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# **Endo-exo causality in the Italian Years of Lead**

Thirty-six years after the end of the so-called Years of Lead (*Anni di Piombo* in Italian language), this article aims to explore a key question that encompasses the most intense period of terrorism in Italy after the end of the Second World War: to what extent did the relationship between internal (endo) and external (exo) causalities influence the Italian Years of Lead?

The article consists of eleven parts. The first section provides operational definitions of terrorism. The second section offers definitions of social movement in order to avoid any misunderstanding about its possible proximity to terrorist actions.

The third section summarises an overview of the so-called *Sessantotto*, the Italian term for the social movement of 1968. The fourth section introduces the relationships between the *Sessantotto* and the Years of Lead.

The fifth and sixth sections investigate key aspects of the Years of Lead that originated, with their own distinctive path, from the regression of the *Sessantotto*. These aspects concern the two sides of the same coin: far-right (or neo-fascist) terrorist groups and far-left terrorist groups involved in the Years of Lead.

The seventh section summarises how emergency laws contributed to the defeat of terrorism, the human costs of which are reported in the eighth section.

The ninth section considers the (sometimes controversial and overlapping) narratives on terrorist events using selected documentation, such as historiographical studies, journalistic publications, judicial sentences and parliamentary investigations.

The tenth section concludes that the Years of Lead were essentially endogenous in nature. They are considered in the Cold War scenario. Endogenous and exogenous factors, typical of globalisation processes, influenced national changes regarding the economic, social, demographic and political fabric.

These changes were the components of the incubator in which the generation that entered the *Sessantotto* grew up, followed its regression and was affected by the Years of Lead. If the events occurred in that period of time did not succeed in destabilising democracy, they were capable of anthropologically destabilising an entire generation.

The eleventh section briefly explains the conceptual paradigm of circular endo-exo causality.

## **1. Operational definitions of terrorism**

As Alex P. Schmid<sup>1</sup> writes, while terrorism "is one of the most widely used terms in adversarial political discourse, there is still no international consensus about its exact meaning. The discussion about the definition of terrorism has been going on for more than half a century and has led to a large number of publications". This includes the so-called "sectoral conventions and protocols, negotiated in the framework of the United Nations, the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)" between 1963 and 2014.

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<sup>1</sup> Schmid A. P. (2023), *Defining Terrorism*, ICCT Report, [www.icct.nl](http://www.icct.nl). ICCT is the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism.

According to Anthony Richards<sup>2</sup>, "It is widely recognised that defining terrorism has been an issue that has confounded policymakers and academics alike. (...) There have always been good reasons for attempting to generate a universally agreed definition of terrorism. From a policymaking perspective the most important of these have been to do with the facilitation of international cooperation against the phenomenon, while from an academic perspective there has been an acknowledged need to advance theoretical development as to 'what terrorism is'. Often used as a pejorative label, a common and formidable obstacle to an agreed definition has been its subjective application (or non-application) according to where one's interests lie, and this has obfuscated a more dispassionate and analytical approach".

Andrew Heywood<sup>3</sup> states that: "Terrorism, in its broadest sense, refers to attempts to further political ends by using violence to create a climate of fear, apprehension and uncertainty. The most common forms of terrorist action include assassinations, bombings, hostage seizures and plane hijacks (...). The term is highly pejorative and it tends to be used selectively (one person's terrorist can be another's freedom fighter). While terrorism is often portrayed as an anti-government activity, governments may also employ terror against their own or other populations, as in the case of 'state terrorism'. Terrorism is nevertheless a deeply controversial term".

Anthony Richards<sup>4</sup> provides the following definition: "terrorism is the use of violence or the threat of violence with the primary purpose of generating a psychological impact beyond the immediate victims or object of attack for a political motive". This "is common to all acts of terrorism. If the primary aim is not to generate this wider psychological impact then it is not terrorism".

In the conclusion of his report, Alex P. Schmid<sup>5</sup> formulates the following short version of revised academic consensus definition (2011):

- "1. Terrorism refers, on the one hand, to a doctrine about the presumed effectiveness of a special form or tactic of fear-generating, coercive political violence and, on the other hand, to a conspiratorial practice of calculated, demonstrative, direct violent action without legal or moral restraints, targeting mainly civilians and non-combatants, performed for its propagandistic and psychological effects on various audiences and conflict parties;
2. Terrorism as a tactic is employed in three main contexts: (i) illegal state repression; (ii) propagandistic agitation by non-state actors in times of peace or outside zones of conflict; and (iii) as an illicit tactic of irregular warfare employed by state- and non-state actors."

All the definitions above have in common the attention to a method (or tactic) of violence aimed at amplifying the (psychological) impact of a violent act, that is, at increasing terror among populations.

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<sup>2</sup> Richards A. (2013), *Conceptualising Terrorism*, available in: <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/1a516f29404d1a130c5bc2013079ccbad50a2c07704631b97a9c284957366121/524404/ConceptualizingTerrorismFinalROAR.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Heywood A. (2011), *Global Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>4</sup> Richards A. (2013), *Conceptualising Terrorism*, available in: <https://repository.uel.ac.uk/download/1a516f29404d1a130c5bc2013079ccbad50a2c07704631b97a9c284957366121/524404/ConceptualizingTerrorismFinalROAR.pdf>. Richards proposes "three preliminary assumptions when approaching the definitional problem – that there is no such thing as an act of violence that is in and of itself inherently terrorist, that terrorism is best conceptualized as a particular method of political violence rather than defined as inherent to any particular ideology or perpetrator, and that non-civilians and combatants can also be victims of terrorism".

<sup>5</sup> Schmid A. P. (2023), *Defining Terrorism*, ICCT Report, [www.icct.nl](http://www.icct.nl). The report "approaches the definition of terrorism from five angles: (i) by focusing on the history of terrorism; (ii) by focusing on the psychology of 'terror' (the threat and fear factor); (iii) by focusing on forms of political violence other than terrorist violence; (iv) by focusing on the terrorist act; and (v) by focusing on the terrorist. Subsequently it addresses the question who should have definition power? The author looks at how terrorists, victims of terrorism, religious authorities, mass and social media, national governments, the United Nations, and members from academia have tried to define terrorism".

The intentions behind terrorist acts can be of a diverse and unclear nature (e.g. anti-government activity, self-determination, state repression and so on).

The variety of contexts can be different, for example peacetime and war environments, struggle against authoritarian states and dictatorships. Casualties can include civilians and non-combatants, as well as non-civilians and combatants.

The variety of actors or perpetrators can be different, for example, terrorist groups and individuals, states, guerrilla groups, social movements, and so on.

Terror is a tool of psychological warfare and unconventional warfare.

Alfred H. Paddock Jr.<sup>6</sup> summarises the following definitions. Psychological warfare encompasses "those activities planned and conducted to influence the opinions, emotions, attitudes and behaviour of the enemy, the indigenous population, and neutral or friendly foreign groups". Unconventional warfare encompasses "guerrilla operations and subversion to be carried out within enemy or enemy-controlled territory by indigenous personnel, supported and directed" by foreigner forces.

Frank R. Barnett and Carnes Lord<sup>7</sup> underline that psychological warfare has a long history, it is evident in classic treatises on war and remains "a distinguishing feature of the contemporary strategic environment. Though taking place in peacetime (or what currently passes under that term), such activity is nonetheless intimately linked with violence. (...) Our era has become the age of terrorism, insurgency, and limited war because each of these is an essential political method of struggle".

As mentioned above, terrorist actions can be carried out by, or linked to, social movements. However, the role played by social movements deserves a clear understanding and special attention to avoid any misunderstanding.

## **2. Definitions of social movements**

Andrew Heywood<sup>8</sup> states that: "A social movement is a particular form of collective behaviour in which the motive to act springs largely from the attitudes and aspirations of members, typically acting within a loose organizational framework. Being part of a social movement requires a level of commitment and political activism, rather than formal or card-carrying membership; above all, movements move. A movement is different from spontaneous mass action (such as an uprising or rebellion) in that it implies a measure of intended or planned action in pursuit of a recognized social goal. Not uncommonly, social movements embrace pressure groups and may even spawn political parties; trade unions and socialist parties, for example, can be seen as part of a broader labour movement".

According to Jonathan Christiansen<sup>9</sup>, social movements "can be thought of as organised yet informal social entities that are engaged in extra-institutional conflict that is oriented towards a goal. These goals can be either aimed at a specific and narrow policy or be more broadly aimed at cultural change". Based on current literature, Christiansen summarises four stages in the life of a social movement: emergence, coalescence, bureaucratisation and decline.

The emergence stage is characterised by "individualised, but widespread feelings of discontent. Movements in this stage lack clearly defined strategy for achieving goals and little organization".

Coalescence is "the coming together of social movement constituents. This stage is marked by demonstrations and formulation of strategy".

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<sup>6</sup> Paddock A. H. Jr. (1982), *U.S. Army Special Warfare. Its Origins. Psychological and Unconventional Warfare*, National Defense University Press, Washington D.C.

<sup>7</sup> Barnett F. R. and Lord C. (1989), *Political Warfare and Psychological Operations*, National Defense University Press. Washington D.C.

<sup>8</sup> Heywood A. (2007), *Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

<sup>9</sup> Christiansen J. (2009), *Four Stages of Social Movements*, EBSCO Publishing Inc.

In the bureaucratisation (or formalisation) stage, strategy is carried out by formal organisations and trained personnel.

Decline “usually marks the end of mass mobilisation” and can occur in five ways: repression, co-optation, success, establishment within the mainstream and failure.

Repression is the way “in which authorities use violent or coercive tactics to destroy a social movement”.

Co-optation “occurs when movement leaders are offered rewards by the movement’s opponents in order divert movement pressure”.

Success can be achieved by social movements that define very specific and clear goals. However, many social movements “have goals that are much less clearly defined and many organize new campaigns once others are wrapping up either through success or compromise”.

Establishment within the mainstream occurs “when goals or ideologies of a movement are adopted by the mainstream and there is no longer any need for a movement”.

Failure includes encapsulation and factionalism. Encapsulation “is marked by an increasing inability for movements to grow because close knit, highly dedicated activist groups become difficult for new adherents to penetrate”. Factionalism “is marked by increasing internal strife within social movements between groups who have differing ideas about how the movement should function or what its goals should have”.

Taking into account the above definitions, it is necessary to make specific considerations to understand the worldwide protest movement of 1968 (i.e. the *Sessantotto*).

### **3. The '68 social movement (*Sessantotto*)**

The 1968 movement must be placed in an international perspective. This movement covered the protests of large sections of the population (students, workers, women, ethnic minorities, intellectuals, artists and so on) in many states of the world, as a social and cultural revolutionary phenomenon without a uniform political platform. The movement was united by spontaneous aggregation and aspirations that catalysed the new generations in search of a better future: that is, by ambitions for a better world.

As Edgar Morin underlines in his analysis on the French case<sup>10</sup>: the '68 movement was anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical, libertarian and based on solidarity values; its main aspirations were towards greater freedom, greater autonomy, brotherhood and community life.

The '68 movement combined the global dimension (for its general contents) and the local dimension (for the specific contents expressed in different countries). Among the general contents of the movement, there were those emerged in previous years<sup>11</sup> with struggles for civil rights and against racial segregation<sup>12</sup>, for freedom and against the Vietnam War<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Morin E. (2018), *Maggio 68. La breccia*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano.

<sup>11</sup> From the vast historiographical literature on the 1968 movement it can be assumed that its beginning may coincide with that of the student movement in the United States of America (USA or US) symbolically referring to the speech given (2 December 1964) by the activist Mario Savio (of Italian origin) at the University of Berkeley (California). Subsequently, the movement spread over the years to various countries, reaching his peak in 1968 and lasting until the end of the seventies.

