's China because according to him, from Maoism had emerged 'a vision almost Spartan of the world, a meaning of life which is hard, sober, military; an ascetic style of the existence. An organic rhythm of loyalty that binds to the Leader all the national community and favors that solidarity tension, which in turn, reflects in the work of the entire population characters of voluntarist discipline, of a free "proletarized" discipline'.³¹⁷ The idealizing of Communist China was another

to be the ground for the German movement known as *Sturm und Drang*, which in turn paved the way to the Romantic and Gothic genre in literature and in the Arts. The Counter-Enlightenment has been developing through time until the latest permutation known as *Conservative Revolution* with more political and ideological aims of which some effects can still be detected in the pre-and post war period and, according to some scholars, is quite active nowadays under different forms and declinations (see Zeev Sternhell and Isaiah Berlin on this specific topic).

³¹³ Franco G. Freda, *Platone e lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* (Padova, Edizioni di Ar 2011).

³¹⁴ Freda takes as main ideological reference Evola's books *Cavalcare la Tigre* (1961), *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928), and *Gli Uomini e Le Rovine* (1953).

³¹⁵ Clemente Graziani and Pierluigi Concutelli were both the leaders of the movement *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order).

³¹⁶ Franco G. Freda, *Ordine dei Ranghi* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1980), my transl.

³¹⁷ Franco G. Freda, *Due Lettere Controcorrente* (1972) in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, 5th edition (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 101, my transl.

anomaly of Freda as representative of radical postwar neo-fascism. However, must be said that Freda's admiration for Mao's Communist China, expressed in more than one occasion in his works as the ideal social model to pursue as opposed to capitalism,³¹⁸ should not deceive the reader, for Freda's admiration for Mao's Cultural Revolution and consequent new communist regime, indicated instead something more complex. Freda saw in Mao's China the embodiment of a type of society based on a rigid hierarchy and on the respect for the Traditions that he envisaged in the social model of Sparta too.³¹⁹ The admiration for Mao's China as seen as the perfect replication of the Spartan society in a modern context, reveals the metapolitical nature of Freda's political activism even if his peculiar and to certain extent, innovative perspective in praising Mao's China, may incline to classify Freda as a representative of the Nazi-Maoist movement.³²⁰ Instead, as we will see later in the chapter, Freda's admiration for Communist China recalls his own perception of the 'ideal society' and therefore, the association Freda makes in relation to the Nazi-Maoism movement results interesting when attempting to understand his idea of communitarism and socialism that refers to the ideological tenets of the German Conservative Revolution, as well as to Plato's model of ideal city. Due to his originality and peculiarity, Freda remains a figure who tends to be admired by the most radical militants and neo-fascist intellectuals who consider him, as we can read on his website, as the 'unimaginable man, that totally fascinates you or scares you. A man that one instinctively worships or totally avoids. You must recite aloud Papini's "March of the Brave", for you will be sure that he will make you feel ashamed of what you have just said, read, and not done, or eaten, with his intellectual horsewhip always ready[...]'³²¹ This quote can be indicative enough to suggest the halo of myth that continues to surround him in the far right circles still today where he continues to be considered an intellectual and an important ideological point of reference for the contemporary transnational radical

³¹⁸ See Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2010).

³¹⁹ Ibid. Freda, (2010), pp. 29-34.

³²⁰ By 'Nazi-Maoism' is intended a political and ideological movement founded among the students of the Law faculty at the University of Rome in 1968. This peculiar political group used to blend together the typical Marxist struggle against Capitalism with ideals like the spiritual and intellectual superiority of those who were standing against the materialist society generated by Capitalism, including the myth of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* which had found in political and ideological icons like Mao Zed-Dong and Che Guevara its perfect embodiment.

³²¹ This description of Freda's character and attitude can be found on the website: www.edizionidiar.com (last accessed on 22/02/2020 at 15:46 and also in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padova, Edizioni di Ar, 2010, p.181).

right.³²² But this quote shows also all the efforts in creating an image of an individual convinced that the *praxis* ‘beyond good and evil’, to quote one of Nietzsche’s iconic phrases, is the right path to follow for a new political and social palingenesis³²³ as the history of his active political militancy seems to suggest.

Within this context, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* must therefore be considered as the evidence of a historical period of socio-political and intellectual turmoil. It has had a lasting significance too, and the text has been recognized as a political and ideological step-stone by many neo-fascist radical groups outside and inside the national borders. Currently, there are in circulation three translations of the book being the last one in order of time the Czech edition published in September 2014. It has also been translated in French and in Portuguese. The Italian edition has five editions with the last one being published in 2010 and that is the edition adopted for the present analysis.³²⁴ The text should not be considered as just a political pamphlet but rather, an ideological manifesto of a radical right generation ready to action and bearer of different and more spiritual type of fascism as already stressed in the introduction. The unstable climate Italian socio-political climate echoing the transnational intellectual and ideological turmoil of the 1968 wave, seems to have provided the perfect framework for Freda’s ideological engagement. Undoubtedly, *La Disintegrazione* has contributed to create the image of Freda as one of the most intuitive and charismatic minds within the radical right milieu, and the most indicative of the neo-fascist terrorism of the 1970s.

2. The Ideal State and Society

Freda’s works resent heavily of the influence of several authors whereas some have a direct linkage with the traditional far-right or anti-Enlightenment tradition like the French René Guénon, Julius Evola, the German author Oswald Spengler and, more in general,

³²² See for instance the interview to Freda broadcasted by the CasaPound’s online radio *Bandiera Nera* (Black Flag) www.casapounditalia.org, or the new website in English: www.emontsalvat.org (both last accessed on 10/01/2022).

³²³ Ibid. Freda,(2010), pp. 35-38.

³²⁴ The book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* has reached five editions in 2010. The text has also a French edition (1974), a Portuguese edition (1983), and a Czech edition (2014). Information from the website www.edizionidiar.com(last accessed on 25/02/2015).

the German Conservative Revolution movement. However, another author that Freda often refers to is the fourteenth century German theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart who seems to have intellectual weight in influencing or in the developing Freda's thought as better explained in chapter five. Freda's apparently ideological contradictions and his self-proclaimed ideological heresy could be understood in the light of his broad intellectual formation as a prominent figure amongst the Italian 1970s radical right kindred spirits. In our analysis of Freda's personal understanding of the concept of the state, it is necessary first to refer to the definition of the state provided by Julius Evola, but also consider the ideal state theory according to Plato. Understanding those two crucial theoretical aspects of Freda's intellectual background, will hopefully facilitate the reading of the complexity of his personality and explain his militancy, thought and popularity within the far-right circles. In more than one occasion Freda affirmed that *La Disintegrazione* owes a debt to the Evolian works and in particular, to *The Men and the Ruins* (1953) and to *Riding the Tiger* (1961) as revealed by Francesco Ingravalle, a member of Freda's inner cohort.³²⁵ However, it is Evola's *Imperialismo Pagano* [Pagan Imperialism] (1928) alongside with Plato's *Politeia*, which seem to have influenced mostly the theoretical framework of *La Disintegrazione*. These seem to have been Freda's main texts of reference while writing the text.³²⁶ It is useful to start the present analysis with the choice of the book's title. The choice of the term *Disintegrazione* (disintegration) is not casual as Freda reveals in many occasions a maniacal attention to the etymology of the terms that he uses for his books and generally speaking, to express his ideas and personal *Weltanschauung*. On this aspect, the editor to the fifth edition of the text, Francesco Ingravalle, points out the inner meaning of the book title. According to Ingravalle, to choose the term 'disintegration' rather than for instance, 'dissolution' or 'annihilation' indicates a specific desire to eliminate the 'integration' of the various parts that forms the given political and social 'system'.³²⁷ The idea is indeed to destroy, disintegrating the 'system' (from the Greek *sun-ístemi*: to keep together) by fragmenting its composition that constitutes its essence. Therefore, according to Freda, a system is the result of the integrated functioning parts that are complementary to each other as himself states in the text in more than one occasion. In *La Disintegrazione*, Freda also develops

³²⁵ Francesco Ingravalle, 'Introduction' in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), (pp. 9-14), p.10

³²⁶ Julius Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano* (Rome: Atanor Editore, 1928).

³²⁷ Francesco Ingravalle in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p 9.

his analysis of the nature of the state by combining the Evolian metaphysics of politics with Plato's ideal city theory as it will better explained in the chapter. The text reveals to the reader a meta-political approach in developing a peculiar interpretation of the fascist ideology's core ideas, which inserts Freda's activism on a mystical and metaphysical level. The most relevant parts of the text are those in which he discusses the nature of the state (pp.29-44) and where he delivers a ferocious critique of the capitalist society and of the bourgeois system (pp.19-28).

The ideal state is central in Freda that he considers according to a mystical and mythical perception: 'we will therefore, comprehend the state absolute truth, as value and thus, as truth that has a *pro aeternitate* significance'.³²⁸ Furthermore, in Freda's article *Alienazioni e Prospettive* [Alienations and Perspectives] published in 1962, he conceives the idea of state as '[something] that links together the individual man to the other men, not necessarily of the same Nation, but of the same Civilization with the same mindset and feelings'.³²⁹ In his dissertation, Freda talks extensively of the concept of *eudamonia* as a central function of the ideal state.³³⁰ Starting with the classic philosophical concept of *eudemonia*, we need to clarify that whereas the term is freely translated as 'happiness' in reality, the term's proper translation should be instead 'harmony' or, 'contentment'. Freda reaches the conclusion that the common translation of the term meaning 'happiness' is the consequent deduction that follows from stating that only in a society where there is a state that can guarantee the harmony among the different social groups, we can then have 'happiness'.³³¹

In matter of fact, this is a concept that is explained and discussed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,³³² whereas the perfect harmony reached within the individual must reflect the harmony of the parts of the society in which he or she lives.³³³ The notion of the *eudaimonia* is important to Freda's personal vision of ideal society as in his book he describes an ideal state that strongly reminds or even replicates the idea of state as discussed in both the Platonic and Aristotelian political philosophy.³³⁴ But the classical

³²⁸ Ibid. Freda, (2010), p. 29.

³²⁹ Franco G. Freda, 'Alienazioni e Prospettive', *Il Nazionale*, XIV, No. 7, February 1962 in Freda (2010), p. 57, my trans.

³³⁰ Franco G. Freda, *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* (1965) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1996).

³³¹ Ibid. Freda, (1996), p.30-31.

³³² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* Lesley Brown (ed.) (Oxford University Press, 2009).

³³³ Ibid. Aristotle (2009).

³³⁴ Ibid. Freda (2010), p 30-34.

Greek philosophers above mentioned are not the sole authors Freda refers to when building the theoretical framework for his personal idea of ideal state to oppose the corrupted and decadent liberal democratic capitalist society whereas the idea of state proclaimed by Freda is eternal, mythical and divine: ‘“Our” myth of the state is not mere utopia, whereas by utopia we mean something that cannot happen because the product of mere intellectual elucubrations. The myth of the state is the myth of a political order, which without becoming in a specific temporal and spatial dimension. *It is eternal and eternally propose itself as true*’.³³⁵ The focus on the ideal state is in function of a profound critique of the capitalist and modern society’s structure. The purpose is to provide the solution to such decadence and corruption generated by this type of social model. The book echoes the political climate and struggle of the time but it can also be collocated within a metaphysical and mystic interpretative approach to politics, for its language and syntax seem to be inspired by Julius Evola’s lexicon and figures of speech as well as referring to other authors, amongst those Plato, that guides Freda in the shaping of his own idea of perfect society and state.

Other interesting aspects of *La Disintegrazione* worth of attention are Freda’s personal interpretation and ferocious criticism of the capitalist society model based on money that emerged after the seventeenth century by introducing his personal interpretation of *aristocratic communitarism*,³³⁶ and finally, the call to political action stretched to the extreme and radical form of armed struggle with the portrait of the ideal type of the hero-warrior, and the reference to the Spartan model of the society that he sees replicated at the time of the writing, in Mao’s communist China: ‘a vision of the world which is Spartan, a sense of a sober lifestyle, hard, military, an ascetic style of the existence. An organic return of loyalty that chain to the Leader all the national community and favours that solidarity that in turn, reflects in the work of a population the characteristics of voluntary discipline, of a militia free and de-proletarized.’³³⁷ Freda’s fascination for the Chinese

³³⁵ Ibid. Freda (2010), p. 30.

³³⁶ Plato in his *Politeia* (The Republic), envisages an economic model based on the common property, but at the same time, the structure of his ideal city is based on a rigid hierarchical order which sees at the higher level the individuals more intellectually gifted, creating in fact, a new type of aristocracy based not on blood lineage but on personal characteristics. On this point insists Julius Evola who in his *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928), referred heavily to this aspect of Plato’s political philosophy. Another intellectual and political movement that adopted the Platonic model of ‘aristocratic communitarism’ is the German Conservative movement as in authors like Moeller van den Bruck.

³³⁷ Franco G. Freda, ‘Ordine dei Ranghi’ (1980) in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua; Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 107 (my trans.).

communism is based on the preservation of the ancient Chinese tradition of the cult of the ancestors that Mao's 'cultural revolution' did not destroy but instead encouraged.³³⁸ The Chinese model of communist comradeship sported by Mao's China held therefore all the characteristics in Freda's personal interpretation of the Platonic communitarianism spirit that would then shape the ideal society.³³⁹ Most interestingly, Freda seems to admire specifically the cult of the ancestry which in his view, denotes respect of the Tradition and of the ancient culture that we can find in Mao's communist China despite Marxism: ' [...] culture of the soul of the ancestors, henceforth, culture of the evocation: religious, cultural, liturgical evocation. A culture where the substance is regulated by temporal coordinates, but whose essence is continuous, whose hieratic symbol is the category of the forever, whose operative tool is the memory, is the return'.³⁴⁰ In his purposely initiatic and 'spiritual' or esoteric language, which seems to be a trademark of his persona, Freda expresses all his admiration for Mao and how his leader-like personality has been able to re-build a new nation keeping alive the myth of the Chinese spiritual and cultural traditions even within the ideological coordinates of Marxist ideology.

Freda's critique of the capitalist society seems to resonate Marxism conception of capitalism. But such a criticism sported by Freda in more than one occasion cannot be easily ascribed to the most commonly known ideological traits of Marxism. Freda's intellectual standpoints are also notably different from Marx's theory of the society although the conclusions and the main points of the analysis provided by Freda were developed on similar line to the classic Marxist critique of the bourgeois system.³⁴¹ To 'disintegrate' the bourgeois system, to use Freda's favorite verb, means primarily to eliminate what keeps the parts together, namely, to eliminate what it is considered to be the *nous* of the bourgeois system, that is, the money. Once the 'disintegration' of the capital would be complete only then there would be the possibility to start again. A society could begin anew from the ashes of a decadent and corrupted bourgeois society giving the way to a fundamental altered perception of civilization and its values. Freda proposes the creating of the *ground zero* for a new beginning.³⁴² This longing for a new palingenesis is however, a typical characteristic of fascist ideology as it has been pointed out already in several occasion in this work. The total destruction of the society in order to liberate it

³³⁸ Ibid. Freda (2010), p. 107 (my trans.).

³³⁹ Ibid. Freda (2010), p. 107 (my trans.).

³⁴⁰ Franco G. Freda, *Il Cattiverio delle Beatitudini (Risposta a Gianni Vattimo)* (1981) in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 118 (my trans.).

³⁴² Ibid. Freda, (2010), pp. 9-10.

from a perceived crisis of decay and corruption generated by modern liberal regimes is thus felt necessary for the setting of the foundations for an alternative concept of modern society. On this re-birth of the society rising from the ashes of capitalism and liberal democracy, Freda and many other fascist ideologues are also influenced by a long tradition of anti-rationalist thinking. On this point, we can agree with the scholar Zeev Sternhell who has noticed that the idea of rebirth from corruption and decay can be traced back to figures such as the eighteenth century philosopher Giambattista Vico (1688-1744).³⁴³ Therefore, Freda's analysis of the State and his ferocious critique of the liberal democracy and capitalist society is nothing new, as this idea had already been expressed by many authors belonging to the *Anti-Enlightenment* philosophical tradition that flourished from the eighteenth century onwards and that started the anti-modern tradition.³⁴⁴

In a more mystical fashion, philosophers of the esoteric tradition like Guénon and Evola have expressed the same ideas and theories and adopted similar ideological and philosophical approaches. Freda in his review of Evola's *Cavalcare la Tigre* [To Ride the Tiger] (1961) published on the journal *Intervento* [Intervention],³⁴⁵ envisages the coming of a *ground zero* where a new era will be generated from the ashes of the old *Zivilization*. As Freda puts it: 'we will reach the ground zero, a term that will precede the *Novum Seculum* and we will welcome the resurgence of the authentic and normal paths of the human existence'.³⁴⁶ This quote typified Freda's longing for a political struggle that, according to Evolian parameters, does not exclude the use of violence.³⁴⁷ This was an idea that Freda also proposed in his work *Alienazioni e Prospettive* [Alienations and Perspectives] (1962) already quoted here where he expresses his views on postmodern society.³⁴⁸ From his perspective, mankind was experiencing a dichotomy between the exteriority (*esteriorità*) represented by the democratic state with its institutions, and the interiority (*interiorità*) of the human essence. The solution to such dichotomy between the

³⁴³ Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-enlightenment tradition*, New Heaven, CT, Yale University Press, (2010), p. 98.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., Sternhell, (2010), p.98.

³⁴⁵ Franco G. Freda, 'Recensione a "Cavalcare la Tigre" di Julius Evola', *Intervento*, year 1, No.1 (1961) in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 58-64.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., Freda, (2010), p.10.

³⁴⁷ Julius Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1978), pp. 100-105; Julius Evola, *Rivolta contro il mondo moderno* (1934) (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998), pp. 180-185.

³⁴⁸ Franco G. Freda, *Alienazioni e Prospettive*, (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1962).

inside and the outside would be the destruction of the ideology that has generated it, namely, liberal democracy. Again here the influence of Evola is evident as this is a concept that is expressed throughout his works.

Freda in his critical analysis of modernity attributes great moral responsibility to capitalism and liberal democracy for the separation and inconsistent rapport detected between the authority and the individual in the given system's socio-political dynamics. Indeed, the criticism to the idea of democracy finds its roots in the Greek philosophical tradition already with Plato.³⁴⁹ In *La Disintegrazione* and in his other works and publications, this intellectual thread can be easily detected starting with his dissertation *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* (1965).³⁵⁰ It is therefore due to this deep fascination for Plato that in his *La Disintegrazione* Freda seems to support a line of thought that allegedly praises two ideologies and political systems in open contradiction with each other like Marxism and fascism. On this point, it is necessary to specify that the interpretation of Plato that Freda develops is itself quite contentious. Freda claims in his *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* [Plato, The State According to Justice] (1965) to have detected in Plato the claim that there is a correspondence between the individual and the state within a well-established hierarchical order, and this establishes the *eudamonia* of which we have discussed above.³⁵¹

The Platonic social order described by Freda set out a society's structure as rigidly hierarchical based around the following order: at top of the hierarchical scale we find the Philosopher-King, then on the second level are the guardians, on the third level we find the traders, on the fourth level the farmers, and in the subsequent sub-layers, the laborers that constitute the base for this pyramidal social structure. By explaining this Platonic view of the ideal society, Freda repeats what Evola had already argued in many of his works, especially in *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928), where Evola draws a parallel between the social structure of Plato's ideal city and the Hindu social order with its caste system that mirrors the Hindu cosmology so to create a correspondence between the celestial

³⁴⁹ Plato's critical analysis of democracy in his *Politeia* brings the philosopher to propose an alternative ideal society hierarchically based and with the property in common. Platonic ideas will be taken to a further development of this ideal society model by Thomas Moore's *Utopia* (1516) and Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun* (1602).

³⁵⁰ F. Freda, *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* (1965) (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 1996).

³⁵¹ Ibid. Freda, (2011), pp. 70-75.

order and the worldly one.³⁵² The consequence of such conviction is that the perfect, ideal social system seems to be the one based on class division whereas each component contributes, according to its own role, to the *eudemonia*, namely, to the harmony of the overall society thus structured and organized.

According to this perspective, an open, horizontal system like liberal democracy which allows the social mobility, is considered impure, imperfect and would only generate chaos. The main criticism moved to the notion of liberal democracy as regime and ideology is the emphasis given by the latter to the alleged freedom granted to the members of society on the grounds of a given egalitarian and universal parameters.³⁵³ The liberal-democratic society is also responsible for breaking down the alleged perfect order that exists in the hierarchical model envisaged by ancient traditions like Hinduism or classic philosophy like Plato re-proposed by authors of the far-right milieu like the over-quoted Julius Evola. Hierarchy is in fact fundamental in the ideal society model envisaged by Freda and his associates, for they recognize the ‘natural’ differentiation in the dichotomy ‘superior-inferior’ between individuals of the same society, and with other ethnic groups that is excluded by liberal democracy. Such a position recalls the identitarian theory of the French intellectual Alain De Benoist, who in the same years was publishing his work focused on similar theories talking of ‘identitarianism’; a definition and theory that also Freda expresses in *La Disintegrazione*. and in his other works as opposed and therefore questioning, the supposed equality and universality of values and virtues amid individuals proposed by the Enlightenment. Freda claims in more than one occasion that the aristocratic and elitist features of the ideal society found in Plato needs to be rediscovered. This is an argument that Freda develops also using specifically as a source once more Evola’s text *Imperialismo Pagano*. Freda disputes the validity of the fundamental principles upon which liberal democracy is based and defines liberal democracy as a corrupted and corrupting ideological force showing, in this as in many other aspects of his ideas, the influence of his authors of reference like Julius Evola. To support this point of the argument is interesting for instance to analyze Freda’s so called ‘aristocratic communitarism’ that he praises in more than one occasion. Again, this was not a symptom of Freda’s specific sympathy for Marxism but rather, the embracing of a social model already theorized in the Platonic state theory where the economy of thus envisaged ideal

³⁵² Evola strongly believes in a correspondence between the cosmological order of the planets and the system of castes as in the Hindu mythology. This can be seen in all his works but especially in his *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928).

society, implies the sharing of goods, women and slaves and the abolition of private property.³⁵⁴ or looking at the theory of ‘aristocratic communitarism’ as developed by the German Conservative Revolution movement. The idea of a ‘primordial communitarism’ is indeed ancient and not only because it can be theorized by the so called ‘Platonic communism’ but because it has been re-proposed cyclically by other philosophers before the advent of the German Conservative Revolutionists of the early 20th century, and by the already mentioned Thomas Moore’s *Utopia* (1516) and in Tommaso Campanella’s *The City of the Sun* (1602)

If, however, Freda seems to be inspired by the utopian views of the ideal society as expressed by classic authors like Plato, Thomas Moore, Tommaso Campanella or, the more recent school of thought of the German Conservative Revolutionists regarding the idea of ‘aristocratic communitarism’ as the ideal economic model of the ideal city-state, he seems equally heavily impressed with Mao’s Cultural Revolution not only because he sees in the Chinese communist society the respect of the Traditions and rejection of capitalism and modernity, which for him, truly Evolian, cannot be neglected, but also because he envisages in the Chinese model a new Sparta. In praising Mao’s China, Freda creates a political and historical hybrid by inserting the Chinese ‘new Sparta’ within the Platonic ideal social structure.³⁵⁵ In the specific, Freda is equalizing Mao’s China to the Spartan social model that he reckons to be the perfect political template for his envisaged ideal society. In Freda’s view, Mao’s China represents an ideal life style that is ascetic, simple, military, rigidly hierarchical and almost monastic being this in his view, the only valid alternative path that will be able to contrast the corrupting and corrupted bourgeois world with its values that he is so fiercely fighting against.³⁵⁶ The choice of Mao’s China as a new version of the perfect Spartan society was not out of character. Here Freda is not praising in anyway Marxism but rather a type of social system that values all those virtues he idealistically envisaged, and that constitute in his view, the ideal and perfect society where the individual fully displays his divine nature beyond any rigid contraposition of fascism/communism. From what explained it is clear the metapolitical character of Freda’s ideological and political projects which not necessarily follows the

³⁵⁴ Plato, *Republic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 159-189.

³⁵⁵ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 26-27

³⁵⁶ Freda praises the State’s structure in Mao’s China, for he recognises in it a sort of ‘universal fascism’ that shapes and forms any political system that contemplates a strong central State and the abolition of private property and social classes divide as in Franco G. Freda, ‘L’Ordine di Sparta’ in *Tradizione*, Vol.3, No.4 (Sept.-Nov.) 1965.

mainstream radical right thoughts as expressed by other neo-fascist ideologues and militants. In his willingness of creating a dystopic ideal society taking as reference communist China and thus overcome the dichotomy fascism/communism we can easily detect his metapolitical discourse whereas ideological differences are erased and in their place to give place instead to an holistic view of the political discourse.

In this ideal society thus conceived, Freda gives a central place to the idea of justice. Here the Platonic influence can be even more strongly perceived as Freda borrows the notion of justice from Plato according to whom, justice is nothing more than the harmony of the parts, whereas each part is perfectly inserted in its own given place.³⁵⁷ Justice here does not have the moral implication of choosing between good and evil but rather, to be simply the result of the balance between the particles. Consequently, 'good' is simply the thus created harmony among the parts. There is no space for an idea of justice implying good and evil as per the Christian ethos for instance. Freda is in fact, rejecting the notion of justice based on Christian-Judaic values as representative of the burgeoise culture. Within this general overview of the ideal society, we are in the presence of a rigid social scheme that, starting with Plato, is characterized by a scale of virtues (or *aretai*) each one of which corresponds to a specific social group.³⁵⁸ The idea of justice in Plato is therefore explicated into a perfect harmony generated by the correspondence between the cosmological order and the social hierarchical order granted by a state divine in its nature.³⁵⁹ The same is also argued by Evola who instead uses the Hindu social order and mythology to discuss and illustrate the same concept of justice within the perfect State.³⁶⁰ It follows that any alteration of this perfect order in a given society will create an alteration in the *cosmos*. From what therefore discussed and afore mentioned, we can conclude that Freda's vision can be defined meta-political as he tends to transcend time and space, and rather seems to envisage an impossible and imaginary reality to become real maybe in a faraway future. This is another peculiarity of Freda compared to other far-right militants and intellectuals of his circles, whose ideological background and political militancy although common to Freda, do not have the same metaphysical and mystical notes that clearly emerge from his works or declarations.

Within this idealization of a supposedly perfect hierarchical society, it is necessary to

³⁵⁷ Plato, *The Republic*, (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2011), pp. 227-249.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., Plato, *The Republic*, p.250.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., Freda (2010), pp. 40-42.