<sup>12</sup> The fight for civil rights and against racial segregation is symbolized by the Martin Luther King’s speech (“I have a Dream”) delivered on 28 August 1963 during the massive march in Washington (USA). The fight achieved success with the federal laws against racial discrimination (Civil Rights Act) and on the right to vote of ethnic minorities (Voting Rights Act), signed (respectively, 2 July 1964 and 6 August 1965) by president Lyndon B. Johnson after approval of the US Congress. The legislative path began during the presidency of John Fitzgerald Kennedy with the contribution of attorney general Robert Kennedy and ended with the decisive action of president Johnson. The latter succeeded John Fitzgerald Kennedy who was assassinated (22 November 1963) in Dallas (Texas). Martin Luther King was also assassinated (4 April 1968) in Memphis (Tennessee) and Robert Kennedy, a presidential candidate, was killed two months later (6 June 1968) in Los Angeles (California).

<sup>13</sup> The Vietnam War lasted almost twenty years (1 November 1955 - 30 April 1975).

In Italy, the student movement (started in 1966) called for the implementation of the right to study as education accessible to all, anti-authoritarian teaching methods oriented towards collective, cooperative and non-competitive learning, political rights that included freedom of assembly, autonomy and self-management of educational content.

By occupying universities, secondary schools and technical institutes (1966-1968), the students became aware that to change the school it was necessary to change society and produce an alternative culture to the conventional one.

The student movement extended the struggle against authoritarianism from educational institutions to social and political institutions (such as family, community, parties and the state).

The student movement addressed issues of international dimension (for peace and against the Vietnam War), affected the Catholic world (grassroots community against the church hierarchy), pushed democratisation and contributed to the growth of civil society (i.e. the social fabric made up of multiple organisations created by citizens and independent of the state apparatus).

The student protest became associated (1969) with the labour conflicts (i.e. a series of large strikes) known as the Hot Autumn (*autunno caldo*).

The *Sessantotto* produced a fruitful relationship between the student movement and the workers' movement. The trade unions were able to assimilate aspirations of the *Sessantotto* such as greater freedom, autonomy and solidarity against a work organisation based on authoritarianism, hierarchy and fragmentation.

The trade unions expanded workers' participation by establishing democratically self-managed workers' councils (*consigli di fabbrica*) and, after their success with an act (Law No. 300 of 1970, better known as the Workers' Statute, *Statuto dei lavoratori*) on the freedom and dignity of workers, and with collective and company bargaining, strengthened (1973-1974) their role of workers' representatives in the national political scenario.

The long *Sessantotto* also triggered the demands for women's emancipation from traditional social conventions. A new feminism took on the role of a transversal movement across all components of society and contributed to a process of cultural and social modernisation witnessed, among other things, by the victories obtained with the referendum on divorce (1974), with the law on abortion (1978) and with the ongoing fight against sexual violence and gender discriminations.

The success of some contents promoted by the *Sessantotto*, their establishment within the mainstream contributed to the decline of the movement. The other factor in the decline was failure due to the movement's encapsulation and factionalism. Therefore, the Italian case study confirms the categories defined by Christiansen.

While the first signs of tiredness and ebb of the movement appeared, the political organisations of the new left proliferated (1969). There were more than one hundred groups, mainly with political orientations towards Marxism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Maoism, Workerism<sup>14</sup> and Anarchism. Only some of them had a national political role capable of counteracting, even partially, that of the historic parties of the left.

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<sup>14</sup> Workerism is the English translation of the Italian word *operaismo*, which could be briefly defined as a political theory aimed at affirming the centrality of the working class as the only historical actor capable of autonomously producing significant changes in the social, economic and cultural fabric. This theory, being rooted in different interpretations of Marxism, is not homogenous but consists of a variety of political positions. *Operaismo* was born from various authors and found a laboratory of inspiration in the magazine *Quaderni Rossi*, whose publication began in 1961.

Among the literature relating to this political approach see for example: Tronti M. (1966), *Operai e capitale*, Einaudi, Torino; the reprint of *Quaderni Rossi* (1970), Sapere Edizioni, Milano; Panzieri R. (1973), *La crisi del movimento operaio. Scritti 1956-1960*, Lampugnani Nigri Editore, Milano; Negri A. (2007), *Dall'operaio massa all'operaio sociale*, Ombre corte, Verona; Filippini M. (2011), "Mario Tronti e l'operaismo politico degli anni Sessanta" in OpenEdition Journals; Nigro R. (2018), "Workerism" in *Krisis journal*, Issue 2.

Among the largest and most prominent groups it is worth mentioning: *Potere Operaio* (workers' power; 1967-1973; Workerism)<sup>15</sup>; *Avanguardia Operaia* (workers' vanguard; 1968-1977; Trotskyism, Maoism and Workerism)<sup>16</sup>; *Servire il Popolo* (1968-1978, serve the people, union of Italian communists; Marxism, Leninism, Maoism); *Movimento Studentesco* (students movement; 1968-1976; Marxism, Leninism and Maoism); *Lotta Continua* (continuous struggle; 1969-1976; mainly Workerism)<sup>17</sup>; *Autonomia Operaia* (workers' autonomy; 1973-1979; generally known as the area of autonomy derived primarily from *Potere Operaio*).

The birth of these groups contributed to the regression of the *Sessantotto* as a spontaneous movement and facilitated the involvement of many of its activists in formalised structures but in continuous fragmentation and permanent political divergence among their leaders.

Similar characteristics of the regressive flow were present in other countries such as, for example, in the French movement where, according to the analysis carried out by Edgar Morin, regenerative ideas degenerated and modern ideas fossilised<sup>18</sup>.

The gradual collapse of the *Sessantotto* in Italy is attributable to the endemic violence of social conflicts, the bloody repressive actions and the terrorism carried out by three types of perpetrators: left-wing and right-wing armed groups and deviant state secret services.

From now on in this article terrorism will be called "red" when it is attributed to far-left groups and "black" if far-right (or neo-fascist) groups are responsible.

#### **4. Relationships between the *Sessantotto* and the Years of Lead**

The term "Anni di Piombo" (Years of Lead) derives from the Italian title of the film directed by Margarethe von Trotta in 1981. The film is inspired by the story of two sisters involved in some way in the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF), a West German group of red terrorists also known as the Baader-Meinhof gang.

Today, after years of studies (performed with different approaches, for example historical, sociological, journalistic, investigative and juridical) and enquiries (specifically those of parliamentary commissions), it is possible to formulate a prevailing evaluation on the relationships between the *Sessantotto* and the Years of Lead in Italy.

Chronologically, the *Sessantotto* precedes the Years of Lead. The first left-wing armed groups appeared (at the beginning of the 1970s) when the regressive curve of the *Sessantotto* manifested itself; in between, the propagation of the aforementioned political groups of the new left (1969).

Red terrorism began with militants whose political experience was influenced by, or linked to, the cycle of the *Sessantotto*. According to Alberto Melucci<sup>19</sup>, the red terrorism was paradoxically both the most radical result and the most radical antithesis of the *Sessantotto*.

Armed groups arose as a side effect of far-left political organizations, as the former separated from the latter and went underground. According to Sidney Tarrow<sup>20</sup>, organised violence was not a property of the *Sessantotto* but a product of its decline.

Therefore, if it is true that there was a chronological continuity, an ideological or cultural continuity could only be found through the mediation of far-left political groups.

According to Salvatore Lupo<sup>21</sup>, the majority of the post-*Sessantotto* movement would have preferred to maintain a practice of social struggles, marches and assemblies based on minimal violence and would have rejected the radicalisation supported by some far-left political groups.

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<sup>15</sup> Grandi A. (2023), *La generazione degli anni perduti. Storia di Potere Operaio*, Chiarelettere, Milano.

<sup>16</sup> Biorcio R. and Pucciarelli M. (2021), *Volevamo cambiare il mondo. Storia di Avanguardia Operaia 1968-1977*, Mimesis, Milano.

<sup>17</sup> Bobbio L. (1988), *Storia di Lotta Continua*, Milano, Feltrinelli, Milano.

<sup>18</sup> Morin E. (2018), *Maggio 68. La breccia*, Raffaello Cortina Editore, Milano.

<sup>19</sup> Melucci A. (1981), "New movements, terrorism and the political system" in *Socialist Review*, 56.

<sup>20</sup> Tarrow S. (1989), *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy 1965-1975*, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

According to Donatella Della Porta and Maurizio Rossi<sup>22</sup>, the *Sessantotto* had some ideological or cultural influence on what happened afterwards, but it cannot be considered as an originator, directly or indirectly, of the subversive violence grew during the Years of Lead.

Terrorism was a separate path chosen by a minority of activists. Robert Lumely<sup>23</sup> argues that it is misleading (and very simple) to construct a linear pattern of cause and effect between the *Sessantotto* and terrorism, while there have been continuities and breaks in contradictory developments.

According to Lumely, the *Sessantotto* led to modernisation, democratisation and the growth of civil society, but also to an endemic social conflict, to a continuous institutional blockade and to a polarisation of politics into repression and terrorism. An initial coexistence (at the beginning of the 1970s) between the movement and the armed groups was gradually replaced by separation and antagonism (at the end of the 1970s). The armed groups became a residual expression of a political extremism clearly at odds with the ideological and cultural roots of the *Sessantotto*.

To the Lumely's considerations it can be added that the sympathisers of the armed groups were above all activists of far-left political organisations. However, armed groups have lost support due to growing counter-terrorism pressure from traditional left-wing parties, trade unions and even new-left organisations. The isolation of armed groups has also increased due to the competition between them, which has led to their fragmentation, while useless criminal acts have favoured the abandonment of militants and sympathisers.

## 5. The black side of the Years of Lead

In Italian historiography, the Piazza Fontana massacre<sup>24</sup> (at the headquarters of a bank located in that square) in Milan (Northern Italy; 12 December 1969) is often cited as the beginning of the Years of Lead coinciding with the so-called "strategy of tension".

According to Francesco M. Biscione<sup>25</sup>, the term "strategy of tension" appeared for the first time in an article on the Piazza Fontana massacre in the British newspaper *Observer*, published on 14 December 1969 (i.e. two days after the massacre). Subsequently (in 2014), one of the journalists responsible for that article revealed that this term had been suggested by two colleagues from the Italian weekly magazine *L'Espresso*.

With some support from deviant state secret services, the strategy of tension was fuelled by black terrorist groups. The main neo-fascist groups involved in the strategy of tension were: *Avanguardia Nazionale* (national vanguard; 1960-1976) founded by Stefano Delle Chiaie; *Fronte Nazionale* (national front; 1968-1970) founded by the prince Junio Valerio Borghese (nicknamed the "black prince"); *Ordine Nuovo* (new order; 1969-1973) founded by Clemente Graziani and Pino Rauti, then (1974) transformed into *Ordine Nero* (black order)<sup>26</sup>.

These groups were formed through separations from the *Movimento Sociale Italiano* (MSI, Italian social movement), the main neo-fascist party (1946-1995) founded by activists of the former dictatorial regime of Benito Mussolini (1922-1943) and the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI, Italian social republic; 1943-1945), the puppet state of the Nazi Germany created by Adolf Hitler and governed by Mussolini.

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<sup>21</sup> Lupo S. (2013), "La Guerra civile immaginata. Un dilemma dell'Italia repubblicana" in *Meridiana* n. 76.

<sup>22</sup> Della Porta D. and Rossi M. (1984), *Cifre Crudeli. Bilancio dei terrorismi italiani*, Istituto di studi e ricerche "Carlo Cattaneo", Bologna.

<sup>23</sup> Lumley R. (1998), *Dal '68 agli Anni di Piombo*, Giunti Gruppo Editoriale, Firenze.

<sup>24</sup> See among others: Flores M. and Franzinelli M. (2024), "Il processo di piazza Fontana" in *Conflitto tra poteri. Magistratura, politica e processi nell'Italia repubblicana*, Il Saggiatore, Milano

<sup>25</sup> Biscione F. M. (2020), "Strategia della tensione. Genesi e destino di un'espressione" in *Bibliomanie* 50.

<sup>26</sup> On the role played by these neo-fascist groups see also: Garbarino P. and Ferrari S. (2024), *Piazza della Loggia cinquant'anni dopo*, Red Star Press, Roma.

Considered as a hero by many post-war Italian fascists, Borghese<sup>27</sup> was honorary president (1951-1953) of the MSI. By founding the *Fronte Nazionale*, Borghese abandoned the MSI to support a harder fascist political orientation.

Former MSI activists were the founders (including Valerio Fioravanti and Francesca Mambro) of the *Nuclei Armati Rivoluzionari* (NAR, armed revolutionary groups; 1977-1981).

In addition to the that of Piazza Fontana, other massacres were attributed to black terrorism, namely those that occurred:

- on a train in the Gioia Tauro railways station (Southern Italy; 22 July 1970);
- in the small town of Peteano (Northern Italy; 31 May 1972);
- at the Milan police station (Northern Italy; 17 May 1973);
- in a square (Piazza della Loggia) in Brescia (Northern Italy; 28 May 1974);
- on a train (Italicus) near to the San Benedetto Val di Sambro railways station (Northern Italy; 4 August 1974);
- in the Bologna railways station (Northern Italy; 2 August 1980).

Benedetta Tobagi<sup>28</sup> summaries the judicial vicissitudes relating to the massacres:

- the Piazza Fontana massacre had three trials in 36 years (1969-2005);
- the train massacre at the Gioia Tauro railway station had two trials in 37 years (1970-2007);
- the Peteano massacre had four trials in 21 years (1972-1993);
- the massacre at the Milan police station had two trials in 32 years (1973-2005);
- the Piazza della Loggia massacre had four trials (the last of which is still ongoing) in 50 years (1974-2024);
- the Italicus train massacre had a trial and investigation in 20 years (1974-1994);
- the Bologna massacre had five trials (of which two are still ongoing) in 44 years (1980-2024).

Definitive guilty verdicts were reached for the massacres in Piazza Fontana, Peteano, at the Milan police station, in Piazza della Loggia and Bologna. The massacres of Gioia Tauro and on the Italicus train remained without guilty verdicts.

Through these trials, several exponents of black terrorism were convicted (including Fioravanti and Mambro), as well as some responsible for misdirection (including exponents of the deviant state secret services and Licio Gelli, head of the P2 Masonic lodge).

In addition to the massacres there were two coup attempts.

The first coup d'état, known as the "golpe Borghese", was planned (on the night of 7 and 8 December 1970) by Borghese with the involvement of army and police departments (including the state forestry corps) and the military intelligence service (SID). In addition to the *Fronte Nazionale*, the other neo-fascist groups involved in the failed coup were *Avanguardia Nazionale* and *Ordine Nuovo*. Immediately after the failure, the *Fronte Nazionale* was dissolved and Borghese took refuge in Spain governed by the pro-fascist dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

Lighter than the golpe Borghese, the second coup, known as the "golpe bianco" (white coup), was planned (for mid-August 1974) by Edgardo Sogno, a former anti-fascist and anti-communist partisan. The main intentions of the coup were: dissolution of Parliament; establishment of a military-led government; the banning of red wing and left wing political parties; recognition of a single trade union; establishment of a presidential republic in place of the existing parliamentarian system. The coup was foiled by an investigating judge (Luciano Violante) who opened (August 1974) a trial against Sogno. The latter fled and was arrested only two years later (1976) together with some of his collaborators.

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<sup>27</sup> During the fascist regime of Mussolini, Borghese became the commander of the elite naval sabotage unit *Decima Flottiglia MAS* (assault vehicle flotilla). After Italy's surrender to the Allies (8 September 1943), Borghese joined the *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* (RSI).

<sup>28</sup> Tobagi B. (2024), *Le stragi sono tutte un mistero*, Edizioni Laterza, Bari-Roma.



According to Giuseppe De Lutiis<sup>29</sup>, the most appropriated definition of “strategy of tension” can be found in the sentence that followed investigations relating to the Peteano massacre: a strategy aimed at fuelling collective panic and insecurity to produce needs and demands for order as a way of legitimising repressive intervention by a strong government (i.e. normalising the political and social situation); a strategy conceived and managed by centres of power located in the hearth of the state, which use intermediaries for operational tasks and protect them by hampering judicial investigations.

The characteristics mentioned above were also at the basis of the Portella della Ginestra massacre (Sicily; Southern Italy; 1 May 1947). The latter, as stated by Salvatore Lupo<sup>30</sup>, was the first case of a strategy of tension in the history of the Italian republic.

A shorter definition of “strategy of tension” was provided by Vincenzo Vinciguerra, one of the fascist terrorists responsible for the Peteano massacre<sup>31</sup>: “to destabilise the public order to stabilise the political order”.

According to his testimony<sup>32</sup>, by applying this formula, the state security services managed and manipulated both right-wing and left-wing political groups. The political aim of this strategy was to trigger, through serious provocations, a popular response of anger to be used for subsequent repression. The final objective was to arrive at the promulgation of exceptional laws (for example the declaration of a state of emergency).

Vinciguerra specified that the strategy of tension, nourished by aversion to communism, was activated in an international scenario supported by the system of Western alliances. Politicians and military services would have justified their actions against subversive attacks (both black and red terrorism) as a means of restoring law and order. In this way they would have obtained the approval of the majority of the population and, at an international level, the respect and consent of the other member states of NATO (i.e. the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, an intergovernmental military alliance signed in 1949 by the United States of America and other Western countries).

Always according to Vinciguerra, all massacres in Italy belonged to a single organised matrix, which was a parallel and secret structure embedded in state institutions, including components of the Ministry of the Interior and the *Carabinieri* (the national gendarmerie).

Ed Vulliamy<sup>33</sup> adds other confirmations provided by Vinciguerra on the secret structure:

- it was parallel to the armed forces;
- it acted with the aid of official secret services and political and military forces;
- it was a super-organisation made up of civilians and military forces, equipped with a communications network, weapons and explosives and men trained in their use;
- it had the task, on NATO’s behalf, of preventing a shift to the left in the country’s political balance.

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<sup>29</sup> De Lutiis G. (1992), “Il sistema eversivo” in ISODARCO, *Venti anni di violenza politica in Italia. 1969-1988*, Tomo 1, parte prima, Università La Sapienza, Roma. The sentence cited here is that of the Court of Venice (4 August 1986), “Sentenza-ordinanza di rinvio a giudizio contro Cicuttini Carlo più 33”.

<sup>30</sup> Lupo S. (2004), *Storia della mafia*, Donzelli editore, Roma. Lupo S. (2004), *Partito e antipartito*, Donzelli editore, Roma. The massacre was carried out by a gang of bandits (led by Salvatore Giuliano) linked to the separatist movement and the mafia. The victims of the massacre were farmers who were celebrating the International Workers’ Day (1 May) and the surprising victory of the communist and socialist parties in the elections for the constituent assembly of the autonomous region of Sicily (20 April 1947).

<sup>31</sup> Vinciguerra (former member of *Avanguardia Nazionale* and *Ordine Nuovo*) and Cicuttini (former secretary of a local section of the MSI and activist of *Ordine Nuovo*) were sentenced to life imprisonment (Assize Court of Venice – 25 July 1987, confirmed by Court of Assize of Appeal of Venice – 5 April 1989).

<sup>32</sup> The Vinciguerra’s testimony given on 29 June 1984 is reported in the sentences of: Court of Assize of Appeal of Milan (22 July 2015) relating to the Brescia massacre; Court of Assize of Bologna (9 January 2020 and 6 April 2022) relating to the Bologna massacre.

<sup>33</sup> Vulliamy Ed (1990) “Secret agents, freemasons, fascists...and top-level campaign of political ‘destabilisation’: ‘Strategy of tension’ that brought carnage and cover-up” in *The Guardian*; available in: [https://www.cambridgeclarion.org/press\\_cuttings/vinciguerra.p2.etc\\_graun\\_5dec1990.html](https://www.cambridgeclarion.org/press_cuttings/vinciguerra.p2.etc_graun_5dec1990.html).

According to Vulliamy, confirmation of Vinciguerra's statements came six years later, when (1990) the then prime minister Giulio Andreotti revealed (to the Chamber of Deputies) the existence of Gladio, an occult organisation created with the approval of the political authorities, a clandestine paramilitary network aimed at countering the Warsaw Pact (i.e. the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, an intergovernmental military alliance signed in 1955 by the Soviet Union and the other socialist republics of the East).

In Italy the first decisions regarding the creation of a clandestine structure were taken (1951) at least five years before the formal foundation (1956) of Gladio through an agreement between the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the United States of America and the Italian military secret service (SIFAR)<sup>34</sup>.

This agreement, permitted by the NATO treaty, strengthened the already existing structure as a component of a network organised (since 1948) by several European intelligence services in close connection with the NATO military organisation.

The Italian Gladio was a branch of NATO's clandestine *Stay-behind* activities. Although Gladio refers specifically to Italy, Operation Gladio was used as the informal name of the *Stay-behind* network. Operation Gladio had the task of supporting the regular armies in the event of an invasion by the Soviet Union and other member states of the Warsaw Pact.

The Italian Gladio, similarly to what happened in other countries of the network, was implemented as a clandestine structure capable of carrying out information, infiltration, propaganda, guerrilla and sabotage activities.

The Gladio structures made use of the military secret services (first SIFAR, then SID and SISMI) and external volunteer staff. Gladio was dismantled (1990) and its resources transferred to the ordinary defense structure almost in parallel with the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (1991) coinciding with the end of the Cold War.

The theoretical foundation of the strategy of tension was developed in a conference (3-5 May 1965) organised by a private institute close to the Ministry of Defence (the Istituto Alberto Pollio) at the Parco dei Principi hotel in Rome<sup>35</sup>.

The conference was attended by the highest ranks of the armed forces, representatives of the industrial sectors, the judiciary and political parties, as well as university students (mainly neo-fascists) some of whom subsequently involved in the massacres already mentioned.

The main theme of this conference was the revolutionary warfare, a doctrine aimed at combating the communist threat in Italy through irregular means. The latter, while excluding an open coup d'état and the banning of the communist party, envisaged actions aimed at promoting forms of political extremism and terrorist events.

The Pollio conference took place almost a year after an attempted anti-communist coup d'état.

Known as *Piano Solo*, it was (June-July 1964) a plot planned by Giovanni de Lorenzo, at that time commander of the *Carabinieri*, in collaboration with the Italian military intelligence services (SIFAR and SID) and the Italian section of the CIA. The plot was called *Solo* (Italian for "alone") because the *Carabinieri* were the only army tasked with carrying out the coup attempt<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> See: Camera dei Deputati (1992), *Relazione sulla Operazione Gladio*, Atti Parlamentari X Legislatura, Rome; Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, Volume Primo, Tomo II, *Elaborati presentati dai commissari* (26 aprile 2001).

<sup>35</sup> See: Flamini G. (1981), *Il partito del golpe. 1964-1968*, Volume primo, Italo Bovolenta editore, Ferrara; De Lutiis G. (1992), "Il sistema eversivo" in ISODARCO, *Venti anni di violenza politica in Italia. 1969-1988*, Tomo 1, parte prima, Università La Sapienza, Roma; Cento Bull A. C. (2012), *Italian Neofascism: The Strategy of Tension and the Politics of Nonreconciliation*, Berghahn Books, New York, Oxford.