³⁶⁰ J. Evola, *imperialismo Pagano*, (Rome: Atanor Edizioni,1928).

specify that the Greek term that Plato uses to indicate a particular social group is *genos*, whose closer translation in English could be *ancestry* and was translated by Freda in more than one occasion deliberately with the term *race*.³⁶¹ In his volume *I Lupi Azzurri* (1990), Freda gives the coordinates to his ‘soldiers’ of the ideal society recalling what already expressed in *La Disintegrazione*. The text is a testimony of Freda’s political project he initiated in the early 1990s when he created a para-military organization whose members (azure wolves) were meant to fight the immigration from third world countries to Italy as it will better explained in chapter five. Freda’s insisting on the term *race* indicates his strong belief in the Evolian theory of the perfect society as being racially based; an idea that is discussed in many of his works too.³⁶² Embracing this ideal city state based on racial terms again is in contrast with the bourgeois system and its principles. Freda seems here to be strongly fascinated by Evola’s personal account of mankind’s history and proposes again, although from a different perspective, the same criticism and hopes for a new type of community with different structures and values as opposite to the one he seems to experience in his lifetime.³⁶³ Freda was indeed looking for a new era, a new time, a rebirth of the Hindu-European civilization based on different values and principles. In this palingenesis thus envisaged of the western civilization, Freda looked back to the utopian social models available finding the answer he was in search of. The theme of the palingenesis is also recurrent in Evola’s works to which Freda seems to constantly refer to as observed by the Italian academic Chiara Stellati.³⁶⁴

Freda’s personal interpretation of fascist ideology seems therefore to have been pushed to the extreme, to the point of trespassing the boundaries of the very same fascist doctrine principles. Freda’s fascism is mystical, almost spiritual if we mean by the term ‘spiritual’ a category of the soul. An understanding of fascism that Freda shares with other neo-fascist militants. However, fascism in Freda’s perspective seems to be more as a philosophy of life, a *Weltanschauung*, a modality of the spirit, a Romantic category that defines the human being and his existence.³⁶⁵ Within this Romantic and idealist view of

³⁶¹ Franco G. Freda, *Platone. Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* (1958) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1996).

³⁶² See Julius Evola, *Il Mito del Sangue* (1937-1942) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2009); Julius Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano* (1928) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1978); Julius Evola, *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* (1941) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1994).

³⁶³ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 37-40.

³⁶⁴ Chiara Stellati, *Un’Ideologia dell’Origine*

³⁶⁵ insert reference

radical fascism as a category of the spirit, the conjunction between Plato's ideal society and the envisaged new Sparta identified with Mao's China found its own significance in Freda's personal intellectual and political development.³⁶⁶ Within his conceptual framework, the idea of state also found its significance according to thus developed political and ideological perspective. From this standpoint, Freda embraces an ideological and political viewpoint that would eventually lead him to become one of the most influential characters of Italian extreme right underground movements with his personal involvement in the 'mother of all terrorist attacks'³⁶⁷ as it will be better explained in chapter four.

Due to Freda's personal history and thought that show element of originality if compared to other neo-fascist thinkers at the time of his militancy, it is therefore difficult to frame Freda into a specific strand of neo-fascism although he has been often labelled as a Nazi-Maoist or as an 'aristocratic communitarist'³⁶⁸ creating also confusion in all those who were trying to understand his enigmatic presence within the complex 'neo-fascist archipelago' of the Italian 'years of lead' far right.³⁶⁹ Therefore, the alleged Nazi-Maoism present in Freda's personal analysis of the state and society should be critically analyzed within a specific historical and ideological context, assessing whether it could be argued its influence on Freda's overall political and ideological standpoint or, whether Freda represents a peculiar and eccentric personality within the radical right milieu of the time. Freda was hugely and profoundly influenced by Evola's philosophical approach to politics and ideology, especially in the perception of the political engagement of the individual. In Freda's view, the human being that acquires such inner enlightenment through knowledge is thus ready to subordinate his body and soul to the spirit³⁷⁰ would then be able to collocate himself within a precise hierarchical order that mirrors his inner degree of perfection. Such inner order would reflect the external hierarchy of the society defining

³⁶⁶ Freda, 2010, pp. 30-33.

³⁶⁷ See Chapter 4 of the present thesis.

³⁶⁸ Insert reference

³⁶⁹ By the apparent oxymoron 'aristocratic communitarism' is intended a specific ideological perspective that sees the ideal society in terms of common property within a hierarchical structure that allows very little social mobility, being the higher positions only for the best selected breed of the community. Both expressions, 'Nazi-Maoism' and 'aristocratic communitarism' tend to create an ideal society that limits the individual freedom of expression and that eliminates the relevance of private property the latter seen more as an element of disturbance and disharmony in this ideal world. In both cases, the reference to Mao's China or to the Spartan model of society is evident.

³⁷⁰ In classical Greek philosophy and in Plato particularly, there is correspondence between the physical (body), intellectual (mind) and spiritual (soul): all those aspects form the individual.

an ontological and analogical correspondence between the individual and the order of the State which will be thus evident and commonly accepted.³⁷¹

This vision of a new type of society is Freda's intellectual response to the flaws he detects in the modern capitalist society and an attempt to a new approach in order to tackle the fallacies and inconsistencies of a world he does not accept or he thinks not to belong to. Instead, he fantasizes a new 'world order' where he can finally witness what he calls 'aristocratic *communitarism* triumph'.³⁷² On this point, it is interesting to note what was stated in the *Manifesto del Gruppo di Ar* [Manifesto of the Ar Group] founded by Freda in 1963: 'We reject the defense of the bourgeois "values", to which we undoubtedly prefer absolute and nihilist openings from wherever they may come'.³⁷³ The rejection of the bourgeois values implies the adoption of another set of values: the heroic values that are the values of 'honor', 'loyalty' and 'hierarchy.' As Freda points out in more than one occasion in this text, those values allow the individual and the community of reference, to overcome the 'dark night of Capitalism', bringing order into the chaos through the rules that self-discipline implies. Freda concludes his analysis by saying that by adopting such a position and by dissolving what he considers to be a 'deformity' (the bourgeois society) into the 'unformed' (the nihilist and absolute attitude), it would eventually give place to the 'form', which would be the result of the efforts of the few who represent the élite, the best individuals thus selected.³⁷⁴

The aim pursued by Freda and his associates of the *Gruppo di Ar* was thus to create the conditions for a new world, a new west, a new Europe. Their purpose as they saw it, was to fight against the *Weltanschauung* established by the values of the Enlightenment in order to reconstitute the 'right' values and system of ideas to the western culture. In Freda's opinion this was the pattern of the righteous whose goals were to oppose the 'dictatorship of the bourgeois world' as he puts it.³⁷⁵ From the analysis of *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* presented so far in this chapter, it is clear that in Freda's opinion, the bourgeoisie using money as a weapon, was responsible for eliminating all the ontological *qualitative*

³⁷¹ Insert reference

³⁷² insert reference of Freda's quote in the text

³⁷³ *Manifesto del Gruppo di Ar* printed in the volume *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p.70.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, Freda (2010), p.11

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Freda (2010), .45.

differences among individuals, replacing those with the merely *quantitative* ones. According to his reasoning, this created amid individuals an inequality based on the material possessions and destroyed an older ontological order that considered some individuals superior and other inferior based on other sets of criteria. The solution to this world view dominated by wealth would be then a proper *politica*, which will eventually make surfacing the differences in quality rather than quantity.³⁷⁶

Freda's conclusion was that this type of politics was the only one that could be true to its own nature, by recognizing its own nature as aristocratic. Freda develops this theme in his work *Il Vero Stato Secondo Platone* [The True State According to Plato] (1966) where he states that: 'human soul and society by the State have the very same structure: in both the same cause produces the same effects'.³⁷⁷ The corollary that derives from this notion of the political reality is a correspondence, if not identification, between human soul and the society hierarchically intended. This also leads to better defining the duty and tasks of the community in a way that becomes akin to the Nietzschean military 'school of the soul' where the individuals and their ontological differences create one single unity that lives and breathes at the unison with the state represented or embodied by the leader.³⁷⁸ It was this totalizing worldview explicated in his works that eventually would lead Freda and his associates to adopt a resolution of political and ideological violence, using terrorism and subversion in attempt to realize their ideal 'City of the Sun'.

3. Anti-Enlightenment Tradition and the Conservative Revolution

Having now set out Freda's critique of capitalism, and discussed his vision for an alternative society, and ideal state, the aim of this sub-section is to explain and analyze the two philosophical trends that mostly influenced Freda's ideological perspective. In his works he often refers to authors of the anti-Enlightenment tradition and to Evola and Guénon's theme of the *religio perennis* as a constant of his political discourse. Once more, this aspect will help reveal how Freda's ideas were the product of diverse philosophical influences, yet ones that have as common trait the negation and refusal of modernity. Freda's works reflect his diverse intellectual background with Plato,

³⁷⁶ Ibid., Freda, 2010, pp. 37-40.

³⁷⁷ Franco G. Freda, *Lo Stato Secondo Platone*, (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1996); cfr., Freda (2010), p. 84.

³⁷⁸ Franco G. Freda, *Il Cattiverio delle Beatitudini. Risposta a Gianni Vattimo* (1981) in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010).

Nietzsche, but also Evola and the fathers of the German Conservative Revolution or, the fourteenth century German mystic Meister Eckhart influencing his perception of reality and with it, his personal idiosyncrasy toward modernity and, as a consequence, its rejection. While quite an original text in its own way, Freda's book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* could be easily placed into the much wider tradition of the anti-Enlightenment thinking. This trend really has its roots in the late eighteenth century and had a remarkable representative in the Italian philosopher of that period, Gian Battista Vico.³⁷⁹ The anti-Enlightenment also include a wide range of philosophers and intellectuals like Hegel, Fichte and Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler too, to quote but few, who are often cited and quoted by Freda in his works.

The anti-Enlightenment flourished within those last two centuries, and operated at the margins of the main stream philosophical and political trends giving place to a utter rejection of all those principles and values introduced by the Enlightenment and by the liberal tradition of the French revolution. The anti-Enlightenment shows a strong intellectual attitude of identifying those virtues with the main social group that promoted a liberal and plural political philosophy, namely, the bourgeoisie. The anti-Enlightenment's main characteristic is to oppose the idea of individual and society derived from the Enlightenment's school of thought.³⁸⁰ The distaste for this specific social class, its world, its perspective on reality, in other words, its system of values has been criticised by a number of intellectuals belonging to this movement. The first reaction translated into action can be identified into the intellectual and artistic movement known as *Sturm und Drang* from which the Romanticism school would eventually derive. The *Sturm und Drang* (1765-1785) indeed introduced concepts like the irrationality of one's emotions; a strong idea of nationalism; the idea of the genius that distinguishes himself from the masses. In other words, a system of values that seems to contradict the one proposed by the French Enlightenment. Germany became the country whereas the anti-Enlightenment movement found its more fertile grounds in the tradition of the *Sturm und Drang* but also of the Pan-Germanic tradition or, the German Conservative Revolution movement, and with the advent of the National Socialism in the 1930s. The German term *Gegen – Aufklärung* recurrent in *La Disintegrazione* reveals Freda's preference for a cultural and

³⁷⁹ Giambattista Vico, *La Scienza Nuova* (1725) (Milan: BUR, 1977).

³⁸⁰ Z. Sternehell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

intellectual model born in Germany, for Germany is considered by Freda the birthplace of a superior race and culture. This wave of intellectual critique of rationalism as a universal value of the Enlightenment, translates in the whole counter-reaction of what is defined by the scholars as ‘counter-Enlightenment’ movement. It was Isaiah Berlin that coined the term ‘counter-Enlightenment’ to explain and analyze the intellectual reaction to the new ideals and political initiatives promoted by the French *philosophes*.³⁸¹ The *Sturm und Drang* can be considered the forefather of this nationalist attitude toward the changes promoted by the French Revolution. Berlin noted that it is to the notion of ‘liberty’, or better, to the idea of ‘negative liberty’ that the anti-Enlightenment movement opposed the French Enlightenment. Because the ‘negative liberty’ is the absence of all type of constraints and barriers. At the core of such contraposition, there is the universality of the idea of equality among individuals, the idea of plurality, the rapport between individuals-citizens and the definition of state-authority. What philosophers like the French Jean-Jacque Rousseau and the Italian Giambattista Vico criticized of the Enlightenment, was the universality of rights of rational individuals and a model of society whose dynamics would allow social mobility between social groups based on the universal principle of equality and equal rights amid individuals.³⁸² According to Vico and Rousseau, the theory of universal rights was considered as mere characteristic of a specific social group, i.e., the bourgeoisie, who tended to create a society that privileged the quantitative element both explained as accumulation of capital and as political mass-participation.³⁸³ Within this line of thought we also find Freda, who often in his works criticizes the Enlightenment’s universal principle of equality amid individuals and their possibility of social mobility within a given community.³⁸⁴ Freda feels strongly for an hierarchical society based on the rigid principle of castes division as already explained thus, rejecting the values of modern democracy as shown in the last section of *La Disintegrazione*.³⁸⁵

³⁸¹ Joseph Mali and Robert Wolker, *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia PA: American Philosophical Society, 2003).

³⁸² Giovanni Scarpato, ‘Vico e Rousseau nel Settecento Italiano’, *Il Pensiero Politico-Rivista di Storia delle Idee Politiche e Sociali*, Year 50, Issue 1, (Jan-Apr.) 2017, pp. 27-58.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, Scarpato (2017), p. 45.

³⁸⁴ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 40-44.

³⁸⁵ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969), 5th edition, (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 40-49.

The anti-Enlightenment paved the way to a different perception of the world. The philosophers and intellectuals belonging to this movement were often embracing a more elitist system of values. In the counter-Enlightenment, human emotions were considered values, together with the attachment to one's land and the praise and pride of one's blood and ethnic belonging as pointed out by Zeev Sternhell.³⁸⁶ Sternhell indicates as funders of the anti-Enlightenment the German philosopher Johannes Gottfried Herder and the Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke. A movement, that according to Sternhell, paved the way to fascism.³⁸⁷ The counter-Enlightenment thus was opposing these new values of the Enlightenment where the universality of the individual in all his humanity, the idea of an open community and the extreme social mobility based no longer on the blood lineage or caste, but rather, on the personal capacities and efforts to succeed was envisaged as the ideal society model. *The Decline of the West* (1918), and less famous intellectual figures alongside Julius Evola and René Guénon. Freda often refers in his works to these figures acknowledging them as source of his personal inspiration and guidance in his personal struggle against the liberal democracy system of values.³⁸⁸

The period between the 1880s and the 1920s saw the starting in central-north Europe of a plethora of movements and philosophical circles that can be considered a direct reaction to the dominant positivist culture of the time that can be considered as direct descendant of the Enlightenment with its progress in sciences and modernization of the society through technology. Positivism was indeed considered as a product of the burgeoise culture alongside capitalism, democracy and modernism and as the result of the enlightenment movement started in the eighteenth century.³⁸⁹ Madame Blavatsky's eccentric and irrational proposal of a new individual and a new society or a new world order, is one of the most quoted examples of this new way of reaction to a world shaped on the values of rationality, industrialization, liberal democracy, capitalism, universal individualism, modernity and science. These were elements that were also strongly contested by characters like Guido Lintz and Rudolf Steiner, intellectuals among the

³⁸⁶ Zeev Sternhell, *The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition* (transl. David Maisel) (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

³⁸⁷ Ibid., Sternhell, 2010, pp. 274-314.

³⁸⁸ Franco G. Freda, 'Il Cattiverio delle Beatitudini' in Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), pp. 115-119.

³⁸⁹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Black Sun: Aryan Cult, Esoteric Nazism and Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions. A Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

founders of the Ariosophy and Theosophy movements.³⁹⁰ They preached an alternative to a rational society that had produced with its rationality and standardization of the individual a sense of alienation and being lost in the outside reality as the German philosopher Martin Heidegger theorized in his famous book *Zeit und Sein* (1927).³⁹¹

This was an extreme, irrational and vitalist reaction to a dominant system of values based on rationality.³⁹² A struggle between the irrational and the rational, the vitalist appeal of the emotions against the measured reason, the praising of the Nietzschean *übermensch* against a society made of equals. The British scholar Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, amid other scholars that investigated this cultural movement, provides us with a detailed and full analysis of this aspect of the western society at the turn of the century, and gives us an alternative key to interpret the origins of political ideologies like Nazism or fascism that reveal an evident 'spiritual' frame.³⁹³ Within such a cultural movement like the anti-Positivism it is also worth of notice that there was a different perception of religion, sometimes steeped into a return to paganism or even turning toward Eastern religions. This intellectual attitude of turning to alternate belief systems is often driven by a desire to find again that sense of mysticism that was felt lost with the advent of modern times.³⁹⁴ From this perspective, modernity can be considered as the source of profound decadence and corruption as opposed to the longing toward a renewed form of primordial society model that goes back to ancient times or far away civilizations as Evola, Guénon and other authors of this school of thought affirmed repeatedly in their works, and that can be

³⁹⁰ The movements of Theosophy and Ariosophy were founded between 1890s and the first decade of the 20th century. Mainly active in the north-central Europe, were attempting to propose a new cosmology and a new set of values often referring to the pagan pre-Christian cults and the Eastern religious traditions.

³⁹¹ Martin Heidegger's most famous text, *Zeit Und Sein* (1927), is considered the text of reference for German existentialism. In this iconic text, the German philosopher unveils the malaise of the individual living in a modern society. Heidegger in his book condemns modernity and its scale of values.

³⁹² Zeev Sternhell, Mario Sznajder, Maia Asheri, 'George Sorel and the Anti-Materialist Revision of Marxism', *Birth of Fascist Ideology: From Cultural Rebellion to Political Revolution* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

³⁹³ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism. Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: Tauris Publisher, 2005).

³⁹⁴ Julius Evola, *Rivolta Contro il Mondo Moderno* (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2010).

detected in the attempts of re-enacting the Ancient Rome model for the Fascist regime, or the medieval and pagan pre-Christian society models for the Nazi regime.³⁹⁵ What emerges is the necessity to regain a perception of the deity hidden within the individual, the sense of a society structured in castes and not in social groups, and the necessity to recuperate an alleged new and purest significance of history and identity. Within this perspective, it emerges that the elaboration of a new type of man would also imply the concept of race.

Thinkers like the French Arthur De Gobineau, or the British-German Houston Steward Chamberlain as quoted in Evola's book *Il Mito del Sangue* [The Myth of the Blood] (1937)³⁹⁶ also can be seen as part of this tradition that proposed a new ideal type of individual based on the notion of race as opposed to the idea of universal type of human being established by the liberal society on the grounds of the Enlightenment values. All their studies were attempts to find the ideal race by establishing common traits or features shared by particular ethnic groups so to typify how race and culture were elements that combined together could be used to determine a superior or inferior group. This is a theory that is still preached today by contemporary radical-right thinkers like the already mentioned French philosopher Alain De Benoist, father of the 'identitarianism', a movement started in 2003 amid young far-right French students and rapidly expanded in Europe targeting migration from developing countries and inspired by De Benoist's work.³⁹⁷ The more intellectual superior or inferior characteristics of a specific ethnic or social group will then be reflected in the physical characteristics of the individuals. In this way, pseudo-scientific classification of the social groups will pave the way to racism and support it.³⁹⁸ The mythical qualities attributed to the Aryan race derive its modern permutation from a combination of the irrationality of the Theosophical movements and the supposed scientific analysis of those thinkers based paradoxically on the positivist science parameters grounds.³⁹⁹ Evola can also be included in this anti-Enlightenment tradition, and as stressed several times, a crucial figure in Freda's intellectual formation

³⁹⁵ Piero Di Vona, *Evola, Guénon, De Giorgio* (Naples: SEAR Edizioni, 1993).

³⁹⁶ J. Evola, *Il Mito Del Sangue* (Milan: Hoepli Editore, 1937).

³⁹⁷ Jean-Yves Camus, 'Alain de Benoist and the New Right', Mark Sedgwick (ed.), *Key Thinkers of the Radical Right: Behind the New Threat to Liberal Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), pp. 73-90.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, Evola, 1937, pp. 50-52.

³⁹⁹ N. Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and Their Influence on Nazi Ideology. The Ariosophists of Austria and Germany 1890-1935*, (London: Taurus, 1993).

who declared in many occasions of having taken from and being inspired by the *Maestro Nascosto* [Hidden Master] as Evola's disciples used to call him.⁴⁰⁰ Freda as well develops his personal 'theory of the race' in his book *I Lupi Azzurri* [The Azure Wolves] (1990) where he explain his 'differentiated ethnicity' model to justify his battle to 'liberate' Italy and Europe from migrants of non-European ethnicity as it will be better explained in chapter five. The afore mentioned *religio perennis* is another important element in the profile of an Evolian 'spiritual' far-right militant as emerged in the Italian neo-fascist milieu since the 1950s and of which Freda is the ideal representative.

The notion of *religio perennis* or the *philosophia perennis* is relevant matter of discussion in this chapter because it has an important place in Freda's own intellectual formation and constitutes the backbone of his metapolitical discourse. It was developed by the so-called 'humanist philosophers' like the Italian fifteenth century thinker Agostino Steuco (1497-1548) based on the Neo-Platonism of Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494).⁴⁰¹ In the early nineteenth century, the 'perennial philosophy' was popularized by the 'Transcendentalists', and at the end of the same century, the Theosophical movement further popularized this philosophical school.⁴⁰² Evola took Perennialism from his inspirational master, Guénon who, together with Schuon and other representatives of what they called the 'Traditional School', adopted Perennialism as main doctrine for their interpretation of the reality.⁴⁰³ The Traditionalists held a worldview that opposed scientism and positivism of the modern society referring to a pre-modern, pre-secular society and also by holding a primordial tradition.⁴⁰⁴ Within this perspective, the criticism to modernity is that the latter has promoted materialism and thus contaminated the true nature of the individual that is divine as stated by Evola throughout his works. In addition, Evola's Perennialism views the nature of the State as the manifestation of the divine and in doing so, he also tends to see in Fascism or Nazism the perfect embodiment of his doctrine. These Evolian theories can be easily detected in Freda's works and, specifically, in his *La Disintegrazione* showing Freda's 'spiritual'

⁴⁰⁰ Julius Evola was known in the post-war Italian far-right circles as the *Maestro Nascosto*, the Hidden Master, a title to indicate his profound influence on the young post-war Italian neo-fascist generation who referred to a 'spiritual' 'mystical' fascism of Pino Rauti's and Adriano Romualdi's *Ordine Nuovo*.

⁴⁰¹ Nuccio D'Anna, *Significato e Dottrine di un Movimento Spirituale* (Rimini: Il Cerchio, 2011).

⁴⁰² Ibid., Goodrick-Clarke (2008).

⁴⁰³ Ibid., Di Vona (1993).

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., Goodrick-Clarke (2008).

approach to political militancy: ‘ [...]Therefore, [...] we must affirm that the condition-not sufficient, but necessary-is SUBVERSION of everything that today exists as political system [...]Our militia must observe the following military rule: serene strength, unyielding firmness, of all the points of the *frontline*.’⁴⁰⁵ In illustrating the ideal characteristics of the ‘political soldier’ of his militia, Freda is using ascetical tone stressing the task of political militancy for the adepts of his ‘magic circle’ wishing to shape the ideal combatant.

The *religio perennis* or the ‘perennial philosophy’ thus envisaged and proposed by Evola, implies the adoption of Eastern traditions and myths that in his view are better suited to preserving the true Traditions of civilizations. For instance, in many of his books, Evola refers constantly to the Hindu sacred text *Bhagavad Gita*⁴⁰⁶ where he finds the evidence and support to his philosophical worldview. The Hindu sacred text is also often quoted to stress the importance of war as vital energy and to describe the ideal warrior that maintains his detachment toward life and in battle: ‘wise men grieve neither for the dead nor for the living’⁴⁰⁷ The reference to the *Kali Yuga* cycle that Evola makes in his *Riding the Tiger* (1961) is also a clear evidence of his fascination for the Hindu cosmological myths and cultural tradition, which will be taken also by neo-fascist terrorist organizations like *Ordine Nuovo* (New Order). In sum, Evola recognizes in the *Kali Yuga* the dark age which the mankind is now experiencing. The modern society is the best example of the age of the Iron (*Kali Yuga*) providing a further criticism of modernity and its values. Evola argues that the solution that would put to an end the *Kali Yuga* can be found in the teachings of the *Gita*, and that only the *uomo differenziato* (differentiated man) can follow and put into practice to eventually come out of the period of darkness.⁴⁰⁸ Freda was profoundly influenced by the teachings of Evola at the time of his political militancy, and equally was longing for an end of the *Kali Yuga* period of darkness, which he saw in the contradictions of the liberal democracy, and more in the specific, in the 1970s Italian complex and turbulent political climate as discussed in chapter two. From what discussed insofar, it is then clear how a specific form of mysticism and philosophical traditions have had a strong impact on Freda’s own perception of politics, society and human existence,

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., Freda (2010), pp. 35-36.

⁴⁰⁶ The *Bhagavad Gita* is a poem of the Hindu religious tradition that Evola often refers to in order to explain his mythical figure of the warrior and to stress the necessity for such heroic figure to fight in order to end the dark period of the *Kali Yuga*.

⁴⁰⁷ *Bhagavad Gita*, p.13 (New York: YogaVidya, 2007) Lars Martin Fosse (trans.).

⁴⁰⁸ Julius Evola, *Cavalcare La Tigre* (Bari: Laterza, 1961), p.16.

and must be added that Freda was not the only one to be fascinated and indoctrinated by such theories. Also, other representatives of far-right terrorism consider Evola as main source of enlightenment as it will be better explained in chapter four. All the mystic traditions analyzed in this section, share one common principle: the anti-rationality as opposed to the rationality of modernity. It is therefore clear how the counter-Enlightenment tradition constituted in time and through its several permutations a common thread that linked together all those political and ideological movements against the notion of modernity as developed by the Enlightenment tradition.

4. The Mysticism of Freda's Radical Fascism

The previous sections have attempted to provide the theoretical framework and ideological references of Freda's political engagement and ideological commitment. This final section to the present chapter intends to explain and analyze Freda's personal mysticism used to give meaning, support, and purpose to his thought and his militancy from a metapolitical and metaphysical perspective. Freda can be considered a product of a specific ideological strand of neo-fascism, as we have seen, and the attentive reading of his work, not just *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969), helps to reveal his intellectual and ideological background as militant of the far right. In Freda's juvenile works like the *La Disintegrazione* as well as in his law degree thesis *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* [The State According to Justice] (1965), he sets out his personal reading and interpretation of Plato's political thought. A personal interpretation of Plato's political philosophy with specific reference to the IV book of *The Republic* Freda expresses in his *Il Vero Stato Secondo Platone* [The True State According to Plato] written in 1964 (while completing his dissertation) and published in 1966.⁴⁰⁹ In those texts it is evident the dominant influence of the Evolian *Weltanschauung*, especially when linking the subdivision of the social groups as in Plato's ideal city, with the Hindu caste order⁴¹⁰ This

⁴⁰⁹ Franco G. Freda, 'Il Vero Stato Secondo Platone', *Tradizione*, IV, No. 1, 1966 in Freda (2010), pp. 82-90.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Freda (2010), pp. 85-87.

can be seen for example by the way when translating the Platonic term *genos* with ‘race’ rather than with ‘social group’ as already observed previously in the chapter. Here it becomes clear that the adoption of the term ‘race’ for the translation of the term ‘genos’ reflects his strong belief in the race theory that in the case of Freda, although being inspired by the spiritual racism of Evola,⁴¹¹ takes the contours of a racial theory with strong elements of biological racism⁴¹² as better explained in chapter five. In his metaphysical and metapolitical view of the active militancy, Freda transcends the divide right/left and calls to the arms those who, according such political classification, would be the ‘enemy’ as we can read in the final pages of the *La Disintegrazione* in which, he calls to arms those ‘on the Left, considering the dialogue with the radical right closed once for all: ‘The appeal to those men that, according to political and parliamentary schemes, make the fringes of the *extreme right* is considered to be concluded. However, we wish to call to the arms all those who radically reject the system, placing themselves to the left of it, being sure that also with them it could be possible such a unity of action in the struggle against the bourgeois society’.⁴¹³ Freda’s ideology is steeped into criticism of what he sees as the corrupted and decadent nature of the modern society calling to a universal revolution beyond ideological labels having in mind the Evolian ‘differentiated man’ as a universal archetype. In such vision we can envisage Freda’s political transcendentalism and utopian message that made him so popular within the radical right cohort.

To fully understand Freda’s mysticism it is necessary to proceed to a comparative reading between his works and Evola’s. Both Freda and Evola tend to consistently repeat their theories and principles throughout their literary production, considering that Freda, as already stressed previously, tend to endorse systematically the Evolian *Weltanschauung* seemingly as one of his most faithful and loyal disciple as already explained. This can be easily noticed when comparing Freda’s *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* with Evola’s *Imperialismo Pagano*. From a comparative reading of both primary sources, emerges a strong influence of Evola on Freda’s political thinking already noticed in Stellati’s work.⁴¹⁴ The mysticism of Freda’s political message explains his radical thinking. Starting with his vision of an ideal society, he takes as model Plato’s ideal city as it is described in

⁴¹¹ Julius Evola, *Sintesi della Dottrina della Razza* (Bari: Laterza, 1942); Julius Evola, *Il Mito del Sangue* (Milan: Hoepli, 1937).

⁴¹² Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1990).

⁴¹³ Ibid., Freda (2010), p. 48 (my trans.).

⁴¹⁴ Chiara Stellati, *Un’Ideologia dell’Origine: Franco Freda e la Controdecadenza* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

the *Politeia*, where the discussions of concepts like ‘superiority’ and ‘inferiority’ are established as the true parameters according to which establish a just and perfect society. Concepts and mystical approach to politics that is even more evident in his book *I Lupi Azzurri* [The Azure Wolves] (1990)⁴¹⁵ where its mysticism and metaphysics of violence become more evident as better explained in chapter five. Freda in his analysis, embraces this rigid hierarchical division of the society agreeing on its divine nature as stated in Plato but also in Evola and by the Traditionalist schools.⁴¹⁶ For instance, it is interesting to recognize the correspondence established between the Platonic hierarchical model and the Hindu social subdivision in castes as pointed out by Freda both in *La Disintegrazione* and in his dissertation.⁴¹⁷ This comparative social analysis between the two civilizations, and its significance, are taken from Evola and Guénon who argue this type of social organization as being perfect for it is divinely ordered.⁴¹⁸ In the same manner, the very same notion of ‘justice’ is not defined according to the common Christian based moral parameters but rather, according to the classic philosophy of Plato and the neo-Platonic directives, as simply the results of the harmony of the parts as already explained when discussing the notion of *eudamonia*. To explain better, according to classic philosophy, the notion of justice does not contemplate any awareness of good or evil like it is in Christian-Judaic ethical terms. Justice is simply the result of re-establishing the balance among the parts implying a different moral agenda parameters as explained in Plato and Aristotle. The corollary that follows is therefore, that a perfect society is that which is structured among the principle of justice as harmony of the parts.⁴¹⁹ Freda’s Platonic view of ideal society is reinforced and supported by Evola’s mystical view of social division as argued in his *Imperialismo Pagano*, where the sacrality of such class division is over stressed by the blind acceptance of the rapport between the superior and inferior element that is thus created within the rigid hierarchy of the society.⁴²⁰ According to such a worldview, the notion of ‘freedom’ can be fully explained only within a rigid hierarchical order, for solely in the total and complete acceptance of one’s own role imposed by this rigid social scheme, it is possible to experience the absolute freedom, for freedom resides

⁴¹⁵ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1990).

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., Freda, (2010), pp. 10-15.

⁴¹⁷ F.G. Freda, *Platone, Lo Stato Secondo Giustizia* (1965) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1996), pp. 35-39.

⁴¹⁸ Piero Di Vona, *Evola E Guénon: Tradizione E Civiltà* (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985).

⁴¹⁹ Ibid. Freda (2010), pp. 29-34.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., Evola (1928).

in the full act of obedience and submission to a superior and absolute authority. For both Freda and Evola, the complete, absolute freedom can therefore be found or explained only within this divine and sacred hierarchical structure. For both authors, phenomena such as the social mobility so important to liberal democracy, condemns the individual to unhappiness as it encourages to try and force them to become something other than the position that his or her true nature would determine in society.

From the reading of the primary sources emerges that the main responsibility of the modern world to have led the individual into the illusion of changing his or her status that instead should have been accepted as part of a divine plan. Within this conceptual framework, the natural alternative is to re-establish the divine nature of the State. Freda spends a long section of the *La Disintegrazione* in arguing and discussing the nature of the state which is perceived as central, totalizing and omnipresent ‘The true State is not demoted to a mere structure of the positive law but it means a superior essence and function; the Spirit of the State. The centre of the State is made of a power that transcends what is merely worldly and simply human. The true State is the authoritative principle of a conquest by the man, the conquest of a super-world.’⁴²¹ A deity that informs with its divinity and thus justifies the structure and dynamics of the society that has the authority.⁴²² According to this view, the main fundamental features of liberal democracy like representation, elections, common decisions taken by citizens on common matters, are considered symptoms of a general state of decadence. The centrality of capitalism is perceived as a source of corruption of the society.⁴²³ Again, here we find two main sources of reference: one is Plato’s critique of Athenian democracy and the other is again, Evola and his ferocious opposition to liberalism as representative of the anti-Enlightenment school of the Traditionalists.⁴²⁴ Furthermore, Freda seems also to heavily borrow the idea of state as sacred and divine again from Evola.⁴²⁵ The Sicilian aristocrat, influenced in turn by Guénon, also argues that the nature of the state is divine and therefore, infallible and worth of being worshipped by its citizens.⁴²⁶ This notion of the state as divine, implies an intimate and strong interrelation with the individual who, unlike in the Christian-Judaic

⁴²¹ Ibid., Freda (2010), p. 31 (my trans.).

⁴²² Ibid., Freda (2010), p 31.

⁴²³ Ibid. Freda (2010), pp. 40-49.

⁴²⁴ J. Evola, *Rivolta Contro Il Mondo Moderno* (1934) (Rome: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1998).

⁴²⁵ Piero Di Vona, *Evola e Guénon. Tradizione e Civiltà* (Naples: Società Editrice Napoletana, 1985).

⁴²⁶ Ibid., Evola (1998), pp. 65-73.

tradition, does not believe in the deity but he himself participates of this divinity and thus, establishes his own divine nature: ‘it was an apparition of the super-world, and a path to reach the super-world [...]. Traditionally, the State had instead a transcendent[...], significance and purpose⁴²⁷ This brings to consider another mystical element we often find in Freda’s radical fascism: the divine nature of the individual that, according to him and Evola, the modern world, and the advent of the Christian-Judaic traditions have contributed to conceal to hide or minimize.

According to this analysis of the political and social reality, one of the main responsibilities of liberalism is exactly this: the cancellation of the perception of the individual’s inner divinity. This important status can be gained through the practice of meditation, ascesis and contemplation of one’s inner profound nature achieving in this way the inside enlightenment of his completeness as living being. The consequence of this conviction is the formulation of an ideal type of warrior who possesses the inner light and sacred qualities to face his enemy. Interestingly enough, on this purpose, Freda is almost plagiarizing Evola who, in the *Metafisica della Guerra* [Metaphysics of War] (1935-1950), and in the *La Dottrina Aria di Lotta e Vittoria* [The Aryan Doctrine of Struggle and Victory] (1941) enlisted the qualities and the sacredness of the war.⁴²⁸ It is described in detail the ideal type of the hero who should face the combat with firm and calm attitude with no space for mercy or piety for the enemy thus becoming a sort of perfect combat machine embodying the figure of the sacred warrior that we find in the Eastern tradition of the *Bhagavad Gita* that both Freda and Evola often refer to in their works.⁴²⁹ The effect is also a recognition of the divine, sacred nature of the struggle and of the war that defines all those who oppose the impact of the Enlightenment. During the years of lead, Evola’s works on the metaphysics of war and other of his works that were praising and illustrating the virtues of the ideal hero-warrior were common reading amid the far-right and extremist circles influencing heavily its members as it will be better explained in the following chapters. It is not a coincidence that Evola entitles his collection of articles *Metaphysics of War* almost to indicate the divine, transcendental meaning of war fought by what he considers the ‘Traditional hero’.⁴³⁰ The reason lies

⁴²⁷ Ibid., Evola (1998), p. 66.

⁴²⁸ Julius Evola, *Metafisica della Guerra* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001); Julius Evola, *La Dottrina Aria di Lotta e Vittoria* (1941) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1986).

⁴²⁹ The reference to this ideal warrior archetype is present throughout the whole literary production of these two authors and is part of the extended neo-fascist mythology of the war.

⁴³⁰ Julius Evola, *Metafisica della Guerra* (1935-1959) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

upon the idea that war has to be considered always on a metaphysical plain as primarily a struggle between the ‘principles of light’ and the ‘principles of darkness’,⁴³¹ namely, between the higher, superior expressions of the divine manifested in certain individuals belonging to the elite, and the groups of individuals classified as inferior, on a lower level. What the followers of Evola’s ideas (Including Freda), perceived was to see their political engagement as a struggle between a divine, aristocratic vision of the world and its more equalitarian, impure, common view. According to Evola, the very nature of war is divine, while violence is perceived as the higher expression of the divine that thus manifests itself fully. Freda taps on to Evola’s war metaphysics and adds also authors like Ernst Jünger getting inspired by the German thinkers’ model of ‘political soldier’ as already mentioned.

The sacredness of violence reaches its peak when it is manifested in the solitary and aristocratic hero-warrior figure and when there is the exaltation of war as positive energy in opposition to peace considered a quality of the weak and therefore, perceived as negative energy. Freda develops his personal version of Evola’s theories even when glossing over the concept of war and directly, praising the value of violence for political ends, as we can read in *La Disintegrazione*: ‘[...] now to all those people we must propose a target for our decisive struggle: the destruction of the middle classes’.⁴³² The above quote is an example of how Freda’s envisaged the use of violence for his political, but foremost ideological purposes within the socio-political context of the historical period examined. This subsection has identified that ideological purposes could lead to violence if the latter is considered a value per se, and how the notion of the revolutionary hero could be used to steep terrorist violence from a purely philosophical sense of fighting for an alternate world. Freda’s mysticism seems therefore shaped by his reading of the authors of the anti-Enlightenment Tradition as already explained, but it seems that Evola and Plato are Freda’s main authors of reference to develop from their theories and world views, his personal ideological doctrine and political response. It is clear how the above Evolian metaphysical approach to politics and his esoteric view of the war as sacred energy have influenced Freda’s political militancy. Freda was pursuing a dystopic political plan with his ideological militancy and political activism. His metaphysical and mystical approach allowed him to be considered by some as a fanatic heretic of the fascist creed, and by his sympathizers as the philosopher-king of neo-fascism as this term would

⁴³¹ J. Evola, *Imperialismo Pagano* (Rome: Atanor, 1928).

⁴³² Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p.36.

be understood within the Platonic tradition.

Conclusion

The chapter attempted to assess how in Freda's most iconic text Evolian themes combined with a radical interpretation of Plato were regurgitated in the combative ideological and militant lexicon of the time. Freda claimed he did not propose anything new in matter of doctrine, nor in matter of ideological concepts but he embraced a doctrine that extolled the action as the ultimate expression of the divine and thus, created an intellectual framework supporting the vortex of violence deemed necessary for the society to enter into a new era, overthrowing liberal democracy in the process as we have read in his text *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] (1969). Freda proposes his cult of violence in his active militancy and in his ideological texts. He differentiates himself from the more conventional neo-fascist militancy that idealized Mussolini's era which also allowed him, another element in common with Evola, to call for a transnational league of 'men of good will' ready to act to safeguard Europe against the corruption of liberalism. In other words, he proposed the need to fight the capitalist society, and was happy to unite with others regardless the ideological expression of those willing to join the struggle. We can conclude then that Freda's own brand of fascism led him to live and experience the historical contingency through the lens of a specific type of ideological mysticism. Undoubtedly, the historical period of the strategy of tension and the Italian socio-political volatile climate, contributed to ignite young minds with ideological radicalism and political extremism in their political engagement. Freda is in this sense, a typical example of the inflamed political debate in the country at the time. A militant who did not restrain himself to put into act the theoretical teachings. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, this intellectual attitude has, as consequence, led to an alienation and distortion of the contingency of the social and political reality. Freda's mystical and, to certain extent, nihilist metapolitics conduced him to leading his life from a remote and detached perception of reality, one where everything becomes possible and justifiable, being the ideal 'hero-warrior' even the use of extreme violence from a standpoint that we could define more as a doctrine rather than a political ideology.

CHAPTER FOUR

FRANCO G. FREDA AND THE PIAZZA FONTANA BOMBING (12.12.1969). THE STARTING OF THE STRATEGY OF TENSION

*'They have not absolved me completely, because with me they should also have absolved my ideas'*⁴³³

Introduction

The present chapter is an analysis of the Piazza Fontana terrorist attack that marked the beginning of the so called 'strategy of tension' and the starting of this volatile period in the history of post-war Italy that lasted between the 1960s and the 1980s.⁴³⁴ Piazza Fontana and Franco Freda or the expression 'strategy of tension' won't say much to the younger generations of Italians, for this period in the recent history of the country seems to have been forgotten in the last forty years. However, the events of Piazza Fontana marked the starting of one of the most turbulent and complex chapters in post 1945 Italian history. Several aspects of the whole event are still unclear

⁴³³ Franco G. Freda in Ettore Boffano 'Freda? Un Vegetariano Sueprtifoso di Khomeni', *Stampa Sera*, 1986.

⁴³⁴ On the period of the Strategy of Tension see: Rita Giovacchino, *Il Libro Nero della Prima Repubblica* (Rome: Fazi Editore, 2012), Marco Fossati, *Terrorismo e Terroristi* (Milan: Mondadori Editori, 2003); Maurizio Dianese e Gianfranco Bettin, *La Strage di Piazza Fontana: Verità e Memoria* (Mlian: Feltrinelli, 1999); Fabio Biondani, 'Freda e Ventura Erano Colpevoli', *Corriere della Sera*, (June 2005); Michele Brambilla, *Interrogatorio alle Destre* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1995).

today, although many documents related to Piazza Fontana and, more in general, to the strategy of tension and to the years of lead have been recently de-classified by the Italian authorities and available now for consultation. In the present chapter, the analysis of the events of Piazza Fontana will focus on its main actors, its ideological and political implications, and by taking into account the historical framework within which such events occurred. Attention has been given to both primary and secondary sources on the topic hoping to contribute to a further understanding of a complex historical, and for many aspects, unsolved event of the Italian First Republic (1948-1994)⁴³⁵ with still unclear contours and aspects that were never completely clarified although the historical reconstructions, political analyses, and judicial reviews made in all those years by scholars and journalists, and judges alike. The only certain element about Piazza Fontana events is that it marked the official starting of the strategy of tension and that posed as a detonator for the socio-political volatile climate already experienced in Italy at the time as already explained and illustrated in chapter two.

The discussion and analysis of the Piazza Fontana bombing is therefore relevant within the context of the whole research work as a central event used as a case study to better explain and discuss Franco Giorgio Freda's fascist mysticism within such historical framework and socio-political background. Freda was identified as responsible by the Italian authorities together with his associate and comrade, Giovanni Ventura and others, as the main responsible of the Piazza Fontana bombing.⁴³⁶ Recently, there has been an attempt to re-habilitate his image in regard of the events by members of his cultural circle, the *Edizioni di Ar* [Ar Publishing]⁴³⁷ with the novel *Non Ci Sono Innocenti* [There Are No Innocents] (2016) whereas events, main characters, and a description of the Italian volatile socio-political climate of the time immediately precedent to Piazza Fontana, and that specific historical period are described and told from a far-right perspective that tend to absolve Freda and his associates from terrorism and political violence activities, making them victims of a non-better explained conspiracy, and by portraying Freda as a sort of romantic and misunderstood hero.⁴³⁸

As already mentioned above, the events of Piazza Fontana have not been completely solved and

⁴³⁵ With the expression *Prima Repubblica* (First Republic) is indicated the period between 1945 and 1994. This is also the historical period where terrorism and political violence find their fertile ground in the complex and complicated socio-political climate of the country. On this topic see: Ferdinando Imposimato, *La Repubblica delle Stragi Impunite* (Rome: Newton and Compton, 2013); Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi, *Gli Anni di Fango* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1993); Mathijs Bogaards, 'The Italian First Republic's "Degenerated Consociationism"', *Western European Politics*, Vol. 28, No. 3, (2005); Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

⁴³⁶ The neo-fascist activists arrested with Franco Freda and Giovanni Ventura were the journalist Guido Giannettini, Guido Paglia, member of *Avanguardia Nazionale*, the military general Saverio Malizia, Carlo Digilio, member of *Ordine Nuovo*, the same Pino Rauti, founder of *Ordine Nuovo* amid others.

⁴³⁷ The *Edizioni di Ar* is Freda's currently owned publishing house and it has substituted in time the original *Gruppo di Ar* [Ar Group].

⁴³⁸ Anna K. Valerio and Silvia Valerio, *Non-Ci Sono Innocenti* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2016).

forty years later, despite a definitive court sentence on the court case, many doubts still remain and the hypothesis of state conspiracy still remain quite a fascinating and an appealing lead to follow for many. In the course of the chapter we will illustrate and analyse how the whole lengthy legal proceedings regarding Piazza Fontana has eventually acquitted Freda and Ventura from their legal responsibility of the terrorist attack for insufficient body of evidence in 2005 as it was not possible any longer to reverse the previous acquittal sentence according to the Italian judicial system.⁴³⁹ Franco G. Freda and his accomplice, Giovanni Ventura, as well as the others involved in the trial, have always proclaimed themselves innocent of the Piazza Fontana terrorist attack. Giovanni Ventura in the 1982 trial declared that all the accusations of their (his and Freda's) involvement in the Piazza Fontana made by their associate, Nicola Lorenzon, 'were the product of wild fantasy and false'.⁴⁴⁰ In many ways, the Piazza Fontana retains a symbolic significance for the post 1945 Italian history. This is when the period of economic booming of the 1960s was collapsing due to social and political tensions amid different social categories, when workers' rights had become increasingly source of political concern and divide among the political parties, movements and for the Italian authorities with students' protests within the cultural and ideological revolution context of the 1968 wave as already explained in chapter two. Within such socio-political volatile climate, we need to read the Piazza Fontana bombing, which marked the beginning of more than two decades of terrorism and political violence in the country. According to the leading scholarship, and political observers of the Italian politics of the time, terrorism became soon a tool in the hands of state agents and politicians with often the intromission of third parties into the already complex and complicated national politics of the time as already explained in chapter two. This element has found some ground of evidence as demonstrated by the parliamentary commissions archive documents where we can read of complex networks made of terrorist organizations, shady characters and third party agents that seemed to be behind the strategy of tension and the year of lead events.⁴⁴¹ The research work conducted for this chapter, as well as for chapter two of the present thesis, has encountered a wealth of publications (mainly in Italian), which tend to agree on the same aspect: that the Piazza Fontana events, and the terrorism of strategy of tension and of the years of lead that followed, seem to support the hypothesis that the whole strategy of tension was a well-studied plan set out by some segments of the Italian political authorities and with the support of the Italian armed forces and cadre sections of the Italian intelligence agencies supervised by foreign powers manipulating the underground of far-right terrorist organizations.⁴⁴² The idea behind would have been to create the conditions of social and political tension to induce an authoritarian coup d'état in the country on

⁴³⁹ Luciano Lanza, *Bombe e Segreti. Piazza Fontana: Una Strage Senza Colpevoli* (Milan: Elèuthera Editore, 2005).

⁴⁴⁰ Atti Sentenza Corte Suprema di Cassazione, Archivi di Stato Italiani, Sezione 1 Penale, (1982), p. 20.

⁴⁴¹ Atti Commissione Senato, doc. XXIII, Vol.2, ter/2, 26 January-9 March 1982 (1985), pp. 887-899.

⁴⁴² Aldo Giannuli, *La Strategia della Tensione, Servizi Segreti, Partiti, Golpe Falliti, Terrore Fascista, Politica Internazionale: Un Bilancio* (Florence: Ponte delle Grazie Editore, 2018).

the example of other countries like Spain, Portugal or Greece, all governed by authoritarian regimes as already explained in chapter two.

The present chapter aims to provide an account and an interpretative analysis of the Piazza Fontana events using both the primary and secondary sources available. The chapter is a brief summary of the events of Piazza Fontana events linked to the figure of Franco G. Freda describing one of the most dramatic terrorist attacks on Italian soil together with the Bologna train station bombing in the 1980 summer. Most of the historical background to this event, has been already explained and analysed in chapter two of the present work. The chapter therefore wishes to serve to a further understanding of the historical and political circumstances in which Freda was moving at the time, and the type of struggle in which he was involved in. The is quite brief with only two subsections and a conclusion, and it has been structured as follows: subsection one will provide a historical account of the historical circumstances that in the 1969 autumn paved the way to the explosion of terrorism in the country. The second and final subsection describes briefly the judicial case of Piazza Fontana showing the alleged complicity of segments of the state (intelligence, military and political sections), and possibly, the fallacies of the Italian judicial system, at least, in the past decades, to deal with terrorism and political violence.

1. The Piazza Fontana Bombing

Piazza Fontana bombing was not the first terrorist attack experienced in Italy since the end of war but it was definitively the one that caused a number of fatalities and casualties compared with the other subversive activities that in that historical period the nation had become familiar with. Piazza Fontana was defined by journalists as the '*madre di tutte le stragi*' (mother of all massacres).⁴⁴³ In the attack, seventeen people died and eighty-eight were injured.⁴⁴⁴ Piazza Fontana was not the most devastating and bloody terrorist attack occurred in Italy but certainly was considered the starting point of the strategy of tension in Italy.⁴⁴⁵ On the Piazza Fontana events exists a vast secondary literature that is focused on the understanding of the historical period and political circumstances of the time and that wishes to provide an analysis of the several actors involved in the specific episode of terrorism. At today, we do not have a clear picture of the events, motive, actors, and dynamics that characterised Piazza Fontana bombing and despite of several court trials

⁴⁴³ It has been impossible to find the authorship of such expression to define the Piazza Fontana bombing. It became suddenly a popular expression in the press to indicate the event.

⁴⁴⁴ The seventeenth victim died one year after the attack due to the gas inhaled as a result of the bombing.

⁴⁴⁵ The history of terrorism in Italy have left a long trail of dead: Piazza della Loggia, Brescia, 28 Maggio 1974, Italicus train, 1974, Peteano massacre, 1972, Bologna train station bombing 2 August 1980, 'Christmas massacre' 23 December 1984.

and lengthy police investigations, there seems to be no clear responsible for the bombing yet. As already said in the introduction to this chapter, Piazza Fontana, as well as most of the events that have characterised the years of lead period, do not have until today a clear conclusion or understanding of the events. This has given the way to many alternative explanations which have contributed to further confusion on such complex chapter of post-war Italian history.

On 12th December 1969, at 16.37, two briefcases with explosive left in the *Banco Nazionale dell'Agricoltura* [National Agricultural Bank] in Piazza Fontana, Milan, exploded. The immediate aftermath was described as follows by the Washington Post correspondent: '[...]. Dismembered bodies were flung about by the blast at the National Agricultural Bank [...]. The bomb [...] tore a yard-wide hole in the marble floor below and shattered all the windows and partitions. After an instant shock the hall turned into chaos, with dead scattered over the floor, wounded people screaming for help and bleeding clerks-who were protected by their counters-putting out fires among their papers and rescuing the injured. The back and square outside were covered with broken glass and patches of blood'.⁴⁴⁶ From the police reports later available for viewing, it emerged that the quantity of explosive used for the terrorist attack was seven kilograms of TNT put in two leather briefcases left under the main table at the centre of the bank hall.⁴⁴⁷ The other element later detected by the investigators was that the TNT used was of the same type of explosive used by the Italian army.⁴⁴⁸ The attack in Piazza Fontana was not the first attack as there had already been attacks on 25 April of the same year at the *Fiera di Milano* and at the *Ufficio Cambi* of Milan train station, and in the summer of the same year, a series of bombings targeting trains, and whose responsibility was later claimed by both Freda and Ventura using the tactics of the 'false flag', namely, with the purpose of indicating in the anarchists and the extra-parliamentary Marxist groups, the responsible of such bombing strategy.⁴⁴⁹ On the same day of the Piazza Fontana bombing, there were three more bombings in Rome: one outside the *Banca Nazionale del Lavoro* [National Workers Bank] in via S. Basilio, and another two outside the monument known as *Altare della Patria* (Homeland Altar) whose authorship was later attributed to Mario Marino and Stefano Delle Chiaie, the latter leader of another neo-fascist organization, *Avanguardia Nazionale* [National Avantguard]. Those three bombings also claimed sixteenth injured overall, and were part of the same 'false flag' strategy initiated by *Ordine Nuovo* in order

⁴⁴⁶ Washington Post, '13 Die in Italian Terrorist Bombings', 13 December 1969.

⁴⁴⁷ Atti Processo Catanzaro (1982).