<sup>36</sup> See: Flamini G. (1981), *Il partito del golpe. 1964-1968* (Volume primo) and *1968-1970* (Volume secondo), Italo Bovolenta editore, Ferrara.

Although substantial historical documentation is still lacking, clues and testimonies seem to demonstrate links between the *Piano Solo* and the clandestine paramilitary organisations triggered by the conspiracy<sup>37</sup>.

There were two in particular, both with clear anti-communist purposes and probably active until 1973: the Nuclei di Difesa dello Stato (NDS; state defence units) associated with the functions of Gladio; the Rosa dei Venti (rose of the winds) a subversive structure that did not correspond to the *Stay-behind* and with a more marked neo-fascist political orientation.

## 6. The red side of the Years of Lead

The end of the Years of Lead is often identified with the dissolution of the strongest red terrorist group: the *Brigate Rosse* (BR, red brigades).

The original group of the BR was formed (1970) as a transformation of the *Collettivo Politico Metropolitano* (CPM; metropolitan political collective; 1969; Milan)<sup>38</sup>. Among the founders were Renato Curcio and his wife Margherita Cagol (militants in the student movement of the University of Trento; Northern Italy), Alberto Franceschini and Prospero Gallinari (former members of the youth organisation of the communist party in Reggio Emilia; Northern Italy), Corrado Simioni (former member of the socialist party in Milan; Northern Italy).

Separating from the original group, Simioni, almost immediately (1970) founded the *Superclan*, so nicknamed due to its profound clandestinity. Initially, Gallinari and Mario Moretti (former member of the CPM) joined the *Superclan*, but subsequently they re-joined the BR (in 1971 and 1973 respectively).

Moretti became (1976) the undisputed leader of the BR after the capture of Curcio and Franceschini (1974) and the killing of Cagol (1975) by the *Carabinieri*.

Simioni and other members of the *Superclan* emigrated (1976) to France (Paris) where they founded *Hyperion*, formally a language school, but probably according to some enquiries<sup>39</sup> a liaison centre for international terrorism also with the support of some secret services.

Activists from two small terrorist groups converged in the BR, namely the former members of the *Gruppo XXII Ottobre* (22 October group; 1969-1971; founded by Mario Rossi in Genoa; Northern Italy) and of the *Gruppi d'Azione Partigiana* (GAP, partisan action groups; 1970-1972; founded by Giangiacomo Feltrinelli; Northern Italy). This occurred after the dismantling of *Gruppo XXII Ottobre* by security forces and of the GAP due to the death of Feltrinelli during an attempted terrorist attack on a high voltage pylon near Milan.

The action of the BR reached its peak with the assassination (1978) of the prime minister Aldo Moro (leader of the *Democrazia Cristiana*, Christian democracy, the most important centrewing political party) in Rome.

Eight months later (1979), in Genoa, the BR murdered Guido Rossa, member of CGIL (Italian general confederation of labour, the most important trade union) and of the communist party.

These two terrorist events were crucial for the BR. In addition to the repression carried out by the security forces, the opposition of the trade unions, the traditional parties of the left, as well as of the new left, to terrorism has resolutely contributed to the isolation of the BR.

The condemnation of the BR by the unions was notable.

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<sup>37</sup> See: Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, Volume Primo, Tomo II, *Elaborati presentati dai commissari* (26 aprile 2001).

<sup>38</sup> See among others: Casamassima P. (2022), *Brigate Rosse. Storia del partito armato dalle origini all'omicidio Biagi (1970-2002)*, Baldini+Castoldi, Milano.

<sup>39</sup> See the enquiries carried out by the Parliamentary Commissions on terrorism (2001) and on the kidnapping and death of Aldo Moro (2016): Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, Volume Primo, Tomo VI, *Elaborati presentati dai commissari* (26 aprile 2001); Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul rapimento e sulla morte di Aldo Moro, *Relazione del presidente Giuseppe Fioroni* (21 dicembre 2016).

For example, Luciano Lama (general secretary of the CGIL) declares<sup>40</sup> (1978) that: the BR are a gang of murderers aimed at destroying democracy, freedom and equality; only a new type of fascism, a dictatorial regime and a new civil war can arise from the armed struggle of the BR.

The BR suffered a loss of consensus accompanied by internal splits. The most important was the rupture of some militants including Valerio Morucci and Adriana Faranda (former members of *Potere Operaio*). The latter, in opposition to the ferociously murderous political line, entered into competition with the BR and formed, together with other small terrorist groups, the *Movimento Comunista Rivoluzionario* (MCR, revolutionary communist movement; 1979-1980).

There were changes in the political direction of the BR: Moretti (together with Enrico Fenzi) was arrested (1981); Giovanni Senzani and Antonio Savasta emerged as leaders, both arrested (1982) in separated occurrences with other terrorists (1982).

Further fragmentation accelerated the dismantling of the BR, as demonstrated for example by four new minor terrorist groups: *BR-Colonna Walter Alasia* (BR-WA, Walter Alasia column; 1980-1983); *BR-Partito della Guerriglia* (BR-PG, guerrilla party; 1981-1983); *BR-Partito Comunista Combattente* (BR-PCC, communist combatant party; 1981-1988); *BR-Unione dei Comunisti Combattenti* (BR-UCC, union of combatant communists; 1984-1987).

The life of the BR was intertwined and in competition with that of other red terrorist groups. Among these, the most relevant resulted from the dissolution of the far-left movements *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaio*.

From *Lotta Continua* came the *Nuclei Armati Proletari* (NAP, proletarian armed groups; 1974-1977). Former militants of *Lotta Continua* and *Potere Operaio* constituted the *Comitati Comunisti per il Potere Operaio* (CCPO, communist committees for workers' power; 1975-1976), from which four other groups arose: *Formazioni Comuniste Armate* (FCA, communist armed formations; 1975-1977); *Unità Comuniste Combattenti* (UCC, communist combatant units; 1976-1979); *Prima Linea* (PL, first line; 1976-1981); *Comitati Comunisti Rivoluzionari* (CoCoRi, revolutionary communist committees; 1976-1984).

Linked to the intricate area of *Autonomia Operaia* (derived from *Potere Operaio*) were two main terrorist groups: *Brigate Comuniste* (BC, communist brigades; 1976-1977) then transformed into *Formazioni Comuniste Combattenti* (FCC, communist combatant formations; 1977-1979); *Proletari Armati per il Comunismo* (PAC, armed proletarians for communism; 1977-1979). Separating from the FCC, the action of the *Reparti Comunisti d'Attacco* (RCA, communist attack units; 1978-1980) began.

Former BC, UCC and FCC militants founded another group called *Brigata XXVIII Marzo* (XXVIII March brigade) that lasted just a year (1980).

## 7. Emergency anti-terrorism laws

Among the tools to defeat the terrorism was the so-called *pentitismo*, a practice according to which a terrorist, once arrested, collaborates with the judicial authorities by providing information in return for a reduction in sentence, or even for personal reasons.

Parliament approved two laws (No. 15/1980 and 304/1982) to strengthen the practice of collaborators of justice, a legal term to designate those who are colloquially called *pentiti* (repentants), in order to counter the emergency of terrorism and maintain constitutional order.

Another law (No. 34/1987) strengthened dissociation, a practice (introduced by law No. 15/1980) in favour of those (i.e. *dissociati*, dissociated in English) who, accused or convicted, have definitively abandoned terrorism.

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<sup>40</sup> Speech by Luciano Lama, CGIL General Secretary, Venice 25 April 1978. Archivio storico CGIL nazionale, Fondo Luciano Lama, INT 1, 33-38, fasc. 14. Available in: <https://www.fondazionedivittorio.it/sites/default/files/content-attachment/Disorso%20Luciano%20Lama%20Segretario%20generale%20CGIL.%20Venezia%2025%20aprile%201978.pdf>.

The dissociated must admit the activities actually carried out and objectively and univocally repudiate violence as a method of political struggle. Under these conditions, they can benefit from a reduction in sentence.

Collaborators of justice and dissociated in the ranks of black terrorism were rare compared to those in the galaxy of red terrorism.

According to the available historiographical literature<sup>41</sup>, the first *pentito* (repentant) was Carlo Fioroni, responsible of the illegal structure of *Potere Operaio* and member of the *Gruppi d'Azione Partigiana*.

Once arrested (1975), his collaboration allowed the then deputy prosecutor Pietro Calogero to issue (on 7 April 1979) 22 arrest warrants against well-known members of *Potere Operaio* and *Autonomia Operaia*, including Antonio Negri and Franco Piperno.

A counter-terrorism trial began (known as the "April 7 case"), which involved almost 80 people at various stages and ended nine years later (1988) with notable sentence reductions and several acquittals. While confirming the political crime of subversive association, the main accusation was cancelled: the alleged responsibility of Negri and other defendants in armed insurrection, direction of initiatives carried out by the BR, including the kidnapping and murder of Aldo Moro.

After the arrest of the main leaders of *Potere Operaio*, there was a notable decline in the initiatives carried out by this group and an increase in political disorientation among its members.

As regards the BR, the first collaborator of justice was Patrizio Peci (arrested in 1980) followed by Antonio Savasta (arrested in 1982).

As regards *Prima Linea* (PL), the first collaborator of justice was Sergio Zedda followed by Fabrizio Giai, Roberto Sandalo, Michele Viscardi and Marco Donat Cattin (all arrested during 1980).

Key collaborator of justice was Marco Barbone (arrested in 1980), the leader of *Brigata XXVIII Marzo*, who also knew well the activity of PL, CoCoRi and other smaller groups.

Above all, Peci, Giai, Sandalo and Barbone provided such important information as to allow the judicial authorities to seriously strike the terrorist groups to which they belonged to and in some cases to determine their dissolution (e.g. *Brigata XXVIII Marzo* in 1980 and PL in 1983)<sup>42</sup>.

The dissolution of the BR was declared (23 October 1988) by a group of intransigent militants (including Gallinari) with a document in which they admitted the defeat of the BR, their dismantling through imprisonment, organisational fragmentation and the lack of militants. As a result, they announced that the BR's war against the state was over. The declaration was also signed by former militants of two other terrorist groups (NAP and UCC)<sup>43</sup>.

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<sup>41</sup> See among others: Flores M. and Franzinelli M. (2024), "L'inchiesta 7 aprile" in *Conflitto tra poteri. Magistratura, politica e processi nell'Italia repubblicana*, Il Saggiatore, Milano; Grandi A. (2023), *La generazione degli anni perduti. Storia di Potere Operaio*, Chiarelettere, Milano; Pacifici G. (2017), "Il PCI, Autonomia Operaia e l'emergenza terrorismo: il caso 7 aprile 1979", in *Storicamente.Org, Studi e Ricerche*, n. 12-2016; L'Arengario – Studio Bibliografico (2010), *Il processo 7 aprile nelle fotografie di Tono D'Amico*, Edizioni dell'Arengario, Gussago.

<sup>42</sup> See: Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla strage di via Fani, sul sequestro e l'assassinio di Aldo Moro e sul terrorismo in Italia (1993), *Requisitoria del PM Armando Spataro nel procedimento penale concernente l'attività di Prima Linea – CoCoRi – Metropoli*; Tanturli A. (2017), *La parabola di Prima Linea*, Università degli studi di Urbino Carlo Bo; Iadeluca et al. (2021), *Storia dell'eversione nel nostro paese. I processi contro il terrorismo*, Vol. XIII, Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, Città del Vaticano; Guiducci E. (2023), "Quando la fine appare l'inizio: l'evoluzione della lotta armata fra pentitismo e dissociazioni in Brigate Rosse e Prima Linea" in *Bibliomanie* 56.

<sup>43</sup> See: ISODARCO (1992), *Venti anni di violenza politica in Italia. 1969-1988*, Tomo 2, parte seconda, Università La Sapienza, Roma; Clementi M. (2007), *Storia delle Brigate Rosse*, Odradek Edizioni, Roma.

It was in the same year (1988) that the last, most famous case of *pentitismo* occurred involving former leaders (Adriano Sofri and Giorgio Pietrostefani) and former activists (Ovidio Bompreschi and Leonardo Marino) of *Lotta Continua*.

Marino presented himself to the *Carabinieri* and confessed to having taken part in the assassination of Luigi Calabresi, police commissioner in charge of the Milan department.

The assassination took place 16 years earlier (1972) and was motivated by Calabresi's alleged responsibility in the death of Giuseppe Pinelli at the police station<sup>44</sup>. Pinelli was an anarchist activist investigated in relation to the Piazza Fontana massacre (1969). He fell from a window of the police building during an interrogation and the officers present said he committed suicide. The circumstances of this event were never clarified and it was dismissed as an accidental death.

In the aftermath of Calabresi's assassination, the *Lotta Continua* newspaper (in a short editorial probably written by Sofri), stated that: although political murder is certainly not the decisive weapon for emancipation from capitalist domination and clandestine armed action is not the decisive form of class struggle, these considerations cannot lead anyone to deplore the killing of Calabresi, an act in which the exploited recognise their desire for justice.

Marino said that his declaration of responsibility was motivated by the sense of guilt accumulated over many years combined with a spiritual sense of repentance. He declared that he drove the car used in the assassination while Bompreschi shot the commissioner and that the operation had been authorised by Sofri and Pietrostefani.

On the basis of Marino's statements, Sofri, Pietrostefani and Bompreschi were arrested (1988). A complex and controversial cycle of judicial processes began (1990), which lasted over ten years (2000). There were 9 trials with an alternation of 6 sentences of conviction (1990, 1991, 1995, 1997 and two in 2000), 1 sentence of acquittal (1993) and 2 annulments of previous sentences (1992 and 1994)<sup>45</sup>.

With the first trial (1990), Sofri, Pietrostefani and Bompreschi were sentenced to 22 years in prison: the first two as instigators and the third as executor. Marino was sentenced to 11 years in prison for his repentance and his collaboration with the judicial authorities. Subsequently (1995), his crime was declared extinguished and he was acquitted. The Court of Cassation confirmed (1997) these sentences. A similar decision was taken by the Court of Appeal of Venice (2000), positively recognising that Marino did not benefit from the laws (approved in 1980 and 1982) on collaborators of justice. The Court of Cassation confirmed (2000) Venice's decision and the sentences became final.

## **8. The human cost of terrorism**

The nineteen Years of Lead (12 December 1969 - 23 October 1988) were strewn with murders, injuries and kidnappings by black and red terrorists. Only a few red terrorist actions carried out by small groups followed (three murders until 2003).

As Miguel Gotor explains<sup>46</sup>, 1978 was a watershed for terrorism (both red and black): its exponential growth was followed by a progressive defeat of the armed struggle. So the defeat was not immediate. For example, BR attacks increased over the course of another three years (until 1981) when they began to decline.

The number of terrorist events and related victims varies depending on the methods of examination as shown by the following sources of information.

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<sup>44</sup> See: Flores M. and Franzinelli M. (2024), "L'omicidio Calabresi e l'ombra lunga di Lotta Continua" in *Conflitto tra poteri. Magistratura, politica e processi nell'Italia repubblicana*, Il Saggiatore, Milano.

<sup>45</sup> See: Corte d'Appello di Venezia (24 gennaio 2000), *Sentenza di revisione nei confronti di Bompreschi Ovidio, Pietrostefani Giorgio, Sofri Adriano e Marino Leonardo*.

<sup>46</sup> Gotor M. (2024), *Generazione settanta. Storia del decennio più lungo del secolo breve (1966-1982)*, Einaudi, Torino.

An accurate analysis, carried out by Donatella Della Porta and Maurizio Rossi<sup>47</sup>, covers the period 1969-1982 reporting the following data. 2,712 attacks were claimed by terrorist organisations (81% by red groups and 19% by black groups).

In claiming their attacks, the groups used 657 different acronyms (82% of which were red terrorism and 18% black terrorism).

The victims were 1,119, of which 689 (62%) were due to the aforementioned massacres (i.e. black terrorism) and 430 (38%) to individual attacks. There were 768 injured (69%) and 351 dead (31%). Individual attacks caused 213 deaths (61%) and massacres caused 138 deaths (39%). Overall, 68% of victims (758) and 53% of deaths (186) are attributable to black terrorism.

More recently (2018), a newspaper article<sup>48</sup> reported the number of 370 deaths and almost 1,000 injuries between 1969 and 1988. According to the article, around 6,000 people were investigated by judiciary authorities as involved in terrorist activities (of which almost 4,000 as red terrorists).

By consulting the current web portal of AIVITER<sup>49</sup> (Italian association of victims of terrorism), 362 deaths can be calculated between 1969 and 2003, of which 227 (63%) attributed to individual terrorist attacks and 135 (37%) to massacres.

According to Salvatore Lupo<sup>50</sup>, although impressive, these numbers are not comparable to those of a civil war such as, for example, the Italian liberation war of 1943-1945<sup>51</sup>.

## 9. Narratives on terrorist events

The source of the narratives is the enormous literature available today on the history of the Years of Lead and on the strategy of tension. Accurate analyses are generally found in the scientific literature. Historians support their narratives with research and interpretation of documents. The documentation includes biographies, memoirs, journalistic publications, judicial sentences, judicial investigations and parliamentary enquiries.

Historians do not judge but observe real facts and formulate hypotheses about their occurrence. Courts of justice formulate sentences that should be taken into account as narratives on how judicial investigations are recognised as an effective contribution to determining the truth about terroristic events. The enquiries carried out by parliamentary commissions are useful narratives for reaching a consensus between different points of view on terroristic events.

According to Lupo<sup>52</sup>, red terrorism triggered the strategy of tension just as black terrorism did. The central objective of the BR was to promote fractures of left-wing movements through armed struggle. Among the political groups of the far-left wing, *Potere Operaio* was the most committed to the creation of an armed party capable of promoting insurrectionary solutions.

Lupo quotes the words of Negri, leader of *Potere Operaio* and philosopher of the area of autonomy, to demonstrate how he was in favour of a permanent civil war.

Lupo quotes the words of Moretti, leader of the BR, who explained that Moro's assassination was decisive in countering the communist party's strategy based on parliamentary

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<sup>47</sup> Della Porta D. and Rossi M. (1984), *Cifre Crudeli. Bilancio dei terrorismi italiani*, Istituto di studi e ricerche "Carlo Cattaneo", Bologna.

<sup>48</sup> Bianconi G. and Gabanelli M. (2018), "Gli anni di piombo: dove sono oggi i terroristi?" in *Corriere della Sera* 6 maggio. Available in: <https://www.corriere.it/dataroom-milena-gabanelli/anni-piombo-terroristi-dove-sono-oggi/da05537e-4fb5-11e8-add4-a53a42c91877-va.shtml>.

<sup>49</sup> AIVITER available in: <https://www.vittimerrorismo.it/>.

<sup>50</sup> Lupo S. (2013), "La Guerra civile immaginata. Un dilemma dell'Italia repubblicana" in *Meridiana* n. 76.

<sup>51</sup> In the twenty months of the war of liberation (also called Resistance) the deaths amounted to 76,420 people of which 14,350 civilians (19%) and 62,070 partisans (81%). See: Strati F. (2024), *Il vento di destra in Italia*, also available in: <https://www.srseuropa.eu/>.

<sup>52</sup> Lupo S. (2013), "La Guerra civile immaginata. Un dilemma dell'Italia repubblicana" in *Meridiana* n. 76.

confrontation and negotiation with other political parties, primarily with the Christian democracy party.

Lupo quotes the words of Fenzi, former BR militant, who clarified that the armed struggle was not a political formula (or means) but a political end, the only way to escape the party system (*partitocrazia* in Italian).

According to Lupo, the rhetoric of anti-party politics (i.e. the fight against *partitocrazia*<sup>53</sup>) brings the political lexicon of the far-left closer to that of the far-right movements. He explains that the intent to inextricably unite political and military objectives recalls the historical precedent (1919) of the paramilitary *Fasci Italiani di Combattimento* (Italian fighting leagues) then (1921) transformed into the National Fascist Party, defined as a "militia party". Both were founded by Mussolini as a response to the so-called "red biennium" (1919-1920), a short but intense period of social conflict with strikes organised by trade unions due to the social and economic crisis originating from the First World War.

In conclusion, Lupo considers the scope of the strategy of tension as the confluence of different and multiple actors in a game of mirrors in which everyone manipulates everyone. For him this interpretation is more convincing than the one based on the existence of a conspiracy centre orchestrated by occult organisations, such as the P2 Masonic lodge led by Gelli, also called "great puppeteer" or "grand old man".

Gotor writes<sup>54</sup> that the memoirs of some members of the BR published once red terrorism was defeated were full of key words such as *partitocrazia* and caste, which they used retrospectively to justify their actions against the system of political parties and institutions, in a word against democracy. The objective was clear: to seize the growing wind of anti-party politics and use it to one's advantage.

According to Massimo L. Salvadori<sup>55</sup>, the opposing extremisms (red violence and black violence) operated within a strategy of tension whose orchestrators were the deviant state secret services with their actions that included the covering up and misdirection of investigations and responsibilities. The convergent objective of the opposing extremisms, one aimed at the proletarian revolution and the other at the authoritarian order, was the demolition of democratic institutions. The secret P2 Masonic lodge (through which Gelli forged close relationships with politicians, businessmen, high officials and members of the armed forces) played a primary role in plots against the constitutional order.

Salvadori argues that the bloody confrontation of the Years of Lead was between enemies and supporters of democratic institutions, and not between government parties and parliamentary opposition parties. The opposing extremisms assumed the role of anti-state and anti-system forces, relentlessly enemies of each other. This situation had an analogy with the past, namely with what happened in 1919-1922, when socialists and communists on the one hand and nationalists and fascists on the other rose up against the liberal state.

44 years after the Bologna massacre (1980), its instigators and perpetrators have been identified following the 19 sentences pronounced in 5 trials (1987-1995; 1997-2007; 2000-2003; 2017-2020; 2020-2024). So far the latest sentence was formulated (8 July 2024) by the Court of Assize and Appeal of Bologna and confirmed the previous sentence of the Assize Court of Bologna (6 April 2022). The latter (hereinafter referred to as the "key sentence") constitutes the epitome of the narratives relating to the strategy of tension and the Years of Lead.

The grounds for the judgement (1,724 pages published on 5 April 2023) contextualise the terrorist events that occurred over a long period of time in which the Bologna massacre was embedded. To this end, the judges used numerous sources of information including: historical analyses with contributions from historians, researchers and consultants; testimonials; statements; judicial sentences; results achieved by parliamentary commissions.

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<sup>53</sup> For a complete analysis of anti-*partitocrazia* movements see: Lupo S. (2013), *Antipartiti*, Donzelli editore, Roma; Lupo S. (2004), *Partito e Antipartito*, Donzelli editore, Roma.

<sup>54</sup> Gotor M. (2020), *Il memoriale della Repubblica*, Einaudi, Torino.

<sup>55</sup> Salvadori M. L. (1994), *Storia d'Italia, crisi di regime e crisi di sistema*, il Mulino, Bologna.