⁴⁴⁸ Luciano Lanza, *Bombe e Segreti. Piazza Fontana, Una Strage Senza Colpevoli* (Milan: Elèuthera Editore, 2005)

⁴⁴⁹ Carlo Terracciano, *Parla Freda* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 1985). This is a document that collects all the acts and interrogations of Freda by the High Court of Appeal of Bari in 1985. The document is interesting because was printed for internal circulation, and provide a portrait of Freda as the innocent hero wrongly accused. The document is therefore a biased account of the events, its utility for the present research is to provide evidence of the charisma that Freda seems to exercise on his associates and members of his groups.

to indicate in the anarchists and Marxists the authors of such terrorist acts.⁴⁵⁰

The Piazza Fontana should be understood within the socio-political framework of the so-called *autunno caldo* (hot autumn), a label given by the press to indicate a particular volatile political and social climate made of manifestations and protests of the working class in the autumn of 1969. Between September and December 1969, the workers' protest exploded in all its violence with strikes, demonstrations and a social class struggle without precedents. The 'hot autumn' can be considered the social and ideological platform from which the following strategy of tension initiated. In 1969, the salary of a factory worker in Italy was one of the lowest in Europe and this created a stagnation of the social mobility and the spreading in factories of ideological extremism.⁴⁵¹ But besides the economic stances that the working class was claiming, what is interesting to notice of the 'hot autumn' as political phenomenon, was the new awareness of the so called '*classe operaia*' [working class] and the re-affirming of concepts like 'class conscience' with the strengthening of the trade unions and a better definition of workers as social and political category.⁴⁵² On 19 November 1969, during the clashes between demonstrators and police anti-riots squads, the policeman Antonio Annarumma was killed.⁴⁵³ The clashes in which the policeman died, were at the end of a public speech of the trade unionist Bruno Storti of the trade union CISL. On 9 December, was signed an agreement between the trade unions and the *Intersind* (that included State-run companies) and on 21 November, the trade unions managed to sign an agreement on contract and minimum wage with the *Confindustria* [Italian Industrialists]. The Piazza Fontana bombing would happen a few weeks after. The country was therefore experiencing a period of social and political turmoil that had already seen extremist political groups taking part in it, with the student movement's protests throughout the country claiming more justice, respect of human and civil rights, and a fair social welfare system.

It could be assumed that the Piazza Fontana bombing and the strategy of tension that derived from it, could be the plan by extreme right organisations to sabotage the type of compromise that the recent agreements of the November and December 1969 had been signed between trade unions representing the working class and the political and economic elite of the country.⁴⁵⁴ The idea embraced by neo-fascist organisations like *Ordine Nuovo* was to create also in Italy the conditions for a neo-fascist coup d'état as in Greece a few years before. Therefore, there was the aim to shape a climate of tension among the populace with terrorist attacks whose authorship could be attributed

⁴⁵⁰ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁴⁵¹ Indro Montanelli and Mario Cervi, *L'Italia degli Anni di Piombo* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1991).

⁴⁵² Andrea Camponi and Domenico M. Bruni, *Istituzioni Politiche e Mobilitazioni di Massa* (Soveria Minelli: Rubettino Editore, 2018).

⁴⁵³ Giorgio Galli, *Storia del Partito Armato, 1968-1982* (Milan: Rizzoli Editore, 1986).

⁴⁵⁴ Fulvio Bellini and Gianfranco Bellini, *Il Segreto della Repubblica. La Verità Politica sulla Strage di Piazza Fontana* (Rimini: Selene Editore, 2005).

to anarchists or Marxists. This seemed the winning strategy for such political purposes. The first investigation on Piazza Fontana that the Milan police initiated was led by the *commissario* [police superintendent] Luigi Calabresi who started to investigate on Piazza Fontana looking at the anarchic trail. It is interesting to notice that the authorities did not even contemplate to investigate the neo-fascist extra-parliamentary groups, and instead, concentrated all their investigative efforts on the anarchists.⁴⁵⁵ This is an element that was later noticed during the first Catanzaro trial (1977-1979).⁴⁵⁶ This investigative trend can be easily explained looking at the political climate of the time and considering that many officials, both in the intelligence as well as in the police forces, together with segments of political class and of the armed forces, were former fascists themselves.⁴⁵⁷ The same evening of the attack, the Milan Prefect, Libero Mazza, alerted the Italian Prime Minister Mariano Rumor that the bombing was most probably responsibility of the anarchists and he did so on a note provided by the *Ufficio Affari Riservati* [Secret Affairs Office] of the *Viminale* (The Italian Interior Ministry).⁴⁵⁸ Therefore, it was concluded that the five bombings that had happened that day in the two major cities of the country, Rome and Milan, were responsibility of the anarchists.

Initially, the people arrested by the police for supposed links with the Piazza Fontana bombing were in a number of eighty and in particular, the authorities concentrated on the Milan anarchic circle *Ponte della Ghisolfa* [Ghisolfa Bridge] and the Roman anarchist circle *XXII Marzo* (XXII March) of which Pietro Valpreda was member, excluding any other political group. According to Antonino Allegra, police officer at the Milan police headquarters, Giuseppe Pinelli, a well-known anarchist to the police and leader of the anarchist circle *Ponte della Ghisolfa*, was immediately arrested without any evidence, and held in custody until 15 December, when he precipitated from the fourth floor of the police headquarters where he had been interrogated since his arrest.⁴⁵⁹ The death of the anarchist Giuseppe Pinelli, threw doubts on the *modus operandi* of the police and the subsequent investigation conducted by the magistrate Gerardo D'Ambrosio, established that Pinelli died following sudden loss of self-control that affected him while at the window, making him to fall out. The results of the autopsy were never revealed and there are still unexplained elements in his death even despite a court case to establish the real causes of his death and to establish the police responsibility for it.⁴⁶⁰ Recently, new findings claim that the night Pinelli was

⁴⁵⁵ 'Audizione del Dott. Antonino Allegra in 'Atti Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sul Terrorismo e sulle Cause della Mancata Individuazione dei Responsabili delle Stragi', 73mo resoconto stenografico, XIII Legislatura, 5th July 2000, www.parlamento.it (last accessed on 10/07/2017).

⁴⁵⁶ Processo di Appello Piazza Fontana, Catanzaro, 1977-1979). RAI Archives.

⁴⁵⁷ Marco Dondi, *L'Eco del Boato: Storia della Strategia della Tensione, 1965-1974* (Bari-Rome: Laterza Editore, 2018).

⁴⁵⁸ Michele Brambilla, *Interrogatorio alle Destre* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1995).

⁴⁵⁹ Audizione del Dott. Antonino Allegra- Commissione Parlamentare d'Inchiesta sul Terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi. 73mo resoconto stenografico della seduta di mercoledì 5 luglio 2000 on www.parlamento.it (last accessed 10 July 2017).

⁴⁶⁰ Camilla Cederna, *Pinelli. Una Finestra Sulla Strage* (Milano: Feltrinelli-Il Saggiatore, 2004).

being interrogated by the police and subsequently died, were present in the police building nine members of the Italian intelligence. Paolo Broggi in his book, claims that the nine officers of the *Ufficio Affari Riservati dello Stato*⁴⁶¹ were there to make sure that the responsibility of the piazza Fontana attack was attributed to Pinelli and his anarchist group.⁴⁶² In the following years, further investigations proved the non- involvement of Pinelli in the events of Piazza Fontana and his alibi was exhibited.⁴⁶³ Pinelli's death gave the way to a vast conspiratorial literature on his case and the writer and screen player, Dario Fo, wrote in 1970 a play by the title *Morte Accidentale di un Anarchico* [Accidental Death of an Anarchist] where were put on stage the perplexities and the doubts surrounding this case of death in custody.⁴⁶⁴ In 1972, the *commissario* Luigi Calabresi that was leading Pinelli's interrogations, was assassinated by militants of the Marxist extra-parliamentary group *Lotta Continua* [Continuous Struggle] to vindicate the innocent death of Pinelli.⁴⁶⁵

The other anarchist initially involved in the bombing of Piazza Fontana was Pietro Valpreda, member of the Rome anarchist circle *XXII Marzo*. The involvement of Valpreda came through the alleged identification made by a taxi driver, Cornelio Rolandi, who recognised in Valpreda the man that he dropped with the briefcase at the Bank on the afternoon of 12th December, few minutes before the explosion. The arrest of Valpreda also illustrates the several fallacies in the investigation of the Piazza Fontana case. Initially 50 million of *lire* were offered to whoever could provide information about the attack and the same Rolandi was somehow influenced by the police officers who were investigating, to recognise Valpreda in a picture that they showed him. The newspaper *Corriere della Sera* announced on 16th December, that the 'monster' had been captured and the Italian president Saragat addressed a questionable message of congratulations to the *questore* (head of the police forces) Marcello Guida.⁴⁶⁶ It has emerged during the several court trials and further investigations, that Valpreda was not involved in the bombing but that rather he could have been possibly mistaken for the neo-fascist Antonio Sottosanti, an ex legionnaire infiltrated in the Pinelli's anarchist circle *Ponte della Ghisolfa* and dubbed as '*Nino il fascista*' [Nino the fascist] for his past.⁴⁶⁷ As today, it has never been proven that Antonino Sottosanti could have been the man driven by Rolandi outside the Bank in Piazza Fontana. There was not follow up to this investigative trail.

⁴⁶¹ The 'Ufficio Riservato Affari dello Stato' was a department of the Italian Military Intelligence branch SID.

⁴⁶² Paolo Broggi, *Pinelli, L'Innocente che Cadde Giù* (Rome: Castelvecchi Editore, 2019).

⁴⁶³ Carlo Lucarelli, *Piazza Fontana* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2007).

⁴⁶⁴ Dario Fo, *Morte Accidentale di Un Anarchico* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1970).

⁴⁶⁵ Paolo Foschini, 'Definitive le Condanne per Sofri e gli Altri', *Corriere della Sera*, 23 January 1997 on www.corriere.it/archivi/ (last accessed on 18 July 2017).

⁴⁶⁶ Miriam Cuccu, 'Strage di Piazza Fontana: Buchi Neri, Nessun Colpevole' www.antimafiaduemila.com (last accessed 2 August 2017).

⁴⁶⁷ Giorgio Boatti, *Piazza Fontana* (Turin: Einaudi Editore, 2009).

The 'black trail' for the Piazza Fontana bombing happened almost by chance. In 1971, while there was still on the investigation for the bombing of Piazza Fontana, the police focused on the Venetian cell of the Nazi-fascist organisation *Ordine Nuovo*, specifically, the group active in Padua and that had as members Franco Giorgio Freda and Giovanni Ventura. The attention of the police on these two characters came when the magistrate Giancarlo Stiz who was conducting his own investigation on terrorist cells in Bologna, came across the testimony of the owner of a hardware shop who declared that few weeks before the 12 December 1969, bombing in Piazza Fontana, somebody that corresponded to the description of Freda, went to his shop to order and buy, 50 timers. Stiz then alerted his colleague in Milan, the magistrate D'Ambrosio, who then started to look into the Padua cell and into the 'black trail'.⁴⁶⁸ There were also other elements that led the investigations to Freda and Ventura. Both had been already known to the police for their bombing campaign on 25 April 1969 and on trains in the summer of 1969 and were under control by the authorities. Furthermore, following an inspection, the same type of explosive that had been used in the bombing of Piazza Fontana was found in possession of Ventura in large quantities together with compromising literature and minutes of meetings that were inviting to the use of violence written by Freda, Ventura and other well-known characters of the Venetian neo-fascist galaxy.⁴⁶⁹ Furthermore, on Christmas 1971, were found compromising documents in a safe-deposit box in Ventura's mother's and aunt's name in the *Banca Popolare di Montebelluna* [Montebelluna Popular Bank]. These documents later examined by the magistrate D'Ambrosio, revealed to be classified reports by the Italian military intelligence branch, the SID: *Servizio Interno Difesa* [Internal Defence Service].⁴⁷⁰

This finding arose perplexities about how such sensitive material could have ended in the hands of civilians and opened another trail of investigation on the Piazza Fontana events.⁴⁷¹ Ventura then told the magistrate D'Ambrosio that those documents found in the safe-deposit box belonged to Guido Giannettini, journalist and secret agent by the name 'Agent Z'. Ventura confessed also, that he met Giannettini, alias Antonio Corsi, alias 'Agente Z' in 1967, in a meeting between him, Giannettini and a Rumanian secret agent.⁴⁷² Following a police search in Giannettini's house, another similar document to the one found in Ventura's safe-deposit box was found with the same code and the progressive number 0281. On 15 May 1973, within the court trial on the Piazza Fontana, Giannettini was indicated as somebody who participated in the planning of the terrorist attack and that after, he was able to flee the country finding sanctuary abroad, specifically, in France, with the support of the SID. On 12 July of the same year, when the SID was asked to

⁴⁶⁸ Carlo Lucarelli, *Piazza Fontana* (Turin: Einaudi Stile Libero, 2007).

⁴⁶⁹ Giorgio Boatti, *Piazza Fontana* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

⁴⁷⁰ This document is classified as KSD/VI M, N.0281, Archivi Nazionali di Stato, Roma (accessed and viewed on 28 August 2017).

⁴⁷¹ Boatti, 2009, p.258.

⁴⁷² Boatti, 2009, p.258.

provide information on Giannettini, the head of the SID, General Vito Miceli, replied that he could not do so as the whole issue was covered by ‘military secrecy and state secrecy’.⁴⁷³ On 20 June 1974, the minister of Defence, Giulio Andreotti, in an interview to the weekly *Il Mondo* [The World] declared that Giannettini belonged to the SID and that was a mistake not to have revealed this information to the magistrates when it was requested.⁴⁷⁴ On August of the same year of the interview, Giannettini gave himself up at the Italian embassy in Buenos Aires.⁴⁷⁵

The Piazza Fontana events fall then within the complicated years of the strategy of tension. The alleged involvement of segments of the political class as well as of the armed forces as briefly described above, indicates the level of fragility of the young Italian republic. The several investigations and trials on Piazza Fontana reveal the complexity of the historical period, and fragility of the Italian democracy at the time creating the grounds for further speculations, investigations and alternative truths to be exposed. The lengthy court trials that will attempt to establish the truth and responsibility for the Piazza Fontana bombing will reveal strange connivance between subversive and terrorist groups, and segments of the intelligence and representatives of the political class revealing impossible to assess the circumstances and factors that determined the Piazza Fontana events. As today, Piazza Fontana does not have an ultimate truth to refer to.

2. The Judicial Review of the Piazza Fontana Court Case

The first trial for Piazza Fontana started in Rome on 23 February 1972, it will later move to Milan and in a second phase, to Catanzaro, a peripheral city in the south of the country. The reason why Catanzaro was chosen was for the location was far from the place of the crime and therefore, with a better possibility of an objective and unbiased judgment.⁴⁷⁶ At the end of the first Catanzaro trial (1979) Freda, Giannettini and Ventura were all sentenced to life imprisonment, while Valpreda and Merlino were found not guilty for the Piazza Fontana, but sentenced to four years and six months for political subversion.⁴⁷⁷ However, in appeal, all the four main defendants for the Piazza

⁴⁷³ Boatti, 2009, p.271.

⁴⁷⁴ Boatti, 209, p.271.

⁴⁷⁵ Boatti, 2009, p. 272.

⁴⁷⁶ Alberto Rapisarda, ‘Il Processo Valpreda si Terrá a Catanzaro’, *Stampa Sera* (Roma), 13 October 1972 (accessed online on 23/08/ 2017).

⁴⁷⁷ Silvana Mazzocchi, ‘Ergastolo a Freda, Ventura e Giannettini Colpevoli della Strage di Piazza Fontana’, *La stampa* (Catanzaro), 24 February 1979 (last accessed online 23/08/ 2017).

Fontana attack were acquitted, and Freda and Ventura were sentenced to fifteen years for the bombings occurred between April and August 1969 in Milan and Padua.⁴⁷⁸ The High Court of Cassation confirmed the acquittal of Giannettini and ordered a new trial for Freda, Ventura, Valpreda and Merlino which was held in Bari. The new trial started on 13 December 1984 and ended on 1 August 1985, with the acquittal of all the defendants for insufficient evidence. On 27 January 1987, the High Court of Cassation made definitive the acquittal for terrorism and massacre and sentenced only the General Gianadelio Maletti and the Captain Antonio LaBruna (both officers of the SID at the time of Piazza Fontana) for interfering with the investigations. A new trial in Catanzaro in 1989, saw as defendants Stefano Delle Chiaie and Massimiliano Fachini as responsible of the Piazza Fontana bombing. On 20 February 1989, they were both acquitted for not have committed the crime. On 5 July 1991, at the end of the appeal, Delle Chiaie's acquittal was confirmed. In the 1990s, the magistrate Guido Salvini opened a new inquiry, linking the Piazza Fontana terrorist attack to the failed *Borghese* coup d'état following the revelations of Martino Siciliano e Carlo Digilio, both former *ordinovisti* who accused Freda and Ventura of being the authors of the Piazza Fontana bombing.⁴⁷⁹

Digilio declared that Delfo Zorzi, another well-known neo-fascist extremist, had revealed to him to be the one that had materially placed the bombs in the bank: 'With pride Zorzi revealed to me that he had participated in the action of Milan and that regardless all those dead due to a mistake, the action had been an important one because it had regained strength to the right and hit the Left in the country'.⁴⁸⁰ Following these new revelations, there was a new trial in Milan on 24 February 2000, that ended on 20 June 2001 with a life sentence for Delfo Zorzi as the material executioner of the terrorist attack, Carlo Maria Maggi as the planner of the attack and Giancarlo Rognoni as their accomplice. On 12 March 2004, the three life sentences were reversed.⁴⁸¹ On 3 May 2005, the High Court of Cassation confirmed the 2004 sentence and condemned the victims' relatives to pay the legal costs. However, the High Court of Cassation in confirming the acquittal, stated that responsible for the Piazza Fontana were Freda and Ventura as members of the neo-fascist group *Ordine Nuovo* but that they were no longer processable as they had been acquitted for the

⁴⁷⁸ Guido Guidi, 'Tutti Fuori, Neri e Rossi' *Il Giornale Nuovo*, 21 March 1981 (last accessed online 21 August 2017).

⁴⁷⁹ Marcella Bianco, 'Il Legame fra Piazza Fontana e il Golpe Borghese nelle Recenti Indagini Giudiziarie', *Studi Storici*, vol. 41, no. 1. January 2000, pp. 37-60.

⁴⁸⁰ Declaration of Digilio on the responsibility of Delfo Zorzi as the material executioner of the Piazza Fontana bombing. In the quotation, there is also the hint that there was a miscalculation in the bomb timers and that therefore, they exploded at the wrong time, when people were still in the bank, while instead the action had been planned to have explosions when the bank was closed so to avoid casualties. This is a *vulgata* that still circulate in the neo-fascist circles but that has never found evidence. The quote is taken from 'Zorzi Mise una Bomba a Piazza Fontana', *La Stampa* (Roma), 11th December, 1996, p. 14, (my trans).

⁴⁸¹ Luigi Ferrarella, 'Piazza Fontana, L'Appello Cancella gli Ergastoli', *Corriere della Sera*, 13th Marzo 2004, (last accessed online 12/ 07/ 2017).

crime in 1987 and they could not be triable again for the same crime according to the Italian law.⁴⁸²

The above succinct summary of the long judicial review that the Piazza Fontana court case endured, shows the complexity of the whole case and the profound political and social implications that it revealed to have. Since 1969, the investigations, trials and sentences of several judges have not been able to secure the responsible to justice. In particular, is the Catanzaro trial held between the 1977 and 1979 that reveals the most disturbing aspects of the Piazza Fontana case and unveils the portrait of a country where the liberal democracy was still fragile, and going under the weight of a still ongoing civil war between left and right, fascists and anti-fascists. Although some scholars like Anna Cento Bull, prefer not to talk of ‘civil war’ for the period of the strategy of tension as not to legitimise politically in this way, terrorism and political violence,⁴⁸³ the examination of the documentation of the several police inquiries and court proceedings, reveals a country coping with an ideological conflict which had reignited after the end of Mussolini’s regime and of the war.

The Catanzaro trial reveals also collusions between high representatives of the Italian Military Intelligence (SID) and members of neo-fascist organizations. Figures like Guido Giannettini, overtly a member of the SID and mediator between the former and the neo-fascist *ordinovisti* Freda, Ventura, Zorzi and others, reveals the level of complicity between these representatives of the state and groups of subversive radical neo-fascists. In the Catanzaro trial is this the most disturbing element that emerges: that Piazza Fontana was a *Strage di Stato* as many defined it, meaning a massacre ordered by the Italian state. Even the inquiries ordered by the Parliamentary Committee for Terrorism and Massacres in 2000, revealed this aspect: extreme right terrorism in Italy was possible with the logistic and political support of segments of the state.⁴⁸⁴ The length of judicial review of the Piazza Fontana case, shows this difficulty of the magistrates, prosecutors and general attorneys to understand Piazza Fontana and to secure the responsible to the justice. The complexity of political and social climate in which Piazza Fontana occurred, impeded the working of the justice system, eventually acquitting all the possible responsible of it and sentencing the victims’ relative to pay the legal cost of what by many has been considered a defeat of the Italian justice.

Conclusion

⁴⁸² Gianfranco Zucchi, “Ultima Sentenza sulla Strage: Neo-fascisti Assolti”, *Corriere della Sera*, 4th May, 2005, (last accessed online 12/07/2017).

⁴⁸³ Anna Cento Bull, *Italian Neo-fascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Non-Reconciliation* (Oxford-New York: Berghahn Books, 2012).

⁴⁸⁴ Commissione Parlamentare d’Inchiesta sul Terrorismo e sulle Cause della Mancata Individuazione dei Responsabili delle Stragi, Camera dei Deputati, XIII Legislatura, 73^{mo} resoconto stenografico, 5th July 2000.

The Chapter intended to be an account of the Piazza Fontana terrorist attack, for Piazza Fontana is of great relevance in the history of terrorism and political violence in the post war Italy. Piazza Fontana is important for it marks the beginning of the strategy of tension and also because is associated almost immediately to the figure of the neo-fascist terrorist Franco Giorgio Freda. The Piazza Fontana attack came at the end of a volatile socio-political climate known as ‘hot autumn’ (September-December 1969) that saw the harshening of the political and ideological militancy with on-going strikes, factories and universities occupied by the demonstrators, and characterised by a strong social class awareness and political assertiveness in the streets as well in factories, schools and universities. The country in the 1969 ‘hot autumn’ period, was the result of the 1968 student uprising with the social fabric of the nation had been seriously tested by those social tensions. Piazza Fontana came therefore, at the end of the ‘hot autumn’ and could be seen as the perfect example of the socio-political tensions of the time.

The fact that initially the authorities identified the authorship of the terrorist attack to the anarchists, tells us of a political climate still rigidly authoritative (is the centre-right DC that is in power in 1969, after a brief governing of the socialists) and does not conceive the idea that the responsible for the Piazza Fontana bombing could be neo-fascists, although those have been already committing acts of terrorism in the early 1950s. The police immediately followed the ‘anarchic trail’ and did not consider any other political extra-parliamentary groups with a different ideological identity. It had to be until 1972, that the ‘black trail’ began to be finally followed by the authorities. This new approach to the inquiry, uncovered a network of neo-fascist radical groups, especially in the Venetian area and in Rome. Characters like Freda, Concutelli, Delle Chiaie, were at the time, representatives of a spiritual and mystic type of fascism that had found its significance in Evola’s philosophy. This was a type of fascism that was not the more conventional fascism of the MSI, or the fascism that recalled the *Ventennio*. This was a new, more radical form of fascism. It had more the ideological flare of Nazism as the movement *Ordine Nuovo*’ ideological creed and deeds show. Piazza Fontana could be seen then as part of a plan to create tension in the populace with repeated terrorist attacks and as consequence of this, demonise anarchists and Marxists while giving the opportunity to the state to become more authoritative and laying thus the basis for an authoritarian state as countries like Spain, Greece or Portugal were already experiencing.

The events of Piazza Fontana therefore show this: the willingness by political and military forces on one side and by underground radical neo-fascist groups on the other side, of conspiring for coup d’etat that would bring Italy in the group of those European countries that at the time were authoritarian regimes. The involvement in this project of characters like Freda could be explained by Freda’s own indoctrination and extremism that brought him to conceive himself as the Evolian

legionnaire, the ‘differentiated man’ that conceive violence as a virtue to be expressed in order to change the outside world and activate the process of transcendence on the inside of what Freda consider to be the ‘chosen one’.⁴⁸⁵ Piazza Fontana has not found its responsible yet, and all the major actors of this event, have been either acquitted or cannot be trialled any more due to the Italian penal law system. However, by the studying of the documentation available and by an analysis of the events and dynamics concerning Piazza Fontana, the complicity of segments of the Italian Intelligence and of the political class, demonstrate the willingness of taking the country into a military dictatorship as the one that Greece was experiencing since 1967. The fact that a dubious character like Guido Giannettini received the backup of the SID to flee the country in 1973, or that he was eventually acquitted, like Freda and Ventura, shows this complicity but also the fallacies of a legal system and the fragility of the Italian democracy of that time. In his memoirs that the Italian politician Aldo Moro wrote while in captivity, being kidnapped by the Marxist organisation *Brigate Rosse* [Red Brigades] in 1978, he affirmed that Piazza Fontana was a terrorist attack executed by neo-fascists at the orders of representatives of the state, and with the complicity of the military Intelligence.⁴⁸⁶ As to today, his explanation of Piazza Fontana and of the strategy of tension has not been argued against yet and remain the most plausible.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE *GRUPPO DI AR* (1963) AND THE *FRONTE NAZIONALE* (1990). FREDA’S OWN METAPOLITICAL BATTLE AGAINST THE DECADENT AND MULTI-ETHNIC LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Introduction

The present chapter intends to provide an understanding of Freda’s metapolitical engagement through an analysis of the two organizations he founded and coordinated in two different periods of his political life alongside his engagement in the armed struggle of the neo-fascist terrorism of the strategy of tension period analysed in the previous chapter. The first association to be taken

⁴⁸⁵ Franco Giorgio Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010).

⁴⁸⁶ Carlo Lucarelli, *Piazza Fontana* (Turin: Einaudi Stile Libero Editore, 2007); CFR Atti Processo Bari (1985).

into consideration is the *Gruppo di Ar* [Ar Group] that he founded in Padua in 1963. The second organization to be investigated is the *Fronte Nazionale* [National Front] which was founded in 1990, and chaired by Freda once he ended his prison sentence for his terrorist activities. The group was active on the territory for the whole following decade until it was dismantled by the Italian authorities in the year 2000 following a court case.⁴⁸⁷ Both the Ar Group and the National Front were shaped upon Freda's own ideological militancy and political project, which can be summarised in the mission of creating and safeguarding a group of kindred minds ready to embrace and share his personal metaphysical and mystic understanding of society and politics, thus creating a group with structure, aims and degree of radicalization.⁴⁸⁸

The two groups were set out in two different historical periods intended to fulfil a different political necessity, and represented two phases in Freda's intellectual development and political engagement according to his *Weltanschauung*. The binomial of *theoresis* and *praxis* that he attempted when founding those two organizations in two different periods of the post-war Italian history had the purpose in Freda's intentions to tackle different social and political threats. If the Ar Group was set out with the purpose of creating a cénacle of elected minds, prepared to oppose the degradation, decadence, and corruption of the 1960s Italian consumerist and capitalist society, and within the social and political tensions of that period as already explained in the previous chapters of the present work, the National Front was instead created with the intention of setting out a proper para-military organisation in order to contrast the mass migration phenomenon from developing countries that Italy was experiencing in the early 1990s.⁴⁸⁹ The organization in the intention of Freda, was to contrast such migrating influx, and thus protecting the Italian 'race', as he declared in the 'profession of identity' of the organization: 'The National Front has instead always maintained the characteristics of a school of national education through which we have manifested the freedom of being Italians, Europeans and "white", spreading amid our fellow countrymen our creed on the safeguarding of our racial and national community'.⁴⁹⁰ This was also the first time that Freda openly took a nationalist approach to his ideological militancy by protecting the principle of the 'white supremacy' of the country while instead, the 1960s Ar Group must be considered a hub where breeding political militancy and feeding a new type of revolutionary fascism different from the official neofascism represented by the MSI party through a programme of indoctrination. The chapter aims thus to a further comprehension of Freda's 'mystical fascism' and the modalities by which such fascist mysticism found its expression within

⁴⁸⁷ Franco Giorgio Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2000).