Among the impressive number of judicial sentences were those concerning the massacres in Piazza Fontana and Peteano, at the Milan police station, in Piazza della Loggia and on the Italicus train. The Court took into account the results achieved by the parliamentary commissions on: terrorism and massacres; the kidnapping and death of Aldo Moro; the P2 Masonic lodge of Gelli; the case of the banker Michele Sindona because it was connected to that of Gelli<sup>56</sup>.

The judges were aware that the task of a Court is to carry out, as far as possible, a broad and accurate search and verification of the evidence in order to reconstruct the truth through the trial. Although the results may not reflect historical truth, they contribute to (do not reach) the understanding of the overall picture in which the examined events fit. For both the judge and the historian, the results of the investigations and analyses may not be definitive but may come close to the truth based on the available documentation.

As stated in the key sentence, while judges finalise their task with a sentence necessary to impose a sanction, to exonerate a defendant or in case of doubt to suspend judgement, for historians every uncertain conclusion is the basis for further research. The historian's experience helps the judge to understand, on the technical terrain of evidentiary research, the context that could compensate for the documentary gap through historically determined perspectives. The judge's experience helps the historian to develop new research by re-elaborating the contents and results of judicial investigations and sentences. The results of the research, in turn, allow the judge to carry out new investigations and formulate new judgements.

According to the key sentence, Bologna was at the peak of a season of massacres linked to the internal and international political order originated from the Second World War with the victory of democracy over fascism.

In Italy, after the end of the war, almost all the former exponents of the fascist dictatorial regime were reabsorbed into the public administration of the new democratic republic. The state secret services were full of former officials of the OVRA (organisation for vigilance and repression of anti-fascism) and the fascist RSI (Italian social republic).

This aspect of the post-fascism transition is a key to understanding the affinity and complicity between deviant state secret services and subversive far-right extremism during the strategy of tension.

The Court examined the implications of the Cold War in the Italian political arena. These implications have favoured the initiatives adopted by members of the state secret services and other agencies (including military apparatus, P2 lodge and neo-fascist organisations) to cover (and protect) people and groups involved in terrorist actions, as well as instilling misdirection in judicial investigations and judgments motivated by the fight against communist threats.

In support of the above, it is worth citing Guido Melis's analysis<sup>57</sup> on the continuity of the high levels of state bureaucracy in the post-fascist transition and on the limits of the anti-fascist purge (*defascistizzazione* in Italian). It should be added that a similar transition affected the judicial power, as demonstrated by Marcello Flores and Mimmo Franzinelli<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> Sindona was a banker involved in mafia organisations and a member of the P2 Masonic lodge. He had relationships with the Vatican bank IOR. He was sentenced (1986) to life imprisonment as instigator of the murder of lawyer Giorgio Ambrosoli. A few days after the sentence, Sindona died (1986) of poisoning in prison.

<sup>57</sup> Melis G. (2014), *Fare lo Stato per fare gli italiani*, il Mulino, Bologna. Melis G. (1996), *Storia dell'amministrazione italiana (1861-1993)*, il Mulino, Bologna.

<sup>58</sup> Flores M. and Franzinelli M. (2024), *Conflitto tra poteri. Magistratura, politica e processi nell'Italia repubblicana*, Il Saggiatore, Milano. See, in particular, the first chapter "Rotture e continuità" in which the complexity of the transition from the fascist and post-fascist periods is also explained by citing high-ranking officials such as Gaetano Azzariti who headed (1939-1943) the Commission on Race under fascism and became president of the Constitutional Court (1957-1961) under the democratic republic.

As regards the Cold War<sup>59</sup>, it should be added that it favoured the right-wing political area in many respects. For a long period of time, the Cold War worked smoothly to maintain the post-war order amidst all the geopolitical tensions between the United States of America (USA or US) and the Soviet Union (USSR) and their respective allies (i.e. the so-called Western Bloc and Eastern Bloc).

The strategy of the Western Bloc was committed to the fight against communist threats. Since its inception, the new international context has allowed the criminals of Nazism and Fascism to benefit from the cover-up of investigations, the reduction of sanctions and acquittals in Italy and Germany, as documented by Filippo Focardi<sup>60</sup>.

In the analysis of the strategy of tension, significant contributions to the key sentence came from the judgements of the Court of Assizes of Appeal of Milan (1 December 2004 and 22 July 2015) concerning respectively the massacres at the Milan police station and in Piazza della Loggia. These judgements reported in detail the contents of the definition given by Vinciguerra (to destabilise the public order to stabilise the political order).

In the analysis of the role played by Gelli and his P2 Masonic lodge in the strategy of tension that includes the Bologna massacre, the key sentence referred closely to what emerged from the parliamentary commission on this lodge.

The commission's final report<sup>61</sup> encourages a vision of reality in its multifaceted and often elusive coherence in order to avoid a simplistic and unwise assessment of the more complex relationships between P2, black subversive forces and groups, as well as deviant state secret services.

Gelli operated as a connecting actor between forces of different origins and relevance. P2 did not identify with subversive environments, but adopted new and more sophisticated strategies by using subversive action instrumentally. Gelli's plan aimed to anonymously and surreptitiously control and influence government policy by acting as a collateral security mechanism against the growth of left-wing parties and organisations in order to prepare an authoritarian turn. To this end, Gelli made use of two fundamental tools: the acquisition of the means of communication and information; the admission of high-ranking representatives (of the armed forces and public administration) into the P2 lodge.

In support of the above, it is worth reading a late interview (2008) given by Gelli in which he stated that: "With the P2 we had Italy in our hands. At that time there was the army, the financial guard, the police: they were clearly commanded by people from the P2 Masonic lodge (...). We never wanted to attack (...), but we were a sentinel so that the communist party did not emerge". The interview is reported in an article written by Marcello Flores and Mimmo Franzinelli<sup>62</sup> who explain that Gelli's role was aimed at protecting and promoting particular interests within unstable environments characterised by the usual actors of the official and informal scenes in the osmosis between political powers and the criminal underworld.

In conclusion, the key sentence provided essential components of the overall picture that confirms the fascist matrix of the massacres, the intertwining of the terroristic events, the participation in them of the same people and organisations.

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<sup>59</sup> In historiography there is no common agreement on the start and end dates of the Cold War. The prevailing opinion attributes its birth to the speech (1947) with which the president of the United States of America Harry Truman defined US foreign policy (Truman doctrine) and associates its conclusion with the dissolution (1991) of the Soviet Union.

<sup>60</sup> Focardi F. (2006), "La questione dei processi ai criminali di guerra tedeschi in Italia: fra punizione, frenata, insabbiamento di Stato, giustizia tardiva (1943-2005)" in *Storicamente*, 2.

<sup>61</sup> Commissione parlamentare d'inchiesta sulla Loggia massonica P2, *Relazione della presidente Tina Anselmi* (12 luglio 1984).

<sup>62</sup> Flores M. and Franzinelli M. (2024), "Licio Gelli e la P2: tanto rumore per nulla?" in *Conflitto tra poteri. Magistratura, politica e processi nell'Italia repubblicana*, Il Saggiatore, Milano. The interview was conducted by Klaus Davi on 4 December 2008.

The two parliamentary commissions on terrorism and the murder of Moro investigated red terrorism and, specifically, its main organisation: the BR. The commissions considered both the national and international connotations of the BR and arrived at quite similar conclusions.

The national dimension appeared clarified in a context comparable and parallel to that of black terrorism, i.e. complex relationships between the galaxy of red terrorist groups and deviant state secret services, contradictions and misdirection in judicial investigations and judgements.

The international connotation remained unclear and suspicious. The attention of the commissions was focused on the role played by the *Hyperion* language school.

According to the commission on terrorism<sup>63</sup>, *Hyperion* may have been a network through which the BR maintained relationships with terrorist groups operating in other countries. The commission underlined the hypothesis according to which the founder of *Hyperion* (Simioni, former creator of the *Superclan*) was considered the "grand old man of the BR".

This expression was coined (1978) by Steve Pieczenik, a psychologist from the counterterrorism section of the US State Department, sent to Italy to help find solutions during the Moro kidnapping as a member of an unofficial committee created by the Italian interior minister Francesco Cossiga. The expression was also used (1980) by Bettino Craxi (secretary of the socialist party). The search for a grand old man is another parallel to black terrorism with a similar role assigned to Gelli.

The commission, making use of elements based on evidence, clues and conflicting testimonies, came to the conclusion that the BR were not directed from the outside and that apart from them were no other instigators of the Moro murder. There were institutional responsibilities, collusions, inefficiencies and intentional errors. Once again the deviant secret services, whose officials were member of the P2, often acted in connection with those of foreigner powers.

The commission reconstructed the historical context (from the end of the Second World War onwards) in which black and red terrorisms took place. The analysis of black terrorism concerned the massacres attributed to it. The analysis of red terrorism concerned in particular the relationships between the BR and the extra-parliamentary political organizations of the new left, namely *Potere Operaio* and its derivative *Autonomia Operaia*. The role of their leaders (namely Negri and Piperno) also emerged at an international level. These political relationships were also nourished by personal, professional (especially academic) and family ties.

Analysing a possible role played by the *Superclan* and *Hyperion*, the commission on the kidnapping and murder of Moro<sup>64</sup> came to the conclusion that this event was not only a consequence of national red terrorism, but had an international character in which a greater number of forces interacted, even directly, with the BR, often influencing the dynamics of the episode thanks to the presence of multiple grey areas, permeable to different pressures.

According to Giovanni Fasanella<sup>65</sup>, a considerable and shapeless grey area was the one originating from the crisis of *Potere Operaio* and *Lotta Continua*. Their former illegal structures and their intellectuals formed the backbone of *Autonomia Operaia*, which served as the political, ideological and military ferment from which the various red terrorist organisations originated. This increasingly radicalised grey zone was the laboratory in which to build the armed party.

Fasanella points out that the BR, once led by Moretti, drew heavily on this reservoir of politically disoriented activists to become the most competitive organisation for the armed party's leadership. Especially with the kidnapping and murder of Moro (also called the "Moro case"), the BR entered larger grey areas.

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<sup>63</sup> Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul terrorismo in Italia e sulle cause della mancata individuazione dei responsabili delle stragi, Volume Primo, Tomo V Parte seconda e Tomo VI, *Elaborati presentati dai commissari* (26 aprile 2001).

<sup>64</sup> Commissione parlamentare di inchiesta sul rapimento e sulla morte di Aldo Moro, *Relazione del presidente Giuseppe Fioroni* (6 dicembre 2017).

<sup>65</sup> Fasanella G. (2018), *Il puzzle Moro*, Chiarelettere, Milano.

For Fasanella, the Moro case constituted an international case par excellence characterised by close and dirty alliances between red terrorism, the armed party wanted by the *Autonomia Operaia*, deviant state secret services, international interests and mafia organisations.

Mario José Cereghino and Giovanni Fasanella<sup>66</sup> argue that, due to its national and international complicity, the Moro case cannot be reconstructed except within the history of Italy and the geopolitical conflicts following the end of the Second World War.

They consider the period of more than half a century, which began and ended with the kidnapping and murder of two prominent politicians, the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti in 1924<sup>67</sup> and Moro in 1978.

They call that period the “golpe inglese” (English coup d'état), a complex and multifaceted attempt implemented by Great Britain to influence Italy's domestic and foreign policies, to transform it into a sort of protectorate.

Milestones of the alleged English coup were the failed attempts to overthrow the Italian democratic system in 1964 (*Piano Solo*), in 1970 (*golpe Borghese*) and 1974 (*golpe bianco*).

However, as examined earlier in this article, the three plots cannot be attributed solely to the alleged long-running English coup. It might be added that, as Benedetta Tobagi<sup>68</sup> observes, these coup attempts consisted of politically heterogeneous plans. The *Piano Solo* and the *golpe bianco* are not comparable to the *golpe Borghese*, which was the only real coup attempt.

Interviewed by Fasanella, the prosecutor Rosario Priore<sup>69</sup> underlines the international connections of the Italian strategy of tension and terrorism. The massacres (such as those in Piazza Fontana and Bologna) and the attacks (such as the Moro case) must be placed in an international context. This includes hegemony in the Mediterranean, control of energy sources and the role played by states such as France, Great Britain, the USSR and the USA. They intervened in Italian internal politics, for example to stop the advance of the communist party. At the same time, the state intelligence services of Czechoslovakia and East Germany were fuelling terrorism.

According to Fasanella and Priore, the Italian intrigue was actually international. Italy remained at war, without knowing it. A grey area of contiguity supported terrorist organisations. The armed revolutionary party, including the BR, was based on a clandestine structure, known as the *Hyperion* language school, a logistical, protective and centralised organisation capable of monitoring and guiding terrorist activities in Europe and other continents. However, easy points of view and reconstructions fail to reach a real truth about the high strategic levels that guided terrorism. The judicial truth has necessarily been partial and the trials have almost always involved only the perpetrators of terrorist acts, without reaching internal and foreign complicity, without discovering the highest level of the instigators.

As Gotor<sup>70</sup> writes, being inserted into a framework of international relations and balances, the difficult national sovereignty (even before the political unification of Italy) was not limited but placed in historically determined geopolitical conditions.

This effectively feasible sovereignty combined exogenous and endogenous factors. For example, the Italian Gladio was a structure that operated within a framework of Atlantic and European loyalty, functional to the defense of national interests and security.

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<sup>66</sup> Cereghino M. J. and Fasanella G. (2023), *Il golpe inglese*, Chiarelettere, Milano.

<sup>67</sup> Matteotti was secretary of the PSU (*Partito Socialista Unitario*, unitary socialist party) and was confirmed as a member of the Chamber of Deputies in the general elections held on 6 April 1924. He openly denounced (30 May 1924) in Parliament the violence and frauds committed by the fascist squads during the elections. Eleven days later (10 June 1924), Matteotti was kidnapped and killed by a fascist squad linked to Mussolini's secret services.

<sup>68</sup> Tobagi B. (2024), *Le stragi sono tutte un mistero*, Edizioni Laterza, Bari-Roma.

<sup>69</sup> Fasanella G. and Priore R. (2010), *Intrigo internazionale*, Chiarelettere, Milano.

<sup>70</sup> Gotor M. (2020), *Il memoriale della Repubblica*, Einaudi, Torino.

The government used Gladio as a means to hide the activities of a series of secret organisations (military and civil), including the Rosa dei Venti and the Nuclei di Difesa dello Stato, infiltrated by fascists from the former RSI (Mussolini's Italian social republic) and linked to the state secret services of Western countries (in particular the USA and Great Britain).

However, as Gotor specifies, the difficult Italian democracy has resisted despite these worst aspects that, associated with massacres and terrorism, followed the principle of destabilisation to stabilise the country.

The above-mentioned framework was (and still is) complex and Gotor's analysis<sup>71</sup> helps to understand why the vicissitudes of the BR and, more generally of the armed party, cannot be explained exclusively by referring to hetero-directions exerted by the secret services of states that manoeuvred within the two Cold War blocs.

Gotor argues that the BR and the armed party were above all a national story.

There was also some collaboration between Italian and foreign state secret services, but this was not always in favour of terrorism. For example, the collaboration with the secret services of the Soviet Union allowed the fragmentation of the BR structure (i.e. the split carried out by Morucci and Faranda).

However, three main tools have been used to defeat terrorism: specific state bodies; emergency laws; investigations and judicial proceedings

The establishment of specific state bodies to defeat terrorism was initiated with special powers assigned (1978) to the *Carabinieri* general Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa. The vigorous activities of these bodies included infiltration into terrorist groups, extensive police arrests of suspected and real terrorists, and some special methods close to torture.

The emergency anti-terrorism laws (already mentioned in this article) have been successful above all due to the provisions in favour of justice collaborators and dissociated persons.

The investigations and judicial trials were decisive. For example, the investigation conducted by Pietro Calogero (i.e. the "April 7 case") made it possible to break the ties of contiguity, competitiveness and co-ordination within the galaxy of the armed party (e.g. *Potere Operaio*, *Avanguardia Operaia* and BR).

As a result, the defeat of terrorism (especially the red one) has become a farewell to arms with three different positions among the former promoters of the armed party who were arrested and accused. There were those who declared to be: indomitable (*irriducibile*), dissociated (*dissociato*) and repentant (*pentito*).

In his two books, Gotor perceives the relationships between the militants of the armed party (e.g. *Prima Linea*, *Potere Operaio* and BR) as affinities and intersections that formed a generational and social transversality. Friendship, kinship, personal contacts, academic interests were components of a subversive mixture that was also reflected in the international relations, including through the *Hyperion* language school.

A network of transversal relationships, in which the same names and the same converging forces emerge, acted on national and international lines. Gotor cites for example that: Feltrinelli's international network, once he died prematurely, was inherited by Negri and Piperno; Senzani inherited the international contacts built by Moretti, once the latter was arrested.

The prosecutor Armando Spataro<sup>72</sup> states that the various theories on conspiracy and mysteries (at a national, international and institutional level) were (and still are) baseless and instrumental in creating mystifications, doubts and apprehensions. A scenario inhabited for many years (during governments of different political orientation) by mysteries, conspiracies, infiltrations, deviant state secret services, and so on, was and is unreliable.

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<sup>71</sup> Gotor M. (2024), *Generazione settanta. Storia del decennio più lungo del secolo breve (1966-1982)*, Einaudi, Torino.

<sup>72</sup> Spataro A. (2010), *Ne valeva la pena*, Editori Laterza, Bari.

According to Spataro, the facts, as certified by judicial sentences, have shown that under terrorism there were no sophisticated minds but a mad ideology that unleashed a mad season of armed struggle. The grand old men did not exist. The BR, for example, were not characterised by hetero directions, that is, those carried out by foreign powers or by the Italian state secret services, and were not managed by a grand old man. The BR militants were men and women who, once trapped in their fundamentalist extremism, once they lost contact with the real life of the population, were capable of producing tragedies that jeopardised democracy.

Benedetta Tobagi<sup>73</sup> writes that two points of view have clashed on the strategy of tension: those who maintain that the conspiracy remains permanently behind the scene ("dietrologi a oltranza" in Italian); those for whom everything is clear and are soothingly pro-government ("filogovernativi rassicuranti" in Italian). In recent times, interpretations of the strategy of tension have been cleansed of ideological excesses to understand it as a conservative method of political interference that, through violent and highly destabilising activities, aims to counter communism and movements committed to promoting democracy and social change.

Tobagi quotes the words of the president of the Italian republic Sergio Mattarella (in 2019 during the commemoration of the Piazza Fontana massacre) who underlined how the cover-up and misdirection actions carried out by deviant state secret services were part of a cynical plan, nourished by international ties with subversive networks, aimed at destabilising democracy.

After such a long period of time, language and understanding have changed and narrow simplifications of complex events have been avoided. The conspiracy theory tends to be overturned: the Italians were the actors of the strategy of tension (fuelled by black terrorist groups) and took advantage of the conscious and sometimes tacit approval of foreign powers. Red terrorism was also an endogenous phenomenon, developed autonomously, not hetero-directed, but used instrumentally by the security forces at times and in some situations, also through infiltration. There were no mysteries, only secrets yet to be discovered.

The conclusions reached by Tobagi are the following. Realistically, the whole truth will never be known, especially when the highest political and institutional levels were involved. At the same time, it is necessary to continue digging and studying to bring to light as much truth as possible, following the example of magistrates, policemen, lawyers, journalists, citizens and so on who have made it possible to discover the currently available pieces of truth.

Salvatore Lupo<sup>74</sup> reiterates his point of view on the non-existence of a grand old man capable of manipulating black and red terrorism as the sole driving force of subversion. This does not exclude that those responsible for the strategy of tension were pleased with terrorist actions when these were capable of exacerbating the strategy itself. Moreover, violence (as fact and as myth) occupied a large space, the institutions were barely legitimated and the idea of repression did not find support in a significant part of public opinion.

According to Lupo, it is necessary to take into account the revolutionary motivations of thousands of people who were part of the red armed groups and of those (more numerous) who in some way shared and supported the activities of the armed party. One reason for the continued reproduction of the conspiracy theory stems from the removal of such motivations.

## 10. Conclusions

The motivations of the black terrorists consisted in the (re)introduction and stabilisation of a regressively authoritarian order capable of restoring aspects of previous anti-democratic political systems in the name of national sovereignty defenders.

The motivations of the red terrorists were to introduce a progressively authoritarian order (a permanent civil war) capable of revolutionary advances towards a dictatorial political system in the name of the exploited and proletarian classes.

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<sup>73</sup> Tobagi B. (2024), *Le stragi sono tutte un mistero*, Edizioni Laterza, Bari-Roma.

<sup>74</sup> Lupo S. (2013), *Antipartiti*, Donzelli editore, Roma.

These opposing motivations contributed to triggering and fuelling the nineteen Years of Lead that affected an entire generation with those who directly participated in terrorism, those who supported it, those who were against it, those who were neither with the state nor with the armed groups, and those who remained detached and indifferent to the events.

It was a generation that luck spared from the horrors of the Second World War because it was born after the end of this conflict, a generation that was an expression of the notable changes brought about by the Cold War. Under the threat of planetary destruction from a growing nuclear arsenal, the Cold War manifested itself in a variety of ways, including regional military conflicts, economic incentives and sanctions. Both the USA and the USSR organised plans for European economic recovery (the Marshall and Molotov plans, respectively, named after their initiators) aimed at countries under their political influence.

The competition between the USA and the USSR in the field of scientific and technological research contributed to economic growth in the glorious thirty years, an expression coined (in 1979) by the French economist Jean Fourastié. This expression became commonly used to define the period (twenty-eight years in reality) that began with the conclusion of the Second World War (1945) and ended with the first world oil crisis (1973).

There was strong growth in industrial production. New products and new consumption have been developed. Productivity increased together with the demand for goods and services with a positive trend in employment and wages.

A strong demographic increase has been accompanied by the lengthening of average life expectancy due to medical advances and to the creation or strengthening of social security and social assistance systems (welfare state).

The end of the Second World War accelerated the intertwined processes of globalisation understood as the growing connection between the regions of the planet in terms of economic, technological, demographical, social and cultural development.

Historically, globalisation has always existed and has involved both negative components (e.g. conflicts and wars, nationalisms, ethnic rivalries) and positive endeavours (e.g. treaties and institutions promoting international rights, democracy, freedom and peace).

The generation that entered the Italian *Sessantotto* and was subsequently affected by the Years of Lead benefited from the scenarios summarised above.

In 1968 the Italian GDP (Tables 1 and 2) was 6 times higher than that recorded in 1945, while it increased by approximately 2 times between 1968 and 1988. The GDP per capita increased: by 5 times between 1945 and 1968; less than twice between 1968 and 1988.