⁴⁸⁸ Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, the Cultic Milieu and Secularization' in Jeffrey Kaplan and Heléne Lööw (eds.), *The Cultic Milieu. Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (New York-Oxford: Altamira Press, 2002).

⁴⁸⁹ Michela Colucci, 'Per Una Storia del Governo e dell'Immigrazione Straniera in Italia dagli Anni Sessanta alla Crisi', *Meridiana*, No. 91, (2018), pp. 385-398.

⁴⁹⁰ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), p. 40, (my trans.)

his political and ideological militancy. In setting out these two groups, Freda took inspiration from a vast array of thinkers and inspirational figures dear to him like the omnipresent Julius Evola, Guénon, or Jean Thiriart. In his quest for ‘mysticism’, he progressively abandoned the more conventional politics looking also at controversial spiritual thinkers of the fourteenth century like Meister Eckehart as was portrayed through the ideological interpretative lens of Alfred Rosenberg’s analysis of the 14th century German mystic provided in his *The Myth of the Twentieth Century*.⁴⁹¹ We can grasp most of the National Front’s political agenda and ideological morphology from the proceedings of Freda’s court hearings between 1993 and 1995, when the organization fell under the radar of the Italian authorities on the charge of ‘restating the fascist party’.⁴⁹² When answering the questions of the judges in his trial for the constitution of the National Front, Freda exhibited a ‘spiritual’ and ‘mystical’ personality and the records of the court hearings are an important evidence of Freda’s spiritual, mystical and metapolitical militancy both on a political and ideological level. On this point, one of the answers that Freda gave to the prosecutor in the court hall, can be exemplificative enough to provide the reader an indication of his metapolitical and mystical approach to politics, and, at the same time, give a better understanding of his character. When asked of the reasons why he was found in possession of an image of the Buddha with a swastika, Freda replied that ‘I got inspired to all the doctrinal sources that represent the matrix of my cultural soul [...] With me I have an image of Buddha with a swastika on his chest: this is a highly metaphysical symbol [...]’.⁴⁹³ In the course of the court hearings, Freda puzzled often the judges showing a high level of education and a profound knowledge of philosophy and theology but also, displaying his rhetorical ability that he clearly possesses. What however, emerges in the analysis of those documents, is once again his metapolitical approach to politics and his fascist mysticism which constitute his ideological trademark.

In Freda’s writings and in the several declarations released to the press, is palpable the desire of becoming a figure of reference and source of political inspiration for his own comrades together with his willingness to create at the same time, a different type of neo-fascist militancy as we can read in the National Front’s official statute when listing the characteristics of the militant: ‘The nature of the National Front’s man must aim to and must reflect the magnanimity of his conduct-not in the magniloquence of his word-the most noble elements of our race and bloodline’.⁴⁹⁴ Here is clear the influence of his masters and the emphasis given to the figure of the hero-warrior as already stated in many other occasions becoming one of Freda’s conceptual tenets.⁴⁹⁵ Freda’s

⁴⁹¹ Alfred Rosenberg, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930) (London: Black Kite Publishing, 2017).

⁴⁹² Franco G. Freda, *L’Albero e le Radici* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008).

⁴⁹³ Franco G. Freda, *L’Albero e le Radici* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008), p. 22.

⁴⁹⁴ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), p. 36, (my trans.).

⁴⁹⁵ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010).

groupscule, *Il Gruppo di Ar* (Ar Group) founded in 1963, was distant in the intents and deeds from the one proposed by the more official Italian neo-fascist organizations of his time like the youth movement FUAN⁴⁹⁶ (of which Freda was briefly a member during his university years), or from the very same Italian official and more domesticated post-war neo-fascist legitimate party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI). Also, in this case of the Ar Group, it was meant to be in Freda's intentions a cénacle of kindred minds engaged on an intellectual and spiritual struggle against the values of the Italian liberal democracy according to the intellectual and spiritual elitism preached by Julius Evola in his works. Freda came to consider these political realities part of the very same system that he wished to disintegrate- as stated in *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*.⁴⁹⁷

Freda at the beginning of the 1960s, was still a member of the neo-fascist organization *Ordine Nuovo* [New Order] and inclined to follow his personal intellectual and ideological path being mainly influenced by Julius Evola's metaphysics and by other intellectual figures of reference like Guénon, Bardeche, Drieu de La Rochelle, Nietzsche and Oswald Spengler, all authors whose works were circulating amid the *Ordine Nuovo*'s milieu. Such an Evolian inspired neo-fascist organisation served well to Freda's own intellectual inclinations and ideological orientation as it allowed him to experience a type of fascism far more revolutionary and 'spiritual' as the one considered in such circles too of the bourgeois type as the one represented by the MSI although at the time of the Piazza Fontana events, the party was under the leadership of Giorgio Almirante, a former Salò combatant and a strong ideological reference for the more radical and anti-system party's membership.⁴⁹⁸ Between the middle of 1950s, and early 1960s, Freda was one of the many Italian youth that felt betrayed by the accommodating and conformist type of fascism pursued by the MSI and opted for a more intellectual engaging political activism, the same that *Ordine Nuovo* was proposing to all its recruits at the time.⁴⁹⁹

The Evolian imprinting is the most evident trait in Freda and it must be remembered that Freda absorbed and formed most of his ideological creed as young militant of *Ordine Nuovo*, which was heavily shaped by Pino Rauti's, Adriano Romualdi's and Clemente Graziani's personal understanding of the Evolian creed.⁵⁰⁰ It is thanks to this group that Freda found his own ideological reference and his political purpose by discovering several authors and thinkers of the extreme right galaxy and aligned with his own personal understanding of the fascist doctrine.⁵⁰¹ The very same Julius Evola wrote articles for the organization's publication *Ordine Nuovo*

⁴⁹⁶ FUAN is the acronym of *Fronte Universitario d'Azione Universitario* (University Front of University Action).

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., Freda (2010).

⁴⁹⁸ Piero Ignazi, *Il Polo Escluso* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1989).

⁴⁹⁹ Julius Evola, *I Testi di Ordine Nuovo* (1955-1971) (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

⁵⁰⁰ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Rights in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

⁵⁰¹ Chiara Stellati, *Una Ideologia Dell'Origine* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2002), p.46.

between 1955 and 1971 to explain and better illustrate the philosophical and political aspects of his own understanding of fascism as ideology and to educate the membership of the organization. In his articles or brief essays written for the ON journal, Evola discussed the theoretical and, to certain extent, the metaphysical backbone of his own personal understanding of ideology and political militancy in perfect Evolian style with its strive for action being essentially revolutionary, anti-system and spiritual.⁵⁰² Freda militated in the Padua cell of the ON between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, before creating his own group. At this stage of his intellectual formation, central was Evola's book *Men Among the Ruins*, where Evola provides a ferocious criticism to modernity and its type of society.⁵⁰³ Therefore, the idea of creating the *Gruppo di Ar* (Ar Group) seemed to have been strongly influenced by Evola's thought and the mystical flare of the *Ordine Nuovo*, and tended to fulfil, at least in the intentions of the founder, the duty of forming a restricted circle of an intellectual elite that could provide a specific political answer to the climate of decadence perceived in those years in the Italian society and in the western world as a whole.

The founding of the *Fronte Nazionale* thirty years later responded instead to a different set of needs although down the same ideological and spiritual lane of the *Gruppo di Ar* thirty years earlier. In the case of the *Fronte Nazionale*, it was the early 1990s and Freda had just been released from prison for his terrorist activities. In those years Italy was experiencing a massive migration from the nearby Albania following the collapse of the communist regime in that country. Italy found itself to face an emergency situation regarding massive migration wave from the other side of the Adriatic Sea. The mass migration from Albania to Italy in 1991, created new political and social issues that were new to the country, and that authorities did not know how to handle considering the Italian migratory history that indicate Italy as a country traditionally of migrants, rather than immigrants from other parts of the world Arnaldo Mauri provides a demographical analysis of the years previous to the migratory wave from Albania observing how Italy never experienced the dramatic migratory influxes of that time, and that the migration had been mainly internal from the agricultural and less developed south to the industrialised north of the peninsula.⁵⁰⁴ Analysis supported by Michela Colucci's work on the same topic.⁵⁰⁵ In the early 1990s, we can detect the strong reactions by right-wings parties and movements especially in Europe, against the new phenomenon of migration and Italy was not an exception to this. Analysis and studies on this new socio-political phenomenon have produced a wealth of academic literature in the following decades. On this issue, the Italian sociologist Donatella Della Porta provides an

⁵⁰² Julius Evola, *I Testi di Ordine Nuovo* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2001).

⁵⁰³ Julius Evola, *Gli Uomini e le Rovine* (1953) (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 2001).

⁵⁰⁴ Arnaldo Mauri, 'Squilibri Demografici e il Caso dell'Italia', in *Studi Economici e Sociali*, Vol. 24, No.4, (1989).

⁵⁰⁵ Michela Colucci, 'Per una Soria del Governo e dell'Immigrazione Straniera in Italia dagli Anni Sessanta alla Crisi', in *Meridiana* No. 91(2018), pp. 385-398.

accurate analysis looking specifically at the Italian case, analysing the political and social reaction that occurred in Italy in the aftermath of the migratory influxes of the early 1990s.⁵⁰⁶ In Della Porta's analysis the main right wing parties active in Italy at the time voiced their protest against a possible 'invasion' of migrants fearing a possible 'Islamization' of the country with parties like *Forza Italia*, the post-fascist *Alleanza Nazionale* and the *Lega Nord* organising protest rallies and even the celebration of public religious rites like Masses in Latin, to better stress their cultural imprinting that they were willing to defend.⁵⁰⁷ The 1990s therefore, were years where Europe experimented a new wave of migration and that saw as consequence, the fear of losing the cultural and ethnic homogeneity of the territory as Tore Bjorgo and Rob Witte's study on this subject demonstrates.⁵⁰⁸

Freda decided to found the group *Fronte Nazionale* that would contrast and combat the migratory influx, specifically from Africa and Islamic countries as it can be read in the official documents of the movement published by the same Freda's publishing house *Edizioni di Ar*.⁵⁰⁹ Although the *Gruppo di Ar* is quite different from the *Fronte Nazionale* in matter of purposes, militancy, and geopolitical assets nevertheless, the two organisations resent the strong influence of the charismatic personality of their founder and display in both cases a strong ideological and political agenda as it will better explained in the chapter. In both organizations, Freda attempted to act his own visionary political plan and while the *Gruppo di Ar* was intended as a cénacle of kindred spirits who were gathering in the back of Freda's bookstore *Ezzelino* in Padua at the beginning of the 1960s, the organization *Fronte Nazionale* created in 1990, counted instead several branches distributed throughout the whole national territory, and was meant to offer a proper paramilitary structure by following a specific militant strategy on the territory. These are all elements that were uncovered by the investigations of the Italian anti-terrorist police division, DIGOS, and that pictured Freda's *Fronte Nazionale* as a terrorist organization with the aims of 'reconstructing the fascist party'.⁵¹⁰ In both cases though, what emerges from the comparative analysis of modes, principles and structure of the two organisations is the following: 1) their common esoteric/neo-pagan flare; 2) both organizations aimed to create an active political militancy on the territory; 3) their metapolitical and cadre character; and finally, 4) their specific ideological imprinting that consistently refers primarily to the Nazi-fascist ideology in its mythical and mystical dimension. The differences and similarities between Stefano delle Chiaie's *Avanguardia Nazionale* or Clemente Graziani's and Pino Rauti's *Ordine Nuovo*, or other neo-fascist organizations of the

⁵⁰⁶ Donatella Della Porta, 'Immigrazione e Protesta', in *Quaderni di Sociologia*, No. 21, (1999).

⁵⁰⁷ Della Porta, 1999, pp. 5-6.

⁵⁰⁸ Tore Bjorgo and Rob Witte (eds.), *Racist Violence in Europe* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 1993).

⁵⁰⁹ Franco Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2000).

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Ferraresi (1996), p. 96.

Anni di piombo period like the NAR⁵¹¹ for instance, make surfacing a far-right networking where the visionary ideas of Freda and his associates with his *Gruppo di Ar* first and with the *Fronte Nazionale* later, found their own niche.⁵¹² The reality of the Italian neo-fascist network reveals a widespreading of the radical right throughout the territory. In the decades 1960s-1970s most of the activities of the Italian radical right were concentrated mainly in the north of the country due to socio-political dynamics as illustrated and explained in chapters two and four of the present thesis. However, starting from the 1980s, the mapping of the radical right on the Italian territory shows a different situation being the presence of different groupscules and far-right associations and movements multiplied and quite extended over the territory. This could also be linked to the social phenomenon of football hooliganism that attracted many far-right militants using football to channel their ideological and political message. It must be added that to certain extent the strength of the conceptual framework of these two organisations had survived permutating and adapting its nature until our days. Freda still currently owns and directs a publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar* with the *Gruppo di Ar* being assimilated by the publishing house, and is still operative, after a period of time in which the organization kept a low-profile due to Freda's own judicial misfortunes. The *Edizioni di Ar* is therefore today a full-functioning publishing house that finds its place within today's Italian far-right milieu, and that has managed to establish rapports with other Italian neo-fascist organizations like for instance, *Casa Pound Italia* or with the other group *Forza Nuova*⁵¹³ as it will be better explained in chapter six of the present thesis.

In both the case of the *Gruppo di Ar* as in the case of *Fronte Nazionale*, Freda's intent was to organise, lead and shape an ideologically elitist group of individuals that would be ready in the case of the *Gruppo di Ar*, to resist the capitalist system of the 1960s Italy by possibly be part of the transnational neo-fascist network active in those years against a common enemy.⁵¹⁴ In the case of *Fronte Nazionale*, as it has emerged from the analysis of original documents of the movement and from the examination of court proceedings, the idea was to create a militant group of selected individuals, the so called *Lupi Azzurri* (Azure Wolves) to combat and resist what Freda's defined 'the invasion of Europe' by 'hordes of immigrants' coming to threaten the 'white identity' of the European populations,⁵¹⁵ echoing or anticipating the phenomenon of 'white supremacism' that we are experiencing today. In both cases, Freda's aims to bring to life the utopian and mythical vision of an elite of warriors that would defend the homeland from the danger of an imminent 'invasion'

⁵¹¹ The *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (Armed Revolutionary Nuclei) was a neo-fascist organization led by Giusva Fioravanti and Francesca Mambro and allegedly responsible for the Bologna train station on August 2, 1980.

⁵¹² Insert relevant bibliography.

⁵¹³ See chapter 6 of the present thesis for an analysis of the rapport between Freda and *CasaPound Italia* group.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid. (Ferraresi 1998); cfr. Jeremy Bale, *The Darkest Side of Politics I: Postwar Fascism, Covert Operations, And Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2017).

⁵¹⁵ Franco G. Freda, *L'Albero e le Radici* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008), p.7.

by alien populations as in the case of the *Lupi Azzurri* of the *Fronte Nazionale*, or as in the case of the *Gruppo di Ar*, to create and educate an elite of intellectuals and combatants that would fight against the decay and corruption represented by Capitalism and Liberalism as the two sides of the same archenemy: modernity

Freda's two movements remark with different modalities and in different historical periods, the safeguarding of the Tradition against the decadence of modernity; they both stress the engagement against the *homo economicus* produced by capitalism and aimed to the creation of an ideal type of a new *übermensch*, a spiritual soldier of a 'New Order' who would come to heal and protect the Tradition of the white populations, who will prevent the decline of the western civilizations.⁵¹⁶ According to Freda, such endeavours should be made possible through active militancy and supported by a specific 'metaphysics of fascism.'⁵¹⁷ The metaphysical aspect of the political and ideological discourse has always been very strong in Freda since the beginnings of his political militancy as himself testifies in his most famous pamphlet, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969): 'We have to collocate ourselves on the line that marks the border between earth and heaven, whereas earth and heaven meet each other. Where the enlightened meets the enlightening and thus give life to the luminous'.⁵¹⁸

Freda has always attempted to sport around his personal metaphysical approach to the political discourse amongst the neo-fascist circles of his youth as well in the years of his maturity with an initiation flare of a sophisticated type of lexicon, obscure and cryptic on purpose to be understood only by the adepts, which constitutes his trademark. This attitude has also contributed to feed his persona's aura of 'unclassifiable fascist' among the transnational far-right movements of today.⁵¹⁹ Freda has always fancied to be considered himself as a *sacerdos*, the high priest of an ideological spirituality leading an elitist group of initiated kindred souls.⁵²⁰ This aspect of his personality together with his spiritualistic and metaphysical aims makes him intellectually relevant in today's far-right groups as it seems that Freda has been rediscovered in more recent times by the younger generations of far-right activists in Italy and abroad⁵²¹ Both the *Gruppo di Ar* and the later *Fronte Nazionale* therefore, have become examples and reference of political militancy to be taken as model by contemporary far-right groups as for instance in the case of *CasaPound Italia*, where Freda has become object of a new historical re-writing that romanticises his figure and his involvement in the events recorded⁵²² as it will be discussed in chapter six. The chapter has only

⁵¹⁶ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), pp. 52-53.

⁵¹⁷ Freda, 2000, p. 52.

⁵¹⁸ Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 122.

⁵¹⁹ On Freda's renewed popularity see chapter 6 of the present thesis.

⁵²⁰ Interview given by Freda to the author on 17/06/ 2015.

⁵²¹ See chapter six of the present thesis.

⁵²² Interview with Franco Freda to CasaPound's web-radio 'Bandiera Nera' on October 30, 2013.

two subsections, and it has been organised as follows: the first sub-section will explore Freda's *Gruppo di Ar*'s ideological morphology and socio-political engagement within the ideological background at the time of the strategy of tension. The second subsection will explain and analyse the aims, ideological tenets and structure of the *Fronte Nazionale*. The conclusion will provide an overall evaluative and conclusive analysis of the two organisations and assess whether Freda's ideological and political engagement has changed in time.

1. The Gruppo di Ar and Political Militancy

Freda came from a family where his father was a devout fascist during the *Ventennio* remaining a loyal member of the MSI after the war.⁵²³ Therefore, it cannot be assumed that Freda came across the fascist ideology when already a young adult. Fascism was a political creed that he already breathed at home and while he was a young law student at the university of Padua. In many of his interviews there is always an episode of his own biography that he likes to recall, and that is how he was saved by a young SS soldier while a young child during a heavy bombing of Padua by the Allies forces in 1944.⁵²⁴ In this episode, Freda seems to envisage a sort of predestination in what he will later consider his own life mission. In his university years, Freda militated briefly in the MSI university students association FUAN and was soon attracted by the more radical and cadre neo-fascist organization *Ordine Nuovo* of Pino Rauti, Adriano Romualdi and Clemente Graziani. Freda's militancy in the ON is an important element to better understand his intellectual and ideological radicalism as it was through this neo-fascist organization that he came across Evola and other relevant authors for the Italian radical right of those years. He consequently intended to create a cénacle of kindred spirits where to discuss, study and comment authors close to their ideological and theoretical school of thought similar and specular to their Marxist counterpart.

The creation of the *Gruppo di Ar* in 1963 followed shortly the opening in Padua, Freda's birthplace, of his bookstore and publishing house named *Ezzelino*. The name for the bookstore refers to the notorious thirteenth century Padua nobleman *Ezzelino III da Romano*, who belonged to the Ghibelline faction and was notorious for his cruelty and for being a tyrant as described by Dante in the book of the *Inferno* (XII, 109). The choice of such a name for Freda's bookstore was not casual revealing Freda's strong anticlerical and anti-Christian feelings as Ezzelino was a Ghibelline leader supporter of the (German) Emperor and a ferocious adversary of the Guelphs, which was the faction that supported the Catholic Church in the 13th century Italy in the struggle for political primacy between the authority of the pope and the authority of the German

⁵²³ Anna K. Valerio and Silvia Valerio, *Non-Ci Sono Innocenti* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2016).

⁵²⁴ Franco Giorgio Freda's interview to Radio Bandiera Nera, October 30, 2013.

emperor.⁵²⁵ The very same choice of the bookstore's name shows then Freda's character: always ready to outstand himself and distantiate the crowd by choosing extreme and radical political positions as his militancy in ON demonstrates, or preferring historical characters who would create outrage in the public opinion and, at the same time, rise admiration among his cohort of loyal comrades. The first book printed by Freda's bookstore and publishing house was the notorious De Gobineau's *Essay on the Inequality of Human Races* written and first published in 1853.⁵²⁶ Again, the choice of such title for the first printed book of his bookstore is a clear indication of the nature of its founder's intentions and the ideological framework that characterised Freda's own cultural and political endeavours in that period of his life. Soon the bookstore became a meeting point for neo-fascist militants and sympathizers, and the *Gruppo di Ar* began its activities within the omnipresent ON's political sphere with whom Freda had maintained contacts and of which he was still a member. The bookstore as well as the *Gruppo di Ar* earlier and the *Fronte Nazionale* later, obey both to Freda's specific *Weltanschauung*, which can be detected in all his publications and by the titles of the publications chosen by his publishing house.⁵²⁷ Freda's mystical approach to politics and, at the same time, his almost detached and aristocratic view on life, made his own militancy and subsequent involvement in terrorist actions, a winning model to follow throughout his activity of proselytism forty years ago as well as nowadays if compared with his most notorious contemporary comrades like for instance, Stefano Delle Chiaie.

The Ar Group was quite a small and selected group of kindred spirits, ready to have their political and ideological revolution against the corrupted capitalist society of the 1960s Italy. The activities of the *Gruppo di Ar* must be analysed within the context of the strategy of tension period, and it would be interesting to assess the organization's role in relation to the Piazza Fontana case. From the investigations related to the Piazza Fontana bombings, we know that Freda's own bookstore was used as an underground hideout for other neofascist subversive cells in the Venetian region.⁵²⁸ From this perspective, the *Gruppo di Ar* could fall within the wider national and transnational neo-fascist terrorism network active in Europe between the 1960s and the 1970s. Scholars like Franco Ferraresi consider Freda's group as a splinter group of *Ordine Nuovo*.⁵²⁹ And indeed, if we compare and analyse the two organizations, both have in common the same set of values and principles. This might signify that Freda was heavily influenced by his militancy in *Ordine Nuovo* and his own group resented of such ideological influence.

⁵²⁵ Trevor Dean, 'The Rise of the Signori' in David Abulafia, *The New Cambridge Medieval History-vol. 5- c.1198-c.1300* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 458-478.

⁵²⁶ Steven Kale, 'Gobineau, Racism and Legitimism: A Royalist Heretic in Nineteenth Century France' *Modern Intellectual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), (April 2010), Vol. 7, Issue 1, pp. 33-61.

⁵²⁷ See Freda's publishing house official website for the book catalogue: www.edizionidiar.it.

⁵²⁸ Atti Processo Catanzaro (1977-1979).

⁵²⁹ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996).

An attempt to explain the ideological nature and the political intent of the *Gruppo di Ar*'s founder was made by Anna K. Valerio in her novel that narrates the first period of Freda's political and ideological engagement, chronologically before the Piazza Fontana bombing.⁵³⁰ Valerio's book contains relevant and interesting elements to better understand the socio-political climate of the late 1960s from Freda's own intellectual and ideological perspective, but it is oftentimes blurred with partialities and romanticises the events narrated as it is the biased account of Freda's biography of those years from an insider's viewpoint being Anna K. Valerio Freda's current wife. Therefore, although her book is interesting because it gives the reader an inside view of Freda's own version of the events, it could not be considered an objective, reliable source of the facts, situations, people and events narrated in the text.⁵³¹ It has been however considered an interesting source for it shows the narration of the events of strategy of tension from Freda's point of view as it is clear, looking at the lexicon, and narrative register that the book had the attentive supervision of Freda himself.⁵³²

It is important for the research hypothesis of the present work to define the *Gruppo di Ar*'s ideological morphology and thus try to insert it within the neo-fascist galaxy active at the time in Italy, with particular relevance to the north of the country. Starting with the sketching of the group's ideological morphology, particular attention should be given to the particle *AR*. This is the root of the terms 'Aryan' and 'aristocratic', and implies the concept of an elite and cadre group whereas there is a notion of superiority because of blood purity, ethnic lineage or because of its intellectual elitism. The particle *AR* seems to mimic Evola's esoteric group, the *Gruppo di Ur* created in 1927 and his work *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* (1941) where we find explained the theory that distinguishes 'superior' races from 'inferior' human groups thanks to the right combination of physical and spiritual characteristics, which reflect moral and ethical codes, and intellectual attitudes.⁵³³ On this point, it is relevant to explain briefly the ideological and theoretical tenets of Evola's group to better understand its influence on the strategy of tension with kindred neo-fascist organizations like for instance, Pino Rauti's *Ordine Nuovo* or Stefano Delle Chiaie's *Avanguardia Nazionale* and the same Freda's *Gruppo di Ar*.⁵³⁴ Evola, together with the esotericist Arturo Reghini, founded in 1927 the so called 'UR Group', which was the Italian version of the myriad of exoteric circles scattered throughout Europe in those years.⁵³⁵ The organization lived

⁵³⁰ Anna K. Valerio and Silvia Valerio, *Non-Ci Sono Colpevoli* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2016).

⁵³¹ The book above mentioned can be considered an autobiography that the same Freda has dictated to his wife in order to explain his political involvement in the years immediately precedent to the Piazza Fontana events.

⁵³³ Julius Evola, *Sintesi di Dottrina della Razza* (1941), (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 1994).

⁵³⁴ Stefano Delle Chiaie is another notorious neo-fascist leader of the strategy of tension and also notoriously Evolian in his understanding of the fascist doctrine.

⁵³⁵ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (1985) (London: Tauris, 2004).

only three years and was eventually closed down by the Fascist regime due to internal pressure on Mussolini.⁵³⁶ Freda created and shaped the *Gruppo di Ar* according to the esoteric and ideological coordinates of the *Gruppo di Ur*, but also influenced by the ideological coordinates of the *Ordine Nuovo*, which preached a certain degree of Nazi mysticism that Pino Rauti's group was proudly flagging around. The fact that Freda in 1960, was in contact with the *Ordine Nuovo*'s chiefs Rauti and Graziani, has led to believe that the *Gruppo di Ar* was in reality a satellite or splinter group of ON and that under this role, was involved in the Piazza Fontana bombing having a supportive and logistic role although there were never found enough evidence to prove it.