Table 1: Total Italian GDP (*), inhabitants and GDP per capita (**) measured in Euro, chain linked values with reference year 2010; selected years.					
Years	1945	1948	1968	1988	1989
Total GDP	107,217,206	185,739,552	671,387,055	1,260,080,633	1,301,063,448
Inhabitants	45,344,000	46,210,000	53,080,900	56,609,375	56,649,201
GDP per capita	2,365	4,019	12,648	22,259	22,967
(*) GDP (gross domestic product), used to measure the economic development of a country, is the total monetary value of goods and services produced in a year.					
(**) GDP per capita is used to measure individual standard of living.					
Calculations based on data from ISTAT (national institute of statistics): <i>La ricostruzione Banca d'Italia-ISTAT 1861-2017; Popolazione residente per sesso, nati vivi, morti, saldo naturale, saldo migratorio, saldo totale e tassi di natalità, mortalità, di crescita naturale e migratorio totale - Anni 1862-2014 ai confini attuali.</i>					

Increase between selected years		
Time period	1945-1968	1968-1988
Total GDP	6.26 times	1.88 times
Inhabitants	+7,736,900	+3,528,475
GDP per capita	5.35 times	1.76 times

Giovanni Vecchi<sup>75</sup> estimates that the GDP per capita of the Mezzogiorno (i.e. of the six southern regions and the two main islands, Sicily and Sardinia) was equal to 49% in 1951, 64% in 1971 and 61% in 1991 of that recorded in the rest of Italy (i.e. in the four regions of the Centre and the eight regions of the North).

Vecchi also estimates regional inequalities in income distribution. He uses the Gini coefficient, according to which perfect income equality is 0 and total income inequality is 100% (Table 3).

Areas	1948	1968	1989	Difference 1968-1948	Difference 1989-1968
Mezzogiorno (A)	36.1%	42.6%	31.5%	+6.5%	-11.1%
Italy (B)	41.6%	40.8%	30.0%	-0.8%	-10.8%
Centre-North (C)	40.2%	39.3%	28.6%	-0.9%	-10.7%
Difference between Mezzogiorno (A), Italy (B), Centre and North (C)					
A-B	-5.5%	+1.8%	+1.5%	+7.3%	-0.3%
A-C	-4.1%	+3.3%	+2.9%	+7.4%	-0.4%
Calculations based on data from Vecchi G. (2011), <i>In ricchezza e in povertà</i> , il Mulino, Bologna.					

Therefore, income inequalities increased in the Mezzogiorno compared to those in the rest of Italy. In the Mezzogiorno, inequalities were less when the GDP per capita was very low for the entire national population. In 1948, its Gini coefficient was in fact 4.1 percentage points less than in the other regions. Subsequently, when GDP per capita improved significantly for the entire national population, the Gini coefficient of the Mezzogiorno was of 3.3 and 2.9 percentage points (in 1968 and 1989 respectively) higher than in the other regions.

An economic boom (or miracle, as many analysts and mass media called it) lasted seven years (1956-1963) when it was interrupted by four years of crisis (1964-1968). Italy was transformed from a predominately rural country to an industrialised economy and an urbanised territory. The population improved its standard of living, but regional, economic, social and cultural gaps remained and even increased.

Augusto Graziani<sup>76</sup> specifies the positive aspects of development:

- rapid growth in the average per capita income;
- growth of the industrial sector;
- rapid opening of the national economy towards that of other countries;
- monetary stability;

<sup>75</sup> Vecchi G. (2011), *In ricchezza e in povertà*, il Mulino, Bologna. The estimates of GDP per capita (in Euro year 2010) are as follows. Year 1951: 2,860 in Mezzogiorno and 5,794 in central and northern regions. Year 1971: 9,691 in Mezzogiorno and 15,147 in central and northern regions. Year 1991: 16,182 in Mezzogiorno and 26,432 in central and northern regions.

<sup>76</sup> Graziani A. (ed.) (1979), *L'economia italiana dal 1945 a oggi*, il Mulino, Bologna.



- equilibrium in the balance of payments, i.e. in the difference between inflows and outflows of monetary transactions with other countries.

Negative aspects were:

- dualism in the industrial structure, for example between export-oriented and domestic market-oriented production, between large companies and small and medium sized enterprises;
- increase in migration both towards other countries and between internal regions;
- inequalities in income distribution and, therefore, in the consumption capacity of the population;
- backwardness of the Mezzogiorno;
- inefficient public spending;
- congestion of large urban concentrations.

Economic growth was the key to a significant increase in population (see Table 2). Between 1945 and 1968, population increased by 7.8 million. Between 1968 and 1988, the increase was almost halved, reaching 3.5 million.

The natural change of population (i.e. the difference between the number of live births and the number of deaths during the year) increased positively between 1945 (176,000 people) and 1968 (414,000 people). Then there was a progressive decline between 1968 and 1988 (40,000 people).

The increase in population was accompanied by internal migratory flows. Internal migration statistics are based on flows consisting of changes in residence between municipalities and aggregated at the regional level. Although affected by some administrative inaccuracies and subsequent corrections, the difference between registry registrations and cancellations provides the proxy indicator of net internal migration<sup>77</sup>.

Between 1945 and 1968, net internal migration from the Mezzogiorno to the more industrialised areas of the North and Centre amounted to 1.9 million people, equal to 84% of the total internal migratory flow (2.2 million people). This number was 2.5 higher than that recorded between 1969 and 1988, equal to 766 thousand people.

The total internal migratory flow of the period 1945-1968 (2.2 million people) was 2.9 times higher than that of the period 1969-1988 (766 thousand people) and the latter was entirely made up of people coming from the Mezzogiorno.

As a consequence of rapid economic expansion, the most intense internal migration occurred in the twenty-year period 1955-1974. Net internal migration amounted to 2.1 million people who left the Mezzogiorno towards the northern and central regions. This number was equal to 11% of the average population of the Mezzogiorno in that period of time.

The net migration rates expressed as a percentage of the average population were different between the regions of Mezzogiorno: Basilicata (24%), Calabria (19%), Puglia (12%), Sicily (10%), Sardinia (9%), Abruzzo and Campania (8%), Molise (5%).

The negative aspects of economic growth were at the origin of the wave of trade union struggles that reached its peak in 1969 (the so-called Hot Autumn, *autunno caldo*).

These labour conflicts contributed to a partial progress in social and working conditions, as demonstrated also by a reduction in the inequality of income distribution between the various sections of the national population (the Gini coefficient decreased by almost 11 percentage points, from 40.8% to 30%, between 1968 and 1989; see Table 3).

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<sup>77</sup> The calculations that follow in this article are based on data provided by ISTAT, namely: *Iscrizioni e cancellazioni anagrafiche per movimento migratorio interno e saldo migratorio interno per regione e ripartizione geografica - Anni 1902-2014; Popolazione residente per sesso, nati vivi, morti, saldo naturale, saldo migratorio, saldo totale e tassi di natalità, mortalità, di crescita naturale e migratorio totale - Anni 1862-2014 ai confini attuali; Popolazione residente a inizio anno e popolazione media, per regione e ripartizione geografica - Anni 1952-2014.*

The combined effects of the workers' movement and the student movement were also reflected in the political arena.

The competition between parties of the right, centre and left wings can be summarised in the results of the six general elections held between 1968 and 1988 (Table 4)<sup>78</sup>.

Political area	1968	1972	1976	1979	1983	1987	Average
Right-wing parties	12%	13%	7%	8%	11%	9%	10%
Centre-wing parties	41%	47%	45%	45%	42%	41%	44%
Left-wing parties	46%	39%	47%	46%	45%	48%	45%
(1) The difference from 100% in the column total is due to the dispersion of votes in very small political parties.							
New Left parties	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	2%	2%
Electoral abstention	7%	7%	7%	9%	12%	11%	9%

In summary, electoral abstention increased 1.6 times. With ups and downs, the political picture was characterised by average shares in which the left-wing parties prevailed, followed closely by the centre-wing parties and both clearly outperformed the right-wing parties. The electoral appeal of the new left was very limited and diminishing.

Despite the positive results of the left-wing parties, governments remained firmly anchored to the key role played by the DC (Christian democracy party, the major centre-wing party).

The difference in percentages points (pp) between the DC and the PCI (communist party, the major opposition party) narrowed in some electoral phases (especially in 1976 and 1983; Table 5). However, the difference in favour of the DC remained constant (almost +8 pp as an average).

Political parties	1968	1972	1976	1979	1983	1987	Average
DC (A)	39.1%	38.7%	38.7%	38.3%	32.9%	34.3%	37%
PCI (B)	26.9%	27.2%	34.4%	30.4%	29.9%	26.6%	29.2%
Differences A-B	+12.2%	+11.5%	+4.3%	+7.9%	+3%	+7.7%	+7.8%

The electoral results were therefore not sufficient to build government alternatives capable of modifying the blocked system that had existed since the end (1947) of the phase of coalition governments (including DC and PCI) based on anti-fascist unity.

Located in the concentric and overlapping waves in which endogenous and exogenous forces collaborated and collided in the globalisation processes, many young people who entered the *Sessantotto* movement sharing its ambitions for a better world transformed themselves anthropologically at the end of the Years of Lead: from the collective enthusiasm for sharing the values of peace, participation, egalitarianism, social justice and inclusion to a feeling of collective defeat, regret, individualism, hedonism, separation, disaffection and detached behaviour.

<sup>78</sup> A detailed analysis of the results of the general elections starting from those held in 1919 until the last ones in 2022 can be found in Strati F. (2024), *Il vento di destra in Italia*, available in: <https://www.srseuropa.eu/>.

The leaders of the political groups who incited the use of violence and justified the choice of the armed party cannot be excused as innocent for the actions carried out by their militants following their indications, as Salvatore Lupo states<sup>79</sup>.

It should be added that even the militants who used violence or terror as a political means cannot be excused as innocent because they followed the directions and orders of their leaders. Each person was responsible for his or her own political choices and related actions.

The Years of Lead were defeated, they did not achieve their objective of destabilising democracy, but they spread terror and apprehension to the point of destabilising an entire generation. It was a generation of lost years, but also a generation of years truly lived<sup>80</sup>.

### **11. Circular endo-exo causality**

The conclusions of the present article confirm that the Years of Lead cannot be understood or explained through a linear scheme of cause and effect between endogenous and exogenous factors. This topic also has a general character debated by cultural, scientific and philosophical approaches.

Edgar Morin<sup>81</sup> is a pioneer of a paradigmatic revolution anchored to the concept of circular endo-exo causality.

According to his definitions, endo-causality is local while exo-causality is general. They are connected by the permanent transformation generated through circular causality, that is to say retroactive and recursive causality. The retroactive loop can produce reactions, counteractions, in which endo-causality is able to determine original effects in terms of production of-self, generating and regenerating itself by itself. The generative internal causality (endo-causality) proceeds in its complex relation with exo-causality. Therefore, endo-exo-causality is a mutually interrelated causality, is not linear, and is endless and circular. Cause and effect lose their substantiality: cause loses its all-powerfulness, effect its all-dependence. They are transformed into each other. The complex interplay of internal and external causalities must be taken into analysis to understand anything in life, society and the individual. Complex causality concerns bodies, populations, and individual beings because they naturally interact with their environment. Internal events are not remotely controlled and steered from the outside.

Masatoshi Murase<sup>82</sup> writes that thinking in terms of cause and effect can be ascribed to a culture for which "what came first, the chicken or the egg" is an important question and it is natural to think of a time frame in which cause precedes effect. In contrast, thinking by simultaneity can be attributed to a culture for which a transition from a sequential linear chain to a circular relationship always occurs. This endless circulation between self (or endo) and non-self (or exo) is the basis of a paradigm proposed by Murase as that of endo-exo circulation.

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<sup>79</sup> Lupo S. (2013), *Antipartiti*, Donzelli editore, Roma.

<sup>80</sup> Terminology borrowed from the book written by Grandi A. (2023), *La generazione degli anni perduti. Storia di Potere Operaio*, Chiarelettere, Milano.

<sup>81</sup> Morin E. (1977), *La méthode, 1. La Nature de la Nature*, Éditions du Seuil, Paris.

<sup>82</sup> Murase M. (2008), *Endo-Exo Circulation as a Paradigm of Life. Towards a New Synthesis of Eastern Philosophy and Western Science*, available in: <https://www.researchgate.net>.