According to scholars like Ferraresi and Bale, Freda's organization was gravitating around the ON and the *Avanguardia Nazionale*, sharing the same ideological tenets and plan of action.⁵³⁷ The fact that in 1969, Freda participated in the Regensburg conference organised by Jean Thiriart's *Jeune Europe* movement, may indicate Freda's political awareness and involvement in the transnational neo-fascist network 'Aginter Press' that had supported and encouraged in those years the strategy of tension in order to seize power and establish autocratic regimes in countries like France or Italy. In the court case instructed for the Piazza Fontana events, there was evidence that the *Gruppo di Ar* was involved in a series of bombings that Freda and his men carried out between April and August 1969.⁵³⁸ Furthermore, as it can be read in the proceedings of the parliamentary interrogation to the Judge Guido Salvini, who was also in charge of the investigation on the Piazza Fontana attack, the *Gruppo di Ar*'s bookstore was used by Freda as an official address to receive the famous fifty-five timers that apparently the same Freda had ordered in the nearby city of Treviso and two of which were used for the Piazza Fontana bombing.⁵³⁹

As Bale has observed, although Freda has always denied any involvement in the Piazza Fontana attack nevertheless, his association was used oftentimes by ON as a hiding place for its militants, and as a safe place to store explosives and to plan terrorist attacks often in accord with Stefano Delle Chiaie's *Avanguardia Nazionale*, as the re-construction of the Piazza Fontana events seems to indicate. The transcripts of the Catanzaro court appeal proceedings, and the final court appeal sentence in Bari, seem to highlight some discrepancies and lacunae in the account of Freda's and his *Gruppo di Ar* associates' alleged involvement of the Piazza Fontana bombing.⁵⁴⁰ The interesting element that emerges from an analysis of the *Gruppo di Ar* is its cultic structure and

⁵³⁶ Michael Moynihan (ed.), transl. Guido Stucco, *Introduction to Magic. Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus by Julius Evola and the UR Group* (Rochester: Inner Traditions, 2001). The text is the English translation of Julius Evola's *Introduzione alla Magia Quale Scienza dell'Io*, vol 1 (Roma: Edizioni Mediterranee, 1971).

⁵³⁷ Franco Ferraresi, *Threats to Democracy: The Radical Right in Italy After the War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); cfr. Jeffrey M. Bale, *The Darkest Sides of Politics I. Post-War Fascism, Covert Operations and Terrorism* (London-New York: 2018).

⁵³⁸ See chapter 4 of the present work.

⁵³⁹ See chapter 4 of the present work.

⁵⁴⁰ ⁵⁴⁰ Atti Corte d'Appello Catanzaro (1982) and Atti Corte d'Assise (1990).

quasi-religious mandate that its members believed to have received due to their supposed elitism deriving from belonging to a ‘superior breed’ and, therefore, to be the ‘chosen ones’ as preached by Freda himself in many occasions.⁵⁴¹[expand and insert quotes] But also, the heavily ideological influence of Freda himself on the members of the group, to the point of making an organization that would totally mirror Freda’s personal political philosophy as we can see in the *Gruppo di Ar*’s political manifesto: ‘[...] we are anti-democrats: on the fetishes of democracies –capitalists and Bolsheviks- falls the political values and of the moral trauma that has disintegrated individuals, alienating them from the organic life of the State’.⁵⁴² Another interesting quote from the *Gruppo di Ar*’s manifesto is the following: [...] For a *traditional conception of the existence*, where the exasperated suggestions of the economy and of the society, leave the place to the ‘heroic’ values of the spirit, intended here as *honour, hierarchy and loyalty*’.⁵⁴³ The above quotes from the manifesto of the *Gruppo di Ar* expresses clearly the spiritual and metapolitical backbone of the organization in the best fascist mysticism tradition and being a clear expression of Freda’s own intellectual and ideological framework.[insert quote by Freda to demonstrate the point] It is relevant to notice that the association is still active today and it is still the main channel used by Freda to spread his political and ideological gospel, unlike his other organization created in the early 1990s with the intention to contrast the imminent migration wave and spreading in this way, his own ‘morphological racism’ that was eventually dismantled and made outlaw by the Italian authorities as the following subsection will attempt to analyse. [to re-write the conclusion].

2. The Morphological Racism: Freda’s Fronte Nazionale and his Lupi Azzurri.

In 1990, Franco Freda, who had been formally acquitted by the Bari *Corte di Assise* for the Piazza Fontana case, set out in Padua an organization called *Fronte Nazionale* [National Front] which had as main task to preserve and protect the ‘Italian race’ against the imminent migration influx and against the phenomenon of globalization.⁵⁴⁴ The members of this group were called *Lupi Azzurri* (lit. ‘azure wolves’). The choice of such name for the members of the National Front was taken by Freda from the Nazi mythology that contemplates the wolf as an animal totem. According to the Nazi symbolism, the wolf represents both nurturing and destruction. But also, it represents the most intelligent, loyal animal who lives in a cooperative family based pack, and most importantly, the wolf represents great strength expressed through its fierce nature and positive action. It is this the reason that brought Freda to adopt the animal-totem of the wolf to indicate the

⁵⁴¹ Franco Giorgio Freda, *L’Albero e le Radici* (1996) (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2008); cfr. Chiara Stellati, *Una Ideologia dell’Origine. Franco Freda e la Controtendenza* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2002).

⁵⁴² The following manifesto of the *Gruppo di Ar* was written and published in 1963 and also appeared on the publication *Tradizione*, Year 1, No. 1, (July-Aug. 1963). Here we are using the version published in appendix to Franco G. Freda, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2010), p. 70.

⁵⁴³ Ibid. Freda (2010), p. 70.

⁵⁴⁴ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Edizioni di Ar, 2000), p. 20.

members of his association. Another reason why Freda chose the name *Lupi Azzurri* for his new organization could lie in the fact that he was maybe referring to a clandestine elite military group organised by Himmler in 1944 with the task of penetrating the enemy's lines and that were called 'Werewolves'.⁵⁴⁵

From the documents available, it seems clear that the main purpose of Freda's *Fronte Nazionale* was to fight the process of globalisation and the consequent multi-ethnicity and migratory influx that Italy was experiencing in the early 1990s but that he saw more as a transnational process and that intended to fight against: '[...]The Fronte Nazionale has focused its energies to the examination and to the study of the migratory phenomenon: in proposing itself as a school of national education that intended to illuminate on the tremendous side effects that the migratory invasion would have and will assume in the next decades'.⁵⁴⁶ This quote expresses the deep fear that Freda felt by observing the migratory phenomenon in Italy and as a global event, and the determination to act in order to avoid what he was perceiving as a social catastrophe, i.e., the multi-ethnic type of society. The ideological framework of the *Fronte Nazionale* consisted of the so called 'idea-form' of the concept of identity. As it is possible to read in Freda's book *I Lupi Azzurri* (2000), this is a new version of racist politics. Freda discussed here the very same concept of racism and distinguished his 'morphological racism' from racism commonly intended. Interestingly enough, Freda cited in the book Julius Evola's own idea of racism and in doing so, although he remained loyal to the Evolian 'the race is an entity that manifests itself both in the body and in the spirit',⁵⁴⁷ he also opposed to it his new 'morphological racism'.⁵⁴⁸

The idea of racism proposed by Freda is based heavily on Alfred Rosenberg's idea of 'superior race' as explained by the Nazi intellectual in his famous book, *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930).⁵⁴⁹ The racism theory proposed by Freda is therefore, addressing his own ethnic group of reference, i.e. the Italians, but without necessarily being nationalist. He claims a type of racism not involving an opposition between different groups or ethnic minorities, but rather as he affirms in the book, to stress the differences between 'superior' and 'inferior' within the same ethnic group: '[...] Racism means not contempt for the other races, but loyalty to our own race, acknowledgment of our specific form of life that marks it, respect for all the links, interior and exterior, superior and inferior that are determining it'.⁵⁵⁰ The other element however, to be highlighted here is Freda's strong opposition to any form of interracial meddling. According to his 'morphological racism' each ethnic group has equal dignity but any 'contamination' between

⁵⁴⁵ Perry Biddiscombe, *The Last Nazis: SS Werewolves Guerrilla Resistance in Europe 1944-1947* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

⁵⁴⁶ Franco G. Freda, *L'Albero e le Radici* (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2008), p. 28, (my trans.)

⁵⁴⁷ Julius Evola, 'Sul Problema della Razza dello Spirito', *La Vita Italiana*, XXX, (February 1942), p.153.

⁵⁴⁸ Franco Giorgio Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), pp. 12-13.

⁵⁴⁹ Insert reference of A. Rosenberg book

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Freda, 2000, pp. 12, (my trans.)

different groups, implies the physiological and intellectual weakening of both groups.⁵⁵¹ This new theory of racism is still dangerously appealing whereas there is a sudden and massive migration flux as was in Italy at the beginning of 1990s with the wave of migrants mainly from north Africa and from Albania. Freda here is attempting a new and original racial doctrine. Freda's *Fronte Nazionale*'s racism was based on the Evolian own theory of racism, which was based in turn, on the triad 'body-soul-spirit' but Freda took further Evola's racial theory and ends up contradicting his mentor.⁵⁵² This theory of racism in fact, does not highlight one specific element of the above mentioned Evolian triad (the spiritual one), but considers the mixing of those three elements as complementary to each other in order to obtain a perfect race.

The group was structured in different branches distributed throughout the national territory. The statute of the association declares that: 'The Fronte Nazionale acknowledges its function of 'Social Order'. the Fronte Nazionale is a political association that intends to protect the essential features that form the nation-state.'⁵⁵³ Here we find the intent of safeguarding and protect the nation-state in its main principles. But what we should pay attention to is the expression 'social order' where is clear the intention to fight what Freda and his associates considered the 'enemy' for such social order to implemented, i.e., the multicultural and multi-ethnic liberal type of society. The symbol used by the movement was a red look-like swastika within a white circle within a blue square. The structure of the group was as follows: at the top of the organization with decisional powers we find the *reggente* (leader), the *comitato di reggenza* (the leader's committee), the *ufficio di reggenza* (the leadership office), the *consiglio dei responsabili territoriali* (the territorial committees), the *consulta nazionale* (the national assembly). Within this hierarchical structure, the *reggente* (the leader of the group) was elected by unanimous vote by the *comitato di reggenza* (the leader's committee). The leader's mandate would last three years and he would represent the group and negotiates on its behalf with third parties like states or institutions. Alongside the leader, was also elected a '*sostituto reggente*' (a leader substitute) who would represent and operate on behalf of the official leader in case the latter could not fulfil his duties. The *comitato di reggenza* was made of variable number of members from a minimum of three to a maximum of seven. The members were chosen by the leader and supported the leader's work, the committee met up to six times in a year. The *ufficio di reggenza* was also made by a variable number of members from a minimum of five to a maximum of nine and supported the work of the leader's committee. The members were chosen by the leader's committee and with the approval of the leader, their appointment lasted two years. They also met six times in a year. The *consiglio dei responsabili territoriali* also had a variable number of members from a minimum of ten to a maximum of thirty and they were chosen by the *ufficio di reggenza* with the approval of the *comitato di reggenza* and

⁵⁵¹ Ibid., Freda 2000, p. 13.

⁵⁵² See chapter 3 of the present work on Evola's analysis of the concept of 'race'.

⁵⁵³ Franco G. Freda *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), p. 1.

supported the *ufficio di reggenza*'s work for the duration of four years. Finally, the *consulta nazionale* (or general assembly) consisted of all the members of the *Fronte Nazionale*.⁵⁵⁴

Written on the *Fronte Nazionale*'s statute we find the real function and role of the organization in the intentions of its founder: 'the function of the member of the association is a civic militia at the service of the national community's own good'⁵⁵⁵, which might imply a paramilitary activity and control of the territory. Interesting is to read what is written in the organization's statute regarding the financial support of the group, where it emerges that the main source of income for the group is the membership plus any type of private donation that the organization may get.⁵⁵⁶ What needs also to be noticed is that the hierarchical structure of the organization recalls the Platonic hierarchical structure of the ideal city as in *The Republic*. In fact, the leader who is at the top of the group's hierarchy is Plato's Philosopher-King while the *comitato di reggenza* and the *ufficio di reggenza* can be associated to Plato's Guardians who have the task to support and advice the Philosopher-King. Eventually, the *comitato nazionale* and the *consiglio dei responsabili territoriali* represent the lower tiers of this personal reading of Plato's ideal society structure. The Platonic call is not a coincidence as Plato is one of Freda's main theoretical reference as better explained in chapter three of the present work. It is then evident that the political aims of the *Fronte Nazionale* were to contain and fight against the policies of immigration that the Italian government of the time with the 'Martelli Law' was then regulating⁵⁵⁷. The *Fronte Nazionale* trial proceedings provide good material for better understanding Freda's own identitarianism theory and the consequent 'morphological racism' that he elaborates in that period.

The identity theory and the 'morphological racism' of Freda and his associates was the result of several attempts of overlapping already well established racist theories with the notions of 'race', 'ethnicity' and 'identity' within a new and more original intellectual framework, at least in the intentions of Freda. The organization established very clearly its political and ideological agenda by putting at the centre of its mission 1) its pedagogical-political approach to the idea of 'race' and 2) the group openly declaring itself 'racist' with its own 'morphological racism' doctrine to look to'.⁵⁵⁸ As already mentioned, Freda initiated with the *Fronte Nazionale* his personal crusade against the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society that he found waiting for him outside the prison's gates.

The transformation in progress of the Italian society into a cosmopolitan and multi-faced society

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid., Freda (2000), pp. 24-27.

⁵⁵⁵ Ibid., Freda, 2000, pp. 1-2.

⁵⁵⁷ The so-called 'Martelli Law' (1990) tended to regulate the immigration policies in Italy after the massive migration experimented that year from the nearby Albania.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid., Freda, 2000, p. 11.

was challenging Freda's own perception of ideal society and augmented his refusal and opposition to modernity in full Evolian spirit and expressed the worldwide far-right's opposition to the process of globalization. Within such intellectual and ideological framework, Freda talked of 'morphological racism' according to which, 'race' became an archaic version of the Platonic 'idea-form', namely, a principle of differentiation between different beings: 'Differentiation not just somatic, but above all, 'animic' and spiritual'.⁵⁵⁹ This in line with what Evola was also writing, namely, that 'the "racist" recognises the difference and wants the difference'.⁵⁶⁰ Freda then stated that 'to be different, being each one of us ourselves, it is not evil, but is [instead] good'.⁵⁶¹ Within the interpretative key of this reading, the idea of race thus acquires a vision and perception of the world ordained according to a misplaced interpretation of the Platonic doctrine of the *kosmos*.⁵⁶² Freda himself explains in his writings, 'a racial Pluri-verse opposed to the universe of the undifferentiated chaos'.⁵⁶³ According to Freda, each race has a value per se and according to its value, each ethnic group- as different from any other- was called to occupy a specific place in the thus ordained *kosmos*.⁵⁶⁴ In this way, according to the Fredian creed, each individual that feels attachment to their own identity roots is in the deep, racist. Freda insisted to affirm that his 'morphological racism' was not to be considered as discriminatory against other groups but that rather, his theory of racism wished to stress the differences that do exist between different ethnic groups. He insisted in defending racism as not an attitude that tends to discriminate against other races but rather as being loyal to one's own race with all the connections that derive from such attitude.⁵⁶⁵ The core of Freda's own theory of 'morphological racism' can be traced back to 1963, when the young Freda published on the journal *Tradizione* an essay on this specific topic, analysing critically Evola's own race doctrine.⁵⁶⁶ The criticism that can be moved to Freda's 'morphological racism' is that his racist theory is still based on the categories of 'inferior' and 'superior', which are intrinsically discriminatory and that will thus tend to create discrimination within the same race oriented group as well as 'being loyal to one's own race' could be interpreted as intrinsically discriminatory and pave the way to ultra-nationalism and extreme forms of nativism and identitarianism.

Conclusion

⁵⁵⁹ Franco G. Freda, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), p. 11.

⁵⁶⁰ Julius Evola, *Indirizzi per un'Educazione Razziale* (1941) (Padua: Edizioni di Ar, 1994), p.23, my transl.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Freda, (2000), p.12, (my trans).

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, Freda, (2000), p. 12, (my trans).

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Freda, (2000), p. 12, (my trans).

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, Freda, (2000), p. 12, (my trans).

⁵⁶⁶ Franco Freda, 'I Tre Gradi della Dottrina della Razza', *Tradizione*, 1963.

The present chapter wished to provide an overlook of Freda's own political and ideological militancy through the analysis of his own two organizations: the *Gruppo di Ar* (1963) and *Fronte Nazionale* (1990). What has emerged from the comparative analysis between the two groups is the Freda's urge to champion his own revolutionary and anti-system flare and to strongly affirm through action his Nazi-fascist doctrine and racist creed through the lens of distorted and dystopian understanding of the political reality that surrounded him. The two groups, as explained in the chapter, were set up in two different historical periods of Freda's personal history as well as in the history of the country. The *Gruppo di Ar*, as emerged from the analysis provided, resented very much of Freda's own understanding of the Evolian creed and of the influence of well-established neo-fascist groups like *Ordine Nuovo* or kindred group like *Avanguardia Nazionale*. Initially, a cenance of like-minded spirits in search of an ideological truth that had lost its purposes in post-war western society, the *Gruppo di Ar* became soon involved in the political activism of the already volatile ideological climate of the country. The fact that the *Gruppo di Ar* was very much considered a satellite group within the sphere of influence of *Ordine Nuovo*, and the fact that there was a connection between Freda's group and Delle Chiaie's *Avanguardia Nazionale* in the events of Piazza Fontana, gives room to speculations that not only Freda was actively involved in subversive activities but that the organization was also heavily involved in terrorist activities as the sequel of bombings between April and August 1969 testify and as Ferraresi (1996) and Bale (2018) seem to imply in their analysis on this matter. In both the *Gruppo di Ar* and the *Fronte Nazionale* emerges also another ideological trait of fascist doctrine and that is the principle of *theoresis* and *praxis* (thought and action) so dear to the philosopher of fascism, Giovanni Gentile.⁵⁶⁷ Although Freda dissociates himself from the neo-idealist Gentile, nevertheless, the typical fascist element of thought as action is also reflected in his thinking and militancy in his hey years as well as in more recent times.

The two movements, although in different historical periods, fulfil both Freda's own strive for political action and are perceived as the ideological tools for a change and transformation of the modern and capitalist society as well as opposition weapons to the Capitalist system. Particularly interesting has been the analysis of the racist agenda of the *Fronte Nazionale* that seemed to have anticipated the wave of nativism and ultra-nationalism that is characterising our contemporary politics. The constitution in 1990, of a paramilitary organization with the sole intent of 'protecting' the Italian 'white population' from the migration wave, has anticipated of few decades the conspiratorial and transnational white supremacism active on the political scene of today. Within such context, Freda becomes an interesting point of reference and a revered figure for the new transnational far-right younger generations, who with their campaigns of 'identitarianism', and more openly, of ultra-nationalism are currently characterising the political debate.

⁵⁶⁷ Giovanni Gentile, *Teoria Generale dello Spirito come Atto Puro* (1916) (Brindisi: Edizioni Trabant, 2015).

One last note on Freda's two organizations. The two groups have revealed some characteristics of the cultic milieu format as described by Colin Campbell and indicated the elitist feature that better defines this type of organisations so widespread in the far-right environment. Furthermore, the two organisations represent a specific *modus operandi* and *modus pensandi* of post-war neo-fascism where the revolutionary element and the further radicalisation of the ideological tenets contribute to provide subversive and potentially dangerous organisations that tend to undermine the social and political status quo. The engagement in the armed struggle encouraged in the acolytes of this type of organizations tends to eliminate the democratic and liberal establishment in order to substitute the latter with a dystopic model of authoritarian society and of a totalitarian hierarchical state conceived in its divine nature. The *Gruppo di Ar* and *Fronte Nazionale* fit perfectly well Freda's own ideological mysticism and his dystopic sense of politics and appealed easily kindred spirits that found once again in Freda the prophet of the radical right's creed since his open political involvement and militancy in the 1960s. Freda continues even today his 'mission' to 'breed souls' ,as he likes to say, with his publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar*, and providing a cultural platform for all those young authors and intellectuals that identify themselves with his *Weltanschauung*. Freda's *Edizioni di Ar* has indeed become one of the best established far-right publishing houses in Italy and has managed to liaise with other well established far-right Italian organizations like *CasaPound Italia* for instance.⁵⁶⁸ The new role of Freda within the new wave of the Italian and transnational far-right will be better analysed in the next chapter in an attempt to assess Freda's intellectual and ideological influence in today's changing world.

CHAPTER SIX

AN EVOLIAN HERETICAL PREACHING IDEOLOGICAL MYSTICISM. FREDA'S IMPACT ON TRANSNATIONAL FASCISM

Introduction

The recent online far-right Italian magazine *Vox* holds the following headline: ‘Freda, the never repented fascist’.⁵⁶⁹ The article headline indicates the several likewise online articles, interviews and political analyses that testify the new wave of popularity that the figure of Freda has been enjoying in the last decade. The transnational far-right network seems thus to have re-discovered his metapolitical and mystical form of fascism, and appears to be fascinated by Freda as one of the protagonists of the strategy of tension period with his personal Evolian approach to the fascist doctrine. Since 2008, Freda’s own publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar* (Ar Publishing) is constantly re-printing all his major works alongside his comments, analyses and simple considerations on politics, society, religion and philosophy on topics like for instance, immigration, the crisis of western society, the idea of nation, and his personal ‘morphological racism’ theory as illustrated in his book *Lupi Azzurri*⁵⁷⁰ [Azure Wolves] (2000) as already discussed and analysed in chapter five of the present thesis. His main and iconic text for which he is mainly known amid the fascist *aficionados*, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] (1969), has been reprinted and translated in at least four languages since its first publication: Portuguese, French, English, and Czech and he is currently considered as an inspirational figure for the younger generations of Italian and foreign neo-fascists alike. Freda seems to have carved a specific niche in the transnational fascist milieu by exercising in some ways the same influence on the far-right youth of today as in the past Julius Evola had done as the *Maestro Nascosto* (Hidden Master) for the Italian far-right milieu.⁵⁷¹

The so-called Italian ‘fascists for the third millennium’ seem fascinated by his figure as two radio interviews available on internet that Freda gave to quite well-established Italian far-right groups like *CasaPound Italia* (in 2013)⁵⁷² and *Forza Nuova* (in 2017)⁵⁷³ and when looking at another interview done by the local Italian *Radio Shamal* (2017), where Freda speaking of himself states: ‘I am not an ex terrorist, I am instead a true terrorist. I am a militant, and I am not scared to use certain expressions’.⁵⁷⁴ The self-affirmation of Freda from the microphone of a local Italian radio reveals his personality: the never-repentant Nazi-fascist militant that is eager to embody the

⁵⁶⁹ <https://www.vox.it/2017/01/29/freda-il-fascista-mai-pentito-e-lora-delle-destre> (last accessed: 8/11/2017 16:49).

⁵⁷⁰ See: <https://www.edizionidiar.it>.

⁵⁷¹ See chapters IV and V of the present work for further details.

⁵⁷² <https://www.radiobandieranera.org/?p=1509>. Here is available an interview given to *CasaPound*’s radio station on 30/10/2013 to mark the anniversary of founding of Freda’s publishing house *Edizioni di Ar* (last accessed on 13/01/2018).

⁵⁷³ <https://www.radiofn.eu/Canale/2017/04/08/il-campo-dei-santi-intervista-a-franco-freda/> (last accessed on 13/01/2018).

‘warrior-hero’ type that has been always so popular in far-right mythology as repeatedly preached by Evola in several of his books and articles, and as preached by the 1930s Nazi propaganda or, as advertised by Niccolò Giani’s *Fascist Mystical School*. In the same interview, Freda, talking about the problem of immigration, states the following: ‘It will be an imminent catastrophe for Europe if the politics of accepting is not halted[...].I am under the genealogical profile, a true Nazi-fascist, and also under the genetic profile there is correspondence’.⁵⁷⁵ This statement reveals Freda’s willingness to reaffirm again his alleged racial and spiritual superiority according to the theory quite popular in the far-right literature that the ‘aristocracy’ of mankind is as such due to specific superior intellectual, spiritual and racial characteristics. The above statement echoes Himmler’s beliefs in the racial selection, and the idea of ‘political soldier’ so important for Nazi-fascists like Freda, but also, Evola’s theory on the same topics as discussed and illustrated in Freda’s books, or in Evola’s works.

It seems that in these interviews Freda tends to shock the interviewer with some bold statements as for instance, when asked to discuss contemporary political issues like immigration or Trump’s victory to the American presidential elections. Few far right movements paid their attention to Freda after the events of piazza Fontana while, instead, in the last decade (since 2013), his fame looks to have been revived with interviews to him. All this interest about his persona seems to indicate that the new wave of far-right movements is ready to acknowledge Freda as one of the neo-fascist iconic leaders of the past to look up to and take inspiration from. In particular, the fact that *Forza Nuova*, the ultra-Catholic neo-fascist movement led by the former far-right terrorist Roberto Fiore, decides to ask for an interview to an openly neo-pagan, Evolian intellectual like Freda seems to indicate that the fascination for Freda and his persona as relevant protagonist of neo-fascist terrorism and a theorist of the latter, has become transversal in the world of the far-right, with particular relevance to the Italian far-right galaxy. The interviews can give an idea of his increasing popularity in those circles of far-right militants when analysing the obsequious tone of the interviewers, and the type of questions asked which underline the radical ideological nature of the interviewed and the interviewer. In addition, also abroad the interest for Freda, his work and past militancy seem to have encountered recently a certain degree of interest as the website in English entirely dedicated to Freda that seems to have been set in the year 2016 demonstrates and that was discovered while researching on primary sources for the present work.⁵⁷⁶

In the present chapter, we will investigate and assess this new political and intellectual re-discovery of Freda and whether he can then be considered an ideological reference for today’s transnational radical right. Furthermore, we will discuss what are the profound reasons that might have made in the twenty-first century a character like Freda such a major icon for young neo-

⁵⁷⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1C2ihhomZA>.

⁸ <https://disintegrationofthesystem.wordpress.com> (last accessed on 12/12/2017).

fascist militants. From the primary sources analysed it has emerged clearly that Freda's own metapolitical and transcendental approach to politics, alongside his past of neo-fascist terrorist in the 1960s and 1970s, and his most recent adventure in the 1990s, have contributed to create a fascinating mixture of ideological and political *theoresis* and *praxis* for young far-right militants that seem to recognise in Freda the 'heretical interpreter of Evola' as Ferraresi defined once him.⁵⁷⁷ Another label with which Freda has been defined can be read on the Italian neo-fascist website *Aperta Rivolta* [Open Revolt] where he is defined as 'unclassifiable revolutionary' stressing once again Freda's own metapolitical attitude and his fascist mysticism that seem to have shaped his political personality creating thus an original ideological profile.⁵⁷⁸ On the English-speaking website afore mentioned, which is dedicated to his figure and his most iconic text, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969), is interesting to find also comments made by Claudio Mutti, a representative and militant of the Italian radical group *Ordine Nero* [Black Order] at the time of the Piazza Fontana bombing, and one of the most prominent far-right terrorists of the strategy of tension period.⁵⁷⁹ Mutti, like other protagonists of the Italian neo-fascist terrorism, seem to have found a new purpose and a new political and intellectual rebirth today. In the specific, Mutti was discussing about Buddhism in the above-mentioned website showing a new rebirth within the path of spirituality as occurred to other former militants like Gabriele Adinolfi now a traditional Roman Catholic prominent figure and former member of the Nazi-Maoist group *Lotta di Popolo* [People's Struggle]. The new label that marks Freda is the 'unclassifiable revolutionary' and seems to stress both his spiritual and metapolitical attitude as a radical militant of the radical right who, because of his ideological peculiarity, cannot be put in a specific ideological box. An analysis of online sources carried out for the present research shows alongside the broad fame that Freda enjoys amongst the new generations of radical right militants (mainly in Italy), also an active collaboration with some of their most prominent intellectuals as it is proven by the tight cooperation that can be observed between the *Edizioni di Ar* and *CasaPound Italia* in particular, by publishing one of *CasaPound Italia*'s most prominent intellectuals like Adriano Scianca, who has been able to publish his work with Freda's *Edizioni di Ar*. In return, *Casa Pound Italia* provides Freda with an internet platform and thus, a wider audience where he can advertise and discuss his work, and broadcasting on *Casa Pound Italia*'s web radio *Radio Bandiera Nera* [Black Banner Radio], an interview with Freda seemingly become one of their new role models. In the last few years, the debate within the files and ranks of the radical right seems to have focused chiefly on the problem of immigration. On this theme Freda can be considered a political and ideological point of reference for the young generation of militants in the far-right as in 1990, he founded an organization, the *Fronte Nazionale* [National Front], whose aim was to block the wave

⁵⁷⁷ Franco Ferraresi, *La Destra Radicale* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1984).

⁵⁷⁸ <https://www.openrevolt.info/2011/11/20/giorgio-freda-the-unclasifiable-revolutionary/>. (last accessed 21/12/2017).

⁵⁷⁹ Claudio Mutti, militant of the neo-fascist group *Ordine Nero* was involved in the investigations on the Piazza Fontana bombing cfr. Piazza Fontana Attic del Processo Catanzaro 1977.

of migrants affecting in those years the Italian coastline intended to combat the phenomenon of immigration alongside preaching his own theory of ‘morphological racism’ as explained and analysed in chapter five of the present work. thesis.⁵⁸⁰

The National Front experience reflects Freda’s own identitarian doctrine, which seems to have anticipated of a decade what appears to be a trademark of today’s far-right socio-political militancy and aims. The main question which this chapter intends to answer is whether Freda can be considered a figure of reference for contemporary transnational neo-fascism due to his fame of ‘black’ terrorist and most importantly, because of his personal battle against multi-culturalism and multi-ethnicity undertaken almost thirty years ago with his group; or whether he can be considered within the ideological framework of the 1960s ‘European New Right’s’ network and therefore, one of its worth representatives alongside authors like Alain De Benoist. On this issue, Freda’s publishing house has been rather engaged in the last years (since 2015) in publishing and organising open talks and events that would promote identitarianism and Freda’s own ‘morphological racism’ theory as is testified by his *Edizioni di Ar* publishing house website, and by a FaceBook page dedicated to his figure. Freda’s publishing house has been reprinting and republishing in 2016, the controversial and dystopic novel on immigration and identity, *The Camp of the Saints* by the French author Jean Raspail published for the first time in 1973,⁵⁸¹ and thus giving space to an ideological and political platform to nativists and identitarians alike as for instance, the controversial Italian scientist and author Cristina Coccia with her book on races and eugenics. These events have given voice to Freda’s own political and ideological militancy, which has come back in a different format indicating also that his political engagement and ideological creed have not changed since his hey years as neo-fascist extremist in the 1960s Padua. Today his name is a constant presence within the Italian circles of the radical right alongside other neo-fascist figures like Roberto Fiore or the late Stefano Delle Chiaie.

The present chapter is therefore an assessment of Freda’s impact on the so-called ‘fascists for the third millennium’ and an analysis of the reasons behind the success enjoyed by characters like him in today’s transnational far-right. But it is also an analysis of to what extent his preaching and ideas might have had an impact in shaping a new fascist ideological morphology looking specifically to the Italian far-right circles. By enhancing his own identitarian and ultra-nationalist tenets and thus paving the way to a new type of radical ideological and political militancy, Freda seems to have been re-discovered achieving thus a new level of popularity within the Italian contemporary radical right galaxy as well as within the circles of the transnational fascism as the

⁵⁸⁰ For an analysis of Freda’s own political organizations see Chapter 5.

⁵⁸¹ Jean Raspail’s book *The Camp of the Saints* has enjoyed sudden fame since the American alt-right ideologue Steve Bannon declared it was among his favorite readings alongside Julius Evola’s work among others.

translation of some of his books and websites like the aforementioned website in English dedicated to him demonstrates.

The chapter has been structured as it follows: the first subsection will analyse the ideological profile and political militancy of the so called ‘fascist for the third millennium’ within a transnational context by analysing websites and online material. The purpose of this subsection is to attempt an understanding of the reasons behind today’s far-right circles’ fascination for Freda’s own persona and his becoming a point of reference and a far-right icon since the Piazza Fontana bombing in 1969. The second subsection will assess and analyse Freda’s popularity in today’s digital and internet era. This section will be analysing mainly online web magazine and websites in different languages and in several countries that are dedicated to Freda and his own personal understanding of fascism and political and ideological militancy. The third and final session will analyse concepts and notions like ‘identitarianism’, ‘Tradition’, and ‘metapolitics’ within the context of the contemporary transnational far right and thus assessing whether or not Freda could find his fame and fortune with the young generations of transnational fascists according to these new ideological and conceptual coordinates of the contemporary far-right.

1. An Analysis of the Profile of the ‘Fascists for the Third Millennium’ within a Transnational Context

The expression ‘fascists for the third millennium’ has been coined by the founders and militants of the Italian far-right group *CasaPoundItalia*, which has been founded by Gianluca Iannone in 1997 by gathering together a group of neo-fascist activists who were gravitating around the pub *Cutty Sark* in Rome.⁵⁸² The ideology of the group refers mainly to the social side of fascist doctrine vindicating for instance, the right of all Italians to have a roof over their head (the term *casa* =house stands for this purpose). The choice of adding the name of the American author and fascist sympathiser Ezra Pound is due to the reference in particular to one of the *Cantos* written by Pound called *Usura*.⁵⁸³ This far-right Italian group tends to refer to the revolutionary aspect of Fascism rather than to its regime. This choice expresses a ‘return to the future’ so to speak in the sense that *CasaPoundItalia* wishes to be a type of ‘new born’ fascism which holds and mixes together the main fascist doctrine’s principles and the populist social policies typical of the fascist creed and that will appeal to the Italian *lump-proletariat* that seems to have lost its ideology of reference on the left of the political spectrum. Its militants thus, profess and propose a renewed form of fascism

⁵⁸² See for reference Anna Castriota and Matthew Feldman ‘Fascist of the Third Millennium’ in Matthew Feldman and Paul Jackson (eds) *Double-Speak. The Rhetoric of the Far Right Since 1945* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014).

⁵⁸³ Ezra Pound, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions Books, 1998).

where ultra-nationalism and social policies are paired together. To certain extent, this is an ideological trait common to many far-right organisations worldwide, where the endorsement of the lower social strata's needs, and the proud re-proposal of the national primacy, have cashed out quite a wide consensus, especially since the Italian *CasaPoundItalia* has attempted to build a new political virginity presenting its candidates to local and general elections in the last four years with some ups and downs in the constituencies of reference.⁵⁸⁴

The 'phenomenon' *CasaPoundItalia* seems also echoing the popularity that other far-right groups have been enjoying in the last decade in Italy and abroad. To remain to Italy, the other popular far-right organisation is *Forza Nuova* founded by the former far-right terrorist and former MEP (Member of the European Parliament) Roberto Fiore, who was involved in the 1980 Bologna bombing alongside Giusva Fioravanti and Francesca Mambro and their far-right terrorist organisation NAR: *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* [Revolutionary Armed Nuclei].⁵⁸⁵ Fiore's *Forza Nuova* is characterised by a strong element of ultra-Catholicism and resents heavily of its founder's own personality and ideological creed. Very active on the Italian national soil like *CasaPoundItalia*, the group has become more present and vocal in the last decade proposing alongside *CasaPoundItalia* the same political approach by helping the lower social groups present on the territory and protesting actively against any form of ethnic integration and immigration politics.⁵⁸⁶ Alongside those two 'fascist for the third millennium' organisations, Italy has seen a proliferation of far right groups thanks also to the widespread use of internet and social platforms as confirmed by studies on the matter.⁵⁸⁷

Obviously, the 'fascist for third millennium' phenomenon cannot just be limited to Italy but can be detected as well throughout the western world as many reports and academic analyses on this specific issue testify.⁵⁸⁸ The attention paid by the media and academia on the popularity of movements like the 'alt-right' in the US, or the PEGIDA originally an anti-Islamic movement set out in Germany and Austria, and then, spread in other European countries, and the British ultra-nationalist group 'Britain First' in the UK show the extension of the phenomenon. All those recent far-right and anti-immigrants movements reveal an ideological underworld that is becoming dangerously popular with the public opinion due to factors like the use of technology and the crisis

⁵⁸⁴ https://www.repubblica.it/speciali/politica/elezioni2018/2018/03/05/flop_neofascisti-190494095.

⁵⁸⁵ See Chapter II of the present work.

⁵⁸⁶ *La Dottrina Forzanovista. Manifesto Politico d'Opposizione Nazionale*, <https://www.forzanuovapalermo.it> (last accessed on 24/03/2018).

⁵⁸⁷ Paolo Berizzi, *Nazitalia. Viaggio In Un Paese Che Si È Riscoperto Fascista* (Milano: Baldini & Castoldi, 2018).

⁵⁸⁸ Steve Bestow, "A Neo-fascist Third Way: The Discourse of Ethno-Differentialist Revolutionary Nationalism", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 7, (3), pp.351-68.; Werner Bonefeld, "Anti-Globalisation Versus Anti-Capitalism", Pratyush Chandra et al. (eds.), *The Politics of Imperialism and Counter-Strategies* (Delhi: Aakar Books, 2004), pp. 301-329.; Flesher Faminaya, Cristina and Laurence Cox (eds.), *Understanding European Movements: New Social Movements, Global Justice Struggles, Anti-Austerity Protest* (London: Routledge, 2013).

of the twenty-first century post-modern western society model as observed.

The observations and data collection made by sociologists and political scientists alike have focused on the analysis and understanding of this new type of fascist militancy by concluding that one of the main causes seems to be the fear of multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism that immigration from developing countries has contributed to create in western society thanks to the predominance of the ideological model of liberal democracy with its character of inclusiveness and tolerance toward the Other with specific reference to Europe and the US. The re-discovery of authors like the French philosopher and identitarianist Alain De Benoist or, the Russian theorist of the *Eurasia* Alexander Dugin and more traditional and well-established authors like Céline, Drieu de la Rochelle, or the evergreen *Turner's Diaries* and the main ideological iconic texts of reference like Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, has contributed to build a generation X of young far-right militants who tend to read this type of literature within a re-discovered and re-visited intellectual narrative. This new type of ideological and political militancy can be quantified in the widespread Islamophobia, a renewed anti-Semitism and more generally, a deep anti-immigration attitude that has characterised this new generation of far-right militants as testified by reports issued in those years like the one issued by the European Union and carried out by the ECRA commission without counting the several non- governmental organisations (NGOs) and international and local human rights organisations or charities and agencies that constantly monitor the rise of the far-right and the increase of xenophobia and hate crimes in different countries.

From the analysis of documents easily available online, or from self-proclaimed far-right websites and FaceBook pages, what emerges is an ideological confusion between present and past (with reference to Nazi-Fascist regimes like Mussolini's Italy and Hitler's Germany) and a distorted and dystopic vision of the future, where the myth of racial purity and national identity are fused together in a renewed version of 'blood and soil' of the Nazi pledge. From the samples here reported is therefore clear that this new breed of neo-fascists has undertaken a new 'crusade' in order to re-affirm their ideological creed and, most importantly, to pass to political action whereas it is possible. It is also interesting to pay attention to the language used and realise how the apparently 'politically correct' statements can, in matter of fact, hide a deep racist and xenophobic agenda.⁵⁸⁹ The type of propaganda that this new brand of neo-fascism is proposing is at an attentive analysis, a re-visitation of the most traditional far-right propaganda, and oftentimes the tones are not soothed in a way to reassure the audience, but are instead quite violent and aggressive as can be easily found out studying these groups' available material.⁵⁹⁰

Another element that needs to be discussed is the structure of the group and the ideal-type

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., Castriota-Feldman (2014), pp.223-246.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., Castriota-Feldman (2014), p.223-246.

militant's profile. By studying several realities of post-modern far-right, the common element is that these various groups, organisations, and movements are all shaped on the cultic model as already pointed out by scholars like Jeffrey Kaplan and Colin Campbell, who have extensively studied the cultic element in both religious and political movements.⁵⁹¹ As reported by Campbell, and further supported by Kaplan, it is clear that specific ideologies like fascism might assume 'mystical' and 'esoteric' contours and as consequence, the group structure and the organisation's purposes might then adopt a cultic style as for instance, the Italian far-right organisation *Dodici Raggi* [Twelve Rays] active mainly in the northern province of Varese in the Lombardy region where the esoteric reference to the twelve rays of the Nazi esoteric symbol of the *Shwartzze Sonne* [Black Sun] has been adopted by the group as their name and also group's symbol.

The structure of these organisations is in fact, hierarchical with a strong and charismatic leadership on the top and a gregarious grassroots at the bottom where the members are then appointed with different tasks within the organization's files and ranks.⁵⁹² For the purpose of the present analysis, *Casapound Italia* has been taken as an example in order to illustrate the cultic element of 'fascist for the third millennium' groups. CPI maintains the classic hierarchical structure with the figure of the leader on the top and a large grassroots base and in between, a middle management sector that monitors, organises and operates the several sections of the movement.⁵⁹³ In respect of the more traditional fascist party structure, is less rigid though, and this allows the creation of a deeper communication between the central headquarters and the several branches. An evidence of this is given by the following example: once there is a call to the arms published by the leadership on the media, there is an immediate response by the grassroots with action taken contemporarily throughout the territory as observed by .⁵⁹⁴ The new reality of far-right organisations of the third millennium sees them at the fringes of the civil society and rather a niche product for few with an elitist element that seems to characterize them and pushes these movements to re-create a cultic structure within the organizational structure of the group, and act as one.

The other element of reference to be taken into consideration is the need for this new generation of far-right militants of myths and figures of reference that will be possibly still around and active in order to be taken as an example to follow. In the specific case of the Italian far-right milieu, the many groupscules today active on the territory have re-discovered iconic figures of former neo-fascist terrorists and militants like the late Stefano Delle Chiaie who, in recent years, has made a coming back on the political scene with a new-brand far-right movement and seemed quite vocal

⁵⁹¹ Colin Campbell, 'The Cult, The Cultic Milieu and Secularization', *A Sociological Yearbook of Religion in Britain*, 5, (1972), pp. 119-36

⁵⁹² Jeffrey Kaplan and Helen Löow, *The Cultic Milieu. Oppositional Subcultures in an Age of Globalization* (Oxford-Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, 2002).

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⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., Castriota-Feldman (2014), pp. 223-246.

on the volatile and complicated Italian political scene of today. Within this new revival of the ‘fascists for the third millennium’, Freda has become an intellectual figure of reference with often interviews also by journalists of mainstream Italian media and press, giving again public visibility to him and thus re-enforcing his fame of Nazi-fascist intellectual and militant. On this point, recent public declarations made by Freda have been reported on other transnational neo-fascist websites. The renewed interest in Freda also by non-Italian neo-fascist websites seems to indicate the building of a new type of transnational neo-fascist network.

2. Franco Giorgio Freda: An Evolian Heretic or an Unclassifiable Fascist? The Building of a Transnational Far-Right Icon

Franco Giorgio Freda seems to enjoy lately quite a wide popularity on the web as an analysis conducted for this present chapter demonstrates. Besides his being regularly interviewed by journalists of the mainstream Italian media, Freda has also been recognised by the Italian far-right world as a prominent ideological personality to whom refer to in matter of fascist doctrine and with reference to his past political militancy.⁵⁹⁵ As already pointed out, his works, with particular attention to his most iconic text *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* [The Disintegration of the System] (1969), have been translated in French, Czech, Portuguese and English language; and many far-right militants and intellectuals consider Freda as the right successor of Julius Evola in matter of ideological coherence and metapolitical discourse within the framework of today’s widespreading of the identitarian ideology and white-supremacism.

Particularly interesting is to notice how Freda’s intellectual influence on the Catholic far-right has been encouraged by some members of the far-right Catholic organization *Forza Nuova*, of which few members are attempting to use Freda as a Trojan horse in order to revamp some of the ideological principles of the now dead movement *Terza Posizione* as the interview with Freda by Adriano Scianca and then published on a Catholic far-right website, *Traditio Christus Rex*. The interest in Freda by the contemporary transnational and national far-right shows how Freda has become for them another relevant ideological referent. In the investigation conducted on this specific aspect of the present research, it has been found that the popularity of Freda is now well-established not only in Italy but also abroad thanks to the widespread use of internet, as already mentioned in the previous subsection of the present chapter. More in details, the Facebook page dedicated to him gathers 1.9k of like, while the Facebook page of his publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar* gathers 5.9k of likes. Both pages are in Italian with an impressive number of posts in favour of Freda and supporting his political creed written mainly by members of far-right

organizations or simple sympathisers. Some examples of how Freda is perceived by Italian neo-fascists of today could help understanding the perception of his figure within the Italian far-right circles: 'It could be useful for many, or for everybody, to know what Giorgio Freda thinks of the current situation. How much he has changed since the armed struggle of the 1970s to today and in favour of whom...but would he tell us?' Another comment says instead: 'The militant Franco G. Freda is always in the trenches defending timeless values. Just think if he decides to attack how many could follow him'. Or, another post that, referring to Freda's most known book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema*, states: 'A book of today, yesterday and tomorrow'.⁵⁹⁶ These are only few of the posts and comments that can be found on the Facebook page dedicated to Freda but what emerges from an analysis of the social platform is that the common element expressed by the several posts and comments points toward the same direction, namely, the perception of Freda as either a victim of the system, or an Evolian heroic and solitary figure.

The other element that emerges from analysing both websites and Facebook pages dedicated to him and to his publishing house, is the conspiratorial trait common to 90% of the posts analysed for our research and related to Freda's involvement into the Piazza Fontana bombing (1969); while a good 10% instead implies Freda's involvement and role in Piazza Fontana as a secret agent alongside Giannettini with the intent of promoting the strategy of tension among the Italian population.⁵⁹⁷ This data are interesting because show that the fascination for Freda is not completely wide shared by the far-right community (at least in Italy) and that there is still a percentage of far-right militants who do not completely trust Freda as the champion of the fascist creed as the *vulgata* about him is proposing since his involvement in the Piazza Fontana events.⁵⁹⁸ The explanation for the apparent distrust in Freda that can be detected in a percentage of the Italian far-right milieu goes in matter of fact, back to the years of Freda's trial and detention for the Piazza Fontana. Such distrust in Freda as a true and trustworthy neo-fascist is shared primarily by the older generation of neo-fascists rather than by the new and younger far-right militants. In the Italian far-right circles the most common explanation of the piazza Fontana bombing is still the one that sees it as a state ordered terrorist attack, looking into the alleged implications of the foreign and Italian intelligence alike in building the so called 'strategy of tension'. Freda is therefore perceived as a martyr to the cause by large part of the far-right both for his alleged non-involvement in the episode that saw the starting of terrorism in Italy, and for his ideological and intellectual 'purity'. Analysing the conspiracy theories that in all those years the Italian radical right has provided, Freda emerges most of the time as the 'victim of the system' alongside his comrade Giovanni Ventura and the anarchist initially arrested for the bombing, Pietro Valpreda.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ https://www.facebook/franco_giorgio_freda.it; CFR <https://facebook/edizionidiar.it>.

⁵⁹⁷ See chapter IV of the present work.

⁵⁹⁸ Quantitative research data results for the present work.

⁵⁹⁹ Quantitative and qualitative research data results for the present work.

The same tone is maintained by the websites dedicated to Freda and particularly, by the webpage of his own publisher house, the *Edizioni di Ar* [Ar Publishing house].⁶⁰⁰ On this webpage we can read the following portrait of Freda: ‘Reserved, disgusted by the current political class, sober and severe but fascinating, charismatic and appealing’.⁶⁰¹ From the analysis of the quotes above is evident how Freda has become in all those years a figure of reference for the new ‘fascists for the third millennium’ generation, and how the use of internet has contributed to amplify the appeal and fascination that he seems to exercise on the radical right of today, particularly, in Italy. On this purpose, it is interesting also to analyse some videos found on YouTube where Freda is seen presenting a new edition of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s *So Sprake Zarathustra* with Francesco Ingravalle, former neo-fascist militant and Freda’s companion in his detention years.⁶⁰² In the video is evident Freda’s charisma and histrionic nature and the appeal to a wide audience of far-right militants he might exercise; and the fact that his *Edizioni di Ar* has since 2015 endorsed the identitarian ideology, brings Freda back to the attention of a specific sections of the far-right world in Italy as abroad. The latest endorsement by Freda of the identitarian ideology has also made again focus of interest his second political adventure of the *Fronte Nazionale* and has seen him and his *Edizioni di Ar* quite active in promoting identitarian campaigns and authors. At the same time, Freda’s books on the matter have found a new life and new purposes in the Italian cultural and political debate on immigration and multi-ethnicity in the country as for instance, their adoption in far-right groups and organizations actively involved in the anti-immigration campaigns.

It could be concluded that Freda has found a renewed fame and fortune within the circles of the Italian far-right and that he has started to get known by transnational far-right organizations although the bulk of his supporters and admirers can be found mainly in Italy. It is also mainly in Italy that he is active and engaged once again more at a cultural level rather than a political level, not with a party or political movement but with his cultural activities sponsored by his publishing house *Le Edizioni di Ar* in preaching and spreading the identitarian ideology of which he considers himself a forefather with his ‘morphological racism’ as his latest publication in 2015 demonstrates.⁶⁰³ Freda therefore, seems to have found a niche alongside Alain de Benoist or Dominique Venner within the New Right cultural influence and the post-war transnational fascism that was generated in the 1960s.

⁶⁰⁰ YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXHTIU0Y_E.

⁶⁰¹ <https://www.edizionidiar.it>

⁶⁰² YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i0EGPBQolUk>.

⁶⁰³ Franco Giorgio Freda, *Primato Nazionale* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2015).

3. Identitarianism, Tradition and Metapolitics

When talking of identitarianism the thought goes to one of its main prophets, Alain de Benoist and his *Nouvelle Droite* movement that found a political and intellectual expression in the group GRECE (*Groupement de Recherches et Etudes pour la Civilisation Européenne*) founded in 1969.⁶⁰⁴ Alain De Benoist and the other members of GRECE reopened and reshaped ideas that were already expressed in the past, only from a new perspective and fashion. Taking for instance, the idea of unicity of the human being, i.e., that there is no human being equal to another and that we are all different from each other, goes against the universalism of Christianity as the same De Benoist affirms. Furthermore, De Benoist concludes that therefore, the creation of a society where egalitarianism is the norm, is just impossible and this is why his advice is to go back to pagan Europe and re-establish the due differences between human beings and human groups. On this point, we find similarities between de Benoist and what expressed in more than one occasion by Freda. One of main intellectual reference in his criticism of modernity is Zygmunt Bauman, quoting his definition of identity as a problem in its essence.⁶⁰⁵ Bauman stresses the intrinsic problematic nature of the term ‘identity’ which itself generates doubts on its own same nature. But according to De Benoist, the problem of identity is due to modernity and to the novel concept of individualism that modern society has generated in time. He makes a comparison with ancient societies where identity is not related to the atomistic nature of the individual as in modern societies, but instead rooted in the sense of community that existed in pre-modern society models. As he says: ‘Individuality is not denied, but it is grounded in the community. Subjective identity originates from a sense of being, expressed in the language of the myth of the origins’.⁶⁰⁶ Here is clear the attempt by De Benoist to clarify that individual identity is rooted in the sense of belonging to a given community, as it is the group of origin that defines who we are, and not a subjective introspection inward that shapes our own ‘I’. Alain De Benoist on the contrary,

⁶⁰⁴ Roger Griffin, ‘Plus Ca Change! The Fascist Pedigree of the Nouvelle Droite’ in Edward Arnold (ed.), *The Development of the Radical Right in France 1890-1995* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 217-52.; cfr. Pierre Andre Taguieff ‘From Race to Culture: The New Right View of European Identity’, *Telos*, 7, 1993, pp. 99-125.

⁶⁰⁵ See Zygmunt Bauman, ‘La Vie en Miettes’ in *Expérience Post-Moderne et Moralité* (Rodez: Le Rougue-Chambon, 2003), p. 34.

⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, De Benoist, (2004), p. 10.

accuses modernity and liberalism of racism and cancellation of the specificity of the individuality, accusing modernity to homogenize all the differences of individual communities in one non better identified group of undifferentiated individuals that have lost their own identity of the origins and flattened into a no better specified 'society'. In doing so, de Benoist refers again to Bauman and his reflection on the Holocaust of the Jewish population during Nazi dictatorship.⁶⁰⁷ The Jews were therefore, the first victims not of the Nazi eugenics, according to this view of the Jewish genocide, but the victims of that tendency typical of modernity, to homogenizing as if modernity could no longer accept particularities. According to this reading of the Holocaust, the Nazi regime was to be considered nothing else than a product of modernity.⁶⁰⁸ He then, opposes to this mechanism of homogenization typical of modern society and that in his view, erases identity, the model of medieval society where according to his understanding of medieval history, 'otherness did not prohibit integration'.⁶⁰⁹ The philosophical analysis that De Benoist conducts on the concept of identity, reveals several aspects of his theoretical approach from the New Right's perspective. First, there is the idea of identity as a myth. It is the myth of the origins of a given community to which the individual belongs to and from which the same individual takes his/her sense of belonging and therefore, defines his/her identity through the vehicle of this myth: '[...] Subjective identity originates from a sense of being, expressed in the language of the myth of the origins'.⁶¹⁰

He then, continues to analyse the question of personal identity and the development of individualism to which he attributes two meanings: one meaning is the value given to the individual within a group, and the other meaning being the 'intensity of the relationship of the person with himself' and by concluding that the notion of identity is specific of the western world.⁶¹¹ De Benoist's main point on the concept of identity is to criticise the rational, modern notion of identity, by opposing to it an identity of the origins that finds its own significance not in the self of the individual but in the belonging to a given community that shares traditions, culture, language, territory and ethnicity. De Benoist develops the theory of 'ethnopluralism', which resembles Freda's 'morphological racism'. In both De Benoist's and Freda's theories there is the

⁶⁰⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernité et Holocauste* (Paris: LaFabrique, 2002), pp. 72-77.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., De Benoist (2004), p. 10.

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid. De Benoist (2004), p.10, footnote 5.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid. De Benoist (2004), p. 10.

⁶¹¹ Ibid. De Benoist (2004), p. 11.

echo of Julius Evola's own racial theory of 'spiritual racism'. Evola states that 'racist therefore, knows the difference and *wants* the difference. To be different, being each one themselves is not evil, is good instead'.⁶¹² In this sense, De Benoist and Freda proceed on the same path, often mirroring each other views as Freda's personal morphological racism as well as de Benoist's identitarianism, does not stress the superiority of one race upon the other, but rather considers each race in its own specificity and therefore, equal to each other: 'racism means not despising the other races but being loyal to your own. To acknowledge its specific form of life that characterises it. To respect all the aspects either interior or exterior, superior or inferior that define it as we can read from the primary source of the political manifesto of Freda's anti-immigration organization *Fronte Nazionale* [National Front]'⁶¹³ This however apparent no-racist agenda in both De Benoist and Freda with their insisting that their theories on identity and ethnicity cannot be defined as 'fascist' or 'racist' can be easily counter argued as the resolution that the two thinkers propose, i.e., a world made of defined and self-contained groups with their differences and specificity saved, and with the prohibition to mixing and meddling with each other, is indeed a new form of racism and a different way to legitimise the fascism for the third millennium in the renewed attempt of sophisticating the fascist- racist agenda. Many critics of De Benoist's nativism have indeed pointed that this is fascism in another form, as for instance the British scholar Roger Griffin who defined De Benoist's theories on identity as a sort of intellectual Trojan horse used with the purpose of smuggling his own true beliefs and ideological creed into less threatening messages as Griffin pointed out: 'What he [De Benoist] did was to crystalize in a really cunning and deliberate way[...] a fascism that does not look like a duck and does not quack like a duck. It looks like high grade intellectual activity'.⁶¹⁴ Interesting is another analysis of the Nouvelle Droite and of Alain De Benoist's thought made by the scholar Tamir Bar-On.⁶¹⁵ Bar-On's analyses the ambiguous synthesis operated by the ENR (Europe New Right) between the ideals of the revolutionary Right and the New Left. The themes of the ENR like loss of identity, the Islamisation of Europe, and the effects

⁶¹² Julius Evola, *Indirizzi per Un'educazione Razziale* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 1994), p. 23.

⁶¹³ Documents of Freda's organization *Fronte Nazionale* (1990-1993) in Franco Freda and Giovanni Damiano (eds), *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2000), p. 12.

⁶¹⁴ From the website: https://www.buzzfed.com/lesterfeder/the-man-who-gave-white-nationalism-a-new-life?utm_term=qi9w.lx76P.dyA9wkybvK, Dec. 28, 2017. (last accessed 12/3/2018).

⁶¹⁵ Tamir Bar-On, *Where Have All the Fascists Gone?* (London: Routledge, 2007).

of globalisation have paved the way to a wave of populist parties throughout Europe and the western world.⁶¹⁶

The new identitarian movement that was initially born in France and later spread into Europe, finds its own spiritual leader in Alain De Benoist, who also preaches against globalisation and global market. The regionalist tendency weds the pre-modern notion of identity and embraces the anti-capitalist aspect of the modern liberal western society within a clever appropriation of the Gramscian notion of a ‘metapolitical discourse’. After all, this attempt by the post-war revolutionary fascism to reproach left and right can be detected also in the 1960s Thiriart’s attempt to involve communist China in his anti-liberalism and capitalist revolution.⁶¹⁷ And the same Freda, in his *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* iconic book (1969), often praises Mao’s China and in more than one occasion called to the unification with the Italian Marxist revolutionary groups to fight against the common enemy, the capitalist society without mentioning the so-called 1970s Italian Nazi-Maoist movement and the other neo-fascist group like Terza Posizione. These two political and ideological realities in the 1970s Italy’s years of lead period, may lead to think to an ideological confusion, albeit it would be better, to talk instead of an ideological diversification that in specific cases had created political and ideological hybrids like the two movements mentioned above. This is also telling us of the ideological mutation occurred in the 1970s to the extreme right movements in Italy and abroad likewise. Studies on this permutation of post-war fascism stress exactly this new ideological permutation. Therefore, the appropriation of methodologies and even conceptual schemes and principles of the Left, is not a novelty. The same expression ‘armed struggle’ was borrowed from Italian communism and is one of the expressions often used by the Italian father of Italian communism, Antonio Gramsci, who, from the pages of his journal [insert the title] often called his comrades to the ‘armed struggle to liberate the proletariat.

However, it should be clarified whether this ‘leftist’ turn of the New Right can be considered as a genuine sharing views of the revolutionary and anti-global attitude of the Left, or instead whether it is just an intellectual attempt in order to better smuggle in their own racist agenda and make it more palatable for a wider audience. It is nevertheless the reference to Gramsci’s theory of ‘homogenising system’ and the

⁶¹⁶ De Benoist, “On Identity”, *Telos*, 128 (Summer 2004), pp. 58-64.

⁶¹⁷ See Chapter II of the present work.

reference to the other Gramscian term of ‘metapolitics’ that is so often used not only by De Benoist or Freda but also by other New Right intellectuals like Aleksandr Dugin when the Russian far-right intellectual discusses of his Eurasian dystopic project for instance. Particularly used is the term ‘metapolitics’ as the term indicates and illustrates an intellectual attitude that transcends the specific ideologies or political groups and embraces a wider vision of the political and social reality. But with the ENR, Gramsci himself became ‘metapolitical’ as his own work and thought seemed to have been hijacked by the New Right to the point of talking of ‘Right Wing Gramscianism’. In a sense, to use the category of ‘metapolitics’ gives the advantage to the many actors of the New Right to propose their own ideological and political schemes as politically and ideological neutral, not necessarily bound to a specific political party or ideology, but only oriented toward the common good. In current times, it looks as this strategy has been finally adopted and the revolutionary and metapolitical characters seem to have become characteristics of the far-right of the third millennium in order to endorse the defence of identity and traditions proper of the identitarian project.

The identitarian movement represents an entirely new phenomenon in the contemporary European radical right. Simply put, the identitarian movement represents a stream whose aim is to draw attention to the threats of the Islamization of Europe and to renew the identity of European nations. It originated in France where it attracted its first supporters in 2003 as ‘Generation Identity’ (*Génération Identitaire*), wing of the French nationalist group *Bloc Identitaire*. Since 2012, it has spread in Germany, Austria as well as in Spain and the Netherlands, and also in Scandinavia, the Czech Republic and Italy. Identitarians believe that the historical period in which we are currently living is a period of decline because of the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural western society and globalization phenomenon. It is easier to detect in this an echo of the Evolian *Kali Yuga* although quite covert in the works of this new generation of far-right intellectuals, and albeit present, the notion of *Kali Yuga* is quite different from the Evolian 1960s Italian radical right. should and must be halted. Such movements’ creed echoes the ENR’s main theories as they designate themselves as a third way between capitalism and communism. The identitarian movement rejects multiculturalism and criticises globalization. In terms of economics, it sets economic protectionism against the free global market. According to the identitarian creed, protectionism and regionalism or localism are the pre-requisites for Europe’s ability

to bypass the current dichotomy between US and China as explained by Alain De Benoist. According to political scientists like Alexander Häusler, the identitarian movement is a meeting point of racism, xenophobia and extreme nationalism, whereas however, race (in biological sense) has been replaced by culture and the latter has been replaced by the term ‘identity’.⁶¹⁸ Basically, a new label for old contents. Identitarians perceive their roots within the context of the country, blood and identity and within such context are linked to the Neo-Nazi movements and their praising of the white race as for the case of the white supremacists for instance. However, it must be stressed the difference between identitarianism and white supremacism for the latter is a movement and ideology obsessed with the idea of defending the white minorities from it is perceived as an ‘invasion’ of other ethnic groups. Identitarianism instead, does not feel the possible disappearance of the ethnic group of reference, i.e., the white population, but rather, they tend preserve the Eurocentrism of the white culture, territory and traditions from any contamination from outside cultural and ethnic groups.

The apocalyptic case scenario that they propose of cultural and racial deterioration in Europe, has found fertile ground in some of the most popular European ultra-nationalist parties and found a worryingly wider consensus in the European electorate. It is interesting to notice that Freda with his *Fronte Nazionale* already in the early 1990s, had anticipated many of the ideological contents of the Generation identity and also many of its methods of intervention in order to stop migration and an alleged Islamization of Italy.⁶¹⁹ Within today’s political engagement on the Right, Freda has contributed by publishing well known and less known identitarian thinkers Italian and international alike as his publishing house online catalogue easily shows.⁶²⁰ Freda’s most championed New Right Identitarians alongside Alain De Benoist, are the Italian authors Cristina Coccia, a supporter of biological racism upon which she lays out her own identitarian theory based on her ‘scientifically-based’ investigations on the matter,⁶²¹ and the Italian intellectual Massimo Fini, who tends to repeat the identitarian

⁶¹⁸ Humayun Ansari and Farid Hafez (eds.), *From the Far-Right to the Mainstream. Islamophobia in Party politics and the Media* (Frankfurt, New York: Campus, 2011).

⁶¹⁹ Franco Giorgio Freda and Giovanni Damiano, *I Lupi Azzurri. Documenti del Fronte Nazionale* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2000).

⁶²⁰ <https://www.edizionidiar.it>

⁶²¹ Cristina Coccia, *Ortogenetica. Johan Gregor Mendel: La Conservazione e L’Ereditarietà delle Forme Organiche* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2016); Cristina Coccia, *Un Futuro Senza Avvenire? La Generazione della Decisione* (Padova: Edizioni di Ar, 2017).

theories of the New Right and by stating as well that Left and Right as ideological and political categories have become obsolete.⁶²² This obsolescence of the classic ideological identification and political distinction is a common trait of New Right intellectuals and activists, which facilitate their task to widen up and channelling their political programme and ideological claims to a wider general public somehow compromising their ideological identity and embracing the metapolitical discourse. Within such context, identitarianism has therefore become the latest frontier of the ENR, according to which, European identity must be protected from inappropriate non-European elements. Their call for the protection of the white race and to oppose the global market remain the main ideological characteristics of the movement that since its foundation, has become a transnational phenomenon with branches in several European countries and in the US.⁶²³ In Italy, far-right organisations like *CasaPoundItalia*, *Forza Nuova*, *Fortezza Europa*, *Reazione Identitaria* alongside the Italian branch of *Generazione Identità* all call for a defence of the European coast line from the immigration wave that has been affecting the European continent in the last two decades.

Within this galaxy of old and new far-right formations Freda, although not anymore on the frontline as in the past with his group *Lupi Azzurri*, is nevertheless considered by activists and militants as a relevant and revered intellectual and political figure of reference, especially by *CasaPound* and in minor respect, by *Forza Nuova*. The reason could be that between the two Italian far-right organizations, the one ideologically closer to Freda is *CasaPound*, whose ideological references tend to embrace more the metapolitical discourse dear to the New Right and to the same Freda; but also for the more evident intellectual sophistication of the *CasaPound*'s establishment, which makes as its point of force, the use of typically leftist methods in championing the rights of the population and in its anti-elitist and anti-establishment attitude. *Forza Nuova* instead, resents still of the influence of its founder, the ex-NAR terrorist Roberto Fiore with his strong ultra-Catholic and old fascist fashion nationalism and idea of homeland. The group *Forza Nuova* although supportive of the identitarian movement, fails nevertheless to come out with an original political project and new understanding and interpretation of novel permutations of the fascist ideological core

⁶²² Massimo Fini, *Il Vizio Oscuro dell'Occidente. Manifesto dell'Antimodernità* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2003); Massimo Fini, *Sudditi. Manifesto Contro la Democrazia* (Venezia: Marsilio Editori, 2004).

⁶²³ For a more detailed analysis and study of the Identitarian movement see Fabian Virchow, 'The Identitarian Movement', July 2014, XVIII ISA Congress of Sociology.

proper of the so called ‘fascist for the third millennium’ discourse unlike *CasaPound Italia*. Within such identitarian context, Freda fits rather well as he had anticipated of a decade the Generation Identity’s ideological and political mission. It can be concluded that Freda has managed to build a secluded ideological niche where his supporters and admirers can still be able to find him and from where he can operate contributing to the current transnational far-right debate with his organised debates, lectures and most importantly, with his publishing house and bookstore.

Conclusion

The present chapter has attempted an assessment of Freda’s relevance in today’s transnational fascism. From the research of primary sources and the reading of secondary sources on the so called ‘fascists for the third millennium’ phenomenon with their sub-culture, some conclusions can be drawn. It is interesting to observe this new ‘fascist ideal type’ of the twenty-first century is generally quite young and well educated, and that can use internet and the social media platforms for better spreading his/her ideological creed or voicing his/her political stances. What emerged is that this new generation of neo-fascists although still looking with nostalgia to historical figures of reference like Hitler or Mussolini, also shows a deep knowledge and understanding of fascist ideology and is intellectually engaged and sophisticated enough to re-elaborate some of the classic ideological tenets of fascism in a more modern and contemporary version. Therefore, the figures of reference are not just those of the historical Fascist and Nazi regimes, but rather intellectuals and philosophers with whom this new generation of neo-fascists can find an intellectual and ideological common ground and to whom they can refer to. On this point, attention should be paid to the recent phenomenon of identitarianism sprung out of Alain de Benoist’s theories and by reviving the GRECE’s ideological message and political commitment about ethnopluralism and anti-globalisation.

On the Generation Identity’s activists and his alleged influence on this organisation’s ideological framework, the French intellectual has stated that ‘[...]what I think is they’re really small tendencies, extremely small tendencies of the lunatic fringe, desperately looking for legitimacy because they don’t have anyone to look toward...maybe people consider me their spiritual father, but I don’t consider them my spiritual sons’.⁶²⁴ With this declaration, Alain De Benoist states his extraneousness from the Identitarian movement. Whether or not Alain de Benoist endorses the

⁶²⁴ Alain de Benoist interviewed by Lester Feder on https://www.buzzfed.com/lesterfeder/the-man-who-gave-white-nationalism-a-new-life?utm_term=qi9w.lx76Px.dyA9wkybvk, Dec. 28, 2017 (12/03/2018).

‘fascists of the third millennium’ and their identitarian crusade against immigration and alleged Islamization of the west, undoubtedly, his work has contributed to provide solid intellectual grounds to the idea that Europe and the west, need to be defended from immigration, global market and left-wing multiculturalism. On this line of thought, Freda is enjoying a revival of his ideas and theories, and a second life as far-right intellectual and figure of reference especially for Italian far-right organisations as the many interviews to him conducted by *CasaPound*’s spokesman Adriano Scianca show.⁶²⁵ In an interview he gave to the ultra-nationalist Italian website www.primatonazionale.it, Freda displays his histrionic and charismatic figure answering with statements like the one discussing the sorrow for having predicted almost twenty years ago the drama of the immigration into Europe: ‘We feel impotent, mortified for having predicted [the immigration wave] without forming or transforming men and institutions...horrific is seeing our land invaded and ruined by waves of strangers’.⁶²⁶ He has been rather active with his publishing house between 2015 and 2018, and in 2015, Freda has published his last book *Il Primato Nazionale*, where he re-states his ‘morphological racism’ –similar in many ways to Alain de Benoist’s ‘ethnopluralism’ that he had theorised in the 1990s when he founded the far-right organization *Fronte Nazionale*.

The ‘fascist for the third millennium’ seem to be seeking for father figures to look up to and to refer to for ideological and political coordinates. The fact that Freda’s main iconic book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) has been recently translated into English and is now available on line, means that he is starting to receive a wider attention by the worldwide transnational galaxy, especially, the English-speaking far-right. However, at the time of writing Freda seems gaining more fame and fortune in his own country although, the English version of his text might in few years reach a wider audience outside the Italian borders. In reality, what has emerged from the present analysis is that the new far-right generation seems to have embraced the proposed ‘metapolitics’ discourse of which Freda often championed about in his writings and that has also been a characteristic of Alain de Benoist’s thought. This ideological rapprochement between Left and Right, conjugating together the primacy of the national culture, traditions and ethnicity with social welfare and anti-Americanism/anti-globalism seems to be the new trademark of the ‘the third millennium fascists’. Within such ideological and intellectual framework, Freda’s popularity is better found in the use of internet and social media. As illustrated in the chapter, the Facebook page dedicated to Freda is quite popular and read by many sympathisers and activists alike, often leaving comments that can provide an idea of Freda’s increasing influence and of the new wave of popularity that, as consequence, his books seem to have found. *CasaPound*’s endorsement of

⁶²⁶ Interview to Franco Freda available on <https://www.ilprimatonazionale.it/cultura/silenzio-parla-freda-e-dice-la-sua-su-immigrazione-europa-e-gender-26407>, June, 28, 2016 (last accessed on 15/04/2018).

Freda and his thought constitutes the major asset in Freda's regained fame among the Italian far-right circles, as today *CasaPound* is the most popular, well established, and influential far right group on the national territory. But is not just *CasaPound Italia* that seem to have discovered Freda; there is also *Forza Nuova* that has started to get interested in his work and in his persona, although for the *Forza Nuova*'s activists Freda has to be taken with caution being Freda an openly self-professed pagan and being *Forza Nuova* a far-right ultra-Catholic movement. In the analysis of Freda's impact on transnational fascism, it has emerged that Freda seemed to have enjoyed increased popularity and fame within the Italian far-right groups in the last ten years although, some of these groups are voicing perplexities about his persona and about his involvement in the Piazza Fontana bombing manifesting some doubts about his ideological commitment to the neo-fascist terrorism of the 1970s Italy. It should also be observed that the translation in several foreign languages of his main book *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) has not made him an over popular figure in transnational fascism as for instance, other figure of reference for the radical right like Julius Evola, although he seems to be receiving more attention in the last five years. This is also due to Freda's personal tendency for been very reserved and available only to a selected group of people as it has emerged from the research findings for the present chapter.

In conclusion, Freda's impact on today's transnational fascism can be summed up as follows: looking at the Italian far-right galaxy with *CasaPoundItalia* championing mostly his works and persona, Freda is enjoying a new revival. However, the translation in several languages of his main work, *La Disintegrazione del Sistema* (1969) did not seem sufficient to make him known to a wider audience although some of his main ideas and ideological statements like 'morphological racism' or his open anti-Americanism/anti-globalism attitude have been considered 'modern' and 'up to date' by the young far-right generation with specific reference to the Italian Identitarians (*Generazione Identità*), who have re-discovered Freda's work alongside the more internationally known French Alain De Benoist. From the analysis of the sources considered for this chapter it looks that Identitarianism, Tradition and Metapolitics have become common language for the younger generation of radical fascists and that Freda, at least in his own country, has become one of the main ideological and intellectual references for the new generation of neo-fascists in the name of a no better specified idea of 'identity' and by defending the 'Fortress Europe' from the dangers of multi-ethnicity and multi-culturalism that seem to anguish the far-right milieu today.

CONCLUSION

The present research work intended to be a study on the element of fascist mysticism that can be detected in the most extremist and radical form of such ideology. For such purpose, it has been considered suitable to use the figure and thought of the Italian Nazi-fascist terrorist and intellectual Franco Giorgio Freda, one of the prominent protagonists of the strategy of tension period in Italy (1969-1979). He was considered a good starting point in investigating the intellectual and ideological tenets that have contributed to create and shape the more 'spiritual' side of the Italian radical right, considering Freda one of the best examples of the embodiment of such aspect of the ideology. Fascism with its liturgy, rituals and doctrines has been already examined and considered a political religion according to scholars like Emilio Gentile for instance, who has already observed and analysed this peculiar aspect of fascism in his works. But also, other scholars like for instance, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke or, the over quoted Roger Griffin, have already discussed and analysed in their books on fascism the more esoteric and metapolitical aspect of fascism. The religious or mystical aspect of fascism as ideology has not always found the general consensus of the academics and scholars of fascism as mentioned in the thesis (chapter one). But it is interesting to analyse and investigate this aspect of fascism whereas, we believe, the same notion of ideology becomes radicalised to the point of being experienced as a proper religious cult with its spiritual and mystical aspects. Authors like Julius Evola or Alfred Rosenberg or Himmler and Rudolph Hesse can be mentioned as samples of this spiritual aspect of fascism as in the interwar German National-Socialism. In the present thesis, there has been an attempt to analyse and explain fascist ideology through the lens of mysticism and spirituality in order to better explain what we believe is the true core of the ideology itself looking specifically at the post-war neo-fascist ideological tenets and political projects as displayed by many of its representatives in Italy and abroad in the post-war period until today.

Therefore, the choice of Franco Giorgio Freda and his militancy in the Italian 1970s black terrorism and his presence and activity in the today's world of the Italian and transnational far-right seems to have been the most suitable in order to better discuss fascist mysticism and, at the same time, to better illustrate and analyse the historical framework in which Freda and his associates were operating, namely, the strategy of tension in the post-war Italian First Republic. Furthermore, the choice of Freda as an iconic figure of this type of 'transcendental fascism' as we call it, has been considered the right choice, for studying and analysing Freda's works and primary sources material available, it is possible to outline the main intellectual and cultural contours of such expression of the fascist ideology. In conducting such study and analysis, it has been considered necessary an introductory chapter on the current debate on the nature of fascism, its

different interpretative approaches and models since its first appearance. Fascism seems to have an elusive nature that cannot always be completely grasped.

In the first chapter of the present thesis, the several theories, aspects, methodologies and approaches have been explored in an attempt to provide the reader with a clear conceptual framework that would then facilitate the comprehension of the more specific analysis of the 'fascist mysticism' as intellectual and cultural coordinate of this ideology. The element that has emerged in the exploration of the nature of fascism, is the diversity of perceptions, and understanding of fascism, as many scholars and academic schools considered the fascism and studied through different interpretative lens. The chapter one was therefore intended as an overview of the major theories and heuristic approaches flourished since its first appearance, in order to understand fascism and looked at the several schools of thought that in time have attempted its explanation and have assessed its relevance in politics. To assess the nature of fascism, its ideological tenets and its permutations revealed to be not an easy task, and the understanding and the interpretative key to its comprehension have also uncovered different interpretative models often in contrast with each other. Chapter one did not aimed to provide an ultimate interpretation of fascism but wished to be an introductory chapter to familiarise the reader with the complexity of fascism as ideology, regime or intellectual framework. What emerged and was argued in chapter one was that fascism often became not just a political ideology of specific historical periods or suited for particular groups or movements, or even just authoritarian regimes. But rather, fascism was often perceived by its sympathizers as a new *Weltanschauung* that tends to embrace the individual's life as a whole as testified by the wealth of primary sources available on this matter. Therefore, chapter one focused on first, to assess the nature of fascism through the overview of several interpretations looking at some specific aspects of the ideology. What we found particularly interesting has been the Marxist interpretation of fascism. We have found this interpretation quite reductive as seems to reduce fascism to a 'historical negativity' as many Marxist scholars affirmed. In reality, Mosse's seminal work on the nature of fascism as mass movement opened a new line of investigation and helped to consider fascism under different lens. The hypothesis of Zeev Sternhell of fascism being primarily a cultural revolution sounded a novelty but also paved the way to a different interpretative approach in defining fascism. The new wave of fascist studies has therefore, offered more space for different interpretations of such complex ideology.

The study and the analysis of what this ideology could be cannot avoid the study of the different characters, actors, groups and events that have better embodied the inner meaning of this ideology. The interest in Franco Freda and the neo-fascist terrorism came from the need to better understand a period in the history of my country that is still very much dotted with mysteries, conspiracy

theories and hidden truths about the period of the strategy of tension. Therefore, the second chapter of the thesis wished to be an account of the historical background and of the socio-political tensions present in the country in that period that still has many questions opened. The attention for the so called 'black terrorism' seemed necessary to better understand the dynamics of a young democracy like Italy in that period, but also to assess to what extent third parties were involved in one of the bloodiest period of Italian history. The understanding of the neo-fascist terrorism of Ordine Nuovo and other kindred groups in Italy and abroad cannot be fully understood if we do not look at the ideology and the political motivations of the extreme right in post war Italy. Therefore, the choice of Freda as case study to better understand what I call 'transcendental fascism' seemed the most natural choice amid all the former Italian neo-fascist terrorists that are still active within our society. Freda is quite active in today's far-right circles and his publishing house, the *Edizioni di Ar* is quite prolific in publications, organising conference and talks with kindred spirits. From the reading of Freda's works emerge a strong influence of Julius Evola, but also Plato, and the fathers of the Conservative Revolution and with some sympathy for Mao's China and the Marxists. In chapter three of the present thesis, there has been an attempt to analyse Freda's intellectual history and his theosis. What has emerged is an Evolian combatant, that fulfils the Evolian characteristics of the perfect 'differentiated man', a man that does not conform to the modern, capitalist society, but that instead, retains for himself an aristocratic detachment from the contingency of the reality that surrounds him. Freda is also the champion of a type of metapolitical fascism where the ideological element has his roots into the theological one. For Freda, ideology and theology are two sides of the same coin, and his detachment from the world, his retirement, his *apoliteia*, allows him to comprehend the essence of the world, and therefore, of its politics. The involvement of Freda in one of the most horrific tragedies that post-war Italy had ever experienced, the Piazza Fontana bombing on 12 December 1969, has been analysed in the chapter four, where a brief summary of the judicial case on the Piazza Fontana events was meant to help the reader to frame the ideological motivations that saw Freda and his associate, Giovanni Ventura, at the centre of one darkest chapter in the post-war Italian history. Chapter five, instead, focused on Freda's involvement as creator, militant and ideologue, in two organizations that himself founded: the *Gruppo di Ar* in 1963, and the *Fronte Nazionale* in 1990. The former, was gravitating around the other extreme right organization of *Ordine Nuovo*, and meant to be a cenacle of elected and kindred spirits to be trained and be educated through the Evolian creed. The *Gruppo di Ar* was marginally involved in the Piazza Fontana bombing and was dissolved following the investigations on the case. The *Fronte Nazionale* instead, was created in 1990 with the clear intention of fighting what Freda and his associated perceived as an imminent danger: immigration. It has been interesting to study the aims, the politics and the organization of this group, and, also to see how Freda has anticipated the 'Eurabia' conspiracy of a decade. This is also maybe the reason why today Freda is becoming a figure of reference for the young far-right generations and he is becoming to be known also abroad with the translation of his iconic book,

La Disintegrazione del Sistema (1969) in several languages. The interest that the young generations may have for Freda has been assessed in chapter six of the present thesis and has brought to the conclusion that in post-modern world there is still need of *Cattivi Maestri* (Bad Teachers). Or at least, so it looks. Overall, the thesis attempted to understand the fascist mysticism in its worst permutation, the political violence and terrorism that affected for more than twenty years the country.

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